

Personal Development:

The Power of Teachers in a Young Person's World

The Rationale for Teaching Personal

Development in Post Primary schools in

Northern Ireland

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Executive Summary

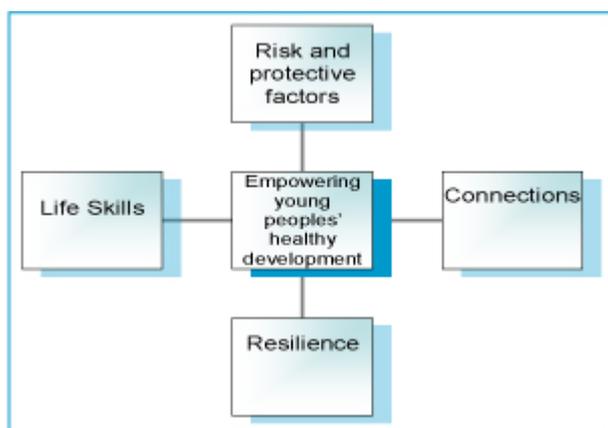
Next to the family, schools have the potential to shape the well being of young people

More than any other institution, with the exception of the family, school has the potential to shape and nurture the skills, well being and potential of our young people in Northern Ireland.

This challenge is consistent of the vision set within *Investing for Health* and the *Northern Ireland Curriculum*. These documents target empowering young people to develop to their full potential.

Teaching personal development will support these efforts. As personal development will be a statutory requirement under the revised curriculum, how it is delivered in the classroom and within a whole school approach will be critical in its successful implementation. The purpose of this paper is to explore the rationale behind its implementation and the processes that will enhance its effectiveness.

CCEA's definition of Personal Development involves the entire world of the young person, of which school can play a significant part. Personal development involves knowledge, attitudes, skills, relationships and behaviour that can be utilised in and outside the classroom. This involves thinking processes, managing emotions, values and relationships along with a range of life skills that assist young people is coping with the challenges of every day living.



Applying personal development to building healthy young people needs to be based on sound evidence based work. There is a growing body of evidence that suggests a range of protective process have a significant impact on the health and well being of young people. It is essential teaching personal development integrates these

concepts in its delivery. These include:

Risk and Protective Factors

When risk factors are reduced across family, school, community and for the individual and protective factors enhanced, young people are less likely to develop problems across a range of areas including substance misuse, teenage pregnancy, crime and mental health issues. (Hawkins, Catalano and Miller, 1992) Schools are in a strong position to build protective processes.

Life Skills

Life skills are one of the protective factors. Teaching life skills in the classroom has been shown to substantially reduce tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drug use. Life skills work is recommended for all pupils. When aimed at the whole school population, universal programmes will also engage pupils with identified risks. Teaching personal development in the revised curriculum accomplishes this. Caution is made, however, to the limitation of a skills focus in isolation. Competence in life skills alone may not be enough. Skills can go unused or be used in an anti-social way if not anchored by connections. (Pittman, 1999)

Connections

The Add Health project, a longitudinal study on adolescent health and development found that young people who feel connected to school have better mental health and are less likely to engage in risky behaviours including the use of alcohol and illegal drugs, early sexual activity and violence. (Blum & Rinehart, 1997) Other researchers have found that pupils respond to efforts to improve academic performance when they feel connected to school.

Resiliency

The risk and resiliency literature emphasise that schools are critical environments for young people to develop strengths and the capacity to adjust to pressure, bounce back from adversity and develop social, academic and vocational competencies necessary to do well in life.

Researchers have found that resilience is an attribute that can be developed and fostered (Benard 1991). Milstein and Henry (2000) specified the following protective factors that build resilience and that can be developed within the school setting; positive bonding, clear and consistent boundaries, life skills, caring and support, high expectations and meaningful participation.

Linking positive development and improved academics.

Years of research exploring healthy development and successful learning from various social science disciplines have found a strong relationship between healthy behaviours and academic success (Jessor and Jessor, 1977; Austin, 1991).

“A climate which fosters effective learning, both within class and about the school, is at the heart of the education process. (Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour 2001p. 6) When the ethos is right, pupils place a higher importance on education, learning and positive behaviour.

Schools can promote healthy behaviours as well as successful learning in young people by creating climates and teaching practices that honour and meet these developmental needs through personal development. The potential of personal development increasing academic performance is clearly demonstrated in the literature. Positive academic and behavioural outcomes are increased when schools are developmentally focused and relationship driven. (Comer, 2001)

Developing the most important resource: teachers

For teachers to be part of this process, their own protective factors need supported. Overwhelmed, change weary teachers can be as disengaged as some of their students. An environment that supports teachers in facilitating personal development work and fostering connections is as important as curriculum material, facilitation skills and classroom management skills.

The Power of Schools in Building Protective Factors, Connections and Resiliency

As Elias states, "Schools are our society's primal formal institution for socializing young people into their roles as responsible citizens. (Elias 1999)

Resilience research provides scientific evidence that protective factors, many of which can be learned or provided environmentally, can make a profound impact on the life course of young people.

(Werner and Smith, 1992)

In 2007, Personal Development will begin to be taught as a statutory subject in the revised curriculum. CCEA have piloted a primary school programme throughout Northern Ireland, *Walk Tall Together*. The five current Education and Library Boards are collectively working on curriculum content for Key Stage 3.

While teaching personal development as an independent subject will be a positive development for young people, it is how it is taught and integrated across the curriculum, involves parents and is reflected in each individual's school ethos that will significantly contribute to young people healthy development.

To effectively implement personal development as a core curriculum subject, it is recommended:

- The commitment to personal development begins with the school management team, is embedded in school development planning and involves a whole school approach.
- Selection of teachers delivering the personal development curriculum is given deliberate consideration. Selection of teachers should be based on the presence of core skills and aptitudes such as empathy, warmth, creativity, valuing young people.

- Support for the school's personal development team is planned a coordinator that is seen as a champion of personal development and can support staff in their work is nominated.
- Teaching staff delivering personal development in the classroom are adequately trained in approaches and skills conducive to personal development work.
- Creative means to embed personal development in other curriculum areas and involve parents are explored.
- Teaching staff are trained and competent in the concepts driving effective personal development including risk and protective factors, life skills, connections and resiliency.

Effectively establishing personal development as a core subject will not happen without deliberate and sustained effort. Embedding a whole school approach will require a drive and commitment from key personnel starting with the school management team and incorporated in school development planning. The effort to actualise personal development as a substantial contribution to enhance the development of our young people is a long term investment. This investment will be worth all the resources both financial and human if it helps our young people reach toward that goal of developing to their full potential.

Introduction

Key strategic documents in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland setting the agenda for developing our young people are presenting a consistent message. They are consistently calling for developing our young people to their full potential. These documents state:

Every Child Matters: Change for Children, the Government's vision for children, proposes changes in reshaping services to help every child fulfil their potential regardless of their background or circumstances. (Every Child Matters 2003)

Investing for Health has among its objectives "to enable all people and young people in particular to develop the skills and attitudes that will give them the capacity to reach their full potential and make healthy choices" (Investing for health 2002)

The Northern Ireland Curriculum in the context of education states its aim, first and foremost, is to empower young people to develop their potential.

