



Beyond curriculum, technology and transformation for an unknown future: Towards a holistic model for understanding student resilience in education

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Many views of fostering student resilience come from the perspective of a set of individual student traits, skill sets, or the lack of ability to ‘tough it out’, rather than viewing resilience as a holistic entity which involves relationships, community and context. This belief, in turn, disconnects learners from the socio-cultural context in which their learning experience is embedded. These factors can play an equally pivotal role on participation and learning outcomes. This poster proposes a holistic model for understanding student resilience in a time of rapid change in education.

Keywords: student resilience, educators, institutions, communities, global education

Introduction

In consideration of education in a time of rapid technological and global change, student resilience (in terms of successful participation and completion) is a concept that extends beyond discussions surrounding curriculum, technology and transformation. Resilience is defined in numerous ways, but is often related to specific inherent characteristics of a particular student, such as those who are “ready, willing and able to lock on to learning” (Claxton, 2002, p.19). However, this publication suggests that resilience is more complex. It suggests that resilience is related to both the relationships that a student has with the significant others in the learning process, and with the socio-cultural environment in which learning is embedded.

Towards a holistic model of student resilience

Resilience may be perceived in terms of individual traits or skill sets, and many support programmes are aimed at helping students acquire these. Beyond this transmission approach to fostering resilience is a suggestion which aligns with constructivist and connectivist pedagogies and learning environments of the 21st millennium. Building on the earlier work of Henderson and Milstein (1996), and later refined by Milstein and Henry (2000), Milstein and Henry (2008) suggest six elements that are essential for improving student resilience. These six elements (positive connections; clear, consistent and appropriate boundaries; life-guiding skills; nurture and support; purposes and expectations; and meaningful participation) comprise the ‘resiliency wheel’ (Milstein & Henry, 2008). It is suggested that without all pieces in place, the resilience puzzle is incomplete for individual students (Figure 1).

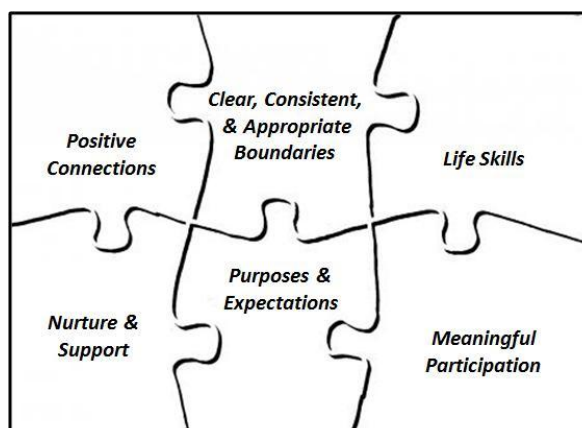


Figure 1: The six attributes of the student resilience jigsaw (based on Milstein & Henry, 2008)

Black and Lobo (2008) write that academic thought surrounding resilience is shifting away from the identification of individual student traits and is focussing more on the impact of positive relationships with significant others. Instead of resilience being solely relating to the attributes of a student, or the student acquiring these if lacking, Luthar and her colleagues (2000) argue that resilience has a ‘multidimensional nature’. Milstein and Henry (2008) argue that resilience relates to not only to individual learner’s abilities and their personal resources, but also their learning environment.

In addition to the learner themselves, there are three other key influences that can be either resilience-encouragers or resilience-impediments. The first is the student’s relationship with their educator(s) – or supervisor(s) in a higher degree context – and what these key individuals bring into the learning situation. For example, are they encouragers? Do they engage the students effectively? Are they actively on the look-out for any signs of student concern? The second relates to the educational institution itself. Do its policies actively foster resilience in their students, or are structures and practices made complex for students? Do the selected technological platforms or learning design strengthen or undermine student resilience? Finally, does the broader community actively foster resilience strategies for the learner? This is especially a crucial question for students who are first in the family to undertake formal higher education. As Willems (2005) has noted, when a student who is the first in the family lives in a community that does not understand (or value) the benefits of successful completion of formal education, they can become resilience impediments. Figure 2 represents these interconnections.

