Mental Resilience: The Importance of Positive Psychology

in the School Context

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Abstract: This work deals with the complex and multidimensional nature of mental resilience, which affects all of us, young and old, at every level and in every area of life. Based on the literature research, resilience is a dynamic and developmental process, where individual characteristics and personal reserves act protectively, interact with certain positive external factors (e.g., secure relationships, good school environment) and promote mental resilience of the person. In this article we will study the connection of teachers' mental resilience with the work of the school based on reference to the school context. The brief presentation of the theoretical framework of Positive Psychology and resilience will highlight the importance of the teacher's mental resilience, as he is faced with major and intense changes in the school environment and is the one who is called to empower students. The findings of the study provide useful information for education and the school environment.

Key words: mental resilience, positive psychology, teacher, school environment, education

1. Introduction

Mental resilience (a relatively new concept in the science of psychology) refers to the ability of the individual to adapt positively and maintain his mental health and psychological adequacy in changes, difficult conditions and challenges of life (Masten, 2007; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Wright & Masten, 2005; Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000) It is a dynamic process in which some internal skills (such as IQ), but also the influence of certain external protective factors (for example, good parental care) can achieve significant, positive development results even in an adverse context (Fergusson & Horwood, 2003; Yates, Egeland & Sroufe, 2003).

Mental resilience is not the same as the ability to escape adversity or the ability to adapt to the environment. After all, adaptation skills can be superficial and in cases of strong developmental and social demands prove to be weak and deficient (Rutter, 2000; Yates, Egeland & Sroufe, 2003). According to researchers, mental resilience is not defined as an inherent and permanent ability of some special people, but exists as a possibility for each person. So the question that reasonably arises is: are there specific factors-characteristics that promote the concept of mental resilience in the school context?

2. Theoretical Framework

Positive Psychology is the branch of psychology that deals with the promotion of well-being, prosperity and

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evelopment of people, so that they enjoy their lives as much as possible. Positive Psychology deals with what helps people become better and happier, as opposed to the more classic approach to psychology which focuses on mental illness and what causes it.

Positive Psychology, established in 1998, focuses on understanding and developing skills and virtues that empower individuals and societies to achieve their goals. It is a science and a function together, which not only restores the psychological damage but cultivates the skills of the person, in order to succeed and prosper in his life (Kafka G., 2013).

There are three axes on which Positive Psychology is based:

• Positive emotions that lead to the happiness experienced in the present and cultivate hope for the future.

• Positive individual characteristics, such as abilities and virtues that shape healthy human relationships.

• Positive institutions, such as responsibility and teamwork, etc. leading to a well-functioning society.

More specifically, the development of skills such as Wisdom-knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence leads to happiness (Kafka G., 2013).

2.1 Basic Concepts and Principles of Positive Psychology

Veenhoven (2005) defines happiness as an individual's overall appreciation of his or her life. Seligman refers to the timeless sense of happiness. Brandurn (1969) spoke of happiness as the result of a subjective assessment of the balance between positive and negative experiences over a long period of time.

The basic concepts on which Positive Psychology is based relate to positive thinking, positive attitude and approach, positive emotions, positive characteristics, tendencies, inclinations and predispositions in the positive context and environment. The non-identification of absence with misery and the need to recognize the impact of specific positive psychological dimensions on people's lives were the basis for the birth of Positive Psychology, which seeks to determine how they develop, their effects and their relationship with other variable.

The positive dimensions of human existence are: the meaning of life, quality of life, potential, mental resilience, prosperity, optimism, positive emotions and the balance of personal and professional life. Joy, interest, pleasure, pleasure, finding meaning, expressing emotions and optimism are responsible for the feeling of satisfaction for life and building strong and meaningful interpersonal bonds (Danner, Snowdon & Friesen, 2001),

3. Mental Resilience

The challenges on a personal, professional, financial and emotional level for the modern person are increasing exponentially and people are trying to find mental well-being. Mental resilience refers to an individual's ability to cope with extreme traumatic and stressful situations (Davydov, Stewart, Ritchie & Chaudieu, 2010; Morales, 2008; Nesheiwat & Brandwein, 2011; Shastri, 2013; UCL Institute of Health Equity, 2014).

More specifically, mental resilience is a process of adapting to adversity (Chi et al., 2016; Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2007; Masten, 2011; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Rutter, 2000). These are behaviors and actions that can be developed in any individual (Cortina et al., 2016; Rojas, 2015). Adversity can be defined as the lack of positive conditions and opportunities, leading in part to physical, mental, social loss or deprivation or the experience of trauma.

Therefore, the concept of mental resilience includes the evaluation of two important dimensions. The first dimension concerns whether a person does well in life mainly in relation to a set of expected behaviors and developmental achievements. The second dimension concerns the degree of exposure to difficult conditions, either

past or present, which may jeopardize the smooth development of individuals.

