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Promoting Resilience through Technology, Art and a Child Rights-Based Approach

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Abstract

The concept of resilience is widely used in many fields as a frame of reference. It is generally understood to be a capacity which a person, group, subject or system can develop when facing a situation affecting integrity, enabling them to hold up, recover and come out of it stronger. Resilience is considered as a cross-sectional study in which more and more areas of knowledge find a positive way to address and raise new studies. This article considers the concept of resilience from an ecological perspective and looks at how it can be promoted and developed through technology, art and a child rights-based approach. Finally, some conclusions and suggestions are made to continue the study of resilience.

Keywords: resilience; ecological framework; technology; rights-based approach.

Introduction

Resilience is an easy concept to understand but difficult to define (Osborn, 1994). According to Windle (2011) its complexity is due in part, to the fact that resilience is studied in scientific disciplines as diverse as psychology, economy, ecology or medicine. This is also recognized by authors in other areas (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Elrkin, 2003; Haskett, Nears, Ward, & McPherson, 2006; Kapeln, 2002; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 2007; Walker, Salt, & Reid, 2006; Yamada & Castro, 2010).

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The authors of each discipline have tried to define resilience using different concepts as a reference framework for their studies. This means that there is no single way to understand resilience, even within the same area. According to Manciaux (2004), these definitions often have only a weak consensus. The nuances that are added are substantial and the many words used for their delimitation in different fields of study are synonymous or very similar (Kaplan, 2002). These different approximations and nuances within the same scientific discipline lead to inconsistencies in concepts linked to resilience itself (Windle, 2011).

However, in whichever the discipline resilience is studied, the definition used or the approach adopted by the study, the phenomenon resilience refers fundamentally to the same idea. Resilience is a reference framework to describe the positive aspects and mechanisms in an individual, group, material or system which, when facing a destabilizing and disruptive situation affecting their integrity and stability, enables them to hold up, cope, recover and come out strengthened by it.

It is also agreed that the phenomenon can be looked at from an ecological point of view, meaning it can be used to refer to both individual characteristics and those of the context, as well as all the mechanisms used by the internal and external assets when facing adversity (Ungar, 2011). However, there are also other factors in people's lives which should be considered influential too.

This agrees with what Windle (2011) says, that an important part of investigation can be carried out using multidisciplinary approaches. This article considers the concept of resilience from an ecological perspective and looks at how it can be promoted and developed through technology, art and a child rights-based approach.

The concept of resilience

Generally, the concept of resilience refers to the capacity composed of the set of personal characteristics and the contexts of development of an individual and the set of internal and external mechanisms when facing adversity (Masten & Obradovic, 2006; Ungar, 2011). Some authors refer to resilience as the ability to respond positively, despite living in challenging or threatening circumstances. This means holding out, facing, and reacting better than expected in a situation of risk, a traumatic event or adversity affecting the psycho-social integrity of an individual (Brooks, 2006; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Masten, 2001; Rutter, 1993; 1995). Others add that it is possible to come out of such situations strengthened, avoiding situations of risk, thus producing a better state (Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984; Luthar *et al.*, 2000; Werner & Smith, 1992). From a purely individual level, resilience is considered as a characteristic of personality, the ability to adapt control depending on the circumstance (Block, 1980, 2002).

Resilience is a concept related to numerous individual characteristics (abilities, skills and personal qualities) and multisystemic (characteristics and qualities of the family, social and cultural environment, where an individual develops; as well as the relationships formed within this context and the individual) (Navarro, 2011). There is no one single way of understanding it, although there are certain characteristics agreed by the scientific literature which shape and frame it establishing its limits and dimensions as a concept. It is these which define resilience theoretically that give greater depth to its understanding.

Resilience is understood as a dynamic process, not as an absolute static or definitive quality. It arises from a process of interaction which implies a positive personal and social adaptation of the individual despite exposure to risk (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). It is evident in continuous interaction with the environment in which people develop and socialize (Vanistendael & Lecomte, 2002). It can vary according to the relationship with the context, requiring a reaction to a series of circumstances specific to each moment and each individual. It is applied when facing an adverse situation which could put personal and social stability at risk (Grotberg, 1996; Kotliarenco, Cáceres, & Fontecilel, 1997; Lösel, Bliesener, & Kferl, 1989; Vanistendael, 1995; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Greater resilience is shown on occasions when a person has to put it into practice. However, the development of resilience is subject to the specific adjustment a person makes in an adverse situation (Luthar, 2010). What determines the response is the balance between the factors and mechanisms which help and hinder this adjustment. This balance made between risk factors and protection factors of each person is what Luthar & Brown (2007) refer to as resilient adaptation, and best represents the mechanism of resilience. Resilience allows the individual to progress, to come out strengthened from adverse situations (Barudy & Dantagnan, 2005; Manciaux, 2003; Munist *et al.*, 1998). It is therefore a quality which should be promoted and developed through social intervention, providing the fundamental pillars for those in situations of risk to cling on to.

