

Success and Failure in Higher Education:

Building Resilience in Students

Edited by
Tessa Leesen
Alkeline van Lenning

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Dedication

This book is one of the outcomes of the Resilience Project, which was designed and implemented at University College Tilburg in 2019. The project has been funded by the NWO Comenius Senior Grant and would not have been possible without the support of University College Tilburg's Dean Alkeline van Lenning and the dedicated contributions of the project members, who invested their expertise, time, and commitment to the project: Tessa Leesen, Ellen Dreezens, David Janssens, Petra Heck, Gerwin van der Laan, Michiel Bot, Krijn Pansters, Thomas Muntz, Rik Peters, Annelies Aquarius, Geno Spoor-mans, Anna Shekiladze, Annelieke Koster, Lies Siemons, Iris Tak, and, most importantly, the student body of University College Tilburg. The editors of this book wish to thank all authors for their contribution to this special edition of the Tilburg Series in Academic Education and for their willingness to engage in and contribute to a discussion on success, failure, and resilience in higher education. Finally, the editors thank Carly Willis for her valuable contribution to the English language editing of the book.

*With music strong I come, with my cornets and my drums,
I play not marches for accepted victors only, I play marches for conquer'd and slain persons.*

*Have you heard that it was good to gain the day?
I also say it is good to fall, battles are lost in the same spirit in which they are won.*

*I beat and pound for the dead,
I blow through my embouchures my loudest and gayest for them.*

*Vivas to those who have fail'd!
And to those whose war-vessels sank in the sea!
And to those themselves who sank in the sea!
And to all generals that lost engagements, and all overcome heroes!
And the numberless unknown heroes equal to the greatest heroes known!*

Walt Whitman (1819-1892), Song of Myself, Section 18.



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Introduction

Introduction

Tessa Leesen

Common understanding suggests that our age is dominated by a “religion of success”: in human endeavors, failure is either not an option or a major embarrassment. Success brings recognition and entitlement, failure brings ostracism and shame.¹ The religion of success has affected our educational landscape. In order to be successful, universities and academic programs strive to obtain high scores in a wide range of rankings. Study success is often defined in terms of study pace, grade point average, and study completion, insufficiently acknowledging the element of learning gain. In the recruitment of students for university programs, “excellence” seems to have become a buzzword.

In a critical glossary, a group of Princeton students and faculty define excellence and other terms common to academic life in a witty manner. They define the “pursuit of excellence” in the academic setting as the “basic objective of most modern human activity in developed societies” and subsequently focus on the negative impact of the discourse on excellency: “The resulting distortions of human experience are difficult to summarize concisely but might be said to include compulsive competition, pervasive hyperspecialization, a ubiquitous capitulation to mechanomorphic ideals (both in the realms of thought and those of the body), want of textured appreciation of the diversity and vicissitudes of life itself, and a widespread and barely concealed disdain for weakness, failure, doomed gestures, tragedy, paralysis, fragility, mediocrity, and the ordinary in all its forms (this despite there being excellent evidence that this litany epitomizes much that is essential to human being)”.²

Whereas some students thrive in a competitive environment, because it encourages them to push their boundaries and bring out the best in themselves, others cannot keep up with the pace. They are unable to meet the expectations they set for themselves and society sets

¹ De Botton (2005).

² A Community of Inquiry (2018).

for them. The pressure to perform is high, sometimes too high, and is fueled by social media, tempting students to share success stories only. As a result, students tend to struggle with fear of failure and other mental health issues.³

The essays within this book critically reflect on the current discourse on failure, success, and excellence within higher education and society at large and suggest integrated definitions that acknowledge the multifaceted character of the concepts. The book also presents and discusses more practically oriented (educational) initiatives that intend to increase students' well-being. The concept of resilience is a means to increase a students' ability to deal with and bounce back from adversity and to stand ground in the competitive environment of higher education.

The chapters of this volume are thematically interlinked, and together they form a cycle to underscore their interconnection: 1) **Society** and **Success**; 2) **Success** in **Higher Education**; 3) **Higher Education: Failure and Resilience**; and 4) Empowering the **Resilient Society**.



³ Although a recent research by Van der Velden *et al.* (2019) concludes that the psychological problems of Dutch students did not increase between 2007 and 2017, and that students do not face more psychological problems than persons of the same age that do not study, a significant percentage of students face mental health issues. A YouGov survey of Britain's students shows that 27% of the respondents report having a mental health problem. See: Aroning & Smith (2016). Also in the US, students report they experience stress to the extent it negatively impacts their mental health: Mortier *et al.* (2018). The University College Student Representatives of the Netherlands conducted a research on the mental health of Liberal Arts and Sciences students in the Netherlands in a survey including 391 students. They found that 50% of University College students believe that they do not have a mental health disorder, whereas the remaining 50% is relatively equally divided between: diagnosed with a mental health disorder (19,7%), students thinking they have a mental health disorder (14,3%) and students questioning whether they have a mental health disorder (15,6%). Unpublished report from the Executive Board of the UCSRN (2018-2019).

I. Society and Success

This chapter aims to reflect critically on the meaning of success in our modern society. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, success is “the prosperous achievement of something attempted; the attainment of an object according to one’s desire: now often with particular reference to the attainment of wealth or position”.⁴ Particularly, the latter part of the definition is striking. It seems to narrow success down to the attainment of external goals, such as wealth and status, which are socially recognized and praised. This illustrates how success is anything but a neutral term and how the meaning of success is inevitably impacted by the sociocultural, geographical, and historical environment, in which it is practiced. Moreover, the definition detracts from the question of what constitutes internal success. The concept of internal success, which is elaborated on in the contributions of Daan van Schalkwijk and José Ignacio Murrillo and touched upon in Ellen Dreezens’ and Krijn Pansters’ essays, measures success by internal standards, such as having meaningful relationships, finding motivation and enjoyment in the pursuits of life and being a good person, rather than by external standards.⁵

Van Schalkwijk and Murrillo’s essay “Rethinking Success” is a philosophical reflection on three distinct notions of success. The essay presents the common understanding of success in our contemporary society as external; it is attained when external objectives (such as obtaining a university degree, employment in a good career, or the attainment of business targets) are met. The authors argue that this notion of success is in line with the modern view of humanity. What makes human beings human in our modern age are the products they yield. Drawing on the philosophical anthropologist Leonardo Polo (1926-2013), the authors state that production has become an important constituent of a human being’s identity. Failing to produce certain results, therefore, negatively impacts a person’s self-appreciation and self-identity and might even result in mental health problems. Because of the problematic nature of the modern notion of external success, the authors explore the classical and Christian traditions in search of other definitions of success. They argue that the classical ideal promotes internal success. This kind of success is attained when human beings realize their Aristotelian potentiality by discovering timeless truths. The Christian ideal promotes relational success; persons are successful when they are able to enter into strong and stable interpersonal relationships. In order to achieve a more balanced, meaningful and psychologically resilient approach to life, the authors suggest taking a holistic approach to success by mitigating the importance attached to external success and re-appreciating its counterparts: internal and relational success.

⁴ *OED Online* (2020).

⁵ Ablard (1996) examined parents’ conceptions of academic success and found that parents either assessed academic success according to external standards, such as grades and college acceptance, according to internal standards, such as their children’s effort, enjoyment, motivation and individual potential, or both.

II. Success in Higher Education

In the context of higher education, success is often defined in terms of external standards, such as study progress, high grades, awards, participation in Honours programs, and involvement in a wide range of extracurricular activities. These seem to be the necessary ingredients to ultimately be able to compete in the labor market and acquire social and intellectual status and financial success. This narrative of external success in higher education is fertile soil for a specific form of excellence: competitive individual excellence. This is a way to distinguish yourself from others, based on individual performances and achievements. As a result, education tends to become a zero-sum game, in which one individual's success can only come at the expense of another individual's failure. And vice versa: if another person succeeds, our own achievements lose luster. This perception of success in higher education does not only risk to imply a certain disdain for mere satisfactory performances but also tends to underrate the importance of learning as a process of intellectual and personal growth. Therefore, it is valuable to critically reflect on the meaning of success and excellence in higher education and consider new definitions, which emphasize learning gain, cooperation, and inclusion.

Teun Dekker confirms that, in recent times, the ideal of excellence in higher education has come under much critical scrutiny in the Netherlands. In a rhetorical plea *In Defense of Excellence*, he, nonetheless, challenges the premises of this book. Although Dekker acknowledges the value of the above-raised concerns, he argues that higher education should not refrain from appreciating excellence. Carefully and considerately assessing the arguments pro and con, Dekker concludes that higher education has the responsibility to accommodate the most academically able and interested students by providing them with challenging, selective, and specialized tracks or programs. His conclusion is based on the premise that higher education has the responsibility to allow every student, also the most intellectually gifted and ambitious ones, to develop themselves optimally.

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Dreezens designed an online course on happiness within the context of the resilience project. She explores the complex relationship between happiness and success, arguing that feelings of well-being can be a catalyst to (academic) success. Her essay aims for students to attain higher levels of happiness and, thus, higher levels of academic achievement. Research indicates that people achieve a more enduring form of happiness when, in their pursuits of life, they are driven by intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivators. Dreezens then translates this insight into the field of higher education. Extrinsic motivators, such as grades and praise, motivate students to start working on a task, but tend to negatively affect a student's intrinsic motivation to invest effort in their learning process. In an inspiring plea to treasure and invigorate a student's innate will to learn, Dreezens presents a range of tools lecturers have at their disposal to intrinsically motivate students.

Alkeline van Lenning explores the possibilities for students to achieve study success. She challenges Tough's "cognitive hypothesis", which states that cognitive capabilities are the

prerequisites for academic success. According to van Lenning, also non-cognitive skills or personality traits should be taken into account. Inspired by a report by the Dutch Scientific Council for Governmental Policy on citizens' self-reliance (2017), she argues that act-capabilities, such as being active, sticking to a plan, self-efficacy, and the ability to cope with adversity, largely contribute to a student's self-reliance, and therefore have an impact on study success. Van Lenning adds the grit and perseverance personality trait to this series of relevant act-capabilities. Research indicates that the ability to persist in an unrewarding task and focus on long term goals is an adequate predictor for both study and career success. A barrier to the successful training of personality traits, however, is the difficulty to train act-capabilities. According to the above-mentioned Council's report, "knowing so, is not doing so". This might also explain why mentor programs and buddy systems at universities do not immediately result in increased student well-being and study success. Van Lenning acknowledges that humans are not necessarily rational beings, who are readily able to put act-capabilities into practice. Therefore, she concludes that it is all the more important for academic programs to invest in training the personality traits in question.

III. Higher Education: Failure and Resilience

Like success, failure can be defined in different ways. According to common understanding, failure is falling short of a set goal. At an individual level, the meaning of failure can differ, as people tend to set different goals for themselves. In the scope of higher education, some students will set very ambitious objectives, whereas others might set the bar lower. The question of whether something is a failure then becomes relative and depends on the person addressing the question. Failure can also be defined at a societal level. The way societies determine and respond to failure depends on the socio-cultural, historical, and geographic context. The meritocratic nature of our modern society enables all to pursue success but is intolerant of failure.⁶ Individuals who fail mainly have themselves to blame since they lack skills and talent or perseverance to realize their dreams. Failure can also have a collective and/or systematic meaning. Like individuals, collectives (communities, organizations, universities, businesses, and states) can be said to fail, both in a descriptive and in a normative sense. This chapter does not only include essays, in which the authors reflect on the concept of failure within the context of higher education, but also includes a series of essays that formulate suggestions for academic programs to build resilience in students and teach students how to deal with failures.

In her essay "Teaching Students How to Fail", Tessa Leesen presents and evaluates the Resilience Project, which has recently been implemented at University College Tilburg (UC Tilburg). This project has a threefold purpose. It aims to increase student's resilience by

⁶ The term meritocracy was coined by sociologist and politician Michael Dunlop Young, who defined merit as intelligence/talent and effort. He foresaw that merits would replace class as the criterion for social hierarchy: Young (1958). On the impact of the meritocratic society, see also: Van Lenning (2019).

offering them tools to adequately deal with setbacks and failures. Any student who enters higher education is likely to fail. This is not only because failure is an essential part of academic training, but also because students are “emerging adults”.⁷ They have not yet fully developed their personal capacities, and by embarking on an academic study, enter unfamiliar territory where anyone is more likely to fail. Within our meritocratic society, failure tends to bring embarrassment and shame. Overcoming the shame of failure is essential to perceive failures as an opportunity to flourish. Therefore, the second goal of the project is to normalize failure and break the taboo around failure. Third, the project aims to invite students to critically rethink and redefine concepts, like success, excellence, and failure. This might encourage students to reappraise the process of intellectual growth rather than focusing on study outcomes only. In order to achieve those aims, the project consists of three pillars: 1) an academic and interdisciplinary module on failure and success, 2) a Resilience Training, and 3) a Failing Forward Event. Leesen briefly guides the reader through these pillars in order to inspire other academic programs and lecturers, who aim to build resilience in students.

Gerwin van der Laan and Bianka Demeter take a side step into another domain of higher education and focus on failure in academic research. Research fails when studies are unable to replicate their findings. The replication crisis is an ongoing methodological crisis, which surfaced at the beginning of the 21st century when the results of many scientific studies in the field of medicine and psychology appeared difficult or impossible to reproduce. In this essay, the authors counterbalance the crisis narrative, which they qualify as counterproductive. In order to enable a productive debate on the matter, the authors argue that failed replications do not necessarily imply the often assumed scientific misconduct on the part of the researchers, nor that the quality of the original study has been below standard. Van der Laan and Demeter state that failed replications bring about scientific progress and offer an opportunity to refine existing and create new research methodologies. The authors also challenge the universality of the norm of replicability. Particularly, the Humanities are set apart as a research area that does not necessarily aim for the replicability of research results. According to the authors, the field of Humanities allows for and values the researcher’s involvement in a research topic, given that the researcher is transparent on possible biases.

The next four essays explore different aspects of the multifaceted concept of resilience. When addressing the question of how to deal with failures and build resilience, Pansters finds inspiration in the writings of the classical philosophers Plato and Aristotle and in the writings of Christian theologians, such as Ambrose, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas. They distinguish four “cardinal virtues” that lead to a virtuous life: prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice. Panster’s essay enlarges on the classical virtue of fortitude as a crucial survival skill for students and others. Fortitude enables a person to adopt and adhere

⁷ The concept of “emerging adulthood” is coined by Arnett (2015).

to a reasonable course of action in the most extreme of situations. Inspired by the philosophical and moral discourse on fortitude, Pansters formulates three rules of courageous living that are relevant in today's society. First, he invites the readers to aspire to *moral* success and pursue to "be good", rather than to perform more adequately. Second, Pansters encourages the readers to seize failures and perceive them as an invitation to grow and flourish, and third, he advises the readers to persist in the pursuance of fortitude, while accepting that the acquisition of the cardinal virtue does not come overnight.

A student's view is essential in this series of essays. Gezy Schuurmans, an alumna of the Liberal Arts and Sciences program at UC Tilburg and currently pursuing a master's degree in International Law and Global Governance, discusses resilience from a student's perspective. She touches upon the struggles that students face: the shame of failure, the fear of missing out, and the pressure to perform. In order to effectively tackle these challenges, Schuurmans argues that shame resilience should be an essential component of any resilience program. Shame resilience is the ability to effectively deal with shame, its impact, and its consequences by applying constructive coping strategies. She introduces the Shame Resilience Theory, developed by Brown (2006), as a key to build shame resilience. This theory states that the degree of resilience against shame is determined by a number of factors: the ability to recognize and accept personal vulnerability; the level of critical awareness of socio-cultural expectations; the ability to form a network and the ability to communicate and speak about emotions. Schuurmans encourages academic programs to create and foster a safe environment, in which these abilities can be practiced.

In an ardent plea that displays a deep concern for student wellbeing, Adina Glickman, who is the initiative taker of the Resilience Project at Stanford University, puts forward three principles for understanding academic resilience in higher education. She first argues that academic resilience is not the student's responsibility only, but should be a shared endeavor of the student and the institution. It is all too easy to require students to resiliently respond to the hardships of higher education without making the institutions equally responsible for creating conditions, in which a student's resilience can grow. Secondly, Glickman asks for the normalization of negative feelings that are inextricably linked to intellectual achievements, such as distress, frustration, and disappointment, and warns of the overapplication (in the United States) of labels that describe mental illnesses. When students experience negative emotions, they benefit from a holistic approach, which addresses both their intellectual and emotional concerns. Thirdly, Glickman points out that resilience is a slow growing plant. This needs to be taken into account when measuring resilience in order to determine whether efforts to cultivate are successful. However, many measurements for resilience are predicated on the modern-day emphasis on speed and ease of adaptability rather than the qualitative transformation over time, and therefore, need refinement.

Whereas most authors in this book define resilience as the capacity to adequately respond to adversity, Herman de Regt's essay defines resilience differently. Resilience is a person's capacity to filter and critically assess the bulk of information that is readily available through the internet. In other words, it is the ability to display "investigative stamina and overcome the disappointment of entertaining beliefs that initially simply feel good, but epistemically do not hold water". In doing so, de Regt touches upon a highly relevant contemporary issue. In a world of "alternative facts" and fact-free opinions, students can easily fall prey to nonsense and thus run the risk to act on false information, which might be harmful to themselves and/or others. In order to equip students to deal with "devilish pulls", de Regt invites them to think scientifically. He introduces magic tricks as an innovative teaching method in the classroom to trigger students to withstand their desire to seek confirmation of their beliefs, but to truly engage in scientific inquiry.

IV. Empowering the Resilient Society

The Tilburg University Impact Program is a university-wide program at Tilburg University that brings together the expertise of researchers and stakeholders in complex societal issues in order to advance society. "Empowering the Resilient Society" is one of the impact themes of this program. Within this program, researchers develop and test new instruments that strengthen the participation of (vulnerable) youth in society, thereby making society more resilient.⁸ This chapter offers a platform for participating researchers in the project as well as for others to share their ideas and experiences on how to build a resilient society.

In the essay "Test Your Own Resilience", Mariëlle Cloin, Bo Broers, and Jolanda Mathijssen present their newly developed self-test for resilience, which targets young persons between the age of 13 and 25. They qualify the self-test as "glossy-style" because it resembles self-tests in glossy magazines, which tend to speak to young people. Notwithstanding its glossy outlook, the self-test for resilience relies on a thorough scientific methodology. The test integrates items from a series of existing youth resilience scales and implements recommendations from stakeholders: youth workers and vulnerable young people. The outcome is a self-test for resilience, which does not only assess a person's relevant personality traits (such as self-reliance, self-efficacy, and self-esteem), but also the social factors (such as parental and peer support) and contextual factors (such as religion) that contribute to a young person's resilience. The objective is to qualify the test person's resilience according to a four-tiered typology, ranging from not resilient to very resilient. The added value of the glossy self-test is multidimensional. The test invites young people to reflect on their own degree of resilience; might increase their level of self-knowledge, and encourage them to seek support. Moreover, the test gives a voice to young people in research.

⁸ The researchers operate under the theme 'join – youth in resilient society'.

Also after college years, resilience continues to be an indispensable personality trait, as Sonja Bekker argues. Young people in search of employment enter a labor market, which has grown more flexible and has even become turbulent over the past decades. This means that young people are no longer likely to transition from school directly into stable employment, but first have different (temporary) jobs or go from job-to-unemployment-to-job. Although young people might benefit from the labor market's flexibility and use the different work experiences to build competencies and move into better positions, the elongated transition period from school to work also entails a number of challenges, such as long-term insecurity or the risk of getting (temporarily) unemployed. Although Bekker acknowledges that political and societal debates should critically assess the limits of a flexible and turbulent labor market, the essay takes a pragmatic stance. In her essay, Bekker invites higher education institutes to equip students and graduates to resiliently deal with the new labor market reality. For this purpose, she offers a toolbox of options that research has proven to be effective, ranging from study and career guidance, to a focus on study completion and after-care for recent graduates.

Together, the essays allow authors who represent a range of disciplines and hold different positions to engage in a dialogue on the meaning of success, excellence, failure, and resilience in the context of higher education and society at large. The essays display the authors' genuine commitment to contribute to the intellectual and personal development of students. Hopefully, this book inspires students, lecturers, policy makers and others to reflect on the role of failure and success in contemporary society, to rethink their pre-conceived opinions on the topic, and take responsibility in order to empower a resilient society.

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I.

Society and Success

Re-Thinking Success

Daniel Bernardus van Schalkwijk & José Ignacio Murillo

In the Netherlands, “Success!” has become an expression that people regularly use to say goodbye to each other. At a time when we are in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, the aptness of this expression can be called into question. After all, many people have seen their success go down the drain for reasons that were beyond their control. Perhaps that is all the more reason to wish them newfound success? But are we looking for the right type of success?

The latter question is not only prompted by Covid-19, even though the pandemic gives the issue some urgency. We have already been seeing indicators of a widespread unease in society. A RIVM⁹ report from 2018 showed that one out of 12 young people were found to be “psychologically unhealthy” on the Mental Health Inventory-5 questionnaire.¹⁰ In this study 15% of students were reported to be in this category. This does say something about the sense of unease among students, even without Covid-19, which as the WHO reported (2020),¹¹ only increases mental health stress.

If we think more about the notion of success that is most commonly applied, we can perhaps start to see why a society that values it highly would become uneasy. One is successful when one’s goals are achieved, and especially when these goals are socially recognized and celebrated. Successful students do well in their studies, get into the further studying programs of their choice, and finally a job or position of their preference. Successful business people make their targets, get an appropriate financial reward, and can advance their careers to higher positions in the company. Successful academics can combine their teaching task with a productive line of research that is showcased in top-tier academic journals and is highly cited. All these achievements are obvious causes for celebration, not

⁹ Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu (National Institute for Public Health and the Environment).

¹⁰ Schoemaker *et al.* (2019).

¹¹ WHO (2020).

unease. So, what is the problem?

The unease comes, of course, when success is not achieved, or when there is a chance of achieving it but it is not yet guaranteed, or when it is achieved but it is perceived as not enough. In those situations, it becomes obvious that the much-desired job, making the target, and getting published in the top-tier journal, do not only depend on oneself. Others are involved who may or may not be favorable or fair to you. If success is all that matters, then these other people that you may not even know, have an immense amount of power over your self-image and self-appreciation. Is that a healthy situation? If not, are there alternatives?

In addition, Toronto psychologist John Vervaeke sees a “meaning crisis” at the heart of the mental health problems that many people face.¹² He argues that there is a set of both positive social patterns, such as a more prevalent search for wisdom, and negative social patterns, such as prevalent nihilism and cynicism, that can be explained through a perceived lack of meaning in the lives of many. If he is right, our focus on success does not seem to provide people with the sense of meaning they desire. The unease with success, with psychological health in students and the general population, and a perceived crisis of meaning all lead to a profound reflection on what it is that can improve our situation.

One objection that arises immediately is whether profound questions of success, psychological health, and meaning can have answers at all. Are we not talking about areas of value that cannot be observed empirically, and are therefore profoundly subjective? This common objection will need to be faced in due time. For now, we will assume that it is at least possible to start reflecting on the issues raised so far and have a meaningful dialogue about them.

In this chapter, we will explore the philosophical roots of the importance that people attach to success nowadays. In addition, we will look into the alternatives that classical and Christian thought have given to this view of man, and how these views can be relevant for facing the societal unease with success. In doing so, we will follow the reflections that the 20th century Spanish philosopher Leonardo Polo, a recognized expert in philosophical anthropology, the philosophical study of human beings, offers in his text “*Lo radical y la libertad*”.¹³ This text has recently been translated into English and published together with an extensive popular presentation, under the title “Freedom in Quarantine”.¹⁴ Those interested in deeper and broader consequences regarding the ideas presented here will find Polo’s text an interesting read.

¹² See, e.g., Vervaeke *et al.* (2017).

¹³ Polo (2005).

¹⁴ Polo & van Schalkwijk (2020).

Our Results Make Us Human

In “*Lo radical y la libertad*” Polo asks himself what it is that makes human beings human, according to different thought traditions. The answer to that question is what he calls “*lo radical*”. Translating this term is somewhat complicated, because while English knows the term “radical” in a sense close to that which Polo means, as in the expression “radical change”, most often it is used to refer to extremist groups, an association that is completely out of place in this philosophical context. Therefore, I have opted to translate it to the word “root” which is etymologically justified because it corresponds to the Latin word “*radix*” from which *radical* comes. It may be somewhat amusing to hear a biologist like the first author saying that human beings have roots, even if that is what it feels like when having to stay at home during the pandemic. However, the roots referred to here are metaphorical: the human root is that which most deeply makes a human being human.

Polo states, according to modern thought, the most profound and characteristic activity of human beings is production and so what makes human beings human are their results. In short, the modern root is the “result principle”. What makes us human is not who or what we are, it is not given *a priori*. Rather, our products are what is special about us. Our products make us truly human.

