Summary
The Prevention of Early School Leaving by Increasing Students' Self-Esteem

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According to the 2013 report published by the European Commission, Turkey comes first in early school leaving among 35 European countries with a percentage of 39.6% (European Commission, 2013). Family, school and environment based factors, low socio-economic status, influence of friends, and parents' lack of support to their children's school life are among factors that lead to early school leaving (Bademci, Karadayı, & Bağdatlı, 2016; Tas, Selvitopu, Bora, & Demirkaya, 2013).

Psychological problems (Downes, 2011), lack of meaningful relationships in school, and the sense of loneliness at school are among factors that lead to school failure (Cefai, Downes, & Cavioni, 2015). It is observed that early school leaving after secondary school influences various functions of psychological health such as anxiety, depression, and mechanisms of resilience negatively (Kaplan, Damphousse, & Kaplan, 1994).

The concept of self-esteem is an individual's emotional and subjective evaluation regarding one's self-worth which includes emotions of worthiness and sufficiency, and self-appreciation (Edmundson, 1979; Shane, 2006; Taku, & McDiarmid, 2015). Self-esteem is a basic personality trait that empowers physically, emotionally, and cognitively during times of rapid change, that protects from psychosocial problems in the face of negative experiences, and that enhances resilience (Mei, Yau, Chai, Guo, Potenza, 2016; Taku, McDiarmid, 2015; Woods, Scott, 2016; Zhang, Chen, Ran, Ma, 2016). Research conducted in this field proves that self-esteem plays a strong and inclusive role in the individual's cognitive, emotional, and behavioural development (Alessandri, Eisenberg, Vecchione, Caprara, & Millioni, 2016; Cameron, Stinson, Hoplock, Hole, & Schellenberg, 2016; Doğan, 2011; Searcy, 2007; Wagaman, 2011). Self-esteem is influential in academic success, and it is related to emotional moods such as satisfaction from life, happiness, depression, guilt; and personal traits such as self-worth and self-integrity (DeHart, Pelham, & Tennen, 2006; Krug, Wittchen, Lieb, Beesdo-Baum, & Knappe, 2016; McGeown, Putwain, Simpson, Boffey, Markham, & Vince, 2014; Piko, Varga, & Mellor, 2016; Sowislo, Orth, & Meier, 2014). In research on the self, self-esteem is generally related to factors based on family (DeHartet al., 2006; Krug et al., 2016). The individual's self-esteem may also increase with the adoption of different social identities and belongings outside family, through school, friend groups and other social groups (Benish-Weisman, Daniel, Schiefer, Möllering, & Knafo-Noam, 2015).

It is necessary that programs which empower the self should be applied, and group activities should be developed at schools, (Beane, 1982; Grosenick, & Huntze, 1984; King, Vidourek, Davis, & McClellan, 2002; Korpinen, 2000; Rechten & Tweed, 2014; Vadeboncoeur & Collie, 2013; Wright, Masten, & Narayan, 2005) and as an alternative to disciplinary action against students, intervention programs in which students are supported emotionally and socially and their self-worth and self-esteem are increased should be put into effect (Boyer & Tracz, 2014; Moradi Sheykhjan, Jabari, & Rajeswari, 2014). The functioning and consequences of the social systems that surround her/him significantly influence the individual's psychological development. (Kirmayer, Whitley, Dandeneau, & Isaac, 2009; Dupper, 2003; Walker, Holling, Carpenter, & Kinzig, 2004).

Method

This study is a qualitative assessment research of the project of "Liseden Üniversiteye Gençler Birlikte" (Youth Together From High School to University), which was carried out in a vocational high school in a district of Istanbul in the academic year 2015-2016. The aim of the project is to protect students that face the threat of early school leaving from the risks that they are exposed to, to enable them to attend school by supporting their cognitive, psychological, and social development so that

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they can be content, productive, and creative individuals. In the project, in coordination with the school counselling service and under the coordinatorship of the district governorship, it was aimed that the families of the students at risk reach the service provided by the District Directorate of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies Istanbul Provincial Directorate.

