

**Resilience and Hope Theory:
An Expanded Paradigm for Learning Disabilities Research**

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Hope as an empirical paradigm (Snyder 2002) has unique significance for understanding the resilience resources for students with learning disabilities. These students are identified by their deficits, difficulties and disabilities. Resilience research aims at identifying the sources of students' hope and personal energy for changing their achievements, well being and future adjustment. By bringing together resilience motives emerging from four international-symposium studies on the resilience new research trends, the goals of this commentary are to explicate core elements of the construct in order to enhance conceptual clarity and explore sources of students' hope for positive outcomes with interventional implications.

Resilient paradigm for LD

Learning challenges and performance heterogeneity among students with learning disabilities highlighted the significant contribution of the new trends in resilience research. The resilient paradigm grew out of the dissatisfaction with the predominant view that underestimated the capacities of young people for growth and well-being by focusing on their deficits rather than on their developmental potentials. This alternative approach includes strong defining assumptions about the critical predictors that have to be identified if we want to accurately capture the full potential of young people to learn and to thrive in diverse settings (Damon 2004) regardless of their individual disabilities.

Changes in the conceptualization of resilience

Early research on resilience considered it a "remarkable aptitude", a trait that only few individuals possessed. Currently, resiliency has been recognized to emerge from the "everyday magic" of ordinary normative human resources and thus it has clear implications for promoting competence among individuals at risk and for intervention theory (Masten 2001). Resilience can be considered as positive and unexpected outcomes - characterized by particular patterns of functional behavior despite risk, or as the dynamic process of adaptation that involves interaction between a range of risk and protective factors. This differentiation reflects a critical theoretical move from the traditional trait conceptualization that focused interest on the positive and normative developmental outcomes in the face of risk and challenging conditions. The proposed dynamic construct focuses scientific interest on examining processes of adaptation to a setting that involves interactions between a wide range of risk and

protective factors, looking for inner energy resources and external energizing factors (Beasley, Thompson et al. 2003).

This focus on dynamic processing instead of stable traits prompts an in-depth exploration for the identification of predictors of these processes, demonstrating the contribution of the hope theory, and has special value for the learning disabilities' research (Margalit 2004).

Hope theory

Hope has been defined by Snyder (2002) as a learned thinking pattern, a set of beliefs and thoughts, involving two relatively distinct ways of thinking about a goal: Agentic thinking involves thought related to one's successful determination about reaching goals (e.g., "I meet the goals that I set for myself"); whereas pathways thinking involves thoughts about one's effective abilities to pursue different means of obtaining goals ("I can think of many ways to get what I want"). However, hope is also one's belief in the ability to pursue goals. This belief is postulated to lead directly to corresponding hopeful behaviors that, in turn, strengthen hopeful thought (Shorey, Snyder et al. 2002). There are reciprocal relations between hopeful thinking and achievements in different areas (Shorey, Snyder et al. 2002; Snyder, Lopez et al. 2003). To engage in such thinking it is necessary to first establish goals. Second, hopeful thinking requires approaching with effective pathways for reaching the desired goals. Third, we need the motivation to use the pathways that will bring us the goals.

Hope theory is different from global – romantic wishful thinking. The scientific construct of hope is complex and challenging, creative and sometimes dangerous – making the individual more vulnerable through nurturing unreachable hopes (Snyder, Lopez et al. 2003). Hoping can be deeply personal, or interpersonal – requiring the assistance of others, and demanding reaching out for help. It may be nurtured in different social contexts – such as school or family that may serve as protective factors. Hope enables children to set valued goals, to see the means to achieve those goals, and to find the drive to make those goals happen ((Snyder 2002). Throughout their school years, students are faced with an array of increasingly important and difficult choices and challenges. These range from deciding what to do for the elementary school project, if and where to go to college, and the best occupation to pursue, to name but a few (Snyder, Feldman et al. 2002).

Hope paradigm reflects the capability to derive pathways to desired goals, and to motivate oneself via agency thinking to use those pathways. Higher hope consistently is related to better outcomes in academics, athletics, physical health, psychological adjustment, and psychotherapy (Snyder 2002). Hope is also related to positive affect and perceived control (Curry, Snyder et al. 1997). These two components - the self-perceptions that children can produce routes to desired goals (the pathways component), along with the motivation to use those goals (the agency component) (Snyder 2002) are reciprocal, additive and positively related, although they are not synonymous.

In line with the proposed paradigm shift, resilience refers to the dynamic process of positive adaptation, in the context of significant adversity. Thus, two critical conditions are implicit within this construct:

- Exposure to a significant threat or severe adversity.
- Individual variations in the responses to adversity.

