HOW TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF RESILIENCE IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN: A PARENT HANDBOOK

By

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ABSTRACT

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This project was developed in partnership with Alice Birney Elementary School in Eureka, California and seeks to address the need of support for families in the Elementary grade levels. The elementary grade levels are defined as grades Transitional Kindergarten (T-K) – 5th grade. The way in which this project provides that support is through the creation of a handbook that will outline the ways in which parents can assist in the healthy development of resilience in their children. This project facilitates interviews with crucial members of a child’s support system, including parents, teachers, and local service providers. The feedback given from these key populations ensures that the handbook is relevant to this particular geographic region. In this project, resilience is defined as how a person is able to cope with adverse or stressful experiences in their lives in healthy, positive ways. Children are not efficiently adept to manage the life stressors of academic and home life without support and guidance from adults in their lives. This handbook will address the ways in which parents can ensure the healthy progression of coping strategies within their children so as to ensure that success is possible both in school and life.

Keywords: resilience, parent handbook, elementary school children, social work
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INTRODUCTION

When we think of childhood, a majority of people think of a time that is filled with happiness, excitement and a lack of responsibility. Even with these sentiments, children are not immune to the stressors that affect their families. Stressors can appear in a multitude of ways. Some of these include poverty, substance abuse, death, mental or physical illness, relocation, domestic violence, and many more. It is hard to pinpoint exactly what may be a point of concern for a child in any particular stage of development. It is, however, possible to emphasize interventions that can help a child cope and overcome these experiences in positive ways. These interventions could ideally help to develop resilience and build protective factors.

Resilience is “the ability to adapt well to adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or any significant sources of stress” (American Psychology Association, 2013, np). When looking at this concept in regards to children, it is imperative that we take the time and make the effort to support the healthy development of resilience. According to Benard (2004), “Positive youth development depends on the quality of the environment. This includes the available supports, messages, and opportunities young people find in the people, places, and experiences in their lives” (p. 40).

In my time at Alice Birney Elementary School in Eureka, California as a social work intern, I have noticed that many children have had intensive experiences happen to or around them. I find that many parents that I work with at my internship are committed to their children’s success in both their academic and life goals but are lacking in the
skills to help them obtain them. There is a need for outreach and the disbursement of information. The information in this project will be focused on the empowerment and support of a child’s ability to cope with life’s challenges.

**Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of my community project is to further my understanding of resilience in children so as to better educate the local community. With the information and the data that I have analyzed as well as discussions with local community members, the need for outreach on this topic has been identified. From discussions with the principal at Alice Birney Elementary School in Eureka, California, parents are in need of information in order to assist in the healthy development of their children’s resilience.

**Aim of Project**

A resilience handbook could be beneficial for elementary school children’s families. This information will be both preventative and supportive in nature. It will be preventative in the sense that with the knowledge in their grasp, parents could have the tools to assist their children in stressful or adverse times in their lives. The manifestation of these adverse experiences may occur in a myriad of ways. If parents have various strategies presented to them, then better outcomes could be attained during these experiences. Parents could teach their child different ways in which to cope and adapt to the stressors of life and school before they actually occur.

The tools that will help families overcome times of stress must be easily accessible. Whenever these hardships appear within their children’s lives, the handbook will exemplify these tools in an easily comprehensible format. This project will be
supportive by reaching out to parents and showing them that the school and community are indeed concerned about the outcome of their families’ lives. Regardless of what their circumstances may be, the parent handbook will improve upon the sense of community support and diminish the sense of isolation some families may experience due to distress.

This handbook will be a way in which outreach to all families of Alice Birney Elementary can be attained. Everyone experiences traumatic events at some point in their lives thus making resilience relevant to all Alice Birney families.

There are many identified factors involved in supporting a child in the integration of coping skills within their life experiences. The aim for this project is to identify the most essential factors in order to educate parents succinctly. The main purpose of the parent handbook is to give basic knowledge so as to not overwhelm the parent but begin the foundation of understanding.

My research question is: what are the most effective ways to support resiliency in elementary school children? This question will help to guide me in my analysis of literature as well as in my research.

In my community project, data has been collected from interviews that target the most influential people in a child’s life. My project is informed by the Systems Theory approach where each member of a child’s support team must be included in the process of fostering resilience. These individuals include parents, teachers and community service providers. Children, as well as, adults must have healthy tools in place in order to face and overcome adversity in their lives. Many adults are able to go in search of ways that are best suited for their particular personalities. Children, however, rely on adults to
fulfill their basic needs. Children also rely on adults to teach them key strategies that are helpful in migrating through life’s wide range of events. My community project is relevant to social work because it identifies the need to instill internal protective factors in children from an early age.
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For this community project, it is essential to have a firm understanding of what current academic literature has deemed to be the important facets that assist in shaping resilience. The goal of this literature review is to assess what has been generally agreed upon as the principal factors in fostering resilience with children as the focus.

