

AN EXPLORATION OF ADVERSE SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

DR. CONOR BARKER , PHD, R. PSYCH.

CHERYL CHISHOLM, BA (HONOURS)

The following study was conducted to consider and critique inclusive education practices in K-12 education in rural Canada and consider how students who did not find success within the education system but have returned to education might have been better supported during their formative years. Semi-structured interviews were conducted followed by qualitative thematic analysis whereby the salient themes discussed during the interviews were identified and sorted. The most prevalent themes included those about relationships such as negative and positive experiences with educators, bullying, discrimination and interactions with peers. A large number of students recalled experiences of bullying and felt that they would have been better supported had they been tested for disabilities and had they been offered accommodations. Students reported often feeling that they were left to "figure things out" and left school for reasons such as substance abuse, gaining work, mental health concerns, lack of confidence in academic ability and bullying. Our study suggests that relationships are vital to students' experiences and that infrastructure needs to allow for teachers to have greater opportunity to build relationships with students especially in high school.



INTRODUCTION

The literature indicates that students tend to feel supported until they don't. A way to look into the inclusivity of a school system is through their dropout rates and Bridgeland (2006) offers reasons such as boredom, lack of support, lack of relationships and poor school attendance as some of the reasons for why students drop out. However, rural schools tend to have less supports and have not been thoroughly researched..

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this study was to consider the recalled adverse school experiences of students who did not find success in their K-12 education and are returning to school through the Adults Basic Education (ABE) program at Great Plains College (GPC). The objective was to identify common experiences between students and consider what aspects of the education system need to be further examined to aid those who struggle the most and those who dropout.

METHODOLOGY

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with (n=12) participants who were enrolled in the ABE at GPC. Purposive sampling was used and participants were recruited through referrals. Following the interviews, researchers used NVivo 12 to analyze the data and identify themes between the recalled experiences of participants.

RESULTS

Overall, relationships and safety was the most discussed topic during interviews for the supports and challenges categories with such themes as relationships with peers and relationships with educators being discussed the most. 9/12 participants experienced bullying and half experienced discrimination based on race or ability. Half struggled with math which affected their future opportunities and 5/12 reported that not being diagnosed with a disability or not being provided accommodations limited their ability to succeed in school. 10/12 participants also reported that their relationships with school and teachers shifted the most in high school with less attention to individual students.

LIMITATIONS

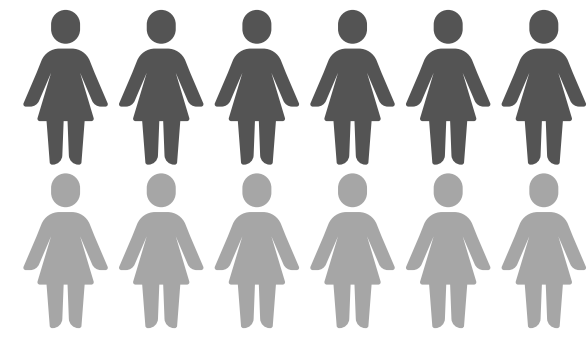
Given that this study had a small n (n=12) the results of this study cannot be generalized to all students participating in ABE or all students who have decided to drop out. We also used purposive sampling rather than randomly selecting participants. A larger scale study with random selection across ABE programs would be required to generalise our findings to the larger ABE population.

CONCLUSION

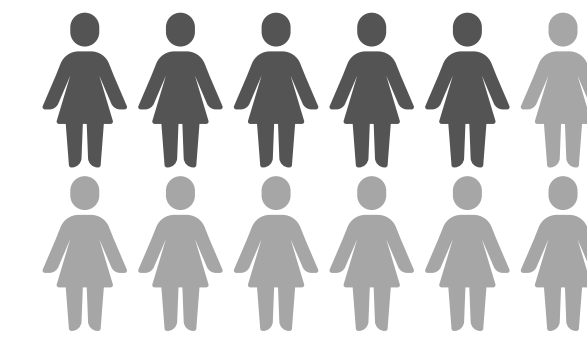
Our results suggest that areas requiring evaluation include testing for students, support for high school teachers which would allow them more opportunities and time to foster meaningful relationships. The study also confirms the need to continue focusing efforts on attempting to prevent bullying in schools on both a teacher and student level. Our study suggests that there is still work to be done in order to ensure that our schools are inclusive.



