Emic Perspectives of Risk and Support: Voices from Lower Elementary Students in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA

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Patrick B. Bell, Jorge M. Verlenden, Allisyn L. Swift, Heather L. Henderson and Bonnie K. Nastasi

Introduction

To understand the systemic factors that promote or inhibit the development of psychological, academic, and social competence for children in the USA, the public school systems are a paramount context to investigate. Roughly 45 million children spend their childhood and adolescence attending state-regulated public schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). It is within public school ecologies that most children begin a 12-year, full-time, government-mandated interaction with other children and adults as well as the legal-, legislative-, and social-systemic factors that potently influence their developmental trajectories. American children are developing in local contexts at the intersection of regional, ethnic, racial, religious, political, economic, and linguistic diversity. Defining any given American racial or ethnic group, including the current white[1] majority, is difficult and imperfect when considering the influence of location (e.g., rural, northeastern, Alaskan), class (i.e., the spectrum from extreme poverty to affluence), acculturation (e.g., recent immigrant, American-born), and city and community values, identities, and expectations.

Therefore, our chief aim is not to tell a broad strokes story of "America's children," but rather to situate a specific group of New Orleans elementary school students' perspectives on risk, protection, and well-being in both a broad, US context and their unique, culture-specific context. Our introductory discussion highlights broader macro- and exo-system themes regarding risks, protections, and trends in psychological well-being (PWB) outcomes for urban youth of color—black youth specifically—as this ecological narrative most closely aligns to our participants and local population. In the 2012 school year, 90% of public school students in New Orleans were black (Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives (CIPEI), 2012). Following this introduction of the distal, yet potent systemic factors, the study findings provide a deeper layer of investigation into what our specific child participants are telling us regarding their stressors and supports as they attempt to successfully develop and navigate their public school.

The Macrosystem[2] of Public Schools: Mindsets and Legislation

Public schools are currently operating in a chrono-system typified by shifting mindsets (and

[1] The racial constructs of white and black are used as alternatives to ethnic constructs that may incorrectly infer identity (e.g., African American, Cuban American, etc.).

[2] This chapter is organized according to the levels of ecological systems theory (see Chap. 2) and proceeds from

P. B. Bell (✉) · J. M. Verlenden · A. L. Swift · H. L. Henderson · B. K. Nastasi
Department of Psychology, Tulane University, 2007 Percival Stern Hall, 6400 Freret Street, New Orleans, LA 70118, USA
e-mail: pbell1@tulane.edu

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therefore, legislation) regarding how best to ensure that children succeed academically. The first shift emerged from legislation and racial tensions embodied in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s; American public schools have moved out of the age of segregating and often relegating children of color or with disabilities to ineffective schools and into an age of inclusion and accountability for all. Embodied in the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) is a history of educational inequities systematically related to, most often, race, class, and ability. Under NCLB, public schools are now charged with closing race-, class-, and disability-based achievement gaps by providing rigorous instruction to all children and as monitored by the state via annual standardized tests. A second shift is one away from a "wait-to-fail" model in which students only receive individual academic, social, emotional, or behavioral supports once severe academic deficits and/or psychopathology manifest to models that champion prophylaxis, early screenings, and monitoring student response to evidence-based interventions (e.g., Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003; National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2010). Finally, public schools are currently renegotiating discipline procedures in a shift away from harsh or exclusionary discipline (i.e., suspensions, corporal punishment) and toward more positive behavioral discipline (e.g., Sugai et al., 2000) and self-discipline via PWB promotion (e.g., collaborative for academic, social, and emotional learning (CASEL), 2003).

No Child Left Behind (2002) and the Age of Accountability The origins of the NCLB (2002) lie in President Johnson's "War on Poverty" and the passing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965). The ESEA was a reaction to mounting evidence that children in low-income schools excessively underperformed as compared to their middle-class, largely white counterparts (Fege, 2006). ESEA granted federal money to schools serving at least 40 % of students in poverty; however, despite assistance, a gap between middle- and low-income children widened. Fifteen years after ESEA, Congress chartered a committee that analyzed national learning data; the committee alarmingly titled their report, *A Nation at Risk* (U.S. National Commission on Excellence in Education [USNCEE], 1983). This report sparked urgency about America's failure to educate its children, and specifically, children of color; at that time, roughly 40 % of minority youth were functionally illiterate (USNCEE, 1983). Since *A Nation at Risk,* the risk factors and negative outcomes for youth in poverty and youth of color have become an ethical concern and a national priority; the past 30 years have witnessed attempts to hold schools and teachers accountable for student achievement via policy, litigation, and legislation—most recently, the reauthorization of ESEA as NCLB (Jorgensen & Hoffmann, 2003). At its core, NCLB continues ESEA's mission to improve academic outcomes by providing funds to underprivileged schools; however, current funding is now tied to a system of accountability (Merell, Ervin, & Peacock, 2012). Specifically, NCLB mandates that students take and achieve yearly growth on proficiency tests in core content areas (e.g., reading). Schools that demonstrate adequate yearly progress (a state determined benchmark of success as evidenced by standardized assessments) are rewarded—typically with money or nominal titles (e.g., "distinguished school"). However, schools that fail to make progress receive sanctions that range from allowing parents a choice to change schools to state takeover and chartering schools to independent or private organizations (USDOE, 2008).

