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Creating Nurturing Classroom Environments: Fostering Hope and Resilience as an Antidote to Violence

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One effective way in which I can describe the ingredients of creating a nurturing classroom environment is to share a journey, a mindset, and a selection of strategies. The journey is the path I have taken as a clinical psychologist, therapist, principal of a school in a locked door unit of a psychiatric hospital, and consultant to many schools. The mindset represents the transformation that occurred in (a) the way I viewed angry, resistant youths, (b) my own feelings of efficacy, and (c) my understanding of the main components of classroom environments that would lessen hostility and increase cooperation. The strategies or interventions we use to create school environments that are safe and nurturing and support the process of learning are rooted in the mindset or the assumptions we have about ourselves and the youths with whom we work.

A model of crisis prevention rather than crisis intervention guides this mindset. That is, the main focus is not on what to do when a crisis emerges, but rather on what we can do to create environments in our schools that will minimize these crises from emerging in the first place. I am not downplaying the importance of having clear crisis plans in place, but in this chapter my goal is to outline an approach to school safety and school violence that places the spotlight on prevention.

I have often been asked what prompted my interest in creating positive classroom environments and in fostering motivation, self-esteem, hope, and resilience in angry and resistant youths. To be honest, my interest can be traced to how ineffectively I interacted with these youngsters when I first began as a therapist in the mid-1960s (Brooks, 1997; Brooks & Gunther, 1997) and when I became the principal of a school in a locked door unit in a psychiatric hospital in the early 1970s. In many ways, the mid-1960s represented the dark ages of our understanding of such youngsters. It was a time when we possessed little, if any, knowledge about the biological substrates of emotions and behaviors; we were unaware of the extent to which the inborn temperament of children interacted with the environment in an ongoing, dynamic fashion to con-

tribute to the formation of their personality, to their capacity to delay gratification, to handle frustration, to soothe themselves, to respond to others, and to learn. Similarly, we knew little about learning disabilities, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, learning styles, or multiple intelligence theory. Thus, we could not appreciate how these factors could have such a powerful impact on how successfully a child met developmental challenges.

The Blame Game Phase of My Journey

This limited knowledge, together with my own insecurities as a beginning therapist and school principal, contributed to an ineffective approach in working with these youngsters and their parents. If children and adolescents did not show signs of improvement under my care, I routinely anointed them with such labels as "oppositional," "unmotivated," or "resistant," thus blaming them for a lack of positive change and for failing to learn.

The blame was manifested in many forms, some subtle and some not so subtle. I assumed that all kinds of behavior were well within the control of the child and that changing behavior was a matter of "will." I would ask hyperactive children who were roaming my office to sit down (I'm not certain why I believed that therapy would be enhanced if a child were seated, especially since I often did my best thinking standing up and moving around), and when they did not respond to my request, I thought of them as oppositional. I constantly exhorted my patients to "try harder," and when they appeared not to follow my advice, I questioned their motivation and their desire to change. The blame extended to the parents of these youngsters. When interventions did not work I frequently questioned the motivation, skill, or perseverance of the parents. If children were angry or oppositional I was quick to assume that these feelings were a consequence of poor parenting, never appreciating the major contribution of a child's inborn temperament to how they felt and perceived their world (Brooks, 1998; Greene, 1998; Ingersoll & Goldstein, 1995).

Perhaps the defining moment of my career occurred when I became principal of a school in a locked door unit of a psychiatric hospital. Within several months of accepting this position I began to experience headaches and stomachaches before going to work each morning that were prompted in large measure by my sense of confusion and helplessness about what to do with these very challenging youth. As a result, I began to dislike all of the children and adolescents in my school, a rather poor attitude for a school principal. My response to these angry, violent youths was to become increasingly punitive; this was reflected in the classroom environments I helped to create, environments devoid of any sense of nurturance and caring. Little did I realize that my approach was actually reinforcing rather than lessening resentment and anger among the students.

This blaming and punitive phase of my professional career left me feeling upset and dissatisfied. I actually began to assume that these students were "out to get me," that they were "placed on this earth to make my life miserable." My work was increasingly

pervaded by feelings of frustration, helplessness, and burnout. I was relying on therapeutic and educational interventions that produced limited success, but I was unable to develop alternative strategies to help youngsters who displayed angry or defiant behaviors in the classroom. Staff meetings were dominated by discussions of how to restrain these youths rather than how to reach and teach them. As my feelings of burnout became more intense, however, I was forced to do a great deal of self-reflection from which emerged a far more positive, energizing mindset and approach.

I came to appreciate that one of the most powerful obstacles to helping these youths and designing a more nurturing, caring school environment was the mindset and negative assumptions my staff and I had developed. In essence, I was blaming the very people I was supposed to help. As a result, I wondered, "Are these students truly resistant? Were they put on this earth to make my life miserable? Do they really not want to get better? Are they lazy and unmotivated, as some have accused them of being? Or is my approach and the approach of my teachers not providing them with what they need?"

Empathy: The Road to Understanding

My intent in asking these questions was not to shift blame from my students to myself, but rather to challenge myself to expand my understanding of what my patients were experiencing. I realized that if I were to become a more effective and helpful therapist and school principal, I had to begin to change my negative mindset. A first step was to refine my ability to be empathic, to see the world through the eyes of the youngsters with whom I was working (Brooks, 1991). How could I be of help to others if I did not understand their experiences? Although empathy is a vital interpersonal skill in any relationship, it is often difficult to achieve. I have discovered that many people judge themselves to be empathic, but are they? How often do we question how others (our children, patients, students, colleagues) would describe us, which is a significant component of empathy? In addition, I have found that it is more difficult to be empathic when one is disappointed, upset, angry, or frustrated with the other person, including the students with whom we work.

Given my developing belief in the importance of empathy, I placed the spotlight on this concept in all facets of my clinical work. As an example, at some point during my initial meeting with parents who have sought a consultation about one of their children, I pose several questions to assess and then promote empathy. These questions include, "Describe a typical day in your child's life, but through your child's eyes. How does your child feel when he/she first gets up in the morning, sees you, and goes to school? How would your child describe you? How does your child feel about himself/herself, about his/her abilities to succeed? How does your child experience being taught, praised, disciplined?" Interestingly, many parents have told me that of all the questions I raised, the ones pertaining to empathy not only were some of the most difficult to answer, but also were the most important since they triggered much thought.

