

Education for an unpredictable future - building resilience in schools

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Abstract

The growing awareness of the challenges of today's society, along with the impacts of related crises, in terms of inequality, injustice and mental health issues, lead to the need to develop abilities as a young person in order to be able to act in a future world. Increasingly, research and practical approaches put a focus on building resilience, understood as a process of dynamic interplay between the self and the environment. School, as a place of development, can make a decisive contribution to the development of resources that are conducive to resilience. To this end, research projects are needed to identify and describe teachers' competences and the learning conditions that are needed in the contemporary context. Following this, practical tools need to be developed as a basis for teaching.

Introduction

Developments in recent decades, set in the context of a «knowledge and information society», characterised by speed and a constant flow of information, have had devastating effects on people's lives (Beck, 1998). Despite expected economic growth, as well as progress in discussions concerning a socially just, inclusive world, there is an increasing tendency towards fragmentation in a world where inequality, marginalisation and misanthropy often lead to conflict and even warfare. Moreover, existential questions are raised regarding the future of human life on earth (Fukuyama, 2018). Today's world is characterised by a tension between the narrative of a more prosperous and socially just society and a reality that shows the opposite (Greitemeyer & Sagioglou, 2017). Rudolf Steiner recognised this state of affairs in the developments of the time as early as 1923, describing them as «leading oneself to an ad absurdum state» (Steiner, 1920). These signs and symptoms of a fragmented world increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and led on the one hand to a deepening of socially divisive tendencies, and on the other hand to profound changes and uncertainties in all areas of life. This has created a significant burden of psychological symptoms and conditions, which have been investigated in a range of studies since the beginning of the pandemic, and highlighted in meta-analyses (Phiri et al., 2021). Increases in depression, anxiety, addiction and post-traumatic stress disorder have been identified in a number of large studies (Schelhorn et al., 2021). The effects of societal changes on adolescent mental health, which is now a notable feature in the educational landscape, are worth noting. Research by Pitchforth et al (2019), finds that the proportion of 4–24-year-olds who have had a mental illness for several years has increased from 0.8% in 1995 to 4.8% in 2014. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a further increase. For example, according to a UNICEF report, 19% of young people surveyed (between 15 and 24 years old) reported suffering from depression (UNICEF, 2021). Looking at education as a microcosm of wider society, similar patterns of developments can be seen. In this context of rapid social, economic and political change, as well as the increasing

prominence of digitalisation in teaching and learning, questions concerning the educational mission of schools for the present and the future arises again. The exclusive transmission of existing knowledge and experiences of humanity is no longer sufficient to give the younger generation access to a future that cannot be predicted (von Henting, 1975). And the relationship of the older generation to the younger generation takes on a new shape under current social, cultural and political conditions.

Linked to the question of the teacher's task towards the growing human being is the exploration of the necessary skills that children and young people need to acquire on their educational journey in order to learn to deal with the unpredictable. To find answers to the rapid and far-reaching developments in all areas of life and work that are expected to continue in the foreseeable future, skills are needed that enable orientation in the world and lead to the ability to act in the given reality. This competence to be able to act in adverse situations, to find an «unbroken» way of dealing with circumstances of challenge and crisis, was first described as resilience in the 1970s. This article is dedicated to describing some aspects of resilience in the context of education. Subsequently, a number of research questions and perspectives will be formulated, which should provide an outlook for further discussions on this topic.

What is resilience?

Research into resilience as an interdisciplinary field spanning several areas of the social and health sciences, including psychology, education, psychiatry, medicine and politics has only emerged in the last five decades (Masten, 2021), and its origins were linked to the study of disasters and their impacts on people and communities. It became clear early on that there was a distinct link between resilience and health, revealing the need to promote resilience as a health-preserving or health-giving aspect (Färber & Rosendahl, 2018). In the early studies, resilience was described as the innate capacity of resistance in a dynamic system (a person, a family, a community), in the face of critical circumstances or adversity (Masten, 2021). The main focus of resilience research has been to examine the characteristics and dynamic processes that help individuals, families and societies to successfully adapt in adverse circumstances. This static view of resilience as an outcome has been refuted by further research. It was observed that various internal and external factors play a role in a particular response to a stressful situation, and resilience was recognised as a complex process that takes place in the form of a dynamic interaction between the individual and a particular given challenge. In addition, the given context of the situation that occurs plays a decisive role. As a result, there is no closed construct of resilience. Rather, the question of what enables or hinders resilience and what internal and external factors contribute to it is of keen interest. In order to find a way of dealing with a crisis situation, or to become capable of acting, a toolbox is required, or more precisely, a constellation of resources that form capabilities. What is to be found as an answer in a particular context, or difficult situation, is an interplay of abilities that are expressed in the form of inner conflicts or actions. These are complex processes of learning, reshaping, transforming. The individual's disposition, as well as their experiences, and particular conditions of life, become the basis for the formation of one's own tool of resources, which are

transformed into abilities and later into action. This process accompanies people throughout their lives.

