# Personal Skills for Effective Learning

# **Annie Greeff**

# **The Resilience Series**

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Annie Greeff

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## Introduction

#### **Fostering resilience**

Resilience is a broad concept, which includes the characteristics you need as an individual, your connection with others, and the support given by the environment you live in. In fact, when people develop resiliency traits and strategies on different levels, these protective strategies act together to create a strong, healthy cohesive society. The aim is to create an understanding of the interconnectedness of individuals, groups and society as a whole and thereby stimulate a sense of social responsibility while also acknowledging that each person can make a difference.

You can find out more about what resilience means in Unit 1, page 10.

Resilient people seem to have protective/support factors in three dimensions:

- individual
- relationships
- organization and environment.

The ideal strategy for fostering resilience is to develop coping skills within the individual and to ensure that the person experiences connection with others within a supportive environment. When support factors within and outside the person act in synergy, they 'automatically' compensate for the areas in which the person experiences difficulty. It is encouraging to know that when a person functions within a protective environment, over time, positive qualities form a stronger bond than that of the adverse influences.

If extreme old age (over ninety) is the ultimate proof of resiliency, research findings based on work done by Thomas Perls and Margery Hutter Silver (1999) indicate that the following traits are typical of welladjusted, happy individuals in extreme old age:

- adaptability
- assertiveness
- sense of humour
- charisma

- involvement
- service to others
- sense of purpose
- caring relatives
- religion.

Age accelerators seem to be:

- regrets and bitterness
- detachment
- stubbornness to accept help
- compulsiveness
- emotional stress
- obesity
- alcohol consumption
- depression
- smoking
- inactivity.

We may not have control over the duration of our lives, but it is clear that we have significant control over the quality our lives, and many of the protective strategies are learnable competencies.

#### **Resilience and effective learning**

Self-esteem and social skills influence our learning abilities as they determine how we form relationships with ourselves, with others and even with information! In short, they form the basis of how we look at life. If resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity or hardship, to overcome the negative influences that block achievement, then resiliency competencies enable learners to achieve excellence and enjoyment.

## Emotional development and developing resilient learners

For young people, major emotional challenges include peer pressure and the resultant need to fit in with a group. They have a need to be accepted and to function successfully within a group. To fulfil that need they have to develop personal and interpersonal

#### INTRODUCTION

skills. When you understand and appreciate the application of what you learn, because you realize that the learning addresses your personal needs, the learning process will be more enjoyable and effective.

There is a saying that some situations are 'windows of opportunity' in terms of learning. When the learner is not ready, even the most impressive learning material may not reach its target. The opposite should also be true. If learning situations address specific needs at the right time, one could expect better results.

Typical traits in the emotional development of children in late childhood (6–11 years) seem to be the following:

- There is a desire to be part of the group and play according to rules, with the child wanting to be 'in'.
- The child experiences periods of heightened emotionality and would rather express than control their feelings.
- They can name feelings more readily.
- They thrive on praise and acceptance and have to work harder to understand and manage feelings.

Although we have to acknowledge that people develop at their own pace, broad categories offer useful guidelines. Based on the generic assumptions about this life stage, *Resilience* places strong emphasis on group-work and refining emotional competencies.

## Resilience and the National Curriculum

The Appendix on pages 189–193 contains details about how resilience aligns with the National Curriculum outcomes for PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) and Citizenship.

# **Guidelines: Activity Sheet 7**

#### I am ...

#### Learning points

It is not easy to describe ourselves, and by doing this activity young people become aware of themselves and their unique set of qualities. This activity is important for forming a realistic self-concept and self-appreciation.

#### Comments

Using coloured pens and pencils, water colours, clippings from magazines and so on, the children design their own emblems or logos. The sharing of something that not a lot of people know about is based on the Johari window concept of self-disclosure and risk-taking, which requires people to respect each other and to treat the information shared with respect.

