



The World Bank

TRANSFORMING ADVERSITY INTO OPPORTUNITY: HOW RESILIENCE CAN PROMOTE QUALITY EDUCATION AMIDST CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE

Why is Resilience Important in Education?

Education systems in countries at all levels of development increasingly need to manage the challenges of crisis, conflict, and violence (WDR 2011). For more than 40 years, research into resilience has sought to understand how positive outcomes (such as mental and physical health, positive interpersonal relations, socially acceptable behavior, academic success, etc.) can result across a wide range of adverse conditions. In the field of education, resilience studies provide evidence that many students succeed academically despite adverse economic conditions (Gamerzy, Masten, and Tellegen 1984; Rutter 1987; Benard 2004; Gizir and Aydin 2009), homelessness and transitory situations (Masten et al. 2008), violence and conflict-affected settings (Boyden 2003; Ungar 2005 and 2012), and social exclusion (Borma and Overman 2004). Resilience matters in education because learning and school success are not only possible in spite of adversity, education can also be the vehicle to overcome it..

What Fosters the Learning of Children and Youth in Difficult Contexts?

Although social and economic factors are important predictors of student academic success, resilience evidence identifies additional factors that correlate with the academic success

of children and youth living under risks. These include both individual factors (e.g., hope, purpose, social competence, problem solving, and autonomy) and environmental factors (e.g., care, support, high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation in school, family, and the community). Resilience research highlights a process that can foster the learning of children and youth as they navigate overwhelmingly difficult living circumstances. This dynamic process—that can transform crises into opportunities for learning, growth and development—entails:

- **Making sense and finding purpose (cognitive engagement).** Individuals facing adversity seek to make sense of the situation they are experiencing and find a purpose that in turn will allow them to make meaningful and positive decisions.
- **Seeking identity and well-being (emotional engagement).** Adversity engages ones' emotions and feelings (e.g., anger, pain, sadness, hope, empathy, humor, etc.), providing an opportunity to manage and regulate them, as well as to develop a concept of self, which builds self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-confidence.
- **Developing control and competence (proactive engagement).** When faced with adversity, individuals seek to take some control over their situation through the development of new competences and skills. In this way individuals aim to satisfy basic material needs,

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such as clothing, food, and shelter, but also long-term life purposes.

- **Connecting with others (connected engagement).** Individuals seek support from others during times of adversity. Within a group, individuals find protection, identity and comfort—and often a connection to something larger than oneself, such as social justice or spirituality.
- **Committing and being accountable (committed engagement).** Individuals during times of adversity move toward adaptive outcomes through perseverance, a sense of accountability, and responsibility to oneself and others.

How Can Education Systems Promote Resilience?

After a child's family, school is most influential in a child's development, values formation, learning, and skills acquisition. Thus, education systems can play an important role supporting both the well-being as well as the educational outcomes of students in contexts of adversity. For this, education strategies must be made relevant to these contexts. Education policy makers, programs and institutions must consider the strengths and assets of education communities and systems to support students in making sense of the adversity they experience, finding purpose in education and developing needed competencies and skills. For example, teaching and learning strategies such as peer-to-peer and community-based learning, teacher learning circles, student-led clubs and other cultural and extracurricular activities can foster both learning and socioemotional well-being. Student assessment can also take into account social behaviors and attitudes such as teamwork, respecting others, effort put into tasks and improvement over time. School management approaches can promote the meaningful participation of parents, students and teachers to support the school success and protection of students at risk. For example, during emergency response, recovery and development in situations of acute and chronic crisis, school-community relations can provide the structures for connection, mutual support and commitment to learning, protection and well-being among students, school staff and families.

What Evidence Guides an Integrated Process to Foster Resilience?

The World Bank has developed the Education Resilience Approaches (ERA) Program to offer a systemic and systematic process to help education systems in contexts of adversity understand resilience and the educational approaches for

fostering it. ERA is based on the empirical evidence and grounded in four integrated and overlapping resilience components: (i) understanding and managing adversities; (ii) identifying and fostering the individual assets and positive engagement in education communities; (iii) providing relevant school services with community partnerships; and (iv) in general aligning the education system policies, programs and resources to support a resilience approach in contexts of adversity.

Understand Adversities: Adversities—and especially conflict and violence—affect children and youth cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally across all stages of their development (Clemens 2006). For instance, a study of 791 children and youth aged 6-16 conducted in Sarajevo in 1994, found that 41 percent experienced significant Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) symptoms (Allwood, Bell-Dolan and Husain 2002). In Afghanistan, after the ousting of the Taliban, a study on mental health found that 75 percent of women and children in the sample also suffered from PTSD (Azimi 2004). Contexts of adversity—acute, chronic or cumulative—also deter learning. Cognitive and emotional functions are deeply affected by traumatic experience, including the mental executive functions which are crucial for higher-level learning and attention (Greenberg, Kusche and Riggs 2004). Stress studies have linked adversity to a shrinking of the hippocampus in the limbic system, which consolidates short- to long-term memory (a critical part of learning), and to hyperactivity in the amygdala, which processes information tied to negative and positive emotional reactions. Pathways between the limbic system and the prefrontal brain cortex, where cognitive executive functions, attention and working memory are processed, are also affected by chronic stress (McEwen 2012).

