

Volume 19, No. 2

Journal

EDUCATIONAL
OPPORTUNITY

Ernest W. Brewer, Editor

Resiliency Monograph

Published by
SAEOPP

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The Literature of Resiliency: A Historical Perspective

*There is nothing wrong with you that
what's right with you can't fix.*

-Unknown

*Connie Hollingsworth
Ernest W. Brewer
Bonnie Benard*

Introduction

A basic tenet of adult education theory is that all adults have preferred styles of learning (Caffarella, 1994), and that these styles may differ from person to person and from learning event to learning event. Attempting to communicate the past, present, and future of a theoretical and still-evolving concept as amorphous as resiliency, therefore, presents certain challenges in the arena of adult learning styles. For some learners, for example, the emergence of resiliency as an educational construct may most easily be grasped when viewed topically in terms of the theoretical contributions made by the diverse disciplines out of which it has emerged. For others, resiliency may best be understood in terms of a straightforward, chronological evolution of the findings of empirical research and the extrapolations of resiliency theoreticians.

Consequently, both approaches will be undertaken by this article. Readers are encouraged to engage their own choice in selecting the modality that is appropriate to their most-favored learning style. The first section of this article, therefore, will review the roots of resiliency as they have sprouted sequentially out of psychiatry, developmental psychology, psychopathology, biology, and sociology, as well as related disciplines. The second section of this article, on the other hand, will be comprised of Table I, which includes what may be considered some of the most historically significant works—limited to those believed to be most relevant for the TRIO practitioner—in resiliency theory, research, and practice. These important works are arranged chronologically in an

effort to provide the reader with a quick overview that might serve as a reference guide to further reading in the evolution of resiliency theory.

One caveat remains a certainty, and that is that a thorough grounding in the historical perspective of the rise of resiliency theory and the spread of resiliency practices is essential to an understanding of the exact breadth and depth to which resiliency has become a force in modern education theory and of the extent to which it may impact TRIO professionals in their daily work.

The Disciplinary Roots of Resiliency

It seems well established by this point in time that the roots of resiliency may be traced to the risk factor model commonly used by health care professionals in the middle of the 20th century (Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, & Kumpfer, 1990; Brown, D'Emidio-Caston, & Benard, 2001). At its most simplistic level, an example of this medical model would be the notion that the offspring of alcoholic parents have a higher risk than offspring of non-alcoholic parents of developing serious, life-long problems, such as low self-esteem, learning disabilities, substance abuse, criminal behaviors, and suicidal tendencies (Werner, 1985; El-Guebaly & Offord, 1977; Russell, Henderson, & Blume, 1984).

The holistic health movement that emerged during the paradigm-shifting decades of the 1960s and 1970s, however, began to look at risk factors in diverse disciplines from a radically different point of view. Instead of focusing on the glass as half-empty in high risk situations, it began to consider why the glass, in many cases, could be found to be even half full. In other words, investigators began to look at the reasons why those who might predictably be considered at risk were instead able to negotiate successfully the "slings and arrows of misfortune" that are a part and parcel of every person's life.

The 1970s

Thus, from the field of psychiatry came the ground-breaking work of Bleuler (1974, 1978), who studied the children of schizophrenics; Miller (1996/1979), who described her work with gifted children who had emerged from violent, abusive, or negligent environments; and Garmezy and Nuechterlein (1972) who first investigated the concept of the invulnerable child. From the field of psychology came the theories of Bandura (1977) on self-efficacy, and the work of Nuechterlein (1970) on the competent but disadvantaged child. From the arena of pedagogical theory there was the continuing work of Piaget (1971) and Havinghurst (1972), both of whom explored children's developmental stages

of learning, and the moving and significant work of Freire (1970) with illiterate adults in Third World environments.