#### Timing

20 minutes designing emblem

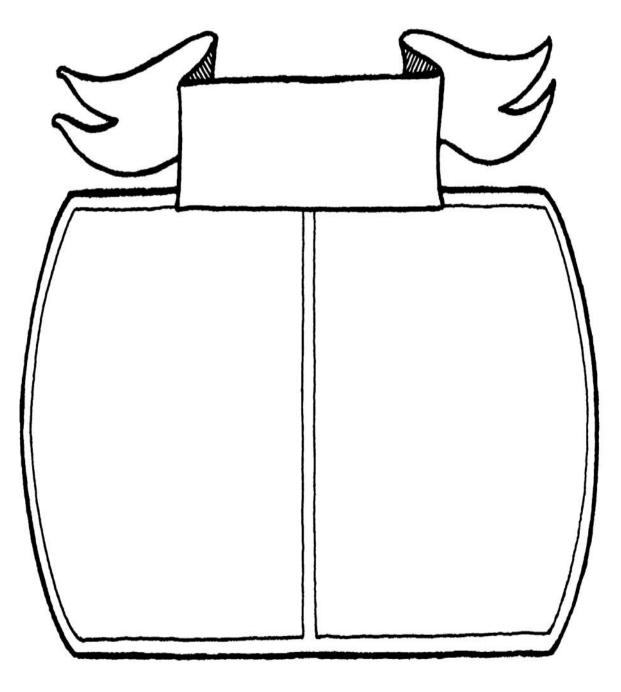
- 1-2 minutes per child sharing with group
- 2 minutes closure

## **7** I am ...

## On your own

Use the emblem below, or draw your own emblem of yourself. It is similar to the logo of a company, or a family emblem. It represents you and says something about yourself.

- Write your name in the space on the ribbon. If your name has a special meaning, write that down as well. Was there a reason why you were given a specific name?
- In the space on the left of the emblem, list or illustrate a few things you are good at.
- In the space on the right of the emblem, list or illustrate something about yourself that not many people know and that might come as a surprise to them.
- Explain to the larger group what your emblem means.



# Outline

#### Outcomes

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# Outcomes

On completion of this unit, children should be able to stick up for themselves and say how they feel without hurting others.

To be able to do this, children need to:

- understand their own emotions.
- know what caused their emotions.
- say how they feel.
- feel confident expressing their needs.
- choose the right time and place to express their emotions.
- accept that they will not always receive what they ask for.
- be prepared to get feedback and handle it well.
- be sensitive to other people's feelings.
- be comfortable apologizing and asking for forgiveness if they have made a mistake.
- forgive others.

I can be myself and ask for what I want, while I keep other's needs in mind. I is OK if I have my own needs and things that are important to me apart from what others think I should do.

I can say what I think and feel.

I can make choices although everybody might not feel the same.

It is OK to make mistakes, because no one is perfect.

I can say what I think, while I also listen to what others have to say.

Mindpower (1996)

# Guidelines: Activity Sheet I

#### The telephone game

#### Learning points

Misunderstandings happen when we:

- give unclear messages.
- don't ask the right questions to check for understanding.
- do not repeat what the other person has said to ensure that we understand.

#### Comments

- With the group, discuss the gist of the activity, giving special attention to the rules.
- Instruct the large group to organize themselves in a circle.
- Show the picture below to the child starting the activity.
- When the activity is completed, show the picture to the whole group.
- Work through the questions and list the learning points.

#### Timing

1 minute introduction

- 2 minutes explaining rules and organizing group
- 3 minutes playing the game
- 3 minutes sharing learning xperiences

1 minute concluding

BISCUITS

## **1** The telephone game

## **Large group activity**

The whole group sits or stands in a circle. One person (sender) is going to start the game, and the last person (receiver) is going to tell the first person what they have heard.

#### Rules

- I You have to whisper.
- 2 You are not allowed to ask any questions.
- **3** Once you have received the message, you have to pass it on, whether you are sure of the exact words or not.

#### **First person**

Look at the picture that your teacher shows you. What do you see? Tell the next person what you see.

#### Group

Each person passes the message on to the person next to them.

#### Last person

As you are the last person, you have to tell the others what you have heard.

#### **First person**

How is the message different from the one you sent at the start of the game?

### **Large group discussion**

How can you ensure that the correct message gets to the receiver?

**Personal Skills for Effective Learning** will enable you to promote self-managed, resilient learning in your classroom. This practical workbook contains a series of easy to follow, well designed modules with full teacher's notes and instructions. The modules include: Resilence; Identity; Emotions; My World; Free to be Me; and My Time. Each module comprises an introduction, guidelines for the teacher and photocopiable worksheets. Learning points are included with the worksheets to remind students of the main focus of the exercises and to assist in understanding what they are aiming to achieve.

"... this is the book I wish I had written. Annie has fulfilled, in quite a brilliant way, the messages and direction that myself and others have been banging on about for years. A real achievement to her and a precious gift to the rest of us."

