Fostering Resiliency in Children

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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Abstract:

Today’s educators have an important role in developing resilient children and fostering the characteristics of a resilient child. Students face numerous adversities in life and must be able to adapt and respond in a positive manner. This presentation focuses on the characteristics of resilient children and as a teacher, how to foster resiliency in students by changing daily routine.
Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank Dr. Lynn Staley for advising me through this thesis presentation. Her help, resources, and knowledge were invaluable in the completion of this project.
Author's Statement:

While student teaching this semester, I saw numerous students at my school that were resilient and ones whom I knew could succeed in life if they were able to learn and put into practice the skills to becoming resilient. I began to wonder how educators could instill these characteristics in their students during their daily schedule, and so my research began.

While conducting my research, I was able to read information and instantly connect a story or a child that fit the information. I knew that I was finding information that could be implemented and shared with other educators to change the lives of the students that enter our classrooms. The ways I found to foster resiliency were quite simple and many times only required a change in attitude by the teacher and a few minor adjustments in daily routines.

I feel very prepared to implement these skills, attitudes, and practices in my classroom. I fully understand how they will help children, and believe that if practiced on a daily basis, will have an immense influence on the many children that pass through my classroom.

Knowing about these practices for myself, however, was not enough. I decided to set up my thesis as an informative presentation, or teacher in-service, as a way to advise other educators to follow these practices and new attitude as well. I presented my thesis to Dr. Staley's 11:00 and 12:00 classes, sharing personal stories and anecdotes in hopes to connect with the pre-service teachers in the classroom. I had good responses from these teachers and hope that they take this information and put it into practice in their own classrooms once they graduate.
Fostering Resiliency in Children
Resiliency is the ability to bounce back from adversity and to adapt successfully. It develops over time in the context of relationships and interactions.

There is no single way to identify a resilient child, but there are certain characteristics that the child will possess:
- Presence and/or influence of at least one supportive adult
- Hope and optimism in the face of adversity
- Pleasant, active, social, nurturing personality
- Can easily problem solve and is eager to learn and succeed
- He/She does not see themselves as victims, rather victors
- Has a friend, hobby, or interest that he/she can turn to in troubled times

1.) Each student needs at least one individual in their life that he/she can turn to, someone who believes in them and has taken care of them...it might be a teacher, a foster parent, a live in relative, etc.

2.) These students have an enthusiasm for life, despite everything that life has dealt them. It is important to understand that their optimistic outlook is not one of denial or is unrealistic, but may seem unlikely based on their background

3.) These are often the students we see helping others at school and on the playground, despite the hardships they are facing at home

4.) Seek out solutions to their problems and carry out expected and assigned tasks. They can easily communicate their wants and needs with the individuals in their lives

5.) These students do not see their hardships as life attacking them, but rather, they accept them and move forward.

6.) These are the students that tend to excel in hobbies such as singing, playing an instrument, sports, etc. They use their talents to move forward and try to create a better life for themselves (Example: Amanda-singing → church and school; extremely social and bubbly)
Families
Communities
Schools

All three of these units have an intense impact on a child’s ability to persist, overcome life’s obstacles, and to set goals and have hope for their future.

Children who have adults in their lives that have high expectations for them are more likely to succeed and go above and beyond.

It is more than just having high expectations; it is setting those expectations and then having faith in their child that they can accomplish those goals.

Having these individuals in a child’s life will help them to withstand negative pressures and become responsible adults.

Both schools and families can promote characteristics of resiliency through children’s literature—there are several children’s books in which the plot and the characters implement and portray the necessary traits needed for resiliency. Some of these books are *Wemberly Worried, Tar Beach, Amazing Grace* (this last text has a girl who dreams about doing and being anything, which pushes her to try out for the lead role in the school play).

Example: Heather—community
How can teachers and the school help?

- Begin each day by greeting your students at your classroom door, calling them each by name. This shows them you are ready for them and an exciting day. Let them know you are interested.
- Help students feel as if they belong to the school.
  - Classroom jobs
  - Extracurricular activities

1.) Meeting them at the door and calling them by name lets the children know that you are prepared for them and ready to have a great day. When you call them by name, it shows the child that you care enough to know who they are and that you care about them and their lives. Ask them how their night was, if they need help on homework, if they have anything they want to share...let them know you are interested in their life and what they are doing.

2.) Give students classroom jobs, let them take ownership in certain aspects of the classroom. It might be their only safe place, or their only place where they feel they belong. Get them involved by allowing them to run errands, tutor other students if they can, and encourage them to get involved with drama, art club, science club, sports team, anything to get them involved.
3.) Challenge the students to do their best and show confidence in their ability to accomplish all tasks. Set your students up for success, make your expectations clear, acknowledge their ideas, encourage critical thinking, praise them for the things they come up with.

4.) Teaching social interactions is critical for some students. Many teachers believe that students have already acquired this skill but many are not. Matthew from student teaching—share his interactions at recess and then the day of the field trip. Model for your students what it looks like to have positive social communication. By promoting positive communication, hopefully bullying, teasing, excluding, and other behaviors can be eliminated or drastically decreased. You can model and promote social skills through role play, creating opportunities to practice it, and praising students who do a great job at demonstrating it.

5.) Remind your students that it is the learning process and the team-building skills that can be obtained that are important rather than who wins or loses. Try to avoid activities that single out students on a performance based task. If you do, keep it in an area that is not very obvious.

