

Building Resilience: Affective Disorders in Adolescent Students

by

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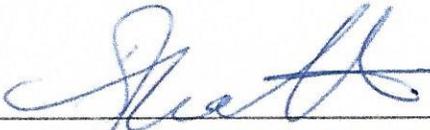
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### **Abstract**

Affective disorders, such as anxiety and depression, are present and rising in adolescent students throughout North America. As students are developing these ailments of mental health, schools are being placed in a position where they must take action. Teen suicide remains a relevant problem and drop-out rates are continuing to rise in North America (Balfand et al., 2014). When the impact of anxiety and depression is this significant for students it is important for schools to begin the process of teaching student resilience.

Building resiliency in students cannot be a one-size fits all approach. Affective disorders are diverse, and the reason a student is carrying a specific anxiety or issue varies depending on the situation. Determining the cause is the first step in building resilience to affective disorders. After a cause has been determined, the levels of intervention can be assessed. Schools can participate in building student resilience by promoting coping strategies and the building of prosocial skills. Building resilient students is a focus that schools and educators are going to need to focus on in order to support students and help produce productive citizens of society.

The various roles of educators in a school, from principal to counsellor to teacher all need to be active in building student resiliency to affective disorders. Family dynamics and a community's socioeconomic standing are all factors that must be taken into consideration. After all of these things are weighed and assessed, the appropriate interventions at the appropriate levels can begin. Thorough reflection of best practices is an important piece in determining the success of resilience building in students.

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## **Building Resilience to Students Affective Disorders**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Affective disorders, such as anxiety are prevalent across the globe and costs the global economy 1 trillion dollars US each year, according to the World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2016). In examining these figures, the need for treatment of anxiety, depression and other mental health ailments has been determined beneficial for the health and well-being of individuals. Although the need for treatment is recognized, disorders are increasing. Between 1993 and 2013 anxiety and depression increased by nearly 50% (World Health Organization, 2016). These issues have been addressed, yet there are still increases in anxiety occurring, particularly when a child reaches adolescence (Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada, 2015). This information can serve to shift focus on anxiety treatment of adults to the task of building resiliency for adolescents. When looking at methods and strategies to building resiliency in students, the education system can provide significant support.

### **Background**

The education system is ever-shifting in the introduction of new policies, implementation of new data, and demand for changing curriculum; to remain relevant (Wolpert et al., 2013). One of the changes schools have gone through in the past fifteen years, is a shift in focusing more on student needs. Whereas schools were originally designed to instill academic objectives, current education systems are shifting to a shared focus including on students' emotional health (Wolpert et al., 2013). In their role of educating adolescents, schools across North America must fulfill the difficult task of not only providing a constructive learning environment, but also supporting student needs in a variety of ways that are not always related to academics. During the 21<sup>st</sup> century, schools are being held more accountable for a child's emotional well-being than

they were only a few decades ago (Foxx, Baker, & Gerler, 2016). While schools are met with higher pressure in regards to meeting student needs, the students themselves are also dealing with more complex issues today as they grow into competent adults. Problems such as cyberbullying are huge factors in causing distress to students in North America (Moline, 2009). Student anxiety and student depression are growing in schools across North America (Rice, 2008).

In dealing with affective disorders, there is a need for students to be able to build resiliency to the many issues that cause stress to them. Student anxiety exists for a variety of different reasons and it manifests in many different forms (Allison, Nativio, & Mitchell, 2013). In battling anxiety, there is no singular answer for creating success with our students. If students are given the proper tools and strategies to deal with anxiety and build resiliency for themselves, this will help them to navigate through the stresses of their lives and grow into mature and competent adults (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997).

### **Purpose**

Creating resiliency in adolescent students will provide individuals who are afflicted with affective disorders the opportunity to build themselves support (Truebridge, 2013). Before educators can begin implementing successful strategies for students it is important to examine why there is a present need for intervention. Mental health issues and an examination of outside influences to the students are important steps to begin addressing student concerns.

The focus of this capstone is to outline effective practices for building student resilience in regards to anxiety and connected disorders like depression, and the variety of ways they can appear within adolescents. There has been a great amount of research in the areas on how to help students cope with their anxiety, however, every student is different and will manifest their

symptoms in a different way (Truebridge, 2013). Therefore, it is important for schools to provide families and individuals suffering from affective disorders with a variety of means to build resiliency. Understanding the causes of student disorders and the case-by-case instances in which they are presented is essential to effectively finding successful strategies that can be utilized (Foxx et al., 2016).

