



LARD? CAPTAIN AMERICA'S SHIELD? OR A STURDY WEED?



If Resilience were an object, what would it be? That was the question that began INSET this week, as we put strategies to help students cope positively in stressful situations at the heart of discussions. Why is it that some of us struggle and muddle through whilst others float up again and again, or bounce back easily from disappointment? Most importantly, what can we do about it?

TEACHING STUDENTS THE ABC OF RESILIENCE

We know that people react differently to the same event. One driver late for work in a traffic jam honks the horn angrily; another calmly switches on the radio. Thus the same adversity does not have to lead to the same consequence. A more accurate way of looking at it is that every **adversity** triggers a **belief**, and it is that which causes the **consequence (A+B+C)**. The first driver may believe that his employer will think poorly of him; or he will be judged by colleagues. The second driver, however, quickly decides that he can catch up the lost time at lunch and accepts that the traffic was beyond his control. When they both finally arrive at work, one enters grumbling and criticising everyone around him; the other enters purposefully. The fears of the first driver that he will be judged badly become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

This model of thinking, developed by Albert Ellis, of Adversity + Belief + Consequence (<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~eap/abcstress2.pdf>), gives us opportunities to teach students self-awareness. It is the consequence of their beliefs that will shape what comes next, not the adversity: do they allow their beliefs about a poor exam result – “I can’t do Maths” – to become a self-fulfilling prophecy; or using the ABC model, and showing them that others will have different beliefs about the same test result, can we help them to create different consequences? “I failed the test but by revising the skills more thoroughly I can succeed next time.”

SHOOT THE POISON PARROT

Equally important is our ability to evaluate our thinking. The tendency to believe ourselves and the thoughts running through our minds does not make it easy to ignore our negative opinions of ourselves! One model of resilient thinking advises us to visualise these negative thoughts as a poison parrot on our shoulder – always criticising and judging, putting our abilities down: you’ll look a fool if you suggest that; no-one’s going to want to come to your party; you’re not good enough to volunteer for that... Instead of listening, we can advise students to throw a towel over the parrot, and regain control of their thinking. With practice, the parrot will eventually just give up.

FAMOUS FAILURES

On the AGS Learner noticeboards in every class room this half term, your sons will be gazing at portraits of famous failures who have bounced back. Michael Jordan has missed the game winning shot 26 times. Walt Disney’s first animation company went broke. Edison failed 10,000 times before his lightbulb moment. Your sons will fail. And that’s okay if we show them how to react.

So what would resilience be if it were an object? Answers on an email, please, to me (vbeckley@ags.bucks.sch.uk) or Gurdeep Singh, Assistant Head (gsingh@ags.bucks.sch.uk)!