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Counselling & Mindful Practices in Education

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BUILDING RESILIENCE IN EDUCATION: Lessons from a Unique Phoenix Drawing Challenge

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The Phoenix Drawing Challenge

Imagine being asked to draw a phoenix¹ upside-down in just five minutes, without using an eraser or tilting your head. Sounds challenging, right? This seemingly simple activity became a powerful catalyst for discussions on resilience among the team at DAS's Tampines Learning Centre during a recent team bonding session.

Exploring Resilience at DAS Tampines

As the **HEAL representatives** guided the DAS Tampines Learning Centre team through the phoenix drawing challenge, initial reactions ranged from 'Why are we doing this?' to 'Is this a stress test?' What followed was a mix of laughter, frustration, and ultimately, insightful conversations on resilience.

“Resilience is the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioural flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands.” (<https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience>).

The DAS Tampines team shared personal stories where resilience played a pivotal role. Some talked about how resilience had helped them through difficult life experiences, while others recounted stories of students who exhibited extraordinary resilience despite significant challenges. All in all, we highlighted the importance of resilience in both personal and professional spheres.



The Power of 'Ish' in Building Resilience

The team was then treated to a reading of “Ish” by Peter H. Reynolds². This delightful book teaches us that more than a refusal to give up, resilience often requires a shift in mindset. In the story, the protagonist, Ramon, stops drawing after a discouraging comment.



[1] <https://iheartcraftythings.com/phoenix-drawing.html>

[2] Ish - Peter H Reynolds: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_bBt3f1QWpk

[3] <https://www.fablevisionstudios.com/ish>



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However, after a touching interaction with his younger sister, he discovers the liberating power of thinking "ishly," allowing him to once again draw freely. Ramon's story embodies the idea that resilience is not always a smooth journey and sometimes you need a nudge from others and a shift in mindset to get going again.

Applying resilience in our personal and work life

Applying resilience in our personal and professional lives is crucial for navigating the challenges we face daily. Insights from the Phoenix Drawing Challenge and our team's discussions reveal that resilience goes beyond mere determination; it often involves changing how we perceive setbacks and actively building supportive networks. Ramon's journey in "Ish" teaches us the power of reframing how we perceive setbacks, yet there are additional strategies to fortify resilience.

What We Learned from the Challenge

One indispensable strategy involves **cultivating a supportive community**, whether within personal or workplace spheres. Friends, colleagues, and family can offer invaluable social support, fostering an environment where individuals can openly share their struggles and feel less isolated. Moreover, these communities serve as sounding boards for brainstorming solutions and providing diverse perspectives on encountered challenges.

Given life's inevitable trials and tribulations, identifying effective coping mechanisms from past experiences is imperative. Colleagues' shared anecdotes on their resilience journeys underscore the importance of this practice. A diverse array of strategies from positive self-talk to visualisation, exists to bolster resilience. Seeking social support, practising mindfulness, and employing relaxation techniques are further tools that can help.

Resilience at Tampines

The unconventional phoenix drawing challenge, emulating the mythological bird known for rising from its ashes, sparked profound discussions on resilience. At DAS Tampines, we agreed that resilience is not just an innate trait but a skill that can be cultivated. Whether through internal shifts in mindset, like thinking 'ishly,' or through the support of our colleagues and communities, we can all become more resilient.

And we certainly feel this support at our Tampines Learning Centre.



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