

Innovations and Perspectives

Linking People and Resources

Newsletter of the Virginia Commonwealth University Training and Technical Assistance Center (VCU T/TAC) for School Personnel Serving Children and Youth with Disabilities and Children At-Risk for Academic Failure

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Resilience: Providing Support, Structure, and Opportunity

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In our roles as professionals or family members, we are often challenged by the different responses of children and youth to life difficulties, including health problems, family stress, and exposure to violence or poverty. Some children withdraw or become aggressive, while others seem to be unaffected by these stressors. What makes such a difference? Are some infants, children, and adolescents naturally more adaptable than others? Is there anything that we can do to help children and youth learn to cope with circumstances that range from unfair to truly threatening? This question lies at the heart of resilience research. These studies clearly point to strategies that families, professionals, and volunteers can use to promote positive outcomes for young children and adolescents.

Studies of children and youth at risk for school failure and poor mental health highlight those individuals who overcome the odds and become "caring, competent and confident adults" (Werner & Smith, 1992, p. 2). These resilient children defy the predictions about adverse outcomes and they cope effectively with stressful or traumatic experiences (Masten, 1994). In spite of family stress, poor economic resources, or developmental problems, resilient children and youth are more likely to complete school, establish stable families, maintain employment, and find life satisfaction.

Risk and resilience are studied in a wide variety of contexts, with research focused on specific risk factors and developmental outcomes. As summarized by Masten (1994), primary sources of risk to children's development are health stressors (e.g., poor nutrition), family circumstances (e.g., unemployment, mental illness), environmental stressors (e.g., unsafe housing, limited resources), and trauma (e.g., exposure to violence). In the context of these diverse risk factors, healthy development may be protected by the characteristics of both individuals and environments. One of the most important influences is the "goodness of fit" for each child in home, school, and community contexts. For example, an "easygoing" baby typically elicits positive attention from adults, although preoccupied caregivers may interact less with a baby who is not demanding. An

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elementary school student who expresses excitement about new experiences may participate in more enrichment activities than a shy classmate, unless the teacher recognizes the importance of encouraging all students to develop their interests and talents. Likewise, a parent of an adolescent with learning disabilities who holds high expectations for his or her child's school success follows through on those expectations by monitoring homework and celebrating academic progress. In the domestic violence shelter, a sensitive tutor realizes that a child has given up on reading because her academic experiences have been disrupted by frequent moving. The tutor carefully assesses the gaps in the student's learning and provides targeted instruction to ensure the child's success. For each child, transactions between individual strengths and vulnerabilities with the demands and opportunities in their environments contribute to the dynamic and complex process of development.

The summaries of selected studies in Table 1 illustrate the diversity of individual and environmental factors that have been investigated to explore the dynamics of risk, protection, and resilience.

Table 1. Risk and Protective Factors Identified in Selected Studies

STUDY	RISK FACTORS	PROTECTIVE FACTORS	OUTCOMES
Baldwin et al., 1990	Neighborhoods with high crime rates & limited economic resources	Family warmth High parental expectations Close monitoring	High academic achievement
Battishtich et al., 1995	High poverty neighborhoods	Caring school community	Student engagement Sense of belonging High academic achievement
Bradley et al., 1994	Prematurity, low birth weight Low maternal education Poverty	Responsive & Accepting caregiver Stimulating & organized care Safer & less crowded housing	Good Health Normal cognitive & social/adaptive developmental gains in early childhood
Heatherington et al., 1990	Divorce	Child temperament Custodial parent's emotional stability	Positive adjustment
Werner & Smith, 1992	Perinatal stress Chronic poverty Disorganized family Low parental education	Child characteristics Warm caregiving Mentoring Growth opportunities Values-oriented organizations	Graduation Employment Life Satisfaction Family stability

This sample of studies addresses family and community risk factors that are germane for many infants, children, and youth in our community and school programs - poverty, family stressors, and other developmental problems. These studies also illustrate numerous protective factors associated with positive outcomes that form the goals for many of our educational and social initiatives - good health, developmental progress, academic engagement and success, and emotional well-being. In

Table 2, individual and environmental factors are identified across these studies as protective influences are summarized.

Table 2. Summary of Protective Factors

Individual Characteristics	Environmental Characteristics
Affectionate, engaging	Warm, supportive relationships
Resourceful, good problem solving	High expectations
Sociable	Values orientation
Actively interested & involved	Well-timed opportunities for development

The interaction of these factors is complex; i.e., individual characteristics can be viewed as contributors to positive transactions within caregiving environments, as well as desirable outcomes of healthy development promoted by positive family, school, and community support. The protective features in children's experiences are primarily positive relationships, careful guidance, and developmental opportunities.