As Personal Development is being developed as a core subject to be taught within the revised curriculum, a need was identified to review the evidence base that creates the foundation and rationale for these changes. How will teaching personal development within the school setting contribute to the realisation of the vision held within the three strategic documents identified? More importantly, how will such a complex subject be taught to make a substantial difference to the young people of Northern Ireland?

As this paper will discuss, personal development has the potential to significantly contribute to the task of assisting in the development of our young people. As the Personal Development Curriculum in

implemented, the task for educators, among all those working with young people, is to identify the processes that are proven to assist in realizing this challenge and supporting its effectiveness.

To explore this further, a series of questions will be explored;

- What do we mean by the term *personal development*?
- What are the developmental needs of adolescents?
- What supports the healthy development of young people?

This paper will then present a review of the literature that provides the evidence that supports the foundations for Personal Development in the revised curriculum. This will include:

- What makes personal development effective in the context of education
- The link between personal development and academic achievement
- The role of school and teachers in the personal development of young people
- How will personal development support the aims and objectives of the revised curriculum and the Investing for Health agenda?

What is Personal Development?

CCEA defines Personal Development as;

Encouraging each child to become personally, emotionally, socially and physically effective, to lead healthy, safe and fulfilled lives;

To become confident, independent and responsible citizens, making informed and responsible choices and decisions throughout their lives'

Taking this definition, it means more than the continuum of life skills. It is a process that involves the entire world of the young person, of which school can play a significant part. Personal development involves knowledge, attitudes, skills, relationships and behaviour that can be utilised in and outside the classroom. This involves thinking processes, managing emotions, values and relationships along with a range of life skills that assist young people in coping with the challenges of every day living. This is inclusive of their present needs and helping them in their development toward adulthood.

While schools can play a significant part in this process, its endeavours are not in isolation. Factors in each young person's family and community will also be significantly influential.

Adolescence: a stage of developmental need

A common perception is that for most young people, the teenage years are a turbulent time. It is often perceived as a time when young people break away from their relationships with adults and friends become all important. Concerns with risky behaviours such as crime, early sexual behaviour, violence and alcohol and other drug misuse are very real.

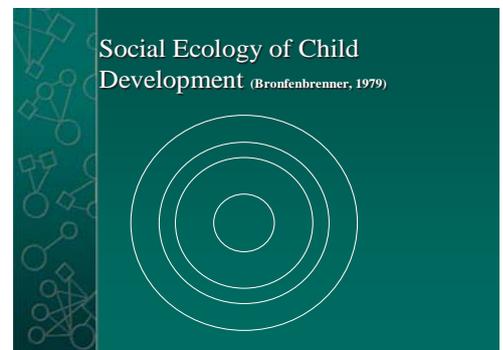
Seeing adolescent as a time of turmoil and challenging behaviour, however, serves only to stigmatise and promote negative perceptions of adolescence. (Howard and Johnston, 2000)

A more constructive analysis of the challenges during adolescence is supported by the emerging literature on resilience. Resilience is defined as the process of, and capacity for successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances (Matson, Best and Garmezy 1990).

Adolescence is a time of developmental need. This is a crucial stage of life, where behaviour that influences well being in adulthood are initiated or firmly set in place. Protective factors and strong relationships help adolescents cope with those developmental tasks they face during their teenage years.

Viewing these developmental tasks within the social structures adolescents live is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. (Bronfenbrenner 1979)

This theory looks at a children and young people's development within the context of the system of relationships that forms his or her environment. Bronfenbrenner's theory defines complex "layers" of environment, each having an effect on a young person's development.



The *microsystem* is the layer closest to the young person and contains the structures with which they have direct contact.

The microsystem encompasses the relationships and interactions a young person has with his or her immediate surroundings including family, school, neighbourhood, or childcare environments. (Berk, 2000).

The microsystem among the other systems impacting the young person can be a source of risk factors. It also presents an opportunity for protective factors to be a deliberate target of intervention. The school is one of those possible settings that can effectively build protective factors.

Skills, attitudes and relationships can be influenced through the teaching of personal development to assist young people in effectively making this transition from adolescence into adulthood. How will the teaching of personal development work be effective? An exploration of what supports the healthy development of young people will indicate the process behind the teaching of personal development.

What supports Healthy Development for Young People?

Applying personal development with building healthy young people needs to be based on sound evidence based work. There is a growing body of evidence that suggests a range of protective processes have a significant impact on the health and well being of young people. These include:

- Risk and protective factors
- Life skills
- Connections
- Resiliency

Risk and protective factors

The literature in the area of young people's healthy development clearly identifies processes that impact both on the onset and avoidance of problematic behaviours across the range of risks young people face.

A growing body of evidence indicates that various psychological, social, and behavioural factors are protective of health and well being, especially during adolescence. (WHO, 2002) It is imperative educators have a working understanding of these risk and protective processes.

When risk factors are reduced across family, school, community and for the individual and protective factors enhanced, young people are less likely to develop problems across a range of areas including substance misuse, teenage pregnancy, crime and mental health issues. (Hawkins, Catalano and Miller, 1992)

A risk factor is defined as scientifically established factors or determinants for which there is strong objective evidence of a causal relationship to problem behaviour.

Protective factors, on the other hand, are those that potentially decrease the likelihood of developing problems with risky behaviour.

These protective factors can influence the level of risk an individual experiences or can moderate the relationship between the risk and the outcome or behaviour. (Jessor, 1993)

Some important issues concerning the risk factors young people face: (Communities that care 1997, Hawkins, Catalano and Miller, 1992)

- Risk exist in multiple domains, across family, community, school and the individual
- The more risk factors present, the greater the risk. Risk factors have a predictive and multiplying feature
- Many of the risk factors identified for alcohol, tobacco and other drug use are also predictive of other problem behaviours among youth, including teen pregnancy, school dropout crime and mental health issues.
- Risk factors show a great deal of consistency in their effects across different races, cultures and social classes.
- Protective factors may buffer exposure to risk.

A list of risk factors can be found in Appendix 1

Issues contributing to risk factors specific to the school setting include; (Benard, 1991)

- Poor design and use of school space
- Overcrowding

- Lack of caring but firm discipline
- Insensitivity and poor accommodation to multicultural factors
- Student alienation
- Rejection of at risk students by teachers and peers
- Anger and resentment at school routines and demands for conformity
- Low perceived life choices

Protective factors counteract the risks young people are exposed to by reducing the impact of the risk factor or changing the way the individual responds to it. (Communities that Care 1997)

The complex interaction between these factors does not imply it is a simple process. The presence of protective factors does not mean the absence of risk. Risk factors can have a multiplying effect with friends who use substances the most reliable and powerful particularly with older adolescents.

It does, however, point to a clear direction. Young people with higher levels of protective factors in their lives are less likely to develop a range of problems including health, mental health, social and relational problems.

