Assessing Adolescent's Responses to a Coping Skills Program:
An Action Research Approach to Understanding Adolescent Stress and Coping

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of stress in the lives of adolescents, to understand how they cope, and to assess their response to a program developed to help them cope positively with the stress they are facing. To this end, I systematically investigated and analyzed a variety of factors which cause stress for a given set of youth and learned what measures they are taking to cope. From there, a coping skills intervention was created and implemented, to provide youth with some tools for coping positively with the stressors they are facing during adolescence. The effectiveness of this intervention was then assessed.

Participatory action research was the research method chosen to implement the intervention and gather data for this study. It was selected for its collaborative, reflective, and innovative approach. The results of the interviews yielded rich data on the lived experiences of this particular group of youth. Many shared their experiences of stress as rising out of relationships with parents and peers, academic pressure, general feelings of overload, discrimination, racism, bullying, and body image. As a result of the pressure, many youth feel angry and express that anger by yelling, verbally attacking, or physically fighting. The tailor made intervention, whose content rose out of the initial interview data as well as on-going dialogue with students, was effective for many students, as they learned emotion focused coping strategies to harness the energy produced by their intense emotions, and how to channel them in a positive manner. The most effective coping strategy cited by students was diaphragmatic breathing.

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I can no other answer make, but thanks, and thanks.

Shakespeare

I think it takes a village to complete a PhD, and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank my "village."

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> *I want to leave a legacy.*
> *How will they remember me?*
> *Did I choose to love,*
> *Did I point to You enough to make a mark on things?*
> *I want to leave an offering.*
> *A child of mercy and grace who blessed Your name unapologetically*
> *And leave that kind of legacy.*
> *Nichole Nordeman*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ix

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

"Good mariners are not made by calm seas."
Author Unknown

In our culture, stress levels faced by individuals are high, and stress-induced diseases have reached astronomical levels. When individuals do not know how to positively cope with stress, maladaptive coping ensues. Maladaptive coping comes at a high cost not only to the individual affected, but to his/her relationships, his/her family, social service agencies as well the health care system. Learning to cope positively with stress can result in significant social and economic benefits.

Research indicates that stress begins as early as life in utero (Field, 1991). Learning to cope early in life would be ideal. Dr. Terry Orlick has created a program for elementary aged children, which focuses on teaching stress management skills (Orlick, 1998). This program has been systematically tested in many Ottawa area schools and the results have been very favourable (Cox & Orlick, 1996; Gilbert & Orlick, 1996). To date, there are no empirically tested coping programs created for adolescents. Transitioning into adolescence is a time of complexity, with changing social affiliations, increasing cognitive abilities, fluctuating emotions, and physical changes. This period in one's life is unlike any other, and has the potential to be a time of incredible tension.

This chapter will serve: a) to introduce readers to the purpose of the research study, and b) to focus readers on a review of literature relating to stress, coping, adolescent stress and coping, and emotions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to develop a better understanding about stress in the lives of adolescents, to understand how they cope, and to assess their response to a program developed to equip them better with the stress they are facing.

Review of Literature

Many individuals try to avoid stress at all costs because experiencing stress can be unpleasant. Yet as humans, we can never really be without stress. Of interest, stress can play an important role in our lives. According to Auerbach & Gramling (1998), "It motivates us to achieve and fuels creativity. Without fear, there would be no courage; without anxiety and apprehension would we ever experience the pleasures and relief that accompany the triumph over our obstacles?" (p.15). Hans Selye (1977) has defined stress as "the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it" (p. 27). It is composed of two parts, including: a) the stressor itself and, b) the manner in which one responds to the stressor. A stressor is defined as:

> an acute life event or a chronic environmental situation that causes disequilibrium in the individual. This disequilibrium is sufficient to cause the person to make an adjustment to the stressor. This adjustment is called a response. When both a stressor and a response to it occur, stress is present. (Blom, Cheney & Snoddy, 1986, p.3)

When individuals experience change in their lives, whether the change is positive or negative, they experience stress. Eustress, the positive stress associated with the opportunity for personal growth, may be experienced when starting a new job or moving. Distress, a type of negative stress, may be caused by events such as losing a job or being

involved in a car accident (Rosato, 1994; Donatelle & Davis, 1997; Powers & Dodd, 1996). Rosato cites three different degrees of stress, including acute, cumulative and chronic. Acute stress is defined as experiencing one discrete, very stressful event, such as the sudden death of a loved one. Cumulative stress relates to a series of events leading up to something that in and of itself is very stressful, such as the events leading up to a divorce. Finally, chronic stress is persistent stress. Chronic distress prevents the body from repairing itself and produces unhealthy physical, mental and emotional reactions and compromises both physiological and psychological health.

<div align="center">The General Adaptation Syndrome</div>

Stress has been called the "disease of prolonged arousal" (Donatelle & Davis, 1997, p.50) and can have a negative impact on one's health. Stress impacts the individual both physiologically and psychologically. The General Adaptation Syndrome explains the physiological changes associated with stress.

According to stress expert Hans Selye (1977), the attempt to keep the body in a state of balance is referred to as "homeostasis." When stress acts on the body, the body responds to the stressors in an attempt to restore homeostasis. Selye termed this process the "General Adaptation Syndrome." The General Adaptation Syndrome involves three phases, including the alarm, resistance and exhaustion phases.

In the alarm phase, the body prepares for action in response to either a real or perceived threat, because this stressor (threat) has disturbed homeostasis. The hormone adrenaline is released, the heart rate increases, pupils dilate in an attempt to receive more information, blood is shunted from the digestive system and is sent to the muscles, blood sugar levels rise to give muscles more energy, blood coagulates more rapidly to protect

against injury, the immune system slows down (Rosato, 1994), cortisone is released to resist allergy attacks and dust, thyroid hormone is released to speed up the body's metabolism for energy, cholesterol is released into the blood for endurance fuel, muscle tension increases to prepare the body for strength applications, and blood pressure increases to increase the availability of oxygen (Bruess & Richardson, 1995). These changes occur to prepare the body for either a "fight or flight response," a physiological response to stress (Greenberg & Dintiman, 1997). The changes which occur during the alarm stage pose significant strain on the body (Selye, 1977).

The "fight or flight" response to stress used to be very beneficial for humans living in primitive times, as during this period, an appropriate response to a threat would have been to fight or flee. However, the fight or flight response does not always seem as helpful today. If one is involved in an altercation (a stressor) with a co-worker, it would not be socially acceptable to physically fight or run from this person, although the body is physically prepared to act in this physical manner. According to Bruess & Richardson (1995), the body cannot differentiate between different types of stressors, thus if one is in the middle of a bad dream at night where she is being chased, or if someone is arguing with a relative, in both cases the body readies itself to fight or flee.

The resistance phase begins immediately after the alarm phase begins, because no organism can maintain itself in the alarm state (Bruess & Richardson, 1995). During the resistance phase, the body begins to adapt to the continued presence of stress and expends a significant amount of energy in an attempt to return to homeostasis. If one is unable to remove the stressor, the body's ability to continually fight the stressor weakens, and so does the individual.

Finally, if the stressor persists for a considerable length of time (weeks, months or years), the individual enters the exhaustion phase. Here, the organs of the body become extremely worn out and the individual is no longer able to resist stress, as the physical and psychological energy used to fight stressors deplete. The body's resistance is very low in this stage and the body becomes increasingly susceptible to disease (Selye, 1977).

Cognitive Appraisal

Cognition plays a very important role in determining whether we perceive a situation as stressful or not. We draw conclusions about how threatening something is based on our observations, histories, and outside sources. We may embrace deeply held beliefs about how dangerous something is, even when not based on fact.

According to Auerbach & Gramling (1998) cognitive appraisal is a "process by which an event is evaluated in terms of its personal significance to the individual. Events appraised as threatening or dangerous elicit a stress reaction" (p.22). Researchers have found that this difference in individual's "stress perception" or "cognitive appraisal" is mainly due to differences in personality (Powers & Dodd, 1996). Many situations have potential to cause stress, but only result in stress being felt when the individual perceives the situation as stressful (Rosato, 1994). A person's perception of the stressor determines whether he/she responds to the stressor adaptively or maladaptively. Two people may experience the same stressor but each may react differently (Youngs, 1985). As some see a stressor as an opportunity for adventure or growth, others may view it as a crisis (Rosato, 1994). How one responds to stress determines whether it enhances personal growth (eustress), or becomes debilitating (distress) (Donatelle & Davis, 1997).

Research suggests that even more important than the frequency and severity of stress is the manner in which one copes with stress (Lazarus & Launier, 1978). Coping has been defined as a process involving "...constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific internal and/or external demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p.141). Since stress is a part of life, it can be helpful to learn ways to cope with unexpected events and adapt to long-term changes. Children learn how to cope by looking to their role models including parents and teachers. When parents and other role models cope ineffectively with stress, children learn and often model what they see. A downward spiral effect can then happen, where children imitate poor coping, because that is the only way they know how to cope.

Coping is a learned behaviour and techniques can be learned in order to cope more effectively. These techniques generally fall under two categories, including: a) emotion-focused coping strategies, and b) problem-focused coping strategies. The key to adaptive coping is to learn to tell the difference between those stressors you can control and those which are beyond your control. Different problems require different coping techniques.

Emotion Focused Coping

Emotion focused coping techniques are fundamental coping strategies helpful for mitigating stress in the moment, and are often used to cope with stress beyond one's personal control. Examples of emotion focused coping strategies include diaphragmatic breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, autogenic training, and imagery. Emotion focused coping strategies are used in an attempt to control stress levels by learning to

control one's reaction to stress, without directly confronting the cause of the stressor. Even though some stressors cannot be controlled, steps can be taken to learn strategies to control one's response to stress. In learning to control one's response to stress, people begin to feel as though they have more personal control.

It is commonly assumed that direct problem solving is always the most effective way to deal with stress. When dealing with recurring stress that requires long term solutions, problem solving methods are highly effective. Conversely, emotion focused coping skills are useful for the short term, and can help one to gain control when dealing with high levels of anxiety. Taking a deep breath in order to calm down can be an effective way to settle before moving forward in thoughts and decisions.

Since coping skills are indeed skills, regardless of the emotion focused technique employed, the skills need to be systematically taught and rehearsed. For skills to be most effective during a moment of stress, individuals need to be able to call on the skill and automatically apply it, which only comes from practice, in order for the skill to be effective at mitigating stress in the moment.

Problem Focused Coping

The goal of problem focused coping strategies is to short-circuit the negative emotions one is experiencing by actively doing something to modify, avoid, or minimize the threatening situation (Auerbach & Gramling, 1998). Problem focused coping skills are most effective when one can change or influence the stressor. Some stressors simply require good planning in order to make them less stressful. Problem focused coping strategies to deal with foreseeable stress may include financial planning, developing a good study plan, time management, and assertiveness training.

Problem solving can play a critical role in stress management, but is not viewed as a stress management tool to nearly the same degree as emotion focused strategies (Auerbach & Gramling, 1998). The essence of stress management is to build a repertoire of skills to help manage problems effectively, and to refine these skills so that one knows which skills to call upon in a variety of situations (Auerbach & Gramling, 1998). Honing both emotion focused and problem focused coping techniques, and practicing them in non-stressful situations so that the skills will be automated when needed during stressful situations, could enable individuals to gain more personal control over stress.

Youth & Stress

*"In this new world adolescents feel much more exposed
and therefore more vulnerable than ever before.
Things can get scary, even terrifying..."*
Wolf, 1991, p. 15

More than any other developmental period, adolescence has been characterized as a time wrought with struggle. During adolescence, many changes occur in family and peer relationships. Dynamic physical and cognitive changes occur as well. This time of intense transition into adolescence represents a peak in stress for youth (Harvey & Spigner, 1995). The heightened sense of doubt related to the unknown contributes to increased tension during this time. Despite it being a time of much muck and mire, it has been given very little attention within the stress and coping literature. According to Colten & Gore (1991) "Adolescence as a time of change has rarely been studied from the point of view of the changes in perception of stress related to the developmental changes occurring during this period" (p. ix). However, understanding the period of adolescence is critical, given high suicide rates, large numbers of eating disordered youth, and

increasing rates of substance abuse, to mention a few issues affecting youth (Aneshensel & Gore, 1991).

<div align="center">Transitioning into Adolescence: Rites of Passage Lost</div>

In some cultures, "rites of passage" mark adolescence. When this period is clearly marked for youth, the transition is made easier. According to researchers, understanding where one is, in terms of phases in life, helps to alleviate some of the uncertainty associated with the transition (Peterson, Kennedy & Sullivan, 1991). More than 20 years ago, Dr. David Elkind identified "markers" as changes that symbolize that a person is moving into a different phase of life. He went on to suggest that today, many of the changes that were historically in place to "mark" the transition from childhood into adolescence have disappeared. As a result, Elkind (1984) suggests that society does little to prepare youth for the transition from childhood into adolescence. Over the past century, "markers" have served to denote the status of the members of the group. Such "markers" suggested by Elkind, at one time defined youth as a unique group separate from both children and adults. These markers included: a) clothing markers, b) activity markers, c) innocence markers, d) image markers, and e) authority markers. I believe Elkind's early work in this area is significant in understanding the complex issues youth face regarding how they "fit in."

Up until a few generations ago, clothing for youth was distinctly different than the clothing worn by children. When girls became adolescents, they were permitted to wear stockings and make-up, clearly distinguishing them from children. Today it is not possible to distinguish children from adolescents based on clothing or make-up. Organized sporting activities where teams were formed and uniforms were worn used to

be something reserved for youth. Today, very young children play organized sports and wear uniforms. Beauty pageants are another activity that was formally reserved for the adolescent. Today these boundaries have been expanded so that children as young as three are becoming involved in pageants (Elkind, 1984).

"Innocence markers" refer to protecting children from information which should only be shared with a person mature enough to handle the information. Human depravity, private family information, and sex are examples of the types of information from which children were once shielded. However, when this information is presented to those who are ill prepared to deal with it, the potential for this as a "marker" is lost.

Television shows often portray youth as sophisticated and worldly. "For many TV writers and producers, realism means not only that teenagers have to be presented with every type of adult problem but also that they be portrayed as handling these problems with a kind of low-key, cool maturity" (Elkind, 1984, p. 105). For adolescents watching these programs, they may feel pressure to handle their life situations with the same level of calmness and sophistication as these fictional characters. Feelings of disappointment may ensue when their issues are not resolved the way they are resolved on television.

According to Elkind (1984), parents and teachers are the primary authority figures in the lives of youth, and their importance should not be underestimated. Providing youth an opportunity to test boundaries is extremely important. Elkind writes, "when teenagers interact with adults whose authority they respect, they can have productive...battles over ideas and actions. Such adults provide healthy opponents against whom to test their opinions and values" (p. 112). Today, in many cases parents and teachers fail to provide youth with the type of authority and insight needed to help them progress through this

stage of life. Further, teachers and parents who fail to set boundaries for youth, or who fail to enforce pre-established guidelines, do the youth a disservice, and the authority figure is no longer "marked" as such. Elkind is not suggesting that things should be done the way they used to be, but does argue that as a society we should embrace those values that once made our society more successful. In his words,

> We hurry young people as children and then unplace them as teenagers. We cannot, dare not, persist on this dangerous course of denying young people the time, the support, and the guidance they need to arrive at an integrated sense of self. Teenagers are the next generation and the future leaders of this country. Their need is real and pressing. We harm them and endanger the future of our society if we leave them, as our legacy, a patchwork sense of identity. (p. 21)

The Adolescent Struggle: Intrapersonal & Interpersonal Stress

Adolescence is a time of both intrapersonal and interpersonal struggles. Intrapersonal stress can be regarded as stress experienced at the individual level, or the stress one experiences apart from another's involvement. Intrapersonally, adolescents are faced with the task of forming a personal identity, one that is separate from the family. Interpersonal stress is defined as involving another person. Interpersonally, youth begin to increase their involvement with peers, and attempt to balance peer relationships with family relationships (Compas & Wagner, 1991).

Both intrapersonal and interpersonal struggles serve as sources of stress for youth. Because adolescents are likely part of a larger circle of close relationships, events that occur to others within their social network can also serve as a source of stress for them. It is important to consider stress as an interpersonal process, since individuals do not live in

isolation from one another, and since relationships can be a large part of what one considers stressful (Compas & Wagner, 1991).

During adolescence, relationships outside of the family multiply and intensify. These relationships can be enriching, but also carry a much greater risk of rejection and conflict. Status within the peer group is evident to the adolescent, and pressures to conform peak during mid-adolescence. Relationships cause stress for the adolescent, and have implications for their psychological well-being (Compas & Wagner, 1991). Surprisingly, there is little research to indicate whether peer, family or intimate relationships constitute the greatest degree of stress for adolescents.

Adolescent Stress & the Family

Because adolescence can be such a stormy period for those experiencing it, it can be thought of as a time of harrowing family relationships. The literature does not bear this point out, however. Certainly there is potential for an increase in family conflict, however studies have not shown that this has a great impact on the daily lives of most youth (Larson & Asmussen, 1991). The importance of peers does increase during adolescence, however this does not appear to occur at the exclusion of parents. The research suggests that peer relationships increase as youth look to friends for opinions regarding fashion and music, for example. However, an overwhelming number of youth continue to look to parents for advice on major issues, such as morality and the future (Takanishi, 1993). Takanishi (1993) found that more youth preferred to seek advice from parents over peers, teachers, and religious counsellors.

Increased Social Affiliations & Stress

Larson and Asmussen (1991) analyzed negative emotions among a group of adolescents. They found that within the "social domain" both male and female adolescents reported significantly higher stress levels due to social situations than pre-adolescents, with adolescent females reporting higher levels of stress than adolescent males. Social issues, the researchers concluded, accounted for the increase in negative experiences associated with the entry into adolescence. They suggested that it was the shift in the importance of peer relationships that most frequently caused stress, anger, and anxiety in the youth they studied. Larson and Asmussen (1991) went on to explain that girls cited "friends" significantly more often as a source of negative emotion than did boys. There were no differences in negative emotion where school was concerned.

Females have also been reported as being likely to take on the stress of those within their social circle (Baldwin, Harris and Chamblis, 1997). Compas and Wagner (1991) suggest that females may be more involved in the lives of those around them, and as a result demonstrate concern and provide social support to a greater degree than males.

The shift in the complexity of relationships during adolescence has the potential to cause upheaval. Where family may have been a source of stress during pre-adolescence, friends and sexual relationships become a source of greater tension, particularly for girls, during adolescence (Colten & Gore, 1991). Wolf (1991) suggests that girls are aware of the changes occurring within relationships and are more apt than boys to articulate their feelings of jealousy and insecurity.

Stress & Gender Differences

Larson and Asmussen (1991) suggest that an adolescent boy's social network typically causes him less stress and upset than it does for the adolescent girl. Understanding this means that increasing social support for the young male as a means to buffer stress may not be as helpful as it would be for the adolescent female.

In a U.S. nation-wide survey conducted by researcher Peter Benson (1993, in Schmitz & Hipp, 1995), he analyzed the assets, deficits and risk behaviours of students in grades six through twelve. He defined assets as resources available to the youth which provide an opportunity for growth. Deficits included negative conditions, influences, and opportunities. In the end, Benson found major gender differences citing that girls turn their stress inward and are more conforming, whereas boys are more physical and rebellious when experiencing stress. He also found that girls tend to have more assets than boys, including being more motivated, more empathetic, and more involved with other people. However girls tended to have very serious high risk behaviours, including a greater risk of depression and more frequent suicide attempts.

Benson found that boys exhibit far more at-risk behaviours, such as not using seatbelts, drinking, being sexually active, and getting into fights, and categorized their risks as more external rather than internal in nature. This survey revealed that boys' assets included good decision making skills and high self-esteem, resources that go a long way to protect the male youth from inflicting self-harm. Although generalizations cannot predict one's reaction to stress, they can help to anticipate who may be at risk, or how someone may react in a given situation. It is important to remember that one's stress

response rises out of who the person is as well as his/her environment (Schmitz & Hipp, 1995).

<center>Adolescent Stress & High Risk Behaviours</center>

> *...there are pressures to engage in pre-mature sex, to smoke*
> *or take drugs, or just to survive living within a dysfunctional family.*
> *Stress accompanies all of these conditions and there is mounting evidence*
> *that these conditions are also accompanied by an unacceptably high*
> *incidence and prevalence of adverse health consequences.*
> <div align="right">*Elias, 1991, p. 263*</div>

There are many avenues which may lead to physical and emotional risk for adolescents. Sex, drugs, and alcohol are much more readily available to youth today. Research has shown that involvement in these activities may lead to an increase in stress experienced by youth (Peterson, Kennedy & Sullivan, 1991; Elias, 1991).

There is a link between sexual activity among youth and heightened levels of stress. Harvey and Spigner (1995) conducted a study comparing stress levels of sexually active versus sexually inactive males. Their research revealed a higher level of depressive symptoms as well as higher levels of stress among the sexually active males. They also found a clear link between sexual activity and risk taking behaviours, which included: a) involvement in physical fights, b) use of alcohol and cigarettes, and c) a decrease in the use of seatbelts. The strongest indicator of sexual activity among both male and female youth was the consumption of alcohol.

Falling in love is risky business during adolescence and may put youth at risk of psychological breakdown. According to Larson and Asmussen (1991), disappointments in love account for one of the major sources of distress among youth. Many psychiatric disorders stem from the adolescent's misconceptions regarding love, as their idea of love

and romance are often idealistic. Other psychological disturbances experienced by as many as 20% of youth include: a) depression, b) alcohol and drug abuse, c) anorexia nervosa, and d) attempted suicide (Schmitz &Hipp, 1995).

The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) report that an estimated seven million out of the 28 million adolescents they studied in 1989 were at risk of the negative fallout of many high risk behaviours including substance abuse, early unprotected sex, and school failure. Youth who were poor or of ethnic minorities were at a much greater risk. Since that study dates back nearly twenty years, it is likely that today this number has increased.

There is a widespread use of alcohol among children and youth today. Time Magazine (1994) reported on a study conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health. Researchers found that of the more than 17 000 students surveyed, nearly half of them were "binge drinkers," meaning they consumed five drinks at one time, at least three times in the past two weeks. Forty percent of the binge drinkers surveyed outlined some of the negative effects of their drinking, including engaging in unplanned and unprotected sex, missing school, and forgetting with whom and where they were. Learning that nearly half of the adolescent population is drunk six times a month sends a clear message that many are not making positive lifestyle choices (in Schmitz & Hipp, 1996).

Emotions & the Adolescent Period

Larson and Asmussen (1991) studied the emotions of pre-adolescents and adolescents. They found that older adolescents reported far more negative emotions than the pre-adolescents. Other studies support these findings. According to Larson, Raffaelli, Richards, Ham & Jewell (1990), adolescents reported fewer occasions of happy, cheerful

feelings. Richards, Casper & Larson (1990) found that youth had more disturbed eating patterns. These negative states could be a passing phase, or the precursor to many more serious problems.

There are several hypotheses that attempt to explain what is happening during adolescence that makes it a time of such negative emotion. Freud (1946) suggested that adolescent stress can be linked to hormonal changes associated with the onset of puberty. Larson & Asmussen (1991) suggest that youth experience more negative emotions because they experience more stressful events in their lives, and a greater frequency of them. This hypothesis is supported by Elias (1991) who revealed 20 discrete stressors found in early adolescence, ranging from peer pressure, to the consumption of drugs and alcohol, to remembering a locker combination. These stressors were experienced by many students who had previously shown positive adjustment, suggesting that these were new stressors being experienced by the youth.

Larson (1990) suggests that adolescents may experience more dysphoric moods because they spend a great deal of time alone. A causal relationship should not be assumed with this theory, as one may question whether youth experience more negative emotions because they are alone, or they are alone because they are experiencing an unprecedented number of negative emotions. In later work, Larson and Asmussen (1991) suggest that adolescents' negative emotions rise out of a disequilibrium they are experiencing between how they think life should be, based on their values and beliefs, and how it is actually experienced. It is possible that the strife experienced during adolescence is rooted in the cognitive changes occurring.

Cognition & the Adolescent Period

Because puberty is considered a time of intense physical change, the cognitive changes occurring during this time may be overlooked. However these cognitive changes are very significant. According to Piaget's theories of cognitive development, children between the ages of seven and twelve are said to be in the "concrete operational" stage of development. In this stage, the individual's thoughts are limited to the "here and now" and the concrete. Thoughts are focused on one's own perspective. As the individual enters adolescence, they enter what Piaget terms the "formal operational stage." In this stage, the individual is able to think about possibilities, hypothesize and take the perspective of others (Kavsek & Seiffge-Krenke, 1996). The ability to think abstractly may pose new dilemmas for youth, thereby increasing their level of stress during this time.

According to Inhelder and Piaget (1958), during the adolescent period, youth move from thinking in concrete terms, to thinking more abstractly. The ability to think in this way holds exciting challenges for youth as they begin to think beyond themselves. However, it also forces them to contemplate issues which have potential to cause great concern. For example, a girl is asked out by a boy she likes, but experiences great anxiety because she is not sure whether or not he was serious. If she decides that he was joking and he was serious, she could miss out on a date and offend him. On the other hand, if she anticipates the date and he was joking, she will look foolish (Larson & Asmussen, 1991). Having the ability to contemplate these possibilities causes anxiety. Because of the ability to think abstractly, youth "become capable of deeper analysis of social situations; they become sensitive to the thoughts of others, the discrepancy between appearance and

reality, the issues of image management and the long term consequences of their actions" (Elkind, 1980, in Larson & Asmussen, 1991, p. 34).

Because youth are able to think from another's point of view, they often begin to hold others to a higher standard. Weighing others' motives and desires may lead to disappointment when these people do not measure up to the adolescent's standards. Another cause for increased stress during this time is the adolescent's inability to place things into perspective. Although youth are able to think with more complex thought, they likely do not have the experience to place things into perspective, which can significantly increase stress levels (Swearingham & Cohen, 1985).

The cognitive growth occurring during adolescence often leads the adolescent to have much higher expectations of those around them. Recognizing that there is friction between what is "ideal and real, between expected and actual, between an adolescent's internal model of the world and the world as it is encountered" (Larson & Asmussen, 1991, p. 23) can be a source of stress for adolescents who think the world should be different than it is. Because the adolescent has a much greater understanding of the world outside her/his backdoor, social, political, and economic issues may become a concern (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958).

Laursen and Collins (1988) suggest that the increase in negative experiences during adolescence may be related to cognitive growth, because new emotions are possible during adolescence that were not possible prior to this time, including feelings associated with guilt. This cognitive growth can lead to better adjustment in the long run, however in the short run, puts the adolescent in a much more vulnerable position.

Physical Changes During Adolescence

The physical changes occurring during adolescence in and of themselves are not necessarily stressful. However, it is the timing of these changes which largely determines whether or not they will be stressful. For example, if these changes occur early and the youth are not prepared to deal with the changes, it may cause heightened levels of stress (Peterson, Kennedy & Sullivan, 1991).

According to Colten and Gore (1991), there are implications for those who are early to physically mature versus those who are later to physically mature. Early maturation refers to those who are the first 20% to reach puberty. Researchers have found early maturing females to be more introspective, less expressive, and more withdrawn. They are also more likely to smoke and drink sooner than those who mature on time or later. For the female who matures later, she is often more expressive, active, and popular (Brooks-Gunn, 1991).

In a study conducted by Schaal, Tremblay, Soussignan and Susman (1996), the social dominance of 13 year old boys was analyzed by asking peers to rate the boys on their levels of dominance. Following the survey, the boys' level of testosterone was measured. Researchers found that those boys who were rated very dominant by their peers also had higher levels of testosterone. This lends support to the notion that early maturing males may be more socially dominant. Early maturing males have also been found to be more athletically skilled and strong while the late maturing males were found to be more conforming, rigid, and humourless (Brooks-Gunn, 1991). The changes occurring during puberty are inevitable, and do not cause tremendous upset for all.

However these changes appear to cause the greatest amount of stress for those who are not prepared to deal with the changes at the time they occur.

Adolescent Stress and Self-Esteem

Studies have shown that stress affects the self-esteem of youth. In a study conducted by Youngs, Rathge, Mullis & Mullis (1990), over 2000 North Dakota high school students were surveyed to find out if negative life events impacted their self-esteem. Researchers administered the Life Experiences Survey along with a Self-Esteem Survey and found that as negative life events increased, self-esteem decreased. Youngs and colleagues found that even when youth reacted positively to the negative life events, self-esteem still suffered, lending support to the notion that stress takes a toll on self-esteem.

Social Support & Resiliency

Change is stressful, even when it is a positive change. Thus it is fair to assume that the transition into adolescence is going to be stressful. However all youth do not suffer from depression, eating disorders, and addiction during adolescence. Social support is one means to help youth grow through their experiences as adolescents.

Some youth may feel the need to solicit support for help with problems during adolescence. When youth do solicit support, some may feel reluctant to disclose any information, for fear of looking foolish. A consequence of this indirect approach to seeking guidance is that it is often less effective. According to Gottlieb (1991), the extent of support offered to youth will depend on their skill at soliciting support, coupled with the nature of the problem, and the level of stress they are experiencing. Youth who cope

more positively during this time will be the ones who seek the support needed from trusted people in times of crisis.

Researchers have found that resilient youth: a) possess a higher internal locus of control, b) actively seek out others, c) follow their own path, and d) are more likely to seek help. Less resilient youth have a tendency to stay away from home and spend more time alone. The literature consistently supports the notion that social support is the most important predictor of the degree of stress and other difficulties experienced by youth. The social support "team" thus plays an extremely important role in mitigating stress for youth (Colten & Gore, 1991). It is important to note that social support takes on different meaning for different people. The term 'social support' is relative, meaning that what is effective for one, is not necessarily effective for all (Gottlieb, 1991).

Understanding Emotions

"Emotions are a vital part of the human experience
and should neither be feared nor ignored."
Botterill and Brown, 2002, p. 58

Coping skills are aimed at teaching people to 'manage emotions.' Emotional control then becomes a good context in which to teach coping skills. When one understands him/herself and his/her emotions, choosing which coping skill to apply in situations of angst becomes clearer. Dating as far back as Aristotle, emotion has had its place in literature. In The Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle writes that emotion itself is not a problem, however the "appropriateness" of the emotion and the way it is expressed can be problematic (in Goleman, 1995).

Daniel Goleman (1995) was one of the first to investigate the implications of not understanding emotions. He suggests that children and adolescents of this generation

appear to be more troubled than generations before, experiencing more depression, anger, unruly behaviour, worry, impulsiveness, and aggression. He suggests that the school can play a vital role in teaching children the skills of self-awareness, self-control, empathy, listening, resolving conflicts, and cooperation, skills he believes will help children to understand their emotions. If society fails to teach children these skills, Goleman believes that the results could be disastrous (1995).

<center>The Eight Basic Emotions</center>

Although not fully agreed upon by philosophers and psychologists, emotion may be defined as "a feeling and its distinctive thoughts, psychological and biological states, and range of propensities to act" (Goleman, 1995, p. 289). In other words, thoughts play a role in the emotions experienced at the 'feeling' level, which translate into both a psychological as well as physiological response. The result of feeling an emotion is often behavioural. The eight basic emotions identified by Goleman include: a) anger, b) sadness, c) fear, d) enjoyment, e) love, f) surprise, g) disgust, and h) shame. Within each of these basic categories is a range of several other emotions which are related to the main category. Falling under the basic emotion of anger, other emotions might include hostility, resentment, annoyance, or outrage. Sadness may include gloom, self-pity, despair, or loneliness. Fear may be expressed as nervousness, terror, misgiving, or apprehension. Enjoyment may be articulated as joy, bliss, euphoria, or relief. Love may be expressed as kindness, devotion, adoration, or friendliness. Surprise may include wonder, astonishment, shock, or amazement. Disgust may consist of abhorrence, distaste, revulsion, or contempt. Finally, shame may be comprised of guilt, humiliation, regret, or embarrassment. All of the basic emotions represent a range of emotion. Some elicit a

very mild response, while others exact an enormous amount of energy and a vigorous response (Goleman, 1995).

At first glance, five of these eight basic emotions appear to be negative emotions. However, if emotional energy is channelled effectively, each have potential to be extremely useful. For example, "fear…can trigger preparation, prevent complacency, and facilitate focus" (Botterill, 1996, p. 27). That same fear has the potential to debilitate if one does not harness the energy produced by fear in a positive manner. Of interest, sadness is the only basic emotion that does not produce energy. Sadness does have an important role to play in the process of grieving, however. Sadness may further nudge someone toward introspection, help with gaining perspective, aid in recovery, and refocus the individual on things that really matter.

According to sport psychologist Cal Botterill, "Our feelings are what make us human, and they are the most difficult part of our total behaviour to control and manage" (1996, p. 27). Therefore, understanding emotions and emotional responses in situations can take individuals far in becoming more emotionally literate. Failing to understand or being unable to discriminate among one's own emotions comes at a huge cost. Not only can it leave one feeling emotionally and physically drained, it increases stress, which can in turn lead to potential eating disorders, obesity, drug and alcohol addiction, crime, and poor decision making.

For those unable to differentiate among their emotions, they may exhibit behaviour they later regret. Not surprising, their behaviour may be inconsistent with their emotions. Goleman (1995) discusses 'emotional deficits' as "failure to tell distressing feelings from one another and to control them" (p. 247). Emotional deficits have

implications for many, and was found to be a key factor among those diagnosed with an eating disorder (Leon, 1993, cited in Goleman, 1995). The eating disordered girls in this study were unaware of their feelings and body signals. They experienced emotions and did not know how to deal with them, so they ate in order to feel better. Following an emotional upset, eating becomes a well entrenched habit. The combination of not being able to distinguish among emotions, using food to soothe, and having a poor body image were found to be key factors among those with eating disorders. Goleman suggests that individuals who are obese often have difficulty discriminating among their emotions, at times mistaking fear or anger with feeling hungry. Goleman says that the individual lumps "all those feelings together as signifying hunger, which leads them to over eat whenever they feel upset" (Goleman, 1995, p. 248).

Those who begin drinking and continue to pursue it until it becomes a dependency, are likely using alcohol to manage emotions. For those who are already dealing with anxiety, depression, or anger, alcohol may ease the emotions caused by the distress (Tshann, 1994 cited in Goleman, 1995). For example, a person who is very nervous may be at risk of alcoholism, as anxious individuals often crave the calmness that alcohol provides. For those who are depressed, alcohol may help to fill a void. For the individual who is chronically angry, alcohol may be used to induce feelings of calmness. Finally, those who are impulsive or have a tendency to become easily bored are also at risk of developing a dependency on alcohol. These individuals use alcohol (or other substances) to relieve feelings of boredom, agitation or impulsivity. In all of these cases, alcohol may be used to help the individual cope with emotions, whether it be to help alleviate depression, calm the rage, or soothe anxiety.

Components of Emotion

Young (in Botterill and Brown, 2002) has identified three basic components of emotion, including: a) a subjective component, b) a physiological component, and c) a behavioural component. The subjective component of emotion relates to cognitive appraisal, as highlighted earlier in this chapter, which outlines that different people respond differently (emotionally) to the same stimuli, due to differences in the way each cognitively appraises the stimuli. While one event may cause one person sadness, another person may experience anger. The differences are due in part to differences in individual's cognitive appraisal of the event. Emotions are subjective and as such, responses vary among individuals.