Many effective programs for children and youth at risk incorporate these protective features – support, structure, and opportunity. The specific strategies and program components will differ depending on the needs of the child and family. A few examples are listed below.

- ❑ Early intervention programs for infants with disabilities are family-focused to enhance the family's primary role in identifying concerns, establishing priorities, and using resources to support the developmental progress of their children (Hanson & Carta, 1996).
- ❑ Even Start uses an effective two-generation approach by supporting both caregiver (adult education) and child (early education) as well as their positive interactions (St. Pierre & Layzer, 1998).
- ❑ Effective homeless education programs must be comprehensive in order to address the complex needs of homeless children, youth, and their families (Stronge, 1997). To foster the physical, emotional, social, and academic development of homeless students, partnerships of support are essential within schools and communities (Reed-Victor & Pelco, 1999).
- ❑ Programs for adolescents with disabilities can target self-determination skills, such as, planning, goal setting, problem solving, and self-monitoring – key skills for independence.
- ❑ Volunteer programs (e.g., Big Brothers/Big Sisters) focus primarily on providing supportive, caring relationships in which older youth and adults serve as mentors to young children and adolescents in need.
- ❑ Numerous community organizations (e.g., scouts, service groups) build self-determination, constructive peer relations, and civic responsibility through youth-generated community service projects (McLaughlin et al., 1994).

Families, schools, and community programs clearly contribute to positive outcomes for children and youth who face a variety of risks. Given the nature of specific stressors and students' needs, effective interventions may incorporate different types and intensity of supports through volunteer and professional efforts. As we continue to build competence-oriented programs for children and youth to

address their stressful developmental circumstances, resilience research provides a meaningful framework for program development with three key features: supportive relationships, clear expectations and structure, and increased growth opportunities. The balancing act involves examining our current practices and reflecting about key factors in fostering resilience, such as:

1. How are we providing caring relationships within our learning environments?
2. What strategies are we using to communicate clear expectations for all students' success?
3. How do we provide effective scaffolding for diverse learners?
4. How do we coach our students in solving problems and monitoring their own progress?
5. What methods do we incorporate to encourage children and youth to explore their interests and develop their talents?
6. How are we working with our colleagues, families and various community programs to foster support, structure, and expanded opportunities for infants, children, and youth?

The articles on resilience which follow provide a starting place for you to begin answering these questions in your own setting.

Evelyn Reed-Victor

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Search for Severe Disabilities Program Specialist

The VCU T/TAC is continuing its search for a Program Specialist in Severe Disabilities. This Program Specialist will join our Team to provide services to local public schools, state operated programs and early intervention programs. If you hold a master's degree in special education or a related field and have at least five years of teaching experience with youngsters who have severe disabilities, you may be qualified. If you are interested in applying for this position, please contact Dr. Howard Garner at (804) 828-1305.

High School and Beyond Resiliency Rules

James is a sixteen year-old boy with severe emotional and learning disabilities. He reads on a 3rd grade level, and can perform 4th grade math problems. His mother is in prison, and James has lived with an aunt and her boyfriend for the past two years. James has never met his father. He is enrolled in a supported employment program for students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) in an alternative school. James is paid a reduced wage (\$2.50/hour) as a kitchen aide in an elementary school cafeteria, and he usually receives outstanding evaluations from his supervisor. He was recently offered a part-time position by the school at \$5.90/hour. James' aunt and her boyfriend attended his June IEP meeting in which they ridiculed James' vocational aspirations, accused him of academic laziness, and informed the IEP team that James would never amount to anything if he accepted the school system's employment offer. He has always exhibited a special resiliency, never complaining about the constant verbal abuse he endures at home.

Resilience is loosely defined both as the ability to recover strength, spirits, good humor and as flexibility, suppleness, and buoyancy. The literature describes resilience among children in stressful environments as the capacity to maintain healthy functioning in an unhealthy setting, or the maintenance of mastery under stress (Garmenzy, 1981). James could be any special education student in America: a child with learning and emotional difficulties exacerbated by a lack of family support, a less than nurturing environment, and a negative peer group. In spite of many obstacles, this child keeps trying, hoping that something will work out. He punches his time clock every morning,

rides the school bus to his job site two miles away and cheerfully greets some of the only people in his world who are genuinely happy to see him every workday - his coworkers.

James has learned to depend on the social support network at his job site. Dumont and Provost (1999) studied 297 adolescents' resilience and found that some high-risk individuals show no clear signs of distress when faced with stress. Smith and Prior (1995) concluded that a prominent positive temperament is a resilience factor among school-aged children.

Grace is a thirty-something special education teacher in a large secondary suburban school. Her husband is recovering from heart surgery. Her self-contained class roll for students with autism exceeds the state guidelines with three extra students. Her assistant has just given her resignation notice. Grace's principal is new to the district and has made it clear that special education is not her first priority.

