

## **RESILIENCE BUILDING FOR OUR PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

**Trina Eastwood, Principal St Gerard's School Alexandra**

**Term 2 2017**

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:**

I am very grateful to my Board of Trustees who released and encouraged me to take this term of learning and re-energising. Also to Julie Flannery, who took on all the responsibilities of Principal during the term, my thanks. Without your willingness and the support of the leadership team of the school, as well as other staff and the families of the school, I would not have been able to have had this time to think, visit, reflect, plan and re-energise. It is exciting to return and see changes and improvements that you have all made in my absence to make St Gerards a great place to learn.

To the principals and staff at Green Island School, Dunedin, Samuel Marsden School, Wellington, Musselburgh School, Dunedin and The Australian International School, Singapore, I am grateful for the time you gave me to observe or just chat in order to understand the many ways you have all developed resilience in your students through programmes, experiences and planning. You willingly allowed me to photograph you and the resources you have created or use to make your schools a place where resilience is talked about and taught.

To the Ministry of Education, for the opportunity to learn and refresh my thinking and my energy by way of this sabbatical, I thank you and applaud your ongoing decisions to maintain this important opportunity for Principals.

### **BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE**

At my present school - St Gerard's Alexandra, we have a number of students, even at primary level, who are saying they wish they could die or be left alone, or not come to school. There are those children who are being kept at home by parents at times when things are tough, because parents feel whatever the task ahead is too hard for their child.

We run “Restorative Practice” in our school, but we find that often it’s too hard for some children to accept their own mistakes and the mistakes of others as being temporary and those that can be improved by learning skills and also being supported to learn. At times parents of these children also see the mistakes of others as being permanent personality issues rather than mistakes made by children who can learn better with support and therefore be stronger and healthier members of our school, their family and society.

I believe that , even though resilience learning is developed by parents as the first teachers, our school could support our children and their parents by developing a programme that would enrich processes learnt at home or introduce programmes that would develop resilience.

When I set my purpose for this sabbatical

*To look at how to build resilience in students especially target students and those consistently having behavioural problems.*

I decided I wanted to:

- explore the concept of Resilience building as it applies to students in school and especially in primary school.
- discover if our Restorative Practice Process would be enhanced by specific resilience building and if resilience building dovetailed with processes already in place at my school.
- know how to incorporate our Catholic values and virtues into the Resilience building so that it fitted well with the vision and mission of our school.
- ensure that any introduction of resilience building was not extra work for teachers but a continuation of work begun but with more clarity and purpose.
- Support our parents, as first teachers of their children, to increase their knowledge and skills in the area of wellbeing and resilience.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Over the space of the term I took the chance to read relevant material ,listen and watch ted talks and informative presentations on the internet, and visit schools who were addressing the specific issues of building resilience. I discovered there is a lot of information and programmes available and those schools who have developed programmes have come from similar motivation to mine - to support students who struggle to control emotions, behaviours or make the most of

learning opportunities, because of the way they think or act. There are definite repetitive understandings and links between all the programmes and information that is available.

The learning has sparked an enthusiasm in me to think bigger, read more and trial my ideas with those who I work alongside.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Visiting**

- 1) Principal and staff of Green Island School, Dunedin to view schoolwide 'Play is the Way' implementation
- 2) Principal, Musselburgh School to discuss the Positive Psychology work completed by the school and staff learning and view how this has impacted on programmes and processes related to resilience building.
- 3) Celia McCarthy and staff, Samuel Marsden Collegiate Wellington, to discuss their strengths based programme that supports the development of virtues (habits of action) and resilience.
- 4) Rebecca Williams, Yr 5 & 6 Dean Australian International School Singapore, and observe a "Restorative Practice" school with strengths in student driven learning and Inquiry and how this impacts on the development of virtues e.g resilience.

### **Taking part in**

- 1) **The Edutech Conference - Sydney Australia 2017-**
  - **Carol Dweck- Growth Mindset, Culture and Strategy** and the importance it plays in the changing of students ability to be resilient and change behaviours that prevent optimism and lessen learning ability ,
  - **Angela Maiers- Liberating genius, Student motivation, Engagement, Contribution and Attainment** - the belief that making each person feel they matter, evokes their ability to genuinely contribute and this increases learning ability and enhances character strengths.
- 2) **An introductory course of- Play is the Way** run by the creator of the programme - Wilson McCaskill

