

**Too Afraid to Learn: Reframing Resilience for Children with Challenging Lives**

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**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?

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**The Problem with Respect**



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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.

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### 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)

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### Why is this important?

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

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### Failing to Thrive or Fighting to Live



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### 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?

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### 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

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## 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.

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## 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

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## 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

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## Symptoms

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

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## 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?

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## RESPONSE!!!!

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

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**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 hopelessness that circumstances can change
- Fosters a sense of internal badness

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**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.

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**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.
- UNABLE TO TURN-OFF THE SURVIVAL STRATEGIES THEY HAVE BEEN CONDITIONED TO EMPLOY.

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**Developmental Impact**

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

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**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

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**Trauma and Behavior**

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

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## 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.

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## How to Help

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

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## How To Help

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

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