Building Resiliency:

A Meta-Synthesis

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**Abstract**

This meta-synthesis of the literature on children who experience trauma, and what we can do in the school setting to support children and teach them to build and shore up their resiliency factors. It takes a closer look at what is working, what educators can do to support children, and assist their families overcome the impact of trauma in their lives.

**1**. **Introduction**

*1.1. Background*

Every school day, children walk into the classroom. Many teachers expect them to be "ready to learn" (Bush, 1990). For many students, this might be an unreasonable expectation. When a child has lived through difficult situations, understanding what is being taught at school can become a challenge when one's basic needs are not being met.

A project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT, has shown an increase in Alaska's children who are not attending pre-school, children in single-parent homes, teen births, children in foster care, and children living in poverty. The economic well-being has been changing - nation wide, 22% of children live in poverty, Alaska has 13%. The national average of children whose parents have secure employment is 33%, Alaska children is higher, 35%. Children nation wide who live in a high housing burden cost is 41%, with Alaska's state trend at 31% (KIDS COUNT Data Center, 2016).  A study by Dube and colleagues (Dube, 2001) shows that 80% of children who attempt suicide have experienced physical and emotional abuse, or early adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

People in crisis may have a very limited set of responses when faced with seemingly mundane, everyday tasks. They may shut down even further when asked to walk into a classroom where everyone else seems to "get it" and their still reeling from what happened before they arrived at school. Children's brains are continuously forming vital connections and creating pathways, this neurobiological process can be altered by unhealthy stress. Their physical and mental health can be affected by trauma and elevated levels of stress. Social emotional learning can happen in a "safe place", and educators today are tasked with setting up an

environment that nurtures the entire child, not just their academics. Children who are part of a school community that practices "Building Their Bounce" (Devereux Center For Resilient Children) can learn to be more resilient, and possibly learn how to integrate and counteract the effects of traumas and stress in their lives.

*1.2. Author's beliefs and experiences*

The children who attend the Title I neighborhood school where I teach are a diverse mix of families; from a variety of situations such as multi-generational homes, single parent homes, foster homes, adoptive homes as well as two parent homes. Each session for our pre-school friends meets for two and half hours, five days a week.

We talk, sing, dance, disagree, and play. In our time together, we're kind of a family. On a good day, we all appear to use our words, walking feet, and make good choices. On another kind of day (and in my opinion, still a good day), we learn how to be gentle with each other, even when it looks like many of us are not really feeling it. For the students who experience traumatic situations in their lives, this isn't always an easy task. This is where all students can build their foundations and shore up their resilience factors. One of the first things that has to happen is that they have to believe; they are safe, their voices are heard, and they have choices. Many already walk in the door with that belief, and I hope everyone walks out with it.

While not all children who attend this school are exposed to trauma, they may still feel the effects of their classmates who are. When so many families are immersed in a crisis, it can be difficult to acknowledge or even recognize it as atypical.

1.   What can happen in a school community to help promote resiliency?

2.   What does research say works?

3. What are educators doing that works?

*1.3. Purpose of this meta-synthesis*

The purpose of this meta-synthesis, which focused on students who experienced trauma, had multiple purposes. One purpose was to locate and examine articles that linked children who experienced trauma, their behaviors in the classroom, what methods educators used, and what seemed to be most beneficial support for the children and their families.

**2. Methods**

*2.1. Selection criteria*

The thirty-five journal articles included in this meta-synthesis met the following selection criteria:

1. The articles explored issues related to children who experienced trauma.

2. The articles explored issues related to classroom methods used by educators to assist children who had experienced trauma cope with their emotions.

3. The articles explored issues related to school wide methods to assist families of children who have experienced trauma to cope with their behaviors.

4. The articles were published in peer reviewed journals.

5. The articles were published between 2006 and 2016.

*2.2. Search procedures*

Database searches were conducted to locate articles for this meta-synthesis.

*2.2.1 Database searches*

In the fall of 2016, I conducted Boolean searches within the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC, Ebscohost) using these specific search term combinations:

1. ("early childhood resilience").

2. ("early") AND ("childhood") AND ("resilience") AND ("method").

3. ("trauma") AND ("classroom") AND ("intervention").

4. ("trauma") AND ("classroom") AND ("resilience").

5. ("stress management") AND ("classroom") AND ("young children")

The database searches resulted in thirty-four articles that met the search criteria (Allen, Megan; Staley, Lynn, 2007; Ashdown, Daniela Maree; Bernard, Michael E., 2011; Bell, Hope; Limberg, Dodie; Robinson, Edward, III, 2013; Berson, Ilene R.; Baggarly, Jennifer, 2009; Brown, Elissa J.; McQuaid, Jennifer; Farina, Lana, 2006; Carello, Janice; Butler, Lisa D., 2015; Coholic, Diana A., 2011; Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2016; Dadds, Mark R; Roth, Janet H., 2008; Durmusoglu Saltali, Neslihan; Erbay, Filiz, 2013; Fallin, Karen; Wallinga, Charlotte; Coleman, Mick, 2001; Feuerborn, Lara; Tyre, Ashli, 2009; Feueverger, Grace, 2011; Gebbie, Deborah H.; Ceglowski, Deborah; Taylor, Linda K., 2012; Gottfried, Michael A.; Harven, Aletha, 2015; Hyson, Marilou; Taylor, Jackie L., 2011; Jacobs, Gera, 2012; Karna, Anu, 2013; Kay, Lisa; Arnold, Alice, 2014; La Greca, Annette M.; Lai, Betty S.; Lantieri, Linda, 2008; Llabre, Maria M.; Silverman, Wendy K.; Vernberg, Eric M.; Prinstein, Mitchell J., 2013; Leininger, Melissa; Dyches, Tina Taylor; Prater, Mary Anne, 2010; Lelli, Colleen, 2014; Lu, Ya-Ling, 2011; MacNaughton, Glenda; Hughes Patrick, Smith, Kylie, 2007; Morris, Pamela; Millenky, Megan; Raver, C. Cybele, 2013; Morris, Robert C., 1998; Mullet, Judy H.; Akerson, Nels M.; Turman, Allison, 2013; Norlander, Torsten; Moas, Leif; Archer, Trevor, 2005; Romano,

