

Teaching Resiliency

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Both adults and children who experience feelings of pessimism could often be susceptible to depression. They do worse at school than optimistic children, they feel less motivated and they attribute the cause of situations to causes external to them which they are not able to control. Besides, optimists lead healthier lives and have a longer life-span. As Dr. Seligman suggests, by the age of 8, the majority of the children have already developed and/or established an explanatory style. A child can either be optimistic and have a high sense of self-esteem and empowerment or not. However, according to research conducted by Dr. Seligman and his students at University of Pennsylvania, explanatory styles can be modified. Optimism is something that can be taught even if the pessimists among them and it can bring with it permanent changes in children's lives.

Recent research suggests that the percentages of depression incidents among students and especially among teenagers are on the increase. However, even if psychological conditions are absent, feelings of happiness and a sense of purpose are not guaranteed. Positive Psychology is here to fill this gap. The enhancement of the positive traits and of the positive emotions in order for individuals to reach their full potential is Positive Psychology's main goal. Besides, isn't that an indispensable part of education? Yes, according to parents who perceive the promotion of children's resilience and well-being as a basic part of education [1]. Most interventions currently underway are re-active and are aiming at the therapeutic potential of Positive Psychology. On the contrary, in my opinion, a more proactive and preventive approach needs to be initiated as Young Learners are the future teenagers, hence they are the audience that needs to be targeted.

Teaching optimism could result in what preventionists call the development of "protective factors", about building resiliency in youth so as not to be involved in deviant behaviors such as alcohol and drug abuse, teen pregnancy, delinquency, gangs and dropping out of school [13]. Gibbs and Bennett [14] advocating the process suggesting that we should "turn the situation around by translating negative risk factors into positive action strategies", namely protective factors which enable the children adolescent and later on adults to change or even reverse predictions of negative outcomes and make people to overcome life stressors [15]. Children who demonstrate resiliency are more responsive and produce more positive outcomes and predictions than other children, display far more activeness, flexibility and adaptability even as infants. Moreover, resilient kids have a tendency to produce comic relief and find different ways to perceive situations based on humor and on the ability to laugh at them and make light of embarrassing moments [15]. Consequently, resilient children are more likely to form more positive relationships with their classmates, peers and people of the opposite sex [18]. Besides, resiliency brings with it the ability to deal with social and cognitive problems in a more adaptable, flexible way.

Our time is being characterized by overwhelming negative emotions. Recent research suggests that the percentages of depression incidents among students and especially among teenagers are on the increase [1]. On the other hand, even if psychological conditions are absent, feelings of happiness and a sense of purpose are not guaranteed. Positive Psychology is here to fill this gap. The enhancement of the positive traits and of the positive emotions in order for individuals to reach their full potential is Positive Psychology's main goal. Besides, isn't that an indispensable part of education? Yes, according to parents who perceive the promotion of children's resilience and well-being as a basic part of education [2]. Most interventions currently underway are re-active and are aiming at the therapeutic potential of Positive Psychology. On the contrary, in my opinion, a more proactive and preventive approach needs to be initiated as Young Learners are the future teenagers hence they are the audience that needs to be targeted. PEAP, an innovative programme in Greece would be the ideal framework in which the principles of Positive Psychology could be implemented so as to enhance children's well-being.

Dr Seligman [3], the father of Positive Psychology has focused his research on the study of people's positive traits. Barbara Fredrickson [4] in her broaden and build theory concludes that positive emotions not only promote well-being, happiness as well as optimism but also they enhance creative



thinking, attention span and they bring about an increase in learning abilities. Moreover they provide individuals with the necessary resources upon which they can draw to foster resilience against negative incidents which will inevitably occur in everyone's life. She categorizes them inside a spectrum ranging from joy and gratitude to inspiration, awe and love. Many of them amalgamate the others and all of them have something to offer us. Whenever experiencing a negative emotion, a feeling of alertness is created and our spectrum of actions is limited tremendously, so as to counteract the stressor or the potential danger. On the contrary, positive emotions do not have an immediate benefit but a long-term one. Her theory is called "Broaden-and-Build-Theory, and contends that positive emotions "broaden" people's scope of action and result in "building" and enriching personal resources.

