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Developing Resilience in the Elementary School Classroom

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of
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Developing Resilience in the Elementary School Classroom

Ellen Ferrin

Abstract

This study explores the ways in which elementary school teachers can help their students develop the skills associated with resilience. Resilient individuals have skills and perspectives that allow them to overcome significant challenges and adversity in their lives. When children develop resilience, they are better able to constructively and healthily adapt to circumstances, and are more likely to succeed in school and beyond.

For this study, an extensive literature review was conducted, exploring the research that has investigated resilience in young children. Subsequently, surveys were distributed to elementary school teachers. Twelve teachers in Washington, Oregon, California, and New York completed the survey. Both the literature and the survey responses reflected an emphasis on positive student-teacher relationships, consistent and safe classroom environments, and social and emotional teaching. The findings have implications for classroom teachers, school leaders and administrators, and teacher educators. All three must be aware of and address students' lives beyond the classroom. In both philosophy and practice, teachers must prioritize and proactively address students' social and emotional needs in order to build their capacity for resilience.

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Rationale

This study identifies ways in which classroom teachers in elementary settings can help their students develop and strengthen resilience. As a social worker and teacher in shelter, residential, and school environments, this author has known many children facing adverse circumstances and has seen the positive impact that a caring and invested adult can have on those children. However, within the current educational climate, the emphasis is on high-stakes academic preparation. As a result, social, emotional, and behavioral needs are frequently deprioritized within teacher training and professional development (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007). Professional experience and research suggest that these needs are critically important and highly influential in terms of student resilience and success, in school and in life.

In this rationale, the topic of resilience is presented and explored within the context of teacher preparation and practice. The methodology and limitations of the study are then discussed. A review of the literature provides insight into how resilience has been examined within the field of education. The focus then shifts to the role of schools and teachers in fostering and supporting the development of resilience in young students.

Defining Resilience

Resilience is increasingly recognized by sociological and educational researchers as a crucial capacity for children and adults facing difficult circumstances (Lantieri, 2008; Windle & Bennett, 2012; Greenberg, 2008). In the context of work with elementary-school-age children, resilience is composed of strong interpersonal skills, high self-esteem, a positive outlook on the future, strong communication skills, and the ability to express and control emotions. Resilience is partially an innate characteristic, one that depends largely on individual predispositions. However, resilience can also be built through positive experiences. Caring and involved adults play a large role in the development of resilience in young children, thus making schools a natural location for intervention, particularly with populations of children who may not have high levels of support at home.

Overview of the Study

Overview of methodology.

This study began with an in-depth literature review exploring the ways in which previous studies have approached the definition and development of resilience in children. Articles, studies, and books were selected from a wide range of sources to gain an understanding of the elements and implications of resilience and to examine the ways in which various programs and studies have attempted to develop or support resilience in children.

Although the literature paints a rich picture of resilience, the voices of the teachers themselves were notably missing. These voices felt important to the author to include in the conversation, since they are closest to the work of helping students become more resilient. Thus, subsequent to the literature review, a survey was developed by the author and distributed to elementary school teachers across the country. The survey asked teachers to reflect on the challenges facing their students and the interventions they had employed to help support students. Teachers were also asked to discuss their own level of preparation to address those needs and the ways in which new teachers might be even better prepared.

Limitations of the study.

Although the study yielded very interesting and consistent results, there are some considerable limitations to consider. Qualitative research is not designed to yield generalizable results (Lichtman, 2010), and this holds true in the present study. As a result of the author's perspective, the surveys were designed to focus solely on the social and emotional needs that contribute to resilience in children. The surveys attributed a certain level of importance to these needs. The surveys were distributed to teachers who had been identified as sensitive to the social and emotional needs of their students; thus, it can be assumed that the survey respondents are not necessarily representative of any larger group of teachers. In addition, the sample size is quite small, further preventing any generalizations to be made from the results. Although the teachers' views presented here cannot be used to represent all teachers' views, the information, interventions used, and advice given are extremely relevant to classrooms and schools across the country.

Review of Selected Literature

Though a great many studies have addressed resilience, few have done so within the context of schools and classrooms. For this review, this author read widely and selected those articles, studies, and books that most closely related to the topic at hand.

Resilience is most commonly understood as the ability to persevere despite adverse circumstances. Much of the literature states that a resilient person will retain a positive self-concept, a sense of optimism, and a feeling of control over his or her environment even in the face of unstable or negative conditions (Lowenthal, 2001; Lynch, Geller, & Schmidt, 2004; Rockwell, 2006). As Freiburg (1993) defines it, resilience is "…a multifaceted process by which individuals or groups exhibit the ability to draw the best from the environment in which they find themselves" (p 365). It is not, as Windle and Bennet (2012) state, a "super functioning or flourishing" but is instead "the maintenance of normal…or 'better than expected' development, given exposure to the adversity under question" (p.219). Resilience, then, includes a number of traits and capacities that all lend themselves to the positive development of self-concept and coping mechanisms.