A disorder such as anxiety can be a precursor or an accompaniment to other, larger mental health issues (Allison et al., 2013). In these situations, the coping strategies offered in this capstone will likely not be enough and it is important that individuals seek out the proper supports through the appropriate channels.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The need for building resiliency at the schools is evident when examining the causes of affective disorders (Morrison & Allen, 2007). Mental health problems can require interventions beyond school supports, but it remains important for educators to be aware of student needs and what best practices are available to provide assistance. Thorough examination of student needs will allow for the best intervention strategies to be utilized.

### **Mental Health Issues**

Student mental health is affected by different factors, including not only stresses at school but often the student's home life as well. To best build a plan for creating resilience, one can examine some of the causes of anxiety and the many mental health issues affecting North American youth. There are many stigmas that exist in relation to mental health, and because of these assumptions it is difficult for teachers, administrators and counsellors to effectively identify problems with students (Miville & Constantine, 2006).

Among the mental health issues facing teenagers and young adults today, anxiety disorder is five to eight times as high as it was half a century ago (Hutchison, 2009). Further research demonstrates that students who suffer from anxiety are also affected by additional mental health disorders such as depression, bipolar disorder, and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) (Haug, Mykletun & Dahl, 2004). It should also be noted that anxiety disorders, like ADD before it, are often being over diagnosed (Walters, Rait & Griffin, 2012). An individual could suffer from a clinical anxiety, and in some cases, adolescent students develop this, however, many of the anxieties presented by students are worries related to a number of extenuating circumstances. The rise of anxiety diagnoses in the past fifty years, indicates that schools and educators should be looking at effective ways to create resilient students that can combat anxiety in their adolescent and adult lives (Wang, Haertal, & Walberg, 1998).

### *Effective Strategies*

There is evidence that indicates student anxiety must be addressed by educators. The challenge is finding ways to best help the students who are faced with this disorder. As previously stated, anxiety can exist in different degrees, for different reasons, and often connected to a variety of other mental health issues. Because of this it is important to start small, and then look at broader reasons that cause these issues. Stress management and effective strategies to dealing with aggression can be effective first steps to dealing with anxiety in an effective way (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997). If students have developed these basic coping strategies it can become easier to discern where their issues are and what is causing the anxious behaviours they are exhibiting.

**Definition of Terms**

**Anxiety:** multisystem response to any perceived threat or danger (not always physical).

**Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD):** a disorder of attention, organization, and impulse control.

**Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):** A behaviour disorder manifested by inappropriate degrees of inattentiveness.

**Bipolar:** mood disorders with a history of manic episodes

**Depression:** a mental state or altered mood, characterized by feelings of sadness, despair, and discouragement.

**English Language Learner (ELL):** Use or study of English by native speakers of different languages.

**First Nations, Metis, Inuit (FNMI):** Referring to the Indigenous peoples of Canada.

**Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD):** an anxiety disorder which manifests in obsession and compulsion.

**Prosocial Skills:** positive actions that benefit others, prompted by a sense of responsibility, not personal gain.

**Resilience (resiliency):** ability to recover from adversities or illnesses.

**Stigma:** Distinguishing personal trait that is perceived as a disadvantage.

**Zones of Regulation:** curriculum geared towards helping students gain skills in consciously regulating their actions.

### **Significance of Study**

A review of the research collected in the area of affective disorders will help educators to gain a firm understanding of what issues need to be addressed as well as the best practices for implementation of interventions. Utilizing the research to take a close look at student mental health is an important first step to building resiliency.

### **Existing Data**

Examining the culture that children grow up in can help to determine why there is a need for resiliency building skills. Secondary schools can help to provide students with the tools that are necessary to face problems in their adult lives (Morrison & Allen, 2009). Skills such as regulation and building prosocial skills are necessary due to the 21<sup>st</sup> century being one that is dominated by the helicopter parent (Somers & Settle, 2001). Educators have taken a more active role in shaping students and moving them toward making positive life choices.