Similarly, when consulting with educators, I ask them how their students would describe them and the work they are doing together. I ask how students would describe their school experiences. I emphasize that every time we interact with youngsters they form images of us, and these images will play a large role in their ability to relate to and learn from us.

Empathy is the road to understanding in any relationship and is a key to a positive mindset that will lead to effective interventions. Goleman (1995) has highlighted empathy as a major component of "emotional intelligence." How can we raise, educate, or do therapy with children and adolescents without comprehending their experiences? How can we create nurturing classroom environments that lessen violence without appreciating the world of our students? Empathic educators continually ask two main questions when relating to students: (a) In anything I say to or do with students, what do I hope to accomplish? and (b) When I say or do something, am I saying or doing it in a way in which children will be most responsive to hearing me?

Although answering the first question is essential, since it relates to goals and expectations, reflecting upon the second question is equally important. Many educators may have clear notions of what they hope to accomplish, but they attempt to do so in ways that are prone to failure. For example, a teacher may have as a goal motivating a student with learning disabilities to produce more work. One of the teacher's prime ways to do so is to exhort the student to try harder. Although the teacher may be well intentioned, the recipient of such a comment typically experiences it in a negative, accusatory, judgmental way. When students feel accused or judged they are less likely to be cooperative. Consequently, the teacher's approach will not lead to the desired results. The more we develop empathy, the more we recognize the possible negative impact of saying such things as "try harder" and the greater the likelihood that we will search for more productive alternatives for motivating students and fostering positive school climates.

As an example of an alternative approach, I frequently say to youngsters who are angry and struggling with school that the problem is not that they are not trying, but rather that the strategies they are using to learn or to handle their feelings or the strategies the teachers are using to teach them are not working. I have found that children and adolescents are much more willing to discuss their struggles when I attribute these problems to strategies that can be changed rather than to a more moralistic view of "not trying."

What Empathy Taught Me: The Centrality of "Earned" Self-Esteem

In my attempt to become more empathic and to gain a greater appreciation of these youngsters' struggles, I gathered information from them through stories I encouraged them to write about their lives (Brooks, 1987). As I read the words of these angry or resistant students, it became evident that self-esteem and a loss of hope played a central role in

their lives. Not only did their stories reflect feelings of inadequacy, but also as they thought about their future, they entertained little hope that things would improve. When youngsters feel hopeless they are likely to engage in destructive behavior (Beck, 1986).

For example, Matt came to see me as a young adolescent who was diagnosed with learning and attentional problems. He was depressed and held a bleak view of his future. His description of school, which follows, captures the way in which many youngsters with special needs experience school; it serves as a testimony to the importance of being empathic and gaining a clearer understanding of the despair and sense of hopelessness that haunt these youngsters:

> School has been and still is something I dread profusely. Going to school has been like climbing up a tremendous, rocky mountain with steep cliffs and jagged, slippery rocks. This mountain is very grey and always covered in dark, murky, cold clouds. I step forth to take on this task of climbing this huge mountain. Each step is a battle against strong, howling, icy winds. The winds contain frigid rain that slams against my body, trying to push me down. I keep battling my way up. Sometimes I am knocked down, and sometimes I have to stop to regain my strength. My body is numb. My hands shake like leaves in the wind as I claw myself up the mountainside. Not being able to open my eyes, I blindly claw myself up the steep cliff. I stop because I am in such great pain. I look up and see that my struggle has hardly begun. Sometimes I just do not want to go on any further.

As I read stories written by Matt and other youngsters, I came to appreciate the burden most of these youngsters face, a burden replete with feelings of inadequacy, helplessness, hopelessness, and anger. I recognized that many of the behaviors I had observed in my patients—behaviors that are frequently labeled as resistant or oppositional—represented desperate attempts to cope with their emotional pain (Brooks, 1992, 1997; Goldstein & Mather, 1998; Wexler, 1991). Unfortunately, many of these coping strategies such as quitting, cheating, bullying, clowning, avoiding, being aggressive, and rationalizing were ultimately self-defeating and counterproductive, adding to rather than relieving distress.

Although children may be angry for a variety of reasons, in my experience one source of anger for many of these youngsters is low self-esteem with accompanying feelings of frustration, hopelessness, and helplessness. Low self-esteem is also evident in depressed youths. Low self-esteem often pervades many areas of a youngster's life. If you feel inadequate in school, if dreams of success fade into the background, motivation is likely to suffer, and then these children will be accused of "not trying." In addition, many of these youths possess poor interpersonal skills that contribute to less than satisfying peer relationships, adding to an overall picture of sadness. As a psychologist and principal of a school, I wondered if school environments could be designed that would nurture hope and self-esteem.

Self-Esteem: A Definition

While numerous clinicians and educators have emphasized the positive qualities of high self-esteem, others have viewed the concept of self-esteem from a much different perspective, contending that many individuals who advocate building self-esteem are doing so at the expense of teaching responsibility, self-discipline, and caring (Baumeister, 1996; Lerner, 1996). One factor contributing to these two different perspectives may reside in the confusion between what Lerner (1996) calls "feel-good-now" self-esteem versus "earned" self-esteem. She argues that:

> Earned self-esteem is based on success in meeting the tests of reality—measuring up to standards—at home and in school. It is necessarily hard-won and develops slowly, but it is stable and long-lasting, and provides a secure foundation for further growth and development. (p. 12)

In contrast, feel-good-now self-esteem is perceived as an approach to reinforcing self-esteem that does not challenge children, nor set up realistic expectations and goals, nor prepare them to cope with mistakes and failures. Lerner (1996) believes that in the quest to help children feel good now, authenticity and dedication are sacrificed, replaced by false praise and lowered standards.

Self-esteem as used in this chapter parallels the notion of earned self-esteem and is in concert with the definition advanced by the California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility (Mecca, 1990). The California group defined self-esteem not only in terms of "appreciating my own worth and importance" (p. 1), but also "having the character to be accountable for myself and to act responsibly toward others" (p. 1). This definition proposes that a basic ingredient of self-esteem includes the respect and compassion that we demonstrate toward others and is very different from narcissism or conceit.

Self-esteem may be understood as embracing the feelings and thoughts that individuals possess about their competence and about their abilities to have a positive impact, to confront rather than flee from challenges, to learn from both success and failure, and to treat themselves and others with dignity. Self-esteem directs and motivates our behavior and, in turn, the outcome of these behaviors affects our self-esteem so that a dynamic, reciprocal process is continuously in force, playing a significant role in determining whether or not a child will become resilient (Brooks, 1992, 1994).