Another positive outcome of the positive emotions is that they are able to undo the physiological effects of negative emotions. Namely, people who experience a negative situation will be able to recover more quickly provided that positive emotions are induced.

Another benefit to experiencing positive emotions is that people who experience high levels of them tend to feel healthier, undergoing less chronic pain, or illness. Furthermore, people with higher levels of positive emotions are more impervious to common flu's symptoms [5]. The experiment conducted to support this contention involved 336 participants, who were evaluated daily as far as their positivity was concerned. Following the compilation of the data, the volunteers were exposed to the common cold virus and after a five-day observation the results revealed that the more positive ones underwent milder symptoms of the virus. Additionally, people who feel happier have a longer life-span [6]. They feel more productive and ageing become a process to look forward to.

Concerning the area of mental health, cross-sectional and prospective data reports have revealed that optimism serves as a predictor of a better mental state, and less distressing experience while they undergo adverse situations [7]. They demonstrate a greater ability in dealing with those situations accepting them, using their humor and think "outside the box" so as to find possible solutions. On the contrary, those who experience higher levels of negative emotions tend to feel hopeless and feelings of dead-end, hence they are more likely to cease trying to overcome any difficulties. Moreover, positive feelings can predict psychological and physical well-being among college students and women who have just gave birth.

Children who are more optimistic, tend to cope with situations in a more positive way [8]. On the contrary, both adults, adolescents and children who experience feelings of pessimism more often could be susceptible to depression [9]. They do worse at school than optimistic children, they feel less motivated and they attribute the cause of situations to causes external to them which they are not able to control [10]. As Reivich, Gillham, Chaplin and Seligman [11] suggest, by the age of 8, the majority of the children have already developed and/or established an explanatory style. A child can both be optimistic and have a high sense of self-esteem and empowerment or not. However, according to research conducted by Dr. Seligman [12] and his students at University of Pennsylvania, explanatory styles can be modified. Optimism is something that can be taught even to the pessimists among them and it can bring with it permanent changes in children's lives. The Penn Resiliency Project (PRP) worked with young learners since 1990s and taught them to seek for plausible optimistic explanations for the things that confront them and to spot a pessimistic justification when they see one.

Teaching optimism could result in the development of "protective factors" which can be employed for building resiliency in youth so as not to be involved in deviant behaviors such as alcohol and drug abuse, teen pregnancy, delinquency, gangs and dropping out of school [13]. Why this should be implemented is what this part of the paper will discuss. Gibbs and Bennett [14] advocating the process suggesting that we should make children and adolescent see the negative situations as opportunities to create positive action plans, namely to create protective factors which enable children, adolescents and later on adults to change or even reverse predictions of negative outcomes and make people overcome life stressors [15]. Resilient children have personality traits like flexibility, caring, responsiveness, social skills and a sense of humor. Children who demonstrate resiliency are more responsive and produce more positive outcomes and predictions than other children, display far more activeness, flexibility and adaptability even as infants [16]. Moreover, resilient kids have a tendency to produce comic relief and find different ways to perceive situations based on humor and on the ability to laugh at themselves and make light of embarrassing moments [17]. Consequently, resilient children are more likely to form more positive relationships with their classmates, peers and people of the opposite sex [18]. Besides, resiliency brings with it the ability to deal with social and cognitive problems in a more adaptable, flexible way [19].

Another protective factor is autonomy, a sense of identity and a capability to act independently and to have control over your own environment [20]. Or even to have the ability to differentiate yourself from possible dysfunctional family environment [21]. This process of breaking away from the problem which exists in the family makes children adept at distancing themselves from the problem and characterizes resilient children who develop a sense of self-esteem and are better capable of achieving their goals [22]. Bandler's [23] research into why some children of alcoholics grew up to be perfectly healthy adults reveals that a compelling future is vital to the present subordination of gratification for a future fulfillment. In other words when teenagers are thinking about their future they are less likely to indulge in deviant behavior.

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