Although some qualities of resilience are inherent, many can be further fostered and developed through intentional work. Bondy, Ross, Gillingane, and Hambacher (2007) identified four categories of strengths in children that overcome adversity, namely, "social competence, problem solving, autonomy, and a sense of purpose" (p. 330). Bickart and Wolin (1997) list seven important characteristics that heighten an individual's resilience: independence, initiative, creativity, humor, morality, insight, and relationships (p. 22). Although different studies prioritize different traits, emotional proficiency, self-confidence, and interpersonal skills are consistent themes.

Individuals possess these characteristics to varying degrees; as such resilience will not look the same within every child. Everyone has some level of resilience, regardless of whether they have encountered adversity (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007), but some have a stronger predisposition towards positive and healthy adjustment. Regardless of their natural strengths, all children can benefit from additional support and guidance in this area.

Many researchers have emphasized the protective nature of a positive adult relationship for children adapting to changing and difficult circumstances (Boorn, Hopkins Dunn, & Page, 2010; Rockwell, 2006; Theron & Engelbrecht, 2012; Lynch, Geller, & Schmidt, 2004). Boorn, Hopkins Dunn, and Page (2010) acknowledge the importance of positive and supportive relationships to the development of resilience, stating that “positive connections with others lie at the very core of psychological development… [and] are critical for achieving and sustaining adaption” (p. 319). Theron and Engelbrecht (2012) also consider relationships with responsive and caring adults crucial protective factors that “buffer risk and enable prosocial development” (p. 265). These relationships model critical interpersonal skills and help children form a positive self-concept as someone worthy of love and care.

While many children find these relationships at home with their parents or families, those children who do not experience positive or secure connections at home are lacking this crucial element of positive and normal development. Even those children that do have strong familial relationships benefit from an additional secure and caring adult. School can be a natural place for children to find these attentive and safe adults.

Academic success is both a result of and a protective factor in the development of resilience (Cunningham & Swanson, 2010; Rockwell, 2006; Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006). A number of researchers have investigated what they call academic resilience, which is the ability of a student in danger of school failure to overcome those challenges and succeed academically. Since school failure is a highly significant risk factor, affecting an individual’s likelihood to live in poverty, be unemployed, or become addicted to substances (McCaul, Donaldson, Coladarci, & Davis, 1992), academic resilience is a very important subset of resilience. Cunningham and Swanson (2010) found that academically resilient students felt “competent, optimistic, and valued as students” within their school community (p. 484). Students develop these feelings when they believe that an adult is invested in them and considers them worthy of time and effort. Academically resilient students also had “significantly higher perceptions of academic involvement, satisfaction, self-concept, and aspirations than non-resilient students” (Cunningham & Swanson, 2010, p. 475). Again, students are most engaged when they feel connected to school and the adults in it.

Because of the important role that it plays in the lives of children, the school community itself can become a protective factor for children experiencing challenges in their home lives (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007; Cunningham & Swanson, 2010; Freiburg, 1993). However, schools are only protective when teachers and administrators prioritize social and emotional needs and development. When adults are able to provide a nurturing environment and explicitly teach the skills, habits, and perspectives that increase resiliency, school becomes a place where students feel safe, valued, and capable (Boorn, Hopkins Dunn, & Page, 2010; Cunningham & Swanson, 2010). By providing children with choices and increasing their sense of competence, adults in schools can create places in which children feel a level of control that may be absent from their lives outside of school (Lowenthal, 2001). Feeling a sense of control over oneself and one’s environment is an important factor in resilience.

Furthermore, the impact of schools is increased by the long-term nature of a student’s relationship with it. Outside of their homes, school is the place in which children spend the majority of their time and where they develop the most significant relationships with adults and peers. Most students attend school regularly over the course of many years, and thus school can provide a level of consistency that is necessary when trying to help children overcome the stressors of potentially unstable environments outside of school (McEntire, 2009; Lynch, Geller, & Schmidt, 2004).

Researchers have been increasing their focus and emphasis on the pre-school and elementary years as a time when students are more adaptable and more open to new protective factors (Lantieri, 2008). Although all development is an ongoing process, the development of basic social and emotional skills usually precedes the development of basic cognitive and linguistic skills and habits (Greenberg, 2006). Children are most able to develop the traditionally "academic" skills when they have reached a developmentally appropriate level of emotional maturity and are able to recognize, acknowledge, and to some extent control their emotions. As such, early attention to emotional and social skills and behaviors can positively impact the development of other academic skills. Because "the school environment is the most significant context outside of the family to promote opportunities in maintaining emotional and social well-being" (Boorn, Hopkins-Dunn, & Page, 2010, p. 318), the primary grades can be an effective setting in which to focus this attention.

Early intervention can have big payoffs for students' future success. By the time children reach age 8, their social and emotional selves are largely formed (Lantieri, 2008). While this does not mean that our emotional selves stop developing at that time or that older students are not impacted by social and emotional interventions, it does strengthen the argument for attending to these needs during the elementary years. Indeed, according to Lantieri (2008), "If children learn to express emotions constructively and engage in caring and respectful relationships before and while they are in the lower elementary grades, they are more likely to avoid depression, violence, and other serious mental health problems as they grow older" (p. 44). Some children have the opportunity to gain these skills in the home environment, but many must rely almost entirely on their interactions at school to practice emotional and social competence.

