Analyzing the Discourse of Dropouts and Resilient Students

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ABSTRACT. The authors focused on high school students who were at risk of dropping out and examined why some of these students persevered and graduated while others ended up dropping out of school. Sixty resilient students and 80 dropouts participated in the study. Our results indicate that although learning difficulties were shared by participants, 4 types of abilities set the resilient students apart from dropouts: (a) inreach (using their own resources); (b) outreach (asking for help when needed); (c) establishing and maintaining positive relationships with teachers and friends while setting limits when necessary; and (d) planning, making choices and following through on decisions. It was also found that resilient students could count on lifelines, people they knew they could always rely on when they had difficulties.

Keywords: academic resilience, high school dropout, qualitative methodology

In recent studies, researchers have shown that over 40% of students who attend high school may be at risk of dropping out before obtaining their diploma (Fortin, Royer, Potvin, Marcotte, & Yergeau, 2004; Lessard, Fortin, Joly, Royer, & Blaya, 2004). The actual dropout rate, however, has remained relatively stable at 25% (Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport [MELS], 2009) for the same population over the last decade. An adolescent qualifies as a dropout if he or she has not obtained a high school diploma and is not enrolled in school (Fortin et al., 2004). In Quebec, the Ministry of Education assesses this status systematically at the end of September each year, and provides statistics for youths in different age groups (MELS, 2009). Although some students leave school before obtaining their diploma, others, equally at risk, do not. They are resilient students; despite the presence of some form of significant risk or challenge in their lives, these students have adapted, persevered, and succeeded (Luthar, 2003; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

Focusing on the prediction of school dropout, Fortin, Marcotte, Diallo, Potvin, and Royer (2013) outlined five latent factors which, combined with low socioeconomic status and being male, contributed to explain 58.71% of the variance associated with this phenomenon. Two pertain to family and three to school. In families, the poor quality of the relationship between teens and their parents along with depression and family conflicts contributed to the prediction of the dropout status. In schools, low achievement, poor interactions between teachers and students, and a classroom climate fostering student disengagement were highlighted as important factors that contribute to school dropout. It could thus be argued that personal, relational, and contextual variables influence the dropout process.

These same variables have also been studied in students who were at risk of dropping out but who persevered. Drapeau, Saint-Jacques, Lépine, Bégin, and Bernard (2007), in a qualitative study of 12 such students, reported that in terms of personal variables, these students showed high self-efficacy (mastery), were able to distance themselves from risks, seized new opportunities, and demonstrated numerous benefits in the different areas of their lives. In support of these results, Dumont and Provost (1999) found that resilient students reported using problem solving as a positive coping strategy more often than other students. Their ability to face problems might have contributed to decreasing their stress level. The use of good problem-solving skills, viewed as a marker of self-efficacy, has also been found to be a predictive factor of resilience in a study conducted by Martin and Marsh (2006) with 402 Australian high school students. These researchers identified control, planning, low anxiety, and persistence as four factors that predict resilience. Drapeau et al. also reported that a significant positive relationship with an adult allowed these students to build a sense of trust and security. Finally, these students also showed the ability to evaluate their context and pinpoint threats that contributed to precipitate changes in their lives.

As stated, resilience occurs when an individual, faced with risk or trauma, succeeds in achieving a positive outcome; hence, both concepts of risk (nature and level) and positive outcome must be clearly defined. Schools represent one context in which an individual may show resilience, although

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many could argue that an individual could obtain a diploma without demonstrating resilience in other areas of his or her life. Wang (1997) suggested that educational resilience should be studied according to an ecological model in order to include not only the student's characteristics, but also the influence of parents, educators, and the community. Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker (2000) agreed with Wang and indicated the need for researchers to specify their theoretical perspective. Finally, Luthar and her colleagues outlined that resilience may vary through time and, as such, time needs to be considered in the study of resilience.