#### Roy Leighton, Writer, Broadcaster and Practitioner in Confidence and Learning

"This volume truly is a treasure chest."

Susan Moss, Professional Coactive Coach

"... contains numerous useful activities for teachers to adapt to the age of children they teach. The book will be a valuable resource for educators researching the field of emotional intelligence."

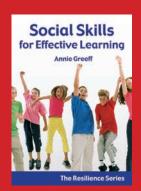
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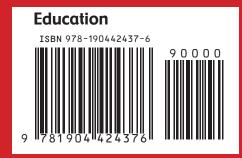


#### Also available:

**Social Skills for Effective Learning** shows you how to foster caring relationships through positive role modelling. The book includes sections on interpersonal and adaptive skills, empathy, finding solutions, conflict, moving on, money matters, and diversity.

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# Annie Greeff



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## Introduction

#### **Developing social competencies**

Today, many families live in neighbourhoods where they are afraid to let children play outside. The result is that children spend hours watching videos or TV, sending text messages or playing with a computer. Children and their parents spend less time talking to each other or visiting relatives and neighbours. Previously, these interactions were the opportunities to learn emotional skills. Now we have to find alternative methods of teaching such skills to children. The school is probably a good place to start this process, and this means that teachers will have to fulfil the roles of life coaches. What is being measured most of the time is the academic part of the curriculum, therefore the attention to cognitive or thinking skills is at the expense of emotional skills. With the strong emphasis on academic success, it requires a definite change in mindset to address emotional skills.

Paul Hawken (quoted in Crane, 2000) said:

We lead by being human. We do not lead by being corporate, by being professional or by being institutional.

In modern leadership, the leader is required to role model lifelong learning and continuous personal growth. Modern leadership implies a certain level of vulnerability, which is a result of connecting with others on a more personal level, and admitting one's own mistakes and weaknesses. The extent to which we share information about ourselves depends on the level of trust in our relationship, and requires good judgement and timing.

When working with children through the use of this book, it may be the only time during a whole day or even week that some individuals will receive focused attention. Whatever the reasons may be, many families do not have regular, constructive, highquality family interaction. Where else could young people learn or reinforce emotional competencies, if it does not happen at home?

During the work sessions on resilience, children will

be listened to and have the opportunity to express their concerns and emotions in a safe environment. When young people are more in touch and in control of their emotions, and acknowledge other people's emotions, teachers may actually reap the benefits in their classrooms! Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman (1982) said:

The simple act of paying positive attention to people has a great deal to do with productivity.

A caring relationship with a teacher gives children the motivation for wanting to succeed.

By being a caring person, the teacher acts as a role model in forming caring relationships. Most parents were not trained in emotional competencies, and traditional teacher training did not include the refinement of such skills either. However, a favourite teacher is not just an instructor for academic skills but also a confidant and becomes an inspiring role model for caring relationships.

Although it would be unreasonable to expect teachers who are already carrying a heavy work burden to also become counsellors and confidants, their influence on children's lives is indisputable. However, working with children with the purpose of developing personal and social skills will spark personal growth in both directions.

Real education consists of drawing the best out of yourself.

Mahatma Ghandi

#### Teachers as emotional caretakers

Ron Edmonds (1986), the so-called grandfather of school effectiveness research, wrote:

A school can create a coherent environment so potent that for at least six hours a day it can override almost everything else in the lives of children. Every child needs encouragement, acknowledgement and acceptance. It is amazing how many successful employees can identify at least one supportive or inspiring person who played a significant role in their personal or career development. So, too, will most people remember a special teacher who paid attention, conveyed high expectations and recognized inputs and successes.

As an investor in people, you have the power to build the self-esteem of a child. Teachers do not always get the public recognition for their work with children, and are often on the receiving end when it comes to criticism. However, by being personally involved in the development of a young person, you earn a place in the heart and life of a human being.

In leadership models, parenting and teaching, it is general knowledge that role modelling is the most effective way of changing people. Some educationalists believed that role modelling may not be the best way to teach – it may be the only way to teach! The actions of a role model are very powerful in bringing about a desired behaviour because actions do speak louder than words. However, the ideal role model is not a perfect being. Modern leadership is not synonymous with perfection - leaders can make mistakes and show their emotions. When they admit mistakes, they become more 'human' and people can associate with them. Young people can associate with less than perfect leaders. More important than anything else is for young people to know that they are loved and that somebody is there for them. Love in this context means unconditional acceptance of the person. You may not always agree with the actions and behaviours of children, but you can accept them

as people. The most beloved modern leaders seem to be vulnerable and less than perfect. It is their warmth and caring nature that gives them a place in people's hearts.