If schools can be natural sites of intervention, then teachers can be the natural facilitators of the protective relationships that can develop in school. As Freiburg (2009) states, “Students want to know how much you care before they consider how much you know” (p. 66). Many children will not fully engage in the academic process without a strong belief that their teacher is dedicated to them and their success. When teachers are able to develop trusting and positive relationships with young children, particularly those facing significant adversity in their lives, they have the potential to impact students’ lives far beyond their classroom success.

The value of a strong and positive relationship is especially important in communities facing significant societal adversity. Indeed, “teachers’ roles as caring adults often supersede their roles as teaching adults: research shows that in resource-poor and challenged contexts, teachers double as surrogate parents, counselors, social workers, confidantes, and health promotion agents” (Theron & Engelbrecht, 2012, p. 267). This multifaceted adult relationship becomes a strongly protective factor against serious challenges that students may face at school and at home (Lynch, Geller, & Schmidt, 2004).

These student-teacher relationships have to be formed carefully and thoughtfully, and are generally founded on strong, well-managed and structured classroom routines and instruction (Rockwell, 2006; Lynch, Geller, & Schmidt, 2004). The resilience that can stem from positive academic experiences depends on teachers having confidence in themselves, having faith in their students, and on the general classroom culture reflecting an emphasis on student success (Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006). There are many ways in which teachers can create this environment.

In addition to developing strong and protective relationships with individual students, teachers can directly teach children skills that support their positive development. This includes teaching social skills like how to read body language, how to maintain conversations, and how to develop friendships; and emotional skills such as how to recognize and understand emotions, how to control anger, and how to navigate and resolve conflicts (Lowenthal, 2001; Lynch, Geller & Schmidt, 2004).

Consistent, predictable, and clear classroom expectations were repeatedly named as essential components of a strong, nurturing learning environment. Studies found that classrooms in which students were actively involved in decision making and standard setting helped to support the students' internal locus of control, a key factor in resilience (Bickart & Wolin, 1997; Lowenthal, 2001; Freiburg, Huzinec, & Templeton, 2009). In addition, holding positive and high expectations for student performance and behavior helped to support the development of resilience (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007; Cunningham & Swanson, 2010; Theron & Engelbrecht, 2012). When teachers adopt a style of management that promotes student choice and involvement and that communicates a strong belief in students' ability to meet high expectations, students begin to develop the skills associated with resilience.

Although much of the literature focuses on classroom practice, it provides direction for school leaders and teacher educators, as well. Teacher beliefs and skills form the foundation for the provision of all the interventions listed above (Boorn, Hopkins Dunn, & Page, 2010). Thus, teachers must first understand "…that they are uniquely situated to promote and safeguard youth resilience, and that their influence may well be long-term" (Theron & Engelbrecht, 2012, p. 277). Teachers who understand their role in this way enter the field predisposed to address all needs of children, rather than focusing solely on the academic aspect of their job.

Once teachers are aware of their ability to support the development of resilience, they must learn how to do so. Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher (2007) point out that "teacher educators have provided insufficient tools for implementation of these values [of respect, support, and safety, which]…leaves novice teachers with few clear ideas about how to achieve their lofty goals" (p. 347). The teachers who are aware of their ability to impact the wellbeing of children will seek out opportunities to learn how to do so. Thus, teacher education programs must do a better job of training teachers to "infuse resilience-promoting concepts into their teaching practices and classroom environments" (Lynch, Geller, & Schmidt, 2004, p. 340).

Teacher preparation does not end when teachers enter the classroom; Howey (1999) refers to pre-service teacher education as "unfinished business", stating that "[t]he understandings, dispositions, and abilities to become an accomplished teacher, especially in inner city settings, can only be acquired over time" (p. 32). In light of this, it is important that school leaders provide and promote opportunities across the school year for teachers in their school to further develop their understanding of conscious and responsive classroom practice (Freiburg, 1993).

Many studies recommended the use of a program or curriculum to provide cohesive and focused staff development within the school, and some schools have done so (Freiburg, Huzinec, & Templeton, 2009; Lynch, Geller, & Schmidt, 2004; Boorn, Hopkins Dunn, & Page, 2010). Most programs, such as “Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies” (PATHs) (in Greenberg, 2006) and *Al’s Pals* (in Lynch, et al, 2004), focus on training teachers in techniques and strategies that will improve their management and responsiveness. Some, like “Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline” (CMCD) (in Freiburg, et al, 2009), also include the establishment of teacher support systems and focus on staff cohesion and collaboration.

Methodology

A 23-item survey (Appendix C) was developed by the author to be distributed to teachers and former teachers. It asked for insight into the ways in which resilience was or was not fostered in their classrooms and schools. In order to reach a wide range of respondents, this author asked teachers and others working in the educational field for recommendations of teachers who were particularly interested in or adept at addressing social and emotional needs in the classroom. Once a primary list of participants was established, the author then asked some of those participants for other contacts who might be interested. The survey was distributed to 18 elementary school teachers representing a wide range of experience in five states across the United States.