In this study, resilience is examined in an educational setting and defined as the process of, capacity for, or the outcome of positive adaptation despite the presence of high risk (Howard & Johnson, 2000), where positive adaptation is evidenced through graduation from high school and high risk through the presence of personal, family, or school risk factors. As educators, we target the school as our focus of interest and expertise, and as such, we seek to highlight school processes that could contribute to the promotion of resilience in the school population. We rely on Bronfenbrenner's (1998) ecosystemic model as a way to conceptualize the role of the student, his or her personal characteristics (ontosystem); the influence of parents, teachers, and peers (microsystem); the place of larger systems such as the youth's relatives, classroom, social networks (mesosystem); and the potential influence of even larger systems such as schools, school boards (exosystem), and society (macrosystem). The chronosystem also needs to be considered because, as was pointed out by Luthar et al. (2000), resilience may not be stable over time; thus, we have targeted adolescence in our investigation while still acknowledging elements present throughout an individual's life.

In an effort to improve the success rate of students, researchers have studied both students who succeed and youth who drop out, but students who are at risk and graduate have not benefited from much scrutiny. As outlined by Martin and Marsh (2006), however, learning more about what keeps these students in school should lead to refined prevention efforts.

In this qualitative study we focused on high school students who were at risk of dropping out and examined why some of these students persevered and graduated while others ended up dropping out of school. More specifically, we looked at how dropouts differ from resilient students. We sought also to gain inferences as about what educators can do to promote educational resilience.

Method

Participants

In the context of a larger longitudinal study, 808 participants were contacted twice a year between 1996 and 2008 to answer questionnaires and take part in interviews. From the data gathered over the 5 years of their secondary schooling,

we identified students who were at risk of dropping out of school on the basis of personal, family, and/or school-related risk factors (Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin, Royer, & Joly, 2006). Coupled with Ministry of Education records of students who received a high school diploma, these data enabled us to identify both dropouts and resilient students. Of the 113 individuals who were identified as resilient students, 60 (36 females, 24 males) agreed to participate in this study. Among the 129 adolescents identified as dropouts, 80 (36 females, 44 males) took part in the interviews. All participants were French-Canadian Caucasians living in Quebec, Canada, age 19–22 years old when interviewed.

Data Collection

We called all participants, informed them about the purpose of the study, and offered them an opportunity to tell their stories, focusing on school life. In accordance with the Tripartite Council on Research Ethics, the participants were reminded about the right to withdraw from the study at any time, and were assured of their anonymity and right to confidentiality. A member of our research team and the participant determined a time and place for the interview. Data were collected through semistructured, individual, face-to-face, audiotaped interviews. The interview protocol was developed by our research team and contained open-ended questions that encouraged the participants to describe their primary and secondary school experiences and their relationships with other students, teachers, and principals, as well as with family members and friends.

Validity and Trustworthiness Issues

Trustworthiness was ensured in different ways. The first way was in the development of the interview protocol and the interview sequence. Seidman (1998) suggested a three-part interview format in order to establish rapport with the participants, to delve into the important concepts under study, to allow the participants to reflect on answers and to permit researchers to do a member check. In the context of this study, the decision was made to do one interview focusing on the main concepts under study. As the participants were recruited and involved since 1996, they were familiar with the research team and a rapport had already been established. We also allowed for more interaction with the participants after the interview; however, as dropouts often relocate, changing both address and phone number, we could not depend on a formal member-checking process. A second approach used to ensure trustworthiness was the collective work of the research team. Different researcher perspectives and insights helped to challenge research findings as needed, as they emerged and to probe more deeply. It should be noted, finally, that all the qualitative analyses in this study took place after a 5-year, quantitative, longitudinal study. The scope of this article does not permit us

to delve into the work in greater detail, but the quantitative work did help promote awareness about issues and develop questions that might not have been raised without this previous work.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is never a linear process; however, in order to answer the research questions, and make our process as transparent as possible, we present it here as a series of different steps. After the initial transcriptions of the interviews were produced in as much verbatim as possible, the interview transcripts were condensed by rephrasing the words of the team member while preserving the meaning of the participant's discourse and presenting the participant's words in italics.

