

Does Nurturing "Zest for Life" Also Lead to Nurturing "Resilience"?

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Abstract

It has been revealed that "resilience" is involved in the ability to overcome adverse experiences in childhood. However, the school education curriculum does not clearly state how to foster resilience, and it cannot be said that there has been sufficient discussion about how to foster the resilience necessary for recovering after a disaster or adversity. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, which oversees school education in Japan, has set the educational philosophy as acquiring "the ability to live." The educational philosophy of each school is left to the principal, and the policy of educational activities is set by each school principal, which is shared and known to teachers and staff, and then put into practice. This study posed the research question of whether "resilience" can also be fostered by cultivating "the ability to live," and aimed to explore the daily educational activities of schools that correspond to cultivating "resilience." We interviewed eight principals. The elementary and junior high school principals with the aim of exploring the daily educational activities of schools that correspond to cultivating "resilience." The principals are working to cultivate "the ability to live" from both the perspectives of subject instruction and student guidance so that children can withstand the stress of adversity, and at the same time, they aim for the school to function as a safe and secure place that protects children, like a shield. It was shown that school practices are not only aimed at disaster prevention education, but also at improving everyday problem-solving skills and enriching humanity.

Keywords: school education, zest for life, resilience, prevention

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Children today are faced with the situation of having to survive various crises, including disasters, infectious diseases, and terrorism. It has been revealed that "resilience" is involved in the ability to overcome adverse experiences in childhood (Atsumi, 2021). Resilience is translated as "ability to recover, ability to bounce back, ability to recover, ability to recover, system, flexible strength, etc." (Kanie, 2020). Disaster researchers define resilience as "the toughness shown by human society under stress to resist and maintain a sense of unity, and the plasticity to reduce the impact of disasters and adapt to new environments brought about by disasters" (Alexander 2012). Resilience is composed of the "ability to recover" that allows a bamboo to return to its original shape even after bending, the "buffering power" that allows a tennis ball to bounce back even after being dented, and the "ability to adapt" to survive in new harsh environments (Mohammad, 2020). School education in Japan is governed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, and since 1996, the principle of compulsory education has been to acquire "the ability to live" (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2024). The educational philosophy of each school is left to the principal, and the policy of educational activities is set by each school principal, shared with teachers and staff, and practiced (Yamakawa, 2019; Yonekawa, 2009). The educational philosophy set out by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology is put into practice in different ways depending on the policy of each school's principal, and is presented as the individuality of the school.

The purpose of this study was to explore the daily educational activities of schools that correspond to "resilience" development, and interviewed elementary and junior high school principals. The research question is whether "resilience" can also be developed by developing "the ability to live."

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The constituent factors of resilience can be divided into endowment factors and acquired factors (Hirano, 2010, 2013). Optimism and sociability are factors that are easily retained innately, while problem-solving orientation and self-understanding, which are strongly related to the aspect of high developmental transformation, are acquired factors that are easily retained later in life. It has also been reported that resilience in Japanese people tends to increase gradually from their teens to their seventies. Therefore, learning in the teens, from elementary school to junior high school, is important as it is thought to be utilized throughout one's life.

The elements necessary for improving resilience can be summarized as 1) acquiring awareness of one's own new endowments through group activities and evaluation by others, and 2) enhancing that awareness through group activities and group work (Garmezy, 1991). Since

school education has many elements that increase children's resilience on a daily basis (Ungar et al., 2015), school education itself plays a large role.

Specialized programs for enhancing resilience come in two forms: individual work and group activity programs (Ueno et al., 2020). Individual work considers the ability to regulate negative emotions to be an important element, and focuses on developing skills such as self-control and understanding one's own and others' emotions (Gillham et al., 2008; Yamazaki et al., 2013; Hara et al., 2014). Group activity programs consider the interpersonal interactions that arise through activities to be an important element, and aim to improve resilience while also considering the improvement of the ability to actually use resilience in situations where it is needed (Oshio, 2016). However, it is problematic that methods for developing resilience are not explicitly stated in school education curricula, and there has been insufficient discussion of how to develop the resilience needed to recover after a disaster or from adversity.