Two Frameworks to Understand the Components of Self-Esteem and Motivation

If our interventions to create positive school climates and to lessen anger and defiance in youths are to be guided, in part, by the concept of earned self-esteem, it is important to examine the mindset of individuals with high self-esteem. To appreciate

the components of this mindset will help parents and professionals reinforce self-esteem, hope, and cooperation in children and adolescents.

Attribution Theory

One promising framework originally proposed by psychologist Bernard Weiner (Weiner, 1974) is called attribution theory. I found this theory appealing because the research examining its fundamental assumptions included children with special needs. In addition, its basic tenets could be applied to the real world. I could actually use attribution theory as a blueprint for what I said and did with at-risk children and with their parents and teachers to foster self-esteem and hope.

Children encounter numerous challenges as they grow, some of which result in success, others in failure. Attribution theory highlights that youngsters assume different reasons for why they succeed or fail and that these reasons, which vary from one child to the next, are strongly tied to their self-esteem. In terms of success experiences, research indicates that children with high self-esteem believe that their successes are determined in large part by their own efforts, resources, and abilities. These youngsters assume realistic credit for their accomplishments and feel a genuine sense of control over their lives. They are typically children who experience success early in their life within a responsive and encouraging environment. They are likely to be very motivated to face new challenges.

In contrast, youths who have encountered many frustrations and disappointments and whose self-esteem has suffered erosion are more likely to assume that their achievements are predicated on luck, chance, fate, or variables outside of their control, thus weakening their confidence in being able to succeed in the future. For instance, I have worked with many children with learning problems who quickly dismiss a high grade with such comments as, "I was lucky" or "The teacher made the test easy." These children minimize the role they have played in achieving any success; unfortunately, the cumulative effect of perceived failure outweighs any success experiences.

Self-esteem and motivation are also strongly implicated in how children comprehend their mistakes and failure. As an example, two children in the same third-grade class have failed a spelling test. One child thinks, "I can do better than this. Maybe I have to study more or ask the teacher for extra help." The second child explains the low grade by saying, "The teacher stinks. He never told us these words would be on the test. It's his fault I failed." Or, to take another example, a child who felt he was incapable of learning constantly hit other students. As he gained insight into his difficulties, he told me in therapy, "I'd rather hit another kid and be sent to the principal's office than have to be in the classroom where I felt like a dummy."

The child who is willing to seek additional help and/or work more diligently basically believes that mistakes are experiences to learn from rather than feel defeated by. Such children typically attribute making mistakes to factors that are within their power to modify, such as a lack of effort (especially if the task is realistically achievable) or

ineffective strategies (e.g., poor study habits). In marked contrast, students who resort to blaming or hitting others typically adhere to the painful view that "I am a failure, I cannot change, I cannot do well." Rather than believing that mistakes are the foundation for future learning, children with low self-esteem frequently experience each new mistake as another rock being placed around their necks, weighing them down more and more. To such youngsters, mistakes result from conditions that cannot be easily modified, such as lack of ability or low intelligence; given this belief, their motivation suffers and their anger often increases.

A vicious cycle is set in motion when children believe they cannot learn from mistakes. Feeling hopeless and wishing to avoid further perceived humiliation, they are apt to quit, offer excuses, cast blame on others, or resort to other ineffective ways of coping, such as assuming the role of class clown or class bully. As these youngsters reach teenage years, our attempts to teach and encourage them may be met with angry retorts such as "Leave me alone!" "I don't care!" "It's my life, I'll do what I want with it" and/or acting out behaviors. In my experience these children care much more than they acknowledge, but they feel hopeless and believe they are unable to change their situation. They do not even want to entertain the notion that things may improve. For them, any hope is false hope that eventuates in further disappointment. Although the adults in their lives may believe that such youngsters are quitters or lack perseverance or are bullies, we often fail to comprehend that these behaviors are rooted in a sense of hopelessness and a desperate attempt to avoid further humiliation (Brooks, 1992; Wexler, 1991). Working with these at-risk youths involves helping to change their negative attributions and mindsets (Bernstein, 1996).

Attribution theory offers significant guideposts for designing classroom climates that will reinforce the self-confidence and motivation of angry and defiant students. The following questions stem from this theory:

1. How do we create a school environment that maximizes the probability that students will not only succeed but that they also will experience their achievements as predicated in large measure on their own abilities and efforts? Or, stated somewhat differently, how do we assist youngsters to assume an increasing sense of ownership and responsibility for what occurs in their lives?

2. How do we create a school environment that reinforces the belief that mistakes are frequently the foundation for learning, that mistakes are not only accepted, but also expected? How do we create an environment that lessens fears of being humiliated or embarrassed, fears that often trigger sadness and anger?

Deci's Approach

A second framework is based on the work of psychologist Edward Deci who has studied self-esteem and motivation through the lens of youngsters' needs (Deci & Chandler,

1986; Deci & Flaste, 1995; Deci, Hodges, Pierson, & Tomassone, 1992). His model has many similarities to Glasser's (1997) choice theory (formerly called control theory) and the work of Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (1990). It suggests that youngsters will develop high self-esteem and be more motivated to engage and persevere at school tasks when the adults in their lives have created a school environment that satisfies basic needs. Deci highlights three needs that provide direction for fostering self-esteem and motivation.

1. ***To belong and feel connected.*** Youngsters are more likely to thrive when they are in environments in which they feel they belong and are comfortable, in which they feel appreciated. Many adolescents join gangs to satisfy this need for connectedness and identity. When youngsters feel alienated or detached they are more likely to act out and fail at school (Strahan, 1989). Related to this feeling of belonging is the importance of helping each child to feel welcome in the school environment. When I asked students of all ages what a teacher could do each day to help them to feel welcome in school, the two most frequent responses I received were: (a) being greeted warmly by a teacher who uses your name, and (b) a teacher smiling at you. Obviously, small gestures can go a long way toward assisting at-risk children to feel welcome at school and in other environments. If students do not feel welcome, they are more prone to becoming angry.

2. ***To feel autonomous and have a sense of self-determination.*** At the core of most theories of self-esteem and motivation, including attribution theory, is the concept of ownership and self-determination (Brooks, 1991). Motivation is increased when people genuinely believe that their voice is being heard and respected, when they believe they have some control over what is occurring in their lives (Dicintio & Gee, 1999). If students perceive they are constantly being told what to do and that their lives are being dictated by adults, they are less likely to be enthused about engaging in learning tasks that they feel are being imposed upon them. If anything, their main motivation may be to avoid or oppose the desires of others. A power struggle or angry outbursts are likely to ensue. An emphasis on reinforcing self-determination requires that educators use classroom experiences to teach youngsters how to solve problems and make wise choices and decisions. In addition, we must provide these children with ongoing opportunities to develop and refine these skills.