The study is a research and an application project which was carried out once a week in two groups, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, and in which 55 undergraduate and graduate students of the department of psychology and 4 professors from the departments of psychology and social services took part. In the scope of the application project, students under risk of early school leaving were given individual and group support by university students. Group activities in the form of workshops in which university and high school students participated together were conducted. The learning experience through peer support group interaction is effective in promoting the academic success and self-esteem of young people (Bertucci, Conte, Johnson, & Johnson 2010). In the project, we worked with high school students under risk of early school leaving and their families using the model of "therapeutic approach based on peer support through the establishment of attachment relations" (Bademci, Karadayı, & de Zulueta, 2015).

Participants

The participants are 52 high school students between the ages 15-19, with an age average of 17. The number of their siblings ranges from 1 to 4. The majority have stated that they live in a house of 4 or 5 people. The educational levels of the participants' parents are evenly made up of primary school, secondary school, and high school graduates. The percentage of university graduates is low.

Procedure

In the beginning of each project day, after a preliminary meeting with the project team, peer support advisors gave peer support to the high school students they paired with in 20 minute interviews every Friday. After the interviews, university and high school students formed groups and participated in workshops on theatre, psychodrama, cajon, bakery, learning English with games etc. High school students chose the activities they would take part in themselves.

During the project, the students who were in charge of peer support were given regular supervision regarding the development of their relationships with students and the adoption of new strategies after the applications and during the week.

Data Analysis

Primarily, demographical information form was given and the frequency distribution was calculated in order to assess the demographical characteristics of the participants. In the second step, as a qualitative data analysis method, *inductive thematic analysis* (content analysis) was chosen (Glaser and Straus 1967, as cited in Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013). In this respect, in the light of inductive thematic analysis method, our aim has been to achieve theoretical knowledge based on data, instead of forcing the data fit into an existing theory (Bademci, 2010). The scripts of in depth interviews were taken and the recurring contents of these scripts were turned into code units. These code units were reviewed with the method of *constant comparison* and the main themes were specified.

Results

At the end of the project, as a result of the study conducted in collaboration with the high school counselling service, school attendance rates of the participant high school students were analysed, and it was found that 32.7% did not have attendance problems any more, 38.4% were still under risk of early school leaving due to absenteeism but still carried on with the project, 17.3% transferred to some other public or private high school, 7.7% would repeat class due to absenteeism, and 1.9% transferred to open high school.

Results of the In-Depth Interviews

The findings will be presented under three sub-headings: "Psychosocial support for students under risk of early school leaving", "the increase of students' self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-worth", and "the prevention of early school leaving through the increase of students' self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-worth".

1. Psychosocial Support for Students Under Risk of Early School Leaving

1.1. Peer Based Support and Attachment Relation

If a 30 year old came, it would be like going to a psychologist. Bu I do not feel that way when their age is close to mine. If there were a psychologist, I would never tell anything. (17, Male)

Working with university students motivates me. I have understood that these are not things I cannot do. They set examples for us. For example, you have been admitted to the university, you have come to this school, and now you are working at our school. And when I see you, I think that if they did this, I can do this. (16, Male)

They acknowledged that the attachment based one-to-one support gave them an opportunity to express and get to know themselves, and as a result of the increased trusting relationship, they have started opening themselves up and showing development in a positive way:

Before I was very shy, but now, I can tell about myself to sister B. I do not hold back, I speak, and I express myself now. I review the past week with her. It is very good for me. Besides, if I am to do something wrong, sister B. tells me what might happen, and tries to calm me down. If I can speak to you at the moment, it is thanks to the one-to-one support. (17, Female)

2. The Increase of Self-Esteem, Self-Confidence, and Self-Worth

Before this project, I could never go near someone and meet him or her, but now I am more courageous in this. (16, Female)

They have stated that an entertaining school environment based on mutual respect and trust increases their self-worth, self-confidence, and self-esteem.