Grace is under pressures familiar to many special educators: finding the strength to cope and confront personal or professional problems. Sagor (1996) developed some suggestions for building resilience in school-aged children. Adults may also build resilience through similar interventions, such as:

- Showing them that they are valued members of the (school) community,
- Providing them with evidence of success,
- Reinforcing feelings that they have made a real contribution to the school or community, and
- Making them feel empowered.

In the first case study, James has displayed an inner resiliency gleaned from many positive experiences in his work environment. His coworkers consistently showed him that he was valued, as evidenced by glowing evaluations. On a daily basis, James is told that he makes a real contribution to the school lunch program at an elementary school. He is empowered by his experiences to ignore negative messages. Consider your colleagues who are performing admirably in the face of personal and professional adversity. What can you do to support them?

Grace has had her obstacles this year, but is showing some resiliency. She could be any special education teacher in Virginia, and she knows that she is not alone. Her many years of experience have built inner flexibility. With good humor, some tenacity, and just plain willpower, and the support of her colleagues, Grace will survive this year.

Katherine M. Wittig

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Research on Resiliency at VCU

The Metropolitan Research Consortium (MERC) at VCU conducted a study of resilient at risk students. The research sought answers as to why, despite incredible hardships, some students have developed personal traits that enable them to recover from or adapt to life's problems. The study provides a new way to look at the problem at risk students pose for schools, teachers, parents, and communities. For further information contact MERC at (804) 828-0478.

Behavior: What Works

Creating School-wide Supports to Foster Resilience in Children and Youth

Most of us know a child who surprised us by growing into a well-adjusted, contributing member of society despite his or her impoverished, dysfunctional, or abusive home environment. We know of more children, however, that re-create their adverse childhood home environments in the families they form as adults. Why some children raised in adversity overcome it while others perpetuate it is largely unknown. What little we do know is the result of several studies that have compared children who overcame adversity to those that did not (see Doll & Lyon, 1998 for a review of the literature). These studies suggest it has a lot to do with three things: 1) the child, 2) the child's family, and 3) the school. We are fairly limited in our understanding of how to promote resilience. Although there is no guaranteed program for promoting resilience, we do know about protective factors that we can foster in many aspects of our schools. (Doll & Lyon, 1998).

The Child

Resilient children are typically described as having a positive, easy-going disposition. They are usually engaged with close friends in productive activities. More importantly, they perceive life through a particular lens: an obstacle is an adventure to overcome. They have this perspective because they have the skills needed to overcome an obstacle and the confidence to use their skills. When faced with adversity, resilient children use a variety of coping strategies. They go into a problem-solving mode and then actively acquire the materials, people or skills needed to solve their problems. Finally, they are intrinsically motivated to achieve (Seifer, Sameroff, Baldwin & Baldwin, 1992).

How can teachers foster resilience in children?

1. Create opportunities for children and youth who are at risk to work on projects with peers who have shared interests.
2. Fine tune your comments to foster resilience. For example, promote and reinforce persistence (e.g., by saying, "This is hard and you're keeping at it!" "You stuck with it!"). Orient the student to his or her feelings while accomplishing the task (e.g., "You're working hard because you enjoy the challenge." "You're sticking to it because you want to learn how to balance your checkbook"). Make the student aware of the thinking, problem solving, and emotional control he or she is using to solve a problem (e.g., "You figured it out." "You thought it through." "You solved your own problem!"). Promote an inner locus of control by reminding the student about the internal rewards he or she experienced as a result of solving his or her problem or accomplishing a task (e.g., "You must feel proud of yourself." "What a feeling of satisfaction you must have."). Use words that

highlight the behavior (e.g., “You took a break and then came back and figured it out” versus “I like the way you took a break to calm down.”) (Brophy, 1991)

3. Also, systematically teach coping strategies (e.g., muscle tense-release exercises, diaphragm breathing, coping statements such as “This may be difficult for me but reading is easy”) and the steps in problem-solving (through programs such as “Talk it Out” by B.Porro, 1996.) Then prompt children and youth to use these skills to approach problems as they arise in the classroom.

The Family

Parents or caregivers or resilient children can be characterized as affectionate, close, warm, caring, responsive, consistent, structured, and encouraging (Egeland & Erickson, 1990; Elder, Caspi, & van Nguyem, 1986; Seifer et. Al., 1992). Within this bastion of love, they also sent their children a clear message: we have high expectations for you and believe you can succeed at whatever you choose to do.

How can schools support families?