And finally, from the field of sociology, arguably the most significant advances of the early years of research on resiliency came in the 1971 report of Werner, Bierman, and French, *The Children of Kauai: A Longitudinal Study from the Prenatal Period to Age Ten*. This study, which commenced in 1954, was staffed by a team of pediatricians, psychologists, and public health workers associated with the University of California, the University of Hawaii, and the State of Hawaii Department of Health. The investigative team followed over 3,000 pregnancies on the island of Kauai and included over 1,000 children and their families for 10 years. This particular study (which continues today) described the course of the pregnancies, as well as the cohort of children as they passed through their early school years, including descriptions of environmental and perinatal stresses to which the children and families were exposed. Significantly, all of the children in the specified community were included in the population, rather than discreet, selected samples.

In one of their follow-up reports, *Kauai's Children Come of Age*, Werner and Smith (1977) continued to investigate their original cohort of children, specifically looking at mental health issues and antisocial behavior of the children as they became adolescents. Particular attention was given to the biological and temperamental bases for problems in these areas, to the nature of the relationship between the children's social class and their vulnerability, to cultural differences in the children's socialization processes, and to the impact of caretaker-child interventions. Of this segment of their study, Werner and Smith (1982) concluded

While this report focuses on the vulnerability of young people, we could not help but be deeply impressed by the resiliency of most children and their potential for positive growth. Most young people in this cohort were competent in coping with their problems, chose their parents as their models, found their family and friends to be supportive and understanding, and expressed a strong sense of continuity in family-held values attached to education, occupational preferences, and social expectations. (p. 2)

This highly-acclaimed research, together with subsequent reports emanating out of the Kauai study, has been described as one of the most valuable studies ever conducted in the field of social sciences for two reasons.

First, it provides researchers with key predictive evidence of the relationship between extreme high-risk environments and future psychological

adaptation. Second, Werner and her colleagues' work explains why those who did not go on to have future coping difficulties were resilient, that is, the factors that predict adolescent success. (Brown, D'Emidio-Castor & Benard, 2001, p. 15)

Much of the work that was undertaken during the 1970s continued into the decade. Similar themes continued to be researched and reported; however, ideas were also starting to emerge.

The 1980s

The sum and substance of the early resiliency studies explained why at-risk individuals seemed to have the ability to foster competent, healthy lifestyles in the face of adversity. Continuing studies during the decade of the 1980s operated to direct further research toward refining the focus from vulnerability to resiliency (Rutter, 1985, 1987, 1989), to investigating the correlation between competence and resiliency (Garmezy, 1985), to classifying protective factors that enhance resiliency (Rutter, 1987), and to correlating traits of resiliency with developmental stages in life (Werner, 1985, 1986, 1989; Werner & Smith, 1982).

Another study that arose during the 1980s that was important to resiliency research was Werner's (1984) book, *Child Care: Kith, Kin, and Hired Hands*. As its title suggests, this work examined, both comparatively and historically, the effect of substitute care providers on children's development. Richardson et al. (1990) summarized the body of resiliency research that arose during the 1980s as follows:

Resiliency, in summary, implies that the processes of coping with mild to severe disruptions are opportunities for growth, development, and skill building. The products of the resiliency enhancing process are increased protective skills as well as skills that facilitate the coping process. After repeated mild to severe disruptive experiences, the resilient individual does not fall as far following disruption and recovers in a shorter time. (p. 34)

Results that corroborated these conclusions were found in other studies that surfaced during the 1980s, including Bandura's, *Psychology of Human Agency, Encounters and Life Paths* (1982); Miller's, *The Untouched Key* (1990/1988) and Higgins', *Psychological Resilience and the Capacity for Intimacy, How the Wounded Might Love Well* (1985). Works such as these set the stage for the transition from the eighties to the nineties—a sizeable body of theory ar

research had accumulated, providing a framework upon which experiments in implementation might move effectively to the forefront of resiliency activity.

The 1990s

It may be presumptuous to assert a comprehensive view of the advances made in resiliency research, theory, and practice during the 1990s. Two divergent areas of interest, however, have categorically emerged and merit attention. The first is a further refinement of the prevention strategies and protective factors that enhance resiliency. This refinement appears to be taking a further step in the direction of personal, affirmative development of resilient characteristics in both children and adults. The second area of special interest is the extension of resiliency principles beyond individuals to societies and communities at large.