The present idea of resilience has not always been the same, its path has been richer and wider and it even seems to be in constant change. Studies about resilience have changed our way of seeing things, going from an idea based on shortcomings to a prevention model based on possibilities.

From an ecological outlook, Ungar (2011) point out that the challenge is to identify the mechanisms which are systematic and variable, and not concentrate on individual characteristics which are not necessarily related to the individual. They therefore suggest taking into account four principles when looking at the phenomenon of resilience (decentrality, complexity, atypicality and cultural relativity) as a basis for an ecological outlook for building resilience, emphasizing environmental considerations for positive growth.

The concept of resilience can therefore be organized under this socio-ecological conceptualization. The ecological framework and the four principles proposed by Ungar (2011) not only allow for the complexity of the development of resilience in and between different contexts, but also recognize the evolution that it has followed in the last decades as well as the waves or generations of studies about the phenomenon of resilience in the field of psycho-social intervention (Figure 1).

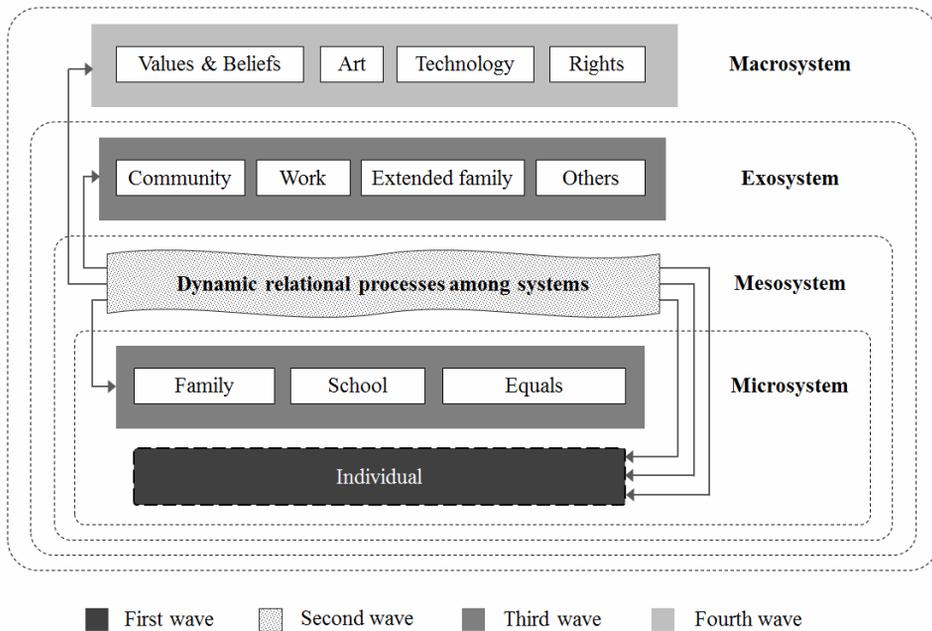


Figure 1. Representation of the waves of resilience according to the ecological framework

According to Masten & Obradovic (2006), studies about resilience have been developed throughout four waves. The first wave of investigations looked at not only the risk factors which give rise to psycho-social problems, but also the strong points of an individual (McDaniel & Benson, 2008; Richardson, 2002). These were mainly descriptive and basically aimed to find out what it is that made children and adolescents in vulnerable situations resist and be *invulnerable*. They identified a set of factors associated with resilience which are still confirmed today in other studies (Garmezy, 1991; Masten & Garmezy, 1985; Scoville, 1942; Werner & Smith, 1982). This wave of studies could be situated in the system, at a purely individual level.

The second wave of studies tried to discover which are the mechanisms and regulation systems related to resilience. These studies extended resilience as a dynamic process of interaction with the social backgrounds nearest to the individual (Bender & Lösel, 1997; Luthar *et al.*, 2000). This idea of dynamics still remains today and is fundamental in understanding the process of resilience which each person establishes with the family, the school, their work place and their friends. This second generation could be situated in the mesosystem, it includes the inter-relationships between the backgrounds in which a person actively moves.