John L.; And Others, 1996; Ronholt, Stine; Karsberg, Sidsel; Elklit, Ask, 2013; Scanlon, Geraldine; Barnes-Holmes, Yvonne, 2013; Smith, Olynda, 2013; Solar, Ernest, 2011).

*2.2.2 Ancestral Searches*

An ancestral search involves reviewing the reference list of previously published works to locate literature relevant to one's topic of interest (Welch, Brownell, & Sheridan, 1999). I conducted an ancestral search using the reference lists of articles retrieved through my database searches. This ancestral search yielded one additional article that met the selection criteria (Dube, S.R.; Anda, R.F.; Felitti, V.J.; Chapman, D.P.; Williamson, D.F.; Giles, W.H., 2001).

*2.3. Coding procedures*

I applied a coding form to categorize the information presented in each of the thirty-five articles. This coding form was based on: (a) publication type; (b) research design; (c) participants; (d) data sources; and (e) findings of the studies.

*2.3.1. Publication type*

Each journal article was evaluated and classified according to publication type (e.g., research study, theoretical work, descriptive work, opinion piece/position paper, guide, annotated bibliography, review of the literature). *Research studies* use a formal research design to gather and/or analyze qualitative and/or qualitative data. *Theoretical works* use existing literature to analyze, expand, or further define  a specific philosophical and/or theoretical assumption. *Descriptive works* describe phenomena and experiences, but do not disclose particular methods for attaining data. *Opinion pieces/position papers* explain, justify, or recommend a particular course of action based on the author's opinions and/or beliefs. *Guides* give instructions or advice explaining how practitioners might implement a particular agenda. An *annotated bibliography* is

a list of cited works on a particular topic, followed by a descriptive paragraph describing, evaluating, or critiquing the source. *Reviews of literature* critically analyze the published literature on a topic through summary, classification, and comparison.

*2.3.2. Research design*

Each empirical study was further classified by research design (i.e., quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods research). *Quantitative* research utilizes numbers to convey information. Instead of numbers, *qualitative* research uses language to explore issues and phenomena. *Mixed methods* research involves the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods to present information within a single study.

*2.3.3. Participants, data sources, and findings*

I identified the participants in each study (e.g., students, teachers, parents). I also identified the data sources used in each study (e.g., observations, surveys). Lastly, I summarized the findings of each study (Table 2).

*2.4. Data analysis*

I used a modified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method previously employed by Duke (2011) and Duke and Ward (2009) to analyze the thirty-five articles included in this meta-synthesis. First, significant statements were identified within each article. Significant statements for this meta-synthesis were defined as statements that addressed issues related to: (a) children who experienced trauma; (b) qualities and characteristics of children who experienced trauma; (c)classroom ideas on how to assist children build their resilience factors; (d) school wide ideas on how to support resilience in children; (e) How to support families with trauma from the classroom; (f) school wide ideas on how to support resilience in families. I then created

a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping verbatim significant statements with paraphrased

formulated meanings. These paraphrased  formulated meanings represented my interpretation of

each significant statement. Ultimately, the formulated meanings from all thirty-five articles were

grouped into theme clusters, represented as emergent themes. These emergent themes presented

as the essential elements of the entire body of literature.

**3. Results**
*3.1. Publication type*

I located thirty-five articles that met my selection criteria. The publication type of each

article is indicated in Table 1. In this meta-synthesis, twenty of the thirty-five articles (57.1%)

were research studies. (Ashdown, Daniela Maree; Bernard, Michael E., 2011; Brown, Elissa J.;

McQuaid, Jennifer; Farina, Lana, 2006; Coholic, Diana A., 2011; Dadds, Mark R; Roth, Janet

H., 2008; Dube, S.R.; Anda, R.F.; Felitti, V.J.; Chapman, D.P.; Williamson, D.F.; Giles, W.H.,

2001; Durmusoglu Saltali, Neslihan; Erbay, Filiz, 2013; Feueverger, Grace, 2011; Gebbie,

Deborah H.; Ceglowski, Deborah; Taylor, Linda K., 2012; Gottfried, Michael A.; Harven,

Aletha, 2015; Hyson, Marilou; Taylor, Jackie L., 2011; Jacobs, Gera, 2012; Kay, Lisa; Arnold,

Alice, 2014; La Greca, Annette M.; Lai, Betty S.; Llabre, Maria M.; Silverman, Wendy K.;

Vernberg, Eric M.; Prinstein, Mitchell J., 2013; Leininger, Melissa; Dyches, Tina Taylor; Prater,

Mary Anne, 2010; Lu, Ya-Ling, 2011; MacNaughton, Glenda; Hughes Patrick, Smith, Kylie,