The NCLB Act (2002) produced a host of supportive and risk factors, both intended and unintended, that manifest similarly across public school ecologies. The supportive aspects of NCLB include mandated attention to (a) prevention and intervention (e.g., Safe and Drug-Free Schools programs), (b) data-based decision-making strategies, (c) individualized instruction and student support, (d) higher standards for student learning and teaching quality, (e) objective indicators of student growth, and (f) prioritizing

the most distal (i.e., chrono-, macro-system) to the most proximal (meso-, micro-system).

research-based methods (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2003). However, NASP (2003) also noted that NCLB and large-scale assessments have far-reaching unintended consequences that manifest as risks at local levels. These include decisions to retain (i.e., "repeat" a grade) or refuse to graduate students based on a single test; practices that precipitate secondary risk such as school dropout (Heubert & Hauser, 1999). Another unintended risk is the narrowing of school curricula; schools teach students to survive and pass high-stakes tests instead of teaching comprehensive curricula that include the arts, physical education, social sciences, health, and technology (NASP, 2003). Further, because schools and teachers are rewarded or punished based on outcomes, teachers report that students now develop in more stressful classroom environments that subsequently lead to increased referrals to special education (often disproportionately in lower-income, minority populations), more fads and "quick-fix" programs, and exacerbated teacher stress that leads to burnout and talent shortages (Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998; NASP, 2003). Although NCLB brought attention to elements of public schooling that are now recognized as best practice, data suggest it did not solve the problem of educational inequity. In 2011, more than half of US public schools did not make adequate yearly progress (USDOE, 2011), and as high as 86% of urban, black public school eighth graders are not reading with grade-level proficiency on standardized tests (Children's Defense Fund (CDF), 2012). Even as this chapter is written, newer—though contested—initiatives are emerging to respond to the difficulties in actualizing NCLB's mission, such as the Common Core movement. Although districts and schools have enormous flexibility in the way state standards are addressed, the Common Core movement seeks to nationalize learning standards across states to promote a deep understanding of the most critical content (Council of Chief State School Officers, National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010). The impacts of NCLB and shifting mindsets toward universal, equitable education were far reaching and illustrate complex distal factors indirectly affecting local child development. One systemic reaction to the challenges of actualizing NCLB was local and governmental movements to address PWB deficits and skills known to interfere with or enhance learning, respectively.

Population-Based Movements to Promote Psychological Well-Being Children's PWB is an intricate construct receiving overdue but growing attention in public schools (Adelman & Taylor, 2006). It appears that accountability and rigor (i.e., NCLB) were necessary, but not sufficient to actualize equity in academic achievement. Although upwards of one in five children experience a psychological impairment that significantly impacts school functioning, 80% of these youth receive no intervention; the probability of receiving services incrementally declines when a child is low income, is living in the American South, is enrolled in public-funded insurance, and is black (CDF, 2010; Cook, Barry, & Busch, 2012; Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 1999; President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health [PNFC], 2003). Public schools and school psychologists have traditionally operated with a "wait-to-fail" model of service that activates resources only when diagnosable psychopathology develops (Gresham, 2002; Martinez & Nellis, 2008). However, paradigms of practice are shifting toward population-based models, characterized by approaches rooted in a public health perspective that emphasize universal promotion and prevention, and selected and indicated interventions (e.g., NASP, 2010). Two such population-based models for PWB are the positive behavioral supports (PBS; Sugai et al., 2000) and social–emotional learning (SEL; CASEL, 2003) frameworks.

Positive Behavioral Supports The PBS framework infuses preventative, effective, and positive (as opposed to punitive and exclusionary) methods of behavioral discipline into school policy (Sugai et al., 2000). PBS urges schools to use behavioral data to plan, implement, and evaluate a continuum of multitiered, evidence-based services ranging from school-wide prevention to individual functional behavior assessments

(Sugai et al., 2000). Multiple research agendas indicate that schools that apply school-wide PBS models with integrity significantly improve outcomes for youth as evidenced by reductions in disciplinary action, more positive student appraisals of school climate, reductions in bullying, and increases in scores on standardized measures of achievement (Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, Ialongo, & Leaf, 2008; Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010; Simonsen et al., 2011). However, amidst this growing zeitgeist of prevention and positive support, there exist a myriad of behavioral risk factors and negative outcomes operating at national levels for youth of color and of low income. One potent risk is that, although decades of research demonstrate the effectiveness of positive discipline, public schools continue to react to behavior challenges by increasing the type, duration, and intensity of punitive measures such as time-out, suspension, expulsion, corporal punishment, and zero tolerance (i.e., consistent and swift suspension for unsafe or "otherwise unacceptable" behavior; American Civil Liberties Union, 2009; Evenson, Justinger, Pelischek, & Schulz, 2009; NASP, 2001; Skiba, 2000; Sugai & Horner, 2002). The high prevalence of such punitive and ineffective measures to discipline students—particularly youth of color—is a large component of what is now considered a "cradle-to-prison pipeline" (CDF, 2012) and represents the effects of historical and institutionalized racism and deep-seated racial biases and stereotypes—particularly targeted toward black males. Black youth made up 18% of the total American public school population in 2012, but were disproportionately indicated in corporal punishments (40% of all cases), multiple out-of-school suspensions (46%), grade retentions (42%), and expulsions (39%). In the same year, black males of traditional college age made up 36% of the prison population, but less than 5% of the total college student population and young black males were more than 4.5 times more likely to be detained in juvenile detention centers than their white peers, 60% of them for nonviolent offenses (CDF, 2012). Although scholars assume complex etiologies of the racial disparity in PWB indicators, consensus exists concerning the deleterious consequences of harsh and ineffective discipline, specifically punitive school environments (CDF, 2011, 2012; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Taylor & Kouyaté, 2003).

Social–Emotional Learning Proponents of SEL maintain that the poor outcomes in well-being and academics are due in great part to late or insufficient attention to psychological determinants of learning—factors consistently shown to be malleable, teachable, and predictive of academic success (CASEL, 2013; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003; Hoagwood & Johnson, 2003; Masten et al., 2005; National Research Council, 2012). Currently, over 200 controlled studies demonstrate that this malleable and powerfully protective skill set includes (a) self-awareness and the abilities involved in recognizing one's emotions, thoughts, behaviors, strengths, and sources of confidence; (b) responsible decision making and problem-solving; (c) self-management and self-regulation; (d) social awareness skills such as perspective taking, empathy, diversity appreciation, and adapting to social–cultural norms and ethics; and (e) relationship skills that involve initiating and maintaining healthy relationships (CASEL, 2013).