The dynamic interactions between personal (inner) and environmental (contextual) factors may modify the children's responses to adversity, predicting their hope for change, their ability to adapt through various developmental paths regardless of major assaults on the developmental processes and expectations for well being (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). In line with this conceptualization of resilience as dynamic and unpredicted processes, recent genetic studies have added to the complexity of the construct by demonstrating that resilience may be considered partly heritable (Kim-Cohen, Moffitt et al. 2004). This study suggests that protective processes operate through both genetic and environmental factors, and the genetic characteristics of the individual predict the nature of the emerging environmental forces. Thus, even though the research interest is focused on processes and potential for changes, it is clear that intervention planning should take into consideration the basic traits that through interacting with environmental factors, will find unique expressions and processes.

In line with research interest in recognizing predictors -- individual differences -- for adjustment and well being, yet without denying the critical role of traits, disabilities and difficulties in the identification of students with learning disabilities, the differential and interactional roles of students' self-perceptions will be discussed as mediated through environmental support or interfering processes, and

environmental attributions. We shall try to explore the students' hope for success, through negotiating their self identity and motivation with environmental processes (Van de Vliert, Huang et al. 2004).

Our goals are to exemplify these trends in the resilience paradigm through discussing the studies that were presented at the International Resilience Symposium (consisting of researchers from four countries - United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Israel) at the 2003 IARLD meeting in Bangor.

Resilience and well-being

A comprehensive literature survey on resilience (Olsson, Bound et al. 2003) that reviewed published studies about adolescents aged 12- 18-years old, between the years 1990 - 2000 showed two major domains: (1) risk factors and setting, and (2) protective mechanisms. Recently research has moved from conceptualizing resilience as an outcome to studying it as a process leading to growth and well being. The use of the concept emotional well-being as a marker of functionality is a particularly perplexing issue, calling for clear definition. Considerable data suggested that young people may function well under high stress and challenging conditions, and in addition to their age-appropriate performance they may experience higher levels of emotional distress compared to their low stress peers (Luthar 1991). Luthar (1991) has suggested that a resilient individual may not necessarily be devoid of distressing emotion, but can show successful coping, regardless of the presence of such emotion. An attempt to understand the mechanisms or processes that act to modify the impact of a risk setting, and to explore the developmental process by which young people successfully adapt, necessitates in-depth understanding of the meaning of well-being.

Acknowledging the complexity of the well-being construct, two broad trends in psychological research have to be considered (Ryan and Deci 2001) – eudaimonic well-being and hedonic well-being.

- Eudaimonic well-being reflects the extent to which individuals experience high levels of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance. This view has been called eudaimonism (Waterman 1993), conveying the belief that well-being consists of fulfilling or realizing one's daimon or true nature.

- Hedonic well-being is exemplified as the individuals' affective and cognitive evaluation of their lives, consisting of the following components: pleasure and happiness, life satisfaction, frequent pleasant emotions, and infrequent unpleasant emotions.

Waterman (Waterman 1993) stated that, whereas happiness is hedonically defined, the eudaimonic conception of well-being calls upon people to live in accordance with their daimon, or true self. He suggested that eudaimonia occurs when people's life activities are most congruent or meshing with deeply held values and are holistically or fully engaged. Hedonic well-being emphasizes positive affect as the defining feature of well-being, while the eudaimonic well-being emphasizes that purpose, growth, actualization of human potentials and mastery may or may not be accompanied by feeling good, as presented by the hedonic approach (Kahneman, Diener et al. 1999). The study of eudaimonic well-being has special value for the research on LD including its conceptualization of basic needs (Ryan and Deci 2001).

Basic needs

Deci and Ryan (Deci and Ryan 2000) proposed three basic psychological needs for predicting growth, integrity and well being:

- Autonomy
- Competence
- Relatedness

The need for autonomy refers to behavior that is congruent with one's volition, abiding interests and values. The need for competence refers to the individual's sense of mastery, capability, and self-confidence. The need for relatedness refers to the feeling of being connected to, belonging with others and being cared for (Ryan 2004, July).

Autonomy and Competence

Autonomy and competence are both basic needs, tapping the individuals' focus on self perception. The need for experiencing competence and self worth was presented as a key concept in each one of the four manuscripts. Weiner et al.'s study (this issue) demonstrates the differential self-awareness of children with ADHD and LD to their unique difficulties. In their conclusion they wrote "One of the

distinguishing features of mental health is that healthy individuals have a positive view of their self worth, or high self-esteem, a clear understanding of their adequacy in specific domains (e.g., academic ability, social acceptance), or self-concept and view their problems as controllable, modifiable, and circumscribed". In predicting resilience, this study clearly demonstrates the accumulative model of risks, showing that students with co-morbidity between ADHD and LD may be considered a more vulnerable group than children with only one of these conditions. The ADHD group expressed lower self-perceptions regarding behavioral conduct, preoccupation with dilemmas of control and autonomy, and the subgroup with LD were aware of their academic difficulties and expressed lower academic self-concept.

