

The Value of Resiliency in Schools Today  
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“Life does not get easier and more forgiving, we get stronger and more resilient” (Maraboli, 2012). During life everyone will face inevitable hardships. These hardships may differ in severity, but may be respectively challenging for each individual. It takes a strong individual to overcome hardship. When an individual becomes resilient, they are more equipped to overcome these unavoidable challenges. As school counselors, we can aid our students through the process of becoming more resilient human beings. We can do this through whole school resiliency education programs, individual counseling sessions, and small group counseling sessions. Resiliency can foster success.

As school counselors we are leaders within our schools and it helps us to understand resiliency on a deeper level, it's value in school and in life, in order to help our students succeed. Al Siebert, in his book, *The Resiliency Advantage: Master Change, Thrive Under Pressure, And Bounce Back From Setbacks* (2005), defines resiliency as “being able to bounce back from life developments that may feel totally overwhelming at first”(p.5). This is a quality that children, who experience any form of trauma can use to push forward in life towards success. Every student will experience a hardship in their life, no matter the severity, and being resilient can help them overcome these challenges.

Resiliency programs in schools, such as the Oregon Resiliency Project, have been shown to be “strongly associated with students’ success in school, not only including their social – emotional competence, but also their academic success, attitudes, school behavior, and overall school performance” (Merrel, 2010). Data from the Oregon Resiliency Project gives high value to resiliency being embraced in our schools today. If we can find a way to help our students build resiliency, we can help them become all that they can be in life. As educators, can we ask for anything more than that?

There are many individuals that agree that building resiliency among our students is important. Sara Maria Castro-Olivo et al. in their article *A Comprehensive Model for Promoting Resiliency and Preventing Violence in Schools* (2013) discuss the multiple components that encompass resiliency, which allow for violence prevention in our schools. These include “self-efficacy skills, peer relationships, family relationships, family belonging, school relationships, school belonging, community relationships, and community belonging”(p.25). When examining these components that make up resiliency in these authors’ minds, it was easy to connect this to Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (McLeod, 2014). In the words of Maslow’s hierarchy, one must have his or her lower level needs met before one can progress into meeting higher level needs (McLeod, 2014).

Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs consists of five levels. The first level consists of physiological needs, followed by safety needs, love and belongingness needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs in respective order (McLeod, 2014). Many of the components referred to by Sara Maria Castro-Olivo et al. (2013) correlate directly with the middle level need of love and belongingness that Maslow refers to, even though the first two level of needs are still relevant in correlation to resiliency. As school counselors this can be of value to our practice, and to the process of creating an environment that promotes resiliency within our students.

As school counselors, there are many options that could be useful to help build these facets of resiliency within our students. One of these options could include incorporating a program such as one that the Knowledge Is Power Program, (KIPP), uses. The KIPP program is a for-profit charter organization located in 141 inner city schools around the nation that is known as a national school of character (KIPP Foundation, 2014). They integrate character traits such as grit, zest, optimism, self-control, gratitude, social intelligence, and curiosity in to their school communities on a daily basis. Students will be more likely to gain these qualities if caring adults, in school and out of school, promote them in everyday life (KIPP Foundation, 2014).

Within this program, resiliency is visible as every character trait that they use helps students overcome obstacles in their lives. The factor of grit seen in this program is a product of resiliency, as it involves an individual pushing through struggles to complete a task. Self-control corresponds directly with the resiliency component of self-efficacy skills, and zest correlates directly with motivation to act effectively that the article *A Comprehensive Model for Promoting Resiliency and Preventing Violence in Schools* discusses (Sara Maria Castro-Olivo et al., 2013). Character education can help one develop a positive self-concept and a resilient attitude. The overall value of this program resembles resiliency, and this all correlates with why students from this program are succeeding. The Knowledge Is Power Program in 2014 had 44% of their students graduate with a four-year degree, compared to the national average of 29%, and more directly related, 8% of KIPP's students come from low-income households. (Question 4 KIPP Foundation). Not all schools have this dynamic approach that fosters success.

When thinking about the average public school, there are many factors that come into play when considering why a school may not foster resiliency within their students. Martin Krovetz, a former principal/current author and education professor, supports this belief on the premise of a few distinct reasons. He states that administrators and teachers struggle within their schools with large class sizes, which automatically creates an environment where an individual often doesn't believe that they are cared for (Krovetz, 1999). This negatively correlates with Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the components that Sara Maria Castro-Olivo et al. (2013) support in their research. This creates a situation where students have less support in their pursuit of meeting lower level needs and ultimately gaining resiliency qualities that have been seen to promote success.

