Making the Grade: Contributions of Social-Emotional Well-Being

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Perspective

• Importance of early identification and supporting at-risk students
  – Lacefield et al. provide an excellent framework that helps to identify students who may benefit from intervention
  – Prevention rather than intervention

• Academic achievement is key focus at school
  – other factors may play a role in moderating success

Non-Academic Barriers to Learning

Behavioural challenges
Family circumstances
Social-emotional difficulties
Self-esteem
Peer Relations
Socio-economic Status

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Mental Health in Schools

• 15% or 1.2 million Canadian children/youth affected by mental illness at any given point
  • Most common mental health problem among children and youth is anxiety: 6.5%
  • 2% of prepubescent children and 5-8% of adolescents experience depression (Son & Kirchner, 2000)
  • Young adults 15 -24 with a mental illness or substance abuse problem: 18%
  • Eighty percent (80%) of all psychiatric disorders emerge in adolescence (Mood Disorders of Canada, 2006)
Application of Lacefield et al. framework

- Current application of the model focuses on student grades, with some inclusion of attendance, discipline referrals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students Predicted to be</th>
<th>Students Who Actually Failed 8th Grade</th>
<th>Passed 9th Grade</th>
<th>Row Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>N = 181</td>
<td>N = 948</td>
<td>N = 1129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-Risk: Falling</td>
<td>N = 488</td>
<td>N = 159</td>
<td>N = 647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-Risk: Rising</td>
<td>N = 264</td>
<td>N = 95</td>
<td>N = 359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-Risk: Falling</td>
<td>N = 206</td>
<td>N = 4</td>
<td>N = 210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Column Totals</td>
<td>N = 1139</td>
<td>N = 1206</td>
<td>N = 2345</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Lacefield, Applegate, Zeller, & Carpenter, 2012)

Application of Lacefield et al. framework

- 1 in 6 students predicted to pass grade 9 still failed – why?
- Possibility to extend use of model to apply to mental health situations
  - Underlying mental health concerns (e.g., depression, anxiety, peer relations, social skills) may contribute to later decline?
  - Maintain grades for a number of years (and therefore predicted to succeed), but became overwhelmed with difficulties?

Recognizing Mental Health Concerns in Children

- Importance of recognizing and acknowledging mental health concerns in the classroom
- Importance of educating new teachers on the impact of mental health
  - U of C: inclusion of Educational Psychology and Diversity in Learning courses in undergraduate program
  - Graduate level certificate: Supporting & Enhancing Children’s Mental Health

Conclusion

- Although academic support is important, awareness and understanding of social-emotional factors influencing academic outcomes may be equally beneficial
- Expansion of Lacefield et al.’s model to take mental health factors into consideration
- Continued emphasis on mental health in educational training programs
Questions remain...

- How can we best support students with mental health concerns in a school-based context?
- Can we incorporate mental health into models predicting academic outcomes?
- Can we create system-wide programs designed to identify children with mental health concerns?
  - Possibility of classroom-wide screenings for mental health

References