

Children's resilience

Working with the Early Years Learning Framework

Pam Linke and Judy Radich



**Early Childhood
Australia**
A voice for young children

Research in Practice Series

About Early Childhood Australia

Early Childhood Australia actively promotes the provision of high-quality services for all young children from birth to eight years and their families, and supports the important role of parents. Early Childhood Australia is also the national umbrella organisation for children's services and a leading early childhood publisher.

About the series

The *Research in Practice Series* is published four times each year by Early Childhood Australia.

The series aims to provide practical, easy-to-read, up-to-date information and support to a growing national readership of early childhood workers. The books bring together the best information available on wide-ranging topics and are an ideal resource for children's services workers and others interested in the care and education of young children.

Series Editor Roslyn Martin

Edition Editor Jenni Connor

Graphic Design Nathalie Scott

Photographs Andrew Sikorski

Invitation to authors

If you are interested in writing for the *Research in Practice Series* or any other Early Childhood Australia publication, please contact the Publications Section for further information on the preparation of manuscripts and for a copy of the guidelines for contributors.

Membership, publishing and general enquiries

Early Childhood Australia Inc.
PO Box 86 Deakin West ACT 2600
T: (02) 6242 1800
F: (02) 6242 1818
Sales line: 1800 356 900 (freecall)
E: eca@earlychildhood.org.au
publishing@earlychildhood.org.au

© Copyright 2010

All rights reserved by
Early Childhood Australia Inc.

Material herein must not be reproduced
in any form without the written permission
of Early Childhood Australia Inc.

Registered for posting as a publication—
PP232100/00036
ISSN 1440-5148
ISBN10 1-921162-46-5
ISBN13 978-1-921162-46-6

Printed by Elect Printing, Canberra

About the authors

Pam Linke is an early childhood and parenting consultant who has had a long-term interest in helping young children develop resilience. She is on the national executive of Early Childhood Australia and the National Board of the Australian Association for Infant Mental Health, and was a foundation member of NIFTeY Australia. She has written a number of articles and books for parents and early childhood educators on topics including child development, bullying, sexuality, children's social relationships, starting school and sleep. She also works part time in early childhood studies at the University of South Australia.

Judy Radich is an early childhood educator, with over 20 years experience working with young children and their families both in New Zealand preschools and in long day care in Australia, a position she currently holds. She is an active member of Early Childhood Australia, a past national president and currently a member of the publications committee. She continues to be a member of a number of national committees, advocating for young children and their families and the services they use and need. She is a parent of four adult children and a new grandmother.

Contents



| | |
|----|---|
| 1 | Introduction |
| 2 | What is resilience and why is it important? |
| 9 | Building resilience in communities |
| 10 | Resilience myths |
| 11 | Resilience factors and processes |
| 14 | Resilience and the Early Years Learning Framework |
| 21 | Developing resilience practices in your service |
| 23 | Resilience in your service |
| 24 | Conclusion |
| 25 | Resilience — checklist for children |
| 27 | References |

‘Resilience is about the ability to deal with and succeed in difficult situations and events. Resilience is a mix of key skills and characteristics of a person and the social supports and environment in which they live.’

<http://www.headroom.net.au/Content.aspx?p=111>

What is resilience and why is it important?

Resilience is the group of skills and qualities that lead people, including children, to be able to cope with difficulties in a positive way.

Edith Grotberg, from the International Resilience Project¹, says that 'Resilience is important because it is the human capacity to face, overcome and be strengthened by or even transformed by the adversities of life. Everyone faces adversities; no one is exempt. With resilience, children can triumph over trauma; without it, trauma (adversity) triumphs' (Grotberg 1995, p. 6).

Practice that supports resilience is informed by the belief 'that we do not perceive disadvantage as a problem to be ... compensated for; instead, we try to look for the strengths that exist within individuals and their environments in order to build upon them' (Grotberg 1995, p. 6). It is about helping children to develop the strengths that the research tells us will help them to succeed in spite of hardships.

We know that early intervention leads to the most successful outcomes for children. By focusing on resilience, early childhood educators can make a crucial contribution to children's ongoing success and wellbeing.



