

PART IV: BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Community Resilience and Education

Education—particularly early-childhood education—not only sets the foundation for who we become in later life, but also shapes society as a whole. If we want a more resilient society and more resilient communities, we have to plant the seeds today in students both young and old. We need education that trains people in both community and personal resilience-building.

The stakes are especially high for young people. We can be pretty sure that the world of the future will be in a state of climate crisis and economic flux. To best cope with these challenges, young people need an education that emphasizes systems thinking, adaptability, creativity, and practical skills.

In short, they need resilience skills. Among those, critical thinking is surely near the top of the list. Successfully adapting to changing circumstances requires the ability to sort useful information from noise, and to self-reflect on our own reasoning process.

Teaching and learning resilience also implies developing habits that foster psychological resilience—keeping a long-term perspective, considering stressful events in a broader context, problem solving, group process, maintaining a hopeful outlook, and taking care of one’s own mind and body. Activities that build creativity, cooperation, self-reliance, and leadership aid personal resilience. And so does practical understanding of basic systems—natural ecosystems, as well as human food, water, and energy systems. Having a wide range of practical skills in maintaining essential community/household functions makes for both psychological and physical resilience.

These should all be taken into account in **curriculum design**.

But then there is the question of what educators call **pedagogy**, or the actual processes of teaching and learning. Currently the American educational

system is designed around standardized tests, and it's increasingly supplemented with online tools that are primarily visual in nature. Adaptability in an uncertain future implies education for the entire brain and all the senses. Resilience will therefore require engagement of all of the individual's multiple intelligences (linguistic, spatial, mathematical, bodily, interpersonal, intrapersonal, musical, and naturalistic). Neuroscience research into learning suggests that activities that move beyond linguistic and numeric drills—beyond classrooms and computers and into nature—may be especially effective at engaging the whole person.

The Center for Ecoliteracy in Oakland, California has pioneered garden-based schooling, in which children learn basic principles of ecology, nutrition, critical thinking, while at the same time developing math, verbal, and physical skills, all while engaged in hands-on, project-based, cooperative and experiential learning activities. Subsequent research has shown that weekly gardening and related classroom work help improve science achievement test scores and measurably increased life skills like appreciation for nature, responsibility, patience, relationship skills, and self-esteem. This helps students develop a sense of ownership and responsibility while fostering relationships with family members, peers, and the outside community.

High school- and college-level education projects that similarly engage the whole person focus, for example, on watershed restoration, climate change activism, and community resilience assessments—which we'll talk more about in the final video of this series.

Self-directed and holistic forms of learning are fostered in some alternative schools, including Montessori and Waldorf schools and some charter schools, as well as many home schools. Democratic schools (or free schools) are ones in which grade-school children learn critical thinking and democracy by designing their own curricula. At the most radical end of the spectrum is the unschooling movement, which advocates entirely learner-chosen activities.

Unschooling students learn through natural life experiences including play, household responsibilities, personal interests and curiosity, internships and work experience, travel, books, elective classes, family, mentors, and social interaction.

Many colleges and universities offer programs that include service-learning or other forms of real-world, community engagement. These kinds of programs are an ideal context for learning about community resilience.

Learning occurs not only inside, but also outside of schools, and throughout life. Informal learning continues through reading, lectures, classes, and online audio-visual materials—like this set of videos!—as well as through community engagement. Public libraries could therefore be particularly useful venues for resilience education, due to their accessibility and their dedication to community service.

In the less-industrialized world, resilience education is perhaps best epitomized in the **Barefoot College** in India, a voluntary organization started in 1972 by Bunker Roy, that works with the rural poor for skills development, public health, safe drinking water, women's empowerment, and solar electrification. More than three million people have been trained by the Barefoot College to date. This example suggests that resilience education can be adaptable to a wide variety of contexts, and doesn't have to be rooted in a traditional educational environment.

In this video we've seen that community resilience starts with education, which can occur in many ways all through life. What's consistent about all the examples of resilience education we've talked about is that they foster cooperation, life skills, and psychological strength while also developing insight into social and ecological systems, and the processes by which those systems adapt.