

FOSTERING SOCIAL–EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE AMONG LATINO YOUTH

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National statistics reveal that Latino youth face significant challenges and engage in many risky behaviors that can hinder positive development and well-being, such as attempted suicide, lifetime cocaine use, unprotected sex, and dropping out of school. However, these statistics obscure the fact that many Latino youth are developing well despite exposure to significant adversity. A critical question that lies before researchers, educators, and policy makers is how to improve the health, well-being, and achievement of more Latino youth. This article considers conceptual issues related to resilience and culture, risk, and protective factors relevant to Latinos and the role schools play in promoting resilience. Special attention is paid to the building of child-based resources, such as social–emotional competencies, and social system resources, such as a caring school climate.
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Sonia was the child of Puerto Rican immigrants. She was born in the South Bronx and grew up in a public housing project, not too far from Yankee Stadium. At the age of 8, she was diagnosed with diabetes and was told that she would not be able to pursue her dream of becoming an investigator like Nancy Drew, the detective in the popular children’s mystery series. One year later, Sonia’s father died, leaving her mother to raise Sonia and her younger brother alone (Keck & Yoon, 2009). Growing up in poverty and confronting the numerous barriers many ethnic minority children face, some would find it hard to believe that she would grow up to become the first Latino and third woman to ever serve on the United States Supreme Court.

This woman is U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor. Her story serves as a poignant example that some individuals can and do survive and, in fact, thrive despite emotional, physical, and environmental stressors. Psychologists have come to call this phenomenon *resilience*, or achieving well-being despite experiencing significant adversity (Masten, 2001). Latinos, however, are not typically the protagonists of stories about resilient outcomes. According to the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB, 1997), Hispanics or Latinos are individuals of “Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.” Latinos are the largest ethnic minority group in the United States, accounting for 15% of the U.S. population. By the year 2050, Latinos will make up 24% of the U.S. population (Umaña-Taylor, 2009). In addition to being the largest minority group, Latinos are the youngest group, with one of five U.S. schoolchildren being of Latino descent and one of four newborns being born to Latina mothers (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009).

How these young Latinos grow into adulthood will undoubtedly shape American society in the 21st century. However, much of the existing research indicates that Latino youth face significant challenges and engage in many risky behaviors that can hinder positive development and well-being. For example, national statistics reveal that Latino youth have higher rates of attempted suicide, lifetime cocaine use, and unprotected sex than Black and White youth (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007), with Latinas having the highest teen pregnancy rate among major ethnic groups in the United States (Umaña-Taylor, 2009). Latino youth also have the highest school dropout rate. Approximately 21.4% of Latino youth drop out of high school, which is four times the rate among White youth (5.3%) and nearly triple the rate among Black youth (8.4%; U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Youth violence, including both victimization and perpetration, is

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also a major concern. It is estimated that 9% of Latino males between the ages of 12 and 17 are victims of violence (National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, 2004). Moreover, after unintentional injury, homicide is the leading cause of death for Latino youth (Shetgiri et al., 2009), and Latino gangs make up 46% of all gangs in the United States (Kuperminc, Wilkins, Roche, & Alvarez-Jimenez, 2009).

Although these statistics are alarming and point to grave concerns for the development of Latino children and adolescents, they obscure the fact many Latino youth are developing quite well despite exposure to significant adversity in their social environments (Kuperminc et al., 2009). For instance, the majority of Latino youth—78.6%—do complete high school (Denner & Guzman, 2006). A critical question that lies before researchers, educators, and policy makers is how to improve the health, well-being, and achievement of more Latino youth. A promising means to foster attainments among Latino youth is the application of school-based interventions consistent with resilience theoretical models and research.

A CONSTELLATION OF RISK

Children and youth are currently exposed to significant sources of risk in their lives. Increasing levels of poverty, violence, substance abuse, and suicide and declines in academic performance are some of the stressors or negative outcomes of stress experienced by American children and adolescents (Condly, 2006). Dryfoos (1998) emphasizes that 25% of all children can be considered at high risk for maladjustment, 25% at moderate risk, and the remaining 50% cannot be considered risk free. When combined with continued disadvantage related to poverty, inadequate health care, illegal immigration, and racial prejudice, school service providers face a sobering set of challenges in helping prepare all students for success in school and life.

