

# Educators Bequeathing Resilience

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**Abstract:** Resilience- An ordinary magic, as Ann Masten called it, is a buzzword today. Today's time is so full of stressors, that we all need something which can help us to deal with everyday hassles and as the time passes life gives us new challenges to deal with.

Moreover as it is always said that prevention is better than cure, Resilience is a trait which can always work as a protective factor against many psychiatric problems, because it is resilience, which makes a person to bounce-back or fight-back at the face of adversity, and adversity is never ever an exception, as it a commonly occurring phenomenon, we all go through ups and downs in our life. So the relevance of resilience as a personality-trait is not a question.

This research-paper is an attempt to find the role of teacher in inculcating resilience in his or her students, while dealing with the changing notions of resilience with time and it also talks about the external and internal protective factors of resilience.

**Keywords:** Resilience, Stressors, Role of teacher & Inculcation of Resilience in students.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*“For the resilient youngster a special teacher was not just an instructor for academic skills, but also a confidante and positive model for personal identification.” —Werner and Smith (1989).*

Deficient-oriented approaches, in academics remained quite popular, it says that to facilitate development in children, we need to understand what they lack, but the academic research on resiliency, which began in earnest 30 years ago, changed the focus from a deficit-based to a strength-based model. Elementary teachers are well positioned to observe students who succeed despite overwhelming odds. It has been found that there are times when risk factors in the life of a child are insurmountable; but even then there are few who flourish amidst adversity. Resiliency research focused on these apparently anomalous youth, trying to track their success into adulthood. (Werner and Smith, 1982, Garmezy, 1974, Rutter, 1979).

Masten, Best and Garmezy (1990), defined Resilience “as the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances”. According to Fraser, Kirby and Smokowski (2004), “Resilience is less a personal trait or attribute of an individual, than the product of dynamic interactions between adversity and a variety of both interpersonal and environmental assets that mediate risk.”

In brief, resilience can be mutually determined by personal attributes (i.e., intelligence, functional coping styles and strategies, sense of worth, self-efficacy) and environmental factors (i.e., caring and supportive relationships, external resources, extended social supports) and also considered to be context specific. As very rightly mentioned by Fraser (2004), “Resiliency is a dynamic, developmental process occurring over time and not a static, fixed, or one-time event”.

### Changing Conceptions of Resilience

Early research on resilience worked on the assumption that youth who exhibited good coping skills in the face of high-risk factors were able to do so through some internal character trait. The theory behind that was like a single trait (like “good temperament”) allowed children to mitigate the challenges of life.

Various researches were conducted to identify this character trait so that it can be fostered in less successful youth. Researches working in this field were so impressed by the capacity of these young people for positive adaptation that they were deemed “invulnerable/invincible” — the assumption being that they could overcome whatever challenges the world might throw at them (Werner and Smith, 1982).

With time, as research progressed, it became clear that it was not the result of a single trait but, rather, of a combination of character traits and external protective factors. After that researches focused on understanding the interaction between the protective factors and the processes that made it possible for young people to thrive in the face of adversity. Then as the next step in the realm of resilience research focus was less on the characteristics of the individuals and more on environmental –factors. The findings were that individuals who were more resilient typically had promotive factors (i.e. those that promote healthy living) in their environments. Factors, which are basically responsible for good adaptation and development could promote resilience through “prevention, intervention, and policy” (Masten and Obradovi´c, 2006).

### Resilience in Today’s Era

Lots of research-work have already been done in the area of resilience over a relatively short time span, and have resulted in fascinating analyses and conclusions. Bonnie Benard, who is considered an important contributor to recent summaries of this body of knowledge, summarized it in four key-points-

1. Resilience is a capacity all youth have for healthy development and successful learning.
2. There are certain personal strengths, which are associated with healthy development and successful learning.
3. There are certain characteristics of families, schools and communities, which are associated with the development of personal strengths and, in turn, healthy development and successful learning.
4. Change in the life trajectories of children and youth from risk to resilience starts with the change the beliefs of the adults in their families, schools and communities (Benard, 2006).

As the understanding of resilience began as an internal psychological phenomenon, the conceptions of resilience no longer focus on some magical trait that is unique to some children and absent in others, but rather it has developed into a psycho-socio-cultural construct where external factors are also deemed salient. This leads to the development of an ecological and constructionist model of resilience: in which both one’s environment of development and one’s personal and cultural elements are equally important. (Ungar, 2004, 2007).