Population-focused models and SEL also have become the best practice zeitgeist of school psychology (e.g., NASP, 2010). However, successful and sustained population-based campaigns in public schools have not caught up with the spirit of the field (Hess et al., 2012). Therefore, much like recent and promising movements for academic excellence (NCLB) and positive, protective discipline (PBS), the SEL movement is proving difficult to actualize in natural settings. The risks and barriers to SEL programming typically fall into categories of (a) service delivery issues such as lack of multiple, coordinated systems of care, lack of professional and financial resources, and lack of clarity on why and how children should be assessed; (b) federal and state policy issues such as lack of strategies and funding for early detection and intervention and lack of coordinated mental health policy; (c) family-level issues including limited access, inadequate compliance to follow-ups, and stigma and apprehension

due to experiences with culturally incompetent services; and (d) uncertainty in how to serve special populations, including immigrant children, homeless youth, youth in justice and welfare systems, and children in communities with high rates of violence (CDF, 2003; PNFC, 2003; USDHHS, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002). A final difficulty in institutionalizing PWB programs rests in a failure of researchers and practitioners to adequately understand the culture, vision, and priorities of each school (Greenberg et al., 2003; Sarason, 1996). This lack of attention to the ecological and cultural specificity of a school poses serious threats to acceptability—perceived congruence between programs and culture—that negatively affects program integrity, outcomes, and sustained efforts to promote PWB (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005).

The NCLB, PBS, and SEL macrosystem factors are powerful influences that evolved in part from growing recognition of the disproportionality of negative outcomes for youth of color and of low income. To address the more proximal manifestations of these risks and supports, we next explicate the exo-systems unique to urban schools, black communities, and lastly, post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans.

The Exo-Systems of Urban Public Schools and Communities

Recent investigations suggest that although complex, urban ecologies share common assets and risks at both school-system and family–community levels that distinguish them from rural and suburban US contexts (American Psychological Association (APA), 2005). At the school-system level, urban schools are required to do more with less. Urban public schools serve larger student populations and with greater proportions of students with exceptional needs, all the while attempting to secure financial resources from declining local tax bases and lower-than-average state funding (Miranda & Olivo, 2008; Weiner, 2006). School-level risk factors also include greater likelihoods of teacher shortages and, thus, a higher percentage of first-year teachers and those with nontraditional training and emergency certification (Council of the Great City Schools, 2000; U.S. General Accounting Office [USGAO], 2002). Academically healthy urban schools exist, and we must laud the resilience and passion of many urban educators, PWB champions, and urban youth and families; however, the academically excellent urban school remains an exception to the norm of underachievement (Miranda & Olivo, 2008; Noell & Gansle, 2009). Finally, the USGAO (2002) detected systematic variability between urban and suburban schools in that urban schools had greater teacher-to-student ratios, greater local poverty, fewer library resources, and lower parent involvement—variables consistently correlated with the academic health of a school.

Studies involving urban youth and communities also identify assets and risks at family and community levels. In 2011, Hart Research Associates (HRA), on behalf of the Black Community Crusade for Children, interviewed over 1000 black community leaders, caregivers, and youth to elucidate emic perspectives on the risks and assets present in their family and community ecologies. The overarching theme in their national sample was that urban ecologies had not significantly improved for black children over the past decade and disenfranchised youth of color were falling even further behind (HRA, 2011). Participants identified economic isolation, parent unemployment, higher imprisonment rates, community violence, failing schools, addiction, negative cultural influences (e.g., media glorification of drugs), and fractured communities (e.g., due to violence) as impediments in the development of urban black youth (HRA, 2011). Optimistically, black communities share powerful protective factors; to actualize the optimal development of youth of color, schools need to reorganize themselves in ways that reinvigorate these supports (Miranda & Olivo, 2008; Myers, Lewis, & Parker-Dominguez, 2003). For example, youth of color that overcome disproportionate stressors typically share family- and community-level supports such as (a) strong and positive racial and ethnic identity development, (b) connectedness to a warm and effective school, (c) parental

warmth, (d) approach- or active-coping (often relationship-based) strategies, (e) access to community-based spiritual and recreational organizations, and (f) mastery of culturally valued skills and mindsets such as self-reliance, interpersonal awareness, problem-solving skills, learning orientations, and persistence (e.g., values for life model, Taylor & Kouyaté, 2003; see also HRA, 2011; Miranda & Olivo, 2008; Myers et al., 2003). The paramount charge to urban schools, therefore, has been to create *meso*-systems of influence (e.g., home–school, community–school partnerships) that respect and foster cultural values, identify unique local assets, and authentically collaborate to capitalize on these assets (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009; Jumper-Thurman, Edwards, Plested, & Oetting, 2003).

New Orleans' Unique Manifestations of Macro- and Urban Exo-System Factors

The urban school and family microsystems in New Orleans manifest many if not most of the aforementioned risks and assets surrounding urban youth of color. Long-standing risks such as New Orleans' poverty rates greater than twice the national average, inadequate housing, a dearth of health and wellness services, community violence and murder rates ten times greater than the national average, failing schools, and complex trauma (i.e., continued and multiple traumatic exposures) compound the existing trauma of 2005 Hurricane Katrina and the slow recovery (Murali & Oyebode, 2004; USGAO, 2009; Wellford, Bond, & Goodison, 2011). Five years after Katrina, 60% of local youth presented with serious emotional and behavioral disturbances; less than half received services (Children's Health Fund and the National Center for Disaster Preparedness, 2010; USGAO, 2009). Local media portrayed these risks as a children's "mental health crisis" (e.g., Grant, 2009; Maldonado, 2009; Smith, 2009).

Despite these risks, New Orleans has witnessed a school-reform effort unprecedented in any American city—78% of New Orleans youth attend charter schools (CIPEI, 2012). Charter schools are a recent school-reform effort and operate on assumptions that parent choice, competition, innovative practices, and school-level decision-making autonomy (e.g., on budgeting, curriculum, hiring, and firing) will lead to dramatic student achievement (Hadderman, 1998; Morse, 2010). A recent report from the CIPEI (2012) identified proximal risk and protective factors in the New Orleans public school system. Data revealed some New Orleans' specific protections for students: (a) master plans in place to ensure that school buildings for every child are renovated and physically safe; (b) a more equitable, single application system for parent application to the wide array of independent charter schools; (c) upward trends in achievement data—particularly for elementary schools; and (d) decreased teacher recruitment activities indicating that the local teacher shortage may abate (CIPEI, 2012). Regarding proximal risks, the CIPEI (2012) detected the following: (a) Although some specific schools are dramatically improving student learning, city-wide achievement results are mixed; (b) doubts are growing about long-term sustainability of the charter movement; and (c) parents are expressing growing distrust of cultural outsiders operating charters and imposing one-sided values. This last risk represents a salient shift in the cultural landscape of New Orleans. Before the school-reform movement, schools served the parents (often alumni) and children of the local neighborhood; however, New Orleans now operates on city-wide access, meaning that the local school culture no longer reflects the neighborhood context but instead serves students from all over the city.