These high-risk circumstances amplify the importance of resilience research as a vehicle for promoting competence in at-risk youth, while the slow forces of change attempt to reverse the causes of disadvantage (Rothstein, 2008). Over the past 50 years, resilience researchers have identified various individual and contextual assets and/or protective factors associated with positive outcomes among children expected to struggle as a result of adverse life circumstances (Luthar, 2006). This valuable research indicates that avenues for prevention and intervention exist, even when the removal of negative forces seems unfeasible (Elias, Parker, & Rosenblatt, 2005).

In the United States, children and adolescents spend a significant amount of time in school, with many spending up to 50% of their waking hours within the school setting (Condly, 2006; Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer, 2003). Therefore, schools provide an important context for promoting resilient outcomes among at-risk youth. As Norman Garnezy (1991) notes, "Schools serve as a critical support system for children seeking to escape the disabling consequences of poor environments" (p. 426). In addition to providing a space for children to learn and practice new skills that can build self-efficacy, schools hold many possibilities for positive relationships with adult role models and mentors (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2006). Having supportive relationships with adults is critical to resilience and teachers, like good parents, function directly as protective factors in the lives of at-risk children (Luthar, 2006; Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2008). A greater understanding of how schools can promote resilience among Latino youth needs to reflect a conceptual and research-based perspective on resilience and on cultural factors related to Latinos.

RESILIENCE DEFINED

Resilience, as noted earlier, is typically defined as "a pattern of positive adaptation in the context of past or present adversity" (Wright & Masten, 2005, p. 18). Resilience extends beyond the concept of a fixed individual trait or quality (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Rutter, 1987, 2006). It is a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses individual, relational, and contextual

factors (Masten & Motti-Stefandi, 2008). Resilience is also not permanent. The developmental progression and changing life circumstances can greatly alter resilience. Thus, it is possible for a child to successfully cope with significant environmental stressors at one point in his or her life, but react negatively to other stressors at a later time (Luthar, 2006; Rutter, 1987, 1993).

For an individual to be considered resilient, he or she must experience significant threat or severe adversity and achieve positive adaptation despite this threat or risk exposure (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2001; Rutter, 2006; Wright & Masten, 2005). A child cannot be judged resilient without being exposed to significant environmental risk or adversity, which is likely to result in maladjustment in critical life domains (Luthar, 2006; Masten, 2001). As detailed later, many Latino youth are exposed to stressors that have the potential to disrupt development and lead to maladjustment. Additionally, when considering resilient outcomes among children, specific criteria are required for judging or evaluating successful adaptation (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten & Motti-Stefandi, 2008).

There has been much disagreement about what constitutes successful adaptation. Is it measured in terms of academic achievement? Is it mental health status? Does it involve attainment of developmental tasks? Should the criterion be one of excellence or adequacy? Would strong, positive mental health count or simply an absence of psychopathology? Are As and Bs necessary, or are passing grades sufficient? Answers to these questions vary, and preferences will be arbitrary. Dalton, Elias, and Wandersman (2007) make a distinction between resilience and thriving, whereby resilience is more closely identified with adequacy and thriving is linked to excellence, or at least achievement surpassing one's functioning prior to encountering significant stressors. For our purposes, we define the kinds of outcomes that would mark resilience as adequate, in terms of academic achievement, mental health, health, and developmental tasks. Although thriving is a desired aspiration, a focus on reversing risk begins with resilience as we have defined it.

VULNERABILITY, PROMOTIVE AND PROTECTIVE PROCESSES

For many years, resilience researchers have worked to identify the various vulnerability and protective factors that might modify the negative effects of adverse life circumstances (Luthar, 2006; Masten & Motti-Stefandi, 2008). Vulnerability factors are those that exacerbate the negative effects of risk conditions. Having poor health, such as juvenile diabetes or chronic asthma, for example, leads children (and their caregivers) to experience severe and ongoing life adversity, resulting in more vulnerability than those with good health (Condly, 2006; Luthar, 2006). Promotive factors, also labeled assets or resources, are those associated with better outcomes and may interact in mediating positive outcomes across most levels of risk. Effective parenting, for example, is generally good for the development of all children. Protective factors, however, have a special role over and above whatever generally positive effects they may have when risk or adversity is high. These factors provide special protection under specific hazardous conditions. For example, a caring student–teacher relationship is important for educational outcomes among all children, but may be even more important for children growing up in very disadvantaged homes (Masten & Motti-Stefandi, 2008). Protective factors appear to moderate the impact of adversity in such instances.

