

Savouring the Moment with Strength-Based Resilience

R.H. King Academy has delivered 13 lessons on Strength-Based Resilience (SBR) over two years for students in Grades 9-12 during our Mentor Period. We began by training a core group of our teachers with Dr. Afroze Anjum, TDSB Psychologist. Our principal, Dave Rowan, provided release time so teachers could learn about the curriculum and an evidence-based survey that would be conducted as part of the pilot. Our ACL team was tasked with developing easy-to-follow lesson plans based on the SBR document. Special SBR Workbooks were given to students and used in classes. Student reflections on the SBR curriculum reveal a practical understanding and appreciation for concepts like: identifying signature strengths, coping effectively in the face of adversity, grit, gratitude and adapting.

Other key concepts like mindfulness, slowing down, and savouring have been supported by our Mindfulness Program. This includes: six-lesson curriculum for our Grade 9 and 11 students, Leadership Mindfulness Lessons and a whole school “Mindful Minute” or “Brain-break” which occurs mid-morning over the P.A., voiced by our students and recorded by our Technical Crew. Our Mentor Program supports the Caring Adult initiative as students move through their high school years with one mentor teacher in the same mentor class.

**“The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall”
Nelson Mandela**

We will be continuing our SBR curriculum during Mentor Period next year for our Grade 10 and 11 students. Our Mindful Library provides respite for students in our lower-light room, quiet seminar room with exercise bike and Calming Corner. Our students were thrilled to attend the recent Students as Champions of Mental Health and Well-Being Secondary School Forum to share ideas around mental health and well-being with other TDSB students and further develop their initiatives. *(By: Lois Lorimer-Nunn, ACL Library and Special Projects at R.H. King Academy)*

Strength-Based Resilience (SBR)

The Millennial Generation faces a multitude of challenges such as, cyber living and cyber bullying, global warming and global viral pandemics, obesity and emaciated social ties, to name a few. Ironically, juxtaposed among these challenges are objective measures of our progress, that we are smarter (at least in terms of IQ scores, Canada was rated third out of 28 countries in reading, writing and arithmetic performance of school children according to UNICEF report of 2013), richer (in terms of per capital income), healthier (in terms of longevity), safer (in terms of declining crime rates), have more social freedom (in terms of rights obtained for minorities) and have even more leisure time (in terms of increase in leisure hours). This is what it means to be human in contemporary times— connected yet lonely, compulsively attached to accomplishments and outcomes, yet ever more stressed, anxious, worried and eventually depressed.

Our educational system spends a lot of effort on improving academic achievement. However, challenges listed above are not likely to be resolved by just focusing on academic achievement. To adaptively deal with aforementioned challenges, we need resilience which can be taught to our children. Resilience, however, is not only about mitigating risk factors, as it is also about amplifying our own resources.

Capturing the complexity of contemporary human beings,
(continued on page 2)



Students as Champions of Mental Health and Well-Being Forum

What I Have Learned About Resilience

3 Exams. 2 Assignments. 1 Week.

My shoulders lock into place,
My heartbeat a rubber ball
Tossed across the room.
It's hard to breathe.

And then I remember:

I can choose to
Breathe. Be mindful. Slow
down.

Know this emotion will
pass...

I can choose to be resilient.

I take this time to think of my
strengths,

I tell myself, “I can do this”.

I make a plan. I get started.

(Hey, I put away my phone!)
I make a schedule, draft that
essay.

And I don't forget to take a
break. Listen to music,
Eat a healthy snack, take a
walk.

Savour, slow down, try to
live in the moment.

Breathe, relax my shoulders,
Feel better...

I start that math problem.

I choose to let stress help me
focus, not bring me down.

But when it's too much,
I'm learning to handle it.

Challenge myself to be the
best

I can be, and good enough
for myself to see.

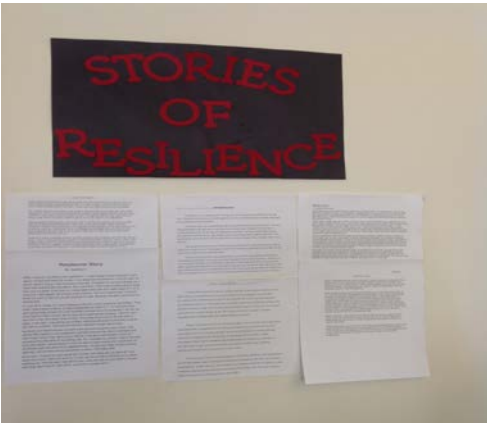
When my results are in,

What I can tell is:

“look how far you've come.”
Don't forget to breathe...