Concluding this introductory analysis of important factors of risk and protection in the ecologies of American public schools brings us full circle. We both began and end by noting that although there are trends in issues facing urban schools and communities, it is imperative to engage local stakeholders—including students themselves—to understand the salient ecological factors proximally affecting child development.

Following, we move to a depiction of our local microsystem, its manifestation of the macro- and exo-system factors discussed, and the perceptions of risk, support, and values from the voices of the children within it.

The Microsystem: Elementary Charter School in New Orleans

Our research was conducted at an elementary charter school in New Orleans (hereafter, "ECSNO"). The student population was predominantly black (99%) and over 90% of students qualified for the free- or reduced-price lunch program—a proxy indicator of low socioeconomic status. The school's mission statement, like many others in New Orleans, emphasizes academic rigor and achievement; they have an extended school year (August 15–June 10), extended school day (7:45 a.m. to 3:45 p.m.), and after-school tutoring for identified students (3:45–5:00 p.m.), believing that additional time in school will lead to greater achievement (New Orleans Parent Organizing Network [NOPON], 2012). Most, but not all, school staff was white, nontraditionally trained and temporarily certified,[3] and early in their teaching careers. In the same year as data collection, ECSNO earned a "B" from the state—a grade based on NCLB testing outcomes and attendance rates (NOPON, 2012). Although ECSNO's mission statement for their "scholars" (their preferred term for "students") is heavily focused on college readiness and academic rigor, it also values strong character. During our early partnership building with ECSNO stakeholders, educators revealed that they were generally confident in their academic efficacy but struggled with the character, mental health, and behavior-management aspects of their instructional program. Results from universal screenings—part of our larger research activities—supported local concerns. Teacher reports on a standardized PWB screener indicated that, across grade levels, between 39 and 59% of students were at risk for behavioral or emotional disturbance (Nastasi & Bell, 2012). These data served as an urgent impetus to better understand the type, severity, and sources of risks facing ECSNO students as well as information regarding the protective factors present to help assuage this risk. The Promoting Psychological Well-Being Globally (PPWBG) project (Nastasi, 2008; Nastasi & International Psychological Well-Being Research Team, 2012; see also Chap. 2) served not only as the driver for this chapter but also our applied work with the students, families, and educators at ECSNO.

Methods Modifications

The PPWBG-New Orleans primary research team included four school psychology doctoral students under the direction of Drs. Nastasi and Cunningham[4] of Tulane University. Student participant data for this project are presented in Table 16.1. Data collection procedures included student focus groups, ecomaps drawings, and ecomap stories. Four major modifications were made to the PPWBG procedures described in Chap. 2. First, given developmental attention spans and ECSNO's emphasis on maximizing instructional time, students were pulled for brief (30 min) and multiple data collection sessions. Sessions were altered to vary the research tasks and maintain student interest. For example, session activities were designed to shift after each 10-min block; one block may include drawing oneself on the ecomap, the next, a 10-min discussion on stressors, and the final block returning to the ecomap to draw important relationships. A second modification was the deconstruction of

[3] In the USA, college graduates who have not been trained in a teacher education program within a university setting may be certified via alternate routes, such as state and national organizations. Typically, alternate route certification involves an intensive, 5-week training in pedagogy and student teaching, followed by a year of continued coursework and coaching. After this full year, they may qualify for full teaching certification.

[4] Michael Cunningham, PhD, is a professor of psychology at Tulane University, with a specialization in developmental psychology.

Table 16.1 Characteristics of the ECSNO student sample ($n=42$)

Sex	Race/ethnicity	Grade level
60% female 40% male	98% black 2% Latino	29% kindergarten 42% first grade 29% second grade

ecomap drawings into smaller steps. First, the child drew himself/herself on a separate index card, that card was then glued in the center of a larger sheet of paper—to avoid self-drawings taking up an entire sheet of paper. Then, children were provided with visual examples of ecomaps (drawn by one member of the research team and used in every group) at each stage of completion; one demonstrating the constellation of important people and institutions and the other with coded relationships. A third modification was the explicit use of positive reinforcement (i.e., food snacks and sticker rewards) to encourage active participation, successful transitions between tasks, and to show gratitude for participation. Finally, initial data collection revealed that multiple students were reporting suspected abuse; therefore, the team worked with the school mental health coordinator to create a protocol for reporting suspected abuse and ensuring follow-up and referrals were made.

Results

Results from the New Orleans site were coded using emergent coding procedures (c.f., Chap. 2). After emergent codes were identified within grade-level data, data were compared across grade levels to assess salience. Specifically, we organized emergent codes into categories: (a) *consensus* across kindergarten, first-, and second grades; (b) *some agreement* (i.e., two groups, but not all endorsing the code); and (c) *grade-specific* codes (single grade endorsing the code). We analyzed ecomaps for new codes and to triangulate the existing focus group codes. Table 16.2 presents a distillation of all emergent codes. However, the results discussed hereafter include only the codes with high salience (i.e., consensus column) and include verbatim quotes to illustrate the data underlying each code.

Valued Competencies

Focus group questions targeting valued competencies elicit the explicit behavioral, cognitive, affective, or social knowledge and skills indicative of adaptive functioning in the local context. In their role as students, themes included (Table 16.2, consensus column): (a) following classroom rules, (b) earning positive and avoiding negative consequences, and (c) respect and manners. Competencies in friendship were (a) helping and service and (b) not being mean. Finally, competencies outside of school or in the neighborhood included (a) obeying adults and (b) inhibiting aggression.