2007; Morris, Pamela; Millenky, Megan; Raver, C. Cybele, 2013; Norlander, Torsten; Moas,

Leif; Archer, Trevor, 2005; Romano, John L.; And Others, 1996; Ronholt, Stine; Karsberg,

Sidsel; Elklit, Ask, 2013; Smith, Olynda, 2013). Ten of the articles (35%) were guides (Allen,

Megan; Staley, Lynn, 2007; Bell, Hope; Limberg, Dodie; Robinson, Edward, III, 2013; Berson,

Ilene R., Beggarly, Jennifer, 2009; Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2016;

Fallin, Karen; Wallinga, Charlotte; Coleman, Mick, 2001; Hyson, Marilou; Taylor, Jackie L.,

2011; Lantieri, Linda, 2008; Leininger, Melissa; Dyches, Tina Taylor; Prater, Mary Anne, 2010;

Lelli, Colleen, 2014; Statman-Weil, Katie, 2015). Two of the articles (5.7%) were descriptive

works (Ashdown, Daniela Maree; Bernard, Michael E., 2011; Kay, Lisa; Arnold, Alice, 2014.

Three of the articles (15%) were theoretical works (La Greca, Annette M.; Lai, Betty S.; Llabre,

Maria M.; Silverman, Wendy K.; Vernberg, Eric M.; Prinstein, Mitchell J., 2013; Mullet, Judy

H.; Akerson, Nels M.; Turman, Allison, 2013,; Scanlon, Geraldine; Barnes-Holmes, Yvonne,

2013). One of the articles (2.8%) were reviews of literature (Carello, Janice; Butler, Lisa D.,

2015). Six of the articles (17.1%) were opinions (Feuerborn, Lara; Tyre, Ashli, 2009; Jacobs,

Gera, 2012; Karna, Anu, 2013; Morris, Robert C., 1998; Smith, Olynda, 2013; Solar, Ernest,

2011).

**Table 1**

| Author(s) & Year of Publication | Publication Type |
|---|---|
| Allen, Megan; Staley, Lynn, 2007 | Guide |
| Ashdown, Daniela Maree; Bernard, Michael E., 2011 | Descriptive Work |
| Bell, Hope; Limberg, Dodie; Robinson, Edward, III, 2013 | Guide |
| Berson, Ilene R., Beggarly, Jennifer, 2009 | Guide |
| Brown, Elissa J.; McQuaid, Jennifer; Farina, Lana, 2006 | Research Study |
| Carello, Janice; Butler, Lisa D., 2015 | Review of the Literature |
| Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2016 | Guide |
| Coholic, Diana A., 2011 | Research Study |
| Dadds, Mark R; Roth, Janet H., 2008 | Research Study |
| Dube, S.R.; Anda, R.F.; Felitti, V.J.; Chapman, D.P.; Williamson, D.F.; Giles, W.H., 2001 | Research Study |
| Durmusoglu Saltali, Neslihan; Erbay, Filiz, 2013 | Research Study |
| Fallin, Karen; Wallinga, Charlotte; Coleman, Mick, 2001 | Guide |
| Feuerborn, Lara; Tyre, Ashli, 2009 | Opinion |
| Feueverger, Grace, 2011 | Research Study |
| Gebbie, Deborah H.; Ceglowski, Deborah; Taylor, Linda K., 2012 | Research Study |
| Gottfried, Michael A.; Harven, Aletha, 2015 | Research Study |
| Hyson, Marilou; Taylor, Jackie L., 2011 | Guide |

| | |
|---|---|
| Jacobs, Gera, 2012 | Opinion |
| Karna, Anu, 2013 | Opinion |
| Kay, Lisa; Arnold, Alice, 2014 | Descriptive Work |
| La Greca, Annette M.; Lai, Betty S.; Llabre, Maria M.; Silverman, Wendy K.; Vernberg, Eric M.; Prinstein, Mitchell J., 2013 | Theoretical Work |
| Lantieri, Linda, 2008 | Guide |
| Leininger, Melissa; Dyches, Tina Taylor; Prater, Mary Anne, 2010 | Guide |
| Lelli, Colleen, 2014 | Guide |
| Lu, Ya-Ling, 2011 | Research Study |
| MacNaughton, Glenda; Hughes Patrick, Smith, Kylie, 2007 | Research Study |
| Morris, Pamela; Millenky, Megan; Raver, C. Cybele, 2013 | Research Study |
| Morris, Robert C., 1998 | Opinion |
| Mullet, Judy H.; Akerson, Nels M.; Turman, Allison, 2013 | Theoretical Work |
| Norlander, Torsten; Moas, Leif; Archer, Trevor, 2005 | Research Study |
| Romano, John L.; And Others, 1996 | Research Study |
| Ronholt, Stine; Karsberg, Sidsel; Elklit, Ask, 2013 | Research Study |
| Scanlon, Geraldine; Barnes-Holmes, Yvonne, 2013 | Theoretical Work |
| Smith, Olynda, 2013 | Opinion |
| Solar, Ernest, 2011 | Opinion |
| Statman-Weil, Katie, 2015 | Guide |