Fostering Social, Emotional and Academic Assets: Evaluated programs, such as the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATH) Program in the United States, seek to address and reverse the relation between detrimental socioemotional trauma and learning. PATH aims to help elementary students verbalize, process and understand their feelings; to foster positive relations with others, and; to plan and improve their problem solving, learning and accountability skills. A randomized study of the program found significant improvement in both socioemotional skills as well as learning (Greenberg, Kusche and Riggs 2004). The importance of positive cognitive, emotional and behavioral skills in spite of contexts of adversity has also been supported by resilience research. A seminal longitudinal study by Emmy Werner and Ruth Smith (2001) that began in the late 1980s followed a group of 500 children born into extreme poverty and exposed to parental alcoholism and other risks for more than 30 years. Although 1 out of 5 children grew to become adults with

serious behavioral and learning problems, many more lived successful, productive lives. This and numerous other studies on resilience (see for example, Benard 2004; Ungar 2012) pointed to the need to identify, use and protect the assets of children and youth in contexts of adversity, and promote supportive engagement with others.

Relevant Classroom Instruction, School Management and Community and Parental-School Involvement: Results from a meta-study of education interventions in the United States (Zins et al. 2007) have found that the programs that correlate with the most positive effects across academic, social and emotional skills are directly implemented by school staff within their core instructional and management activities, not implemented by outside actors—researchers, university students, counselors—or outside the regular classroom and school practices. These studies stress that socioemotional components can no longer be an “add-on” or “complement” to academic learning, but are an inherent and enabling component to school success—for all students, but especially for those in contexts of adversity, risk and stress.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has done much research in this area. For example, a review of 80 nationally available school-based programs in the United States (34 percent of which formally integrate socioemotional skills in the school curricula) found that 83 percent of these programs produced academic gains (CASEL 2003). Another landmark study assessed 213 social and emotional support programs for 270,034 students (Durlak, et al. 2011). These programs were integrated into the core instructional and management activities of schools such as classroom instruction, school management, extra-curricular activities, and parental and community participation. The study found improved social and emotional skills and positive engagement among education actors, and also reflected an 11 percentile-point gain in achievement. An earlier meta-analysis (Payton, et al. 2007) of 317 socioemotional programs involving a sample of 324,303 students found improvement in achievement scores by 11 percentile points in children without pre-defined behavioral problems and 17 percentile points in at-risk children.

Family support and involvement in schools has also been correlated with high student academic performance (Benard 2004; Christenson and Havy 2004; Rumberger 1995). It becomes even more important in contexts of adversity, conflict and violence. Studies have found that in Afghanistan, where more than 8,000 schools have community-based management committees (called Shuras), Glad and Hakim (2009) found that the participation of mothers and fathers—and other community members—not only creates a positive school climate but also

protects schools from attacks. A study of 10 community driven development programs in seven Sub-Saharan countries found positive contributions to social cohesion, although positive and negative impacts depended on the context of each case study (King, Samii, and Snilsveit 2010). Also, school-community participation can contribute to school success through relevant learning expectations and support (Bryan and Henry 2008; Barrera-Osorio, et al. 2009). In post-civil war El Salvador and Nicaragua, parental involvement in school management proved to support improvement in standardized test scores (Barrera-Osorio, et al. 2009).

Education Systems Resilience Alignment: Education systems in contexts of adversity would do well to support the identification and mitigation of risks faced by students; the identification, use and protection of assets in education communities and; the relevant school-community supports for children and youth in contexts of adversity. Support from this must come from the system level in the form of resilience-relevant policies, programs, and human, financial and material resources. A case study of the education reform in Rwanda after the 1994 genocide found explicit reference to the role of the education system in “creating a culture of peace, emphasizing positive non-violent national values, and promoting the universal values of justice, peace, tolerance, respect for others, solidarity and democracy” (Arden and Claver 2011:7). Equally, in post-conflict countries around the world (e.g. Guatemala, El Salvador, Nepal, Afghanistan, Central African Republic and Madagascar), education systems have proactively provided the structures to sustain the participation of parents and communities in schools. This has been done through enacting the legal status of community schools, providing financial support to pay teachers and school maintenance, integrating procedures for creating community-based school committees, supporting school improvement plans, and providing per-capita based grants (Barrera-Osorio, et al. 2009). These are only examples of the different ways education systems, structures and services can align to resilience-fostering elements in education settings.