## Reading

1. **Fun Friends by Dr Paula Barrett** ( An Australian programme for developing resilience in Children aged 4-7 years) and Friends for Life for children ages 7-onwards [www.pathwaysshrc.com.au](http://www.pathwaysshrc.com.au)
2. **Building Resilience in Young people** -( resource to support webinar- Building Resiliency in Young people) [Resource link](#) This resource explores the 7 key elements of resilience
3. **My Wellbeing-My Classroom** - a resource about positive psychology and wellbeing [Resource link](#)
4. **Children Aren't Made of China** by Wilson McCaskill-a practical guide for concerned parents and teachers. "Children need resilience, perseverance and other life skills if they are to remain optimistic in the face of life's daily challenges".Wilson McCaskill.
5. **Play is the Way** - a practical methodology for teaching social and emotional learning using guided play, classroom activities and empowering language. Volume 1,2,& 3
6. **The Optimistic Child** by Martin Seligman- a revolutionary approach to raising resilient children. Written for parents and teachers.
7. Numerous Ted talks and literary reports on the topic of Resilience building and growth mindset( see references).
8. Ready to use workshop - **Building Resilience in Young Children** ( Government of Ontario) [www.reachinginreachingout.com](http://www.reachinginreachingout.com)
9. RIRO- Building Resiliency guidebook [Resource book](#)

## FINDINGS

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity and supports us to deal with life's obstacles.

Having resiliency skills has proven to minimize the effect of negative stressful situations and allows us to face challenges, learn from them and apply skills to live a healthy life. Resilient children are able to convince themselves that mistakes and failures in one area are only temporary and do not mean that they do not have skills in other areas.They also look for reasons, other than just themselves, for why things have gone wrong. They can recognise negative thoughts, control them and remain motivated.

There are 7 essential skills that are possessed by resilient individuals:

1. Emotional awareness and self regulation
2. Impulse control
3. Optimism ( a sense of hope)
4. Flexible and accurate thinking
5. Empathy
6. Self efficacy
7. Connecting and reaching out to others

My research has shown that resilience skills can be taught and learned.

Throughout my research some things were consistently repeated.

Resilience is highly connected to one's self identity and how we perceive the world.

- **making students aware of their strengths** - use of VIA strengths survey has been used at Samuel Marsden with their senior school.  
<http://www.viacharacter.org/> Once students are aware of their strengths they make links to others who have the same strengths( connections). Strengths such as gratitude, zest, hope and love are associated with life satisfaction. Martin Seligman (Positive psychology) states that to “use our highest strengths and talents to belong to and serve something you believe in, is larger than self and leads to a meaningful life.” (Teaching resilience to children. Lynne Namka -lynnenamka.com).  
John Hendry of Geelong Grammar school stated in his article A pro-active Positive Education Approach to Resilience -” talents that are valued by self and others”- as one of the 5 descriptors that children with resilience demonstrate.
- **Helping children to know how their brain works**, takes their issues from personal to medical and can support optimism and change. Research has shown that those who think they can learn from their mistakes have a different brain reaction to mistakes.
- **Teach growth mindset (Carol Dweck)** and have this as a school wide practice. Studies have shown that growth mindset can lead to optimism. Optimists believe defeat is temporary, they perceive a bad situation as a challenge and there is a willingness for those with a growth mindset to learn from their trial and error which in turn teaches persistence and self mastery. Carol found that those with a growth mindset had positive attitudes, helped others and were more willing to forgive.
- **Students need to understand their feelings**, be able to name them and recognise the effect these have on their behaviours and decisions. Seligman

believes that children should be allowed to feel negative emotions and use them as signals.

- **Teach social skills and self control** -In the Education Review volume 8 Issue 2 article - Is it a teacher's job to teach resilience? we are told that in the ASG parent report card survey, 800 NZ parents were surveyed and it overwhelmingly stated that parents are happy with our academic teaching but that they are concerned about the social and emotional learning. They were concerned about children's ability to be resilient and their coping abilities.
- **Applaud effort not intelligence or talents. Use effort statements.** Wilson McCaskill states in his book Children are not made of China " if praise is to be really valuable it must be informative and allow children to build on their achievement". Informative praise lets children know the skills and values they have used and ensures we inform children and help them become self aware and self motivated.
- **Student driven learning** - where students are involved at a planning level and have their passions for learning acknowledged and encouraged they have a better chance of meeting their goals. Self reflection is essential so that self talk is used to analyse and rethink next steps. Setting goals is essential.
- **Effective relationships** - working in teams, alongside others, problem solving, conflict resolution helps them establish better relationships and connections with others
- **Self reflection +/-or mindfulness**

## **PROGRAMMES I HAVE RESEARCHED AND ANALYSED**

A programme called: **My Wellbeing, My Classroom**

<http://au.professionals.reachout.com/my-wellbeing-my-classroom-resource>

This is part of the Positive Psychology movement begun by Martin Seligman.