The academic articles I reviewed were primarily literature reviews and reviews of programs which focused on intervention and supportive measures. These articles all concentrated on the development of resilience in child populations that spanned various backgrounds and adverse life experiences. While exploring the literature, recurring themes presented themselves within the articles. The themes which surfaced were the importance of clearly defining resilience within your research, the identification of risks, the identification of protective factors, and intervention strategies.

Defining Resilience for Research Purposes

An overall theme within the academic articles was the need to define resilience as it relates to specific research. At the beginning of each article, resilience was clearly defined so as to guide the reader through the research in a specified viewpoint. The importance of this is made clear by the necessity for the research community to come to a consensus of what is actually meant when resilience is referenced in research articles. This is to ensure that resilience research is given the proper credence as a formal structured theory (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).
Throughout the literature, several factors were central to the creation of the definition. Fundamental concepts considered to be compulsory inclusions within the definition of resilience are risk factors and protective factors. When risk factors are used in defining resilience, risk is an indication that there have been stressors or adverse experiences that have affected a person in their lifetime. Protective factors reference the ways in which a person is able to overcome those obstacles and increase positive outcomes within their life (Mangham, Reid, & Stewart, 1997). Without the inclusion of these two concepts, the definition of resilience would not be whole. When referencing resilience, it is important to note that resilience is not an inherent quality that is representative of a trait encompassed by an individual (Rutter, 2006). Research must focus on the processes underlying the responses to adverse experiences rather than framing resilience to be an abstract entity or characteristic (Rutter, 2006). In other words, resilience refers to the qualities that an individual is able to use to cope successfully due to the integration of a wide range of skills and approaches (Alvord & Grados, 2005).

**The Identification of Risk Factors**

Another theme that was common in the literature was identifying what was meant by risk factors within the studies. Risk factors are defined as the exposure to some form of adverse, stress-related experience that promotes the possibility of a reduced outcome (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). A reduced outcome refers to the risk of mental health or adjustment disorders a child could experience from exposure to adverse circumstances (Fergusson & Lynskey, 1996: 281). Emerging evidence has provided a clearer understanding of what actually constitutes high risk factors. This research shows that
children and families suffering from adversities may be experiencing a multitude of issues, such as poverty and economic discord, a lack of parental involvement or severe mental illness, abuse, family conflict and family change (Fergusson & Lynskey, 1996). Another risk factor that was identified in the research was living in a rural environment. This was stated in an article in reference to a lack of attainable social services (Dearmont & Larson, 2002). Overall, the adversities which youth face could be anything from long term ongoing stressors to short intensive stressors, or to traumatic events (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

**The Identification of Protective Factors**

The research in which I focused my attention was centered on understanding what defines protective factors and identifying which of these protective factors are most beneficial in the development of resilience. A majority of the research related to resilience provided the reader a vast number of protective factors that reoccurred throughout the content. Before going into specific examples, it is important to clearly state what defines protective factors as a whole. Protective factors are “influences that positively modify, improve, or vary a person’s response to some adverse experience that would normally prompt a negative outcome” (Alvord & Grados, 2005: 2). There are two types of factors that can positively help children avoid the negative side effects of adverse experiences. These are assets and resources (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

Assets are internal characteristics that reside within an individual. These qualities are shown to create a strong foundation for resilient outcomes (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). These qualities include a high self-esteem (Brooks, 1994), an easy going
personality (Brooks, 1994), intelligence and problem solving capabilities (Fergusson & Lynskey, 1996), strong social skills (American Psychology Association, 2013), an optimistic perspective (Alvord & Grados, 2003), and behaviors that promote health and wellness (Mangham, Reid, & Stewart, 1997).

Resources, when used in defining protective factors, refer to “the factors throughout an individual’s environment that assist in overcoming obstacles that are adverse in nature” (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005: 399). The resources highlighted within the literature include family (Mangham, Reid, & Stewart, 1997), supportive school environments (Alvord & Grados, 2003), and access to community services (Dearmont & Larson, 2002). Of these three identified factors, the importance of positive parental and family support was highlighted throughout all academic articles as the most resilience enriching external factor (Mangham, Reid, & Stewart, 1997). It is mentioned within the literature that the effect of parents as a protective factor is most noticeable under extreme conditions. An example of “extreme conditions” was children growing up in dangerous or resource deficient communities. In cases such as these, children are reliant on on their family as their only dependable resource (Benard, 2004: 50).

**Intervention Strategies**

Resilience focused intervention approaches were touched upon in most of the compiled research. These strategies invoked the knowledge regarding protective factors as a base reference. The interventions acknowledged within this literature search were supported by an overall consensus by researchers spanning various academic fields. The interventions emphasized throughout the articles were teaching children how to make
friends (American Psychology Association, 2013), encouraging children to express their feelings (Alvord & Grados, 2005), teaching children how to maintain a daily routine (Alvord & Grado, 2003), encouraging children to contribute to their surrounding community (Brooks, 1994), fostering positive self-esteem (American Psychology Association, 2013), and teaching optimistic thinking (Alvord & Grados, 2005).