THE ECOLOGICAL–TRANSACTIONAL PERSPECTIVE OF RESILIENCE

Resilience is a dynamic process involving an interaction among risk, vulnerability, and protective factors over time, internal and external to the individual, that acts to modify the effects of an adverse life event (Olsson et al., 2003). One major framework guiding resilience research is the ecological–transactional perspective (Cicchetti & Lynch, 1993; Luthar et al., 2000), which proposes that multiple levels of children's ecologies influence each other and in turn influence children's development. Cicchetti and Lynch (1993) conceptualized ecological contexts as consisting of a number of nested levels with varying degrees of proximity to the child, including the macrosystem,

exosystem, microsystem, and ontogenic development. The macrosystem refers to the underlying mainstream societal beliefs and values. The exosystem includes the neighborhood and community settings in which families and children live. The microsystem refers to the family environment that children and adults create and experience. Lastly, ontogenic development includes the individual and his or her own developmental adaptation. Cicchetti and Lynch (1993) hypothesized that these levels of the environment interact and transact with each other over time in shaping child development and adaptation. From a resilience perspective, risk, vulnerability, and protective factors operate at all ecological levels to influence development. Therefore, vulnerability, promotive factors, and protective factors are best understood as processes because their mechanism of effect is the active and ongoing way in which they impact an individual's interactions at multiple ecological levels (Dalton et al., 2007).

CULTURE AND RESILIENCE

Although culture plays an important role in children's development, it is typically afforded a distal or indirect role in models of resilience. Culture refers to the common language, history, symbols, beliefs, unquestioned assumptions, and institutions that are part of the heritage of members of an ethnic group (Roosa, Morgan-Lopez, Cree, & Specter, 2002). There is much to be learned about the many possible ways that cultural practices enhance or interfere with resilience (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2008). Forces within a child's ethnic culture may serve as a buffer against adverse social circumstances. Culture builds identity, sets norms for behavior, and provides a sense of group cohesion that is vital to a child's growth and development (National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, 2004). At the same time, sociocultural factors may hinder resilience. For instance, research indicates that certain cultural beliefs and practices, such as focusing more on spiritual than medical cures, can greatly influence the utilization of medical and mental health services and treatment adherence (Antshel, 2002). This, in turn, will affect a child's recovery from an illness or disease.

Recently, Kuperminc et al. (2009) proposed a cultural–ecological–transactional model for studying resilience among Latinos and other ethnic minority groups in the United States. In this model, the interaction between a child's culture of origin and the mainstream culture plays a central role in development. Thus, cultural factors, including values, behaviors, and norms, interact and transact with every level of a child's ecology and help shape outcomes.

LATINOS IN THE UNITED STATES

Placing Latino youth in the United States under one heading may be problematic because considerable variability exists among Latinos in terms of national origin, immigration history, and migration history, as well as different levels of education, socioeconomic status, acculturation, and immigration status. Thus, it is misleading to suppose that all Latinos adhere to a monolithic, unidimensional "Latino culture" (Gallo, Penedo, Espinosa de los Monteros, & Arguelles, 2009; Rosado & Elias, 1993). Differences among Latinos likely impact the extent and nature of risk exposure and the availability of resources and protective factors Latino children and adolescents experience in their daily lives, as well as differences in rates of engagement in delinquent behaviors and opportunities for positive developmental outcomes (Kuperminc, et al., 2009). As Kuperminc et al. (2009) note, "It makes little sense to compare the academic success of Cuban Americans in well-established Cuban communities in Miami to the relatively poorer academic performance of Mexican-origin youth in Atlanta without at least accounting for cultural and sociopolitical factors that contribute to those differences" (p. 214). Considering the diversity that exists among and within the various Latino groups is essential for understanding the experiences of Latino youth in the United States (Umaña-Taylor, 2009).

The diversity and rapid growth of the Latino community has only exacerbated the significant challenges that Latino families and children face. Overall, Latinos are more likely to be exposed to risk factors related to negative physical and mental health outcomes than any other ethnic minority group (Gallo et al., 2009). The difficulties Latinos in the United States experience have long been documented. In his writings about the delivery of mental health services for urban Latino families and children, Rosado (1980, 1986) underscored the various migrational, linguistic, acculturative, and socioeconomic stressors experienced by many urban, low-income Latino families. Although many Latinos have settled in rural and suburban communities beyond the major urban regions of the United States, not much has changed in terms of the nature and extent of stressors experienced by a significant number of Latino children and families.