Investigate research-based school reform programs that successfully involve parents. Consider replicating Project Achieve (Knoff & Bastche, 1995), where a school provides parent education in tutoring strategies, parts of their child’s classroom curriculum, and positive behavior support approaches. School staff also directly supervise the parents-in-training working with students who have academic difficulties like their own child. As a next step, staff supervise parents working with their own child in the educational setting. This training is followed by a home consultation. A Parent Drop-In Center to encourage parent participation in school activities is also included in this model.

The School

Schools that successfully help at risk children move out of poverty and adversity do three things:

1. provide a responsive, high quality curriculum,
2. offer access to and promote relationships with positive adult models, and
3. involve at risk children in at least one pro-social extracurricular organization (Long & Vaillant, 1984).

How can school-wide interventions support at risk children?

1. Rethink the purpose of school to include what happens between classes and after school. Enlist faculty to serve as mentors, schedule time for students to connect with their mentors, and reward mentors for their time and effort. Provide the necessary support to encourage students who are at risk to become involved in extracurricular organizations.
2. Use a research-based school-wide behavioral support program such as High Five (Taylor-Greene et. Al., 1997). Get the whole faculty involved in identifying behavioral expectations for the school and defining how these behaviors would look in specific settings within the school (e.g., the cafeteria or the halls). Obtain faculty consensus on how to teach and reinforce the students for using the desired behavior. Teach these behaviors to the students via large group assemblies and classroom re-teaching. Obtain faculty commitment to provide ongoing reinforcement to students displaying the desired behavior and collect simple data for program evaluation purposes.

Obviously an effective program requires a multi-faceted approach because of the complex interplay of factors that produce resilient children (Pianta & Walsh, 1998). This is why it is so important for schools to rethink their role. Otherwise, simply fostering resilience in children via individual classroom

curriculum will in all likelihood do little to create real change in the quality of life for a student who is at risk.

Tracy Landon

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Check Out Your Public Library

Do you need resources to help reinforce a unit you are teaching or additional grade-appropriate materials for use in your classroom? Have you visited your local public library recently? When you think of the library, do you think only of checking out a recent bestseller? Most libraries have available fiction books that emphasize or help to reinforce math or science concepts along with building reading skills. Also available are books to help support the teaching of different SOLs. Most libraries have special privileges that allow teachers to use materials for extended periods of time. The next time you find yourself searching for additional materials, remember your public library.

Linda Bagley

Birth to Two Overcoming the Odds of Multiple Risks

It is daybreak, and I am awakened by the voice of Katie Couric on the Today Show. Once again, I hear startling statistics that remind me of the complexities of today's society.

"Every second a baby is born into poverty."

"Every two minutes a baby is born to a mother who had late or no prenatal care."

"Millions of children are abused or neglected each year."

"Growing numbers of newborns were prenatally exposed to drugs and alcohol." (Hanson & Carta, 1996)

Before I get out of bed, I pause to think about how these statistics affect the families and children I will see today as an infant service provider. I am concerned about factors such as poverty, mental illness, substance abuse, poor nutrition, health and environmental risks, domestic violence, and family stress. It is unusual to work with a family facing only one risk. Many of the families I visit live under the stress of multiple risks. The children living in these conditions are facing long-term impacts – developmental delays, risk of school failure, and for some, crime and imprisonment.

As startling as these statistics are, it is equally amazing that not all of the children from these families are adversely affected. Researchers have determined that one-third of the children from families facing multiple risks escape the effects of high-risk environments and grow up to be successful, competent adults (Hanson and Carta, 1996). These are the resilient children who are protected from the tresses in their lives by a combination of individual, family, and environmental factors. Children with good problem solving skills; high self-esteem; easygoing dispositions; and who are sociable, curious, and enthusiastic are more resilient. Children from families that are warm and supportive, have high expectations, are responsive and accepting of behaviors, and provide stability and rules in the home are more successful. We frequently hear the African proverb "it takes a village to raise a child." Community support such as safer and less crowded housing, mentoring relationships and a network of early and preventive services appear to buffer some children from the adversities of multiple risk factors and allow them to develop normally.

What can a service provider do to support these children and families? Hanson and Carta (1996) offer the following ideas:

- Help families understand their child's behaviors and language cues. Families will, in turn, feel more competent and comfortable with their children. As a result, the child will experience more pleasant interactions with family members.
- Shift the focus of intervention from deficits to an emphasis on individual and family strengths. Service providers are not here to "fix" families. Intervention efforts are most effective when they focus on supporting children and families within the communities in which they live. Help families identify the good things they are doing for their children and the supports the families have in their extended families, friends, co-workers, and neighbors.
- A family's ethnic, racial, cultural, and linguistic identity strongly influences their values and beliefs regarding disability, education, healing and health care, child rearing, and intervention. The effectiveness of services is linked to the degree to which service providers are able to listen to children and families as they identify their needs and concerns. Effectiveness is further enhanced when service providers are sensitive and respectful of children's and families' needs even when they differ widely from their own. This process begins with one's developing a clear under

standing of one's own beliefs and values and an acknowledgement that these may differ from those of the families we serve.