In a “Letter of Consent,” participants were informed that the study was investigating social and emotional needs in the classroom and that they had been identified as someone who was particularly effective at addressing these needs (Appendix B). Participants were assured that their names and other identifying information would not be used, and that the final project would be published electronically in a graduate school library. Each respondent was required to provide a virtual signature on the informed consent form before they were granted access to the survey, and were given clear instructions for how to exit the survey and withdraw from the study at any time.

As stated above, the survey consisted of 23 questions. Eleven of those questions asked for information about the students and schools within which the survey respondents worked. The remaining twelve questions asked participants to identify significant student needs, effective interventions and supports, and obstacles to the establishment of their ideal classroom environment. The majority of questions were qualitative in nature, requiring open-ended responses. One multiple choice question asked respondents to identify the primary challenges their students faced, while two Likert-style questions required participants to rank their feeling of preparation at the beginning of their career and at present.

The completed surveys were read by the author and several themes were identified. Survey responses were then coded by theme within each question and across the survey itself. These themes are presented in the Findings section below. Once survey responses were reviewed, follow-up was completed via email with nine respondents. Follow-up asked for greater specificity and anecdotes about particular students and experiences. Five of those participants responded with additional information about their students and strategies. All student names used in responses have been changed for this study.

Findings

In this section, results of the survey are presented. Responses are organized by question, then further organized by theme or focus. These themes are then analyzed in the context of the literature.

Presentation of Data

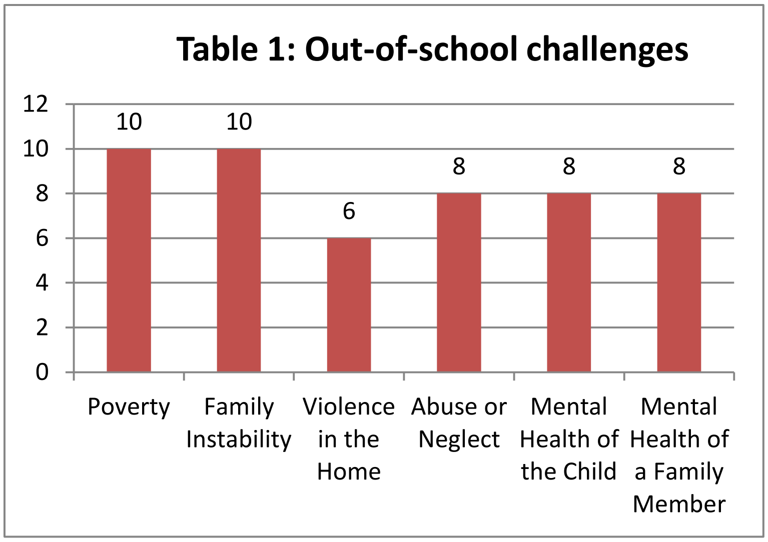
Participant demographics.

Twelve participants completed and returned the survey, for a 67% participation rate. A great diversity of experience was represented by those teachers who responded. Years teaching in an elementary classroom ranged from two to 43; half of the responding teachers had more than ten years of experience in elementary schools. Participants had worked with children in every grade from kindergarten to fifth grade. Two respondents had additional experience in speech therapy and two had also taught preschool. The majority of respondents (10) held a Master's degree and all held a degree in education or teaching. Half of the respondents were certified in special education.

Survey respondents worked in a variety of settings. The majority of the responding teachers worked in public schools, though private/independent and charter schools were also well represented. None of the respondents had experience working in religious schools. Respondents were split equally between urban and suburban settings; no respondents indicated working in a rural setting. Participants worked in schools in Washington State, New York, California, and Oregon.

Significant student challenges.

The students taught by survey respondents faced a number of challenges in their everyday lives. Ten of the 12 respondents indicated that their students faced poverty and family instability; eight respondents identified abuse or neglect and mental health of the child or of a family member as significant challenges for their students; and six respondents indicated that violence in the home was an issue for their students (See Table 1, p. 16). In addition, respondents identified language and a lack of literacy in the home,



family incarceration and gang activity, foster care, immigration and citizenship issues, hunger and chronic sickness, violence in the community, and absent, overscheduled professional parents as additional challenges to their students' learning and success.

Several common themes emerged when the respondents discussed the social, emotional, and behavioral needs exhibited by their students. These themes included helping children understand and express their emotions, establishing a safe and trusting relationship with the student, and providing clear structures and guidelines.

Many respondents addressed the need to help children understand and express their emotions and feelings; for example, stating that "a lot of students seem ill-equipped to name or handle their emotions" and have an "inability to express needs, wants, or desires." One respondent wrote that her students "don't know how to deal with these emotions" while another wrote that her students have "difficulty with expressing their feelings, difficulty identifying feelings, [and] difficulty expressing their emotions."

According to participants, a large component of addressing students' needs is establishing safe and trusting relationships within the classroom community. Statements like "…[students] need to feel safe, loved, and highly regarded", "…they need to feel like they are of value" and "…needing to feel emotionally safe" were frequent. One respondent explained that "students also require time and space to talk to teachers and each other about other problems in their lives." Another respondent wrote that students "need to feel like you care and are willing to listen." Other needs named by respondents included "an incredible amount of positive reinforcement," "constant adult attention [and] validation," and "positive interactions with adults on a consistent basis."

