



NURTURING RESILIENCE IN CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Enfield Town Schools' Partnership
16th November 2017

BACKGROUND

Ana da Cunha Lewin
Programme Director
Foundation Degree in Psychology for Education
Professionals
BA Psychology for Education

Department of Psychological Sciences
School of Science
Birkbeck, University of London
Malet Street
London WC1E 7HX

a.lewin@bbk.ac.uk | @ACLewin

NURTURING RESILIENCE IN CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Research indicates that an individual's resilience has a significant impact on their wellbeing, their engagement with work or study and their mental health.

This workshop will discuss:

- the theoretical basis of resilience,
- the research evidence, and
- possible interventions that can be used in schools to enhance the wellbeing of staff and pupils.

AIMS

- What is resilience?
- What is the history of resilience research?
- What are the characteristics of resilient people?
- What are the risk and protective factors?
- What is the relationship between:
 - Resilience and mental health?
 - Resilience and engagement with work or study?
- Can resilience be learnt?
- What can schools do to support resilience?
- Conclusions
- Questions

WHAT IS RESILIENCE? 1

Like the tree whose branches bend and sway in a storm rather than crack under pressure, we have the power to remain **flexible** and **strong** amid life's challenges... to be resilient!

Resilience is defined as the process of bouncing back and fully recovering in the face of change and stressful situations.

(Steinhardt, 1983).

WHAT IS RESILIENCE? 2

Resilience .. (is).. a process or force that drives a person to grow through adversity and disruption (Jacelon, 1997; Richardson & Walte, 2002; Richardson, 2002).

WHAT IS RESILIENCE? 3

From the Latin *resilire* (to recoil or leap back),
.... a general concept related to positive
adaptation in the context of challenge.....
has broad and diverse meanings....

Essentially, resilience refers to patterns of
positive adaptation or development
manifested in the context of adverse
experiences (Masten and Gerwitz, 2006).

WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

Pattern ... highlights the fact
that resilience is not a single
quality (it also reinforces that
it is a typical response to
adversity).

Positive ...underlines
the fact that the
response has positive
benefits of the
individual.

.....patterns of positive adaptation or
development manifested in the context of
adverse experiences

Adaptation or development
...underlines the fact that
thoughts, emotions and
behaviour are responsive to
the event (and that it can
evolve).

HISTORY OF RESILIENCE RESEARCH

- To begin with resilience was seen as fixed –
you were either born with it or not;
- The next stage saw researchers
attempting to isolate the characteristics of
resilience, for example, vulnerabilities and
protective factors (for example, Masten et al, 1990).

FIGURE 1: IDENTIFICATION OF RESILIENCE

Outcome	Adversity	
	Low	High
Positive	A. Favourable experience of life	B. Resilience: Unexpected positive outcome
Negative	C. Unexpected negative outcome	D. Risk and vulnerability

- People who are exposed to low levels of risk and have positive outcomes (square A) – the preferred option!
- The people in square D have experienced adversity which has impacted on their mental or physical health.
- The people in square B have experiences of high risk and yet have maintained good health. These are the people who are demonstrating resilience: positive adjustment in the face of adversity.

From Bartley, 2006

SO WHAT DO WE KNOW.....

More recent research has focused on exploring the elements of resilience and crucially the relationship between characteristics and environmental factors (Roffey, 2014).

Acknowledging that the capacity to be resilient depends on:

- Personal (individual) traits
- Family experiences
- School experiences
- Community
- Society



CHARACTERISTICS OF RESILIENT CHILDREN

- Have positive self-regard – with good self worth and high levels of optimism;
- Are able to express their feelings – with low levels of reactivity and good emotional and impulse control;
- Have good coping strategies – with good impulse control and a realistic assessment of their own capabilities;
- Have good social skills – make friends and keep them;
- Have a sense of belonging – to their family, school, community or faith group;
- Are able to trust others – with secure attachment patterns;
- Are more engaged with learning – and motivated and willing to try things unhindered by a fear of failure;
- Are more able to plan, reflect and to make choices,

(Seligman, 2009; Boniwell, 2013)

WHICH CAN BE SUMMED UP AS

- Security
- Self esteem
- Self-efficacy
- Self-regulation

(From Daniel, 2017; Karoly, 1993)

WHAT RISK FACTORS HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED?

- Some children are more at risk than others (Werner, 1993):
 - low birth weight
 - low-socio economic status
 - low maternal education,
 - parental physical/mental ill health or substance abuse, and
 - unstable family structure, for example, divorce, neglect or abuse (cited in Heffernan and Bontwell, 2011).

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- Sensitive and responsive parenting leading to secure attachment styles, and:
 - A sense that the world is safe, and
 - The child feels loveable;
- High levels parental support, interest and monitoring (Ying, 2015);
- Good models for coping style, efficacy and internal locus of control (Werner, 1993).

RESILIENCE AND MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- Resilience is associated with lower levels of depression, anxiety (Smith et al 2008 and many others);
- Others have shown similar associations between resilience and mental health incidence and severity (Taylor et al, 2013);
- Higher psychological resilience has also been associated with better physical health, including reduced symptom severity in a range of physical illnesses (Nygreen, 2006);
- This effect appears to be lifelong (Harris et al, 2015);

RESILIENCE AND ENGAGEMENT WITH WORK OR STUDY

Resilience is associated with:

- higher levels of educational engagement,
- school attendance, and
- educational attainment (Bailey and Challen, 2012; Seligman, 2009).