The third wave promotes resilience through prevention and psycho-social and socio-educational intervention (Masten & Obradovic, 2006). Firstly, this wave strengthened the growth of resilience to their groups, not just to the individual, to families or companies, developing concepts such as family resilience (Walsh, 2003). With this goal, they introduced the first psycho-socio-educational intervention programmes for individuals and families which helped to improve resilience by interventions at an individual, familiar and community level (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). This third wave could be placed in both the microsystem and the exosystem of Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework (1979).

Finally, the fourth wave in resilience research proposed by Masten & Obradovic (2006), focused on integrating the study of resilience across levels of analysis, across species, across disciplines, across different approaches and across more global contexts. This fourth generation of studies could be placed in the macrosystem in which more global environments can influence the context in which an individual moves, even though they do not take part in them actively or directly. These could be ideological, political-social contexts, the existing cultural conceptions, society, technological development, art, or the rights for which a group are recognized. The fourth wave offers interesting possibilities for a deeper understanding of how the mechanisms work within and across the approaches to develop resilience (Masten & Obradovic, 2006).

According to Masten & Obradovic (2006: 24), "a wave of creative new interventions is beginning to appear on the horizon". This could mean new complimentary ways to promote and develop resilience with the use of technology and art, focusing on rights, as explained below.

New approaches and practical applications to promote resilience

Resilience through the use of technology

The terms resilience and technology are usually used together in the field of engineering, in areas such as information technology and telecommunication. Here, resilience generally refers to the capacity of information and communication networks, supply networks and distribution of goods and services, to resist the flow of people and information to mitigate the risk of failure from an over demand or malicious interference (Ulieru, 2007). Nemeth, Wears, Patel, Rosen, & Cook (2011) talk about the concept of resilience in engineering as an emergent property which should be analysed and dealt with in any network system with a wide technological and digital infrastructure.

However, ICT has penetrated all levels of society to an extent which was almost unimaginable a few years ago. In this sense the concept of resilience can be linked with technology, understanding technological resilience as the capacity of people, groups and organizations to face changes, challenges and inequalities in a technological advanced society. On one hand, it can be understood as the capacity to cope with the challenges and inequalities caused by technological development. On the other hand, it can be understood as the ability to deal with adversity encountered in hostile or harsh environments assuming the positive use of technology as a means to adapt, recover and regain previous living conditions.

Mark, Al-Ani & Semaan (2009) remark that during and after the war in Iraq, people used Internet and social networks to rebuild contacts and relationships and for general social support (family, friends, neighbours, acquaintances, etc.). During the conflict, people not only used technology to reshape social networks that the war had destroyed, but also the interaction by Internet widened and strengthened links between communities as the contact made with people with common interests helped them cope with the war situation. Al-Ani, Mark & Semaan (2010) suggested that the use of communication tools and online publications such as blogs had effects which could be understood as resilient. Forming virtual support groups or using the support offered by these networks are examples which these authors point out as a way of social or individual empowerment using technological tools (Al-Ani *et al.*, 2010; Mark & Semaan, 2008). Anderson-Butcher *et al.* (2010) say that risk factors and protection factors among adolescents can be detected by social networks.

If resilience happens in interaction with the environment, and developed societies have an increasingly technologically advanced environment, it can be assumed that ICT is a component which can be taken into account in this interaction. This means considering technological resilience not only as a strictly personal, absolute, stable or definitive attribute but rather as a dynamic process with strong socio-technological influences. The changes generated by current technology and

the influence this can actually have goes much further than the domain of certain devices or digital skills. Technological resilience can vary according to what is required by different circumstances or contexts, moments, individuals or technological developments. It can, therefore, vary depending on the situation, the development contexts or the level of digital skill which an individual has. This also depends on the level of digital literacy required or considered necessary by society to cope with the current and future social and technological advances.

Technological resilience can also be considered as a positive way to face an adverse situation. However, apparently two types of resilient responses can only be included as technological resilience perspective. Firstly, if when it is demonstrated it uses mechanisms which require technological skills and knowledge. Secondly if this outcome is manifested and developed through digital means.

This approach is an important challenge for social intervention in children and adolescents in situations of risk and their families. On a practical level, the challenge is to help children and their families to use technology to improve their well-being, to strengthen family cohesion or aid their communication. Socio-educational interventions could help them use technological resources as social resources, giving them more independence to face the challenges and difficulties of a technologically advanced society. This means that the use of technology not only implies risks for children and adolescents, but also provides support which entails a positive, resilient and human focus to technology (Haenens, Vandoninck, & Donoso, 2013).