**Conceptual Framework**

The systems theory was used in the interpretation of the research I obtained through methods and academic literature. This theory illustrates the complexity of human beings and all the entities contributing to one person’s outcome. The evaluation of all systems in contact with children is crucial for effective intervention planning in rural child welfare (Dearmont & Larson, 2002). As interventions are shaped, it is important to take into consideration all systems involved in a child’s experience. This includes the individual, family, and community (Dearmont & Larson, 2002). The creation of a parent handbook supports the idea that parents are the most influential people within their child’s system.

According to the Systems Theory, every human system must exchange information and resources with other parts of the systems and act on that information, to maintain itself and flourish (Hardcastle, Powers & Wenocur, 2011). Through local research and data analysis, information will be shared throughout the systems surrounding the students of Alice Birney Elementary School in order to assist these children in their developmental processes.
This project also incorporates the Social Learning Theory. This theory’s basic assumption is that human behavior is learned during interactions with other persons and with the social environment (Hardcastle, Powers & Wenocur, 2011). The perspective of the social learning theory supports my decision in directing interviews towards parents, teachers, and service providers. These are the individuals who have the most interaction and influence in a child’s life.

Finally, the resilience theory was a focal theory of this literature review. The Resilience Theory is a multilayered field of study that has been addressed by a wide range of social service professionals, including social workers, psychologists, educators and many others (VanBreda, 2001, 1). Resilience theory focuses on the strengths people exhibit that enable them to rise above hardships. The resilience theory has been associated with the diminished emphasis on pathology and the increased emphasis on strengths (VanBreda, 2001: 1) I find this theory to be imperative to incorporate within my literature review and project because it is such an integral aspect of social work. Social work has transformed into a profession that identifies the positive qualities in individuals. Social workers then help their clients recognize these qualities and support their growth.
METHODS

Introduction

The literature review identified the importance of creating resiliency in children and the role parents have in this process. In my community project, data was collected from interviews that target the most influential people in a child’s life. My project was informed by the Systems Theory approach where each member of a child’s support team must be included in the process of fostering resilience. These individuals include parents, teachers and service providers. The interviews ranged from 6 to 7 questions in length and lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Once the interviews were completed, the collected data was analyzed through a Constant Comparative analysis. Along with the data generated from the interviews, academic literature was compiled to see what has been crucial in regards to the development of resilience. The reoccurring themes that present themselves in the project’s research as well as the academic research were included in the parent handbook. The handbook will be disseminated in physical form to parents so as to ensure that every parent can access it.

Research Sample

The sampling technique I established within my research design was nonrandom selection and convenient sampling. Overall, I ended up interviewing 5 teaches, 4 service providers, and 1 parent, making a total of 10 participants. The project’s goal was to interview 15 participants but only 10 were available within the time restraints of the
The 10 participants were from 3 groups; parents, teachers, and service providers. The participants for my community project were parents and teachers from Alice Birney Elementary School as well as social service providers in the city of Eureka. By selecting parents and teachers, data was collected to gain a better sense of what information is lacking regarding the healthy development of resilience in children at the elementary school age.

All potential participants were 18 years old or older. The parents and teachers were given a chance to identify what they found to be crucial inclusions within the handbook. The handbook will be a tool for outreach on ways in which families can support the development of resilience and coping skills in their children’s lives. This makes it imperative that these two populations be included. The focus of interviewing service providers is to siphon the expertise of those who are working with children ranging from Transitional Kindergarten (T-K) to 5th grade in this specific rural area. The ability to understand what they found imperative to disseminate illuminates the need in the City of Eureka. Their insight further added to the useful information collected for the parent handbook.

I recruited participants from Alice Birney parents and teachers and Eureka social service providers in order to gauge what they would find useful in a parent handbook. Before any recruitment took place, I requested permission from the Alice Birney Elementary principal in the early stages of the planning process (please see Appendix A). I contacted teachers by outreaching to them individually in their classrooms. I already have a rapport with them through my Social Work internship which gave me familiarity
that eased me into the initial outreach. I briefly gave an overview of the community project and what the anticipated outcomes were. I asked for the participation of teachers in this project. I explained to them how their contribution of information would be a great help. Then, I wrote down which teachers showed interest and contacted them by email to schedule interview times.

Next, I contacted parents that I have already worked with through my internship at Alice Birney. I contacted them by phone. This was to ensure that I have a rapport already in place with potential parent participants. My hope was to put the parents at ease and help them feel confident in the sincerity of the project. I explained briefly about the project and interview process and asked if they would like to participate (please see Appendix B). As an intern at Alice Birney, I have access to contact information for parents. If parents were interested, I set up interview times at the school.