¹ The **International Resilience Project (IRP)** seeks to broaden our understanding of how resilience is conceptualised across cultures and contexts. The IRP is currently validating a culturally sensitive measure of youth resilience, the **Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM)** and gathering life stories from individuals around the world who survive and thrive in contextually and culturally specific ways. www.resilienceproject.org

Resilience practice and the EYLF – a good fit

Resilience practice fits very well with 'Belonging, Being and Becoming — the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia', because a fundamental aim of the EYLF is to 'contribute to realising the Council of Australian Governments' vision that *All children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation*'. (EYLF, p. 5).

Resilience practice sees children as individuals learning from and supported by their interactions and relationships in their world. The goal of the EYLF is to 'to extend and enrich children's learning from birth to five years and through the transition to school', and its view of children and the principles, practice and outcomes it describes are very consistent with resilience practice. The EYLF wants us to give children strengths and skills to cope in their world. It tells us 'Children's early learning influences their life chances'. Wellbeing and a strong sense of connection, optimism, and engagement enable children to develop a positive attitude to learning (EYLF, p. 9).

'Building resilience is aimed at giving children who have to face more difficulties and challenges than others better chances to succeed – to help to even the playing field.'



What does resilience involve?

The systems, cultures and relationships within which children live interact with the personal qualities that the children bring to the development of resilience. There are many different factors involved in resilience including:

- ◆ factors in the individual person:
qualities such as optimism and problem-solving skills help people to have hope and to know that there is a way through when they face difficulties
- ◆ relationship factors:
knowing that there is someone who believes in you and will be with you is invaluable in difficult situations
- ◆ factors in the community:
communities that provide resources and supports also provide a context for resilience.

We need to be aware of and sensitive to individual children and see how they interact in their relationships and their daily experience. The impact on them of cultural expectations and experiences is also important. This will help us to identify children who may need particular support in developing resilience.



An is a school beginner who is somewhat overwhelmed by the new environment. In his family children are expected to be very respectful and not overly enthusiastic or loud in their interactions with adults. He tentatively puts up his hand a few times when the teacher asks a question, but is overlooked because there are a number of more boisterous children vying to be seen. He stops putting up his hand. With his parents' permission, An's teacher has spoken with the ECEC service An attended and understands something of his need to be particularly encouraged and supported. From this base she is able to give An opportunities and encouragement in the class and to speak further to his parents, to understand more about their point of view, share her own observations and thoughts, and work towards an agreed approach with An.



Reflection

- ◆ Think about one child in your service, perhaps one who concerns you, or you feel you'd like to help more. Watch how the child relates with the staff, other different children, visitors, the environment and parents. Watch how the child feels and responds. Get to know and think about the family — their beliefs and values, their interactions with their child and their cultural and social background. Think about this not only in relation to what the child is learning but to who this child is. What can you learn that will help you to support the child better?
- ◆ Supposing you have a child who has just arrived, from a different cultural background than the other children in your service. What can you do to help this child's family become and feel part of your service community? What links can you build with the child's community?
- ◆ How can you develop links between your service and your children's communities as you help 'the children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities'? (EYLF, Outcome 2).



Risk factors

There are a number of 'risk factors' that can prevent children from developing resilience. In order to understand resilience we need to know about the particular risk factors that can lead to serious life problems, such as not completing education or being unable to get a job, mental illness or getting into trouble with the law.

Research indicates that the more risk factors in their lives, the more difficult it is for children to have the ability to adapt successfully. This is where resilience is so important because it builds adaptive qualities and skills (Green, Oswald and Spears, 2007).

'Watch how the child relates with the staff, other different children, visitors, the environment and parents.'

Risk factors may be personal or environmental

- ◆ **Personal risk factors** may include disability, challenging temperament (as seen by the parent or carer), and early childhood illness.
- ◆ **Environmental risk factors** include early separations from the main caregiver, attachment problems (where a child has learned not to trust that there will be someone whom they know will be available, both physically and emotionally, to support and help them when they need it), child abuse, marital conflict, parental divorce in the early years, parental criminality, moving house, living in overcrowded conditions, trauma, parental drug abuse, parental mental illness, harsh discipline and lack of monitoring and supervision of children.

These are the factors that can make life hard for children, and children experiencing them need extra supports. Risk factors are not absolute and it is the risk process which makes a difference to the effect on the child. For example, early hospitalisation is a risk factor and the processes involved in this may include separation from parents, not having consistent staff to relate to due to shiftwork, and painful or confusing medical treatment. If we are aware of this there are often ways to modify the risk, for example the parent staying with the child, taking care when and how treatment is given and so on.





