

Responsible Risk Taking and Resilience at Spaghetti Bridge

One of the key skillsets for students heading into the world of the future is that of learning how to take responsible risks, try new approaches and ways of working, and being resilient when things do not work out in the way that might have been expected. Yet somewhat ironically our traditional approach to education supports the exact opposite mindset by discouraging- or even punishing- students for getting things wrong or doing things differently in the forms of “teach-to-the-test” and an emphasis on exams in which there is only a right and wrong answer.

The Spaghetti Bridge Enterprise Learning curriculum and pedagogy is intentionally designed to support students to become knowledge creators and not simply knowledge consumers, as Paolo Freire, the founder of Critical Pedagogy, articulated in his work *The pedagogy of the oppressed*. It is essential to the process of creating new knowledge and developing new ideas that individuals are willing and able to get things wrong, learn when a process does not go to plan, and then use this learning to iterate, try again, and discover a solution that is potentially both unexpected and effective.

Taking responsible risks and developing resilience are important for more than just innovating and creating new knowledge; these skills are also essential for developing positive mental health and confidence. Recent research shows that a sense of resilience is consistently negatively correlated with depression, anxiety, and trauma symptoms in children and young people, yet the promotion of resilience is often overlooked and instead the importance of negative risk factors emphasised (Mesman et al, 2021). Studies also show that activities such as adventurous play provide children with the experiences of fear, excitement, thrill and adrenaline that help them to manage and cope with situations involving uncertainty or anxiety (Dodd and Lester, 2021). The work of psychologist Jonathan Haidt shows that avoiding risky experiences in children leads to increased anxiety and fragility and that children’s exposure to real challenges results in increased confidence and emotional resilience, showing that responsible risk taking is a necessary input for the development of resilience (Haidt and Lukianoff, 2018). The developmental psychologist David Yeager in turn argues in his research that challenge and risk is beneficial when framed as growth oriented and enhancing as opposed to toxic and debilitating (Yeager, 2024). Finally, psychologist Angela Duckworth demonstrates that experiences of perseverance through difficulty and repeated exposure to challenge and failure builds resilience and a sense of self-efficacy.

The Enterprise Projects and Relational Approach that form the core of Enterprise Learning, with their real world experiences, open-ended questions, opportunities for exploration, experimentation, and innovation, and iterative processes are an ideal vehicle for the development of resilience, confidence, and positive mental health. Though this may sound strange, one of the key aspects of Enterprise Learning is encouraging students to take chances, make mistakes, fail, and therefore learn. This approach also reduces the anxiety some of our students experience around always needing to get things right and a persistent fear of failure.

All of this is not to say that some stress is not toxic and that some experiences of failure can

negatively impact our confidence and resilience. Instead, it is the way in which these experiences are supported, the mindset that students and staff bring to uncertain situations, and the wider culture of exploration and curiosity that turns what might be negative experiences in some school settings into positive ones within Spaghetti Bridge schools.

References

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