

## Grow your academic resilience

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### *Presentation abstract*

Grow Your Academic Resilience is a 60-minute interactive workshop aimed at equipping Edge Hill University students with practical tools to nurture their academic resilience, or their ability to deal with academic challenges and setbacks (Martin and Marsh, 2008). The session helps students recognise the qualities of a **growth** as opposed to **fixed** mindset (Dweck, 2006), and supports them to feel confident in dealing constructively with feedback. Students are encouraged to identify strengths they already possess and consider the skills they need to achieve their academic goals.

Research demonstrates that resilience is an attribute that positively impacts student wellbeing, engagement, and academic achievement (Turner, Scott-Young and Holdsworth, 2017). Consequently, we believe universities play a key role in developing the resilience of students, therefore introducing students to this concept at the earliest opportunity is paramount. Feedback from students and academics to date has been positive and we are aiming to grow the number of sessions we deliver.

Our objective at ALDinHE 2022 was to deliver an adapted session and elicit feedback from our peers for future development. Participants took part in a 45-minute workshop as university students. Alongside this, commentary was provided discussing the nature of the activities. Finally, workshop participants were given 15 minutes to share their experiences and offer any constructive suggestions. Resources were shared with participants, alongside presentation notes.

## Session plan:

1. Fixed vs. growth mindset quiz.
2. Grow your academic resilience (bespoke worksheet).
3. Your feedback plan.

The session addresses the following Learning Outcomes:

- Understanding what it means to be academically resilient.
- Recognising a growth mindset.
- Discovering practical tools to nurture your resilience.
- Dealing confidently with feedback.

## Community response

Figure 1. Visual reflection from Session Chair J Bartram.



Two broad themes emerged from the audience's reflections: the importance of embedding teaching around resilience into learning development work and the role of emotions in academic work.

Learning developers are frequently privy to a direct, unvarnished picture of students' struggles around feedback. We work in a context of pure support: no grades or judgement are applied, only teaching and academic development. The incorporation of resilience as an aspect of Learning Developers' support 'would be useful and empowering', particularly when it comes to dealing with feedback. As one audience member noted, when we 'see students in tutorials where they have had negative feedback, a big part of the job is helping them to realise that they can overcome problems'. Opportunities to employ teaching around resilience and growth mindset are embedded in daily practice of learning development work with students, not distinct from our practice of supporting students.

Emotions play an important role in academic work, facilitating things like engagement (Weiss, 2000) and motivation (Dweck, 2006). Students may experience strong feelings about the feedback their academic work receives. Shields (2015) found that these emotions were related to students' identities as learners, shaped by their prior educational experiences, the significance they ascribed to the feedback, and their beliefs about themselves as learners. He noted that tutors and learning developers had the opportunity to 'induce the positive activating emotions needed for learning' (p. 622) by addressing these experiences and identities. This is particularly important because students build resilience not individually, but through interactions with their environment (e.g., school, family, community, culture) – these interactions do not create resilience, but make resilience more likely to occur (Ungar, 2012). As Learning Developers, we may see direct evidence of that growth:

[T]here is a pattern in academic resilience introspectively as a learner and observed when mentoring. When the learner sees that I am genuine rather than being polite about the strengths within their work, the learner starts to build resilience and believe in their own strengths. But this is always after the first interaction, and I think this might be a kind of pre-resilience period where the learner is deciding if the interaction was genuine or generic. Some people need more sessions before they trust but once this period is over, I feel that visible change in academic resilience grows. That ability to trust and be academically vulnerable allows growth.

Vulnerability also plays a role in the feedback-feelings cycle; as an audience member reflected, a 'combination of aspects of mindset, resilience, [and] vulnerability all feel a powerful mix for student support'. Emotions, then, are not an individual experience that

one must learn to control or damp down, but a natural part of learning and something that changes and develops in interactions with others, as students build self-efficacy in academic contexts. As one audience member noted, Learning Developers have an opportunity to reframe struggle as unconscious growth, shifting perspective from a deficit model to a strengths model when it comes to negative emotions (Kort, Reilly and Picard, 2001).

### ***Authors' reflections***

This session was designed to experience and reflect on a workshop we delivered to students. Despite all our preparation, on the day a tech issue meant that we were without cameras until five minutes before our workshop began! This added to our stress levels immediately prior to presenting.

Nerves were high beforehand; whilst we knew our presentation inside out, we could not fully prepare for the questions. Imposter syndrome was also lurking in there somewhere too, particularly as this was the first conference any of us had presented at post-Covid-19 and we were all feeling a little bit out of practice. Like many other skills, resilience is one that can develop or atrophy with lack of use.

We received lots of engagement with the activities which prompted some interesting discussion too. Trying something different worked well, and we were glad we opted to utilise Padlet rather than relying on using the Zoom chat box. Considering we were initially nervous about receiving questions, we relished the opportunity to be asked about our work and received some insightful questions which will help us develop further too.

On reflection, we all agreed that there were a lot of benefits to co-delivery of a conference workshop. Discussion was about the research we had carried out together (along with the resulting student workshop which we had developed), which meant that it was great to also be able to work on this as a team. As is the case with our students it seems that peer support certainly enhanced our resilience as a team.

There was a profound sense of relief following our workshop, along with positive feelings, this was also a real opportunity to put our own resilience skills into practice!

## **Next steps**

The following week we were pleased to be approached by several attendees who had enjoyed our presentation and had requested further information. The whole ALDinHE community were incredibly welcoming and the experience of delivering has strengthened us as a team and really increased our confidence levels, and motivation to do it all again next year.

## **Acknowledgements**

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