- The problems of children can be addressed only when other issues facing the children's families are also considered. Families with multiple challenges may require assistance in a variety of areas before they can respond to interventions that address the child's specific needs. Families may need emotional support, assistance with housing, employment, income, food, and health care. Develop knowledge about the wide range of available community resources and how the families that live in the community view them.
- Services must be flexible and user friendly. Families and service providers must work together to decide how often and how intensive services will be, where and how they will be delivered, and how involved the parent will be in the program. Reduce the obstacles families with limited skills and resources have to overcome in order to access services such as transportation, fee payment, and telephone communication.
- Successful programs are not limited by professional or bureaucratic barriers in meeting the needs of families and children. Look beyond your own agency and develop cooperative relationships with other agencies to work with families whose needs extend beyond the services and jurisdictional boundaries of one program.

As I stumble into the shower I am feeling more optimistic. In order to support children and families facing multiple risks I must reexamine my own system of beliefs, reevaluate the way I am providing services, and work together with a network of individuals and agencies. Today I will be part of the "village" and I will strive to make a difference in the life of a child and family.

Sharon Jones

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Risky Business

Accentuate the Positive

It is both shocking and depressing to think of the huge number of children worldwide who are living in high-risk conditions. Conservatively, there are tens of millions, perhaps hundreds of millions of children experiencing abuse, observing illegal activities, going to bed hungry, or living in war zones (Benard, 1995). One of the things that makes these statistics so frustrating is that we, as educators, have very little control over many of these conditions and risk factors.

Ever since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, American educators have been inundated with information about students who are *at risk*. Students may be at risk physically and emotionally, and they are often at risk academically. While physical and emotional risks pose indisputable threats to the health of the child, we cannot overlook the importance of education in the 21st century and the necessity of supporting students who are academically at risk. We must do all we can to make sure they have the opportunity to receive the education they need.

For the past sixteen years there has been a virtual mountain of research on both the *risk factors* and the strategies for countering the negative effects. The knowledge we have gained from this research has proved helpful; however, continuing to reflect solely on the negative causes a deficit approach to

this problem. Educators also need to look at the opposite end of the spectrum and study the children who are resilient in spite of these risk factors.

It is quite encouraging to know that many of the children living in high risk conditions, despite adversity, still go on to be confident, competent, and caring adults (Werner & Smith, 1992). This is resilience. Thankfully, the growing area of resiliency research has identified several *protective factors* or processes that enable many children to succeed despite the odds. One of the best things about resilience research is that it focuses on these causes of success rather than the causes of failure. Whereas we might not be able to greatly affect the causes of failure, we definitely have the capability to affect and nurture the causes of success (the protective factors).

The first, and maybe the most important, protective factor is **the presence of at least one caring person** in the life of the child. The second factor is the establishment of **high expectations**. The third factor is provision of **opportunities to participate in meaningful and responsible ways** that lead to a sense of self-worth and purpose (Benard, 1997, Benard, 1995, Finley, 1994).

It should come as no surprise that resilient adults – adults who have succeeded despite adversity – most frequently list favorite teachers as filling that need to be cared for when identifying key people outside of the family circle (Benard, 1995). With lawsuits, pressures of accountability, and real life demands on personal time, schools have frequently moved away from being caring communities. Caring school communities have a philosophy that creates and promotes student-to-teacher relationships that build student self-esteem and resiliency skills. Positive student-teacher relationships flourish in schools that create a positive school-wide climate that supports teacher development and creates opportunities for positive student-teacher interaction through administrative support (such as scheduling). Caring school communities also encourage and develop student-student relationships through grouping options, inclusive strategies, and instructional adaptations and accommodations (such as paired or cooperative learning activities, cross-age grouping, peer tutoring, and mentoring). Such communities also promote positive teacher-teacher relationships through teaming and trust building activities that support building professional friendships, respecting diversity, and providing individual teachers time to share and build professional knowledge. Last, but not least, caring school communities promote strong teacher-parent relationships through home-school activities and positive parent involvement that link parents to community resources and provides supporting, nurturing family activities (Benard, 1995).

