

Episode 2: Wildcat Resilience

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We acknowledge and are mindful that CSU Chico stands on lands that were originally occupied by the first people of this area, the Mechoopda, and we recognize their distinctive spiritual relationship with this land and the waters that run through campus. We are humbled that our campus resides upon sacred lands that once sustained the Mechoopda people for centuries.

00:30

Welcome to the Rise, Teach, Learn Podcast. I am Dr. Chiara Ferrari, Director of Faculty Development at Chico State, and we are happy to make this resource available to our campus community and beyond. The podcast is hosted by Dr. Jamie Linn Gunderson and she will engage in timely conversation with faculty, staff, and students and give you a taste of the Chico experience. Subscribe to our podcast and explore the many resources available on our website. Thank you for listening.

01:01

Hello, and welcome to rise teach learn. I'm your host Jamie Gunderson, in our second episode entitled Wildcat resilience, we explore what resilience means discuss examples of faculty and student resilience, and we also identify practices that foster resilience in learning and teaching. With me today is Dr. Rebecca Jettison, the Director of the School of Education at CSU Chico, she has not only studied resilience, but also has first hand experience navigating her team through fire, flood and pandemic over the last few years so welcome Rebecca, can you tell us a little bit about yourself.

01:41

Sure. I've been here at CSU Chico for, I believe this is my 19th year as a professor and this is my third year as Director of the School of Education and as you mentioned during three pretty hard years. So luckily I had some background and resilience. I studied Positive Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, with Martin Seligman in his master's of positive psychology program. And there, the conclusion of my work there. Penn had gotten a contract with the United States Army to create a resilience training course to sort of stand up in the army and so we took a deep dive into some of the resilience skills that have grown out of the research, and I worked for five years in that organization, training and training soldiers and developing some of those skills myself and with others so that was a. I think a project that deepened my interest in resilience, and then I, you know, interested in teacher education and have forever been interested in fostering resilience in student populations myself I needed it as a student. And so, I knew the value of it firsthand, Rebecca I'm

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so glad you're here because you're the perfect person to talk about resilience today. I want to introduce our next guest, Dr. Josh Winning Hill who serves in many roles at Chico State including faculty in multicultural and Gender Studies, as well as academic advisor and assessment coordinator in the

educational opportunity program. Welcome, Josh, can you tell us a little bit more about your background.

03:24

Yes, hi Jamie thanks for having me out here today. I think this topic of resilience is, is fascinating, in a sense, because I think I was one of those people practicing resilience for years and didn't know the term really even existed from being a student, when I started out I was on academic probation for four and a half years, and was still pushing forward. And then when I finally was introduced to a different life and made some changes. I started to learn more about this topic and that was over 25 years ago for myself in higher education. And as soon as I did all that all sudden I became engaged with school, and I did only take nine years to get my bachelor's. That was a long haul there but at that point, I really went into graduate work, and started to really look more at the idea of social emotional growth and learning what that was and that people were studying it and had terms and names for these things. And so when I was hired at Chico State, one of the first things I was able to do was develop a series of workshops for students on academic probation. And I didn't realize, when I did it as a student. It didn't help me at all. And it was just a bunch of facts here's what AP is here's what this is and I realized, none of that helped with this thing to be more of a holistic self development and understanding journey versus just here's how education works here's the numbers. And so I really moved into that. And as I progressed, I went into graduate work I said with Master's programs, and then finally a doctorate program and really did a lot of research on social emotional learning and development for students and then people in general, because it never stops that's part of the process of us continually growing in our relationships, and our roles we have, whether it's work or family. So now, campus for 20 years I still get to do a lot of workshops discussions with students, faculty and staff around these topics.

05:32

Awesome. I'm sure you're gonna bring a lot of great perspective to our conversation today, but Rebecca I'd like to start with you I've heard this word resilience. use around campus in workshops events all over the place for the last three years, and it seems as there's like this permeation of self help language into education. So, being that you have this background, can you help me deconstruct this term, what exactly is resilience.

06:01

When we forget can tell you exactly what it is but I'm going to give you some common definitions and ways to think about it.

