Connections: Families and Schools Supporting Our Youth

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This project is part of a collaborative effort between NSU’s Center for Psychological Studies, the Broward Comprehensive School Counseling project, and four low-income, Broward County elementary schools. Its overarching goal is to enhance the quality-of-life of low-income, ethnic minority children living in Broward County by developing and evaluating a pilot program to increase the family and school support available to them. These factors, in turn, are expected to promote children’s academic achievement and positive mental health outcomes. This intervention will target protective factors that consistently have been shown to improve outcomes for low-income youth: child coping skills, positive family relationships, effective parenting practices, and relationships with supportive adults and peers. We will draw from evidence-based practices shown to effectively change the targeted protective factors, but will also use innovative research methods, including focus groups and interviews, to adapt such practices to the needs of low-income, ethnic minority and immigrant families. Indeed, this study will be the first step in a program of intervention research seeking to adapt existing evidence-based practices for use with low-income families from Latin America, Haiti, and the English Speaking Caribbean and to develop new strategies—ones that are culturally-competent and contextually-relevant—when existing interventions fall short. We will evaluate intervention effectiveness using a single-group, multiple-baseline design. We will examine pre- to post-intervention changes on protective factors and child outcomes using repeated-measures ANOVA and multiple regression models. Study results will be used to shape future program implementation and to seek additional funding for replication and dissemination.
By virtue of being poor, children are at increased risk for academic failure and mental health problems, including depression and behavior problems.

Ecological Perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) posits that beyond their individual strengths and needs, children are heavily influenced by the contexts in which they live, grow, and learn.

Protective Triad of Resources (Garmezy, 1991; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998) posits that when strengths and resources exist in each context, children do better academically and in terms of their own well-being, despite poverty.

CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS
TARGETED PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Fortunately, research on resilience suggests that parent and child coping skills and strong, supportive relationships with parents, extended family, school adults, and peers can buffer families from the negative impact of stress on parenting and child academic and mental health outcomes.
TARGETED PROTECTIVE FACTORS

CHILD COPING SKILLS
problem-focused and emotion-focused coping

POSITIVE FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS
warmth, cohesion, communication, respectful parent-child conflict
reduced exposure to interparental conflict

EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE
praise, effective commands, work first then play, remove privileges, time out,
reduced harsh parenting & corporal punishment

SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH EXTENDED FAMILY AND SCHOOL ADULTS
expressing appreciation and respect
support-seeking

PROSOCIAL PEER RELATIONSHIPS

BICULTURAL COMPETENCE
It is expected that the Connections program will produce significant, meaningful changes in the targeted protective factors, and in turn, children will exhibit improvements in their academic and mental health outcomes.
LEARNING HOW TO LEARN PERSPECTIVE

FOCUS GROUPS

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS WITH PARENTS AND CHILDREN

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS WITH CULTURAL BROKERS

QUALITATIVE CODING OF PARTICIPANTS’ ENDORSEMENTS, QUESTIONS, CONCERNS AND OBJECTIONS TO INTERVENTION CONTENT

POST-INTERVENTION INTERVIEWS WITH PARTICIPANTS RE: CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND CONTEXTUAL RELEVANCE OF THE INTERVENTION
PARTICIPANTS

Low-income families

Latin America, Haiti, and the English-speaking Caribbean

US born and immigrant

English, Spanish, and Creole speaking

3rd to 5th grade children attending our four partner schools

Parents, children, and extended family will be invited to participate
In Year 1, 30 families participated in the pre-test assessments. 

- 28 mothers or mother figures 
- 6 fathers or father figures 
- 30 children 

60% were two-parent families, 23% were single-parent families, 17% missing data

Children were third to 5th graders in our four partner schools. They ranged from 8 to 12 years old ($M = 10.35$, $SD = .99$).

73% of participating children were boys.
Participants

Parent Ethnicity

- Haitian (39%)
- Latino (33%)
- African American (12%)
- Bi-Ethnic (6%)
- Jamaican (3%)
- Missing (7%)
Preliminary Results Year 1

Participation & Attendance

- Active Participants: 47%
- Brief Participants: 20%
- Participated in One Session: 23%
- Pre-Test Assessment Only: 10%
MEASURES