This notion can be clearly identified in one of the greatest modern thinkers, Hegel. His philosophy of the absolute is the result of a production process,¹⁵ and human beings are part of the absolute, of the result. This notion is in no way limited to one thinker, it was conceived well before Hegel, and reverberates well after him. According to Marx, for example, what human beings produce is essential to them, it affirms them. This is why Marx believed separating a worker from his products is such a profound “alienation”.¹⁶ Our products make us special.

Does This Make Sense?

We have already seen that the modern root leads to a feeling of discomfort. This feeling is part of a broader movement of mistrust in modern thinking. Polo describes it as a crisis of modernity and uses the common term postmodernism for that. Postmodernism expresses mistrust towards and abandons modern projects.¹⁷ A key reason for this mistrust is the overwhelming sense of uncoordinated complexity that the current world brings to us. The modern world presents us with so many conflicts and paradoxes, that it is easy to lose one’s way. Should we be politically right-wing or left-wing, if both have at least some valid points, and at least some errors? What to think about the plethora of religions and

¹⁵ Hegel frequently equated the Absolute with the Christian conceptions of God, and states: “He produces Himself of His own act, appears as Being for ‘Other’”. Citation from: Hegel (1895), 118.

¹⁶ Marx (1844).

¹⁷ See, e.g., Pluckrose *et al.* (2020), Chapter 1.

philosophies of life that we can choose from? It is easy to get stuck in complexity. Once we are stuck, we can easily become hedonist, looking for short-term pleasures, or nihilist, rejecting all moral and religious principles and settling for perplexity. Experience shows that these solutions do not make anyone happy. Have we reached a dead end?

Classical Insights

Postmodern nihilism stands in stark contrast to ancient Greek optimism about the ability for human beings to know what makes their lives fulfilled and fully human. The core Greek discovery, according to Polo, is the notion of “act”, formulated by Aristotle based on Socratic insights. This notion is also the classical root, the classical conception of what makes human beings human. It requires some elaboration.

The Greeks discovered by looking up at the stars that some things in the world are not subject to time. No matter how long you look, the stars always seem to move in the same way. Their patterns are timeless. Not only that, but we seem to be able to grasp these timeless patterns in the world around us. Ancient philosophers looked for the firm and stable principle behind all changes. We can think about the stars, and especially the concepts we have that do not change with time. The number “three” will remain the number three for as long as I live. I may learn to call it different names, relate it to many other concepts in new ways, but the concept itself does not automatically change when I get older. It is not affected by time.

While nowadays we may disagree that the movement of the stars is always the same, the fundamental insight that there are things in the world around us that are not subject to time has only been further confirmed. Think of the laws of nature, or fundamental cosmological constants. These do not change as we get older: they are not affected by time.

28 This Greek discovery actually led the Greeks to philosophy: the search for these timeless truths. With Socrates, that search started to focus on human beings themselves. Is there something fundamentally human about us, something that is in our human *physis*, our human nature? Unlike many modern thinkers, the Greeks thought these things do exist, that everything has its own *physis*.¹⁸ And the capacity to search for stable truths is what is most important about the nature of human beings. Doing that well makes human beings happy and fulfilled. Whereas modern thinkers would emphasize making the world around us a better place, producing things that are good for us, and realizing ourselves in that way, in classical thought it is especially important that we can possess what is good for us inside ourselves. We can become beings able to contemplate truth and act accordingly. Because we strive for timeless truths, these ideals that help us become good at thinking and rational contemplation are always the same for everyone.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Ducarme *et al.* (2020).

Importantly, the Greeks discovered that searching for truth and acting according to truth improves firstly ourselves. We can learn good habits and virtues, that dispose us to thinking well and acting according to what is truly good for us. So we can better enjoy what is truly good. On the other hand, if we do not search for the good in our thinking and doing we build up bad habits or vices. A fulfilled life, according to the Greeks, is one in which we have internalized truth in our thinking and our activity. That is the Classical notion of a successful human life.

Christian Inspiration

Before going into the relevance of the classical root for success, I would like to mention the Christian view of human beings, which Polo also explains in depth. In Christian thought, what makes human beings human is that they are created persons; they are not just exemplars of the human species, each of them is radically new and unique. In short, the Christian root is the person.

While the notion of person, *prosopon* in Greek and *persona* in Latin, was formulated before the advent of Christianity, Christian thought, especially Christian theology added some important aspects to the notion. It became a key ingredient in Christian theology, especially the formulation that God has one divine nature, but three persons (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and that Jesus Christ is one person, but has two natures (divine and human).¹⁹ These formulations emphasize both the uniqueness and relationality of each person. We are who we are, because of our relationships with other persons.

Personal relationships between human beings, if done well, are loving. Each human being is lovingly created by God and called to a loving relationship with Him. However, this relationship faces obstacles, as our original intimacy with our creator has been damaged by the rebellion known as sin. The Christian religion revolves around the restoration of this relationship, which has been made possible by the coming of Jesus Christ, who takes the damage upon himself and invites people into a renewed and elevated relationship with God. Yet doing so is no pushover, we are invited to die with Christ to everything that is an obstacle to the relationship with God in us, so that this relationship can be profoundly renewed, and we enter into a new spiritual life with God. From the spiritual force that comes with this new life, it is possible to also experience human relationships in a new and more loving way. Still, human freedom always leaves the possibility for a relapse to lifestyles that are damaging to relationships with other people and with God. Remaining faithful to the Christian vocation is a life-long adventure, which despite its pitfalls and obstacles is nevertheless truly possible, as many examples of saintly Christian lives illustrate.²⁰

¹⁹ See, e.g., Athanasian Creed.

²⁰ A more elaborate account of Christian thought and living can be found in: Catholic Church (1993).

Success and Mental Health

How can classical and Christian insights help students struggling with mental health issues? Should they renounce the ideal of success altogether? Are classical ideals not outdated? And how can Christian insights be relevant to the many non-Christians?

Combining the best aspects of the three roots is a task that requires careful consideration. We cannot just “pick and choose” from the aspects we like best if we are to do justice to the serious truth claims that all three roots entail. Instead, a humble search for truth is required. For a careful comparison of the three roots, we refer to “Freedom in Quarantine”, given the limited size of this article. Here we will briefly summarize the main conclusions and explore their relevance to our thoughts about success and our thoughts about mental health.

When carefully combining the three roots, we see that the classical insight that human beings are capable of discovering timeless truths remains valid, implying that we should carefully consider the core classical insights about human nature. This classical notion also implies that the big questions we are tackling in this paper can be addressed meaningfully. Modern thinkers contribute to the insight that human production is more important than classical thinkers made it out to be; production is a valuable manifestation of human freedom and creativity. Finally, the Christian notion of the person adds an extra dimension to both these insights, underlining the possibility of intimate personal relationships as a constitutional feature which makes each human being unique.

If success means to reach the goals we set ourselves, then we must note that the most important goals we set ourselves vary according to our understanding of what is most important in life. If we were to stick with the modern root, success mainly lies with how many people see it today: reaching external objectives, of financial or other nature, and social acclaim. We could call that “external success”. As we saw, external success entails a lot of uncertainty, because such results do not only depend on our own efforts. If our whole self-worth depends on these results, it is a recipe for mental instability.

In contrast, following the classical ideal, success is seen as “becoming who we are”: developing the potentiality that lies in our human nature by following timeless human truths. Being able to rationally contemplate the world can then be seen as a goal in itself. Importantly this is a goal that we can also attain in this life and enjoy, while modern thought would tend to have us chase more external results. Living our practical life according to reason, and thus becoming prudent, strong, temperate, and just, what are known as the classical cardinal virtues, are then also seen as successes in themselves. We can call that “Internal success”. These stable and unchanging ideals are attainable and we can enjoy possessing them. Therefore, even though they are sometimes difficult to attain, and we need to learn to deal with failure too, the stability and enjoyment of the ideals do contribute greatly to mental stability.

Finally, according to the Christian root, the person is always new and able to generate novelty. Success means the ability to enjoy this newness and enter into stable and faithful personal relationships with other persons. This could be called “relational success”. These personal relationships can give meaning to both our external and internal successes. Personal relationships have their challenges too, and, in line with Christian theology, they may even involve dying to aspects of ourselves that are in the way of their stability. To deal with these challenges, working simultaneously on the internal success of a virtuous character is important.

Practically Speaking

“Life is short and the art is long” Hippocrates famously said about medicine. The same can be said about the ideas that are briefly summarized in this chapter. Living a life in which relational, internal, and external success find an appropriate balance is no mean feat. For example, the book “The Road to Character” by Brooks shows how a greater emphasis on internal success has played out in the lives of people with very different backgrounds and circumstances.

The current pandemic gives a very specific context in which to think about success concretely. External success has been challenged for many people, people have passed away prematurely. Still, many students have adapted to challenging circumstances and are doing their best to learn online and manage to get good grades.

For students, “internal success” in these times entails a challenge to adopt a completely new set of habits. It calls for the virtue of prudence, the habit of applying practical reason to your life, for instance when making a schedule. It requires the virtue of fortitude, which helps overcome obstacles, for example when having to get out of bed on time while the online class exerts less external pressure than face to face teaching would. More generally, fortitude helps to keep to your schedule. Spending more time online also requires temperance, the virtue which helps to resist temptations, for example when trying not to get distracted by videos and social media. Finally, the circumstances also call for justice, the virtue that helps give other people their due, for example when doing group work and contributing a fair share to the outcome of the project. These are examples of how we can live some of the most important virtues in the current online learning setting.

“Relational success” during these times often requires proactivity, for example arranging an offline meeting to get to know other students personally. Making time for friends, for family, and for God, requires consciously making time for those relationships when other obligations keep on pressing.

Finding balance always has an important personal element, in the sense that not only general truths about human beings, but the very concrete personal circumstances, relationships, and someone’s perceived calling play an important role. A complete practi-

cal handbook for life will therefore never be written. Still, moderating the importance of external success in favor of internal and relational success is already an important step towards a more balanced, meaningful, and psychologically resilient approach to life. This realization also entails that there is a wealth of experience in the tradition of thought, religion, and spirituality that students of today would be wise to consider making their own.

Conclusion²¹

Success is a defining value of our age, and is, in line with the modern view of human beings, in many cases thought of as external success. Re-considering the value of the classical and Christian view of human beings leads to a re-appraisal of what we can call internal and relational success. Next to pointing to profound truths that would be unwise to disregard, taking seriously all three notions of success is likely to lead to a more meaningful life and a more stable mentality. That will help provide much-needed mental resilience.

²¹ For those interested in further exploring and communicating this line of thought, we are developing a range of materials that can be of use. Murillo (2019) offers a medium-length exploration of the different notions of humanity and discusses the relationship with neuroscience. We also offer a free online course consisting of four 10-minute videos which illustrate the core ideas in this paper through cinematographic material. A more in-depth, but widely accessible philosophical explanation can be found in "Freedom in Quarantine", Polo (2020). Finally, these concepts, together with further economic insights, are explored artistically and didactically in the academic novel "WIN WIN WIN", written together with Lans Bovenberg. Visit www.danielbernardus.nl for more information.

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II.

Success in Higher Education

In Defense of Excellence

Teun Dekker

In recent times, the ideal of excellence in higher education has come under much critical scrutiny in the Netherlands. It is often seen as elitist and as contributing to student mental health problems. While these are serious concerns, in criticizing excellence there is a risk of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. The objections against it are rarely formulated precisely enough to assess properly. A better understanding of the precise nature of the ideal, as well as the arguments for and against it, might contribute to a more nuanced appraisal of the role of excellence in a higher education system.

1. The Excellence Thesis

The word excellence has a range of connotations, not all of them helpful in this context. Hence it is important to specify how the concept should be understood for present purposes. This paper will defend the thesis that, in a system of higher education, there should be dedicated provision for students who are at the higher end of the distribution of cognitive ability and who are interested in attaining a very high intellectual level. For short, there should be what might be called excellence programs for students who can do more and who want to do more in the academic domain. This could be in the form of specialized honors tracks within existing programs or through dedicated programs. These should be designed to be attractive to the relevant students and to optimally facilitate their academic development. This might involve some form of selective admissions and is likely to require dedicated pedagogies or facilities.

It is important to stress that this thesis only asks for differentiation within a higher education system. It does not state that higher education should be restricted to only those students who are eligible for such programs, or that there should not be other kinds of programs as well. Nor does it require these programs to be better funded or be accorded a higher social status. Furthermore, it focusses only on cognitive ability and academic am-

bition. Different individuals are better or worse at different things, with some being good at academic symbol manipulation and others at athletics or artistic pursuits. Similarly, some individuals are interested in academic matters, but not in sports, while others have a passion for music, but not for science. As such, the thesis does not differentiate among students all things considered, but only in terms of particular abilities and interests.

2. An argument for the Excellence Thesis

Several arguments can be made for the excellence thesis. One such argument is based on the premise that higher education should allow every student to develop themselves optimally. It adds the premise that, for the most academically able and interested students, this is best achieved through dedicated programs. This last premise seems more contentious than the first, but one might support it by arguing that in such programs one can discuss more complicated material without having to worry that not all students will be able to understand it. One can also tailor the pedagogy used to the level of the students, giving more room for interaction and student input, which the relevant students might be particularly interested in offering. Secondly, educating students together with those of similar abilities and interests can result in a culture which encourages students to strive to do the best work possible and in which fascination with scientific developments is not considered weird or nerdy. This can motivate them to work harder.

One might object to this premise by maintaining that these students can be offered an equally good learning experience together with students of different abilities and interests, undermining the need for differentiation. However, one might doubt this line of argument. Firstly, it can create problems in the level of the material to be discussed. In a group of mixed cognitive abilities, educators often end up discussing material that is too complex for some students and too easy for others. This is particularly relevant in the light of increasing enrolments in higher education, as this is likely to result in a more heterogeneous population of students, with a wider range of interests and abilities. Ensuring that all students attain the minimum standard will take up most of the educator's time, which will disengage those who can easily surpass it and leaves no time to discuss material that challenges and excites them. Secondly, in a program in which only a minority of students have a profound interest in intellectual matters, a culture may emerge in which discussing academic issues and working to the utmost of one's academic ability is frowned upon. If few people in a community are excited about doing the best possible job, those who are might feel marginalized, underappreciated, and can become demotivated.

Interestingly, the insight that it is beneficial for the most able and passionate individuals to develop themselves together is widely accepted in other contexts, such as athletics or the arts. Few would argue that high-level athletes can best develop their athletic talents in groups of mixed ability, or that the most talented musicians should be taught together with those who have only a passing interest in music. It is not obvious why one would

want to take such an approach for those who are particularly able and interested when it comes to academic development.

There are of course other arguments to be made for the excellence thesis. For example, one might make an instrumental argument, to the effect that it is beneficial for society as a whole for there to be people who have attained a high cognitive level, as these people will be able to contribute to society in all kinds of ways. One might also make a desert-based argument, holding that achieving a high level of academic achievement is admirable and that those who do so should be rewarded with special opportunities to further develop their abilities. These are important arguments in their own right. However, they do not directly relate to the most frequently voiced objections to the thesis, and so they will only be mentioned in passing.

3. Against Excellence: The Elitism Objection

One objection against the thesis is that it fosters elitism and that this is undesirable. Elitism is a powerful rhetorical concept in a debate, but the charge is rarely specified. Several distinct objections are hiding within this idea. Firstly, some hold that creating dedicated programs for the most able and interested students fosters inequality in higher education. It creates an elite group, which gets special treatment, and this is argued to be unjust. However, note that the argument for the excellence thesis presented above is based on equality. It holds that all students should be facilitated to optimally develop their talents. This requires different things for different people, but that is not incompatible with equality.²² Rather, equality requires that people's differences be taken into account. If people are relevantly different, they should be treated as such. Indeed, giving everyone the same treatment regardless of the differences between them would perpetuate inequality. If two people, one short, the other tall, were to stand on identical stools, they would obviously not be of equal height. Rather, to achieve equality, stools of different heights would be required. Likewise, allowing everyone to develop their talents to the best of their ability requires differentiation in the higher education system.

A second argument against the excellence thesis holds that it would be unfair to lavish extra resources on the most able and interested students, at the expense of the education provided to other groups of students. To a certain extent, the same egalitarian arguments discussed above apply here too. If some people, through no fault of their own, require more expensive education to optimally develop their talents than others require to develop theirs, many egalitarians would not consider this unjust.²³ However, it is also not necessarily true that the excellence thesis requires that the relevant programs be given more resources than others. Perhaps such programs cost more money to provide than other programs, because of small class sizes or dedicated facilities, but other students might

²² For a discussion of this point, see Sen (1979).

²³ For discussion of this matter, see Cohen (1989).

cost extra money in other ways, such as by having to repeat courses they fail or by requiring the support of counselors and remedial tutors. Additionally, due to their small scale, programs for the most able and interested students might be laboratories for testing educational innovations, that can later be introduced in other programs, benefiting all students.

A third argument against the excellence thesis is that such programs are the exclusive domain of the higher socio-economic classes and that they will use them to confer high levels of socio-economic capital upon their children, thereby limiting social mobility. This is a much harder allegation to deal with. However, it is important to distinguish elite from elitist. Undoubtedly, the kinds of programs under consideration are intended for the academic elite, in the sense that they are for people who are able to reach a high cognitive level. However, that is different from being elitist, in the sense of being reserved for those with high socio-economic status, which such programs should not be. Needless to say, the two categories do not overlap; some students from privileged backgrounds are not particularly able or academically interested, while some students who can and want to achieve a high intellectual level in their studies come from modest backgrounds. Hence, it is imperative that the relevant programs ensure that their admissions and recruitment procedures do not give an unfair advantage to students from privileged backgrounds and do not confuse markers of privilege with indicators of intelligence and genuine interest in academic issues. This is not easy; no admissions system is ever completely resistant to ambitious upper-middle-class parents. However, insofar as programs can separate elite from elitist, they need not be reserved for the higher socio-economic classes.

This concern might also be mitigated by reflecting on a fourth argument against the thesis, namely that creating separate programs for the most academically able and interested students will give them an overinflated sense of self-worth. They will come to believe that they are altogether superior as people, not merely in one particular respect. Graduates of these programs will form a social elite without any insight or interest in the lives of other classes. They will permeate the top echelons of society, and seek to exclude others from leading positions, to maintain their grip on power.²⁴

This is a powerful critique, but it does rely on the assumption that the programs in question will become socially recognized as relevant markers of achievement that open doors that will remain closed to others. This need not be the case. The most academically successful students are often not the ones who end up in leading social positions in current Dutch society, and the world is not run by those who graduated *summa cum laude*. Once again, it is important to make a distinction, in this case between intrinsic and positional goods.²⁵ Education can be pursued for its own sake or to gain an advantage over others in later competitions for social positions. It is the latter effect that some members of the higher socio-economic classes are primarily interested in. Whether or

²⁴ This is the concern advanced in Michael Young's famous book *Rise of the Meritocracy*. See Young (1994).

²⁵ I owe this distinction to Adam Swift. See Swift (2003).

not a type of education is recognized as affording such an advantage is a social construct, depending on how programs fit into a wider culture. It might be possible to present excellence programs as different from, but not necessarily better, all things considered, than other programs, or to ensure that job-selection processes do not give undue weight to whether or not candidates have attended such a program, thereby limiting the positional advantage they confer. This would prevent the rise of an exclusive cartel in society, making these programs less attractive to those who seek status and social capital and saving their students from a sense of superiority. For the thesis does not require that these programs be accorded a higher social status, certainly not beyond what is relevant to one's later pursuits. The danger is real, but if these programs are embedded in a culture which appropriately values them, then these problems might be prevented.

4. Against Excellence: The Mental Health Argument

Another frequently voiced argument against the thesis is that creating excellence programs in a higher education system results in high levels of stress among students. Here too several distinct arguments could be made, and these need to be considered separately.

One set of arguments holds that these programs have a high workload, and those in them must consistently perform well, leading to stress and anxiety. However, recall that these programs are only intended for those who can and want to do more, and should not confer undue positional advantage. There should be no shame attached to not studying in an excellence program. The great thing about a differentiated higher education system is that everyone can enroll in a program that suits them. If there is a good match between student and program, this may reduce anxiety. In a less differentiated system, in which students of different abilities are mixed, it might be that students with less academic abilities feel the need to keep up with their better-performing peers, causing stress. At the same time, the more academically able students may feel frustrated and unrecognized because they cannot live up to their full potential.

Another concern relating to stress and mental health pertains not to students in higher education, but rather to students in secondary education, who might suffer anguish in the process of applying to selective programs. The problem is that ambitious high school students, and their parents, will get caught up in a competitive frenzy for admission, to the detriment of all. Clearly, this is a valid concern, and one need only look at the US or the UK to see its gravity. One might respond to it in two ways. One is to bite the bullet. After all, the reality of life is that some goods, such as desirable jobs, prizes, and honors, are competitive. If one desires them, one must work hard and can be disappointed. Why should university admissions be any different? And perhaps having a goal to strive for can also benefit those who are not admitted to selective programs, as they might still achieve better results than if they never had the ambition to attend them in the first place.

One might also once again stress that differentiation in higher education does not inherently have to imply vertical differentiation. The fact that programs cater to different students does not have to mean that some programs become seen as better than others *tout court*. It is not part of the excellence thesis that these programs should acquire undue social desirability, and that not completing such a program should result in social stigma or dramatically fewer opportunities in life. If this can be prevented, perhaps prospective students and their parents might be less concerned about gaining admittance, and only those for whom these programs are a good match will be attracted to them. This might prevent any unhealthy stress.

Many will argue that the idea of dedicated programs for the most academically able students existing in a differentiated higher education system without acquiring an undue aura of superiority is naïve. Separate inherently means unequal, and, try as one may, these programs will inevitably become markers of social status. They will be sought after to gain positional advantage, resulting in undesirable elitism and stress. Perhaps this is true, but it is as much a pathology of society as a system which does not allow for differentiation. In his *Politics*, Aristotle identifies two forms of social corruption.²⁶ One occurs when those who are unequal in some respects are seen as unequal in all respects, as might happen when those who are the most academically able come to dominate society. The other occurs when those who are equal in some respects, namely their value as citizens, are made equal in all respects. This happens when education is not sensitive to the differences between students.

In the end, this defense of excellence boils down to this: there are simply some students who really like books and science, and who would benefit from studying together with people who share that passion. They do not ask for any special social status or undue advantages later in life on account of their education. All they ask for is an education that fits their interests and ambitions, as everyone has the right to.

²⁶ Aristotle (2009, 1301^b39).

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Increasing Student Happiness: Treasuring the Will to Learn

Ellen Dreezens

Happiness has long been proposed as the ultimate goal of human functioning.²⁷ It is a goal shared by many people around the world,²⁸ and an overwhelming majority of U.S. residents place “finding happiness” very high on their list of major life goals.²⁹ Common knowledge suggests that success is the fastest route towards long-lasting happiness. We expect people that are successful in terms of wealth, attractiveness, marital status, or influence to be happier than people that are not. This is one of the reasons why many people try to attain success in various fields of life, be it in the domain of beauty, wealth, career, or education. However, these people may be looking for happiness in the wrong place, because research shows that happiness does have little to do with money, attractiveness, education, or good or bad luck.³⁰

Success: Not Necessarily a Prerequisite for Happiness

When looking more broadly into our western society, the expected positive relationship between happiness and success does not necessarily reflect reality. Many successful people deal with general unhappiness, depression, substance abuse, and large amounts of pressure (from their environment or put on themselves). We also see this pressure building up in our students. They seem to think that, in order to achieve happiness at a later point in time, they have to excel in their academic education, focusing on achieving high grades and an impressive amount of extra-curricular activities. This pressure is starting to show in increased amounts of students dropping out due to burnout, depression, or other

²⁷ Waterman *et al.* (2008).

²⁸ Diener (2000); Lyubomirski *et al.* (2011).

²⁹ Diener *et al.* (1995), National Differences.

³⁰ Brickman *et al.* (1978); Diener *et al.* (1995), Physical Attractiveness.

psychological problems. In this essay, we would like to come to understand what it takes to become happy, and how teachers can help their students achieve happiness in the current moment, instead of only focusing on expected happiness in the future.

Happiness

Happy people are energetic, creative, productive in the workplace, cooperative, and motivated to help others. They have more friends, more satisfying social interactions, stronger immune systems, they cope more effectively with stress, and they even live longer.³¹ In sum, happiness carries a wide variety of benefits for the individual, as well as for families, workplaces, and communities.