At School: Following Classroom Rules Scholars spoke mainly of being a good student in terms of complying with classroom rules. Students spoke about following the teacher's instructions and rules by saying students should "…sit in 'S.T.A.R.' (i.e., (S)it still, (T)rack the speaker with your eyes, show (A)mbition (i.e., answer questions), and (R)aise your hand to speak). Another student spoke to procedural rules: "A good student…walk[s] into the classroom and say[s] hello to your teacher and walk[s] to your seat to do your work." "[Bad students] don't listen to the teacher," provided a supporting counterexample.

At School: Earning Positive Rewards and Avoiding Negative Consequences Students spoke often about the ECSNO clip system, a behavioral management system composed of clothespins (i.e., clips) that a teacher moves up or down a consequence ladder toward rewards ("stars") or checks ("punishments"), respectively. Students considered to be behaviorally competent are those whose clips move up. "In class we have clips;" one student explained, "if you get a star, that's good…When you get two checks

Table 16.2 Emergent codes for psychological well-being (PWB) domains from focus groups and ecomaps

PWB domain	Consensus	Some agreement (grade level)	Grade level specific (grade level)
Competency: role—student	Follow classroom rules Earn positive consequences Avoid negative consequences (subtype: clips)	Kindness (K, 1) Support peers (K, 2) Academic, behavioral success (1, 2) Problem-solving abilities (1, 2)	Grit and challenging oneself (1) Follow D.R.E.A.M.-TEAM school values (K)*
Competency: role—friend	Respect Helping and service Is not mean	Make amends (K, 2)	Defends you (1)
Competency: roles—neighbor/ outside of school	Listen and obey adults Inhibit aggression	Engage in play (types: old friends; to make friends) (1, 2) Cooperative play (K, 1) Patience/frustration tolerance (K, 1) Manners and respect (K, 2)	Engage in gender-normed activities (K) Report crime (1) Do chores (2) Respect property/neighborhood (1) Give holiday presents to family (K)
Stressors	Family death, separation Physical aggression (types: peers; domestic) Social exclusion Bad neighbors Adult meanness Punitive discipline (type: physical/corporal) Sibling conflict	Neighborhood violence/crime (1, 2) Media/scary movies (1, 2) General worrying (1, 2)	Mosquitoes (K) Vandalism (1) Vampire masks (1) Having a lie told about you (2) Teasing (2) Bad dreams (2) Ghosts/shadows (2) Being bossed around (2)
Reactions to stress	Avoid/ignore people Help seeking Aggression (types: physical; social; self-directed) Self-calming techniques Physiological	Emotional reaction (K, 1) Disobedience (K, 2)	Try to earn rewards (2) Try to engage in play (K) Redemption (2)
Supports	Peer support and play (Source: same-age family members and school mates) Receptive adults/known teenagers Physical affection Self-calming to regulate heightened emotions Engaging in pleasant activities Pets Gifts/tangibles	Talking about feelings (K, 2)	Seeking and earning positive consequences and avoiding future negative consequences (2)
Reactions to support	Experience positive emotions Happy facial expressions	(n/a)	Playful behavior (K)

A version of this table presented to elementary charter school in New Orleans (ECSNO) stakeholders included verbatim quotation samples to illustrate each code. Letters and numbers in parentheses in the "some agreement" and "stakeholder specific" columns represent the grade levels—(K)indergarten, (1)st grade, and (2)nd grade—that endorsed the code
*D.R.E.A.M.-TEAM was an ECSNO created acronym to depict a system of values including, [D]iscipline, [R]espect, [E]nthusiasm, [A]chievement, [M]ake a difference, and [TEAM]work

you have to go home." Another student spoke of being a "*dream* scholar" [a student whose clips consistently moves to the highest positive rung]; "…if you [are] a DREAM scholar, you get to go to Fantastic Friday [a celebration to positively recognize students]."

At School: Respect and Manners Competent students show respect to peers and adults. Respect to peers emerged primarily from counterexamples that reflected disrespectful behavior. For example, a bad student "[calls] another student an 'idiot' and 'stupid' and all kinds of words that you shouldn't say in school." Another group discussed "messiness" (i.e., disrespect) and explained, "[A bad student] messes with you and teases you, even after you tell them to leave you alone." Respect toward teachers also was valued. One student illustrated: "A bad student talks back to the teacher and talks behind teacher's back while the teacher is talking." Students also valued manners as in the admonishment: "Use your manners. Say 'please' or 'thank you,' [and] you gotta be waiting 'til somebody [is done with their] turn."

In Friendships: Helping and Service As a friend, students valued service to others, particularly focused on helping friends feel better emotionally and physically. "When your friend is sick and they [are] at home, you make them hot cocoa and you have to help them do stuff because that's what friends do, and if they have to go to the doctor, you can [go with] them." Helping can come in many forms such as helping when a student is getting teased, helping with schoolwork, or helping to maintain appropriate behavior. For example, "If you can't figure it out [a math problem], a good friend could help." Help also related to the aforementioned clip system as a good friend would be "helping you get your clip moved up."

In Friendships: Not Being Mean Many students mentioned that good friends are "not mean to you and do not tease you to your face." Another student added that a friend will not "brag and tease you about what you have when they have something better." Still another added that a good friend does not "talk bad about you…[or] hit, push, or call [you] names…this is being a mean friend."

In the Neighborhood/Outside of School: Obeying Adults A competent child at home and in the community follows adult directions. For example, almost every focus group had some variant of one child's comment that a good child "listens to [their] mama always and pays attention to her." Another student validated this expectation with a disturbing, but contextually relevant rationale: "A good student would listen to [their] mom or dad or grandma because if you [don't] listen to them you, you [could] go where you aren't supposed to go and then [bad neighbors] are gonna shoot at you." Students also talked about obeying rules at church: "When the pastor or priest is talking, you track them [with your eyes] and listen to them."

In the Neighborhood/Outside of School: Inhibiting Aggression Students agreed that using physically aggressive behavior was undesired across contexts. "A bad kid is when they fight and hit people and slap people and punch people," explained one student. Students also agreed that destruction of property was a behavior that was undesired, for example, "When [bad children] break things."