The condensed transcript was then analyzed further using the methodology described by Labov and Waletsky (1967) to produce shorter synopses of the interviews that were composed in a sequential and nonrepetitive narrative. We recognize that the imposition of this kind of linear narrative removes complexity from personal stories, but we decided that to elicit the kernels within the participants' narratives, we had to extract these basic elements to get a sense of these data. The analysis proposed by Labov and Waletsky aims to position the elements of the discourse by presenting an abstract (a summary of determining events in the life of a participant), an orientation (a description of events which contributed to shaping the educational journey of a participant), the complicating action (events which directly contributed to the outcome), a resolution (elements which help make sense of the outcome), an evaluation (elements presented by the participant describing his or her evaluation of the resulting situation), and a coda (elements pertaining to the participant's outlook on the future, considering past events). This step helped to make sense of each story by putting it into a sequence, by reducing the interviews from approximately eight pages to three pages, and by retaining the essence of each story, while making it as concise as possible. We made a conscious decision to present these condensed narratives in the third person to indicate our presence in this process (Rhodes, 2000), but all participant words were italicized to enhance the persuasiveness of each account.

We met to discuss the different narratives, focusing on the elements that were similar in all cases. The goal of this step was to reach a better conceptual understanding of how students who were at risk evolve by following different paths. The data were reviewed to find other elements that might be present across the entire continuum of experiences (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Charmaz, 2005). As a way to map out the chronosystem and attempt to compare life paths of participants, we also created chronological accounts for each participant, highlighting adverse life events, and what we called *lifelines* (positive events or influences).

Results

Although 60 resilient students and 80 dropouts were interviewed, these findings will highlight narratives from two participants (Emmanuelle and Pete, pseudonyms) chosen because they are representative of the lived experiences of dropouts or resilient students to provide answers about what distinguishes dropouts from resilient students. Bronfenbrenner's ecosystemic model was used as a framework for analysis. The aggregated discourse of all participants who proposed suggestions for better prevention efforts will then be presented. It should be specified that the Quebec school system enrolls students in kindergarten at age 5 years, elementary school begins at age 6 years and takes the students from Grades 1 to 6, after which time they go on to secondary school for 5 years. The law on public education states that students must remain enrolled in school until they complete the school year during which they turn 16 years old.

Emmanuelle

At the age of 3 years, Emmanuelle's parents divorced. Her father lived in France, while her mother lived locally with her boyfriend for whom Emmanuelle had absolutely no affection. Despite the conflicts between Emmanuelle and her mother, her mother had always been there for her, with encouragement and support. Upon entering school, Emmanuelle had some difficulties and was held back in first grade. She had always had trouble in mathematics and had a conflict with one of her teachers, but she was not one to let others walk all over her! It was apparent that she knows what she wants; she maps out a plan and then follows it through. So despite being held back in Grade 1, she did fine. Secondary school was different. She was afraid of moving on to a big school; however, she realized fairly quickly that it was the same as elementary school, just on a larger scale. Her marks started going downhill nevertheless—her biggest problem was not moving to a new school, as it was only one block from her elementary school and she was able to keep all her friends. Once again, her major stumbling block was mathematics. She could add, but had great difficulty integrating fractions and doing more complicated calculations. As a result, she was placed in a special education class in mathematics for 2 years. In Secondary 3, her marks were finally acceptable (70%–80%). In Secondary 4, her marks slid down to 60%. In Secondary 5 she went to all her classes, but gave up. She hated her teacher, who actually began the first class by telling his students that "[t]hose who don't go on to CEGEP [postsecondary schooling] are a bunch of losers, future welfare beneficiaries, and those who choose a technical career path aren't much better." Emmanuelle was really angry. That teacher was horrible! Terrible! The first chance he had to stick it to a student, he would. At some point, Emmanuelle questioned him: "Aren't you supposed to . . . like . . . motivate us, so that we like and do well in your subject matter? Many of us are reluctant as it is." If he could

have made mathematics more attractive to her somehow, maybe it could have been a little easier.

