

The Future of Education

DISCUSSION BRIEF 06



**Caloundra City
Private School**

Discussion Brief

Number 06

The importance of resilience, self-regulation, and a positive attitude to lifelong learning (and how to strengthen them).

Written by Jamie Dorrington

I included a warning at the start of Discussion Brief 5 because I predicted my words would prove controversial. In doing so, I mostly had teachers in mind. In this brief, I suspect my words might prove controversial with some parents.

Previous discussion briefs made many references to the need for resilience as a part of a suite of personal qualities required to thrive in the Age of Agility. This discussion brief looks at resilience in more detail and links it to self-regulation and lifelong learning.

The highly regarded American Psychological Association (APA) has the following to say about Resilience:

Resilience is the process and outcome of **successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioural flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands.**

A number of factors contribute to how well people adapt to adversities, predominant among them:

- the ways in which individuals view and engage with the world
- the availability and quality of social resources
- specific coping strategies

- psychological research demonstrates that the resources and skills associated with more positive adaptation (i.e., greater resilience) can be cultivated and practiced.⁽ⁱ⁾

We have noted the importance of resilience if youth are to prosper in VUCA environments. Clearly, in an era plagued by instability and uncertainty, graduates must be equipped to deal with correction, failure and, from time to time, rejection. Paradoxically, we also live in an era where young people are given few opportunities to build this resilience. Marketing divisions of cosmetic, travel, and consumer goods companies are amongst many telling potential consumers that they deserve more, without explaining why. Law firms seeking new clients infer accidents are always someone else's fault. Schools have removed the word 'fail' from their lexicon and ensure that every child gets a ribbon. Absolving people from responsibility and convincing them they deserve more results in disillusionment, diminished resilience, and positions them as victims.

We know our children are going to face challenges from which they will need to bounce back, reflect, and reengage if they want to avoid the harshest consequences of 4IR. We therefore need to work together to offer them appropriate levels of support that tapers off as they move closer to graduation. We wouldn't expect them to run a marathon with no training, so why would we expect them to navigate VUCA environments, where high levels of resilience will be a key to success, with no

preparation? APA's definition included 'successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences', yet many young people are shielded from difficulties and challenges.

There is no doubt that many aspects of life have changed, but some haven't. Let's look at a few examples from school. A child does poorly on an assessment piece or knows you will be disappointed in their end of semester report. The savvy student takes steps to minimise the flack: 'Everyone else bombed the test' – there was either something wrong with the test or with the teacher (victim of someone else's ineptitude defence) ; 'I was away on the day the teacher handed out the revision sheet' (victim of circumstance defence); or 'the teacher doesn't like me' (victim of social injustice defence). We are not suggesting that anyone should be punished for a poor test result, but we are stating that condoning obfuscation represents a missed opportunity to build resilience.

Here's a few points to consider:

1. You didn't sit the test (and teachers hope you didn't do the assignment), so it's not your problem. I know this can be difficult because you desperately want your child to be happy, as do we (you and the team at CCPS). But we also want them to be successful. Happy is a short-term experience that happens soon after an event and dies away quickly. Success is a medium to long-term experience that takes time to create and lasts much longer. They will need to be highly resilient to succeed in the world of work, so building resilience is far more important than a test result. In the spirit of 'failing forward' it might be best to ask them four questions:
 - a. Are **you** happy with this result?
 - b. Do **you** believe it is the best you could do?
 - c. What could **you** have done differently to bring about the result you wanted?
 - d. How could **I (we)** help you to prepare more effectively next time?

2. Every time you are on the verge of accepting an excuse (as opposed to a reason), ask yourself: How would an ethical and kind employer, who nonetheless has reasonable expectations that (your child at age 18) will be an asset to their business, react? I don't think they will tolerate blaming others.