As depicted in Table 16.2, a variety of other competencies emerged either with some agreement or specific to a grade-level group; however, illustrating each code extends the limits of this chapter. The absence of consensus for less salient codes may reflect developmental differences (e.g., first and second grade mentioned more advanced "problem-solving abilities") or perhaps do hold consensus, but for unknown reasons did not emerge across grade levels. Regardless, some less salient codes may become potent targets in further planning (e.g., competencies such as "making friends" and "frustration tolerance" align to aforementioned SEL skills; CASEL, 2003).

Student Stressors

Student perceptions of stressors emerged from two types of focus group questions. One set explicitly asked students, "What challenges/stressors do children your age experience?" Another set were induced from follow-up questions about things, people, or events that caused them to experience unpleasant emotions (i.e., sad, angry,

and scared). Stressors with complete consensus include: (a) family death and separation, (b) physical aggression, (c) social exclusion, (d) adult meanness, (e) punitive discipline, and (f) negative sibling interactions.

Death and Separation Students experienced stress when separated from family members. Sometimes the separation existed between living relatives, for example, "My mom [doesn't] want my Dad to be by me. I want him to live with us but my momma [doesn't]. I want to call my dad to go somewhere—I never do—I never go places with my Daddy." They also spoke of separation via death as stressful; one student shared, "Six months ago somebody who was important to me died, it was my friend's mom." Finally, one student alluded to separation and death: "My mom tells me that my grandma has to stay in the hospital and [won't] come home."

Physical Aggression Students mentioned being physically hurt by someone as stressful. One said, "If somebody hits you, it makes you feel mad." Many students expressed that "fights with friends" were stressful, particularly "when somebody hits you in the face and doesn't say sorry." Finally, students also reported threats of physical aggression as stressful. For example, "My mom's old boyfriend said he was going to kill our mom and [he] might kill us."

Social Exclusion Another stressor salient to this group was social exclusion, which typically happened in peer situations. For example, one student explained, "[It is stressful] when they say they don't like you, or they say they['re] not your friend anymore…[that] breaks your heart…[and] if somebody break[s] your heart, that means that they're not being nice to you." Another type of social exclusion was from access to play or treats, as one student shared: "[It makes] me sad [when] nobody plays or gives me [any] cake, when nobody shares with [me]."

Adult Meanness The concept of "adult meanness" emerged exclusively from ecomap interviews. Notwithstanding, this concept garnered consensus across grades. Perceptions of unwarranted, extreme, and inconsistent meanness from adults clustered together to form this code. For example, "If I want to talk, [the bus driver] won't let us talk…because he wants to listen to the radio; the bus driver whooped[5] us. He used his belt." Another student explained that it was stressful when "my [mother] slaps me in my face just to be funny with her friends when they visit." Finally, at school, one student illustrated the adult meanness code by recounting having "[felt] angry at [my teacher] because she moved people's clips down when they don't know why the clip got moved down. She is mean and I feel mad like when she yells at us to move our clip down for tying our shoes when standing in line…she takes her anger out on us; she teaches us about letting out our anger without being mean but she looks at us mean when she gets angry and sends us to the end of the line."

Punitive Discipline Punishment-based consequences emerged as a stressor; this code is different from adult meanness in that the intended consequence is to modify children's behavior. For example, one student was sad when "I get two checks [clip moved down]." Another student indicated stress when teachers "yell at you because you did something wrong and they will yell and yell." Many others mentioned punishment at home, for example, "When my mom makes me go in the corner with my hands up [a form of corporal punishment]." Another student said, "When my dad comes in and yells at me." Finally, many students mentioned that getting "whoopings" was stressful.

Sibling Conflict Sibling conflict was another code that derived solely from ecomap interviews and that reached consensus. Students in all grades mentioned examples of stressful encounters with siblings. For example, one student said, "My

[5] "Whoop" is a local term akin to spanking. It typically involves hitting a child either with the hand or with an instrument (e.g., a belt).

little sister pulls on [my] ear and bites on [my] ear, screams and makes me distracted when I do my homework." Another explained, "Me and my brother mostly don't get along. He likes to beat me up and he won't let me go into his room but he comes into my room."

Similar to the valued competencies, a variety of stressors did not reach full consensus. However, some grade-specific stressors map onto aforementioned, known risks cited in research literature and may be important in PWB promotion planning (e.g., exposure to neighborhood violence). The culture-specific stressors that children endorse become powerful within a model of PWB promotion designed to reduce risk and to identify children experiencing intense or numerous stressors via, for example, a school-specific measure of risk using emic descriptors of stressors.

Reactions to Stress

The stressors discussed in focus groups were presented back to elicit common reactions; for example, groups that mentioned discipline as a stressor were asked, "When a child's clip moves down, what do they do? How do they feel?" For most groups, the primary reaction was "being mad," and stress responses were manifestations of, or attempts to regulate, anger. Four salient reactions emerged: (a) avoiding/ignoring people; (b) help seeking; (c) physical, social, and self-directed aggression; (d) and using self-calming, affect-regulation techniques.

Avoid or Ignore People In response to stress, students described avoiding the stressor. Students retreated to their rooms, ran away from situations, and turned their faces away to avoid continued interaction. One student explained, "I go to my room and [don't] come out." Another said, "I run and slam the door and lock it and sit in my room." Students also said that they deliberately ignored stressors, for example, "I would just ignore them and ignore them." Students also described strategies for ignoring stressful individuals or situations. "I hum to myself. I cover my face," said one student; another added, "I put my arms and head inside [my] shirt."

Help Seeking Informing others and seeking help were dominant reactions to stress. "You can tell somebody about your feelings to make you feel better," explained one student. Family members, teachers, and peers were identified as helpers. One student said, "You can tell the teacher, tell the principal, and tell your momma or your dad." Students also described peers as helpers in times of stress. One student offered, "There [are] a lot of things [a friend] can do when someone is sad…. When someone is sad, you help them get better."