North American schools have begun to see increases in the diagnosis of anxiety in students during the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 2012 the Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada released a report stating that by the age of 15, generalized anxiety disorders were becoming present in over 12% of the population (Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada, 2015). Teachers in schools are serving multiple functions and are often called on to act in the role of a counsellor as well as educator (Foxx et al., 2016). In this role it becomes beneficial for teachers to understand the mental health afflictions of the students and currently, anxiety is seeing an increase (Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada, 2015). Strategies exist to assist the students in building resiliency and develop coping strategies. It is beneficial for students to be exposed to these skills so they can effectively manage their stresses in their adult lives and avoid labels and stigmas (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997). Teaching students to face their problems and effectively combat

them will assist in raising self-esteem, something that is an effective tool for the leaders of tomorrow to possess.

The various anxieties presented in youths are often tied to other psychological disorders and mental illnesses, as well as societal factors at home or at school. An effective balance and a competent understanding of the various issues will allow educators to provide coping strategies in a differentiated fashion. Through utilizing these strategies, students can begin to build resiliency.

### **Summary**

Data shows that mental health issues are very prevalent in 21<sup>st</sup> century adolescents. Among these afflictions, anxiety has been on the rise over the last decade. It has become crucial for schools and the educators working within the schools to address the topic of student mental health and provide suitable coping strategies and safe environments for students to grow and learn. This task can be difficult for schools because the issue of student anxiety is often tied to further mental illness issues in the students. These are the reasons why educators must carefully assess student mental health and provide support based on informed research.

### **Outline of the Remainder of Paper**

This capstone has been broken into three chapters. The first chapter addresses the need for student resiliency to develop in order to allow students to deal with anxieties and other issues pertaining to mental health. The second chapter provides a literature review of the research to date about building resiliency. The third chapter outlines the importance of recognizing the needs within the schools and how effective coping strategies could be implemented with successful results.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The number of students who are at risk of failing is increasing based on a variety of factors, including, poverty, illness, divorce, drug and alcohol abuse and frequent relocation (Dietrichson, Bog, Filges, & Jorgenson, 2016). Examining these various factors is important for creating coping mechanisms for students. There was a time when it was believed that educators were not responsible for their students' emotional well-being, but studies now show that this belief is false, if schools want to provide for their students in the best possible way (Dietrichson et al., 2016). Coping strategies for healthy emotional development of students are available to educators, but a challenge comes from properly identifying a student's needs. Student anxiety can take many different forms and can be attached to mental health problems, the first start to building coping strategies is to understand why the need is present.

What has changed in the last 15 years that has caused an increase in affective disorders? These issues always been present, but the onus is now being placed on teachers and schools. There have been changes in socio-economic status across North America since 2008, when the North American economy dropped and this could be a factor in many of the problems which lead to student anxiety. A shift in parenting routine has occurred over the last decade that potentially contributes to this as well (Hawes, Dadds, Frost, Hasking, & Hawes, 2011). When stakeholders examine why there is a need to re-focus their attention to increasing student resilience, the coping strategies become easier to identify.

### **Emotional Intelligence**

Sillick and Schute (2006) stated that parental love and attention have a direct impact on student happiness, and that this happiness impacts the students' motivation to achieve. Socio-

economic changes, such as the drastic changes in economy have a direct effect on home life and parenting of children (Archer, Hutchings, & Ross, 2005). After an economic shift in the socio-economic status of standard working class individuals, priorities in a household can change. The people in the province of Alberta have experienced this as more working class people have made the move to trades and oilfield work to best support their families when jobs are scarce and tuition is expensive. These changes in employment can create a gap in parental involvement and perceived parental attention (Hollenstein, Allen, & Sheeber, 2016). When a child feels neglected, they are no longer happy and the effects can carry over from home to school (Sillick & Schute 2006). An unhappy student may not have their academics set as a priority, which can impact their mental health leading to anxieties that exist both within and outside of the classroom.

The emotional intelligence of a child is affected by their performance in school, but it can also have a direct impact on their academics. For a student to have self-esteem, they must be getting love and attention from their parents (Sillick & Schute 2006). Lack of attention leads to low self-esteem and it is when students are feeling down on themselves that the problem of anxiety can become present. A student with healthy self-esteem and a sense of self-worth is less likely to be suffering from disorders such as anxiety or depression (Sowislo, Orth, & Ulrich, 2013). Parental attention from an early age can be directly tied to an individual's happiness not only through childhood and adolescence but also into adulthood. (Sillick & Schute, 2006).