The previous year, Emmanuelle had a fabulous teacher. He was interesting and she actually had fun while learning. His subject was really tough, but at least, when she had difficulties, he would come see her and say, "Look, I'll take 15 minutes after class to make sure you get this, OK?" and most of the time, she did. Emmanuelle is the first to admit that she is slower than most in mathematics. That's just the way it is. In Secondary 5, however, there was nobody to help her. She made it through the first school term, but then her attendance started to wane, and she only went to a few classes during the last semester. She knew she was failing mathematics. She kept asking herself, "Why? Why should I even try?" During the last term, she lost all interest in school. Her mother kept trying to motivate her by repeating, "If you don't make the right choice now, you'll have a rotten future!" The pressure was tremendous. She was burned out. She gave up, this despite the fact that she loves learning and always behaved well in school. At one point her ethics teacher said, "Do what you have to do, build your life according to your hopes and dreams, not those of others." Those words stayed with her. They helped to alleviate some pressure. As well, she took dancing classes and really gave it her all to lessen her stress. She continues now by running up and down the stairs at Montmorency Falls, outside of Quebec City. Another person who helped her was Serge, the high school psychologist. He didn't seem like a psychologist to her; he was just someone she could confide in and someone who always gave her sound advice. When she thought her world was coming apart, he would tell her to take a deep breath. Thankfully, she did. She finally completed the required courses in French, English, and mathematics. She got her diploma and graduated.

Pete

Pete was held back in Grade 1. He was placed in a special education classroom for children with behavior problems. He felt bullied, ridiculed, and humiliated all the time, and that's why he fought with others. In Grade 2, things got worse. This was about the time when his mother took him and left his father, who drank and mistreated them both. Pete was glad to leave his father behind. Before that, he actually thought about hanging himself. His mother, however, always provided him with unconditional support. In school, he did not feel supported by his teacher; on the contrary, he felt his teacher disliked him. Pete made a point of acting out to try to gain control in the classroom. There were constant conflicts with the teacher. He gave up eventually and decided to stop trying to do well in school. In Grade 4, he was transferred to a classroom for students with learning disabilities. He had a good teacher, but it was too late. He did not see the use of trying. On several occasions, Pete was suspended from elementary school. It didn't help that he changed schools every year. When he went on to secondary

school, he fought less. His teachers told him that he would never get his diploma, and suggested that because he was 16 years old, he could legally quit school, if he wanted. In the end, he caused trouble once again. Because he felt his mathematics teacher had been on his case the whole year, he decided to get even before leaving. He knew how to disrupt a classroom and he created a major conflict. She kept threatening to send him to the principal's office, but he did not care. He had made up his mind and he quit school halfway through his fourth year of secondary school.

Ecosystemic Analysis

In answering the first research question, the students' discourse reveals challenges or risk at three different levels: family related, school related, and personal. Using Bronfenbrenner's ecosystemic model as a lens, the discourse shows that there were similarities and differences in both the ontosystem and microsystem. There is also a foreshadowing of problems stemming in the mesosystem (retention policies, moves from schools).

The ontosystem refers to the individual and his or her psychosocial and emotional functioning. There are some differences between Emmanuelle and Pete that extend also to other resilient students and dropouts. Both share learning difficulties. Emmanuelle behaved well in school despite those difficulties, whereas Pete showed behavior problems for much of his schooling. They both admitted to giving up, in terms of learning or participating in class, but the moment chosen to reach this decision was different. Pete gave up in Grade 4, whereas Emmanuelle gave up when she knew she had the qualifications needed to obtain her high school diploma. Emmanuelle showed signs of coping. She indicated that she knew what she wanted; she set goals, planned, and sought to attain her goals. She also learned how to manage her stress and anxiety through physical activities. Pete, on the other hand, was focused on the present and seemed unable to envision the future. We called Emmanuelle's ability one of *inreach*. She was able to draw on her own assets to set a goal and maintain her course. This ability emerged as an element that set the resilient students apart from the dropouts.

In the mesosystem, on the home front, a common challenge faced by both dropouts and resilient students was the divorce of their parents, which brought about changes both in the milieu where they lived and in the structure of their families. Moving meant adapting to different schools and friends. The change in family structure meant dealing with new significant others in their parents' lives, with or without new siblings. In this climate of change, participants described their parents as less available to them to help them with their schoolwork.