*3.2. Research design, participants, data sources, and findings of the studies*

As mentioned previously, I located twenty research studies that met my criteria for selection (Ashdown, Daniela Maree; Bernard, Michael E., 2011; Brown, Elissa J.; McQuaid, Jennifer; Farina, Lana, 2006; Coholic, Diana A., 2011; Dadds, Mark R; Roth, Janet H., 2008; Dube, S.R.; Anda, R.F.; Felitti, V.J.; Chapman, D.P.; Williamson, D.F.; Giles, W.H., 2001; Durmusoglu Saltali, Neslihan; Erbay, Filiz, 2013; Feueverger, Grace, 2011; Gebbie, Deborah H.; Ceglowski, Deborah; Taylor, Linda K., 2012; Gottfried, Michael A.; Harven, Aletha, 2015; Hyson, Marilou; Taylor, Jackie L., 2011; Kay, Lisa; Arnold, Alice, 2014; La Greca, Annette M.; Lai, Betty S.; Llabre, Maria M.; Silverman, Wendy K.; Vernberg, Eric M.; Prinstein, Mitchell J., 2013; Leininger, Melissa; Dyches, Tina Taylor; Prater, Mary Anne, 2010; Lu, Ya-Ling, 2011; MacNaughton, Glenda; Hughes Patrick, Smith, Kylie, 2007; Morris, Pamela; Millenky, Megan; Raver, C. Cybele, 2013; Norlander, Torsten; Moas, Leif; Archer, Trevor, 2005; Romano, John L.; And Others, 1996; Ronholt, Stine; Karsberg, Sidsel; Elklit, Ask, 2013; Smith, Olynda, 2013). The research design, participants, data sources, and findings of each of these studies are identified in table 2.

**Table 2**

| Authors | Research Design | Participants | Data Sources | Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ashdown, Daniela Maree; Bernard, Michael E., 2011 | Qualitative | 99 kindergarten & first grade students | Surveys, Classroom Observations | Students given explicit instruction in social emotional learning increased their social interactions with peers and caregivers. |
| Brown, Elissa J.; McQuaid, Jennifer; Farina, Lana, 2006 | Quantitative | 63 children & their caregivers | Surveys, Assessments | Classroom interventions for students exposed to September 11, 2001 World Trade Center Attacks worked to reduce PTSD symptoms in some students. Classroom interventions provided temporary relief in other students who then were given individual PTSD treatment. Parent integration & classroom peer support can be more helpful & give children a feeling of inclusiveness rather than isolation. |
| Coholic, Diana A., 2011 | Qualitative | 50 children & their caregivers | Interviews | To teach the skills of how to pay attention, self awareness, emotional regulation, & dealing with others in an effective way is part of teaching/learning mindfulness. The students were taught this via art based lessons & to have "fun" while learning to express their emotions in a healthy way. |

| Dadds, Mark R; Roth, Janet H., 2008 | Quantitive | 720 children, their teachers, & 734 parents | Telephone Interviews, Surveys, Assessments from parents & teachers | The intervention program, REACH for RESILIENCE, provided small changes, externalizing behaviors of young students (sample group) tend to not be a high priority concern for parents of the very young. Parents found the program methods helpful, useful & reported they enjoyed the optimistic approach. |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Dube, S.R.; Anda, R.F.; Felitti, V.J.; Chapman, D.P.; Williamson, D.F.; Giles, W.H., 2001 | Mixed | 17,337 adult health maintenance organization members | Survey | Experiencing unfavorable childhood circumstances increased the risk of suicide attempts 2 to 5 fold. Prevention of traumatic experiences, or if negative experiences happen, treatment of people affected by them may aid in suicide prevention. |
| Durmusoglu Saltali, Neslihan; Erbay, Filiz, 2013 | Qualitative | 45 preschool teachers | Interview | Attachment has an effect on how children feel starting school for the first time. Modeling and teaching appropriate expression of feelings when stressed can build support for children & their families. Inexperience in emotional skills, emotion regulation, & language development can increase negative response to stress. Appropriate teacher behaviors & modeling can help children's transitions into becoming a student less stressful. |

| Feueverger, Grace, 2011 | Quantitative | 30 students | Surveys, Assessments | Implementation of a multi-tiered treatment (included prevention & community wide resilience building, school based interventions, & direct interventions using trauma systems therapy) for engaging and treating refugee youth in the school settings has shown an increase in resiliency & hope. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gebbie, Deborah H.; Ceglowski, Deborah; Taylor, Linda K., 2012 | Qualitative | 5 teachers | Surveys, Essays | A teacher's efficacy &/or their perception of their efficacy can affect how children in their classrooms behave. Ongoing training, even for experienced teachers is beneficial for all. |
| Gottfried, Michael A.; Harven, Aletha, 2015 | Quantitative | Approximately 1000 kindergarten students, their parents, teachers, & school administrators | Surveys | Does having more girls in the class reduce negative behaviors & affects of negative behaviors in a classroom experiencing disruptions due to another (non-gender specific) students emotional & disruptive behavior? |

| Hyson, Marilou; Taylor, Jackie L., 2011 | Quantitative | Early childhood teachers & directors | Surveys | Children's development of pro-social skills through early experiences important; intentional instruction in this domain is just as crucial as early literacy and mathematics. Teaching children voluntary & pro-social behaviors intentionally can create resiliency & support children & their families when they may not already have the skills or have another reliable model of positive social behaviors. |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Kay, Lisa; Arnold, Alice, 2014 | Quantitative | >40 artists & educators | Surveys | The art classroom can present a safe forum for expression, realizing the consequences of actions & words, group collaboration, reflection & strengthen a sense of community. |
| La Greca, Annette M.; Lai, Betty S.; Llabre, Maria M.; Silverman, Wendy K.; Vernberg, Eric M.; Prinstein, Mitchell J., 2013 | Quantitative | 568 children | Surveys | Effective screening after disasters can be critical for identifying youth most in need of limited clinical resources. |
| Leininger, Melissa; Dyches, Tina Taylor; Prater, Mary Anne, 2010 | Qualitative | 79 children & adolescents | Observation, Case Study | Student support & strategies by working collaboratively to provide accommodations & addressing the issues & concerns of the students by the teacher. |

