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Supporting a Child's Resilience in the Context of Collaborative Partnerships Between Parents and Teachers

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Abstract

Research Objectives and Problems: The aim of this article is to analyze the factors that support and strengthen a child's resilience from the perspective of the synergistic cooperation between supportive adults—parents and teachers. The central research question is: *How can family-school partnerships support and nurture a child's resilience?*

Research Methods: This paper employs a synthetic-analytical review of relevant literature. It also reviews selected findings from previous research.

Structure of the Article: The discussion begins with a definition of resilience and a characterization of a resilient child within the school environment. It emphasizes the importance of partnerships between parents and teacher, which is expressed, among other things, through their shared commitment to strengthening the child's resilience.

Research Findings and Their Impact on Educational Sciences: Resilience is a process that helps children to thrive in a rapidly changing world. Partnerships between the child's significant adults—mainly parents and teachers—enhance the effectiveness in fostering resilience. A child's resilience builds up when the adults who spend the most time with them work synergistically,

rather than acting independently. The analyses presented are founded on education and family sciences. They take into account research from various cultural contexts; hence, the conclusions and findings have international relevance.

Conclusions and Recommendations: Promoting and supporting resilience is one of the key challenges of today's educational process. Resilience enables children facing difficult situations or the pressures of disadvantage to achieve healthy development, well-being, success, and ambitious life goals. Caring, attentive and supportive adults—whether parents or teachers—must be sensitive and vigilant to prevent difficult experiences from becoming chronic, as this could undermine the process of building resilience and deplete the resources needed to maintain it. Adults in the child's life should be responsive, observant, and, most importantly, actively present to provide consistent support and guidance.

Keywords: resilience, resilient child, resilience at school, resilience wheel, teacher-parent collaboration

Introduction

The realities of the world in the third decade of the 21st century often expose children to stress, psychological and mental problems, anxiety, constant change, tension, and fear. The overwhelming daily stimulation from both other people and virtual reality often leads to internal chaos and increased confusion. The pace of change in today's world is so intense that people sometimes struggle to keep up with it. While changes in various areas of life present opportunities for development, they can also pose threats and force unplanned changes and unpredictable reactions.

To stay in step with life and remain part of its mainstream, individuals must constantly maneuver new contexts and unpredictable situations. This demands the ability to adapt to uncertainty and unpredictability. The new demands of modern reality require competences and resources that enable continuous adjustment to quickly shifting circumstances. This

is especially challenging for the adults who are responsible for guiding children's development and upbringing within educational settings.

One of the skills that supports adaptation to this variability is resilience. Resilience is the ability to recover quickly, adapt, respond flexibly, and persist in achieving goals despite adversity. It is also a key process that enables a child to function optimally and maintain their well-being amidst dynamic and volatile changes. Positive adaptation to the instability of daily life has become one of the paramount tasks that human beings must confront in what is often referred to as the VUCA world—characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Dybowska, 2022; Michel, 2014).

Children's resilience is shaped and supported by the interplay of individual, family, and environmental (primarily school-based) factors. Individual characteristics that nurture resilience include high self-esteem, a sense of efficacy, positive intellectual functioning, a calm disposition, faith, and other personal resources. Family factors comprise family cohesion, close and healthy relationships between family members, and a sufficiently stable financial situation. External factors enfold a functional and safe neighborhood, participation in community organizations, and attending a well-functioning school (Borucka & Ostaszewski, 2008; Brooks, 2006; Kumpfer, 1999). Resilience helps to understand and explain why some children and young people, despite prolonged exposure to disadvantage, are able to develop and function appropriately with stability and mental balance (Borucka & Ostaszewski, 2008). Resilience, therefore, emerges as the interaction between a person's internal personal resources and their external support systems.

Developmental theorists argue that resilience in adverse childhood contexts results from a cumulative and interactive combination of genetic (e.g., disposition), personal (e.g., family interactions), and environmental (e.g., community support systems) risk and protective factors (Bonanno, 2004; Cove et al., 2005).