3.1 Mental Resilience & Educational Framework

In our time society is experiencing a crisis as it is faced with economic, social and cultural problems. Today's societies are characterized by cultural and ethnic heterogeneity. New types of family structures are emerging. Consolidated ideas and beliefs are overturned (Malikiosi-Loizou, 2011, pp. 66-67). These issues-problems are faced daily by the school, which is called to adapt and respond to the needs that arise and to form a framework that strengthens mental resilience (Cefai, 2011, p. 304). Children are in school most of the time during their development (Chatzichristou, 2015, p. 239). School affects the cognitive, emotional and social development of the child, therefore it can contribute to the strengthening of his mental resilience by creating in the child the feeling that the child belongs to the school, by positively affecting his mental well-being, by to give opportunities for success in lessons, sports or other activities (Matsopoulos A., 2011, pp. 52-54).

The school is a safe place for children facing difficulties or dangerous situations, but also for activities outside the curriculum for all children. According to Masten, the school context provides opportunities to promote the mental resilience of children at risk of exposure to adversity, who have experienced divorce or domestic violence, homelessness, war, natural disasters and religious persecution (Masten, 2008, p. 76). School can help students cope with adversity. A positive educational experience works supportively, helps the student through the skills he acquires to form a stronger image of himself, strengthens his self-confidence and confidence in his strengths (Cefai, 2011, p. 304).

Often, however, teachers complain that they feel helpless and have difficulty when teaching students from different and problematic environments. On the other hand, many teachers who have years of service do not want to make changes regarding their traditional roles. This situation and its long duration, in the long run undermines the mental resilience of the teacher and the quality of his work.

3.2 Mental Resilience & Teachers

Main factor for the cultivation of mental resilience in students is the presence and appropriate training of teachers (Ebersohn et al., 2015; Grant et al., 2015). The existence and availability of competent adults in the lives of children is a very basic condition for the promotion of mental resilience. In particular, research on children's mental resilience has shown that in cases where their parents or family are unable to cultivate it, "significant others" in the children's lives, such as teachers and peer group, can play a key role.

Since teachers' mental resilience is a new field of research, it is defined in the literature in several different ways. For example, teachers' mental resilience is described as "quality" that allows teachers to "maintain their commitment to teaching" (Brunetti, 2006, p. 813). It is also mentioned that it has to do with "regulating emotions for effective interaction with the social environment" (Tait, 2008, p. 72). The research of Mansfield et al. (2012) indicate that teachers' mental resilience consists of four dimensions: professional, emotional, social and motivational. Each dimension refers to the skills, abilities and methods that the "mentally resilient teacher" should possess.

The professional dimension includes dedication, adaptability and flexibility, preparation and organization, time management, transmissibility, teaching effectiveness. The emotional dimension includes a sense of humor, emotion management, meeting demands, stress and recovery, well-being and enjoyment of teaching. The social dimension concerns problem solving, relationship building, interpersonal and communication skills. Finally, motivation focuses on patience, optimism and self-confidence, enthusiasm and goal realism (Mansfield et al.,

2012). This is one of the few studies that investigate the mental resilience of teachers based on their knowledge, views and attitudes on the issue.

The stress experienced by teachers is related to a variety of factors such as lack of supportive organizational framework, difficulties in communicating with parents, difficulties in peer relationships, high workload, low salaries without the possibility of professional development as well as lack of support and guidance. Relevant studies indicate that there is a high risk of Occupational Exhaustion Syndrome in teachers which puts their physical and mental health, quality of life and performance at serious risk. This is why it is important to mention that the perceptions of the teachers themselves are necessary and necessary as it is unrealistic to expect teachers to become mentally resilient or to promote mental resilience in the school context if they are not adequately informed and trained (Henderson & Mistein, 2003).

In order for teachers to be able to recognize and help children to develop mental resilience, it is necessary to have knowledge and awareness of the various and complex factors that reflect and affect their development (Silyvier & Nyandusi, 2015). Students will not be able to develop mental resilience skills if their teachers do not have those (Henderson & Mistein, 2003). Teaching is a demanding job especially in an age of diversity and constant change (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Mental resilience is strongly associated with a strong sense of effectiveness and motivation for teaching (Mansfield et al., 2012).

4. The Mentally Resilient Teacher — Characteristics

A mentally resilient teacher is constantly evolving in order to meet the challenges of his work. Constantly looking for opportunities for training and professional development, experimenting with new teaching methods (Henderson & Milstein, 2008, pp. 71–73). The knowledge and skills offered by training and professional development strengthen him and help him cope with the daily difficulties and chronic frustrations he faces daily in the school context and life in general (Matsopoulos, 2011, p. 57). The mentally resilient teacher is characterized by personal strength, sense of self and self-esteem, sense of humour, optimism, belief and problem-solving skills (Bonanno & Mancini, 2008; Cooper, Estes, & Allen, 2004; Netuveli et al., 2008).