Sugiura et al. (2015) summarized the "skills necessary for recovery after a disaster" into the following eight elements based on a survey of disaster victims. 1) Leadership (attitude and habit of gathering and organizing people), 2) Problem solving (attitude and habit of strategically tackling problems), 3) Altruism (characteristic of caring for others and trying to help), 4) Stubbornness (characteristic, attitude and habit of sticking to one's desires and beliefs), 5) Courtesy (attitude and habit of following social norms in daily actions), 6) Emotional control (attitude and habit of trying to stay calm even in difficult or tense situations), 7) Self-transcendence (recognition of the meaning of life from a spiritual perspective), and 8) Active health (daily practice to maintain or improve one's physical, mental and intellectual condition). These "abilities necessary for recovery after a disaster" can be called resilience, and it is desirable to develop them in school education.

The components of "the ability to live" are "problem-solving ability," "autonomy," "cooperation," "rich humanity such as a heart that cares for others and a heart that is moved," and "health and physical strength," and the aim is to develop them through subject instruction and student guidance methods. However, it has been pointed out that the Japanese educational curriculum devotes less time to learning about emotions and mental health compared to schools overseas (Tominaga, 2013, 2014; Shimoda et al., 2020).

■3.0 METHODOLOGY

School principals who lead school organizations were interviewed about their educational goals, ideal image of children, and practical activities aimed at cultivating "zest for." The philosophies and activities in the responses were analyzed in correspondence with the components of "zest for" (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2024), "resilience" (Mohammad, 2020), and "skills necessary for recovery after a disaster", as ① leadership, ② problem solving, ③altruism, ④stubbornness, ⑤courtesy, ⑥ emotional control, ⑦self-transcendence, ⑧active health (Sugiura et al., 2015) (Table 1).

Table 1 Components of the ability to develop and how to develop it

Ability to develop	elements	Cultivation
zest for living	Problem-solving skills, self-reliance, cooperation, a rich sense of humanity, physical strength and health	Subject Matter Guidance Student Guidance
resilience	Resilience, buffering, adaptability	Individual Work Group work
Strengths needed for post-disaster recovery	① leadership, ② problem solving, ③altruism, ④stubbornness, ⑤ courtesy, ⑥ emotional control, ⑦self-transcendence, ⑧active health	

An interview survey was conducted on eight principals of elementary and junior high schools in Osaka Prefecture regarding their awareness and practice of preventing school crises. There are 981 elementary schools and 513 junior high schools in Osaka Prefecture, and 10 schools were randomly selected from them. A survey description was created using Google Forms and distributed to the 10 schools, and interviews were conducted with the eight principals who agreed to be interviewed. The survey description was distributed and collected via the Internet, so the principals could answer the questionnaire anywhere they wanted, and they were only asked to reply if they were interested in the survey. The interviews were conducted at the schools to which the principals belonged or online, for approximately 60 minutes. The survey period was from June to the end of September 2024.

The questions were as follows. Attributes such as gender, age, and years in position were asked. After that, semi-structured interviews were conducted based on the research questions regarding 1) efforts and awareness toward developing children's "zest for life" and 2) educational efforts and awareness in preparation for natural disasters and school crises.

As an ethical consideration, the survey would be anonymous, the data would be processed anonymized so individuals would not be identified, cooperation in the survey was voluntary and no disadvantage would be suffered whether or not they participated, they could withdraw from the survey at any time, the survey response data would be managed responsibly by the researchers and would be disposed of appropriately after use in the research, and it was explained to participants that the survey response data would include a consent form, and that submission of the consent form would be deemed to have consented to the survey.

■4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There were eight pieces of target data. Seven respondents were male and one female. The ages of six were between 55 and 59 years old, and two were over 60 years old. Four were elementary school principals and four were junior high school principals. Five respondents had 3-4 years of experience as a principal, and three had 5-6 years (Table 2).

Table 2 Subject attributes

Data No.	d 1	d 2	d 3	d 4	d 5	d 6	d 7	d 8
sex	Female	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male
Age (years)	64	64	61	60	58	56	56	55
Years of experience (years)	5	6	3	4	4	3	3	3

The topics of the obtained data were considered in relation to the components of "will to live," "skills necessary for recovery after a disaster," and "resilience."

(1) What is the policy for dealing with the hurt of individual students in school education?

The policy for dealing with the hurt of individual students in school education was described.