The aim of this article is to provide a scholarly overview of children's resilience through the lens of teacher-parent partnerships. Being surrounded by caring and supportive adults is a key element in helping

a child build individual resilience. Despite the changing circumstances of life, the adults that children encounter most often are their parents or caregivers at home and their teachers at school. Home and school are the environments where children spend the majority of their time; thus, receiving adequate support in these spaces supports the development of a competent, resilient adult.

Building on previous research, this article analyzes the factors that shape children's resilience, with special consideration for the school setting. At the same time, the analysis recognizes the central role of the family environment in raising and supporting a resilient child. This work draws on research and analysis from diverse social and cultural perspectives on child resilience and the adults who support it: teachers and parents.

The Phenomenon of Resilience

Resilience is analyzed, explained, and studied from various perspectives. It generally refers to the ability to endure and recover from destructive life challenges. It includes dynamic processes that promote positive adaptation in the face of substantial adversity (Brooks, 2006; Błasiak & Dybowska, 2021; Bonanno, 2004; Masten, 2001; Smulczyk, 2016; Walsh, 2012). In the social sciences, the term resilience is a metaphor for the processes that enable normal human functioning and development despite objectively disadvantageous living and developmental conditions. Poverty, stress, traumatic events, and other unfavorable external factors represent "external forces," while the adaptive processes through which individuals mobilize internal and external resources correspond to "resilience forces." Thus, resilience can be understood as the ever-changing processes of balancing or neutralizing adverse life conditions through the internal and external resources available to an individual (Ostaszewski, 2014, p. 74).

Resilience ceases to be considered a characteristic of exceptional individuals with specific biological and psychological characteristics and

is understood as a process of change, growth and improvement that can be carried out by any person. Along these lines, understands resilience as a “universal capacity” that every person can develop at any stage of his or her life cycle. (Moll, Riquelme et al., 2022)

An analysis of the definition of resilience identifies three key elements fundamental for understanding this phenomenon. The first is the occurrence of and exposure to risk factors, processes, and mechanisms, such as challenges, adversity, or excessive stress. These factors tend to interfere with or disrupt one's overall well-being and functioning. The second element involves the operation of protective factors, processes, or mechanisms that mitigate the impact of risk factors. The third element is the positive outcome resulting from the interaction of these two opposing forces—risk factors and protective factors—namely, positive adaptation. Positive adaptation is defined as a return to well-being after successfully bouncing back from a difficult situation. These components of resilience are referred to in various ways depending on the experiences and linguistic traditions of researchers and authors (Masten, 2018; Ostaszewski, 2014).

Jean E. Brooks argues that resilience cannot be developed by sheer willpower within the at-risk person; it is developed through interactions within the environment—families, schools, neighborhoods, and the larger community. Environments may contribute to a person's risk of various problems but can also provide protection, enhancing the likelihood of positive outcomes. (Brooks, 2006, p. 70)

Resilience is thus best understood as a process resulting from a triad of protective factors: personal/individual, social/family, and social beyond family/environmental (Błasiak & Dybowska, 2021).

The Resilient Child

The term *resilient child* refers to a child who is supported by kind and caring adults and provided with the appropriate tools necessary for growth and development (Coyle, 2011). The characteristics of a resilient child stem from both their individual attributes and the relationships that they experience in different aspects of their lives. Individual attributes vary depending on the child's age, but commonly include problem-solving skills, self-regulation abilities, hope or faith, motivation to succeed, and a sense of meaning in life. Relational attributes encompass secure attachment relationships—initially with a reliable caregiver, and later with extended family, friends, mentors, and romantic partners. Connections are often made to supportive schools and strong social networks for children and families (Masten, 2018).

Cove et al. (2005) define a resilient child as one who displays negligible or no behavioral problems, remains engaged in school learning, and avoids delinquency or risky behavior. A resilient child has not been suspended from school, does not have more than one behavioral issue, and demonstrates consistent positive engagement. Resilience factors commonly identified from the child's perspective include nurturing and sensitive caregiving; attachment relationships and emotional security; a sense of belonging; skilled parental management and discipline tailored to the child; agency and motivation to adapt; problem-solving, planning, and executive function skills; self-regulation and emotional regulation; hope, faith, and optimism; meaning-making and belief that life has purpose; positive self-views or identity; and routines and rituals (Masten, 2018).