Happiness as a Catalyst for Success

Happiness is associated with and precedes numerous successful outcomes, as well as behaviors paralleling success. For instance, children higher in subjective well-being earn higher grades, even when taking intelligence and past academic performance into consideration.³² Happy people marry sooner and stay married longer than people with a less happy life.³³ The happiness - success link exists because positive affect may be the cause of many of the desirable characteristics, resources, and successes correlated with happiness.³⁴

Happy people, who experience more positive emotions, are more appealing as dating partners and are easier to live with as spouses. They grow rich faster because, as in the marriage market, they are more appealing to others (such as bosses). An individual experiencing a positive mood or emotion is encountering circumstances that he or she interprets as desirable. He or she might feel that life is going well, goals are being met, and resources are adequate.³⁵ In these circumstances, Fredrickson expects people to “broaden and build”.³⁶ Because all is going well, individuals can broaden their resources and friendships; they can take the opportunity to build their repertoire of skills for future use; or they can rest and relax to rebuild their energy after expending high levels of effort. This helps prepare the organism for future challenges and helps them to seek new goals that they have not yet attained. Their frequent positive emotions help them to commit to projects, to work hard, and to invest in their futures.³⁷

Some people seem to be predisposed to be happier than other people. While it is true that there are personal differences in degrees of happiness, that does not mean that people

³¹ Lyubomirski *et al.* (2005); Kurtz & Lyubomirski (2008).

³² Quinn & Duckworth (2007).

³³ Haidt (2006).

³⁴ Lyubomirski *et al.* (2005), The Benefits.

³⁵ Cantor *et al.* (1991); Carver & Scheier (1998) ; Clore *et al.* (2001).

³⁶ Fredrickson (2001).

³⁷ Lyubomirski *et al.* (2005), The Benefits.

cannot become happier if they wish to. Research shows that 50% of one's happiness is controlled by our genes, and is therefore unchangeable. The next 10% of our happiness is determined by environmental and demographic factors such as intelligence, age, gender, race, marital status, and wealth. These factors can only be influenced to a small extent. Thus, 60% of our happiness is mostly beyond our control. The part of our happiness level that we are not able to influence is called our happiness set-point.³⁸ Whether our circumstances change for better or for worse, the process of hedonic adaptation makes us return to our original happiness set-point after some time.

Hedonic Adaptation

A prevalent misconception about happiness is that once you “get happy” (for instance because you win a lot of money), you will stay happy for the rest of your life. Happiness is seen as a destination instead of a journey. However, happiness erodes.³⁹ The human mind is extraordinarily sensitive to changes in our condition. If you win the lottery or get a promotion, you will certainly feel happier.⁴⁰ However, our brain cells respond vigorously to new stimuli, but they gradually react less to stimuli that they have become used to. Therefore, happiness levels always return to their set-point level after a while. This phenomenon is called hedonic adaptation.⁴¹ Hedonic adaptation works for positive and negative life events. Lottery winners feel happier at first, but after some time, this effect diminishes. Research by Brickman *et al* (1978), shows that accident victims who have become paralyzed from the neck down, experience a decrease in their happiness scores for about a year, after which they return to their original happiness levels. Whatever happens, after a few months, human beings start setting themselves new goals and begin adapting to their situation, which brings their happiness back to its set-point level.

This however does not mean that it is impossible to change your happiness level for the better. As seen before, 60% of the factors contributing to our happiness are relatively unchangeable, which means that 40% of the factors that affect our happiness are under our control.⁴² The happiness set-point mentioned above can better be seen as a potential range of happiness levels that center around this set-point. Engaging in happiness-increasing activities (such as committing to important goals, meditating, acting kindly toward others, thinking optimistically, or expressing gratitude) has the potential to improve levels of happiness for significant periods of time.⁴³ The practice of volitional positive activities may provide lasting boosts in well-being that do not wear off entirely with time.

³⁸ Lyubomirski *et al.* (2005), Pursuing Happiness.

³⁹ Guilbert (2007).

⁴⁰ Haidt (2006).

⁴¹ Guilbert (2007).

⁴² Lyubomirski *et al.* (2005), Pursuing Happiness.

⁴³ Lyubomirski *et al.* (2005), Pursuing Happiness.

This means that we can learn to become happier and can actively increase our happiness levels. Only, we need to do it in different ways than our society prescribes.

How (Not) to Achieve Happiness: Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation

Research shows that people experience long-lasting happiness when they live their lives based (mostly) on intrinsic motivations rather than extrinsic motivations. Extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards (e.g. money, prize, grades). You participate in a game because of the prospect of winning. You do your homework because that often leads to higher grades. Success, at least the way it is defined in our Western society, is often based on extrinsic motivators. However, extrinsic motivations focus on the end result (the reward) and lead away from (enjoyment of) the process itself.⁴⁴

When people are intrinsically motivated, they do things because they find them interesting and enjoyable. They go to work because they feel that their job is meaningful. They do their homework because they want to learn about a specific topic. Intrinsic motivation relates to a wide range of positive outcomes such as psychological well-being, increased effective performance, and greater persistence.⁴⁵ Doing things that are intrinsically motivating generates positive emotions, but also gives people a sense of purpose.⁴⁶ It is primarily when people achieve intrinsic (rather than extrinsic) aspirations that they experience greater well-being and less ill-being.⁴⁷

As we have seen, individuals feel pressured by societal standards to focus on extrinsic motivators such as making (more) money, looking better, attaining recognition, or being successful in order to achieve happiness.⁴⁸ However, the attainment of extrinsic motivators does in itself not lead to lasting happiness. Extrinsic motivators are considered to be second or third order motivators.⁴⁹ These are motivators that exist for the sake of other motivators. They are instrumental. Being attractive, an extrinsic motivator, is not important in its own right, it is important because it serves another, underlying motivator (such as wanting to be loved). It is intrinsic motivators that are underlying our extrinsic motivators. There is no underlying reason why being healthy makes one happy, health itself is a first order motivator, that has a value in itself. Therefore, achieving intrinsic motivators (such as health) can be seen as an end result which leads to happiness. Achieving extrinsic motivators (such as prestige) is only a means to achieve another motivator, which has not yet been achieved. Therefore, extrinsic motivators only lead to short-lived happiness.

⁴⁴ Pink (2009).

⁴⁵ Deci & Ryan (2008).

⁴⁶ Vandercammen *et al.* (2014).

⁴⁷ Ryan *et al.* (2008).

⁴⁸ Yubomirski *et al.* (2005).

⁴⁹ Ryan *et al.* (2008).

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations should not be seen as completely disjunct categories. In practice, people's motivations are often complex compounds of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. One places motivations on a scale between being more fundamental to being more instrumental. Nevertheless, the distinction is useful in thinking about happiness and success and how to achieve both in our student populations.

Extrinsic Motivators Crowd out Intrinsic Motivators

Not only do extrinsic motivations not directly lead to happiness, Deci (1971) has shown that external rewards (grades, praise) actively decrease intrinsic motivation. Kohn (1993) surveyed the results from a variety of programs aimed at losing weight, quitting smoking, and wearing seat belts. Consistently, individuals who receive rewards showed better compliance at the beginning, but less compliance in the long run than those that did not get a reward. These findings also generalize to students. In an experiment by Deci⁵⁰, college students were either paid or not paid to work for a specific time on an interesting puzzle. The students that were not being rewarded played with the puzzle significantly longer in a later unrewarded "free-time" period than subjects who expected a reward. They also reported a greater interest in the task. Lesmos and Veríssimo (2014) even show that whereas intrinsic motivation is associated with better achievement, extrinsic motivation shows a negative relationship with achievement.

When we translate these outcomes to an educational setting, this might mean that extrinsic motivations (an orientation towards grades, tests) motivate students initially to start working on a task. However, extrinsic motivation leads the attention to tasks that are being done until a reward (a sufficient grade) can be collected and no longer after that. In the process, extrinsic rewards take away student's intrinsic motivation. The next part of this paper will focus on the tools teachers have to intrinsically motivate their students.

Motivators in a University Context

Nobel Prize winner Heckman (2006) argues that social and emotional competencies, such as motivation, tenacity, and perseverance play an underestimated role in educational attainment. These are interdependent from cognitive and linguistic skills, and a student needs all of these in order to make learning more efficient and easier. Johnston argues that the "will to learn" is at the very heart of the learning process.⁵¹ It is derived from a person's sense of deep purpose, or their intrinsic motivation to learn. The will to learn is related to the degree to which the learner is prepared to invest effort in the learning process, and is that which engages their motivation to process, perform and develop as a learner over time.⁵²

⁵⁰ Deci (1975).

⁵¹ Johnston (1996).

⁵² Johnston (1996).

Fixed and Growth Mindset

Researcher Carol Dweck and colleagues (2003) distinguish between two sorts of mindset for learning. On the one hand is a growth mindset, the idea that intelligence and skills can be trained and that most abilities can be developed through education and hard work. For growth mindset people, the process counts much more than the end result. They realize that good performance takes hard work, and they need to constantly keep learning and improving. They see hard work as a sign of getting better. A fixed mindset on the other hand, is the belief that basic qualities like intelligence and talent are fixed traits, you are born with them. If you have a fixed mindset, your focus lies on grades and performance. You believe that a bad performance implies you are insufficiently intelligent, without feeling challenged to put in more effort to complete a task. A fixed mindset is bad for overall performance, particularly at times when you have to struggle to get things done. It is also related to symptoms like depression and anxiety, rumination, and loss of self-worth.⁵³

Both the growth mindset and fixed mindset can be taught. This means that teachers can help to promote a growth mindset in students. First of all, they can choose not to (only) praise intelligence. Student's intelligence and current abilities are not necessarily a sign of what they can and cannot do. Instead, teachers could promote grit and perseverance, which are two factors that contribute to success and happiness.⁵⁴ In order to achieve grit in students, teachers could focus more on the process than on the result (grades). They could look for engagement, effort, and progress, and make that the aim of their teaching. So, instead of only asking the “good” students to give the correct answer, try to invite everyone to add something to a discussion. Praise the fact that a student speaks up, and not only value the validity of the content that is being shared.

Teachers can also encourage students to make use of the right words in their learning efforts. This means a shift from “I don't know” to “I don't know yet”. When teachers believe that students are able to learn, this will open up students' minds to seek solutions that did not seem possible earlier. Together, the teacher and student can change the story in a student's mind from: “I will never be able to do this”, to: “If I put in enough effort, I will take steps toward achieving my goals”. Furthermore, teachers could provide students with tasks just above their current abilities to enable them to realize the benefits of hard work and consistent effort. By investing in these types of tasks, a teacher can set up a path for continuous improvement by slowly building upon students' current abilities.

⁵³ Grant & Dweck (2003).

⁵⁴ Duckworth (2017).

Assessment

Assessment is one of the ways in which school systems try to motivate their students. In general, there are two types of assessment, summative and formative. The goal of summative assessment (giving a grade on a test) is making a judgment according to standards, goals, and criteria.⁵⁵ Summative testing relies on extrinsic motivation because it involves grades and passing. Teachers promote extrinsic goals by attributing performance to individual ability, and rewarding students who outperform others.⁵⁶

Formative assessment, however, is designed to aid learning by generating feedback. It helps to identify specific student misunderstandings and helps students correct their errors.⁵⁷ Formative testing relies much more on intrinsic motivation. This emphasizes learning, understanding, improving, mastering new skills, and taking on challenges. Teachers promote intrinsic goals by evaluating student progress, providing students with opportunities to improve, treating mistakes as part of the learning process, and making evaluation private.⁵⁸ This benefits students during the learning process and leads to enhanced learning outcomes.⁵⁹ Formative assessment is recognized as one of the most powerful ways to enhance student motivation and achievement.⁶⁰

The role that assessment plays in promoting intrinsic or extrinsic motivation is a central one. Learning has to be done by the learners, no-one else can do it for them; therefore, the more the learner feels intrinsically motivated, the more likely that there is effort put into learning. The kind of assessment that takes control away from the students reduces intrinsic motivation and leads to “surface” learning.⁶¹ However, focusing more on intrinsic motivation, and less on passing courses will encourage the adoption of an active learning approach and may help achieve deeper learning.⁶² This deeper learning helps students achieve higher learning outcomes.

The Necessary Catalyst for a Happier Generation

As educators, we must leave behind the misconception that the best route to happiness is to cultivate a focus on success in our schools. Rather we must take on a more encompassing and direct responsibility for the happiness of our students, during and after their studies. This is a subtle, yet earth-shattering change in our thinking, shaking the foundations and many of the practices of our educational systems.

⁵⁵ Scriven (1967).

⁵⁶ Cauley & McMillan (2010).

⁵⁷ Cauley & McMillan (2010).

⁵⁸ Ames (1992); Patrick *et al.* (2001); Meece *et al.* (2006).

⁵⁹ Ames (1992).

⁶⁰ Cauley & McMillan (2010).

⁶¹ Deci & Ryan (1985).

⁶² Meece *et al.* (2006).

The good news is that teachers already master most of the tools that are needed to achieve this. Teachers work with students in their formative years. They can serve as important role models for students, especially the ones they are in contact with on an individual basis.⁶³ The expectations teachers have of their students have an important signaling function. Are students allowed to try, and fail? Can they answer incorrectly, and still be valued? Do they get feedback in order to improve, or only when their grade has already been determined?

It helps to realize that the will to learn and general feelings of happiness come from the same place: intrinsic motivation. In their capacity as mentors, teachers could focus on helping students to become more intrinsically motivated, which leads to both higher levels of happiness and higher levels of academic achievement. It is intrinsic motivation that makes students able to push through when things get hard, which is a critically important skill that helps students succeed, also outside their studies.

⁶³ Chen *et al.* (2003).

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Training Personality Traits

Alkeline van Lenning

Introduction

In 2017, the Dutch Scientific Council for Governmental Policy (De Wetenschappelijke Raad voor Regeringsbeleid, De W.R.R., from now on: the Council) published a report on citizens' self-reliance.⁶⁴ The report's main point is that the current Dutch government imposes substantial demands on its citizens' self-reliance. Citizens have to be alert on life's crucial aspects, such as health, career, and pension accrual, and act accordingly. The Council observes that many citizens are not capable of living up to these requirements. There is a big difference between what is expected from citizens and what they can manage. Moreover, the Council states that the quite large group for which the demands are too high, not only includes the - to be expected - more vulnerable ones such as people with a low IQ and those living on society's outskirts, but also highly educated people and people holding important positions. When people cannot meet demands, this is often not because their knowledge or intelligence falls short but because other mental capacities fail, such as the capacity to act, to stick to a plan, to keep a cool head, and to retain good intentions. According to the Council, this can happen when a life cycle takes a downturn: in cases such as divorce or dismissal. Is the Council's critique that the Government insufficiently takes into account a potential deficit in its citizens' self-reliance when designing policies also applicable to current universities? Just like the Government, academic institutions tended for a long time to ignore the non-cognitive skills that are also essential to perform well at university. This has started to change in the past ten years.

In this essay, I will draw a comparison between the citizens as described in the report and students at the university. First, trained skills will be discussed. Then I will propose not only training of non-cognitive skills but also universities' articulation and structure of their mission to further the flourishing of their students. I propose to develop a conceptual taxonomy

⁶⁴ Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid (2017).

– rooted in the past but re-purposed for the present – on the objective of student flourishing as important to higher education today.

A Comparison Between Students and Citizens

At university we expect students to pass their exams and to graduate on time. We presume that students appreciate as much freedom and choice during their studies as possible. They are perceived as smart young people, who have a lot of energy and are familiar with clearly formulated academic demands. Especially in newly designed educational programs students can choose their study path as well as their study hours.

However, there is a growing group of students struggling with stress, loneliness, and mental problems. As is discussed elsewhere in this essay, several recently published reports on students' mental health in western societies showed disturbing results.⁶⁵ Just like the quite large group of citizens for which the governments' demands are too high, the group that struggles to meet universities' standards does not only consist of "weaker" students, but also of students that started off passing exams with high grades, but somehow run into difficulties. Just as the intelligent citizens in high positions in society who encounter hurdles along the way, as described in the Council's report. The Council mentions life-changing events and stress factors as huge risks for falling short of meeting standards.

Life-changing events and mental burdens put pressure on students. To start with the first: students, especially freshmen, are often for the first time living independently from their parents. In the absence of daily parental control, they have to make their own decisions about study and party times. These freshmen also experience crushes, new relationships, rejections, loneliness, and new friendships. On top of all that, they often bear for the first time in their lives major financial responsibilities. All these fundamental changes render students vulnerable. Secondly, these days, students seem to be granted a lot of agency, but their passions have not yet evolved. They are told, also by the university, to make the most of themselves, but many have no idea what that could be.⁶⁶ They do not lack ambition, but they often lack a direction and a well-defined goal. They are unsure of who they are and what it is they want. They are highly responsive to other people's and society's expectations, resulting in stress. The university's demands are made very clear. The standards for passing exams are communicated carefully, as well as the standards for *judicia* on the diploma and the possibilities to participate in honor programs. Parents' hopes are often more implicit, but still, students are very much aware of them, and these expectations run high.⁶⁷ Students' openness towards these high expectations are partly due to their lack of direction which may result in a heavy mental burden.

⁶⁵ Aroning & Smith (2016); Mortier *et al.* (2018); Unpublished report from Executive Board of the UCSRN (2018-2019).

⁶⁶ Van Lenning (2019).

⁶⁷ Cowen (2013).

Not surprisingly, student psychologists, academic advisors, and the like, experience an increasing number of requests for help from students. This kind of work is still not perceived as part of academic education's core business but is considered to be a service to those students who need support. However, the importance of this kind of assistance has been increasingly acknowledged. In the students' interest, but also in the interest of the universities. Universities want students to flourish and to be successful, in their studies and their working lives. For the students' sake of course, but universities also benefit from the students' study success and timely graduation.

Apart from knowledge transmission and the training of specialist skills, universities offer skills training including the development of skills such as résumé building, self-presentation, standing your ground in a debate, and presenting an argument in both written form and orally. Although taught in different forms these are all cognitive capabilities and they have always been taught at university in one form or another.

The Council distinguishes between intelligence and cognitive capabilities on the one hand, and mental capabilities and act-capabilities on the other. The Council introduces in its report a Dutch neologism: *doenvermogen*, best translated as: *act-capability*. The Council mentions several traits and skills that are part of this act-capability: being active⁶⁸, sticking to a plan, self-efficacy, and the ability to cope with adversity. The Council also speaks of self-control and belief as important non-cognitive qualities. They see the ability to handle setbacks, self-control and taking action as mental capabilities and as crucial for self-reliance. These features have different names in different disciplines: in economics, they are called “non-cognitive skills” and in psychology, they are called “personality traits”.⁶⁹ In the remaining text, I will use the psychological term.

Personality Traits and Success

Apart from the four personality traits that the Council classifies as act-capability, there is another personality trait that seems to play a crucial role in study success. Psychological studies show that traits such as “grit” and “perseverance” have a huge influence on study success as well as on success later in life.⁷⁰ Heckman did groundbreaking research on the topic of personality traits and study success. He concluded that personality traits such as being able to persist in an unrewarding and, or, boring task, is an important predictor of success in school but also in the workplace. Angela Duckworth (et al.) came more or less to the same conclusion. The authors wrote about “grit” as a non-cognitive trait that predicts success and define grit as perseverance and passion for long term goals. They re-

⁶⁸ The authors make a distinction between people with an approach temperament that are inclined to face difficulties and to act, and people with an avoidance temperament that are inclined to avoid and or deny difficulties.

⁶⁹ Tough (2013), 150.

⁷⁰ Paul Tough discusses many studies proving the importance of character traits. Recently, Duckworth *et al.* (2007) published findings of the influence of character traits over talent.

searched the effect of grit on: educational attainments, grade point average, and retention rates and found that grit demonstrated predictive validity of success measures over and beyond IQ. Duckworth and her colleagues concluded that the achievement of very difficult goals entails not just talent but also sustained and focused application of talent over a longer period of time.⁷¹

Heckman's and Duckworth's findings were published at the beginning of the 21st century and were appreciated. Until then the belief that cognitive skills were the only predictors of study success persisted for quite some time. Paul Tough refers to the belief that success in school depends primarily on cognitive skills as the "cognitive hypothesis". He explains that this was a relatively new invention that came up in the United States around the 1990s. Psychologists researched young children's school achievements and their backgrounds.⁷² They concluded that the number of words children had heard from their parents' conversations was a decisive factor in their later school results. It seemed therefore to be very logical and the matter was approached from a quantitative angle and put into orderly statistics. This was widely accepted. Recently, researchers from different disciplines found evidence for a different conclusion: it is not about the quantity of information in a young child's brain. Features that predict success are: persistence, self-control, curiosity, conscientiousness, grit, self-confidence, the tendency to follow through a plan, to think ahead, and the ability to delay gratification.⁷³ These traits partly overlap with the Council's act-capabilities, but grit and perseverance are personality traits that are not mentioned in the report. Maybe the reason for this is that these two personality traits are especially important for students, and are less urgently needed by the average citizen, who is the Council's main concern.

Students Support Program's Success

So we know that apart from knowledge and cognitive capacities (résumé building, self-presentation, standing your ground in a debate, presenting an argument), there are non-cognitive capabilities or personality traits that play an important role in students' study success. These are: being active, sticking to a plan, self-efficacy, self-control, grit, perseverance, and the ability to handle setbacks.

Since it became clear that these skills are crucial to develop to be successful at study and at the future workplace, universities acknowledged the importance of skills other than learning capabilities, talent, and intelligence. Various programs were developed to help students study. Mentor systems, peer support, and buddy cooperation were, and still are, emerging rapidly throughout universities. These systems are aimed at all students, not just at those who have trouble keeping up with the study pace. One would expect students

⁷¹ Duckworth *et al.* (2007).

⁷² Hart & Risley (1995).

⁷³ Carneiro & Heckman (2003).

to flourish and study success to be on the rise. Although it is difficult to draw concrete conclusions on students' well-being and study success, the reports mentioned earlier do not point in this direction. The question arises: how successful are these student support programs?

According to the Council's report, there has not been much research done yet on training and improvement of non-cognitive traits that are important to succeed in many regards in life. But the studies that have been done, show that this is very difficult and we should not harbor too high hopes. The most favorable perspectives are found in training programs targeted at specific domains in life.⁷⁴

Students are in a relatively favorable position: they are young and can train during their studies on specified terrains. We know from several studies that the personality traits of young people continue to develop during their time at university. Psychological studies show that students at university, although legally considered adults, are still very much in their formative years.⁷⁵ Students are trained in the curriculum to design plans, meet deadlines, and concentrate for longer periods of time et cetera. Student assistance programs offer training in matters such as: getting to know your strengths and weaknesses, dealing with adversity and how to stick to a plan. Together these instructional programs, curricular and extracurricular, form a total package. Why do these efforts seem to bear little fruit?

Man is Not a Rational Being

The answer to this question lies in the Council's report titled "*Knowing so, is not doing so*". It points to the fact that man is far less rational than we tend to assume. The awareness that man is not only a rational being, seems to be as old as humanity itself. Pascal stated in the 17th century that: "Le coeur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connaît point", (The heart has its reasons which reason does not know).⁷⁶ At the beginning of the 20th century, Sigmund Freud's psychological insights underlined that human behavior is often less driven by rationality than we think it is. Since the 1980s, much research done in the field of psychology and economy confirmed the high degree of irrationality in humans. For example, the social psychologist Melvin J. Lerner discovered our fundamental need to believe in the delusion of a just world.⁷⁷ According to Lerner, people need to believe that the world is an orderly, predictable, and just place, where people by and large get what they deserve. Such a belief plays an important role in our lives; in order to make plans we need to assume that our actions will have predictable consequences. Lerner makes clear that this belief is a delusion. He researched the ways we try to protect our belief against proof that it is a deception. Lerner concluded that man is not a rational being.

⁷⁴ Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid (2017), 12.

⁷⁵ Crone (2008).

⁷⁶ Pascal (1670). Pensées, nr 277.

⁷⁷ Lerner (1980).

Daniel Kahneman, psychologist and economist, and Amos Tversky, a cognitive and mathematical psychologist, published a series of articles in the field of judgment and decision-making showing that humans are far less rational than they think they are.⁷⁸ We make choices that defy clear logic and do this systematically. The findings of the behavioral economist Dan Ariely on choice-making processes point in a similar direction.⁷⁹ Ariely showed in his study how commercial parties make avid use of this knowledge of people's irrationality. While these entrepreneurs work with these insights from leading researchers, universities do not. The findings of our irrationality underline the importance of training in desired habit formations.

Possible Objections

A proposal, in accordance with the Council's report, that would entail the university to train students' personality traits in the curriculum, might encounter objections. An obvious argument could be students' personality traits in general are their responsibility and private business. The university should not invade this confidential, individual terrain. A linked argument to this reasoning could be that it is not the university's task to train personality traits. Academia's task is to merely: educate in science, teach scientific methods, transmit knowledge, and train specialist skills. My counter-argument would be that the provided education will always have quite an impact on our students' personality, whether we like that or not. As I stated earlier: our students come to us in a formative age, their years spent at university will form them. When we don't want to interfere with their personality traits we deliberately don't offer any training in this. We think we are neutral, but of course we are not. During their years spent at university, students will change and mature with or without training in relevant personal traits. We therefore either form graduates that apart from the usual academic training in knowledge and specialists' skills are trained in relevant personality traits. These graduates are aware of their strengths and pitfalls, can handle disappointments and failures, and are able to stick to a plan. Or we form graduates that have only been trained in academic skills and knowledge. The question is: what kind of graduates do we want? Will we form graduates who are oriented towards instrumental ideas of success and have an underdeveloped idea of their strengths and pitfalls? Or do we invite our students to improve their study and working methods?

