

BUILDING RESILIENCE WITHIN SCHOOL COMMUNITIES


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WHAT DO WE WANT?

- HEALTH
- HAPPINESS
- MONEY?
- RESILIENCE – STAYING STRONG IN CRISIS

- Increasing rates of depression
 - Technology and the decline of social connectedness
 - Decline of institutionalised religion
 - New stresses (recession, family breakdown etc)
 - Ongoing uncertainty
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THREE REALITIES

- We are all vulnerable
 - We will all face challenges, crises
 - We underestimate our own potential to cope during the challenging times
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WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

“Resilience is the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances”

(Master, Best & Garmezy, 1990)



“More than education, more than experience, more than training, a person’s level of resilience will determine who succeeds and who fails. That’s true in the cancer ward, it’s true in the Olympics, and it’s true in the boardroom.”

Dean Becker, Harvard Business Review



WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

“Resilience is predicated on exposure to significant threat or adversity, and on the attainment of good outcomes despite this exposure.”


(Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000)




- How come some people can pick themselves up?
- How come some others don't; they become stuck?
- The obsession with illness
- Deficits, disadvantages and disorders
- What about the survivors, the people who thrive in adversity, the people who bounce back?




WHY THE INTEREST IN RESILIENCE?


- If we can find and identify elements of resilience, then ways of helping those with low resilience could be developed.
 - In a stressful, recession stricken, fast-changing world, boosting resilience in individuals, families and communities could have very beneficial effects
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GREAT NEWS


- It can be learned
 - New research
 - New interventions (particularly for primary school children)
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- No magic wand
 - Schools doing what they can do
 - The reality of home environment
 - The role of community
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WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO?

- Schools can have an critical influence - for good or bad - on the mental health of their students
 - The potential that schools have to foster their students' psychological resilience is frequently not realised
 - Professional development of teachers
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WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO?

- The core principles of resiliency need to be embedded in the everyday practices / ethos of the school
 - No necessarily a specialised course/module on the curriculum
 - Resilience stems from experiences not a text book
 - Sowing the seeds of mental wellness
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WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO?

- The potential of the interactions and behaviour of teachers to influence the mental health and resiliency of their students is very real
 - Resilience is fostered in an environment that is supportive, challenging and involving.
 - The innate potential of each child is believed in and nurtured
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POTENTIAL: FOSTERING RESILIENCE IS SCHOOLS

- Students would have better mental health,
 - Staff would have better job satisfaction, less stress and a better capacity to cope with change,
 - Links with parents and the community would be more positive
 - Such schools would have the capacity for a resilient response to crises in the school community
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5 KEY FACTORS AT THE HEART OF RESILIENCE

- **CARING RELATIONSHIPS**
 - **HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND ACADEMIC STANDARDS**
 - **OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION AND CONTRIBUTION**
 - **SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS**
 - **SELF-EFFICACY**
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1. CARING RELATIONSHIPS

CARING RELATIONSHIPS

- Teachers can be highly significant people in the life of a child, providing positive role modeling, caring and support for their students (Geary, 1988; Benard, 1995).

SOME ASPECTS OF THIS CARING RELATIONSHIP
INCLUDE:

- Genuine concern for the welfare and progress of every child in their care
- Listening to students' concerns and providing empathy and understanding
- Connecting with the students



SOME ASPECTS OF THIS CARING
RELATIONSHIP INCLUDE:

- Recognising the strengths in students
- Nurturing strengths
- Providing encouragement
- Being positive
- Being hopeful – fostering hope



SOME ASPECTS OF THIS CARING
RELATIONSHIP INCLUDE:

- Challenging negative and defeatist talk
- Role-modeling problem-solving behaviour
- Refraining from negative comments i.e. thoughtless 'off the cuff' remarks that may be more damaging than the teacher realises
- The aloof teachers – 'them' and us

SOME ASPECTS OF THIS CARING
RELATIONSHIP INCLUDE:

- Creating a climate in which bullying and put-downs are not tolerated;
- A whole school approach
- Developing and maintaining informal avenues of communication between teachers and parents
- Helping to monitor student's progress and develop **co-operative** strategies for addressing issues.

SOME ASPECTS OF THIS CARING
RELATIONSHIP INCLUDE:

- IMPORTANT: The caring relationship must extend beyond the relationship between teachers and students
- However, the teacher/student relationship is the critical relationship as far as children are concerned.