I then called service providers who regularly work with children from T-K to 5th grade in the Eureka area by phone. I asked them if they would like to participate in an interview regarding resilience in elementary school children and explained the premise of the parent handbook. If they were interested, I scheduled interview times at their agency or over the phone.

**Research Design**

Once possible participants were identified, I asked them to participate in an interview. This interview provided a space for feedback on what they felt should be included in a parent handbook focusing on the healthy development of resilience. The participants were notified two weeks in advance to establish adequate time for contacts to
be made. This also gave each participant time to fully consider whether they would like to be included in this research project.

When participants were identified, I arranged meetings with each individual. The time and place of the meeting were based on the convenience and availability of the respective participant. I gave a range of possible locations for the interviews. These locations included classrooms, the counseling room at Alice Birney, or over the phone for parents and teachers. For service provider’s interviews, I either traveled to their offices or agency locations or spoke with them over the phone. In each setting, participants’ confidentiality was protected. In being flexible with my availability and location, I estimated that I would have more participant cooperation and involvement.

Before the interviews began, I had each participant read and sign the informed consent form (please see Appendix C). I asked if they had any questions before we began the interview. It was necessary for the consent form to be signed before the interviews were conducted. If the participant signed, the interview would carry on as planned. If the participant declined, the interview would respectfully end and additional participants would be contacted.

If the consent form was successfully signed, I began the interview process. While we moved through the interview questions, I took detailed notes. The interviews were semi-structured but open to discussion as topics arose. The interviews ranged from 6-7 questions and lasted approximately 45 minutes. Three groups of interview questions were created in order to address the three participant groups I intended to interview (please see Appendix D). The three participant groups included Alice Birney parents,
Alice Birney teachers, and Eureka social service providers. Each set of interview questions generated discussion regarding resilience information that participants were likely to know within their role. After the interview, I gave the participants my contact information. I informed the participants that if they thought of anything they would like to add, please feel free to contact me. Their additional comments would be added to my notes.

**Analysis and Synthesis of the Data**

This community project collected qualitative data from interviews. Before beginning analysis, I ensured that all notes were legible, all questions were answered, and the responses were complete. I then examined the results of the interview for similar themes and responses. The findings created a clear understanding of what may be necessary to include within the parent handbook. The data will be explained within the results section of the project manuscript and incorporated in the creation of the parent handbook. I also conducted a literature review of previously published work. The information supports and creates a tentative outline for the fundamental aspects of the handbook. The data collected from interviews addresses Eureka City’s needs while the literature review focuses on overall themes throughout research.

Once the interviews were completed, I only used the person’s title as parent, teacher, or service provider. When referencing a particular person, I gave them a specific number to go along with their title. The coded name ensured the anonymity of the participant. An example of this would be teacher 1, teacher 2, teacher 3, etc. In my
interviews, I only asked about general information so personal identifiers were not needed.

**Ethical Considerations**

This research project is non-experimental design and low risk descriptive research questions take great care to ensure safety of the study participants. I outreached to possible participants who had the choice to voluntarily participate. Participants were given an informed consent form to sign which outlined the procedures and risks involved in this research design. The participants then had a choice whether to sign or not. The interview was not distributed without a full understanding by the participant of these conditions. I addressed confidentiality by using coded names for active participants.

Once the interviews had been completed, contact information and notes taken from the interviews were locked and stored in a filing cabinet in my place of residence until the handbook was complete. I am the only person with access to this cabinet and had the key attached to my key chain. After the project has ended, the notes and any identifiable data will be destroyed by a shredding machine. When the project is complete, all of the data analysis files will be deleted and no copies will remain. The informed consent documents will be placed in a locked filing cabinet at the department of Social Work at Humboldt State University and kept for three years and then destroyed.

After the completion of the interviews, participants were given information to resources in the local community that may assist with any discomfort experienced due to past events, or any discomfort that was caused by the interview. There are resources and contacts on the consent form that they may contact in this event. The person I chose for
debriefing was Emily Carlson, who is currently the counselor at Alice Birney. I chose this professional because she has a solid rapport built with parents and teachers. Copies were made of the informed consent form for the participants to take with them.

**Project Limitations**

Great precautions were utilized to ensure that the needs of the community were accurately represented. Nonetheless, limitations are still prevalent to this research project. Due to time constraints, the sampling is quite small and gives a very brief overview of the needs of the Eureka community. The formatting of the open ended questions coupled with the small participant group yielded a concise scattering of answers. Therefore, there weren’t large response rates. The chosen location, Eureka, does not have the same needs as all rural communities, thus the data collected is specific to this geographic location.

