Co-ordinated Centre of Resilience for Social Justice and Boingboing response to the Department for Education consultation

'Character and Resilience: Call for Evidence'

July 2019

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DfE Question 10. We are defining character as:

- **Believing that you can achieve**
- **Being able to stick with the task in hand**
- **Seeing a link between effort today and payback in the future, and**
- **Being able to bounce back from the knocks that life inevitably brings to all of us.**

To what extent do you agree that character and resilience are important in enabling young people to be successful and to thrive in later life? Please comment.

Our response: This definition is problematic for three main reasons.

Firstly, it is overly reductive and simplistic. Whilst we do agree that the coping strategies described in the above list are important as part of resilience and character forming, our evidence-based conceptualisation of resilience (often co-produced with young people) is much broader. The essential importance of multiple, complex and interacting socio-ecological factors that are known to shape a young person's experiences and outcomes is well established in sociological and psychological theory, and yet is missing from this definition. In addition, cultural variations in what can be considered as 'resilient' are not attended to. This term might mean different things for different people, in different contexts, due to the context specificity of the concept. In other words, as Michael Ungar identifies (2008), 'there are global, as well as culturally and contextually specific aspects to young people's lives that contribute to their resilience…' (p219) '…since a family or community must be resilient, if a child is to be resilient it makes sense to look to those communities to define for themselves what they determine to be signs of healthy development' (p221).

Privileging local knowledge and partnering with multiple local stakeholders to examine current practice and outcomes will reveal patterns and nuances about resilience in that specific context that can be understood in the context of existing literature. Interventions

that help children navigate to health resources and negotiate for what they need to resolve these tensions are those most likely to be helpful in building resilience (ibid).

Secondly, because of this over-simplification, it is in danger of 'responsibilising' the individual, as opposed to seeing resilience-building as a collective and shared person-environment interaction, that is dramatically shaped by structural inequalities (Bottrell, 2013; Hart et al, 2016). The individualised definition provided does not account for the structural barriers facing many young people in the UK. Instilling a sense of 'believing you can achieve' is important, but we must also acknowledge that for some children, the odds are stacked significantly against them to do so. For example, children eligible for free school meals are four times more likely to be excluded from school than their peers, and children with a diagnosed SEND are six times more likely than pupils with no known SEND (DfE, 2018a). The attainment gap is largest for children and young people eligible for free school meals (the best available proxy measure of economic disadvantage) and the vast majority of these pupils leave education without a good standard of recognised qualifications in English and Maths – without which, achieving their goals in the world of work or further study will be much harder. The problem is not that these young people lack character, but that schools need to be better supported to identify and address barriers to learning that these young people face, and maximise the protective factors that they need to build resilience.

As Bottrell (2013) writes, an 'individualised "can do" notion of resilience, twinned with the privatisation of responsibilities, circulates in and flows from policy texts, it obscures historical and more recent structural inequalities that are fundamental barriers to the wellbeing of the poor and blames and penalises them for what are intertextually deemed to be their failings'.

It is therefore vital that conceptualisations of resilience encompass the potential for marginalised children and young people to challenge and transform aspects of their adversity, and do not hold them responsible for the barriers they face (Hart et al, 2016). For this reason, notions of character as inner strength, determination or grit are limited. Of course school staff need to think about the interaction between resilience processes external to the child, and their internal processes. However, when the focus is put on inner strength etc. it is unhelpful and dangerous if they detract policy makers from making the structural and system based change required to address social inequality:

'When overcoming the odds is erroneously viewed as simply a matter of individual motivation or grit, the failure to succeed is perceived as the fault of the individual… Many economic, education, health, and social policies that address the effects of adversity in individuals do little to create the conditions that are known to build greater resilience' (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015, p7).

Thirdly, defining character primarily for its association with individual resilience (i.e. bounce back), work ethic (i.e. sticking to tasks) and ambition (i.e. believing in achievements, seeing effort as bringing a reward), neglects the importance of empathising with others, taking

responsibility for others, having a sense of belonging to a school and wider community, and having a sense of purpose, which are crucial for both personal wellbeing and making a positive contribution to society.

To be successful and thrive in life, young people need more than personal coping strategies for when things go wrong. Our extensive research in this area has been developed into a 'Resilience Framework' which summarises the evidence base from existing literature, and has been developed with input from children and young people, their parents, education and mental health practitioners and academics (see https://www.boingboing.org.uk/ to download free copies in multiple languages).

The **Resilience Framework** has been described in detail in response to Q13.

DfE Question 11. Thinking about the aspects of character and resilience that you think are most important in order for people to be successful in life, are there any that you feel are not covered in the list below? If so, please list these and tell us why you feel they are important.

