

FOSTERING RESILIENCE AMONG STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITY

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ABSTRACT

Education plays a crucial and dynamic role in all round development of children. It is not only the mere acquisition of knowledge rather focuses on the development of skills, habits and attitudes which helps a person to lead a full and worthwhile life in this world. Every classroom is a combination of a diverse group of children with their own individual personalities, personal histories, family constellations, strengths, and challenges. Some students learn differently from their peers and their performance may be substantially below that expected for age, schooling, and level of intelligence. These learning problems can significantly interfere with academic achievement or activities of daily living that require reading, mathematical, or writing skills. Learning disabilities can be conceptualized not as deficits or impairments inherent in the students but rather as variations from the dominant way of learning that has been socially constructed and sustained by the education system. Reviews on resiliency among students pointed out the fact that despite barriers to learning “at-risk” students still demonstrated levels of success. Developing resilience among students with learning disability can help those tackle the risk factors they face in their life. This dynamic ability can be either developed or damaged with life experiences particularly taught by teachers, parents, caregivers and family during childhood and adolescence.

Key Words: Resilience, Learning Disability, At-risk students, Internal and External protective factors.

RESILIENCE: TO BOUNCE BACK

Much adventure philosophy emphasizes the need for humans to encounter the edges of their physical and psychological possibilities in order to enhance their capacity to deal with everyday life. Resilience is a dynamic process whereby individuals exhibit positive behavioral adaptation when they encounter significant adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress. According to Wolins (1993) resiliency is the capacity to bounce back, to withstand hardship and to repair. Resilient people are able to utilize their skills and strengths to cope and recover from problems and challenges. Those who lack this resilience may instead become overwhelmed by such experiences and may use unhealthy coping mechanisms to deal with such challenges. Bernard (1991) characterizes resilient children as socially competent with life skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and ability to take initiative, have sense of purpose and foresee a positive future for themselves. They have special interests, goal directedness and motivation to achieve in school and in life.

RESILIENCE AMONG LEARNING DISABILITY (LD) STUDENTS

Every classroom is a combination of a diverse group of children with their own individual personalities, personal histories, family constellations, strengths, and challenges. For some students learning comes easily, but for others it can be a constant struggle. Even though they are fostering bright, inquisitive children with their own unique strengths and talents, some students experience difficulties learning the fundamental academic skills that seem to come so easily to their classmates. Some students learn differently from their peers, from what educators have come to consider the norm, and these children often find the conventional classroom and the traditional mode of teaching challenging (Winzer, 2007).

These are the students who often come to be diagnosed with learning disabilities or that an individual's achievement on individually administered standardized tests in reading, mathematics, or written expression is substantially below that expected for age, schooling, and level of intelligence. These learning problems can significantly interfere with academic achievement or activities of daily living that require reading, mathematical, or writing skills (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV, APA, 2000, p. 49).

In addition to the academic challenges many students with learning disabilities also contend with a variety of social and emotional issues brought on by the demands that their environments place on them. Researchers have identified a range of mental health issues that affect students with learning disabilities at a higher rate than their peers, such as anxiety, depression, and even suicidality (Bender, Rosenkrans, & Crane, 1999; Huntington & Bender, 2001; Maag & Reid, 2006; Weiner & Tardiff, 2004; Wilson, Deri Armstrong, Furrie, & Walcot, 2009). Additionally, students with learning disabilities are more likely to exhibit lower levels of self-esteem and self-competence than comparison groups of their peers (Heath, Roberts, & Toste, 2011; MacMaster, Donovan & MacIntyre, 2002; Stiehr-Smith & Nagel, 1995), and they are more prone to feelings of loneliness, social isolation, and even peer rejection (Al-Yagon & Mikulincer, 2004a, 2004b; Margalit, 1998; Pavri & Monda-Amaya, 2000).

