Supporting Teacher Resilience in Working with Special Needs Students

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Cleo Eulau Center
Helping Children Rebound from Adversity
What is The Cleo Eulau Center?

- Supports educators to support students
- Rooted in Resilience Theory
- Focuses on social-emotional dimensions of learning
Agenda

- Review of Resilience Theory and Teacher Support

- Using a Resilience Lens to Support Teachers
  - Attention Problems
  - Bullying
  - Stressors and Family Problems
  - Disruptive Students

- The Care and Feeding of Educators
Norms

We need to agree to:

• Participation that challenges your comfort level
• Mutual respect among all participants
• Openness to new and different ideas
• Take this information back to your schools
Goals and Objectives

• Understand yourselves and your teachers’ needs

• Identify new ideas for supporting teacher strategies with student’s special needs

• Make a commitment to teacher-care and self-care

• Sharpen your strength-based lens
One of the most significant protective factors in promoting student resilience is a **supportive relationship** with an adult outside the family, most often a teacher.
Teacher Support

- **Student engagement in learning** (Brewster & Bowen, 2004; Klein & Connell, 2004; Wehlage et al, 1989)
- **Sense of belonging at school** (Molero, 2006)
- **Reduced problem behavior** (Hamre & Pianta, 2005)
- **Motivation to learn and persistence through school** (Wentzel, 1999; Rosenfeld et. al., 1998, 2000)
- **Reduced risk-taking behaviors** (Resnick et. al., 1997)
- **Parent support of the educational process** (Comer, 2004; Thompson, 2003 in Woolley & Bowen, 2007)
Teacher Support

What does teacher support feel like? (Ryan and Patrick, 2001)

“My teacher cares about me and believes in me.”

“My teacher tries to understand me and is available to help.”

These measures of teacher support are correlated with improved learning and less disruptive behavior.
Teacher Support

But, what about Teacher Resilience?
A Day in the Life of a Teacher

Group Exercise
Efficacy and Burn Out

- Job Satisfaction
- Positive assumptions
- Sense of workplace community
- Administration Support

- Job Dissatisfaction
- Negative Assumptions
- Isolation
- Administration Complaints
Stress for Students and Teachers

• Positive stress response
  A normal and essential part of healthy development, characterized by brief increases in heart rate and mild elevations in hormone levels.

• Tolerable stress response
  Activates the body’s alert systems to a greater degree as a result of more severe, longer-lasting difficulties. If the activation is time-limited and supportive relationships exist in the person’s life, the brain and other organs recover from what might otherwise be damaging effects.

• Toxic stress response
  Can occur when a person experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged without an adequate support system. This kind of prolonged activation of the stress response systems can disrupt the development of brain architecture and other organ systems, and increase the risk for stress-related disease and cognitive impairment for children and adults.
Teachers with high measures of burnout show:

- Reduced innovation and problem-solving in the classroom
- Reduced organizational commitment
- Increased absenteeism
- Poor performance or attrition
- Poor student outcomes

(Loed, Darling-Hammond, and Luczak 2005)
Teacher Resilience

When teachers are resilient

• They feel more willingness to persist with struggling students
• They contribute to a healthy organizational climate
• They are more effective, leading to positive student outcomes

CEC promotes a relationship based approach to fostering resilience in students and educators.

Our work has led us to believe in an innate tendency towards growth that is fostered in and through relationships.
Parallel Process

Administrator ↔ Teacher Relationship

- Increasing awareness of teacher and student strengths
- Increasing teacher’s self-awareness
- Increase teacher’s connectedness in school system

Teacher ↔ Student Relationship

- Teacher recognizes and points out student strengths
- Teacher models/teaches self-awareness to students
- Teacher has more internal resources to connect with students
Exercise (Pair/Share)

Take a minute to remember when you were in the classroom as a teacher. Think about a “memorable student”.

• What about that student was challenging for you?
• What did you try that didn’t work?
• What did you try that did work?
• What feeling do you have when you think about that student?
Resilience Building Approaches

- Attention Issues
- Bullying
- Disruptive Students
- Stressors and Family Problems
Resilience Lens

- Care and Support
- High Expectations
- Opportunities to Participate in Meaningful Ways
- Pro-social Bonding
- Clear Boundaries and Expectations
- Teaching of Life Skills
Care and Support

Students feel nurtured when

• They receive support and encouragement

• They feel connected to school and experience school as a community where they are valued and necessary

• They receive positive recognition for their strengths and achievements.
High Expectations

• Adults make sure that students know they can be successful and provide resources for them to do so.

• Students have self-confidence and a sense of purpose.

• They are not limited by personal circumstances.

• Students encourage others to do well because they are not threatened by others’ success.
Opportunities to Participate in Meaningful Ways

- Students are given many chances to demonstrate competence
- They feel that their abilities, strengths, and diverse backgrounds are celebrated
- Students are not afraid to take academic risks and approach challenging tasks
Prosocial Bonding

• Adults focus on increasing positive connections between students, as well as between students and adults

• Adults foster students’ abilities to separate from unhealthy situations or people, as well as nurture a sense of empathy for others
Clear Boundaries and Expectations

• The policies and rules that govern behavior are clearly stated and applied fairly and consistently

• Students understand why the rules are necessary

• All students are aware that adults are open to taking student input into account regarding creating or changing rules
Teaching Life Skills

Life skills include

- Decision-making
- Healthy and clear communication
- Stress management
- Assertiveness
- Conflict resolution
- Refusal skills
- Flexibility
- Ability to act independently
- Cultivation of a sense of humor
Exercise

Four Groups

- Attention Problems
- Bullying
- Stressors/Family Problems
- Disruptive Behavior

Using the resilience lens identify strategies for teachers to manage these challenging special needs.
How to Do It: Best Practices

• Support, validation
• Practical feedback
• “Coaching”
• Reflective questions
• Modeling
One More Best Practice

from the mental health professional’s bag of tricks…

Reframing
Students are not the only people who need to be taken care of. I find that teachers are harder on themselves than they are on their students, giving up weekends and vacations to organize their classrooms, plan lessons or attend workshops.

-- Lisa Medoff, PhD.
“Resilience in the Classroom: Helping Students with Special Needs” 2010
Self-Care Exercise

Take the Resiliency Quiz
(and be honest with yourself)
Reflection

- What surprised you?
- What did you already know?
- What will you change?

Share out – how do you take care of yourself?
Making a Plan

Identify three concrete ideas you will implement as part of an action plan to support teacher resilience:

1.
2.
3.
Thank you!