- **Believing that you can achieve (e.g. being self-confident, believing in your own abilities)**
- **Being able to stick with the task in hand**
- **Seeing a link between effort today and payback in the future (e.g. deferred gratification, being aspirational and ambitious)**
- **Being able to bounce back from the knocks that life inevitably brings to all of us (resilience)**
- **Having strong personal qualities and values like kindness, generosity, a sense of justice, respect, integrity and humility**
- **Social skills, such as being articulate and able to mix and work easily with others, forming and maintaining long-term relationships and commitments.**

Please list any missing aspects of character here and say why they are important.

Our response: As discussed in our response to Q11, the definition of resilience / character in this list excludes the many complicated socio-ecological factors involved in building resilience, and also neglects the link between inequality, adversity and long-term wellbeing.

All of the definitions in the list provided are portrayed as intrinsic properties of individuals. For example 'being able to bounce back', and 'maintaining long-term relationships', whereas in fact these individual characteristics emerge in the individual as a result of having the 'basics' they need, a sense of 'belonging' and 'purpose', multiple opportunities to develop their interests and talents, multiple opportunities to experience success, and experience of positive and lasting relationships over time. Some children and young people may have shown enormous resilience just getting into school. Acknowledging that, depending on the context, resilience means different things for different people, creates a strengths-based approach, in which 'resilient moves' can build over time, from any starting point. As Roisman et al (2002) state, resilience can be understood as an:

'...emergent property of a hierarchically organised set of protective systems that cumulatively buffer the effects of adversity and can therefore rarely, if ever, be regarded as an intrinsic property of individuals' (Roisman et al, 2002, p1216). The focus of policy ought to be identifying and putting in place the protective systems that buffer adversity. Protective factors can exist at multiple system levels, from individual coping strategies to the influence of positive and lasting relationships with peers and trusted adults, to the availability of and access to specialist support services.

Our definition of resilience is informed by a social justice perspective in which building resilience is about both 'beating' and 'changing' the odds: 'overcoming adversity, whilst also potentially changing, or even dramatically transforming, (aspects of) that adversity' (Hart et al, 2013, p31; 2016, p3). This is more than 'bouncing back from the knocks that life inevitably brings to all of us', because some people are experiencing long-term adversity that cannot be said to be a 'knock', and essentially they have nothing to 'bounce back to'. It is about providing positive experiences that help to mitigate the risks of constellated disadvantage so that in spite of the difficulties they might face, young people achieve well in school, have positive mental health and wellbeing, and are empowered to challenge stigmatisation and inequality.

At a recent Westminster Parliament event on parents, play and emotional wellbeing, Public Health England, Lego Foundation, Cambridge University and Save the Children were amongst those discussing the links between play, early childhood development, mental health and inequality. A common thread of the discussion was how crucial the development of early relationships are and how policy can support this. Examples were given from redesigning housing areas to accommodate high quality safe play spaces, closing public streets to traffic to facilitate street play, bringing play to communities with a 'street bus', and addressing causes of stress and lack of time for parents to engage positively in play with their children. Emphasis was placed on the multi-sector collaboration required between Health, Education

and Social policy to evidence the links between play, learning and wellbeing, and educate parents and school staff to adapt their approach. This specific example around play is just one way resilience can be built through an individual's interactions with other people and their environment, demonstrating the ways in which policy makers will have to think about removing barriers and maximising protective factors in order to influence children outcomes.

Again, the definitions provided in the list for this question place too much emphasis on the individual and not enough on the people, services, structures and policies around the individual. For example 'being able to stick with the task in hand', is something that will be easier for some people in some circumstances depending on other variables, and is highly context dependent. It is having the time, opportunity, encouragement, modelling and mentoring through difficult challenges that result in 'being able to stick with the task in hand'. Individualised definitions responsibilise the most vulnerable children, who are facing multiple disadvantages, and do not acknowledge the social mechanisms by which these skills develop, or the barriers that exist for many children to developing these skills.

The definitions above are missing a sense of the foundations of resilience, which project a child towards successful outcomes in spite of any adversity they might face. As a Harvard University report about the foundations of resilience suggests: 'Even under highly adverse conditions, development can proceed in a positive direction if parents and other caregivers provide consistent responsiveness, and if communities provide resources and supports that strengthen families' capacities and make a broader environment of protective relationships accessible to all children' (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015, p3). The same report states that, 'resilience is often situation-specific, rather than a general trait that applies in all contexts' (p6), meaning that an abstracted list of individualised traits is inherently problematic.