Resilient participants described fathers who were gambling, alcoholic, unknown, or generally absent. These students either felt rejected by their fathers or described a nonexistent or cold relationship with them. Resilient

students, however, described an unwavering maternal support. Mothers helped their children throughout the different phases of their lives, frequently offering help with homework in elementary school, but mostly lending an attentive ear and demonstrating a will to be there and help. It was interesting to see, evidenced in the chronosystem, that most mothers represented supporting forces throughout the students' lives. Dropouts' stories often echoed those of resilient participants, but many of them also described mothers who were depressive, absent, neglectful, or overwhelmed. Our work suggests that unwavering maternal support constitutes one of the main differences between dropouts and resilient students.

The positive relationship with their mothers described by resilient students was often reflected in their schooling. They were able to describe at least one positive relationship with a teacher who contributed to their school achievement. Dropouts, on the other hand, tended to be at odds with teachers. Some dropouts reported conflicts with teachers as their reason for dropping out. Negative relationships represented a serious challenge for dropouts; moreover, dropouts had fewer friends; they reported participating in illegal activities with them, and they were unable to describe long-lasting, positive friendships. The negative relationships they had with teachers were also present with peers. For resilient students, on the other hand, peers were a positive factor in their lives. Not only did they report strong and lasting friendships, but also they described prosocial and healthy leisure activities (e.g., working out, dancing, playing hockey). In addition, resilient students demonstrated the ability to set limits with friends. When they realized friends were leading them astray from their goals, they withdrew from the relationship. Throughout the different systems, resilient students demonstrated the ability to plan, make choices, and follow through with their decisions.

The mesosystem also extends to the classroom. Both resilient students and dropouts experienced problems either because of learning difficulties, or conflicts with their teachers. The resilient students found that they could count on their teachers with whom they had established positive relationships. Most of these students behaved well in class, did what was asked of them, and took part in activities at school. Conflicts with teachers were not representative of most of the experiences of resilient students, but they were frequent in the experience of male dropouts. When faced with conflicts with teachers, most girls who dropped out reported disengaging from school, and just fading out while most boys reported fighting back.

Overall, in the mesosystem, what set resilient students apart from dropouts was their outreach ability. When they realized that they could not perform or that they needed help, they asked for it. Emmanuelle sought out Serge, the school psychologist. Many other resilient students did the same by seeking help from an adult in their school environments. Dropouts very rarely, if ever, sought help. In both cases presented, mothers were present. Pete lived in a con-

flictual household for most of his childhood, nevertheless, and he indicated how this had a negative impact on his life.

It is difficult to infer much about the other dimensions of the ecosystemic model from the participants' discourse. There is, however, some evidence that school policies affected the individuals' school trajectories, most notable were those around school retention and transitions from school to school. Both Pete and Emmanuelle were held back for a year, and this seemed to have had an impact on their educational trajectories. Pete changed schools eight times. Apparently, the school district in question decided to rotate the special education class among the schools in order to minimize the impact it could have on one particular school. For Pete, a change in school meant changing friends and adapting to a new environment. This situation created stress in his life and prevented him from making and maintaining positive friendships.

The chronosystems for Emmanuelle (Figure 1) and Pete (Figure 2) point out some differences over the course of their lives. One element is the discontinuity present in Pete's life. School transitions, divorce, and change of friends are disruptions that were visible in most of the dropouts' chronosystems, whereas the element that stood out in the resilient students' chronosystems was the presence of several lifelines (psychologists, good friends, parent).

Promoting Academic Success and Resilience

In answering the second research question on what educators can do to promote academic success and resilience, the participants provided some insight. Both dropouts and resilient students reported that a good relationship with a teacher was fundamental; moreover, they added that this relationship was nurtured when the teacher was available, and showed a genuine interest in his or her students, and was warm and understanding. They recognized, also, teachers who enjoyed their jobs and their students. They appreciated teaching approaches that were dynamic, motivating, and fostered student autonomy. Finally, they outlined the importance of providing structure and support, particularly in grade levels that followed a school transition (elementary–secondary).