Another counter-argument would be that universities offer training in personality traits already, but do so now in offering separate support activities. As we discussed earlier in this essay, students are still in the midst of their development when they enter university.⁸⁰ When they leave university and are seeking to enter the world of work their chances to improve their working methods will be reduced, because they are older and it is

⁷⁸ Kahneman & Tversky (2000).

⁷⁹ Ariely (2016), 128; Ariely (2019), 224.

⁸⁰ Somerville (2016).

best to train these traits when one is younger. All in all, the blending of supportive training in the curriculum would lead to a more realistic approach of students.

Consequences for University's Policy

Based on our knowledge of human's irrationality and on citizens' differences in personality traits, the Council proposes the Dutch government to exchange the currently used rationalistic perspective for a more realistic perspective on citizens' capabilities. A rationalistic perspective assumes that apart from a small group, all citizens have appropriate mental capabilities, they have self-control, and "knowing" will lead to "doing". Based on these assumptions the idea is: the more choices offered, the better it is. Citizens are supposed to be aware of the available information. This results in a businesslike contact with the citizens and help is only offered in events of force majeure. The Council proposes a more realistic perspective, with not only attention for "knowing" but also for "doing", with acknowledging that self-control is limited. This results in a policy that is oriented towards reducing temptations and stress and approaching citizens more personally.

Such a more realistic approach will not only benefit citizens but also students. That would mean more focus on training. Scientific research on the effects of students' assistance would help universities to establish what kind of assistance is most useful. It would probably be best to integrate students' training on the discussed personality traits in the curriculum. Training perseverance and grit are already naturally incorporated in many courses students have to take, but traits such as: being active, sticking to a plan, self-efficacy, self-control, and the ability to handle setbacks, could be further trained in regular courses.

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III.

Higher Education: Failure and Resilience

Teaching Students How to Fail

The Resilience Project at University College Tilburg

Tessa Leesen

I. Introduction

In spring 2017, an article in the Belgian newspaper *De Standaard* sparked my attention. The article examined “why some persons barely overcome the death of their canary, whereas others rise like a phoenix after having experienced a traumatizing youth” and concluded that persons have different degrees of resilience.⁸¹ Although this conclusion is not particularly groundbreaking, the article was interesting for another reason. The final paragraph briefly referred to a yearly event, organized at Stanford University, which invites students to share their failures on stage in order to break the taboo on failure, encourage students to rethink failures as lessons learned, and strengthen their resilience.⁸²

Around the same time, I was researching the study success rates of students within the Bachelor’s program Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) at University College Tilburg (UC Tilburg) and trying to uncover why students fail to obtain a positive Binding Study Advice (BSA), drop out from the study program or incur a study delay.⁸³ A high percentage of this group of students was known by the Academic Advisor to have struggled with personal, psycho-

⁸¹ Deriemaeker (2017).

⁸² For more information on the Resilience Project at Stanford University, see: <https://learningconnection.stanford.edu/resilience-project>

⁸³ The small-scale survey was based upon anonymized data, retrieved from the meetings the Academic Advisor had with the students in question: Leesen (2017).

logical, and psychiatric problems in the course of their study at UC Tilburg.⁸⁴ Although institutions of higher education increasingly endorse student wellbeing, university programs rarely engage in a more fundamental and critical debate on the role of failure in higher education and society at large.

This essay will first argue that an academic debate on failure is of added value to any academic program. Next, the essay will present the resilience project, which has recently been implemented at UC Tilburg and was inspired by similar initiatives at Stanford University, Harvard, and Princeton.⁸⁵ This project aims to raise student's critical awareness of the importance attached to individual competitiveness and excellency in (higher) education as well as within our modern-day society. It also offers students tools to become more resilient in dealing with failures and setbacks and aims to normalize failure.⁸⁶

II. The Relevance of Failure

1. Failure and Shame

Although, in recent years, companies have started to accept and even embrace the idea that failure is a prerequisite and perhaps even a catalyst for business innovation,⁸⁷ individuals often perceive their personal failures in an entirely different manner. When asking an audience of first year students during our Opening Conference at UC Tilburg the question: "Who failed at something in the past year?", the vast majority raised hands. The subsequent question "who is willing to share?" persuaded only a handful of students to take the floor. The discrepancy between both groups is telling. Intuitively, people tend to hide their failures: "If you do not succeed, then hide all evidence that you have tried", the comedian Steven Wright quotes. Even though failures are an inevitable part of any learning process, failure tends to bring embarrassment, an (assumed) loss of esteem and shame.⁸⁸ When people do dare to speak up about their failures, they often do so after they managed to turn their failures into success.⁸⁹

De Botton explains why failure is associated with shame in our modern-day society. He argues that today's meritocratic society allows everyone who is talented or intelligent to climb the social ladder. Although a meritocratic society creates opportunities for many, the

⁸⁴ In the group of students who failed to meet Binding Study Advice requirements and had discussed their study with the Academic Advisor, 38.1% had indicated to have experienced personal, psychological, or psychiatric problems. These students had been confronted with difficulties in adapting to student life and with family-related issues but had also experienced more severe psychological and psychiatric problems, such as depression, drug abuse, and psychosis. The analysis of data also demonstrates that 61.11% of post-BSA drop-outs, who had been in touch with the Academic Advisor, were known to have experienced mental health problems before dropping out.

⁸⁵ For more information on the resilience project at Stanford University and other American universities, please check: <https://academicresilience.org/>

⁸⁶ The project was funded with an NVAO Comenius Senior Grant.

⁸⁷ Farson & Keyes (2002); Daub (2018).

⁸⁸ De Botton (2015).

⁸⁹ Holder (2018) refers to several CEOs, award winning book authors, and celebrities, who "humblebrag" about their failures, which have paved the way for their successes.

meritocratic ideology also implies that persons who are unable to realize their ambitions have mainly themselves to blame. Apparently, these persons lack the abilities and talents to become successful.⁹⁰ This often leaves them with feelings of shame.⁹¹ However, as also pointed out elsewhere in this book by Gezy Schuurmans, shame is an unproductive emotion, which induces destructive feelings, such as fear, rejection, and self-contempt and is not likely to be shared.⁹² Since shame can proliferate when it is not shared, it becomes all the more relevant to break the taboo on sharing failures, disconnect failures from feelings of shame, and reassess the value of failure.

2. The Value of Failure

Most of us will agree that failure has an instrumental value: every failure offers an opportunity to learn.⁹³ However, Alex Holder, who is a journalist for *The Guardian* and a philosopher, warns us not to take this approach too far by defining failure solely in terms of the success that is reached afterward:

“True failure”, he states, “is the kind where you can’t just pick yourself back up [...] You know, the humiliating kind that you haven’t yet reinvented with a positive spin. As a friend told me, ‘it makes me even more scared of failure in a way, because of the success that is expected afterwards’. Sometimes failure is just failure and it can’t be turned into a neat uplifting tale. [...] I hope we learn that failure is part of life, not necessarily the road to success”.

Although I agree with Holder that failures do not necessarily have to be a precursor to success, it is equally important not to indulge in your failures either. However, the (narrative as well as visual) discourse on the value of failure often tends to yield to either one of these extremes by either depicting failure as the pathway to success, or glorifying failure for the mere sake of it. In the face of failure, however, it is important to find a middle ground and take up responsibility by engaging in self-criticism without loss of self-esteem. Particularly for students, this is a difficult balance to strike.

3. Failure in Higher Education

Students enter university in their formative years. Participation in a university program is challenging for many of the so-called “emerging adults”.⁹⁴ Students have to get used to the academic level and quantity of study materials. They might still have to train self-disciplinary skills, learn how to adequately and realistically plan tasks, and how to properly manage their newly acquired freedoms at university. Emerging adults might be living independently from their parents for the first time, so that there is the need to build an additional support network.⁹⁵ Since our tendency to fail increases when we venture into

⁹⁰ De Botton (2015). In the same vein, Van Lenning (2019) and Sandel (2020).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Baljon & Geuzinge (2017), 41-42.

⁹³ Fryer (2011), 30-32.

⁹⁴ Arnett (2015).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

unfamiliar territory,⁹⁶ failure is constantly lurking around the corner for emerging adults that have embarked on an academic study. At the same time, emerging adults might not yet have developed the required degree of resilience to adequately deal with failures or the fear of failures. This makes it even more relevant to introduce students to various productive coping strategies, so that they are able to deal with failures in a resilient manner.

The field of higher education seems to have a paradoxical relationship with failure. On the one hand, there is a consensus that academic failure is inherent in learning. This has, for example, resulted in the increased importance attached to feedback on assessments, so that students can improve their knowledge and skills. On the other hand, there is a tendency in governmental and university policies to reduce failures to the minimum. The Binding Study Advice, for example, aims to discourage students from pursuing a study that does not match their capacities and intends to decrease the number of students that exceed the nominally available study time.⁹⁷ Obviously, an adequate pace of progression in an academic study and a focus on educational attainment are important for individual students as well as for universities and society at large. However, the focus on study progress increases the pressure to perform on a group of students who have just entered the unfamiliar territory of higher education, in which they are more likely to fail. The pressure to perform is amplified by the awareness of both students and their parents that the successful completion of higher education offers a wide range of employment options. They feel that their future is at stake.

It might be meaningful to invite students to join the discussion on the meaning of the concept of (study) success. This concept is now often narrowly defined in terms of study pace and study completion, obscuring other aspects of study success, such as intellectual, personal, and social growth.⁹⁸ The Resilience Program aims to encourage students to critically question the commonly accepted outcome-focused definition of study success in favor of a reappraisal of the study process.

III. The Resilience Project at UC Tilburg

In line with the Resilience Project at Stanford University and other similar initiatives at Harvard and Princeton, UC Tilburg considered it relevant to design and implement its own resilience project. The Resilience Project at UC Tilburg is different from any other educational project on the topic because it is embedded within the curriculum of the Bachelor's program of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Moreover, the project does not only focus on skills training but also includes an academic and reflective component. This component aims at offering students a critical and interdisciplinary perspective on the dominant discourse within our society and higher education on failure and success. The project also aims to

⁹⁶ Fryer (2011), 32-33.

⁹⁷ de Koning *et al.* (2014) on the impact of binding study advice on study behavior.

⁹⁸ Seifert *et al.* (2014) present the outcome of two studies that suggest an integrated definition of student success.

increase the ability of students to cope with and bounce back from failures and to normalize the discourse on failure. In order to achieve those aims, the project consists of three pillars: 1) an academic and interdisciplinary module on failure and success; 2) a Resilience Training, and 3) a Failing Forward Event. Next, we will elaborate on each of the three pillars and assess to what extent the resilience project has been appreciated by students.

1. The Academic and Interdisciplinary Module on Failure and Success

The academic and interdisciplinary module on failure and success consists of an Opening Conference and a series of lectures that are embedded within a number of mandatory courses. A core group of lecturers within the Bachelor's program of Liberal Arts and Sciences invites students to critically and interactively reflect on the meanings of abstract concepts like success, excellence, failure, and resilience from multiple disciplinary (i.e., psychological, economic, historical, and philosophical) perspectives.⁹⁹ The complexity of these concepts turns them into a treasury, which is worth exploring, as it also allows for a critical analysis of modern society, which increasingly seems to define success in terms of material attainment and achievement of status.¹⁰⁰

In an evaluation of the academic module of the resilience project, the students unanimously valued the academic discussions on success and failure in the program, particularly when the lectures corresponded well with the rest of the course. It has been a deliberate choice to embed the lectures of the module in mandatory courses because this guarantees the continuity of the project beyond the scope of funding. A possible downside is that students do not always recognize the lectures as being part of the resilience project. This means that it continues to be important for individual lecturers to make explicit that the lecture in question is part of a separate academic module on success and failure.

2. The Resilience Training

Whereas the academic module entails the theoretical and reflective component of the project, resilience training has a more practical approach toward increasing students' resilience. Although there is no clear consensus in literature on the definition of resilience, here we use the definition by Van der Meer, who defines resilience as "the process wherein an individual maintains a relatively stable, healthy level of psychological and physical function when confronted with potentially traumatic events".¹⁰¹ According to Van der Meer, resilience is influenced by multiple factors that can be divided into two categories, namely the *internal* capacities to deal with setbacks, such as self-confidence and self-efficacy, and *external* factors, such as a support network.¹⁰² The resilience training primarily aims to enhance the internal capacities of students to deal with setbacks and failure, since the external capacities are largely beyond the scope of our academic program.

⁹⁹ The participating lecturers are: Michiel Bot, Ellen Dreezens, David Janssens, Gerwin van der Laan, Krijn Pansters, Thomas Muntz and, since 2020-2021, Rik Peters.

¹⁰⁰ The content of the lecture can be found on the project webpage: www.theresilienceproject.nl.

¹⁰¹ van der Meer *et al.* (2018), 2.

¹⁰² van der Meer *et al.* (2018).

The Resilience Training consists of three workshops, which are embedded in the mentorship program of LAS.¹⁰³ The workshops have been designed in such a way that they are useful to all students, and not only to students with a specific problem. The following themes of the workshops have been chosen in close consultation with the student-representatives: 1) Crazy busy; 2) Making Choices, and 3) Failing Backward and Forward. The Crazy Busy and Making Choices workshops both teach students how to cope with the stress they respectively experience when they are feeling overwhelmed by a multitude of tasks, and when they have to make study-related or other choices. The Failing Backward and Forward workshop offers a theoretical framework on coping mechanisms and asked students to reflect on their own use of coping mechanisms.¹⁰⁴

The students who participated in the workshops were invited to fill out an evaluation form at the end of the session. The evaluation form asked the students how satisfied they were with the content of the workshop on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 “very dissatisfied” to 5 “very satisfied”. The overall satisfaction of the participating students in all workshops was high, both in terms of content as in terms of the lecturer’s performance. The mean score for content satisfaction was 3.96 (standard deviation: 0.546) and for training satisfaction was 4.33 (standard deviation: 0.596). The workshops have equipped the students with a number of new ideas and tips on how to handle stress-related concerns. These evaluation results are all the more noteworthy since the students have critically assessed the mentorship program in the past. The students particularly appreciated the interactive character of the workshops and the safe environment, in which they could openly discuss sensitive topics and issues they otherwise could not.

When asked about points of improvement, the most commonly mentioned suggestion was to boost attendance. Out of a total student body of 289 students, 57 students (19.7%) participated in a workshop. Apart from possible shortcomings in the communication on the workshops, there is another explanation for the small number of students participating. Participation in the workshops is not mandatory. This has been a deliberate choice because the workshops target students who are intrinsically motivated to participate rather than students with an extrinsic motivation. As Dreezens demonstrated elsewhere in this book, there are convincing arguments that support pursuing this strategy. The downside is that the resilience training only reaches a limited portion of the student population.

3. Failing Forward Event

The third pillar of the project is the Failing Forward Event. For this concluding event, the Dean of UC Tilburg, two staff members, two students and two alumni were invited to share their personal stories on failures in order to normalize failure and break the taboo.¹⁰⁵ The event would end with an open mic, in which the attending students could take the

¹⁰³ The resilience training has been designed by Ellen Dreezens, psychologist and mentorship program coordinator, and Annelies Aquarius, student psychologist at Tilburg University.

¹⁰⁴ More information on the content of the workshops can be found on the project webpage: www.theresilienceproject.nl

¹⁰⁵ The organizational committee included Studium Generale and Extra Muros, the LAS study association.

floor and share a personal failure. The event was scheduled to take place in Spring 2020 for all students of Tilburg University, but was postponed because of the Covid-19 guidelines. We are currently organizing an alternative for the original event.

When inviting speakers for the event, it was striking to notice that staff members and alumni happily accepted the offer to share a failure with an audience of students, but that it was much more difficult to find students willing to do so in front of a group of peers. This is in line with the attempts to find students who were willing to pose for a picture to be put on the webpage of the project, while holding a whiteboard, on which they wrote down a failure. The students who were willing to do so preferred to be depicted anonymously. This might mean that sharing a failure in front of peers is difficult and/or that the willingness to openly testify on failures increases with age. It nonetheless confirms that the stigma and taboo on failure are still present, that failure brings about shame, and strongly supports the relevance of the event and of the entire project, for that matter.¹⁰⁶

IV. To Be Continued

The design and implementation of the Resilience Project at UC Tilburg was an interesting journey, involving many stakeholders, such as the program management, lecturers, the authors and editors of the booklet, staff, student- and project-assistants and, most importantly, the students themselves. The coordination of the academic module has been challenging because of the number of lecturers involved. However, the module as well as this booklet offer an inspiring and kaleidoscopic perspective on success, excellence, failure, and resilience. Although the resilience training did not reach all students and runs the risk of making students more apt for an educational system, which leaves little room for failures, the participating students highly appreciated the training. The discussions on the design of the resilience project with the study association and the student-representatives, made it clear that the topic speaks to students. Therefore, we will continue to include the resilience project in our curriculum and have organized a second Opening Conference on the topic and are looking forward to an online variant of the Failing Forward Event.

¹⁰⁶ A reflection on the reasons why failure is associated with shame in our modern western culture, see De Botton (2015).

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The Universal Replication Crisis

Gerwin van der Laan & Bianka V. Demeter¹⁰⁷

Failure in research became a hot topic in the past two decades, with increasing concerns about the replicability of prestigious findings in medical research and psychology.¹⁰⁸ The phenomenon was coined the “replication crisis”, and spilled over to affect society’s trust in science. While replicability was certainly not a novel standard for science, the crisis narrative began after an extensive research project was unable to replicate more than half of a hundred studies in psychology.¹⁰⁹ These failed replication attempts thus suggest that science is (becoming) unreliable. Participants in an experimental study who learned about failed replications experienced lower trust in science. Despite a number of mechanisms to restore trust, the authors did not identify a single candidate that effectively repaired the damage done.¹¹⁰

This essay aims to shed light on the debate about the replication crisis. It will be argued that the crisis narrative is counterproductive. We do not deny that studies fail to replicate. Our ambition is neither to marginalize questionable research practices. Yet we do argue that the crisis narrative criminalizes all original research that fails to replicate. The value of replications can only be realized if failed replications are not automatically accused of questionable research practices. Moreover, we show the variation in academic disciplines that are differentially subjected to the replicability criterion. Research shows the extent to which findings are replicated is not uniform across disciplines. We add that under some conditions other evaluation criteria might prevail over replicability.

We illustrate our points with insights of researchers affiliated with Tilburg University. From February to June 2019, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 professors

¹⁰⁷ The authors are grateful for the financial support from the RTS program as well as the Grassroots Projects for educational innovation.

¹⁰⁸ Feilden (2017); Gelman (2018)

¹⁰⁹ Open Science Collaboration (2015).

¹¹⁰ Wingen *et al.* (2019).

from the university. The interviewees are of senior ranks, including 12 full professors, and represent four schools of Tilburg University: Economics (six), Law (four), Humanities (seven), and Social Sciences (seven). In extending invitations, a balance was struck between interviewees from different national backgrounds (ten non-Dutch), as well as between the genders (seven women). The sampling strategy aimed to maximize variety without striving for representativeness. The interviews were taped and transcribed with voice recognition software. In the interviews, a wide range of topics were explored: the role of the researcher, their relationship with practice, criteria for high-quality research, et cetera. Initially, the interviews served educational purposes, but the material turned out to be insightful for research objectives as well. Fragments from these interviews will be used to illustrate our arguments. Due to the sampling strategy, the essay does not intend to make any definitive statements. We refer to interviewees with a number and mention their school, ensuring their anonymity. The quotes from the interviews have been polished to change spoken into written language, leaving the content unaffected.

In the sequel, the case is made that failed replications are good for scientific progress and that the crisis narrative does not do justice to the function of replications in science. Thereafter, the universality of the norm of replicability is challenged.

The False Narrative of Failed Replications

When an outcome cannot be observed in a repeated study, research fails to replicate. Both the lay public and the academic community tend to draw negative conclusions regarding the research practices that must have been upheld by the involved researchers. For example, in a comment in *Nature*, researchers point to the limited replicability of preclinical oncology research.¹¹¹ They identify a myriad of reasons for the many failures to replicate, including the limitations of preclinical tools, the challenge of selecting participants, and the noise in measuring outcome variables. Their recommendations, however, challenge the culture of those involved in the research: “Cancer researchers must be more rigorous in their approach to preclinical studies. Given the inherent difficulties (...) reviewers and editors should demand greater thoroughness.”

The negative evaluation that follows a failed replication is unwarranted. There are many different reasons that can cause a failed replication effort:

¹¹¹ Begley & Ellis (2012).

“Any study that you run could not work in the future just for reasons of chance. If you do it again, random chance will lead to a different result. It’s part of the reason we want to do this a lot. It gives a sense of what seems to be the most consistent result. (...) When you are talking about experiments on people, life is full of minor variations. These things have helped us figure out the theories that we should pay more attention to. Because they seem to be making robust predictions that hold across time.” (interview #4, social psychology)

“Replication across cultures is very important because every culture comes with its own set of norms. But also replication in different time periods is very important and different age groups or age cohorts because growing up in a different time shapes your narrative for the rest of your life.” (interview #6, developmental psychology)

Hence, replications are important regardless of the quality of the original study. Chance can play a role even in the best conducted studies, and “there is nothing unethical about being lucky” as interviewee #7 (social sciences) stated. The extent to which findings are replicated reveals the robustness of the original finding, in its own context, as well as the extent to which the finding is robust against (minor) variations in context.¹¹²

Although questionable research practices should not be automatically assumed, the risk of (honest) biases in the literature is real. Replications may also identify the extent to which original research was subjected to these biases:

“There are many, many decisions in a statistical analysis that need to be made. It is very likely that if a researcher does not find anything in the first analysis of many possible analyses, that he or she might think: ‘maybe there’s something wrong with how I set up the analysis, maybe I should go and look more closely at the data?’ But the problem is, if you go and search in the data, you will always find something. Another problem is: even if the researchers were right, so there might be an effect, by analyzing the data differently in different ways and selecting the most desirable outcome, you would inflate the effect. It still then would be a biased outcome. So these are two ways in which literature can be off: One, too many false positive findings from false findings in the literature or, if the researcher is right, somehow the effects as published are inflated or biased. (...) I completely understand why they are looking for patterns in the data. It is part of our job description. [But] if many people do this in science, many results might not be trustworthy and we need to deal with that somehow.” (Interview #7, social sciences)

¹¹² Guttinger & Love (2019).

As a result, the value of replications is not realized if all studies that fail to replicate are disregarded and charged with scientific misconduct. Original research might not be able to live up to the standards of replicability, due to its novelty. Replications have the potential to shed light on the areas of research that still need to be refined, to be further investigated across contexts.

A relatively new development proposed in response to the replication debate is preregistration, now common in psychology but conquering other fields as well. Specifying the hypotheses and the analysis plan prior to data collection reduces the threat of data mining and honest biases in the research process. The open science movement enhances the reliability of findings, by advocating for shared data. Fields vary in the extent to which they embrace these initiatives. Sharing raw data is not a common practice in psychology, interviewee #7 (social sciences) admits, while another interviewee sees value in preregistration to the extent that it reduces questionable research practices:

“In a field study, you can gather many variables. By preregistering, you can avoid that scientists mine their data in such a way that they find an effect, write only about this particular effect, and forget more or less about the original hypothesis. [Interviewer: preregistration then targets the opportunistic behavior of researchers]. Yes. [Interviewer: And if researchers would not be inclined to mine their data, there would not be a need for preregistration?] Indeed.” (Interview #20, economist)

While the economist also acknowledges that preregistration helps to carefully plan a research project, economics – in the eyes of the interviewee – embraces it less. Multiple interviews with economists suggest that the mathematical foundations of this field create an image of the researcher as an outside observer whose decisions have few implications for the results of the study. This contrasts with interviews in other fields with predominantly quantitative methodologies, including psychology.

The interviewees thus voice different views on why a finding fails to replicate, the extent to which this is problematic, and possible remedies. Indeed, some scholars argue that science, in fact, is not faced with a universal replication crisis.¹¹³ Advocates on this side of the debate believe that the universal nature of the crisis is questionable, as not every field is affected to the same extent by failed replication attempts. The prevalence of reporting and publishing biases has been found to be less of a threat to science than it was thought to be when the crisis debate broke out.¹¹⁴ In addition, these biases are not equally prominent in every discipline.¹¹⁵ This does not mean that tendencies such as the grey literature bias or the citation bias can be overlooked.¹¹⁶ However, these biases are heterogeneously

¹¹³ Fanelli (2018); Guttinger (2020).

¹¹⁴ Fanelli (2018).

¹¹⁵ Guttinger (2020).

¹¹⁶ Fanelli *et al.* (2017).

distributed among certain subfields. As a result, Guttinger proposes new localism, which argues that the crisis narrative should be replaced and issues should be studied on a local level, addressing one subfield and not science as a whole.