These traits, although found in a large number of people, are more developed in mentally resilient people. However, teachers often have significant shortcomings. They do not have the necessary knowledge in terms of techniques for an effective management of the classroom, knowledge and teaching techniques that make teaching more interesting and quality, but also knowledge that will help the teacher to understand the context of school and class, the student and its problem, as well as the interactions of all these factors. Experience shows that extroversion, satisfaction from peer relationships, work in education as well as training all have an impact on teachers' ability to feel ready to respond to change in a creative way, to consider the work they do has value and how they exercise control over what happens to them which in turn increases satisfaction with their work.

Therefore, the teacher must be equipped with skills that allow him to apply teaching methods, plan and carry out psycho-pedagogical interventions in order to deal with problematic behaviors and issues of co-education of children with special needs (Matsopoulos, 2011, pp. 54-57). The resilience teacher volunteers, believes in the crucial importance of school and teacher collaboration with parents and the wider community, and most importantly shows interest in the problems his students may face (Henderson & Milstein, 2008, pp. 71-73).

5. Mental Resilience & School environments

Recently, there has been a growing concern and research interest in the components of an effective school where the main aim is to adapt the goals and operation of the school to the specific characteristics and needs of students, families and all members of the school community (Bickel, 1999). Gafoor and Kottalil (2011) argue that education, as it has been practiced to date, "fears spirituality" and that real education should cultivate inner life in an integrated way.

Schools must help students to fight adversity from within, to develop into people with full potential. Based on the uniqueness of each child, the school must ensure that the learning needs of each are met. This presupposes that wide opportunities are provided to support each child by working with the family, parents and the wider social environment. Schools must provide a safe environment in which students not only feel safe but also feel safe. Teaching should develop curiosity, imagination, creativity, promote a sense of awe and admiration. Personal responsibility for student actions must be ensured by promoting teamwork and sharing of responsibilities.

However, in order to achieve this, it presupposes mentally resilient teachers, who through their intensely dynamic role will develop dynamic and functional interaction with the students. The relationship should be reciprocal and function as a reciprocal and dialectical relationship, which will mobilize student participation in various programs within the school. The teacher as a psycho pedagogue must have the main characteristics that distinguish the role of the psycho pedagogue scientist and that is, the responsibility and method in relation to the teaching work. His role in shaping a positive school climate is important, and he is a moral perpetrator.

6. Summarizing

The bibliographic re-emergence shows that mental resilience refers to the ability of a person to adapt positively to difficult conditions and the process of coping effectively. Mental resilience is an ongoing variable, which may differ at different times in human development, and not a categorical variable that either exists or does not exist. Therefore, mental resilience is an important factor for the education sector.

The way teachers teach and their behavior towards each student individually has a catalytic effect on the school performance of students and the creation of a positive atmosphere in the classroom. Dealing mainly with the subject matter of the course rather than with the global and integrated cultivation of students hinders the global development of their personality. The way teachers interpret their role and organize their action depends on many factors. But their mental resilience is the element that will catalyze the way they will work and will be able to adapt and respond to any difficulties.

Mental resilience is a factor that affects the professional well-being of teachers in a positive way, that is, the higher the mental resilience, the greater seems to be the professional well-being ((Birkeland & Johnson, 2002; Kardos & Johnson, 2007). this is exactly what mentally resilient teachers alone have the ability to promote mentally resilient students.

In conclusion, in the difficult days we are experiencing, the promotion of mental resilience is - in my view - a necessary and capable condition to move forward steadily and steadily down. It is necessary and vital to maintain an optimistic attitude towards our daily lives and not to worry about what might happen to us, but to act and prepare properly in order to protect ourselves mentally.

7. Suggestions

Based on the above conclusions, the following proposals can be formulated:

- Empower teachers in mental resilience skills and practices,
- Training of teachers in skills and knowledge related to the global approach to the development of the student's personality,
- Continuous feedback of the teacher from colleagues and supervisors,
- Providing opportunities for teachers to participate effectively in activities that are challenging for them.

The mental resilience of the teacher is strengthened by the emotional and psychological support of colleagues (Matsopoulos, 2011, p. 57). Through specific directions and instructions, both in theory and in practice, teachers can practice in the design, development and implementation of specific actions that promote mental resilience at the school level through their reinforcement and training. At the same time, the principal must understand the special needs of the teacher and support him in his work, especially if he is a new teacher (Henderson & Milstein, 2008, pp. 74–75).

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