The process of gathering information can be problematic because of researcher bias. Limitations arose due to selection bias within the parent and teacher populations. I chose several participants I knew from the local community but also requested that the principal and counselor of Alice Birney Elementary make their own suggestions for participants. This was to ensure that I did not only choose individuals I was familiar with. While constructing research questions included in the study’s questionnaire, I worked towards the creation of questions that would not sway or coerce the participants to answer in a particular way. I also kept in mind the way in which I interviewed participants. I tried not to lead them towards answering the interview questions to my liking.
Summary

In summation, parents, teachers and social service providers play integral roles in children’s lives. They must be called upon for their expertise and experience in order to gain a firm understanding of what information is imperative for parents to know.

Resilience and healthy development can be supported by parents, if parents are given manageable tools and information (Benard, 2004). A handbook that touches on these points would be beneficial for the families at Alice Birney Elementary School. It would give them a very tangible way to learn and incorporate healthy habits into their daily lives.
RESULTS

The various populations that participated in the study sample were parents, teachers, and service providers. There was a total of ten participants (n=10). The interviews consisted of 6 to 7 questions formatted to generate open-ended responses. Even with the three different outlooks of the participating populations, I was able to decipher reoccurring themes within the responses. The interview questions were created to address the three individual populations. Each question was the same in nature, just written in a form that would speak to that specific population. For the purposes of analysis, I have rewritten the questions to represent the three populations as a whole.

**Question 1: After hearing the definition of resilience, what are your first thoughts or reactions?**

Of the ten participants, five participants (50%) answered that the internal abilities that support resilience are important for Eureka City children to learn and build upon. The consensus was that there are a lot of struggles within families and home life specific to this area such as drug addiction, poverty and homelessness, violence and abuse, and transient school experiences. With a 30% response rate, the second most common theme was that the definition made the participants think of the students in Eureka City schools. The two remaining answers were as follows:

1. Children may not have access to consistent parenting, which could create a huge difference in outcomes.
2. Participant wonders how much resilience is innate and predisposed. Participant questioned if “internal abilities” could really be taught?

**Question 2: Do you feel this is relevant to the children you work with?**

A collective ten participants (100%) answered yes to the topic of resilience being relevant to the children whom live in the city of Eureka. One participant noted that “children do not have the tools to develop resilience on their own; therefore, it must be taught at home and in the classroom by dedicated adults.”

**Question 3: After reading the possible topics that may be included in the handbook, do you find there are any other topics that may be necessary to add?**

Four participants (40%) responded that they did not think anything needed to be added to the list. They agreed with the topics that were included and thought that they addressed a majority of the issues that they observe Eureka City students facing. Three participants or 30% responded that the inclusion of imparting a sense of personal responsibility in children is an important aspect in building resilience. Two participants (20%) emphasized that the need for routine cannot be reinforced enough. These participants both mentioned the need for stability in the parent/guardian’s life so as to increase the stability of the child. Finally, one participant responded as follows:

1. It is important to help children understand that a part of the learning process is making mistakes, we must teach children perseverance and the personal power in not giving up.
Question 4: Within your experience, what are some coping strategies that you have previously used in stressful situations when working with elementary school children?

Five participants (50%) answered that teaching children that they can talk and express their emotions openly to a trusted adult was a focal point of their coping strategies. The ways in which this was explained was through scheduling a time to talk daily or weekly and by providing children with the appropriate amount of time they need in order to fully disclose feelings and emotions. Four participants responded that they teach and reinforce calming down and coping skills. These skills include deep belly breathing, counting to calm down, and learning language in order to problem solve and facilitate conflict management. These are used in order to teach children that they do have a choice and give them a sense of control over the situation they are experiencing. Teacher 1 responded as follows:

1. One of the main strategies I use is to demonstrate compassion and a sense of humor. There is a need for students to want to come back to school. This can be done through laughter and a compassionate outlook.

Question 5: Were those strategies successful? Why? Why not?

Of the ten participants, four or 40% answered “yes” their strategies for coping were indeed successful within the stressful situations they were implemented. Three or 30% of the participants responded that their strategies worked “most of the time”. Three (30%) of the participants responded that they were “uncertain” of the success of their strategies.
Why? Of the ten participants, only six specified why the strategies were successful. Of these six participants, two responded it was successful because children felt more independent and capable due to the skills and strategies they had been taught. Teacher 1 responded that it is important to work on one area of growth at a time. If you try to work on too much with a child, they will become overwhelmed. We should only add more responsibilities and lessons once we see growth and achievement. Two participants responded that their strategies had been successful because of the positivity of the adult and child relationship. Parent 1 commented that when a child has a significant level of trust built with the adult, the child will feel comfortable speaking openly about their issues. In turn, children will then ask for help with problems. Two responses didn’t fit into these themes. They are as follows:

1. Teacher 5 answered that “the strategies were successful because I taught, modeled, and provided moments of practice. Consistency is key in strengthening these tools.”

