Building Resilience in Gifted Students

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Outline

• Defining resilience in education
• Factors promoting resilience
• Resilience and gifted children
• A universal, inclusive model for educational resilience
A positive approach to child development, psychology and education

• Resilience perspective shifted our ways of thinking about development and competence: from WHY STUDENTS FAIL (risk/deficit model) to WHY STUDENTS SUCCEED (resilience/strengths model)
A positive approach to child development, psychology and education

Resilience perspective provides a research base for

• Asset Development/Strengths-Based Practice
• Child Development
• Positive Psychology
• Motivational Psychology
• Social Capital
• School Effectiveness & School Improvement
Invulnerable
Invulnerable children: The SUPER KIDS

• Going back to the 1970’s, researchers noted that some children considered at high risk for socio-emotional problems and psychopathology were developing quite well
  – First generation of researchers led to the notion of ‘invulnerability’ in the face of adverse life circumstances (Anthony, 1974, Garmezy, 1974, Rutter, 1979)
  – The SUPER KIDS (DNA resilience)
The second generation of researchers moved from a within-child model (some children are resilient) to a broader biopsychosocial perspective, focusing on the systems which protect and promote children’s healthy development besides individual factors (Benard, 1991, Wang, 2007, Luthar, 2000, Masten, 2001)
Defining resilience

Two key criteria

1. positive adaption including development of competence
2. presence of risk or adversity (death of a parent, parental psychopathology, family instability and conflict, child abuse, poverty, homelessness)
Defining resilience

• Definition of resilience implies successful adaptation in the face of adversity and environmental stressors:
  
  — “Set of qualities that foster a process of successful adaptation and transformation despite risk and adversity” (Masten, 1994)
Defining resilience - inclusive

• “Resiliency may be more about ordinary responses which focus on strengths rather than extraordinary processes” (Masten, 2001) ~ an inclusive perspective
Defining resilience-contextual

- “Resiliency is a multidimensional phenomenon that is context-specific and it involves developmental change” (Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994)

"If circumstances change, resilience alters" (Rutter, 1981)
Criteria for defining resilient outcomes

• Presence of positive behaviour (academic achievement, achievement of developmental tasks)
• Absence of undesirable behaviour (e.g. serious emotional distress, criminal behaviour)
• Good external adaptation (e.g. gaining occupational skills) and internal adaptation (e.g. psychological well-being)
• Functioning in normal range (“doing OK or better”) rather than excelling
• Multiple outcome domains (rather than a single domain)
Typical measures of resilience outcome

- **Academic achievement** (e.g. grades, test scores, staying in school, certification)
- **Conduct** (rule-abiding vs. anti-social behaviour)
- **Peer acceptance & friendship**
- **Mental health** (few symptoms of internalizing or externalizing problems)
- **Involvement in age-appropriate healthy activities** (e.g. extracurricular activities, sports, community activities).
Promoting resilience

• Efforts are directed at
  • risk reduction and
  • enhancement of protective factors

A simultaneous approach more effective (Pollard et al, 2008)
Protective factors

• “Most people (children included) have attributes eg. social competence, problem solving skills, autonomy, sense of purpose. Whether these attributes are strong enough to help individuals cope with adversity in their lives depends on PROTECTIVE factors in families, schools & communities” (Krovetz, 1999)
Protective Factors

**INDIVIDUAL**
- Problem solving skills
- Self efficacy
- Sense of purpose
- Good cognitive ability
- Positive temperament
- Emotional control

**FAMILY**
- Stable, competent, nurturing parenting
- Encouraging competence and skills
- Strong and coherent family values system

**SOCIAL SYSTEMS**
- Social support networks
- Peers
- Neighborhood community
- School
INDIVIDUAL

Good cognitive abilities:
problem-solving and attention skills
Easy temperament and adaptable personality
Positive self perception & self efficacy
Sense of purpose and meaning in life
Emotional regulation
Talents valued by self and others
Good sense of humor
CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS WITH CARE-GIVING ADULTS