Resilience is associated with:

- positive emotions at work , and
- team resilience (Fredrickson, 2001);
- team performance,
- job satisfaction and engagement (Meneghel, 2016).

CAN RESILIENCE BE LEARNED?

Of course!

But interventions need to be carefully planned!

A STARTING POINT.....

Helpful ways to consider resilience building is to focus on the key factors:

- Security
- Self esteem
- Self-efficacy
- Self-regulation

and structure interventions to address these.

ANOTHER WAY

Research indicates that some behaviours are particularly conducive to resilience building

- Make connections with others
- Help others
- Maintain a daily routine
- Take a break
- Self-care
- Have goals and move towards them
- Nurture a positive self-view
- Keep things in perspective and maintain a hopeful outlook
- Look for opportunities for self-discovery
- Accept that change is part of living

(adapted from Seligman 2013; APA, 2013)

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO TO NURTURE RESILIENCE?

1. Model resilient behaviour
2. Whole school and whole class approaches
3. Individual Interventions

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO TO NURTURE RESILIENCE?

- Nurturing resilience in children and young people involves thinking about:
 - The way we take care of ourselves – *modelling resilient behaviour*
 - Our interactions with them
 - The way we speak with them
 - Our expectations of them (Morris, 2009)
 - Their expectations of themselves
 - The ways we model/support/teach them about engaging with the world (Reivich, 2004)

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO TO NURTURE RESILIENCE?

- Whole class/school approaches, for example:
 - Having a culture of high expectations but where mistakes are accepted and valued as learning opportunities (Roffey, 2014);
 - Creating a culture where emotional and physical safety is a joint venture (Roffey, 2014);
 - Celebrating effort, individual achievements and (crucially) strengths (Seligman, 2006).

IDENTIFYING AND CELEBRATING STRENGTHS (Boniwell & Ryan, 2012)

WISDOM	COURAGE	HUMANITY
Creativity Curiosity Judgment Love of Learning Perspective	Bravery Perseverance Honesty Zest	Love Kindness Social Intelligence
JUSTICE	TEMPERANCE	TRANSCENDENCE
Teamwork Fairness Leadership	Forgiveness Humility Prudence Self-Regulation	Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence Gratitude Hope Humor Spirituality

(from <https://www.viacharacter.org/www/Professionals/Character-Development>)

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO TO NURTURE RESILIENCE?

► Individual interventions, considering a child (or children) that you particularly want to support and consider ways in which you can nurture their:

- Security
- Self esteem
- Self-efficacy
- Self-regulation

SECURITY

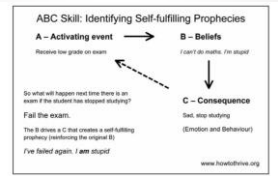
SELF-ESTEEM

SELF-EFFICACY

SELF-REGULATION

USEFUL STRATEGIES:
ALTERNATIVE THINKING STYLES

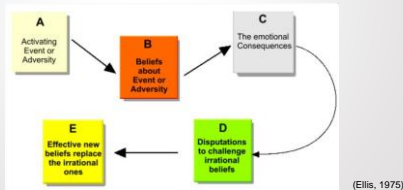
- Children who are not resilient may engage in negative pessimistic ruminative thoughts:



(Beck, 1976)

USEFUL STRATEGIES: ALTERNATIVE THINKING STYLES

Supporting them to developing an optimistic explanatory style e.g. the ABCDE technique (Beck, 1976) can be really useful;



USEFUL STRATEGIES: ALTERNATIVE THINKING STYLES

- You can also help them to avoid "thinking traps", for example:
 - jumping to conclusions,
 - tunnel vision,
 - magnifying the negative and minimizing the positive,
 - personalising or externalising blame,
 - overgeneralising small setbacks,
 - engaging in mind reading, and
 - using unhelpful emotional reasoning (Reivich and Shatte, 2002).

OTHER ACTIVITIES: ENDING THE DAY POSITIVELY

"Three good things?"

- Identify 3 good things that happened yesterday;
- Why did this good thing happen?
- What does it mean to you?
- How can you increase the likelihood of having more of this good thing in the future?

(Adapted from Seligman et al, 2009)

DOES IT WORK?

- ▶ The evidence would suggest that it can. Meta analysis of a wide range of studies suggests:
 - ▶ Reduction and prevention of :
 - ▶ Depression;
 - ▶ Levels of hopelessness;
 - ▶ Levels of anxiety and depression; and
 - ▶ Levels of behavioural problems. (Gilham et al, 2008).
- ▶ A key feature is the proper training and supervision of school staff.

Additional Resources

- ▶ Albert Ellis on worrying:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iw3sDga0BeA>
- ▶ Ann Masten on resilient children:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBMet8oIvXQ>
- ▶ APA – the road to resilience
<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx>
- ▶ Educating for Happiness and Resilience
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DbC18wFkHNI>

Possible reading.....

- ▶ Reivich, K. and Shatté, A. (2002). *The Resilience Factor*. New York: Broadway Books.
- ▶ Seligman, M. (2007). *The Optimistic Child*.

and many others.....