LATINO RISK FACTORS

Poverty

Perhaps the greatest of the challenges Latinos experience is poverty. According to the National Center for Child Poverty, in 2007, 29% of Latino children lived in poverty compared with 10% of White children (Fass & Cauthen, 2008). Poverty and its associated problems, including crime, lack of opportunity, and violence, can have a significant impact on children's development (Condly, 2006). For example, poverty has been linked to lower levels of cognitive functioning, social development, psychological adjustment, self-esteem, and poor academic achievement (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994).

Ethnic or Racial Discrimination

Research indicates that ethnic or racial discrimination is a relatively common experience among Latino youth (Kuperminc et al., 2009; Szalacha, et al., 2003b; Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007). For instance, in their study of 248 Puerto Rican adolescents, Szalacha et al. (2003b) found that 49% reported perceiving racial or ethnic discrimination against them in situations inside and outside of school (e.g., when they wanted service at a store, with classmates), and 47% indicated that they were worried about being discriminated against. Similarly, Kuperminc, Henrich, Meyers, House, and Sayfi (2007) found that among the 176 Latino middle school students in their study, 29% reported being disliked, 23% reported being treated unfairly, and 43% reported seeing friends being treated unfairly because of their ethnic group or race (as cited in Kuperminc et al., 2009).

Discrimination experiences can be demeaning and degrading and are linked to poor mental health outcomes (Luthar, 2006; Szalacha et al., 2003b). Research on the effects of discrimination has shown that it is associated with depression, anxiety, anger, lowered self-esteem, reduced academic expectations and goals, and risky behaviors among ethnic minority youth (Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007). For example, Szalacha et al. (2003a) found that perceived discrimination and worrying about discrimination were negatively associated with self-esteem and positively associated with depression and stress among Puerto Rican adolescents.

Acculturative Stress

Acculturative stress refers to the psychological stress resulting from the process of acculturation. Acculturation is the process by which immigrants and their children acquire the values, behavioral norms, and attitudes of the host (mainstream) culture, while gradually modifying or discarding those of their culture of origin (Cortes, Rogler, & Malgady, 1994; Zimmerman & Zayas, 1995). Scholars have long theorized that it is not the acculturation process itself that results in psychological maladjustment but rather the stressors encountered during the process of acculturation that impact meaningfully on psychological functioning (Umaña-Taylor & Alfaro, 2009). Stressors include loss

of social support, language difficulties, ethnic or racial discrimination, and familial conflict related to gender or generational differences in the rate at which new cultural conventions are adopted (Gallo et al., 2009; Gonzales, Fabrett, & Knight, 2009).

The idea that support is “lost,” that language becomes unfamiliar, that discrimination is faced, and that generational differences arise is contradicted in some sense by the Latino Paradox, whereby the achievement and adjustment of recent immigrants exceeds that of second- and third-generation Latinos in the United States (Hill & Torres, 2010). Changes that would seem greatest on transition and that should abate over time, in fact, seem to have the opposite effect. However, this is explained by a further paradox, which is that new immigrants are often sustained beyond their immediate reality by a strong belief in the American Dream and often-misplaced optimism about the resources and support they will have in helping children achieve academically and vocationally.

A growing number of studies elucidate some of the mechanisms involved in creating mental health risk from unrequited optimism. Acculturative stress is associated with higher levels of externalizing and internalizing problems among Latino youth, including low self-esteem, substance abuse, symptoms of anxiety and depression, and suicidal ideation (Gonzales et al., 2009; Umaña-Taylor & Alfaro, 2009). Additionally, linguistic barriers, economic constraints, stigmatization, and inadequate support systems prevent many ethnic minority youth, including Latinos, from participating fully in school activities (Kuperminc et al., 2009), which in turn compromises academic achievement and potentiates school dropout (Hill & Torres, 2010).

Certainly, the nature and degree of stress Latino children and adolescents experience will vary according to demographic and contextual factors, such as national origin and socioeconomic status. For example, Gil, Vegas, and Dimas (1994) found that acculturative stress varied widely among a sample of immigrant and native-born Latino adolescent boys. Low-acculturation immigrants and native-born adolescent boys were more likely to report language problems and perceive low life chances, but high-acculturation boys from both groups were most likely to report low family pride and perceived acculturation gaps with their parents. Most notably, the low-acculturation native-born group fared worse, as these adolescent boys reported the highest frequency of all types of acculturative stressors.