Resiliency can be hard to foster in public education with this lack of access to teachers, or supporters. Within this structure, classroom learning may commonly be considered irrelevant as students may see it as having little value to their lives. They often lack reason to believe the material being taught in class is important (Krovetz, 1999). Krovetz, in his writing, discusses the lack of multiple intelligence differentiation used in classes. He describes a class, even as dynamic as physical education, as often only reaching a select aspect of kinesthetic intelligence, specifically the main sports such as soccer, baseball, basketball, and etc. (Krovetz, 1999). Some students have kinesthetic intelligence in other realms such as skateboarding, skiing, baton dancing, and more. By only focusing on the common sports in physical education, these other students are unable to showcase their abilities and ultimately find pride in their skills. This inhibits these students from ability to see their skills in a positive manner, which would in turn hinder their capability to build resiliency in regards to their self-esteem. (Krovetz, 1999).

Another issue within the common school dynamic alludes to the focus on peer relations and cliques. If one is not in the “in crowd”, they may become discouraged (Krovetz, 1999). With large class sizes and schools that haven’t been able to encompass components that a school such as the KIPP program has, many teachers and administrators may feel they are failing their students. They might also feel that their students are less capable than they actually are. These students need individuals in their lives that care, they need to feel wanted, and they need to be given the opportunity for this to happen (Krovetz, 1999). While building a comprehensive school counseling program will take a considerable amount of time and coordination with other staff members, one option to reach our students with the most need (academically, socially, and/or emotionally), sooner rather than later, could be to create freshman resiliency transition framework focused around building resiliency. This could be included with a whole school comprehensive school-counseling program that supports building resiliency. Every student is unique and they will all face different struggles. As a school, we can set up a transitional framework for freshman to help them from getting bogged down in their struggles that may prevent future success.

Richard DuFour, in his book *Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap: Whatever It Takes* discusses multiple schools with a freshman transition dynamic that allow their specific schools to thrive. We must systematically become aware of our incoming students’ progress and struggles, so we can in turn support every student as needed. We have to understand how to properly implement a freshman transition RTI, or response-to-intervention framework with our students (DuFour, 2010). We must have a system in place to notice when a student begins to struggle, so we can help them get back on track before a small struggle snowballs into a larger one. This should begin before they move into high school. This is important for schools because if we can maintain awareness of where students are developmentally, socially, academically, and emotionally, we can assist them in reaching their full potential. For this program, it means that students will ultimately all achieve at their highest potential, if we can effectively remain aware of their progress/struggles. This will assist our overall mission to help every student become successful. To promote this, a school should set up a systemic approach that will meet the needs of their students specifically. This will allow every student to be accurately monitored and assisted when need be by the appropriate professionals (DuFour, 2010).

When thinking about hardships and building resiliency, small group counseling can be an effective avenue of approach. By using small group counseling, school counselors can directly work with students who could benefit most from gaining resiliency qualities. The evidence based program known as Building Resiliency, for grades three to seven, is a great small group counseling program that school counselors can use effectively to promote this quality within students. This positive and effective evidence based program is supported via Karen Griffith’s dissertation research study entitled, *Building Resiliency in Children Through a Small Group Counseling Intervention* (2011). Small group counseling programs can involve activities that focus on “being healthy, goal setting, problem solving, understanding and communicating feelings, managing stress, personal competency, social competency, and positive outlook” (Griffith, 2011). When thinking about meeting the common characteristics surrounding resiliency, such a program has the ability to do just that. This program has a scope and sequence that can be implemented throughout the course of a school year to enhance the level of resiliency in our students who could use resiliency skills the most. This could be used as another layer of intervention in a freshman transition program.

Karen Griffith did extensive research in her dissertation that supports the value behind small group counseling on the topic of resiliency. After conducting her twelve-session building resiliency small group program while being assisted by another school counselor with conducting ten small-groups in the fourth and fifth grade, the results showed a positive impact on student success. The results provided statistically significant evidence that the students within these groups showed increases in school behavior, school attendance, and academics (Griffith, 2011). The small group sessions were facilitated weekly and focused on the previous topics stated, which included “being healthy, goal setting, problem solving, understanding and communicating feelings, managing stress, personal competency, social competency, and positive outlook” (Griffith, 2011). This program clearly fostered success and its overall value with our schools’ students.

Overall, resiliency is a personal quality that will help every individual reach his or her full potential. Even though the common framework of our schools today often lacks the fostering of this important quality, researchers and school counselors are working hard to create and implement comprehensive school counseling programs in more schools that will help promote this quality within our nation’s students. While in the process of creating a comprehensive program, and even following its creation, the inclusion of small group counseling that focuses on resiliency with our students has recently proven to be significantly effective. If we want to foster success, small group counseling with a primary focus on resiliency will do just that.

## References

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