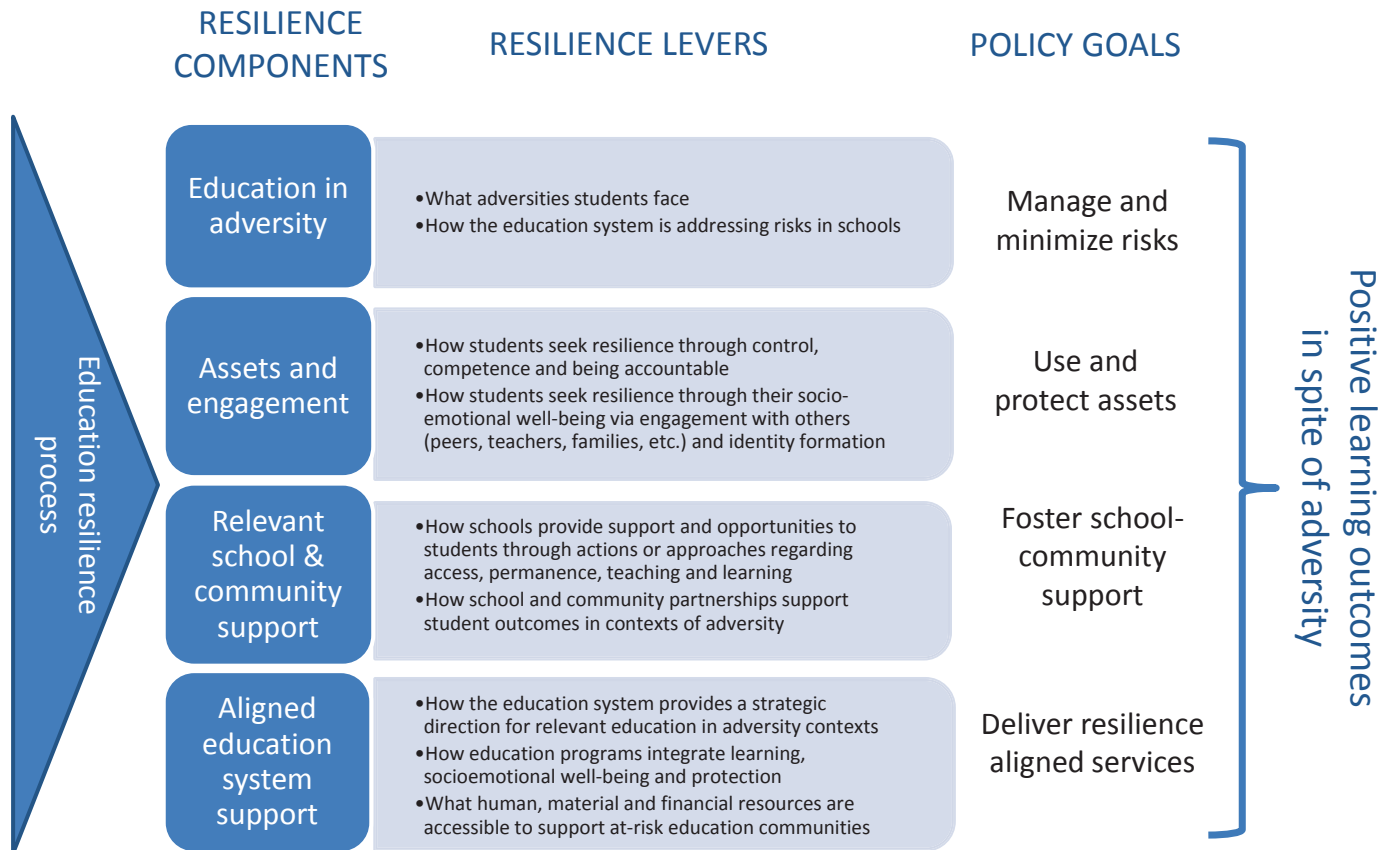
How is ERA Promoting a Resilience Approach in Education Systems?

Based on this evidence, the ERA Program proposes a four-level integrated process and puts forward corresponding associated policy goals (illustrated in the figure below). The first two components aim at better understanding the adversities experienced by education communities (students, parents, teachers and education administrations), but also grasps their assets and engagement processes. It is precisely these individual assets and opportunities for group engagement that can



foster recovery, competence and social cohesion. The third and fourth components consider how schools and education systems can mitigate the previously identified risks and foster the resilience assets and engagement processes in education communities. ERA tools related to this framework help collect local resilience evidence

to inform in-country dialogue and decision-making on how schools and communities can foster resilience, and how education systems can deliver relevant services in contexts of adversity. Through a resilience approach, education services can be made relevant to learners in difficult contexts and potentially transform adversity into opportunity.



Source: Author.

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For a complete list of references that informed the development of this paper please see the ERA Program's framework paper, What Matters Most for Students in Contexts of Adversity (available at <http://www.worldbank.org/education/resilience>).

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