Methods of dealing with children and students who have clearly experienced adversity were presented. *"First, listen carefully and instruct them not to bear it alone"* (d1), *"Think together about how to overcome it"* (d4), *"Aim to improve the ability to deal with problems"* (d5), *"Instruct on a lifestyle and mental attitude that minimizes being affected by the home environment"* (d8).

It was also shown that specific instructions were given to teachers and staff on how to deal with such children. *"We call out to them in a way that allows us to shift from 'facing' the children to 'looking in the same direction'"* (d3), *"We are there for them as much as possible"* (d7). The principal's policy on psychological care and psychological education for individual students was known to all school staff and was put into practice. *"I try to talk more with teachers who disagree with this policy and exchange ideas with each other"* (d3).

"When it is objectively clear that there is a problem in the home, we will quickly cooperate with other organizations. For this reason, it is also the principal's role to build a network with other organizations on a regular basis. When necessary, we have sought the help of city council meetings. There are many people in the community who have the resources necessary for the development and protection of students. It is the principal's role to be involved with such people on a regular basis. It makes it easier to cooperate with the community when a disaster occurs" (d2). *"If there is a problem in the home environment, we will work with the SSW and the government to improve the environment. As the head of the organization, I am always thinking about how to utilize resources that can be cooperated with"* (d6).

This is the ability to unite teachers and staff belonging to the school organization, and it shows the policy for teachers and staff to instruct children and students in adverse situations.

This approach corresponds to the problem-solving ability and cooperation of "zest for", the adaptability of "resilience", and the ability to respond to leadership in the "ability necessary for recovery after a disaster" (1).

(2) Nurturing "zest for" within human relationships at school

The topic of nurturing "zest for" within human relationships at school was discussed.

"I believe that if a child can position themselves within human relationships, they will be able to carve out their own path. To that end, I try to take some time to celebrate their child's progress with the parents. For example, I invite a child who won a painting award and his/her parents to my office and praise the parents for raising such a child. Children seem to feel a lot when they see their parents being praised for their actions. I think this makes the parent-child relationship more gentle, and I think the child's perspective on themselves changes." (d4)

The teacher praised the child for the effort he/she put into creating the painting, sympathized with the child's feelings of wanting to give up midway, and praised the parents who supported the process. It is believed that this practice increased the child's motivation to persevere, increased their sense of self-confidence and usefulness, and created an opportunity for them to see the parents' gaze on them from a broader perspective.

This initiative corresponds to the "will to live" - independence, cooperation, and rich humanity - and the "resilience" - recovery ability, buffering power, and "strengths necessary for recovery after a disaster" - ③⑤⑥⑦⑧.

(3) Relationship between "Zest for living" and academic ability

The relationship between "Zest for living" and academic ability was discussed.

"Zest for living" and academic ability may be related, but for example, academic ability can decline even without being affected by a disaster. Instead of focusing on that, I want to focus on everyday school life and improve "Zest for living". I am not only the principal but also a teacher. I want to be able to recognize the issues and emotional fluctuations that children face from a decline in academic ability. I think that the way teachers interact with their students affects children's "Zest for living" and "Resilience". (d5). *"If academic ability declined after a disaster, it could be that there was little study time, teaching materials were lost, or students were anxious and did not learn. On the*

other hand, if academic ability increased after a disaster, it could be that there was no play or leisure time, so students lived seriously and only valued studying properly, there was a long period of time off school, and the desire to study increased rather than leisure." (d6). "When a student's academic performance drops, instead of providing supplementary lessons, we help them to feel stable and appreciate the importance of their peers, so that they can calm down. We believe that it is important to start by supporting the creation of friendships. We tell teachers and staff to understand the mental and physical condition of children and provide guidance that allows them to be flexible in their approach to learning." (d7). "Not only can we learn about 'zest for' and 'resilience' from disaster prevention education, but bullying and abuse are more familiar problems and easier to tackle on a daily basis. Children who have undergone training to overcome bullying have more confidence, and there is a sense that their motivation and ability to learn have increased. I think that the experience of experiencing a crisis and overcoming it, rather than avoiding it, makes children and students stronger. There is a lot to learn from human relationships at school. Everyone thinks about one problem together and exchanges opinions on how to deal with it. For example, I think it's like a doctor discussing cases at a conference. This kind of learning can only be done in a group of people of the same age at school." (d8).