Henderson and Milstein (2005) outline a six-element strategy to promote resilience in schools. This strategy can be implemented by learners, educators, and the school as a whole. It functions as both a diagnostic tool and a guide for program development with the aim of creating schools as resilience-promoting environments.

Figure 1: Resiliency Wheel from the Perspective of a Child in School

Source: Henderson and Milstein (2005), cited in Moll Riquelme et al. (2022).

Increase pro-social bonding

Increasing pro-social bonding involves fostering positive interactions among all participants in the school community. This includes relationships between students, between teachers and students, between teachers and parents, and between parents and their children. Regarding the classroom, teachers should allocate time and create opportunities to build relationships by implementing teaching methods that encourage multiple interactions and collaborative situations in which students can help one another, as well as engaging parents in the life of the school. Organizing a variety of extracurricular activities for students further promotes relationship-building, as it provides opportunities for children with diverse interests and motivation levels to engage meaningfully. Such activities not only strengthen relationships among students but also between students and adults. Research shows that children with a greater number of positive relationships are significantly less likely to engage in risky behaviors (Moll, Riquelme et al., 2022).

Set Clear, Consistent Boundaries

Setting clear, consistent boundaries involves establishing well-defined and mutually agreed-upon rules for harmonious coexistence. Children who lack clear rules and boundaries set by adults are more likely to follow the behavior of their peers, particularly those with leadership tendencies who may not always act in others' best interests. Whenever possible, students should be involved in the process of setting these rules, as this can increase their acceptance and adherence to them (Moll, Riquelme et al., 2022).

Teach Life Skills

In the concept of the Resilience Wheel, *teaching life skills* entails helping students learn how to learn, think, understand themselves, communicate effectively, resolve conflicts, cooperate, make consensual decisions, and set common goals. These competencies should be seamlessly embedded into the curriculum across different curricula and contexts. The goal is for students to recognize the practical value of what they are learning, as this realization will increase their engagement and interest in their studies (Moll, Riquelme et al., 2022).

Provide Caring and Support

According to the authors of the Resilience Wheel, *providing caring and support* is the most fundamental aspect of building resilience in a child. Offering a sense of support means recognizing each student as a unique individual. This can be demonstrated by exploring their interests, encouraging them to develop their talents and skills, identifying and helping them appreciate their strengths, and showing genuine care, understanding, and a willingness to assist when they encounter difficulties (Moll, Riquelme et al., 2022).

Set and Communicate High Expectations

Setting and communicating high expectations requires knowing students well and giving them individualized attention. It is essential that expectations be both high and realistic in order to serve as effective

motivators. This involves teachers reflecting on the language they use when conveying expectations and employing varied instructional methods that consider students' different learning styles and ways of processing information. The ultimate goal is for every student to experience educational success and develop the potential to build a positive self-image (Moll, Riquelme et al., 2022).

Provide Opportunities for Meaningful Participation

Providing opportunities for meaningful participation means giving students increasing opportunities to make decisions that affect the functioning of the school and classroom activities. It also involves engaging parents in decision-making and initiatives that shape the organization of the school. This approach works best when the school operates as a learning organization (Moll, Riquelme et al., 2022).

To foster a child's resilience, multiple aspects of school life—both formal and informal—must be considered. The factors that contribute to building resilience at school are often classified as *protective factors*. These factors may be expressed in different terms, but they ultimately emphasize concern for the child's well-being and their ability to cope with future challenges in life (Christle et al., 2005). A resilient child is someone who is aware of their resources—both internal (personal traits and strengths) and external (support available in their environment). These external resources include closer systems like family and school, as well as the local community. Supportive and caring adults are instrumental in helping children recognize and identify these resources, as well as pointing out opportunities to use them in specific situations. However, the objective goes beyond simply noticing these resources or demonstrating their potential applications. Equally important is teaching children how to *maintain, renew, and continuously build upon* these resources. This may include expanding their resources with new skills or opportunities as they grow and face new difficulties.

