

Preface

Have you ever noticed that once in a while, a dandelion will plant itself in a very unlikely spot and begin to grow? I have seen abandoned parking lots filled with dandelions and weeds growing out of blacktop, not very fertile ground at all. Those dandelion seeds were blown by the wind and deposited randomly. Some landed on beautifully manicured lawns and others landed on paved roads. Because the seeds possessed everything that they needed to be the best dandelions possible, as soon as they landed, the seeds began to do what came naturally. Although the soil available was sparse, the seeds put down roots and began to grow in spite of landing in austere circumstances. That is because the environment had enough for growth to begin. As long as the rain came and the sun shone, the dandelions survived. However, if the parking lot began to have cars that ran over the plants, or if the rain didn't arrive and the sun shone too much, even the heartiest dandelions would succumb to their environment. So it is with people.

Unless there are extenuating physical circumstances, most of us are born with everything we need to grow into competent adults. We arrive in our environments, just like dandelions, without the luxury of picking the most nurturing one. We begin to do what comes naturally: eat, drink, sleep, learn, and grow. Like dandelions, we seem to make the most out of the resources we have. As long as our environments have enough to satisfy our needs, we will continue this process. However, if we are continually stressed or run over by our environments, even the heartiest will succumb. That is why

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the people who have responsibility for creating and sustaining the environments in which children land must be vigilant in making sure that all children have the opportunity to grow into the competent adults they are meant to be.

Educators create environments all the time—in classrooms, cafeterias, counseling centers, and even hallways. I believe that if educators understand and use resiliency-building concepts, school environments will improve, and schools will be better places for kids. All children who land in a classroom are capable of learning in their own ways, and every educator who interacts with a child needs to believe that and help that to happen. Educators need to guide kids to find their own resilience so that they can thrive no matter what their circumstances. The five specific educational topics, or megatrends, included in this book, are not only solid educational practice but also are integral to building resilience in students in the school setting. This book will make the connection between the five specific educational topics and resilience.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR BUILDING RESILIENCE IN STUDENTS?

Every adult who interacts with a child educates in some way. In a school setting, teachers, counselors, social workers, nurses, psychologists, clerical staff, and support staff are all role models and have the potential to impact a student's academic and social growth. These educators often feel the weight of the world on their shoulders and understandably so. In addition to their actual jobs during the school day, they may act as parent, counselor, disciplinarian, nutritionist, police officer, and friend to many young people. It is especially difficult to educate children in this day and age. Even though educators' jobs may seem almost impossible, the research on resilient people often reveals that a school experience or staff person had made the most significant difference in a young person's life (Benard, 1991).

WHO HAS THE TIME OR KNOWLEDGE TO DO THIS?

This book is designed to be a resource for busy educators who have little time to study. A great deal of information is summarized, and resources are provided for those who wish more in-depth information. Educators want to do the best for their students yet don't always feel that they can. Time constraints, few resources, more emphasis on higher standardized-test scores, and students with few family or community resources can make a difficult job even more challenging. Preservice education cannot possibly prepare professionals for everything they will need to know to do their jobs, especially the parts that deal with socioemotional issues. So once they are on the job, educators often attend inservice training. Some are designed to introduce new educational concepts and some to enhance the staff's ability to use complicated instructional approaches such as learning-style theory.

Educators often return to their work places and store volumes of new information in their files, which become like educational pantries. Staff development rarely comes with the follow-up and coaching that ensures its utility. So educators wait for a break in the action so that they may read the new information, process it, and put it to use. Often, the anticipated break doesn't arrive, and the very information that could make them more effective remains on the shelf. Without adequate knowledge, skills, and resources, many educators burn out. Burnout is not from working hard but, rather, from feeling ineffective.

USING RESILIENCY THEORY IS GOOD EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

Resiliency theory and the strategies that emanate from it may be an answer to an educator's prayers. I have had students in my graduate class, who experimented with some simple

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strategies as part of their projects, tell me that the student response is immediate and positive. These teachers and counselors, some teetering on the brink of burnout, became excited because reluctant students finally responded to their efforts. I am convinced that students whose teachers use resiliency-building strategies act better and perform better both inside and outside school.

For many years now, information on building resilient students has been available to schools. I used to wonder why more schools were not embracing the resiliency concepts. I now realize that the reason may be that resiliency is perceived as additional information that cannot be attended to because educators are overwhelmed with so many new tasks and needy students. In addition, they are being asked to address issues of inclusion, learning styles, multiple intelligences, performance-based assessments, technology, higher standards, and more. In effect, their plates are full and their pantries are overstocked. As a result, resiliency is not receiving the attention it deserves.

Henderson and Milstein (1996) introduce the notion that good educational practice builds resilience. They identify how resiliency is related to current educational megatrends, such as the connection of learning to the real world or the involvement of all stakeholders in the solution of problems. I use their concept as a starting point in this book. I have identified five megatrends that are related to building resilience in students. These are: character education, multiple intelligences, emotional intelligence, service learning, and violence prevention. The resiliency wheel, which Henderson and Milstein (1996) developed to illustrate the six components of resiliency-building strategies, will feature prominently in this book. After the first chapter, which lays the foundation for understanding resiliency, each subsequent chapter will relate how resiliency is inherent in a particular megatrend. The wheel will be used to generate ideas and strategies for using each trend more deliberately to build resiliency. When resiliency is viewed as an integral part of good educational practice, it ought to feel less like one more thing to do (Henderson & Milstein, 1996).

VALIDATING THE ART OF TEACHING AND COMMON SENSE

While reading this book, educators may realize that they are already doing many resiliency-building things. For example, by implementing strategies for building responsibility through character education, educators are actually building resilient students. Also, when teachers recognize and use students' strongest intelligences, students learn better and feel more bonded to school. Research indicates that students who are connected to school seem to be more resilient (Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992). By devising ways to help students become emotionally literate, educators are not only enhancing their ability to learn but also preparing them for life. As we move through the book, more connections will become evident.

I hope that this book will validate, reenergize, and instill hope in overwhelmed and tired educators. Each chapter deals with one specific topic and, while the information is not exhaustive, it is enough to lay a foundation for practical understanding. Very often, once educators have enough information to understand a concept, they can begin to implement strategies right away. I have included ideas and activities in chapter sections called Try This Out. This book is designed to be a practical resource for new and veteran educators that will not wind up in their well-stocked pantries. I hope that its utility will cause readers to place it within easy reach so they can start cooking right away.

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