Anxieties can always exist to different degrees, and they can often be connected to other mental health ailments. Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), depression and bipolar disorder are a few examples of mental health problems which are tied to anxiety. In these instances, the simple solutions of regulation and building prosocial skills

that will be outlined below are going to be insufficient in helping afflicted students. The mental health issues referred to here require additional interventions, such as counselling and psychological attention and at times, prescribed medication. It is still possible to manage anxiety in these cases, if the anxiety disorder is dealt with in the proper way (Rice, 2008).

Reducing anxiety can make it easier to assess and deal with additional mental health issues in the students. More complex interventions for dealing with anxiety could include behavioural-interventions as well as training to improve focus and studying skills (Rice, 2008). As with all situations, interventions will vary based on a case by case basis. The need for further intervention beyond self-regulation and building prosocial skills should be determined by teachers, counsellors, parents and medical professionals. Only with the unique perspectives these people can bring, can schools begin to effectively deal with anxiety and how to increase resilience.

After making early identifications further action can be taken to assist the struggling students. At times, general coping strategies may be all that is needed for students, and in these cases, it can be beneficial to teach students to self-regulate in order to de-escalate themselves (Kuypers, 2011). Self-regulation is effective for not only young children, but adolescents and adults as well, if regulation techniques are adopted early on, it is possible students will deal with less aggression and anxiety as they grow and mature (Kuypers, 2011). School districts that adopt the strategies of building prosocial skills (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997) and the zones of regulation (Kuypers) can help their students to combat anxieties with little intervention. There are always cases, however, where more intensive intervention is needed.

### *Cultural Context-FNMI*

As stated previously, emotional strength and intelligence are built and developed based on the family dynamics and home life of a child (Sillick & Schute, 2006). Examining different cultures and the struggles that exist on a cultural basis can help educators to identify the causes of affective disorders. This can be observed by examining the cultural history of the North American Indigenous peoples. The First Nations, Metis, and Inuit (FNMI) cultures is one that has had a historical struggle with abuse, negligence, abandonment, and drug and alcohol addiction. These struggles have been present and building over the past 200 years (Balasaro, Maldonado, & Baltes, 2016).

FNMI students in Canada and Alberta come to the schools with issues such as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), many of these students are also living without a sense of identity as they are being raised in foster care, or they come from group homes and are wards of the province (Steel & Fahy, 2011). When these students come with these pre-existing issues, it is important for schools to promote strength and resilience (Crooks, Snowshoe, Chiodo, & Brunette-Debassige, 2013). Examining the emotional intelligence, family dynamics and socioeconomic status of all students is important, and when FNMI students enter the schools, the same steps must be taken. It is important to highlight the FNMI culture, because their history has almost created a hereditary group of affective disorders. Until very recently these disorders were largely ignored or misdiagnosed by the school systems (Crooks et al., 2013).

Students coming forward with existing mental health challenges or even cognitive delays must be taught as if they are a blank slate coming forward, in regards to FNMI students, schools often get very little background knowledge on the student they are receiving (Crooks et al., 2013). It is therefore, vitally important in these cases to promote the strategies and skills-

building techniques suggested in this paper. Not only will it benefit other students suffering from affective disorders, it will assist in the growth of the FNMI students and population as well.

### **Interventions**

Examining emotional intelligence and observing cultural differences can be helpful for educators to assess the problems a student is having. A counsellor can draw many conclusions, but in order to best support the students and truly build resiliency, interventions must be made. School workers and at times, community workers can collaborate on the most effective measures of intervention to be taken for a student.

Depending on the situation, and the student, there can be different levels of intervention for affective disorders. Younger children have the benefit of being able to build early strategies that will prevent future behavioral problems or outbursts. For older students, there may already exist mental health issues, and in these cases the building of coping strategies and teaching of skills is an important intervention to be made.

### **Preventive Measures**

Children are showing signs of affective disorders, such as anxiety about social status or academics at earlier ages during the 21<sup>st</sup> century than they had been displaying in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Devane, Chiao, Franklin, Kruep, 2005). Much of the cited research shows that there is a coexistence between anxiety and depression (Devane et al., 2005). Therefore, it is important to ask the question as to whether or not the two can be exclusively treated or if treatment for anxiety should also cover issues of depression and other mental health ailments. In a study by Barrett, Lock and Farrell (2005) it was found that if preventive measures are taken when students are in primary grades, then they have a decreased chance of developing an anxiety disorder by the time they reach their adolescence. What these preventive measures are could vary depending

on the home life and socioeconomic status of the child (Barrett et al., 2005). Time and attention at home are important preventions for a child developing anxiety, as well as fostering of independence and reasonable expectations in regards to achievement and development (Devane et al., 2005).