We repeat Guttinger and Love's position that overgeneralization failures cannot be entirely removed from scientific practice¹¹⁷: the lack of knowledge in the initial phases of a subfield is essential to science. Moreover, when the investigated phenomenon is so complex that it is easy to overlook certain variables or contextual effects, findings that prove specific to the time and place in which the research was done still advance our knowledge of the topic. Thus, original studies should not be dismissed due to replicatory failures, and connoting a failure to replicate with questionable research practices does not acknowledge this progress.

The Researcher is Also a Person

If the research questions and methodologies seek to understand the plurality of perspectives on a phenomenon, replicability as a norm might not be as relevant. In fact, some view that the criteria of reliability and validity in quantitative research do not apply to qualitative studies and should be replaced by credibility and dependability or trustworthiness and authenticity.¹¹⁸ These criteria shift the attention from characteristics of the research itself to a perspective that also includes the researcher as a decision-maker who affects the studies he or she conducts.

"The researcher is a person, and, of course, that's true as well in physics or any other discipline. But in the humanities that is more significant for two reasons: the person might bring his own personal preferences to the research. That may introduce all kinds of biases, but it is also a kind of engagement. And the researcher is a person and thereby might be to some extent, also on the same level as those who are studied, interacting with those people in a culture, learn about what people think about them. Neutrality is something to aspire for in many contexts. But it is also not purely a given because people deserve to be treated as humans. They're not just objects of study." (Interview #17, philosophy)

As a result:

"If it was not Darwin who went in this boat, but someone else, would we have the same theory? In the humanities, but maybe even in physics, there is always the role of the researcher. You cannot just presume that you can do science or research as if the characteristics of a researcher do not play a role."
(Interview #13, culture studies)

¹¹⁷ Guttinger & Love (2019).

¹¹⁸ Yilmaz (2013).

Hence, while the effects of the researcher on his or her work may be similar across fields of research, the response differs starkly. Instead of striving for neutrality, for a science free of researcher effects, some interviewees embrace the effects of their engagement and emphasize the need to capture their effect on the findings. Research is credible and trustworthy if the researcher documents how his or her characteristics may have affected the study. The role of the researcher has to be acknowledged as different people will find different things, and that is what research is all about. Reflexivity is a key construct in this regard:

“Depending on the topic, of course, there can be differences in terms of how close the researcher is to the topic. Sometimes, if you study very familiar environments, that can be very different from studying an environment that is entirely new to you. What ethnographers try to do is exercise reflexivity: as much as possible, account for your own biases and be aware of the kinds of beliefs and ideas and biases that you might have towards the topic and people that you study. There are mechanisms, like, for instance, triangulation, which is used a lot in ethnography. You can use data triangulation, for instance: you collect the different kinds of data from different contexts to make sure that the things that you observe occur in many contexts or in many types of data. It is not just once off, a once off thing that you observe. You can use researcher triangulation where you have not just one person, but a number of researchers looking at the data. That is another way of ensuring that it is not just your own biases that are being reflected in your analysis. Because ethnographers really put a lot of emphasis on trying to account for people’s realities in a realistic way it is often important to engage the people that you study. They would be reading your conclusions and analysis, or you would have a discussion with the people themselves to see that it is also something that makes sense to them.” (Interview #12, culture studies)

If the researcher’s position in his/her work is not only considered pivotal to the research process, but also embraced a justified form of engagement with the topic and the relevant actors, the motivation for replication studies shifts. Replication is geared towards understanding how variations in the study context are relevant for the findings presented in the original study. This research context is partly a pre-existing reality but also shaped by the intervention of the researcher. As a baseline, original findings are expected not to replicate, as any finding is presumed to be highly context-dependent. The emphasis on the influence of random chance on outcomes may even disappear, as randomness presupposes an associational relationship which the researcher may not be after.

Taking everything into account, the narrative that science is in a universal crisis is counterproductive. The issue of replicability does not threaten every field to the same extent. Thus, claiming that the entirety of science is experiencing a crisis does not do justice to the differences between sciences. Moreover, not all fields of science strive

for replicability. In certain qualitative, exploratory disciplines, replicability is not the ultimate norm that scientists aim for. Consequently, arguing that replicability should be the utmost standard that all fields should abide by does more harm than good.

Conclusion

Reproducibility failures are part and parcel of scientific progress. Science is and needs to be self-correcting.¹¹⁹ Every finding that fails to replicate opens up new avenues for researchers to further investigate. Failure in research thus should not be condemned, because it brings value to building scientific knowledge. Failure essentially means that a goal is not reached - science aims to advance the knowledge we hold about the world, and replication failures definitely contribute to this goal. The crisis narrative is therefore counterproductive: it connotes a replication failure with questionable research practices, and those scholars who replicate prior work are members of the statistics police force. As a result, the incentive structures do not reward replications – both in terms of the cultured perception of replications as not bringing new insights as well as in terms of the limited room for studies that do replicate prior findings. Too few original findings are subjected to replication studies and only those which discover academic misconduct make it to the headlines.

The “universal replication crisis” is not only more business-as-usual than crisis, but also not so universal. Research paradigms, including those humanities approaches reviewed in this essay, do not equally presuppose that their findings would replicate. Findings dating back to the founding period of a field in which theories were nascent and measurement instruments not yet widely validated similarly should not be expected to jump through uniform replicability hoops.

¹¹⁹ Redish *et al.* (2018).

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Failing with Fortitude: How to Face Difficulties Well and Flourish

Krijn Pansters

Introduction

In this essay I will make use of insights from ancient philosophy, medieval history, modern psychology, Buddhist spirituality, and moral theology in order to deal with the classical virtue of fortitude or courage – one of the four “cardinal virtues” in Western morality – as a crucial survival skill for students and others. I will discuss the following three aspects of this virtue as an “active power” that empowers the self: (1) Historical appearances of this virtue and how we can learn from them; (2) Psychological workings of this virtue and how it is connected to other classical virtues like prudence, temperance and justice, and (3) Practical applications of this virtue and how it may contribute to flourishing. Individuals who develop the virtue of fortitude and the various virtues associated with it will adopt a “habit in action” that enables them to accomplish greater things for themselves, to avoid cowardice as well as conceit, and to acquire equanimity. They will also learn to become more resilient in the face of inevitable failure, i.e. become more powerful from within by way of personal virtue.

1. *“Surrounded by Such a Great Cloud of Witnesses”*

The very first thing to remember as a student who is possibly lacking in resilience is the historical evidence of a long string of individuals who may have been finding themselves in the same kind of “hopeless” situation. Many sources, both descriptive and normative, provide proof of the great struggle for psychological strength of all those “who have gone before.”¹²⁰ History, indeed, offers us a plethora of instances and illustrations of (failing) courage-in-practice.

¹²⁰ “Surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses” is a translation of Hebrews 12:1 (New English Translation). “Surrounded by all those who have gone before” is another translation of the same passage (The Voice Translation).

William II, Duke of Bavaria-Straubing (d. 1417), was a very powerful man. As soon as he obtained, through descent, the titles Count of Hainaut, Holland, and Zeeland in 1404,¹²¹ he became involved in severe troubles between two political parties: the Hoeks (“Hooks”) and the Kabeljauws (“Cods”). The Cods, especially, experienced firsthand that William could be a real “feudal ruler.” Fortunately, this “Alexander” of the Low Countries had at his disposal his own “Aristotle”: the poet and writer Dirc Potter (d. 1428), who would be the secretary to three successive counts of Holland. Apart from being a clerk and diplomat, Potter also composed a mirror for princes, an instruction on aspects of rule and behavior. Here is what he wrote for his master in his *Flower of Virtues*:

Be brave and confident and cheerful
See that you do your things in an honest way
Always resist iniquity
And you will be pleasantly elevated.¹²²

Courage, confidence, joy, honesty, and morality are the way to ultimate success: a good piece of advice for *all* those who find themselves in trouble or worse: in battle.

Jacobus de Cessolis (d. 1322) was the Italian author of the most famous book on chess in the Middle Ages. In this work, the Dominican friar used the beloved strategy board game as the basis for “a moralized explanation [...] based on the medieval estates, whereby each chess piece represents a different social class.”¹²³ Among the king, queen, judge (bishop), legate (rook), and others, we also encounter the knight. Here is what Jacobus wrote of (and to) him in his *Game of Chess*:

A knight must be brave. He must show not only physical, but also mental strength [...]. Often knights are physically strong, but mentally weak. To be brave, however, means to endure and not be distracted from one’s goal.¹²⁴

Among the many readers of this extremely popular treatise, we also find students and professors, who cannot but be encouraged to pursue their own goals in a more “chessly,” here: “knightly” fashion.

The anonymous author of one of the most interesting spiritual writings of his age was a priest and member of the Modern Devotion, a late-medieval spiritual movement dedicated

¹²¹ William was a son of Albrecht I (d. 1404), son of Louis IV (d. 1347), Holy Roman Emperor, and his second wife Margaret II (d. 1356), Countess of Hainaut and Holland. He became William IV (Hainaut), William VI (Holland), and William V (Zeeland). On William, see for example Van Oostrom (1992), 1-36.

¹²² “Weest sterck vroem ende wel ghemoedt / Siet dat ghij u dinghen eerlijc doet / Ende wederstaet altoes ondoecht / Ghij werter lieflijck bij verhoecht.” Dirc Potter, *Blome der doecheden*, c. 1416. See Pansters (2007), 1.

¹²³ Grossvogel (2006), 356.

¹²⁴ “Fortes milites necesse est esse, non tantum corporis fortitudine [sed et animi]. Plerique multi fortissimi robore corporis] debiles sunt animo. Magni corpore fortes esse possunt, raro vero animosos credimus; [medicores magis animosos et ad bellum aptos existimamus]. Fortis vero est, qui patitur et non deducitur.” Jacobus de Cessolis, *Libellus de ludo scachorum*, c. 1320. See Köpke (1879), 11.

to a pious and virtuous way of life. In his social treatise, the Dutch theologian urges his brothers and sisters to “live well” by living in harmony with others. The basis of communal harmony is the well-known scheme of the four cardinal virtues, viz., justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude. Here is our writer’s recommendation of the latter virtue in his *On Living Well*:

In the face of hardship, adversity or other obstacles on the way to your destination, arm yourself with courage and patience so that you will endure and bear your troubles with equanimity.¹²⁵

The message is crystal clear: you, and all around you, will profit profoundly from your acquired habit of calmness and composure.

Here, by way of an introduction into the application of the indispensable virtue of *fortitudo*, I have mentioned only three of many examples from only one of many periods: the late Middle Ages.¹²⁶ This in order to show that history is a treasure trove for those seeking strength “in the face of hardship, adversity or other obstacles on the way to your destination.” Failure-facing students and others who find themselves in such dire circumstances may want to look not only forward – to ultimate success where one has overcome one’s obstacles – but also, and even more so, backward – to the well-advised and well-tested strategies of many bygone generations. As our path in life is strewn with unanticipated difficulties, so our history is brimming with unanticipated solutions. Have a good look at it, like a true historian of human psychology, and be strengthened and sustained by the many excellent examples of *brave behavior*.

2. “Accompanied by a Certain Firmness so as not to be Moved by its Contrary”

What is courage and how can we benefit from it? Plato (d. 347 BC) already mentions this virtue, especially in the context of the four classes of the city and the four faculties of man of the good in *The Republic*. He sees “bravery” as a stable quality (of cities and souls) that is possessed and preserved both in pain and pleasures and in desires and fears.¹²⁷ Aristotle (d. 322 BC) has the same kind of reverence for this political virtue but gives a more psychological definition: courage means to be undismayed by fears of death, confident in alarms, and brave in face of dangers, in short: to always endure with confidence and

¹²⁵ “Deinde etiam, ne laboribus, adversitate vel quibuscumque contrariis obviantibus a predicto fine impediatur, debet per fortitudinem et pacienciam armari, ut omnia equanimiter paciatur et toleret.” *Aliud est bene vivere*, 149v, c. 144o. See Klausmann (2003), 341.

¹²⁶ And thus from a male-focused and male-dominated discourse. In this essay, “man” or “soul” or “person” essentially means “(wo)man.”

¹²⁷ “Bravery too, then, belongs to a city by virtue of a part of itself owing to its possession in that part of a quality that under all conditions will preserve the conviction that things to be feared are precisely those which and such as the lawgiver inculcated in their education [...]. And by the phrase “under all conditions” I mean that the brave man preserves it both in pain and pleasures and in desires and fears and does not expel it from his soul. [...] This power in the soul, then, this unfailing conservation of right and lawful belief about things to be and not to be feared is what I call and would assume to be courage.” Plato, *The Republic* 4, 429-430, trans. P. Shorey (1935).

perseverance.¹²⁸ Roman philosophers like Cicero (d. 43 BC) and Marcus Aurelius (d. 180) follow in their footsteps by giving similar explanations, as do Christian theologians like Ambrosius (d. 397) and Augustine (d. 430).

Then comes the Italian Dominican friar Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), the great summarizer of the wisdom of his age, who deals with this virtue extensively. In chapter 61 of his famous *Summa theologiae* he describes fortitude as “a disposition whereby the soul is strengthened for that which is in accord with reason, against any assaults of the passions, or the toil involved by any operations.”¹²⁹ Even after 750 years, this description has not lost any of its meaning. Courage is the attitude (“disposition of the soul”) that

- (1) is sensible (“in accord with reason”);
- (2) withstands internal emotions (“any assault of the passions”); and
- (3) overcomes external tribulations (“the toil by any operations”).

Like all other virtues, courage for Aquinas is “a good habit, productive of good works.”¹³⁰ It is therefore an “attitude in action,” anchored within the goodness of the human person and advantageous to that person and those around him. Here, we see fortitude’s connection to the other three cardinal virtues: working “in accord with reason” it is associated with prudence; working “against the assault of the passions” it is associated with temperance, and bringing forth “good works” it is associated with justice.¹³¹ In this way, fortitude is also advantageous to the other virtues: “because it is fitting that every moral virtue, from the fact that it is a ‘habit,’ should be accompanied by a certain firmness so as not to be moved by its contrary [viz., weakness]: and this, we have said, belongs to fortitude.”¹³²

3. “From that Space that Our Best Part of Ourselves Comes Out”

The main lesson that I want to draw from the reflections and recommendations of the great thinkers of our past is that the purpose of courage and the various virtues associated with it does not lie in personal success but in becoming a better and truly good person – the real goal and destination in life. True security only comes with morality, true resilience only with the peace of mind that is the product of goodness.¹³³ Like the failures of historical figures, furthermore, the teachings from the past give us a sense of perspective and nuance: the world is so much bigger than my own accomplishments and mistakes. What

¹²⁸ “To courage it belongs to be undismayed by fears of death and confident in alarms and brave in face of dangers, and to prefer a fine death to base security, and to be a cause of victory. It also belongs to courage to labor and endure and play a manly part. Courage is accompanied by confidence and bravery and daring, and also by perseverance and endurance.” Aristotle, *Virtues and Vices* 4, trans. Rackham (1952).

¹²⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 61,4, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920). See also in this chapter: “man needs to be strengthened for that which reason dictates, lest he turn back; and to this end there is ‘fortitude’; ‘the irascible faculty, subject of ‘fortitude’; ‘every virtue that strengthens the mind against any passions whatever, be called fortitude’; ‘fortitude, the virtue which strengthens against dangers of death’; ‘every virtue that strengthens the mind against any passions whatever, be called fortitude’; ‘fortitude, when a man conquers himself, and is not weakened and bent by any enticement’; ‘possess the habit and act with firmness and steadfastness’; ‘he whose mind is strengthened by fortitude against dangers of death’; ‘fortitude keeps the mind unbent by the enticements of pleasures’; ‘fortitude prevents the soul from being afraid of neglecting the body and rising to heavenly things’; ‘fortitude, about fear’.”

¹³⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 55,3, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920).

¹³¹ See also Pieper (1966) and (Mattison (2008)).

¹³² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 55,3, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920).

¹³³ Here, I do not mean moral courage as public, political bravery, as in Robert Kennedy’s Day of Affirmation Address (1966): “Moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence. Yet it is the one essential, vital quality of those who seek to change a world which yields most painfully to change.” See also Kennedy (1956).

do these insights mean in practice, for students and others who are secretly feeling like a failure? I will answer this question by formulating three rules of courageous living: seek to succeed in being better before doing better; find in failure a most direct way to flourish, and cultivate the commitment and confidence to continue.

Seek to Succeed in Being Better Before Doing Better

Self-help bestsellers like Angela Duckworth's *Grit: Why Passion and Resilience are the Secrets to Success* give persuasive accounts of the value of "the true qualities that lead to outstanding achievement."¹³⁴ They are very useful for those aspiring to get back on their feet, keep going after failure, try again and try harder, work hard and smart, and become their best selves, in short: "do better."¹³⁵ Rarely do these popular performance books underscore the primacy of *moral* success, of *being* better. Duckworth, however, does:

But greatness and goodness are different, and if forced to choose, I'd put goodness first. [...] In fact, in studies of how people size up others, morality trumps all other aspects of character in importance.¹³⁶

With this statement at the end of her book, Duckworth puts herself in a long line of promoters of goodness of character. Strength of character and similar virtues now become qualities *par excellence* for moral and spiritual development. Being smart now becomes a function of being good, not the other way around, whereas getting better at something now serves the purpose of getting better as a human being.

Find in Failure a Most Direct Way to Flourish

In her book *Fail, Fail Again, Fail Better*, the Buddhist nun Pema Chödrön explains why the experience of failure, which itself can be improved (!), is exactly the space from which "our best part of ourselves comes out."¹³⁷ Failure is often unavoidable, but our usual response to it – the feeling that there is something fundamentally wrong – is not. Failure functions as a source of strength and flourishing, rather than stress and frustration, when we view mishaps and missteps as opportunities to develop virtues like bravery and kindness. In the words of Chödrön:

[...] out of that very same space of vulnerability and rawness and the feeling of failure can come our best human qualities of bravery, kindness, the ability to really care about each other, the ability to reach out to each other.¹³⁸

As we have seen, many classical and Christian thinkers relate fortitude-in-failure to flourishing.¹³⁹ This Buddhist teacher now relates flourishing-in-failure to fortitude, in such a

¹³⁴ Duckworth (2017), blurb. Other examples are Kishimi & Koga (2018) and Bayer (2019).

¹³⁵ Duckworth (2017), 118.

¹³⁶ Duckworth (2017), 273.

¹³⁷ Chödrön (2015), 71.

¹³⁸ Chödrön (2015), 73. On courage and vulnerability, see Brown (2015).

¹³⁹ On flourishing as the aim of education, see Kristjánsson (2020).

way that courage becomes misfortune's child rather than its combatant. More importantly, Chödrön shows how failing offers "the most direct way to becoming a more complete, loving, and fulfilled human being."¹⁴⁰ Failure is the portal to even greater things than the things you would have liked to see work out the way you wanted them to.

Cultivate the Commitment and Confidence to Continue

Let me return to the late Middle Ages for my last rule of courageous living. Most medieval women and men were experts in the fine art of slowly going forward, not participants on the fast track to success. Having the courage to be happy and content with the things that God had provided¹⁴¹ and having no intention of stopping short of reaching perfection, they steadily "progressed from virtue to virtue."¹⁴² This progress was meritorious in itself. In the words of Gerard Zerbolt of Zutphen (d. 1398), one of the pioneers of the Modern Devotion:¹⁴³

If you have been truly courageous in attacking and assiduous in bearing [adversities], it is impossible not to make progress. If it happens that you do not progress in the fight against vices or not appear to progress, you will nevertheless enjoy the merits due to your many efforts.¹⁴⁴

Surely one must make efforts to fight vices – personal iniquities – in order to move forward. Surely one must also commit oneself to the process of progress itself, developing confidence in the *movement* of improvement even in those moments when one is least aware of it.

Coda: Kindness and Compassion

"Just be brave" can be a cruel thing to say to somebody who struggles with fear and suffers from insecurity. Such a person deserves encouragement in the form of kindness and compassion. In this essay, I hope to have shown that courage can also be a positive and powerful thing: a virtue, or, in traditional terms, "a habit perfecting man in view of his doing good deeds."¹⁴⁵ *Perfecting* means steadily going forward on the way to one's destination ("flourishing"); the person who lacks courage may indeed find comfort in the conviction that he will progress in life, slowly but surely. *Doing*, then, signifies beneficial actions as signs of this progress. Augustine says it well when he says that in the end, courage is

¹⁴⁰ Chödrön (2015), blurb.

¹⁴¹ See also Kishimi & Koga (2019).

¹⁴² See Psalm 83:8 (84:7): "They go from virtue to virtue."

¹⁴³ See *On Living Well*, above.

¹⁴⁴ "[...] vere si ita fueris virilis in aggrediendo, et strenuus in sustinendo, non poteris non proficere. Si enim non proficis vicium extinguendo forsitan amplius non proficiendo proficis, id est, propter multos tuos labores inde amplius promeris." Gerard Zerbolt van Zutphen, *De reformatione virium animae*, 42. See Legrand (2001), 264 and Pansters (2007), 179.

¹⁴⁵ Another definition by Thomas Aquinas, now in *Summa theologiae* 58,3, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920). Please note that most Christian philosophers speak of "perfection" in terms of a process of "perfecting." For them, perfection as a "failure-free state" can only be found in the life after this life.

“love, encouraging us in face of difficulties.”¹⁴⁶ The moral consequence of all this is that the not-yet courageous person should treat himself with kindness and compassion – as he would treat others in the same situation.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Mähl (1969), 18; Pansters (2012), 57. On courage and love, see furthermore Palmer (2017), 57: “If we dare to move through our fear, to practice knowing as a form of love, we might abandon our illusion of control and enter a partnership with the otherness of the world. By finding our place in the ecosystem of reality, we might see more clearly which actions are life-giving and which are not – and in the process participate more fully in our own destinies, and the destiny of the world, than we do in our drive for control.”

¹⁴⁷ The implications of virtue theory and virtue practice for character building in higher education are manifold. The Tilburg University educational profile, for example, focuses on knowledge, skill, and character (“Students at Tilburg University are educated to become knowledgeable, self-aware, and engaged academics, who understand society and want to play a significant role in it, driven by solidarity, entrepreneurship, a sense of responsibility, and empathy: values demanded by our society”), but not yet on virtues – personal moral possessions – like courage, confidence, and compassion. See: The Tilburg Educational Profile.

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Competitive Advantage, Failure, and Shame: A Student Perspective

Gezy Schuurmans

Introduction

The marketization of higher education has changed the definitions of success and failure. The marketization of higher education entails the subjection of educational institutions to market demands.¹⁴⁸ This puts higher education in the service of the economy and the labor market.¹⁴⁹ This has shown to have far-reaching effects on academic life, and one of those effects is that notions of success and failure are changing.¹⁵⁰ One illustration of this change can be observed in the yearly global rankings of universities. These global university rankings assume that excellence of universities can be universally defined, objectively captured, applied to all universities across the world, and that it can be measured and compared.¹⁵¹ Hence, universities are considered successful based on a unified measurement scale that looks at quantifiable and measurable aspects of academia. Moreover, measurements of success are often based on variables that focus on the outcome of education.¹⁵² For instance, employment rates of students after graduation is a factor of success in measurement scales of universities.¹⁵³ This may be explained by the view that education is instrumental to the labor market.¹⁵⁴ In this line of reasoning, education is successful in so far that it helps graduates attain employment.¹⁵⁵ Importantly, this notion of success overlooks the intrinsic value of education and immeasurable aspects of academic life, such as personal growth or intellectual development.

¹⁴⁸ Mok & Lo (2002), 57; Baltodano (2012), 494; Ek *et al.* (2013), 1306.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Loveday (2018).

¹⁵¹ Brankovic *et al.* (2018), 18.

¹⁵² Barnes & Jenkins (2014); Jabbar *et al.* (2018).

¹⁵³ Molesworth *et al.* (2009), 279; Taylor & McCaig (2014), 30; Bendixen & Jacobsen (2017), 21.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Due to the marketization of higher education, not only universities are conceptualized differently, but students as well. Students are considered consumers of the ‘service’ (i.e. education) that universities provide,¹⁵⁶ and education is presented in terms of a private interest on the part of the student to invest in their own human capital.¹⁵⁷ This may change the way students view themselves in relation to universities, as they might view education as an investment and instrument rather than a goal on its own. Also, with the heightened attention on the outcome of education,¹⁵⁸ students may consider differently what it means for them to be successful. At the same time, research shows that there is cause for concern for the mental health and well-being of students, as they are experiencing higher levels of anxiety, stress, and burnout.¹⁵⁹ Interestingly, feelings of uncertainty over future employment and financial stress have been connected to this observation of decreasing mental health of students.¹⁶⁰ This raises the question of whether current notions of success and failure in academic life affect the well-being of students. In this essay, I argue that the current climate of excellence in universities creates more situations in which students are prone to feel shame, which negatively impacts well-being. I argue that shame plays a central role in experiences of failure or the fear of failure. Consequently, I assert that it is important to include shame resilience programs in higher educational institutions. First, this essay will look into what it means to feel shame. Then, a few situations will be provided in which, I argue, students are more prone to feel shame, based on my own experiences and academic research. Lastly, Brené Brown’s¹⁶¹ Shame Resilience Theory will be introduced as a possible angle or method of shame resilience programs in higher education.