| Lu, Ya-Ling, 2011 | Mixed | 133 children | Student Journals | Behaviors triggered by issues children experience may cause either seeking (problem solving) or escape (denial) responses. Teaching children methods on how to problem solve can change their response. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| MacNaughton, Glenda; Hughes Patrick, Smith, Kylie, 2007 | Mixed | 10 preschool teachers, 3 early intervention workers | Surveys, Essays | When educators were given guidance & support, there was a change in educators idea of who the child is rather than label behavior as the child; teachers changed their relationships with the children & reduced stress on in the classroom environment. |
| Morris, Pamela; Millenky, Megan; Raver, C. Cybele, 2013 | Quantitative | 304 children & 25 teachers/classrooms | Surveys, Observations | The intervention decreased observed conflict for higher risk children with no notable differences for lower risk students. Teachers reported a change in children's approach to learning. |
| Norlander, Torsten; Moas, Leif; Archer, Trevor, 2005 | Quantitative | 88 students, 7 teachers | Surveys | Teaching children relaxation techniques reduced classroom noise. Children in the noise reduced classrooms were less stressed, seemed better able to learn the presented materials than the noisier classrooms, & teachers reported an increase in focus from their students. |

| Romano, John L., 1996 | Mixed | 651 students, 200 parents, 20 classroom teachers, 4 school counselors | Surveys | Student well being curriculum is important, gender specific lessons in later years, & that it is best taught in phases/reinforced throughout the elementary years. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ronholt, Stine; Karsberg, Sidsel; Elklit, Ask, 2013 | Quantitative | 108 third through ninth grade children | Surveys, Assessments | Evidence that use of the cartoon based screening tool about a boy named Darryl, paired with a storyline framing a local fireworks disaster. Follow up treatment by assisting children with restructuring and building stronger coping skills, self talk, self trust, communication skills & resilience can alleviate PTSD symptoms in children with chronic PTSD symptoms. |
| Smith, Olynda, 2013 | Qualitative | 5 teachers | Surveys | Social support from co-workers with similar experiences are a critical factor for increasing teacher efficacy. |

*3.2.1. Research design*

Ten of twenty studies (50%) applied a quantitative research design (Hyson, Marilou; Taylor, Jackie L., 2011; Morris, Pamela; Millenky, Megan; Raver, C. Cybele, 2013; Norlander, Torsten; Moas, Leif; Archer, Trevor, 2005; Kay, Lisa; Arnold, Alice, 2014; Feueverger, Grace, 2011; Ronholt, Stine; Karsberg, Sidsel; Elklit, Ask, 2013; Brown, Elissa J.; McQuaid, Jennifer; Farina, Lana, 2006; La Greca, Annette M.; Lai, Betty S.; Llabre, Maria M.; Silverman, Wendy K.; Vernberg, Eric M.; Prinstein, Mitchell J., 2013; Gottfried, Michael A.; Harven, Aletha, 2015; Dadds, Mark R; Roth, Janet H., 2008). Six of the studies (30%) used qualitative research design (Durmusoglu Saltali, Neslihan; Erbay, Filiz, 2013; Leininger, Melissa; Dyches, Tina Taylor; Prater, Mary Anne, 2010; Smith, Olynda, 2013; Gebbie, Deborah H.; Ceglowski, Deborah; Taylor, Linda K., 2012; Ashdown, Daniela Maree; Bernard, Michael E., 2011; Coholic, Diana A., 2011) and four of the twenty studies (20%) utilized mixed research design (MacNaughton, Glenda; Hughes Patrick, Smith, Kylie, 2007; Lu, Ya-Ling, 2011; Romano, John L.,1996).

*3.2.2. Participants and data sources*

The twenty studies included in this meta-synthesis analyzed data collected from diverse, heterogeneous groups of participants. The stakeholders in the studies were students, parents, educators, administrators, counselors, intervention workers, and artists.  Sixteen (80%) of the studies utilized surveys (Ashdown, Daniela Maree; Bernard, Michael E., 2011; Brown, Elissa J.; McQuaid, Jennifer; Farina, Lana, 2006; Dadds, Mark R; Roth, Janet H., 2008; Dube, S.R.; Anda, R.F.; Felitti, V.J.; Chapman, D.P.; Williamson, D.F.; Giles, W.H., 2001; Feueverger, Grace, 2011; Gebbie, Deborah H.; Ceglowski, Deborah; Taylor, Linda K., 2012; Gottfried, Michael A.; Harven, Aletha, 2015; Hyson, Marilou; Taylor, Jackie L., 2011; Kay, Lisa; Arnold, Alice, 2014;