In addition, school staff inherently know the value of extra-curricular activities, of a broad and diverse curriculum that is relevant, challenging and has multiple opportunities to celebrate success in its varied forms. School staff know that opportunities for meaningful co-planning and evaluation with children and young people are far more preferable to tokenistic 'pupil voice' activities. School staff know the importance of positive relationships that navigate the contours of adversity and growth alongside the child on a daily basis, in which talents are discovered and nurtured. Building resilience in these small ways, day to day, is the work of a school. Schools should be building these variable pathways towards success rather than character. In this way, resilience becomes both the route (school/practitioner practice that builds resilience) and the destination (the pupil's response to pedagogical experiences and emergent resilience/character).

However, in recent research carried out by one of our PhD candidates, school staff have told us that these essential aspects of their role have become a more and more difficult weight to bear alongside their already unmanageable work load and the pressures of accountability. As Sean Harford outlined in a presentation on behalf of Ofsted in May, 2018, barriers that

schools say prevent more work on building character include, 'competing demands of the curriculum, staff time to meet and discuss the work, and the capacity of staff'. Staff who participated in our research also reported that the very activities and experiences known to provide young people with the opportunities to develop resilience, such as cross curricula learning, arts subjects and school trips are being squeezed out in response to limited funding, staffing and the pressure to attain better academic results. Forest schools, known to give opportunities for team building, taking risks and being outdoors, have been cut from many schools. Lunchtime revision classes, for example, have replaced the opportunities for pupils to engage in outdoor play or clubs, affording far greater importance to intensive study than the resilience-building activities which will sustain pupils through a stressful exam period.

Many children do not have access to the relationships and experiences needed to build resilience outside school. This has been widely discussed in critique of how inclusive the 'activity passports' are, which are another example of simplifying resilience-building experiences by assuming the same experience will be accessible and beneficial in every context. As Michael Tidd recently wrote in the TES:

'As teachers in Secondary schools see their timetables increasingly fill, with group sizes growing and continuous changes to the curriculum, there is scant time left in their busy weeks for providing the extracurricular opportunities that once existed; especially when the environment is one where exam success has been the centre of external accountability' (Tidd, 2019).

Schools must be supported to be able to prioritise the foundations for resilience and character across the whole school system, as opposed to seeing the academic curriculum as separate to distinct or 'bolt-on' character curricula. As the recent report from Harvard University identifies, the role of schools in building character is centrally tied to 'building supportive relationships and adaptive capacities that can be applied in multiple contexts,' (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015, p8). Empathy, critical thinking and problem solving, collaborative skills, leadership, diplomacy and conflict resolution, and creativity can be developed through active, play-based approaches to learning, extra-curricular activities and the creative arts, the activities which are provided in schools, but not always prioritised in terms of time and funding.

Damian Hinds (2019) recently stated that, 'It's a good time of year to remind pupils that in 10 years' time their exam results might be a distant memory, but the life skills they acquire will stay with them forever'. However, school staff are experiencing tensions as they are held to account for these restrictive measures of educational success, whilst being asked to deliver mental health prevention and wellbeing intervention in spite of their own high workload and high stress. There is a disconnect between the values that attract people to teaching, and the reality of how 'value' is measured by the education system. Recent DfE statistics show one in six teachers drop out after one year of teaching, the highest figures since 1997, and high teacher turnover further negatively influences young people (DfE, 2018b).

DfE Question 12. Which aspects of character do you think are most important in the workplace, or most valued by employers?

- **Believing you can achieve**
- **Being able to stick with the task in hand**
- **Seeing a link between effort today and payback in the future**
- **Being able to bounce back from knocks**
- **Having strong personal qualities and values like kindness, generosity, a sense of justice, respect, integrity and humility**
- **Social skills, such as being articulate and able to mix and work easily with others, forming and maintaining long term relationships and commitments**

Others (please list below).

Our response: There is currently a focus on producing skills in schools that meet the supposed skill needs of employers, which does not effectively account for enormous contextual variation across employment sectors, within employment sectors, across geographical regions and dependent on changing needs over time. As identified in a recent paper, the key to addressing this simplification of 'employer needs' is effective education-employer partnerships, which work to support inclusive growth in key economic sectors through co-production (Hodgson et al, 2019). Central to increasing employment opportunities as a way to address inequalities will be increasing awareness of employment pathways, especially where there are underrepresented groups employed in the sector (e.g. based on gender, race or SEND). Mentors can be enlisted from local or national businesses or organisations that explain the pathways to specific career trajectories and how barriers were overcome. Work placement opportunities are an important part of fostering the necessary skills required and can also identify aptitude in young people who might not have considered certain pathways. There are great examples in the recent RSA 'Schools without Walls' report about schools which are partnering with local businesses to set up these opportunities on a voluntary basis to fulfil their social responsibilities, or in return for use of school space for small charities or local enterprises (Partridge & Bath, 2019).