NEED OF FOSTERING RESILIENCE AMONG LD STUDENTS

Resilient students are those who succeed in school despite these characteristics and apparent obstacles encountered (Rutter, 2001). The researches in educational resilience identifies at risk individuals who have positive life outcomes despite of their life obstacles. The study of resilience has found a place in research as being a worthwhile endeavor (Rutter, 2001; Masten, 1994). In Werner's longitudinal study of high-risk individuals, birth to 32 years, from the Hawaiian island of Kauai resilient adolescents were identified as being more responsible, being more successful in environments that provide structure, having more emotional support from family members, and receiving more interpersonal support from members in the community such as peers, ministers, and teachers. Out of 698 children studied, fully one-third had four or more risk factors present in their lives and identified as "high risk" (Werner & Smith, 1982). Significantly, however, one-third of those "high-risk" children (72 of 201) demonstrated good outcomes by adolescence. Moreover, resilient adolescents possess strong capabilities and context beliefs, respond well to positive influences in their lives, and are more oriented toward achievement. They apparently use specific resources to accommodate and overcome encountered risks (whether being physical, emotional, or personal supports). Findings of different studies offers hope and proof that despite traumatic and stressful life experiences individuals can be made resilient.

STRATEGIES TO FOSTER RESILIENCE

Schools continue to function as one of the most powerful spaces to capitalize on the resilience of students (Rutter, 1979). Research on resiliency among students pointed out the fact that despite barriers to learning "at-risk" students still demonstrated levels of success (Luther & Seigel, 1991; Masten, Best & Garmezy, 1990; Padrón, Waxman, Brown & Powers, 2000). Research studies indicate that in spite of their difficulties, a supportive and caring family, community, classroom environment can help *children manage to survive and even thrive successfully, academically and socially, into adulthood*(Hersholt C. Waxman et al., 1997; Steven J.

Condly, 2006; Yolanda N. Padrón et al. 2014). Some of the strategies to develop resilience are:

- **Developing Protective factors:** Protective factors are characteristics within the person or within the environment that mitigate the negative impact of stressful situation and conditions. Bernard (1991) characterizes resilient children as socially competent with life skills such as problem solving, critical thinking and ability to take initiative. Schools can embody both the environmental conditions that foster resilience reactions to immediate circumstances and the educational approaches, prevention and intervention programs and appropriate curricula to develop individual, internal protective factors. Environmental protective factors are the characteristics of families, school, communities and peer groups that facilitate resiliency which includes encouraging value education, encouraging supportive relationships, sharing responsibilities etc.

- **Developing Outside supports and Inner strength:** the outside support include caring relationships, positive role models in families and communities, community resources such as community centres, parent-child drop-in centers, faith groups, or support programs for children with special needs and the Inner strengths include: self-control, thinking skills, confidence, positive outlook, responsibility and participation. Outside supports and inner strengths work together to develop our resilience.

- **Benefits through inclusive education:** The word *inclusion* carries positive connotations of belonging. Truly inclusive classrooms integrate and coordinate specialized school support programs within the general education program. This will help them to develop their potentialities up to their maximum and to remove their complexes. By being in the same class, the disabled students will learn how to compete with the normal students. They will try to compensate for their disability. They will strive hard and which in turn, will increase their confidence (Aradhana & Bhargava, 2014). Inclusion educational programmes do not focus on the accommodation of these children into a general educational setting, but are focused on the restructuring of schools to accept and provide for the needs of all students (Aradhana & Aggarwal, 2012).

- **Role of the Teachers:** According to Psychologist and resiliency researcher Dr. Robert Brooks a *Charismatic teachers possess expertise in their subject areas, but they also appreciate that if students are to learn from them, they must touch their hearts and minds. The teachers should be able to*

- Be a positive and charismatic leader
- Provide a Caring and Supportive Environment
- High Expectation
- Meaningful participation

Role of Parents: Parents play a key role in the development of resilience in their children. Parents need to recognize that simply fixing the problems of their children will not assist children to identify and use their strengths in order to meet the challenges they face on a day-to-day basis. Therefore they should be able to:

- appreciate, praise and reinforce the effort put by the children and not just the results
- Help to identify the areas of ability and competence
- Provide your child an opportunity to contribute and provide with activities that they can do as well as enjoy
- Help them to learn to solve problems by and make decisions
- Help the child to set realistic expectations and goals

CONCLUSION

Children are the greatest resource of the nation who need to be provided with opportunity to grow up to become citizens who are physically fit, morally healthy and mentally alert to be endowed with skills and activations needed by the society. It is believed that each day a baby is born with certain unique potential and these inborn components are believed to form the core feature in making a distinction between a person's innate potential and what actually happens to that potential over their lifetime. Equal opportunities provided during the period of growth to all children for an effective physical, mental, moral and spiritual development will make them capable of realizing his/her fullest potential.

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