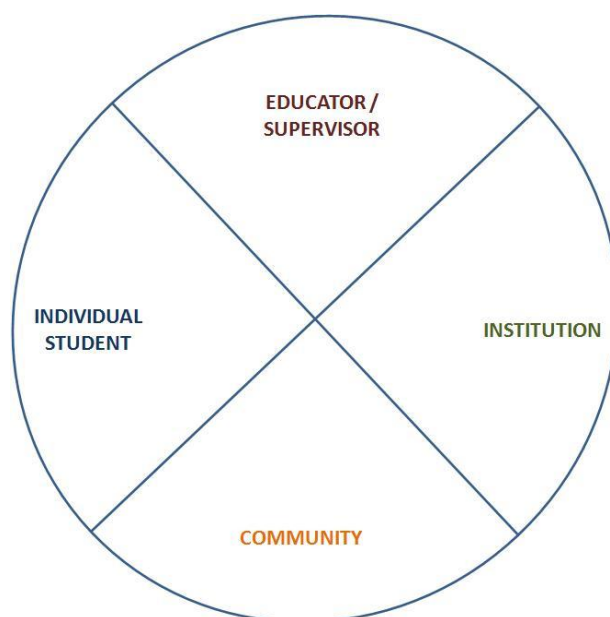


Figure 2: The socio-cultural context of student resilience

On the basis of the preceding argument, a holistic model for considering student resilience in education is suggested (Figure 3), in which all these influencing factors are recognised. In identifying these interlinkages and the socio-cultural context of students, the responsibility of fostering resilience shifts from a student deficit to one of shared responsibility.

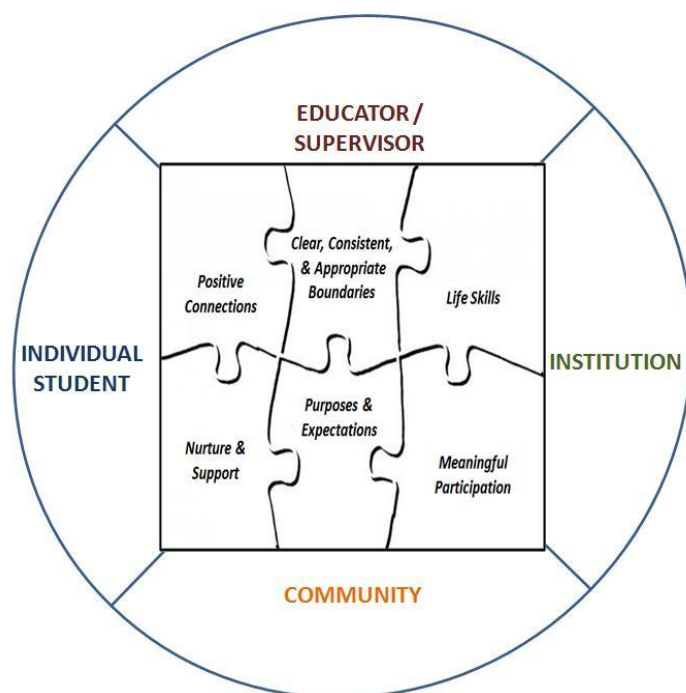


Figure 3: A holistic model for considering student resilience

Conclusion

Student resilience needs to be viewed holistically in terms of the shared role that students, educators, communities and institutions all have in fostering the six attributes of resilience (positive connections; clear, consistent and appropriate boundaries; life-guiding skills; nurture and support; purposes and expectations; and meaningful participation). With this understanding, clear implications arise if we are to truly consider higher education from the learner's perspective in a time of rapid technological and global change.

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Julie Willems holds qualifications in Education, the Humanities (including Media and Communication), and Nursing. Her research areas include distance education, flexible learning, virtual learning, learning styles, and equity issues in formal education.

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