If one considers resilience as an individual process, rather than an adaptive performance containing positive characteristics that are measured by external indicators, one comes closer to the description given by Rudolf Steiner with regard to the presence and activity of the «I» in the context of human development. This can also be found later in the 20th century in Viktor Frankl's work. The «I», in one of its possibilities of development, is the agent of what a human being «is able to achieve», a strengthening of the centre of his being, «so that what he can become for his environment, what he can become for all life, radiates ever more powerfully from his self.» (Steiner, 1909). Through this «power» of the I, the human being can search for suitable paths for his or her development, even in demanding situations. According to Viktor Frankl, one of these ways is to find a meaning for the situation at hand. Pursuing the question of what potential for development can be found in an adverse situation is an aspect associated with resilience (Frankl, 1997).

For the formation of these resources, which can be included in a «toolbox», school as a place of human development plays an essential role. In view of the fact that many children worldwide currently attend all-day schools, educational tasks are increasingly shifting from families to schools (Enderlein, 2015). Thus, in the school setting, the question predominantly arises of creating learning conditions so that the child and young person can build resources that foster resilience. The following section looks at this concern in more detail.

Foundations of a pedagogy to promote resilience

As humanity, we seem to be at a turning point in education, one in which schooling is about equipping individuals with the necessary skills to respond to uncertainty, challenges and setbacks in ways that are relevant to them. In this context, fundamental debates are needed on the question of the necessary conditions that children and young people need in order to develop the necessary resources.

In essence, what is needed is an education that contributes significantly to providing people with transferable and renewable skills to create sustainable communities and societies in an ever-changing world. An education that is also based on forming abilities and not just knowledge, as Rudolf Steiner describes the foundations of his educational impulse (Steiner, 1920). Two fundamental goals for enabling such a pedagogy are identified in his work on education. On the one hand, the task of education is to provide an answer to the social question of the present. This requires a deeper consideration of the world situation in which the human being finds himself. Furthermore, Rudolf Steiner formulates the necessity of a pedagogical impulse based on «knowledge of the human being». This requires a consideration of the developing child within the concrete life situation, as well as a deeper examination of the development of the human being as a whole. This gives rise to what is called an «art of education» as a corresponding pedagogical response and approach. The human being should be prepared for the «true school», the life (of the future), by creating fruitful conditions for his development (Steiner, 1920). In other words, it is about the formation of resources that children and young people can develop through an

enabling setting of teaching and learning in order to be able to find resilient responses to challenging situations in life.

The promotion of resilience at school is most effective when it happens in the classroom. According to recent studies in the field of educational science, this promotion should not only be found through distinct or targeted interventions in school but should be integrated in the context of the whole curriculum (Wustmann, 2004; Opp & Fingerle, 2007; Fröhlich- Gildhoff & Rönnau-Böse, 2015). This raises the question of identifying and developing teacher competences to create the necessary conditions in the classroom.

Outlook and research projects of the Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum

Observing social developments it is clear that the topic of resilience in education will become increasingly relevant in the future. Research on resilience in educational contexts is still in its infancy (Wosnitza et al., 2018).

Currently, most research activity in educational settings focuses on understanding and describing the concept of resilience and developing or modifying theories and theoretical frameworks. Much of the current resilience research focuses on coping strategies to deal with stressful situations and on developing methods to build resilience. On the whole, this work follows a constructivist approach. Approaching the concept of resilience from a processual, dynamic perspective requires looking at the human being from a point of view that is not static but includes the aspects of «becoming» and «development». Rudolf Steiner's pedagogical impulse created possibilities to realise these aspects in practice. Together with schools that are active in offering this educational approach, these foundations need to be deepened and explored.

In this context, there is a need to address fundamental questions such as:

- What will the world environment look like in future and how will human beings live and develop?
- What resources do children need to develop in order to be able to act in the future?
- What competences does the teacher need to answer these two questions in practice?

Future research at the Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum will identify both the curricular elements and the methods that can lead to the development of the resources and protective factors that will foster capacities for resilience, and the corresponding teacher competencies. These questions will be examined with the help of a longitudinal study in order to obtain meaningful information on the effectiveness of the methods in the area of resilience through medium-term monitoring of the schools (Beltman et al., 2011). In this way, it can be determined how resilience changes over time and in the course of a person's biography, while seeking to throw light on what leads to these changes, or lack of changes.

The results are to flow into the initial and further education of teachers (Rudolf Steiner/Waldorf schools, as well as other school forms) in various countries and will be made publicly accessible through sharing and exchange in workshops, articles in journals, and at conferences. Practical approaches, such as discussion, sharing and reflection in teachers' meetings, professional development and evaluation by empirical means are to be developed within the framework of the research project.

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