*(By Helen Q. - R. H. King Academy
Student)*

Strength-Based Resilience (SBR) *(continued from page 1)*



Teacher, Samantha King's students write their stories of resilience and how they handled a challenge adaptively

the Strength-Based Resilience (SBR) Program is currently being implemented in various TDSB middle and secondary schools and attempts to prepare our students to deal with inevitable hassles, stressors and challenges using their character strengths. Participants not only learn ways to explore, express and enhance their psychological assets – their character strengths, but also build awareness of their unhelpful beliefs such as making problems bigger than they are or holding themselves responsible for a problem when they are not.

Students learn ways to spot their strengths from their lived experiences and also learn how to notice strengths of others. Additionally, participants learn specific strategies and skills to cultivate gratitude, savouring, altruism, empathy to deal with their problems and challenges using their strengths through video/movie clips, role plays, stories as well as art activities.

The previous edition of this newsletter talked about the importance of building relationships, but to some friendship skills do not come naturally and may need to be learned. We do that, for instance by teaching assertiveness skills or how to respond to someone's good news. In doing so, the aim of the Program is to nurture student's growth and resilience at the same time. SBR is not about building a caricature of smiley face happiness, but it is about identifying and amplifying your strengths such as grit, self-regulation, zest, curiosity, optimism, hope, and love, as well as adaptive use of strengths to solve your problems. Feel free to participate in an online assessment to further your understanding of your signature strengths by registering at: www.strengthbasedresilience.com.

If you would like more information about this Program, contact Dr. Afroze Anjum, Psychologist – Area B, at afroze.anjum@tdsb.on.ca.

(By: Dr. Afroze Anjum, Psychologist – Area B)

"First of all, resilience isn't an individual characteristic of a person – it's a process and we all have a role to play in building the resilience of children and youth. I would agree that there are some characteristics that an individual may have that will help with resilience, but a positive sense of self and community connectedness also come into play. It's important to note that resilience is more than just coping – it is about getting through a bad experience and bouncing back, to be better than expected." Dr. Jean Clinton

in conversation, Spring 2014 – Volume IV – Issue 4 (Ministry of Education Publication)

"Resilience is developed slowly and across different settings. It's essential that children and youth are encouraged to try many things and especially tasks that take practice to master. They have to learn who they are and what they are good at and what they are not good at but can improve at with practice. They become resilient by understanding that no matter who they are, they are special, valued and cared about and that they will have a good future." Dr. Bruce Ferguson

in conversation, Spring 2014 – Volume IV – Issue 4 (Ministry of Education Publication)

Resiliency Research and the HEROES Program

Since 2008/2009, to assess students' resiliency and social-emotional well-being, Model Schools for Inner Cities (MSIC) have administered a Child-Youth Resiliency Survey (C-YR:ADS) for the students in Grades 4-8 on an annual basis. The survey results show that students' resiliency levels drop drastically by age from **76%** of Grade 4 students with high resiliency, to **62%** of Grade 7 students with high resiliency, to **54%** of Grade 8 students with high resiliency.

Further analysis indicates that student resiliency level has much to do with their:

- school experiences – in terms of engagement in school, relationships with school adults and peers, and sense of safety;
- experiences outside of school – in terms of sense of safety in their neighbourhoods, and home activities; and
- emotional well-being – in terms of self-concept and social and emotional challenges (e.g., loneliness and sadness).

The above findings have triggered the need for intentional interventions especially for the Middle Years students. Hence, the piloting of the HEROES program in a number of MSIC schools in 2014.