Parents and Teachers in the Care of the Resilient Child

In today's educational landscape, it is evident that parents are no longer passive recipients in their interactions with schools and teachers. Instead, they are active participants who play a significant role in shaping what happens within the school environment (Błasiak, 2017; Dybowska, 2024). When reflecting on a child's resilience, it is therefore impossible to overlook the shared interaction and mutual cooperation between parents and teachers. Parent-teacher involvement and collaboration are positively associated with the child's well-being, engagement in learning, academic achievement, emotional development, and adaptation to the surrounding reality (Błasiak, 2017; Dybowska, 2024; Pirchio, 2023).

Jean E. Brooks (2006), building on the ideas from the Resiliency Wheel, identifies several strategies that can be implemented in the school environment to strengthen a child's resilience. The first strategy is Developing Social Competence. Social competence is a protective factor, so its development is essential for building resilience. It is important to consider the environmental context by involving parents and reinforcing key skills during the regular activities of the school. The second strategy is Increasing Caring Relationships, which concentrates on relationships with teachers characterized by trust, empathy, attention, affirmation, and involvement. This includes spending quality time with students, understanding their needs, and engaging them in decision-making processes.

The third strategy, Communicating High Expectations, builds on this concept from the Resiliency Wheel by advocating for the establishment of high yet realistic goals for students, regardless of their current level of achievement. Such expectations inspire students to believe in their ability to succeed. The fourth strategy, Maximizing Opportunities for Meaningful Participation, seeks to ensure that students actively contribute to school life rather than remain passive observers, facilitated through the collaborative efforts of teachers and parents. The next strategy is Strengthening School Capacity for Building Resilience. Brooks points out that teachers who do not experience supportive relationships with other school staff struggle to create nurturing, caring relationships with their students.

The final strategy identified by Brooks is Creating Partnerships with Family and Community. It goes without saying that resilience-promoting schools actively strengthen collaborative and mutually supportive relationships with families and communities to enhance students' access to a wide range of resources.

An example of fostering resilience in the school environment is the UPRIGHT program—Universal Preventive Resilience Intervention Globally Implemented in Schools to Improve and Promote Mental Health for Teenagers (<https://uprightprogram.eu/>). The general aim of the UPRIGHT program is to promote mental well-being and prevent mental disorders by enhancing resilience capacities in youth through a holistic approach that caters to early adolescents, families, and education professionals, while advancing a culture of mental well-being in schools. The program is designed not only for teachers but also encourages parents to participate as key contributors.

The UPRIGHT program is built on four main elements: coping, self-efficacy, acquiring social-emotional competence, and mindfulness. These four elements include a total of 18 skills. The coping component incorporates skills such as cognitive behavior modification, conflict resolution, assertiveness, communication strategies, and mental health literacy. The self-efficacy component provides materials that deal with self-efficacy, growth mindset, emotional resilience, social resilience, and leadership skills. The Social Emotional Learning (SEL) construct includes attributes such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Lastly, the mindfulness component emphasizes observation and description, acting consciously, and accepting experiences without judgment (Las, Hayas et al., 2019).

Conclusions

The analyses clearly emphasize that resilience enables children experiencing difficult situations or living under the pressure of adverse conditions to develop normally, maintain their mental and physical health,

achieve success, and pursue ambitious life goals. However, it is important to note that when adverse circumstances persist for too long, or when children lack access to resources that can counterbalance these adversities, resilience processes can break down, making individuals less capable of coping with destructive living conditions (Ostaszewski, 2014).

Facing adversity and difficult events is an inevitable part of everyday life. Resilience allows individuals to get through such situations, emerge stronger, and develop greater confidence in their own abilities, as well as greater awareness of one's own strengths, internal resources, and the external resources available in the environment (Moll Riquelme et al., 2022). As Brooks (2006) notes, resilience is fostered by providing children with access to supportive relationships with caring adults and expanding the range of opportunities for constructive activities, such as after-school and summer programs, which enable meaningful participation. Ultimately, resilience will lead to the child's optimal well-being and ability to function capably in a rapidly changing reality.

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