

Three Pillars for Supporting Resilience

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To give all students the opportunity to achieve excellence in their education, educators know that students, especially at-risk learners, need to develop resilience in their pursuit of learning. Yet teachers often wonder, What specifically enables some students to persevere, while others appear to easily give up?

Although research indicates that resilient students most likely have personal characteristics like social competence and a sense of purpose, it is helpful to consider additional aspects that contribute to resilient students' achievement: the learning environment, instructional pedagogy, and teacher dispositions (Benard, 1997; Bruce, 1995; Wright, 2011).

The Learning Environment

Learning environments that foster resilience are academic, supportive, and promote opportunities for success (Schussler & Collins, 2006). Students not only perceive that they are welcome in class but also feel comfortable asking questions. Classrooms are safe and orderly; well-defined and appropriate routines and procedures are the norm and are applied with equity, purpose, and consistency. Teachers effectively address misbehavior, and students feel an overall connection among themselves, the teacher, and classmates.

For at-risk learners, especially, research suggests that students have a strong need to perceive that an environment is caring, respectful, and supportive. A nurturing classroom embodies affective characteristics that promote learning and trust (Poplin & Weeres, 1992). Students are more likely to do well when the environment fosters a belief that they can achieve. As one student said, "In some classes, you feel like just doing it—at least trying. You feel like the teacher is pushing you as far as you can go" (Wright, 2011, p. 82).

Instructional Pedagogy

Fostering resilience requires instruction that is student-centered and engaging, "where students are involved in challenging lessons that would help them develop new skills and learn to focus their attention" (Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2003, p.14). Although educators tend to believe that struggling students have a preference for less complicated tasks, research indicates that they instead favor assignments that spark curiosity and encourage thinking (Benard, 2004; Wright, 2011). This research suggests using lessons that stimulate active participation in the learning process rather than merely allow students to sit and listen. Instruction is relevant, presented in meaningful chunks, and relates to real-world situations while prompting reasoning and joyful learning.

Teacher Dispositions

Teachers who contribute to resilient students' positive learning experiences express high expectations, are competent in their content areas, and challenge students to do their best. These teachers cultivate knowledge and convey that students have the capacity to learn. Resilience-fostering teachers are caring and appreciate the cultural experiences students bring to the classroom. Such teachers emphasize positive teacher-student relationships, make learning interactive, and value student voice. Teachers are approachable and communicate rigorous yet realistic expectations.

Resilience Checklist

Although it is clear that students' experiences influence resilience, one cannot overlook those factors that cultivate success in the classroom. In fostering a culture that contributes to a positive education experience, my analysis of research suggests a firmly grounded approach that includes a welcoming environment, evidence-based practice, and teachers who exhibit a strong commitment to student learning (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Factors That Contribute to Resilience and Learning

The Learning Environment	Instructional Pedagogy	Teacher Dispositions
Respectful Nurturing Orderly Questioning valued Consistent classroom routines and procedures	Meaningful engagement Connected Evidence-based Relates to the real world Develops digital literacy Embeds instructional strategies	Competent Inspire self-efficacy Value student voice Exhibit positive teacher-student relationships

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