

5 Strategies for Promoting Resilience and Self-Care in the Classroom

Teaching has the reputation as one of the best jobs in the world, but equally one that comes with a busy workload and great responsibility, both physically and mentally. Remembering self-preservation and self-care when working as part of one unit in a larger school system is vital to ensure educators avoid burnout and stay resilient under the pressures of accountability. We are each the most important person in our life; while for teachers, whose primary concern is the students in their care, this often be forgotten, it is only when we are maintaining good levels of well-being that we can truly give our best to others.

An analogy from working in a different environment

In the late 1990s, I once spent ten months working for a South Korean electronics company that, in its huge factory made, among other things, computer monitors. As a production line feeder, I was responsible for ensuring that for the length of its 80-metre production line all the workers were fully equipped with any parts they required to manufacture the computer monitors as they passed along for their assembly. Such parts would include different types of screws or assembly bits for the monitors.

Each operator would have probably just over a square metre of working space either on the production line (a giant conveyor belt) or be standing operating a machine. It was made clear to the production operators by the team leaders that looking after the production line was imperative to the profitability of the whole factory. For each second the production line was inoperative it

would cost several thousands of pounds in lost profit. To prevent such a situation, two things were instilled into the workforce.

The first procedure was to look after the workspace. This was done by a Korean version of the Japanese '5-S' system of factory organisation which was designed for safety, efficiency and cleanliness. The five 'S' translated into English represented:

- **Sort.** Only having the necessary tools for production
- **Set in order.** The efficient way to use what remains
- **Shine.** Cleaning and maintaining equipment – This was the most frequent activity I performed.
- **Standardise.** creating routines and factory floor pathways
- **Sustain.** Keeping the process going which is what the team leaders monitored

The second procedure was the due care and attention afforded to the machines. Each machine would play the tune 'London bridge is falling down' (comical analogy I grant you) and it would prompt a small team of engineers who wore yellow hard hats and drive to the machine in a buggy on any given line (in the one factory building there were five production lines, not including the storage of parts and materials and the storage and QA areas; so it was a huge enterprise). One machine could cause the whole line to stop working which is where often the revaluation of 5S would occur to maximise efficiency and the workforce. 'Time is money' and the care of the machine was a priority.

You may see the factory system in its purest economic sense as the need for the machine to be well maintained and fixed when not working. A factory would not make a profit with idle or inefficient machines and a factory system that did not constantly strive for efficiency. Therefore, the two systems were more important than the humans who operated them (I am not suggesting health and safety was not!). I was aware that should I be late with any delivery of parts to the production line then that would also cause the factory to lose money and the line to be delayed. In that factory the

owners needed to make a profit, pay employees' wages, sell its products to the consumers, and contribute to the local economy. Therefore the machine and factory efficiency needed to be seen as having priority over what some outsiders would value as important: humans.

Teacher resilience and self-care

In schools, it is vital that the value of teachers is recognised and celebrated. How can we ensure that teachers are cared for, in order to, in turn, look after the children in their care? A key way to stay mentally healthy in the classroom is through focusing on resilience. Resilience is made up of five pillars: **self-awareness, mindfulness, self-care, positive relationships, and purpose**.

In line with these five pillars, there are some simple strategies to promote resilience:

- **Self-awareness.** Consider writing down a sentence or two after each lesson; what went well? Use a journal or write it in your planner. Invite another member of staff to observe you teaching and offer feedback. What are your strengths and what can you improve? Observe other teachers to inspire and motivate you to continue to develop your teacher toolkit.
- **Mindfulness.** Find moments through your day, either with your class or on your own, to be mindful. Watch a five-minute mindful meditation on YouTube, or do some yoga stretching before lunch or at the end of the day. Eating can also be mindful: take your lunch outside the classroom and away from the staffroom if you can. Focus on your food and take your time to enjoy it.
- **Self-care.** Make sure you acknowledge moments of joy in your day. Make a joy board on your class wall and put up post-it notes of special moments. Reflect on your feelings and needs; ensure you take a break at lunchtime if possible rather than working through it. Set boundaries on your working hours; decide what time you will leave work and stick to it. Keep

bottles of water and simple snacks (such as cereal bars) in your desk to stay hydrated and fed throughout even the busiest days.

- **Positive relationships.** Foster positive relationships with colleagues by ensuring you have opportunities to build connections not just based on education. Offer to take a walk after school with colleagues and talk about your weekend plans, for example.
- **Purpose.** Remember why you trained to be a teacher in the first place. What motivated you? Don't forget the important part you are playing in your students' journeys; care for yourself so you can continue to care for them.