It was shown that school education effectively utilizes the group learning environment as an educational resource of being a group education, and provides opportunities for children to "case-study" problems that arise in interpersonal relationships within a group, and to develop problem-solving skills and to infer and empathize with their own and others' feelings. It also emphasizes that schools are places of learning, and a policy was presented in which the psychological state of children is taken into consideration behind the progress of academic ability. It was mentioned that teachers set up situations where they can look at individuals in the school group, providing opportunities for students to infer and think about the current state of their own and their friends' mental and physical condition. It was shown that picking up opinions that come up during group discussions and exchanging various opinions about how to deal with problems for oneself and friends will be useful after graduating from school and entering society.

This type of instruction corresponds to problem-solving skills, autonomy, cooperation, collaboration, rich humanity, physical strength and health, recovery ability, buffering ability, adaptability, and "abilities necessary for recovery after a disaster" ②, ③, ⑥, and ⑧ of "zest for life," which are "ability to recover," "buffering ability," and "adaptability" of "resilience."

(4) Assuming a school crisis, there are things that the school and the head of the organization have prepared for.

Assuming a school crisis, there are things that the school and the head of the organization have prepared for.

"We conduct many drills on a regular basis, and also provide the perspective of having discussions with families. Specifically, we assume that the school will become an evacuation shelter, and we believe it is necessary to actively hold events to set up evacuation shelters, and we have actually done so. It took a long time to propose this event to the Board of Education and get their approval, but my opinion that it is necessary to develop children's "will to live" was adopted and we were able to get their understanding. We gave each child a role in the event. 5th and 6th graders were leaders, setting up tents and distributing retort foods. 3rd and 4th graders cooperate by following the leaders' instructions. 1st and 2nd graders were observers. We learned from watching what actions we should take in the future in preparation for the next school year and beyond." (d2). "It is impossible for humans to avoid earthquakes, but I believe that we can prepare for what happens after a disaster. I think it is important to conduct drills that assume a post-disaster situation." (d4). What children can learn from this initiative is, first of all, that they can learn about the minimum supplies and equipment necessary to enrich their lives. They can also learn that there are things that children can do with their own strength when they encounter a disaster. In order to transport heavy supplies from the storehouse at the back of the gymnasium, it is essential to control one's own emotions and work together with others. "I want them to experience overcoming heavy and tiring loads by encouraging each other" (d2), "Even when it is difficult to calm down on one's own, a word from a friend or peer can help you change your mood. It also allows them to see their own limits together with their peers" (d2). In addition, from the statement, "I want them to experience completing a task that they want to give up on. That's why we instructed the teachers not to lend a hand and only talk. When the child completes the task, we can praise them for being able to do it on their own" (d2), we can see that specific words of encouragement were considered in advance after the disaster experience event was over, and that a teaching plan was made for the skills that the children would acquire after the event was over.

There are not many opportunities for children to demonstrate leadership in school life, but starting an event run by children provides them with such an opportunity. This initiative corresponds to the "will to live" which includes problem-solving ability, self-reliance, cooperation, rich humanity, physical strength and health, "resilience" which includes recovery ability, buffering power and adaptability, and "skills necessary for recovery after a disaster" ①②③④⑤⑥⑦⑧.

■5.0 CONSIDERATION

The analysis results suggested the following.

In the principals' talk, there were fewer mentions of the two items of "skills necessary for recovery after a disaster," 1) leadership and 4) stubbornness, compared to other items. This suggests that emphasis may be placed on developing cooperation and obedience to instructions rather than leadership development. On the other hand, all subjects spoke of the awareness that strong leadership is required of the principal as a school leader, indicating that the development of the principal's own leadership is important and that the principal is actively working on it.

The principal presented a long-term perspective that creating something that is "always the same" and "unchanging" in the daily life of the school will lead to psychological stability of students and faculty and staff when the entire school community falls into a crisis. The importance of creating a framework for daily life at school was indicated, and emphasis was placed on both faculty and students adhering to that framework. Following rules and keeping to time creates a framework for daily life, and the idea was presented that making that

framework strong will lead to psychological robustness, such as a sense of self-affirmation that will allow people to recover on their own even if they are hit by a natural disaster.

Although schools do not proactively provide opportunities for students to experience adversity, they provide guidance to students on interpersonal problems and learning difficulties they encounter by chance in their daily lives at school, aiming to develop their ability to overcome problems. Various efforts were made to make the school the most secure and safe place for children while cultivating their ability to solve problems within a group.