2. Teacher 2 responded that “these strategies were successful for those children who are aren’t way beyond the average. The degree of damage can affect the outcomes.

Why not? Of the ten participants, only five specified why the strategies were not successful. Three participants responded that they were not always able to see immediate results from the strategies used. Of these three participants, the responses varied. Service Provider 3 answered that there are no quick fixes but these strategies can give children more self-awareness for the future. Service Provider 4 responded that after the strategies
are implemented, a next step is needed in order to follow up and reinforce. Teacher 3 answered that it could be due to the lack of available positive parent attention. The remaining two responses were as follows:

1. Teacher 4 responded that “students come and go which makes the outcome ambiguous.”

2. Teacher 5 responded that “it is based off of the individual student. Students may know the strategies but may not actively choose to use them.”

**Question 6: What information regarding the development of resilience would you find important to include in the parent handbook?**

I decided to focus on both service providers and parents for these questions. I made this decision by assessing that parents would be able to relay any information they would like to know more about and service providers would have a thorough understanding of resilience. Therefore, I decided to remove this question from the teacher interview questions because I did not think it would be a relevant question for this particular population. Of those who did reply to this question (n=5), one service provider and one teacher (40%) responded that parenting classes would be beneficial for the development of resilience in both parents and children. Service Provider 2 stated that the Marshall Family Resource Center offers parenting classes that cover all of the potential handbook topics and more. Another theme within the responses was the necessity to inform and continually remind parents that they are not alone in their parenting endeavor. Two participants thought it important to note that the education of a child is a shared forum
between parent and school and that they should always strive to remain connected with
the school. Finally, the last response, Parent 1, responded as follows:

1. It is so important to make strong connections with our children. We must talk
with our children every day after school. We must ask questions such as: How did
school go? What did you eat? How was your behavior in class? What did you
learn?

**Question 7: Do you have any suggestions for the outlay of the parent handbook?**

The last question was to gain insight on what participants thought would be successful in
regards to aesthetics. My hope for this handbook is that it will be approachable and easily
comprehensible. When asked what they thought, four (40%) participants suggested that
the handbook be formatted with marked sections using tabs that can easily be identified.
This is to ensure that when parents are in need of clarification of a certain topic they can
reference the book promptly and with ease. Four (40%) participants agreed that it would
be better to keep the handbook concise. They felt that if it is too long it may deter parents
from reading it. Three (30%) participants responded that they did not have any feedback
in regards to the layout of the handbook. They could not think of anything off hand that
would be beneficial in this regard. Three or 30% of participants responded that creating
an interactive capacity to the handbook would improve the chance of parents reading it.
These participants mentioned a section at the back of the handbook where several blank
pages could be included in order to leave room for parent notes and intervention plans. It
was also mentioned that if daily reminders or student practice sheets were included there
may be an increase in the use of the handbook. There was also a suggestion by Service Provider 3 to incorporate end of the section questions. This was suggested in order to help parents in the processing of information and to see where they are at in regards to this particular topic.
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of the interviews was to find out what would be crucial inclusions in a parent handbook focusing on resilience. Parents, teachers, and service providers were called upon to give feedback due to their knowledge and expertise of the needs in this particular rural community. A handbook that outlines various ways parents can support the development of resilience would be beneficial to the parents of Alice Birney Elementary School.

The significance of this study is to provide relevant information to parents at Alice Birney Elementary School by gaining feedback from the local community. Relevant information refers to information regarding the healthy development of resilience and protective factors in Elementary School children. The handbook’s goal is to show parents that the school does support them in their efforts. As stated by service provider 4, “Parenting is on the job training, there are no failures, just room for growth and improvement. The raising of their children is a shared forum, meaning the parent is not alone.” I find that this statement truly exemplifies the need for the parent handbook and the continual show of support from school entities.

The findings that have been analyzed within the results section make it very apparent that this subject is relevant to this population. This is shown by the 100% agreement in response to Question 2. Fifty percent of participants answered that the definition of resilience made them think of the students within the City of Eureka. Forty percent of participants thought the proposed topics regarding ways to increase resilience
in children (please see Appendix D) were sufficient. They felt there was nothing further to add. The teaching of personal responsibility and the reinforcement of the importance of routine were mentioned as topics that should be added to the list. The last question regarding the formatting of the handbook was also an important one to address. Forty percent of participants agreed that in order for the handbook to be successful it must be concise. They reinforced the importance of informing parents about supporting the development of resilience within their children. Their thoughts were that if the handbook is too long, many parents would find it too daunting to read. Therefore, they would not take time read it.