The study documents that co-occurring ADHD with LD functioned as a predictor for lower self-perceptions and distressed accompanying mood ("feeling sad most of the time"). The students' self awareness in this study also showed that the current methodological approach, that was able to normalize the students' problems, made it more acceptable to them to disclose their difficulties, and suggested the advantage of this approach to promote positive change.

Stone's study (this issue) explored predictors of competence for high school students with LD, through examining the relation of support to global and academic self-concept, and focused attention on the critical role that educational and social environments may play in promoting self-perceptions of competence and personal worth. The differentiating results that showed the similarity in the self perceptions of general competence among students with and without LD, yet the lower scores of academic self-concept among students with LD further validates the students' ability at the adolescence age-stage to capsule their academic difficulties, a factor that may predict their resilient potential. This study emphasizes the need to further identify factors that predict self concept and resilience, by showing that social support predicts smaller variance for the LD group than the comparison group even though no significant differences were found between the levels of general self competence. The centrality of parental support in predicting self concept emphasizes the importance of relatedness, yet the possible dilemma about the students' autonomy at adolescence should be further explored. Probably different factors play a critical role in predicting self worth of students with LD, as will be mentioned in the Relatedness paragraph.

Meltzer et al (this issue), in a cross-sectional study added the developmental perspective to the competence awareness (in terms of academic self-concept) at two

age groups (elementary and middle school students) and its relations to their effort and strategy use. The results documented that the consistent and continuous difficulties were expressed by differentiating between the amount of effort invested by students who felt competent and reported high self perception. The students with lower self concept, and decreased sense of competence reported their decreased effort among the older group.

Chapman et al's study (this issue) show in his longitudinal study the impact of poor reading behaviours and inadequate teaching approaches on the developing of lower competence perceptions. The negative self perceptions as a learner and students' feelings of learned helplessness, negative expectations, lowered motivation, and limited practice have been associated with ongoing failure. Poor performance in reading appear to be associated not only with poor reading self-concept, but also with more generalized negative academic self-concepts, and with self-efficacy in reading, spelling, and math.

Tur Kaspas and Weisel's study did not examine the children's sense of competence, but explored the competence evaluation by significant adults in their environment – the teachers. It may be concluded that different aspects of competence awareness are provided by these studies, at different age groups and environments, focusing interest on the role of relatedness as a basic need in explaining resilience.

Relatedness

The importance of 'relatedness' for predicting resilience has been commonly accepted by several researches, considering it an essential predictor for well-being and adjustment (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Ryan 2004, July). Others have suggested that having stable, satisfying relationships is a general resilient factor across the lifespan (Mikulincer and Florian 1998). Attachment conceptualization, considering the importance of the secure base construct for personality development, as well as studies of individuals who related their higher-quality relationships with well-being, emphasizes the central role of relations and social support. Reis et al (Reis, Sheldon et al. 2000) further showed that within-person, day-to-day variations in feelings of relatedness, over a two-week period, predicted daily indicators of well-being, including positive affect and vitality. Data were also gathered concerning the type of interactions that fostered relatedness and, in turn, well-being. People experienced greater relatedness when they felt understood, engaged in meaningful dialog, were

provided with social support and yet felt autonomous. Through the discussion of relatedness, studies explored the ecological impact in different environments such as families, academic environments and peers.

Stone's study has clarified the predictive role of social support at school. He demonstrates the differential role of social support in predicting self-concept and academic success among students with and without LD. In line with attachment and relatedness paradigms, parent support was identified a significant factor for predicting self-concept in both groups of students with and without LD. Yet, the fact that peer support played a significant role in predicting self-concept only for the comparison group should be further considered. From early age both groups of students treat parents as their secure base, and parental support has been considered important and a basis for learning and experimenting relatedness. The increased needs of students with LD for prolonged and consistent help by adults is revealed through Stone's results that reflect the unique and complex role of parents for these students. Indeed the amount of social support did not differentiate between the two groups, yet the students with LD did not consider their peers' support as a predictor for their views of themselves. Recent research further supports the centrality of parental social support in predicting behavioral and emotional problems (Windle and Mason 2004), calling for additional studies for examining students' academic self-concept when confronted with developmental challenges, and in order to promote their autonomy development and resilience.