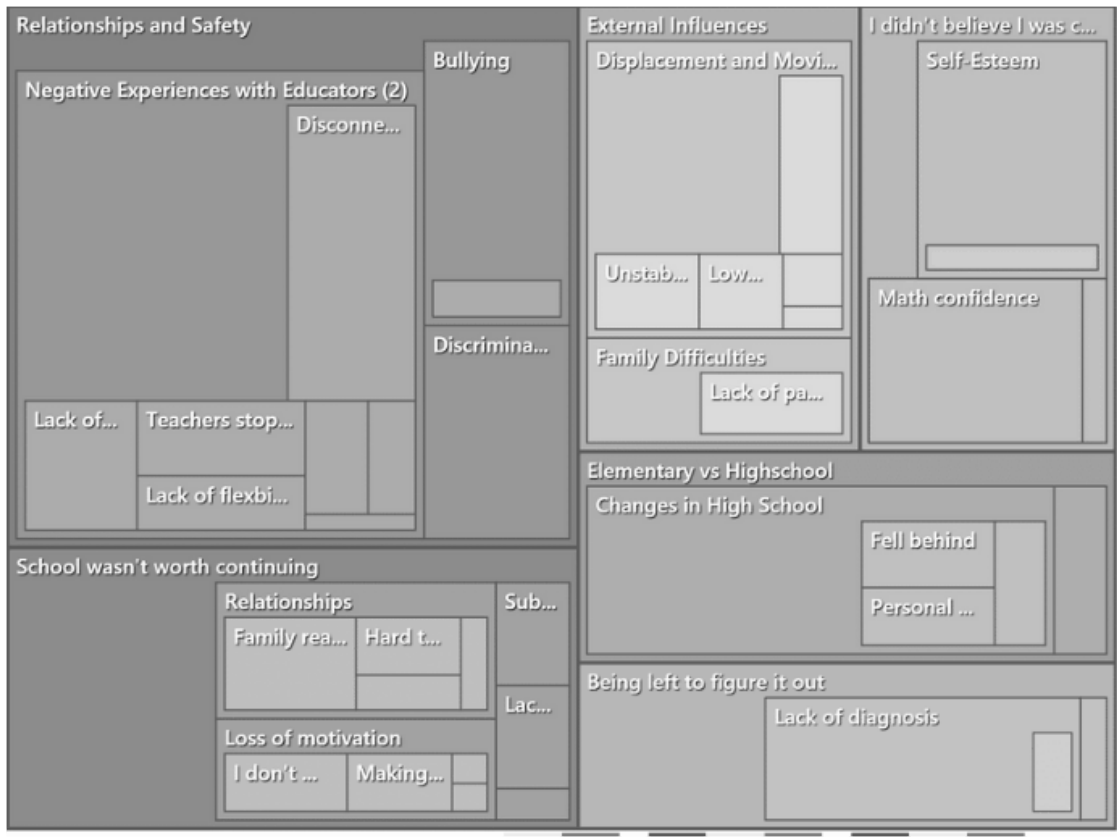
- 9/12 participants experienced bullying in K-12.