Physically, there are changes that occur in the body as a result of emotion, as highlighted in the General Adaptation section earlier in this chapter. Physiological changes may include an increase in heart rate, an increase in blood pressure, and pupil dilation to name a few. Many of the physiological changes produce energy. This energy can be harnessed to motivate the individual to 'get busy' and be productive, when one is aware of how to harness the energy in a positive manner. 'Getting busy' leads to the third component of emotion, which is behaviour.

Behaviourally, the energy produced by emotions cause some to act. The behaviour may be positive or negative, but the energy produced by emotion often causes one to respond behaviourally (Botterill and Brown, 2002). Teaching adolescents to channel this energy in a positive and constructive manner will serve them well as they work through adolescence and the issues that they will face.

Teaching Emotional Inoculation

It is important to recognize that although emotions are a natural response to being human, the way one perceives certain events and the emotional responses to those events can be learned, and are not necessarily automatic. Following this logic, positive responses to stimuli may be systematically taught and learned, in an effort to effectively respond to emotions. According to Botterill and Brown (2002), "it may…be appropriate to take steps which will bring emotional responses in line with one's goals and best interests" (p. 42). Authors outline an intervention strategy for teaching core emotions, the effects of these emotions, and appropriate responses to the emotions. This systematic approach to handling emotions may help to promote good emotional health. The steps to the intervention include: a) education, b) individualization, c) skill acquisition, and d) application.

Education refers to teaching the target audience about the basic emotions and how they can be used favourably in situations. Individualization refers to encouraging individuals to take their own 'emotional inventory,' outlining key emotions they feel, and how they experience these emotions. This information should be recorded, so that appropriate strategies can be identified to manage these emotional responses, where necessary.

Following the identification of emotions and their effects on the individual, the individual learns the mental skills to mitigate or channel emotions. This is the 'skill acquisition' phase, and is the point where emotions can be influenced and regulated by psychological skills. Participants may be taught any number of psychological skills, including relaxation, imagery, focusing, or thought stopping.

Application is the fourth and final step in Botterill and Brown's Emotional Inoculation intervention. During the application phase, participants practice using the skills in various situations. Visualization can also be used to imagine situations that are likely to cause an emotional response. Participants imagine themselves handling the situations as they would ideally handle the situations if they were to occur. Working through such scenarios in advance can help individuals have a "plan of attack" for when the situations do transpire. It also serves to build confidence in the individual, since often times they feel as if they have already experienced the situations.

Understanding emotions and how they affect the individual is one of the first steps in teaching people how to cope. Without the fundamental understanding of the eight basic emotions, it can be very difficult to determine which coping skills to apply in various situations. Understanding these emotions has the potential to turn trial into triumph, and sadness into success, if the individuals involved can label the emotion they are experiencing, understand its utility and then use it to their advantage in order to grow.

Bringing it all Together

Stress and coping are complex areas of study. Adolescence is a complex period of life. Together, there are many pieces of a very complicated puzzle that need to fit together in order to begin to appreciate the complexities of adolescent stress and coping. Stress is something that we as humans can never be without. Since the beginning of time, the human body has responded to stress by reacting with a myriad of physiological changes. Because each individual is so uniquely different and complex, each cognitively appraises and responds differently to situations they perceive as stressful. Adolescence is a unique time of the life cycle as well. "Markers" that in the past clearly denoted

adolescence as a distinctive period of life, no longer exit (Elkind, 1984). Some youth are unsure of where they fit and how they fit into their world and social groups. Some feel constrained by family and family expectations. Adolescent females, who tend to be more social, often endure stress as a result of these social affiliations, while their male counterparts are often times engaged in more risk-taking behaviours. Adolescents are not only changing physically, but cognitively many begin to view their world differently, as they begin to be able to empathize and look at situations from others' points of view. This can feel frustrating and disappointing, particularly when there is friction between what is ideal and what is real. Strong social supports during adolescence can help to carry youth through this period of transition. Emotions run high during adolescence, and understanding, managing, and channelling the energy produced by the rising emotions can be an important step in mitigating stress.

CHAPTER 2

Methodology:

Framing my Research Study within Action Research

Ideas are clean. I can take them out and look at them. They fit nicely in books.
They lead me down the narrow way. And in the morning they are there.
Ideas are straight. But the world is round, and a messy mortal is my friend.
Come, walk with me in the mud.

Hugh Prather

The purpose of my research study was to systematically investigate and analyze those factors which cause stress for a given set of youth and determine what they are doing to cope with this stress. From there, a needs based coping skills intervention was created and implemented (see Appendix A), to provide youth with some tools for coping positively with the stressors of adolescence. The effectiveness of this intervention was then assessed.

There were several criteria that I was looking to meet when deciding on a research methodology for this study. First, I wanted to employ a research method that was participatory, and one that could guide me along the path to produce knowledge that would be useful to individuals in their everyday lives. I wanted to ensure that I made a contribution to the field and contributed to human emancipation (Reason & Bradbury, 2003). Because action research is collaborative, participatory, geared at increasing human understanding, concerned with improving quality of life, reflective, eclectic, innovative, empowering, and scientific (McKernan, 1996), it appeared to be a good fit for this study.

Action research can be defined as

> a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing
>
> in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory
>
> worldview...It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice,
>
> in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of
>
> pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual
>
> persons and their communities. (Reason and Bradbury, 2003, p. 2)

Action research is both a systematic as well as a collaborative approach to inquiry. It strives to take into account participants' histories, culture, and emotions. It works specifically to resolve problems with people, for people. It strives to give voice to those who have in the past, been silent in the research process. Action research is rigorous and the reports written at the conclusion of action research studies are typically accessible to both "experts in the field" and lay people (Stringer, 1999).

Within action research, participants are seen as the stakeholders who hold valuable information. The researcher's job is to facilitate the study, to understand the phenomenon or problem. Because action research aims to be collaborative in its approach, together the facilitator and stakeholders work to peel back the layers in an attempt to discover the core issues under investigation. The facilitator works with the information shared by stakeholders, and then returns to stakeholders to confirm his/her interpretation of the information. If the interpretation is incorrect, the stakeholders have the opportunity to clarify. They continue to work together on the study until the entire

picture is built. In this regard, participants are 'co-creators' of the knowledge gathered within the study (Stringer, 1999).

Building the Picture in an Action Research Study

Stringer offers a visual image of how to conduct action research by suggesting that researchers "build a picture" in their study beginning with gathering data, then recording the information, followed by providing descriptive accounts of the phenomena under study. To follow is an explanation of how the 'picture' was built within this study.

Gathering Data

Interviews

According to Stringer, the "gathering process" within action research unfolds by interviewing participants, observing, and reading appropriate documents. Interviews are a large part of how the picture is constructed in an action research study, and was a significant part of how the data was gathered within this study. Through interviews, students were given the opportunity to tell their stories. According to Stringer, allowing participants to tell their stories "not only provides a record of their views and perspectives but also symbolically recognizes the legitimacy of their views" (Stringer, 1999, p. 68). Many academics have written about various questioning techniques to use during interviews (Stringer, 1999; McKernan, 1996). For this research study, I found it helpful to prepare a series of guiding questions for interviews (see Appendix B for examples of interview guides) in order to keep both me and the students somewhat focused, but also kept the questions general enough to allow the student to expand on topics that they felt were relevant to their lived experiences. In this way students helped to answer the research question, while exploring other related issues.

Initial interviews were done as focus group interviews. Given that I did not know the students, this was a good way to start. It may have been uncomfortable for some students to participate in one on one interviews with me before we had a chance to establish a rapport. Further, Stringer (2004) asserts that through the interactive exploration of topics, the focus group process can help to trigger participant's ideas and insights, hopefully yielding rich data.

Following the first two sets of focus group interviews, the intervention began. When I began the intervention, I had planned to work through emotion focused coping skills with the students, to lay a solid foundation for coping with stressors beyond their personal control. These skills included a variety of relaxation techniques such as diaphragmatic breathing, autogenic training, progressive muscle relaxation, imagery, and positive thinking. If there was time, I had hoped to work through problem focused coping skills, which are aimed at teaching skills for dealing with stressors that are generally foreseeable including goal setting, communication, and assertiveness. Because the research methodology was based on an emergent design, the topics that were discussed in class were different from what I had initially expected. In the end, we worked through diaphragmatic breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, autogenic training, positive perspectives, understanding emotions, understanding anger, and maintaining a positive attitude. See below for a schedule of the content covered during the intervention. For a complete "intervention and data collection schedule and contact time," please see Appendix C.

Table 1: Schedule of Content Covered During Intervention

Date	Content Covered
Feb. 22	Member checking, introduction to emotion focused and problem focused coping, introduction to diaphragmatic and square breathing
Feb. 27	*"Skills of the Superstars theme;"* explored skills of Olympic athletes, that have put them on top; discussed how the mental skills help give them an edge
March 2	*"Positive Perspectives theme;"* discussed people in our lives who give us positive energy and those who deplete our energy; discussed how this happens & qualities of each of these types of people; discussed four key reasons to be positive (improves performance, improves relationships, improves quality of life & gives energy); introduced autogenic training
March 6 to March 15	*"Emotions theme;"* Brainstormed emotions; identified emotions which yield positive energy; identified which emotions are positive, negative or neutral; systematically worked through the 8 basic emotions & discussed how each can work to help us; for each emotion, discussed how energy yielded from each could be used positively or negatively
March 20 to April 4 (spring break fell in between)	*"Anger theme;"* introduced progressive muscle relaxation; discussed positive and negative responses to feeling angry (discussion based on student responses from previous class on emotions); role played "angry scenarios" and rehearsed a positive response following an interaction with someone who has made you feel angry; rehearsed a) taking a step back, b) taking a deep breath, and c) counting to ten (or distracting yourself in some

	way); discussed anger triggers, anger cues, and those things students currently do to reduce feelings of anger; discussed methods students would like to learn to reduce feelings of anger
April 6 to April 26 (Easter fell in between)	*"Attitude theme;"* discussed attitude; read 2 poems and a story & discussed the attitude theme; engaged in an extensive dialogue on attitude, e.g., What is attitude? What does a good attitude look like? How do you feel when you spend time with someone with a positive attitude/negative attitude? Who has the potential to go farther in life, a person with a positive attitude or negative? Why? Who are the people in your life you admire? Would you say they have a positive attitude or negative attitude? Etc… *Performance:* students were asked to write a poem, song, rap, read out lyrics of a favourite song, perform a skit, etc., which reflects attitude. Classtime was given for preparation of this performance.

Initial focus groups were formed based on the peers that students had chosen to sit with at their tables. Since I knew the students much better at the time of the final interviews, I made the decision to conduct both focus group as well as individual interviews. Those involved in the final focus group interviews were students I observed as interactive and spurred on by others during group dialogue. Students who were invited to final individual interviews were those whose voices I noticed were not heard very well within group interviews. The final interviews yielded rich and powerful data because the interview styles selected seemed to be a better fit for many.

Participant Observation

Stringer (1999) suggests that observing participants where they live and work "enable[s] researchers to record important details that become the basis for formulating descriptions from which stakeholding groups produce their accounts" (p. 72). He further suggests that field notes taken via participant observation may be accompanied by photos and video recordings. Although I did not seek consent to take videos or photos of the students, I did take extensive field notes, recording the interactions I saw occurring in the classroom. I also recorded my personal communication with students, teachers, and administrators. My field notes contained many of my thoughts and feelings as the study unfolded. When reviewing the data, my field notes helped to remind me how I felt at the time, stirring up many emotions as I engaged in the writing process. Ninety-seven single spaced, hand written pages were recorded in total.

Documents

Documents are another way for researchers to gain valuable information within an action research study. Documents such as minutes from meetings, policies, evaluation reports, and memos are all examples of potential documents that could be reviewed. I did not request to read any private student records, however I did request that students complete five written assignments during my time with them. These assignments built on information taught through the intervention, and helped me to understand the students better. These assignments were collected, and the data found therein were analyzed and included in the research results.

Recording Information

Recording information in an action research study can take many forms including

notes, audiotapes, videotapes, and photographs. For the purpose of this study, interviews were audio taped and later transcribed for analysis. Transcribing the recorded interviews allowed me to accurately recall student comments, in an attempt to more accurately interpret their experiences. A total of 330 pages of single spaced text was transcribed following all of the interviews.

Developing Descriptive Accounts

An important phase of "building the picture" includes describing the context. When writing about a population or phenomenon, it is important that researchers offer a detailed description of the context within which the study occurred. This serves to clarify certain aspects of the study for the reader. My goal in chapter three is to provide a descriptive account of the ethos of the community, the school and the classroom, giving the reader a 'snapshot' of the environment in which I worked, situating myself inside the context of the classroom culture, to show how I fit in.

Giving Participants a Voice

Action research reports do not always conform to traditional methods of reporting. Denzin (1997) suggests that research reports are typically formal and technical. He goes on to suggest that this type of writing often silences the voices of those represented. Instead, Denzin recommends reporting research data in a way that clearly represents people's lived experiences, which can be accomplished through the writing process. He notes (summarized by Stringer, 1999):

> Such reports would be open-ended, would be many sited, would not indulge in
>
> abstract terminology, would be mulitvoiced, and would not privilege the
>
> perspective of persons in positions of authority. Thus [Denzin] suggests the need

for writing that experiments with genre, voice, and narrative style, so that "official" reports may take on the appearance of writing more usually associated with fiction or poetry. (p. 109)

It was my goal to give voice to the students who participated in this study. To this end, interview quotes are woven throughout so that the reader can hear their voices answering the research questions. As well, results are presented in the form of narratives, in order to bring life to the participants and their experiences. These narratives allow students to tell their own stories, from their own points of view, hopefully making who they are as individuals shine through, as well as making the information more accessible to the reader.

Within action research, Denzin (1997) further explores the notion of research data being presented in a performance rather than in a written report. Although it makes sense for me to report my research findings in written text, I wanted to experiment with Denzin's notion of presenting data through performance. Because a large amount of time was spent discussing attitude during the intervention, I requested that students present what attitude meant to them through a performance. This was done at the conclusion of the study. Students chose to perform: a) a skit, b) read a poem, penned by someone else, c) write and recite their own poem, d) write and perform a monologue, and e) share lyrics of favourite songs. Hearing their voices through the songs, skits, poems, and monologue was very powerful. Many students enjoyed the experience, and it served to give me greater insight into who these students were, and the impact the study had on them.

Analyzing and Reporting Results

A tremendous amount of data was collected during the research study, including: a) three sets of interviews with 15 students, b) field notes, c) students' homework assignments, d) an extensive interview with the school administrator, and e) an extensive interview with the classroom teacher. In all, 518 single spaced pages of raw data were collected and analyzed (see Appendix D for raw data summary chart). Data analysis within this study did not all occur at the conclusion of the study. According to McKernan (1996):

> Analysis begins with the practical deliberation that accompanies the field work stage and continues as one collects information and writes up the research report. Rather than doing analysis immediately after field work and data collection, there is a constant comparative analysis going on during action research. (p. 219-221)

Within this study, data analysis needed to be on-going as the study unfolded, in order to ensure that the intervention was relevant to the lives of the students. This meant conducting member checks after the first two sets of interviews, so that I could be sure that I understood what the students had shared. Following the first two sets of interviews, the interviews were immediately transcribed, analyzed, and themes were coded. I then spent one class with the students checking to ensure that I had accurately understood what they had shared with me during the interviews. This was done through facilitating a discussion. The member checking session discussed stress (as it related to the first interview), and coping (as it related to the second interview). During the member checking session, we discussed the topic as a large group. Points of discussion raised from the interviews were pre-recorded on chart paper, and additional points that were

raised during the class discussion were added to the list. Each item was discussed, and I offered my interpretation of it, saying something like, "If I am understanding you correctly, what you are saying by this is…" thereby checking the accuracy of my interpretation. All points were clearly recorded on chart paper for all to see, and students did a good job affirming key points highlighted on the list, and in one instance, added a point that I had mistakenly forgotten to record. Member checks were not conducted following the third set of interviews, as these occurred at the conclusion of the intervention, and there was not ample time to transcribe these lengthy interviews, and then reconvene as a group to assess the accuracy of my interpretations before the intervention concluded.

On-going data analysis translated into planning lessons that reflected my interpretation of the students' needs, then re-visiting what was taught, analyzing how it went, and assessing where I needed to go next, based on the feedback students were giving me during classtime. Following each and every class I deliberated at length regarding where to go next, based on the information gleaned from the students that day. Students truly did guide the course of this intervention. Appendix A contains a detailed unit highlighting what was taught during each lesson. Of interest, each lesson includes a rationale for that particular lesson. Each lesson was tailor designed for these students, based on the feedback I received from them and Mrs. Smith. It was my goal to meet the perceived needs of the students, based on information they shared both formally and informally during the previous lesson. Something a student said during one class, for example, led the way to an unanticipated area of exploration for a subsequent lesson.

Triangulation

Using multiple methods in an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and to exhume the richest data is termed triangulation. "The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study is best understood then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to any inquiry"(Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 5). Layering the data over time, gathering information from a variety of participants, engaging in multiple events, and looking to different documents, all help to validate the data collected, and gives a base for drawing out recommendations and conclusions (Pitman and Maxwell, 1992).

Many different sources of data were layered, to help answer the three parts of my research question. The first two parts of my research questions looked at stress and coping. Through interviews, I was able to directly ask youth what things caused them stress and how they coped. During the twelve week intervention, I observed and recorded as field notes some of what the students shared during classtime regarding stress and coping. Through homework submitted, I was able to dig even deeper and find out more about what caused the students stress and how they coped. During dialogues with their teacher and principal I learned more about the students, the community, and the school.

The final part of my research question looked at the effectiveness of the intervention. I learned about the effectiveness of the intervention by: a) asking students directly in interviews, b) observing through teaching and recording observations in my field journal, c) assessing their submitted homework, d) assessing their final presentation, and e) speaking with their teacher, both informally and in a formal interview. All of these

layers of data, gathered from many sources over a period of five months, have helped to better inform the recommendations and conclusions recorded at the end of this thesis.

<center>Trustworthiness</center>

In action research, Stringer (2004) suggests that researchers are seeking "truths-in-context" (p. 56) rather than *the* truth or *the* cause of the topic under research. Because qualitative research methods can be subjective, establishing validity becomes a question of ensuring the trustworthiness of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness is established by ensuring that the data are credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable (Stringer, 2004). Credible research refers to a study that has been carried out with integrity, and includes spending a significant amount of time with research participants, regularly observing them, debriefing with them, triangulating the data, and conducting member checks.

Transferability means that the results of the research study may be applied to other contexts or settings. Because qualitative research is rich in detail, it makes it possible for others in the field to assess whether your research findings may be transferable to their situation. When contexts are similar, the knowledge generated by one study may benefit others when they are able to apply your strategies or recommendations in their work/study situation.

Dependability means that results are clearly outlined and open to audit. Clearly defining the research questions, collecting and analyzing a sufficient amount of data, and writing an in-depth report work together to demonstrate that the data are dependable.

Finally, confirmability is when the results of the study come directly from the data. Confirming the authenticity of the data comes when raw data, including field notes,

interview transcripts, documents and so on, are available for auditors to review, in order to confirm the validity of the results. It is critical that every measure be taken during a research study so that others will find your work trustworthy. Maintaining field journals, triangulating, gathering reference material, debriefing, and maintaining an audit trail are all examples of how trustworthiness can be established (Stringer, 2004; Stringer, 1999; Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

<div align="center">Catalytic Validity</div>

Catalytic validity is one type of validity which represents "the degree to which the research process re-orients, focuses and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it" (Lather, 1991). Catalytic validity has occurred when the research has practical consequences for practice, when participants recognize the impact of the research and make a decision to take what was learned through the research to gain further understanding. The information gained through the research process may move participants to apply the information learned from their experiences of being engaged in the study, to bring about changes in their own world.

<div align="center">*Mrs. Smith's Validation of My Work*</div>

In my research study, catalytic validity was confirmed in several ways. After we covered the topics of emotions, anger, and attitude, classroom teacher Mrs. Smith[1] took the lesson plans that were taught, and taught the same content to her grade seven students. Mrs. Smith also requested a copy of all of the work that I had taught, in order to be able to teach the same content next year. Upon conclusion of the intervention, Mrs. Smith requested copies of the relaxation scripts that I had written for her students, so that

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[1] All names of people have been changed in order to protect their identity.

she could continue to engage her students in relaxation beyond the scope of the intervention.

When we were discussing the topic of anger with the grade eight students, Mrs. Smith wanted to learn more, and I shared copies of the literature I had researched, which looked at the root causes of anger and the cycle of anger. During an interview with Mrs. Smith, she shared how she learned new content through the information delivered in the intervention, which made her feel confident that her students were learning as well.

In the end, not only did Mrs. Smith validate my research by taking the content taught through the intervention to use with her grade seven and eight students after I had finished, many of the students also employed elements of the intervention beyond the classroom. Students shared verbally and in homework assignments how they were using the skills in their lives beyond the classroom such as square breathing, diaphragmatic breathing, and shifting focus for controlling stress.

By the end of the intervention, students wanted to do the relaxation and came to expect it. Mrs. Smith recalls, "I think the first time they had no relevance to it. I think the last few times we did it, they wanted it to happen, 'cause the time that they were expecting it and they came in [asking] 'Where's the breathing?' They were disappointed [when we didn't do it] so I think it's extremely beneficial."

Cutting Edge Work

School principal Mr. Miller also appreciated the work that I had done with his students during my time at Yorkdale School, and recognized the relevance of the coping skills taught. " I think it's great, what's happening here when you're talking about self awareness and giving kids some of those coping skills, and trying to do it at a young age

when they think they can cope with anything." He also appeared to recognize the uniqueness of the skills being introduced to his students, as something that is not typically taught within schools. Referring to the content taught to the students, Mr. Miller expressed, "I think that's pretty cutting edge stuff."

<div align="center">Connecting with the Gatekeepers:</div>

<div align="center">Securing Consent from the Top Down</div>

The process of accessing students in a public school setting for the purpose of conducting research is no quick task. First, the University of Manitoba required a rigorous process in order to secure ethics approval for working with human subjects. Human ethics approval to conduct this research study was granted by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB), University of Manitoba on August 2, 2006, Protocol #E2005:051. From there, a school had to be contacted, and potential participants needed to be sought out.

Eight months spanned from the time of initial consultation with administration at Yorkdale School, to the commencement of the intervention. One calendar year spanned from the time of initial consultation with Yorkdale School administrators until the completion of the study. During that time, a presentation was made to the school administration as well as the Physical and Health Education Supervisor for the school division, to discuss: a) the potential of me working in the school, b) the learning outcomes the intervention would cover, and c) what subject area would be the most logical fit for the intervention. From there, administrators had to bring the proposal to their staff, to see who would be interested in working with me. After that was determined, consent needed to be granted from the school division superintendent, the school

administrators, and the classroom teacher with whom I would be working, the parents of the students with whom I would be working, and the students themselves. To follow is a chronicle of that process.

Consent to work within the Yorkdale Heights' school division, and with the staff and students of Yorkdale School needed to be secured from the top down. After Principal Miller expressed an interest in being involved in the research study, I connected with Mr. Niles, school division superintendent in the fall, 2005. During a telephone call I introduced myself, explained the research, and asked if I could forward an information package containing more detail on the study. The information found in the package introduced the study and its purpose, outlined data collection methods, a tentative timeline, proposed work expected of students during the study, curricular connections, risks and benefits of involvement in the study, and assurance of anonymity and confidentiality. That day, arrangements were made to re-connect with Mr. Niles, giving him time to read the information sent. Mr. Niles and I re-connected in December, 2006, and verbal consent to conduct the research at Yorkdale Heights School was given that day over the telephone. Written consent was later sent to me in the mail in January, 2006.

In January, 2006, the same information package that was created for Mr. Niles was distributed to Principal Miller, Vice-Principal Bell, and Mrs. Smith. In January, 2006 each gave written consent to be involved in the study.

Following securing consent from the school division superintendent and school personnel, in January, 2006, an information package was distributed to each of the students who were invited to participate in the study, which were to be taken home to be discussed with parents. The information package included: a) information regarding the

purpose of the research, b) the research procedure (timeline, how the classes will likely run, learning outcomes), c) risk assessment, d) recording devices to be used, e) assurance of confidentiality and anonymity, f) future feedback to the school, g) compensation for participation (no compensation to be given), h) my contact information should parents decide to call with question or concerns, and i) contact information for ENREB (Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board, University of Manitoba) should parents have concerns or complaints about the research project. Mr. Miller also wrote a cover letter to this information package, introducing me and the proposed intervention to parents. Consent forms were to be returned on or before the start of the intervention. By February 1, 2006, consent had been secured by 100% of the parents.

I did not request that students give written assent to participate in the intervention. I did not believe it was fair to ask them to sign assent to participate in a research study that was based on an emergent design. None of us knew exactly where it would lead, thus, during initial focus group interviews, I explained the purpose of the research, and how I was hoping to use the information gained from students. I then asked for verbal assent from each student, to use the information that they shared with me. Throughout the program, I affirmed the information that they were contributing, and re-explained how I hoped to write up the results of what they shared. Then, during the final interviews, I asked each student for permission to use the information that they had shared during the course of our time together. Although in the original protocol I suggested that I would seek assent from students at the start of the study, I later decided that since students had experienced the entire intervention, and knew the information that they had shared during the course of our time together, it would be ethical to request permission to use the

information that they had shared with me during the intervention. Each student granted me permission.

<div align="center">Answering the Research Questions</div>

As stated earlier, the purpose of the study was to develop a better understanding about stress in the lives of adolescents, to understand how they cope, and to assess how they respond to a program developed to equip them better with the stress they are facing. In the end, I believe that the participatory action research methodology helped me to answer my research questions. Through the layering data over the twelve months of contact with the school, from initial contact to the conclusion of the study, I learned about the stress experienced in the lives of these grade eight students at this point in time. During the first two sets of interviews, students shared what caused them stress and how they coped with the stress of adolescence. Through observations in their classroom over twelve weeks, I was able to see firsthand some personal, social and academic stressors, and the students' methods of coping. In their written work, some students further expanded on these stressors and their personal methods of coping, also sharing those issues that made them angry and how they feel. Finally, class presentations highlighted their thoughts on attitude.

Through observation and regular debriefing with classroom teacher, Mrs. Smith, I was able assess and record on a daily basis the students' responses to the intervention designed to equip them with coping strategies. During the final interview, I was able to more formally ask students their impressions of the effectiveness of the intervention. A final interview was also conducted with Mrs. Smith and Principal Miller, to ask their observations of their students' response to the program, and to request their feedback. All

of these pieces of data have been pieced together to answer the research questions of how these youth experience stress, how they cope, and how they responded to the coping skills intervention.

<div align="center">Action Research: A Good Fit for this Study</div>

The participatory action research methodology was a good fit for the study, because it allowed me to be flexible in selecting content to cover with the students within the intervention. Because the design of the study was emergent, the course of the intervention meandered, in order to meet the needs of the students. Students may not realize it, but they actually determined the content of the intervention. From one brainstorm to the next, they highlighted worries, concerns, stressors, interests, and strong emotions, which were the themes that I pulled out, researched and delivered as content during subsequent classes. Had I been rigid in my approach and planned in advance to deliver only content that I thought the students would benefit from, I would have risked the content being irrelevant to the students' lives.

In sum, action research was the methodology of choice for this study. Because action research aspires to be a collaborative methodology, and focuses on the researcher and participants as co-creators of knowledge, it was a good fit. The students' stories, their lives, experiences, and impressions of the intervention are what I have attempted to give voice to in the following chapters. Action research allowed me to do this in a way that was empowering, and held the potential for improving the quality of these student's lives. Action research gave me the privilege of "walking in the swamp" together with these youth.

CHAPTER 3

Stepping into Yorkdale Heights:

Picket Fences, Pretty Girls & Sporty Boys

To follow is an overview of the community, school, and classroom where I

delivered the coping skills intervention. It is presented to provide a sense of where and

with whom I worked. This chapter is also aimed at providing a sense of how I was

received into this classroom, the challenges I faced, and the relationships that were built

with some of the students. Working through a very challenging learning climate added

unexpected class management issues, and took the intervention down an unexpected path.

However, these challenges also brought with them a richness and authenticity to the

study, shedding even greater light on the stressors facing these young people.

The Ethos of the Community and School

Yorkdale School[2] is set in the heart of the suburb of Yorkdale Heights, an

upwardly mobile, upper middle class neighbourhood. School principal Mr. Miller

specifically referred to Yorkdale Heights a "multiethnic" rather than a multicultural

community. There are a variety of cultures represented in this community. In the class I

worked with for example, there were students who were Chinese, Vietnamese, East

Indian, West Indian, Japanese, Eastern European, Jewish, and French. Six out of the

fifteen students in this class represented visual minorities[3].

Yorkdale is a very large school, serving 500 students from kindergarten to grade

eight. There are 70 staff members, and multiple classes at each grade level. It is a clean,

bright school, in a well-kept neighbourhood. Many parents of younger children walk with

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[2] All names of places have been changed for the purpose of anonymity and confidentiality.
[3] "Visible minority" is a term used in Canada to describe those whose skin is a colour other than white.

them to school, while many others ride bikes. The street can be seen lined with mini-vans as students both enter and exit the building. Community support for the school seems strong. Yorkdale School appears to have a good reputation in the community, and the school administrators work hard to be effective, in an effort to "get it right for their learners," by keeping up with the current educational literature, and attending international conferences. I have worked with Mr. Miller in the past and was excited to have the opportunity to work with him again. He cares passionately about his students, his staff, and their learning. It was a privilege to be supported by Mr. Miller as I carried out the research study.

The Culture of the Classroom

Mrs. Smith, the classroom teacher, joined the teaching profession four years ago. She is energized and it is easy to tell by the way she interacts with her students that she enjoys teaching. Mrs. Smith's teaching style is very relaxed and interactive. She often engages students in dialogue while sitting on a stool in the centre of the classroom. She shares funny stories about her children, and reveals a great deal about the stress and pain of her own adolescent years. Her willingness to share so much about her personal life is an effective way for Mrs. Smith to connect with her students. "Did that really happen to you when you were younger? That must have been so hard," Adele said after Mrs. Smith shared an incident that took place in her life during adolescence. Mrs. Smith genuinely likes her students. "You guys give me a lot of positive energy," she said during a class discussion on emotional energy. Students seem to really like and trust Mrs. Smith. One student said during an individual interview that he has shared personal issues with Mrs.

Smith, and another indicated that she would go and talk to Mrs. Smith if she had a problem.

The students involved in this intervention were not a random sample. In this school the grade eight students had a choice between taking Band or Human Ecology. The students who chose to take Human Ecology were the students I taught during the intervention. The class was comprised of ten male and five females.

Many of the males in this group were very athletic. Among them was a highly skilled baseball player, and a competitive basketball player. Others were involved in organized football, hockey, and tennis. A keen interest of all the boys was video games.

The girls were also very physically active. Four out of the five girls were on the cheerleading squad, and danced competitively outside of school. Other interests of the girls included basketball, soccer, and gymnastics. Sarah was the only girl in the class who was not part of this core group of four females. Sarah was involved in creative and performing arts, including singing, acting, and creative writing.

All of these students with the exception of one have siblings, and 13 of the 15 students in this class are being raised by their parents who continue to be married to one another. The students in this class represent a variety of cultures, and some of these cultures are honoured and celebrated in their homes. Understanding a student's culture and home life has implications for the classroom teacher.

"I think twice before I phone home to some parents," Mrs. Smith explained, "because some families of particular cultures are really punitive in their discipline, a telephone call home from a teacher could have serious consequences for that child at

home." This causes Mrs. Smith to be very prudent in her decision to make phone calls home to discuss negative student behaviour.

Change can be very stressful, and in a dialogue early on with Mr. Miller, I learned about some of the changes that these students were experiencing. "Two of these students' teachers have left their positions in the past month. They have lost two key 'relationship people' in their lives. One is on sick leave, and the other has gone down to part time. It's a real loss and another change for the students," he shared. This offered me some insight. Change always elicits some stress, and adolescence is a time wrought with change. Losing two teachers at once could be difficult if they were effective teachers, and Mr. Miller suggested that they were. With me arriving and teaching coping skills, and not the Human Ecology curriculum they expected, students were faced with another change. Taking direction from three new teachers, and being assigned work from all of us may have added to feelings of aggravation, potentially increasing stress for these students. In the first week, two girls submitted homework to me with frowning faces next to their names. They clearly wanted to let me know that they were not happy. In sum, my arrival may have contributed to the stress related to unanticipated changes in their school life.

Teaching Challenges

There were some issues affecting the delivery of the intervention that I had not anticipated in advance. First, I was challenged to figure out how to effectively present the information given the atypical set up of the classroom. Next, a short class length was a challenge, since I had expected to have more contact time with students. Finally, my advance preparation had been limited to the content of the intervention and the method of delivering it. Because I did not spend any time in this classroom or with these students

prior to the study, I was surprised and disappointed with the time that I needed to spend on managing student behaviour.

Unusual Classroom Space

The classroom that we worked in together was a food lab. It was a large space with six kitchens around the perimeter of the room. Each kitchen contained an oven, a sink and cupboards above and below. The classroom also housed a refrigerator, a freezer and a large rectangular shaped 'island' at one end of the classroom. In the centre, there was an open space with six round tables, arranged in two rows. Each table could comfortably seat six students. The space was open and bright, with a large window giving view to a field outside, and another window facing an indoor hallway.

This classroom impacted my teaching because of its unusual set up. It was primarily a food lab, and as such, did not contain some typical features of a regular classroom, such as a blackboard, white board or flip chart. It did not have a "front of the room" space, in order to bring students' focus back to one central location. Conducting large group brainstorms was challenging, but adaptations were made by taping pieces of chart paper onto a cupboard door, and recording student thoughts onto the paper with markers. Students also orally presented thoughts and ideas by first recording them onto flip chart paper before presenting them to the class. An overhead projector was used when appropriate, and large black garbage bags were taped over windows during relaxation sessions, to increase privacy and to make the room darker.

Time

In my nine years of teaching coping skills, I have found that a minimum of 45 minutes per class is necessary in order to adequately: a) cover content, b) engage in a

discussion, and c) work on practical application of skills. The amount of time that I had to work with students from Yorkdale School was 40 minutes per class. Unfortunately, 40 minute classes ended up being 30 to 35 minutes in length. I typically saw these students during the first class period of the day. This meant that students began their morning in their homeroom for attendance, sang our National Anthem, paused for a moment of reflection, and listened to announcements before being dismissed to their first class. By the time they walked down the hall to our class, it was typically five minutes past the hour. By the time students settled, it was ten minutes past the hour. This was one of my first challenges. I felt as though I was behind before I even began. There was so much that I wanted to cover, and thirty minutes twice a school day cycle meant that I would be with them for one hour a week. I was not convinced that this would be enough time to affect any change.

Class Management

Class management was another key issue affecting the amount of information that I was able to cover during a class. Because I started the intervention on the first day of the second semester, I did not have the opportunity to observe Mrs. Smith interacting with her students. It would seem important to 'gauge the landscape' and assess how a classroom teacher works with her/his students before jumping in, in order to ensure consistency with classroom management style and approaches to misbehaviour. If I had observed Mrs. Smith before I began, I might have seen how she delivers content, responds to outbursts, and deals with off task behaviour, since her rules and boundaries are what students have come to expect from previous years.

Mrs. Smith and I had determined that her role during my teaching was to remain present in the classroom, to learn the techniques that I was teaching the students, so that she would be able to reinforce the strategies beyond the scope of the intervention. She was present in the classroom from day one. At times she raised her hand to contribute to class discussion, but rarely intervened to discipline students.