Significant protective factors include

- Bonding, those strengthened relationships with family members, teachers or other socially responsible adults. Research consistently illustrates young people living with heightened risk factors who are positively influenced by a strong, positive relationship (this includes having opportunities to make meaningful contributions, and being recognised for those contributions.)
- Healthy and consistent standards from the family and other support systems.
- Interpersonal / social skills.
- Raised self-esteem.
- Alternative activities.

Social bonding can occur within a number of settings including family and schools.

Resnick et al (1997) found that parent-family connectedness and perceived school connectedness were protective factors against a range of health risks behaviours including tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana use, violence, emotional distress, suicide and age of sexual behaviour.

The work of Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore and Houstin identifies school as a significant source of protective factors. Young people in discordant and disadvantaged homes are more likely to demonstrate resilient strengths if they go to schools with good academic records and caring and attentive teachers. (Rutter, et al 1979)

Bonding is enhanced through opportunities for involvement, social and learning skills, healthy standards, recognition and praise. (Hawkins, Catalano and Miller, 1992)

Enhancement of the school as a protective factor includes having a safe and caring environment, opportunities for success at school and recognition of achievement. These processes are particularly supportive for pupils who are not receiving support at home. Studies have consistently shown the power individual teachers can play in the lives of resilient young people. (Geary 1988; Werner and Smith, 1987)

Rutter (1987) describes four types of protective factors and processes.

- Those that reduce negative risk impact or reduce a person's exposure to risk.
- Those that reduce negative chain-reactions that follow bad events or experiences
- Those that promote self esteem and self efficacy through achievement
- Positive relationships and new opportunities that provide needed resources or new directions in life.

Pollard, Hawkins and Arthur (1999) grouped the protective factors into three basic categories:

- individual characteristics (e.g. a positive social orientation, high intelligence, and a resilient temperament,
- social bonding (e.g. warm, affective relationships)
- Healthy beliefs and standards of behaviour.

Effective prevention targets the reduction of risk factors and the enhancement of protective factors.

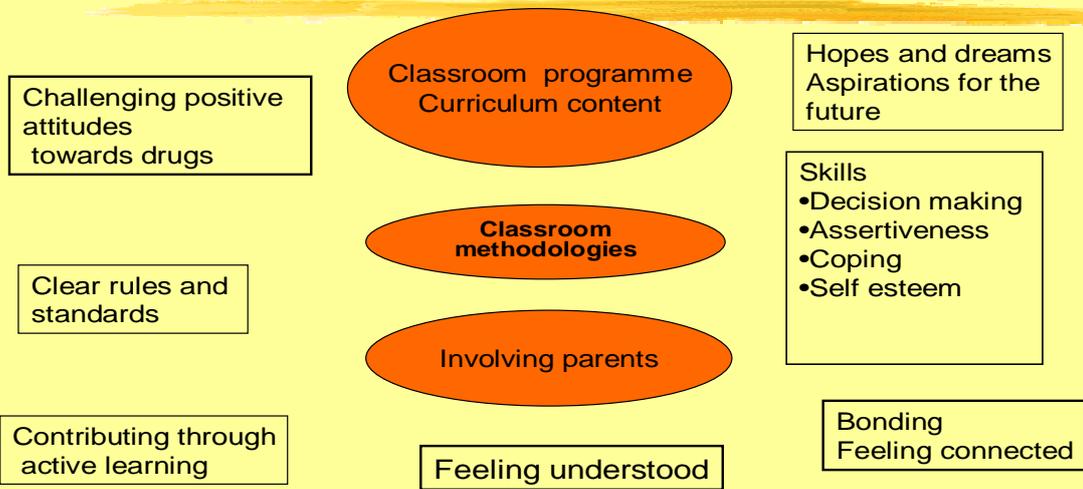
Whilst some authors have argued that the focus should be building the protective factors associated with resilience others have argued that to focus only on this one strategy ignores the social and contextual risk factors. In their study, Pollard, Hawkins and Arthur (1999) found the results indicated that prevention policies and programmes should focus on both the reduction of risk factors and the promotion of positive influences if the reduction in substance use, crime, and violence among adolescents or the improvement of academic performance are intended outcomes.

Four types of strategies have been shown to effectively support the health and well being of adolescents.

- Decrease the risk factors that contribute to risky behaviour and poor health outcomes
- Increase the protective factors that contribute to resiliency and healthy outcomes
- Provide opportunities for young people to successfully meet the developmental needs of adolescence
- Build healthy communities that support and nurture adolescents. For this paper, the schools community is the target for discussion.

A further exploration of protective factors are presented in appendix 2

How personal development can reduce risk and enhance protective factors



Life skills

Having positive social skills to make healthy choices and cope with everyday life is one of the protective factors previously discussed. (Hawkins, Catalano and Miller, 1992)

Teaching life skills in the school setting is not a new initiative. Schools have had elements of life skills work embedded in their timetable for considerable time. During the 1970's and 1980's organization of curriculum elements developed social and life skills. The work of Hopson and Scally (1981) among others was well known at the time.

What is new, as proposed in the revised curriculum, is a detailed programme of study covering the range of skills within The Learning for Life and Work Theme.

Teaching life skills has proven to be an effective initiative when using the approach to address substance misuse prevention and is cited in *Guiding Effective Prevention* published in Northern Ireland. (EDACT, 2005) This report highlights the work of Botvin and the *LifeSkills Programme*. The *LifeSkills* Training program was developed by Dr. Gilbert J. Botvin, professor of public health at Cornell University Medical College and director of Cornell's Institute for Prevention Research. Results of numerous evaluations show that this program can reduce tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drug use substantially. Findings have also suggested prevention effects have been found to last for at least six years. (Botvin and Botvin, 1992)

The **LifeSkills** middle school curriculum (consistent with key stage 3) consists of 30 class sessions (approximately 45 minutes each) to be conducted over three years.

The **LifeSkills** program consists of three major components that cover the critical domains found to promote drug use. Research has shown that students who develop skills in these three domains are far less likely to engage in a wide range of high-risk behaviours. The three components include:

- **Drug Resistance Skills** enable young people to recognize and challenge common misconceptions about tobacco, alcohol and other drug use. Through coaching and practice, they learn information and practical resistance skills for dealing with peers and media pressure to engage in substance use.
- **Personal Self-Management Skills** teach pupils how to examine their self-image and its effects on behaviour; set goals and keep track of personal progress; identify everyday decisions and how they may be influenced by others; analyze problem situations, and consider the consequences of each alternative solution before making decisions; reduce stress and anxiety, and look at personal challenges in a positive light.
- **General Social Skills** teach pupils the necessary skills to overcome shyness, communicate effectively and avoid misunderstandings, initiate and carry out conversations, handle social requests, utilize both verbal and nonverbal assertiveness skills to make or refuse requests, and recognize that they have choices other than aggression or passivity when faced with tough situations

Kauffman, Walker and Sprague (1997) recommend exposing all pupils to a range of life skills training. This should include even pupils not seen as been at risk. While aimed at the whole school population, universal programmes will also engage pupils with identified risks. Teaching personal development in the revised curriculum accomplishes this.