University/college-school-employer partnerships are also a way to link the training and qualifications required so that pupils are given experience of attending university style sessions, campus visits and help with applications etc, if their route to employment involves applying to university or college.

Care must be taken to retain critical thinking, creativity and collaboration as central aspects of the curriculum. Current approaches to measuring individual and school attainment have been criticised as reductive and overly focused on assessment, or 'teaching to the test', due to accountability pressures schools face linked to exam outcomes. Opportunities may be lost to develop the 'soft skills' that most employers value, such as adaptability, creative thinking and problem solving, diplomacy and conflict resolution, assertive leadership, critical observation and so on. Opportunities both within and outside the curriculum should be fostered to develop these skills, including opportunities to play, involving pupils in co-productive school improvement (meaningful pupil voice), co-planning of the curriculum, and opportunities to engage in local and global issues in a pro-active way.

DfE Question 13. What activities and approaches do you think are most effective in supporting the development of character and resilience? What evidence do you have to support this?

(For example, any published evaluation studies, or data collection done within your organisation)? Please list.

Our response: Our '**Resilience Framework**' (Hart, Blincow, & Thomas, 2007; 2012; Boingboing, 2015) summarises the existing evidence base about the necessary support, experiences and skills required to build resilience and thrive in spite of adversity.

The Framework identifies the 'Basics' as fundamental to building resilience in young people. They need to be supported to have the absolute 'basics' first: to feel safe, to be free from discrimination, to have good enough housing, a healthy diet, and enough family income to live, to play and participate in leisure activities, to have access and adequate transport, and to get enough sleep. Depending on the circumstances of the child, school staff and other support services will be essential in terms of helping the child and their family navigate to the appropriate support. Currently we know that around nine children in every standard UK class are unlikely to have some of these fundamental basics in place, because they are living in relative poverty.

Considering the rising statistics about loneliness in the UK, and the increasing prevalence of mental health issues, fostering a sense of belonging and challenging rhetoric about individual self-sufficiency to re-shift policy focus onto building and sustaining relationships and connections is key. Children and young people need a sense of 'Belonging' in order to tap into positive relationships in their family, with their friends and with trusted adults. Investing in these relationships will help to establish a network of supportive, good influences around the

child, from which they can be given responsibility and independence to explore where they came from, their current place in the world, and new experiences. Schools are a crucial part of a child's sense of belonging, both in terms of belonging to the school community, and a friendship group, but also in terms of the school fostering a sense of belonging to the local community, and celebrating the diverse backgrounds and cultural heritage of their pupils.

Schools all over the country have developed ways of showing pupils how deeply the staff care about them. In a local school (in Patcham), senior leaders greet each pupil with a shake of the hand in the morning, aiming to create a positive start to the day for children who may not have had a good start at home. A member of staff wearing a coloured ribbon signifies to a particular pupil that they know they are being thought of. In our recent research into whole school resilience-building approaches, however, school staff told us that there wasn't always enough time in the busy school day, and given the pressure of accountability, to prioritise building these positive relationships with pupils and their families.

We know that 'Learning' is key to resilience building. Making school life work as well as possible involves careful co-planning with parents and young people. Building life skills, helping young people to map out their life and career plans, supporting self-organisation and independence through mentoring, and highlighting achievements, are already fundamental parts of school support for young people, which help to build resilience for the future.

Young people are also supported by schools to understand and respect boundaries, solve problems, think positively, develop strategies to keep calm, access support when needed and have fun. School-based experiences can support these 'Coping' strategies through a broad range of activities in which these aspects are not taught discretely, but are embedded in collaborative learning, creative thinking, practice, perseverance, social interaction and relationship building, both within and beyond the curriculum.

It is with this foundation of support that young people are able to feel hopeful about the future, develop empathy for others, have a sense of themselves and their talents, and ask for help when they need it. These aspects of their 'Core Self' cannot taught as 'bolt ons' but are emergent from the myriad of social interactions, opportunities to engage in creative, challenging and rewarding activities, and trusting and supportive relationships.