Relatedness can be understood within different environments and from different perspectives. The focus of Tur-Kaspa and Weisel's study (this issue) was on the attribution processes of teachers, examining the effects of labeling and contact on teachers' causal attributions for low-achieving (LA) students' academic performance in two educational settings -- special classes versus general education classes. Teachers' beliefs have been conceptualized as related to the students' self-beliefs. Attributions are defined as causal explanations that individuals give to their own behavior, others' behavior, and events. A comprehensive meta-analytic review of attribution research (Rudolph, Roesch et al. 2004) documented the attribution for two groups of behaviors: providing help and aggression. In addition, thoughts and beliefs, together with their accompanying affective reactions have been considered influential in helping behavior as well as in anger reactions. Thus the results of Tur-Kaspa and Weisel's study are important to exemplify the dynamic processes between risk and

protective factors, demonstrating the negative impact of the special education labels (expressed in lowered teachers' expectations from the students), yet showing the mediating role of relations and personal contacts of these beliefs. They showed that the causal attributions of teachers with contact were based on their students' performance as their attributions demonstrated the violation of stereotypical bias. Teachers with contact attributed more controllable causes to the failure of students from special classes than did teachers without contact, considering these students as having control over their success and failure, and being able to change their achievements in the future.

On the other hand, teachers who had no contact with students from special classes based their causal attribution on stereotypical perceptions. The critical role of the communication and contacts among teachers and students in predicting achievements (Postlethwaite and Haggarty 2002) demonstrates the importance of teachers' attribution for their students' expectation. However, the authors may add an important link to these results by adding students' attribution to the teachers' attribution.

Coping research examines why several individuals, when faced with stressful situations are better able to manage their actions and emotions in ways that increase the likelihood of avoiding negative consequences. These individuals tend to employ coping strategies that are more likely to yield positive growth (Henry 2004). Coping is not a static reaction to adversity, but rather encompasses the range of actions and thoughts with which one deals with situations. The process encompasses an emotional-management component as well as a goal-directed action component. The emotional-regulation and management component has an important balancing role in maintaining a sense of positive outlook thus sustaining the goal-directed motivation. In order to gain maximum benefit in recovering from stress the individual typically employs both emotional and cognitive-rational coping processes. Appropriate emotional management energizes positive goal directed motivation and can contribute information value. Emotional regulation without the rational-action component is likely to reduce the feelings of stress, but will limit the realization of opportunities inherent in the situation through interaction or avoidance.

Summary

The goals of this commentary were to point at the multi-dimensional structure and the overall design emerging from the studies presented in this symposium. These researches exemplify new trends in resilient research that move from emphasizing the predictive role of individuals' characteristics and traits to the search for possible sources of personal energy that will predict hopeful thinking and effort investment among students with LD.

In line with the hope theory (Snyder, Lopez et al. 2003), the consideration of resilient processes as 'ordinary magic' (Masten 2001) was related to the results of the studies. Several factors contributed to resilient results such as attributions of teachers, students' differential self awareness to their abilities and difficulties, and the confidence in social support from different sources: (i.e., parents, peers and case managers), when the need for relatedness and help was established. In order to predict the sources of students' personal energy for effort investment and persistence, inner and external factors interact in an individualistic manner, and the significance of the contextual conditions expressed in classroom relations as well as the adequacy of remedial approaches, quality of the social dynamics with significant adults (parents and teachers) and with peers will be critical in planning effective intervention approaches for promoting resilience.

Future research directions

This commentary considers the expression of new trends in resilient research and hope theory, discussing the results of the studies within the basic needs conceptualization, and viewing competence and relatedness as goals for promoting hope. The outcomes of these studies call for the planning of future research in the following domains:

- To develop comprehensive studies that will explore the multidimensional self-perceptions of competence and relatedness, and the interrelations within contextual conditions. The suggested research may predict resilient outcomes.
- To identify subgroups of students in order to differentiate between predictors of resilient and non-resilient students, within different environmental conditions such as different remedial methods and different educational settings.

- In order to promote insight to the developmental processes, and to demonstrate the interplay of inner and external factors on self perception and functioning, comprehensive longitudinal and cross-sectional studies are needed.

Future experimental studies that will explore the mediating role of the hope construct for students with LD within multidimensional self-perceptions that will document interactions between internal and external factors, cognitive deficits and affective factors, from students and teachers' perspective will enhance our understanding. In addition, examining the family role in supporting students with LD as well as enabling them to achieve needs for competence and autonomy is a true challenge that should not be neglected.

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