With respect to the first category, the defining explication of Benard (1991) in her synthesis of resiliency literature, *Fostering Resiliency in Kids: Protective Factors in the Family, School, and Community*, set the stage for much of the other work within this classification that was to follow. Benard noted: "What clearly becomes the challenge for the 1990s is the implementation of prevention strategies that strengthen protective factors in our families, schools, and communities" (p. 1). The most significant protective factors identified by Benard included (a) the presence of at least one other person in a supportive, caring relationship; (b) the communication of expectations that were consistently clear and high; and (c) the provision of numerous occasions for children to participate in, and contribute in a meaningful way to, the social environment.

Also within the first category of 1990s research relating to the refinement of the prevention strategies and protective factors must squarely fall the comprehensive model of resiliency provided by Richardson et al. (1990). The resiliency model proposed by this group of researchers described an expanded view of resiliency traits for health educators and prevention specialists. This point of view holds promise for assisting persons in recovering from disruptive life experiences and, significantly, for increasing one's ability to traverse the frequently icy slopes of the vicissitudes of life.

The challenge of the 1990s resiliency movement, as noted above by Benard (1991), was also met in the work of Wolin and Wolin (1993, 1995), which described what they had learned about resiliency from their work with adult children of alcoholics. In particular, the Wolins proposed a shift from the prevalent risk paradigm, associated with a damage model, to what they denominated the "challenge model." In other words, they advocated grafting onto the traditional damage model an additional focus that included the possibility of healthy outcomes for those in an at risk group, such as adult children of alcoholics.

Wolin and Wolin (1993) also used retrospective clinical interview data to identify areas of strength that evolve as children adapt in protecting themselves against family adversities, such as physical abuse, neglect, or marital turmoil. These areas of strength were identified as the "Seven Resiliencies," and included insight, independence, relationships, initiative, creativity, humor, and morality. These authors noted that the evolution of these resiliencies could be tracked in progressive stages from early childhood through adolescence, and ultimately into adulthood. As a result, these researchers concluded that children of alcoholics developed both strengths as well as weaknesses, but while the weaknesses had been well-documented, the strengths had been traditionally overlooked. "The Challenge Model and its related vocabulary of strengths extend the Damage Model by including the possibility that . . . children who experience hardship can be both resilient and vulnerable. The Challenge Model offers a developmental vocabulary of resilience" (Wolin & Wolin, 1995, p. 427).

Other studies on resiliency that emanated out of the final decade of the 20th century focused more on what might be termed the psycho-spiritual aspects of personal growth and development. These researchers include Higgins (1994), who explored ways in which adults might overcome a difficult past; Mullen (1996), who provided a compassionate analysis of alternative ways of moving beyond one's limitations, and Young-Eisendrath (1996), the title of whose book speaks directly and eloquently of its substance, *The Resilient Spirit: Transforming Suffering into Meaning and Purpose*.

Representative of the works undertaken in the 1990s that characterize the growing application of resiliency principles to societies and communities at large include Linquanti (1992) and Benson (1997), both of whom considered the tasks that communities must undertake in order to foster the growth of healthy children. Community-level applications of resiliency principles were also at the heart of the ground-breaking work of the Health Realization approach as applied in the Modello-Homestead Gardens projects, spearheaded by Mills (1990) and described in detail by investigative reporter, Pransky (1998).

A final work completed during the 1990s of which note must be made, and in a class entirely by itself, is the last volume in the three-part series by Werner and Smith (1992), *Overcoming the Odds: High Risk Children from Birth to Adulthood*. The stated objectives of this portion of their longitudinal inquiry were twofold: (a) to track the effects of childhood adversity on the lives of the now-adults who comprised the initial population of children born in Kauai, Hawaii, during 1955; and (b) to evaluate the effects of the protective factors that led most of the studied population to become successfully adaptive adults (p. 3).