Caution is made, however, to the limitation of a skills focus in isolation. Competence in life skills alone may not be enough. Skills can go unused or be used in an anti-social way if not anchored by connections. (Pittman, 1999)

Connections

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, known as the Add Health Study, found that young people who feel connected to school have better mental health and are less likely to engage in risky behaviours including the use of alcohol and illegal drugs, early sexual activity and violence. (Blum & Rinehart 1997) Other researchers have found that pupils respond to efforts to improve academic performance when they feel connected to school.

What seems to matter most in building these connections is that schools foster an atmosphere in which pupils feel fairly treated, feel safe both physically and emotionally, feel close to others and feel part of the school. (National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health, 1997)

This sense of connection to school, while important to all pupils, is most important for those young people seen as at risk, who struggle with lack of support from home, have academic deficiencies and other challenges or risk factors. (Henderson and Milstien, 1996)

The Add Health Study is a comprehensive school based study of health related behaviours of adolescents in the United States. More than 90,000 young people between 7th and 12th grades answered brief questionnaires about their lives including their health, friendships, self esteem, and expectations for the future.

Pupils were surveyed from 132 schools around the country. Administrators from these schools also completed questionnaires regarding school policies and procedures, teacher characteristics, health service provision and student body characteristics. The initial survey was completed between September, 1994 and April, 1995. An in-home interview followed up 20,000 pupils from the original survey.

A follow up interview was conducted a year later with parents also being interviewed.

How connected were young people in the Add Health Study?

How connected to school were young people? The average level of connection across all schools in the Add Health work was 3.6 out of a possible range of 1 – 5. From that study, 31% of pupils were stating they did not feel connected to school. (McNeely, et. al, 2002)

Measuring connectedness

Using different terms to describe similar things can add a variation to how it is measured. Terms used to describe a pupil's relationship with school can include school bonding, school climate, attachment to school, positive orientation to school, school connectedness, school engagement, and pupil satisfaction with school. Each can be measured differently. They all can be influenced by academic engagement, belonging, discipline and fairness, liking school, having a voice in school, extracurricular activities, peer relationships, safety, and teacher support.

When considering connections, school represents an umbrella term which includes several aspects of the pupil's relationships within school including with the school as an institution, teachers, and friends ect. The Social Development Research Group uses the term *bonding* when they refer to relationships within school. Bonding is defined as the presence of attachment and commitment. Attachment involves an emotional link to school. Commitment represents an investment. (Catalano et al, 2004)

The Add Health study used a measurement of school connectedness including feeling close to people in the school, are happy to be at school, and feeling part of the school. (Moody and Bearman 2002)

How do pupils from Northern Ireland relate to school?

While the Add Health Study is American based, the Health Behaviour of School Children Survey last published in 2001 gives a picture of pupil's connectedness to school along with other health related issues.

The findings were gathered from a representative sample of 6,589 pupils in Primary 7 through year 12 throughout Northern Ireland

This survey suggested 68% of girls and 59% of boys identified a sense of belonging with their school. While the questions that were asked differed in the two studies and cannot be compared, it left 32% of girls and 41% of boys reporting not feeling that sense of belonging.

Consideration needs to be given to how personal development for all young people, but particularly boys, can improve their sense of connection to school. (HPA, 2001)

For both genders this feeling of belonging declines with age, with the most marked difference occurring between year 8 and 9.

Three quarters of young people felt accepted by their peers, while 1 in 4 experienced some form of bullying. Less than half (45.7 %) agreed with the statement our school is "a nice place to be". (HPA, 2001)

On average, young people in Northern Ireland reported they like school with the same frequency as other young people in other countries. They did, however, perceive school stricter and participated less than the European average.

As expected, older pupils experienced a higher level of expectations from their parents. While this increase of expectations is consistent across Europe, it is markedly higher in Northern Ireland. Boys felt their parents expected more of them than girls.

Since a substantial proportion of young people in Northern Ireland do not identify a sense of connection and belonging to school, policies, strategies, curriculum material and classroom management skills will be required to build these relationships and assist in enabling personal development to be effectively taught within the school setting.

As the Add Health Study found, feeling connected to school, defined as, "feeling close to people at school", "like that I am part of this school", "teachers at this school treat pupils fairly," and

“feeling safe at school” was the most powerful protective factor of any school attribute studied.

(Resnick et al., 1997)

Resiliency

The concept of resilience is based on the theory that particular traits or “protective factors” such as caring relationships and high expectations help strengthen people’s resolve, enabling them to persist during adversity.

The concept of resiliency emerged from longitudinal studies of “at risk” groups of children who encountered significant life stressors, yet developed into healthy, competent adults. (Weiner and Smith 1987)

One of the first and most influential resilience studies was conducted by Emmy E. Werner, a University of California child psychologist. She followed a group of Hawaiian students from 1955 to 1985 and found that about one-third of the students who were affected by major conditions of “risk”, moved into adulthood without significant difficulties.

What is resiliency?

Resilience” is the ability to “bounce back” from adversity, to overcome the negative influences that often block achievement. Resilience research focuses on the traits and coping skills and supports that help young people survive, or even thrive, in a challenging environment.

Rutter regards resiliency as the ability to recover and move on in the face of difficult circumstances. (Rutter 1994)

A simple, workable definition may be described as the knack of being able to “bungee jump” through the pitfalls of life. Having that elastic rope around them helps a person rebound when things get tough and to maintain their sense of whom they are as a person. (Fuller 1998)

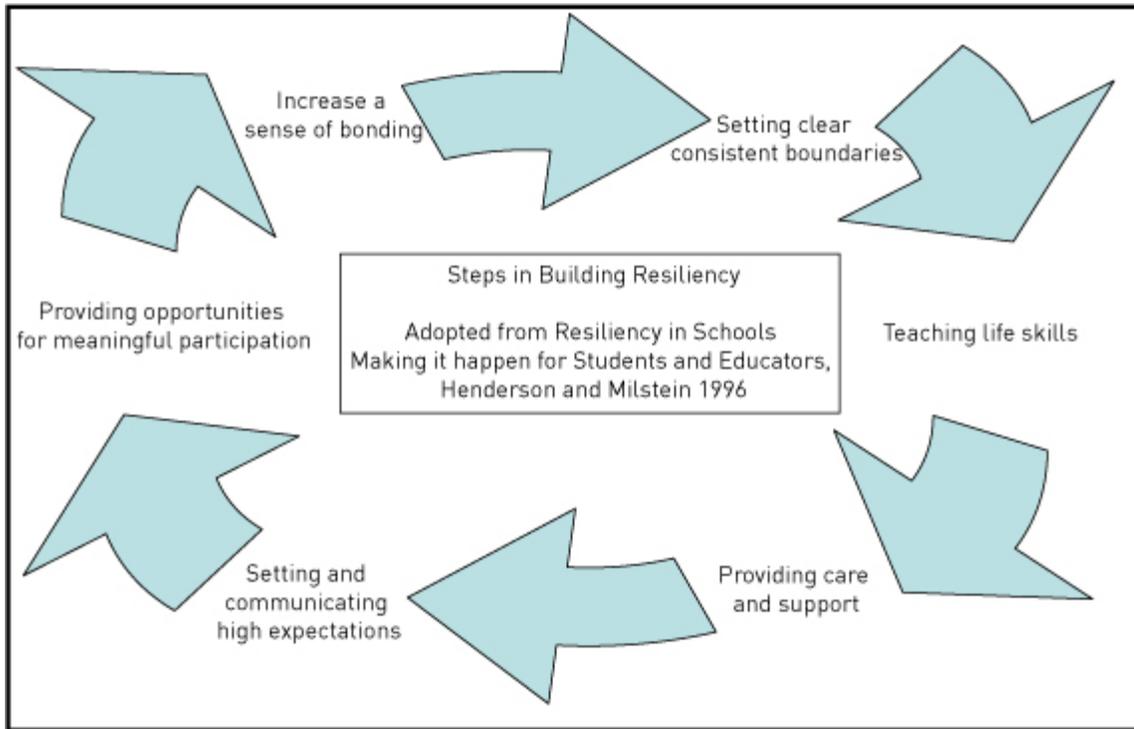
A workable definition for use within the school setting is to see resiliency as the capacity to spring back, rebound, successfully adapt in the face of adversity and develop social, academic, and vocational competence despite being exposed to extreme stress or simply to the stress that is inherent in today’s world. (Henderson and Milstein, 1996)