Discussion

In answering the research question on how dropouts differ from resilient students, three elements stand out. First, in the ontosystem, resilient students demonstrated the ability to draw on their own resources. They were able to plan, anticipate, and make sound choices. They were also able to set limits. Second, their ability to establish good relationships with others enabled them to evolve and grow and to reach out to others when they realized that they were unable to solve a problem on their own. Finally, resilient students could count on the presence of several lifelines throughout
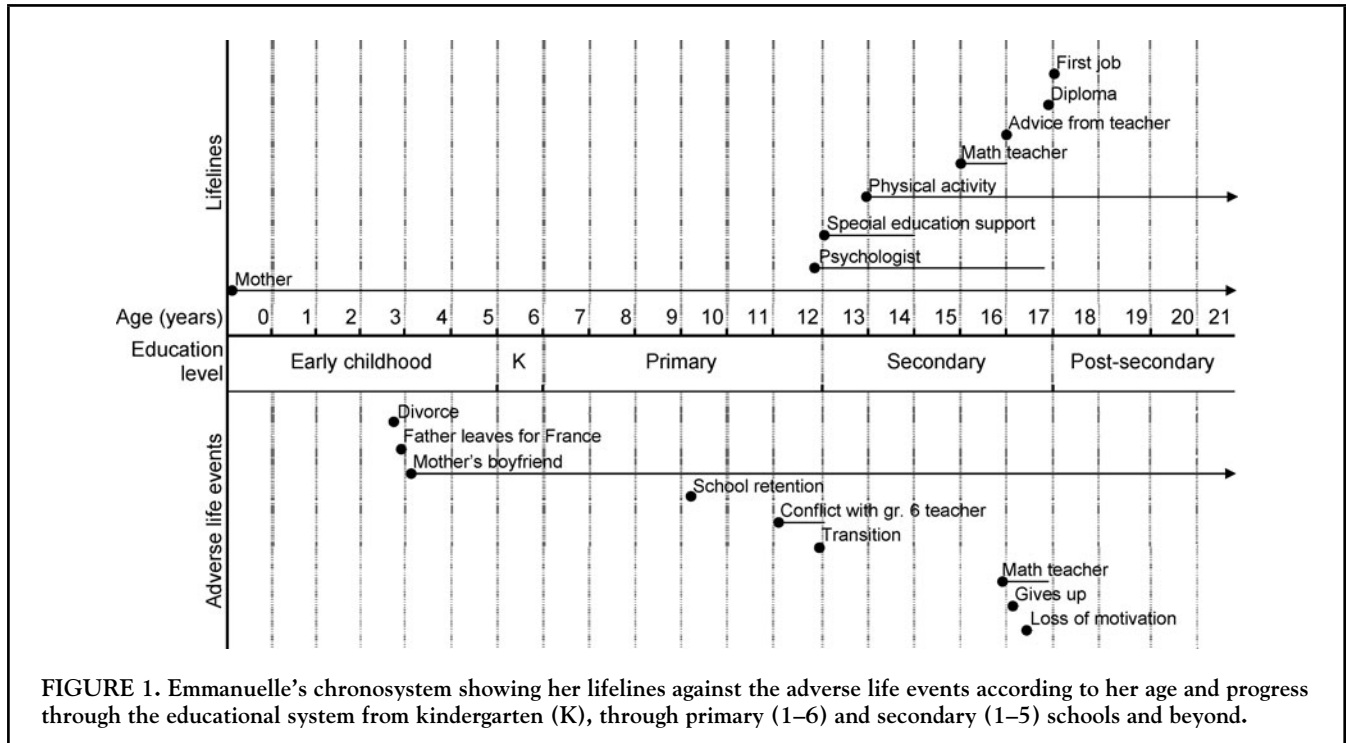
FIGURE 1. Emmanuelle's chronosystem showing her lifelines against the adverse life events according to her age and progress through the educational system from kindergarten (K), through primary (1–6) and secondary (1–5) schools and beyond.

their lives. A parent, in most cases the mother, provided unconditional support. This maternal support was coupled with long-lasting friendships and other stable professional resources, such as the school psychologist.

