

Why Should School Cultivate Cooperation to Enhance Children's Resilience?

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Abstract: Children resilience began to receive mounting attention in field of Psychology from the 1970s and is now an extensively studied topic. The concept can be applied to the field of Education, in support of a new educational paradigm and learning model -- cooperative learning -- advocated by education reformers for the past 40 years. By nurturing social aptitude and individual achievement, cooperative learning promotes resilience through both interpersonal and personal dimensions. The essay also points out some considerations for optimizing cooperative learning to fulfill its potential towards building benign resilience. Overall, cooperative learning is the ideal structure for cultivating resilience and merits further implementation.

Keywords: Resilience; Cooperative Learning; Educational Structures; Psychology; Education; Sociology.

1. Introduction

Children spend around 15,000 hours in school (Gillham et al., 2013) and the quality of the learning environment casts profound leverage on the development of children's resilience, a character that strongly aligns with educational initiatives. As the nurturing ground, schools provide ideal opportunities for children to develop "self-regulation" and "social skills such as empathy and teamwork" (Gillham et al., 2013). This demonstrates schools' vital functions for developing both personal and social competence essential for children's tenacity. However, schools often fail to achieve such important role. Walker and Sylwester point to early antisocial behaviors at school as the cause of adolescent crimes (1991). Such behaviors are largely induced and intensified by the school environment due to the prevalence of violence and isolation compounded by children's lack of resilience, because it is the co-occurrence of risk factors and "limited resilience" that predict delinquency (Morrison et al., 1994). The dramatically escalating instances of suicide and suicidal attempts also display children's lack of resilience. Contemporary reformers, therefore, argue for reexamination and reformation of schools and their structures. Mainly through psychological, educational, and sociological lens, this essay argues for adopting a cooperative learning system in which groups of students work together for a common goal. By significantly advancing interpersonal competency, connections, and individual attainment, cooperative learning outcompetes individualistic and competitive structures and maximally enhance children's resilience.

2. Competing Educational Structures

In the field of Education, educational psychologist David Johnson and his colleagues identified three main educational structures with disparate impacts on students' resilience -- competitive, individualistic, and cooperative -- reflecting three principal perspectives on the notion of school (1984). The competitive and individualistic structures are the most widely observed. Nevertheless, they tend to create an environment where students are detached from each other, seeking outcomes beneficial to themselves but potentially detrimental to their competitors. Different educational models

can be compared using the psychological understanding of resilience. In Psychology, there are six principal constituents of resilience -- "emotional competence", "self-control", "problem solving and decision-making", "social awareness", "social competence", "self-efficacy and realistic optimism" (Gillham et al., 2013). This construction suggests that both personal and interactive skills are emphasized. The psychological definition of resilience is applied to assess the three distinct educational paradigms.

3. Competitive

Competitive structure hinders the growth of resilience because it negatively impacts children's social awareness and self-efficacy, and leads to veneers of resilient children. In a competitive environment, students are often left with two choice -- strive to surpass others or slacken because they do not believe they can win (Johnson, 1984). The first choice reduces children's social awareness, one of the essential components of resilience, and forces children to have reduced empathy for others and act for themselves. The second choice severely constrains students' self-efficacy. Under adversity, students do not adapt positively but instead show indifference and cynicism, damaging their personal competence and growth.

Further, the dangerously large amount of stress caused by the state of competition would lead to ostensible and often stubborn resilience but anxiety and depression inwardly. The effect is studied in social science and is particularly notable in Rahill and his colleagues' study on Haitian resilience after Haitian Earthquake, where though outwardly resilient and full of hope, many Haitians failed to elude their hopeless sentiment, expressing their submission: "manage to live anyway" (2016). The over-resilience is also criticized by Chamorro-Premuzic and Lusk (2017), who argue that leaders that adopt a heroic and seemingly fearless outlook towards hopelessness would ultimately undermine team effectiveness. Therefore, competitive structure fails to promote the growth of resilience from both psychological and sociological standpoints.