3. ***To feel competent.*** We all hope to be successful, to possess skills in our lives that help us feel competent and accomplished, skills that generate satisfaction and pride. Unfortunately, many children do not feel competent. Feelings of incompetence, which are often associated with anger and sadness, prompt children to retreat from challenges and to engage in self-defeating behaviors, including aggression, that serve to intensify an already difficult problem.

It is important to emphasize that all students require positive feedback and encouragement from educators. A focus on encouragement, however, should never be confused with giving false praise or inflated grades since children are quite perceptive in

knowing when they are receiving undeserved positive evaluations. As noted earlier, positive feedback must be rooted in actual accomplishment and success, which requires teachers to provide opportunities for children to succeed in areas judged important by themselves and others. The students' accomplishments should be displayed for others to see. (What good is listing a child's strengths on an educational plan, for example, if no one witnesses these strengths?)

In addition, a focus on competencies and positive feedback is not mutually exclusive with offering feedback to correct a child's performance or behavior. Corrective feedback, however, must be undertaken in a nonaccusatory, nonjudgmental manner that does not humiliate the child. Corrective feedback is most effective when presented to the student as a problem to be solved.

The Search for Islands of Competence

As we consider the tenets of attribution theory and Deci's model, it is important to recognize that any intervention that teachers implement to develop a classroom milieu in which self-esteem, motivation, hope, and resilience are fostered must be guided by a strength-based approach and must promote autonomy and self-determination in a climate of genuine caring for and appreciation of the child. Although we must never minimize a child's difficulties, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities, we must not lose sight of the strengths of angry, defiant children. If we are to minimize anger in our schools, we must ensure that all students feel welcome, important, and hopeful (Charney, 1991; Heath, 1999; Malicky, Shapiro, & Mazurek, 1999).

Some youngsters are much more confident playing baseball or basketball than they are taking a math test or talking with their peers. Other children and adolescents feel secure in the classroom but are very self-conscious and anxious playing a sport, and still others are self-assured working on the motor of a car or drawing a cartoon but dread writing an essay. A child's self-esteem may vary from one situation to the next. Thus, there is little wonder that some children are sad or angry in certain environments or with certain people, but more content and cooperative at other times. Unfortunately, if youngsters experience self-doubt and failure in many situations, especially those they judge to be of value to significant others, their overall sense of competence and confidence is lessened and they are more likely to demonstrate anger. I use a metaphor to capture this feeling that involves an image in which I see these youngsters swimming or drowning in an ocean of self-perceived inadequacy. In therapy and in the classroom, these children have communicated to me that they doubt they will ever be successful. To counteract this image of despair, I believe that every person possesses at least one small "island of competence," one area that is or has the potential to be a source of pride and accomplishment (Brooks, 1999b).

This metaphor of islands of competence is not intended to be merely a fanciful image, but rather a symbol of hope and respect, a reminder that all children and adolescents have unique strengths and courage. Caregivers have the responsibility to locate

and reinforce these islands of competence. If we can find and reinforce these areas of strength, we can create a powerful ripple effect in which children may be more willing to venture forth and confront situations that have been problematic. For this reason whenever I meet with parents or teachers or other professionals to discuss an angry youngster, within a few minutes I ask them to describe the child's islands of competence. Then I ask how we might strengthen these islands and display them for others to see.

Clinicians and researchers have emphasized the importance of reinforcing these areas of strength. Rutter (1985) in commenting about resilient individuals noted, "… experience of success in one arena of life led to enhanced self-esteem and a feeling of self-efficacy, enabling them to cope more successfully with the subsequent life challenges and adaptations" (p. 604). Similarly, psychologist Mark Katz (1994) has written, "… being able to showcase our talents, and to have them valued by important people in our lives, helps us to define our identities around that which we do best" (p. 10).

The case of a young boy who was referred to me illustrates the importance of identifying a child's islands of competence. Billy was an angry and depressed 10-year-old boy with learning problems who dealt with his anxieties about school by hiding behind the bushes of the school instead of entering the building. In our first session, Billy and I discussed why he hid behind the bushes. He responded quickly and directly, informing me that he "liked the bushes better than he liked school." Rather than engage in a debate about the merits of bushes versus schools, I decided to discover what he saw as his islands of competence. He responded that he enjoyed taking care of his pet dog. With his permission, I mentioned Billy's expertise in taking care of animals to the school principal, suggesting that the school might benefit from the presence of a "pet monitor."

The following day the principal scheduled a meeting with Billy and asked if he might be interested in becoming the school's first pet monitor, even handing Billy a pet monitor "union card" that he had created to emphasize the position's importance. When Billy asked about a pet monitor's responsibilities, the principal said that to begin with, Billy would be expected to come to school 10 minutes early each day to take care of a rabbit the school had recently purchased.

Billy accepted the offer and handled his duties in a very responsible manner, in marked contrast to his history with academic requirements. Within a short time, he began to take care of other pets. Billy's teacher communicated how impressed she was with his knowledge of pets and helped him to write a manual about animal care. Billy had always been reluctant to write, but under these circumstances his hesitancy disappeared since he felt more confident and recognized that he had information to communicate. His manual was placed in the school library. In addition, by the end of the school year, Billy "lectured" in every classroom in the building about taking care of pets.

Billy's aggressive outbursts and his avoidance of the school building decreased significantly once he assumed the position of pet monitor. Very importantly, Billy's teacher and principal had been willing to take a risk and change the way in which they

had been approaching his avoidant behavior. Rather than seeing Billy as a resistant, annoying child who had to change his behavior, they had the courage to ask what they could do differently so that he would not be as frightened in school.

Resilience and Hope

All parents worry to some extent about what the future holds for their children; this worry is greatly magnified for parents of children who are angry, defiant, and/or depressed, especially when they witness their children confronting so many burdens and frustrations. When speaking with these parents, I often hear this question: "Will my child always be so unhappy and angry and feel so unsuccessful?" Educators often pose a similar question when they question whether they can "reach" students who have replaced hope with anger.