We have designated the term *inreach* as the individual's ability to make use of psychological, emotional, and relational resources present in their ontosystem. This three-fold ability has been documented in different terms in the
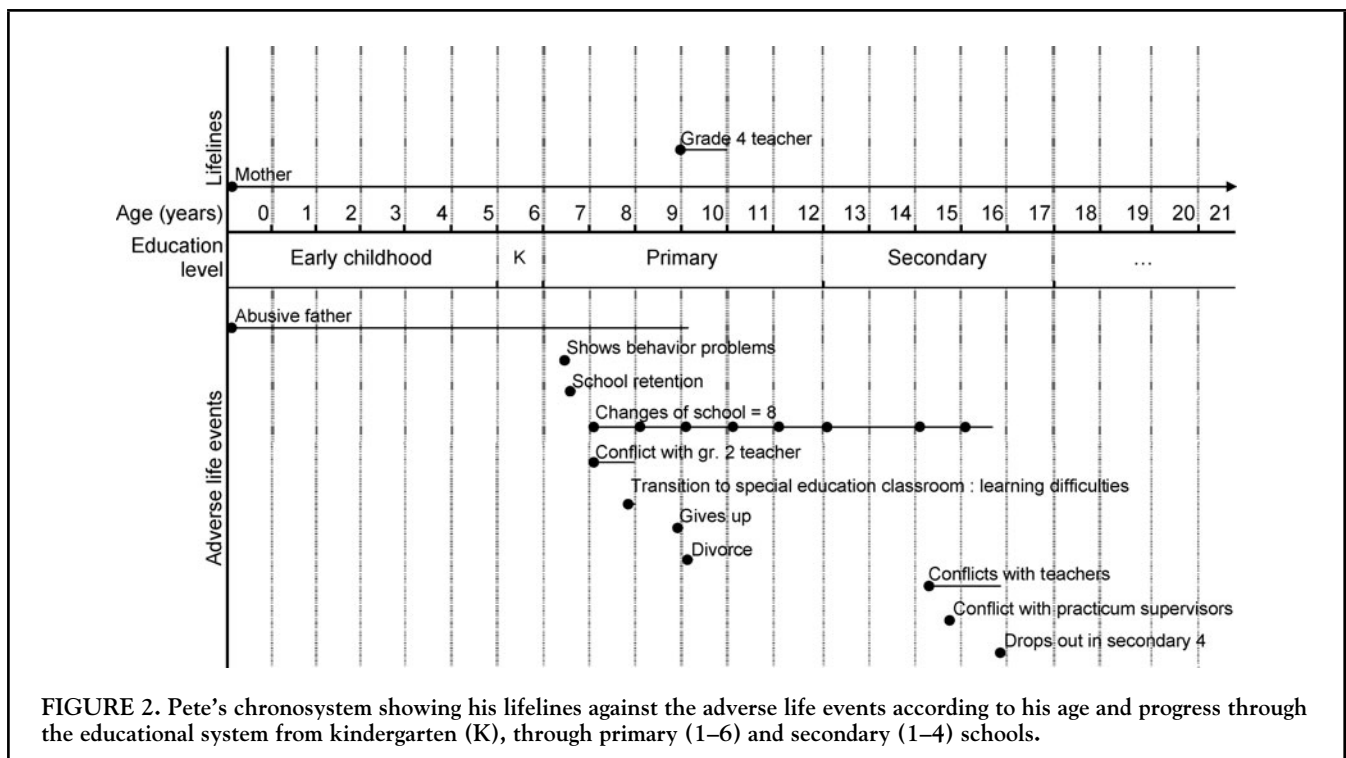

FIGURE 2. Pete's chronosystem showing his lifelines against the adverse life events according to his age and progress through the educational system from kindergarten (K), through primary (1–6) and secondary (1–4) schools.

literature. Martin and Marsh (2006) outlined five elements, which they found in at-risk students who persevered: confidence (self-efficacy), coordination (planning), composure (low anxiety), control, and commitment (persistence). Resilient students have also been found to have high self-esteem, a strong locus of control, clear expectations, and a healthy outlook on life (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994). They have been reported to engage in extracurricular activities and to participate successfully in school life (Martin & Marsh, 2006). Resilient students who took part in this study often pointed out that they knew they would succeed. Many had learning difficulties, but despite that fact, they reported working long and hard until they understood and completed the learning tasks. They seemed to have a fundamental belief in their own abilities. This element was not present in dropouts; moreover, dropouts had unrealistic expectations and no concrete plans for the future. It was evident throughout the discourse of the resilient students that generally they displayed good planning skills, for both the short and long term. The discourse of resilient students shows coping strategies associated with anxiety management. For example, Emmanuelle reported exercising. Other students used sports as a way to alleviate tensions. Control and commitment were often linked with coordination in resilient students. For example, one student's goal was to specialize in woodwork. She had mapped out her plan. Her friends became involved in delinquent activities. She deliberately closed a door on those friendships in order to stay on course. Most dropouts reported actively participating in delinquent acts and very few showed the control required to withstand peer pressure.