Shame and Failure

Shame takes a central place in the experience of failure and the fear of failure,¹⁶² which is why it is important to examine what shame is and how it relates to failure. Shame is essentially an emotion relating to self-identity. Shame arises when there is a conflict between the ideal version of the self and the real self, which often occurs when a person negatively evaluates their self-identity.¹⁶³ Part of this negative evaluation is the fear of being unlovable and the fear that people will not like you if they knew the truth about us.¹⁶⁴ Consequently, shame brings up “feelings of inadequacy, self-contempt, embarrassment, self-exposure, and indignity”.¹⁶⁵ To reduce these feelings, people use defensive strategies including rage, contempt, striving for perfection, transfer of blame, denial, withdrawal, attacking the self-

¹⁵⁶ Bunce *et al.* (2017), 1958; Jabbar *et al.* (2018), 88.

¹⁵⁷ O’Neill (2014); Tomlinson (2018), 720.

¹⁵⁸ Barnes & Jenkins (2014); Jabbar *et al.* (2018).

¹⁵⁹ Brewer *et al.* (2019), 1105-1106.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Brown, (2006).

¹⁶² Turner *et al.* (2002), 80; McGregor & Elliot (2005), 229; Conroy *et al.* (2007), 239; Leach (2017), 14.

¹⁶³ Van Paassen (2015), 41-42.

¹⁶⁴ Brown (2010), 62.

¹⁶⁵ Fedewa *et al.* (2005), 1610.

avoidance, and attacking others.¹⁶⁶ In contrast to shame, guilt revolves around negative evaluations of actions and behavior and not of self-identity.¹⁶⁷ To resolve guilt a person is focused on constructive action repairing a broken interpersonal bond or situation and will be more likely to empathize with others and take personal responsibility.¹⁶⁸ Shame, as opposed to guilt, induces destructive rather than constructive behavior.¹⁶⁹ Therefore, it is not surprising that there is a relationship between shame and self-destructive behavior such as violence, aggression, depression, addiction, and eating disorders.¹⁷⁰ It is also an inherent characteristic of shame that it is not shared or spoken of by individuals.¹⁷¹ It is not easy for people to talk about the things they consider negative about themselves. However, when shame is not shared, it is likely to grow.¹⁷²

Shame is the core emotion behind the experience of failure and the fear of failure.¹⁷³ An individual's fear of failure makes events where performance is tested threatening moments that expose the entire self to judgment and puts the security in their relationships with others on the line.¹⁷⁴ Thus, when a person experiences failure or the fear to fail, these moments are not simply opportunities to learn, improve competences, or compete against others, they are moments that potentially induce shame over not meeting expectations or a standard of achievement.¹⁷⁵ Failure is perceived by an individual to reflect an important shortcoming of who they are as a person.¹⁷⁶ This leads to feelings of shame as shame occurs when a shortcoming is identified in self-identity, and when the ideal version of the self is negated by (possible) reality.¹⁷⁷ Therefore, it can be concluded that shame is the key emotion behind a fear of failure or the experience of failure.¹⁷⁸ Since the concepts of success and failure are changing in the academic environment, it becomes relevant to assess how they are changing in order to identify where students might experience the negative consequences of shame.

Competitive Advantage, Failure, and Shame

With the marketization of higher education, students are conceptualized as 'consumers' of the service provided by educational institutions, and education is put in service of the job market.¹⁷⁹ In addition, the success of academic programs and universities is measured

¹⁶⁶ Kaufman (1996); Pattison, (2000).

¹⁶⁷ Van Paassen (2015), 41-42. Shame/guilt was first distinguished by Lewis, (1971).

¹⁶⁸ Fedewa *et al.* (2005).

¹⁶⁹ Tangney (1992), 199.

¹⁷⁰ Brown (2010), 65.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Turner *et al.* (2002), 80; McGregor & Elliot (2005), 229; Conroy *et al.* (2007), 239; Leach (2017), 14.

¹⁷⁴ Crocker & Wolfe (2001); McGregor & Elliot (2005), 219, 227.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ McGregor & Elliot (2005), 219; Conroy *et al.* (2007), 248.

¹⁷⁷ Van Paassen (2015), 41-42.

¹⁷⁸ Turner *et al.* (2002), 80; McGregor & Elliot (2005), 229; Conroy *et al.* (2007), 239; Leach (2017), 14.

¹⁷⁹ Mok & Lo (2002), 57; Baltodano (2012), 494; Ek *et al.* (2013), 1306; Bunce *et al.* (2017), 1958; Jabbar *et al.* (2018), 88.

by the extent to which graduates are employable after education.¹⁸⁰ The success of the student, thus, resides in their ability to gain employment after their education.¹⁸¹ On top of that, due to marketization business ideals such as competitive advantage and cost-effectiveness have found their way into the governance of higher educational institutions, including universities.¹⁸² This has not just affected universities themselves, but also their students. Students are aware that when they graduate, they are in competition with many other graduates and have limited job opportunities.¹⁸³ Moreover, they are also conscious of the fact that employers may expect skills and competence beyond a regular academic curriculum.¹⁸⁴ This creates pressure on students to gain a competitive advantage over other graduates in the (future) job market. This is manifested in the efforts of students in taking on extra-curricular activities outside of the required academic program. In this way, students are already making decisions whilst studying based on the idea that they should have a competitive advantage in the future. However, one overlooked aspect may be that taking on extra work in combination with an academic program also means that students have a higher overall workload. Thus, there is more pressure on students to combine studying with working, in order to gain a competitive advantage.

Another situation in which students may particularly feel shame is when they are studying abroad as part of their educational program. Students may feel more pressured to go on an exchange semester to a foreign country to gain this competitive advantage. University students can develop personal capital and, thus, gain competitive advantage over other students in the graduate labor market.¹⁸⁵ Research also shows that studying abroad is connected to higher employment.¹⁸⁶ Studying abroad may help students develop language skills, cultural literacy, global awareness and engagement, and specialized knowledge, which are all attractive features to future employers.¹⁸⁷ Like the decision to take on extracurricular activities, studying abroad may be a decision made with the aim of having a competitive advantage in a future labor market. However, studying abroad may bring along pressures outside of the pressure to gain a competitive advantage; it may increase the pressure on students to lead an idealized version of social life. In other words, there may be an accompanying pressure to keep up appearances even if students are experiencing difficulties whilst studying abroad.

Students studying abroad are mostly in contact with other students through social media and they compare themselves to other students in similar situations on these platforms.¹⁸⁸ However, the lives that are portrayed on social media are highly polarised and skewed

¹⁸⁰ Molesworth *et al.* (2009), 279; Taylor & McCaig (2014), 30; Bendixen & Jacobsen (2017), 21.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Mok & Lo, (2002), 57; Hemsley-Brown & Optlaka, (2006), 319; Jabbar *et al.* (2018), 87.

¹⁸³ Moreau & Leathwood (2006), 306-307; Roulin & Bangarter, (2013), 22-23; Trower & Lehmann (2017), 276.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ Trower & Lehmann (2017), 276; Schmidt & Pardo (2017).

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Reer *et al.* (2019), 1488.

towards a more positive, happier, and more successful image.¹⁸⁹ Still, individuals compare their lives to the lives presented on social media, and there are negative consequences of upward social comparisons that are based on positively biased accounts of reality.¹⁹⁰ This kind of social comparison can lead to negative evaluations of the social competence of a person, and it can induce feelings of inadequacy because other individuals appear to be doing better.¹⁹¹ Drawing on my own experiences abroad, one reason why this may be even stronger during periods when students are on exchange is because students may only have access to the perspective of their friends' and co-students' lives through social media, eliminating a perspective where personal vulnerability or imperfection is available to them. With only a perspective of perfection and a happy and successful lifestyle available, students may feel pressured to show that during exchange, they, too, are having the best possible time abroad. Thus, there may be a pressure to keep up appearances and students may find it difficult to reach out to others when their lives are not as perfect as the lives other students show them on social media.

I think that there are two ways in which students are very likely to encounter shame. First, as previously discussed, the pressure to take on extra-curricular activities and to study abroad are motivated out of a fear to fail to gain employment in the future. Since shame is the core emotion behind the fear of failure, the motivation to gain a competitive advantage will induce shame.¹⁹² Second, the inability to gain employment after graduation, or the inability to get extracurricular activities while studying, can be a direct source of shame. When a standard of success places importance on employability, the inability to gain employment is considered as failing. The same goes for the inability to go on exchange or the inability to take on extra work experience. This may be considered as an inadequacy of the self to live up to a standard of achievement on the part of the student. When students experience failure, they will also feel shame. Hence, rejection or inability to take on (work) opportunities are likely to be a source of shame for students. For this reason, specific attention could be paid to application processes in resilience programs. When students are applying for jobs or internships, this process will probably also include rejections. This concretely confronts students with a standard of success, and possible failure in light of this standard. Rejections may be perceived as personal inadequacies in light of a norm of achievement that prizes employability. When negative evaluations of the self occur, this is expected to lead to feelings of shame.

To conclude, all the efforts made by students to gain a competitive advantage may have negative or unforeseen effects. This competitive advantage has shaped the decision-making and behavior of students on a personal level,¹⁹³ even though it is part of a larger culture of success. Thus, the concept of success in terms of employability has a far-reaching

¹⁸⁹ Stead & Bibby (2017), 535; Reer *et al.* (2019).

¹⁹⁰ Reer *et al.* (2019), 1488.

¹⁹¹ De Vries & Kühne (2015); Stead & Bibby, (2017), 535; Reer *et al.* (2019).

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Roulin & Bangerter (2013).

influence on student life. Notably, shame may be an every-day experience for students. As previously mentioned, shame brings up feelings of inadequacy, self-contempt, and self-exposure, and people often cope with these feelings by striving for perfection, transferring blame, denial, avoidance, and by attacking others.¹⁹⁴ In addition, high levels of shame have been connected to depression, eating disorders, and addiction.¹⁹⁵ Therefore, it is useful and important to include shame resilience building in resilience programs in higher education to improve or safeguard the resilience of students against shame, and to provide them with constructive coping mechanisms. Particularly if students are taking on more activities outside of their standard academic program which requires them to go through application processes, it is important that they have strategies to cope with possible feelings of rejection. Thus, shame resilience programs can support students in all kinds of situations and essentially increases a student's ability to cope with shame, even if this is not related to education.

Shame Resilience Theory

Shame Resilience Theory could provide a framework for shame resilience programs in higher education. Shame resilience is a specific form of resilience building that concerns the processes and strategies that are used to resolve the impact and consequences of shame.¹⁹⁶ Shame resilience is defined as “the ability to recognize shame, to move through it constructively, and to ultimately develop more courage, compassion, and connection as a result of our experience”.¹⁹⁷ Brené Brown (2006) has developed a framework for shame resilience building called Shame Resilience Theory (SRT).¹⁹⁸ In the framework of SRT, the level of resilience against shame is determined by the sum of four aspects: the ability to recognize and accept personal vulnerability; the level of critical awareness of socio-cultural expectations; the ability to form mutually empathic relationships that facilitate reaching out to others; and the ability to communicate and speak about emotions.¹⁹⁹ To become shame resilient one needs to attain skills in all four aspects.²⁰⁰

First, the ability to recognize and accept personal vulnerability increases resilience against shame. Brown's research showed that individuals who were aware of issues that leave them vulnerable to feeling attacked were more likely to react to an experience of shame with recognition.²⁰¹ In contrast, those who did not recognize vulnerabilities were overwhelmed and confused by emotions in reaction to shame experiences. The awareness of vulnerabilities increases the likelihood that people seek and find support, an important

¹⁹⁴ Kaufman (1996); Pattison (2000); Fedewa *et al.* (2005), 1610.

¹⁹⁵ Brown (2010), 65.

¹⁹⁶ Brown (2006), 45.

¹⁹⁷ Brown (2010), 63.

¹⁹⁸ Brown (2006).

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

part of building resilience against shame.²⁰² Second, the level of critical awareness of socio-cultural expectations is important in shame resilience, because it deconstructs individual experiences to larger forces. Critical awareness of socio-cultural expectations includes the ability to evaluate personal experiences of shame within this context. Critical awareness supports individuals in deconstructing individual incidents of shame and contextualizing them to the social and cultural environment of expectations.²⁰³ In this way, it helps individuals to understand that feelings of shame reflect a larger issue instead of personal flaws.²⁰⁴ Third, the ability to form mutually empathetic relationships with others is a crucial element of resilience building. It builds networks of support which help identify shared notions of shame and it creates consciousness of the fact that individuals are not alone in their feelings of shame.²⁰⁵ Lastly, the ability to speak about shame allows people to engage in dialogue about shame and shame resilience.²⁰⁶ Only when individuals know the words and concepts that substantiate what shame means, can they start engaging in dialogue with others to create strategies of shame resilience.²⁰⁷

SRT offers insight into what elements a shame resilience program should address to successfully promote resilience in higher education, more specifically universities. A shame resilience program should include exercises to recognize personal vulnerabilities and it should include information and build knowledge on shame to increase shame fluency. Moreover, universities may play a role in facilitating support networks that are easily accessible and foster mutually empathetic relations among students. One form in which this could be possible is in peer-to-peer support groups. Peer support is the support provided by and for individuals with similar conditions or issues, so that people who have faced adversity before can offer support to others facing similar situations.²⁰⁸ This could also be a form of a student support network dedicated to shame resilience building. Yet above all, universities can play a particularly important part in the development of critical awareness of students, as their institutions are part of the socio-cultural environment that creates expectations for students. Linking the personal experiences of shame of students to this larger environment increases the shame resilience in students. It may help them understand that their feelings of shame are not singular experiences and can be explained as part of a wider social and cultural normative environment. It may also help universities identify trends that are increasing pressures and standards of success on students (and perhaps staff) to which they may contribute or which they may be able to influence. In short, universities could be an influential factor in the resilience building of students, and it is important that this resilience building includes attention paid to the effects and constructs of shame.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Faulkner & Basset (2012), 41-42; Stigmar (2016), 124-125.

Conclusion

This essay has tried to illustrate the importance and scope for shame resilience within higher education resilience programs. Focusing on emotions in learning is often overlooked or seen as less important compared to more serious, rational, and academic tasks.²⁰⁹ Yet, students may experience shame in a variety of situations that are part and parcel of student life. I have argued that the notion of competitive advantage creates situations in which students are likely to feel shame, also in everyday life. I have also argued that students do not only feel pressure to perform professionally, but also feel the need to accomplish socially and that social media plays an important role in this. Since academic life constantly includes working with standards of success and failure that focus on employability, shame resilience may be an important skill for students to develop. In the implementation of shame resilience programs, universities should consider the influence that the marketization of higher education has on notions of success and failure, as academic life may constitute the social-cultural environment that creates expectations for students. Shame Resilience Theory could provide a guideline for implementing shame resilience programs, but eventually the specific forms are chosen per educational institution. Sometimes already existing programs of student mentoring, academic advice or study support may be used for these purposes. Implementing a scope for developing coping mechanisms against shame does not have to involve a lot of change or investment.

On top of that, shame resilience programs are not only beneficial for students as shame may be felt by anyone. Creating an environment in which individuals are able to constructively engage with each other without inducing shame, in which individuals are comfortable enough to talk about personal vulnerability and to be personally vulnerable, is beneficial for all involved, including academic staff. Hence, it may foster mutual respect and possible mutually empathetic relations between faculty and students. Furthermore, shame resilience programs may facilitate the development of other skills, such as formulating constructive feedback and engaging in a useful dialogue. These are useful skills in all parts of life. This makes one thing clear: resilience against shame is desirable for everyone and necessary to holistically create resilience in students in higher education.

²⁰⁹ Walker (2017), 2.

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Academic Resilience in Higher Education: Three Key Elements

Adina Glickman

Since the turn of the 21st century, resilience has become a buzzword in education. With the wide variety of organizational, disciplinary, and ideological orientations in higher education, the term “resilience” is understood and applied in numerous ways. It is often used interchangeably with grit, perseverance, persistence, tenacity, and has become a catch-all that describes the thing our students need to have in order to flourish. The resilient student has come to represent an ideal well-adjusted student who is achieving academic success and emotional, physical, and interpersonal wellness. Because of how education has adopted resilience and so closely associated it with the concept of wellness, the absence of resilience is equated with the student who is languishing, not meeting academic goals, depressed, and unwell.

But few concepts are as un-binary as resilience. All students, just like all adults and children, are resilient to varying degrees, and resilience can be manifest in a wide range of behaviors and emotions. Furthermore, humans are hard-wired for resilience: we learn to walk, talk, feed ourselves, and eventually solve complex problems through effort, failure, and learning. Our brains and bodies are constantly adapting to and making sense of the world around us; that adaptation is a demonstration of resilience. Resilience is not something one has or doesn't have, it is a human characteristic built into all of us. With varying degrees of access to shape this capacity in ourselves, the challenge is to grow and cultivate our resilience within the dynamic and complex contexts of the systems and institutions which we build and are part of.

It has been suggested that students who struggle with resilience in college have been over-parented, undermining their perception of their own strengths.²¹⁰ Over-parenting shields kids from challenges, disappointments, and failures that would otherwise call on them to develop their capacities for resilience before coming to college. And so colleges have turned their attention to teaching or cultivating resilience in students, and focusing on resilience as a defining and essential capacity to cultivate during the college years. This etiology is troublesome because it assumes that resilience is somehow “missing” from college students. If this were true, none of them would have ever learned how to walk or feed themselves, much less shown up for college, often in the face of considerable challenges.

In an effort to raise the discourse on academic resilience in 2014, I collaborated with colleagues in several large universities in the United States to form a consortium focused on understanding and promoting academic resilience on our campuses. This group, The Academic Resilience Consortium (ARC), has since evolved into a non-profit organization with about 600 members from 350+ schools in 16 countries. Members include faculty, undergraduate and graduate students, professional staff in student affairs and health/wellness, and administrators, representing a variety of organizational, theoretical, and practical contexts. The ARC enables members to connect with and learn from one another about research and interventions regarding student resilience in academic settings, and includes students themselves as active members to help shape and guide this work. In addition, the ARC hosts symposia and webinars, provides professional consultation, and maintains a listserv for members.

A key element of The ARC's mission is to encourage a complex and diverse understanding of what academic resilience is, how it works, and how those invested in education can support and cultivate it. My particular viewpoint rests on three principles. First, that academic resilience in higher education is a shared endeavor of the institution and the individual.²¹¹ It should not be understood as only a personal characteristic; the institution provides a context that can contribute to or undermine academic resilience. Second, because the institutional context is so vital, the “hidden curriculum” must be surfaced and explicitly discussed. The hidden curriculum refers to “norms, values, and expectations” that shape and inform interactions among students, faculty, staff, and administrators.²¹² Because the hidden curriculum is not articulated in actual policy, the institution must hold itself accountable to be self-reflective and self-correcting in identifying and removing the barriers it may be creating that inhibit true and sustained resilience. At the same time, student resilience is promoted when experiences of failure, difficulty, problem-solving, motivation, help-seeking, and other aspects of resilience are welcomed into an explicit conversation about the academic experience. And third, in developing programs, policies, and direct interventions to help schools and students cultivate academic resilience, we must create effective measurement tools for determining the degree, nature, and changes

²¹⁰ Lythcott-Haims (2015).

²¹¹ Ungar (2013).

²¹² Smith (2013).

in what we believe to be academic resilience, such that speed and ease of adaptation are not considered the gold standard to measure academic resilience to the exclusion of depth, complexity, and transformation.

Academic Resilience is a Shared Endeavor Between the Individual and the Context

Academic resilience is not simply a characteristic of an individual student but emerges as part of a complex and dynamic relationship between student and school (as well as the larger sociocultural context). In the natural world, we see resilience in context all the time. A plant that is given abundant light, water, and fertilizer will grow healthy and strong. One that is given too much or too little light, or deprived of water or nutrient-rich soil, will not thrive. The resilience of students is the product of an interdependent relationship between their own internal and evolving capacities for resilience and the conditions created by the school and the world around them.

Thus, efforts to support and cultivate resilience in college students must incorporate robust examination into the institution's contribution to resilience, and must reveal and address the hidden curriculum and institutional culture that has such a significant impact on the student experience. By emphasizing the overt and tacit impediments that schools present, we avoid a "blame the victim" sentiment that otherwise blames students for their difficulties with the many cultural, economic, and institutional barriers that are put in their paths. Without this distinction, students can experience the demand for resilience as an unfair burden, and justifiably resent the idea of being required to compensate for yet another deficit of their context.

The basic four-year undergraduate model in itself contributes to the hidden curriculum which undermines resilience. 150 years ago, the four-year model didn't include Modern Art. 100 years ago it didn't include quantum physics. Learning computer languages like Python or how gig economies function are parts of the curriculum introduced in the past several decades. Adherence to the four-year model presents students with greater and greater barriers to resilience -- increasing the speed and volume of course content, including more and more requirements, increasing expectations of 24-hr activity. Too often, the promise of a rich education is sidelined by teaching and learning pedagogy that relies on read-as-fast-as-you-can quantities and learning in service of test-taking. This creates a double bind for students. They can plow through the work or have a meaningful learning experience, but it is difficult to do both and we shouldn't be asking them to choose one or the other. Equally insufficient are courses that require that students either to purchase an expensive text or read the pdfs online, putting those with financial constraints at a disadvantage because pdfs are difficult to annotate, compete for screen attention, and limit discursive reading strategies.

A school's ignorance of or indifference to the challenges it creates in its culture of rigor, tacit expectation of super-human speed, or the fact that financial disparities create achievement disparities, are all part of the hidden curriculum that undermines their stated commitment to cultivating student resilience. Schools that impose consequences of failure without opportunities for reflection and adaptive learning can't possibly hope to cultivate resilience in their students.

But who is "the school"? While convenient to point to instructors and administrators as having the most obvious role to play in shifting these practices, "schools" are comprised of extremely complex political and financial systems in which individual efforts are often lost. The instructors and professional staff who care deeply about the students they teach and care deeply about removing barriers to their success, cannot do it all themselves, and cannot do it in the absence of integrated institutional support.

While individual human beings are able to support student resilience in their own teaching and professional practices, it is more difficult for these individual efforts to form a cohesive institutional paradigm. We who are in charge of shaping educational systems must own and evaluate not only our personal but our *institutional roles* in framing student success or failure. Our commitment to consistently looking for our blind spots and asking what we may be missing is a brave and necessary step. We must replace the message that it is up to students to be resilient with the loud and clear message that the institution holds itself equally responsible for creating conditions in which resilience can grow.

Cultivating Resilience Must Be an Explicit and Holistic Endeavor

If we want our students to respond to failure, setbacks, and rejection with resilience, we must create educational environments that not only make room for them to do so but explicitly encourage and teach to this end. Learning is an extraordinarily complex emotional, intellectual, and social process; we know that good learning happens when many parts of the brain are engaged.²¹³ Consider how we learn about not touching a hot stove: we are instructed by a parent about kitchen safety, perhaps we feel some heat standing nearby the stove, perhaps we have touched it and been burned. All of these experiences contribute to our ability to learn about not touching hot stoves. The physical, emotional, and interpersonal equipment that makes us human learns and adapts as an intricate system. But imagine if you burned a finger on a hot stove and when you cried out in pain, you're told you should have known better, you're weak or unmotivated, and you need to be more resilient. And yet if the lesson is about trigonometry instead of hot stoves, the teacher offers instruction, the student reads the text and tries solving some problems in their effort to learn, but when they are frustrated or disappointed by getting stuck or getting the wrong answer or a poor grade, and they express their distress, they are often characterized as academically wanting or insufficiently resilient -- or possibly mentally ill. Colleges too often

²¹³ Schwartz *et al* (2016).

respond to the complexities of learning by separating the emotional from the intellectual, pointing students in the direction of tutoring or study skills help to address content or process needs, or counseling for the emotional fallout, rather than understanding academic achievement as a complex process that involves the intellectual and emotional spheres.

Academic supports are essential to address the root causes of situational stress and the normal emotional responses to the challenges of learning and developmental changes in young adulthood. Mental health resources are essential to support students who come to college with diagnosed or diagnosable mental illnesses, as well as students who develop mental illnesses during the college years. Adjusting to life away from family, engaging in independence and decision-making in an adult realm, coping with internal or external pressures, and the negative elements of stereotype threat, are not inherently mental illnesses, but rather normal aspects of the college academic and developmental experience.