Faced on a daily basis with children who have low self-esteem, it can become very easy for caregivers to focus on pathology and risk factors rather than on those factors that help children bounce back. Yet, as I encountered a number of adults who as children experienced years of frustration, failure, humiliation, or abuse, and were now leading satisfying, successful lives, my focus and questions shifted. I began to ask, "Why are some high-risk children successful as adults while others are not?"

Answering this question is perhaps one of the most important tasks for those of us who work with, raise, or educate youngsters. If we can understand those factors that contribute to children bouncing back, to becoming hopeful and resilient, then we can develop and implement more effective interventions that will give all of our children a fighting chance.

Fortunately, during the past 15 to 20 years there has been a burgeoning literature focusing on the topic of resilience (Beardslee, 1989; Brooks, 1994, 1997, 1999b; Brooks & Goldstein, 2001; Katz, 1994, 1997; Rutter, 1985, 1987; Werner, 1993; Werner & Smith, 1992). Researchers and clinicians have noted that three interrelated domains influence the occurrence of resilience, namely, the inner characteristics of the child, the family, and the larger social environment (Hechtman, 1991). Inner resources of the child that contribute to resilience include an "easy" temperament from birth, more advanced problem-solving skills, good social skills, and effective coping strategies. Very importantly, resilient youngsters possess a high level of self-esteem, a realistic sense of personal control, and a feeling of hope. Concerning the family dynamics, it is not surprising to find that resilient children are more likely to grow up in homes characterized by warmth, affection, emotional support, and clearcut and reasonable guidelines, limits, and consequences.

Supportive adults outside the immediate family have also proved to be a major source of resilience. When resilient adults were asked what important factors in their childhood helped them become resilient, they invariably responded: "an adult who believed in me." Segal (1988) referred to such a person as a "charismatic adult," someone from whom a child or adolescent gathers strength. Schools have especially been

highlighted as environments that can provide angry, resistant, or alienated youngsters with experiences that enhance their self-esteem and competence, lessen their sadness and bitterness, and strengthen their resilience and hope (Brooks, 1991; Curwin, 1992; Goldstein, 1995; Segal, 1988). In this regard, a recent report issued by the U.S. Department of Education (Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998) about safe schools noted:

> Research shows that a positive relationship with an adult who is available to provide support when needed is one of the most critical factors in preventing student violence. Students often look to adults in the school community for guidance, support, and direction. Some children need help overcoming feelings of isolation and support in developing connections to others. Effective schools make sure that opportunities exist for adults to spend quality, personal time with children. (pp. 3-4)

Strategies to Foster Self-Esteem, Motivation, Hope, and Resilience

A number of self-esteem strategies, predicated on attribution theory and Deci's framework, build upon a child's islands of competence to reinforce a sense of confidence, motivation, hope, and resilience. These strategies can be applied in our homes, schools, and offices. As many will recognize, these strategies also can help to develop skills implicated in emotional intelligence (e.g., self-awareness, empathy, self-control, responsibility, and ease in interpersonal relationships), skills crucial for success and contentment in life (Goleman, 1995). The following are a selected group of these strategies together with some recommendations for the implementation of an orientation period at the beginning of the school year:

1. Developing Realistic Expectations and Goals and Making Accommodations When Necessary

I am often asked about realistic expectations and goals in our schools and homes for children of different ages. My answer is, "I don't know. First, tell me about your child and then we can decide on realistic expectations and goals." Although a wealth of research proves that children have different temperaments from birth (Chess & Thomas, 1987), possess different learning styles (Levine, 1994; Rief & Heimburge, 1996), and that multiple intelligences are distributed differently among children (Gardner, 1983), we often give lip service to accepting children for who they are. Instead, we respond to youngsters as if they were a homogeneous group. When we fail to make appropriate accommodations based on the unique quality of each child, children are more likely to fail and become sad and angry and display aggressive outbursts. This scenario is often seen in the school environment.

For example, it is not unusual to hear a teacher say it would not be "fair" to offer accommodations for one child because of what the other children might feel. I appre-

ciate what the teacher is saying, but I also believe that if children are different, the least fair thing we can do is to treat all of them the same. If we do not teach students in the ways they are able to learn best, we will continue to have many youngsters who feel mistreated, ill-at-ease, alienated, and angry in our schools. The issue of fairness must be addressed, however, lest other students begin to resent those students who are receiving accommodations. One suggestion I advocate for schools is to use the first couple of days of the new school year as an orientation period (Brooks, 1997, 1999a). During this period, teachers do not take out any books, but instead use the time to set the foundation for a classroom climate in which all students have the opportunity to thrive. Key questions and concerns are considered and possible obstacles to learning are confronted before they became obstacles.

As an illustration, to minimize the possibility that children think a teacher is unfair because some children are doing more reading or homework than others, on the first day of school, the teacher can discuss with the class how each of them is different, how some students can read more quickly, how some can solve math problems more efficiently, and how some can run a mile in less time. The teacher can explain that in light of these differences, there will be different expectations of the amount and kind of work done by each student. Next, the teacher can say, "Since I will treat each of you somewhat differently because you are different, one of my concerns is, if you begin to feel I am not being fair, it will interfere with your learning. Thus, if at any time during the year you feel I am not being fair, I want you to tell me so we can discuss it." I have received feedback indicating that when teachers bring up the issue of fairness before it has become an issue, it remains a nonissue and permits teachers to accommodate each student's needs without prompting negative feelings on the part of others. It lessens the frustration, anger, and sadness that are typically byproducts of frustration. I also suggest that teachers communicate the same message about fairness to parents, perhaps through a short, written statement of class philosophy that is sent home.

The kinds of accommodations I typically recommend do not require major modifications in a student's program, nor do they demand that a teacher have extremely different educational plans for each student in the classroom. I believe that effective accommodations on the part of parents, teachers, and other professionals need not be complicated. It requires is that all parties—students, teachers, therapists, parents—appreciate a child's strengths and weaknesses, share an understanding of appropriate expectations and goals, and define what each has to do to maximize the probability of success in meeting these goals. We must help at-risk youths to understand their strengths and vulnerabilities and the accommodations that will help them to succeed. Realistic expectations lessen the frustration that results in anger and/or sadness. A few examples of typical accommodations follow:

Homework time. Some youngsters experience attending school as the equivalent of climbing Mt. Everest each day. Then they are required to do homework after school. If they have learning problems, they often must spend two or three times longer than their peers to do homework. By bedtime they are frustrated and exhausted, as are their

parents. Common sense would dictate that a time limit be established for homework, regardless of how much work is actually finished. For example, if most students can complete a homework assignment in an hour, then the limit should be approximately an hour for all students—even those with special needs. Some might argue that this approach will result in some children not completing as many problems as other students in the class and, thus, not learning as much; however, asking these children to spend several more hours per evening on homework will typically prove counterproductive. It may produce sadness, anger, and defiance.