It is developed for use in classrooms and the activities can be modified for all ages, including adults. It talks about the personal and social capabilities of self management, which is an important aspect that supports the 7 essential skills of resilience building. It takes the students through the practical skills to develop and appreciate :

- **positive emotions**-ways that people optimise, experience, predict and savour positive emotions and feelings of peace, gratitude, inspiration and curiosity
- **Engagement**- engaging in work, love, friendship and social life- identifying and nurturing your own character strengths in the areas of - wisdom & knowledge, transcendence, temperance, courage, justice and humanity,
- **Relationships**- development and maintenance of these in a positive manner.

- **Meaning-** finding something bigger than yourself gives a sense of purpose,
- **Achievement-**making goals that bring meaning to our lives.

This programme has practical activities and can be taken at any stage and in any order. You do not need to be trained to use this resource. The website

<http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/>

is an excellent resource for resilience building programmes and information.

**Building Resiliency in Young People** developed by Karen Reivich and Andrew Shatte  
[resource link](#)

This whole resource is designed to assist the development of the key competency of self management.

Creating a supportive environment is stressed as important before any teaching and learning takes place with this programme.

This resource works through all 7 essential skills- emotional awareness and self regulation, impulse control, optimism, flexible and accurate thinking, empathy, self efficacy, connecting and reaching out.

Each individual skill level has lessons that have key messages, outcomes, resources and activities to support learning. Resources include worksheets that can be used in whatever way fits your individual school or class. There are links throughout to ReachOut.com .

*These two programmes can be used as resources to be drawn on as needed but I do not see a place in my present school to work through from page 1-20 of either programmes. We may need to decide as a staff, after data has been collected, as to which aspects are relevant to which particular area of the school and ensure all staff have the knowledge and access to use these as they are needed.*

**Building Resilience in Young Children-** (a workshop for parents of children from birth to six years of age))

This resource can be sourced at

[resource link](#)

and can be shared with your parents as part of one to four sessions.

An excellent resource that supports a facilitator to take parents through : modelling resilience, outside supports, being a positive role model, building caring relationships, encouraging children's responsibility and participation, helping children 3 yrs and older develop thinking skills.

*This is a wonderful programme to share with parents. The resources link on the website is clear and easy to use. It could be easily facilitated and the setting up of a support link for parents keen to investigate its use with their own children would be worthwhile. A link to outside services would be wonderful to ensure parents are aware of all the support that is available locally.*

### **Fun Friends- Dr Paula Bennett** [resource link](#)

This is a programme for ages 4-7 . This is a programme that you need to train to become a facilitator in. It has been available in the Christchurch area after the earthquakes. My understanding is that the NZ Ministry Of Education is looking into developing a New Zealand version of this programme .

It is based on the same 7 essential skills.

The programme looks at: **feelings, our bodies, how we relax, friends, Green thoughts**-things we say to ourselves in our head that make us feel good feelings, -happy, confident, brave, calm- helpful thoughts

**Red thoughts**- things we say that make us feel unhappy feelings - sad, worried, angry, stressed or make us feel less confident- unhelpful thoughts

**Setting goals, doing new things, being a good friend, patting ourselves on the back, role models, being happy with our efforts.**

It is an Australian programme and the resource itself has many Australian icons used throughout it but these could easily be modified to work with your class and your set of children.

**Friends for life** is the 7- 12 year old programme from the same people.

A programme that once again should be facilitated by a trained facilitator. It looks at higher level aspects such as anxiety and depression, emotional and social skills. It revisits making and maintaining friends and self talk.

Both programmes involve parents and have good information for facilitators and practical activities for children.

I asked a staff member to look at the Friends for Life resource and to see if aspects could be used and linked with our Restorative Practice. She had completed a Restorative Practice survey asking children specific questions around relationships and issues in the class and playground and how they were dealing with them as part of the RP in the school. The questions also identified positive and negative thinking. From the results of this, she was able to identify aspects of the Friends for Life programme that



would improve the issues highlighted by children. She established 3 circle time skill sessions in her classroom to teach the skills and then incorporated activities into her Religious Education, Reading, Health and PE and Inquiry learning where relevant. After one term the results showed that, the major issues had changed and those previously mentioned had been improved. The whole classroom culture had improved and positive relationships had been created or were developing. Other smaller issues have appeared but she will continue to use this format to address these and build on the earlier learning completed.

*I see this as a positive way to use this resource without overwhelming staff and it keeps the learning relevant and real for students by addressing their issues. It links from the RP surveys already in place and lessons are tailored using the knowledge already within the class.*

*My understanding is that the NZ Ministry of Education has recognised its worth and is looking at developing a NZ version of this.*

**Play is the Way** - is a methodology for teaching social and emotional learning using guided play, classroom activities and empowering language. Created by Wilson McCaskill. [resource link](#)

This programme is designed for primary school and is comprised of 6 elements-

**1) Life Raft concepts**

1. Treat others as you would like them to treat you,
2. Be brave- participate to progress
3. Pursue your personal best no matter who you work with
4. Have reasons for the things you say and do
5. It takes great strength to be sensible

**2) Games**

**3) Self reflective language**

**4) Play Is The Way (PITW) 3r's-** reflection, repair, restitution

**5) Growing personally and socially**

**6) Ultimate community role model**

The full programme is generally introduced over a 3 year period, but this is solely dependent on teaching staff knowledge and skills and school wide direction and commitment. It is introduced with personal training from the creator Wilson McCaskill and includes sessions for staff, classes and parents all run by Wilson, as well as ongoing support.