The whole school Academic Resilience Approach (ARA)

The ARA has been designed by Professor Angie Hart and Lisa Williams (2014; submitted) to help schools adopt a whole community approach to resilience building that benefits everybody, but particularly the most disadvantaged (it is available free to download from https://www.boingboing.org.uk/). The ARA uses an 'audit, plan, review' approach to reflect on existing strengths in the school and how they can be preserved, as well as considering how resilience-building approaches can be increased for multiple stakeholders, at multiple system levels, to increase community and organisational resilience. Many resilience-building or early

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mental health interventions have been reported to be costly to schools, rely on external expertise, and have short-lived outcomes (Hart & Heaver, 2013). In contrast, our recent research into the impact of the ARA for school staff found that there were significant improvements to staff perceptions of workload, leadership and participative decision making, due to the systemic nature of the approach. In addition, headteachers told us that they had a clearer whole school ethos and perceived increased parent/carer engagement, as well as improvements in pupil behaviour and communication. Fundamental to the success of the ARA is in developing an embedded whole school culture in which building resilience and challenging 'the odds' for the most disadvantaged pupils is 'everybody's business' as opposed to a 'bolt on'.

The importance of building resilience and providing support to school staff for any whole school approach to be successful has been core to the ARA. Many schools who have adopted this approach provided feedback that the approach was sustainable because it did not expect 'another task' of staff, rather it re-framed school priorities to be more closely aligned to existing staff values (building pupil resilience for long-term wellbeing), and addressed staff adversity as part of finding whole system solutions to achieving this goal. This system-wide approach to building resilience in staff has parallels with other research in relation to staff wellbeing and early career professional resilience to stress and burnout.

Boingboing volunteers and employees

Boingboing CIC provides people with direct 'lived experience' of social disadvantage, mental and physical health difficulties, and other factors considered barriers to accessing work opportunities, with placements on a voluntary or paid basis. These people are directly involved in shaping strategy, delivering training and writing reports, and are an important way in which we ensure we are making our work accessible, relevant, meaningful, co-produced and evaluated by the people we aim to benefit. Providing these placements also involves extensive mentoring, support to improve work skills, access to a network of potential future employers, and opportunities that most of the people we employ could not otherwise access, for example speaking at international conferences about their work. The link between academics at the University of Brighton Centre of Resilience for Social Justice, Boingboing CIC, and young people and adults from the community, creates a 'virtuous circle' of mutually beneficial connection that helps us to make a difference to individuals, as well as challenge 'the odds' overall, as can be seen in these showcase films:
https://www.boingboing.org.uk/resilience/short-films-showing-resilience-building-action/

Resilience Forum

The Resilience Forum is a space where we welcome and encourage discussion, disagreement and debate about resilience research and practice. Forums take place in Blackpool and Brighton alternately each month. Presenters at the Forum have included parents, young people, academics and practitioners, covering a wide range of topics, research and practice issues. In our experience, participating in the Forum is a good way to build personal resilience through increasing supportive connections, personal understanding and receiving positive feedback. We also explore 'what works' in building resilience and tackling adversity in a range of contexts, understanding what is context specific and what mechanisms initiate change over time. Many teachers, other school staff and volunteers attend the Forum and we have specific school-focused Forums on a regular basis (see https://www.boingboing.org.uk/ for upcoming Resilience Forums).

The importance of play and creativity in learning

Creative and play-based experiences provide children and young people with opportunities to develop empathy, adaptability, peer relationships, independence, leadership, negotiation, perseverance, critical thinking and many other skills necessary to be able to manage adversity – in other words to have resilient characters. Embedding play into the curriculum and school culture is a key way in which schools can improve the trajectories of 'disadvantaged children' and tackle poverty, by providing a social context through which children and young people develop the key skills necessary for long-term wellbeing, as well as positively influencing their academic learning. Play also provides the mechanism to link directly and build partnerships with parents, carers, teachers and communities. As has been noted in recent research carried out by the Cambridge Research Centre for Play in Education, Development and Learning (PEDAL Cam), parent and school staff perceptions are often that play is not synonymous with learning. However findings of research carried out by the PEDAL Centre suggest that play is a learning experience for children in which a joy of learning and discovery, managing uncertainty, developing tenacity, and building socio-emotional skills, can be instilled as important skills for the future for the individual, and for their role in society. Therefore, further research is required in order to justify and prioritise play as central to health and education policy, and alter the perceptions of those directly able to influence children and young people's development.

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DfE Question 14. We are keen to understand how access to character building activities can help make the greatest positive difference to groups of children and young people vulnerable to poorer life outcomes, such as those living in poverty/with economic disadvantage, having a disability or SEN, being a young carer, living in care and others.

What examples of good practice do you have that demonstrate how barriers to participation in activities can be overcome for these groups?

Our response:

Resilience Framework

Our 'Resilience Framework' (Hart, Blincow, & Thomas, 2007; 2012; Boingboing, 2015) has been developed with and for children and young people, alongside school staff, mental health professionals, parents, carers and academics. It draws on an existing evidence base to summarise what is important in building resilience for all, and especially for those facing adversity or who might be considered 'vulnerable'. The Framework has been behind many research and practical projects in the UK and abroad that emphasise empowering children and young people to 'beat and change the odds' by building their own resilience and the resilience of those around them.