Physical, Social, and Self-Directed Aggression Aggression was a salient reaction to stress and was expressed toward others, objects, and the self. For example, "[When] I get really angry I push people. I feel like fighting them." Another student reported, "I [am] mean to the teacher when I'm angry and kick the teacher's stuff down and [don't] pick it back up or say sorry." Regarding relational aggression, "I would hurt them back by calling them names or ignoring them." Another child explained self-harm: "When I get mad, I throw everything down on the floor… get [my] toy and hit [myself]." Other aggressive stress reactions included, "classroom outbursts," "hitting people," "kicking chairs," and "punching the wall."

Use of Self-Calming and Affect-Regulation Techniques Children spoke in detail about specific calming and emotion-regulation techniques such as deep breathing and positive thinking. "They can calm [them]selves down by thinking calm thoughts, like thinking about a time you went to the park. And you can count from five to zero." Another student advised, "Take a thousand deep breaths." Self-calming techniques also included distraction. For instance, one student explained, "I have a friend. Every time she is scared she wants me to put on music." Other related self-calming strategies included "sleeping," "taking a walk," "cold rags on your face,"

"writing music," "play[ing] on the computer," "brushing my doll's hair," and "dancing."

Physiological Responses Students discussed an array of physical responses including "fast heartbeats" and "shivering." However, the primary physiological response was crying. "One time… somebody at my table said [my] picture wasn't beautiful and [I] started crying." Another explained, "When my mom whoops me, I be crying."

Perspectives of Supports

When experiencing stress, the sources of support described by students included both internal and external supports such as classmates, friends and family, and teachers. Regarding types of support, opportunities to play either with another person or alone was one of the most commonly reported. Other types of support included (a) physical affection, (b) self-calming techniques, (c) engaging in pleasant activities, and (d) playing with pets.

Play, Encouragement, and Help In response to the question, "What do you do for a friend who is feeling upset?" children most often expressed providing encouragement and help through opportunities to play. For example, one student suggested, "Go[ing] to play in the park together." Another said, "You can play football in the grass with them; you can help them on the field…like real football players." Help and encouragement in general were discussed. For instance, one child offered consolation to a friend who had been teased: "I knocked on her door and she came to answer her door and I said, 'Just ignore the other kids that don't like you. When they say you['re] ugly, you say, 'I'm not really ugly, I'm beautiful and pretty…' I told her that she was beautiful and pretty."

Supportive Adults and Teenagers Students mentioned family members and other known adults as members of their support system. For example, "I will go to my mother and my sister and my dad. If my mom is doing something, I go to my dad. If my dad is doing something, I go to my sister. If [she can't help], I go back to my mom." Other specific adults included teachers, grandparents, uncles and aunts, the ECSNO principal, and police officers. Children also described their teenaged siblings as sources of support, as in one students' example: "[My sister] used to go to my soccer games but now she's in high school. I understand [that] because she's a teenager she won't be able to go to all my games, but I know inside of my heart she'll always be there for me."

Physical Affection Students noted physical affection as a way to make others feel better. "Give them a hug," and "Pat [them] on the back when [they] get hurt" were discussed in every grade-level group. Students also reported that "rubbing backs" was a common method of soothing used by parents and adults at home to relieve their stress.

Self-Calming Students listed several self-calming strategies, often as directly instructed by the teacher, as important sources of support. One student mentioned smiling to improve mood. Another spoke of changing thoughts: "[I would] think calm thoughts like you're dancing with a best friend [who] knows how to dance." Finally, another spoke to the ECSNO practice of deep breathing in explaining, "Since [I'm] angry, [I can] go in that corner. I would count from 1 to 10 and take 100 deep breaths."

Engage in Pleasant Activities Slightly different than general play, students also mentioned engaging in pleasant activities or events as sources of support. For example, one student mentioned that after being upset, his family took him downtown. "We went on the streetcar. We went to Canal Street. I got a lot of stuff." Time spent in pleasant activities often occurred with family and peers, and typical activities included, "swimming," "reading," "playing video games," and "watching football."

Pets Pets offered support to many students, both through the previously discussed physical touch

and also feelings of love. One child said her dog made her "…so, so happy, I took her for a walk, and she licked my hand and she gave me a big hug." Another explained going to his dog when upset: "I love him, he loves me, I'm happy about him, he's happy about me; Roody loves me because when he barks he's trying to talk to me."

Reactions to Support

Students were also asked how they can detect when someone is experiencing positive feelings (such as happiness), and how students react when they are experiencing or have received support. Students described these reactions to support in terms of experiencing positive emotions and demonstrating these emotions through facial expressions.

Positive Emotions Student reactions to support were generally described as sensations and feelings of happiness. The most commonly described feelings were "great," "being happy," and feeling "good inside" when they experienced internal or external support. They also hinted at the positive emotion from self-efficacy in responding appropriately to stress, as one child explained, "When they help [themselves] feel better, people feel good about themselves."

Facial Expressions Students explained that facial expressions were another common reaction to support. For example, one student said that when you "…make a smile on your face, it means that somebody made you happy." Another student explained, "I see that their whole face is going up like this [demonstrating a wide smile]." When happy, another student said, "My face goes up in the air and I start laughing."

Discussion

Across our child participants at ECSNO in New Orleans, Louisiana, there was general agreement that a competent student mastered the skills and behaviors involved in following classroom rules, earning positive and avoiding negative consequences, respecting others, helping those in need, avoiding meanness, obeying adults in different environments, and inhibiting aggression. Risk factors are hypothesized to impede children in their development of the aforementioned valued competencies. Our children presented variables that they recognized as stressful that included family deaths and separations, physical aggression from peers or at home, social exclusion, bad neighbors, adult meanness, punitive discipline, and sibling conflict. However, in the face of stress, our participants highlighted common supports such as peer support through play, receptive adults or teenagers, physical affection, self-calming techniques, engaging in pleasant activities, pets, and receiving gifts.