A child's temperament may be seen as a problem by a parent or educator and become a risk factor because of the way they react to the child. Another parent or educator may see the same temperament positively, for example as sensitive, creative or adventurous, and make the most of the child's strengths while helping with adaptation where needed. The process of how they respond to the child is what makes the difference.

It is not always possible to modify risk factors but it is important to consider the possibilities of good early childhood practice and to try. For example:

- ◆ 'providing children with consistent emotional support'
- ◆ partnerships with families that 'are based on the foundations of understanding each other's expectations and attitudes and build on the strength of each others' knowledge'
- ◆ educators who 'believe in all children's capacity to succeed'
- ◆ 'educators who think critically about opportunities and dilemmas that can arise from diversity and take action to address unfairness' (EYLF, p. 12 and p. 13).

all support children and families experiencing resilience risk factors and are all promoted in the EYLF.



**Early Childhood
Australia**

A voice for young children

Early Years Learning Framework resources

Resources specifically designed to support you in implementing and understanding the Early Years Learning Framework.



The Early Years Learning Framework: Stars are made of glass—Children as capable and creative communicators

This book focuses on *Learning Outcome 5 of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)* for Australia and explores how children communicate and express themselves through different means and ideas whether through language, music, movement or images.

Authors: Leonie Arthur, Felicity McArdle and Marina Papic. 32 pages.

Price: \$14.95



The Early Years Learning Framework: Building confident learners

Explores how educators can help children to be confident and involved learners, focusing on Outcome 4 of the first national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) for Australia.

Author: Leonie Arthur. 28 pages.

Price: \$14.95



Every Child Vol. 15 No. 4—Early Years Learning Framework

This issue focuses on the EYLF, with several key articles on key aspects of the Framework, as well as a 'how to' emphasis, where it is relevant. It will help you understand how you can approach it, as well as what it can mean for your service, your practice and your families.

Authors: Various. 36 pages.

Price: \$14.95



Every Child Vol 16 No 1—Belonging

The informative and easy-to-read articles in this issue focus especially on the notion of being and belonging, including articles on developing inclusive relationships among early childhood staff, connecting behaviour with belonging, encouraging families to belong, the challenges of starting a new service, and much more ...

Authors: Various. 36 pages.

Price: \$14.95

All prices include GST, postage, handling and packaging within Australia. Overseas orders will incur additional postage.

Prices are subject to change without notice.

TO VIEW THE FULL LISTING
OF PUBLICATIONS VISIT:

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eylf

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

T: 1800 356 900 Email: eca@earlychildhood.org.au www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

ABN: 44 950 767 752

Children's resilience: Working with the Early Years Learning Framework

Resilience is about the ability to deal with and succeed in difficult situations and events. Resilience is a mix of key skills and characteristics of a person and the social supports and environment in which they live.

It is generally understood as the capacity to recover or bounce back from setbacks in life. The scientific understanding of resilience is specifically developed in relation to young children who have experienced setbacks and is about what adults can do to help them make the most of their lives. Resilience provides the underpinning for all children to succeed in their education and in the rest of their lives.

Children's resilience: Working with the Early Years Learning Framework helps parents and educators:

- describe resilience, its importance for all children and its particular significance for vulnerable children
- examine factors and processes that contribute to resilience
- consider risk factors which may mean that children need extra help with developing resilience
- identify strategies for use in early childhood education and care settings and clearly links the EYLF with good resilience practices.

This book also includes a 'checklist for children' for perceptions of resilience in children. This checklist can be helpful to educators who can use this in everyday practice. Using this checklist can help you to increase any strengths that you believe the child may need.

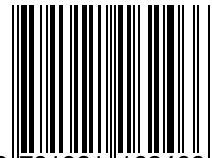
While these are practical guidebooks for educators, they may also be of interest to families and others who work closely with young children.



Research in Practice Series
Early Childhood Australia Inc.
PO Box 86 Deakin West ACT 2600
T: (02) 6242 1800 F: (02) 6242 1818
E: eca@earlychildhood.org.au

Volume 17 No. 4 2010

ISBN 1-921162-46-5
ISBN 978-1-921162-46-6



9 781921 162466