“The programme is a behaviour education programme using wisdom not force”. It takes place over the full year and at every level.

An excellent source of expertise using this resource is Green Island School Dunedin, who have been involved with this programme and Wilson for many years.

<http://www.greenisland.school.nz/>

*The benefit I saw with this programme was that, as a full school implementation, all staff were using the same language from year 1-8. This dovetailed with Restorative Practice and used skills and learning times staff already made use of in my school e.g circle time, fitness, self reflection. It certainly linked to many of the skills needed to develop resilience in students as my research had shown me. It is not extra work for staff but can be used alongside other planning in relevant ways. The skills are real and the games are fun! This programme works for those targeted students because it is physically based and repetitive of skills but games have variety and fun. The professional readings that are part of the programme support staff to deal with behaviour issues and different children’s social and emotional learning paths.*

## **BOOKS OF INTEREST**

- **Children Aren’t Made of China- Wilson McCaskill**

A book written by the creator of ‘Play is the Way’ programme. This book is for parents and teachers and is easy to read. Wilson states - “ let us raise children to be considerate of themselves, others and the world in which they live with sound reasons for the things they say and do... from this, all else will follow”.

In this book Wilson defines the difference between Values ( ideals, aspirations) and Virtues - (habits of action) which are entrenched and define the core of our character.

Throughout his book there are solid conversational examples that support the learning in the book. He discusses all 7 essential skills that a resilient person has and has very strong opinions on the use of praise and reward.

*I have given each of my staff this book to support their understanding of how resilience can be taught and learned. We are unpacking it as we look at resilience possibilities in our school. I also want to have copies available for parents to read once we begin the ‘Play is the Way’ programme.*

- **The Optimistic Child- Martin Seligman**

This is also a book written primarily for parents. Martin was concerned for the prevalence of childhood depression and pessimism. This book brings together his

research and outcomes. It explains the programme developed by Martin and Postgraduate students, at Pennsylvania university. It gives parents some a very solid process to follow and supports them to use cognitive restructuring and social skills training to overcome depressive episodes in their children. A simple interpretation of some of the work activities for children who struggle with challenges and become overwhelmed. It asks- What is the worst thing that could happen? What is the best thing that could happen? What is most likely to happen?

*I have recommended this book to some parents of students with anxiety and pessimistic tendencies in effort to support them as first teachers of their children. The feedback has been varied from these parents but generally they liked having something that gave them a beginning way to work with their children. I have used the three question technique with one child in my school and noticed an instant calming as he thought about the three questions and then was able to get himself in control of the problem. He has told me he has used the technique himself since.*

## **IMPLEMENTING FINDINGS IN MY SCHOOL**

- Develop student and staff Wellbeing procedures.
- Staff to read -Children are not made of China- unpack this book together and discuss, in order that we establish common ground and shared understandings around resilience and student wellbeing.
- Share my findings with staff and look at the resources available. Discuss and if agreeable plan the development of a St Gerard's resilience building resource using the programmes available to us.
- Incorporate Circle Skills time in every class and use the RP survey completed at the end of term 1,2,3 to determine what skills are taught at each level. Allow flexibility for staff to ensure the skills are driven from the needs of the students in individual classes. Unpack the Play is the Way component on circle time in book 3 and use this to enhance our own programme.
- Organise for Wilson McCaskill to train staff in 'Play is the Way' and set in place. Commit to the full three year programme. Allow staff the chance to view this in action at Green Island School, Musselburgh School and Mornington School all in Dunedin.
- Offer the pre-school resilience programme to our parents using the resource from Ontario. If successful, run it on a cyclical basis to reach new families.

- Use the school newsletter to include information of resilience building for parents as part of our Restorative practice weekly updates.

**References:**

- **Seligman, Martin** (2011 ) *The Optimistic Child, Published by William Heineman*
- **McCaskell, Wilson** ( 2002 ) *Children are not made of China, Published by Play is the Way Pty Ltd*
  
- **Meisner, Kathryn** ,*The ABC of Resilience at TEDxYMCAAcademy*
- **Barrett, Dr Paula**, ( 2007)*Fun Friends & Friends for Life, Published by Barrett research Resources Pty Ltd*
- **McCaskell, Wilson** (2011) *Play is The Way ,Volume 1,2,3, Published by Play is the Way Pty Ltd*