Our data pointed to the ability of resilient students to establish positive relationships with parents, peers, and teachers. This relational ability is corroborated in the literature (Garmezy, 1974; Masten, 1994). The resilient students' ability to relate well to others enables them to have a strong network on which to rely when problems arise. This is the ability we have designated as *outreach*. In the mesosystem, relationships are fundamental if the student is to evolve positively in all the different spheres. This contrasts sharply with the experience of dropouts, who often discussed conflictual relationships with teachers and peers. The resilient students, on the other hand, when faced with this type of adversity attempted to make the most of the situation. For example, Emmanuelle confronted her teacher and asked him to help her.

Luthar et al. (2000) outlined the importance of considering time when studying resilience. In this study, an analysis using the chronosystem allowed us to point out that although all at-risk students did face a number of adverse life events (parents' divorce, transitions, moves, losses), dropouts' trajectories were disrupted and they discussed how these ruptures created a great sense of loss. Resilient students, on the other hand, could count on lifelines, people who were there for the duration of the academic experience. Their ability to plan can also be considered critical in this system be-

cause these students reached decisions at different times in their lives as a result of planning for their future. They had long-term goals.

Martin and Marsh (2006) found that classroom participation, enjoyment of school, and general self-esteem were three defining factors for resilience. When attempting to answer the question of what educators can do to promote resilience as well as academic achievement and perseverance, the participants provided some insight. It was interesting that both dropouts and resilient students agreed on the essential elements needed to prolong their educational journeys. The nature and importance of the student–teacher relationship was prevalent in the data: Dropouts explained that when a teacher connected with them, it made them feel important. As has been reported in the literature by Fortin et al. (2006), when at risk of dropping out of school, students generally report that there is less order and organization in the classroom. They require structure and stability. Resilient students reached out for structure and stability by challenging teachers who were not engaging them.

What distinguishes dropouts from resilient students? When asked what the key to their success was, some resilient students answered spontaneously, "ME!" others added, "You," meaning educators in general. At the outset, dropouts may be faced with a more severe risk than resilient students, a hypothesis we attempt to validate in a different study; whatever the case may be, the spontaneous answers of resilient students helped to distinguish them from dropouts. Resilient students are part of the solution. They are aware that they hold assets. They are convinced they can succeed. They know how to get help if they cannot manage on their own. They have lifelines.

Risk is simply a measure of probability, not certainty. There is much that can be done by adults to help students faced with risk to learn more about themselves, about healthy participation in school life, about making sound choices and about aiming for a prosperous future. Parents can help to build a child's self-esteem and an overall self-awareness. Guidance counselors can play an important role in tipping the scale (Michaud, Bezanson, & Rénald, 2011). They can help the students identify their interests, values, aptitudes, and beliefs so that students can reach sound decisions concerning their life plans and help them to develop and carry out an orientation project (a form of career plan). They can help students to know themselves and their environments better. Teachers can provide structure and motivating pedagogical approaches to stimulate learning. They need to provide support, particularly when a student has learning difficulties. Teachers can also build relationships with their students on which the students can bank and use later to keep them on track. Finally, teachers should help promote independent and responsible learning practices in students (Brackenreed, 2010; Lessard, Poirier, & Fortin, 2012).

School dropout is a multidimensional problem. When looking at it from an ecosystemic perspective, it is clear that individuals positioned at the different levels must work

together in order for there to be significant changes over the long term. There is a strong need for parents, teachers, school professionals, and decision makers to think about the best ways to help students help themselves over time. Valuing education in the community, stabilizing systems over time, and using research data to support decisions are other means to help students achieve success.

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