One of the ways in which our work has aimed to overcome barriers has been to involve and engage 'vulnerable people' in conceptualising resilience and developing co-productive approaches to building resilience. A way forward with 'character' in schools would be to consult with CYP abut the term 'character building'. How do they feel about it? Does it imply they don't have character at the moment? Do they want to build their characters? And in which ways?

Our practitioners have found that a sense of achievement only emerges from resilience-building activities if they are child-led and highly valued by the children and young people, who may also be able to suggest ways in which barriers to access and inclusion can be tackled. Recognising children and YP's existing expertise, and using this as a 'vehicle' that can help motivate and sustain interest and perseverance in something new, is key. An example from a local 'Widening Participation' Saturday clubs project, young people were anxious about attending because they thought it would be 'just like school', but they were attracted by the glamour of making a racing car using the facilities of a university and racing it around Goodwood. Others were attracted by the opportunity to be part of a fashion show or chemistry practical activities like making perfume. They overcame their anxiety with support from parents, teachers and peers, and were given meaningful roles in setting up the clubs. They met new people and learned new skills, such as problem solving and perseverance,

through the experience and process of building the car as a team, with an ultimately achievable but challenging goal. Success was celebrated and learning transferred back to the classroom in the form of increased confidence and engagement in school.

In one school in which we have established a partnership, the mental wellbeing of a nine-year-old pupil, about whom school staff shared concerns, was supported by setting up a computer club, mentored by an older pupil. This afforded him the opportunity to experience positive relationships in an environment targeted at his area of interest. He had been exhibiting low affect, was beginning to become aggressive with his peers, and had started to soil himself at school. Staff identified that his low mood and concerning behaviours indicated feelings of unhappiness, and possible depressive symptoms, coupled with the potential for social exclusion.

As a result of this context, staff discussed resilient moves that they could make for, and with, this pupil. A Year 10 pupil was engaged to mentor the nine-year-old in a computer club (tapping into good influences, Hart et al, 2007, p67; engage mentors, p91). These pupils shared a strong interest in computer programming and it was arranged for them to develop their own web site, facilitated by the school's computer technician (fostering interests, Hart et al, 2007, p116; keeping relationships going, p70). The pupil's teacher put a visual guide to the steps he needed to take if he soiled himself at school in a discrete place (help with self-organisation, Hart et al, 2007, p95). The school provided him with clean underpants, wet wipes, deodorant and tracksuit bottoms to support his hygiene and social needs (the basics, Hart et al, 2007, p42). Observable outcomes for this pupil were noted by staff within four weeks, with him smiling again, and joining in playground games.

Extra-curricular activities

In recent research carried out through our Centre into the influence of extra-curricular activities for children eligible for free school meals, school staff reported that opportunities to participate were often not enough. Many pupils do not choose to participate in extra-curricular activities, but this does not mean that these pupils lack interest. Many pupils require an initial invitation or selection to trigger participation, and for many others, staying on after school is not possible. Schools held activities during the school day to avoid access issues, provided opportunities for adult feedback and peer mentoring by other more experienced members of the club, and promoted teamwork and collaborative learning experiences, which led to improved capabilities and mastery. None of the twenty extra-curricular activities studied set out to teach 'character' or 'resilience' in a discrete sense. They were instead activities that concentrated on performing an activity at the best levels that the children could achieve, through collective learning, a sense of belonging and a safe environment to try new things. This reflects existing evidence that engagement in meaningful activities provides a vessel through which life skills can develop. As opposed to teaching

'character', schools must concentrate on finding activities in which children can, in time, feel competent, valued, and that they belong.

Extra-curricular activities were found to be a rich vein for schools to offer routes to success. This may be particularly beneficial for pupils struggling in the classroom. A girl in Key Stage 2 discovered her talent through introduction to a lunch time running club. She quickly represented her school, and then her county. Her school attendance improved, as did her academic performance. Through the lunch time running club she found her sense of belonging to the school. This is just one example of many stories about the pathway of extra-curricular activities, in this case running, with the result of increased resilience.

Co-producing solutions with young people

Involving young people in decision making and co-producing solutions, whether at an individual or collective level, is an effective way of building resilience. For example, one of our PhD projects involved highly participatory research with young adults with learning disabilities. Participants reported that they felt more resilient due to an increased sense of belonging gained from working collectively to identify their specific social adversity context. They also identified what could help promote their resilience in their socio-ecological environment, and co-presented their research to broad audiences, which was a way of highlighting and aiming to tackle the identified adversity. The young adults indicated that they had an increase in confidence and positive perceptions of identity as a result of being involved in decision making, leadership processes and communicating their findings.