Resilience has focused on children growing up with extreme adverse situations. Poverty stricken, parents with mental health or addiction problems do add extreme stress in families. Given the challenges young people face in the developmental stage of adolescence, and the complex web of difficulties facing today’s pupils, it is clearly a need to support resilience in all young people.

Researchers have found that resilience is an attribute that can be developed and fostered (Benard 1991). Schools, families, and communities can all take steps to build resilience in young people. The resiliency building process begins by focusing on underlying protective factors apparent in those who seem to cope in adverse situations. Protective factors are the characteristics within a person or the environment that serve as a defence during stressful life events. Milstein and Henry (2000) specified the following protective factors:

- Positive bonding
- Clear and consistent boundaries
- Life skills
- Caring and support

- High expectations
- Meaningful participation



Resilience researchers stress that resilience is not simply a list of traits but a process of development. While it is identified some people have genetic tendencies that contribute their resiliency, such as an outgoing personality and social disposition, most of the characteristics associated with resilience can be developed or learned. (Higgins, 1994)

The risk and resiliency literature emphasise that schools are critical environments for young people to develop strengths and the capacity to adjust to pressure, bounce back from adversity and develop social, academic and vocational competencies necessary to do well in life.

Teachers and Schools Have the Power to make a difference in the lives of young people

Henderson and Milstein (1996) develop the protective process discussed above into a strategy for fostering resiliency in schools. These strategies are subdivided into processes that mitigate risk and those that build resiliency

Schools and teachers can mitigate risks young people are exposed to

The literature suggests three strategies for mitigating the impact of risk in the lives of young people and moving them toward resiliency. (Hawkins and Catalano, 1990)

Increase bonding.

This protective process involves increasing the connections young people have with any positive person or activity and is based on the evidence that young people with strong bonds are far less involved in risk behaviour. School change literature also focuses on bonding young people to school and academic accomplishment though connecting with each pupil's preferred learning style.

Set Clear and consistent boundaries

Developing and consistently implementing school policies clarifies expectation of behaviour.

These expectations should be clearly written, communicated and coupled with appropriate consequences that are consistently enforced.

Teach life skills

When life skills such as conflict resolution, stress management, assertiveness, communication, and decision making are adequately taught and reinforced, they help pupils navigate the challenges of adolescence. They have been further identified to reduce tobacco, alcohol and other drug use. (Botvin and Botvin, 1992)

These skills are also important in creating an environment that is conducive to learning and assists pupils engaging in effective and positive interactions within the school. (Henderson and Milstein, 1996)

Schools and teachers can help build resiliency

A common finding in resilience research is the power of teachers tip the scale from risk to resilience. Caring adults in the school environment provide and model three protective factors that buffer risk and enable positive development by meeting young people's basic needs for safety, love and belonging, respect, power, accomplishment and learning, and, ultimately, for meaning ([Benard, 1991](#)).

Three further environmental protective factors that foster resiliency include:

Caring, Relationships.

The most critical resiliency builder for every pupil is a trusting relationship, even with just one adult that says, "You matter". (Weiner, cited in Gelham, 1991) It seems impossible to successfully overcome adversity without the presence of caring.

Educators are recognising that caring environments are an essential foundation for academic success. Young people will work harder and do things for people who care about them and that they can trust. (Noddings, 1988)

Teachers can convey caring support to pupils by listening to students and validating their feelings, and by demonstrating kindness, compassion, and respect ([Higgins, 1994](#) ; [Meier, 1995](#)). They can refrain from judging, understand when young people are doing the best they can and do not take pupil's' behaviour personally.

Support translates into the meeting the need for emotional safety and recognition. Throughout the literature on resiliency, young people talk about teachers, who listen, notice when they are absent and seem interested in them. (Benard, 2004)

Positive and High Expectations

High expectations are identified in both the literature on resiliency and academic success. It is important that expectations are both high and realistic in order to be an effective motivator.

Teachers who support resiliency are pupil centred. They use the pupils' own strengths, interests, goals, and dreams as the beginning point for learning, and tap pupils' intrinsic motivation for learning.

Teachers' high expectations can structure and guide behaviour, and can also challenge pupils beyond what they believe they can do ([Delpit, 1996](#)). Teachers can recognize pupils' strengths, and help them see where they are strong. They especially assist overwhelmed young people in using their personal power to grow from damaged victim to resilient survivor by helping them to: (1) not take personally the adversity in their lives; (2) not see adversity as permanent; and (3) not see setbacks as pervasive (adapted from [Seligman, 1995](#)).

Opportunities to Participate and Contribute

Using the strengths-based perspective, teachers can support pupils expressing their opinions and views, make choices, problem solve and work with others. They can treat students as responsible individuals, allowing them to participate in all aspects of the school's functioning (Rutter et al., 1979). Teaching approaches that are more hands on and interactive, curriculum more relevant and real world and decision making more meaningful support the building of resiliency.

THE MINNEAPOLIS APPROACH

The Minneapolis Public School Systems have begun making state wide policies to promote resilience. It has trained the majority of its teachers in resilience strategies to help young people build social skills, reduce stress, and increase their sense of skill mastery.

The approach focuses on five resilience strategies:

1. Offer opportunities to develop attachment and relationships.

Child psychologist Emmy E. Werner's research indicated that the influence of a caring adult was the single most important way of making a difference for "at-risk" students. The approach promotes a relationship with a caring adult for every young person.

Schools try to schedule extended periods so students can work with one teacher for prolonged periods. In addition, they use peer helpers, cross-age teaching, and cross-age tutoring programs to link younger pupils with older pupils.

Schools build a support parents as well as pupils. Schools offer parenting education workshops and look for ways to involve parents at school. They also seek to enhance relationships between pupils and their parents by giving positive feedback on student work, with phone calls and notes to parents.