In sum, poverty, ethnic and racial discrimination, and acculturative stress are each linked to poor outcomes and often co-occur in the lives of Latino adolescents. When various risk factors co-occur, their effects are synergistically debilitating (Luthar, 2006; Masten & Motti-Stefandi, 2008).

LATINO PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Although there is much diversity among Latinos, there are some common values across the various Latino cultures. Values that have been considered distinctly Latino and hypothesized to serve a protective function in Latino communities include *familismo*, *personalismo*, and *respeto* (Clauss-Ehlers & Levi, 2002). Moreover, the values of *personalismo* and *familismo* have led researchers and scholars to describe Latino culture as one that values a collective rather than an individualistic orientation, with an emphasis placed on family solidarity, obligation, and paternal authority (Cauce & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2002). (It should be noted that although *familismo*, *personalismo*, and *respeto* are among the most commonly cited Latino cultural values, they are not the only factors relevant in the lives of Latino youth. Religion, for example, can play an important protective function in the lives of at-risk-youth (Masten & Motti-Stefandi, 2008)). This article emerges in part from the lack of consensus as to the extent to which any culture-specific factors shape established psychosocial risk or resilience processes among Latinos (Gallo et al., 2009). A discussion of all possible cultural factors, however, is beyond the scope of this article.

Familismo

Often considered one of the most important Latino cultural values, *familismo* (also called familialism and familism) emphasizes the importance of the family unit and stresses the obligations and support that family members owe to both nuclear and extended kin. Key components of *familismo* include a sense of obligation to provide economic and emotional support for family members, reliance on family members for support, and the perception of family members as behavioral and attitudinal referents (German, Gonzalez, & Dumka, 2008; Marín & Marín, 1991; Sabogal, Marín, Otero-Sabogal, Marín, & Perez-Stable, 1987). In addition to being viewed as a natural support system that promotes health and psychological growth, the Latino family can provide protection against physical and emotional stressors. Consequently, the Latino family has been called the “great untapped resource” by health practitioners and researchers (Sabogal et al., 1987).

There is some research evidence supporting the protective role of *familismo* in the lives of Latino youth. For example, German et al. (2009) examined whether the familism values of Latino adolescents and their parents protected Latino youth from the negative effects of deviant peer affiliations. Their sample consisted of 598 Mexican American seventh-grade students. Results revealed that adolescent, maternal, and paternal familism values attenuated the relation between deviant peer affiliation and teacher reports of youth externalizing behavior problems. Additionally, *familismo* has been identified as an important contributor to academic motivation in immigrant families. Among Latino college students, family interdependence is associated with a strong desire to do well educationally and to repay parents for sacrifices made in immigrating to the United States (Ong, Phinney, & Dennis, 2006).

Although *familismo* may keep Latino youth from being unduly influenced by delinquent youth groups, such as gangs, it may also serve as a risk factor that draws them to such groups. In families where there is instability or dysfunction, gangs and delinquent groups can serve as surrogate families (National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, 2004). Additionally, Latino children and adolescents are more likely to share households with extended kin, which has been viewed as evidence that Latinos in the United States are more familistic than other groups. Such living arrangements might serve as an added stressor. As a result of immigration and migration, households with extended kin are likely to be more unstable than other households as new arrivals come in and others move out. It is possible that such instability is associated with disruptions in schooling and inconsistent caregiving (Glick & Van Hook, 2008).

Personalismo

Personalismo or personalism, is a cultural value related to *familismo*. Although defined in a variety of ways, it generally refers to the importance Latinos place on personal goodness and getting along with others, which is considered more important than individual ability and material success (Cauce & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2002). From a risk and resilience perspective, *personalismo* becomes especially important because it suggests that Latino youth who are experiencing difficulty will be comfortable with and will benefit from interventions that help them get past their distress by giving them opportunities to help others in positive ways (Clauss-Ehlers & Levi, 2002).

Respeto

Respeto or respect refers to the belief that every person deserves to be treated with respect and courtesy, particularly elders. One result of *respeto* is that great social worth and ultimate decision-making power is vested in authority figures, such as parents, elders, civic leaders, teachers, and law enforcement and other government officials (National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, 2004). *Respeto* promotes resilience when youth are exposed to positive

leaders, such as role models and mentors. This is supported by research indicating that having one significant positive relationship with an adult is an important protective factor in the lives of at-risk youth, because it reduces the likelihood of violence (Clauss-Ehlers & Levi, 2002).