Testing. Students with learning or attentional problems usually encounter more difficulty taking timed tests than their peers. As one child with learning difficulties once asked me with tears in his eyes, "Why did they ever invent timed tests?" I have seen the test scores of students increase noticeably when taking untimed tests and, yet, they only required another 10 minutes. The pressure of a timed test no longer existed and they were more relaxed. Similarly, some students will display far more knowledge when answering questions orally than when having to write these same answers. We should test students under the best possible conditions for them. Such accommodations should not be viewed as spoiling these youngsters, but rather as treating them with fairness and dignity.

Assignment assistants. I have worked with many youths who engage in ongoing battles with parents about homework. The nightly routine is filled with frustration and anger, and family harmony is almost nonexistent. The reasons why students do not do homework vary. Some students find it difficult to copy homework assignments from the blackboard. Providing the child with a monthly syllabus of assignments can be helpful. (It is interesting to note that college professors typically distribute a syllabus for the entire semester during the first class—I'm not certain why we cannot do the same in our elementary, middle, and high schools.) It may also be helpful to assign a buddy to ensure that the child has an accurate picture of what homework is required.

School books at home. A vast number of books are lost being transported between home and school. Providing two sets of books to a student, one for home, the other for school, so that no textbooks have to go back and forth, helps many students. It is one less pressure that students have to worry about, giving them more time to focus on learning the material in the books and less time to be angry or depressed.

2. Developing Responsibility by Providing Opportunities to Contribute to Others

In my experience when children develop a sense of accomplishment and pride, they are less likely to feel sad or angry and less likely to engage in defiant, uncooperative behaviors. It is therefore essential to provide youths with opportunities for assuming responsibilities, especially those that help them to feel they are making a contribution to their home, school, or community environments. The experience of making a positive difference in the lives of others reinforces self-respect and a sense of hope. It

serves as a powerful antidote to feelings of defeat, anger, and despair (Brooks, 1988). One of the best ways to boost self-esteem and motivation is for youngsters to taste success. As Werner (1993) has noted:

> Self-esteem and self-efficacy also grew when youngsters took on a responsible position commensurate with their ability, whether it was part-time paid work, managing the household when a parent was incapacitated, or, most often, caring for younger siblings. At some point in their young lives, usually in middle childhood and adolescence, the youngsters who grew into resilient adults were required to carry out some socially desirable task to prevent others in their family, neighborhood, or community from experiencing distress or discomfort. (p. 511)

The child who was asked to become the pet monitor of the school is an example of a youngster making a contribution. Other examples include the following:

Charitable projects. An educator I know enlisted visually handicapped adolescents with learning difficulties to create piggy banks to sell and sponsored a bake sale and raffle, with the proceeds going to a needy family. The educator noted that the students' self-esteem and cooperation improved as did the many academic skills that were involved in the charitable project.

"Budding." I visited an elementary school in which fifth-graders were "buddies" with kindergarten and first-grade students. They would spend time each week with their buddies in a variety of possible activities, including reading to them, helping them with work, or playing a sport. All of the students benefited from this approach, and the atmosphere of cooperation that permeated the building impressed me.

Committee membership. A school social worker formed a committee of five elementary school students who were often absent from school. The committee focused on the question of what prompted students to be absent, and the five students engaged in research to answer the question. Not only did they prepare a report of their findings, but they also recommended keeping track of the attendance of first-graders and intervening early for all first-graders who were absent a great deal. After becoming members of this committee the attendance records of the five students improved significantly. They now had a reason to come to school.

School beautification. Youngsters can take care of plants in school, paint murals on the wall, or hang up favorite drawings. When I was a principal I found that asking students to decorate the walls was a strong antidote to vandalism.

Peer tutoring. Cooperative learning as well as tutoring younger children is a powerful way of increasing a sense of belonging and competence in the school setting (Brooks, 1991). I am reminded of the impressive results of the Valued Youth Partnership Program reported by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development

(Hornbeck, 1989). The program was developed to address the large percentage of youths dropping out of school before they reached high school. It was highly successful, as the Carnegie report noted:

> A rise in tutors' self-esteem is the most noticeable effect of the program … As a result, only 2 percent of all tutors have dropped out of school. This is remarkable, given that all of these students had been held back twice or more and were reading at least two grade levels below their current grade placement. Disciplinary problems have become less severe, grades have improved, and attendance of tutors has soared. (p. 47)

3. Providing Opportunities for Making Choices and Decisions and Solving Problems: Reinforcing a Sense of Ownership

Theories of self-esteem and motivation as well as research about hope and resilience emphasize the importance of reinforcing the belief that one has some control over one's life. I believe that a sense of powerlessness is often one trigger for anger and defiance. To develop this sense of control, ownership, and autonomy, children require opportunities to learn the skills necessary to make sound choices and decisions and to solve problems. They also need opportunities, in keeping with their developmental level and interests, to apply and develop these skills, especially in those situations that have an impact on their lives (Adelman & Taylor, 1983; Deci & Chandler, 1986; Deci & Flaste, 1995; Deci, Hodges, Pierson, & Tomassone, 1992; Dicintio & Gee, 1999; Glasser, 1997; Kohn, 1993; Shure, 1994). If children and adolescents feel they are always being told what to do, if they feel they have little control over their lives, they are less likely to be cooperative. Teachers and other professionals have many opportunities to reinforce problem-solving and decision-making skills. The following are some examples:

Choice. I spoke with a group of teachers who always gave their students a choice in what homework problems to do. For example, if there were eight math problems on a page, the students were told they had to do six of the eight and it was their choice which six to do. The teachers told me that they actually received more homework on a regular basis when permitting their students some choice since it reinforced a sense of ownership for doing the homework. Similarly, a resource room teacher found that students were more likely to write when he offered them several different colored pens and asked them which color they would most like to use that day. When students are provided these kinds of options, they are less likely to view school as a hostile environment.

Guided problem solving. I advocate that teachers should incorporate some time in a class schedule to obtain the input of students about solving particular problems. I have found that assisting students to articulate what the problem is, to think of possible solutions to the problems, and to consider the likely consequences of each solution, increases the probability of children not only learning to solve problems, but also following through on the solutions (especially since they have helped to formulate the solutions).