La Greca, Annette M.; Lai, Betty S.; Llabre, Maria M.; Silverman, Wendy K.; Vernberg, Eric M.; Prinstein, Mitchell J., 2013; MacNaughton, Glenda; Hughes Patrick, Smith, Kylie, 2007; Morris, Pamela; Millenky, Megan; Raver, C. Cybele, 2013; Norlander, Torsten; Moas, Leif; Archer, Trevor, 2005; Romano, John L.; And Others, 1996; Ronholt, Stine; Karsberg, Sidsel; Elklit, Ask, 2013; Smith, Olynda, 2013). Four (20%) of the studies analyzed assessments (Brown, Elissa J.; McQuaid, Jennifer; Farina, Lana, 2006; Dadds, Mark R; Roth, Janet H., 2008; Feueverger, Grace, 2011; Ronholt, Stine; Karsberg, Sidsel; Elklit, Ask, 2013). Three (15%) of the studies utilized observations (Ashdown, Daniela Maree; Bernard, Michael E., 2011; Leininger, Melissa; Dyches, Tina Taylor; Prater, Mary Anne, 2010; Morris, Pamela; Millenky, Megan; Raver, C. Cybele, 2013). Three (15%) collected interview data (Coholic, Diana A., 2011; Dadds, Mark R; Roth, Janet H., 2008; Durmusoglu Saltali, Neslihan; Erbay, Filiz, 2013). Two (10%) studied data from essays (Gebbie, Deborah H.; Ceglowski, Deborah; Taylor, Linda K., 2012; MacNaughton, Glenda; Hughes Patrick, Smith, Kylie, 2007). One (.05%) utilized student journaling (Lu, Ya-Ling, 2011). One (.05%) analyzed data from a case study (Leininger, Melissa; Dyches, Tina Taylor; Prater, Mary Anne, 2010).

### 3.2.3. Findings of the studies

The findings of the studies included in this meta-synthesis can be summarized as follows:

1. Students who experienced traumas and difficulties in their life were less likely to have the same set of social skills as their typically developing peers. They were also less likely to have appropriate emotional management role models in their communities and at home, which is typically their first resources for learning how to behave in most situations.

2. Once students were taught how to appropriately recognize and manage their emotions in potentially difficult social situations, their responses were more positive.

3. Classroom strategies were shown to be effective, school wide efforts even more so. Delivery of how to support the emotional growth and development varied, but a common theme was larger growth in-group models paired with individual support when the expression of behaviors warranted a more intense approach for emotional growth.

*3.3. Emergent themes*

Four themes emerged from my analysis of the thirty-five articles included in this review of literature. These emergent themes, or theme clusters, include: (a) need to teach social skills; (b) need to teach to identification/recognition of feelings/emotions; (c) teaching effective coping strategies for past traumas; (d) teaching how to manage emotions in difficult situations; (e) support of the family unit/community. These five theme clusters and their formulated meanings are delineated in Table 3.

| Theme Clusters | Formulated Meanings |
|---|---|
| **Need to Teach Social Skills** | • **In the selected studies, educators and school staff noticed children didn't always have the skills to behave in socially appropriate ways in class.**<br>• **Children had not been exposed to healthy social skill management behaviors at home, in their community, and at school.**<br>• **Children who have been taught positive social skills are more likely to respond to difficult situations and crisis in a positive manner.**<br>• **Many children who are intentionally taught how to be a friend exhibit growth in their social emotional skills.**<br>• **A consistent support of social emotional skills in the classroom and school environment can help improve family, community, and a students well being.**<br>• **Some children have a difficult time separating from caregivers/family for school, and once they experience & are taught that school/class and the teachers/staff are safe people, they are better able to expand their skills interacting appropriately.**<br>• **Teaching children about differences and how to be accepting of them in others (cultural, racial, economical, gender)**<br>• **When intentional teaching of social emotional growth is part of a classroom, children tend to feel more accepted and understood.** |
| **Need to Teach Identification/Recognition of Feeling/Emotions** | • **These studies predominantly addressed the idea that children didn't always understand what emotions they were feeling.**<br>• **Children who had only experienced events and did not understand how to to effectively navigate their own emotions could exhibit victim or aggressor behaviors in many different  situations.**<br>• **Children who are able to identify their feelings had a more positive response and outcome for negative situations.**<br>• **Children were taught mindfulness and awareness, this was to increased they ability to be more accepting of what they were feeling, then allowed them to redirect and reshape their thoughts.**<br>• **Children who are better able to recognize their emotions and feelings tend to feel more understood and exhibit less negative behaviors.**<br>• **Reading guided imagery while students engage in art activities was a successful way to facilitate mindfulness.** |

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| **Teaching How to Manage Emotions in Difficult Situations** | • When taught the skills to recognize their emotions, children were able to access their *tool box* for coping, problem solving, and effective communication.<br>•  Learning decision making skills can alleviate stress.<br>• When able to identify being in a difficult situation, children had a tendency to feel more in control of themselves and their emotions, even if they weren't in control of what was happening.<br>• After experiencing another trauma, children were able to locate their resources, or helpful people in their lives.<br>• Children who learned how to *breathe* through the experiences were better able to cope until they felt safe again (back at school, with a trusted adult, etc).<br>• Teaching children to stay on task, focused, and complete tasks.<br>• Children who are comfortable enough to ask questions of the adults around them seemed better able to manage their emotions in stressful situations.<br>• After being taught meditation, guided imagery, and relaxation exercises in the classroom, children were able to utilize these skills in other situations and places outside the classroom.<br>• Practicing and reinforcing positive and effective stress and emotional management can create a more positive response.<br>• Self awareness and self love build resilience factors. |