In the formulation of my project, I had planned on interviewing 15 participants. This would include 5 parents, 5 teachers, and 5 service providers. Unfortunately, due to time restraints and issues with successful contact I was unable to meet this quota. I ended up interviewing 5 teaches, 4 service providers, and 1 parent, making a total of 10 participants. I feel that in the future, I would leave more time for recruitment and also incorporate an incentive into the interviews for the parents. In my experience, it was extremely difficult to ascertain parent cooperation without an incentive for them to look forward to. This incentive could be anything from a small gift card to a local store, a pizza night, or free child care.

Overall, I feel this project was successful in determining the most effective ways of supporting resiliency in elementary school children in the City of Eureka. It was illuminating to see the responses from the various participant populations. Individuals from various backgrounds support this project and find that education is a crucial part of
change within these families’ lives. There were participants who questioned the validity of resilience but in the end agreed that the teaching of these positive assets would be beneficial.

More research is needed in order to gain a thorough understanding of the parents’ perspective on resilience. Future research may be beneficial if a large quantity of parent participants were involved in the interviewing process. Parent participation is necessary in order to have a clear understanding of what parents would find useful from a resilience handbook. I suggest that in the future, further research is done in order accomplish this. I would also suggest that the handbook be revised and additions be made in order to correspond with the results of the research.
REFERENCES


doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/h0079565


doi: 10.1196/annals.1376.002

APPENDIX A: Alice Birney Project Support Letter

Alice Birney School
Georgeanne Fulstone-Pucillo, Principal
Lori Dorsey, Secretary
717 South Avenue, Eureka, California 95503-5041
(707) 441-2495 • FAX (707) 444-3524

January 7, 2014

Dr. Cesar Abarca, Committee Chairman
Department of Social Work
Humboldt State University
Arcata, CA 95521

Dear Dr. Abarca:

This is a letter of support for Samantha Salgado’s proposal for a community project entitled, “How to Support the Development of Resilience in Elementary School Children: A Parent Handbook.”

As you know, Ms. Salgado is currently serving as our Social Work intern at Alice Birney and, throughout her tenure, has demonstrated both a keen mind and a mature perspective when dealing with our students and their families. She has an impressive list of qualities and skills and is especially good with people and relationships.

Personally and professionally, I am excited about this project and its potential meanings for our families and our staff. Please count on me for support, time and materials as Ms. Salgado works through this project. In conclusion, I am sure the staff at Alice Birney will join me in doing whatever we can to further Ms. Salgado’s research and we look forward to a formal presentation of her findings at a Staff Meeting in the Spring. Feel free to contact me if I may be of additional assistance.

Sincerely,

Georgeanne Fulstone-Pucillo
Principal

Inspiring academic EXCELLENCE, CREATIVITY and the confidence to succeed — ECS
By phone, e-mail or in person:

Hello my name is Samantha Salgado and I am a master’s in social work student at Humboldt State. As a requirement for graduation, I am currently developing a master’s project that focuses on the healthy development of resilience. By resilience, I mean the ways in which a person is able to cope positively to stressors in life. I will be creating a parent handbook that will be distributed to the parents of Alice Birney Elementary School outlining the possible ways in which to support resilience in elementary school children. Thus, supporting children to be more successful within the classroom and at home. This manuscript will be a public document available for anyone who wishes to use it for the support of children ranging from Transitional Kindergarten (T-K) to 5th grade. The manuscript will be created and available at the Humboldt State University library.

I would like to know if you would be interested in participating in my project. As part of the project, an interview will take place that will outline possible topics to include in the parent handbook. The interview will last around 45 minutes to one hour. Once the interview is complete, I plan on organizing the data collected from the interview participants and contribute these opinions to the research already generated about the healthy development of resilience. The handbook will be a basic tool for parents to begin their understanding of the steps they can take to be supportive in their children’s development.

I have contacted you because I find that parents/teachers/service providers have such a critical role in the success of a child and would like your insight. If you are interested, maybe we could set up a time and place to meet and interview.

If you need to contact me, you can reach me at (714)xxx-xxxx or xxxxx@humboldt.edu

Thank you for your time,

Samantha Salgado
APPENDIX C: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

**Purpose and Benefits:** The purpose of this study is to learn how to best support resilience in elementary school children. Resilience, in this project, is defined as - how a person is able to cope with and overcome stressful situations in healthy, positive ways. The information gathered from this project will provide useful feedback to the student researcher who is creating a parent handbook that will be distributed to parents at Alice Birney Elementary School. The primary goal of the interview questions is to begin understanding what information is of relevance to a parent handbook that will be given to parents of Alice Birney. The handbook will place an emphasis on ways in which to support children’s healthy development of resilience so they have the potential to succeed both in school and in their lives. The interview will consist of a series of questions that further examine this topic.

**Procedures:** If you accept to participate in the study, you will be asked questions that focus on the topic of resilience. The interview will be administered by the student researcher, Samantha Salgado. The interview may take anywhere from 45 minutes to one hour. You may refuse to answer any question or choose to not complete the interview at any time. Personal, sensitive questions will not be asked. No school-related service of any kind will be lost or in jeopardy if you choose not to participate in the interview. No risks are anticipated.