06:08

The most common definition, you probably hear, and you hear this a lot is sort of the capacity to recover or bounce back from difficulty or adversity. That's just a very common popular sort of definition. We hear people talk about being able to cope, cope with adversity is sort of another thing what is again what is coat mean. And another definition that's common that I like is resilience is the ability to grow and thrive in the face of challenge and bounce back from adversity, or hardship. So, you know, those are those are some of the taglines that you'll hear. And while resilience does help us sort of recover from loss trauma, it's, it's more than that, because it helps build our well -being, gives us sort of an underlying sense of satisfaction or contentment or happiness when, when we're building our inner

resources. So, so that's a definition, those are some definitions, but one of my favorite comes from Ann Masten who wrote a book. She wrote probably 100 research studies first, because she was conducting a lot of research within a book called ordinary magic. And one of the biggest surprises to her. When she was studying youth and resilience and the development was the ordinariness of the phenomenon, she said you know when individuals experience, hardship, and they work to do this recovering or bouncing back or overcoming that we talked about so frequently. We think that it's some special secret thing they're doing or, you know, you think about all of the, you know, fairy tales and stories and lore around people who've overcome amazing things and so you think it's this transformational, you know, monumental sort of magic skill that they leverage. But really, it's very common things that people do, and it looks magical when it happens when they're doing it to overcome something hard, but it's really very ordinary it's really very common it's normal development in action. So I would say those are some of the ways that we might talk about what Riesling says the research would tell us that there are competencies that contribute to resilience. So we talked about the broad term we know certain things contribute but there are certain things that we know are supportive of resilience. So self-awareness is one self-regulations another building optimism is a third having mental flexibility is another knowing who you are and your strengths and specific skill sets, it tends to be related, and in connection, you know any sort of technique strategy or skill approach way of being in the world that can enhance the development of those competencies is going to be really good for students.

09:20

That's actually very helpful in preparation for meeting and talking about resilience I wanted to make sure that I did a lot of research and I found this podcast that I listened to. With this lady named Donna Volpitta the founder of the Centre for resilient leadership and creator of the pathways to empower website. She described resilience as our response to challenge based on neural pathways created around what she calls the four S's our sense of self, our situation our supports and our strategies, and she believes that these pathways are created by experiencing struggles which makes total sense to me because we know that experience is forming walkways that connect our views perspectives beliefs, the things that we know the things that we're witnessing in our environment. We already know that that's brain science but you know in my research on resilience, I found that there are actually a lot of critics who caution practitioners and before we really get into like actionable practices, I just want to have this conversation, but they caution practitioners not to shift the focus away from the system's barriers and the students responsibility to perform or circumvent these barriers.

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I tend not to subscribe to deficit-based conceptualizations that I would want to be sure that we don't take the deficit view of our students as lacking in something because they're pretty perfect the way they are. And sometimes the students that we're talking about when we use that sort of frame is some of the most underserved students that we have and the argument I would make is that some of those students are in fact some of the most resourceful students that we have, they have made it to, you know, college or making it to school for primary age kids. In spite of overwhelming obstacles, whether those obstacles are, you know, societal or institutional barriers to their success. Whether it's a family situation, you know, whether it's all sorts of issues related to resources. So, I am careful with that frame, because I believe that we can all enhance our resilience, we can all grow in our resilience. We can all. You know, improve our well-being through some specific strategies, but I want to be careful to

not label certain people completely, you know, not resilient because being a product of their circumstances, and I find it's not true. I find that there's some, some super resourcefulness out there and resourcefulness is, you know, more common than not.

12:00

I want to bring Josh into the conversation because he works with students who are first gen and so, um, you know, we see the same thing and how we talk about first gen students and we kind of labelled them from this like deficit view, but in other countries like South Africa, Canada, they're actually focusing on just what you say Rebecca this resourcefulness So Josh you get to work day in and day out with the first gen population of students. Do you have any insights on the challenges, and then also the acids that they're bringing to the university experience?

12:35

Oh gosh yes I, when I started working with first generation students. I jumped in because I had worked with the EAP students and staff, and I just loved what they brought into the situations and discussions, but I was still just had no idea of what I was going to learn, and what students really were experiencing as they came to school. And so it took a couple of years to really wrap understand and learn from the students what it is their needs were, what their anxieties were what their frustrations were, but then also realizing, they have all these tools. And so a lot of discussion. In the last number of years have gotten into more like funds of knowledge and looking at community cultural wealth, and inside of that there's specific capitals they bring with them, and like, for one instance would be resisting capital. Right. they have this, this knowledge and a skill that they've developed or nurtured through facing oppositional situations, and then challenging inequality, because quite often, they've been doing it, their whole life, getting away from deficit is extremely important, but I think it's also extremely important to recognize that it's there.

