

Resilience in Teacher Education

A Program for Teacher-Students During Their Training for The Job: The Development of Skills, Competencies and Tools for Coping with Emergency Situations, Special Events and the Day-to-Day

The proposed program seeks to examine the methods and tools requires for developing the personal and professional resilience of teaching personnel – teachers and kindergarten teachers.

The initiators of the program see this as an important condition for strengthening teaching personnel both as people who are responsible for the system they work as well as for their success in developing this strength in their students. As so, they aspire to make it a basic component in the teacher training process prior to entering the education system. They also see great importance in training the staff of the training institutes to lead this process.

Background

The personal, social, economic and national problems that the COVID outbreak created (and continues to create) - sharpened and increased the need, which already existed, to develop the resilience necessary for coping with these issues. There is an increased understanding that the absence of resilience can lead to personal and structural collapse, to an increase in suicide and in the need for psychological treatment, to an increase in violence and sexual abuse, to a greater use of drugs and alcohol. It can also cause “softer” injuries in the ability to persist in ones work or studies, in the professional functioning, in human connectivity, etc. These manifestations exist even in the day-to-day and demand suitable reactions, but their danger rises in emergency situations.

These phenomena take place in every walk of life and in every civil society, but their strength is particularly notable in the education system, both in children of all ages as well as in the teaching and management staffs (some of whom don't manage to function, drop out or even give up their teaching and move on to a more preferable career.

Coping with this reality demands clarification of the kind of resilience that needs to be developed, with an emphasis on the education system and its teachers.

What is 'Resilience'?

Professional literature in the field clearly shows that the definitions of resilience change according to the approach, the discipline and the subject under discussion. They also differ in their developmental process from the classic definition to the ones seen in the natural and social sciences. The concept itself is not clear, and neither is the distinction between it and other related concepts such as “successful coping”. Moreover, the validity of the tools for measuring resilience is insufficient.

In a broad reference resilience is defined as the ability of individuals, groups and human or structural systems to flexibly handle difficult disturbances caused by nature or man; to manage a reasonably consistent level of functioning; and to quickly recover – and even grow – from such disturbances. This is a mega-concept that includes adaption to various events (from their start until the end). The key concepts to these changes are 'flexibility-based adaptations', 'quick reaction' and 'the ability to contain situations surrounding mental health'. There are five types of resilience generally mentioned: personal resilience (emotional and professional), social resilience (communal and organizational), economic resilience, infrastructural resilience and national resilience (which includes all of the above).

Resilience is a necessary component for coping with disturbances and crises in emergency situations and in day-to-day life. Investing in advance, in its development is extremely worthwhile and important. The assumption is that resilience can be preserved and developed both for routine, as an important part of coping with every day events, as well as in preparation for emergency situations. However, this needs to be done systematically, consistently and continuously based on an organized and binding format.

'Resilience' and the Education System

The development of student resilience in the education system must be a major priority of the national system's policy. In Israel, this concerns a population of over two million people whose condition affects the older multi-generational family system. This is a young population with no life experience, that finds itself in a probable formative process. This population is the reserve of the country's future citizens. Investing in the resilience of this group, is building national resilience in every walk of life.

During regular times, in addition to teaching and finding ways to inculcate knowledge in a significant way, the education system is demanded to cope with the pupils' social and emotional needs, with socio-economic gaps and the implications of negative phenomena such as school drop-out, drugs, alcohol, bans, and suicide. As these problems expand both in ordinary times as well as in times of pressure, the teaching and learning processes are abused.

The ongoing COVID pandemic and the lockdowns accompanying it caused traumas that brought about fears, loneliness and damage exposing extreme distress. 3,000 education counselors (44%) report that during the lockdowns they saw learning difficulties (79%), emotional problems (74%) and loneliness (58). They also noted difficulties in attendance at classes, anxiety and family pressure. According to data from the Psychological Guidance Services of the Ministry of Education, many of these difficulties intensified. The data presents a rise in requests for diagnosing suicidal tendencies (25%), in the need for psychological treatment (30%), and in reports of sexual abuse (25%). It also presents an increase in behavioral disturbances, food disorders and the use of drugs and alcohol. A slight decrease in these manifestations was seen when the lockdowns ended and students returned to school, but a report published by the Forum of Psychologists Organizations clearly shows the difficulties involved in returning to normal routine study, the increase in violence, and the increase in anxiety, in lack of concentration, in depression and in feelings of pressure. It also shows the lack of psychologist consultants and therapists.

Various bodies deal with designing and assimilating programs for emergency and crisis situations in the general population, especially concerning security (the Home Front

Command and the INSS - The Institute for National Security Studies), and in the educational system (the Unit for Crisis and Emergency of the Psychological Guidance Service and groups such as the Resilience Association and the Trauma Coalition). Resilience centers have been opened around the country, particularly in the south and additional relevant public initiatives have also been built.