2. Increase pupils' sense of mastery in their lives.

Schools and teachers need to provide experiences and opportunities for all young people to be successful. Teachers make a conscious effort to see that all students experience success and mastery of something every day. "Failure begets failure, success begets success."

Pupils are taught "positive self-talk" techniques to help bolster a positive self-image. Schools also initiate student recognition activities and celebrate milestones toward mastery in academic, spiritual, cultural, and artistic areas.

Teachers are encouraged to use teaching strategies that address different learning styles and to use creative ways to affirm efforts in the classroom

3. Build social competencies as well as academic skills.

Schools use social skills development programs to teach refusal skills, coping skills, friendship skills, and negotiating and mediation skills.

Teachers are encouraged to link their curriculum with events and people in the community, so pupils see how the skills of learning are related to the skills of living. They also teach pupils to recognize behaviour that is causing them trouble and then show them appropriate responses and resources that can help them better cope with problems.

4. Avoid the avoidable; reduce the stressors young people don't need to face.

Schools are urged to restructure their programs to better meet their pupils' developmental needs. For example, middle schools (consistent with key stage 3) are encouraged to move toward a team or family model that decreases the number of decisions students make. This increases student feelings of security and stability.

Schools also offer mental health groups, which give young people a place to talk about problems and stresses.

5. Generate school and community resources to support the needs of children.

This strategy requires schools to familiarize teachers with neighbourhood resources and to introduce them to local initiatives.

It is important to note, especially to school staff already feeling the burden of demands on them, that resilience building is not “one more thing to do”. It should be seen as consistent with the research from effective schools as to what constitutes excellent education. Resilience building is the foundation to that excellence in education as it impacts on the well being of each pupil as well as academic achievement. (Henderson and Milstein 1996)

A further overview of practical internal and environmental protective factors that facilitate resiliency can be found in appendix 3

Resilience research provides scientific evidence that protective factors, many of which can be learned or provided environmentally, can make a profound impact of the life course of young people, more so than specific risk factors or stressful life events.

(Werner and Smith, 1992)

Why does connections, resilience and young people’s development matter to schools? Linking positive development and improved academics.

Years of research exploring healthy development and successful learning from various social science disciplines have found a strong relationship between healthy behaviours and academic success (Jessor and Jessor, 1977; Austin, 1991).

When schools face mounting pressure for exam results and academic success, the implication is that a narrow focus on only cognitive development ignores other critical areas of young peoples' development. Youth development is defined as the process of promoting the social, emotional, physical, moral, cognitive, and spiritual development of young people through meeting their needs for safety, love, belonging, respect, identity, power, challenge, mastery, and meaning. This range of skills attitudes beliefs are consistent within CEA's definition of personal development.

Young people must be taught in ways that motivate, engage, and involve them in learning so they enjoy learning and have a stake in their own achievement. (Catalano et al 2004) Schools can promote healthy behaviours as well as successful learning in young people by creating climates and teaching practices that honour and meet these developmental needs.

Two studies, evaluations of the Seattle Social Development Project and The Raising Healthy Children Programme identified that bonding to school and motivation is enhanced by:

- Pupils having the opportunities to actively participate in their education
- Pupils having the social and emotional skills to participate effectively
- Pupils receiving recognition for their efforts

The findings of these two longitudinal studies provide evidence that school bonding promotes academic success, reduces barriers to learning and reduces health problems. (Catalano, et al 2004)

Sagor (1996) identified from the research available the kinds of experiences pupils need on a daily basis in order to leave school optimistic of their personal and educational futures. These experience falls into one of four categories:

- Belonging: experiences that show they are valued members of a community
- Competence: experiences that provide them with authentic evidence of academic success
- Potency: experiences that make them feel empowered
- Usefulness: experiences that reinforce feelings that they have made a useful contribution

The potential of personal development increasing academic performance is clearly demonstrated in the literature. Positive academic and behavioural outcomes are increased when schools are developmentally focused and relationship driven. (Comer, 2001)

The Power of Schools in Building Protective Factors, Connections and Resiliency

As Elias states, "Schools are our society's primal formal institution for socializing young people into their roles as responsible citizens. (Elias 1999)

School bonding plays a central role as one of the most important means of socializing our young people. Positive school bonding inhibits anti social behaviour and promotes positive development in children and young people. (Catalano et al, 2004)

The level of caring and support is a powerful predictor of positive outcomes for young people. Outside the family, the most frequently source of positive role models in the lives of children was a favourite teacher. For a resilient young person, an influential teacher was not just an instructor

for academic success, but a confidant and positive model for personal identification. (Werner, 1990)

Programmes per se are not the answer. It is how we do what we do that counts.
(Benard 2004)

A key finding from resilience research is that successful development and transformation exists not in programmatic approaches, but at the deeper level of relationships, beliefs, expectations, and interactions (Benard 1991). It is not just curriculum content that makes the difference but how it is taught.

What helps makes personal development effective in the classroom, is the focus on the process of the lesson. This can be a significant departure for some teachers who are focused on lesson outcomes. Flexibility and spontaneity to the presenting needs of the pupils is a requirement of effective personal development. (Leitch et al 2005)

This reinforces the view that effective introduction of revised curriculum content requires teaching methods that foster interaction, pupils' making active contributions, and connections.

Schools need to develop caring relationships not only between educator-student but also between student-student, educator-educator, and educator-parent. Certain programmatic approaches can provide the structure for developing these relationships, and for providing opportunities for active student involvement: small group process, cooperative learning, and peer helping. (Benard 1991)

Making it happen: Curriculum and a whole school approach

Personal development work in schools begins with a sincere, deliberate commitment to the belief that all students can meet high academic standards, and that schools have the ability and the responsibility to help every young person reach that potential. This commitment means more than a few changes and a list of strategies. It requires a long-term, developmental process of re-examining school practices, policies, and attitudes. Complete staff involvement and sustained professional development will be needed to anchor this process.

In 2007, Personal Development will begin to be taught as a statutory subject with the revised curriculum. CCEA have piloted a primary school programme throughout Northern Ireland, *Walk Tall Together*. The five current Education and Library Boards are collectively working on curriculum content for Key Stage 3. The challenge in developing curriculum material that engages pupils' motivation is that the material is seen as meaningful and competence is built. (Benard, 2004)

While teaching personal development as an independent subject will be a positive development for young people, it is how it is taught and integrated across the curriculum and each individual's school ethos that will significantly contribute to young people healthy development.

In the report, *A Study into Current Practice and Potential models for the Effective Teaching of Personal Development at Key Stage 3 in the Northern Ireland Curriculum* (Leitch, Mitchell and Kilpatrick, 2005) there is acknowledgement that the commitment to personal development must start with the school management team.