Parent engagement

Involvement of parents and caregivers is crucial to pupil resilience. One school in Hastings has organised multiple projects, such as making a mural or pond, inviting all parents from that class to come and help. Food is provided that both creates a sense of community and provides a decent meal for the many families who may otherwise go without. A school in Brighton are currently having 'family week' to celebrate different types of family, and a Secondary school in West Sussex have invited local English Romany Gypsies to celebrate and explain aspects of their culture, such as flower making. Schools work very hard at connecting with and engaging parents, but could be better supported with advice on what works well and how to set it up. Small things can make a big difference to parents, and also for pupils, for example, providing the school newsletter as a digital audio or video file for non-literate parents. Ensuring that parents feel able and comfortable to come and talk to staff freely, and know who to contact, providing adult education courses, access to counselling and parenting courses, extending opening hours, and voluntary and paid positions for parents to become school staff. In one school, an audit of skills is sent home to parents so that they can let the school know what skills or training they can offer as inset or extra-curricular clubs, creating a

closer connection, whilst maximising opportunities for pupils and staff and reducing staff workload. Many schools are using software (eg Idoceo) which makes it really easy for staff to send a positive email home with a quick click on a link, reinforcing the positive connection.

Working closely with families and developing robust relationships with families in order to build resilience for young people is a vital part of the Academic Resilience whole school approach, and necessary to embedding resilience in a whole school system. For all age stages, from Early Years to Further Education, linking in to families in meaningful ways is of critical importance to building resilience that enables children and young people to thrive. It is not only about engaging parents in education, but also about building parent and family resilience to maximise and strengthen the protective systems around the child. As Fiona Walsh (2003) has identified, in a conceptual framework for intervention and prevention efforts to strengthen families facing serious life challenges, key processes in family resilience are outlined in three domains: family belief systems, organisational patterns, and communication/problem-solving. These can be priority areas for schools to work in alongside families in order to build capacity.

DfE Question 15. What evidence do you have of specific activities or approaches that can be particularly helpful for these groups of children?

Please be specific about which groups and provide details of the evidence you have e.g. references, links.

Our response:

Resilience Revolution

The Resilience Revolution is a whole town resilience-building approach led by HeadStart Blackpool, a Big Lottery funded programme in partnership with Boingboing, a not for profit community interest company. The programme is being evaluated by a team at the University of Brighton's Centre of Resilience for Social Justice. The whole town approach draws together a wide range of interventions and programmes that aim to build a sense of pride in the local community and build individual and community capacity. Using a Community of Practice approach, the whole system approach is forging expertise in co-production, putting young people themselves at the heart of the developments. Practices based on the Resilience Framework have been embedded into local schools and communities, ensuring that the project has the best chance of being sustained. The range of projects in the intervention are the 'Friend for Life' programme matching looked after children with supportive adults, school-based 'resilience coaches', 'resilience committees' comprising children and young people who

advise schools and local services, targeted intervention around school transition, anti-bullying projects, parent and carer support groups, and equine therapy for vulnerable young people.

Friend for Life

Friend for Life is a project matching children in care (or 'Our Children') in Blackpool, with a trusted adult who makes a permanent, but not legally binding, commitment to them. Preliminary research has suggested that co-production of the project design by young people has been valued by participating young people in care and 'Adult Friends'. At the design stage, youth suggested that all Adult Friends be volunteers and not be reimbursed for activities. In an ongoing study on the project, young people have stated how much they value that their Adult Friends are volunteers and not reimbursed for their time, saying that they value their contributions more than those of paid key workers. Preliminary analysis of the results suggest that young people, with access to an Adult Friend, develop skills in communicating with others, with some reporting that this has made school more enjoyable for them. Although more research is needed, this suggests that community-based activities that seek to develop supportive intergenerational friendships may improve youth engagement in schools.

Young People's Engagement Group and the Youth Researchers team

The YPEG group and Youth Researchers team, established as part of the Resilience Revolution and supported by the connection to academics at the University of Brighton, are giving children and young people the opportunity to volunteer to speak on behalf of young people in Blackpool to influence education and health practice and policy. Participants have reported greater self-confidence, a sense of empowerment, a sense of belonging in school and the local community, and an increase in skill competency – for example, negotiation, collaborative group work, using digital media, carrying out research, an understanding of the process of research and policy making, and public speaking to share findings. Recently, the young people were involved in organising a conference, at which they were keynote speakers. These young people are influencing, in a real and meaningful way, the direction of a large scale, whole system project and determining the best use of funds to make lasting change.