In my job as a university lecturer, one of the most salient points that I attempt to impart to teacher candidates is the notion that they ought to teach "people before purpose." The student is always first, and the teacher's agenda is second. Looking back to my experience at Yorkdale School, I should have taken my own advice. I was clearly motivated to teach content, not students. Meeting my study objectives was at the forefront of my mind, and I was determined to answer my research questions. My own agenda led to incredible frustration at the onset of the intervention. Even though eight students were polite and seemed eager to learn, four boys poor impulse control, out of turn talking, and calling out insults at one another made me feel frustrated. Three girls were passively aggressive, making comments under their breath to one another. I simply could not get the content out on the table. My greatest fear was that by the end of the intervention, I would have covered zero content, and not answered my research questions. During a partner activity, I circulated to offer students clarification and feedback. "How's it going Aiden? Do you understand what you need to record for each list?" I asked. Aiden was the only student without a partner to work with. His friends excluded him that day, and he was mad.

"This is gay," he said, flipping his marker across the table. He then stood up and walked out of the classroom. These were issues that I had never faced when teaching

coping skills to a younger audience. In a conversation early on with Mrs. Smith, she observed, "These 15 feel like 30." I was relieved that she felt that this group was a challenge as well.

There was no seating arrangement in this class, which had implications for class management. When students arrived, they sat with their friends, which was not always productive. Six boys all piled around one table, acting rambunctious and disruptive when they sat together. Four girls quietly carried on their own conversations, shooting looks and gestures at one another, in response to comments made by Mrs. Smith, a peer, or me. There was no focal point in the room, thus very few students faced the speaker. Instinctively, I experimented with table arrangements, initially placing the tables in a "U" shape, requesting that students only sit around the perimeter of the tables, so that everyone could see everyone else, including the speaker. Re-arranging the tables made managing disruptive behaviour a bit better because nobody had their backs to me. However, it wasn't until halfway into the intervention that Mrs. Smith decided that we needed to "break up their little groups," and formulate a seating plan. Mrs. Smith determined the groups, and most tables had one girl sit together with one boy. Students were not pleased with the revised seating plan, but disruptive behaviour decreased significantly, student attention increased, and we were able to cover more content during classes.

Unexpected poor student behaviour at the beginning of the intervention led me to feel very frustrated and disappointed at my inability to emotionally connect with some students. Because I believe that much of a teacher's success comes from the relationship built between teacher and student, as a teacher I endeavour to build a sense of community

within the classes that I teach. This sense of community can lead to a safe and caring learning environment, where students are willing to take risks. My initial attempts to assimilate into this classroom environment, and create a sense of community came up short. I have not been a teacher candidate in more than a decade, but in this class, I felt like I was learning the ropes of teaching for the first time. The disappointment I felt led to regular de-briefing sessions with Mrs. Smith. Because she was present in the classroom during all sessions, I sought her insight into what was going on. "Is it me? My teaching style? The content?" I asked. I wasn't really sure.

In her opinion, "Charlie and Tess are the popular kids, and they are acting like jerks." Understanding this was helpful. It made sense to try and make an impact on the leaders. If they bought in, others might follow. I made a special effort to involve Tess and Charlie in classroom dialogue, asking them questions, and requesting their help with holding up posters during teaching time. Although they did not refuse to participate, it did not seem to help. Since breaking in with the leaders did not work, I tried a new tactic.

"Maybe if they see my 'human side' they'll find me more real and be more responsive," I thought. So I began to share a bit about my children and their latest antics. Students seemed only mildly amused, so after a few classes I stopped sharing. They did not really know me, so hearing about my children, even if the stories were funny, did not elicit much response. I was beginning to lose hope in my ability to connect emotionally with some of these students.

After several weeks of trying many strategies to connect with certain students without success, I came up with a new idea. I approached Mrs. Smith and asked, "Would you be willing to team teach the content with me, so that you could make the examples

more relevant to the lives of these students? I will continue to plan all of the lessons and assignments. But if you would be willing to team with me to deliver the information, maybe the content would be better received from you." She agreed and things began to turn around.

Relationship & Cultural Relevance

Immediately, Mrs. Smith activated her students' thinking on topics by using relevant examples of daily occurrences in their lives. She incorporated their family and friends into every illustration to make the content authentic. She began the first lesson by saying "Okay, Robby, let's say it's Saturday and you want to go out, and your mom says that you can't because you first need to clean your room, and strip your sheets and wash them. And you are really mad because it's unfair, and you don't want to, and you shouldn't have to, and you're really pissed off. What do you do? How do you handle that anger?" Because Mrs. Smith's relationship with her students had spanned two years, the examples that she drew on brought the content to life. Drawing from a pool this deep began to make the learning more relevant and meaningful to the students. Mrs. Smith went on to cite examples of Tess fighting with her mother, Tim's fierce loyalty to his family and friends, and Robby's great sense of humour. Connecting the content to what she had observed of her students' attitudes and relationships helped to make the content genuine. After observing Mrs. Smith in action, I finally stopped beating myself up over my inability to connect with the students in the way I had hoped, and breathed a sigh of relief. I saw that the relationship Mrs. Smith had with her students helped make the skills have real purpose. The examples that she was able to draw on were examples that I could never have come up with, given the limited time I had spent with these students, and the

fact that I did not know these students' families or friends outside of this class. I resolved to enjoy my work in this class, realizing that Mrs. Smith was part of this classroom community, and me only peripherally, and that I could not expect to fully assimilate into this group in three months. With a younger group, past experience tells me that I could have assimilated. However it was apparent to me that I was not going to be able to intimately connect with these students. Once I accepted this, I felt much more encouraged.

The importance of the relationship between the teacher and learner in making learning meaningful cannot be underestimated. In my experience at Yorkdale School, no matter how impressive the coping skills were that I wanted to teach, and no matter how entertaining I was as a teacher, some students were not buying in. We had no relationship. There was no trust built between us. In a group setting I was asking them to share what made them stressed out, what made them feel angry and how they handled it. Why should they share and risk looking foolish in front of their peers? I asked them to lay on the floor, close their eyes and relax. Why should they participate and close their eyes in a public place? What if nobody else did and they were the only ones? Everyone would know and they would feel ridiculous. Relationship is key, particularly during adolescence. Adolescents feel vulnerable, and subject to the scrutiny of their peers. Sharing intimate thoughts or doing something that may make them look foolish in front of their peers is risky. When there is trust between the student and the teacher, there is an increased possibility that the student will attempt the activities he/she is being asked to do. Without the trusting relationship, it is unlikely that a student will put himself or

herself at risk for a teacher. This sort of relationship takes time to build, and cannot be assumed, simply because someone enters the classroom with an agenda – like me.

Even though Mrs. Smith said that she would teach with me, she shared, "I'm afraid that I might misinterpret the information, and not present it the way you want it presented." I assured her that the spin she put on the content would increase the likelihood that the information would be *'culturally relevant'* to the lived experiences of the students.

"You are immersed in the culture of this school and these students' lives, so your interpretation of the content is really important. Even if you interpret the content differently than me, your interpretation is going to be meaningful, because you know these students and know how to frame it so that they will get it," I said. This helped to put Mrs. Smith at ease.

Cultural relevance is a concept that has been explored by Gloria Ladson-Billings in her book The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African-American Children (1994). As she looks at the success of eight teachers with their elementary aged African-American students, Ladson-Billings highlights the importance of ensuring that the learning environment and the content being covered in the classroom is relevant to the learners. She explains that culture applies to more than the ethnicity of an individual, but expands to include everything that informs an individual's daily cultural landscapes, which teachers need to know to be effective. When a teacher makes the decision to meet students where they are, and strives to design content that is meaningful and relevant to their day-to-day activities, this teacher is addressing one element of culturally relevant teaching. When students are able to see themselves in the content being delivered by the

teacher, and desire to learn what is being taught, a culturally relevant connection has been made. It is important to note that the theme of culturally relevant teaching is complex and in-depth. I have highlighted only one key piece of it here. For more information, see Ladson-Billings (1994).

Adolescence is a sub-culture in our society, and many of the emotional and relational difficulties experienced by youth may simply rise out of the challenges that accompany adolescence. It is a tumultuous age, and the more teachers can modify the way they deliver content, to ensure that they are making personally, socially and culturally relevant connections of the material to the learners' lives, the greater the chance that students will gain from the learning experience.

On the first day of our "team teaching," I delivered the content, and Mrs. Smith "connected the dots" linking the content to the lives of her students. "That was amazing!" I congratulated Mrs. Smith after our first day of team teaching.

"Was it okay?" she asked.

"You did a great job of using concrete examples of things you know these students are experiencing in their lives and at school, like what happens when someone hits you, or having to stay home to clean your room. Your examples had some kids saying 'uh-huh,' agreeing with you as you spoke. It was fantastic." It was an exciting day, realizing that we had hit on something key.

The action research framework used in this study acknowledges the important contribution that stakeholders have to make in a research study. Stringer (2004) points out, "Although I have professional knowledge that may be useful in exploring the issue or problem facing us, my knowledge is incomplete" (p. 29). Certainly I had the content

knowledge to deliver this intervention, but I did not have the relationship with the students to draw on meaningful examples or the trust built with them, for them to try the different techniques that I had hoped we would cover together. Thus, exploring the issues further with Mrs. Smith and enlisting her help when delivering content extended my understanding of the students as well as the importance of cultural connections in this study.

I continued to create the content of the lesson and from that point on, Mrs. Smith and I delivered the material together. Mrs. Smith was pivotal at connecting the dots, making sense of the content relative to the students' lives. This approach worked very well. Students felt more comfortable challenging Mrs. Smith on certain topics that they disagreed with, making the dialogue more rich and honest. "How can you choose a positive attitude all the time? It's nearly impossible to have a positive attitude all the time if you've been through what I've been through," protested Sarah.

"What does it mean to choose to live or die?" Shane asked after reading a poem on attitude. "You can't choose to live or die. How can choosing to live actually make you live?" he challenged. The intervention was beginning to have meaning to the students and it was exciting to witness.

The Road Less Traveled: Working with Adolescents

Among the 15 students with whom I worked with at Yorkdale School, there were eight who worked hard and appeared to buy into a relationship with me as well as the skills that were being taught. Their diligence during group work, their in depth reflections on homework assignments, and their participation during class discussions showed me that they were "getting" the content being delivered. For example, in a homework

assignment Chris wrote, "When I'm stressed I make sure that I leave and forget my mistake. I also take a deep breath."

Billy shared, "One time in a basketball game I got blocked and became really angry. I harnessed the emotion and turned it into determination. I came back and blocked the person who blocked me."

Shane and Chris wrote a poem at the conclusion of the intervention, which they shared in class that read:

"When there's rain, sun will come after.

When tears fall, there will still be laughter.

When you fall, you'll get up again. As the sun sets, it will rise again.

When everything goes wrong, there's someone there,

Who never gives up, who'll always care."

All 15 students taught me a great deal about the stressors of adolescence, how adolescents cope, and the effectiveness of the intervention for them. The eight students mentioned above were positive in their disposition, eager to participate, and appeared to "buy in" to the program. During final interviews, all eight of these students shared that they have a solid network of social support which serves them well. These students practiced several of the coping skills which were taught to help them through the turbulence of adolescence, and I believe that if the students rehearse them, that the skills will serve them well.

I do not want any of the students' stories to appear more important than the next, nor do I want it to seem that any one student's contribution was more valuable than another. However, for the purpose of keeping the size of this thesis manageable, I needed

to make a decision on whose stories to include and whose stories to leave out. I have decided not to include these eight students' stories. Rather, seven other students' stories will be presented as narratives. These seven stories will be told because the issues facing these students appear to capture a wide range of the tensions experienced during adolescence, and the way each chooses to cope represents an array of coping styles.

In the following paragraphs you will be introduced to Tess and her friends. Their stories have been included to give you a sense of the tensions faced by adolescent girls, to paint a picture of the culture of this class, and to show how I was received by this group of girls as I attempted to teach.

Tess, Adele, Rhea & Michelle

Tess is one of the popular girls in her grade. She appears to be the leader of the group. She is smart, attractive, and strong. She wears designer clothes and a fair amount of make-up. She has been seeing her boyfriend Charlie who is in this class, for six months. Tess is very busy, involved in competitive dance six to seven days a week. Her parents separated one year ago, and have recently divorced. Tess adores her mother's boyfriend 'Pete,' because he is considerate and kind to her, her mom, and her younger sister Julie. Tess is overjoyed when Pete shows that he cares by taking Tess to McDonald's at 10 o'clock in the evening after a dance class. Pete has moved into their family home with Tess, Julie, and their mom. Two weekends a month Pete's daughter comes to stay with them. It is stressful when Pete's daughter comes to stay, as she is the same age as Julie, and does not treat Julie well. Tess' father misses his Tess and Julie and wants to spend time with them, but Tess does not want to spend time with her dad. In Tess' words "We don't want to go over to his small apartment. I cannot be in a small

space....so I don't go there...He keeps on asking me and I say, 'Dad, stop asking!' And he just doesn't understand." Tess is very close with her mom, stating that, "...most of the time she's positive and is the one who helps me a lot....When there's a problem with my mom, I feel, usually completely lost." From Mrs. Smith's observations, Tess' mother acts more like a friend to Tess than a parent.

Tess holds a lot of power in her social group. During a focus group interview I asked a girl named Michelle if she might like to learn about assertiveness during our time together. As Michelle was about to respond, Tess cut her off, shouting over top of her, "We don't need to learn to be assertive. We *are* assertive!" Tess is intense, has a great deal of energy, and can be quite verbally aggressive. She exerts tremendous control over the group and also wields a lot of influence over the mood of the entire class.

During an after class debrief, Mrs. Smith shared "Tess used to be chatty and happy last year, that bubbly, kind of tap dancing into the classroom, twirling ballerina kinda' thing, but since her parents' divorce, she is angry and really difficult to work with."

Tess hangs around with Adele, Rhea, and Michelle. Adele is athletic and shared how she likes sports, dancing, listening to music, and going out with her boyfriend. She also mentioned that she hates her parents. Adele dresses in black and wears black make-up. Her parents are involved in her life, and have approached Adele's teachers with concerns they have about the changes in her appearance. Adele says that she dresses in black because she likes it, and that she is not turning "mod" or "goth." When speaking with Adele one on one, it sounds as though she is going through a mild period of rebellion.

Rhea is a competitive gymnast. She is also involved in basketball, cheerleading, and dance. Rhea is a girl who appears very sad. She lives with her brother, mother, and mother's boyfriend. Rhea cannot stand her mother's boyfriend and does not like to take direction from him. She finds him immature and whiny. Her tensions appear similar to Tess', in that her parents are divorced, and both have their mother's boyfriends living in their family homes. However unlike Tess, Rhea really misses her father, and does not get to see him as much as she would like. Her dad is fighting for joint custody of Rhea and her older brother, which Rhea hopes will happen. She feels badly for her dad and also feels caught between her parents when they fight. Adolescence is a time of inherent turbulence. Rhea does seek the social support of her father, but her family situation has made access to him as a consistent source of support very difficult.

Michelle is a girl who is working to fit in with this crowd. It is easy to tell that she is on the periphery of the group by the way the others pair off, and sometimes exclude her. She is a bright, cheerful, and athletic girl, and is the oldest of five children in her family. Family time is important to Michelle, and she often helps her mom with her younger siblings. This is Michelle's first year taking Human Ecology, as in past years she was a Band student. Tess made it clear that Michelle is trying to break into their crowd. "…you might call her the follower…they just kinda' ignore her…just shrug her off. And she tags along with them….She tries to be like some of us – like copy exactly our personalities." Michelle is not a good fit with this group. She is studious and positive. She greets Mrs. Smith and me with a smile and a 'hello' as she enters the classroom, and participates in class discussions. As she becomes more confident in who she is, she will likely break from this crowd.

During initial focus group interviews with these girls, I found them to be animated and eager to share their stories with me. With the exception of Michelle, they fed off of each other's negative energy, saying things like, "I hate school. I hate the teachers. I hate my parents." The interviews that I conducted at the conclusion of the intervention were done separately with these girls, so that I could better engage with them individually. Separately, I found the girls to be sensitive and sincere. Tess, Rhea and Adele together appear to be an unhealthy combination.

<div align="center">Encounters with Angry Girls</div>

My first real encounter with the youth was in the form of focus group interviews. I conducted two initial sets of interviews, the first to understand the stressors these adolescents face, and the second to learn how they cope with that stress. When I asked Tess what kinds of things cause her stress, she highlighted being too busy, and admitted to coping with stress by responding with anger. "When you're doing a lot of things, maybe not even a lot, and it gets so tough and you kind of get depressed and you break down and you, like, take it out with anger or something and you get mad at people because you've been given too much to handle."

Rhea echoed Tess' sentiments. "It like happens when you're, like, handling too much, like, sports and you're trying to do school and everything and the teachers give too much work and you can't do it, 'cause, like, they give us all this work and they don't think that we do extra things, like out of school, and they think that we just like to do school all the time, which kinda makes me mad and then, like, we all get stressed out and depressed."

"Do you get depressed?" I asked Rhea.

" I don't get depressed, I just get mad and angry."

Students are busy and often feel overloaded by teachers, family, school, and extra curricular activities. Feeling unable to meet all of these demands stirs up lots of emotions in these girls. A theme that quickly emerged was that they tend to respond to these feelings of helplessness by getting angry. Adele shared, "Like, we have so much going on all the time and it's like there's no time to just relax. Like you have so much homework, you have sports, you have teachers getting mad at you and parents getting mad at you. It's like 'Solve all these problems' and it's like all too much to handle and it makes you go, like madder."

Adele shared that her family is a constant source of stress. "Family problems stress me out too. They want us to be responsible, and we are, but they expect us to do, like, so much more. Like I got into a fight with my dad this morning about responsibility and everything. But like even if they just expect you to be at a higher level when you can't, or where you are right now is not good enough for them."

Tess also feels frustrated with her father; their relationship is a source of stress for her. "And my dad stresses me out because my parents just got a divorce recently....but my dad he doesn't understand me and I don't get along with him very well. But he still wants me to come over and stuff. And he's got this really tiny apartment and he says he's can't afford things but he can."

Homework appeared to be an enormous source of stress for all the girls. When I asked which stressor they would like to better control, they all agreed that it would be homework. Tess said, "I don't have time to do [homework]. So you know, dance is more important to me, right, so I leave the homework."

Rhea mentioned that school, homework, teachers and time were stressors that she would like to get under control. "We should get more breaks, longer lunch, start later, get off earlier, less homework. We should get like a free period to do all our homework - a spare. It's for homework, like, not just so you can go out - so you don't have so much to do after school."

Adele agreed, "We shouldn't get homework unless we don't finish an assignment in class. Like they shouldn't at the end of class, after we've worked on an assignment in class say, 'Okay, now for homework--' what's the point of that?!"

The girls were aware of what behaviours constituted both positive and negative coping. They suggested that some positive things people their age do to cope with stress include getting involved in "activities like sports and after-school stuff" (Michelle), "Pretty much keeping themselves busy, if they're like having problems with their family then they will probably go out" (Rhea) and "…going to talk with whoever the problem is with" (Tess).

"What are some negative things you see people your age doing to cope with stress?" I asked.

Tess shared, "Crying and being really over-dramatic; hitting and breaking things. I broke a door once! My sister was really ticking me off so I kicked a hole in the door." She later shared that there are two holes kicked in her bedroom door. "I must have done that another time, but I don't remember when," she said. This sort of reaction was not unique to Tess.

Adele said that she likes to "break things; I don't know; smash things. Like you just get into a fight and run up to your room and slam the door. That's what I do. Or I go, like, just throw stuff to the ground and it might break - it depends what it is."

"What do you think, Rhea?" I asked.

"If they're in a fight then they might just like, get in, like, keep on pushing and pushing, like, keep on, like, they get really, really mad and then they start yelling and screaming and then everyone's really mad and then you freak and go in your room, or something, and slam the door and all the stuff falls. 'Cause I have stuff on my wall and if I slam my door then sometimes stuff falls and then that gets me really mad and then I just throw stuff everywhere."

When Rhea talked about 'pushing and pushing' she was referring to verbal and emotional pushing. She explained further, "Yeah, and then you say a lot and if you say one thing and it's bad, but then you just keep going and going because that thing didn't hurt the person. So you want to keep saying things that you know you're going to regret but you know will hurt them and that's all you want to do when you're angry. You just want to hurt them." The others agreed that when they are mad, they show no restraint. Their verbal attacks are on purpose, and their goal is to hurt the other person as much as they can.

Adults act as coping role models for the children and youth in their care. When children witness negative coping, it can lead to the children coping in the same way, since coping is a learned behaviour. A downward spiral may then ensue, as children imitate the poor coping strategies that they have come to learn. Rhea shared about how her mother's boyfriend, who lives with her family, uses alcohol as a means to cope with

stress. "Like, my Mom's boyfriend, like when he's really stressed out, like on the weekends he always drinks and, like, he gets very drunk all the time and he's like 'dangerous.' He's kinda' like an alcoholic but only on the weekends, but he won't go to like rehab for alcoholics." Rhea has identified her mother's boyfriend's drinking as a stressor for her, and as a coping strategy for him. Understanding that he uses alcohol to cope and not liking it will not necessarily protect Rhea from using alcohol herself as a means to cope in the future.

After the students shared these personal stories with me, I asked them how I could help. "If there were any skills that I could teach you, to get a better handle on your stress, what would they be?"

Rhea replied, "Really to not over-react and not yell as much." When I asked how this could be helpful, she replied, "I won't be yelling as much and I won't be as angry, and I won't slam doors."

Michelle shared that she would like to learn to be a better communicator, "...so, like, a big argument doesn't turn into, like, a big fight."

Mood Swing: Meeting Tess in the Classroom

During these interviews, these girls were animated and dynamic. Tess shared a great deal about the stress of her family situation and the hectic pace of her life. Following these interviews, I was really excited about beginning the intervention. The girls clearly articulated aspects of their lives that cause them stress and the methods that they currently use to cope. I could hardly wait to get into their classroom and channel some of that energy into interesting class discussions, and teach them to harness that energy and put it into positive methods of coping. I also sensed that I had really made a

connection with each of these girls, spending close to two hours with them. They shared, from my perception, some really significant, personal aspects of their lives.

I used the information gathered through all of the focus group interviews to map out an intervention for the students, focusing on skills that I thought would equip them with healthy ways of coping with stress. I felt that I had a good grasp of their stressors, the ways that they coped, and their personal interests. All of these things combined gave me an interesting context in which to frame the skills.

To describe my first day of teaching at Yorkdale School, I would say that it represented one of the biggest mood swings among adolescents that I have ever witnessed. I thought that I had built some rapport with these students during the interviews, but many acted completely different in the context of the larger class. Tess, who shared intimate details with me about her life suddenly stared at me, arms crossed, slouched down low on her chair, looking through a sheet of bangs that covered her eyes. I thought that she would be an ally, someone who would buy in. But there was no buying in to anything, I quickly learned.

Initially, I was disappointed in many students' 'too cool to do this' attitude. Many who chatted incessantly during interviews shared very little during classtime. They seem to be concerned about how they looked to their peers. Following one class at the beginning of the intervention, Tess stopped to talk with Mrs. Smith after class. "I was talking to my mom about the things that we're doing in this class and my mom said that I'm too young to learn this stuff. I'll learn it as an adult." This was revealing to me. First, it piqued my interest that Tess would talk to her mother about the intervention at home. It was also helpful for me to learn that Tess' mother did not believe that the skills Tess was

learning were necessary at this point in her life. Tess is close with her mother and respects her opinion. This comment from her mother may have been a turning point for Tess and her involvement in the intervention. If her mother did not think that Tess needed these skills, then perhaps Tess decided that she did not need them. Since Tess exerts such influence over her peers, perhaps once Tess decided not to put any effort into learning these skills, her gang followed. Without her mother's endorsement, I was likely not going to get far with Tess.

Early in the intervention, I prepared a lesson on "4 Key Reasons to Be Positive." The key points were recorded on poster paper and taped to a cupboard. These reasons included:

1. A positive outlook improves performance.

2. A positive mindset improves relationships.

3. A positive outlook improves a person's quality of life.

4. A positive attitude gives us energy, while a negative attitude zaps us of our energy. (Please see Appendix A, page 192 for complete details of lesson).

After this class, Tess privately challenged the "4 Key Reasons to Be Positive" list. She objected to the statement that read "*A positive attitude gives us energy, while a negative attitude zaps us of our energy.*" She went on to explain a time when she had a big fight with her mother just before going on stage to perform at a dance competition. She went on to dance really well, and was awarded with five medals at that competition.

Tess' tough questions made me a better teacher and her opposition challenged my own thinking of where we needed to go next in the intervention. After reflection and careful consideration, I realized that I needed to follow-up this lesson with an explanation

of the eight basic emotions. It seemed very important to discuss with students that they had control over whether they used the energy produced by emotions in a positive manner or a negative manner. It was a choice. At the time, I had no idea that Tess' comment would change the course of where this intervention was headed.

<p align="center">Tess on Private Thoughts & Sharing</p>

I began the following class by sharing that an interesting discussion arose after last class regarding emotions and energy. I said, "Tess, would you like to share about it with the class?"

To my query she flatly replied, "No."

"Would it be okay for me to share about it with the class?"

Again she said, "No." I got the picture, and I left her example alone, proceeding to discuss how almost all emotions give us energy, using examples from sport and life. Initially I was surprised that Tess did not seize the opportunity to tell her story. During the interviews, she could not tell me enough about her life, her thoughts and feelings. I later learned how private certain thoughts were for Tess, and that she did not like to share her private feelings publicly. Fair enough.

A few classes later I followed up with Tess on a piece of homework that had not been submitted, which asked students to write about a time when they harnessed the energy from an emotion and used it positively, and a time when they harnessed the energy from an emotion and used it negatively. "I didn't get that piece of homework from you yet, Tess. Did you have any questions about it? Does it make sense?"

Tess replied, "I don't want to do it. It's too personal."

"I understand. No problem," I said. During our final interview Tess explained that she is willing to share her private thoughts out loud, but would rather not write them down on paper. Again, fair enough. Recording private thoughts on to paper is risky. Written thoughts are permanent, and can also easily be misinterpreted. And if the wrong person ever got a hold of someone else's personal thoughts, that significantly increases one's vulnerability.

Working with students in a school setting holds potential for a "creative, contextualized, realistic, flexible, rigorous, and illuminating experience" (Macintyre, 2000, p. 7). However, a classroom situation often sets up a power imbalance. This power imbalance can make it difficult for some students to muster up the confidence to share that they are not comfortable participating in some aspects of a class discussion or research study. Like teachers, researchers must acknowledge that students do have a right to refuse to participate. Macintyre (2000) warns that children are unlikely, perhaps even unable to say 'no' which can leave them vulnerable to exploitation. Thus ensuring that students' rights are respected is essential. In order to protect the rights of the students I worked with, I informed them that if they felt uncomfortable, they were free to not respond to interview questions, homework assignments or participate in class discussions without penalty or prejudice. These points were highlighted within the letter of consent, and students were also reminded about it throughout the study.

Although a few other students did not hand in select pieces of homework, saying that they forgot or did not have time, Tess was the only student who made me aware that she was unwilling to submit a piece of work. At the conclusion of the intervention students presented their thoughts on "attitude" using a variety of approaches. Despite

writing a very interesting poem, Tess made a decision to not present her poem to the class. I do appreciate that there could be a great deal of performance anxiety for students to present their work in front of their peers. Because many students presented in pairs or small groups, they seemed to really enjoy the experience. Tess was not too shy to get up in front of her peers to help read aloud the lyrics of a song chosen by Rhea and Adele, but sharing her own work was something that Tess was not comfortable with. I respected Tess' decisions to say 'no' and I was impressed by her confidence to tell me so.

<div align="center">Exploring Emotions & Anger</div>

Several classes were spent exploring emotion. A recurring theme during class discussions was the topic of anger. Many students felt that anger was a positive emotion to have, since it yielded so much energy. Many did not consider anger to be a negative emotion, because of the natural high that they experienced as a result of it. Initially I thought that what I had learned about their involvement in sports and the performing arts was going to provide a constructive context for teaching coping skills. Following the class discussions on emotion, I learned that a different context was going to be more effective, and my focus shifted to teaching students about coping skills as a means to cope with emotions and the energy yielded from building anger.

A class discussion occurred one day regarding the anger students like to feel when playing sports, because of the competitive edge that it gives them. Mrs. Smith then turned the discussion around, challenging students to think of other variables needed to have a 'competitive edge.' "If we pull the anger piece out of sport, what other things could give you a competitive edge?" she asked.

Tess publicly announced, "Hate." This comment made me think that it is nearly impossible for Tess to reach beyond the negative state in which she is currently immersed. She embodies negativity, so bracketing out negative emotions to think of an alternate positive emotion is such a challenge for her.

Turning a Corner: Making Connections

In an interview with Mrs. Smith at the conclusion of the intervention, she talked about the anger she noticed emanating from so many of the students. She knew that they were angry, but could not understand why. She said that life at home was good for so many, and that they are living "the good life" in Yorkdale Heights. "Life doesn't get much better than this!" she suggested. When I asked Mrs. Smith if she felt that we had gotten to the bottom of why her students were so angry she said, " Yes, and that's where I think the relationship was forming with you and them. Once they saw the relevance. Once they started to understand the relevance of square breathing[4], I think they were able to make a loop over to 'This is why we square breathe' and 'This is why I'm angry,' and 'These are the different emotions'....I think that's where it started to change 'cause we had some really good classes when that was happening." In Mrs. Smith's opinion, connecting the coping skills content to managing anger was a turning point in my relationship with the students. It helped students to see the relevance of the information that I was delivering, and legitimized my presence in their classroom. It was affirming to hear that Mrs. Smith felt that I had connected with her students.

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[4] Square breathing is an extension of diaphragmatic breathing. In square breathing, a person imagines drawing one side of a square with each inhale and exhale. For example, when inhaling, the individual imagines drawing a line across the top of the square, then holds it. He/she then exhales while imagining drawing the line down the right side. He/she then inhales again, imagining drawing a line across the bottom of the square, and holds it. Then finally exhales it as he/she imagines drawing a line up the left side.

The first class back after spring break was different. Tess was out of town and had not yet returned. With Tess away, the atmosphere in the class was much less 'charged.' Tess's friends were more responsive to me, and I actually had a conversation with Adele. "Hey Adele, I noticed that you didn't hand in your homework from February 28th. I am wondering if you understand what the questions are asking."

"No, I don't really know what you mean by 'the teams I play on.'" I then explained what the questions meant, as I crouched down and made eye contact.

"How is diaphragmatic breathing going for you?" I asked.

"It's going okay, but I think I could use it when I'm in a fight with someone," she said, referring to a verbal battle.

"Sounds like a great strategy," I affirmed. We made a really good connection that day. Adele even smiled after our conversation. When Tess was absent there was definitely a different feeling in the classroom. As a result, the lessons went better, and I was able to draw more out of the other girls in the class.

Tess' Return

When Tess returned, I was hopeful that I had turned a corner with the other girls in the class. Tess came back with attitude, crossing her arms when she looked at me, and expressing a sigh of disgust when I said we were going to do some relaxing. She just sat there with her eyes open and didn't participate. Of interest, Adele and Rhea did. Maybe I had turned a corner with a couple of the girls during Tess' absence.

During a class discussion on positive attitude, Mrs. Smith stated, "Even despite negative circumstances, there is always the choice to carry a positive attitude. For example, say you just bought a new car, and it is beautiful. And you are still paying for it,

and then you get into a really bad car accident. The car is wrecked. If you chose to be positive you could turn that around by saying 'Well, at least no one got hurt. We're all still okay.'"

Tess interrupted her, "If someone said that to me, I'd slap 'em." Although Tess may be performing for her peers by making strong statements like this one, the way in which she blurts it out, her facial expression, her body language, and tone of voice gives the impression that she is a very angry young woman.

Tess was one of many students who expressed a great deal of anger. This level of anger has implications for the tone that is set in the class, and affects everyone. I also believe that the anger these students are feeling has implications for their futures. Because functioning at such an angry level all of the time feels normal to some of these students, it holds potential for them to be abusive in their relationships. Addictions to numb the pain of the root cause of the anger is another potential risk. Addiction may then lead into a downward spiral in many other aspects of their lives. Those students who are driven by anger, and do not understand the root of what is making them feel so angry are, in my opinion, at-risk. Thus, I recommend that these students dig deep to get to the bottom of the anger that they are feeling.

In sum, working with Mrs. Smith and her grade eight Human Ecology class was a rich, and enlightening experience. My encounters with this group ended up being one of the most humbling, challenging, and introspective tasks of my career. Humbling because I had experienced so much success teaching coping skills to children between the ages of two and twelve in the past, and expected to carry that success into working with these students. Given that the focus group interviews went so well, I expected that the

intervention would go just as well. When it failed to go as I had imagined, I was surprised and very humbled. Humbling experiences can be effective when they spur us on to make changes for the better. Since I was unable to rely on strategies that had worked in the past, I was challenged on a daily basis to test out new content that would be meaningful to these students. I was also challenged to experiment with innovative styles of delivering the information, to capture and maintain their interest. It felt like I was starting from scratch, and in the end, these students were given a truly customized intervention which they shaped, aimed at addressing stress and coping at this point in their lives. Finally, this experience was introspective because I constantly reflected on the information the students shared with me. It was like putting together pieces of fifteen discrete but interconnected puzzles, by gathering information from initial focus group interviews, in-class dialogues, homework submitted, and the final interviews. Each interaction gave me more information to build a better intervention. Reflecting on who these students were also gave me a genuine appreciation for what stressors they experience, and how they cope.

<div align="center">Ending on a Positive</div>

Near the end of the intervention, students began asking, "Are we going to do relaxing today?" in hopes that we would. After making the connection to using deep breathing as a way to gain self-control when feeling angry, students began to see its application in their lives, and started to enjoy engaging in it during classtime. During our final class, Mrs. Smith challenged her students to think of feedback to give to me after our three months of working together. "I liked the square breathing," offered Tim.

"You taught us very well how to use the diaphragmatic breathing, not just what it is," said Billy.

"The positive thinking part was my favourite, " shared Adele.

"I learned how to make the best of every situation," said Chris.

"I liked all of the fun activities and the way you taught us," Shane shared.

"Yeah," nodded several others in agreement. In final interviews, everyone with the exception of Tess said that the skills were helpful and that they would use them in their daily lives. Mrs. Smith used the lessons that I had created for this class and taught them to her grade seven students. She also continued to employ elements of the intervention including relaxation, once the research had concluded, providing catalytic validity (discussed in chapter 2) of the importance and effectiveness of the content covered.

After I thanked the students for their hard work and participation in the intervention, Mrs. Smith presented me with a card from her, a card from the class, and a gift. A few of the boys approached me as the class was dismissed to say thank you, and as she was leaving, Rhea came beside me and gave me a 'side hug.' In the end, perhaps I made more of an emotional connection with the students than I thought.

In the end, I spent over nine hours with these students in the classroom, and 14 hours interviewing with them, totalling over 23 hours of contact time (see Appendix C for breakdown of contact time). I wish I had had more than three months to work with these students. I think I only began to catch glimpses of who these students really are. To follow is a poem written by Tess, which she gave to me at the conclusion of the intervention. It was folded up and handed in. Tess does not say whether she is writing

about herself, but the depth of emotion expressed in this poem might be a window into Tess's heart.