If you have been teaching long enough to remember the “self-fulfilling prophecies” of the eighties then you are already aware of the need to have high expectations for **all** students. We should never underestimate the difference teachers’ expectations can make and the positive effect it can have on a student. A teacher’s belief in a student can lead that student to have faith in his or her own abilities. A teacher can give a child a chance to feel, “She thinks I’m worth something; maybe I am” (Kidder, 1990). While you are setting those high expectations, don’t forget the other part of this factor. When you set high expectations for your students, set them up to succeed, not to fail. Using supportive strategies that allow students to develop skills and gradually move to higher levels, while experiencing success, helps the student “live up” to your high expectations. Instructionally, this means supporting below grade level readers with multi-sensory approaches (such as recorded text); **teaching** comprehension activities through guided reading, “think alouds”, and direct instruction; proactively encouraging good behavior; and setting up the classroom environment and managing instruction in ways that support a variety of learning styles. There is an old saying that, “Nothing breeds success like success.” Expect your students to succeed. Set very high expectations for all students, and then make sure they have opportunities for success.

The third protective factor is providing opportunities for meaningful, responsible participation. Students who are at risk often seek attention. Some students will find ways to get that attention through negative participation.

As you can see, these three protective factors are very interrelated. If students are in a caring environment and are experiencing success, they are also receiving. "... many opportunities to participate in positive ways. Students, like the adults teaching them, need to have a purpose in life and something to hope and plan for" (Finley, 1994). When teachers set high expectations and create an environment that guarantees success, they provide the positive encouragement for students who may not otherwise participate because of negative experiences in the past. Caring teachers demonstrate respect for less participatory students by providing opportunities for all students to be a part of class discussions through the use of response boards or "learning buddy" pairs. The use of a discreet answering system, such as response boards, supports student learning and participation but does not put the student *on the spot*. Another way teachers can encourage participation from students who often appear unmotivated is by carefully arranging instruction to include all learning styles so all students have an opportunity to "shine."

Building resiliency results in a general "positive" feeling in the classroom. Concentrating on the negative has the opposite effect and subconsciously conveys the message to students who are at risk that they have so much to catch up, and are so lacking that there is no need to even try. Teaching towards resiliency results in students' beginning to blossom and teachers beginning to feel the joy of teaching again. What more could a teacher ask for?

Debby Wesson

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Practical Solutions (Page 10)

Would you like a Drink of Water?

As human beings, we all have basic physical and emotional needs. For example, when you are thirsty, only a drink of water will satisfy your need. When you feel lonely or upset, your needs may only be met when you have a sense of closeness or belonging with another person. When our needs are not met, we are not able to reach our highest potential. Our performance as a family member, co-worker, or friend is affected. Everyone suffers when his or her needs are not met. Young people in the delicate developmental period of adolescence are especially vulnerable to the negative consequences of unmet needs.

Adolescence has been described as a stage of storm and stress that serves a healthy function (White, 1997). Youngsters at this developmental stage must constantly seek a balance between their competing need to belong and their need for independence. Managing this conflict is critical to the developmental process of evolving into a competent young adult. In their desperate need to quench their thirst for independence, adolescents are often rebellious and argumentative. This is often in stark contrast to the young person's thirst to feel connected with others and gives rise to frustrations and anger for adolescents and the adults in their lives. When adolescents are confronted with environmental risk factors, these normal frustrations may contribute to their failure to become well-adjusted adults.

How do we help our young people satisfy their developmental needs in healthy and productive ways? Resiliency research has established that in addition to needing specific skills, adolescents must establish significant, meaningful relationships (Dugan & Coles, 1989). One way adults can assist adolescents who are at risk for failure is to consciously build significant meaningful relationships with them. Three avenues for enhancing our relationships with adolescents are suggested here.

Be understanding from a developmental perspective. We often give lip services to the critical issues of adolescent development, but the expectation is often for adolescents to behave as young adults. If we expect normal adolescent behavior from adolescents, we may be more prepared for the disruptive behaviors we encounter. Remember that being rebellious and argumentative may be healthy functions for adolescents as a means of transforming themselves into productive young adults. It is a developmental process, not a personal issue for us as adults unless we make it a personal issue. We can help facilitate the developmental balance between independence and belonging by perceiving each conflict as a developmental step and not a personal attack. In an effort to keep a developmental perspective, it is important to use self-talk such as, "this is not about me, this is about a child struggling to grow up." Adolescents should be encouraged and taught to express their frustrations within responsible guidelines. Skill development for self-expression is available through various anger management programs such as those described in Adolescent Anger Control: Cognitive-Behavioral Techniques by Feindler and Ecton (1986).

Be empathic in your responses during conflicts and emotional situations. Empathy is a communication and relationship skill that helps one to feel understood and emotionally validated, creating a sense of connectedness with others. Communication that validates feelings and experiences may diminish the adolescent's frustration and enhance the feeling of belonging, therefore, creating a safe environment in which to explore identity and independence issues. Delivering an emphatic statement prior to a corrective statement allows the adolescent to feel understood and valued, and possibly more receptive to correction. It is important to quench the thirst for belonging and support before any other expectations can be met. In an effort to be empathic, it is helpful to use statements such as, "it makes sense you would feel that way." Empathy literally means to 'feel in'. Therefore, try to truly think and feel from the adolescent's viewpoint.