For instance, when I was principal of the school we established a Student Council. The opportunity and structure for the student patients to discuss their concerns and criticisms noticeably lessened hostility and created a more responsible attitude.

Input. I believe that we must involve students from an early age in providing input about their own education. An article in *Teacher Magazine* (Jacobson, 1999) titled, "Three's Company," about parent-teacher conferences reported:

> When Michelle Baker first learned that her son Colin would take part in a parent-teacher conference, she was skeptical. "I thought, This is going to be a fiasco," she recalls. Instead, the meeting turned out to be a big success: Colin … showed unusual insight into his academic strengths and weaknesses. "He had the opportunity to hear his teacher talk about him with him sitting there," Baker says. "He was able to communicate and understand better what he was being judged on." (p. 23)

It is interesting to note that Colin was only in the first grade.

4. Establishing Self-Discipline by Learning to Discipline Effectively

As might be expected, many of the questions I am asked at my workshops, especially about angry and defiant youths, revolve around the issue of discipline. In turn, I often ask the audience to think about the purpose of discipline. Not surprisingly, the first response I typically receive focuses on the importance of establishing rules and guidelines to ensure that our home and school environments are safe and that both children and caregivers feel secure. I am in total agreement with this purpose of discipline, especially since I have seen what can occur in an environment in which rules, limits, and consequences are vague and inconsistently followed. But we must not lose sight of a second, very important purpose of discipline, namely, to promote self-discipline and self-control in our children. It is difficult to conceive of children developing high self-esteem, motivation, and resilience if they do not possess a comfortable sense of self-discipline, that is, a realistic ability to reflect upon one's behavior and its impact on others, and then to change the behavior if necessary. In essence, self-discipline implies ownership of one's own discipline.

Before examining more closely some strategies that nurture self-discipline without a loss of self-esteem, one point about discipline deserves special mention. As much as possible, parents, teachers, and other professionals should anticipate those situations that may prove very difficult for particular youngsters, those situations that are likely to result in disruptive behaviors. We should consider ways to help children either avoid these situations, until we know they are better able to manage them, or to provide them with alternative behaviors. One illustration of a preventative approach was the child who was appointed the pet monitor. Another example is asking a hyperactive child to take messages to the office every half hour to provide needed physical activity. One teacher told me that she asked a disruptive child, who was constantly being sent to the

assistant principal's office for disciplinary purposes, to become the "assistant to the assistant principal." This position required the child to work in the assistant principal's office for a short time at the beginning of each day. The disruptive behavior ceased, especially as the child formed a more positive relationship with the assistant principal. In addition, the child's self-esteem increased.

Even if we create school environments that lessen the probability of students misbehaving, we still know that children will, at times, act in ways that invite disapproval from educators. Many angry and defiant youngsters require more limits and guidelines than their peers, but they are the first to experience limits as significant impositions on their life, arguing that the teachers are not being fair. We must remember that discipline stems from the word disciple and should be understood as part of a teaching process. In helping children to develop self-discipline, it is essential not to humiliate or intimidate them (Charney, 1991; Curwin & Mendler, 1988; Mendler, 1992). Humiliation and intimidation are more likely to result in increased anger and uncooperativeness, the very feelings and behaviors we wish to change. If we want children to assume responsibility for their actions and to perceive rules as being fair, they must understand the purpose of the rules and participate within reason in the process of creating these rules and the consequences that follow should the rules be broken. Adults often walk a tightrope when discipline is involved, maintaining a delicate balance between rigidity and flexibility, striving to blend warmth, nurturance, acceptance, and humor with realistic expectations, clearcut guidelines, and logical and natural consequences. Several examples follow:

Self-reflection. I spoke with an assistant principal of a middle school who asked students to write a brief essay while serving detention. They were given a choice of more than 30 topics, including what they would do if they ran the school, what they could do in the future to avoid detention, what dreams they had for their future. As I reviewed some of the themes the students had written about, I was impressed with their ability to reflect upon their lives and their behaviors and to consider alternative ways of behaving in the future. In addition, the exercise led to a decrease in defiant behaviors.

Shared rule making. During the orientation period I advocate for the first couple of days of school, I have encouraged teachers to ask students what rules were necessary in the classroom or school, the best ways to remember these rules (so that adults did not have to remind or nag them), and the most effective consequences should rules be broken. In recommending this approach, I also emphasize that students should be informed about nonnegotiable rules related to safety and security issues. Some teachers have voiced reservations about allowing students to have input in the creation of rules and consequences (they predicted that students would take advantage of the opportunity and do away with all rules), but I and others have found that the students make up strict rules and consequences. If anything, many teachers have reported they must help students to develop less rigid and harsh rules and consequences. The key point is that students are more likely to remember and follow rules they have helped to create since they feel a greater sense of ownership for these rules (Rademacher,

Callahan, & Pederson-Seelye, 1998). In addition, if students have a difficult time following their own rules, teachers can use their difficulty as an opportunity to discuss more effective ways of remembering these rules.

I want to make one other important point about discipline. We must never forget that perhaps the most powerful forms of discipline involve positive feedback and encouragement. I include a discussion of this in point #6 when I consider ways to help our children feel special and appreciated.

5. Helping Children to Deal More Effectively With Mistakes and Failure

All children worry about making mistakes and feeling foolish. At-risk youngsters are typically more self-conscious and/or worried about making mistakes than their peers. As attribution theory highlights, these children believe that mistakes cannot be modified and are an ongoing source of embarrassment and humiliation. Many children spend more time and energy in attempting to avoid a task they believe will result in failure than in seeking solutions. This avoidance is often manifested in oppositional and defiant behaviors. Since self-esteem and resilience are linked to a child's response to mistakes and failure, we must convey the message that mistakes are part of the learning process. We can do so in a number of ways.

Modeling. Parents, teachers, and other professionals serve as models. I frequently ask youngsters to describe how their parents or teachers handle mistakes or frustrations. I have heard a wide array of responses including, "They scream," "They yell," "They don't talk with each other," "They walk around with a frown on their face." Obviously, these parents and teachers are not modeling effective ways of dealing with frustration.

Responding to mistakes. Teachers must reflect upon how they respond to a child's mistakes. This implies that we must have realistic expectations for children and not overreact to their mistakes or shortcomings. All of us from time to time become frustrated with the behavior of youngsters, but we must avoid disparaging remarks such as: "You have to pay closer attention." The goal is to communicate that mistakes will occur and we should learn from them. We can also engage a child in problem solving by asking what might help to minimize the mistake from occurring in the future.