When you work through this resource book, you will possibly embark on your own personal development journey as you rethink some of your own beliefs, values and actions. In this process of personal growth, you will demonstrate the healthy habits of lifelong learning and flexible thinking.

While the news emphasizes the darker side of life – corruption, murder, HIV Aids pandemic, the gap in the ozone layer, war, unrest, the list goes on – it creates a frame of reference in the minds of children. Different generations have different frames of reference, and therefore respond differently to challenges. How do you balance hope and a positive outlook on the future with a bleak reality? How do you inspire young people to believe in the future when their own personal realities may be anything but bright?

Your biggest challenge is possibly to start believing in a bright future yourself. So, before you embark on this personal journey with children, ask yourself:

- What do I believe about myself?
- What do I believe about children?
- What do I believe about the future?

Your beliefs create your reality. Your beliefs become your self-fulfilling prophesy. And your beliefs about children determine where you take them during this journey.

## **Guidelines: Activity Sheet 4**

#### **Noticing different emotions**

#### Learning points

Being aware of emotions is a graded competency. Some people are highly sensitive to other people's feelings, they become too involved and almost take over the other person's emotions. Other people are insensitive, not feeling or caring at all. Both extremes are unhealthy. When you have empathy, you will be able to acknowledge and understand other people's emotions, while being objective enough to analyse the situation rationally or 'from a distance' at the same time. In this way you can evaluate circumstances accurately and form a balanced opinion.

#### Comments

- 1 Ask the children to rate themselves on the scale shown on Activity Sheet 4 based on how they think they react to other's feelings.
- 2 Talk about the story of Sarah who did not discuss her observations, but was deeply aware of other people and their preferences. It is worth noting that usually people who are very talkative are not so aware of other's feelings.

#### Timing

- 5 minutes introduction and Sarah's story
- 2 minutes self-rating
- 3 minutes concluding

## **4** Noticing different emotions

## On your own

Read the text below and then decide what number you are on the empathy scale.



#### Cold fish

- Do not understand emotions
- Do not feel guilty when doing something wrong
- Do not work well with others
- Fight with others
- Hurt others
- Bully
- Tell lies



#### Warm teddy bear

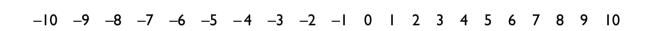
- Comfortable with emotions
- Love others
- Enjoy working with others
- Make people feel good
- Repair friendships
- Try to be kind
- Want others to be happy

## **Empathy scale**



#### Soppy puppy

- Take over other people's problems
- Feel guilty when others suffer
- Talk about other people's problems all the time
- Want to be liked by everybody
- Cannot say no



## Large group

This is a story about Sarah, a quiet little girl in a playgroup. She often used to sit on her own, watching the others play. The teachers and her parents were a bit worried that she might have emotional problems.

Then one day, one of the teachers did an experiment. She asked each child in the class to explain to the rest of the class who played with whom, what the favourite games of the different groups of children were, and which toys they preferred to play with.

When it was Sarah's turn, everybody had a big surprise! She knew better than anybody else in the class what everybody else did or enjoyed the most.

## Reflection

Where on the scale would you place Sarah?

# Guidelines: Activity Sheet 10

## Recovering from emotional setbacks

#### Learning points

Asking for help is an important aspect of being a resilient learner. If you are too shy or too proud to ask for help, you slow down your own progress. This does not imply a lack of effort on your side. Taking full responsibility for your life takes effort, but also requires the wisdom to know that we are here to make a difference to other people's lives while allowing them to make a difference to ours.

#### Comments

1 Discuss the steps one by one, expanding on each.

2 At the end, ask the children to share their insights.

#### Tip

Have a tactful discussion about events that can happen to people that could be devastating and harmful, and how help from others is needed. There are stories about people who survived horrible circumstances because there was someone there to help. Afterwards, even strong survivors need to work through the emotional aspects of trauma in order to heal completely and live normal lives.