### *Coping Strategies*

If early preventive measures are unsuccessful in combating affective disorders, an important strategy is to develop coping strategies for afflicted students. Affective disorders, such as anxiety can be treated and handled in a way that will allow students to continue with the everyday functioning of their lives. An important strategy for success that students can utilize is the creation of standardized organizational skills (Hatcher & Pond, 1998). Standardized organizational skills and standardizing habits, such as studying and information gathering are important skills for students to use, building up their own organizational skills will help to ease the many of the stresses they have related to deadlines and academic expectations. If schools focused on teaching these strategies it would allow students to have access to a level of consistency in their lives. Therefore routines will not be different when they move from classroom to classroom or from one grade level up to another. The method of consistent forms of organization such as; note-taking, study skills, and information gathering and its benefit to students was further examined on college students in 2005 (Weaver, Qi, 2005).

A very popular strategy used with students in schools across North America are the Zones of Regulation (Kuypers, 2011). The zones are a system of student checks and balances that are used to regulate their behavior. Students that have high levels of stress, ADD, ADHD or OCD can use the zones system to regulate and redirect their thoughts and actions. The zones system is prompted by the teacher and is meant to be started in early elementary so that students

can build the skills they need to cope with high tension situations as they grow into adolescence and adulthood. Although the zones of regulation system is primarily initiated with younger students there have been schools that found it beneficial to implement zones for adolescent students as well. When students can learn to self-regulate they are able to better identify their triggers and eventually become pre-emptive in facing issues that cause them stress, anxiety or discomfort.

### *Skills building*

Student resilience is a skill that educators are able to build on within a school (Brooks, 2005). School environments can be structured in such a way that the students are given opportunities that allow for growth in positive peer interaction, academic and social performance, and the building of organizational skills (Brooks, 2005). Goldstein and McGinnis (1997) wrote about skill streaming the adolescent and building prosocial skills. The work of Goldstein and McGinnis breaks up the building of resilience into steps that involve; early skill building, adolescent skill building, emotional control and collaboration (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997). The strategies outlined by Goldstein and McGinnis are focused on in much of the research about student resiliency. The book by Goldstein and McGinnis can be used as an excellent starting point for helping students to build strategies and regulate emotional control. The work of Kuypers, Brooks, Sillick, Schute, Weaver, Qi and others cited through this capstone all compliment the recommendations made by Goldstein and McGinnis. In order to create the opportunity for student resilience, capacity must be built in the area of prosocial skills and emotional control. Teachers and counsellors can help build this capacity by focusing on the areas of regulation, organization, collaboration and positive social interactions.

Skills building could be considered a general term, but when examining the many different aspects that make up that terminology it is evident that this general umbrella term is very important in addressing the topic of student resilience. Skills such as goal setting, speaking out, having meaningful conversations and how to handle disappointment and failure are all different ways to build resiliency. Only when the skills outlined by Goldstein and McGinnis are broken down and focused on at an individual level, can positive results start to be seen in students. This is evidenced by Morrison and Allen in their writing about resilience in school contexts (2009). Creating a sense of purpose in students is written as being important for resilience. This purpose can only be achieved by strengthening the emotional intelligence of a child, something that can be strengthened using the skills written about by Goldstein and McGinnis.

### **Role of educators**

Educators are an incredibly important part of childhood development and student learning. Teachers spend a large portion of the school year with their students and with this much exposure to one another, an impression is going to be made. Because educators are in this important position, schools can be a natural starting point for skills-building in schools. Principals, teachers, and counsellors all play a role in skills building and creating resilient students.