Thus, it can be stated that all youth have the capacity for resilience, whether it is apparently reflected in the behaviour to outside observers or not. Werner and Smith (1989) conducted a longitudinal study for which they examined children with various risk factors (poverty, strained parental relationships, poor role models, etc.) for 40 years, and found that one out of three of these children developed into competent adults. Then they studied the children who were able to succeed despite living with much stress and adversity and tried to identify factors that were present in these successful children; according to them these factors form the basis of resilience. Among other things, it was found that these children often credited a favorite teacher who went beyond academics and became a mentor, confidant, and positive model for personal identification.

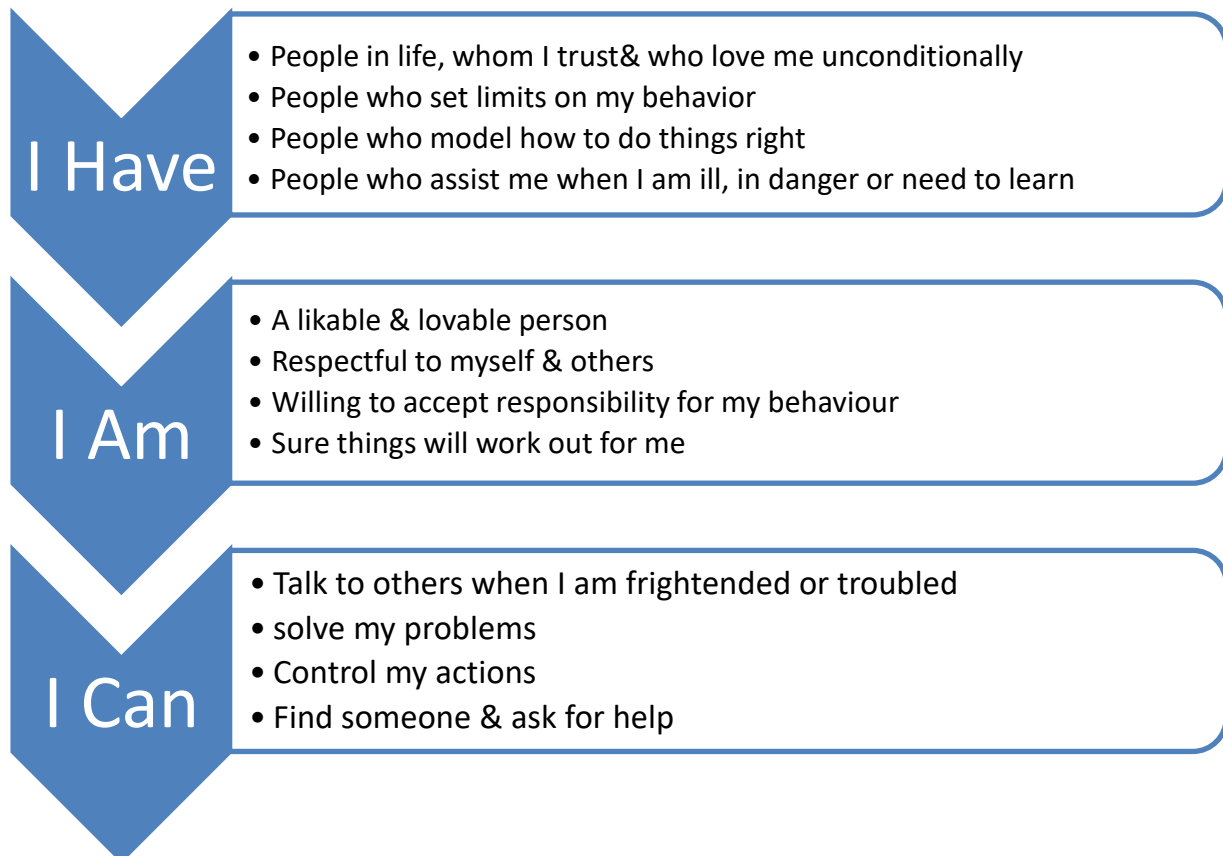
Educators are most of the times considered the role-models. Research evidences indicate that teachers can have tremendous impact on students’ quality of life, including affecting whether students engage in harmful behaviors as well as affecting their emotional health and resilience (Resnick et al., 1997). Much of the research findings point to one critical factor in the educational-setting: positive and personal teacher-student relationships.

To summarize, Resilience research can take the form of three words-

*I Have....*

*I am.... and*

*I can...*



Protective factors can be called as attributes or assets that when present protect the child from developing harmful, destructive, and ineffective behaviors. Protective factors contribute to students' resilience. Researchers have identified the critical protective factors by studying the lives of those children who overcame adversity, despite having lots of risk factors. Generally speaking, the more protective factors children possess, the more resilient they are said to be. According to Benard, (1995) "a resilient child is one who "works well, plays well, loves well, and expects well."