College is hard. College is supposed to be hard; it's supposed to stretch students intellectually and emotionally, and both stimulate and support the normal developmental transition from childhood to adulthood. Challenging experiences create strong emotional responses, from excitement and passion, to dread and self-loathing. But not all of these emotional responses constitute illnesses that require treatment. When we create demanding curricula that indeed stretch the student and they become appropriately stressed by that, the institution must develop a humane and supportive response to that stress, rather than pathologizing it. The overapplication of "mental health/illness" to educational contexts perpetuates the perception and experience of emotions (sadness, frustration, confusion) as an illness requiring treatment rather than normal parts of the learning experience. Many emotions experienced in the course of a student's developmental and intellectual growth in the college years are normal developmental aspects of a college career. Interventions that integrate "academic" and "personal" growth rather than dichotomizing these are needed to reverse the culture which misrepresents normal emotions as mental illness. What would happen if we anticipated the anxiety students feel before or during a test and built this into test-taking-practices?²¹⁴ Or demonstrated that it's normal to feel bad or worried after failing a class? Or that of course it hurts and makes us question ourselves when we get feedback that indicates we're not perfect in some way? What's actually happening is just the opposite; when maintaining a sympathetic silence, we tend to conspire with students to view their distress as their personal problem, not one of our educational design.

While many schools have increased their funding for mental health resources to respond to the stress, anxiety, and depression their students are experiencing, academic support resources often languish. Programs such as holistic academic counseling and coaching can help students learn effective ways of studying, respond with resilience to setbacks, and develop both intellectual and psychological strategies for approaching their academic work. To the extent that these academic supports are underfunded or expected to operate in some sort of emotion-free zone, referring all things emotional to the mental illness/health

²¹⁴ Ramirez & Beilock (2011).

resources, colleges are overlooking an essential inroad to cultivating student resilience.

One such example is articulated in response to the shuttering of Harvard University's Bureau of Study Counsel (BSC) in 2019.²¹⁵

"During the last few decades, at Harvard and beyond, the term "mental health" has slipped into everyday parlance and has become overly applied to human experience including the inherently personal and emotional aspects of education and learning. The best educational/developmental support welcomes the rich complex whole of the students' experience of learning. Although such support -- including that offered by the BSC -- is appropriately informed by the fields of psychology and neuroscience, it is not mental-health treatment."²¹⁶

Resilience-oriented programming that integrates the academic and emotional elements of failure and resilience such as Elon University's Phoenix Flops initiative, the Princeton Perspectives project, or Stanford University's "Stanford, I Screwed Up!" have shown how transparency, explicit focus on, and normalization of failure and resilience and the emotions that accompany them, can benefit students. The University of Washington's Resilience Lab presents "Fail Forward" each year showcasing prominent leaders, coaches, professors, administrators, and community members sharing their stories of failure and setbacks. When schools actively support and promote these types of programs they not only provide an essential resource to help students cultivate their resilience, they communicate a commitment to normalizing the imperfect processes of learning and professional growth.

Higher Education Needs More Effective Measurement Tools

Finally, our tools for accurately measuring resilience to determine whether efforts to cultivate it are successful or not, need careful attention. Research designs that enable rapid assessment of interventions by definition also emphasize rapid change. But growing resilience is a gradual process that can sometimes only be revealed over time.²¹⁷ When research reveals positive effects from interventions that measure a change in the short term, it sets a tacit expectation that rapid change is the norm. Educators and students then look for quick fixes that can show results, and the incremental growth in resilience that isn't surfaced by these methods is overlooked. Worse yet, the failure of an intervention in the short term might be mistaken as ineffective when in fact it's simply a cake that's been taken from the oven too soon.

²¹⁵ For 70 years the BSC provided a wide range of academic support services, including holistic academic counseling, peer tutoring, study skills workshops, and a well-known Success-Failure Project, and was replaced by an Academic Resource Center that does not address the emotional aspects of learning. Retrieved from: <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2019/9/10/bureau-study-counsel-mental-health/> (21 May 2020).

²¹⁶ Retrieved from: <https://harvardmagazine.com/2019/11/letters> (21 May 2020).

²¹⁷ Hauser *et al* (2003).

If our measurement tools are looking at changes in attitudes about student's setbacks and their behaviors and decisions as a result of those setbacks, within the time frame of their college or even graduate years, we are limiting the event horizon to perhaps 4-8 years.²¹⁸ Since resilience is understood to be a process of building perspective, learning and finding meaning, developing emotional tools and interpersonal support, who is to say how long it should take someone to be thriving after, for example, the death of a sibling? Does their grief over time reflect the absence of resilience, or are they in fact moving through a resilient process that makes room for grief? If a student is rejected from graduate schools, or denied entry into an undergraduate major, who is to say how long the emotional upheaval and concomitant logistical and existential working through should take? Too often, our efforts to determine whether an intervention is useful or not rely on snapshot assessments that are taken at an arbitrary moment, or on one-size-fits-all expectations and definitions that do not allow for the uniqueness of each student. As a result, students see their inability to learn quickly as failure to learn at all. And schools see the student's inability to bounce back easily -- rather than take the time to reflect, learn from, gain perspective, get support from their family, friends, and mentors -- as a lack of resilience. Though resilience is defined by "a return to a former state,"²¹⁹ academic resilience should emphasize learning and growing from adversity, a transformative endeavor.²²⁰

Furthermore, assessment tools that measure behavioral indicators without incorporating personal narrative don't reveal the true emergence of resilience. For example, suppose we are trying to understand resilience by looking at two students, both of whom have failed an introductory Chemistry course. One student decides to take the next course in the sequence and the other chooses not to. If we are simply looking at their behavior, we might conclude that the student who is continuing in the series demonstrates resilience. But if we look more carefully, we find that while persistent, that student is planning on dropping most other courses, reducing their sleep to three hours per night, and "powering through" despite stating they don't particularly enjoy Chemistry but their immigrant parents so want them to become a doctor that they feel they must follow through. The other student, who chooses to discontinue the Chemistry sequence, upon receiving their failing grade, looked long and hard at why they had failed. They realized though they probably could have gotten a better grade by putting in more time and effort, but, after taking the time to feel terrible about the failure, realized they didn't want to pursue the pre-med track despite feeling pressure from family. Or perhaps the student decided to stick with the sequence but consulted with an academic coach or advisor and was helped to develop more effective strategies for learning. In this example, the true growth of resilience as a capacity for responding and adapting to adversity can only be identified through the student's narrative. These types of narratives will never be discovered without institutionally sanctioned opportunities to reveal and understand their importance through nuanced and longitudinal research.

²¹⁸ Connor & Davidson (2003).

²¹⁹ Funk & Wagnalls (1959).

²²⁰ Although the 1959 definition of resilience makes no mention of speed or ease of recovery from adversity, present day definitions include "an ability to recover from or adjust **easily** to misfortune or change". Retrieved from: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/resilience> (21 May 2020). And "the capacity to recover **quickly** from difficulties; toughness." Retrieved from: <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/resilience> (21 May 2020).

Perhaps one direction we must move towards is developing greater continuity across the lifespan rather than researching and cultivating academic resilience as if it begins in the freshman year, manifests and grows in college, and is fully present by senior year. The narratives that are so essential to both developing and revealing how academic resilience shows up belong to the entire life span. With attention to measurement tools and their tacit messages about speed and ease, full transparency and discussion around the hidden curriculum, and shared ownership of the complex relationship between student and institution that results in changes in culture and policies, efforts on the part of educators to move the dial on student resilience can be achieved.

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Trick Questions

How Magic Tricks Enhance Resilience in Academic Students²²¹

Herman de Regt

‘Trick question: I show you a trick, and then I ask you a question’
Justin Willman, *Magic for Humans*.

1. A Contemporary Challenge: Thinking Scientifically, Acting Resilient

Our time is characterized by an abundance of sources of readily available claims about the nature of humans, the world, and the universe. Never before have young people been able to draw on so many sources to mold a picture of the world in which they (think they) live. The Web offers a seemingly endless array of sites where they can search to their heart's content for claims that look either plausible or nonsensical to them. Just as much, the same internet offers a chaotic and crowded marketplace for merchants to present and sell others humbug and nonsense, fact-free politics, and “alternative facts”. Often, they do so to an audience that lacks the resilience to react to a frustrating feeling of living doubt with a careful and time consuming sifting and valuation of all kinds of opinions, beliefs, and claims – most people rather escape into a quick and sheepish acceptance of the best sounding or most pleasurable speculation, something that simply ‘feels good’, restoring a soothing state of belief. Ironically, because we *feel* that it takes effort to discover the most promising, plausible, and productive position to defend and further explore, we give in to the pleasurable ‘doxic lure’ – lacking will power, discipline, or indeed resilience to do or redo the work needed to get (back) to probable and empirically reliable beliefs.

²²¹ This essay is a revised version of De Regt (2018).

The discriminatory skill to see the difference between sense and nonsense seems all the more urgent because of the unprecedented circumstance that we communicate digitally in 'real time' about anything with anyone, all the while hardly testing relevant claims and assumptions for accuracy or probability. In fact, it is becoming increasingly clear that internet users, human as they are, are looking for like-minded people in hyperspace, in order to find confirmation of their personally cherished beliefs.²²² In other instances, digital conversations between (anonymous) users often result in mutual insults, and even (personal) threats, instead of conversations that lead to a communal increase of true and justified beliefs. Increasingly, social media are seen as a vice rather than a virtue of society, as public sources of falsehoods and misunderstanding rather than truths and comprehension.²²³ Subsequent generations grow up in a world of Facebook bubbles, hashtagged Twitter tweets, trending Reddit topics, viral YouTube videos, filtered Instagram pictures, continuous WhatsApp chats, and addictive TikToks. While surfing the waves of information, they grow an often biased view of themselves, others, and the world.

I view *scientific thinking* to be one of the necessary skills that helps students to support and strengthen resistance to ill-informed decisions, with facts and probable claims, and to fortify their resilience so they know how to bounce back after a disappointing failure to try to find such facts and probable claims. Learning to ask the right questions about claims presented to us, and using a reliable method to assess and diffuse information or wild beliefs, have always been part of an academic education as it grows a *habitus* in students that promotes at least one important aspect of resilience: investigative stamina and overcoming the disappointment of entertaining beliefs that initially simply feel good, but epistemically do not hold water.

I am fully aware that my use of the notion of *resilience* here does not (as such) carry the standard meaning of resilience as a person's ability to bounce back after a jarring setback. Although I would certainly not deny this important aspect of resilience, I do want to add another dimension to the concept. Just as it is important for a person to be able to bounce back after a jarring setback, or nasty push, it is equally important for a person, I think, to be able to bounce back after an attractive but deceiving quick win, or devilish pull. The first prevents you from being pushed down, the second from being pulled down. Resilience thus has (at least) two aspects: it refers to the ability to bounce back from a push, as well as to bounce back from a pull. In training our resilience we train our ability to regain our balance whenever a push or pull threatens to topple us. In this paper, I focus on one possible way to train students to keep their scientific and academic posture in a world of not just nasty pushes, but also devilish pulls, especially in the domain of doxastic management.

My suggestion will be to introduce students to thinking scientifically, not by *instructing* them (as we still tend to do), but rather by letting them *feel and experience* what it means

²²² Cf. Sharot & Garrett (2016).

²²³ Genner & Süss (2017).

to be in the dark about the world, and *discover for themselves* the scientific method and its happy *Aha!*-results. In a Deweyan vein, I use the idea that it is the experience that lasts, not the instruction. That experience in understanding science can be triggered by doing magic tricks in the classroom. Properly supervised, magic seems to trigger in a quite natural way scientific thinking in students, helping them to boost their resilient attitude (bouncing back from misleading doxastic pulls). It is the ‘trick question’ that sets them on the course for science: I show them a trick, they feel confused, and then I ask an epistemological question.

2. Science: What It Is – What It Suggests

Not content with Cartesian, Kantian or Hegelian philosophy, American pragmatism takes Darwin’s hypothesis seriously that man is a naturally evolved organism, *Homo sapiens*, and that this fact is important in understanding what science is. The American pragmatist Charles Peirce describes science as the most refined and empirically reliable way to fixate our beliefs in the face of an irritating living doubt.²²⁴ Surprisingly little can be said about the nature of the scientific way of conducting research, says Peirce. Indeed, any research based on the hypothesis that there is an ‘external permanency’ that can correct our beliefs and that exists independently of what I personally believe, is deemed scientific. Precisely because people are exemplars of the natural species *Homo sapiens*, it is to be expected that not everyone will use this energy-consuming scientific method. Famously, John Dewey, another towering pragmatist, also reverts to the result of Darwin’s research. In a Darwinian light, all humans naturally strive not for knowledge but for a pleasant feeling of understanding.²²⁵ From this perspective, science is a time-consuming and energy-costly successful generator of sustainable and robust, blissful feelings of understanding, usually resulting in effective action and control.²²⁶

Recent results in (neuro)psychology seem to indicate that human beings naturally strive for a feeling of understanding – that is, people return to a soothing state of belief only if they experience a pleasurable feeling of understanding.²²⁷ A personal web of beliefs that generates and nurtures such a feeling of understanding in an individual, offers great resistance to change and is mainly seeking confirmation of held beliefs and evading scientific investigation and inquiry.

Given this view, it is to be expected that students, like all humans, have a strong tendency and disposition to accept authorities, familiar sources, and any belief that simply ‘feels good’. The instinct to believe whatever generates a feeling of understanding, works like a magnet amidst iron filings: it draws the map of beliefs one holds and determines the

²²⁴ Peirce (1877).

²²⁵ Cf. De Regt & Dooremalen (2015).

²²⁶ This section is an extremely brief summary of a book length argument to be found in De Regt, Dooremalen, and Schouten (2021) especially chapter 14.

²²⁷ De Regt & Dooremalen (2015), chapter 3.

doxastic management of one's beliefs. Yet, the feeling of understanding is often a devilish pull: it promises insight but will deliver disappointment if the belief cannot survive the right epistemological light. To bounce back from such a devilish pull, and thus to train students' resilience, we must show them how one might indeed feel attracted to a certain belief and lean toward it, but that there is reason to bounce back from it if it does not stand the scientific test.

So, to strengthen this aspect of their resilience, we need to convince students that we expect them to think scientifically. But rather than *instructing* them to do so, in light of science it is better to let them *experience and discover* this mode of thinking. The pragmatic idea that, *under the right pedagogical conditions*, scientific thinking emerges when people are confronted with a strong, recalcitrant experience, can be used to develop a new way of stimulating scientific thinking in young people: introducing magic tricks in the classroom.

3. Magic Tricks and Scientific Experience²²⁸

The magician is someone who is trained to present us with situations that make us feel that in order to generate a new sense of understanding there is work to do. Students' responses to magic tricks give reason to think that in an academic setting simple magic tricks work like recalcitrant experiences that require you to revise your web of beliefs. Doing scientific research to control and transform a perceived problematic, irritating situation into one where the sense of understanding has been regained is no different than what we do when we try to understand a magic trick. In other words, under the interpretation of science I have presented and stressed a specific aspect of resilience (bouncing back from pulls rather than pushes), puzzling a magic trick is basically training our ability to think scientifically, thus strengthening our resilience.

3.1 Trick example 1

Let me give a first epistemological trick-example (spanning multiple seminars). I have taught myself a number of self-working card tricks plus scripts. Even for those self-working card tricks, the rule is that magicians do not reveal tricks, but this beginner card trick is so simple that we can come a long way without revealing the explanation.

The trick starts with an ordinary deck of playing cards. I give the deck to one of the students with the task to shuffle it. Meanwhile, I tell (for example) how the human brain including its biases is the result of a long evolutionary process or I ask whether people are familiar with visual illusions and to name one. When the shuffling is done, I ask the card shuffler's best friend whether the cards have been shuffled properly. I then show them face up in a fan, and continue the script. The bottom line is that I ask a third student to think

²²⁸ Unfortunately, I do not have the space available here to refer to the increasing amount of psychological research on magic tricks.

hard of “say, the ten of hearts.” I give the instruction to voluntarily say “Stop” while I let closed cards flip by with my left thumb (with my right hand I hold the deck of cards face down). The third student says “Stop”. I turn over the upper selection of cards, place it face up on top of the rest and show the top card. That is not the ten of hearts. I explain what is going on (“You haven’t been mentally focused enough”). I ask the student to say “Stop” one more time while the cards pass my thumb (I go beyond the already turned cards). The student says “Stop” again. I turn the cards over and again it is not the ten of hearts. I admit an error on my part, because the first closed card of the deck is indeed the ten of hearts and I show it. The attentive reader will quickly understand how this very simple self-working card trick works. But the effect on the students is huge: “How is this possible!?” At that point, we start the epistemological discussion.

Often the first reaction is “Do the trick again!” That in itself is an important step to consider. In fact, the trick is now interpreted by the students as basically *a scientific experiment* during which they want to pay much more attention to what is happening! After my philosophy of science interlude, which shows that we have learned in history that replicating and repeating experiments can apparently provide us under certain circumstances with reliable information to understand how something happens, I do the trick again (exactly the same; with the same students, but now they notice that I am calling another card). Then they start making proposals about what is going on: they refrain from the paranormal statement initially suggested by the magician. I ask them why they exclude that possible solution. And I use a second interlude to explain that thinking scientifically does not mean one arrives at *absolute* certain beliefs about ourselves and the world, but that (again, under circumstances) there is a *reasonable* consensus on how things happen, especially when the predictions that are produced by that shared consensus are accurate.

The proposals students offer go in all directions. After introducing *the concept of hypothesis*, I ask for the most likely hypothesis. It is suggested that I made a deal with the students who participate in the trick, but that is countered by the fact that it is a different card the second time, which makes a plot unlikely (although not impossible). We talk about *conspiracy thinking* and there is ample time to investigate when a conspiracy is likely. Card tricks in which “stooges” or accomplices are key can also be used for this – the stooge is only revealed the moment there is absolutely no alternative explanation (a very difficult task!).

In this way, seminars are filled with unraveling a very simple (card) trick in a scientific way. The result is, I suggest, *a natural training in scientific thinking* by which students arm themselves against believing nonsense and learn how to track the truth – thus they overcome disappointing pulls toward beliefs that generate a temporary feeling of understanding, and in the end experience a comfortable, scientifically much more *robust feeling of understanding*.

3.2 Trick example 2

The second trick I perform in a second series of seminars is a lot more complicated and exposes more complex issues of knowledge acquisition. I take a deck of cards and only show to the first row of students that the cards are all different (“Look, all different cards”; which is being confirmed). Then I ask someone to pick one from the complete range of 52 spread out (closed) cards, take a good look at it, and put it under a book or notebook. I put the stack of the now 51 remaining cards back in their box. I return to the student and lead the person forward. I ask the student to look at me, as relaxed as possible, but also to think of the card as hard as possible. I explain how a deck of cards is put together: four suits, numbers, and pictures. I ask the student to say out loud “Hearts, spades, diamonds, clubs”, and when she does, I ask the other students whether they heard it: “The slight hesitation in saying ‘Spades’”. Then I ask the student to count from ten to two and to follow my index finger moving from right to left. I do this again “just to be sure”, now with moving my finger from left to right. This time I ask the audience whether they saw the facial expression and blinking eyes when the student said “Six” and “Seven”. I conclude that the drawn card is either a six or a seven of spades. I admit I must take a guess here and go for the seven of spades. I ask the student to pick up the card to show to the others. It is indeed the seven of spades.

Again we start an epistemological analysis of what happened. The trick is questioned and scientific thinking is trained. The first suggested statement comes from the back of the class: “All cards are seven of spades!” From the first row comes the reply that the cards were different. This situation gives me the opportunity to address aspects of the problem of witnesses (the epistemological *problem of testimony*) in collecting reliable information.

The real difficulty with this trick, however, is that at first glance and given all the “information” that can be found on the Internet, there seems to be the possibility that I do indeed have the ability to guess the student’s card using so-called physical micro-expressions and eye blinking behavior. In this case, this hypothesis quickly emerges in a discussion with students: I have been trained in a special psychological skill. I invite students to learn the skill and replicate the experiment next week.

That week, after hearing about failed attempts by students to replicate the same effect using psychological skills, I deny that I have such skills. The answer is often that students protest: they have seen other illusionists do it exactly this way. Fortunately, the students are now ready to ask how they know those magicians are telling the truth when explaining their own tricks; this initiates (amongst other things) a reflection on real and phony *authorities of knowledge*.

The scientific thinking exercise that unmasks this trick is not easy and often results in a homework assignment that is discussed the week after. Of course, there are also students who want to investigate the deck of cards in more detail, and although that is something that is postponed for another seminar, students are invited to ponder what could possibly

be the case with the deck of cards, evoking the *concept of probability* linked to properties of objects.

The interaction between students is also very interesting in these cases: to what extent does an individual as opposed to a group succeed in explaining such a phenomenon? My experience is that the assignment for students to come up with a solution, based on plausible assumptions, in a scientific way (individually (difficult) or in a group (easier)), given the information at hand, is hard but very educational in the sense that the whole experience is rather intense. This intensity contributes to the learning effect and stresses the scientific and resilient attitude in students.

4. Conclusion: Magic Tricks, Scientific Thinking, and Resilience in Students

It seems that magic tricks can be used *par excellence* to initiate the first exercise in scientific thinking. These form the surprising, irritating, recalcitrant experiences that prompt students to conduct scientific inquiry. A robust feeling of understanding is annoyingly kept at bay and they notice that ignorance is not bliss. They become familiar with what it means to take into account the psychological properties and biases they have. Although these traits often put us on the track of control and successful action in a complex and dangerous world, they simultaneously make us susceptible to numerous illusions and nonsensical beliefs. Thinking about magic tricks prepares them for greater self-awareness and a deeper understanding of what is at stake in the scientific research into ourselves, the world, and the cosmos.

Practice makes perfect here too, because ultimately the training is about the ability to recognize in which situations their judgment is very likely to be scientifically correct, and in which situations they must take a scientific step back to see if their judgment is justifiably true. And this, I suggest, is a skill needed to boost their resilience in the face of attractive pulls that initially generate pleasurable feelings of understanding. They start to recognize *robust* feelings of understanding, and they can handle the disappointment that stems from the fact that the pull and leaning towards an attractive belief does not always stand scientific testing. In that case, the belief must be rejected – painful as that may feel.

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IV.

Empowering the Resilient Society

Test Your Own Resilience

Towards a Glossy-Style Resilience Self-Test for Young People

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Do you Know Your Own Resilience?

Resilience research and social programs for young people to foster resilience are widespread. Yet there is little knowledge on how young people themselves perceive resilience, which can be defined as the ability to cope or bounce back from adversity in a healthy way. This is surprising, considering calls from both science and society to give greater voice to young people in research and intervention development.²³⁰ How does the term and concept of resilience relate to them? Do they have good insight into their own resilience, are they able to recognize and identify areas of need? Different scientific scales to measure resiliency in young people are available. Yet there is no ‘golden standard’ amongst these measures,²³¹ nor one that aims to specifically fit the world of young people. Therefore, we developed a “glossy-style” resilience self-test that has scientific roots yet takes into account young people and youth professionals’ perception of resilience. The test is suitable for young people approximately aged between 13-25 to use on their own but can be exploited in for instance youth work or student support/counseling settings as well. The test aims to provide insight into young people’s own developments in resilience and to increase awareness of individual strengths and needs concerning aspects of resilience. It consists of a series of questions and a result in the form of a provisional four-tiered typology that relates to the different elements and levels of resilience.

²²⁹ This work is part of the research line “Youth in a resilient society” of the Dutch National Research Agenda (Nationale Wetenschapsagenda), financed by the Dutch Research Council (NWO). The project is executed in collaboration between Tranzo and Telos/PON. The Province of Noord-Brabant and R’newt, the largest youth care organization in the city of Tilburg, were also involved. We wish to acknowledge Koen Vinckx MSc., the main researcher on the project at Telos/PON during the time of the study.

²³⁰ Larsson *et al.* (2018).

²³¹ Windle *et al.* (2011).

Resilience is important for all children and young people because it is part of achieving and maintaining good health and wellbeing. Everyone is resilient, albeit in varying degrees. We particularly involved vulnerable young people in the development and pilot testing of our self-test.²³² Vulnerable in this context refers to a diminished capacity of an individual to cope with and recover from the impact of uncertainty, setbacks, or even trauma. Although our test is partly based on the input of vulnerable youth in particular, it intends to be an easy-to-administer tool applicable to the majority of all young people. This can range from those facing serious problems like hardship, abuse, and neglect to those with serious but less severe struggles such as family conflict, peer pressure, and academic stress. The current COVID-19 pandemic also highlights that resilience cuts across social positions: it is a source of tremendous stress and adversity for many young people, students as well as other youth, during a crucial stage of their life.²³³ An accessible, user-friendly self-test can be a first step for students to check and evaluate their resilience, and help them to get through adversity or seek support.

Steps in the Development of the Test

As there is no ‘golden standard’ for a self-test or even one on how to measure youth resilience,²³⁴ we followed several analytical steps during the project’s process. First, we executed a literature review to identify the scales currently present in the literature on youth resilience. Next, a classification of relevant resilience items from existing scales was made together with youth workers, followed by building and testing a draft typology based on a large survey of young people. Finally, based on further testing with vulnerable youth and youth workers, we presented an abbreviated version of the self-test.