It is good to be able to talk comfortably and properly outside school. I am having a lot of fun; I am looking forward to your visit. (18, Male)

The Development of their Skills of Emotion Regulation

I have tried to improve myself. Before the project, I was punching on the walls. Now, I have learnt to calm down a little more. There has been a huge difference. My getting angry at everything and every now and then is gone. I am more patient now. (17, Male)

The Development of Relations of Friendship

Thanks to this project, I have met people from school that I did not know before, and now they are my best friends. The activities that we had together have built on our relations. (18, Male)

The Impacts on Their Lives Outside School

It has contributed to my life outside school. There has been an alliance in the family; for example, I am looking after my younger sibling in a sympathetic way when my mother is not at home (17, Male).

3. The Prevention of Early School Leaving through the Increase of Students' Self-Esteem, Self-confidence, and Self-worth

It is very happy for me to have you here. I had a lot of absenteeism before the project, but I can say that with the project, especially in the second semester, I had almost none. I will definitely go to the university. The project has facilitated my school life. I wish I had it next year, too. (17, Male)

It has contributed to my school life. For example, I never came to school on Fridays. I come only for you. Many of my friends called on me to play truant from school but I stayed in order to come to the project. (18, Male)

Discussion

Within the scope of the project carried out in collaboration with the district governorship for the best interests of the students under risk of early school leaving, sociologists and psychologists from the district

Figure 1. The Model of the Prevention of Early School Leaving through the Increase of Self-Esteem and Self-Worth

governorship also found neglect/abuse in their family observations at the students' homes. Youell (2006) remarks that the child experiences a feeling of unworthiness such as the feeling that people do not love her/him, and when raised without internalizing a parental figure who is inclusive and interested in the child and her/his development. The students under risk need a long term and loving relationship, to be taken care of, and someone who will help them regulate their emotions and impulses (SFSC, 2011). In the project, it is understood that university students play an important role for high school students under risk of early school leaving. Peer based psychosocial support through the establishment of secure attachment relationship between high school students and university students increased the high school students' self-esteem, self-confidence, self-worth, and their resilience in confronting negative experiences. (Bademci et al., 2015; Shane, 2006).

It is observed that a trusting relationship established through one-to-one support helps students cope with feelings of anxiety, fear, and unworthiness that they experience. It has caused them to feel more comfortable with young people closer to their age group and take these young people as positive role models for themselves (Bademci et al., 2015; Bademci & Karadayı, 2013; Gill, 1996; Karabanow & Clement, 2004; Perry, 2006). That the project activities are based on peer relations and student-centred perspective caused students mediate and internalise the thoughts and behavioural patterns of the university students that they had activities together (Cole, 1998). Socializing in an entertaining (Boyer & Tracz, 2014; King et al., 2002; Van der Kolk, 2005) and supportive environment with the support of a caring adult increased the self-esteem, self-confidence,

and self-worth of the students under risk; supported their cognitive, emotional, and social learning (Wright, Masten & Coatsworth, 1998) and developed their emotion regulation skills and friendships. It is stated that the positive relation between school life and self-esteem can be observed better in qualitative evaluations (Chetcuti & Griffiths, 2002). The findings of the interviews with the students under risk of early school leaving in this qualitative research also support this approach.

Even though an application model that has promising results in terms of the prevention of early school leaving is suggested at the end of the project, it is necessary to evaluate the student from a systemic perspective in relation to all the institutions that the student is in contact with and that are in contact with one another to ensure that the effects of the interventions are not only sustainable but also have long term effects on the student. The institutions that surround the student within the system, that is, institutions of family, school, social services and other social constructs. Organizations should be structured in accordance with the principle of the best interest of the child.