

2015

Resilience Begins With Beliefs: Building on Student Strengths for Success in School by Sara Truebridge

Rolla E. Lewis
California State University, East Bay

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cedar.wvu.edu/jec>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lewis, Rolla E. (2015) "Resilience Begins With Beliefs: Building on Student Strengths for Success in School by Sara Truebridge," *Journal of Educational Controversy*. Vol. 9 : No. 1 , Article 14.
Available at: <https://cedar.wvu.edu/jec/vol9/iss1/14>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Peer-reviewed Journals at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Educational Controversy by an authorized editor of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact westerncedar@wvu.edu.

Book Review

Rolla E. Lewis, EdD, NCC
Professor Emeritus
California State University, East Bay
rolla.lewis@csueastbay.edu

Truebridge, S. (2014). *Resilience begins with beliefs: Building on student strengths for success in school*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

In her foreword to *Resilience Begins with Beliefs*, Bonnie Benard passes off the resilience torch for supporting her life work to Sara Truebridge. Now retired, Benard was a key advocate for resilience theory and practice for over two decades (e.g., Benard, 1991, 2004; Benard & Slade, 2009). Benard's strengths-based, human development, and health promotion perspective framed resilience as a process promoted by three "protective factors" found in family, school, and community environments: 1) caring and supportive relationships, 2) high expectations, and 3) opportunities for meaningful participation and contribution. A treasure trove of wisdom about resilience theory, practices, and the key literature supporting the resilience construct, Benard's (2004) *Resilience: What We Have Learned* concludes with a reference to beliefs, "If we can focus on our belief in young people's innate resilience and developmental wisdom, we are in a position to find what allows each one to thrive" (p.113). Truebridge took the torch Benard handed her with gusto, and Truebridge's book on resilience begins where Benard's ends—with beliefs.

With a keen insight to develop a work designed to appeal to a wide-audience, Truebridge's *Resilience Begins with Beliefs: Building on Student Strengths for Success in School* is an accessible text that could be used by beginning and experienced education professionals, by parents and education advocates, and as part of any on-going school in-service or improvement effort. The text is merely six chapters, 77 pages long, with an additional 28 pages of appendices. The appendices offer strategies and tools for promoting conversations and practices designed to help readers develop and deepen their strengths-based, human development, and health promotion perspective undergirding the resilience construct. Each chapter ends with a Reflection Section where questions are posed for individual readers or groups to explore and deepen their thinking about the content and practices presented.

In the first two chapters, Truebridge presents a working definition of the rather complex and contested resilience construct:

the dynamic and negotiated process within individuals (internal) and between individuals and their environments (external) for the resources and support to adapt and define themselves as healthy amid adversity, threat, trauma, and/or everyday stress.... Another way to define resilience is... the self-righting and transcending capacity within all... to spring back, rebound, and successfully adapt. (p. 12)

She shares how the resilience construct defines people as agents in their own lives, and not as passive objects. Truebridge goes on to summarize twelve important insights from the resilience research that point to the essential need to believe in the innate resilience of others and of ourselves. She then offers a brief history of the resilience construct, discussion of the shift from the language of risk to the language of resilience, and a more reflective analysis of the complexities and contested nature of the resilience construct.

In chapters three, four, and five, Truebridge connects resilience and beliefs to student success in schools. In these chapters she expands her argument and research supporting the assertion that all students have the capacity for resilience. For instance, citing previous studies involving successful teachers, she shares research that concluded that those teachers who believed all students could learn were more likely to have greater success with all their students than those teachers who did not believe that all students could learn. Beliefs matter. Sandwiched between the research being cited, Truebridge offers her own anecdotes and stories about working with teachers who believed in children. She shows how youth must be encouraged and supported, challenged, and engaged in order to tap their resilience within their families, schools, and communities. “A teacher’s attitudes and beliefs—whether consciously or subconsciously—about a student’s resilience will also negatively or positively influence a teacher’s behavior....” (p. 44). In Chapter Five and the Appendices connected to the activities in the chapter, Truebridge presents a conceptual framework and materials designed to help educational leaders guide fostering conversations about resilience during teacher in-services or as part of a professional development process. The model she proposes magnifies the beliefs discourse by asserting that school change must go beyond merely dispensing information; it is vital to invite participants to be “*their own agents of change*” (p. 52, italics in original). Truebridge provides practical tools for, among others, understanding beliefs, building trust, and telling positive and supportive stories. As I was reading and reflecting, I realized and was touched by the fact that her theory and practice align with how I frame the resilience construct and with the tools I have developed for fostering resilience (Lewis, 1999, 2014).

Her final chapter provides tools and suggestions for teachers to sustain resilience in their schools, their students, and within themselves. Framed by inspirational quotations by famous people, ranging from Thomas Paine to Mother Teresa, she highlights such things as the need to tap your own resilience, pay attention to words, look at adversity in new ways, and the crucial importance of caretakers taking care of themselves. She understands that people, both students and teachers, are the most important life enhancing elements within any school community. She understands that people are the most important for changing schools as systems. For her, real systems change comes not from programs within the system but from “*within the individuals creating and implementing the system*” (p. 77, italics in original). In the end, it is the belief in people’s resilience that makes all the difference. This is a practical book that should be on every educator’s desk.

Truebridge tenders readers a text for supporting others in taking the first steps toward moving their school's discourse from deficit and risk to strengths and promise.

References

- Benard, B. (1991). *Fostering resiliency in kids: Protective factors in the family, school and community*. Portland, OR: Western Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities.
- Benard, B. (2004). *Resiliency: What we have learned*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.
- Benard, B., & Slade, S. (2009). Listening to students: Moving resilience research to youth development practice and school connectedness. In R. Gilman, E. S. Huebner, & M. J. Furlong (Eds.). *Handbook of positive psychology in schools* (pp. 353-369). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Lewis, R. E. (1999) A write way: Fostering resiliency during transitions. *Journal of Humanistic Education and Development*, 37, 200-211.
- Lewis, R. E. (2014). Resilience in individuals, families, and communities (pp.43-65). In D. Capuzzi and D. R. Gross (Eds.), *Youth at risk (6th ed.)*. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.