#### Timing

5 minutes introduction

10 minutes general discussion, going through the steps

10 minutes sharing of stories and their learning points

5 minutes concluding

## **10** Recovering from emotional setbacks

## **Large group discussion**

Resilient people know when to ask for help and they find out to whom they could go. When something happens to you that makes you really sad, angry or upset, it may help to talk to a person that you can trust. Once you have talked to this person, you can keep on working through difficulties on your own as well. The following steps may help you recover from difficulties.

- Admit to yourself that you have a problem, and think of people that you trust and that you feel comfortable to talk to.
- 2 Talk to a person who will understand and explain what happened and how you felt. Don't try and tell everything at once. Use a few talks to work through the experience bit by bit.
- 3 If you feel guilty, angry and cheated, admit that to yourself. Allow yourself to really feel the emotions if you deny the emotions, they won't go away. They simply stay there, until they have a chance to surface again. Cry, shout into a pillow, beat your fists into a pillow or take a walk, and let go of the feelings.
- **4** Give up feeling like a loser. Bad things that happen to you do not make you bad. Remind yourself of your good points.
- 5 Forgive the person or persons who made you suffer.
- 6 Learn useful lessons from the experience. Think what you will do differently in future.
- 7 Find a short answer that you will use when people ask you about this difficulty.
- 8 Move on with your life, and use the wisdom you have gained from working through this problem.

Adapted from Al Siebert (1996)



# Guidelines: Activity Sheet 7

#### Talk tactfully

#### Learning points

This activity is an application of feedback skills and the use of WIN-messages. The principle is that the talker owns the message. It is not blaming, attacking or complaining, but rather a description of the talker's experience of the event.

#### Comments

- 1 The children work in pairs and formulate answers.
- 2 They give feedback to the larger group.

#### Тір

Children are still in the process of developing emotional skills, and may find this activity difficult. It may be useful to begin with several general examples. Be sensitive not to refer to 'wrong' or 'right' answers, but instead assist in refining skills. This is not an easy skill to master.

#### Timing

Depending on the size of the group, it may take up to a minute per participating pair.

## 7 Talk tactfully

## Share in pairs

Work in pairs and for each of the examples below, write one of your own. Be prepared to read your examples to the larger group and take care not to use examples that may hurt or embarrass others.

I Show that you understand the other person's feelings. You might not agree, but when you understand and accept the other person, you make it easier for the other person to relax and talk.

Example:

'I can understand that you are upset. If I were in your position, I might feel the same.'

2 Accept it when the other person does not feel comfortable to talk about the problem. Later on, the person might feel like sharing information.

Example:

'I understand that some things are private. You do not need to discuss that now.'

3 Use 'l' messages. Describe actions, feelings and effects, not the person.

Example:

'When you did not return my call, I thought that you were angry at me.'

Not: 'You never phone back.' **Resilience Volume 2: Social Skills for Effective Learning** will help you promote self-managed, resilient learning in your classroom. This practical workbook details a holistic approach to developing your students' resilience through a series of modules with activities, theory, and reflective exercises.

Volume 2 shows you how to foster caring relationships through positive role modelling, and includes sections on:

- Interpersonal and Adaptive Skills
- Empathy
- Finding Solutions
- Conflict

- Moving On
- Money Matters
- Diversity

Each unit comprises an introduction to the topic, followed by guidelines for the teacher and photocopiable worksheets to use with your students. Learning points are included with each worksheet to remind you of the main focus and to assist in understanding what the specific exercises aim to achieve. They can also be used to introduce or clarify the topic to students.

**Annie Greeff** started her career as a teacher, but also gained experience in various other fields. In 1996 she became a Training and Development Consultant and has since developed and presented extensive ranges of Emotional Intelligence and Resilience or Wellness training programmes, facilitated group processes and offered life coaching for executives in various corporate companies.

"... the core skills that Greeff details are essential for today's young people to be successful in tomorrow's world. This resource will give confidence to school staff who wish to be an effective life coach in enabling young people to learn to cope with the inevitable challenges they will face."

#### **Rob Long, Chartered Psychologist**

"... contains numerous useful activities for teachers to adapt to the age of children they teach. The book will be a valuable resource for educators researching the field of emotional intelligence."

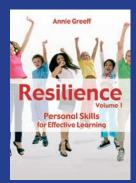
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#### Also available:

**Resilience Volume 1: Personal Skills for Effective Learning** focuses on promoting self-esteem and emotional development within the individual. The book includes an introductory overview of resilience for the teacher and student, and sections on identity and emotions.

isbn: 1904424376