Resilience through art

The concept of art and resilience are common to well-being, because they both encourage positive personal growth. Any artistic process promotes personal empowerment (Chambon, 2009), in the acquisition of skills which help to resolve interpersonal conflicts, improving self-esteem and self-confidence. Resilience is also strengthened through art because it allows people to work using their personal sphere from three dimensions which make up human development; to feel, to think and to do (Lea, Belliveau, Wager, & Beck, 2011).

Vanistendael (2013) confirms that art forms part of resilience in a transversal way because it allows personal growth and development. The role played by art in resilience is fundamental because it gives meaning to human life, it links man to life, and without it life has no meaning. It is therefore, important to act through art and its languages.

There is a double connection between art and resilience. The first connection is with oneself through a personal dimension. Intrapersonal communication can be made through art by understanding our inner being. The second connection is inter-subjectivity in art which relates to the social dimension of resilience. If art is

understood as a form of expression there is a relationship with the exterior (people, objects or situations).

Art is a means of expression and communication which promotes sensitivity and the opportunity to create beauty. In consequence, art is the essence of the human being because it connects with people's emotions (Guerrero, 2005). If it is accepted that a way of promoting resilience is through controlling emotions then a viable way of doing it is through art (Davidson, 2000). Cyrulnik (2009) sees artistic expression as the best way of treating deep pain. He says that sentiments, emotions, sensations and experiences can be shown through art, providing the opportunity to continue personal and social growth through educational and ludic attainments. The awareness and recognition the emotions help to confront vital events in an assertive way and with a more positive outlook.

Artistic expression implies a contemplative and imaginative dimension of reality, in a free way, it is the most widely used way of creating beauty for humans. Resilience can therefore be promoted through art because creation helps free emotions, in communicating and talking about experiences (Cyrulnik, 2009). It could be said that art allows us to look at sentiments or emotions from a distance and an optimum perspective to start dealing with them and facing a traumatic situation with a realistic outlook necessary for resilience (Cyrulnik, 2009; Lorenzo, 2010).

People connected to art have added possibilities to make changes in their social reality and in consequence, are able to face adversity more assertively (Bungay & Velel-Burrows, 2013; Daykin *et al.*, 2008; Tyson, 2002). The development of the capacity of symbolization, shared pleasure and leisure, introspection, self-awareness and individual reflection, growth in autonomy, accepting and valuing others, co-operation and implication in group activities, social support through sharing experiences with other people and group cohesion are some of the benefits which art can grant to promote the processes of resilience (Barragán, 2004; Brown & Sax, 2013).

Resilience through the child rights-based approach

The children's rights-based approach and the use of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as a socio-educational tool so that children and adolescents are active subjects in their own development also promotes resilience, as its aim is a constant improvement in child welfare (Artigas, 2002).

The United Nations (2006) define it as a conceptual framework for children's development and the protection of their rights. A child rights-based approach consists in a set of values and standards and a comprehensive and inclusive manner that apply to all children and their best interest, and the development of their capacities (Herczog, 2012).

The rights-based approach is defined in contrast to the needs approach (Save The Children, 2002; Shier, Hernández, Centeno, Arróliga, & González, 2013), even though both deal with the survival of people and full development of their potential. While the needs approach looks at solving specific problems, with rapid and immediate intervention if necessary, the rights-based approach recognizes that everyone has certain rights, moving away from merely identifying and satisfying people's basic needs (United Nations, 2006). This new approach involves the change from seeing children as passive objects which need attending (Save The Children, 2004) to recognizing them as active subjects with rights (Shier, Hernández, Centeno, Arróliga, & González, 2014). That is, a person with an opinion, who can participate and contribute as any other member of society in a situation of equality.

This contrast of approach is connected to the socio-educational intervention models which promote resilience. There is a striking parallelism between the rights-based approach and the intervention model based on the strengths and potentials of the individual. In the same way, the needs approach corresponds to the model based on shortfalls.

The rights-based approach arises as a result of change and evolution in the concept of childhood, funded fundamentally by the CRC. Children were regarded as passive objects who belonged to their parents (Casas, 2009; Liebel, 2009b). With the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, 1959, children's rights were recognized, but childhood was still seen as a future potential (Liebel, 2009a; Toffano, 2007). With the approval of the Convention in 1989, the recognition of children as subjects was achieved. In this agreement, children are subjects with recognizable rights to their own personality, as well as their individual needs and decision-making skills (Corsaro, 1997; Qvortrup, 2005; Richter & Zartler, 2011; Verhellen, 2008).