What are required are enthusiastic principals with vision to be strong advocates for young people and to create schools which take a child-centred, caring ethos reflecting the values and approaches associated with personal development. (Leitch et al 2005)

This commitment does not stop at the senior management team. It involves all school staff and a genuine commitment on the part of all teachers, not just personal development teachers, to the importance and value of personal development principles, practices and the holistic development of pupils that can be actualised outside the classes dedicated to personal development. (Leitch et al 2005)

The concept of a whole school approach to personal development is consistent with the Health Promoting Schools. Health Promoting Schools' is an 'Investing for Health' partnership. 'Health Promoting Schools' aims to enable schools to provide an environment where the physical, social, and mental wellbeing and the health and safety of all staff and pupils are supported in partnership with the family, community and external agencies.

The objective of the initiative is to support schools in Northern Ireland in developing policies and programmes that underpin a sustainable healthy lifestyle. The whole school is involved in an audit of its current status. This audit forms the basis of a plan identifying areas for improvement and results in a set of actions based on agreed priorities.

All school staff is involved in Health Promoting Schools initiatives. This would be required in furthering personal development as a whole school approach.

Developing the most important resource: teachers

For teachers to be part of this process, their own protective factors need supported.

Overwhelmed, change weary teachers can be as disengaged as some of their students. An environment that supports teachers in facilitating personal development work and fostering connections is as important as curriculum material, facilitation skills and classroom management skills.

This is a challenge viewing the levels of stress teachers are experiencing. In the Northern Ireland Teachers' Health and Wellbeing Survey (2002) 49.7% of teachers indicated that they found their job very or extremely stressful.

Teachers need real support if they are going to take on an area as challenging as personal development. "We are not talking here about stress management, exercise regimes, giving up smoking or improving diets: we are talking about the physical and emotional wellbeing of a profession that faces considerable and unique pressure: a profession that shapes the society of the future and indeed, the nation's future wealth, in all its guises."(Improving the wellbeing of teachers in Scotland 2005)

Who teaches personal development is an important consideration.

Selection of teachers should be based on the presence of core skills and aptitudes such as empathy, warmth, creativity, valuing young people.

Support within the school's personal development team is required and will be enhanced by a coordinator that is seen as a champion of personal development and can support staff in their work.

Training and teachers own personal development is the final issues in this discussion. It is acknowledged that teaching practices are important to enhancing the effectiveness of personal development. Through the development of appropriate training, personal development teachers need to acquire and develop a sufficiently strong knowledge and skills in group work, facilitation skills and creative and expressive approaches.

Involving parents, carers and the wider community

Research shows that parent and family involvement in schools is a strong indicator of young people's academic achievement, attendance, attitude, and continued education. (Henderson & Berla 1994).

In the area of preventative drug education programmes, parent's support is vital if it is to be effective. (Velleman, 1999)

While it's generally acknowledged that parental involvement is a positive dimension, many schools highlight the difficulty of engaging parents.

Parents who don't respond to invitations to attend things in the school or get actively involved may be perceived as lacking interest in their children's education. There may be a number of barriers. School personnel may have preconceptions that single or working parents cannot be approached or relied on (Epstein 1984). More attention to parent involvement is especially critical at the secondary school level, when parental involvement declines dramatically

Research shows that schools can do a great deal to promote broader parent involvement. It requires establishing a climate where parent involvement is actively solicited, and where parents feel welcomed, respected, trusted, heard, and needed. A study found that the best predictor of parent involvement was what the school did to promote it (Dauber & Epstein 1993).

Studies suggest that if schools were to create programs that encourage school-family contacts, more families would participate in schools and would be better able to guide their children's learning efforts.

Strategies must take into account the diversity of families, time constraints, as well as the fears and prejudices that keep some parents from becoming involved. Epstein (1990) recommends using a variety of strategies from among six major types of parent- involvement activities.

Parenting: Activities that assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students. A programme such as *Talking to your Children about Tough Issues* is one Northern Ireland wide programme that assists parents and careers examining risk and protective factors.

Communicating: Activities include school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and students' progress. Parents are more likely to participate in schools if they receive frequent and positive messages from teachers about classroom activities, the progress of their children, and how to work with their children at home.

Volunteering: Activities enable families to give their time and talents to support schools, teachers, and young people.

Learning at Home: This is the type of involvement that families are most interested in (Epstein 1995) For example, some schools offer workshops to help parents become better home educators, monitoring children's homework, reducing TV time, encouraging good study habits and high expectations.

Decision-making: Activities enable families to participate in school decisions that affect their own and other children. Family representatives on school councils, committees and other decision-making bodies, ensure that parents' voices are heard and incorporated into school decisions.

Collaborating with the Community: Activities are encouraged that facilitate cooperation and collaboration among different schools, agencies and community organisations. Some schools in Northern Ireland have developed a Parent Centres, where parents find a welcoming atmosphere, and other activities. Other schools have developed working relationships with services that provide support to young people inside and outside of school hours.

Exploring these strategies takes strong administrative leadership and continuous staff development. Little attention is paid to preparing teachers to work with parents and communities to develop practices that inform and involve families.

Personal development is a subject that will benefit from active parental involvement. Topics such as values, attitudes and beliefs will have a family dimension in their formation and maintenance and could benefit from active parental input.

In Northern Ireland, some personal development programmes have demonstrated the potential of engaging parents in home activities that work along side personal development work (Scott in press 2006)

Connecting personal development with other areas of the curriculum and other key strategies

This report began by stating key strategic papers in Northern Ireland are consistently calling for developing our young people to their full potential. How this is actualised is a challenge for all those concerned with the well being of young people.

The guidance from the Department of Education on Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour cites the difference schools can make in enhancing the quality of young people's lives.

This report identifies the significant difference schools do make in the lives of young people. It cites relationships are at the heart of a positive school ethos.

"A climate which fosters effective learning, both within class and about the school, is at the heart of the education process. Such a climate, or ethos, is best promoted through focusing on the creation and maintenance of good relationships: among the staff themselves, teaching and non-teaching; between staff and pupils; among pupils and their peers; between parents and school; and between the school and the community it

serves” (Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour 2001p. 6)

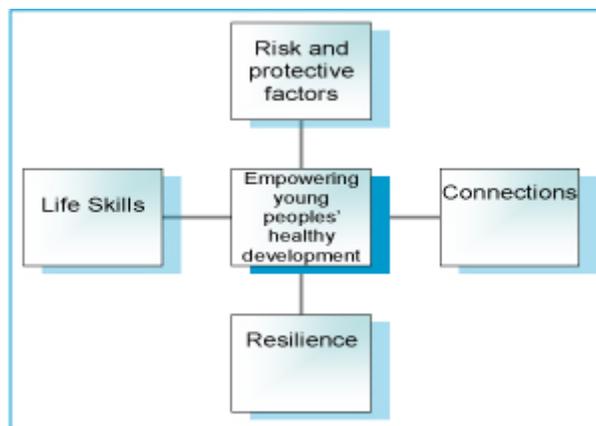
When the ethos is right, pupils place a higher importance on education, learning and positive behaviour.

This positive ethos only occurs when it is actively and collectively promoted by the entire school community.

Personal development as a statutory requirement for teaching enables schools to put the well being of pupils at the centre of the teaching agenda. It is not saying at all, academic success is not important. But as this report clearly identifies, consistent research shows the more young people feel connected to school, have the opportunities and skills to make active contributions and have enhanced resiliency, the better they will achieve academically.