4. Individualistic

The individualistic system has similar deficiencies since it

discourages students' social competence and heightens their egocentric perception. By downplaying teamwork, individualistic structure deprives students of social competence, an essential aspect of humanity that is largely learned by social interaction. Piaget maintains that without interaction, children tend to make egoistical conceptualizations and logical constructions (Piaget 1926; as cited in Slavin, 2016). With the self-centered logical framework, children not only become incapable of reasoning through others' perspectives, but also pertinaciously withhold new knowledge. Furthermore, individualistic framework affects students' ability to make decisions in groups, another vital determinant of resilience. The system acquaints them with making decisions for themselves instead of incorporating perspectives and different judgment. Their individualism would result in egoistic decisions and greatly reduced efficiency.

However, individualism is largely endorsed by positive psychology. Positive psychology indoctrinates improvements via personal exertions and upholds personal fulfillment to be one's life goal -- an individualistic way of thinking (Becker & Marecek, 2008). Yet positive psychologists also stress and validate the importance and indispensability of the social dimensions in well-being, proposing a "five-factor theory of social well-being" (Keyes & Lopez, 2009), aligning perfectly with the goals of cooperative learning. Despite approval by positive psychology, centering education on individualism ultimately injures children's resilience by damaging their social competence and decision-making capacity.

5. Cooperative

A new educational model is in place to change the norm. Cooperative learning is defined by "a set of instructional methods in which students are encouraged or required to work together on academic tasks" (Slavin, 2016). Students form positive interdependence in their goals and interact in a mutually beneficial way. The system provides an alternative that cultivates personal resilience to a level unattainable by other educational paradigms. It prepares potent individuals with optimism, confidence, empathy and the will to self-actualize, and points in a new direction for future education and resilience cultivation.

5.1. Bridging Meaningful Connection

Cooperation enables and enhances substantial connections and support between children, fostering resilience by improving their social skills. Connection and support are heavily stressed in the majority of resilience literature. Luthar points out that positive connections with peers greatly advance resilience (2015). Constructing interrelations among children develops their empathy and altruism, and delivers support that help them fare well under stress and trauma. Also, it raises their well-being by making they feel important or useful to others (Luthar, 2015). In cooperative learning with mutual objectives and interdependent assignments, students form a collaborative network, allowing natural connections based on mutual trust, concern, and understanding. Their altruism is advanced when they readily help their teammates in order to achieve the optimal team result and maximize the fruit of collaboration. In the process, members form important connections with the rest of the team, raising their sense of purposiveness and self-efficacy.

Further, teammates readily accept each other despite varying social competence. In a study by Fantuzzo, when

abused and normal children are paired, significant decrease in isolation for both maltreated and non-maltreated children is observed accompanying the increase in peer interaction (1996). Mandela similarly observed in his imprisonment that the stronger prisoners embolden the weaker ones, and both become more resilient in the process (1994). The positive connections help students with varying capacities thrive under stress and adversity.

5.2. Promoting Academic Achievements

Cooperative learning empowers greatest personal accomplishments that effectively build resilience. In the meta-analysis study conducted by David Johnson with his colleague, cooperative learning is found to be considerably more effective in yielding achievements (1981). Increased level of achievement in the cooperative structure substantially raises children's self-efficacy and realistic optimism in a cooperative environment. The interdependence of goals and individual participation contribute to cooperation's immense implication on academic achievements. In a group, each member is required to contribute to a common goal or reward that involves cognitive challenges. Individual efforts are principally emphasized with "individual accountability," where individual contribution must be accounted for. The individual endeavors will be stressed as strongly as in other systems but with lessened impairment in resilience. During interaction, members can encourage others' productivity and help with academic conundrums while cognitively rehearsing learned material themselves. Also, by cooperative exploration, children expand their limited perception to a wider range of perspectives and thus cultivate creativity, an important trait for resilience. Thus, cooperative learning has an immense impact on children's achievement, which builds more tenacious children ready for future challenges.

