



Reframing Resilience for Young Children with Messy Lives

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Goals for session

- Reconsider and/or broaden our perspective on what it means for a child to be resilient.
- Develop a deeper understanding of how trauma and other forms of chronic stress may influence the way children develop and demonstrate resilience.



The Ethical Endeavor

- What does it mean to teach for justice in an unjust world?
- What must education be like for a child whose world has turned upside down?

Reframing Resilience

Beyond “better than expected **outcomes** in the midst of adversity.”
(Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990)

Resilience as a dynamic developmental and interpretive **process** that is fundamentally context and domain specific. (Wright, 2007; Wright, 2010)

Why is this important?

- Teachers’ perceptions of students greatly influence the ways we.....

Think to Yourself.....

- What are your hopes for the children you teach?
- What are your fears for them?
- Are you teaching from your hopes or your fears?

Failing to Thrive or Fighting to Live



The Problem with Respect



Implications for Practice

- Must be aware of our own assumptions and values
- Important to take child's perspective on her/his behavior
- Recognize that children are not just students- they are people with full, complex, and often messy lives (just like the rest of us)
- Children experience all of the emotions of adults, but may not have the words to express them- don't underestimate the power of children's lives on their emotions and development

Implications for Practice

- Think about how the behavior/ attitudes you are witnessing in class may be keeping the child safe in other parts of her/his life.
- Consider how you might engage these skills adaptively in your classroom.
- Be explicit about the boundaries and rules of your classroom.
- Address the “ghosts in the classroom” head on. (For example, “I will watch out for you while you are sleeping.”)

Questions or Comments?

Trauma:

- The impact of external forces that render the individual temporarily helpless and overwhelms her capacity to cope.
- Confronts one with the extremities of helplessness and terror
- Individual-specific- what may be traumatic to one person may not be traumatic to another.
- Individualized response
- Age of experience and severity shapes impact

Too Scared to Learn

“ I remember crying in the night. I found it difficult to hear Mrs. Patterson when she spoke in the classroom. I felt as if she were speaking from beneath tumbling water, or from the end of a long tunnel. She assumed I was daydreaming. I stopped imagining that I might one day be a teacher.... No longer did my imagination dance me through the leaves. The sound of ringing church bells irritated me. Mostly I felt ashamed, different.” - Adult survivor of childhood sexual abuse

Types of Trauma

- Type I: Single, sudden stressor; distinct and full memories
 - Witnessing death of parent
 - Car accident
 - Being bitten by a dog
- Type II: Long-standing repeated trauma; blurred memories of the traumatic event
 - Chronic abuse
 - Poverty
 - Community Violence

RESPONSE!!!!

- Fight!!!!
- Flee!!!
- Freeze!!!!!!

Symptoms

If the world was a scary, unpredictable, punishing place, how would you adapt?

It Gets Complicated When....

- And how would you feel if the one who makes it most scary is supposed to be the one to protect you?
- Or, what if your protector is not able to keep you safe?

A Worldview Gone Awry

- Shifts one's view of the world to threatening, scary, and erratic, where danger and pain are expected.
- Leads to negative expectations and assumptions
- May lead to overwhelming despair and a loss of the ability to imagine the future of the hope that circumstances can change
- Fosters a sense of internal badness

A Worldview Gone Awry

- Difficulty forming personal attachments; relationships based on fear and insecurity
- State of constant alertness– extraordinary ability to scan for warning signs of attack. Learn to recognize subtle changes in facial expression, voice, and body language as symbols of danger.
- Child victims learn to respond without being able to name or identify the danger signals that evoked their alarm.

Survival Mode

- For children who routinely operate in overwhelming states of stress, shutting down, constantly surveying the room for danger, expecting to fight or run at a moment's notice can become a regular mode of functioning.
- Even when the dangers are not present, children may react to the world as if they are.
- UNABLE TO TURN-OFF (REGULATE HEIGHTENED LEVELS OF AROUSAL AND EMOTIONAL RESPONSES) THE SURVIVAL STRATEGIES THEY HAVE BEEN CONDITIONED TO EMPLOY.

Developmental Impact

- Language and Communications Skills
- Social and Emotional Communication
- Problem-Solving and Analysis
- Organizing Narrative Material
- Cause-and-Effect Relationships

Developmental Impacts

- Taking Another's Perspective
- Attentiveness to Classroom Tasks
- Regulating Emotions
- Executive Functions (goal-setting, planning, carrying out plans, anticipating consequences)
- Engaging the Curriculum

Trauma and Behavior

- Reactivity and Impulsivity
- Aggression
- Defiance
- Withdrawal
- Perfectionism

Trauma and Relationships

Individuals with Trauma often vie for power in relationships since they know they are safe only when they control the environment. They do not like surprises or spontaneous events, which are perceived as dangerous or out of their control. For this reason, transitions are especially difficult.

How to Help

Allow the Individual to feel some **Mastery** and some sense of **Control**

How To Help

- Create a safe place.
- Allow your clients/students a different model for relationships.
- Establish a culture of respect.
- Maintain routines and consistent schedule.
- Create opportunities for success.