Our knowledge of resiliency and adolescent development suggests that we may best serve our at risk youth by knowing when to hand them the glass of water and when to let them get it for themselves. It is a balance for them, and it is a balance for the adults working with them. It is suggested here that we may address this balance by being understanding from a developmental perspective, being committed to being fully available, and responding with empathy. Drink up!

Debi Kipps-Vaughan

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT.....

The Classroom Teacher

I have come to a frightening conclusion.

I am the decisive element in the classroom.

It is my personal approach that creates the climate.

It is my daily mood that makes the weather.

As a teacher, I possess tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous.

I can be a tool of torture, hurt, or heal.

In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, and a child humanized or dehumanized.

Haim Ginott

It's Academic

Positive School Environments Can Make a Difference

Youngsters with learning disabilities, by definition, are at risk for school failure. In order to ensure that they have the best possible academic outcomes, we must use specialized instructional tools and strategies that allow these students to maximize their learning and demonstrate their knowledge. Although many students with learning disabilities grow into productive, happy, and well-adjusted adults, the combined effects of a learning disability, school failure, and a negative school environment may increase the chances that students will experience some very undesirable outcomes. These include poor emotional adjustment, dropping out of school, juvenile delinquency, or substance abuse (Morrison & Cosden, 1997). Knowing that the interaction of the school and the learning disability can produce these outcomes is a wake up call for the entire school community. How can we make sure the school makes a positive contribution to the prevention of these serious problems?

Wang and Haertel (1998) identified four areas within the school context that can either contribute to academic failure or promote resilience in schools. These are the teacher, the curriculum, instruction, and the organization and culture of the school. The potential negative forces of each of these areas and recommended practices to promote resiliency are summarized below.

Teachers who are burned out and have low expectations for learning may actually contribute to the failure and not the success of their students. In order to avoid this outcome, every teacher must ensure that they accomplish the following for each of their students.

1. Establish caring and committed relationships with their students
2. Hold high expectations for every student
3. Help students' master new experiences
4. Promote positive self-esteem for all students
5. Be a good role model for problem solving and pro-social behavior

The **curriculum** can also influence whether students succeed or fail. Curricula that are watered down, insensitive to cultural or ethnic differences, do not build on students' prior knowledge, or are inflexible and not integrated across subject areas can contribute to student failure. In order to mitigate these potential problems, curriculum must include the following.

1. Sensitivity to the diversity of students' learning styles and cultures
2. Use of universal themes to make content more accessible
3. Adaptation of curriculum and instruction to ensure student learning
4. Teaching prerequisite knowledge when it is missing
5. Opportunities to learn higher order thinking skills and advanced knowledge

Instruction is the third area of the school context that can either contribute to students' failure or protect them from it. Inadequate time devoted to instruction can contribute to failure. Also, instruction can be ineffective for a number of reasons, such as: 1) students who learn differently are labeled and/or stigmatized, 2) teachers are not familiar with the content they are teaching, 3) there are inadequate opportunities for interaction during learning, or 4) assessment is not used to guide instruction.

The protective factors that can ensure that instruction supports rather than detracts from student learning include the following.

1. Maximize learning time with high levels of student engagement
2. Involve students in goal setting
3. Use positive and proactive classroom management strategies
4. Teach students metacognitive and self-regulation strategies
5. Use frequent assessments to guide instruction

The final area within the school context that has the potential to promote student success is the **school's organization and culture**. Several attributes can make the school itself a contributor to student failure, including: 1) an overrepresentation of educationally disadvantaged students, 2) lack of vision, 3) ineffective leadership and poorly prepared teachers, 4) violence in the school, 5) limited professional development, 6) little parent or community involvement, 7) segregated programs, and 8) inadequate resources.

Schools that want to work toward ameliorating the detrimental effects of these factors should consider the following options.

1. Organize into smaller units that create a sense of involvement and belonging for students and staff
2. Create a safe and orderly atmosphere that rewards achievement in academics and behavior
3. Strong leadership by principals
4. Inclusive classrooms and programs

5. Active parent and community involvement programs
6. Coordinated school-community services

The possibility that the combined effects of learning disabilities and poor school experiences can produce is a bad news-good news effect. The bad news is that as educators, the environment and experiences we create for our students can contribute to the worst possible outcomes for individual students. The good news is that we have learned many things about how to make schools supportive and nurturing places. Now it's up to us to take action based on what we know.