**Confidentiality:** The information received by the participants and any personal identifying data will remain confidential. The responsible investigator will be the only one with access to the data. Anonymous quotations may be used in the findings. The participants’ identities will not be connected with the data in the final reporting or in any of the findings.

You understand that the researcher will answer any questions you may have concerning the project, the interview, or the procedures at any time. You understand that the investigator may terminate your participation in the study at any time.

If by any chance uncomfortable feelings arise when responding to questions, the Alice Birney counselor will be available to contact for services and support. The counselor, Emily Carlson, can be reached at (707) 441-2495.

If you have questions or concerns regarding this project, or any dissatisfaction with any part of this study, you may contact the IRB Chair, Dr. Ethan Gahian at eg51@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-4545. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant, any concerns regarding this project, or any dissatisfaction with any part of this study you may report them to the Humboldt State University IRB Institutional Official, Dr. Rhea Williamson, at Rhea.Williamson@humboldt.edu or (707) 826-5169.

Please take this copy of the consent form now and retain it for future reference. If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research as described, please sign the consent form below and continue with the interview. Thank you for your participation in this research.

Samantha Salgado, HSU Student Investigator, svs14@humboldt.edu or 714-357-3483.

Dr. Cesar Abarca, Committee Chair, Department of Social Work, BSS 544, cesar.abarca@humboldt.edu, (707) 826-4552

I have read and understand the information provided and agree to participate in the following interview.

Participant’s Signature: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________
Interview Questions for Community Project

Before beginning the interviews, I will give a brief description of what resilience means when referenced in the interview.

- Resilience will be defined as – how a person is able to cope in stressful situations in healthy, positive ways.

- The process of resilience uses internal abilities and external resources in order to overcome these adverse experiences.

- This handbook will be focusing on reaching out to the external resource of the parent and will be providing information that will help to increase a child’s internal abilities.

- Some examples of internal abilities are a high self-esteem, an easy going personality, intelligence and problem solving, strong social skills, an optimistic perspective, and behaviors that promote health and wellness.

Intervention Strategies I will be showing participants:

The handbook may highlight the following possible intervention strategies:

- teaching children how to make friends
- encouraging children to express their feelings
- teaching children how to maintain a daily routine
- encouraging children to contribute to their surrounding community
- fostering positive self-esteem
- teaching optimistic thinking
- teaching children to create reasonable goals and then taking small steps to achieve them
- helping children accept that change is a part of life
- when needed, access counseling and other forms of support either within the school or in the community
- teaching children self – care through personal examples (i.e. eating healthy, exercise, regular sleep patterns; scheduling time for family fun activities)
Student Investigator: Samantha Salgado          Faculty: Dr. Cesar Abarca

Alice Birney Parents

1. After hearing the definition of resilience, what are your first thoughts or reactions?

2. Do you feel this is relevant to your child/children?

3. After reading the possible topics that may be included in the handbook, do you find there are any other topics that may be necessary to add?

4. What are some coping strategies that you have previously used in stressful situations when working with your children?

5. Were those strategies successful? Why? Why not?

6. What information regarding the development of resilience would you find helpful to include?

7. Are there any topics that you would find helpful?
1. After hearing the definition of resilience, what are your first thoughts or reactions?

2. Do you feel this is relevant to the children you work with?

3. After reading the possible topics that may be included in the handbook, do you find there are any other topics that may be necessary to add?

4. Within your work, what are some coping strategies that you have previously used in stressful situations when working with elementary school children?

5. Were those strategies successful? Why? Why not?

6. Do you have any suggestions for the outlay of the parent handbook?
Student Investigator: Samantha Salgado

Faculty: Dr. Cesar Abarca

Service Providers

1. After hearing the definition of resilience, what are your first thoughts or reactions?

2. Do feel this is relevant to the children you work with in the City of Eureka?

3. After reading the possible topics that may be included in the handbook, do you find there are any other topics that may be necessary to add?

4. Within your work, what are some coping strategies that you have previously used in stressful situations when working with elementary school children?

5. Were those strategies successful? Why? Why not?

6. What information regarding the development of resilience would you find important for parents to know?

7. Do you have any suggestions for the outlay of the parent handbook?
Resilience in Elementary School Children

A Parent Handbook

2014
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Introduction

Hello Parents and Guardians!

This handbook has been designed as a resource for parents and guardians from Alice Birney Elementary School. We acknowledge that parents are the most important part of a child’s life. You, along with the school and outside services, have the ability to influence your child’s life for the better. This handbook will touch on several ways parents can support the healthy development of their children.

A way in which parents can do this is through the enhancement of resilience within their children. The following pages will provide information on what is resilience, how it relates to your child, and the ways in which you can support its growth.

Thank you parents for your time and efforts!