Many teachers wrote that that their students require "clear models of acceptable behavior for our classroom" as some students "have no appropriate model of social and emotional behavior." Part of providing this model is establishing a strong and consistent classroom structure. One respondent said that "students need a lot of support in solving interpersonal problems," and this was echoed in a number of other responses. To provide this support, students need "explicit classroom norms, which they understand and agree with, logical consequences, [and] problem solving procedures to follow."

Many of the responding teachers referred to challenges outside of school. Some of the challenges named included "domestic issues that clearly affect children and this affects their academic and social progress," being "uncertain where/when the next meal is" or being "essentially the 'adult' at home," and "other problems in their lives, like deaths in their families, incarcerated family members, and violence in the community." One teacher spoke directly to the effects of outside challenges on classroom behavior, stating that "some who struggle academically try to hide their difficulties by disrupting others, or pointing out and making fun of other students' struggles" and "some children used race, ethnicity, supposed sexual difference, and gender as ways to put down other students."

Whole-group interventions.

Respondents were asked to identify individual and whole-group interventions that they had utilized to help support some of the needs and challenges noted previously. One of the most frequently named whole-group interventions was explicit social and emotional teaching, much of which occurred during class meetings. For example, one participant holds “daily classroom meetings that encompass the learning and practice of common courtesy” and another includes “lots of social/emotional teaching during morning meeting or community times.” During these meetings, respondents modeled and taught appropriate behavior. One did so by having “honest conversations with my class as a whole so they know…how they should respond to others socially.”

In a follow up email, one teacher gave an example of how community meetings had helped one of his students express his feelings to his classmates: “[i]n a community circle, Alvin (who rarely speaks during discussions), raised his hand and said, ‘There’s a big problem! I keep cleaning up the room and no one helps me!’” The teacher wrote that Alvin then got up and walked around the classroom, pointing out items that needed to be picked up or put away. “‘I’m… I’m so frustrated that I have to do all this work and NO ONE is helping!’” The teacher felt that the classroom environment and community circle structure allowed Alvin to feel safe to express his strong feelings in a constructive way.

Explicit teaching also occurred during specific emotional or social lessons. One school provided “whole-class lessons with the school counselor,” while other teachers implemented lessons “on making and using a ‘solution’ kit to deal with emotions and conflicts,” “on identifying emotions,” or “providing direct instruction on particular social skills.” Some respondents referred to using specific professional curricula as guides to help them create their lessons. As one teacher stated, “[t]he [curriculum] allow[s] us to discuss situations specifically without making a particular student the focus of the conversation. It helps us create a safe environment to discuss social problems and build empathy.”

Some social teaching was incorporated into other classroom structures or lessons, such as “social skills embedded in play through classroom rules”, “a problem-solving structure to help support kids in solving interpersonal problems”, or a literacy program that “is really designed to help kids talk about their feelings and process common problems encountered in their stage of development.”

In addition to explicit social and emotional teaching, respondents placed a strong emphasis on creating a classroom community. As mentioned above, most respondents reported holding regular community meetings, sometimes in the morning, sometimes at the close of the day. According to participants, these meetings served many purposes, including, “to check in, share, and play games together,” “to discuss issues that have come up,” to “report acts of kindness and air grievances,” “to talk about classroom issues,” and “to address problems that arise and allow time to acknowledge students who make good choices and encourage self accountability with those who were part of the problem.”

Part of creating a positive classroom community included creating opportunities for students to make positive connections with teachers and other students. Teachers celebrated students through a “Star of the Week” activity, provided modeling and practice in “giving authentic compliments,” or created “kindness chains” in which students recorded kindnesses they saw or experienced throughout the day. One teacher "carefully planned seating" and "encouraged friendships between certain students;" another teacher "paired students experiencing some of the same issues so that they could offer each other support." A couple of respondents also held special lunches and wrote special notes to individual students "so that they are aware that someone cares and can offer support."

Many of the responding teachers were adamant that, in order to create a consistent and safe classroom environment, students needed clear expectations and structures to address issues that arise. One participant wrote that "consistency and fairness are terribly important." Many of the responses reflected a belief that students needed to feel like they had the tools to take control of their situation and make their own choices. Teachers tried to create an environment in which this was possible in a number of different ways, including "providing sufficient time in the day for students to make choices and take responsibility of their learning [sic]" and by making and posting "rubrics and charts explicitly outlining expected behavior." One teacher also "clearly delineated a series of consequences for behaviors deemed completely unacceptable" and another created a "class-wide positive behavior support reinforcement system."

One teacher whose students faced particular challenges outside of school felt that it was important to address the basic needs that arise, such as hunger and homework support. This teacher's school provided "breakfast for every child" and assigned "[h]omework that doesn't require parent literacy or supplies from home." The teacher felt that these interventions allowed students to concentrate more effectively on school and schoolwork without feeling like their home life was a barrier to success.

Individual interventions.