Seeking a competitive advantage

We understand that our children will be transitioning to a highly competitive world and need to be equipped with a set of transferable skills, including resilience and self-management (self-regulation). The World Economic Forum conducted a survey of global companies that resulted in a list of Top Skills for 2025:

Top 15 Skills for 2025	
1	Analytical thinking and innovation
2	Active learning and learning strategies
3	Complex problem-solving
4	Critical thinking and analysis
5	Creativity, originality and initiative
6	Leadership and social influence
7	Technology use, monitoring and control
8	Technology design and programming
9	Resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility
10	Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation
11	Emotional intelligence
12	Troubleshooting and user experience
13	Service orientation
14	Systems analysis and evaluation
15	Persuasion and negotiation

Figure 1 Top 15 skills for 2025 according to the World Economic Forum⁽ⁱⁱ⁾

Resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility were placed 9th, while over 55% of respondents stated that Self-management was increasing in importance, after Critical thinking and analysis and problem solving and above the need for Technology use and development.

An article called The Top Ten Findings on Resilience and Engagement reported results from a survey of over 1000 people in each of 25 countries. The article appeared in MIT Sloan Management Review in March 2021.⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ The researchers defined Resilience as ‘the capacity of an individual to withstand, bounce back from, and work through challenging circumstances or events’, while engagement was defined as ‘the emotional state of mind that causes people to do their best work sustainably’.^(iv) Data they collected allowed them to classify people into four quadrants using the criteria; Highly resilient vs. Vulnerable, and Fully Engaged vs. ‘Just Coming to Work’ (not engaged). The results presented in Figure 2 below were interesting.