The COVID-19 period clearly showed the lack of a national methodological program for building resilience. The important work that several organizations and authorities (such as Tel Aviv and Sderot Municipalities, The Fund for Educational Initiatives, the “Ve’Ahavta Association”, Reichman University and others), do in this area are not enough to bring about change. The solution of psychologists outside of the school system also wasn’t suitable, and indeed, the Minister of Education, Dr. Yifat Sasa-Biton laid down basic principles for the school system to develop social-emotional resilience (personal and social capability).

A national educational program for the development of resilience is a complex mission demanding attention to varied components and to systematic and continual building. **The most important component is the ability and personal, social and professional resilience of the teaching personnel.**

'Resilience' in Teacher Education

Teaching and learning are two sides of the same coin. The effects of the pandemic on the students created many complications for principals, teachers, kindergarten teachers and other educational staff. ‘The teacher left because of emotional difficulties, the students remained alone’ (The Marker, 10/12/21). Teacher drop-out, which also exists during regular school days (like in any profession), increased during the pandemic period due to a tremendous level of pressure. Lockdowns, the switch to on-line teaching, the constantly changing instructions, the shortage of teaching staff due to illness or retirement, the combination of work and looking after their own children at home, and the phenomena affecting their students (as described above), raised difficult problems regarding the teaching personnel. The teachers do their best, but they also need support. The programs used during regular school days and also during COVID have attempted to give the teachers the tools for coping with such situations, but they mainly focus on

ways to cope with the problems of the students and almost totally 'ignore' the very necessary basis and that is the personal and professional resilience of the teacher.

What is of concern for the students is also of concern about the teachers. The development of personal, social and professional resilience is a central part of the teachers' professional ethos and its influence on their teaching abilities and nature is very large. As in every professional training, there is great importance both in constructing and developing the educators' resilience as well as in designing their ability to develop the resilience of their students. The process must begin the moment the students choose TEACHING as their profession (i.e. in the framework of their training in the colleges and universities), and should continue to be developed and updated throughout their professional path as active teachers. Currently, the initial stage of this process – in the training framework – is extremely minor and in most cases non-existent.

All of the above led to the present initiative: Constructing a framework that will examine the methods and tools for developing the personal and professional resilience of teaching personnel, and then applying it as a necessary and permanent basis for training teachers towards their teaching as a career. This also requires the training and preparation of teacher trainers to lead this process.

The Minister of Education, who is fully aware of the situation of the teachers, related to this in her speech about strengthening teacher resilience, and the new outline for training teachers (Vadmany-Inbar, 2021) presented by the Council for Higher Education. also includes this component.

The Program

The program has three stages:

1. Preparing the conceptual infrastructure and the system of principles and practices necessary for teacher training;
2. Adoption of the document by the relevant policy makers and by the teacher training institutions;
3. Applying the infrastructure into the training processes alongside assessment, research and suitability processes.

This document details the first stage mentioned above: preparing the conceptual infrastructure and the system of principles and practices necessary to develop resilience in teacher training.

This stage became operative in September 2021 and is planned to end in October 2022.

The Purpose

Phrasing and establishing a basic document that defines both the essence of the resilience to be developed among teacher-students during their training process, and the appropriate methods and tools. This document is intended to serve policy makers and teacher training institutes as a basis for action in this matter.

Target Population

- Teacher-students for all age levels and subjects toward first and second degrees at colleges of education;
- Management, lecture and pedagogic instructors in colleges of education.

Participating Bodies

- The MOFET Institute (leader and coordinator. Representatives of: The Unit for National and International Networking and Collaboration, The Research authority, The Information Center, and The "Reshit" Program – a project for training home-room teachers for the elementary schools).
- Staff members representing seven colleges of education from around the country and from various sectors (alphabetical order): **D**avid Yellin, **G**ordon, **H**emdat Hadarom, **K**aye, **L**evinsky, **S**akhnin, **S**eminar Hakibbutzim.
- Representative of the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS).

- Representatives of the Home Front Command.

The Ministry of Education (representatives of the branch for the academic training of Teaching Personnel, the Psychological Consultant Services and the Department for Emergency Programs).

Work Methods

The work is done in several formats and groups:

- Leading Team: MOFET's staff coordinates the project – preparation, operation and supervision on the program's progress, timeline, meetings, etc.
- Plenary sessions with all participating representatives.
- Work group (including all representatives): Four groups of 5-11 members who represent the various participating bodies. Each group focuses on one of the central subjects determined by the plenum: (1) skills and practices for inculcating resilience; (2) the college as an institution fostering resilience; (3) work during emergencies; (4) conceptualization.

Each group was appointed a chairperson who is responsible for operating its work.

- Chairpersons: The four chairpersons together with the leading team meet regularly for mutual updating, problem solving and coordinated planning.
- Study days: (March, May, June, 2022). Three study days in the plenum for all the groups. These days are intended for presenting the groups' work progress, for reflective and critical discussion toward connecting the various topics, and for completing the knowledge still needed by inviting experts.
- A relevant literature review (April-May 2022): The review is prepared by MOFET's information center with the consultation of an expert in the field. The material will be available to all groups.
- Final document team (August 2022-October 2022): This team (from within the project's participants) will integrate and collate the final materials of the various groups and prepare an organized and coherent document to be submitted to the policy markers toward the second stage of the program.