In terms of individual interventions, responses followed similar themes as in whole-group interventions. Building individual relationships with adults was a top priority. Some respondents found opportunities for students to have one-on-one interaction with other adults in the school, such as pull-out work and individual conversations with the school counselor and other faculty members. Multiple teachers reported having either intermittent or regular lunch dates with students “which is often a need on their part for positive interactions with an adult.” Respondents also used special jobs, individual check-ins, and partnering with a teacher during activities and trips as powerful ways to nurture a positive, personal relationship with students.

One teacher reached out to a student, Katherine, who “was really disconnected from the group at the beginning of the year.” This teacher checked in with Katherine, who disclosed that her mom was not at home. He continued checking in with Katherine and her family. He let Katherine come in early to help in the classroom each morning, so that she was the first one in the classroom. He and his co-teacher “told [Katherine] that she could ask to speak to us whenever she wanted to speak about it. She did not often speak about it…but those check-ins definitely helped [Katherine] to be more open about how she was feeling.”

Family outreach was another area of priority for many teachers, from addressing basic needs to collaborating on behavioral interventions. At one school, “certain families receive backpacks filled with food for long weekends. Some children get grooming (face washing/nail trimming/hair brushing) at school [and] vouchers for clothing, shoes, glasses, etc. are distributed." This school appeared to be unique among the respondents in its attention and response to its families' material needs.

Many respondents cited regular communication with parents and families about both positive and negative behaviors as a crucial factor in creating consistency for the student. One teacher made "behavior charts that had to be signed by a family member daily" while another held "lots of meetings with families to come up with plans and interventions that would carry over from school to home." One teacher maintained daily contact with one student's mother who was going through a difficult divorce that was affecting the student in school. He knew that his teacher and mom would talk about all of the good and bad things that happened during the day, which helped him feel some consistency during a relatively unstable time in his life.

Another teacher held a meeting with one of his student's mothers at the beginning of the year, discussing the student's evident frustration during academic times. The mother had seen the same frustration at home but was unsure of how to support her son in those moments. The teacher told her how, at school, the student was given some space and invited back when he was ready. The next day, the student made it through a moment of frustration, saying, "My mom told me that when I get frustrated that I should just tell myself, 'I can do it! I can do it!'" Having a consistent and positive approach at home and at school helped this particular student immensely in working through difficult moments.

In addition to family collaboration and individualized behavior plans and charts, respondents wrote a lot about their efforts to teach students about behavior management and decision-making. In one classroom, Isaac "had a hard time choosing an appropriate response to people. He would often choose to yell or walk out of the room." His teacher sat down with him to come up with a list of more appropriate reactions, which was printed out and kept by Isaac's cubby. "Now, he thinks about his reactions and often comes up to a teacher before engaging with a student if he is feeling really frustrated. He pays attention to the times when this happens and tallies it on his chart."

Multiple students were given the opportunity to enter the classroom early to help them adjust to the classroom and to allow the class to develop around them. One teacher reported that one of her students, William, had "horrible separation issues from his parents," which led to difficult mornings and affected him throughout the day. This teacher suggested that he begin attending a breakfast club in the morning, during which he had a number of regular jobs to ready the classroom for his classmates. "Kids would come in one at a time, and he wouldn't have to worry how he was going to fit into their stuff. They were approaching him."

Social and emotional regulation was also an important area of individual teaching. Multiple teachers mentioned providing journals; as one teacher put it, "to express whatever emotions [students] have so that whatever it is they are feeling won't culminate." One student who had a journal was Evan, whose teacher reported that he "carried a lot of anger and didn't have productive ways of dealing with that. Often he would explode at a peer because he was angry about things that had happened at home." In conversations with his teacher, Evan expressed that he "felt terrible and out of control all the time." Evan and his teacher started a "Feelings Notebook" in which he could "draw or write about what was bothering him as an alternative to exploding and disrupting the class." Although it was occasionally difficult for Evan to keep his journal private in the classroom, his teacher felt that the journal allowed him to have “some kind of outlet for the torrent of emotions he carried all the time.”

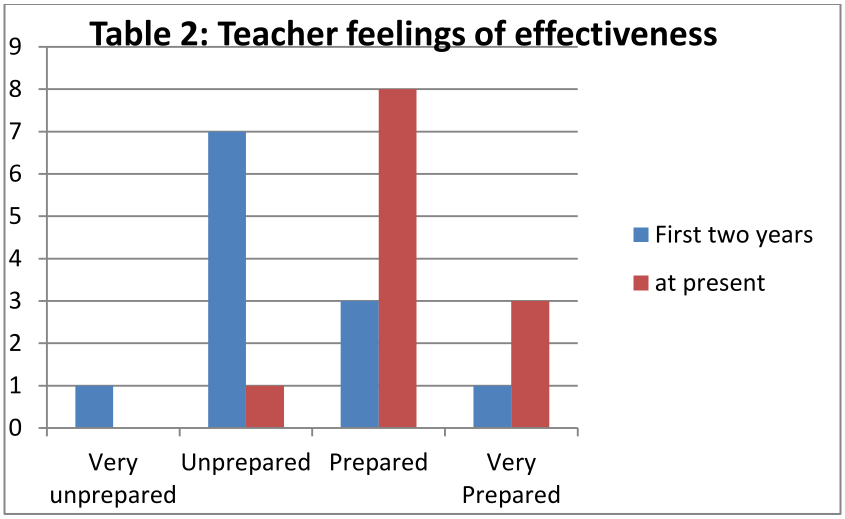
Some students had charts “to monitor their emotional regulation” and “IEP goals based on increasing positive social skills and behavior.” One child that had an emotional regulation and behavior chart learned how to “keep his body in control” and received a small prize when he was able to do so during the day. His teacher reported that