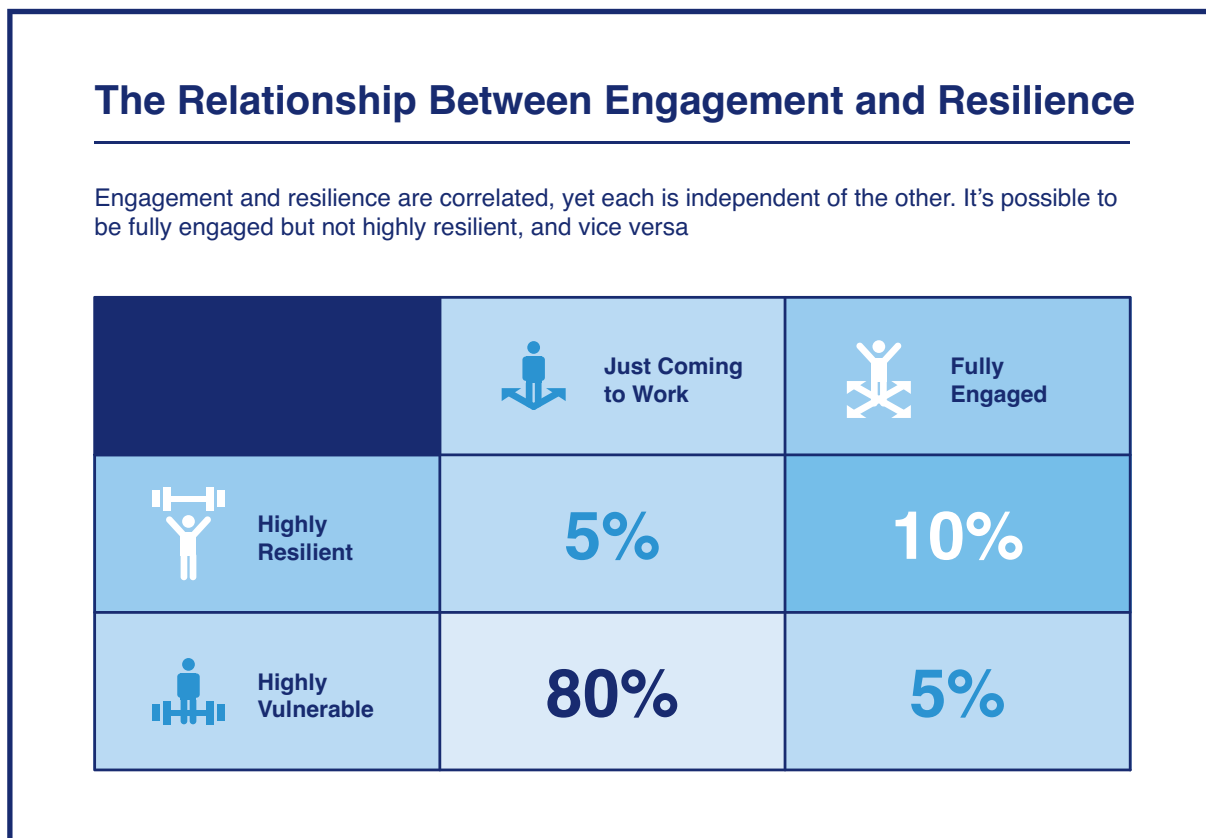


Figure 2 Findings from research into engagement and resilience by ADP Research Institute.

The most valuable employees have high levels of resilience and are fully engaged. The research revealed that only 10% of the employees fit into this quadrant. The majority (a shocking 80%) were classified as both vulnerable (lacking resilience) AND Just Coming to Work (not fully engaged). This is why employers cannot find the people they need. Ideally, we want to equip graduates to operate in the quadrant currently occupied by only 10% of the workforce.

(These researchers rejected the notion that Generation Z are less resilient than older generations. ‘Resilience’, they claimed, ‘is much more a function of exposure to challenges, being on a team, and trusting one’s colleagues than it is of age’.^(v) I agree there is nothing in the genetic makeup of youth that makes them less resilient. They are just given fewer opportunities to develop and exhibit it. Their problem is environmental, not generic.)

We do our children a disservice when we cocoon them from challenges that build resilience and lead to personal growth. We need, therefore, to change our strategy from shielding students to one where we help them develop the perspective and perseverance they will need to succeed. Learning from failure and bouncing back from disappointments will promote better mental health and assist with the development of other transferable skills. We should all work together to position CCPS graduates in the Highly Resilient and Fully Engaged quadrant. Clearly, people in that quadrant will have a competitive advantage. They will also be happier and more successful in work and life in general.

A lurking threat – the Age of Disillusionment

The World Economic Forum’s Global Risk Survey 2021 made the following observation:

A doubly disrupted generation of youth is emerging in an age of lost opportunity. While the digital leap forward unlocked opportunities for some youth, many are now entering the workforce in an employment ice age. Young adults worldwide are experiencing their second major global crisis in a decade. Already exposed to environmental degradation, the consequences of the financial crisis, rising inequality, and disruption from industrial transformation, this generation faces serious challenges to their education, economic prospects and mental health. According to the GRPS, the risk of “youth disillusionment” is being largely neglected by the global community, but it will become a critical threat to the world in the short term. Hard-fought societal wins could be obliterated if the current generation lacks adequate pathways to future opportunities—and loses faith in today’s economic and political institutions.

There is a subtle difference between promoting optimism and leaving youth with the impression

that everything will be fine if they just keep breathing. The optimism we want to see is based on youth understanding that their prospects are very good if they are prepared to learn, collaborate, create and be resilient. It is going to require their active engagement. From my perspective, this means placing students in the driver’s seat as soon as they have the skills and attitudes to accept that role. Of course, as with all new drivers, they will need to be correctly trained, encouraged, and closely monitored until they are ready to go solo.

We referred to the old social contract, in which application at school and university was a guarantee of a start in a great career, being breached. The other social contract is something peculiar to wealthy developed economies. It implies that being born in such a country is a guarantee of future prosperity. Truth is that the fortunes of countries wax and wane. For example, Argentina and Venezuela were two of the richest countries in the world in the 1950s, but now sit much lower on the rankings. Many forecasters agree that China, once considered a poor country, will be the world’s wealthiest country by 2030. We cannot assume that the wealth experienced by previous generations of Australians will be experienced by tomorrow’s adults. Just breathing Australian air will not be good enough.