SUMMARY

There is a unique constellation of risk and protective processes that operate on Latino youth beyond those related to their socioeconomic status. Protective processes such as those outlined previously, as well as the values of humility and behaving with dignity and respect toward others, can have the effect of reducing competitiveness among Latino students and also reducing the likelihood that individuals—parents or students—will speak up in sustained ways in the face of injustice, whether institutional or in the form of victimization by relational aggression or bullying. It therefore falls on the schools to set up structures that recognize the cultural constraints that lead Latinos in particular to be poorly matched with the educational environment of many schools today. Fortunately, the needs of Latinos in schools are converging with new views of the kinds of services that will benefit all students. We elaborate on this next, with particular attention to the role of school psychologists in helping to advance this momentum.

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL IN PROMOTING RESILIENCE AMONG LATINO YOUTH

There is a strong convergence between many of the cultural values of Latino youth and the emerging view of the kind of culture and climate in schools that best promote positive student growth and learning experiences (Cohen, 2006). Specifically, the Latino emphasis on community, interdependence, respect, and cooperation, as well as the overall value placed on education, suggests that as schools approach these ideals, they will become more attractive to Latino students. A powerful, caring, supportive school culture, sustained over time, would have the potency to offset the significant forces noted earlier that place Latino youth at particularly high risk for problematic outcomes.

A review of the literature conducted by Wyman, Pedro-Carroll, & Forbes-Jones (2003) indicates that systems seeking to generate positive outcomes for children in challenging circumstances must give simultaneous attention to two levels of resources: child-based resources and social system resources. Child-based resources refers to individual factors such as positive self-efficacy beliefs, social-emotional competence, and sound intellectual ability, occurring especially through a positive start in school/preschool/early childhood education and structured competence-building curricula. Social system resources refers to key social systems and services that, if they are functioning well, serve to help children in both a preventive and a remediate way. This includes health systems, schools, social services, religious organizations, and after-school programming.

Child-Based Resources

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has identified a key set of five social-emotional competencies that are linked to positive mental health and academic outcomes (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004):

1. *Self-awareness*—Identification and recognition of one's own emotions, recognition of strengths in self and others, sense of self-efficacy, and self-confidence.
2. *Social awareness*—Empathy, respect for others, and perspective taking.
3. *Responsible decision making*—Evaluation and reflection, and personal and ethical responsibility.
4. *Self-management*—Impulse control, stress management, persistence, goal setting, and motivation.
5. *Relationship skills*—Cooperation, help seeking and providing, and communication.

These competencies can be taught, practiced, and reinforced through effective, evidence-based social–emotional learning (SEL) programming (CASEL, 2003) that takes place within caring, supportive, and well-managed learning environments (Elias, 2009). This is consistent with other literature showing that development of autonomy, self-discipline, and ethics is more likely in environments in which mutual respect, cooperation, caring, and decision making are the norm (Bear, 2005). Such contexts are structured in ways that encourage students to explore and try new learning activities, provide them with easily accessible opportunities to address their personal needs and problems, and support them in establishing positive relationships with peers and adults. As a result, students feel safe and secure and are not fearful of making mistakes. Ultimately, a reciprocal relationship exists between SEL skills and school climate. A positive school environment promotes SEL, and SEL facilitates a supportive climate. Because social, emotional, and academic areas of growth are interdependent, the result is synergistic progress in all of these areas.

School psychologists, counselors, and other educators wishing to institute systematic programs of SEL will find ample resources for their efforts. A comprehensive list of 37 guidelines for developing SEL can be found in *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators* (Elias et al., 1997). These guidelines, which are summarized in 12 major points in Table 1, describe in detail what effective SEL instruction entails. For example, it must be systematic, provided over multiple years, integrated with the academic curriculum, and supported by school–family–community partnerships and a caring supportive environment.

