

Prachi Murarka

EDUC 210: Jamie Cutter

August 6, 2016

Nurturing Our Children and Ourselves: Fostering Resiliency

To encourage our children to become successful adults, we must not only teach content but foster life skills in our children. One of these skills is resiliency. Resiliency is the able to receptively encounter challenges, bounce back from adversity, and continue to meet one's chosen destiny. According to Bonnie Bernard, children need caring and support, high expectations, and participation in their home lives, schools, and communities to become resilient individuals. In addition, Steiner's education fosters a curative stance on education, taking into account different levels of health to encourage resiliency in youth.

In Steiner's methodology, the teachers take the role of "priests" setting their children on the altar of life. In early childhood, parents and teachers act as witnesses and guides for the children. The ideal teacher is often considered to have grandmother-like qualities of nurturing and caring. In early childhood education, high expectations and participation are encouraged. The teacher is embracing and yet non-interfering in most activities. Children are encouraged to become self-reliant through meaningful work such as chopping vegetables for soup, folding napkins, making bread, making wooden toys, tidying up after playtime, and washing up after outdoor play. Children are seen as capable members of the classroom community, who can translate their skills into home life.

Early childhood teachers encourage the development of primarily physical capacities in the children. The children create the school environment. They choose their play themes and games. The teachers encourage playing in an outdoor

environment and taking physical risks. Falling down is met with care, bandages, and calming lotion. The children are allowed to master their physical bodies, so they can grow in health and have physical and emotional resiliency.

During the elementary school years, Steiner encourages teachers to become authors and artists in the classroom. Regardless of ability level, children are taught to sing, play flutes and recorders, color, paint, as well as the core academic subjects. In his book *Balance in Teaching*, Steiner encourages the arts as a way to strengthen etheric or life forces. These forces encourage well-being in the child. Steiner differentiates two types of art activities: sculptural and musical. The musical arts, such as singing and playing recorder, help the child build community, learn to share and listen to others as well as themselves, and help foster extroversion. The sculptural arts such as using beeswax, clay, and painting help the child come in and explore their own talents and qualities. With each of these arts, Steiner encourages a balance, and a breathing—rhythm, as well as strength.

In early childhood and elementary school, Steiner schools work with the perspective that rhythm replaces strength. When children know what is happening and when, and there is a natural order, they feel more comfortable, safe, and at ease in their environment. When chaos or upsets occur, such as a substitute teacher having to come in, the daily rhythm of the classroom keeps the children going without too much of a disruption. Similarly, in Ayurveda, keeping *vata*, or the wind/space principle in balance fosters contentment, physical, mental, and emotional strength, and prevents burnout.

In teaching subjects, Steiner encourages that thinking be combined with feeling and willing (head, heart, and hands). In academics, the feeling life is

considered essential to the subject matter. For example, teaching botany will be combined with doing a study, drawing of a flower, or working with clay to metamorphose a seed into a flower, fruit, and then back. Students will also be encouraged to act or dance in ways that embody the themes. There are high expectations and many different ways for students to participate in their academics.

When we speak of participation in the middle school years, Moll's "Funds of Knowledge" and Raffini's "Winners without Losers: Structures and Strategies for Increasing Student Motivation to Learn" support the use of materials that are meaningful and relate 'to the child's present experience, powers, and needs' (Raffini 242). Teachers show that they care when they value what they teach and who they are teaching it to. Knowing how a particular subject will enhance the life and values of the their students is imperative to teaching. Furthermore, when a teacher creates activities that value children's innate knowledge and sociocultural knowledge from homes, they give them opportunities to engage. Only when a student is motivated to learn can a teacher have high expectations. The teacher has to make material relevant and meaningful to encourage children to benefit from the classroom.

Connecting to the arts and sociocultural knowledge are the main two pedagogical tools I will use in my classroom instruction. The ways I intend to be a critically conscious educator and utilize sociocultural knowledge in my classroom are

- having individual, partner, group , and full class activities and assignments;
- singing songs from students' cultural backgrounds;
- creating activities and math problems with their names and hobbies;
- creating opportunities for parents to come in as speakers, guests, or volunteers;
- have opportunities for cooking and crafts;

have stories, narratives, and biographies reflective of the children's ethnic backgrounds, sexual identities, and hobbies;

celebrate important festivals present in my children's home communities, and invite parents and community members to participate as appropriate;

have images of heroes, heroines, people of color, and famous LGBTQIA personalities;

invite children to bring in favorite non-media related items from home for show-and-tell;

invite children to decorate the inside of their desks with photos, or favorite quotes;

prevent bullying and have spaces for conflict resolution weekly; and

create a safe space, in which diversity and different cultures and view points are celebrated!

As an educator, it is important for me to develop my own resiliency.

According to Steiner, there is a pedagogical law at work in the classroom, in which the teacher's subtle bodies work to form the children's subtle and physical bodies. In this case, a teacher's etheric body (sense of general well-being and life force) affect the development of a child's physical organs, and the teacher's astral body (mental/emotional well-being) affect a child's sense of well-being. Many of us have experienced how a teacher's bad mood or criticism can affect the feeling of well-being and safety in children. The student's relationship to a teacher can affect whether the child wants to go to school, or feels ill and is unmotivated to attend classes. Therefore, it is imperative for me to develop my own resiliency and health.

This year is a bridging year for me, where I am putting into place many of the habits and skills I will need to become a healthy, happy, and successful human being and teacher. This means, self-care becomes of utmost importance. I am taking dance

classes and yoga to build my physical stamina. I am learning to cook larger meals so I can save energy and still have nutrient rich food. I'm building in regular massages into my budget. For my etheric health, I am doing my best to meditate every day, take walks in nature, sleep around 10 PM, use flower essences, wear protective lotions and stones, and do energetic dance (eurythmy). For my astral body (mental/emotional health), I am taking time to journal, read spiritual books in the evening, go to satsang—my spiritual community weekly, and take singing lessons. I also hope to begin psychotherapy again.

High expectations and too much participation are challenges for me. I tend to be extremely enthusiastic and perfectionist. As I go through this year, I really am doing my best to understand my priorities and create a sense of balance. This often means skimming articles, asking for extensions, and having boundaries in group projects. I also do my best to find where the readings bring me joy. What questions are interesting and how can I explore this more in a way that is meaningful for me. To increase my own participation, I am constantly looking for activities and ideas that bring me joy and understanding, and connect them with our materials.

Overall, the health of teachers and students are intimately combined. We are members of larger communities, as well as schools and classrooms. Only when the teacher is healthy and supported can they really foster resiliency in their children. By taking care of ourselves, we take care of each other and become role models for our students.

Bibliography

Bernard, B. (1991) *Fostering Resiliency in Kids: Protective Factors in the Family, School, and Community*. San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development.

McDonough, K. (2009) "Pathways to critical consciousness: A first year teacher's engagement with issues of race and equity." *Journal of Teacher Education*.

Moll, L.C., Amanti, C., Neff, D. & Gonzalez, N. (1992) *Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. Theory into practice*.

Raffini, J. (1993) *Winners Without Losers: Structures and Strategies for Increasing Student Motivation to Learn*. 1993.