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And Rebecca, you've done a lot of research on like relationships and bringing that into the classroom. Can you talk a little bit about some actionable practices that faculty can take into their classroom, to make sure they're fostering resilience in their teaching and learning. Well, I think, you know,

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starting small is important so with resilience strategies sometimes the small things are the big things so stuff that we might consider very simple. Knowing all of your students in a, in a particular section of your class, knowing their name, knowing something about them, making space in a course to hear you know at the beginning to like hear about who your students are what are their strengths, what are their needs as learners that builds community, and that turns out it's critical for people lowering defenses and feeling comfortable enough to reach out for help to ask for assistance. It goes a long way in establishing relationships between students so that they can use each other as resources. Many people probably do that but it's really important. We in resilience, always talk about other people matter. That was a term phrase, sort of coined by Chris Peterson a psychologist at the University of Michigan who has since passed but he's done some important work. And he always lead with other people matter, and it's hugely important with students. They have to know that they matter to us, and we will come to matter to them and we'll forge a connection that helps them develop their capital, whether it's

navigational capital or social capital whatever is coming up for them. They have a reliable other person to touch base with that is hugely resilience enhancing, you know, various professors handle that differently but I spent time in in one of my classes and I always deliberated whether it was a waste of time whether it wasted instructional time, but I spent time, having them take some sort of a strength survey as a first assignment to get to know some of their greater strengths and lesser strengths as learners and people, and the end people part is important not just as learners but as learners and people, and we take some time and talk about that and have them, you know give each other examples and here's me at my best here's me at my worst. Sometimes I'd start classes with positive introductions where they'd say, here's my greatest literacy challenge, because I taught literacy, I'd say you know had students write about their greatest literacy challenge and their greatest literacy success and share you know who they are their best and worse. And I always felt like when I did take the time to do those things, there was a payoff for the rest of the semester in the connections and relationships that sort of organically developed after that short investment of time so I think anything we can do like that, that's related to our own style and our own content is usually worth the time and effort.

16:55

I love that I am a firm believer that education is all about relationships, and in fact in our last episode, we really kind of pinpointed that students and faculty for that matter are really craving this connection so it's important to implement practices that create community, you served as my director, during a time where I was a new faculty member and about, I would say what was it 11 or 10 weeks in, we had the campfire. And unfortunately, I was impacted in that natural disaster. And you really took a role in mentoring me. So one of the things you taught me during that time. And probably the thing that helped me most was this idea of practicing gratitude cultivating optimism and so fast forward a couple of years, this is now part of my daily practice, and I recently read some research that really kind of dialed in the positive impact of gratitude on the relationship in education, you know I want to figure out a way for faculty to take this as an actionable practice into their classroom so you have any ideas on how to cultivate optimism and gratitude and overall well being in classes,

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all the positive emotions have important benefits for resilience. When you think about gratitude particularly it's been, you know, related in the literature to physical health, and strengthening of the immune system and the cardiovascular system. It's been related to helping people recover from loss and trauma. It's been related to widening and individual's perceptual field, so that they can see the big picture of a situation better and they can see the opportunities available to them more. It might be in that way it encourages ambition, it connects people. But one of the things it's really doing is building optimism, when you when you focus on what is good in the world, it builds optimism. So, Robert Emmons from he's down at UC Davis right now. As a professor he's been there for a long time actually studies gratitude and he's put out some really good work on sort of the benefits, and he's found that it definitely makes individuals more optimistic feel happier and experience more sense of self-worth a greater sense of self-worth. It also reduces anxiety and depression, to practice gratitude. Something we see commonly in students write that sort of common code of mental health, before I go into sort of one main strategy for cultivating gratitude. I would put this in the context of saying that this suggestion to practice get gratitude is definitely not denying hassle pain loss and justice. All the difficult emotions of the world. It's an antidote to them but those are there, and there's a little thing called the negativity bias