Data is being collected on children’s academic and mental health outcomes, the risk and protective factors targeted by the intervention, and factors that might impact whether families and children benefit from the intervention.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable of Interest</th>
<th>Measure(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Engagement &amp; Performance</td>
<td>De-Identified Archival Records (BCSCP)</td>
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<td>Student Absences, Tardies, Grades</td>
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<td>Mental Health Outcomes</td>
<td>Parent (CBCL) and Teacher Report (TRF)</td>
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<td>Internalizing and Externalizing Subscales</td>
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<td>Risk &amp; Protective Factors</td>
<td>Parent and Child Report</td>
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<td>Family Cohesion (FACES-II), Parental Acceptance (CRPBI) &amp; Attachment (IPPA)</td>
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<td>Consistent Discipline (CRPBI, CTSPC), Child Coping Strategies (CCSC)</td>
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<td>Parental Social Support, Family Conflict (IPC, PAC), Peer Relationships</td>
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<td>Program Mediators &amp; Moderators</td>
<td>Stressful Events (MESA), Acculturation (LIB), Parenting Self-Efficacy</td>
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RESEARCH DESIGN

We propose using a single-group, multiple time point design to examine intervention effects. In addition, we will use several quasi-experimental design features to strengthen the internal validity of the study.

MULTIPLE TIME POINT DESIGN

REPLICATION ACROSS FOUR SCHOOL CONTEXTS

TESTS OF MECHANISMS OF CHANGE

DOSE-RESPONSE ANALYSIS
DATA ANALYSIS

We will evaluate the following questions by examining pre- to post-intervention changes on protective factors and child outcomes and by examining potential mediators and moderators of program effects using repeated-measures ANOVA and multiple regression analysis.

INTERVENTION EFFECTIVENESS Did the program work?

MECHANISMS OF CHANGE How did it work?

TREATMENT MODERATORS For whom did it work?
FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

• Mothers reported
  • being more consistent in their discipline
  • greater use of specific discipline strategies (redirection, removing a privilege, and sending the child to their room or time out)
  • less harsh parenting (less yelling and name-calling)

• Children reported many of the same improvements noted by their mothers.

• Mothers and children did not report improvements in warmth.
Preliminary Results
Year 1

YOUTH COPING SKILLS AND SUPPORT SEEKING

- Children reported
  - increased use of emotion-focused coping skills (thinking positively, using distraction and religious coping in stressful situations)
  - increase in seeking support from their parents and other adults
  - increase in asking for help with problem-solving (but no improvements for problem-solving skills)
  - decrease in seeking support from their peers.
CHILD MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES

- According to mother report, children exhibited
  - decreases in rule breaking and aggressive behavior
Parents indicated that:

• the parenting strategies were very helpful to them.

• they learned a lot and their parenting improved.

• they felt Connections would be helpful to other parents from their culture or community.
Steps for Next Year

CONNECTIONS - YEAR 2

- Three partner elementary schools
- Increase sample size
- Increase Latino/Spanish-speaking family participants
- Addition of individual sessions
- Addition of children’s bicultural competence as goal
- Addition of teacher trainings
- Changed format in ways suggested by parents
  - shorter (1.5 hours)
  - 9 sessions
  - every week
In Year 2, 21 families are participating in sessions.

- 21 mothers or mother figures
- 2 fathers or father figures
- 24 children

Haitian 48% ($n = 10$)
Latino 28% ($n = 6$)
African-American 9% ($n = 2$)
Multi-Ethnic 9% ($n = 2$)
Jamaican 4% ($n = 1$)

48% are participating in English, 38% in Creole, and 14% in Spanish.
58% of participating children are boys.

Children were in 3rd to 5th grade.
## Anticipated Barriers & Possible Solutions

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<tr>
<th>Anticipated Barrier</th>
<th>Possible Solution</th>
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<tr>
<td>Identification &amp; recruitment of families; access to schools</td>
<td>NSU/CPS and BCPS Partnership</td>
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<td>Retention of families</td>
<td>Reduce barriers to participation, such as cost, transportation, child care, meals, negotiating unfamiliar systems, stigma Reminder phone calls, per parent request</td>
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<td>Staffing Connections intervention research efforts</td>
<td>School-Based Interventions for Ethnically-Diverse Families, student co-investigators, research practicum credits, clinical hours, undergraduate RAs</td>
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<td>Cultural Adaptations &amp; Translations</td>
<td>See Learning How to Learn Perspective, cultural brokers, translators.</td>
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<td>Discussion of Use of Corporal Punishment by Participating Families</td>
<td>Additional literature review, consultation with cultural brokers; pilot tested CP session last year, w/ promising results</td>
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Thank you for your generous support of the Connections project!

Questions?
Conference Presentations