1. Literature Review on Youth Resilience Scales

For our literature review of youth resilience scales, two inclusion criteria were set. First, scales must have an explicit focus on young people (approximate age ≤ 25). Second, scales should include factors of resilience that cover both the individual, social, and contextual levels. Here, we follow the authors stating that resilience is not just an individual internal trait. Others (parents, peers, teachers) and the feeling of belonging to a wider community/ social context also play an important role.²³⁵ Individual factors include personality traits such as self-reliance, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. Social factors refer to social, parental and peer support, trust, and feelings of connectedness or loneliness. Contextual factors address being part of a context, e.g. religion, school, culture, and participation at the local community level.

²³² In this case young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) and youth with an autism spectrum disorder that regularly visit youth work at R-Newt, Tilburg.

²³³ OECD (2020).

²³⁴ Dagdeviren *et al.* (2016); Cosco *et al.* (2017).

²³⁵ Masten & Obradović (2006); Benzie & Mychasiuk (2009); Schafer *et al.* (2009); Zimmerman *et al.* (2013); Sanders *et al.* (2015); Van der Haar *et al.* (2018).

The review revealed that not many resilience scales target young people,²³⁶ yet some are used frequently with adolescents.²³⁷ Based on our criteria, eight relevant scales emerged from the literature. Of these, the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC)²³⁸ and the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)²³⁹ are the most widely used and recommended.²⁴⁰ In addition, the 28-item CYRM (Child and Youth Resilience Measure)²⁴¹ is popular and explicitly addresses individual, social, and contextual aspects of resilience. Other scales include the Ego Resilience Scale (ER89),²⁴² The Protective Factors for Resilience scale (PFRS),²⁴³ and the Resilience Scale (RS14).²⁴⁴ Next, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)²⁴⁵ is a widely used instrument in practice, also in the Netherlands. Finally, the Academic Resilience Scale (ARS-30) is a relevant, recently developed scale specifically aimed at students yet also considered relevant for youth in general.²⁴⁶

The researcher mapped all items from these eight scales into a clear overview, resulting in 200 items summarized in individual, social, and contextual factors. By far most items measure individual level resilience and as expected, many items overlap or are interrelated. For instance, the individual level construct “self-reliance” is part of almost all scales but its conceptualization varies considerably.

2. Consultation with Youth Workers and Young People

The overview of items from the eight scales from the literature review served as input for a group interview with eight youth workers from R-Newt, Tilburg. Led by the main researcher, the youth workers first reflected together on their conceptual understanding of resilience and whether different aspects of the construct from the literature review matched that perspective. They indeed recognized the main constructs (i.e. self-reliance, dealing with setbacks/changes, et cetera). However, they also indicated that they missed what they considered an important element of youth resilience, namely media literacy and appropriate media engagement which was then included.

In the second part of the group discussion, the youth workers focused on forming a short-list of items which best captures what they perceived most relevant, important, and appealing aspects of resilience for young people. This resulted in a reduction of the initial 200 items to a list of 63 items. The next round, eliminating vague, unclear statements and doubles, reduced the list to 40 items. These 40 items then formed the draft questionnaire, covering ten individual level constructs (see figure 1), four social level constructs, and one construct on the contextual aspect of resilience. Both in existing scales in the literature as

²³⁶ Luthar & Cicchetti (2000); Windle *et al.* (2011); Aiena *et al.* (2015); Gibson (2016); Vannest *et al.* (2019).

²³⁷ Jørgensen & Seedat (2008); Pritzker & Minter (2014).

²³⁸ Connor & Davidson (2003).

²³⁹ Smith *et al.* (2008).

²⁴⁰ Windle *et al.* (2011).

²⁴¹ Ungar & Liebenberg (2011).

²⁴² Block & Kremen (1996).

²⁴³ Harms *et al.* (2017).

²⁴⁴ Wagnild & Young (1993).

²⁴⁵ Goodman (2001); Ungar & Liebenberg (2011).

²⁴⁶ Cassidy (2016).

in our shortlist, individual level items of resilience are thus still dominant. All constructs contain two to four items. The draft questionnaire was pilot-tested and discussed by six youths and youth workers during a regular meeting at R-Newt. This resulted in only minor adjustments to the exact wording.

Figure 1. Individual, social, and contextual constructs that are part of the items list for the typology construction

Individual level	Social level	Contextual level
1. Self-reliance	1. Togetherness (belonging to and knowing people)	1. Being part of a context/ community
2. Willingness to change	2. Peer support	
3. Dealing with setbacks/ changes	3. Family support	
4. Persistence/severance		
5. Self-reflection/willingness to seek help		
6. Emotional stability/ response to adversity		
7. Social skills and behavior		
8. Restlessness/restless mind		
9. Hardiness/mental toughness		
10. Media literacy/safe use of new media		

3. Survey and a Latent Class Typology

After pilot testing, the 40 ‘resilience statements’ questionnaire was administered online among 1.050 young people aged 13 to 25. Based on the survey data, first the number of underlying constructs was determined (variables that fit together under a reduced number of underlying constructs). Exploratory factor analysis resulted in five factors: ‘social network’ ($\alpha=0.81$), ‘emotional response’ ($\alpha=0.83$), ‘self-reflection’ ($\alpha=0.64$), ‘family support’ ($\alpha=0.81$), and self-confidence’ ($\alpha=0.62$). Second, latent class analysis was executed to determine the optimal subgroup structure²⁴⁷. Based on this analysis, we distinguished four subgroups of young people that have a lot in common with each other within one particular type but differ in several aspects from the other types. The ‘working names’ are ‘very resilient’ (59% of the young people), ‘resilient’ (25%), ‘partly resilient’ (15%), ‘not resilient’ (1%). The types are characterized as follows:

²⁴⁷ Vermunt & Magidson (2005); Mathijssen *et al.* (2012).

How resilient are you?

The **'very resilient'**, type 1 often lives within a traditional family and is very well connected to family and friends. They score above average on self-confidence and sense of control. They do not panic often or become discouraged when bad things happen, can let go of things easily, and are above average ready for change. They score lower on emotional response (i.e. panic, discouraged) but are less inclined to ask for feedback and think less about personal strengths and weaknesses.

Type 2 **'resilient'** youth have a smaller but present social network (family and friends). Accordingly, they feel safe with and accepted by their social network. They score high on self-confidence and sense of control of the future. Contrary to type 1, type 2 is very self-critical, asks for feedback and considers personal strengths and weaknesses. Also contrary to type 1, they tend to panic or get discouraged when something bad happens. They cannot let things go quickly and find it more difficult to deal with criticism. They also do not like change. Both types 1 and 2 on average are older (18-25) and higher educated, yet boys are overrepresented in type 1 and girls in type 2.

Type 3 **'partly resilient'** youth lack a strong, supporting social network and do not really feel that they belong. In addition, their scores on self-confidence and self-reflection are below average. They do not often ask for feedback and seldom consider personal strengths and weaknesses. They have a high emotional response, tend to panic quickly or get discouraged, cannot let things go quickly, and find it more difficult to deal with criticism. They do not like change and tend to stay under the radar i.e. are not very pronounced. In their free time, they are less often a member of an association or club compared to types 1 and 2.

Finally, type 4 **'not resilient'** youth do not feel socially connected to family or friends. They generally experience low levels of self-confidence and feel out of control of the future. Also characterizing is a slight sense of self-reflection (they not ask for feedback or think about strengths and weaknesses). Yet, these young people do not quickly panic or get discouraged when something negative happens. They can let things go quickly and can easily deal with criticism. This may also reflect indifference: type 4 youth seem to react flat and do not really express feelings. Finally, this type of youth is participating in society mostly by providing informal help. Both youth types 3 and 4 are often between 13 and 18 years old and less educated compared to the more resilient types. They relatively often live with one parent.

4. Consultation with Youth Workers and Youth on a Quick Version of the Self-Test

Up to this stage of the project, we identified and used a potential set of 40 items for the design of our typology/self-test. Since this is too many and complicated for a practical self-test, we ended with a final step of providing more substantive characterization to the types

and the construction of an abbreviated self-test. The main inspiration for this step came from a final workshop with two youth workers and four young people (15-27) at R-Newt. By using creative conversation techniques, a first translation was made of the scientific language of the tool into a language appropriately fitting youth and their daily-life context. During this session, a YouTube film was shown to introduce the theme of resilience,²⁴⁸ connecting the concepts to the real-life experiences of the young people. The young participants then reflected on the video while the researcher noted down the words they used to describe what they saw. By then, the five factors (self-confidence, emotional response, self-reflection, family support, and social network) were introduced and illustrated. Next, the youth were challenged to build a character around the four types from the typology by using creative forms (which celebrities, cartoon characters, et cetera, does this person remind you of, how does this person spend his/her free time?). On Pinterest boards, they pinned images belonging to the types. The session ended with the question: which resilience type do you think you are? The youth could relate well to the types and describe themselves, for example:

"In the beginning, I was type 3. Now I am more type 2. At first, I found it difficult to make friends and to talk to people. I started bullying people because I was being bullied myself. People did not like me then, while it was my reaction to how they treated me. I was not accepted then. Now I can talk to people more easily and deal with others in a good way."

This resulted in the following abbreviated version of the test:

Figure 2: Resilience self-test: Examine the following statements and indicate which option best describes or applies to you.

I feel safe when I'm with my parents/care-givers I know my family will help me if I need help	If something bothers me, the problem constantly plays on my mind I can't handle criticism from others
I feel like I belong with my friends I feel supported by my friends There are plenty of people I feel close to There are plenty of people I can fall back on in case of trouble	I often ask for feedback to improve myself I often think about my strengths and weaknesses
I usually panic when something nasty happens I quickly get discouraged when something doesn't work out I find it hard to accept annoying situations I'm brooding a lot	If I become successful, I would remain myself If I become successful, I won't behave differently What happens to me in the future depends largely on myself

²⁴⁸ Fragments of a Dutch documentary on social pressure among youth, NOS, 2017. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fE_UgoikTY&feature=youtu.be

I totally agree (4 points) – I agree moderately (3 points) - I agree slightly (2 points) – I

Disagree (1 point).

Per battery of statements, 3-4 points (type 1), 5-6 points (type 2), 7-9 points (type 3) or 10-12 points (type 4) can be scored. With which type do you show the most resemblance? The most common scored type is your dominant type!

Finally

In this essay, we reported on the development of a 'glossy-style' resilience self-test for vulnerable youth that provides a four-class typology of resiliency varying from 'very resilient' to 'not resilient'. The test has scientific roots yet matches the experience, language, and daily life of young people and youth workers as it was developed in co-creation with them. By doing so, we followed a recommendation from the literature to develop our own instrument to measure resilience for use(rs) in practice, based on professionals and young people's perspective on resilience and items of interest²⁴⁹. The final test consists of 17-statements with the answers adding up to one of the four 'types'.

In the project that we reported upon, first steps were taken to develop a glossy-style resilience self-test for young people. Follow-up steps are needed to develop the test to its full potential. For instance, the types should be assigned with strength-based substantive names and the test needs to be translated into a visually attractive online tool in order to increase its user-friendliness. Finally, it is desirable to test, improve, and, when applicable, expand the usability of the test. For instance, R-Newt Tilburg is developing a 'portfolio' for school dropouts as an alternative to present their skills and capacities to, for instance, future employers. The resilience self-test is considered to be a potential valuable part of such a portfolio. In addition, the test can be implemented and tested in other relevant settings, such as academia. After all, young people face a variety of challenges and although the test can also be applicable and helpful for students to know and develop their resilience, further research would need to establish whether the test in its current form has indeed relevance for students or would require adjustment.

²⁴⁹ Ungar & Liebenberg (2011); Vannest *et al.* (2019).

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Supporting Solid Steps from Higher Education into Sustainable Jobs

Sonja Bekker

Introduction

The current corona crisis seems to be a stress test for the resilience of our society. Having tested the capacity of our health care system first, it has moved on to test our economic and social systems. As such, the crisis exposes much of the cracks and loopholes that were already present before the crisis. This might also be true for our higher education system. While teachers have been making a rapid change to on-line teaching, students have been challenged with ‘learning from a distance’. Simultaneously, students have seen their future perspectives going from excellent to unsure in a matter of months, at least in terms of their likeliness of getting a job soon after graduation. This essay looks at the transition of students into their first jobs and outlines the obstacles and opportunities. It identifies what young people need to become and remain resilient in modern labor markets, and indicates how higher education might support their students.

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Transitions to and at the Labor Market

Success in higher education from a societal perspective may be defined as students being able to finish their studies and to take a step into a good job with career prospects. This idea of success has been defined increasingly as a need to be ‘excellent’. In contrast to the drive for excellence in education, modern labor markets do not always offer ‘excellent’ jobs. Labor markets have changed fundamentally over the past decades. The vast growth of temporary jobs and solo self-employment has made the labor market much more flexible, or even ‘turbulent’.²⁵⁰ Flexibility means that young people no longer flow from school

²⁵⁰ Bekker & Pop (2020).

into a 'job-for-life'. Rather, their first job is temporary, which means that the job has a defined end date. Although such a temporary job may act as a stepping-stone into stable employment, the growing turbulence suggests that this is not always the case. Turbulence refers to frequent transitions in the labor market, going from temporary job to temporary job or from job-to-unemployment-to-job.²⁵¹ Thus, school-leavers frequently hop between internships, temporary agency work, self-employment, temporary jobs, and short-term unemployment, and do not always have the option to choose their pathway or career.²⁵² Therefore, the transition from school-to-work should not be seen as a single moment in time.²⁵³ Rather, the first step after school is the beginning of a transition period where multiple labor market states can occur, reoccur and co-occur.²⁵⁴ Societal and political debates should critically assess the degree of flexibility an economy and society requires. At the same time, both students and higher education should deal with this labor market reality, including its risks and opportunities. The many steps students are likely to take before getting a stable career, means that success will not always come instantly. This also questions whether 'excellence' in education is the only ticket to success. The labor market reality requires more patience, yet also gives more leeway for browsing through several jobs before needing to commit long-term to a profession.

The context in which students move from school to work matters. Labor market institutes are able to support young people.²⁵⁵ Also higher education institutes might prepare students for the labor market. On the one hand, students should learn how to cope with the fluid demands of modern labor markets and not get discouraged if a 'good' job is not landed immediately. Moreover, they should learn how to benefit from flexibility, making sure that a chain of different work experiences with different employers builds their competences and makes them move into better positions. Such virtuous or inclusive transitions are to be preferred over transitions that set young people on a pathway to exclusion or long-term insecurity.²⁵⁶ On the other hand, higher education institutes could offer support to students, by giving them the skills they need to navigate modern labor markets, and by offering them some form of after-care. The lessons from the past economic crisis (2008-2014) and the related spike in youth unemployment, may inform higher education on how to offer labor market support. The lessons also shed light on the role of other relevant labor market institutes.²⁵⁷ This essay summarises these lessons.

²⁵¹ Bekker & Pop (2020).

²⁵² Hartlapp and Schmidt (2008); O'Reilly *et al.* (2018).

²⁵³ Bültmann *et al.* (2020).

²⁵⁴ Bültmann *et al.* (2020), 180.

²⁵⁵ Marsden (2010); Schmid (2015).

²⁵⁶ Schmid (2010).

²⁵⁷ Bekker *et al.* (2020).

Support While Being in Education

The most important role of education might be seen as developing students' knowledge, skills, and competences while enabling them to graduate. This is certainly relevant from a labor market perspective. School-leavers with a diploma have much better chances to navigate the labor market and remain employed (CBS 2019). In keeping young people at school and encouraging them to take their courses and to graduate, higher education thus has an important role in preventing youth unemployment.²⁵⁸ In the past few years, the Netherlands has developed new policies to reduce early school-leaving, making sure that pupils will at least get a starter qualification.²⁵⁹ This starter qualification level is generally seen as a minimum requirement for having reasonably good labor market prospects. Most of the efforts to reduce early school-leaving have been made at the intermediate professional education level (*MBO*), where schools cooperate with municipalities to track down and support young people who were no longer attending school regularly.²⁶⁰ The programs also have preventative elements, from which higher education could learn. These include coaches for young adults who dropped out of school, special groups or classes for youngsters who have doubts about their study choice, guidance in career choices, assistance in finding a job or internship (also for drop-outs), and additional support for pupils who are over-burdened or vulnerable (Rijksoverheid 2020). Also in Dutch higher education, the percentage of students who quit their studies or switch to a new study is relatively high (ResearchNed 2017; Inspectie van het Onderwijs 2009). The reasons for switching studies or leaving higher education vary considerably. These include studies that do not meet the student's expectations, a lack of motivation, or not feeling at home (ResearchNed 2017). Here, universities could play a role in making sure that students feel at home, or make a good move to another study or a job.

Apart from making sure that students graduate, higher education could act as a shelter in times of economic downturn and high youth unemployment. Youth unemployment is often the first one to rise in times of crisis, but also the first one to go down when the economy recovers. The corona crisis is no exception to this rule. In March 2020 the number of Dutch jobs decreased by 23,000, these being predominantly young people's jobs (age 15-20) and temporary or on-call jobs (CBS 2020). By postponing graduation or doing an additional master study, students can delay moving into the labor market and wait until times improve. Such studying in 'slow motion' might not be calculated as a great 'success' in terms of efficiency. Usually, higher education gets credits for navigating students through their programs within a set time. However, for the individual student, it might be a clever strategy to avoid becoming unemployed simply by remaining a student. This strategy transforms into lower youth unemployment at a societal level. Meanwhile, an extra study or additional courses build students' 'human capital', and is therefore not a waste at all.

²⁵⁸ Eichhorst *et al.* 2016.

²⁵⁹ In the Netherlands, this is having a diploma at least level 2 of intermediate professional education, or a high-school diploma at *HAVO* or *VWO* level.

²⁶⁰ Rijksoverheid 2020.

Even better, additional time spent in education might be invested in doing an internship. This contributes to job prospects in the medium term. To explore the latter: vocational education and training (VET) with apprenticeships, or any other initiative that strengthens the link between education, training, and work, benefits the step from school-to-work.²⁶¹ Internships allow students to gain work experience in ‘real’ jobs and with ‘real’ employers while being in school. It gives them relevant skills, such as proper perceptions, attitudes, and behavior regarding work, and also gives them access to a professional network.²⁶² Additionally, job search assistance often improves the transition from school-to-work.²⁶³ At Tilburg University, the Career Centre offers such guidance in finding a job or internship. As students may get this support up until one year after graduation, the university also gives some form of after-care, from which students may benefit greatly.

Support from Labor Market Institutes

Despite youth unemployment currently increasing, most students still find a job after graduation. However, each time people have to make a ‘transition’ to a (new) job, they run the risk of being unsuccessful, and become unemployed. In statistics, unemployed or inactive young people are labeled as NEETs: young people neither in employment nor in education. Within the group of NEETs, seven percent have a high level of education (data 2017 for the Netherlands; CBS 2018). This group is likely to grow given the uncertain economic prospects. Labor market institutes might support these young adults in moving back to school, a job, or an internship. Among the success factors of fighting youth unemployment are personal support within reintegration trajectories, and cooperation between education institutes, employers, and local support services. Moreover, offers of support should be of good quality, matching the capacities and of interest to young adults.

Personal and tailored job finding support is relevant because the group of young unemployed is quite diverse, including differences in educational attainment, (long-term) unemployed, family background, ethnicity, nationality, sex, or health.²⁶⁴ It is therefore relevant to take the social context of youth into account when trying to understand their (failed) transition from school-to-work.²⁶⁵ For instance, young people with mental health and behavioral problems have more difficulties with making the step from school-to-work.²⁶⁶ If you know which groups have the highest risks of becoming unemployed, you can improve policies by targeting these to specific groups.²⁶⁷ This also means that having ‘one-size-fits-all’ programs are less likely to reach their goals. Among successful ingredients

²⁶¹ See, e.g., Eichhorst *et al.* (2016); Tamesberger *et al.* (2014).

²⁶² Chen (2011).

²⁶³ Hadjivassiliou (2017).

²⁶⁴ See, e.g., Yates & Payne (2006).

²⁶⁵ Bynner and Parsons (2002).

²⁶⁶ Rodwell *et al.* (2018).

²⁶⁷ Eichhorst *et al.* (2016).

of reintegration, are personalized counselling, mentoring and on-going support.²⁶⁸ These strongly resemble the success factors of preventing pupils from dropping out of school. A mentor helps young adults to navigate the various (and often complex) administrative systems or to deal with labor market realities. A mentor also offers support throughout the intervention. Although such support seems most needed for vulnerable youth, school-leavers from higher education might benefit from support as well. For instance, mentors could point out job opportunities or introduce them to a network of employers. This also relates to the key lesson that an offer to young unemployed should be of good quality.

Research shows that the cooperation between educational institutes, employers, and local support services (e.g. Public Employment Services, municipalities, social services and health services, trade unions, NGOs, and youth organizations) is beneficial for several reasons. First, cooperation prevents that young people get lost between different policy domains, it avoids service fragmentation and enables integrated services.²⁶⁹ Within such a partnership, organizations can also cooperate to reach out to youth. For instance, if a graduate does not know that Tilburg University offers labor market support in the first year after graduation, it would be helpful if the youth desk of the municipality refers this student to the university's service. A successful example of cooperation in order to offer students work experience after graduation is the Work Experience Grant (WEG).²⁷⁰ This is a Dutch program aiming to improve the job prospects of young adults by providing wage subsidy to increase the number of paid traineeships. It moreover aims to improve the match between demand and supply of traineeships at a regular employer. In practice, the WEG reached predominantly youth with a high level of education. Youth are facilitated to find their own traineeship for a minimum of 32 hours per week and a maximum period of six months. Between June 2014 and May 2017, 2,839 young people participated in a longitudinal study on the effects of the WEG.²⁷¹ One year after completion of their traineeships, 81,9% were employed, most of which had a job that matched education level, skills and also offered good career prospects.²⁷² Factors that predicted positive employment outcomes are quite similar to the lessons learned from the past crisis: the youngster should find the internship relevant (i.e. a good offer), have active job-seeking behavior, and obtain the support of a coach or supervisor. Additionally, young adults with higher social capital and the ability to be adaptable were more likely to secure a job. This latter quality of adaptability could be developed within the scope of higher education as well.

Lastly, success factors do not include the supply-side of labor only, i.e. the young people. They also include the demand-side: the number and quality of jobs that are offered in the labor market. In times of high unemployment, one could think of creating extra jobs for young adults. This could be done via specific taxation or social premium measures that

²⁶⁸ Hadjivassiliou (2017).

²⁶⁹ Hadjivassiliou (2017).

²⁷⁰ See: <http://www.startersbeurs.nl/>; Bekker *et al.* (2020).

²⁷¹ Bekker *et al.* (2020).

²⁷² There is no control group in this study, meaning that there is no data on similar youth who did not follow the WEG program.

facilitate the hiring of young people. Moreover, social partners may conclude collective labor agreements with plans to create additional internships or jobs for youth. Lastly, the rationale of having turbulent labor markets should be reassessed, including a fair analysis of positive and negative aspects of certain forms of flexibility. If young adults and other groups of workers have a better outlook on stable jobs, recurring unemployment might be prevented, giving better opportunities to set course on a 'high road' to better jobs instead of getting on a track that leads to long-term insecurity and exclusion.²⁷³

Conclusion

The transition of students into their first jobs is often a long-lasting transition period where young people interchange between different temporary jobs, unemployment, self-employment, and temporary agency work. The corona crisis worsens the job perspective of young adults. It is therefore of key relevance to discuss the position of young people in our societies, for instance critically assessing the limits of turbulent labor markets and the degree of stability needed to contribute to the resilience of workers. The present economic situation has already resulted in discussions on inclusive income security for all types of workers while limiting types of flexible work that undermine minimal standards.²⁷⁴

Higher education can support students by making them more resilient to modern labor markets. This may be done in different ways, both by preparing students for and supporting them in making steps to the labor market, and in cooperating with local organizations that deal with youth. Luckily the best prevention of unemployment is making sure that students graduate. Having a diploma at higher education level helps tremendously in getting and keeping employment. Still, higher education could offer additional support, for instance via career and study guidance, by facilitating internships, and by building skills to navigate modern labor markets. Also offering some form of after-care for recent graduates is a welcome support. Moreover, in times of crisis, the university could act as a shelter against unemployment by keeping students in education until the economy improves. As such, building youths' resilience and offering support are elements that strengthen each other. This synergy is also visible when young adults become unemployed. Lessons learned on lowering youth unemployment describe a strong combination of offering support and making sure that young people get the skills and network they need to move into the labor market. Higher education could play a role by keeping in touch with recent graduates and by forming strong bonds with other local organisations that support young adults.

²⁷³ See, e.g., Unt and Gabel (2018); Bekker & Leschke (2020).

²⁷⁴ Bekker & Leschke (2020).

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A TILBURG UNIVERSITY ESSAY: SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: BUILDING RESILIENCE IN STUDENTS

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