Schools are in a position to identify and build on pupils' strengths and interests with them, both within and external to the curriculum. One case study in a special school in East London showed the impact this had on a Secondary aged pupil who was extremely disengaged from school and only able to access one-to-one support, on a temporary half-day timetable. The school identified with the pupil that he was interested in, and talented at, fixing bikes. School staff approached a local bike shop down the road from their setting and agreed a daily timetable for the young man to attend the workshop. This immediately had an impact, with his school attendance increasing and his amount of Fixed Term Exclusions decreasing.

DfE Question 16. We are keen to understand how developing character and resilience in children and young people may contribute to reducing the likelihood of gang membership and youth violence (e.g. knife crime), and preventing anti-social attitudes. Are you aware of any character-related work focused on this area? Please tell us more here:

Our response: In our review of the existing literature, there was actually limited research focusing directly on the link between resilience and knife and gang crime. The research instead focuses on the concept of 'desistance' within criminology. Desistance refers to the end of a criminal career or any involvement in criminal behaviour, and therefore focuses on the behavioural outcome, i.e. the cessation of criminal behaviour. Resilience is a broader concept, not limited to the offending behaviour, and is related to a variety of individual or structural processes that produce adversity in a young person's life. This offers a more extensive application to practice, enabling young people to be resilient to adversity as a whole, rather than in one area of their life. However, integrating ideas from research on both concepts may usefully complement, rather than replace, existing perspectives. Integrating theoretical insights encourages joined-up thinking at the policy level, particularly with respect to young people in the care and criminal justice systems, who have similar welfare needs but are subjected to disjointed policy assumptions. Extending this perspective, it is arguable that similar interventions may be effective in promoting both resilience and desistance.

Within any resilience-promoting intervention or programme it is important that there is a focus on both social and individual processes in support of resilience to knife and gang culture. Crime prevention cannot be artificially separated from socio-economic inequality and the influence of barriers to physical, emotional and mental wellbeing.

For example, in a report produced by the Transition to Adulthood Alliance (2011), stable accommodation, good health and sustained employment were the three main elements that made the biggest difference to reducing reoffending rates. Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice carried out a crime reduction prisoner survey in 2008. The results highlighted that two in five prisoners (37%) reported needing help finding a place to live when they were released, and of these, 84% reported needing a lot of help. Finally, three fifths of prisoners (60%) believed that having a place to live was important in stopping them reoffending in the future. High levels of unemployment and a criminal record negatively impact on their opportunity to contribute within society. This has a bearing on their ability to provide for their own basic needs. Therefore, the recession has adverse consequences both for steering young people away from crime and for helping them to rehabilitate after custody. This is of concern, as evidence provided by the Transition to Adulthood Alliance shows a link between stable employment and reoffending rates (Transition to Adulthood Alliance, 2009). To purely focus

on individualised interventions neglects both individual and collective needs (and the contribution that society plays in creating barriers for young people's resilience) through maintaining the oppression young people are subjected to, particularly those young people who have been involved in crime.

Since resilience is dependent upon both global and culturally specific aspects of young peoples' lives (Ungar, 2008), attention must be given to the diverse views of individuals and communities directly affected by gang membership and youth violence if we are to understand factors influencing health and life outcomes in this context, and determine effective ways of building resilience. Health and education resources must be co-developed with people in the communities they are for, in order to ensure access, relevancy and that they will be used. For example, providers of a health or education programme or service must ensure safe access for all in local areas in which gang related violence creates invisible boundaries, meaning that many will not use the service depending on its location.

Gang involvement for Secondary aged pupils in schools is a concerning social issue in Boroughs such as Newham, London. Newham is one of the areas in which we have a strong partnership with schools who are using and helping to develop the Academic Resilience Approach. Newham has the third highest knife crime rate in London (Al-Othman, 2015). Of the acid attacks committed in London in the past year, one third of them occurred in Newham (see BBC, 2017, March 20). Future consideration needs to be given to what is not working, why not and what else could be done for them; differing mechanisms may exist or be required for Secondary pupils to facilitate resilience with and for them. Perhaps their identity and sense of belonging needs are not being fulfilled outside of school. Pyrooz, Decker and Webb (2014) state that gang involvement provides young people with some of their social and emotional needs - the need to belong to a greater social collective.

DfE Question 27. Finally, please share any views or specific examples of character development which have not been captured elsewhere which you think will assist us to support schools and other organisations in character development. Please share your views and/or examples here.

Our response: We have embedded many examples in our answers so please see those for specific examples. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important consultation.

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