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Developing Resilience in Secondary Schools

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Resilience is a universal capacity which a person uses to minimise or overcome the **damaging effects of** adversity (Grotberg, 1995). Schools play a role in the

development of resilience by **identifying early vulnerabilities** and creating learning **environments** to teach students to meet **challenges**. Previous research **has** examined

alienative vulnerabilities, such as feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness and social estrangement in the school context.

A study of **resilience** is more hopeful than investigating the maladaptation of children and adolescents at risk. Resilience keeps **students functioning** when they are confronted with adversities and life's challenges. An academic research grant, **Developing Resilience in Secondary Schools**, is in progress at NIE and is supported by the Ministry of Education.

During the first stage of research, the principal investigator consulted with Dr Michael Rutter who is a highly-respected researcher and has written extensively in the field of resilience. Rutter stresses the need to focus on the "steeling" or protective mechanism by which **children** maintain their self-esteem and self-efficacy in the face of adversity. Self-esteem is a belief in oneself and self-efficacy is having the internal power to deal with changes and **difficulties** in specific situations. Rather than being a static factor, resilience is a process by which students can overcome failure or adversity and bounce back. Interestingly, people who face childhood adversity or problems and bounce back may do better later in life than someone whose childhood was relatively easy.

A review of the literature suggests that resilience in one domain of life may not translate to other domains. Some students may show resilience with peer conflicts, but not with academic achievement. Other students considered to be academically resilient may show signs of emotional maladjustment. Yet other students may adapt to difficult situations time and time again.

This research focuses on resilience from a positive perspective where students strive to do well academically and socially in schools. What determines how much students can experience before giving up differs. Some students give up after much stress, while others give up after a small incident. The former may

have had more opportunities to take a risk, fail, and bounce back. The latter group may have had little experience of picking themselves up after failing. These experiences of successfully bouncing back develop self-efficacy ... the "I CAN" do it attitude.

In the stage of collecting and analysing data, one interesting finding showed that **students** sought help from those they have grown to trust or see regularly, such as older siblings, friends, and teachers. Students who have succeeded despite their problems very often have one person who can create a pathway to resilience, rather than leave success to fate or to character traits.

Another interesting finding is that experiences in school affect students in various ways either by exacerbating or by protecting them from debilitating consequences. Rutter (1987) explains that schools can be protective because they promote self-esteem and self-efficacy. In the interview stage of the research, teachers explained that they promote protective factors by developing a supportive relationship between a student and at least one person. In addition, teachers taught problem-solving skills for daily life. These protective factors help students have a belief and power in themselves to deal with changes and difficulties.

The research study surveyed secondary students to develop profiles of resiliency and interviewed principals, teachers and students for clarification and elaboration. Moreover, the study is a research of the comparison of data from two multicultural societies, Singapore and Hawaii, on resilience of adolescents.

References

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