*Multiplication Fact poster is behind my desk, out of the way of class activity*
6.) Teaching students how to be responsible and accept the consequences for their actions is one of the most important things we can teach our students as they go through school. Help teach children to take charge of their life and plan for the future...begin with taking charge of their homework, taking it home, finishing it, and turning it in.

   Example of B: student who had his homework done but never turned it in. As a result, he had to re-do it and lost points because it was late. When he came up to tell me about it, he argued that it wasn’t his fault. However, if he had shown responsibility and initiative, the assignment would have been turned in on time.

7.) Teaching our students how to problem solve is equally important. Our students do not always have someone at home who can help or listen to them. Give your students steps to follow: Identify the problem, ask yourself “What can I do?”, brainstorm and write down solutions, choose a solution, plan, and organize it, then try it and evaluate the results. Is the problem solved or do we need to begin brainstorming again? Help students realize it’s a step-by-step process and sometimes is nothing more than trial and error.

8.) Every child is unique and special...make sure he/she knows that! Give your students time to dream and set goals, potentially set this as a journal entry every so often. It is good for students to dream and imagine themselves doing something amazing and something that they love. Have one day a week when the class looks at their journal entries and sets goals and determines steps that need to be taken in order to reach those goals and dreams. Potentially take a week and have a “Dream Session” in which the students write down everything they can dream of for themselves then have them pick their top three dreams that they would like to achieve in the next few years. Have them pair up, and discuss these top three dreams and let them problem solve ways together and help each other find out how to reach their goals. Have a follow up session every week or two to check the progress of the students’ dreams.

How can we help?

- Teach them responsibility and leadership
  - Great way to do this is through homework
- Teach them how to problem-solve
  - Give them steps to follow, questions to ask
  - Trial and error is okay → students have not failed, rather found a way that doesn’t work
- Help them find what makes them unique and special
  - MAKE SURE THEY KNOW THIS!
  - Dream Session
9.) Show your students how they should act. Be organized, genuine, avoid using sarcasm (they don’t understand it), and be consistent! If you say you are going to do something then do it. For example, I told my class I would bake them cookies if 90% of them scored at or above the mastery criteria for my LAMP, only 2 could miss but 3 did. Even though I wanted to, I did not bake them cookies. I needed to stick by my word and not do it. They need consistency all around. If you tell them you will give extra credit, then do it. If you tell them you will play a game tomorrow, then do it. Don’t make promises to a child that you don’t intend to keep.

10.) Parents are our children’s most important teachers. Encourage them to work with their student, help them on homework, and be actively involved in their education in any way they can. They need to display some of the same characteristics that we do in order to help their child, provide them with that information! Help the parents to see how critical their role is in the education of their child. My philosophy of education contains a three way venn-diagram in which parents, teachers, and students must all be actively involved in order for the child to have the best overall success. Parents may not know how to help their child, let them know, give ideas, invite them to come into the class and help in any way. Don’t leave it up to them to make the first move and approach you, put the offer out in a newsletter!

It is not easy to do all of these things. You must be very conscious of the decisions you make on a daily basis and think how those decisions and your attitude will affect the attitude of your students.

Raising Resilient Children by Robert Brooks Ph. D., and Sam Goldstein Ph. D.
Give example of Jane on page 3. → As a teacher you will face situations like this more than you can imagine, especially in the lower grades. I had forgotten the amount of tattling that occurred in the primary grades and was not prepared for it when I entered my student teaching. It is very easy as a teacher, who is busy, constantly thinking and doing, to try to solve the problems for the students and move them on their way. However, by doing this, we are robbing our students of the learning experience that can take place. Much like was stated in this book, take these negative situations and make them a positive by creating a learning experience in life for the child. In this case, and in the case of tattling in schools, take these situations and make them a learning experience for your students and maybe it will eliminate the tattling and they will problem solve on their own before coming to you.
This particular student is one that is at the school I am student teaching at. He is a very sweet kid, cute, smart, and full of energy. He is by far the biggest class clown I have ever met! However, the more I get to learn about this student, the more my heart goes out to him. When he was still in my math and reading class, I tried to use his joking around as comic relief and did not punish him too much if the offense wasn’t very bad, remember that punishment did not work well with him, so it just took up class time to stop and “yell” at him. Instead I would acknowledge his actions and the class would have a little laugh and we would move on with the lesson (and he would be satisfied with the attention he received). The only thing I have found to work with this student is to get on his level and force him to look at you while talking...this will require you to say “look at me” every 10 seconds but he won’t take you seriously if he can look away, that is his tactic to get out of the seriousness of the situation.

From what I have discovered with this student is that he is a little boy who is starving for attention. He wants nothing more than for you to pay attention to him and only him and he doesn’t care if you are giving the attention in a positive or negative manner. This is why I do not always punish him for his actions. This is a student who came to school one day and fell asleep in both mine and Miss Mueller’s class and when asked why he was so tired, he responded, “No one tells me when to go to bed.” Here is a little boy, 9 years old, who is responsible for getting himself to bed at night...and at 9 years old, he’d rather play video games than go to sleep. This is a situation in which there is very little to no family involvement. There is abuse in the home from the boyfriend to the mother that the children must witness. This leaves him starving for attention from adults, he has none at home.
Read excerpt from Ron Clark’s *The Essential 55* (p 188) and explain how he handled the situation and the long term affect it had on this particular student.
Resources