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| **Teaching Effective Coping Strategies for Past Traumas** | • **Past traumas could put children into a *fight or flight* mode when put in stressful situations (PTSD behaviors), rather than the typically assumed ADHD behaviors.**<br>• **In some children, past traumas caused behavior issues.**<br>• **Sleep disturbances could be resolved by treatment of past traumas.**<br>• **Untreated past traumas could cause a negative spiral effect, creating an environment leaving children and families more vulnerable to more traumatic experiences.**<br>• **Untreated past traumas is highly correlated as a cause for depression in many children.**<br>• **Untreated adverse childhood experiences increased suicide attempts in children.**<br>• **Children experienced difficulty in staying in the present moment, focusing on the task at hand, expressing their thoughts, and maintaining social acceptable behaviors.**<br>• **Children who are refugees, or come from a community experiencing violence often witnessed and were a part of cultures at war with each other and revisit that friction when placed in schools together.**<br>• **Teaching children how to sequencing can help them organize their thought process and skills.**<br>• **Help children identify who the helpful people are in their school, communities, and families.** |

| Support of the Family Unit/Community | • **Children were better able to reverse the effects of trauma and adverse experiences if the family was given support as well.**<br>• **Once families financial, housing, and food needs were stabilized, the positive effects of treatment increased.**<br>• **Teacher education on how to support and educate children with behavior issues, the children's families, and even teacher ideas of who the child is.**<br>• **Education for teachers, families and community members about the effects of violence, trauma, and adverse experiences on children.**<br>• **Screening, intervention, and support for children and their families can significantly increase their resilience and abilities to bounce back and move forward in a more positive manner.**<br>• **Education for the adults in children's lives about why children challenge adults/rules/routines and how to better manage behaviors when these challenges occur.**<br>• **The teachers and adults who can be present, model, and embody the very behavior skills they are teaching can be a positive difference.**<br>• **Support by listening and encouraging the victories and positives that happen.** |
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**4. Discussion**

*4.1. Need to teach social skills*

Social emotional skills vary from individual to individual. Children each have their own different skills sets; they are not always the socially appropriate. What they bring to the classroom is typically a reflection of what they've experienced, witnessed, or is triggered by a fight or flight response. One student may have ideal role models at home, and respond in a typically developing way, while their peer might react by shouting, punching, pushing, or hiding. Studies have shown when social emotional learning is an integrated part of the school day, intentionally presented, worked on, and refined, children change their responses to more positive behaviors. Research has shown part of learning to behave and respond within socially acceptable manners is feeling safe and understood by their caregivers, teachers, and community. This can start by reassuring a hesitant parent that their child will be in goods hands. Typically once the parent is accepting, the child separates easier. If the child is secure without their parent, they can further their growth and awareness of self within their own community of peers, their classroom. When there is a sense of belonging, a community or family feeling can be achieved. This is when differences and similarities become more apparent, can be talked about, and explained. If there is an understanding why and or how, acceptance of the differences is a normalized part of the child and their classroom.

The children in my classroom are placed there due to multiple developmental delays. Many of then have social skills as an area that is an identified need in their evaluation summary and eligible review for their special education individual education plan. This translates to needing a goal, with measurable objectives, that will guide the team on how to present the ideas

then measure the growth (or lack of growth) the child is able to demonstrate at school. When a new student grabs a toy from another new student, it can get interesting. In the beginning of our school year (or when a new friend joins the class) we rely heavily on coaching the students through the experience of how to ask for a toy, how to respond when your toy is taken, and what to do if that didn't work. We also address social emotional learning through research-based curriculum presented at circle and throughout the session. We have visual guides of how to calm down, children depicted on posters with a variety of expressions who are feeling different emotions. The sand timers in our classroom have many people using them, from teachers announcing "three minutes left to play" to a student show another child the timer then saying "one minute until it's my turn to play with the truck". This was all taught by consistent constant modeling on a daily, regularly scheduled basis and is maintained in a similar manner. I've heard back from parents these skills are being used at home and have been able to share what works in our classroom and why. It's been a positive point of growth for our classroom family and families.

*4.2. Need to teach to identification/recognition of feelings/emotions*

Research has shown that when children learn how to name their emotion, they are better able to navigate what comes next. Just the act of realizing they are feeling a strong emotion can start movement towards a positive outcome, or at least a sense of control over their emotions, even in situations where they couldn't control the outcome.

The students in my very busy, sometimes loud classroom have learned to self regulate or "sit out" by having some quiet time to themselves in one of the classroom safe places (we have two, three if we count their cubbies). A staff member will typically cruise by and ask if they are

ok, would like to read a book, or just sit close in the vicinity of the safe place to be quietly

available if the child wants to reach out. This is one of the methods we use. Another is if a child

is feeling a strong emotion, they have been taught to put their hands on their tummy and say

"Stop" or name their emotion, or even take deep breaths. They can also say "Calm body". These

are all tools that can be used individually or together, depending on what works at that moment,

for that child; current research is building support for use of these methods as what can help

children build their resilience factors.

*4.3. Teaching how to manage emotions in difficult situations*

Studies have shown when students are taught how to be aware of how they are feeling,

they can learn to respond in a positive manner; this response and skill is another part of building

resilience. They are able to think about their emotions, name how they feel, then decide how to

behave, or what to do when placed in stressful situations. The results have been positive for

every day, typical stressors (I want the blue crayon and so does he) to a negative situation that

they have little control over (parents arguing, being lost). When a child is able to take a deep

breath, and look around them, they can access their tool box of learned behaviors (ask for help,

name their emotion, have a calm body). This awareness of their emotional state can being a

feeling of self worth, build and strengthen their resilience, mitigate a negative response and have

a positive outcome. Proven methods have been directed responses, guided relaxation, and

mindfulness, or being "present" with how they feel. Art therapy, dance, play, and teacher directed

guidance are modes of delivery that can feel natural, fun, and elect positive response and

behaviors.