Through Pain's Harsh Eyes

She alone sits on her bed, music through her ears, hands hold her head.

A tear races down her soft rosy cheek, she's forgotten her heart continues to beat.

Her eyes so blue, tired, but wide, they blink then close, she wished she had died.

Pull your covers up high, and fade away.

Go to sleep right now, enough crying for today.

Her vision goes blurry, and roses turn black,

things she tried to forget she wants them back.

The sun is setting, it's almost five, tonight she bleeds to know she's alive.

The scars don't fade. They tell a story of each time you hurt her and were not sorry.

Floating on a cloud of nothing she's told, dressed in black, that her make-up's too bold.

Wanting to live, her heart skips a beat.

Too broken to run free, slowly admitting defeat.

A rainbow of pain arches over her tonight, taunting and teasing not a colour in sight.

Watching what she's missing fly by and by,

behind the shadow of her past she's living a lie.

Bearing a secret soul she's not willing to share,

why talk to her, it not like she'd care.

CHAPTER 4

Sarah Plain & Tall

The following three results chapters will be told in the form of narratives, to capture my conversations, observations, and interactions with several students. The narratives are based on actual interview data, observational data, student homework submissions, and my reflective journal entries. This style of writing is intended to a) introduce you to the students, b) help you to empathize with their stressors, c) paint a picture of how they cope and, d) breathe life into the results and subsequent recommendations.

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My heart broke as I watched the tears of pain roll down Sarah's cheeks. After nine weeks of working together, it seems that this research study has really caused her to dig deep as she discusses some of the pain that it is to be her. "Nobody thinks I'm special. Boys are all dumb. How can they do that to a person, picking on them the way they pick on me?"

I reminded her that "All princes start as frogs," in a feeble attempt to lighten her mood.

"It's hard to be positive when you are picked on all the time. Those other people ~ how can they live with themselves?"

"Don't give them all your energy, Sarah," I countered, "they don't deserve it. Don't spend your energy there."

"It's hard!" she screeched at me, "I hate them! I just wish the whole Shields family would be killed in a car crash!" Turning to me, she asked, "Do you know the

Shields family?" I do not know the Shields family personally, but since Mr. Shields is a prominent figure in the community, I am familiar with who he is.

Sarah went on to fill me in, and then referring to Mr. Shields she said, "Oh sure, nice family on the outside. There's just one little thing that disturbs the image: his family! He's got a rotten son. His son Mark - he's a son of a beep[5] - you know? You get the picture? I wish he would choke on his own poison and die!" she screamed, sobbing.

Sarah's teaching assistant Mrs. Adams walked over with a box of tissue and sat down. "This is good," she said. "She needs to get this anger out. We've been working on encouraging Sarah to write these feelings down."

"Maybe you could jump on your trampoline today?" I suggest.

"I guess," Sarah responds.

"You know Sarah, today in class we talked about forgiveness as a way to be more positive. Wouldn't it be better to let some of that anger roll off of you?" suggests Mrs. Adams.

I went on to further this thought, "Sarah, when you forgive, you release the other person, and by doing that, you release the grip they have on you. Anger then has no more power over you. Those people have no more power over you when you forgive and let it go."

"Yeah, right," Sarah retorts. Mrs. Smith approaches us and sits down across from Sarah, saying, "You know, Sarah, I believe that what goes around, comes around."

"Oh, so you mean that one day Mark will be bullied as bad as he bullied me?" she questions.

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[5] All quotes taken from interview transcripts are verbatim. In some instances, student's have "censored" their own words, such as Sarah did above.

"Well, maybe he'll be in a different situation that will make him realize how he has treated others, and how he should treat people," replied Mrs. Smith.

"Well, I hope so," said Sarah.

In another pathetic attempt to be encouraging, I piped in, "Only two more months left, and then you're outta here!"

"Ha!" Sarah blurts. "It feels like two million, trillion years."

Mrs. Smith broke in, turning the conversation in a different direction. "Next year, you will be going to Sherbrook High School, and you'll have lots of friends to choose from, and it will all be new."

"No one will like me there. All of those people have their nice little lives, " said Sarah.

"You have a nice life too, Sarah," Mrs. Smith counters.

"Yeah, if you call being picked on and being treated like a freak everyday," says Sarah.

The Person Behind the Pain

"What's it is like to be you?" I asked Sarah during an interview.

"Awful!" she shouted back at me.

"What's awful?" I asked.

"Well, I have to put up with friends who try to impress people that are *rude*, by being rude themselves. *And, apparently, God made me His chew toy 'cause God just loves to pick on me!*[6] "

I probed further, "What's it like going to Yorkdale School?"

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[6] Italics used to emphasize when certain words were shouted during an interview.

"It's terrible 'cause that's where the stuff happens." She went on to share that her community is a good community to live in, but the people in it are bad. Sarah ended our interview by saying, "this school is rotten!"

Sarah's descriptive imagination and ability to verbalize her feelings causes her hurt to really come to life. There is so much pain in her heart and in her words as she shares what it is like to be her. Sarah, who is white, has been attending this school since kindergarten, and has always been different. She has a learning disability. Sarah has a team of people supporting her in her education, including two very involved parents, a full time teaching assistant who travels with her to each class every day, and a counsellor outside of the school. Sarah is a very bright, incredibly articulate, and creative student who is also a quick thinker and an amazing writer. Sarah appears to have no "filter" and fully speaks whatever is on her mind. How lonely and isolating it must be to be Sarah. In this class, and apparently throughout the school day, she is needled, teased, and bullied.

Other students are not kind to Sarah. While some do not treat her with unkindness, neither do they make a move to include her or invite her into their circle. Perhaps that would be too risky, after all, she is different. Sarah is sad and mad. In the three months that I worked at Yorkdale School, I did not see her laugh or smile once. Instead, she sat slumped forward, arms folded, and head hung low.

Sarah on "Stress"

During our first interview together, I asked students to explain what stress is. Sarah's definition of stress was highly descriptive. In her words, "Well stress is sort of like, um, soda pop in a can. You know, imagine that it's calm at first but then someone comes along and starts to shake that can and you gotta' let the stress out to someone right

away because the more you keep it down, well, the bigger the mess it will be when you open it up." For Sarah, stress really is like a shaken can of soda pop. The hurt that she has experienced in her life is expressed with overt anger and hostility toward others. She is confrontational and ready to unleash her wrath on anyone who crosses her.

Changing Relationships, the Shock of Exclusion & Popular Girls

"Going to school with 'Team Psycho' and listening to pointless conversations about boys" are a few things that cause stress for Sarah. When I probed further, for examples of things that would cause someone her age to experience stress, Sarah launched into a dialogue about the pain of changing relationships and being excluded during adolescence. "Well, there are some people who have been friends with someone for a long time but then their friends start to make friends with someone else and ignore their old friend, so that would cause stress."

She explains further, "I remember when I was younger, well, you didn't really just have a few best friends, like, all the girls in your room were best friends. Sarah went on to share how her former friends have gone on to enjoy the antics of a boy she describes as "cruel to the bone," a person who has made life very miserable for some underdogs. Sarah wailed, "I thought they were my friends. They used to be when we were younger. This isn't going to reach any of them, right? Good, because *they're just a bunch of miserable little snots who've got mosquitoes stuck up their butts.*"

Adolescence can be a time of changing social groups, and many of the girls whom Sarah used to play with have moved on to different social groups. Sarah is experiencing a classic case of the "shock of exclusion" that David Elkind (1984) first described. Adolescence brings with it many "shocks" and one of them is the shock of exclusion,

where individuals who used to be friends, because proximity made it convenient, seek out different friends, based on similar values, attitudes, and interests. With increased mobility, proximity no longer determines with whom an individual maintains a friendship. This shock of exclusion has left a huge void in Sarah's life, and it is very painful for her.

The stress of being excluded has grown into contempt for the girls who used to be Sarah's friends when they were younger. She spends much of her energy despising these girls. Through informal observations, it would appear that Sarah can be quite confrontational with her former friends, and shows little restraint when it comes to sharing her thoughts and feelings. These girls, who have become the "popular girls" exclude her, ignore her, roll their eyes at her, and when provoked, verbally duke it out with Sarah.

Sarah feels that these girls are shallow, and all they care about are boys. "...basically these people, all they're concerned about is boys, boys, boys, and that's pretty much it. And here's something I've learned: If these girls can't find anyone else to be mean to, they turn on each other. So, maybe they're not as close as they appear to be to everyone else." Sarah's observations are sharp, and so are her words. Her confrontational nature can, at times, contribute to a tense classroom climate.

Sarah suggested that perhaps some of these girls are stressed out with their own lives, and pick on her as a means to vent some of their own stress. Sarah went on to explain, "Maybe most of the girls, mainly my ex-friends, maybe most of them have got stress in their lives and maybe they're dealing with stress in a negative way by picking on me, and stuff." When I asked her what advice she has for those girls, to help them cope

more positively, she shouted, *"The next time you have the urge to play the cruel game of 'torture the freak,' keep your big, fat, trap shut!"*

Sarah and I explored the need for people to feel popular, or to be accepted by the popular crowd. Sarah felt that "Only pathetically stupid and desperate people would" want to be friends with popular people, if those popular people are mean. Sarah also suggested that others want to be popular "even if it means not being sensitive to your best friend's feelings." Sarah then launched into an attack of her friend who is striving to get in with the popular crowd. "I don't know. Here's something ironic," Sarah said. "A lot of people do things they think will make them popular, you know, like bully people who are socially beneath them when in reality it just makes them look like an insecure 'wanna be!' That's what Alli looks like now. Someone who's insecure and a total 'wanna be'…. The only reason why Alli even wants to be friends with Dawn is because she's impressed by her oh so heavenly, skinny figure, and by her cool style of clothes and makeup. And she also wants to be friends with Andrea because Andrea is from Africa, right, and she thinks that probably Africans have a lot of cool jewelry and stuff like that, and she's afraid that if she's no longer friends with them, all that stuff will just be taken away from her. *I think I'd rather be a dork for the rest of my life than be a totally inconsiderate wart to my friends."*

Sarah is very upset that her friend Alli is attracted to the popular crowd, and is trying to fit in with them. Alli lets Sarah down when she fails to speak up in defence of the underdog, when Sarah thinks Alli should. Instead, Alli sits idly by, and watches the drama unfold. This infuriates Sarah, as she laments "Well, now I'm not sure if I want to

be Alli's friend any more. *That's not Alli! Someone stole her and replaced her with this robot clone of her!"*

Girls' emotions tend to be very social in nature and their negative emotions are often caused by interpersonal conflict rising out of what they perceive as breaches in behaviour expected from peers, family and romantic partners. Adolescent females desire solidarity with these people, and when there is a breach of trust, relational strains and stress result (Larson & Asmussen, 1991). Sarah feels a breach of trust with Alli, whom she feels has let her down by attempting to break into a new social groups.

Sarah went on to share a time when she was involved in a group science project. "And, you know what? One time during our science project, guess who I was partnered with? Alli and Andrea! I hate Andrea - I can't stand her." Dripping with sarcasm, she goes on, "Who wants to be like her? Oh, wait, I know! That girl I was telling you about - Alli - she's the friend who didn't listen to me when I tried to tell her about those rude girls. When I tried to tell her about how mean and manipulative Dawn was, she wouldn't listen to me." My hypothesis is that Sarah truly wants to protect those she cares about from the popular girls whom she sees as "rude little snots," and also feels threatened that if her friends try to get into that crowd, that she might lose them, or already has.

One day during a game of dodgeball in gym class, an incident arose where one of the popular girls hit one of Sarah's friends in the head with a ball. Sarah explains, "Well, Dawn - accidentally or purposely, I don't know - hit one of my friends, Joy, on the head with a ball and, um, Joy was crying. This really got to me because she's normally a tough girl so I sat by her. And you know what? I was just about ready to commit my first murder because while I was comforting Joy, Dawn was standing there smiling.

Yeah, she actually was, as though it was the cutest thing in the world. And, even though she said she was sorry, I could tell from the look on her face she didn't really mean it.... And then she walked away with a flip of her hair. *Little snot*!" When I asked Sarah what she could do to cope with the pain she feels at the hands of these girls, she suggested that a good strategy to try might be to, "not [focus]on the friends that betrayed you and try focusing on the people who are still with you, no matter what." That would be a very good coping technique for Sarah, if she can harness the energy produced from her anger, and channel it in a positive manner.

Thoughts on Boys & Bullies

"Who bullies you?" I asked Sarah.

She shared, "It's mostly from guys, you know. Guys are like bloodhounds, they can smell fear.... They find your weakness, then they use it against you.... Anyway, if you try to stand up for yourself, the guys just sort of point and laugh at you. They actually think they're being funny." I cannot imagine how one would cope with daily, incessant bullying. When asked how she copes, she shares, "Unfortunately, standing up to them does not work; neither does violence. And neither does ignoring because they still continue to do it and they laugh at you. Like, the boys actually think they're being funny; well, if *they're* being funny, do you know what that means? *I'm the Queen of France!* If I was, I'd throw them in a dungeon!"

With all of the rage that Sarah feels toward those who pick on her, she could not help but muse over their possible fate. "They're going to end up in jail, or they'll end up working in a drive-in, or they'll become taxi cab drivers, or they'll cut hair at the mall!" Further on she elaborates, "Actually, the bullies, in my opinion - all the people who pick

on me now - are not going to be successful later in life. Like, um, when they're busy picking on people all the time, they're not going to get a job because they won't be able to relate to people so good. And, if you act like an insensitive beast, you'll lose your job 'cause you won't care what happens to it." Her final prediction of their probable fate: "I think that one day at least one of my tormentors will anger someone who's bigger than them. That person's going to beat the living daylights out of them!" she said with satisfaction.

Being teased is not something that has suddenly happened at the onset of adolescence for Sarah. She shares, "You know how there's always one kid that every boy is going to pick on? That was me and, um, well stuff like that doesn't make me in the mood to do my homework and I sometimes leave my homework till late at night" which often augments stress for Sarah in her life.

The Risk of Rage

There is no doubt that an individual who is persistently treated unfairly, picked on, and bullied would feel angry and helpless. Sarah's anger toward her perpetrators is strong, and is a "red flag" for me. I fear that her anger may one day lead to an act of rage. If fully unleashed on someone at a later date, Sarah's rage could put her, or others, at grave risk.

Sarah shared in a written piece of work that after being incessantly needled by a boy, she dug her nails into his arm, and was very proud to have left marks behind. I asked her to explain what happened. Sarah did not relate the incident, but said, "He seemed sorry about it - well, he didn't until after I hurt him...he had it coming." The satisfaction

from having dug nail marks in this boy's arm must have left Sarah feeling as though she had some control, and was less of a victim, something she does not experience often.

During an interview, I reminded Sarah about a class discussion we had on elite athletes and the amazing skills they have honed, such as commitment and drive. "What kinds of those skills do you wish you could just grab hold of?" I asked.

" I don't know - the ability to beat someone up!" she said emphatically. I mentioned to Sarah that I sensed a lot of aggression in her. She agreed. I decided to be blunt and ask her if she thought that she was really going to hurt someone one day. She thought about it and responded, "I might if they continue to push my buttons....People who have hurt me - *if they're going to throw a tomato at me, I'm going to throw a brick back at them!*"

One homework assignment asked students to write about an incident where they experienced an emotion, and took the energy yielded from that emotion and used it in a positive manner, and an example of when they used it in a negative manner. Sarah explained, "The worst negative energy I remember happened when William nearly drove Xavier out of school and then bragged about it. Then one of [William's] cronies made a stupid remark about making miracles happen. It made me angry that someone could have that much cruelty and not even feel the least bit guilty about it. I felt enraged at William and at the people who actually supported him for it and I still feel that fury today. It was frustrating that I couldn't do anything about it. I will never understand why some people can be so thoughtless and cruel." Not only is Sarah enraged when she is teased, but when it happens to others she empathizes to the extent that it causes rage to well up inside of her, in defence of the victim. This desire to get behind the marginalized was re-

emphasized in a subsequent piece of homework, where Sarah cited "being teased unjustly, seeing friends teased unjustly, and bullying in general, whether at me or someone else" were things that zapped her of her positive energy.

Pain

Sarah cried in my presence several times, both after class, and during interviews. In one tearful moment, she expressed her pain in these words: "Why do boys have to be mean to me? What is it about me? Why? What have I ever done to them? Maybe I'm just a rotten person who doesn't deserve anything!....It's not fair! They should be the ones crying and being miserable! They don't deserve to be happy." Her pain is very real and very deep. She suffers at the hands of both male and female classmates. She does have a handful of friends at school, but her very strong opinions and confrontational disposition may make it difficult to for friends to stay loyal to Sarah.

A Supportive Family & a Positive Self-Concept

Sarah is the youngest of four children and the only child still living at home. Her parents appear to be very supportive of her, and it would seem that Sarah has begun to talk with her mom and older sister at length about the problems she experiences at school. If she was ever in trouble, or had a really big problem, Sarah mentioned that she would go to her sister to talk about it. Having significant supports in one's life is critical for any youth. For Sarah, the support of her family, and in particular these women, help her to cognitively re-appraise situations, and act as a 'voice of reason' for her.

One factor that can potentially put some youth at risk is their inability to positively fill their leisure time. For those without leisure skills, youth often find themselves getting into trouble (see Nazer-Bloom, 1996). For Sarah this is not an issue.

At home she works on her laptop, surfs the internet, watches TV and rides her bike in the park. The fact that Sarah has honed leisure skills is a good distraction for her. She is skilled and talented in many creative arts and had no difficulty thinking of ten things she is good at, which include: "reading, writing stories, drama (acting), photography, singing, bowling, cooking, computer games, computer (internet) research, and movie trivia games." Engaging in these and other activities put Sarah in good stead as they serve not only to fill her time, but can also be used as methods of coping.

Sarah's parents attended a triad conference, where parents, teacher, and student are invited to discuss the student's mid-term progress. This occurred about nine weeks into the intervention. Sarah's parents wanted to discuss Sarah's involvement in the study. Apparently, as a result of the topics being addressed during the intervention, a lot of emotions were coming to the surface that they were having to deal with at home. Together Sarah and her parents began discussing 'fitting in,' not being popular, not fitting into certain styles of clothes, and feeling upset at certain girls. All of these things that were brewing up in Sarah were now becoming topics of conversation at home. Her parents stated that these discussions were causing Sarah some stress. During the interview Mrs. Smith asserted, "This is life! Sarah needs to deal with these issues!" Mrs. Smith told Sarah's parents that Sarah was working well in the groups during classtime, and that Sarah was presenting her work at the front of the class, and doing a great job. "Sarah lit up at this comment," Mrs. Smith later shared.

The dialogue occurring in Sarah's home as a result of the topics discussed during classtime really encouraged me. Any student who believes something covered at school is significant enough to share at home shows that the content is having some impact. The

dialogue that continued at home with Sarah's parents and sister demonstrates that Sarah is putting into practice some of the positive coping techniques discussed during our time together. Even though talking about issues relating to mean girls, bullies and popularity cause stress for Sarah, she was being equipped to learn how to cope with this stress during classtime, giving these skills a personally meaningful context for her. It is scary to think about how students would cope with this type of bullying without family support in place.

The support of Sarah's parents definitely enhances Sarah's self-concept. In one homework assignment I asked students to write about a time they experienced a strong emotion, and how they channelled the energy yielded from that emotion and put it into something positive. Sarah shared, "The best positive energy I remember happened when I was celebrating my birthday party. I decided to have a murder mystery and I planned the whole thing myself. I bought a Murder Mystery game at Wal-Mart, made an invitation list and decided everyone's parts. It was the best party I ever had because my friends and I got to act out parts and forget who we were. We laughed together as we discovered who we were married to and what kind of mischief we were all up to. It was great fun." Sarah's parents appear to go to great lengths to support their daughter, not only in academic pursuits, but socially as well. This sort of support will serve to continue to enhance Sarah's positive self-concept.

Effectiveness of the Intervention for Sarah

Right from the start of the intervention, Sarah was not too self-conscious to allow herself to get into the relaxation exercises during classtime. As a result, she appeared to really benefit from them. One day Sarah came in late to class, and had missed the

relaxation portion of our lesson, but still wanted to do it. She and Mrs. Adams went into another room, and started Sarah's day out with relaxing. Mrs. Adams later shared that she and Sarah had made a routine of starting each day with a relaxation session. Mrs. Adams felt that it started the day out on a positive note for Sarah, and helped them both to cope better later on in the day. As a facilitator, seeing students use the skills they have been taught, as well as witnessing them apply these skills in a variety of contexts was very heartening.

During classtime we discussed positive and negative self-talk, and how people sometimes speak to themselves in ways far worse than others would ever speak to them. We went on to discuss how negative self-talk affects our attitude about ourselves, and that it is better to speak to ourselves positively, since positive self-talk is more helpful and less defeating. In a written piece of work, Sarah shared examples of when she speaks negatively to herself, and offered solid suggestions regarding how to change the negative thoughts into more positive ones. "Sometimes I think there must be something wrong with me if my opinions are different from my friends." She also shared, "Sometimes I tell myself I am not very stylish when I see the clothes some of my friends are wearing." To counter these unhelpful thoughts, Sarah said that she would, "try very hard to tell myself that my friends are entitled to their opinions, even though they are different from mine." Regarding the clothing, Sarah observed, "when I look carefully, I realized [their clothes] are often from the same stores I get my clothes. I tell myself I look just fine."

Sarah is very self-aware, and has developed a very good sense of that which makes her feel angry, including: bullies, deleting computer work, boys who don't listen when adults lecture about bullying, friends who don't listen to her, going to school,

getting picked on, seeing other people being treated unfairly, and interruptions while working. Even more impressive is Sarah's ability to identify what cues her body is giving her when she is beginning to feel angry. Many students were unable to identify any physiological or psychological changes occurring in their bodies when anger sweeps over them. This level of self-awareness could be very helpful for Sarah to learn to get a better handle on her anger. "Increased breathing, a hot throat, a sudden urge to punch someone, a hot stomach, and tense muscles" were physiological and psychological responses Sarah experiences in response to anger. However, recognizing these anger cues early on in the fight or flight response, and then making a decision to respond positively will be very important for Sarah. Coping in the heat of anger was rehearsed during classtime, but it will be up to Sarah to make a conscious decision to take a deep breath and a step back, when she begins to recognize the cues her mind and body are giving her, when the anger begins to build.

It would appear by Sarah's list of things she does to cope with anger, that she has a good handle on how to control her anger, as she lists: a) listening to music, b) inhaling and exhaling, c) reading, d) day dreaming, e) writing stories, f) writing songs, g) doodling, and h) exercising. Her list was the most comprehensive of all her peers. In the same way that Sarah needs to practice taking a deep breath and a step back when she realizes that anger is rising in her, she also needs to rehearse these strategies for coping with anger, before she unleashes her fury on others. By taking the time and creating the space between herself and others, she will increase the likelihood that she will cope with her anger more positively.

Overall, I believe that the intervention was very successful for Sarah. During our time together, Sarah identified what makes her feel stressed, and what she does to cope. She has recognized exercise as a good way to help her get rid of anger, by jumping on her trampoline or riding her bike. She has begun to talk about the pain that she has lived with, and is developing some skills for coping with anger. The dialogue that has been occurring at home as a result of the intervention is a very positive sign that her parents are being made aware of the difficulties that Sarah experiences at school. Daily rehearsal of the relaxation skills will help Sarah to automate deep breathing and relaxation, as a response to stress and anger. Automating a relaxation response in the face of anger or stress would be a healthy way for Sarah to cope.

Sarah's Monologue

At the end of our twelve weeks together, students were asked to write a poem, song, story, rap, act out a skit, share favourite song lyrics or something along that line, to present to the class what they had learned during our time together. When Sarah was called, she approached the front of the class, and launched into the following monologue off the top of her head. It was apparent that these thoughts had been brewing in her mind for a long time. Notably, her performance was met with crossed arms, rolled eyes and "tisks" from some of her female peers.

Popularity

Popularity. Has anyone noticed it has the word "pop" in it, as in soda pop?

It looks great and tastes great, but you have to add things, to make it good.

In the end, it's just artificial flavouring and colouring. There are girls who

have it all: fantastic clothes, amazing make-up; guys just love them and

are willing to lose every shred of dignity for them. These are the type of girls a lot of people look up to, but I wonder what these popular girls would be like if we got to know them better? You might get off lucky and find a girl who is both pretty and nice, but other girls can be manipulative and downright nasty. Sadly, people don't look beyond that; the good looks are all you see and all you're going to get. There are some girls who are so fascinated by this, they're willing to use any means to become popular. Some decide to get popular at any cost, even if it means dumping your best friend. I must ask this: How is ditching your best friend supposed to get people to think you're "cool?" Will it win over respect? Or will it just get you feared and possibly hated? Their popularity earns them fear, power and hatred. I wonder if it is all really worth it?[7]

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[7] Sarah later typed out and shared her monologue with me. This is nearly verbatim of what she recited to her peers.

CHAPTER 5

Tim's Tapestry: The Fabric of One Canadian Boy

Tim is a tall, muscular fourteen year old boy who is passionate about his family, Martial Artist Jet Lee, basketball, and rap music. One on one, Tim is engaging, sincere and very talkative. In a classroom setting Tim is energetic, easily distracted, and a persistent talker. Initially, Tim's ceaseless talking, poor impulse control, and explosive reactions to certain students in the class made me feel discouraged and drained. His emotions boiled close to the surface, his voice was loud, and he was difficult to diffuse when set off. At first, I found that I had little opportunity to emotionally and intellectually connect with Tim, because so much of my energy was used to try and manage his outbursts. About halfway into the intervention, due in part to the new seating plan, Tim started to calm down, and we began to make progress. It wasn't until near the end of the intervention that Tim and I connected at an intellectual and emotional level, as he shared personal stories about his life, his family, and his culture. His sharing opened my eyes to the person behind the energy, and explained a great deal about his behaviour.

I have chosen to share Tim's story because it provides insight into the causes of stress for some adolescents, and demonstrates how some young people's methods of coping place them at risk. Tim is a visual minority, and he and his family have lived with discrimination and racism in Canadian society. The racial slurs that he has been subjected to prompt him to fight in defense of himself and his family. Tim's life can be viewed as a very intricate tapestry, each thread woven tightly to the next. Threads such as family, loyalty, culture, racism, fighting, and the media are all intricately connected. It is my goal in the following narrative to weave together all the pieces of the tapestry to show who

Tim is, what makes him feel stressed, how he copes, and how these elements may put him at risk.

A Strong Family Fabric: Introducing Tim and his Family

If you asked Tim to tell you a little bit about himself, he would share that he does well academically, he loves Martial Arts, basketball, and music. He has learned to speak nine different languages, and is good at "fighting, staying strong on the outside, basketball, exercise, and knowing music."

If you asked Mrs. Smith about Tim, she would tell you that he is a good kid who possesses really positive attributes. "He's honest, he's loyal, he's responsible, he's just a good person....Because of the importance his culture places on family, Tim has strong family values, and is also very respectful of his of parents," she said. Mrs. Smith really enjoyed Tim's spirited energy, and felt that if his energy was channeled positively, that he would be successful, but that if his energy was not channeled positively that Tim could be at-risk. "He could go either way," she wagered.

Tim is the second youngest of five sons in his family. He lives at home with his mother, father, and three brothers. He is a young man with tremendous responsibility. After school, Tim and his younger brother are home alone most nights until 11 o'clock. His parents each work two jobs. Tim prepares supper for his whole family, and has dinner waiting for his parents when they arrive home after work. "What else are you responsible for?" I queried.

"I wash the washrooms - two of them - and I vacuum the hardwood floor - I wash that, too. And then I wash the kitchen floor - I do the laundry, and I vacuum the whole house.... Basically, you can just say that I'm the man of the house right now."

"Wow, you do a lot to help your family," I marvelled.

"My dad comes home from work every day all tired, right, and you know, he can't do anything...and I feel bad for that....they've worked themselves too hard."

Tim comes from a family of hard working, determined people. Twenty-five years ago Tim's father and eldest brother crossed the ocean in a boat, leaving Tim's mother and two older brothers behind in Vietnam. They came to Canada with nothing, in search of a new life. They did not speak English. They settled in Winnipeg and have lived here ever since. It took ten years after Tim's father's journey to Canada, for his mother and two older brothers to obtain their "green cards" and immigrate to Canada. After re-uniting, Tim's parents had two more sons, Tim and his younger brother. When I revelled at the amazing story of determination and fortitude of his family, Tim shared, "We still have a family. You see, that's the thing. No one can take away my family - it's just too strong." Tim's love for his family is demonstrated through the loyalty he shows them. He is fiercely loyal, and as you will read further on, will fight anyone who calls down a member of his family.

Tim's eldest brother Tho[8] lives in Edmonton with his wife and three children. Tho became a father at the age of sixteen, married the mother of his child, and they have remained together for the last ten years. Tim shared that he is so proud of the father that Tho has become. Since the age of 16, Tho has taken good care of his son, and has inspired Tim to set goals for his life. "He has told me that if you want to do something, you picture, you will do it. You repeat it - you will do it," said Tim.

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[8] Tim was born in Canada and his parents gave him a *Canadian* name. Tim's three older brothers were born in Vietnam, and have Vietnamese names. As stated earlier, all names used in this narrative have been changed to protect individuals' identities.

Tim's second oldest brother, Bao, is totally committed to Tim, and Tim looks up to Bao as well. "What is it about your brother? Tell me about the qualities that he possesses that make him so special to you?" I asked.

"He always has a positive attitude. He's never negative, and if something bad happens, he'll make a joke out of it and he'll just cheer me up. That's the way he is. And he is a very nice guy. I like him." Tim went on to share that Bao has a lot of stylish clothes that he lets Tim borrow. This is exciting for Tim, because looking good is important to him. "He gives me his clothes 'cause he has a big wardrobe. And, you know, 'cause he has hook-ups, like, friends who work from everywhere, and they give him clothes that are, like, good, like posh brand names and that, and he just gets them free. His closet is huge, so he just hands me his clothes, sometimes. He's, 'here, you take it,' so I just take his clothes."

The attention that Bao pays to Tim makes Tim feel really special. Because Tim's parents work such long hours, they do not have as much time to be involved with Tim. As a result, Tho and Bao appear to be significant adult role models in Tim's life.

During our first interview Tim shared about his third oldest brother, Duc. Tim does not get along well with Duc. Tim feels frustrated with Duc and does not respect his work ethic, saying that Duc does not help out around the house or contribute to the family the way he ought to. "He sleeps until 8:30, and then he wakes up, eats and then goes to work out until it is time to come back and sleep, eat and go do the same thing. I don't really know why he does that, when he could be helping around the house and stuff." Because Tim works so hard at helping to run the family household, he is discouraged by

Duc's lack of contribution to the family and unkindness toward him. "Duc is someone who takes away my positive energy," Tim shared in one of his written pieces of work.

During our final interview, Tim shared that he and Duc are getting along better, and working together more as a family. "The thing is, he's gotten nicer to me because, you know, my big brother that's the oldest, talked some sense into him." Tim went on to explain that Tho approached Duc about the way he had been treating Tim. Tho and Duc ended up in a fist fight over the matter of how Duc was treating Tim, but following the fight, Duc began to make some changes in his treatment of Tim. Reflecting on how Tho stuck up for him, Tim confides, "And, you know what? I don't necessarily like the feeling 'cause it makes me look weak, and at the same time I do, " Tim said, with a big smile. Tho's willingness to fight for Tim appears to have made Tim feel really special.

Tim's older brothers look out for him, but are not reluctant to set him straight when they see Tim taking for granted the opportunity that he has as a Canadian. Tim shared that there have been times when he has not performed well in school. His brothers quickly jumped on him saying, "Are you *stupid*?! You come from Canada! This is a great opportunity! You're not like us - we came from Vietnam - we didn't have education, you know. You're...a Canadian boy - you should be good at this." Tho and Bao want Tim to seize the opportunities that are available to him as a Canadian, and also appreciate how hard their parents work to make a good life for their family in Canada. Bao said to Tim, "Dad and Mom have planned everything for you, you know. They have raised a bank account for you for university. We didn't have that stuff - we have to work for our money!" Tim's brothers want Tim to go to university, and find a career where he can use his mind to make a living, and not have to work using his body to earn a living the way

they do. Although their words are meant to encourage, these brothers add pressure to Tim to perform well academically.

The pep talks and attention Tho and Bao give to Tim inspire him and motivate him to do well. According to the Carnegie Council's Task Force on the Education of Young Adolescents (1989), "every student needs at least one thoughtful adult who has the time and takes the trouble to talk with the student about academic matters, personal problems, and the importance of performing well" (p. 288). It is so much easier to believe in yourself when someone else believes in you. The gift of having others believe in you can go a long way in building confidence, especially during adolescence. Positive role models also hold the potential to influence youth to make positive choices. In Mrs. Smith's opinion, since Tim's parents work so much, "there's no attention there for him from his parents, no role modeling. And the role modeling falls to his siblings because they're the ones who are always around." Although often absent in a physical sense, it could be argued that Tim's parents are role modeling a strong work ethic and how to provide financial support for a family. However, Mrs. Smith's observation points to Tim's brothers as a tremendous source of emotional support for Tim. They make themselves available to Tim, and Tim seeks them out when he needs help.

In addition to the relationship that Tim shares with his parents and brothers, he also has a paternal grandmother who lives in Winnipeg, whom he adores. Tim visits her every week. "I love my grandmother," he shared. "Every Saturday, we go visit our grandma 'cause she's really, like, superstitious….And she has a sixth sense so she can see spirits." Tim went on to share how he sees spirits as well. He finds his ability to see spirits very scary, and tells them to go away when they visit him at night.

"Have you told your grandma about the spirits?" I queried.

"Yes, my grandmother had already known before I told her….she knows that I had it already 'cause she can tell by my eyebrows. It's not normal people's eyebrows. My eyebrows are built to ward off evil spirits." Tim's connection to the spirit world is something that he shares with his grandmother alone. He is unable to communicate his experience with anyone else in his family, because it is beyond their experience. The spiritual connection that Tim shares with his grandmother is unique, and one that some, particularly Westerners, may have difficulty understanding.

Tim's family is a significant part of his life. His relationship with his brothers is important and his respect for his parents is great. He adores his grandmother and shares a special connection with her. It is apparent that Tim's family has helped to define who he is.

Blazing Threads in the Tapestry: Dealing with Issues of Race

"You know what? You can't stop racism. Racism cannot be stopped.
Name me one place that you can go where there's not racism.
It's impossible, eh? That's right 'cause you know why?
Racism cannot be stopped. It's everywhere in the world." (Tim, 5:13)

From what Tim has observed of his older family members, individuals who are visual minorities are not treated well in the workplace. Tim shared that his father is smart and very gifted mathematically. Without understanding any English, Tim said that his dad has worked to strengthen a previously unsuccessful company. Tim feels infuriated that his father works so hard, and is not treated well by his employer. He recounts, "My dad - same thing. His boss is French and he's white. He's always yelling at my dad because his other people that he supervises aren't doing their job - 'cause my dad ran that company to the top!" Bao's experiences working for white people have not been positive

either. Tim shared about a time when Bao was relegated to dusting off bricks for twelve straight weeks. When Bao asked to switch tasks, his boss said, "If you want to get paid, you're gonna do it." Tim shared, "My brother has a thing with white people….Every job he got was for a white boss who treated him bad."