### **Leadership in the schools**

In the school context, building resilience for each individual student can be a challenge. The inclusion model could make adequate instructional strategies seem difficult to achieve (Truebridge, 2013). Through differentiation of instruction teachers are provided with a variety of instructional strategies, but these strategies must be supported by the leaders of the schools

and the districts (Kennedy, Russom, Kevorkian, 2012). Due to the variety of adversities faced by students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the policymakers of schools must sustain environments that nurture healthy development (Truebridge, 2013). Resilient students are not just the concern of parents or classroom teachers, but those in charge of school policy must also take a serious interest as the students going through the system need to become resilient adults (Brooks, 2005).

How can school policy and school administrators effectively focus on resiliency building skills? Through creating strength-based outcomes for students that focus on individual supports and environmental conditions of families and environments (Truebridge, 2013). ‘Programs that promote resilience’ are an effective method of targeting students at risk of failing, focusing on these at-risk students will help to curb anxieties and create the necessary skills needed to become resilient (Cassidy, 2015).

Witzers, Bosker and Kruger (2003) wrote in a study they conducted that principal leadership within a school is tied to student achievement, but in an indirect way. School administrators are responsible for their mission/vision as well as upholding their district’s mission/vision. Implementation of these goals is where administrators can have an impact on student growth and achievement. If school leaders provide opportunities for classroom teachers to promote skills and activities that play on student strengths, then teachers will have more room to build effective resiliency in their students (Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2008).

### ***Role of the School Counsellor***

School counsellors are an asset that can be utilized in fostering resilience building skills. In regards to anxiety, depression, OCD and other mental health issues, the counsellor will often be the first one reported to at the school level (Foxy, Baker, & Gerler, 2016). School counsellors have a responsibility to care for the mental health of students as well as an obligation to report

any issues that may involve community police or social services involvement. If student resiliency is to be built at a school-wide level, the counsellor must be utilized as a resource, not viewed as an obstacle. In some cases, the school counselor is not working closely with the rest of the staff. Counselors are now being called upon to deal with more concerns and have a greater awareness of student issues, outside and inside of the school (Foxx et al., 2016). School counsellors serve as important contacts in dealing with many issues that can cause mental health problems (Chibbaro, 2007). Tapping into these individuals and approaching student resiliency as a school team of administrators, counsellors and teachers is an important step in serving the best interests of the students.

### **Summary**

Skills for students to build resilience to emotional and mental health related anxieties, must be broken into different categories and examined individually. First, a student's emotional intelligence needs to be taken into consideration and observed. A student's home life and socioeconomic status are related to their emotional well-being and these are often huge triggers for a student's anxiety. Understanding a student's emotional state is important in order for a student to build a strength of resilience.

After determining where the students are at emotionally, any potential preventive measures must be observed. The earlier the interventions occur for a student, the higher chance that student will have for success and effective strategies for dealing with the issues (Devane et al., 2005). Prevention strategies for student anxiety will vary depending on the child's situation at home and in the community (Barrett, et al. 2005).

As soon as there is an understanding of where a student is at emotionally and there is a knowledge of the student's home life, coping strategies for anxiety can begin. Effective coping

strategies are a key component to building resiliency in the youth of North American schools. The work of Hatcher and Pond (1998) and the regulation technique of Kuypers (2011) are effective forms of students understanding and facing their emotional issues and their control problems.

The work of Goldstein and McGinnis (1997), backed by the work of Brooks (2006), and Sillick & Schute (2006) all stress the need for effective prosocial skills and organizational skills as keys for building resiliency in students. Skills building should be an inherent part of the classroom and the pupils must have plenty of opportunity for growth and peer interaction and learning. In order to effectively implement each of these strategies, educators must have an active role in building resiliency. From policy makers to principals, teachers and counsellors all play a vital role in the development of a student's ability to cope and become resilient individuals.

### **Chapter 3: Summary, Recommendations and Conclusions**

#### **Summary**

Resilience can begin when educators are able to properly determine where the needs of the individual student need to be focused. Proper observation must occur and school counsellors must work with teachers and administrators to effectively intervene when needed. If educators take the proper steps, resilience can be a reality for all students afflicted with affective disorders.

#### **Determining the Cause**

To begin diagnosing affective disorders, those conducting the assessments must begin in early childhood and consider pre-existing family conditions. After determining early childhood causes for anxieties and mental health issues educators can observe and assess what the needs are at the school level. Establishing reason and cause can be difficult when dealing with mental health (Rogers & Pilgrim, 2014). Proactive measures can be taken if reason is correctly identified, in these cases self-regulation skills can be of help as can early development of prosocial skills (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997). Family history and family dynamics play an extremely important role in the mental health of children and adolescents (Hollenstein, Allen, & Sheeber, 2015).