SEL programming should be approached from a risk and resilience perspective. In other words, children may acquire risk processes, such as school failure, involvement with antisocial peers, or family poverty, that make it more likely that they will develop problem behaviors. The more risk processes they have, the higher their relative risk, although having risk processes does not guarantee that a student will develop problems, and many of them do not. On the other hand, protective

Table 1
Outline of Effective Social–Emotional and Character Development Practices in Schools

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- Based on theory and research and carefully planned
 - Builds and reinforces skills and social competencies, health promotion, problem-prevention skills, coping skills, social support for transitions and crises, and positive service
 - Links efforts to build social and emotional skills to developmental milestones as well as to the need to help students cope with ongoing life events and local circumstances
 - Emphasizes the promotion of prosocial attitudes and values about self, others, and work.
 - Builds a safe, civil, respectful school climate linked to overarching themes, goals, values, and/or essential life habits
 - Integrates and coordinates SECD-related programs and activities with the regular curriculum and life of the classroom and school
 - Builds connections to school through caring, engaging, and challenging classroom practices and problem-based learning, including service
 - Promotes developmentally and culturally appropriate instruction
 - Enhances school performance by addressing emotional and social dimensions of learning through engaging and interactive methods
 - Fosters enduring and pervasive SECD effects through collaboration between home and school, establishes organizational supports and policies that foster success
 - Provides high-quality staff development and ongoing support
 - Addresses key implementation and sustainability factors, including continuous improvement, outcomes evaluation, and dissemination factors
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Note. SECD = social–emotional and character development. Table based on Zins and Elias (2006) and Elias et al. (1997).

mechanisms or development of competencies—such as bonding to school, learning to consider the perspectives of others, or possessing adequate social decision-making skills—keep children from harm’s way or buffer them from the negative effects and thus lead to more successful adaptation (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2008). These positive, health-promoting processes may be found within the child and at the family and community levels. That said, providing Latinos with SEL skills so they can cope with the adversities likely to affect them must be complemented by ongoing systemic support as they deal with developmental transitions, such as moving into middle and high school, college, careers, and family-related crises.

In addition to adopting a risk and resilience perspective, SEL programming should also focus on building on the cultural strengths and protective factors of ethnic minority students within the school. As noted previously, the most effective SEL programming takes place within a positive school climate. For many ethnic minority students, this includes an environment that acknowledges and accepts their cultural values and beliefs. In the case of Latinos, building on the concepts of *familismo*, *personalismo*, and *respeto* can be important in supporting the acquisition of SEL skills. For instance, research indicates that a supportive student–teacher relationship is one of the most important factors in student success (Woolley, Kol, & Bowen, 2009). Given the emphasis many Latinos place on *personalismo*, Latino students are more likely to be drawn to student–teacher relationships characterized by warmth and genuine teacher interest in student’s lives—both personal and academic.

The parent–teacher relationship is also essential for the successful promotion of SEL skills among Latino youth. Positive parent–teacher relationships are often missing in the lives of Latino youth. As Woolley et al. (2009) note, “When Latino children are taught at home to respect adults (*respeto*), and they see the key adults in their lives, parents and teachers, working together and mutually invested in their education, this is likely to lead to better school outcomes” (pp. 63–64). Research indicates that when Latino parents receive respect from school personnel, parent involvement in school increases. This can also lead to greater student respect for teachers as the message to respect elders and authority figures becomes more consistent across the home and school settings. More perceived respect from students, in turn, can result in an increase in teacher support (Woolley et al., 2009).

Social System Resources

The notion that particular programs can inculcate resilience via some form of inoculation is belied by studies such as that of Lochman (1992), who found that a cognitive–behavioral intervention with aggressive fourth-through-sixth-grade boys required boosters along the way to maintain the initial level of success and to increase generalization of gains to include classroom behaviors. Key factors appeared to be longer length of intervention, focusing on general cognitive processes such as goal setting, consequential thinking and expectancies, problem solving, and focusing on the maintaining factors for change by including the peer, school, and family environments as part of the intervention program (Lochman, 1992).

Resilience is an ecological construct that requires the long-term coordination of social system resources; it resides in the interaction of individual, small group, organizational, neighborhood, cultural/historic, and macrosystemic influences. As Osher, Kendziora, VanDenBerg, and Dennis (1999) note:

The individualized conceptualization of resilience does not take into account how the organization of institutions in particular and society in general places some individuals at greater risk than others. . . . In de-emphasizing or even discounting the importance of social context, the “Horatio Alger model” of resilience takes responsibility and power away from family, schools, community, state, and nation, and

places the burden of survival squarely on the shoulders of those placed at risk by social as well as individual circumstances. (p. 3)

Success stories have strongly influenced initial resilience research and literature. However, these are not a representative sample of the efforts of those individuals who attempted to use their skills and persisted to an equal or even greater extent than those who were successful, but who failed because they were going down pathways that had very low likelihoods of success and a lack of consistent, effective support.