Because Tim's family did not speak English, they were also taken advantage of by dishonest Canadians. Tim describes how his father was born with a disfigurement, and upon coming to Canada, he underwent cosmetic surgery to correct it. Tim's father was purposefully overcharged for the surgery, and when the government later found out, Tim's dad and the surgeon went to court. With the help of a translator, Tim's dad won the court case. "My dad got two thousand dollars. He was pretty proud of that," Tim said. The way Tim's family has been treated by some white Canadians has left an indelible image in Tim's mind of what white Canadians are like. Because young children often learn about their world through their role models, before Tim was even exposed to white people, he felt defensive toward them. "Growing up my parents said they were treated unfairly by white people and it's true. And I felt that 'cause, you know, when you're young you don't know anything but what you hear, right? And so I was, 'Oh my god, I hate white people.'" As Tim grew older, his attitude remained the same. "Every single white people that ticked me off, it's 'They're going down!'" he said.

Tim is very passionate about the topic of racism. He shared that adversity has made many immigrants tough. That toughness may result in them dealing with discrimination by using their fists, instead of words. "And, again, I'm not trying to be racist or anything, 'cause you know you've got someone coming from a different country, right, and they've grown up, and that country might have been hard on them -

made them tough outside, like, they deal with it with their fists - and you say something like that ('that' meaning a racial insult) - prepare to die." As you will read further on, Tim's first reaction to dealing with racism has been to use his fists as well. When someone calls him or his family down, he has often found that the only way to defend himself is to fight.

Dealing with Race in the Context of the Intervention: A Major Life Stressor

I was not prepared for race to be identified as a major stressor among several youth involved in this intervention. Although I was not present in class one day when a student named Aiden called Tim a "Chink," in response to Tim calling Aiden "fat," Mrs. Smith shared that it took very little for an outburst like that to occur between these two students. These types of outbursts did not occur during the intervention, but if they had, they could have potentially taken the intervention down a different path. A teacher must not turn a deaf ear to discriminatory comments, and following such remarks, issues of discrimination would have required discussion. Subsequent to discussions, methods for positively coping with the stress of being the target of these types of comments would have needed to be explored. Learning that these types of outbursts were a part of this class dynamic could have had tremendous implications for the intervention, and I was not equipped to handle these sorts of behaviours were they to occur while I was teaching.

The topic of racism began to surface in students' written work when four students, all of whom are visual minorities, mentioned racism, prejudice, bullying, "being called names, and people who don't like you for no reason" as sources of stress, anger triggers, and things that deplete them of positive energy. Of interest, these individuals never raised racism as a topic during class discussions, likely due to its sensitive nature. Nonetheless, I

knew that during final interviews I needed to discuss racism with these students, and was aware that these discussions needed to be handled with care and sensitivity. I was particularly interested in learning the context surrounding these statements. Because students' responses to exit slip questions (written responses to questions I posed) were at times listed in point form, I did not have the full picture of how racism affected them individually. I wanted to clarify whether these students were stressed or angry: a) because they were targeted due to race, b) when they witnessed racism, c) regarding the topic of racism on the whole, or d) all of the above. I sought clarification of these points during final interviews, which was helpful, as these one-word responses meant something different to each individual.

Anson, Ian and Shane were invited for a final group interview together. During this interview, the students engaged in rich dialogue regarding racism, and strategies for handling annoying people and bullies. Shane argued that there is not much racism among the students in their grade, and most of the time when comments are made, students are only needling one another, and the remarks are intended as jokes. He went on to say, "Racism comes in once in awhile but then people know that it's not really that offensive – well it is, but like for a joke sometimes people just say it and know that you're joking."

Ian did not view these racial comments as jokes, and appeared to be 'fed up' with people he labelled "annoying." According to Ian, "Some people think they're joking around with you, but it's not funny. Other people bother you 'cause how you look, and you know it's not true, but it's so annoying 'cause they keep on trying to come at you and there's either two things you can do: either stop it by saying 'Okay, I don't care' or you can dish it back to them and then it just keeps on going on and they annoy you more."

In following-up with Anson on the topic of being bullied due to race he said, "I've never really been totally bullied but just watching people get bullied, it's not a good thing to be around. Like, you feel that people aren't just accepting them for who they are, so they end up taking it out on them, and like then I just feel like out of hand with them….If the situation continues I find that I will lash out, but that's not the best thing to do. But if it doesn't stop, then I find that it's the only thing I can do." Following Anson's comment, the three students explored how they could handle situations of being bullied. They discussed lashing back physically, calming the situation and talking it through, laughing, saying something back, letting it go, and getting angry. Anson suggested using humour as a way to turn the attention back on to the person who is needling, as a way to make them look foolish.

To this suggestion Ian replied, "It works sometimes [but]…they can make your life a living hell if you try and stop it like that." Discussing the topic of racism with these three students was sensitizing for me. Shane did not appear to take comments to heart, suggesting that "they're not trying to be disrespectful…everyone just tries to be themselves and just be humorous and stuff just in order to make a laugh once in awhile, like about someone."

Ian, on the other hand, had had enough, and was unwilling to simply stand by and tolerate it. In his words, "I'm not just going to say nothing. I'm going to speak my mind. I don't care what other people think. If they want to, like, try and insult me then I'm going to give it back to them."

Anson's reaction was somewhere between these views. In Anson's words, "Some people are annoying but I've learned to deal with them, so I don't really care what they say."

Robby and A.J., both students who are visual minorities, were interviewed together. A.J. did not mention racism or bullying as stressors in any pieces of his homework, however Robby mentioned fighting, bullying, and racism as sources of stress. During our final interview, Robby said that he is only bullied sometimes "but as a joke." Further on he said that he is neither a bully, nor is he bullied. Being teased or targeted due to skin colour 'as a joke' appears to be a theme. It would be worthwhile to explore the literature in this area, to seek further understanding for future interventions.

Listening to the experiences of Tim, Ian, Anson, Shane and Bobby taught me a great deal about what these students have experienced due to discrimination based on the colour of their skin. Learning this challenged me to think of how I would prepare for delivering future coping interventions. First and foremost, I recognize that I need more education in the area of racism, anti-racism education and teaching in a racially diverse setting. Grounding myself in the literature in order to feel more comfortable and competent discussing race in a classroom setting is paramount.

Next, I need to take a close look at how I would handle exchanges of overt racism, including jokes, racial slurs, and/or outbursts during future interventions. Further, I recognize that if racism and other types of discrimination surface as sources of stress in future interventions, strategizing methods for sensitively and effectively addressing theses topics would need to occur. Subsequently, a variety of emotion focused and problem focused coping strategies would need to be introduced, in order to determine

which coping strategies would be most effective for managing the stress rising out of discrimination. Follow-up with students after coping strategies have been introduced would be necessary, in order to learn which coping strategies were most helpful.

Tim taught me about the cumulative effects of racism (Essed, 2002) and how he and his family have coped with overt racism since moving to Canada. Anson, Ian, Shane and Robby taught me that Tim is not alone in his experiences with racism. They each showed me how they cope with the stress of being targeted due to their non-white skin colour. All teachers need to be educated on the topic of race, racism and discrimination, in order to comfortably and effectively discuss it in a classroom setting with students. Name-calling due to race, ability, size, and sexuality is not acceptable and this type of bullying must be interrupted, which will never happen if it is not addressed.

Aggressive Threads in the Tapestry: The Burland District Community

From the time he was born, until he was eleven years old, Tim and his family resided in the Burland District. This was a lower income community, which Tim describes as having its own set of rules. The Burland District was comprised of a very tight Filipino population, making it difficult for Tim to fit in. In the Burland District, when someone hit, you hit back. It was self-defense. A good fight could earn a person a good reputation, and maybe even stir a bit of fear among others. School administrators frowned on fighting, which often resulted in Tim getting into a lot of trouble. "I was a trouble maker back then," Tim said. There would be times when Tim would walk through the school yard, and be jumped from behind by those wanting to beat him up. He was forced to fight back to defend himself. Tim found himself sitting in the principal's office on countless occasions being reprimanded for fighting.

"You can still walk away," the principal suggested, after hearing Tim's side of the story. This infuriated Tim. The principal did not understand that Tim felt that he could be "beaten to death" if he did not defend himself. Following one fight, Bao went with Tim to the principal's office, in defense of his younger brother.

Tim shared, "And then my brother yelled at him, too. He was, like, 'My brother is bleeding, like hard core right now, and you're telling him that he shouldn't fight? What could that have done?! He probably could have broke his leg or arm or something like that!' And then the principal just didn't say anything." Following this encounter, Tim said that he started to pick up the pace when it came to fighting, and did not hold back. "I started defending for myself….You know, I'm hard-core when it comes to fights. All my fights usually last about five seconds straight and that's it - the guy's down."

Tim's anger can be explosive. He used to get mad, and once his anger reached a certain point, he would "see red" and unleash his wrath on the person offending him. He explains, "I used to hold all the things that got me mad inside until that final thing that got me. Just like a volcano - I just exploded! And so, what I would rather do back then was I'd beat the guy up, like, until he learned not to do it again. And I'd ask him, and say, 'If you do that again, I will seriously hurt you,' right. And so, the person eventually got scared and he didn't do it again." In front of this person Tim would smash a locker with his fist, leaving a big dent in it, point to the dent and say, "that's what's going to happen if you do it again." Tim had had enough with being picked on. He was big, and could fight and win. And he did.

Living in the Burland District necessitated fighting. Tim asserted that the way to survive in that community was to fight. If you did not pick on others, others would pick

on you. All of this fighting gave Tim a reputation as a bully. Tim hung around with a tough group of peers, and others in the community were getting sick and tired of being picked on by Tim and his gang. Some thought that they could end this streak of terror by taking Tim down. Tim shared that one day after school, a group of kids surrounded Tim and challenged him to a fight. Tim took on the challenge and snapped one of the kid's legs in two, putting him in a cast. Tim felt guilty and remorseful after hurting this boy so seriously. He shared, "I felt sorry right after that. After that I just thought 'No, I'm not doing it anymore - that's it'….I felt so horrible and that's why I stopped." Reflecting on his fighting, Tim shared, "I used to be a bully myself and I regret it. And, you know, I don't admit this to people but since it's just me and you - one on one - I used to cry every night after I'd done it." Tim knew that he had to be strong while living in the Burland District, because, "if you're not strong, you're down," he shared. Tim was certainly strong, and was willing to take on anyone who would challenge him, but his parents were beginning to worry about all the trouble that Tim was getting into.

An Unmarked Piece of Fabric for the Tapestry:

Starting Afresh in Yorkdale Heights

There's downs and ups in everything you do, and my favourite saying is, 'For every choice you make there's always going to be a consequence.' No matter if it's good or bad, there's always going to be a consequence. Be prepared to deal with it. (Tim, 5:27)

After living in the Burland District for eleven years, Tim and his family moved to Yorkdale Heights, an upper middle class neighborhood. His family has been residing in Yorkdale Heights for three years now. Tim said that his family decided to make the move from the Burland District to Yorkdale Heights, to give Tim a fresh start, and for their

entire family's physical safety. "My Mom [couldn't] even walk to Safeway, which is, like, two minutes away from where we used to live, by herself....She was terrified to go." Tim's mom now feels much safer in Yorkdale Heights.

"What about for you, Tim? How is Yorkdale Heights for you?" I asked.

"When I moved into this area I felt like I could be safe, you know. I felt like I could walk down my street and have nothing happen to me ....It's so quiet here - nothing's happening, you know? And like, I mean, wow! One or two fights at school - that's no big deal here. I just take it, nothing big. When you go to my [old] school, there's always fights every day. And that was a big change for me," he shared.

Tim's parents really did wish for their family to have a fresh start in Yorkdale Heights. Since moving, Tim has had to make a cognitive shift from his well-learned way of responding when provoked. Learning to control his swearing, and his fists has been an on-going process. Tim noted, "And you know, since this is such a nice area, you know, it's hard for me to adapt to this place, right, because you know you got all these nice people here and, you know, I'm hard core when it comes to fights." Tim's mother was very clear from the start that Tim was to gain control and be 'good' in his new community. "My Mom's like, 'This is a fresh start - no more lying - no more being bad - no more beating up people at school. You have to be good - you have to learn how to adapt.'" Adapting was a challenge for Tim, since fighting had become a way of life in the Burland District. When he first moved to Yorkdale Heights, Tim felt that he had to prove himself to his new peers. The only way he knew to prove himself was to fight. Tim would target people in advance and pick fights with them. This resulted in Tim making a reputation for himself early on in Yorkdale Heights. "And I'm not saying it's a bad thing

to have a reputation here because people learn how to respect you," Tim shared. The reputation that Tim built for himself produced some fear among his peers, which he liked. When he would overhear others talking about him, he felt especially inflated when they would say "'Oh, no, no, no - you don't want to take that kid out. He's got a reputation for himself. He's really good.'"

It wasn't all smooth sailing, moving into this upper middle class community. Last year, a boy named Skyler who was one year older that Tim, continually needled Tim. Tim recounts, "This guy was just being mean. He kept on making fun of me, you know, kept on making fun of my religion - called me 'Chink' - and so I went back and called him 'Cracker,' right. And he made fun of my mom and so I said, 'Hey, that's enough! You can make fun of me, but nowhere *near* my mom. I respect your mom. Why can't you do the same thing to me?'" Skyler continued to needle Tim, so Tim challenged Skyler to a fight after school. Later that day, Tim waited outside with his friends by his side, to fight Skyler. Skyler then proceeded from the school building, with a huge pack of grade eight and grade nine students surrounding him, and approached Tim. Tim told Skyler, "If you want to start something, you throw the first punch. If you don't, quit wastin' my time." Skyler threw the first punch, and Tim grabbed Skyler's arm and kept hitting Skylar in the temple. Tim recalls, "After ten hits, it was all swollen and then I just took him and I said, 'Don't *ever* say that about my mom again.' And so after that I turned around and I broke a fence." It seems that Tim would have been willing to walk away from Skyler and ignore his needling, but when Skyler began to insult Tim's mother, Tim drew the line. I am certain that Tim's fierce loyalty to his family would mean that he would defend his family honour at any cost.

Although Tim is Canadian, he identifies himself as Asian. Being a person with yellow skin, Tim sometimes feels like the white kids talk about him behind his back. "I hear them whispering. That's when I know it's about me because, you know, white people - they talk to other white people, like, straight up, you know? You know, understand? But if I'm the only Asian guy and they're talking secretly, you know ... they're talking about me, and that's hard." Life in Yorkdale Heights is not without its ups and downs. One day early in the intervention students were working at their tables while I was in an adjacent office conducting focus group interviews. Aiden, a white student, and Tim were sitting at adjacent tables, verbally needling each other. The needling escalated, and Aiden called Tim a "Chink," saying, "everything in your country is cheap. You can buy like, a t-shirt for a dollar." This infuriated Tim. Tim took a verbal shot at Aiden, making fun of Aiden's weight, then jumped up and grabbed Aiden by the collar of his shirt. Their voices escalated as they fumbled across the floor. I could hear shouting in the classroom and had no idea what was going on. It took about five minutes for Mrs. Smith to separate Tim and Aiden and remove them from the classroom to resolve the issue.

"Do you think that racism is an issue in your class?" I later asked Mrs. Smith.

"You know, I don't know if it starts the bullying, but I know it adds to it. Like, if they are having a debate about hockey, for example, they're arguing because of differences of opinion, obviously. But it would take nothing for Aiden to say 'You're such a Chink!' and then right away, it would be 'Well, you're fat!' It would be something like that." Of interest, the term "Chink" would be a racial slur targeted at someone who is Chinese, however Tim's family is Canadian, and Tim himself was born in Canada.

Regardless of the accuracy of the insult, Tim does respond, because it is a racial insult directed at him, with the intent to hurt.

Six of the other boys in Mrs. Smith's class had skin colour other than white. In the time that I worked in Mrs. Smith's class, I did not see any of the other six boys overtly targeted due to race, although four of the others did mention it as a source of stress. Many of the boys had very poor impulse control, and when they were upset with each other, the first thoughts that came to their minds was what flew out of their mouths. Words like "fat" and "Chink" were really hurtful, and those were the names that they called each other. Mrs. Smith went on to share, "The type of bullying I see in my class is more verbal, you know? The boys go right at each other….So for example somebody said something to Aiden, and he turned around and called them a 'fucking faggot.' Another person made a comment to Aiden, and Aiden said, 'Why don't you learn to fucking speak English?'" Although the insults slung at Tim, mostly by Aiden, were racist, they typically followed a difference of opinion. Because both Aiden and Tim have explosive personalities, they each went immediately for the "jugular" when calling each other down. The name-calling witnessed in this class is most often racist and homophobic, reflecting common oppressions in Canadian society.

Making a fresh start is a theme that continually emerged from Tim's family's stories. Not only did Tim's parents make the decision to leave the Burland District, to give Tim an opportunity for a new start, two of Tim's older brothers have made similar decisions to move out of province in order to make a new beginning. Tho's decision to move was an attempt to get away from a particular group of friends, who had "done him no good," said Tim. Things changed when Tho's best friend found a girlfriend. Even

though Tho had been faithful to this friend, and even helped him pass Grade 12 math so that he could graduate, his new girlfriend did not like Tho and made it clear that he was no longer allowed to hang around with Tho. That, coupled with an incident where Tho learned that a few other friends had been stealing from him led Tho to say "enough is enough." With that, he moved away to start afresh.

Tim's second oldest brother Bao was getting ready to move to another city at the time of my final interview with Tim. It was a big shock for Tim to learn that Bao was involved with drugs. Elkind (1984) describes the "shock of disillusion" as a shock that occurs when someone whom an adolescent highly esteems shows an interest in, or takes part in something that the adolescent does not respect. The adolescent then becomes disillusioned by whom they thought this person was. Tim experienced the shock of disillusion when he learned that his brother smokes marijuana. "I just felt terrible," Tim shared, "because he didn't tell me before that he did drugs, right. But my brother said it accidentally. And he says, 'You're not supposed to know that'....And it hurt because I looked up to my older brother." Bao's involvement with drugs led him to becoming involved with the wrong crowd and encounters with the police. It must cause a lot of pain for Tim to hear his parents say that they do not want Bao living with them anymore. Tim was very sad at the thought of Bao moving away.

Although it is unclear why Bao began his involvement with drugs, he was adamant with Tim that Tim not follow his example. "Don't do drugs, you know, you've got a good life for you - I want to see you high (in life) one day - I want to see you go to the top - I want to see you do something with your life instead of, you know, 'f-ing' it up with just drugs," Bao said to Tim. Tim assured Bao that he would not grow up to drink,

smoke or do drugs, and that as a result, his life was going to be perfect. "Good. If you do that, I'll buy you anything you want," Bao said. Bao is now on his way to a new life, and through all these circumstances you can sense the fierce love that these brothers have for one another. Again, Tim is given a great deal of positive attention from his brother, but his brother's expectations of Tim can also carry a burden, potentially increasing stress for Tim.

<div align="center">A Vibrant Thread in the Tapestry: The Media</div>

Current media has made a tremendous impact on Tim. He is an avid listener of rap music, and a huge fan of Martial Artist and Hollywood actor Mr. Jet Lee. In addition to that, he is a sport enthusiast, looking up to elite basketball player Yao Ming, the NBA's only active Asian basketball player this year. It is hard to say whether those in the media realize the impact they can potentially have on young people. Many youth trust these icons, believe in the messages they deliver, and support their causes. Tim has already been observed as a loyal person, and is also very devoted to his heroes.

Tim explained the media's influence on him, and how he learns and grows from it. He began by describing an episode of Superman that he watched when he was five. Even though he did not understand English, it impacted him, as he and Tho tried to act out a scene by flying down the stairs on a pillow. "Influence is one of the biggest things and it has to be with me 'cause after watching something that I really like, something I really enjoy watching, I learn from there and that's how I become a good person. You learn from what you see."

During our final interview, I mentioned to Tim that I had noticed that he seemed calmer. "Are you working at being calmer?" I asked. Tim said that he had made a choice not to be as explosive anymore, and his idol Jet Lee was the reason.

"Well, for one thing I had this mentor named Jet Lee. He's always calm. He doesn't like to fight a lot but, you know, he's a master at it, right. And what he does is, whenever he gets mad, he just stares. And that's what I just do when I'm mad, I just stare at something harder." By choosing to adopt the calm disposition of his mentor Jet Lee, Tim has begun to gain a great deal more self-control.

During our final classes, students made presentations regarding what they had learned about attitude. Some presented poems, skits, speeches, or lyrics of a favorite song. Tim read aloud lyrics of a song by Ludicris called "Growing Pains." Being a rookie of rap music, I needed to ask, "What about the lyrics of that song that you read today, 'cause I'm not so sure that they're super positive. Are the lyrics of a lot of the songs you listen to positive or negative, angry or energizing?"

Tim explained, "They're not - they're neutral. I mean, I cannot say if they're all positive - all negative - but they're neutral. They're a combination." Tim knew the lyrics to all of the rap songs read aloud by his peers from memory. He had the intonation and the body movements down pat as he read his song lyrics. Even though I did not consistently understand the message in the music, Tim could interpret the lyrics, and offer insight into the song.

Even when Tess said, "I don't get that song. It changed topics like every ten seconds," Tim went on to explain the race of the rapper, the struggles that he has faced,

and highlighted the various themes in the song. Tim seems to believe in the messages in these songs, and defended his music to any peer who put it down.

Weaving in a New Thread:

Coping and the Effectiveness of the Intervention

"When I get really stressed up and just blow up.
[Now] I just hold it back and take deep breaths" (Tim)

In the end, Tim shared that he benefited from the intervention. As he walked down the hall after class, he shared with Mrs. Smith, "I know that it doesn't look like I'm payin' attention in class, and that I'm just foolin' around. I mean, I know it doesn't look like I'm listenin' to you or Mrs. Nazer-Bloom, but I am. I'm gettin' it now, I'm really gettin' it. I'm lovin' it," he repeated, pounding his fist against his chest, "I'm lovin' it."

Because Tim had such a difficult time paying attention and was easily distracted when the intervention first began, he shared, "I might not have shown you that it was effective to me 'cause I was talking a lot, but it was, I have to admit – 100 percent." When I asked him if he thought the skills that he learned would be helpful for students to have as part of their regular school day, he replied "I am hoping, yes. Mostly in the beginning of school like, the first day, because you know it gets them through the whole day - no problem - and that's what I feel is good for people to do."

I knew that Tim was enjoying the relaxation exercises, since after relaxing one day, he asked, "Can we do it again?" During our final interview, I learned the extent to which Tim had been rehearsing diaphragmatic breathing.

"Tell me about diaphragmatic breathing….Have you ever done that on your own?" I asked.

"Yes, I have actually. I haven't been telling students this, but I've been doing it every day." He explained, "Every time [my friends] always tell me, 'Have you been doing that diaphragmatic breathing?' and I'm, like, 'Oh yeah, I've tried it a couple of times.' But you know I've been doing it every day." Tim went on to share how he practices deep breathing on the basketball court as well, as he visualizes himself playing in the NBA. "Like, I picture that I'm famous, like in the NBA right now, right. It's 5 seconds left in the game - 2 points behind - foul shot - only two tries. And while I'm on that line, I'm breathing hard and I'm picturing it's only me and the rim and the game's on the line, and I'm breathing hard. So, yeah, I use it....I do the square breathing." I was really surprised that, in front of all his peers during our final class, Tim shared that the one thing he enjoyed most during my time in their class was the square breathing. "I'm using it a lot," Tim said, "and I haven't told anyone yet." If Tim continues to practice square or diaphragmatic breathing, he may be able to automate it in response to stress. If Tim chooses to apply controlled breathing in situations when he feels angry, it could help him mitigate stress and gain better control of his temper.

Although oral presentations are a source of stress for Tim, diaphragmatic breathing has become a helpful coping skill to combat the nervous jitters. Tim shared, "Presentations make me stressed - I die! I stand up there and everyone's looking at me and I'm looking at the wall.... and I can sometimes hear voices, like, 'Oh my god - what the hell is he doing up there? Isn't he going to say anything?'" Tim was referring to the presentation on "attitude" that he had made to the class earlier that morning.

I assured him, "You kept it together and you did a good job!"

Tim replied, "I started using the breathing." I taught the students that emotion focused coping strategies such as diaphragmatic breathing are effective to mitigate stress "in the moment." Tim understood this concept, and by employing diaphragmatic breathing when he was feeling nervous about presenting, helped to mitigate the stress he was feeling during that moment, which in turn helped him to stay composed and focused.

Tim is very physical, and when he is feeling stressed, he finds exercise helpful. Tim says that basketball is an effective outlet, and a positive way to calm himself down. He shared, "I use all my anger there, you know, get it out then I do that breathing bit you told me to do and it just helps." Tim also finds it helpful to take his aggression out on a human shaped punching bag. "I mean it's always good, like, just go half an hour on it, you know, when you need it to take all the stress out. That's what I do." As mentioned in chapter three, anger was a dominant theme among many students in this class. Tim was among those who could be considered angry, for a variety of reasons already mentioned. Tim was very astute in identifying those things which trigger his anger, and was also aware of how his body responds when anger rises up in him. If Tim can continue to recognize his anger triggers and anger cues, he will be in a position to determine when it is time to hit the basketball court, instead of another person.

Tim's Tapestry: Threading the Needle, Tying the Knot

"I am going to make it and I believe that." (Tim, p. 5:21)

Given what Tim has shared regarding his family, his culture, his community, and the media, it was my goal to show how each piece of the tapestry has played a part in shaping who Tim has become, and how each piece has been intricately woven into the fabric of the others. In sharing his story, Tim has done a good job of revealing the cycle

of stress in his life. First, he is a person of Asian-Canadian decent, who has continually encountered prejudice and racism in Canadian society. The stress of racism prompts Tim to cope by fighting, in defense of himself, his family and his culture. This fighting leads to increased encounters with authority, in addition to feelings of guilt as a result of hurting others. The anger felt also leads Tim to take his aggression out on the basketball court, on a punching bag, and by pumping up his music. Through the intervention Tim has learned to apply relaxation techniques such as diaphragmatic breathing to help him cope during moments of stress.

"Is there anything else that you haven't had a chance to share that you think would be important for people like teachers and principals to know?" I asked Tim as we wrapped up our interview.

Tim responded that he wanted to be sure that teachers and administrators understood that the past does not predict a person's future. He also wanted them to know that his previous life experiences help him relate to people and situations that he finds himself in today. Rather than dwelling on the negatives, Tim suggests that all people, teachers and administrators included, should focus on the positives, encouraging students to do things that are positive, rather than telling them what to avoid that is negative. In his words, "I'm, in general, a tough kid, and I've learned how to live my life, but, like I said ma'am, people have memories - kinda like muscle you know.... that's the thing with people's brains. You did something and can relate to it. That's how we relate to things nowadays. And being a tough kid, back in my old area in the Burland District, I still relate to it and I just want to tell everyone this: Don't say what's going to get you in

trouble. Don't say things like that. Say things that will get you friends, that will help you."

I do believe that Tim will make it. He is bright, energized and motivated. If he remembers to channel his energy positively, keep his temper under control, and take a step back to breathe when he is feeling angry, he has the potential to go far in life.

CHAPTER 6

Affluent, Angry & Alone:

Anecdotes About Aiden

The Morning After

He who accepts evil without protesting against it
is really cooperating with it.
Author Unknown

The students pushed and shoved their way into classroom on Wednesday

morning. The girls settled in the same way as they do any other morning. Tess and

company whispered among themselves, and Sarah sat alone at one table. Today, the boys

acted a bit differently though. They were making comments to one another under their

breath. Rather than their noisy chatter, they shrugged their shoulders at one another, or

shook their heads. Something seems amiss today.

Mrs. Smith walked in with energy and focused intensity. She began to speak. "I

heard what happened at lunch yesterday with Aiden," she started.

"It wasn't us. We didn't do it," protested Robby.

"That's *not* the point," she went on. "You guys either drop him as your friend or

include him. You make a decision. Drop him, or include him. You can't treat people like

that."

"But we weren't the ones who did it," Charlie insisted.

"Silence is consent. Do you understand that? Silence is consent, and so if you are

standing around and watching something like that happen to someone, and you say

nothing, your silence shows that it's okay. Do you *get* that? Your silence is consent,"

Mrs. Smith re-emphasized. She was furious, and anger could be heard in the tone of her

voice. She wanted to be sure that these students understood that being a bystander when somebody is being bullied, and choosing to do nothing demonstrates approval. "You are going to have to make decisions that aren't going to be popular. Eventually, you will have to make the decision, 'Am I a leader or a follower?' *You* decide." She made her point. I think they got it. The boys slumped into their chairs, deciding not to defend their lack of action any further.

The incident that Mrs. Smith was referring to was something that occurred the previous day. While on the school grounds during the noon hour, three boys jumped on top of Aiden. Two boys pinned him to the ground while a third boy stood over top of him. The boy who stood over top of Aiden pulled down his own pants, squatted low into Aiden's face and passed gas right in Aiden's face.

"We didn't think he was going to do it," Robby said in their defence. "He said he was going to, but we didn't think he would actually do it. I thought he was joking." But he did do it, and the humiliation and embarrassment that Aiden endured as a result of that incident has caused him to feel incredible fury. When Aiden finally broke loose of the two boys, he ran into the school sobbing, cussing, and screaming. A teacher who was in her classroom during the lunch hour heard yelling and the sound of lockers being kicked in, and emerged to find Aiden pacing back and forth between the boys' bathroom and the hallway, punching in lockers and screaming. She managed to corner Aiden into her classroom, and immediately called for help. The two senior administrators rushed in to first restrain Aiden, and then to calm him down in order to find out what happened. That was during the last week of the intervention. I never saw Aiden again.

Ethnographic Fiction

As you read further about Aiden, you will notice that several approaches have been taken to tell his story, including: a) sharing actual accounts of events that occurred during classtime, as cited above, b) highlighting conversations between Aiden and me during interviews, c) paraphrasing quotes from Aiden, and d) presenting data in the form of ethnographic fiction. "Ethnographic fiction has been defined as an evocative product of the imagination that incorporates such literary techniques as flashbacks, flashforward, unfolding action, dialogue, interior monologue, alternative points of view, and the omniscient narrator" (Halas, 2001, p. 79). To follow are a series of vignettes aimed at introducing you to Aiden. Some of them are presented as fictional reconstructions based on: a) field notes, b) my reflective journal writings, c) interviews with Aiden, d) interviews with Aiden's peers, and e) informal and formal dialogue with Mrs. Smith. The vignettes read much like fiction, and have been created out of the information given by those involved in the study. In places where a vignette is presented as a fictional reconstruction, the reader will be alerted.

The reason that this writing style was adopted for telling Aiden's story is because so much of what I learned from Aiden was though observation, noting the things he didn't say, in addition to what he did say. He offered such rich insight into his life, and what it must feel like to be him, but at times these pieces, taken from his interviews, observations, and interviews with others, had to be pieced together. Often during interviews, he nodded, shook his head, or responded with only his eyes or a grin. His body language told so much of his story that seemed to be communicated more effectively using a combination of writing styles. Themes of loneliness, anger, rejection,

and hopelessness were shared in Aiden's actions and posture. Ethnographic and fictional narratives helped me to present Aiden to you, to give you a sense of what life is like for him, helping to point out how he copes with stress and how his coping strategies could potentially put him at risk.

Aiden's Life

I don't think I can describe in words how my heart broke for Aiden. He is a big boy who is lonely and angry. Aiden is white, and an only child who lives with both of his parents in Yorkdale Heights. Aiden moved to Yorkdale Heights from a small city at the beginning of the school year. His parents are both professionals, and have started their own business in Winnipeg, and continue to maintain the business they left behind in their former city. Work keeps these parents out of the house from seven o'clock in the morning until eight o'clock at night. Sometimes they are home earlier, and sometimes later. When they do arrive home early, the family goes out to dinner together. "Does anyone make supper at your house?" I asked Aiden.

"Not really anymore," he said. Most nights Aiden is home alone, and if he doesn't make himself a plate of pasta, he spends the money his parents leave him on take out pizza or pitas.

Endomorphic

After meeting Aiden, it was apparent that he had a poor body image and low self-esteem. In a conversation with Mrs. Smith, she noted, "He's a larger set boy and, people are quick to point it out." Mrs. Smith teaches this same group a Foods and Nutrition course. In that class, they discuss Canada's Food Guide and energy input and output. "When we do that…you can see, like, he puts his head down and, you know, he singles

himself out … I think he already knows it - he doesn't need it reinforced by his peers when they make fun of him and stuff." Aiden does have an endomorphic shape. He is rather soft looking, but not obese. He carries a large frame and he would likely be a good enforcer in hockey or football. Since the males in this class jump immediately to insult each other based on physical appearance, he is often called "fat," mostly by Tim.

Home Alone

Home alone…again. What should I do? Watch TV? Play X-Box? Hack into someone's computer? Look at raunchy websites? Whatever…who cares. Being an only child has its perks. I get all my own stuff. I like my stuff. I have lots of it, and I don't have to share one bit of it. A television, a computer and an X-Box all in my own bedroom. It's sweet. I never have to leave my room. But man, I spend a lot of time alone. When my friends let me down, it's really lonely. Living in this big house and being by myself can really suck. I think I'm hungry. I guess I'll order a pizza for supper again tonight.

The above fictional account was based on an interview with Aiden when he proudly shared the positive aspects of being an only child who has the opportunity to spend a great deal of time unsupervised. He enjoys hosting his friends, and allowing his friends to do things in his home that they would not be permitted to do elsewhere. However, the freedom that accompanies this unsupervised time can also lead to isolation and extreme loneliness, which Aiden experiences when his friends exclude him.

After School Retreat

"Where are you rushing off to Aiden?" I asked one day as the 3:30 school bell rang.

"Can't talk now, Mrs. Nazer-Bloom. Robby and Charlie are coming over after school so I gotta get going" he said, fumbling to close his locker as he rushed to leave the school.

"Sounds fun. Have a great time," I called out to him, as he ran past me and out the door.

At Aiden's house, he and his friends decide what to do. "So, what do you guys want to do?" Aiden asks.

"I wanna go back onto that website that we were on last time. You know the one," Robby says, mischievously.

"What do you got to eat?" Charlie asks, as he rummages through the fridge. He pulls out some leftover pizza and walks to the computer where Aiden and Robby are sitting.

"Yeah, I know what website you wanna' see. Move over. I'll type in the address," says Aiden.

"Yeah. That's the one," Robby says, as the images begin to appear. "Man, Aiden, you're so lucky that you're here alone and can do this stuff. I can't even invite friends over to my house after school. You can have anyone over you want, and do this stuff. This rules."

"Like, if my parents ever caught me looking at this stuff on the internet, they'd like kill me," Charlie says, as he fixates his eyes on the images. "You're so lucky man."

"Yeah, I know," Aiden boasts, leaning back in his chair. "This is the life."

This fictional narrative is based on encounters Mrs. Smith has had with Aiden after dismissing him from class, and information Aiden shared with me during our final

interview. The activities that Aiden and his friends engage in, in his home after school again points to what Aiden sees as the positive aspects of his life, and the freedom that accompanies his lack of supervision.

Aiden on Stress

During our interviews together, Aiden shared his thoughts on stress. To follow is a paraphrase of Aiden's words on what stress is to him.

Stress sometimes takes over your life and messes you up. Making friends and getting along at school is stress to me. Stress makes me feel heavier, and I start feeling smothered. Sometimes it gives me a headache and other stuff. I can't explain it. I feel it mostly in my body. Fitting in at a new school is hard. It's weird because you have to make all new friends. Relationships can be hard too. Sometimes communicating is hard. It depends on the two people.

