

**Engaged, Resilient and Successful in school.
*Measuring the process for better outcomes.***

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Students who get the best out of their schooling are engaged in learning, relationships and activities that build social and emotional and academic skills for life. But how do we know if each student is engaged in this process and how do we help them to become more engaged in our schools?

Measuring and tracking engagement in order to enhance student performance is difficult. In the past, researchers have used measures that focused on the absence of negative behaviors, indicating disengagement however these measures failed to understand the strengths and processes involved to encourage engagement (Sharkey, You, & Schnoebelen, 2008).

Being engaged with positive, intentional relationships and connections has been shown to build resilience in children and young people and can sustain adults through inevitable difficulties. These positive relationships in various contexts contribute to self-esteem, self-efficacy and an awareness of resources (Armstrong, Birnie-Lefcovitch, & Ungar, 2005).

Schools using the Resilience Doughnut programs have been asking whether strengthening the key contextual factors that build resilience in children and adolescents lead to an increase in each student's personal competence, social skills and subsequent engagement in school. The primary outcome of these programs is for students to be more engaged in learning and/or school activities and subsequently show improvement in their academic performance.

The Resilience Doughnut model was developed to ascertain the key protective factors and strengths that exist around a developing child at any one time. The model is nested in the strength and positive psychology movement and educational programs using the model focus on the role of the schools in the turnaround process from a deficit perspective to a position of resilience.

The Resilience Doughnut whole school program makes optimal use of the strong contexts around the child in order to help them engage with their most positive relationships. Teacher training focuses on using the model to facilitate change by partnering with the students, parents and communities to build their resilience. To date the evidence collected on the whole school programs in three Australian High schools, show that all students increased their resilience and engagement in the school process over a 6 month period, however those who were seen as "at risk" by exhibiting emotional and behavioural difficulties showed the most benefit of the program, which was sustained and increased a further 6 months later (Worsley, 2014a).

Qualitative data suggests that the Resilience Doughnut program promoted cooperative learning, small group process, adventure learning, arts experience, peer helping, mentoring and service learning. More importantly the program appeared to tailor to each individual student to strengthen their most helpful relationships to learn positive life skills and attitudes through direct and on going experiences that meet their developmental needs.

As engagement is difficult to measure, the Resilience Doughnut program uses the Resilience Report (Worsley, 2014b) to measure each student's personal and social competence as well as their most helpful resources with the aim of helping the student to work on what is working to develop their resiliency skills and to track their progress over time.

The Resilience Report is both a part of the program in giving feedback to individual students regarding their progress, and a useful tool for tracking the effectiveness of whole school programs. The report gives the principals a top down view of the whole school resilience and competencies and aggregate scores are collated as well as access to individual students reports. At last there is a measure to track the positive progress of student engagement and to give individual students and teachers ways forward to enhance the student experience in school. The next step in the process is to measure whether an increase in engagement actually does result in an increase in their academic performance.

References

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