Our children's depictions of their most proximal school and home microsystems equip us as scientists and practitioners to appreciate a fuller ecology in which we strive to promote our dual goals of academic achievement and PWB. An essential insight from our data was that even young participants were quite attuned to, and could make explicit, the norms, values, and expectations that the adults in their environments hold for them. More specifically, in our full data set that includes parent, teacher, and administrator perspectives on the same domains presented herein, 13 valued expectations emerged. Our children discerned 11 of these, oblivious only to the adult values of internal motivation—an abstract concept—and understanding Louisiana culture and history. Our children are keenly aware of the expectations in their ecology; nonetheless, high numbers of ECSNO students screened as having behavioral and emotional risks (Nastasi & Bell, 2012)—indicating that a sizeable proportion of students struggles to succeed in these behavioral, academic, and social–emotional competencies. The issue is not that they do not understand or value what a good student is expected to do; there is disconnect between knowledge and skill mastery. This disconnect is likely an overload of inhibiting factors or dearth of promoting factors to assist children in successfully developing these skills in their day-to-day realities. The emergent questions

from this observation become practical, and our results represent one step in cataloguing these factors to best hypothesize which protections to boost and which stressors to mitigate. What are the messages we can take from the children to inform PWB and academic planning? We believe there are three stark conclusions from our results, each with implications for future research and practice.

Our first conclusion involves the importance of relationships. The parents, teachers, and administrators at ECSNO, in our broader research project, provided an inventory of stressors and challenges that almost perfectly reflected our introduction on known risk factors in the chrono-, macro-, and exo-systems for urban youth of color (Nastasi & Bell, 2012). Parents spoke of their children's challenges developing in a society of racism and with few financial and professional resources; teachers addressed the growing pressures of accountability to rigorous standards vis-à-vis a student population entering kindergarten already academically behind their more affluent peers. However, our children provided no references to distal influences in their ecology (e.g., NCLB). The children depict both their stressors and supports almost entirely in reference to their immediate personal relationships. Children acknowledge that a power dynamic exists in their relationships with adults (i.e., "listen to your mama;" "listen to your teacher"); however, they experience stress when this relational power is expressed inconsistently, with an overreliance on punishment, by way of double-standard (e.g., "she teaches us about letting out our anger without being mean, but she looks at us mean when she gets angry") or with corporal methods (e.g., "whoopings"). Of the most salient codes for both student stressors and supports, all but one involved interpersonal (and even human–animal) relationships. This observation holds potential for both practical application and future, broader research. We are becoming acutely aware that the social and affective characteristics of classrooms may be equal, perhaps better, predictors of learning than the instructional and cognitive characteristics (Doll, Spies, LeClair, Kurien, & Foley, 2010; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997). However, champions for PWB currently struggle with translating this research on social–emotional competence into local settings and promoting sustainability of PBS and SEL approaches.

A second conclusion we observed in these data related to the tension between the PWB supports students value as effective and the supports schools traditionally employ. Specifically, physical affection and play were valued supports to children; however, both lie in opposition to typical educational practice. Regarding human touch, research has never wavered as to the benefits of human contact, and indeed, Western medicine is beginning to embrace touch for its therapeutic benefits (e.g., Brody, 2012). However, touch is controversial in schools; lawsuits and fear of child sexual abuse have led many schools to adopt no touch policies and create unequivocal professional distance from children (Andrzejewski & Davis, 2008). Play is a fundamental mechanism through which young children learn. However, in the age of accountability, knowing how to read has undoubtedly triumphed over knowing how to play, manage friendships, and navigate conflict prosocially and nonaggressively. In US schools, if recess is available at all, it is often used as the reinforcer to be removed in a negative punishment behavioral management paradigm (e.g., Pellegrini, 2005). The dilemma of this conclusion, therefore, is how to best negotiate responding to students in ways they perceive as supportive while also ensuring their safety (i.e., from inappropriate touch) and balancing learning and support to include play.

A third stark observation involved the ever-present issue of school discipline. Since the founding of our nation, public school administrators and teachers have been granted vast discretion over the procedures and policies for maintaining safety and order in school buildings (Jacob, Decker, & Hartshorne, 2011). However, an overreliance on harsh and exclusionary discipline (i.e., corporal punishment, suspension, and expulsion) and the discriminatory application of such methods toward students with disabilities and children of color have continually called into question the constitutionality of punishment-based discipline (CDF, 2012; Jacob et al., 2011).

Discipline and order are necessary at school and home to socialize children to behavioral expectations; however, discipline and punishment are not synonymous. Our children were not necessarily opposed to rules, expectations, and "clips"—indeed some reveled in the joy of getting their clip moved up. They did note, however, that punishment (e.g., yelling, whoopings, "going home," i.e., suspension, clips) was a source of stress. Both schools and broader research agendas must constantly assess their vision for competent students against the methods used to socialize behavior and determine whether the methods used for discipline are working for the children to whom they are intended to "teach." Our guess is that they currently do not, as a national cradle-to-prison pipeline would not exist (CDF, 2012).

Beyond these observational musings, we also believe our methods and results—although host to limitations of external validity—provide guidance to both practitioners and future research. The cultural specificity of our results represents both its chief strength (i.e., internal validity) and its greatest limitation (i.e., external validity). We believe that future research and practice might benefit from negotiating this tension, such as the field of implementation science that seeks to translate broad research with strong external validity into cultural niches to facilitate cultural specificity, only to disseminate back to science generalizable conclusions about the process at local levels (e.g., Fixsen et al., 2005). More incisively, it is our process that is generalizable, and the results for each school or system will inherently always be culture specific and therefore highly internally valid. For example, at ECSNO, the strong internal validity of these data meant that PWB planning at the school level was well positioned to reflect and capitalize on shared strengths and visions for student competence while better understanding the discrete stressors active in the microsystem. After this reflection, conducted in administrator and teacher meetings, ECSNO has established universal mental healths screenings, is initiating school-wide PBS planning for the upcoming school year, and because of the PPWBG data, a universal SEL program will move out of its pilot year and into full operation and evaluation. Efforts to date and preliminary analyses hint that the attention to cultural specificity (presented herein) have enhanced teacher and parent acceptability (i.e., perceived value and congruence with cultural norms) and have allowed the system to successfully accommodate programs and mindsets related to SEL and child PWB (Bell, Summerville, Nastasi, MacFetters, & Earnshaw, 2015). These data provided a blueprint to assess vision against reality and to make data-informed plans to promote PWB that were fortified with local specificity.

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