> …his behavior and emotional regulation completely turned around. At the beginning it was not uncommon for him to have his head in the cubbies crying all day, but by the end he was an active participant in class and completely engaged in learning. His social success also improved as the other students became less scared of him and his non-compliance no longer got in the way of social instruction.

In addition, play and social skills were focused on during one-on-one or small group instruction time. One teacher reported “working with [a] student on ways to help control his anger/emotions such as self-talk, taking deep breaths, giving himself a break or time out.” This student had extreme anxiety that could present as aggression. He learned how to give himself a break to calm down that “has not only decreased his challenging behaviors, but also increased his success with is peers. When upset, he is able to communicate with peers and teachers, ‘I need to take a break.’”

Teacher preparation and support.

Respondents were also asked about their own level of comfort and preparation to address these student needs in the classroom. During their first two years of teaching, eight of the 12 respondents felt unprepared or very unprepared to address social and emotional needs in their classrooms. Three felt prepared, and only one felt very prepared to address these needs. When asked about how prepared they felt currently, only one respondent felt ineffective, with the remaining 11 respondents feeling effective or very effective at addressing the social and emotional needs in their classroom (See table 2). Five respondents indicated that the administration of their school provided professional development or other support to address students' social and emotional needs, and six respondents indicated that they had received training in professional social and emotional programs.



Among those respondents whose administrations provided training, experiences varied widely, from increased counselor time and book groups to lectures on poverty and trainings in proactive parenting and teaching techniques. One respondent reported that the counselor time "gave teachers more opportunities for problem solving with [the counselor]." One participant described a book group that developed "a list of children's books appropriate for learning about social and emotional needs" while another respondent participated in one that was based on the various philosophies and perspectives, such as *The 5 Love Language of Children* (Chapman & Campbell, 2012) and Dr. Ruby Payne's *Framework of Poverty* (Payne, 1996). Multiple respondents had attended trainings on *Love and Logic* (Love and Logic Institute, Inc., 2013), and all felt that it had been especially helpful. One school coordinated meetings with local resources and authorities to increase collaboration and outreach within the broader community. One participant referenced having “opportunities for training” while another said that he was “encouraged to go to any professional workshops and share the info[rmation] with the whole staff.” In almost every case, little was mandatory or school-wide.

Many teachers discussed taking the initiative to educate themselves outside of work, and about adapting programs to create a better fit within their classrooms. Often respondents indicated that their independent efforts were more useful than any resources provided by their school or district. One participant stated that “I’ve not been trained in any method, but I have read on my own” and another said that “doing continuing education on my own was the most help.” However, there was a sense among respondents that independent research and self-education was not the ideal way in which to prepare oneself. One teacher said that “these things were less effective than they could have been because I was trying them on my own” and another said that her school lacked “a clearly articulated, school-wide program.” One respondent stated, “What prepared me most to deal with children’s emotional needs is my experience as a parent, and intuition.” Within their own independent research, multiple respondents mentioned using *Responsive Classroom* books (Northeast Foundation for Children, 2013) to guide their teaching techniques and routines.

Only two respondents discussed graduate-level classes as a resource. One teacher took a class on Emotional and Behavioral Disorders and was also exposed to a social-emotional program in her student teaching placement. The other respondent who referred to graduate-level courses reported that a few of her classes “offered much ‘role play’ and passages that addressed responsive classrooms.” Both respondents reported using a few of the techniques in their own classrooms that they adapted to what they've been taught. They found these to be most effective for their students.

Reflections on resilience.

Respondents were asked to contemplate the ways in which teachers can help students to develop increased resilience. Many respondents wrote about providing students with challenges so that students experience both success and failure. One respondent wrote that "Students need to fail in small ways so that they see that they can find a solution…and feel empowered." Another pointed out the importance of providing challenges for the students for whom academics come easily, noting

> [p]roviding students with opportunities to work through challenges…is very important. So much emphasis in society is on winning, or getting a right answer…That means we really need to challenge students who succeed academically easily. I've witnessed many meltdowns from strong students who encounter something that is difficult. They don't know how to handle that because they've never really experienced it.

In addition to challenging students, respondents felt it was important to provide students with encouragement and a positive perspective. One participant thought teachers could do so by "[h]aving high expectations and believing in [students]" and another recommended "recognizing school accomplishments (no matter how small)."