The choices in our classroom are all around, and can be given in many ways - "Would

you like to use the red pencil or the yellow pencil?" when the non-preferred task is to write their

name. On particular days, this could cause a tantrum response in some children who may be

feeling as if they have no choices (they wanted to stay home, they had to go to school, etc.).

Thankfully, there are ways to help a child breathe through this response, and have a positive

outcome (their name is written). Research has shown this builds emotional management, which

can create a sense of control because it is a predictable outcome. When a child has been

traumatized, giving them an ability to be in control of some choices, in predictable, expected

situations, can help them regulate from out of control to back into control of themselves.

Sometimes it's as simple as helping them calm down, then giving a reminder of the classroom

routine "First we write our name with a pencil, then you're able to use the markers." This is part

of our routine and the schedule we follow. It's a known, reliable, structured part of our room, and

is reinforced by visual schedules, verbal reminders, and consistency. One student who was

learning to self regulate watched a new student who was yelling and on the floor kicking, calmly

walked by and quietly said "Calm body" as they went on about their business.

*4.4. Teaching effective coping strategies for past traumas*

Children who have experienced trauma in the past may have had a *fight or flight*

response. Research has shown, if they feel uncomfortable, are placed in a potentially stressful

situation, or are uncertain of how to respond, anxiety can build. This can start a reaction with

behaviors such as screaming, aggression, withdrawal, elopement, or hiding are typical. Having

an adverse experience that is unresolved can often create a reactive set of behaviors in children.

When in a moderately stressful situation, a child with typically developing sense of self and

social skills might be able to respond with expected behaviors (questions, seeking out a preferred

caregiver) a child who has experienced unresolved trauma would most likely react with stronger

emotions and behave as if they were in more of a dangerous situation than what is actually

happening. There are also issues for these children that involve negative self image, perhaps

from overreactions being misunderstood and perceived, then related back to the child as being

naughty, bad. When given this sort of feedback, a child can build a very negative self image,

which can lead to depression, lack of focus, and sleep issues. Children who have been immersed

in a culture of violence, such as communities at war with each other, bring those learned

behaviors with them, wherever they go. Left untreated, entire family units and especially the

children within them often get caught in a negative cycle, which can be difficult to identify. Left

untreated, could lead to suicide attempts and or violence against others and self. However,

children can be taught resilience. They can learn positive self talk, how to determine who is a

helpful person in their life (police officer, teacher), and coping skills for when they feel

overwhelmed.

Children sometimes respond well when they feel validated and heard. One way to do that

in my classroom is to actually listen when they talk about what the play dough feels like in their

hands, or when they describe how pancakes smell. That's building a bridge. If that bridge is well

traveled by "squishy play dough" comments, the more difficult conversations have an easier path

to cross. One student would call me one to the are easel to talk about the color green and the

circles he painted, then he would start to tell me about how his family was going to move

because of the lady next door and "loud people hitting her door and yelling." He felt comfortable

telling me about it, and I was able to say that he was in a safe place now. I have a very open line

of communication with his mother and father, and was able to relay what their son told me in a

caring, nonjudgmental manner. This particular child had a trauma counselor (they had great family supports in place) and they were able to talk about it in a session with him.

*4.5. Support of the family unit/community*

Research models that incorporate family education, support of basic needs, and counseling have shown greater family growth and higher student success rates. When asked if they need support, the family units who have been given access to needed resources have shown it can alleviate some of the pressure and stressors of daily life. Once those needs are better met, furthering the family groups' understanding of how to cope with behaviors, reactions, and potentially harmful situations can increase the positive responses and resilience. Some adults have not learned how to respond, and their ability to adjust and modify their behavior significantly increased their children's protective factors.

Teachers can be the first to identify a child, then possibly a family who may benefit from additional support. Whether it's clothing, food, housing, or reliable transportation, that extra bit of support can start building a relationship of trust and caring between home and school. A child can have a sense of belonging in both places. When there is relationship building parents may be better able to engage in conversations with healthier responses for their children's behaviors. Learning how to help their children to navigate emotions can lead to greater family strength and bonding.

**5. Conclusion**

Having a school community plan to teach children grade level requirements is the typical plan. Research has shown that this can be better facilitated when children are actually ready to learn. Being able to understand what is being taught in our classrooms is a process that runs

deeper than their ABC's and 123's. It's teaching children how to recognize their emotions, how to respond, and awareness of their choices. This can begin in the classroom, move through the halls, and be felt all the way home with school wide, community support of children and their families. Bad things happen. Research has shown how we choose to deal with emotions has everything to do with our resilience factors and sense of self. These can be shored up through community support and intentional, structured activities that promote family wellness. When a family feels supported, the entire community benefits, and children have a safer, healthier place to grow. This enables them to have a better sense of self and gives them the ability to shape the tools they need to manage life in a responsible, mindful way. This meta-synthesis has brought me closer to an understanding of what is working in the classroom, and given me encouragement to keep trying new ideas while moving forward with has been successful for us as a class, school, and community family.

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