As discussed by Blanchet-Cohen & Bedeaux (2014) the children's rights-based approach is an innovative model, which tries to get away from the historical role of parents as service providers to children (Linds, Goulet, & Sammel, 2010) to see them as creators of opportunities so that young people can exercise their rights and reach their full potential (Bennett, Hart, & Ann Svevo-Cianci, 2009).

According to Wearing (2011) the rights-based approach has become an important concept in development and especially in its application to children, but it is still early in practice. In recent years other authors have recognized the need to implement practices with this approach (Bennett *et al.*, 2009; Lundy & McEvoy, 2009; Shier *et al.*, 2013; 2014; Vanistendael, 2013).

Vanistendael (2013) says that new ways of implementing resilience should be used and they should be defined with other themes, such as children's rights. Lundy and McEvoy (2009) and Shier *et al.* (2013, 2014) say that the application of the children's rights-based approach in children's welfare services and the

participation of children in matters that affect them, gives them confidence in their capabilities and power in their development. Bennett *et al.* (2009) also agree on the need for change in child protection practices through child rights.

Putting the child rights-based approach into practice in schools could show willing to promote resilience. Cohen (2012), The Education Department of Western Australia (2000) and Henderson & Milstein (2003) point out different characteristics of schools which promote resilience. The child rights-based approach applied at school gives beneficial results such as (Guadix *et al.*, 2013; Sebba & Robinson, 2010): (1) improvement in personal skills and empowerment of the child, creativity and a critical spirit; (2) the development of proactive processes in class decision making and reflection capacity, (3) helps social cohesion processes, mediation and community feeling (4) a sense of belonging and participation as active members of the community. These benefits reflect the characteristics of resilient schools, as the organization of the centre is based on the values of el CRC and can have a positive influence on the development and welfare of the child.

Conclusions and future research

The contributions of those studies about resilience done in the first, second and third waves made it possible to build a concept as it is understood now, as a dynamic ecological process. However, the study of resilience should go further than the individual because it is much more than something purely personal (Ungar, 2011). Resilience should be understood through an ecological approach, across disciplines and across different perspectives and practical approaches, to open the door for new ways of promoting and developing resilience.

Little attention has been given to how it can promote resilience through using technology, artistic expression or through child rights-based approach. The few studies carried out are evidence of the potential of knowledge to explore, which could produce new findings related to other aspects concerning the life of people to reach a wider and richer understanding of resilience than the current one.

The promotion of resilience through the use of technology, art and the approach of rights, assumes the reality which surrounds an individual is complex. Resilience is not developed in the same way in everyone, in each case the internal and external influences are different. When our understanding of the human being takes into account all our capabilities and strengths, then we are promoting a resilient view of all the things which affect us. Positive elements can be found in all fields, just as each individual develops different abilities according to his/her possibilities. This duality can influence the development and promotion of resilience.

From a technological approach, the versatility and infinity of applications that technology offers are not very convincing arguments to stir interest to explore questions such as, if support processes which help people overcome adverse situations can be developed using technology, or which ethical approaches are necessary. Little is known about how people use technology to face problems, obstacles and difficulties; which factors influence when a person chooses to use technology to do this, if it is accompanied by a certain level of digital competence, what makes it difficult or and which means are the best to use.

Scientific literature linking resilience and art has been scarce for many years. Currently, due to the positive results of the few existing studies, interest in the links has grown (Knowles & Cole, 2008), and this mutually reinforces them. Artistic expression leads to the expression of different languages which help the individual to find a meaning in life and a lifetime project. However, the scientific literature is insufficient; there is a clear need to continue investigating into which alternative methodologies are most efficient when considering adversity.

Finally, both the rights-based approach and the CRC are a good tool to promote resilience in childhood as they allow children and adolescents to know their rights and responsibilities. Knowing their rights leads to self-protection; it allows them to recognize early situations of non-participation, abandonment, abuse or neglect and try to avoid them. Besides, knowing their responsibilities enables self-regulation, improving co-existence and interaction with others. The greatest advantage of the child rights-based approach is that it extends the protection of the child by requiring a more complete context of the promotion and protection of human dignity, welfare, health and development.

To sum up, promoting resilience by means of technology, art and the rights approach all recognize that the concept of resilience is transversal in a person's life. For this reason it is necessary to intensify the search for new factors and mechanisms to transform and overcome adverse situations which introduce new ways for a wider understanding of resilience.

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