Jo Smith Read

References

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Resilience On Line

When "resiliency" was typed into a search engine, a note appeared indicating that 16,611 web pages are available with a focus on some sort of resilience. Here are some that seem interesting.

***A Curriculum for Resiliency**

This site, which is sponsored by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, provides a summary of the research on resiliency and information on The Resilient Youth Curriculum.

Web address: <http://www.nesp.org/commp1197c.htm>

***Family-Resiliency Listserve**

The Family-Resiliency List is an electronic mail network on the topic of family-centered approaches for families of all kinds, including families with children with special needs, families with children who are at-risk for developing difficulties and families with elderly members. Subscriptions to the listserv are free.

Web address: <http://www.quasar.ualberta.ca/cfrfp/frl/frmm.html>

***Organizations with Resiliency Materials**

This site provides links to 17 organizations that are concerned with resiliency. Examples include the National Center for Family Literacy, the National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education, and the National Parent Network on Disabilities.

Web address: <http://www.nnfr.org/curriculum/topics/>

INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY AND DEVELOPMENT OF RESILIENCE (ISADOR)

ISADOR is an institute for the study and development of resilience at VCU. ISADOR's mission is to research resilience across the lifespan in at-risk populations, to share information fostering resilience, and to link community resources that foster resilience. The Institute utilizes a multi-disciplinary approach and collaborative processes across the university and community to accomplish its mission.

For more information, call Rosemary Lambie at (804) 828-1332, extension 563.

Program Spotlight

AI's Pals: Kids Making Healthy Choices, a resiliency-based early childhood curriculum and teacher training package, and the parent education series, **Here, Now and Down the Road... Tips for Loving Parents**, strengthen the abilities of teachers and parents to teach children to get along with others manage anger, problem-solve, use self-control, and make healthy choices. Research conducted by Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) indicates that children who received **AI's Pals** made significant gains in positive social skills and other traits related to resiliency. Developed at Virginia Institute for Developmental Disabilities at VCU, these programs are offered nationwide exclusively by Wingspan, LLC.

For more information contact:

Susan R. Geller
Wingspan, LLC
P.O. Box 29070
Richmond, VA 23242

Phone: (804) 754-0100

FAX: (804) 754-0200

Website: <http://www.wingspanworks.com>

Upcoming T/TAC Events

Reading in the Content Areas

Presenter: William P. Bintz, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor,
University of Kansas;
College of Education,
Department of Curriculum & Instruction

Date: Friday, February 25, 2000;
8:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Location: John Tyler Community College,
Student Center, Chester, VA

Cost: \$15.00 (includes registration fee and lunch)

Registration

Deadline: February 4, 2000 (use form below)

Target

Audience: **All teachers**, K-12.

For more information, call Jayne Bradley at 804-828-6947 or 800-426-1595.

**(Complete and return the registration form below (with check payable to VCU/VIDD) to:
Registration Coordinator, VCU T/TAC (Region 1), Box 842020, Richmond, VA 23284-2020).**

REGISTRATION FORM

READING IN THE CONTENT AREAS

Name/Position of Contact Person _____

School/Level/Disability Area: _____

School/Program Name: _____

School/Program Mailing Address: _____

School/Program Phone#: _____

School/Program FAX#: _____

E-mail: _____

4th Annual Tapestry for Learning

March 9, 2000 at
Virginia Commonwealth University Student Commons
Sponsored by the Training and Technical Assistance Centers (T/TACs) at
The College of William and Mary
Old Dominion University
Virginia Commonwealth University
And
Together We Can

(**please look for the full page flyer and registration form in the January **UPDATE**)

Professional Development
Opportunities

**The Virginia Branch of the International Dyslexia Association:
1999-2000 Feast and Forum**

(A series of ten dinner meetings for parents and teachers featuring training in teaching methods to enhance students' mastery of SOLs.)

Locations: Richmond, VA
Charlottesville, VA
Fredericksburg, VA
Cost: \$10.00 (covers dinner and presentation)
(optional: manual fee \$8.80 each)
Contact: The Virginia IDA Hotline
1-800-988-8336

**PACR/M 2000 Center on Disabilities Study:
16th Annual Pacific Rim Conference**

Date: March 6 & 7, 1999
Location: Waikiki Beach,
Honolulu, Hawaii

TRANSTION FORUM 2000

Date: March 15-17, 2000
Location: Williamsburg, VA
Contact: Kathe Wittig, VCU T/TAC
(804) 828-6947
<http://www.odu.edu/~dln/forum2000/index.htm>

Autism 2000

Date: April 5-7, 1999
Location: Wiehe-Darre, PA
Contact: Sheri Martin/Mary Veslosk
1-800-879-8858
<http://www.hscm.com>

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