Mental illnesses such as anxiety have seen an increase during the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada, 2015). Schools and educators are being called to deal with these problems in students. No longer is the counsellor the only staff member working with student mental health. School counsellors can be consulted on student concerns, but the counsellor is not always available. Teachers and other school staff are often faced with student anxiety first-hand and a way to effectively combat this is in building student resilience.

*Strategies to build resilience*

Educators can help students battling anxiety and depression through teaching techniques such as the Zones of Regulation (Kuypers, 2015) and building Prosocial Skills (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997). When the Zones of Regulation (2015) are used, it allows teachers and students to communicate effectively about behaviours. Students are taught to recognize their ‘zones’ and take the appropriate steps to regulate their behavior. Self-regulation is the goal of using the Kuypers system. Building prosocial skills is a list of strategies to teach students, these fall into the categories of communication, organization, stress management and conflict resolution. Being equipped with these life skills will allow students to become more resilient as they encounter new challenges every day. Each child will be a different case and considering a child’s family dynamics and socioeconomic status are important pieces to creating appropriate methods of resilience building. In the cases of early childhood it is possible for preventative measures such as regulating to avoid an intense emotional response, can be used. In adolescents, often times building coping strategies for the problem is the best way to help students get through their adolescent years (Folkman, 2013). Coping strategies to combat anxieties could range from diary writing to self-soothing and meditative techniques.

In order to ensure student success, educators at all levels should be involved in aiding students through their anxiety-related issues. The role of the school counsellor remains important during these cases (Foxx et al., 2016). School leadership is also key in building student resilience. The success of the students is placed on administrators as they carry out their school’s mission (Truebridge, 2013.) If this mission does not include promoting resiliency, then schools will not be as equipped to combat mental health concerns in students (Kennedy et al., 2012).

## **Recommendations**

As evidenced by the research, tackling the task of building resilience is not something that can be done overnight. The many students who are afflicted with affective disorders range from many ages to many demographics. Rather than beginning to initiate strategies that may not be successful for all students, interventions can begin in more localized environments. After more research is compiled and successes are documented in different learning environments, consistent strategies can become more widespread and universal.

### **Building Resilience at the local level**

At St. Marguerite Bourgeoys Catholic School (SMB) in Innisfail Alberta, there are a multitude of diverse cultural backgrounds and a student population that is largely low socioeconomic status. Many of the families at St. Marguerite's are ideal candidates for the resiliency building techniques written about previously in this paper, and as such, the need for strategies and interventions against affective disorders is important. At SMB, school administration must work collaboratively with the counsellors, Educational Assistants (EAs) and teachers to ensure student support is happening on all levels.

Mental health concerns are very prominent at SMB, especially with our adolescent students. The school is a Pre-K to grade 9 model, so it is one of the few schools in Red Deer Catholic Regional School District that functions at all three levels of educational service. Because of the age gap between students (4-15) the staff at SMB must be well-versed in how to assist young children to teenagers. Many of the middle school students at SMB are dealing with affective disorders such as; anxiety, depression, ODD, and bipolar disorder. I have encountered many of these students in my 4 years at the school.

In the elementary grades, teachers employ Kuypers Zones of Regulation (2011). Building self-regulation and coping strategies are being implemented early. At the middle school level, students are actively encouraged to visit the school counsellor and the Family School Wellness worker. These workers are able to refer students who need more intensive help. Teachers and other staff members are skilled at relationship building and establishing positive rapport with the students, this then allows for the teaching of skills building and methods of coping. A gap exists in serving the students, when it comes to dealing with parents and assessing the home lives of the children. This gap is seen in many of the attendance issues found in middle school students. Missed instructional time due to anxieties have become more commonplace in the last 3 years. Some students at SMB have even left the traditional classroom environment to seek online or homeschooling options, instead of focusing on building resiliency to their problems and anxieties.