By preventing over-resilience and fostering the optimal form of societal leadership, cooperative learning further enables students to procure greater social achievements. In traditional learning group, polarization of leadership substantially increases the leader's fear of being criticized and positions the leader under risk of developing undue self-awareness. Children that lead can become over-resilient with greatly reduced capacity to conduct the team, even resulting in conflicts (Chamorro-Premuzic & Lusk, 2017). Cooperative learning, however, is characterized by shared leadership. Every group member assumes responsibility of leading the team. By weighing different views equally, children develop social awareness and become more capable leaders.

The importance of cooperation in maximizing achievements is evident beyond education, extending far to sociology. In "Long Walk to Freedom", Nelson Mandela speaks of the importance of cooperation in strengthening resilience and achieving prisoners' common goal to survive physically and thrive mentally (1994). If separated into individuals, it is hard to resist; only within a cooperative system where they share what they learn and feel can their courage be multiplied, stress alleviated, and mental fortitude reinforced (Mandela, 1994). Cooperative learning, by directly teaching the social skills students need in order to work collaboratively, enables different student's knowledge to interact and multiply into a collaborative whole, furthering their achievement and strengthening their resilience.

Therefore, psychological, educational, and sociological research into resilience demands considering cooperative learning as an alternative school structure. Participation and

Inclusion, as fundamental human needs (Benard, 1995 & Willis, 2007), build resilience as individuals are valued by teams and each partaker's contributions are appreciated. Thus, cooperative learning needs to be further implemented to raise a steady and competent future generation.

6. Considerations for Implementation

However, if not properly implemented, cooperative learning will have negative consequences. Children without social skills would find it hard to be incorporated into the team and feel isolated, negatively influencing their self-esteem. In social relationships, children rejected by peers perform poorly psychologically and have lower resilience (Luthar 2015; Kupersmidt & Dodge, 2004). Therefore, imparting social skills to children before cooperation becomes a crucial challenge for educators. Teachers should also be a careful observer (Johnson et al., 1984) and mediator during children's cooperation and enact timely intervention to prevent isolation.

Educators should also actively encourage connections between different groups. After the Haitian Earthquake, Haitians are composed into groups with members "within one's inner circle" (Rahills, 2016). However, the structure whose root lies in Haitian culture obstructs resource communication between people that does not belong to the same circle, leading to undesirable consequences (Rahills, 2016). Similar predicaments can be affected if the assigned groups are separated afar from one another. The inter-group competition would injure members' social awareness and cause unnecessary stress.

Further, it should be emphasized enormously that cooperative learning is not narrowly defined to exclude competition and cooperation. Johnson, who was himself an advocate for cooperative learning, stated: "The natural place for competitive and individualistic efforts is under the umbrella of cooperation" (1981), cautioning the overuse of any structures and encouraging schools to synthesize different systems. Also, Tauer and Harackiewicz found that the combination of cooperative and competitive structure would immensely boost performance outcome (2004). Therefore, competition and individualistic structures should be integrated into the cooperative model to create benign inter-group and intra-group competition and place due focus on the individuals' efforts and their differentiated achievements.

7. Conclusion

Education reformers criticize schools as alienating places (Sarason, 1990) when active participation is not directly highlighted. Thus, cooperation is essential for building education beneficial for individuals and the society at large. Cooperative learning system is an interdependent learning environment where students work towards a common goal and individual contributions are accounted for. It improves children's social skills, self-efficacy and personal achievements, greatly enhancing their resilience. Nevertheless, educators need to constantly enact interventions and encourage inter-group communication; they should also appreciate the benefits of competition and individualistic structures. By building children's social competence and awareness, bridging meaningful connections, and maximizing personal achievements, cooperative learning strengthens children's resilience and competence more effectively than other educational systems, making it the

optimal structure for future education.

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