Anticipating mistakes. Since the fear of failure has such a strong influence in classrooms, it should be addressed directly even before any student makes a mistake. This can be accomplished during the orientation period. One example is for a teacher to ask at the beginning of the new school year, "Who in this class feels that they are going to make a mistake or not understand something in class this year?" Before any of the students can respond, the teacher raises his or her own hand and then asks why they think this question was posed. The students' responses can serve as a catalyst to discuss how fears of making mistakes interfere with offering opinions, answering questions, and learning. The teacher can then involve the class in problem solving by asking what he or she can do as their teacher and what they can do as a class to minimize the fear of

failing and looking foolish. To acknowledge openly the fear of failure renders it less potent and less destructive. Early in the school year youngsters can be taught that not understanding material is to be expected and that the teacher's job is to help them to learn. Mistakes can be "celebrated" as part of the educational process. This intervention for dealing with mistakes is important for all students, but even more so for those youngsters who feel vulnerable, sad, and angry.

Focus on the positive. Adults who focus on children's strengths and their capabilities rather than on what they cannot do lessen the fear of failure. For instance, the seemingly simple practice of teachers marking tests by adding points for correct answers rather than subtracting points for incorrect answers places the spotlight on the positive. I visited one school in which teachers engaged in this practice and did so with green rather than red ink, believing that the use of red ink for indicating errors on papers had a negative impact on children.

6. Letting Children and Adolescents Know That They Are Special and Appreciated

In my workshops I often ask the audience, "In the past week or two, what have you done to help another person to feel special and appreciated?" I pose this question since I have found that although most of us are thrilled to receive a note or phone call of appreciation, many well-intentioned people do not make use of opportunities to show appreciation. I am reminded of an article I once read that noted that many adults have a "praise deficit." We must make certain we find ways to appreciate angry or sad youngsters, especially since they often feel scared, vulnerable, and not well-liked. Self-esteem, motivation, hope, and resilience are nurtured when we convey appreciation and encouragement to students, when we become the charismatic adults in their lives. Words and actions that communicate encouragement are always welcome and energizing. They are vital for defiant children, many of whom are burdened with anger and self-doubt, and may not at first accept the positive feedback. We must persevere, however, and never forget that even a seemingly small gesture of appreciation can generate a long-lasting positive effect. The following are examples:

Connecting outside of school. I met a high school teacher who had more than 150 students in his classes and he planned to call each of them at least twice at home in the evening during the school year to find out how they were doing. He told me that the practice took only about 7- to 8-minutes an evening, but had very positive effects, including students being more respectful and more disciplined in class, and doing their homework more regularly. This particular teacher was gifted in knowing how to help his students feel welcome and appreciated.

Becoming a charismatic adult or mentor. Research indicates that when students have at least one adult in school whom they feel cares about them and is an advocate for them, they are less likely to be violent or drop out and more likely to attend (Brooks, 1991).

School-wide recognition. Schools can hold recognition assemblies not just to acknowledge the achievements of students with high grades, but also to spotlight the islands of competence of students whose grades do not qualify for the honor role, but who have made other contributions to the school environment.

Concluding Thoughts

Anger and resistance in youths present major challenges for educators. I believe that if we use a strength-based model guided by empathy, self-esteem, self-discipline, motivation, resilience, and hope we will be able to create nurturing school environments that reach an increasing number of these youngsters and help direct them toward a more constructive path in life. A review of questions to assess whether we have provided a positive school climate for each student may be found in this chapter's Appendix. Educators involved in psycho-educational case studies and/or behavior intervention planning may find this Appendix of valuable assistance.

As educators we must remember that we have a great privilege, namely, that of having an impact on the life of a developing youngster. Having this privilege, we must always ask, "Are we using it in the most effective way?" Educating angry, alienated, at-risk students presents many challenges and struggles, but out of these can emerge children who become very productive, resilient adults. Although it is not an easy task, all of us are capable of becoming the charismatic adults in children's lives. It is our gift to the next generation.

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Appendix

Guideposts to Providing a Positive School Climate for Students

I. Helping students to feel they belong, are connected, and are welcome in the school.

- Is there at least one staff member whom the student believes cares about him or her? How is this caring communicated to the student?
- What are strategies that teachers might use to help this student feel they are genuinely interested in him or her?
- Is this student accepted by other students? If so, who are these other students?
- If the student is isolated, what can be done to help this student develop closer relationships with other students?

II. Fostering self-determination and helping students to have a sense of ownership.

- What choices would this student say he or she has had in the past few months in school?
- What decisions would the student say he or she has made about his or her educational plan during this school year?
- Is the student invited to individualized education program (IEP) meetings and parent conferences? If so, who prepares the student for what will occur in the meeting and what will be expected of the student?
- Does the student have an opportunity to discuss issues and possible solutions pertaining to his or her school program?
- If the student is not in attendance at IEP meetings and parent conferences, is the student asked what he or she would like to have discussed at the meeting or conference and are suggestions elicited from the student?
- If the student is not in attendance at the meeting or conference, who will meet with the student to discuss what occurred?
- If the student is on a contract, does the student feel he or she was an active participant in the development and implementation of the contract?

- If educational and/or psychological testing was conducted, did the student receive feed back about the results of the testing, both in terms of areas of strength and areas of weakness?

- Does the student have a clear understanding of why certain interventions have been implemented?

III. Identifying, reinforcing, and displaying a student's islands of competence.

- What are the student's competencies or strengths?

- Has anyone asked the student what he or she believes are his or her areas of strength?

- How are these strengths displayed in the school setting (e.g., if a student is an excellent artist, is the student's artwork displayed in school)?

- If the student has an IEP, are the areas of strength listed and does it also indicate how these strengths will be used?

- What does this student contribute to the school? One of the best ways to help students to feel competent is for them to feel that they are making a contribution to the school (i.e., they have at least one responsibility that helps them to feel that, because they are in the school, the school is a better place).

IV. Identifying a student's coping strategies.

- What are the main ways this student copes with school and with mistakes (e.g., asking for help, being a bully, quitting, being a class clown)?

- Does this student's main ways of coping lead to positive or negative outcomes?

- How can we help this student to develop more adaptive coping strategies (e.g., asking for and accepting assistance, developing new strategies for learning)?