This seminal research established several profound implications for professionals who work with children, students, and communities. In their earlier

report, Werner and Smith (1982) found that approximately one third of the babies included in the study grew to become, by the age of 18, competent, confident, and caring young adults. Ten years later, in their 1992 study, these researchers found that of the remaining two thirds of the children who were considered high-risk adolescents, two thirds of those had successfully adapted by the time they had reached the age of 32.

Werner and Smith (1992) identified several factors as significant in the process of "bouncing back" from adversity. In general, they found a correlation between the cohorts' health and success in relationships, school, and work and what has been described as "their disposition, intelligence, communication skills, and internal locus of control; parental warmth and support, and positive relationships with siblings or other adults; and support systems in school, church, or community clubs that rewarded competence and provided a value system" (National Network, 1995, p. 4).

The implications of this benchmark research have been summarized by Benard (1993) in her analysis of articles taken from the *Western Center News*. In her synthesis of the work of Werner and Smith (1992), she concluded that several of their findings hold profound implications for professionals who work with children and families, schools and communities. She noted

First, they clearly establish the self-righting tendencies that move children toward normal adult development under all but the most persistent adverse circumstances.

Second, the life stories of the resilient youngsters now grown into adulthood teach us that competence, confidence, and caring can flourish, even under adverse circumstances, if children encounter persons who provide them with the secure basis for the development of trust, autonomy, and initiative.

Third, their research, along with other prospective longitudinal research, finds that these positive, buffering relationships make a more profound impact on the life course of children who grow up under adverse conditions than do specific risk factors or stressful life events.

Fourth, it is never too late to change a life trajectory from despair to one of hope and success. And last, a focus on these protective factors gives all of us who work with youth and adults a motivating sense of optimism that through our positive relationships, youth and adults can recover their inner strengths. (pp. 41-42)

Their research resulting from the Kauai study has been recognized by Harvard and Radcliff as one of the leading studies of the 20th century. Certainly Werner and Smith's work stands as a cornerstone of the resiliency movement as we know it today.

Outline of TRIO-Relevant Resiliency Research

It goes without saying that there are literally thousands of books and articles that have been written on the subject of resiliency, and the number continues to increase seemingly daily. The present body of work on resiliency encompasses issues that run the gamut from resiliency in adults, as well as in children and in the elderly, in the workplace, in schools, in organizations, and in careers, not to mention across all disciplinary platforms imaginable. It is, therefore, impossible to attempt a complete compilation; instead, the short outline presented in Table I undertakes the task of simply listing in chronological order those works that might be said to have most influenced the advancement of resiliency as it might be expected to impact the work of TRIO professionals with their students and clients. The complete bibliographic data pertinent to any one of the following sources may be found, of course, in the Reference section of this article.

Conclusion

Resiliency issues are relevant across the board—students, staff, host institutions, and various learning communities. Each and every one of these entities will experience adversity at some point in time; that much is a foregone conclusion. Because one of the keys to the quality of life for individuals or organizations is how they manage to deal with such adversity, it behooves educators to acquaint themselves with the potential for change that is inherent in resiliency principles and practices. As a result, educators, individually and collectively, may benefit from identifying their protective factors and their resiliencies and learning what action, if any, they may choose to take in response to setbacks.

Implications of the resiliency research may also reach far beyond the boundaries of local institutions or agencies. All educational-based programs presently involved in the delivery of services may be impacted by the findings on resiliency research. Obviously, based on the information provided, abundant information concerning resiliency and protective factors is available to those interested in pursuing additional insights into these areas.