AUTHORITATIVE PARENTING

POSITIVE FAMILY CLIMATE INCLUDING LOW DISCORD BETWEEN PARENTS

ORGANIZED HOME ENVIRONMENT

PARENTS WITH PROTECTIVE QUALITIES LISTED EARLIER

PARENTS’ INVOLVEMENT IN CHILD’S EDUCATION

SOCIO ECONOMIC ADVANTAGE
SOCIAL SYSTEMS

Close relationships to competent, pro-social and supportive adults
Connections to pro-social peers
Ties to pro-social organizations (school, clubs, church)
Safe neighborhoods with high ‘collective efficacy’
Good public health and health care services
Effective schools
School Factors Promoting Resilience

CARING RELATIONSHIPS
- “Being there”
- Modeling caring
- Showing interest in
- Getting to know
- Compassion
- Listening/Dialogue
- Patience
- Basic trust/safety

HIGH EXPECTATIONS
- Belief in children resilience
- Respect & Confirmation
- Challenge & support
- Firm guidance
- Strengths-focused
- Reframing

MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION
- Safe context
- Inclusion
- Voice & Choice
- Child-initiated activities
- Experiential skill development
- Active participation
- Caring for others
- Peer support
Resilient classrooms enable students to (Weare, 2004)

• bounce back after an experience of upset and failure
• be flexible and adaptive in response to a problem
• process and learn from a difficult experience and use it to aid development and learning
• move on rather than be immobilized by upset or failure
• stick at a task when the going gets tough
Gifted children and resilience

- Resilience literature suggests that intelligence (esp. communication and problem-solving skills) and scholastic competence (esp. reading skills) are associated positively with the ability to overcome adversity (Werner, 2002)

- Average/above average intellectual development supports resilience and is one of the most important personal qualities serving as a protective factor

- But high intelligence on its own does not necessarily promote resilience
Neihart (2001)

- Little evidence that resilient individuals are gifted or that most gifted individuals are resilient.
- Resilience does not require high intelligence, though cognitive capacity may contribute to positive outcomes to the extent that it supports effective coping strategies.
Risk

When things happen unexpectedly or take a wrong turn, gifted children are just as susceptible to the intense vulnerability that accompanies struggle and tragedy.
Four main risks by virtue of giftedness (*Pfeiffer & Stocking, 2000*)

1. Discordant or asynchronic development (cognitive, social, emotional and physical)
2. Teachers’ unrealistic expectations and misconceptions about giftedness (eg no need of support) may lead to power struggle, helplessness
3. Disparity between learning environment and capabilities of gifted child lead to boredom, disengagement and challenging behaviour
4. Social & emotional difficulties because of problem in finding appropriate peer group, being accepted by the peer group, and potential bullying
Risk of underachievement amongst gifted students (Montgomery, 2006)

- large gap between oral and written work
- failure to complete school work
- poor execution of work/disorganisation
- persistent dissatisfaction with achievements
- does not function well in groups
- lacks concentration
- poor attitudes to school
- dislikes drill and memorization
- difficulties with peers/isolation/rejection/bullying
- low self-image
- sets unrealistic goals/perfectionism
Protective factors against underachievement amongst gifted children (Rees, 1998; Reis and McCoach, 2000)

- Challenging and engaging curriculum starting from early on in primary school
- A caring adult, such as a counsellor, coach or teacher
- Peers play a major role in preventing underachievement from occurring in their closest friends, making peer groups that support achievement a protective factor
- Active involvement in clubs, extracurricular activities, sports, and religious activities
- Music, dance and art lessons, and regular time for homework and reading can be very helpful for developing positive self-regulation strategies
Rees et al (2005)

- 3 year qualitative study with 35 gifted students coming from low SES minorities:
- The protective factors for the high ability students who achieved despite encountering obstacles were:
  - Supportive families, peers and adults
  - Caring teachers and counsellors
  - Challenging classes
  - Participation in numerous in-school and extracurricular activities.
  - Strong belief in oneself
A resilience framework for gifted children (Niehart, 2002)

- Resilience may serve as a theoretical framework for systematically addressing the social and emotional issues of gifted individuals (e.g. lack of challenging curricula, asynchronies in development)
- Attention to affective development of gifted students is particularly important given that IQ accounts for only about 25% of the variance in school outcomes
  - self-efficacy is an important factor supporting resilience beyond intelligence (Sternberg et al 2001)