Since the piloting of the HEROES program, a preliminary analysis of the resiliency data demonstrates that by the end of the school year (Spring 2014) the Grade 7-8 students involved in the pilot had higher resiliency levels than their counterparts who were not in the program. (By: Maria Yau, Research Coordinator – Research and Information Services)

Remember to view:

- The "Foundations of Children and Youth Mental Health and Well-Being" online training module on KEY to Learn. This module has been loaded onto everyone's Learning Profile - click on the "MyLearning" tab to get started.
- The Anxiety Awareness Module with your staff. This module can be found on the Professional Support Services webpage under training modules or by clicking the following link: http://tdsbweb/_site/ViewItem.asp?siteid=10486&menuid=42888&pageid=36043

The HEROES Program

As mentioned above by Maria Yau, Research Coordinator, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) collects student resiliency data annually to measure the impact that resiliency factors have on student achievement, engagement, well-being and on overall school climate. Our current resiliency data demonstrates that as students progress through the intermediate grades and into high school, socially related skills such as positive feelings about self tend to decrease, in some instances up to 10% between Grades 7-8 and Grades 9-12. Similarly, an approximate increase of 10% is evident between Grade 7-8 and 9-12 students who report feeling emotionally challenged “all the time”. It is data such as this that initiated a partnership between *Impact Society*, Dr. Wayne Hammond’s *Resiliency Initiative* and the TDSB’s *Model Schools for Inner Cities* (MSIC) program. Together in 2011, they embarked on implementing the HEROES program in 25 MSIC schools with Grade 7 and 8 students. HEROES is a strength-based experiential learning program (that originated in Calgary) with a focus on the ongoing development of confidence, character, and integrity for adolescents. Teachers are provided with training and resource materials to implement the program as part of their class curriculum. Through stories and personal sharing, the intent of the program is to invite students to explore their unique strengths, gifts and abilities, to examine the implications of how they see themselves and navigate challenges in positive ways.

One of the five essential components of the MSIC program is to support the “Social, Emotional and Physical Well-being of all Students”. The HEROES program falls under this category as it specifically sets out to connect youth to resources, people around them and most of all to *themselves* in order to effectively respond to life’s challenges. The MSIC program exists in order to close opportunity and achievement gaps for historically marginalized students and communities who face greater systemic barriers to success. HEROES is therefore of particular significance to the MSIC program as it further pursues the goal of equity of opportunity for equity of outcome.

Since 2011, MSIC has trained teachers and coaches every year in the implementation of the program. Teachers participate in a half-day training and networking session with other schools in the program. After the training, teachers have access to MSIC coaches who co-teach lessons from the HEROES guide and provide further job-embedded professional learning opportunities. During this time, MSIC has collected feedback from its teachers and administrators on the HEROES Program. Many feel it is invaluable to the growth and engagement of their intermediate students. Others feel the program would benefit from additional stories, anecdotal and instructional material that are culturally relevant and responsive to the students in our schools. MSIC responded to this feedback by assembling a writing team in 2014 to create complimentary tasks for teachers to use in conjunction with the HEROES program. The tasks foster meaningful conversations and activities that delve deeper into issues of gender, race, sexual orientation, faith and other factors that impact social identity for our students. Thus far, feedback on the complimentary tasks has been overwhelmingly positive.

Teachers and students participating in the program have been and will continue to complete a “pre and post” survey that measures resiliency skills (and thus the effectiveness of the program) and this year, they will also be participating in focus groups to gain greater insight into the program’s impact. We look forward to continuing to examine resiliency data in order to guide and establish a need for important decision made with respect to the social, emotional and physical well-being of TDSB students.

(By: Helen Fisher, Central Coordinating Principal – MSIC and Simona Emilliani, Coordinator – MSIC)

Upcoming Events

“Change the View” Video Contest – contest opens February 19, 2015 and closes April 9, 2015. For more information please visit:
http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca/news_and_events/ctv2015-about-the-contest.php

Empowering Families Through Knowledge and Networking Conference: Saturday, March 28, 2015 at Earl Haig Secondary School – 100 Princess Avenue

Children’s Mental Health Week: May 3 – 9, 2015

Hincks-Dellcrest Parent Seminar - Strengthened by the Storm: March 25, 2015 at Young People’s Theatre – 165 Front Street East

Making the Connections: Toronto Public Health Open House – April 28, 2015 at Novotel North York – 3 Park Home Avenue

Mental Health and Well-Being Awareness Parent Symposium: May 9, 2015 at Earl Haig Secondary School

Mental Health and Well-Being Core Leadership Team

Heather Johnson & Saleem Haniff, Social Workers, Mental Health and Well-Being – System Support

Rose D’Alimonte – Chief of Social Work/Attendance – Area D

Marcia Powers-Dunlop, Interim Senior Manager – Professional Support Services

Sandy Spyropoulos, Executive Superintendent – Student Support Services and Care