Table 1
Chronological Listing of TRIO Relevant
Resiliency-Related Resources

Date of Publication	Authors	Title of Publication
1959	Erikson, E. H.	<i>Identity and the Life Cycle</i>
1962	Havinghurst, R. J. et al.	<i>Growing Up in River City</i>
	Murphy, L. B.	<i>The Widening World of Childhood</i>
1970	Freire, P.	<i>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</i>
	Nuechterlein, K. H.	<i>Competent Disadvantaged Children: A Review of Research</i>
1971	Piaget, J.	<i>Biology and Knowledge</i>
1972	Garnezy, N., & Nuechterlein, K. H.	<i>Invulnerable Children: The Fact and Fiction of Competence and Disadvantage</i>
	Havinghurst, R. J.	<i>Developmental Tasks and Education</i>
1974	Bleuler, M.	<i>The Offspring of Schizophrenics</i>
1975	Seligman, M. E. P.	<i>Helplessness: On Depression, Development, and Death</i>
1976	Murphy, L. N., & Moriarty, A. E.	<i>Vulnerability, Coping, and Growth: From Infancy to Adolescence</i>
1977	Bandura, A.	<i>Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change</i>
	Vaillant, G. E.	<i>Adaptation to Life</i>
	Werner, E. E., & Smith, R.	<i>Kauai's Children Come of Age</i>
1978	Bleuler, M.	<i>The Schizophrenic Disorders: Long-Term Patient and Family Studies</i>
1979	Bronfenbrenner, U.	<i>The Ecology of Human Development</i>
	Miller, A.	<i>Prisoners of Childhood: The Drama of the Gifted Child and Search for the True Self</i>
	Rutter, M. et al.	<i>Fifteen Thousand Hours: Secondary Schools and Their Effects on Children</i>
	Werner, E. E.	<i>Cross-Cultural Child Development: A View From the Planet Earth</i>
	Vaillant, G. E., & Milofsky, E. S.	<i>Natural History of Male Psychological Health, IX: Empirical Evidence for Erikson's Model of the Life Cycle</i>
1982	Bandura, A.	<i>The Psychology of Chance Encounters and Life Paths</i>
	Werner, E. E., & Smith, R.	<i>Vulnerable But Invincible: A Longitudinal Study of Resilient Children and Youth</i>
1983	Miller, A.	<i>For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence</i>
	Rutter, M.	<i>Stress, Coping, and Development: Some Issues and Some Questions</i>
1984	Vaillant, G. E.	<i>The Natural History of Alcoholism</i>
	Bleuler, M.	<i>Different Forms of Childhood Stress and Patterns of Adult Psychiatric Outcome</i>

Date of Publication	Authors	Title of Publication
	Rutter, M., & Quinton, D.	<i>Long-Term Follow-Up of Women Institutionalized in Childhood: Factors Promoting Good Functioning in Adult Life</i>
1985	Werner, E. E. Higgins, G.	<i>Child Care: Kith, Kin, and Hired Hands Psychological Resilience and the Capacity for Intimacy: How the Wounded Might 'Love Well'</i>
	Rutter, M.	<i>Resilience in the Face of Adversity: Protective Factors and Resistance to Psychiatric Disorders</i>
	Werner, E. E.	<i>Stress and Protective Factors in Children's Life</i>
1986	Werner, E. E.	<i>Resilient Offspring of Alcoholics: A Longitudinal Study From Birth to Age 18</i>
1987	Rutter, M.	<i>Psychosocial Resilience and Protective Mechanisms</i>
1988	Miller, A.	<i>The Untouched Key: Tracing Childhood Trauma in Creativity and Destructiveness</i>
1989	Noddings, N. Rutter, M. Werner, E. E.	<i>Schools Face Crisis in Caring Pathways From Childhood to Adult Life High Risk Children in Young Adulthood: A Longitudinal Study From Birth to 32 Years</i>
1990	Richardson, G. et al. Mills, R. C.	<i>The Resiliency Model Substance Abuse, Dropout and Delinquency Prevention: The Modello-Homestead Gardens Early Intervention Project</i>
1991	Benard, B.	<i>Fostering Resiliency in Kids: Protective Factors in the Family, School, and Community</i>
	Garnezy, N.	<i>Resiliency and Vulnerability to Adverse Developmental Outcomes Associated With Poverty</i>
1992	Munson, P. Seligman, M. Billingsley, A.	<i>Winning Teachers/Teaching Winners Learned Optimism Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Enduring Legacy of African American Families</i>
	Garbarino, J. et al.	<i>Children in Danger: Coping with the Consequences of Community Violence</i>
	Linquanti, R.	<i>Using Community-Wide Collaboration to Foster Resiliency in Kids: A Conceptual Framework</i>
	Muller, W.	<i>Legacy of the Heart: The Spiritual Advantages of a Painful Childhood</i>
	Noddings, N.	<i>The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education</i>
	Saleebey, D.	<i>The Strengths Perspective in Social Work Practice</i>