Osher et al. (1999) recommend that a contextual focus can be maintained by focusing on risk prevention or reduction; enhancement of strengths or assets; and supporting protective mechanisms in youth and in families, schools, and communities. From their perspective, Latino cultural concepts, such as the importance of family and community, become potential social system resources if their principles are integrated into the organizational culture and process of school settings. Resilience can best be fostered by providing caring school climates and communities that (a) openly value Latino cultural assets and strengths, (b) welcome parents while understanding their hesitation, (c) provide Latinos with SEL skills so they can cope with the adversities likely to affect them, and (d) organize ongoing support as they deal with developmental transitions, such as moving into middle and high school and into college and careers.

Relatedly, the precepts of *personalismo* and *respeto* support Benard's (1991) view that the most powerful integration of protective processes comes from providing expanded opportunities for youth participation. Such a strategy is implicitly cross-cultural in that participation is a fundamental human need, like caring and support. It is related to having meaning and a sense of efficacy. To engage students, schools must give them opportunities to participate in roles that are valued and meaningful. Examples include:

1. Giving more students a chance to respond to questions without criticism/put-downs.
2. Asking their opinions on issues related to the subject matter but also concerning the classroom, the school, and the wider community.
3. Making learning more active, experiential, and problem-based.
4. Engaging students in self-evaluation and goal setting, including within-session participation.
5. Using experiential pedagogy, such as cooperative learning, peer and cross-aged tutoring, and service learning.
6. Finding ways to acknowledge and build on strengths regularly.

Benard (1991) also advocates creating more channels for generating and sharing powerful new, positive narratives for at-risk youth. Among the various social resources affecting the growth of children, she affirms the importance of schools as a source of participation and positive identification, and as a place where students can and should establish caring, stable relationships.

These suggestions are supported by recent data from Perreira, Fuligni, and Potochnick (2010), who studied Latino ninth-graders in North Carolina and Los Angeles. They found that the students in North Carolina, who tended to be more recent immigrants, had higher academic motivation. Importantly, this was linked to positive experiences at school and a strong sense of acceptance. The authors note that “even though youth experienced discrimination both at school and in their communities, daily positive experiences, positive treatment by peers at school, and encouragement by teachers and other adults at their schools counterbalanced these negative experiences and fostered a generally positive school climate” (p. 150). That similar findings were not found in Los Angeles illustrates both the hope and the challenge in reversing the negative trends besetting Latino youth and ending the paradox of declining achievement: the climate of the school can play a highly influential role. Importantly, there is a convergence between what is being increasingly seen as necessary for

improving achievement and adjustment in all students and the kinds of school climate conditions that would be especially appealing to many Latino youth (Elias, 2009).

As implied earlier, school system resources will themselves have to be resilient and adapt to changing demographics and immigration patterns, as well as the consequences of acculturation. Gross (2009) defines three sets of competencies that school psychologists will need as they seek to manage change and promote resilience in their schools: (a) capacity to absorb new populations, values, and ideas; (b) capacity to change and to create institutional infrastructure that is adaptable to new circumstances; and (c) capacity to accommodate to the unexpected, including regular review and scanning to catch these unexpected influences as early as possible. In these exciting and challenging times, the training and role of school psychologists must adapt if the profession is to retain and expand its high degree of salience and indispensability in the schools. Fortunately, the field of school psychology is particularly attentive to these emerging challenges as they relate to professional preparation and development. The Multicultural and Diversity Committee of the Evidence Based Interventions Task Force provides guidance for school psychologists on how to evaluate the quality of evidence available for the potential generalizability and transfer of programs across cultural contexts and delineates some of the competencies needed to engage in such translational work; the guidelines emphasize the need for creating broad collaborative partnerships versus attempting to develop all needed competencies on one's own (Ingraham & Oka, 2006).

CONCLUSION

The need for schools to provide contexts of caring as a way of fostering resilience is not a new concept. School professionals, who tend to be educated toward individual level models of assessment and intervention, are often not comfortable addressing organizational and systems-level processes but the implications of adopting a resilience point of view will require movement out of the professional comfort zone (Kress & Elias, 2006). Specifically, attention will have to be paid toward school culture and climate assessment and intervention, engaging parents in sustained and respectful ways, particularly those for whom the English language and American culture are not primary, and providing students with more project-based and experiential learning, especially service-learning, as a vehicle for engagement in school and activation of altruistic and interdependent processes that are so much a part of many cultures, especially the Latino culture.

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