Fitting In

Aiden tries so hard to fit in at Yorkdale School. He wants it so badly. But it isn't easy. How hard would it be to move to a new city at the age of thirteen, trying to break in to a new crowd? Mrs. Smith sympathized, "What I've noticed is if you don't start here in kindergarten and go to grade eight with the same group of kids, it is so hard to get in." Aiden arrived at this kindergarten to grade eight school as a grade eight student. Many of the others have been together since kindergarten. If he was more skilled socially, maybe Aiden would have a chance at fitting in, but his interpersonal skills are not well developed.

"If you've got the social skills you can fit in. But Aiden is a prime example. If you don't have the social skills, forget it. And if his family does get up and move, you

know, he's just going to struggle over and over and over again," Mrs. Smith pointed out. Although I would suggest that the present does not necessarily dictate the future for Aiden, I agree that he does need to be taught effective communication skills in order to cope better interpersonally. With his parent's business, it is likely that another move is forthcoming in a year to two for Aiden and his family. Without some sort of social skills intervention, attempting to fit in at age fifteen or sixteen might not be any easier than fitting in now for Aiden.

Buying Friends

Aiden does not know how to interact with others well. When he speaks to adults, he mumbles and keeps his head down. He is successful at winning friends, however, by 'buying' them. "I'll buy you a chocolate bar at the deli today," he'd tell Bob. "I got you covered for lunch today," as he pulled out is wallet to treat Charlie to lunch at the school deli. "Wanna' come over after school, Bob? I'll buy you a bag of chips," he bribed. His confidence seemed low and his wallet appeared full. Although Aiden did not share with me that he purchased food for his friends, both Mrs. Smith and other students during interviews mentioned this pattern. And for Aiden, buying friends seemed to work. Inviting others over after school to raid his fridge and look at "unmentionables" on the computer screen also attracted others to hang around with him. Were they really his friends? That's difficult to say. Did they defend him when he was in trouble? No, not even close. Of all the students in the class, Aiden was the only one who said that he did not have a significant adult in his life that he could trust, if he had a problem - not a parent, relative or teacher that he trusted enough to confide in, when the chips were

down. Did he at least have one person that he could count on as a friend then? I'm not certain that he did.

Mrs. Smith shared that she has tried several times to establish a connection with Aiden, by chatting with him after class or while walking down the hall. "He shuts me out," she shared. The amount of time and number of students that Mrs. Smith teaches also constrains her ability to establish a relationship with Aiden. In this school of five hundred students, Mrs. Smith sees Aiden for three classes and one food lab over a six-day school cycle.

<div align="center">Dejected</div>

Aiden is a very sad person. His body communicates sadness by a slumping posture, and hanging his head low with his hair in his eyes. At times, there is no intonation in his voice at all. It was often difficult to elicit a response from Aiden during class discussions. There was a lot going on in this young man's mind, but nothing that he would make himself vulnerable to discuss during classtime. Interviews helped me to understand him much more. "Aiden, sometimes you seem really sad. Are you sad?" I asked.

"Sometimes," Aiden replied.

"What makes you feel sad?" I asked.

"I can't really say," he answered.

"Is it home or school?" I probed further.

"Both," he replied.

Insult to Injury

Being called names, and being bullied by one student in particular were a constant source of stress for Aiden. "This kid kicks me every once in awhile, but it doesn't really hurt." Aiden went on to share about a time when this bully got physical with him. "I was standing where that window is, right. Then he drop-kicked me across the room and my shoulder went back and snapped."

"What happened next?" I asked.

"That kid got suspended for two days!" he said.

"What did your parents think about this kid hurting you like that? Were they upset?"

"Oh, no, not really," he said.

"How did that make you feel?" I asked.

"It pissed me off!" he exclaimed. "They thought I was faking."

Aiden saw his parents as unsympathetic, which added insult to injury for him. He had been broken by another human being, and as he saw it, his primary source of support did not jump up in his defence. Aiden felt as though he had nowhere to turn when he needed help. He could not count on his parents. They were never around, and when they were, they failed to show him the type of support that he craved. He couldn't count on his friends. They just used him for food and cheap thrills on his computer. When he was bullied, Aiden felt that he had no one there to back him up. Feelings of hopelessness shone though during our final interview.

Everyone's Out to Get Me

"I always get into trouble – I don't care anymore! Like seriously, school has tried everything to suspend me." Aiden clearly feels that everyone is out to get him. When he gets into trouble for what can be looked on as self-defence and has to deal with the consequences of his actions, he feels like nobody hears him, nobody is listening, and nobody cares.

These experiences are not new for Aiden, who encountered similar situations at his former school. He explains, "Like, my old school, they tried everything to suspend me. They tried planting evidence in my locker."

"What do you mean *evidence*?" I asked.

"Weed!!" he exclaimed.

Aiden went on to share that the school principal had a personal vendetta against Aiden since, during a hockey game, Aiden checked the principal's son into the boards, knocking him out and giving him a concussion. Following that incident, Aiden says that the principal put another student up to planting marijuana in Aiden's locker, in an attempt to get Aiden thrown out of school. Whether this story is accurate or not, it is still Aiden's perception that this authority figure was out to get him, which is very significant. These perceptions likely contribute to his feelings of frustration, alienation, and hopelessness.

When Aiden shared about giving the principal's son a concussion, he chuckled and wore a wide grin. I think Aiden enjoys being an enforcer in games with physical contact. I think it makes him feel empowered, strong and in control – feelings he doesn't often experience.

Aiden on Coping

Aiden and I talked about coping during our three interviews together. To follow is a paraphrase of Aiden's thoughts on coping.

Kids my age get into fights to cope with stress. Punching a punching bag isn't as good as hitting a person. Fighting is a good stress buster. At least you're doing something about it, not like when you hit a punching bag. You might get suspended but that will give you a few days to, like, cool down. I got suspended for two days, but it helped me to cool down. Playing X-Box also helps me to cope. Sometimes I just settle my breathing and calm down. It helps. But I'd really rather fight.

Anger Brewing: A Conversation

"You know, Aiden, I feel worried about you with all of the stress you experience and not feeling any support. What do you do with all that anger inside of you?" I asked.

"Bottle it up," he said.

"Have you ever done anything…with the energy produced by your anger that's bottled up inside?"

"Yeah. I got in a few fights at my old school and got suspended for a month for two fights in one day. I won them both!" he announced proudly.

"What did your parents think about that?" I queried.

"They were pretty pissed off," he said.

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I am troubled by the anger festering inside of young people, like Aiden. Isolation, loneliness and anger are real issues facing many young people. It may only take one small incident, on top of years of other incidents, to put a young person "over the edge."

140

Going 'over the edge' could result in an angry young person unleashing all his fury by launching an attack on those he feels have wronged him, as exemplified in the tragedies of Columbine, USA, and Taber, Alberta. These issues are in desperate need of attention.

Tensions Mounting

During classtime Aiden demonstrated that he is a very angry young man. A verbal poke from Tim here. Another jab from Robby there. Aiden would mutter something back to them under his breath. Needling, jabs and digs fly back and forth, back and forth, class after class. Some of the boys are able to murmur their insults to one another, and still manage to fly under the radar, not being heard by the teacher. But when Aiden has had enough, he is unable to hold back. "Shut up you fucking faggot!" he'd scream back at the one insulting him.

"I am getting so fed up with the language in my class. There is no need to speak like that - *ever!*" Mrs. Smith exclaimed. In her sensitive yet no nonsense approach in these situations, Mrs. Smith removes Aiden and any other offenders from the classroom, taking them into the hall to get to the bottom of the situation privately.

After one class in early April I asked Mrs. Smith, "Where's Aiden these days?" after noting his repeated absence.

Mrs. Smith had reached her limit. After countless episodes of poor impulse control and shouting matches between Aiden and others, Mrs. Smith escorted Aiden to the principal's office, and told her administrator, "He's not saying 'fucking faggot' in my class again! It's not acceptable!" and left Aiden there to deal with the principal. Aiden did not return to class for nearly two weeks. I do not know what he was doing instead of

coming to class, but when he did return in mid-April, his attitude had softened, and he seemed less agitated. Perhaps he had softened because he hadn't been bullied?

I Don't Care Anymore

"I don't care about school and I don't care about homework. I don't do homework and I don't worry when the teacher comes around to collect it. I just don't do it and I don't care." In the twelve weeks that I was in his class, Aiden did not submit one piece of homework. He did not make excuses for it. He just didn't do it, and shrugged it off when asked about it. His parents are well educated, and expressed a desire for Aiden to do well in school. Aiden wrote entrance exams for admission into a prestigious private school. His results did not measure up, and he was not accepted. "My dad was pissed with me, but I don't care anymore. I don't care that I don't fit in here. None of it really matters anymore." I could hear the hopelessness in his voice. He meant it. I could tell that nothing really mattered to him anymore.

Where are Your Parents?

"So what are you and your buddies up to, after school?" I asked Aiden.

"My friends come over and they just go on my computer and log onto their accounts," he said.

"What are they doing on your computer?" I asked.

"Trashy things," he confessed.

"In your house?" I clarified.

"Under my supervision," Aiden said proudly.

"It sounds like you feel pretty proud of yourself, Aiden," I observed.

"Yes, I am," he said confidently.

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My parents are always away. And when my parents are away, I look after myself. I like to play X-Box, video games, and killing video games. I have friends over a lot, and I like to do that. I guess my dog is really the only one who keeps me company. He and I wrestle. My friends come over to use the computer and to do things that they can't do on their own computers.

The preceding fictional narrative was based on information Aiden shared. It would seem that with superficial friendships like the ones Aiden experiences, life can be lonely.

Aiden One on One

Two out of the three interviews I conducted with Aiden were done one on one. Aiden shared very little during our first group interview. He was the 'class clown,' and only mumbled under his breath, in an attempt to make his peers laugh. The decision to interview Aiden alone was a good one. One on one, Aiden made eye contact and sheepishly grinned as he shared the mischievous things that he and his friends do after school.

"You know, it's really different meeting you here one on one. You are different from the way you are in the classroom," I said to Aiden.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"You're soft-spoken and funny and it is nice to visit with you here. When I speak to you in class, it sounds like you are annoyed and just not happy to be there," I said. Aiden went on to share that when his friends are being obnoxious in class, he does it too, in order to fit in.

"I have to do it too because, you have to," he explained.

I bluntly asked, "What would happen if you didn't act like that?"

"They'd call me a woosy," he said. Aiden was not the only boy in the class who stated this. Both Bill and Chris, who are athletic, bright, hard working students agreed that there was pressure to join the crowd and behave inappropriately in class, or risk being called a "woos." Although I did not witness Bill or Chris behaving inappropriately during classtime, it appears that there is tremendous pressure to follow the crowd in order to fit in, as with most adolescent situations.

Sharing His Music

About mid-April, the typical reserved, non-commenting Aiden came to life for the first time during class, when I announced their final project. "For our final classes together, we are going to do presentations. I'd like everyone to present something related to attitude. You can share a poem, or a skit. You can write a story, a rap or share lyrics of a favorite song. Whatever you like, that has something to do with attitude." Aiden's hand shot up. "Mrs. Smith, can I go to the library? Can you write me a note so that I can go?"

"Sure Aiden," she said, jotting a note to the librarian, seeking permission for Aiden to use the library computers. Before the end of class was up, Aiden was back with lyrics of a favorite song printed out. They were lyrics written by a rap group, and Aiden couldn't wait to share them. The following class, Aiden was among the first to get up in front of the group, and without hesitating, recited and then interpreted the lyrics of the song. This was remarkable for a student who had contributed virtually nothing all term. Asking students to choose something personal to share appeared to make an impact. For those who chose music to share, it seemed to make the greatest impact. Aiden's voice

seemed to be heard for the first time since the beginning of February. Maybe he was not comfortable sharing his own voice, but felt much more at ease sharing his thoughts and feelings through the lyrics of a song.

Music was an effective component of the intervention that helped me to connect at a deeper level with many of the students. Many song lyrics revealed the "heart" of the students, pointing out what students valued and where their passions lie. Their music gave me a platform to ask more questions in follow up interviews, and allowed me to enter their world.

Asking students to share song lyrics was particularly effective with Aiden. After class, Aiden stayed back to share more with me about the meaning of the song he presented called "Changes." He wanted me to know that the song artist was Black, and died in a racially motivated killing a couple of years ago. Aiden knew so much about music, and seemed to feel very proud to share something with me that I knew nothing about. It was interesting that the song Aiden shared with the class discussed how people have to start pulling together to make changes, and that we can go nowhere unless we help one another. The essence of the song can be summed up in these lyrics: "We gotta' make a change. It's time for us as a people to start makin' some changes. Let's change the way we eat, let's change the way we live and let's change the way we treat each other. You see the old way wasn't working so it's on us to do what we gotta do, to survive" (Shakur, 1998).

"Finally, something that resonates with Aiden," I thought. I was ecstatic at this breakthrough. Then a thought occurred to me, "I wonder if the message in this song is his heart's cry?" If only I could have worked with these students longer, I think that I could

have made an even richer connection with each of them. Processing the content of their music was definitely an enlightening moment for me.

Wrapping Up

I am not sure how effective some of the techniques taught through the intervention were for Aiden because he missed so many classes. Visits to his former city and trips to the principal's office took him away from nearly half of our classes together. The intervention would likely have been more meaningful for Aiden if he had not been absent so often. When Aiden was in class, he did not participate much and seemed really annoyed at having to participate in group work. Group work was not a good teaching strategy to use with Aiden, since his peers were fickle, and at times mean, and were not always open to including him in their groups. Other times the verbal needling between Aiden and others contributed to a tense classroom environment. Looking back, it might have been effective to work one on one with Aiden, where possible, to catch him up on the work that he had missed, and to alleviate the stress he may have felt working with others when exploring personal issues.

Music was a rich avenue to explore with these students, and when given the opportunity to voice his thoughts through the words of a favorite song, Aiden shone. I am grateful to all of the students for opening up to me, and sharing their lives. I am grateful to Aiden for opening my eyes to the countless variables that put him and others living in this upper middle class neighborhood at risk. Before working with this group, I had not considered that these students would be at risk. It was startling to discover that some students were experiencing neglect, feelings of hopelessness, feelings of isolation, and

bullying. I was also surprised that many students were feeling so angry. The grass is always greener on the other side, isn't it? But things aren't always as they appear.

A "Fictional Flash Forward"

I got nothin' better to do.

I may as well get blasted.

During our interview together, Aiden shared how on one occasion, he become drunk on the alcohol in his parent's liquor cabinet. He also mentioned that he had been to a party and drank beer. Although this preliminary evidence of experimenting with alcohol does not point to addiction, in my experience with working with youth at risk, a significant factor which is often a precursor to drug and alcohol addiction is a lack of leisure skills. This lack of leisure skills often leads youth into looking for things to do to fill their time. Because Aiden does not appear to be involved in any activities outside of school, or any activities offered within the school, he does not appear to be honing leisure skills aside from exploring on the computer and playing video games. I might suggest that substances could become attractive for Aiden, as a means to fill his leisure time.

Youth From Yorkdale Heights at Risk?

"Affluenza," Neglect & Disconnect

I believe that the affluence of some of the youth living in this community could actually put some of these students at risk. Easy access to money for many of these young people could lead them into trying substances, which could translate into future issues related to substance use and abuse.

My experience working with young people before teaching at Yorkdale School had been limited to working with incarcerated youth who, by our judicial system were

labeled 'at risk.' When I came to Yorkdale School I did not expect to find so many similarities between those at risk youth and the youth living in Yorkdale Heights. I followed up with Mrs. Smith about the similarities that I had observed between these two populations, and she agreed that although there are many differences between the two populations, there are many similarities. Since Mrs. Smith herself grew up as a child of poor immigrant parents, and considers herself to have been 'at risk,' she easily relates to students who grow up with less. "Like, some kids [in poor communities] were going to school hungry because there was no food and there was neglect....When I come here to teach, you know, a lot of these kids have food and choose not to take the food and come to school hungry."

This must be frustrating for a teacher who, having grown up with no food in the cupboard, deals with inattentive students who cannot focus due to their empty bellies, when there are positive alternatives and healthy choices available.

From what they shared of their lives, I feel concerned at the apparent neglect of some of the students with whom I worked. In today's society, many parents are working really hard to provide for their families, and children are suffering as a result. Mrs. Smith raised this as a concern as well. "A lot of these kids are neglected in the same way here [as in poorer communities]. Here Mom and Dad are working, like, to eleven o'clock at night or traveling by plane and emailing [asking], 'Are you doing your homework?'" Although the neglect that these young people experience is not physical, as they appear to have an abundance of what they need, their neglect is experienced in the form of emotional care and contact time with significant adults in their lives. For someone like Tim, for example, the time he has to spend with his parents appears minimal. To his

advantage, Tim has three older siblings who help to care for him and provide some mentoring. Aiden, on the other hand, has no siblings, and mentioned that he does not have any significant adults in his life to whom he could go if he needed help.

One final similarity between the at risk youth I worked with in the past and the youth from Yorkdale Heights was a lack of connectedness to the community. In poorer communities where children and youth may be at risk, often times there are people who move in and out the community on a regular basis, making it difficult for these young people to lay down roots. Because the adults who live in Yorkdale Heights are often professionals, it is not unusual for families to move when the breadwinner's job takes the family out of province or out of the country. Mrs. Smith shared, "There were transient people in my area growing up but there's a lot of transient families in this area too, who stay for two or three years and then leave because of transfers, right. So being rooted in the community isn't really there either." Feeling a sense of belonging in a community, and knowing where you are from can lead to feelings of security. As an adolescent, feeling secure can go a long way in helping to move through this tumultuous period of life. Moving and starting over is difficult at any stage of life, but during adolescence, it can be extremely difficult. Attempting to find an existing social group to fit into, especially when you are still figuring out who you are, can be very stressful.

The most obvious difference between the youth with whom I worked in the past, and these youth, is accessibility to money. This access to money may put the youth from Yorkdale Heights at great risk. Access to money means access to a lot of things, all of which may not be positive or healthy. Drugs and alcohol cost money, and many of these youth have easy access to money, which could lead to experimenting with substances that

could potentially lead to addiction. When leisure skills are lacking, boredom results. Getting high could be an effective means of alleviating boredom, or even dulling the pain of isolation and rejection.

My Final Visit to Yorkdale School

I did not meet with the students again after we finished the presentations. Our three months were over, and ending off with the music was a strong way to finish our time together. I did go back one last time in June, hoping to see them again, but they were busy writing exams. I brought in a hand written note for each student which Mrs. Smith was going to pass on to them. In the note I thanked students for their hard work, wished them well, and included a copy of my favourite poem, written below.

The Goose Story

Next fall, when you see geese heading south for the winter…flying along in V formation…you might consider what science has discovered as to why they fly that way:

As each bird flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird immediately following. By flying in V formation the whole flock adds a 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew on its own.

People who share a common direction and sense of community can get to where they are going more quickly and easily because they are traveling on the thrust of one another.

When a goose falls out of formation it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to go it alone…and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird in front.

If we have as much sense as a goose, we will stay in formation with those who are headed the same way we are.

When the Head Goose gets tired, it rotates back in the Wing and another goose flies point.

It is sensible to take turns doing demanding jobs with people or with geese flying south.

Geese honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed. What do we say when we honk from behind?

Finally…and this is important…when a goose gets sick, or is wounded by gunshots, and falls out of formation, two other geese fall out with the goose and follow it down to lend help and protection. They stay with the fallen goose until it is able to fly or until it dies, and only then do they launch out, on their own, or with another formation to catch up with their group.

If we have the sense of a goose, we will stand by each other like that.

<div align="right">Milton Olson</div>

CHAPTER 7

Recommendations & Conclusions

A hundred years from now, it will not matter what my bank account was,
the sort of house I lived in or the kind of car I drove...
But the world may be different because I was important
in the life of a child.

Author unknown

For this final chapter, a wide range of recommendations are offered for the researcher and teacher, including: a) recommendations for practice, b) recommendations for working with the adolescent learner, c) recommendations for working in a racially diverse classroom, d) recommendations for future programming in the area of coping skills, and e) recommendations for future research. Recommendations for practice offer suggestions for implementing a coping skills program, based on my successes and failures in the classroom at Yorkdale School. What I learned about how stress, coping and adolescence impact the youth with whom I worked are highlighted within the sections 'working with the adolescent learner,' and 'working in a racially diverse classroom,' and general recommendations are made suggesting the need for adolescent coping skills programming at the school level. Finally, specific recommendations are made for future research. It is hoped that the recommendations found in this chapter contribute to the body of knowledge in the field.

Recommendations for Practice: Logistical Decisions

The following recommendations for practice outline logistical suggestions for planning and implementing a coping skills program for adolescents. These recommendations address the "how to" piece, highlighting what worked well, and changes I would make were I to implement a coping skills program for youth in the

future. These recommendations are written with the teacher-researcher-practitioner in mind.

Observing in Advance

When working in an existing classroom setting with students and their teacher, I would recommend observing the classroom dynamics before beginning your work with the group. 'Gauging the landscape' in advance could help to ensure consistency with classroom management style and approaches to misbehaviour, give you a sense of the class culture, and show how the teacher and students interact. Doing so could also provide the opportunity to see what teaching styles the teacher uses, and how the students respond to that teaching style. Had I had the opportunity to observe these students in advance, I may have changed the manner in which I delivered some of the initial content, to be more in line with Mrs. Smith's discussion approach to disseminating information. I would have also recognized her definition of and tolerance for inappropriate behaviour, and had been more consistent with her approach to classroom management.

Choosing to Be Flexible

Within an intervention such as this, it is important to be prepared - for anything. Before I began, I was well informed by the literature, and well equipped with ideas, techniques, and strategies for teaching coping skills. That knowledge, added to nine years of experience, made me feel ready to go. I soon realized that the course that I had expected to travel with the youth was not where we needed to go. I had to let go of past experiences, and start fresh with this group. Being flexible meant allowing the intervention to take its course, which translated into me letting go of the reins and "going with the flow," which is far more intentional than it sounds. Going with the flow meant

that each day an assessment was made regarding where we were and where we needed to go next. Looking at the results of student brainstorming, class discussions, homework, and debriefing with Mrs. Smith often made the next step a logical decision. Choosing to be flexible translated into a tremendous amount of work, as I needed to research and review new literature and create new lessons every week. In the end, letting go of the reins was a very liberating experience. The students truly did chart our course, and ended up receiving a genuinely tailor made intervention geared to responding to where they were, at that point in time. I strongly recommend making a decision to be flexible, and letting go of pre-conceived ideas and expectations.

Ensuring Personal, Social and Cultural Relevance

As highlighted in Chapter 3, it is important to bear in mind the concept of cultural relevance in order to ensure that the intervention and its delivery is meaningful for the learners. This means that the content taught and activities used to deliver the content meet the students where they are, acknowledging and honouring who they are and their feelings. This sort of program needs to be meaningful and relevant to them in their daily lives in order for it to have an impact. It also needs to acknowledge and honour the challenges that confront these young people on a daily basis, which could be influenced by interconnected issues of gender, race, class, ability, and so on. I learned from engaging in this research that if the content under study is not personally, socially or culturally relevant to the participants, there will be little "buy in" and it will be difficult to meet the study objectives.

Thus I would recommend the following in order to help ensure that the program is relevant to the students: a) conduct interviews in advance of the intervention to begin to

get to know the students, b) ask students to complete an "interests inventory" to give you more information about them, c) consult with the classroom teacher regarding the students, their likes, dislikes, interests, social groups and friends, to learn more about them, d) observe them in their natural classroom setting in advance, e) facilitate a team building session with students in order to build a sense of class community, helping you to get to know the learners better (Halas, 2006), and f) team teach with the classroom teacher (addressed in the following section). These ideas combined, plus work in the classroom setting could help to build a picture of who these students are, so that you will be able to draw on examples of relevant situations in their lives, which will help make your teaching more personally, socially and culturally relevant. Further, during the course of the intervention, you could also stop to "check in" with students by asking them questions such as: "Is what we're doing helpful? Meaningful? Is there anything we could change that would make it better?" These sorts of questions also lend themselves well to being an effective affective teacher.

Partnering with the Classroom Teacher

I quickly learned that experience and expertise in an area meant little without first establishing a relationship with students. Of course building a trusting relationship takes time. Without that initial relationship, it was difficult to step into this classroom and draw some students into the content that I had hoped to teach. After some trial and error, working effectively with students meant partnering with Mrs. Smith. Although I had the content knowledge, my knowledge was incomplete because I did not know the students. Mrs. Smith knew the students well, so partnering with her made good sense. For the success of the intervention, it was important that she and I work together so that she

could take the content I prepared and put it into a personally and socially relevant context for the students to understand. Without a relationship with the students, some were not keen on working with me. Without a relationship, I was unable to make the information meaningful for them. Once Mrs. Smith and I began working together to deliver the information, students began to see the relevance of the information being taught, and my relationship with them began to grow. In order to ensure relevance of the content under study, and to help deepen the relationship between the facilitator and students, I would recommend teaming with the classroom teacher when delivering an intervention such as this.

Affirming the Learners

I believe that a good way to keep students motivated and energized regarding their efforts is to genuinely affirm their hard work. Letting students know that you are learning a great deal from them and validating what they are contributing is important. Because I was team teaching with Mrs. Smith, I did not affirm their work in the classroom as much as I would have liked. I did, however, seize the opportunity to continue dialoguing with students on the pieces of homework that they submitted. I wrote questions back to them, underlined and commented on certain aspects that they shared in their homework, and a dialogue was established within their written work. In these running conversations, the students' hard work was consistently acknowledged and they were thanked. During every interview, student responses were affirmed and their candour was congratulated. I recommend intentionally affirming young learners and their hard work. Showing a genuine appreciation to those with whom you are conducting research goes a long way at demonstrating respect and gratitude.

Respecting Privacy

In my previous experience teaching coping skills to younger children, students could hardly wait to share their thoughts, ideas, and stories with me. At times, containing their enthusiasm was a challenge. However in this research, I soon realized that when students move into adolescence, many are much less willing to disclose their thoughts. For example, Tess taught me that asking her to share her stressors and methods of coping is intimate personal territory. When working with adolescents, the level of intimacy expected in disclosing this information needs to be respected which may translate into any number of changes to the delivery of content, such as changing teaching styles, so students do not have to publicly disclose information. Another alternative might be to have teachers team teach the information to smaller groups of students, so students feel less vulnerable when disclosing personal information during class brainstorms and discussions.

Re-Grouping

Students are all at different places in terms of their emotional development and their understanding of how to cope. I found that when working with this group, eight students were very keen to learn how to apply the skills being taught. They were already quite effective at coping and wanted to learn more about application in other areas of life. Other students were learning this information for the first time, and needed to start with learning very basic skills. Meeting a variety of student needs may best be accomplished by breaking students into smaller groups based on where they are in their understanding of how to cope and what they are experiencing in their lives. Since many are in very different places, it is wrong to assume that the skills Tim needs are the same skills that

Sarah needs, for example. Working in smaller groups may better accommodate student needs, and could also make the curriculum more personally and socially relevant. This could be accomplished efficiently by having two teachers team teach the information to smaller groups of students, so that the information being taught is helpful and appropriate to where students are in their lives. Delivering the content in this way could potentially: a) demonstrate respect for student privacy, b) acknowledge personal and social relevance, and c) respond individually to student needs.

Focus Group, Individual and Mid-Point Interviews

I began the intervention by conducting focus group interviews. I needed to get to know the students so that I could begin to create a meaningful and relevant coping skills curriculum for them. I thought that group interviews would be a good way to get to know students, and to help put them at ease with me. It could have been intimidating for students to meet with me one-on-one for a tape-recorded interview, thus I made the decision to conduct initial interviews in small groups, which was a good decision.

When forming the initial focus groups for interviews, I did not know which students worked well together. Because there was not a class seating plan, students decided with whom they were going to sit when they arrived in class. I used these student-formed groupings as focus groups for initial interviews. For example, Tess, Rhea, Michelle, and Adele sat together, so I invited them as a group to an interview. During our initial interview together, these girls fed off of each other's negative energy, and were eager to tell me how much they hated school, the teachers, and their parents. Although their stressors were valid, it was not a very productive combination. In hindsight, I should have asked Mrs. Smith to help create the groupings, as she would have known in advance

which students mixed well together. Although I did interview groups of friends, it may have been more effective to group students according to common interests. As well, during initial focus group interviews, I sat down with as many as four students at one time. This was too large a group, as some students dominated the interviews while other voices were not heard.

After conducting group interviews, I recognized that subsequent data would be better gathered by conducting some individual interviews with students, which resulted in much richer interview dialogue. There were still some students who I felt would interview better with a peer, so for those students, they were paired with one other student, according to common interests.

I found that during individual interviews, students often shared a great deal more than they did within group interviews. For example, during an interview with Tim, after sharing a personal story, he said, "I don't share the story too much with people because they don't understand and so I'm just happy you're the only one I can share to right now," and prefaced another story by saying, "And you know, I haven't told anyone this yet, but..." These statements tell me that Tim felt safe to share parts of his life with me in a one-on-one interview, but had one or more of his friends been present, I doubt that he would have disclosed that information. That being said, this information was shared after 12 weeks of working together, following the opportunity to build a relationship with Tim, which could have significantly influenced his decision to disclose intimate details to me.

Final interviews were also conducted separately with Tess, Rhea, Michelle, and Adele. Individually I found these girls to be sensitive and more relaxed. They exposed a different side of themselves to me when they were not in the company of their peers, and

we engaged in dialogue with breadth and depth. Although group interviews can be a good way to initially establish rapport and offer a safe environment for students to share some of their thoughts, subsequent individual interviews may be much more effective. Given that adolescence can be a time of particular vulnerability, sharing intimate thoughts and feelings during a group interview could be very risky. In order for adolescents to feel safe to reveal their thoughts without risking being exposed, I recommend doing individual interviews with students at this age, after establishing a rapport.

The final interviews that I conducted with students ran approximately one hour each, and were rich and in-depth. Topics such as racism, bullying, conflict with parents and siblings, and loneliness were all points of dialogue that were raised. In the future, if the intervention had run longer than 12 weeks, it might have been helpful to conduct in-depth interviews half way through the intervention for several reasons. First, these interviews appeared to soften the students toward me, and helped us to forge a stronger relationship. Second, the interviews gave me much greater insight into each student, keeping me sensitive to whom the students were and their needs. Third, some of the issues that students were facing could have been incorporated into my teaching. Finally, the information shared by students would have helped me to make the content of the information more personally, socially and culturally relevant.

It would be important to ensure that mid-point interviews and final interviews are not held too closely together, or else it is possible to run the risk of not exhuming the richness of data that would be yielded by conducting only one. Thus, for interventions that run over several months, I recommend conducting in-depth interviews at the halfway

point, to build rapport and trust with students, as well as to learn what their lives are like, so that the information shared can be incorporated into the content of the intervention.

Follow-Up: Supports for Students

Because many issues were uncovered both in the context of the classroom and during interviews, students may need to connect with teaching staff, such as school counsellors, to continue to discuss issues revealed during the intervention. Ensuring that supports are in place to follow-up with students after the intervention has completed is important. It might be considered unethical to request that students delve into issues of stress and coping, asking them to reveal personal information, and then not have resources in place for them to continue the discussion, if issues remain unresolved. For example, Aiden may have benefited from the opportunity to continue speaking with someone following the intervention, as issues relating to anger and feelings of hopelessness surfaced during the intervention. I recommend alerting the school resource team and/or counsellor of what is happening in the classroom. When it appears that a student would benefit from follow-up support, seek that student's permission to put her/him in touch with someone from the resource team.

Time as an Issue

During my initial planning, three months seemed like plenty of time to administer a coping skills intervention. In hindsight, I wish I had requested more than three months to work with these students. At the conclusion of the intervention, I was beginning to catch glimpses of who these students were. Not only did I long for more time to teach content, I ached for the opportunity to continue to build relationships with these students. After students made their presentations at the end of the intervention, we began to make

some significant connections. They were starting to "get it." I was starting to "get" them. And then our time was up. Time is often an issue in teaching, and in this case, I would recommend three months as a minimum time commitment when delivering a coping skills intervention.

Another issue relating to time was class length. The class length was 40 minutes, but as highlighted in chapter three, that 40 minutes often translated into 30 to 35 minutes, once students settled. More than 30 to 35 minutes of classtime is necessary to review previous concepts, engage in meaningful dialogue, and delve into hands-on activities. I would recommend a minimum of 45 minutes of contact time, to fully discuss and rehearse concepts taught. Anything less, and you will likely feel behind before you begin.

Program Maintenance

The classroom teacher can maintain that which was introduced through the intervention, if he/she is interested, once the formal part of the intervention has been completed. In order for this to happen, I recommend that the researcher give the classroom teacher a complete resource package of all the lessons taught during the intervention, and any other materials necessary to make it possible for him/her to carry on with the content. Without concrete resources, a teacher may feel ill-equipped to carry on with aspects of the intervention. For this research, Mrs. Smith requested copies of all that I taught, so that she could continue teaching what I had started, as well as introduce it to new groups of students.

Where Do We Go From Here?: Mrs. Smith's Recommendations

I asked Mrs. Smith where she thought the intervention should go next, if I were to have stayed on at Yorkdale School. She suggested that after completing the topic of attitude, and how attitude affects people in their everyday lives, that she would have liked for us to explore attitude's effect on various relationships, including relationships with parents, siblings, friends, and romantic partners. From attitude in romantic relationships, she suggested exploring dating as a topic, which would include abusive relationships, identifying when you are in one, how to get out of one, and the cycle of violence. "I would focus on the relationship piece," Mrs. Smith went on to say, "because there are different relationships you have with different people, but attitude affects them all."

Where I Would Go Next: Looking to the Future

Because Mrs. Smith knows her students, and where they are in terms of places and spaces in life, her recommendations could be one direction to take, following what we discussed during the intervention. If I were to have continued at Yorkdale School, depending upon the students and their responses, some areas that I would have appreciated the opportunity to explore next would have included: a) stressors that are both within and beyond one's personal control, and positive responses to each, b) cognitive appraisal, and how perception affects stress levels, c) stressors that are foreseeable, unforeseeable, avoidable and unavoidable, and positive responses to each, d) positive thinking, including positive and negative self-talk, e) looking for the good in others, supporting others and being a team player, f) looking for the good in every day, including looking for natural highs, and showing gratitude, g) bullying, how it feels to be bullied, and personal responses to bullying, including the topic of bullying as a means to

exclude and discriminate. Finally, I would have enjoyed showing videos of the young students with whom I worked in the past, who understood and applied coping strategies, and in the videos explained what stress is to them and how they cope.

The rationale for exploring these areas listed above rose directly out of the results of the research. Many students were under tremendous stress, but did not understand that they had some control over those stressors. They also did not realize that there are different strategies that can be experimented with, to help mitigate particular types of stress. They did not understand that the reason some of them are able to go with the flow, while others "choke" when it comes to stressors is because each person has a different perception of stress. Because so many were feeling negative, overloaded, and defeated, focusing on looking for the good in themselves, in others, and in every day would have been a positive step to take, helping them to cognitively restructure some of their thoughts and attitudes. Finally, in light of what was revealed during final interviews, discussing coping strategies when facing issues related to exclusion, racism, and body image, specifically how body image is constructed and how the media portrayal of body image is unrealistic, could have been helpful. Not only would it have been beneficial to teach coping skills to those who have been excluded, targeted due to skin colour, size or sexuality, addressing these issues may have been sensitizing to those who were responsible for excluding, behaving in a racist manner, or teasing others.