Date of Publication	Authors	Title of Publication
	Sergiovanni, T. J.	<i>Moral Leadership: Getting to the Heart of School Improvement</i>
	Werner, E. E., & Smith, R.	<i>Overcoming the Odds: High Risk Children From Birth to Adulthood</i>
1993	Benard, B. Benson, P. L.	<i>Turning the Corner From Risk to Resiliency</i> <i>The Troubled Journey: A Portrait of 6th-12th Grade Youth</i>
	Freedman, M.	<i>The Kindness of Strangers: Adult Mentors, Urban Youth, and the New Voluntarism</i>
	Wolin, S. J. & Wolin, S.	<i>The Resilient Self: How Survivors of Troubled Families Rise Above Adversity</i>
1994	Burns, E. T.	<i>From Risk to Resilience: A Journey With Heart For Our Children, Our Future</i>
1995	Higgins, G. Benson, P. L. et al.	<i>Resilient Adults: Overcoming a Cruel Past</i> <i>What Kids Need to Succeed: Proven, Practical Ways to Raise Good Kids</i>
	National Network for Family Resiliency Children, Youth and Families Network	<i>Family Resiliency: Building Strengths to Meet Life's Challenges</i>
	Seligman, M. Wolin, S., & Wolin, S. J.	<i>The Optimistic Child</i> <i>Resilience Among Youth Growing Up in Substance-Abusing Families</i>
1996	Henderson, N., & Milstein, M. Muller, W.	<i>Resiliency in Schools: Making it Happen for Students and Educators</i> <i>How, Then, Shall We Live? Four Simple Questions That Reveal the Beauty and Meaning of Our Lives</i>
	McCubbin, H. et al.	<i>Family Assessment: Resiliency, Coping and Adaptation</i>
	Viscott, D.	<i>Emotional Resilience: Simple Truths for Dealing With the Unfinished Business of Your Past</i>
	Young-Eisendrath, P.	<i>The Resilient Spirit: Transforming Suffering Into Meaning and Purpose</i>
1997	Benson, P. L.	<i>All Kids Are Our Kids: What Communities Must Do to Raise Caring and Responsible Children and Adolescents</i>
	Resnick, M. D. et al.	<i>Protecting Adolescents From Harm: Findings From the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health</i>
1998	Garbarino, J. et al.	<i>No Place to be a Child: Growing Up in a War Zone</i>
	Horn, L., & Chen, X.	<i>Toward Resiliency: At-Risk Students Who Make it to College</i>
	Pransky, J.	<i>Modello: A Story of Hope for the Inner-City and Beyond</i>
	Werner, E. E.	<i>Reluctant Witnesses: Children's Voices From the Civil War</i>
2001	Brown, J. H., Caston, M., & Benard, B.	<i>Resilience Education</i>

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Connie Hollingsworth is the Director of Pre-College Programs at The University of Tennessee. She received her Ph.D. from The University of Tennessee in 1999 and is completing her second term as a trainer with the ASPIRE Training Institute's Retention Through Resiliency Grant.

Ernest W. Brewer is a Professor at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville in the Department of Human Resource Development. Dr. Brewer is also the Principal Investigator and Director of Federal Programs at UTK.

Bonnie Benard is a Senior Program Associate for Human Development Program at WestEd located in Oakland, California. She is a prolific writer having authored and co-authored numerous resiliency-related books and articles. Ms. Benard's work is widely circulated and highly respected within the resiliency community.