



Resiliency:

The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness.

## Failure and Adversity

Sense of Self

P. 116/117

We don't have a contained sense of self, which we carry around and put into play during social interactions, our self emerges as a consequence of our interactions with others. Mead says the self is:

A process in which the individual is continually adjusting himself in advance of the situation to which he belongs, and reacting back on it. So that the "I and me," thinking, this conscious adjustment, becomes then a part of the whole social process and makes a much more highly organized society possible.

Professor Jordan Peterson says:

So the idea is that there's more to you than you know and the way you call it out is by challenging yourself voluntarily in as many directions as you can manage and that's a real thing...it's actually how you learn to cope in the world.

This was our goal, to challenge the students in all directions, to help them cope in the world. From my own experience, I saw quiet students find their voice during the projects. It was a struggle at first, like most new things, it feels uncomfortable and we want to repel anything which moves us away from our comfortable positions. From the resulting development of these students, it appears TPP's might just be about the most powerful learning tool in the box.

## Rites of Passage

P. 117

A "rite of passage" was provided for students when they reached fourteen. This tradition saw the students spend a week together on the west coast of Scotland. This wasn't a week of comfort and organised events, it entailed difficult conditions in cold weather and required the students to exhibit resilience and resourcefulness. The students were taught survival skills, how to find food and water, build a fire and find shelter for a few days, then they were taken to small islands and dropped off in small groups and left there for two days with no supplies.

Everyone, especially parents were nervous about this trip. Although managed by professionals, there was a slightly dangerous element and the first time all of the students would be in this situation.

When the week was over, they returned home looking different, an air of quiet confidence definitely swirled around them as they took their bags off the coach.

## **Order & Chaos**

### **P. 45**

I believe the secret to projects is the freedom to be able to meet the need for certainty, structure and familiarity, whilst also meeting the desire for uncertainty, adventure and potential. The balance of order and chaos.

Too much order and the students are comfortable and bored, too much chaos and the students are uncomfortable and overwhelmed. An attachment to too much order stifles creativity, an attachment to too much chaos is unproductive.

## **Frustration Phobic**

### **P. 128**

Adam Phillips is a British psychotherapist and essayist. He talks about how frustration is a state of optimism, a belief in the future and hope for a different situation, something that will ease our state of frustration. He tells us:

If we are frustration phobic, then we won't find what we want... If we live in a culture that discourages states of anticipation or that assumes that we can't bear it or it will drive us mad or we'll get too anxious then what that means is all the imaginative space that frustration opens up is foreclosed.

Phillips thinks we find it difficult to see children become frustrated because we don't like to be hated by them. He believes the rewards are there if we can bear to leave them alone, for one thing, they'll become more imaginative. He says that children need a language to make frustration more "alluring and interesting and intriguing, rather than just terrible or frightening." He also says that frustration is needed to help us think and should be taught in schools."

## **Adversity Through Disruption**

### **P. 335**

The Disruptors within TPP's were the troublesome knowledge, the problems to solve, which the facilitators would inject into the project as a major disrupting force. This force would throw the student's plans into chaos and had an effect on the students, which was similar to the reactions that the researchers found in the behaviour of rats, the "sudden shocks to enhance the ability to emotionally cope with unexpected stressful situations." And, like Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration, the ensuing anxiety tension and loss of control, do not cause the student to retreat, but to face the challenges and burn away old ways of thinking and behaviour, culminating in emotional growth, self-awareness, empathy and compassion.

## Play

### P. 261

In a paper entitled ‘The Function of Play in the Development of the Social Brain,’ the authors studied the behaviour of rats. They pose the question “Why do animals play?” Their findings show that play is multifunctional and how play early on in life helps you in later life. From the paper:

We think it important to note that because play fighting is an inherently social behavior, when juvenile rats do *not* do it, they become socially incompetent as adults.