SOME ASPECTS OF THIS CARING
RELATIONSHIP INCLUDE:

- Schools caring about the wellbeing of staff, students and parents
- Fostering resiliency by creating a general climate of emotional safety and support
- Effective, competent, consistent and caring management
- Good Occupational Health and Safety standards
- Recognition of staff for good work and contributions to the school.




2. HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND ACADEMIC STANDARDS


HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- The importance of academic achievement for resiliency is well established (e.g. Howard & Johnson, 1998)
- **THE CHALLENGE:** Not all students are equally academically gifted or inclined.
- Students' perception of themselves is critical
- Fostering hope – making the school experience meaningful


HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- Influence of student's home environment is a very real factor
 - Parental attitudes to and support for study
 - Student's beliefs about their own competence
 - The need to be motivated
 - The reality of mental health disorders and learning disabilities
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HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- Rutter's (1979) study of schools in economically disadvantaged areas of London found that some schools showed consistently better academic results and lower rates of delinquency and non-attendance
 - These schools had the following characteristics in common:
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HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- An academic emphasis
 - Clear expectations and rules
 - High levels of student participation
 - Many varied resources available to students
 - High quality staff
 - Attention to professional development for teachers
 - Careful monitoring of student's progress
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HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- According to Rutter, schools which hold high expectations for *all* their students, and which provide the support and resources necessary for them to achieve them, have 'incredibly high rates of academic success'
 - Several students stated that it was the fact that "someone believed I could do it" that was a major factor in their decision to continue their education (cited in Benard, 1991).
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HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- How they make sense of things
 - Setbacks as temporary failures
 - Fostering students' belief in their own ability
 - Maximising their true potential
 - Helping them realise that their best is good enough
 - Self-efficacy
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HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- Setting realistic goals
 - What we expect at minimum rather than excessive or out-of-reach performance ceilings
 - Ongoing support and coaching of students who are experiencing learning difficulties.
 - Establishing policies which emphasise the importance of academic achievement to **all** of the students
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HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- Staff with high expectations of themselves
- Staff taking responsibility for the performance of their students.
- Providing a positive learning climate, through both the physical environment and the pervading sense of order and discipline in the school.



HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- Teachers being consistent
- Management overseeing consistency
- Protecting instructional time through policies regarding attendance, lateness, interruptions etc.
- Providing explicit instruction in study skills and learning techniques. (Cotton, 2001; Howard & Johnson (1998))



3. Opportunities for participation and contribution

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION AND CONTRIBUTION

- Rutter (1979) found that successful schools offered many and varied opportunities for meaningful participation, and gave students many opportunities to take on responsibilities
- Opportunities to learn how to lead as well as selecting leaders

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION AND CONTRIBUTION

- Students being offered multiple avenues for involvement
- Opportunities to find something that suits them, which they were good at, and which provides some form of meaningful participation in the life of the school.
- Such involvement protects against anti-academic attitudes and the sense of alienation that is characteristic of many anti-social youth. (Benard, 1991).

EXAMPLES OF SUCH OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION INCLUDE:

- **Use of co-operative learning strategies**
- **Participation of students in setting curriculum**
- **Convening classroom meetings to solve classroom problems**
- **Involving students in assessment and goal-setting (not just announcement of grades)**
- **Involving students in setting classroom rules**
- **Giving students roles of responsibility**

LINKS WITH THE COMMUNITY


- Resilient schools have strong, healthy links with the communities in which they are embedded.
- Relationships with counselling, mental health and other support services for children with emotional and psychological difficulties.
- Schools can develop a database of community agencies, and link families with appropriate services for their needs (Benard, 1997).


LINKS WITH THE COMMUNITY

- Many avenues of communication with parents, and opportunities for parents to participate in the life of the school;
- Links with other community groups, such as sporting clubs and drama groups, to add to the recreational and other opportunities available to students.

- Research has demonstrated the self-fulfilling nature of teachers' beliefs about their students' abilities (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968),
- Another factor that may need to be addressed is 'burn-out', or the long-term effects of high stress, overwork and lack of support which can result in teachers depersonalising students and developing a jaded outlook about their work

4. SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

- Growth of depression
 - Social media and real and meaningful social connection
 - Learning how to be social
 - Greatest friend of depression is solitude
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- One best friend
 - Learning how to engage
 - Connecting
 - Volunteering
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5. SELF-EFFICACY

- Confidence in their ability to solve problems.
- Knowing what their strengths and weakness are and relying on your strengths to cope
- Different than self-esteem – it is not just about feeling good about yourself – it's 'a skills-based mastery' of coping
- The crucial role of HOPE

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