Conclusion

Years of research is consistently demonstrating reduced risk and enhanced protective factors, life skills, connections, and resiliency contribute significantly to the well being of young people. This evidence base will assist in the effective



implementation of the teaching of personal development as well as the evidence demonstrates, increasing academic performance. It is essential that teaching staff with the responsibility of teaching personal development are grounded in these theoretical underpinnings.

Personal development with effective curriculum content and more importantly, the manner and ethos in which it is taught will build on these protective processes and will greatly contribute to that goal of helping young people reach their full potential.

The choice of curriculum content will assist young people having the skills to make informed decisions and the resiliency to cope with the demands of the modern world. This is essential in assisting young people becoming productive adults in the future. Competence in life skills alone may not be enough. The teaching of these topics will be much more effective if anchored by connections. How it is taught and the competence of those responsible is essential.

As stated by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2005), Education only flourishes if it successfully adapts to the demands of the time. The curriculum cannot remain static. It must be

responsive to the changes in society and the economy and changes in the nature of schooling itself and the needs of potential employers.

The changes in the revised curriculum places personal development in a position to assist our young people developing emotionally as well as academically. The research is quite clear that when young people feel more connected to school and personal development is effectively enhanced, young people do better academically.

Effectively establishing personal development as a core subject will not happen without deliberate and sustained effort to utilize existing effective classroom material, develop material in areas not exhaustively covered, create the emotional climate for connections and relationships to flourish and develop the skills and confidence of the staff teaching personal development. Embedding a whole school approach will require a drive and commitment from key personnel starting with the school management team and incorporated in school development planning.

A long range strategy to help schools nurture this sense of belonging, competence, empowerment and purposefulness within the entire school community will assist in creating that emotional climate in which personal development will flourish.

In addition to personal development, proposed investment in young people through the extended school and services developed within schools will further develop schools' potential to positively influence the lives of children and young people.

The efforts to actualise personal development as a substantial contribution to enhance the development of our young people are a long term investment. This investment will be worth all

the resources both financial and human if it helps our young people reach toward that goal of developing to their full potential.

The question educators need to ask as they embark in making personal development a statutory requirement in education is how will we know we have made a difference for our most essential resource: our young people?

To effectively implement personal development as a core curriculum subject, it is recommended:

- The commitment to personal development begins with the school management team, is embedded in school development planning and involves a whole school approach.
- Selection of teaches delivering the personal development curriculum is given deliberate consideration. Selection of teachers should be based on the presence of core skills and aptitudes such as empathy, warmth, creativity, valuing young people.
- Support for the school's personal development team is planned a coordinator that is seen as a champion of personal development and can support staff in their work is nominated.
- Teaching staff delivering personal development in the classroom are adequately trained in approaches and skills conducive to personal development work.
- Creative means to embed personal development in other curriculum areas and involve parents are explored and implemented
- Teaching staff are trained and competent in the concepts driving effective personal development including risk and protective factors, life skills, connections and resiliency.

Appendix 1 Risk factors

(Taken from the *Power of Parents in a Child's World* which can be downloaded from www.edact.org)

Community

- Availability of alcohol and other drugs.
- Community laws and norms that are favourable towards alcohol and other drug use.
- Transitions and mobility i.e. moving schools a lot, undergoing a major life style change i.e. divorce, relocation or death of a loved one.
- Low community management of problems.
- Poverty and deprivation in the community.

School

- Early and persistent anti-social behaviour (particularly in boys).
- Academic failure especially in late primary school.
- Lack of commitment to school.

Individual/Peer

- Young people feeling they do not belong.
- Rebelliousness.
- Low self-esteem or feeling unvalued.
- Friends who drink or use drugs (in fact, this is the most reliable of the risk factors).
- Favourable attitudes to drink and drugs.
- Early onset of drinking, drug use.

Family

- A family history of addiction.
- Family management of problems (including a lack of clear expectations and rules, supervision, knowing with whom and where they are, a lack of praise, family conflict and inconsistent, excessive or harsh punishment)
- Family conflict
- Parental attitudes and involvement in alcohol, drug use and crime.
- Broken family structure - i.e. loss of contact following separation.
- Unclear rules about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.
- Low parental involvement in their children's lives. (Including parent's failure to notice children's efforts, not getting their views regarding family decisions that affect them, lack of doing enjoyable things with parents.
- Past problem behaviour with other brothers and sisters - including alcohol and other drugs misuse
- Children who feel their parents don't understand them.

Appendix 2 Protective factors

(From Young Adolescents Displaying resilient and Non Resilient behaviour: Insights from a Qualitative Study – Can Schools Make a Difference? Sue Howard and Bruce Johnson, 2000)

life events	Self	Family	School
Full term birth	Well-developed social competencies	Close bond/attachment with at least one person	Good teaching
Continued good health	interpersonal skills	Availability of support	Caring school climate
Opportunities at major life transitions	Well-developed problem-solving skills	High warmth	Feeling safe
	Autonomy	High, clear expectations	Staff knowledgeable about the needs of adolescence
	A sense of purpose and future	Rootedness	At least one caring friend/peer
Meeting significant people	At least one coping mechanism or strategy	Opportunity to contribute in meaningful ways	Personal interest of school personnel
Moving into a supportive community	A sense of self-esteem and personal responsibility	Parenting : - consistency, positive	Cooperative learning
	Religious commitment	Positive expectations	Positive role models
	Self efficacy	Family personal social network	Continuity over time
	Positive attitude	Good role models	Expectations for success
	Optimism	Positive links to school	Range of options for participation
	Sense of humour		Overall positive school experience

Appendix 3: Internal and Environmental Protective Factors That Facilitate Resiliency

Source: Nan Henderson and Mike M. Milstein, *Resiliency in Schools*,

Internal Protective Factors:

Individual Characteristics

1. Gives of self in service to others and/or a cause
2. Uses life skills, including good decision making, assertiveness, impulse control, and problem solving
3. Sociability; ability to be a friend; ability to form positive relationships
4. Sense of humour
5. Internal locus of control
6. Autonomy; independence
7. Positive view of personal future
8. Flexibility
9. Capacity for and connection to learning
10. Self-motivation
11. Believes he/she is "good at something;" personal competence
12. Feelings of self-worth and self-confidence

Environmental Protective Factors:

Characteristics of Families, Schools, Communities, and Peer Groups That Foster Resiliency

1. Promotes close bonds
2. Values and encourages education
3. Uses high-warmth, low-criticism style of interaction
4. Sets and enforces clear boundaries (rules, norms, and laws)
5. Encourages supportive relationships with many caring others
6. Promotes sharing of responsibilities, service to others, "required helpfulness"
7. Expresses high and realistic expectations for success
8. Encourages goal setting and mastery
9. Encourages prosocial development of values (such as altruism) and life skills (such as cooperation)
10. Provides leadership, decision making, and other opportunities for meaningful participation
11. Appreciates the unique talents of each individual

Adapted from Richardson et al. 1990; Benard 1991; Werner and Smith 1992; Hawkins et al. 1992

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