### **Family dynamics**

As stated above, there are many lower socioeconomic families at St. Marguerite's school. Because of this, students are sent to us with pre-existing issues. Identifying these issues becomes a job that falls on the teacher. There are many FNMI students at SMB who are living in foster care. These students, just like other FNMI students suffer from identity disassociation and often-times a feeling of neglect. Many other students have parents who are working away from home, or split families. There are many middle school girls who lack a paternal figure in their lives and this is evidenced by the attachment they form with male coaches, teachers, etc. The same is true with those who lack a stable maternal figure and latching on to female staff members for support. All of these family dynamics produce children with what could be considered as 'warning signs'

when it comes to mental health. St. Marguerite's school works to address these problems, in the different approaches that are necessary.

### *Parental expectations*

At SMB School, particularly in the middle school, there is a large push for students to perform at an exceptional academic level. Students find themselves suffering from anxieties at the end of each of the three terms, as there are pressures and expectations to reach Honors with Distinction (90 or above average) in their subjects. This expectation is simply unrealistic for all students, however parents will expect their children to achieve this goal, regardless of whether or not it is a legitimate possibility. When these extra pressures are placed on students who are already suffering from affective disorders, it can lead to things like behavioral outbursts, negative extracurricular activities, and missed instructional time. As written above, there are a number of students at school who miss a great deal of their days of school, this then creates an inability to catch up, which fuels the stress levels even more.

On the other side of parents who push their children, are those who do not place importance on the value of education in their children. Innisfail is largely an agricultural community, and as such many students (typically males) have the goal to simply inherit the family farm from their parents. They miss school days to work on the farm and they do not prioritize how they perform in school, nor do their parents. Because of the family dynamics, existing affective disorders and parental expectations, there are a large number of mental health concerns at St. Marguerite's school, these concerns must be addressed by the teachers, counsellors, and administrators, in order to best serve each of the students.

To effectively guide and support the students of St. Marguerite's school, the affective disorders that students are coming forward with must be examined and dealt with differently on a

case-by-case basis. Whether it is Prosocial Skills (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997), or Instructional Strategies (Truebridge, 2013), or Regulation (Kuypers, 2011) each student's mental health must be examined and dealt with by the appropriate staff in a way that supports student growth, health and safety. A big help at SMB has already been the addition on the staff of a Family Wellness Worker. This individual is can collaborate with the teachers, counsellor and administrator and she is able to reach out to the families on a different level, not bound by all of the constraints faced by the educators. Through this link parents and guardians can support and implement resilience building skills in their children.

### **Conclusions**

Disorders such as depression and anxiety are present in students, based on a number of different factors (Allison et al., 2013). Family dynamics as well as cultural background play large roles in the mental health of teenage students. Working to understand the cause of the affective disorders and effectively laying out a support plan is important for the students who are afflicted by the various issues (Foxx et al., 2016).

After the cause has been determined, school supports can begin, depending on the situation and the level of intervention that is needed for the students. The support at the school level should involve the different levels of teacher, counsellor and administrator (Kennedy et al., 2012). In many instances, the building of prosocial skills (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997) and coping strategies (Folkman, 2013) are of great benefit to the students. The school can function as a safe place where there is access to supports not available in the home (Foxx et al., 2016). Working with the intent of building resilience in afflicted students, will allow educators to provide more universal supports for students who suffer from affective disorders.

### **Implications**

This paper outlined the high-rising number of adolescent students suffering from affective disorders. This rising number leads to not only the increase of adults suffering mentally, but also the rise of suicide among adolescents. Building student resilience is an important component of educators providing the students in their care with a safe and caring environment. Focusing time on the students' mental health in addition to teaching the mandated curriculum, is what is in the best interest of the students (Truebridge, 2013).

The skills and practices that are presented in this paper are useful life-learning tools for students to carry forward into adulthood. If the mental health of students is not addressed at the school level, there is a risk of adverse behaviours and mental health ailments continuing to grow in numbers (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997).

### ***Moving Forward***

Beginning at the local level is an important step in putting best practices forward. The gap at SMB School is that many students are not directly facing their problems because they may not possess the appropriate skills to do so. Working with the students at SMB and the various schools in Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools will allow me to take an active role in building student resilience. Working with school leaders and counselling teams and implementing the research findings; specifically Goldstein-McGinnis (1997), Kuypers (2011), Rice (2008), and Folkman (2013) will help to promote resiliency skills in the schools. If the promotion of student resilience can be present in not only the counselling offices, but the entire school and the home students can thrive in their adolescence and move into adulthood with the necessary skills and strategies needed to function with not only competence, but happiness in their adult lives.

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