and psychologists will know this that the negative problematic, issues of life are very salient and they grab our attention and they pull us in that direction and we notice them, and we fixate on them and sometimes we obsessive Li fixate on them. It's important to see what is negative because it's in short our, our survival right as a species, it keeps us safe. But there's there's these other benefits that I just sort of enumerated of practicing gratitude because it builds optimism and more perspective and openness and awareness so one of the things that is really common in the literature on gratitude is to practice and carry out some sort of exercise that is called three good things. When we worked with it in military we call it hunt the good stuff. We were languaging it, it's been real language for schools and all kinds of settings but the essence of the strategy is to cultivate gratitude by noticing reflect noticing recognizing reflecting on three good things in your life. At the end of the day, as a self care strategy I don't know at the beginning of the day you know people notice it. Some people recorded in a journal some people, lay in a hot bath and think about it you know what was good in my life and sometimes it is low hanging fruit like today was an awful day but I had my favorite soup. I mean, it can be really really pedestrian things like that, or it can be gosh I'm so grateful for the people in my life or you know whatever. And it just it's it tends to be one of those things when you practice it It builds and your, it builds your capacity to notice more of what's good and balancing what's bad and good, because those coexist right light and dark good and bad they exist side by side. And it just keeps us sort of in the game in terms of productivity. So it's sort of an upward spiral type of activity in terms of our emotions, it keeps us from, it's sort of an antidote to downward spiraling into, you know, everything is terrible. And I'm going to bed. Goodbye. I'm giving up right I'm not persisting or I'm separating on my thoughts, and it's just sort of a channel shifter here it's like the turning the channel in your brain from all of the negative stuff that's really salient to something good for a while. Bounce you out, and it tends to be correlated with all of these benefits. So, it's simple, and it's a strategy that, you know, I like to recommend.

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It seems so small and so easy to implement that it almost seems like too easy like that, that couldn't be the answer for the test because that's just so obvious and this is one of those like just tiny little things that you devote, you know, two to three minutes to as a tool to just get you prepped and ready for your day and it does over time shift your perspective and it is something that's so small that can just be easily brought into a classroom.

23:01

One thing I was introduced to along the way through education at a conference probably even over 10 or 15 years ago maybe or so at the end of it. And I do this now with class every now and then I'll throw it out at the end of the class session. What it is just, hey, if you have a phone. Go ahead and pull it out. Pick someone off your list you haven't talked to, and just send them a text letting them know you appreciate them. And that you're thankful for them, and then I'll do it and all of a sudden, people will start to get responses. And then people will want to share, like, oh hey my old neighbor from you know sixth grade I haven't talked to forever just said oh I was thinking about you recently too and wondering what you're up to. So, so it can then just be this ripple effect that then not just for the person in your class or the students we're working with, or even faculty and staff I did it during the faculty development workshop one time and even faculty all of a sudden were just amazed at the responses they were getting within five minutes from people and so that's a great thing that we can do as faculty with our

students even is just throw that out, you know every now and then during your class session. When students experience these and see themselves growing their gratitude for what you've done, Rose, because they're like oh yeah I really am thankful for this. What this teacher did for me or what some of my classmates did for me, our course content is not always what students are going to take from our class. And that's just the way it is and there are students who have who have not earned such a great grade in a course, but they'll talk to me afterwards and say you know what I learned much more from your course than other courses where I got A's and B's because your course was challenging you challenged me as a person you ask questions that made me think about my own connection or relationship with these discussion points and topics and how they connect to the world and to me and, and they'll get more from it. And so it's so it is that bigger picture as well that what we're doing the faculty, like Rebecca pointed out so gratefully is, it's not just our course material. Yes, that's, that's been the structure and the idea of higher education for, you know, since 1636. It started in the United States but but but there's so much more to it like you know then than just course content. Yes, we hope to get it. Now, one of our goals right but not every student is going to leave getting it. But have we helped them get something else from the process.

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Yeah, and it's truly I'm not trying to devalue the content I mean I care about my content as much as any other Professor cares about their content, deeply right. Yeah, deeply but I just know that part of my content is, you know, it's the people I people I'm teaching and if they are not picking up what I'm putting down I'm not doing my job. And if they're not, you know, interacting with it and owning it and feeling connected to it and feeling more empowered in their life for having been in the class than I, I worry that I'm not having the impact that I want to have. And certainly I don't have it all the time obviously we, none of us do, but to try to have the intention i think is a worthy goal.

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Kind of like content rooted in care.

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Yeah.

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I kind of like that, you know, thinking about it in that way. And there you have it folks. Today we define resilience discussed examples of faculty and student resilience and identify practices that foster resilience in teaching and learning. For more information on resilience including research practices and resources, check out our FTM teaching guide on fostering resilience in teaching and learning, and building student agencies, encourage you to try and implement the three C's in your teaching, create community cultivate well being, or communicate consistently. To learn more about gratitude and optimism, check out the resources that you use. I'd like to thank Dr. Rebecca Justin and Joshua Hill for contributing to this episode, and a special thank you to Quinn Winchell for our podcast music, and to the vocal stylings of Dr. Browning Neddeau for the land acknowledgement, join us for our next episode where we talk about supporting students and faculty and crisis. Until then, we got this Wildcat.