We don’t have to adopt the child rearing practices of Ancient Sparta to prepare our children for the challenges ahead. We simply need to stop running interference and allow them to experience the natural consequences of their own action or inaction. Of course, we must make exceptions in cases of abuse or unprofessional conduct, but every school now has policies and procedures requiring them to take these matters very seriously, as they should.⁽¹⁾ These instances are a far cry from running interference when a teacher corrects a student or gives them a disappointing grade. We should all remember that, except for high-stakes exams, it is not the grade that matters the most, it’s the growth that occurs in the individual. Growth

¹ Schools should have processes in place to deal with disputed grades. These can include blind marking by a teacher from another school.

with respect to proficiency and resilience are paramount. We agree that young students need appropriate levels of protection and support, but as they approach graduation, they really need to be confident and resilient enough to be encouraged, but not rescued.

Humans are innately resilient. If you want proof, just turn on the SBS news tonight and witness how the people of Ukraine are reacting to extreme violence. Look at your history books or documentary programs to see how the English responded during the blitz, or how the Russians behaved when Stalingrad was under siege. Speak to a cancer survivor, or to a Paralympian. Learn about the Afghan girls who are defying threats and demanding their right to be educated. There are countless examples of people bouncing back from huge setbacks provided they are willing to 'own' the problem.

Self-regulation

'Owning the problem' is the first step towards self-regulation which, as the name implies, means taking responsibility for and control of one's own behaviour. I have been a fan of Stephen Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Effective People for many years. With over 40 million copies sold in 40 different languages, this famous book has been used to develop company executives for decades. What many people don't realise is that the book, which is easy to read and understand, has valuable lessons for everyone, including teachers, parents, and senior students.

The first three habits are Be Proactive (think before you act), Begin with the End in Mind (understand what kind of person you want to be rather than stumble along aimlessly) and Put First Things First (prioritise tasks and focus on those that are important before they become urgent). Mastering these three habits gives the individual a Private Victory (mastery of self). The next three habits are Think Win/Win or No Deal, Seek First to Understand Then to be Understood, and Synergise. Mastering these provides a Public Victory (leading others). The 7th Habit is Sharpen the Saw (make sure you maintain production

capability by devoting time to exercise, reflection etc.).

Self-regulation is associated with the first three habits. A self-regulating student set their own goals, choose their response to circumstances, and prioritise what they believe is important before it becomes urgent (e.g. they won't leave assignments till the night before they are due unless they believe them to be unimportant). These skills can be taught and can eventually become habits if the student wants to learn them. As with most forms of learning, the will comes before the skill. A good program to strengthen self-regulation will first identify the areas where the student requires most help, which is most often organisation. This process requires one on one coaching by a human, not a computer. This role will be revisited in Discussion Brief 10.

Programs to promote the development of personal mastery/private victory

There are several programs and resources available to help develop personal mastery in students and staff. Angela Duckworth's Characterlab (<https://characterlab.org/>) provides resources to promote Grit, Franklin Covey Education operates a program for youth development called The Leader in Me (<https://www.leaderinme.org/>), and Positive Education resources are available from the Positive Education Schools Association (<https://www.pesa.edu.au/>). Having presented these, nothing has the same impact as modelling behaviours at home. If you give up, your children will too. If you intervene to solve their problems you will place them in the company of 80% of employees who lack agility and are the victims of VUCA.



Extension Activity

Click on the link to the APA website. It contains several useful resources to help build resilience in people.

Pick up a copy of 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. QBD often has them for sale at a discount. If you want something more recent, read Angela Duckworth's Grit.

If you want to read a seminal work, get a copy of Viktor E. Frankle's Man's Search for Meaning.

Reference List

(i) American Psychological Association. 2022. Resilience. Accessed June 2022 at <https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience>

(ii) World Economic Forum. 2020. The Future of Jobs Report. P. 36. Accessed March 2022 at https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2020.pdf

(iii) Buckingham, M. 2021. The Top Ten Findings on Resilience and Engagement. MIT Sloan Management Review. Accessed December 2021 at <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/the-top-10-findings-on-resilience-and-engagement/>

(iv) Ibid..

(v) Ibid.

Caloundra City Private School
Pelican Waters Blvd
Pelican Waters QLD 4551

P 07 5437 5800
E admin@ccps.qld.edu.au
www.ccps.qld.edu.au



Pelican's Nest
Early Learning Centre



City Stars
Kindergarten



Caloundra City
Private School