It was shown that events that can cause chaos in school communities can be expected to occur on a variety of scales, from natural disasters and infections that affect the entire country to individual-level events. As part of disaster prevention education, one school was practicing education that taught students to provide support themselves at schools that serve as evacuation shelters. In this case, the focus was on developing ① leadership. Efforts were made to allow students to actually experience things such as setting up tents, helping with soup kitchens, distributing food, how to carry stretchers, and where to store first aid kits. Behind this was the principal's wish that children would be able to live after a disaster without losing their sense of competence and effectiveness. Thinking about what you can do now is presented as a "will to live," which can be said to foster "resilience" in the event of a disaster.

When a large-scale natural disaster occurs, schools become evacuation shelters. In such cases, until administrative officials begin to respond to the evacuees in an organized manner, teachers and staff are required to work devotedly, from running the school to giving appropriate instructions for food distribution, etc. It was suggested that in times of emergency, social trust in teachers and staff is of great significance in promoting crisis management. On the other hand, citing a precedent in which the response to such situations hindered work toward resuming educational activities, the role of schools in times of disaster, disaster prevention systems, disaster prevention education, etc. were presented as issues for future consideration.

The aim of disaster prevention education is to "cultivate the foundations of the ability to respond appropriately to disasters," which is thought to be closely related to the "cultivation of the will to live" indicated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. The aim is to acquire the ability to make accurate judgments and take prompt action based on acquired knowledge in order to predict and avoid dangers on one's own. To achieve this, he showed that it is important to acquire an "attitude of acting independently" that judges situations in daily life and tries to do the best one can in order to build one's own life independently. A perspective of mutual support between oneself and others in a group is also necessary, and it was thought that guidance in accordance with development was necessary and practiced in terms of a caring attitude for others, an attitude of accepting each other and living together, and a spirit of respect for one's own and others' lives and human rights, which support this perspective.

From the principal's words, it was shown that the efforts of individual teachers were recognized and backed up, and an environment was created to ensure that efforts to develop "zest for" reached children. Activities were proposed to the city's board of education at the school level, and the allocation of budgets, materials, and human resources was negotiated, with the aim of developing individual children's zest for, using that skills to cooperate with each other, and ultimately enabling children to work together with adults.

These efforts to develop "zest for" at the preventive stage can also be said to be efforts to develop "resilience," and are thought to develop skills that can be used in the post-disaster and recovery stages from adverse experiences. In order to put into practice the skills that students acquire in their daily educational activities, it is important to provide an opportunity for each individual to deepen their problem-solving abilities and self-understanding, to try using those skills in a group at school, to become aware of their own new qualities through self-evaluation and evaluation by others during that experience, and to further enhance that awareness through group activities and group work. In other words, it is thought that both individual introspection and group work experiences are necessary to improve "zest for life" and "resilience." Taking programs provided by experts in parallel with the practice of teachers and staff at school is also thought to be an even more effective way of promoting the development of "zest for life" and "resilience."

■6.0 CONCLUSION

Using the components of "*powers required after a disaster*" by Sugiura et al. (2015) as a clue, this paper asks whether the education that schools regularly practice to develop "power to live" also supports the development of "resilience," and obtains various suggestions from the principals' answers.

The principals are working to develop "power to live" from both the aspects of academic instruction and student guidance so that children can withstand the stress of adversity, and at the same time, they aim for the school to function as a safe and secure place that protects children like a shield. It was suggested that not only disaster prevention education and special events such as sports days, but also daily student guidance is being carried out with the aim of developing the eight powers and "power to live" that will be "powers required after a disaster," namely "leadership," "problem solving," "altruism," "stubbornness," "etiquette," "emotional control," "self-transcendence," and "active health." It was shown that school practices are not only aimed at disaster prevention education, but also at improving everyday problem-solving skills and rich humanity.

This survey suggests that the practices of Japanese school education that foster "zest for life" may also foster "resilience." Future research topics include the need to academically describe these practices and theorize the concepts that are instilled in teachers and staff on a daily basis. In addition, school organizations led by principals include interpersonal support professionals such as school counselors and school social workers. It was suggested that schools providing practices through interactions in interpersonal exchanges that arise from activities, together with professionals providing individual and group programs, would further foster "resilience" in children and teachers and staff.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper

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