Engaging Difficult Youth . . . in the process of Education
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In this short presentation I hope to stimulate discussion and leave behind some resources that might aid you in your continuing discussions and practice relating to "Difficult Youth". The presentation will not necessarily follow this handout. I have listed some of those questions that have been posed to me in preparation of the day, and have left some resources in answer to those questions.

Q. Development Theory....what tasks are youth trying to master. Why to some youth seem to sail through the stages of development and others have more difficulty.

A. From a practical point of view, the most useful theory I have found in explaining and understanding adolescence is that posited by Erik Erikson (See Erickson's Model of Psycho-social Development on next page). Erikson suggested that our lives evolved in stages and that each stage was defined by a central developmental task that was essential to master. Like the butterfly emerging from a chrysalis, Erikson suggested that the mastery of each stage occurred through the process of overcoming a centra "crisis". The term connotes struggle and hardship, without which true mastery cannot be achieved.

Moving from parental Identity to Peer Identity is the critical phase here. The avoidance of negative peer influences the major challenge.

Q. What is resiliency and how do youth become resilient?

A. Taken from the website of Resiliency Canada (also see the resiliency chart, also taken from the website.)

> "What is Resiliency?
> Long term developmental studies have followed individuals raised in extremely high-risk environments that included significant levels of poverty, alcoholism, drug abuse, physical and sexual abuse, and mental illness.
> Researchers found that at least 50 percent and usually closer to 70 percent of these individuals grow up to be not only successful by societal standards, but "confident, competent, and caring persons (Werner & Smith, 1992).
> The reason some individuals succeed when faced with risks and adversity is resiliency the capability of individuals and systems (families, groups and communities) to cope with significant adversity or stress in ways that are not only effective, but tend to result in an

increased ability to constructively respond to future adversity.

Lifton (1994) identified resiliency as the human capacity of all individuals to transform and change, no matter what their risks; it is an innate righting mechanism. It is important to understand that resiliency is not a static state.

Rather, this capacity for resiliency develops and changes over time, is enhanced by protective factors within the individual and their social environments, and contributes to the maintenance or enhancement of health.

So, resiliency is the capacity to "spring back". It would seem that the presence of both internal and external resources gives a person the capacity to endure hardship and achieve success in the face of hardship. I like to compare this concept to the idea of attachment. (Flip chart)

Q. What strategies can teachers use to engage a student who seems "uninterested" in learning? How does one engage the disengaged?

A. This is a difficult question. When you consider that of the 31 resiliency factors only 7 of them relate to schooling, it is easy to see that the job of supporting resiliency and engaging difficult youth is almost an impossibility for the classroom teacher. I suggest the following strategies:

- Take every opportunity you can to learn to "KNOW" the students you teach
- Embed learning in and relate it to the cultural context of the student (remembering that the "cultural context" might also relate to the developmental stage of the student, their socio-economic, racial, cultural heritage, and increasingly the "happenings" in the neighbourhood in which the student lives).
- Develop a palpable interest in the lives of students.

I often teach an exercise I call "self in context mapping" (Flip Chart Exercise)

1. Stage (age)	Psychosocial crisis	Significant relations	Psychosocial modalities	Psychosocial virtues	Maladaptations & malignancies
I (0-1) -- infant	trust vs mistrust	mother	to get, to give in return	hope, faith	sensory distortion -- withdrawal
II (2-3) -- toddler	autonomy vs shame and doubt	parents	to hold on, to let go	will, determination	impulsivity -- compulsion
III (3-6) -- preschooler	initiative vs guilt	family	to go after, to play	purpose, courage	ruthlessness -- inhibition
IV (7-12 or so) -- school-age child	industry vs inferiority	neighborhood and school	to complete, to make things together	competence	narrow virtuosity -- inertia
V (12-18 or so) -- adolescence	ego-identity vs role-confusion	peer groups, role models	to be oneself, to share oneself	fidelity, loyalty	fanaticism -- repudiation
VI (the 20's) -- young adult	intimacy vs isolation	partners, friends	to lose and find oneself in a another	love	promiscuity -- exclusivity
VII (late 20's to 50's) -- middle adult	generativity vs self-absorption	household, workmates	to make be, to take care of	care	overextension -- rejectivity
VIII (50's and beyond) -- old adult	integrity vs despair	mankind or "my kind"	to be, through having been, to face not being	wisdom	presumption -- despair

Chart adapted from Erikson's 1959 Identity and the Life Cycle (Psychological Issues vol 1, #1)

Intrinsic Strengths

Extrinsic Strengths

Parental Involvement in Schooling

High Expectations Parents

Positive Peer Relationships

Positive Peer Influence

Achievement

School Engagement

School Work

School Boundaries

Caring School Climate

Bonding to School

High Expectations School

Caring Neighbourhood

Adult Relationships

Community Values

Neighbourhood Boundaries Youth

Caring Family

Family Communication

Adult Family Members As Role Models

Family Support

Restraint

Resistance Skills

Planning & Decision-Making

Self-Efficacy

Self-Esteem

Cultural Awareness

Acceptance

Spirituality

Equity & Social Justice

Empathy

Caring

Safety