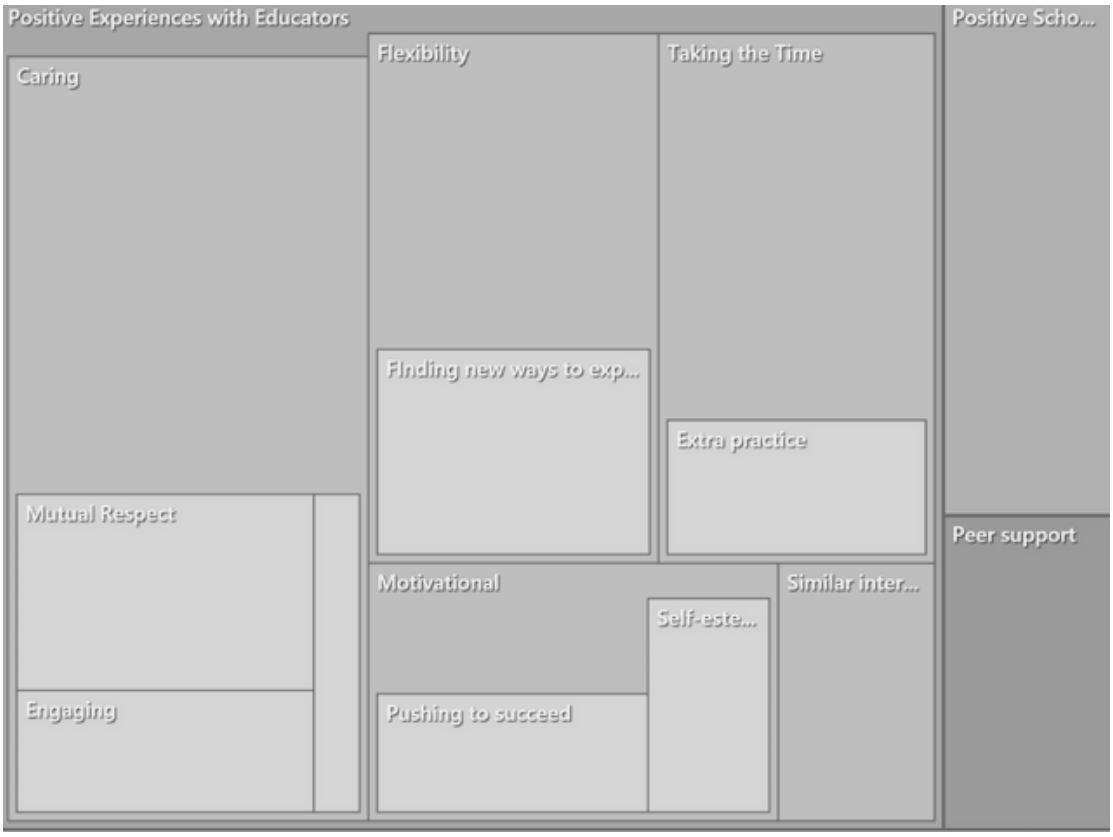
- Half of participants had difficulty with math that impacted their future opportunities.



- 5/12 participants reported that not being tested for disabilities earlier in life impacted their school performance.



The above hierarchy chart shows the distribution of "challenging" themes and how prevalent they were during the semi-structured interviews. The most discussed topic was "Relationships and Safety".



The above hierarchy chart shows the distribution of themes detailing the supports students discussed the most during the semi-structured interviews. The most discussed topic was "Positive Relationships with Instructors".

RELATED LITERATURE

Bridgeland, J., Dilulio, J., & Burke Morison, K. (2006). The silent epidemic: Perspectives of high school dropouts. Civic Enterprises. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED513444.pdf>

Downing, J. E., & Peckham-Hardin, K. (2007). Supporting Inclusive Education for Students with Severe Disabilities in Rural Areas. Rural Special Education Quarterly, 26(2), 10–15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/875687050702600203>

Jordan, J. L., Kostandini, G., & Mykerezi, E. (n.d.). Rural and Urban High School Dropout Rates: Are They Different? 21.

Loreman, T., McChie-Richmond, D., Barber, J., & Lupart, J. (2008). Students perspectives on inclusive education: A survey of grade 3-6 children in rural Alberta, Canada. 5(1), 12.

Tuters, S. (2015). Conceptualising Diversity in a Rural School. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 19(7), 685–696. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2014.964573>