Recommendations for Working with Adolescents:

Differentiating Teaching Styles

I noted during my time at Yorkdale School that students in the middle years are often fidgety, and need to move. Thus, I recommend incorporating movement into the lessons where appropriate, and actively engaging students in their learning. This can be done by differentiating teaching styles, so that the kinaesthetic learner is engaged, in addition to the auditory, visual, and tactile learner (Dunn and Dunn, nd). Looking to Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1999) would also give teachers further ideas on how to meet the needs of interpersonal, intrapersonal, logical, verbal, visual, musical, and kinaesthetic learners. Offering lessons that incorporate some or all of these "intelligences" translates into a teacher who meets the needs of more of her/his students. Students also affirmed my attempts at differentiating teaching strategies used in their class by sharing that they liked all the different activities that we did together.

Teaching students in the middle years, suggests Principal Miller, can be effective when it is more eclectic. Giving students a wide variety of topics to explore, and using a variety of modalities to deliver the content could be a fun way for students in the middle years to experience learning. I did find that when I moved away from more conventional approaches to teaching, and allowed students to explore their thoughts by creating posters and charts, exploring poetry, and asking them to make presentations using song lyrics, students really came alive. In an interview with Mr. Miller, he points out,

> Why not expose them to lots of stuff? Why not give them lots of stuff to be
>
> engaged with? And let's not worry so much about how they're doing in it, from
>
> an achievement point of view, but let's look at how they're doing from a

participation, enjoyment and learning perspective and give them some sense of who they are.

Delivering an eclectic curriculum is a creative idea, and could be a way of meeting the needs of a variety of learners.

Relationship Building

Mr. Miller suggests that relationships between students and teachers are critical during the middle years, which have the potential to make a significant impact on students' lives. In Mr. Miller's words

> And, so, I think the capacity of middle years teacher...to be the really warm, loving, responsible, competent, level adult is really important. And level doesn't mean that you can't be upset with the kid. It means that if you blow it you go back and say, 'You know what, I didn't handle that really well yesterday. Sorry about that. I still need what I need, but didn't handle it well.' It's the relational piece.

Those teachers who invest in relationships with their students will have a much greater impact on their students within and beyond the classroom. The trust built in these relationships could translate into students approaching a teacher and soliciting her/his help or advice when grappling with life issues. I recommend being "intentional" in building relationships with students by making a point of asking questions, showing interest, and spectating games or concerts as ways of investing in the lives of your students, for example. Showing that you are interested in them could go a long way in making an impact.

Understanding Emotions

Manitoba's Physical and Health Education curriculum (see Manitoba Education and Training, 2000) have several specific learning outcomes (SLO's) targeted at emotions, focusing students on identifying emotions, and determining strategies for expressing them. Within the "Personal and Social Management" general learning outcome (GLO 4), students as young as Kindergarten are expected to be taught to "identify a range of feelings and emotions...in a range of contexts" (p. 132). This is a positive step in a direction where I noted a great deal of need.

During a class discussion at Yorkdale School, it become clear that many students were unable to distinguish among the eight basic emotions. Some believed that all emotions yielded energy, and many felt that anger was their most positive emotion. The need to create awareness about emotions became a foundational part of the intervention. After concluding this study, it has become apparent that understanding emotions is foundational to understanding self and others. Thus, to expand on what is outlined in the Manitoba Physical and Health Education curriculum, I recommend that within the school setting, adolescents be systematically taught: a) the eight basic emotions, b) how to interpret emotions, and c) what to do with the energy produced by emotions. Without an understanding of basic emotions, students have the potential to misinterpret them, which could result in "feeding" emotions inappropriately. Some might feed feelings of loneliness with food, while others will fill it with alcohol. It is paramount for students to understand that: a) emotions are normal, b) no emotion is positive or negative – it is how the emotion is handled that can lead to positive or negative outcomes, c) no emotion is wrong, and d) one's response to emotions produces consequences. Understanding one's

response to an emotion is critical and the result can be the difference between thriving or merely surviving.

The Dance with Anger

Before I began this study, I was unaware of how angry some youth are feeling. Their anger became apparent to me very quickly. There were many reasons for their anger, including bullying, racism, feeling caught between fighting parents, and parental controls. Many students had compelling reasons to be angry. According to Mr. Miller "Now you're only thirteen and your parents just split up and your dog died and you've never been really successful at school, and the kids really are isolating you and making fun of you. So you are probably justifiably angry." However, what students need to be taught is how to express anger effectively. Many consequences ensue when anger is not expressed effectively, and those areas need to be discussed. Anger is an energizer, and using the energy produced by anger responsibly needs to be taught.

The fact that these students are adolescents makes them more likely to be angry. Adolescents are trying to spread their wings and fly, and may feel restricted by rules enforced by school and parents. Adolescence is notably a time of rebellion, and we should expect, according to Erikson (1980), that working through the "age of ego identity" translates into young people who are going to challenge authority. Within the context of the school classroom, I recommend identifying anger as a key emotion during adolescence, and teaching students to positively use the energy generated by anger. A coping skills program such as this could target the eight basic emotions, and then delve into anger as an energy producing emotion. It could be explored, dissected, and examined, to determine effective responses to the emotion. Pointing out that anger is not

a negative emotion, rather the energy elicited by anger could produce positive results if channelled effectively, could be a valuable teaching point.

Those students who are driven by anger and do not understand the root of what is making them feel so angry are, in my opinion, at risk. Displaced anger as mentioned in chapter three, holds the potential for some students to behave abusively in relationships, because functioning at an angry level all of the time feels normal for them. Addictions to numb the pain of the root cause of the anger is another potential risk. Addictions could lead into a downward spiral in many other aspects of their lives, putting youth and their promising futures at-risk. As stated in chapter 6, I am concerned about the level of anger displayed by many of the students with whom I worked, and fear that this unresolved anger could lead to any number of negative consequences. Therefore, I recommend that teachers and counsellors together explore emotions and anger with these students, and work to uncover some reasons for anger, address the underlying causes, and identify some positive ways to cope with it.

Recommendations for Working in a Racially Diverse Classroom:

Acknowledging Race & Building a Healthy Learning Milieu

Racial identity should be a source of pride for children from all racial groups. Many times, the attitudes of the majority culture serve to distil this pride, making children from minority cultures feel inferior. Because of a long history of explicit racial discrimination, schools have been slow to change and develop a true multicultural perspective.

Sparks, 1994, p. 34

Although I initially noticed that the students I worked with at Yorkdale School represented various races, as mentioned in Chapter 5, I had not anticipated it as a stressor among the students in this class. I only caught a glimpse of racism initially, when Aiden called Tim a "Chink" while I was conducting interviews in a nearby room at the start of

the intervention. I then had more indication of racism when four students stated "racism, prejudice, and name calling" as sources of stress in their written work. Although it did not surface in any class discussions, I did take the opportunity to explore racism during final interviews with those who mentioned it as a stressor, which was a helpful way to gauge many of the students' perspectives on the issue.

Since I had not anticipated discussing race as a source of stress, I had not researched it and did not feel prepared to discuss it with the group. Had I known in advance that it was a source of stress for students, I would have grounded myself in the literature, and been better prepared to explore it with students. We would have also experimented with emotion focused and problem focused strategies for coping with the stress caused by racial discrimination.

Reflecting on working in this racially diverse classroom, I can say that I was initially "colourblind" to the extent that I saw all students in the classroom as thinking, feeling, moving human beings, and looked past the colour of their skin. Following the delivery of this intervention, I realized that I needed to assess whether a colourblind attitude was in the best interest of students.

Colourblind may be defined as being purposefully blind to people's colour. A colourblind ideology is pervasive in North America (O'Brien, 2000) and as a teacher, I have held on to the notion that a colourblind attitude was in the best interest of my students. Not noticing colour in an effort to be fair and treat all students equally seemed like a good idea. However, upon further research and dialogue with an advisor, I learned that choosing a colourblind stance could be detrimental to my overall relationship with students of colour.

It is necessary to treat people according to their needs, and those needs may arise when an individual's racial identity leaves them vulnerable within Canadian society. Not acknowledging skin colour could potentially deny people of colour who they are and what they need. Further, not acknowledging colour could inadvertently deny racism (O'Brien, 2000). When a white person acknowledges another person's colour, it has the potential to increase one's sensitivity to them, and help one to empathize with or affirm the other person's experiences (O'Brien). According to Tatum (1992), by treating everyone the same, teachers do not have the opportunity to see that racial identity is a part of who students are. A colourblind attitude does not afford the opportunity to appreciate and affirm students' identities, including their culture and traditions. For example, Tim's Asian-Canadian culture is an extremely important part of his life, and something he is proud of. His race positively relates to his identity. Showing interest in his culture, the traditions of his culture, and his family would have acknowledged and affirmed who he is.

Tim, Ian, Anson, Shane and Bobby felt targeted due to skin colour, and other students in Mrs. Smith's class felt stress associated with other types of discrimination. Sarah felt discriminated against because she is "different," due to a learning disability and Aiden was teased due to his size. Body image and physical appearance contribute significantly to one's perception of self, and others' perception of an individual. Addressing body image and appearance would be an extremely relevant topic to discuss during future interventions.

Teacher education programs need to effectively address issues of race within Canadian society in order for teachers to be better prepared to work within diverse

classrooms. Teacher education holds the potential to better equip teachers to take up issues of race and discrimination in the classroom, in an effort to help address, diffuse, and put an end to discrimination due to physical appearance within their classrooms. Discussions of this topic could sensitize students and increase understanding. Delving into this area would require a great deal of careful thought before proceeding, to ensure that students who are 'different' from the mainstream are not further marginalized by the discussion. Race and discrimination are very difficult to talk about; however they are stressors that students have identified, and teachers and facilitators of future coping interventions need to be prepared to address them.

Finally, I recommend that teachers strive to be culturally responsive (Sparks, 1994). Recognizing and appreciating each student's racial identity is a good place to start. From there, intentionally incorporating learning activities that build a sense of community and increase sensitivity could be accomplished by: a) team building, b) checking in (outlined in Chapter 3), c) building trust with students by investing in relationships with them, d) making an effort to learn about students' cultures, e) using different teaching styles to appeal to all learners, f) offering feedback to students, g) being selective when choosing instructional material to include different cultural perspectives, and h) making an effort to connect with parents/guardians of students of different cultural backgrounds (Sparks). Sparks would argue that it is a teacher's moral responsibility to be culturally responsive to students' needs, acknowledging "the influences of culture, language, race, gender or other characteristics that mark children as different from the majority" (p. 35). I believe that the strategies outlined above are simply

good teaching practices. However, as Ladson-Billings (1995) has pointed out, students who are racial minorities are not always exposed to good teaching.

Teaching about oppression can be difficult, and I have scarcely done it justice in the few preceding paragraphs. Facilitators of future interventions should be prepared to address discrimination, including discrimination based on race, ability, size, gender, and sexuality. I am only beginning to understand the complexities of this area, and in future research, would seek to develop my knowledge base regarding these issues.

Making a Case for Future Coping Skills Programming:

The Need for a Coping Skills Curriculum

If we want our most precious resource, children, to survive whatever is ahead in our super-stressed world, they must have the tools made available to them to cope with the daily stressors. Their own internal resources are waiting to be tapped, the resources they will have with them through every step in life's journey. Without these basic life skills, they will have difficulty making healthy choices for their own well-being. By knowing themselves, they can choose right actions over wrong actions, feel good enough about themselves to be content without substance abuse, and know how to prevent stress-related illnesses. They will also be able to communicate clearly, to respect others because they respect themselves, and to be able to nurture healthy relationships. Most of all they will care.

Miller & McCormick, 1991, p.58

The students from Yorkdale School were grappling with many issues which were brought to the surface through interviews, homework, and day-to-day dialogue that we shared during the intervention. It was through this process that tensions were revealed. I strongly recommend that coping skills programming, such as this one, be implemented with other youth in schools across Canada.

Teach Them When They're Young

As far back as twenty years ago, Zaichowsky and Zaichowsky (1984) pointed out that school based coping programs have the potential to positively impact student health, lifestyle, and performance. They went on to suggest that coping skills be taught to children when they are young, before they develop bad habits and poor coping strategies. I support Zaichowsky and Zaichowsky's recommendation that coping programs be taught to students when they are young, if possible. First, children look to their role models to figure out how to cope. When role models do not cope positively, children learn and model these same strategies. Learning coping skills such as the ones outlined in Orlick's *Feeling Great* Program (1998) from childhood would not only help students to learn and apply healthy coping strategies early in life, but also give children the time to learn to automate a positive response to stress. For example, learning to breathe diaphragmatically as an automatic response in a moment of stress is possible when it is practiced. When coping responses are rehearsed and applied, stress is often more manageable. Learning coping strategies when one is young is often easier, since during the adolescent years, teens often feel self-conscious when engaging in certain skills, such as relaxation, in the presence of their peers. In the case of working with the students from Yorkdale School, some of the students were not able to enjoy the benefits of engaging in relaxation exercises, because they were too self conscious to let themselves close their eyes and lie down in front of their peers. If these skills are learned from childhood, it could alleviate those feelings of embarrassment.

Inservicing the Teachers

Oldfield and Petosa (1986) identified many advantages to teaching coping skills in the regular classroom twenty years ago, all of which I fully endorse today. They suggested that first, learning these skills improves the health of children because being equipped with the ability to control stress translates into decreased feelings of helplessness and anxiety. Second, teaching stress management techniques is easily integrated into the curriculum strands of physical education, health and science. Third, only a small investment of time is needed in order to adequately equip teachers with the skills of how to administer such a program. Finally, teaching students to relax as a means to control the class is more simple than implementing a behaviour modification approach to manage behaviour (Petosa & Oldfield, 1985; Oldfield & Petosa, 1986). However, most children have not been systematically taught coping skills in a classroom setting, and may not have the requisite skills for coping positively in an ever-changing world because until very recently, there has been little room in the Manitoba and other curricula for teaching coping skills.

The Manitoba's Physical and Health Education curriculum (Manitoba Educaiton and Training, 2000) has come a very long way in terms of identifying a mind-body connection, and has now included general learning outcomes in the area of personal and social management. This area branches out to include learning outcomes in the area of stress identification and methods of coping. Unfortunately, this curriculum is typically in the hands of the physical educator alone. Further, in casual dialogue, many generalist teachers and some physical educators have expressed to me feelings of inadequacy regarding delivering this content to their students. If teachers do not have a good grasp of

how to employ these skills themselves, then teaching these skills to their students could be difficult.

Referring to my experience and education, Principal Miller commented, "I think the skill set that you have Leanne, is huge and I don't think we're always trained in it." When teachers are faced with decisions about teaching students self-control, self-management, and coping with stress, they often learn on their feet. According to Principal Miller, "We learn it by default sometimes." Thus, many teachers feel "in the dark" regarding how to approach these topics in the context of the classroom. Mrs. Smith further validated the need for this information to be taught to the teachers. She was aware that many of the issues uncovered during the intervention were plaguing her students, but she did not know why. In her words,

> So, for me, exploring why and having the information, like, how to get to the 'why,' was important for me. So, what you gave me to get to the 'why' is what I needed, 'cause I would have done it through discussion. It's not just discussion - it has to go through activities and the poster paper with all the different types of emotions.

Having systematically taught components of the intervention contributed to both Mrs. Smith and her students' learning. According to Mrs. Smith,

> So, that was the first time the information was brought up to me, like, that was the first time I was exposed to that, and so I was learning from the information, so I'm thinking, 'these kids must be learning something because I'm learning it', so that was helpful for me.

Thus, I recommend that those who are considered 'experts' in this area inservice teachers and teacher candidates to systematically teach the teachers coping skills, and methods of teaching coping skills, so that teachers gain the skills and confidence needed to teach their students.

Although it may take an initial time investment to teach these skills to teachers, and for them to in turn, teach them to their students, the pay-offs can be great. In my experience teaching coping skills to elementary aged students, I have found relaxation to be a positive alternative to the "heads down, lights off" technique to quieting down students; students attitudes are generally more positive, and on-task behaviours increase (Nazer-Bloom, 1997).

Where to Begin?

When teaching coping skills to students, this research experience would lead me to recommend beginning with emotion focused coping skills as a starting place. Emotion focused coping skills include mind and body relaxation, as well as keeping a positive outlook. These skills are designed to help students cope in a moment of tension, allowing them to call on skills to mitigate stress for that moment. Following emotion focused coping skills, I recommend teaching problem focused coping skills. Problem focused coping skills teach concrete skills to cope with stress in advance, offering students techniques for combating stress before it begins. By goal setting, communicating clearly, acting assertively, as well as taking care of their physiology, youth would be working toward keeping stress "in check." All of these skills put together offer students a better chance at combating the stressors felt in their lives, as well as teaching them to take more personal control over that which causes them tension.

The above suggestions are by no means exhaustive, yet working through emotion focused and problem focused coping strategies could serve as an excellent platform for students to learn to take more personal control of their lives and increase the possibility that they will experience a sense of peace. Within the intervention completed at Yorkdale School, we worked through various components of emotion focused coping, and did not have time to delve into problem focused coping techniques. Because students worked with me in deciding the direction of the intervention, it was clear that emotion focused coping was where we needed to spend our time, hopefully making the intervention more personally relevant for them.

General Recommendations for Research:

Securing Consent

Securing consent from those involved in the research study is a necessary step prior to beginning the journey of research. The students with whom I worked at Yorkdale School were under the age of legal majority. This meant that permission to work with them was secured from the top down, including the school superintendent, the school administrative team, the classroom teacher and the student's parents. After that consent was secured, individual consent was sought from each student, requesting their permission to write about them and what they shared with me.

Throughout the intervention I regularly highlighted for students the purpose of my research, and how the information I was learning from them might be used to help others who work with youth. During the final interview phase of the research, one on one, I re-explained my research to students, and highlighted how the results would be written up. I then requested verbal consent from each student individually, asking if I may include the

information that they had shared during our time together in my written and oral reports. I was sure to seek permission from students to use the information they shared with me when we spoke during final interviews, because at that point, students had fully experienced the entire intervention. All of the students consented.

Follow-Up: Effectiveness of Intervention

Follow-up is an important step of any intervention, as it allows the researcher to learn the long-term benefits of the work that he/she did with the population. I recommend starting this work early in the school year, and then following up later in the school year, making it possible to assess the effectiveness of the program after some months have passed. Unfortunately, I concluded my research at the end of the academic year, and follow-up was not possible. The students with whom I worked are now dispersed among various high schools, since their education at Yorkdale School terminated at the end of grade eight. This is unfortunate, as following up with students regarding what they learned and whether they continue to use what they learned would have provided very valuable information.

Recommendations for Future Research

How's it Going?...Talking to Youth

An intervention is not meaningful if it does not meet the needs of the target population. Speaking with youth regarding that which causes them stress and how they cope is critical to the success of any coping skills intervention. I strongly recommend that on-going research continue in this area.

When I first began researching the literature in the area of adolescent coping and stress, I immediately noticed that there had been very little written. It became clear to me

that researchers need to invest time with youth, sitting down and conducting in-depth interviews with youth, and observing them in their natural settings, in order to learn and write about that which causes youth stress and how they cope. We live is such a fast-paced society, and every generation appears to be dealing with different stressors than the generation before. Today technology plays a significant role in increasing stress for youth. Pressure from the media, addiction to computers and computer games, internet bullying, and computer generated violence are unique to this generation. Those factors, when added to experimenting with designer drugs, alcohol, and pre-mature sex, can potentially put youth at risk. The manner in which many youth cope with these stressors can have serious, deleterious consequences. In order to keep current, and to deepen our understanding of the issues affecting youth, we need to keep connected with young people. If we endeavour to help them without staying current, or assume that those things that caused us stress during adolescence are the same stressors they are facing, our efforts could be fruitless.

Specifically, I recommend looking at diverse segments of youth in our society to understand stress experienced by young people from different walks of life. The interconnected oppressions based on gender, class, race, sexuality, and geography could be explored. For example, looking at stress and coping of youth who live in the inner city versus those who live in the suburbs and the country. Youth who live in western parts of Canada might have different life experiences and stressors than youth living in eastern, central, and northern parts of Canada. Exploring issues related to the stress of life for adolescents living in each of the regions of Canada could be rich and enlightening. By talking to the youth, and exploring their life experiences, custom tailored intervention

programs could be developed for the various segments of youth represented in our society.

Longitudinal Studies

After conducting a three month study, my only regret is not being able to re-connect with these students, to find out if they are continuing to use any of the skills that we explored together. I recommend that in the future, when an intervention such as this is administered, that the research carry a longitudinal component, so that researchers can return to the students months and potentially years later, to examine the impact the coping skills had with the individuals involved. Finding out what students retained, and which skills, if any, they continue to employ would be very helpful.

Conclusion

Sport psychologists and other professionals are made available to elite athletes to help them cope with the stress of competition, realize their potential and become peak performers. There are a myriad of self-help books, television talk shows, and professionals available to help the adult cope with stress and the challenges of everyday life. There is even a school-based stress management program designed to help children cope (Orlick, 1998; Orlick & McCaffrey, 1994;Orlick & McCaffrey, 1995a; Orlick & McCaffrey, 1995b; Orlick & McCaffrey, 1995c; Orlick & McCaffrey, 1995d). However, very little exists in the way of empirically tested programs designed to help youth cope. The results of this study coupled with the literature provide enough evidence to support the need for coping skills to be systematically taught as school curricula for adolescents.

Given that adolescence is a time of immense change, I recommend that coping skills curricula include emotion focused and problem focused coping skills which may

181

help youth deal positively with the physical, emotional, cognitive and social changes they are experiencing all at one time. By learning coping skills, I am not suggesting that life will be easy for youth, however learning to cope in a healthy way could provide students with the skills, awareness, and perspective necessary to thrive during this time of transition, helping them to recognize and manage stress. Being equipped to manage one's own stress may help youth to live and act more positively, and to take more control over that which is in their personal control. Of all that youth will learn in school, coping skills are the gifts teachers can give students, which students could potentially carry with them for a lifetime.

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Appendix A

Coping Skills Curriculum

The following lesson plans were prepared specifically for the students of Yorkdale School. Many of these lessons unfolded in ways that were surprising to both me as well as the classroom teacher. There were many times when the discussion took the lesson in a very different direction than I had anticipated. As a result, all of the lessons were customized for these youth, to address the issues facing them, at this point in time. Most of the lessons were developed immediately following the previous lesson, in order to ensure that the content of each lesson was personally, socially, and culturally relevant and meaningful to students. Much of the content of the lessons was derived directly from the students themselves, as I gathered relevant information from them through class discussion, written assignments and presentations, and presented it back to them in subsequent lessons.

These lessons were designed to include: a) an activation phase, for the purpose of getting the students thinking about the topic under study, b) an acquiring phase, where content was taught, and c) an applying phase, where students were given the opportunity to apply some of what was learned during the lesson. Where appropriate, an assessment phase was also included. Although I would have liked to have had a written assessment piece following every class, I quickly learned that it was too much to ask of the students, who already had a heavy course load. Most of the lessons ran several classes, if not several weeks. When it was appropriate, lessons were expanded and explored in depth, to address issues raised by students.

Please note that student handouts and worksheets are typed in a different font, as a means to easily discriminate these from content delivered in each lesson.

Exit Slip #1

One morning when I was at Yorkdale School conducting an initial set of focus group interviews, a substitute teacher was in. She was unfamiliar with the students and unsure of what content to cover with them. That morning I assigned the following "Dear Mrs. Nazer-Bloom" letter.

Letter to Mrs. Nazer-Bloom, assigned Friday, February 17, 2006

Dear Mrs. Nazer-Bloom,

Things that stress me out include...
Things that I do when I'm stressed include...
An example of when I handled stress really well was...
An example of when I handled stress really poorly was...
What I have planned for this weekend includes...

From,

Lesson #1
Topic: Member Checking, Emotion Focused Coping & Problem Focused Coping
Date: February 22, 2006

Rationale for Lesson
I needed to conduct member checks in order to ensure that my interpretations of what students shared during focus group interviews was accurate. I decided to begin with explaining emotion focused and problem focused coping as a way to give an overview of where we would go during our time together. Diaphragmatic breathing is the most basic relaxation technique, and is foundational to emotion focused coping, and thus was the first relaxation technique taught.

Activate
- member checks of the first two focus group interviews
- specifically review "Things that cause them stress," "positive coping strategies," and "negative coping strategies"

Acquire
- discuss emotion focused coping – a type of coping skill used to mitigate stress for the moment; good for stressors largely out of one's personal control
e.g., diaphragmatic breathing, autogenic training, progressive muscle relaxation, imagery

- discuss problem focused coping – a type of coping skill used to deal with stress in advance of the stressor; good for stressors within one's personal control
e.g., goal setting, assertiveness training, time management

Apply
- do diaphragmatic breathing; use balloon to illustrate pushing air deep into diaphragm, and filling diaphragm with air
- do square breathing; illustrate on flip chart how to imagine drawing a square in your mind as you inhale and exhale deeply

Lesson #2
Topic: Skills of the Superstars – Exploring What Skills Our Olympians Have Honed that put them at the Top
Date: February 27, 2006

Rationale for Lesson
- this lesson was designed since 93% (14/15) of these students are involved in competitive sport or dance. The one other student is involved in a performing art, thus I thought that reviewing these skills would give "psychological skills" a meaningful context to which all could relate, and potentially benefit.

Activate
Recap of last class
- Do you recall the breathing technique we applied? (diaphragmatic breathing & square breathing)
- Did any of you practice it on your own? If yes, how did it go? When did you practice it? Was it helpful?
- Are there any of you who are still having trouble finding where your diaphragm is?

Today...
We are going to take a look at two of our Canadian Olympic Superstars
→ Show picture of Clara Hughs & Cindy Klassen
  - Do you know who these athletes are? What's so special about them? (Olympic medallists)
  - These athletes worked very hard and have acquired some very specialized skills to put them at the top

Acquire

Brainstorm: "Skills Of The Superstars"

Probing Question: What skills do you think they have worked at, in order to be the best?
→ record on chart paper (no blackboard or white board in this classroom)

→ *after this brainstorm, indicate which of the skills highlighted are "physical skills" & which ones are "mental skills"*

Teaching point:
- at then end of the day, an athlete will only be able to take his/her game so far, with physical skills; a lot of them are on an equal playing field when it comes to physical skills
- the thing that makes some star athletes "superstar athletes" is that they have developed the psychological skills to put them ahead of others

- if you think about it, if two athletes are equally matched in terms of physical skills, who will do better, the one who is focused or the one who is distracted?
- Who will do better, the one who is able to get her body under control and channels the energy to where she wants it to go, or the one who wastes energy fretting and getting nervous and worried?
- Who will do better, the athlete who has set goals for herself or one who doesn't?

→ the athlete who is skilled at her game, and also has learned and applies the psychological skills needed to be a peak performer will always come out ahead

- I use sport as an example, because many of you are athletes
- Even if you're not an athlete, we all play "the game of life," and we all play a part on many different teams
- Can you give me some examples of the teams you play on?
e.g. sport teams, family team, school team, community team, etc…

- some of these skills that I would really like to teach you first started with the athletes

- there are many skills that we could learn together that would help you in your athletics, but they can also be applied to help you in so many other areas of your life, like in school, in relating to friends and family, in coping with stress

Apply
- diaphragmatic breathing again today, for the purpose of getting yourself feeling relaxed and focused
- some people feel sleepy after relaxing at school, but the purpose of learning to relax at school is to focus the mind and quiet the body, so that you can settle yourself into your work and do well at it
- when you relax at home before bed, that is a good time to use relaxation to help you fall asleep
- the purpose of relaxing at school is different

- How did that go? How do you feel? Was it easier today?
- Just like the physical skills that an athlete learns to be skilled at what they do, they also practice and rehearse the psychological skills, to be the best at what they do

February 27, 2006

Dear Mrs. Nazer-Bloom,

- The teams I play on include... (family, dance, hockey, community, church, other groups)

- Out of all of these "skills of the superstars" that we discussed today, the ones I would like to learn the most include...

- I would like to learn these skills because...

- In what parts of your life would you use these skills?

- How is diaphragmatic breathing going for you?

- In what situations do you think diaphragmatic breathing can help you?

From,

Lesson #3
Topic: Positive Outlook
Date: March 2, 2006

Rationale for Lesson
I made a decision to carry on with attributes of the superstars. We laid a base for relaxation, and I wanted to move next into positive thinking.

Activate.1
Review of last class...
- last time we were together, we looked at the attributes of two of our star Olympians Clara Hughs and Cindy Klassen, and decided that they were hard working, determined, skilled and focused athletes
- we also thought that although they have amazing physical skills, their psychological skills help them be excellent in their sport

Today we are going to continue looking at attributes these superstars possess that helps them stay at the top of their game, and that is *maintaining a positive outlook*

- *Before we start that, I would we like to try a different kind of relaxation activity today.*
- *Do Comfy Comforter script (an autogenic training method of relaxation)*

Activate.2
A story to get us started...
Certain ordinary people in our lives can inspire us, or cheer us on, or make us feel good. A person in my life who does this is my sister. Kathryn is an upbeat, energetic, and positive person. If I am ever feeling discouraged or low, all I need to do is give her a shout and she'll be there to encourage me. Last year my sister, who is younger than me was diagnosed with cancer. She had a little baby at home and her life hung in the balance. Yet through it all, she was strong. She stayed true to her positive self and had a great sense of humour through the really tough times. She is a hero to me.

I also have a friend whose husband does the opposite of what Kathryn does for me. He is someone I can always count on to be grumpy, and negative. I almost never ask him how he is doing, because he always says "Grumpy, tired and hungry." One Christmas eve our family was walking to church and we saw him outside and said "Hey Doug, Merry Christmas! How is it going?" And he gave us his usual reply "Tired, grumpy and hungry." This man has a great wife and his children are kind and sweet. His negative attitude baffles me, and his disposition drains me. Some people serve to feed our spirits and others serve to drain us.

Acquire

Discussion:
Q. Do any of you have people in your life whose positive attitude "energize you" or give you the kind of encouragement you need to keep going? Discuss.

Q. Do any of you have people in your life whose attitudes draw all of your energy out of you and make you feel drained? Discuss.

Being a positive person is healthy and helps us be superstars in the things we do in our lives.

Four Key Reasons to Be Positive (key points written on chart paper, taped to wall)

1. *A positive outlook improves performance: "Attitude is everything"* **(being positive with ourselves)**
→ Why should we keep a positive attitude regarding ourselves? How can we do this?
   - We sometimes say things to ourselves that we wouldn't dream of saying to our friends, because it is too mean. This is not a healthy way to speak to ourselves.
   - the negative things that we say to ourselves is termed "negative self talk"

2. *A positive mind set improves relationships* **(being positive with others – family, friends)**
→ Why should we keep a positive attitude when dealing with family and friends?
When we are positive with others, this often comes back to us. When my sister is positive with me, it develops our relationship and helps me to stand a bit taller – it's like filling up a balloon – it inflates me a bit and I feel good

When we are negative and critical with others, it acts to deflate them. It is draining to both the person who is being negative and to the person who is subjected to it. When I am feeling really upbeat and energetic, and my neighbour is a grump, it can sometimes take the wind out of my sails or the air out of my balloon

3. *A positive outlook improves a person's quality of life.* **(looking for positives in everyday; highlights)**
→ How can having a positive outlook improve our quality of life?
When we look for the good in each day, and look for the good in others, we feel better; we have more energy; we enjoy our lives more

4. *A positive attitude gives us energy, while a negative attitude zaps us of our energy.*
→ How does a negative attitude diminish our energy? How does a positive attitude give us energy?

- when you think about superstars, like Cindy Klassen, do you think she dwells on the negative, and has a bad attitude?

- Attitude is very important in making us who we are, and who others see us to be. It really makes a difference.

196

March 2, 2006

Dear Human Ecology Class,

As we discussed in class, having a positive outlook is really important for improving our performance, improving relationships, improving our quality of life and giving us energy. Sometimes we speak negatively to ourselves, which often times makes us feel more discouraged. It is important that we be positive with ourselves, because a positive attitude can help us with our performance. On the reverse, please *explain three situations where you often find yourself speaking negatively to yourself. For each, suggest how you could speak to yourself differently.*

On the reverse, please also share ten things that you are good at. Keep in mind that suggesting that you are good at something doesn't mean that you are the best at it. As well, by suggesting that you are good at something doesn't mean that you have a big ego. When you enjoy doing something, and believe that you are good at it, it helps to give you the energy that is so important for staying positive.

Some things and some people in our lives can be super fun and give us lots of positive energy to keep us going. Other things can easily take away our positive energy and make us feel tired, sad or unmotivated. *Please complete the following chart, listing at least five things on each side.*

Things that give you positive energy	Things that take away your positive energy
1.	1.
	2.
2.	
	3.
3.	
	4.
4.	
	5.
5.	

Have a great weekend. Please be prepared to hand this in on Monday, March 6. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and ideas with me. From, Mrs. Nazer-Bloom

<u>Script "The Comfy Comforter"</u> *Done at the start of class*

Sit back and get yourself into a comfortable position.
Close your eyes.
Breathe easily and slowly.
Let yourself completely relax.
Place your hand gently over your belly.
As you breathe in, feel your belly fill up with fresh, clean air.
As you breathe out, feel your hand sink way down on your belly.
Breathe in and focus completely on your breathing.
Breathe out and focus on letting go of all of your tension.
Breathe in, belly up.
Breathe out, belly down.
Continue to breathe long, slow, deep breaths while I tell you about the comfy comforter.
There is a warm, soft, cozy comforter lying at your feet.
In your imagination, pull that comforter over your feet.
Your feet feel warm; They are relaxed beneath the softness of the comforter.
Using your imagination, let that comforter gently expand over your calves; feel the tightness from your calves dissipate; your calves feel warm and calm; they feel so relaxed and loose
Allow your imagination to effortlessly bring the comforter up to stretch over both of your thighs. Your thighs, calves and feet are so relaxed and your breathing is still slow and deep.
The comforter is now gently expanding over your belly.
Your belly is warm and clam; you feel so relaxed and so good.
Allow the comforter to expand over your entire upper body.
Your fingers and hands are under the softness and warmth of the comforter; your toes, your legs, your arms, your hands and your shoulders are snuggled under the comforter and they feel so relaxed.
Your breathing is still very deep and calm.
Finally, allow the softness of the comfy comforter to gently support your head and neck as you relax.
Your neck feels supported and the warmth of the comfy comforter is reaching deep into your muscles throughout your body.
You feel calm you feel relaxed, you feel great.
You can go back to this feeling of complete relaxation any time you like. All you need to do is breathe in deeply and slowly and imagine the warmth of the comfy comforter enveloping your body.

Lesson #4
Topic: Emotions
Date: March 6, 2006 until March 15, 2006 inclusive

Rationale for Lesson
After last class, a student privately challenged the "4 Key Reasons for Being Positive" list. She objected to the statement that read *"A positive attitude gives us energy, while a negative attitude zaps us of our energy."* She went on to explain a time when she had a big fight with her mother just before going on stage to perform in a dance competition. She went on to dance an amazing dance, and was awarded with many medals at that competition. She took a firm stance against my statement, which made me realize that she had made a very significant observation. Certainly all but one basic emotion elicits energy, and it is the channelling of that energy which is critical. It made sense to me, to address the basic emotions, and determine the responsibility of the individual to channel the energy elicited by the emotions in a positive, rather than a destructive manner. I had no idea at the time, that this student's comment would change the course of where this intervention was headed.