If they do not engage in play fighting, they overreact to social contact, they are hyper defensive, and are more likely to escalate encounters to aggression. They fail to act appropriately, may be humble in the presence of other, more dominant rats or don’t have the strategies to avoid annoying the more dominant rats.

A really interesting observation about this “loss of control” comes from another paper entitled ‘Mammalian Play: Training for the Unexpected.’ This paper reveals the results of observing rats for the specific identification of noting how rats will “put themselves into disadvantageous positions and situations.” Apparently they will deliberately engage in risky maneuvers during play (such as standing on another rat with all four feet) to “increase the versatility of movements used to recover from sudden shocks such as loss of balance and falling over, and to enhance the ability to cope emotionally with unexpected stressful situations.” This practice of control in stressful or surprising situations allows them to practice for real-life situations in the future, where a big emotional overreaction could increase and inflame a dangerous situation or an interaction of conflict. The paper says these include locomotor shocks such as falling over, being knocked over, pinned down etc., or psychological shocks, such as facing threatening stimuli or experiencing a sudden reversal in dominance.

The information in this paper aligns with the Theory of Positive Disintegration, I wrote about at the beginning of the book which puts forward the theory that anxiety and tension, which are often viewed as negative states, are actually positive and necessary elements of healthy development. And that behaviour and character transforms through emotional growth, which is a process beginning with instinctual egocentrism and culminates in self-awareness, empathy and compassion.

## Public Speaking

### P. 110

Lisa had sailed through phase one and managed phase two, but then became really worried about being on trial and speaking in front of others in the final phase. The students were not supposed to read lines from notes during the trial, the whole idea of TPP’s is to respond to questions, to be ready to restructure your thoughts and defend your argument with only minimal glances at the notes.

Lisa asked me if her notes could be read out by someone else, a stand in? Maybe “Henrietta” was too upset by the death of her mother to attend the trial? I didn’t think that was the answer.

## Antifragility

### P. 211

In Nassim Taleb's book, *Antifragile: Things that Gain from Disorder*, he writes about the concept of "antifragility," a term he coined to describe the opposite of fragility. The opposite of fragile is not, as Taleb tells us, being unbreakable, this implies resistance but not change, things stay the same. Antifragility, like bones, or the immune system strengthen under the effects of stressors, volatility and change. The antifragile thrives on uncertainty and disorder and uses this to grow.

The projects offer not just immersion, but immersive developmental and growth through the application of "antifragility."

Being antifragile sounds similar to the resilience and robustness qualities which are so often chased in education, however, antifragility is not this.

To understand the difference we can look to Greek mythology. The Phoenix rises from the ashes, regenerates and renews, it is robust and resilient. However, the multi-headed Hydra, a dragon-like water serpent takes this one step further. If the Hydra suffers the misfortune of having one of its heads lopped off, it responds by re-growing two new heads. It not only survives defeat, it is strengthened by it.

That's the difference between robustness and antifragility.

## Snowflakes

### P. 215

Snowflakes are seen to display the antithesis of magnanimous qualities. They can be timid, over-sensitive, lack courage, avoid taking risks and have no resilience to adversity. However, they can also be quick to take offense, intolerant to disagreement and can become angry and vocal in a group.

Young people should feel comfortable putting their opinions forward. They should be open to other people challenging those opinions. They should be able to deal with conflict in a rational and mature way. "Freedom of inquiry" and "productive disagreement" should definitely be a part of a young person's development.

### P. 221

What softens the steel and fortifies the fragility within the snowflake? Not teachers, not parents, but peers. In the projects, peers restrict each other's snowflake sensibilities with their awareness of the two systems of thinking.

### P. 222

We need to sort out the snowflakes, for their own good. We should be aiming to raise and educate "anti-fragile hailstones." Thunderstorms lift hailstones, through strong up-drafts, to the top of clouds. When they collide with super-cooled water they develop extra layers and grow stronger. An increasing intensity of the updraft, causes the hailstones to become larger and stronger. They are antifragile.