External protective factors are the factors, which present outside the student and involve the family and school environment. Some examples of external protective factors are high expectations, supportive and caring adults, and significant relationships, while Internal protective factors, are characteristics or attributes that the student possesses, such as social-emotional skills, self-control, problem-solving skills, optimism and hope for the future, and a sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the belief that one can accomplish a given task and that one possesses the power to exert some positive influence in one's life. It has been seen that strengthening of social-emotional skills may result in reduction of aggressive behavior and violence, mental disorders (Rutter, 1990), academic failure (Rathvon, 1999), chemical abuse and early pregnancy (Hayes, 1987), as well as delinquency (Michelson, 1987). Teaching and modeling these social-emotional skills are significant to a relationship-driven approach to classroom management.

#### **Teachers as agents of fostering resilience**

Resnick et al. (1997), found in the research titled "Protecting Adolescents From Harm," that positive emotional connections to parents and teachers was the strongest protective factor. School connectedness was found to be protective of almost every health-risk behavior (e.g., emotional health, suicidal thoughts and behaviors, violence, use of cigarettes,

alcohol, and marijuana) except history of pregnancy. This study is considered significant to educators because these positive relationships and connections at school can prevent and protect adolescents from engaging in unhealthy behaviors.

Positive teacher-student relationships are also found to be a significant contributor to academic achievement and motivation (Elias, 1997) and the prevention of dropout from the academic-institution (Thurlow, Christenson, Sinclair, Evelo, & Thornton, 1995), bullying behavior (Olweus, 1999), violence (Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998) and substance abuse (Resnick et al., 1997).

### Role of a Teacher

What should we consider the role of an ideal teacher?

- to Help Students Be Effective Learners? or
- to Maximize Student Learning? Or
- to Prepare Students for the Workforce? or
- these all with something additional?

Benard (1995), even the presence of only one caring person can provide support for healthy development and learning. This person may be someone who has compassion, conveys unconditional regard, and does not take the behavior of their students personally because the person understands that the students are doing the best under the given circumstances. Students who have caring relationships in their life develop the belief “I am cared for and worthy of love.” Strategies such as relationship building, classroom community building, social skills training, mentoring, advisory groups, and school within a school (for larger schools) can be very helpful in ensuring that all students are noticed and have at least one adult who knows them well. The degree of caring and support within an educational institution can be a powerful indicator of positive outcomes for youth.

### Ways to Inculcate Resilience in Students

Research has consistently found that educational institutions have a significant role in the development of resilience in children and youth (Krovetz, 2008).

**1. Understanding the student’s preferences** – An ideal Teacher will have an idea about the environments where students spend time outside of school. In case of these environments being problematic, an early intervention can be done when risky issues arise. Research indicates that the short-term intervention of even a single caring adult can make a profound positive-impact.

**2. Understand character strengths of the student-** Teachers need to identify the character-strengths of the students. Every single student has unique understandings, knowledge and awareness; it is very much required to find it out and to work on the strengths which are overused and underused.

**3. Clear Instructions & Setting Realistic Goals:** the instructions given to the students should always be very clear, to avoid any kind of confusion. Clear instructions help in setting realistic goals, which are achievable in nature. Achievable goals make the students optimistic and hopeful in life leading them to being resilient.

**4. Motivating students to Participate** – the students should be motivated enough to participate in various activities in the school or college. Teachers should make them learn that the “failures are only learning”, giving the scope for improvement in the future.

**5. Always be on the learning-Curve-** The role of a teacher is not just to give textual knowledge, but also contextual knowledge, to make students think pragmatically in day to day life situations, where it is quite probable to face failures, traumas and have negative experiences. They should be given a positive approach towards negative events like these are the incidents, which make us realize the value of achievements and positive-events. Negativity should motivate them to work harder for positivity rather than breaking them down.

## 2. CONCLUSION

In the end, we can conclude that the teachers as educators not only unlock the door of ignorance and weakness but also inculcate the trait of resilience in students. The children in school prepare the foundation for their entire life. Thus to develop a tendency to fight back or bounce-back, which help them in every aspect of life, is a foremost requirement.

Teachers just don't teach, but also furnish the youth of the future and being the role –model most of the time can bring a big change in students' life. These are the some ways, which if applied in educational institutions can work for the development of resilience in the students, helping them to fight every challenge in their future.

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