

## Resilience: A Key to Success in School and Beyond

Resilience is the ability to recover quickly from some type of misfortune or adversity; resilience results in a heightened likelihood of success in school and in other aspects of life, despite environmental adversities (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1995). Psychologically, resilience is a product of personality traits. Philosophically, resilience is reasoned to be an illogical resistance to stressful situations. The motivation for resistance is not to overcome, but an effort to shield oneself which inevitably results in overcoming the stress-induced situation.

### Psychology of Resilience

The concept of resilience was described in the 1950s in a series of experiments by Werner (Werner & Smith, 1982). In an effort to discover why some children become juvenile delinquents, abuse substances, and act out in society, while other children ease into society and have successful careers, Werner reported that successful adults exhibited higher levels of autonomy, higher intelligence, task orientation, curiosity, independence, empathy, and problem-solving skills. These traits combined to define the concept of resilience. Children who became juvenile delinquents, high school drop outs, and had continuous trouble staying employed were deemed unable to cope with stress, and were, thereby, ir resilient.

Further study has identified added factors related to resilience including age, family and social relationships, past coping abilities, social maturity, locus of control, competence, self esteem, temperament, and the need for achievement. Resilience is not limited to resisting the negative effects of stress, but, in honing the ability to cope with stressors. Family and social relationships influence what kind of stressors a child faces in early development and influence the way in which a person develops and handles the stressors of future relationships.

The need for achievement also influences resilience. Undertaking the amount of time, focus, and other stressors to achieve academic success requires resilience as does career achievement. Those wishing to enter the workforce must prepare, interview, and, when hired, continually improve their skills in an effort to be promoted. Resilience is a key factor in surviving the globalized world. The need for achievement reinforces resilience in the workforce (Jew, Green, & Kroger, 1999).

Mrazek and Mrazek (1987) define resilience as responses to stress and how they are influenced by the evaluation of the stress-induced situation; it is the ability

to process an experience, attach meaning to it, and incorporate it into one's belief system. Once the stressful situation is processed, if the individual then experiences increased self-confidence and competency as a result of the stress, the individual is said to possess resilience. Skills linked to the psychological nature of resilience are:

1. A rapid responsiveness to danger lends to one's ability to see and make adjustments in order to avoid harm.
2. Precocious maturity, or role reversal amongst children and their parents.
3. A disassociation affect allows individuals to distance themselves from intense feelings.
4. Information seeking, the desire to learn about the hazards in the environment.
5. The formation and use of relationships in order to survive, especially in times of crises.
6. Positive projective anticipation, to project oneself into the future and visualize life after difficult times.

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7. Decisive risk-taking, to take responsibility by making a crucial decision despite risk.
8. The conviction of being loved, the belief that love is owed to the individual.
9. The ability to identify with some aspect of the aggressor's competence.
10. A cognitive restructuring of painful events, to take a past painful experience and reprocess the memory to make it more acceptable.
11. Altruism, the ability to gain pleasure from giving to others.
12. Optimism and hope, a positive perception of the world (Mrazek & Mrazek, 1987)

This view of resilience reveals a direct relationship to personality traits. While Werner believed the personality traits that aided in a child's resilience were inherent in the child's core personality and independent of external factors, Mrazek and Mrazek judged that personality traits evolved within the stress-induced situation.

### Philosophy of Resilience

Philosophically, resilience is seen as a phenomenon of an individual's belief system derived from biased memory retrieval and an altered perceptual attention. Existing beliefs have more influence than the circumstances involved, whether past or present. For example, an individual experiences a tragic car accident in childhood. In adulthood, the individual accepts driving as a part of life without fear of being in a car accident again. The phenomenon is that, as an adult, the individual remembers the car accident, but, the perception is biased in that he or she believes the accident to be a one time occurrence. The individual's mind has altered the perception of the accident around the belief that cars are safe; the accident was an isolated occurrence that would not happen again. How a mind reasons about its environment results in resilience or irresilience (Solomon, 1992).

### Resilience and Schools

Research on students has increasingly focused on the concept of resilience. Students with low self-efficacy (belief about the capability of being successful on a task) are not characterized by having resilience whereas students with high self-efficacy are often considered to be resilient individuals. Once students have developed a high sense of self-efficacy and resilience, failure on an occasional basis is unlikely to dampen their optimism for the future. When these students encounter small setbacks on the way to achieving success, they learn that sustained effort and perseverance are key ingredients of that success and they persevere. Such students have developed resilient self-efficacy, the belief that one can perform a task successfully even after experiencing setbacks with the recognition that effort and perseverance are essential for success (Bandura, 1989).

Research has identified the following school practices that promote resilience (Eggen & Kauchak, 2007, p. 122).

1. **High and Uncompromising Academic Standards:** teachers emphasize mastery of content and do not accept passive attendance and mere completion of assignments.
2. **Strong Personal Bonds:** teachers become the adults who refuse to let students fail, and students feel connected to the schools.
3. **Order and High Structure:** the school and classes are orderly and highly structured; teachers emphasize reasons for rules and consistently enforce rules and procedures.
4. **Participation in After-School Activities:** activities such as clubs and athletics give students additional chances to interact with caring adults and receive reinforcement for achievement.

Teachers who talk more frequently with students, learn about their families, share their own lives, maintain high expect-

tations, use interactive teaching strategies, and emphasize success and mastery of content, promote student resilience. Such teachers motivate students through personal contacts, instructional support, and attempts to link school to their students' lives. Teachers who are less effective in promoting resilience are more authoritarian and less accessible, distance themselves from their students, and place primary responsibility for learning on them. Lecture is a common teaching strategy and motivation is seen as the students' responsibility. Students often see these teachers as adversaries, to be avoided if possible. Like being an effective teacher in general, promoting resilience lies in the teacher's attitude and commitment to students (Doll, Zucker, & Brehm, 2004; Gschwend & Dembo, 2001).

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