Activate.1
Last class we touched on a couple of points relating positive and negative people in our lives
- Tim gave us two great examples of two people in his life, one who gives him a lift, positive energy and helps him to feel motivated, and another person who depletes him of his energy
- Rhea has her grandma, Sarah has her friend, Bob has his mom

- Research shows that this positive energy that we get from people is helpful, but one of your peers made an awesome observation relating to how her negative energy following a fight gave her enough energy for a peak performance in a dance competition

- this observation brings to light such an important topic → emotions

- emotions goes to the very heart of what makes us human

Activate.2 (do on chart paper)
- I would like us to start with you doing a small group activity, two people per group, and I'd like you to brainstorm as many different emotions as you can think of
e.g., anger is one emotion

- after you are done that, then circle the emotions that give you energy
- put a happy face next to the emotions that are positive
- put a frowning face next to the emotions that are negative
- put a straight lined mouth in a face to indicate emotions that are neither positive nor negative (neutral)

- when everyone is done, you will present, and offer rationale for how you categorized the emotions, e.g., positive, negative or neutral

Teaching Point
- note that almost all of the emotions listed give energy
- this can be a good thing or a bad thing, depending upon how the energy is used

Acquire (list typed out on overhead)
research shows that there are eight basic emotions with other related emotions that fit along side the emotions, including...

a) anger, which also include hostility, resentment, annoyance, or outrage
b) sadness, which also includes gloom, self-pity, despair, or loneliness
c) fear, which also includes nervousness, terror, misgiving, or apprehension
d) enjoyment, which also includes joy, bliss, euphoria, or relief
e) love, which also includes kindness, devotion, adoration, or friendliness
f) surprise, which also includes wonder, astonishment, shock, or amazement
g) disgust, which also includes dislike, revulsion, or contempt
h) shame, which also includes guilt, humiliation, regret, or embarrassment

- each of these represent a range of emotion
- some elicit a very mild response, while others exact an enormous amount of energy and a vigorous response

e.g., Fear can help us to get prepared and focused, e.g., settling in to prepare for a big presentation
- however that same fear can debilitate – make you feel paralysed like you can do nothing, if the energy produced by fear isn't used in a positive manner

- interestingly, sadness is the only emotion that does not produce energy
- sadness does have an important role to play in the process of grieving
- sadness may play an important role at helping people gain perspective, aid in recovery and refocus the individual on things that really matter

Apply

Teaching Point
* some people are not able to understand or figure out what emotion they are feeling at times
- they may think that they are really sad, but underneath it all, they are really angry
- or they may think that they are hungry, but underneath it all, may be feeling really lonely

- when people cannot figure out what they are feeling, it leaves them feeling emotionally and physically drained, and can potentially lead to all sorts of other problems
- nobody really teaches adults or kids how to figure out what emotions they are feeling, and what to do with those feelings
- but a very important first step is being able to identify what you are feeling, so that you can then decide what to do with the energy the emotion gives you
- again we come back to making a decision regarding whether to be positive or negative...taking the yucky feelings and harnessing that energy to make it work for you is a much healthier choice than using that energy for destruction
- people who cannot figure out how they are feeling often end up with eating disorders, addictions, turning to crime and making poor decisions

***

- please find a partner and complete the following assignment on poster paper
- you will present your ideas when everyone is done

Emotions

Research shows that there are eight basic emotions with other related emotions that fit along side the emotions. They include:

a) anger, which also includes hostility, resentment, annoyance, or outrage
b) sadness, which also includes gloom, self-pity, despair, or loneliness
c) fear, which also includes nervousness, terror, misgiving, or apprehension
d) love, which also includes kindness, devotion, adoration, or friendliness
e) surprise, which also includes wonder, astonishment, shock, or amazement
f) disgust, which also includes dislike, revulsion, or contempt
g) shame, which also includes guilt, humiliation, regret, or embarrassment
h) enjoyment, which also includes joy, bliss, euphoria, or relief

Each of these represent a *range* of emotion. Some bring out a very mild response, while others take an enormous amount of energy and bring out a strong response.

Example: When we feel really nervous about preparing for an upcoming presentation, our fear can help us to get prepared and focused.
- However that same fear can debilitate us, and make us feel paralysed like we can do nothing. This is what happens if the energy produced by fear isn't used in a positive manner.

Interestingly, sadness is the only emotion that does not produce energy.

Activity
- Create a "T" chart on poster paper. Title one side of the chart "negative response" and the other side "positive response."
- Select one emotion from each list (a-h), and together with your partner, decide how you could harness the energy from each emotion in a positive way, and how you could harness the energy from that same emotion and use it in a negative way.

~ As you consider each option, discuss with your partner how each will affect your:
a) performance, b) relationships, and c) your quality of life. Be prepared to share your responses.

e.g.

Negative response	Positive Response
ANGER - respond negatively by calling person names, yell at them and be mean	ANGER - channel my anger into a workout; pour all of my energy into a physical activity that I enjoy doing, to distract me and to get the anger out
FEAR - freeze up; do nothing	FEAR - take the nervous energy from fear and focus myself to do my work and get busy

Assessment
- exit slip letter

March 15, 2006

Dear Human Ecology Students,
This week we have been talking about emotions, and how most emotions result in some kind of energy. It is up to us how we use that energy ~ either positively or negatively.
This week I would like you to write about *two* things:

    a. Please write about a time where you had an experience with an emotion, and harnessed the energy positively, and yielded a positive result. Explain the emotion you had and what you did.

    b. Please also write about a time when you had an experience with an emotion, and didn't use the energy produced by it positively, and yielded a negative result. Explain the emotion you had and what you did.
      Please have this ready to hand in on March 20, 2006.

Thanks very much for sharing your experiences with me. I hope that you have a great week.
From,
Mrs. Nazer-Bloom

Lesson #5
Topic: Talking about Anger
Date: March 20, 2006 to April 4, 2006 (Spring Break fell in between these dates)

Rationale for Lesson
This topic was explored because of a recurring theme I noticed among all of the youth in the previous lesson. Most appear very angry, and out of that, appear to operate from an angry disposition most of the time. As well, most think that operating in this way is a pretty good deal, as they see anger as giving them the energy they need to perform well at the things they like to compete at. This anger theme concerned both me and the classroom teacher, so a decision was made to pull the "anger" emotion out of the list of the eight basic emotions, and to discuss it further.

Please note: Each "anger class" concluded with progressive muscle relaxation exercises. This was done to teach students how diaphragmatic breathing as well as progressive muscle relaxation could be helpful in a moment of anger, or during an "anger processing" phase. Employing these skills in this "anger" context, appeared to be more meaningful and more appropriate for the students, than sharing them in a sport context since the one thing they all shared in common was that they were feeling angry. The script used for progressive muscle relaxation can be found at the conclusion of this lesson.

Activate
- we're going to talk about anger, as it was a very strong theme that came up in all of your posters and presentations last class
- persistent anger is not a healthy place to function from
- you need to have the skills to be able to work through this anger
- you need to also acquire the skills to cope with and work through a moment of anger
- sometimes it is important to be able to put the anger aside for the time being, in order to finish what you are doing, until you can get to the place or space to deal with the anger in a healthy way
- you cannot function at the angry level all of the time

- it is critical to understand that what you choose to do with your anger is really important
- what you choose to do with your anger, when you're mad is a conscious decision

- if you are angry, and choose to unleash your fury on someone else because of that anger, you are responsible for the "residue" that you leave all over that person, because of the things you have said

Acquire
- To follow are a series of overheads that we are going to review
- The information contained on them is *information drawn from you*

- The information you presented from your last poster was taken and under the heading of "anger" all of the things that you said regarding using anger positively and negatively were typed out to share with you today

- We are going to walk through all of these points that you have raised, and discuss the implications (both positive and negative) of each of them

Using Energy from Anger Positively – Student Generated Suggestions
→ *on <u>overhead transparencies</u> for discussion of implications of each*

~ gives us energy
~ use your anger to give you more energy than you normally have
~ taking the energy you get from anger and using it for something you do, like a sport or activity
~become physical and channel it into sport, e.g., hockey, boxing
~ increases performance
~ motivates you to do work or accomplish your task
~ give you confidence
~ makes you aggressive
~ makes you competitive

Using Energy from Anger Negatively – Student Generated Suggestions

~ may physically hurt somebody when used in an inappropriate situation
~ take your anger out on someone or mistaken others as the person we're mad at, and flip out on them
~ get physical with others, i.e., fighting
~ makes you mad
~ feel negative
~ feel sad
~ makes you feel depressed
~ causes abuse
~ causes fighting, it's physical, not safe
~ could result in drugs, drinking, physical/mental/verbal fights, insecurity, foggy mind
~ respond negatively by hurting someone emotionally or physically
~ take your anger out on other people
~ yell or over react
~ be hurtful

204

Apply

- discuss the handout
- ask students to "role play" a confrontation on a mat, which is on the floor
       - ask students to get toe to toe with a partner, then rehearse taking the step back,
then taking a big breath; then counting to ten, if it feels right

- practice this five times with different partners

Student Handout
Anger Triggers, Anger Cues & Anger Reducers

<u>Anger Triggers</u>: things that make us feel angry

<u>Anger Cues</u>: physical signals that tell us that we're getting angry, e.g. rapid breathing, tense muscles, feeling really hot

<u>Anger Reducers:</u> things that work to cool you off when you're feeling angry, e.g., deep breathes, listening to music

Strategies for Dealing with Anger

<u>In advance</u>: recognize things that trigger your anger and your own body's anger cues, e.g. how does your body respond when you are feeling angry or threatened?

<u>When you are feeling the anger rise in you:</u>

1st : take a step back

2nd: take a deep breath

3rd: count to ten or do something to distract yourself, during a moment of tension, or when you need to re-focus on a different task and cannot effectively deal with the situation then and there

<u>After the situation and you are still feeling angry, you can:</u>
keep taking deep breaths
use positive thinking
use humour
try to make sure you communicate with "I" messages

Assessment:
- assignment given to students

<u>Anger Triggers, Anger Cues & Anger Reducers</u>   NAME:

Last class we talked about the importance of recognizing <u>in advance</u> those things that you know trigger anger in you. When you know that something burns you up every time, it can be helpful to decide in advance how you wish to respond to that situation. Planning in advance will help increase the chances that you will respond in the way that you know you want to respond, rather than just reacting (and sometimes regretting how you've responded) in a situation.

Please list your anger triggers.

We also talked about anger cues, or physical signals that tell us that we're getting angry, e.g. rapid breathing, tense muscles, feeling really hot. These physical responses happen automatically, and we can only control them once we recognize that they are happening.

The reason that these changes happen is because our bodies go from being cozy at "homeostasis" to the "alarm" stage of the General Adaptation Syndrome, where we feel like we either need to fight or flee. When we recognize these triggers, we can calm our bodies' down and get back to homeostasis.

Please list your anger cues.

Last class we practiced a relaxation exercise, to give you one way of reducing your anger when you feel it ruminating inside of you. The progressive muscle relaxation exercise works well when you can be alone and in a quiet space. You all have lots of other positive methods of reducing your anger to cool you off when you're feeling angry.

Please list things you do to reduce your anger.

Please list any other strategies that you don't know how to do, that you might like to learn, to reduce your pent up anger (use the back of the sheet if needed).

Script for Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Tip: have students hold the tension phase for a good seven seconds and let them relax about half a minute

Get yourself into a comfortable position. Breathe easily and slowing. Gently place your hand over your belly button feeling your hand rise as you take in deep, cleansing breaths. Let your hand sink down on your stomach as you exhale. In a minute we will go through tensing and relaxing all of the muscles in your body, but for the moment, enjoy the feeling of relaxing your mind and your body as you continue to breathe easily and slowly.

Begin by tensing your toes. Make your toes as hard as a rock. Hold those toes. Now relax your toes, making them feel warm and loose.

Now tense your legs. Make your legs tight and strong and tense. Hold all of your tension in your legs. Now relax your legs. Let the blood flow through them so they can relax and become warm and soft.

Tense your butt (gluteus maximus). Make your butt super small and tight. And release. Relax.

Now focus on your abdomen. Make your abdomen tight and as flat as a pancake. Hold the tension in your abdomen, while still remembering to breathe. Your stomach is hard and flat. Now relax your abdomen. Breathe out all of the tension you were holding in there. Your abdomen is now warm and soft and relaxed. Your breathing is still calm and slow.

Feel the tension in your shoulders and neck. Create even more tension by squeezing your shoulder in so that they are tight and flexed and rigid. Hold this tense pose in your shoulders. Now relax those shoulders. Let them droop. Feel all of the tension dissipate from your shoulders and feel how relaxed they are. Your whole body is beginning to feel very relaxed and very good.

Your arms and hands are now becoming very tense. Squeeze your fists tight and tense all of the muscles in your arms. Your arms are strong and tense. Now release the tension in your hands and arms. Your hands and arms are very relaxed and very warm.

Finally, scrunch up your face. Your face is tight and rigid. You are not smiling. You are serious. Your face is very hard. Now relax all of the muscles in your face. Your forehead is not wrinkled. It is very relaxed and very calm. Your whole face feels very relaxed.

Your whole body feels warm, and calm and relaxed. Carefully scan your whole body to make sure there is no tension still remaining. Check your toes - are they all loose? Your legs are warm and relaxed, not bearing any weight at all. Your butt and your abdomen are relaxed as you continue to breathe slowly. Your neck and shoulders feel warm and calm. Your shoulders are drooped and not feeling any tension at all. Your arms and hands and fingers are all relaxed and loose, and your face is holding no tension. You are completely and utterly relaxed and feeling no tension in your body.

Remember that you can return to this feeling of complete relaxation anytime you like by simply going through your muscles, and tensing them tightly, then asking them to relax. If at any time you notice that a muscle group is tense, let that tension go, and tell your muscles to let go of the tension and relax.

Lesson #6
Topic: "Attitude"
Date: April 6, 2006 to April 26, 2006, inclusive (Easter fell in between these dates)

Rationale for Lesson
It seems that we have come full circle. We began our time together looking at attributes of peak performers, and considered how a positive attitude can contributes to excellence. Addressing attitude, and more particularly a "positive attitude" seemed fitting after spending so much time discussing emotions, more specifically anger. Ending on a positive note, by looking at an emotion from a positive vantage point seemed like a solid way to conclude.

Activate
- read aloud "Choices" poem
- read aloud Hamlet quote
- read aloud "Attitude is Everything" story (all three appended to this lesson)

→ read one at a time and discuss each theme
→ after all are read, discuss common thread among them

Acquire
Probing questions regarding attitude...
- What are these stories saying? Do they make sense?
- What is attitude? Can you define it/put it into your own words?
- What does it mean when we say someone has a "good attitude" or a "bad attitude?"
- What qualities do these people possess?
- Who would you rather hang out with: someone with a good attitude or a bad attitude? Why?
- How does hanging out with someone who has a good attitude make you feel?
- How does hanging out with someone who has a bad attitude make you feel?
- Which type of attitude do you think is healthier (for both your mind and body)?
- Which type of person do you think goes further in life – a person with a good attitude or a bad attitude?
- Consider those you admire and respect ~ do they have a good attitude or a bad attitude?
- Consider those you hang around with ~ do they have a good attitude or a bad attitude?
- Consider your family & those you live with ~ do they have a good attitude or a bad attitude? How does their attitude affect your life at home?

Apply
- discuss and explore attitudes or qualities in others that you admire; share why you admire these qualities
- **instructor records student ideas on poster paper**

Attitude Lesson, Part II

Activate
- explore student generated list of attitudes they admire in others
- discuss, ask for support and examples of each

Student generated list
- loyalty
- good decision makers
- looking on the good side/positive thinking
- spontaneous & fun
- use common sense
- not too serious/sense of humour
- encouraging

Acquire
Offer some other potential suggestions of other attitudes/qualities of a person that they may consider; discuss further

My List (recorded on poster paper) presented to class, to spark more dialogue regarding positive attitudes
- gentle
- self controlled
- kind
- respectful
- honest
- good
- persistent
- hard working
- compassionate
- successful
- fair
- possesses integrity
- peaceful
- joyful
- patient
- committed

Apply
- write a poem, story, song, rap song, create something artistic, share lyrics of a favourite song, act out a skit or whatever creative idea you can come up with, to reflect your thoughts on attitude
- be prepared to present your work next class/over the next few classes

Poem, Quote & Story Used to stimulate "Attitude" Discussion

- each student was given a copy of each

Choices

All you have to do to change your life
Is to change your mind.

It really is that simple,
But it isn't always easy.

All you have to do to stop feeling bad
Is to start feeling good...but

Feeling good is not a one time event;
It is a decision we make minute by minute,
Day by day...
It is a creation.

The way to change the world
Is to change your attitude toward it...
Not just once,
But all the time.

Author Unknown

* * * * *

"Nothing is either good or bad.
Thinking makes it so."

Hamlet

* * * * *

211

<u>Attitude is Everything</u>

Jerry was the kind of guy you loved to hate. He was always in a good mood and always had something positive to say. When someone would ask him how he was doing, he would reply, "If I were any better, I would be twins!"

He was a unique manager because he had several waiters who had followed him around from restaurant to restaurant. The reason the waiters followed Jerry was because of his attitude. He was a natural motivator. If an employee was having a bad day, Jerry was there telling the employee how to look on the positive side of the situation.

Seeing this style really made me curious, so one day I went up to Jerry and asked him, "I don't get it! You can't be a positive person all of the time. How do you do it?" Jerry replied, "Each morning I wake up and say to myself, 'Jerry, you have two choices today. You can choose to be in a good mood or you can choose to be in a bad mood.' I choose to be in a good mood. Each time something bad happens, I can choose to be a victim or I can choose to learn from it. I choose to learn from it. Every time someone comes to me complaining, I can choose to accept their complaining or I can point out the positive side of life. I choose the positive side of life."

"Yeah, right, it's not that easy," I protested.

"Yes it is," Jerry said. "Life is all about choices. When you cut away all the junk, every situation is a choice. You choose how you react to situations. You choose how people will affect your mood. You chose to be in a good mood or bad mood. The bottom line: It's your choice how you live your life."

I reflected on what Jerry said. Soon thereafter, I left the restaurant business to start my own business. We lost touch, but I often thought about him when I made a choice about life instead of reacting to it. Several years later, I heard that Jerry did something you are never supposed to do in a restaurant business: he left the back door open one morning and was held up at gunpoint by three armed robbers. While trying to open the safe, his hand, shaking from nervousness, slipped off the combination. The robbers panicked and shot him. Luckily, Jerry was found relatively quickly and rushed to the local trauma center. After 18 hours of surgery and weeks of intensive care, Jerry was released from the hospital with fragments of the bullets still in his body. I saw Jerry about six months after the accident. When I asked him how he was, he replied, "If I were any better, I'd be twins. Wanna see my scars?"

I declined to see his wounds, but did ask him what had gone through his mind as the robbery took place. "The first thing that went through my mind was that I should have locked the back door," Jerry replied. "Then, as I lay on the floor, I remembered that I had two choices: I could choose to live, or I could choose to die. I chose to live."

"Weren't you scared? Did you lose consciousness?" I asked.

Jerry continued, "The paramedics were great. They kept telling me I was going to be fine. But when they wheeled me into the emergency room and I saw the expressions on the faces of the

doctors and nurses, I got really scared. In their eyes, I read, 'He's a dead man.' I knew I needed to take action."

"What did you do?" I asked.

"Well, there was a big, burly nurse shouting questions at me," said Jerry. She asked if I was allergic to anything. "Yes," I replied. The doctors and nurses stopped working as they waited for my reply...I took a deep breath and yelled, 'Bullets!' Over their laughter, I told them, 'I am choosing to live. Operate on my as if I am alive, not dead.'"

Jerry lived thanks to the skill of his doctors, but also because of his amazing attitude. I learned from him that every day we have the choice to live fully. Attitude, after all, is everything.

Francie Baltazar-Schwartz

Appendix B

Example of Interview Guide For Stress, Coping and Final Interviews

Interview Guide for "Stress" Interview

Opening Comments

Thank you for meeting with me today. We are meeting as a small group because I would like to conduct a focus group interview with you. Today, I would like to get to know you a bit, explain what a focus group is, and lay down a few ground rules for our time together during focus groups before we begin our actual focus group interview today.

Introductions

You have heard about me, and my purpose for being here. Now can we take a few minutes for you to introduce yourselves and tell us a little bit about yourselves? (Probe as necessary).

Defining Focus Group Interviews & Setting Ground Rules

Focus group interviews are group discussions addressing a particular topic or issue. Today we are going to talk about stress. There are no right or wrong answers during focus groups. I hope you will feel safe to share what is on your mind. I will facilitate, in order to help ensure that everyone's who wants to be heard, is heard.

Everyone needs to be clear on the ground rules of our focus group interviews before we begin. First, what is shared in this room needs to stay in this room. The information we share is confidential. You are expected to be mature handlers of the information shared during these sessions, being respectful of others and their thoughts, feelings and opinions.

Second, focus group sessions are not shout-out-loud-sharing sessions. There will be a facilitator (me) posing questions to the group, and you will need to take turns speaking and respectfully listening while others speak. Since these interviews will be tape recorded and later transcribed, it is important that only one person speak at a time. When you have something that you would like to say, please put up your hand, and you will be called on when the previous person has finished speaking.

You need to be rest assured that these focus group interviews as well as your participation in the study on the whole is voluntary. If there is a question posed during a focus group interview that you are not comfortable addressing, please know that you do not have to answer. Your responses or your choice to not respond will have absolutely no bearing on your academic success. Does that make sense? Do you have any questions on anything outlined? Let's get to today's focus group interview.

Key Questions for Focus Group Interview #1

1. What is stress to you? How would you describe it?

2. Do people your age experience stress?

3. Do you experience stress?

4. How does stress settle into your mind? How does it feel in your body?

5. What kinds of things cause people your age to experience stress? (if necessary, prompt with academics, athletics, peer pressure, media)

6. Where do you carry most of your stress, in your mind (bad thoughts) or in your body (stomach ache, butterflies, headache)?

7. If there was one stressor that you would like to control better, what would it be?

Closing Comments

Is there anything that we didn't touch on today, that you feel is important for me to know about people your age and stress? Before we go, is there anything else you want to say about what we've been talking about today?

Thank you so much for all of your great sharing!

Interview Guide for "Coping" Interview

Opening Comments

Please remember that in a focus group interview, the information that is shared in here, stays in here. Thanks.

Questions

1. What is coping? How might you define it?

2. What kinds of positive things do you see people your age doing to cope with stress?

3. What kinds of negative things do you see people your age doing to cope with stress?

4. What things do you do to cope with stress?

5. How would you handle the stress if you were feeling really nervous about a big event like a final exam or a competition?

6. Have you ever been taught certain strategies to cope with stress? E.g., taking deep breaths, stopping negative thoughts, etc.

7. If yes, what have you been taught and who taught you?

8. If you could master one skill to help you get a better handle on stress, what skill would you like to learn?

Closing Comments

Is there anything that we didn't touch on today, that you feel is important for me to know about people your age and stress? Before we go, is there anything else you want to say about what we've been talking about today?

Thank you all so much for sharing your thoughts with me.

Interview Guide for Final Interview: Guide Prepared for Anson, Ian & Shane

Please note: For each student's final interviews, a tailor made interview guide was created for each student, re-visiting salient points that the student had raised during class, and within homework assignments. To follow is an example of the interview guide created for Anson, Ian and Shane.

Opening Comments

The reason that I am doing these interviews with you is to "give you a voice" or to "give voice to what it is like to be a teenager living in the year 2006."

So many good intentioned people assume to know what it is like to be 13 or 14, because they have been that age themselves at one point, and maybe try to help students with issues they are facing – but we cannot be very effective in our help unless we sit down and talk with you first about what it is like to be you.

When I first came to your school in February, I had planned on working on psychological skills like relaxation, imagery, and goal setting – but that didn't happen because as we first began to spend time together, Mrs. Smith and I noted that there were

some other issues that were arising that seemed to need addressing, issues like emotions and understanding them and understanding how anger is used for energy, and what happens when we are only fuelled by anger. That's what happens when you have a good teacher like Mrs. Smith who understands her students and wants those things she teaches to be meaningful and helpful for her students

These interviews that I have done and will do will let your voice be heard regarding what it is like to be you and hopefully address the kinds of things that Grade 8 students need.

You three have done an outstanding job at taking the information we've been covering and applying it to situations that you have encountered. Your homework has been outstanding, in terms of giving me a glimpse of what life might be like for you. Thank you for all of your hard work

Now that we have covered all of the content in the program, I need to ask each of you if I can have your permission to use the information that you have shared with me in my writing?

Interview Questions

1. What is it like to you be you? To live your life, in this community, in your home, part of this school? What is it like?

2. How is diaphragmatic breathing going for you? Have you used it? Could it be helpful?

3. How do you like doing the relaxation exercise? Is it working for you? Have you ever done it on your own? Do you think you would ever use it on your own? When?

4. It seems that you have some really real things that make you stressed – you guys have mentioned homework, tests, being behind in assignments, presentations and big sport games. But you have also talked a bit about some very emotional issues including arguing, bullying, physical and emotional abuse and anger. Can we talk about those for a minute? Tell me about the kinds of things you have experienced in these areas.

5. Is bullying something that you experience? Is it very prominent among students in your grade? Who bullies – older students, students your age? When does it start? What does it look like? How are you bullied?

6. What happens when you witness this type of bullying – what do you do? How helpless do you feel? What is the school's policy on bullying, do you know? Are they strict?

You all seem to have really good coping strategies, including physical activity, play and having fun with friends, getting busy with the assignments that are stressing you out.

7. **Ian,** you talked about how when you are stressed, you get negative thoughts in your head. Tell me a bit about that. Do you worry and think about the assignment, or do you have bad thoughts about yourself? Does anyone else experience negative thoughts?

8. **Anson,** you mentioned that you attend a [cultural] school[9] as well. When do you do this? How often/how many hours? What do you learn? Are there any other students from your school who attend your [cultural] school?

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[9] Name of actual type of school removed to protect the identity of the student.

How do you feel about that, as something extra to do? Is it something that adds to an

already busy, stressful schedule, or is it something that you look forward to and

enjoy?

During classtime, we talked about things that give us positive energy and things that take

away your positive energy. You all came up with great things that give you positive

energy, like laughing, comedies, music, friends, accomplishing things, sunny days and

finding the silver lining. When I work with students with psychological skills, many of

the things you've mentioned, we call "highlights," and I encourage students to look for

these in each and every day. Good for you guys.

Your list of things that take away your positive energy was very insightful. Your

reasons were similar to those things that stress you out and included bullying, fighting,

arguing, physical and emotional abuse, anger, criticism, being called names and

prejudice. Let's talk about this for a bit.

9. You mentioned being called names. What kind of names are you called? Who

    calls you those names? Is this all happening at school? What do you do in

    response?

10. Who do you talk to about the things you are experiencing? Is there anyone at

    home? What do they tell you to help you out?

I love the list that you all gave me regarding the things you are good at. This is

something else that you can use to shift your focus from feeling negative to feeling more

positive, when others are calling you down and making you feel bad. You can just stop

and think, "What they are saying is not true. I am good at so many things, including being

positive, being honest, being a friend, being patient, stopping conflicts, etc"…(these were amazing things you listed).

11. Can you tell me a bit about the positive people in your lives – those "people of influence" who give you positive energy, encourage you, make you feel like you are someone special. Do you have someone in your life like that?

12. What are the qualities of that person? What do you admire about them? What do they do that makes you feel special and worth it? What do they do that gives you positive energy?

You all gave really good examples of using negative energy and channelling it into something positive, like in a sport situation where your frustration is turned into determination and success or a school situation where you turn the frustration of not doing well into determination to do better next time.

13. Do you think this is a healthier way to cope with anger and frustration, or do you think that feeling the anger and doing whatever you feel like is healthier?

14. Do you think that people can be taught how to turn this negative energy into something positive? If it can be taught, do you think people who are your age would want to learn it?

Just before spring break, we started talking about anger triggers and anger cues. It is so interesting to me that the things that make you angry are the same things that make you stressed and that take away your positive energy. This time, you all consistently mentioned bullying, insults & name calling, arguments, annoying people and pain.

We keep coming back to these same issues which are very real and very important for me to understand, so that I can share your experiences with others who are in a position to make changes.

15. Tell me about "annoying people" – you mention it quite a few times, Anson. What do people do or say to annoy you?

You all are very aware of how your body responds when you are feeling angry, e.g., hot, clenched teeth, shaky, watery eyes, cold stare, change in voice. This is really good to know, because sometimes our body will tell us that we are beginning to feel angry, even before it registers in our minds. Knowing this may help us to know that we need to walk away or get some space between us and the other person or situation, to cool down.

You are all very good at identifying strategies that can reduce your anger, and most of them are the same as those you selected to reduce your stress – like sports, tv, games, talking with friends, deep breaths.

You have all taught me so much. As we've gone through these things that cause you stress, the things that take away your positive energy and the things that make you angry, much if not all of your responses have been the same. This is really interesting to me.

As an adult, when I think of the things that "stress me out" they are very different from the things that make me angry. When I am stressed, it is because I am worried, or feeling overloaded and feel like I don't have enough time to get through all that is on my plate. Sometimes I am stressed out about a relationship that isn't going well, knowing that it is going to take some work to get it back on track.

16. Do any of you experience stress because of worry?

17. What about feeling overloaded?

18. What about as a result of relationships?

19. There are many adults who will read the document that I will write, regarding the experiences of being grade 8 students in the year 2006. Is there anything else that you think it is important that they know about what it is like, so that they can understand you better? Thank you all very much.

Appendix C

Intervention & Data Collection Schedule
& Contact Time

Date	Content/Context/Information
June, 29, 2005	- initial meeting with school administration team, discussed proposed intervention, and potential to work with the students and staff at Yorkdale School to pilot the research project - meeting was favourable; school administrators were going to ask Mrs. Smith to see if she would be willing to allow me to work with her in her Grade 8 Human Ecology class (appeared to be a good 'fit' with both of our curricular outcomes) - *2 hours*
September, 2005 to November, 2005	- emails and telephone conversations between me and Mr. Miller, keeping in contact regarding intervention, and determining start dates
November 23, 2005	- communicated with Mrs. Smith on the telephone for the first time, discussed purpose of intervention - set up time for in person meeting - *45 minutes*
November 30, 2005	- meeting with school administration and Mrs. Smith to determine dates for intervention, discuss questions and logistics; - was given names and some information regarding the group with whom I would be working - *1 hour*

January 11, 2006	- met with students, highlighted that I would be coming in to work with them, shared a bit about what the intervention might look like, allowed students to pose questions, circulated a parental information letter, in addition to a consent form to be signed by parent/guardian, which was to be returned prior to the start of the intervention (February 1, 2006) - *30 minutes*
February 1, 2006	- first day of intervention - began with informal class dialogue, reintroduction of self and program - began first set of interviews on "stress" interviewing Bob, A.J. - & Tim together, then Robby, Anson & Shane together - *40 minutes(interview)*
February 8, 2005	- continued stress interviews; Tess, Rhea, Michelle & Adele together; took the entire class period - *40 minutes (interview)*
February 9, 2005	- continued stress interviews; interviewed Sarah alone; interviewed Charlie, Chris & Ian (Aiden - absent) - *40 minutes (interview)*

February 14, 2006	- began interviews on coping; interviewed Bob, Tim & A.J, and started coping interview with Tess, Rhea, Michelle & Adele - *40 minutes (interview)*
February 16, 2006	- completed coping interview with Tess, Rhea, Michelle & Adele, and conducted coping interview with Robby, Anson, Shane & Aiden - conducted stress interview with Aiden alone, since he was absent the days I conducted stress interviews - *40 minutes (interviews)*
February 17, 2006	- conducted coping interviews with Charlie, Ian & Chris - *40 minutes (interviews)*
February 22, 2006	- conducted member checks on the information gained from stress and coping interviews; introduced diaphragmatic breathing - *40 minutes (in class)*
February 27, 2006	- lesson[10] - *40 minutes*
March 2, 2006	- lesson - *40 minutes*
March 6, 2006	- lesson - *40 minutes*

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[10] For specific topic of lessons, see Appendix A

March 7, 2006	- lesson - *40 minutes*
March 15, 2006	- lesson - *40 minutes*
March 20, 2006	- lesson - *40 minutes*
March 22, 2006	- lesson - *40 minutes*
March 27-31, 2006	Spring Break Week
April 4, 2006	- lesson - *40 minutes*
April 6, 2006	- lesson - *40 minutes*
April 12, 2006 Easter Weekend	- lesson - *40 minutes (lesson)* - meeting with school administration team to connect on how things are progressing in the classroom - *30 minutes (meeting)*
April 18, 2006	- lesson - *40 minutes*

April 19, 2006	– full day of interviews (no lesson today; pulled students from other classes); interviewed Sarah, Aiden, Michelle, Rhea, Adele - *5 ½ hours (interviews)*
April 20, 2006	- lesson a.m. - 40 minutes - afternoon of final interview with Tess, Tim, A.J. (pulled students from other classes) - *2 ½ hours (interviews)*
April 21, 2006	- lesson a.m. - 40 minutes - afternoon of final interviews with Ian, Shane & Anson, Chris & Bob, Robby & Charlie (pulled students from other classes) - *2 hours(interviews)*
April 25, 2006	- lesson - *40 minutes*
April 26, 2006	- lesson - *40 minutes*
June 12, 2006	- interview with Mrs. Smith -*2 ¼ hours (1:15 pm – 3:30 pm)*
June 19, 2006	- interview with Mr. Miller - 2 ½ hours (9:30 am – 12 pm)

Appendix D

Number of Pages of Raw Data Summary Chart

Name/Source	# pages raw data interview 1, typed single spaced	# pages raw data interview 2, typed single spaced	# pages raw data interview 3, typed single spaced	# pages raw data homework, handwritten by most
Sarah	5	Interview 1 & 2 combined	22	6
Tess	6	7	19	6
Aiden	3	5	27	0 + 3 songs
Adele	Part of group interview; pages #'s already accounted for	Part of group interview; pages #'s already accounted for	27	4
Tim	4	6	29	5 + 6 songs
Rhea	Part of group interview; pages #'s already accounted for	Part of group interview; pages #'s already accounted for	27	2 + 2 songs
Charlie	Part of group interview; pages #'s already accounted for	Part of group interview; pages #'s already accounted for	13	5 + 2 songs
Michelle	Part of group interview; pages #'s already accounted for	Part of group interview; pages #'s already accounted for	21	6
Shane			23	7

Ian	Part of group interview; pages #'s already accounted for	Part of group interview; pages #'s already accounted for	Part of group interview; pages #'s already accounted for	6
Anson	Part of group interview; pages #'s already accounted for	Part of group interview; pages #'s already accounted for	Part of group interview; pages #'s already accounted for	6
Chris	4	5	22	6
Bob	Part of group interview; pages #'s already accounted for	Part of group interview; pages #'s already accounted for	Part of group interview; pages #'s already accounted for	8
A.J.	4	Part of group interview; pages #'s already accounted for	Part of group interview; pages #'s already accounted for	6
Robby	Part of group interview; pages #'s already accounted for	Part of group interview; pages #'s already accounted for	Part of group interview; pages #'s already accounted for	5
Mrs. Smith			30	
Mr. Miller			21	
Field Journal			97	

Raw Data Sub-totals:

- Single Spaced transcribed and typed interview data: 330 pages

- Homework (including typed song lyrics):   91 pages

- Field journal and reflections: 97 pages, single spaced, hand written

- Total Pages of Raw Data: 518 pages