- Need to address both HEAD and HEART
Addressing both Head & Heart (cognitive & emotional intelligence)

Shann (1999): caring and academic press are related to higher achievement in contrast to an exclusive focus on achievement


Durlack et al (2011): meta-analysis of over 200 studies (288,000 primary and secondary school students): SEL increased academic performance ~ SEL students scored significantly higher on achievement tests when compared to peers not participating in SEL programs
Socio-emotional needs of gifted children

- Emotional literacy (awareness of strengths and needs, emotional regulation, dealing with frustration)
- Social competence: making and maintaining friends, communication skills, collaboration
- High self esteem, self efficacy, agency, optimism, internal locus of control
- Decision making skills
- Problem solving and coping skills
SEL Framework (CASEL)

- Social & Emotional Literacy
  - Self-awareness
  - Self-management
  - Social awareness
  - Responsible decision-making
  - Relationship Skills
  - Forming positive relationships, working in teams, dealing effectively with conflict
  - Making ethical, constructive choices about personal and social behavior
  - Recognizing one's emotions and values as well as one's strengths and limitations
  - Managing emotions and behaviors to achieve one's goals
  - Showing understanding and empathy for others
Universal model of resilience

• A universal inclusive model of resilience
  – From children at risk to contexts matched to the developmental needs of all children including gifted children
  – Search for common factors which promote academic and social competence in all children

• Resilience builds upon typical psychosocial processes involved in the development of socio-emotional competence
Universal model of resilience

- Avoids differentiation and specialisation of support that may lead to further stress among vulnerable children and to possible stigmatisation and labelling of ‘non-resilient’ children
- Focuses on cross curricular and whole class/school approaches - problems with off-the-shelf intervention programmes targeting specific groups
Universal model of resilience

- “within this philosophy every teacher-child interaction becomes an opportunity to promote resiliency. This does not mean that teachers need to become experts in psychology but ...(that) they need to be aware of the potential their interactions and behaviour have to influence the mental health and resiliency of their students...Resiliency is absorbed by children who learn in an environment that is supportive, challenging and involving, in which the innate potential of each child is believed in and nurtured...” (Benard, 2004)
A broad, holistic, inclusive definition
Methodology

- Based on naturalistic study of 3 schools and 9 classrooms over an extended period of participant observation, including interviews with pupils, teachers and Heads of school.
- The schools and classrooms were selected for operating as optimum learning environments, characterised by pupil engagement and prosocial behaviour and included mixed intake of students from different SES.
- A grounded theory analysis led to the development of a theoretical model of resilience-enhancing communities.
Three key processes

- Caring Relationships
- Authentic Meaningful Engagement
- Shared Focus on Learning
Caring relationships

Teacher-student Relationship
- Overt expression of warmth and affection
- Making efforts to know the pupils
- Spending quality time with pupils
- Hunting for gold
- Using emoticons
- Using connective language

Peer relationships
- Opportunities to know each other
- Creating safe base for harmonious relationships
- Promoting a culture of peer support
- Pro-social values through storytelling
- Resolving own conflicts
The literature on resilient children, those who have grown up in the worst circumstances, shows that what made the difference was not the terrible circumstance of their chaotic home, but the fact that one caring adult got involved in their lives and helped them out. Often-times that person is a teacher (Goleman, 1996)
Authentic meaningful engagement

- Inclusive engagement
- Collaborative engagement
- Influential Engagement (voice, choice, belief)
- Learning-focused engagement
- Meaningful engagement
Shared focus on learning and prosocial behaviour

- Learning
- Learning together
- Learning for all
- Prosocial behaviour
Caring Classroom Community

- Caring Relationships
- Ethic of Support
- Active & Genuine Engagement
- Inclusion & Success for All
- Collaborative Learning & Teamwork
- Voice & Choice
Final note (Dent & Cameron, 2003)

"Resilience offers school staff a destination that is not only inviting, but that is a reminder to teachers of why many had embarked on their journey into the profession in the first place"
Thanks