One participant wrote, "[a]t my school, students do not get to hear a lot about what they are doing right or that there is anything positive in the world. For some of my students, their families don't have a lot of positive things going for them. I think teachers can provide a positive relationship with their students." Many other respondents similarly discussed the need to establish positive and honest relationships between students and teachers. Respondents used words like flexible, open, sincere, authentic, honest, personal, and positive to describe the ideal and most powerful form of a student-teacher relationship. Statements included that students “should know you care” and feel “that they have an adult they can trust.” Teachers had many ways in which they tried to establish these relationships, such as “allowing students to know how you feel,” giving “sincere and specific” compliments, and “carving out time to specifically feed the soul and connect with kids.” These relationships felt especially important for those students who did not have positive connections at home.

One element of the student-teacher relationship that many participants discussed was the need for the teacher to be a role model for their students. As one respondent stated, “[t]eachers are a model for resilience. Through their daily reactions to adversity, teachers can model resilience.” One teacher mentioned using lessons and intentional language to model for students “how to handle difficult situations whether it be through a social or academic lens.” In the context of a reading lesson, another respondent wrote that a teacher could say “When we get to a tricky word, which we all see in our reading, even me…” to acknowledge that even teachers encounter challenges and have to work through them.

Many responding teachers also wrote about the need to explicitly acknowledge and discuss resilience and the skills that contribute to it. One teacher used book talks to “have specific discussions about resilience as a trait that our characters in our books exhibit,” while another had class conversations “[a]cknowledging struggles outside of school and talking about ways we can work with them/overcome them.” In general, respondents felt that teachers could provide students with the skills and tools they needed to succeed outside of the classroom, such as teaching students “to use their words to express how they feel and not to be afraid to ask for help when they need it.”

In addition, the need to create a positive, safe, and consistent environment felt very important to respondents. Multiple participants mentioned the importance of building and consistently maintaining classroom routines. Doing so, teachers felt, would provide a safe and positive learning environment. When the structure is clear and consistent, teachers can “encourage creative thinking” within it.

Hopes, dreams, and obstacles.

Respondents were asked to reflect on what they would like to be able to achieve in their classrooms and what stands in their way of accomplishing this. Overwhelmingly, respondents named time as an obstacle in creating the classrooms they wanted to create. One teacher wrote that “I would like to be able to have less ‘scheduled’ time in the classroom. There is so much that needs to get done that things need to get scheduled in order to get everything done. Even then, things do not get done.” This felt to some respondents as symptomatic of the current educational climate: “[w]ith the push for more academics, important teaching…has to be given up.”

Participants had many ideas for how they would use more time. One stated that she would “incorporate emotional/behavioral support into lessons,” and another wanted to “reflect more on our challenges, taking more about how to positively handle them.” One teacher wanted “more time to plan for differentiation so that all students get opportunities to work through challenges on a regular basis.” Another would use it “to spend with kids in small groups or one on one… for example, a before school ‘coffee club’ just to start the day with a connection to them.” Respondents also mentioned that funding and class size contributed to this problem.

In addition to more time and flexible schedules, teachers wished for additional support and training for themselves and their colleagues. One respondent wrote that it would be helpful "to have administration that takes the time to be aware of these children and be more involved in addressing the needs of the students that obviously need our assistance." Multiple respondents felt that such an administration would encourage collaboration and would ensure that there was more communication among school staff about individual student plans. As one teacher wrote, "I do think it is truly important for administration to be involved in student's social and emotional needs as well. Without their support it's so difficult to give [the students] the help that they require." Another participant specifically mentioned wanting to further educate para-professionals in the classroom on students with specific behavioral and emotional needs. Another respondent stated that finding curricula to use was a significant challenge, and wanted to be "able to take a class to help support my classroom."

Many respondents wrote about the type of environment and resources they would like to be able to provide for their students, and the impact of family and community on these desires. Some teachers reported high levels of parental anxiety contributing to challenges that their students faced. One participant wished that parents were "okay with kids getting bumps and bruises, real and figuratively, trusting and giving a message of confidence that it'll be okay." Other respondents saw the outside environment as a major challenge for their students. Teachers wanted their students to have stronger role models and more reasons to take pride in their community and in themselves. For example, one participant wrote that "I'd like my kids to see examples of people who came from their backgrounds and have become successful…Right now they see a lot of people who have been failed by the system." Another stated "I would like to have my students be happy to come to school and teach the ability to find pride in themselves. I want my students to be able to reach success and feel proud."

Looking forward.

Respondents were asked to offer advice to incoming teachers on how to approach and respond to social and emotional needs in the classroom. Responses largely centered on the ability to build and maintain positive personal relationships with students. This began with "building a safe and caring classroom climate from the start" by "making personal connections with students – both one on one and as a group. From greeting students at the door by name each morning to holding a daily class meeting, there are a plethora of strategies." Participants mentioned getting to know students individually and "encouraging students with praise" in order to "build positive relationships." Listening to students, observing them, and using positive and consistent classroom management were all themes in multiple responses. These skills, in addition to knowing "what is developmentally appropriate for your students" were all thought to allow the teacher to effectively communicate with and advocate for their students.

A teacher's attitude and commitment were also emphasized in the responses. Respondents wrote poignantly about the need for passion, patience and trust within the teaching relationship. One teacher wrote,

> I think the most important thing I could say would be to respect your students and the fact they have complex and often extensive social and emotional needs. What you first see on the outside is not always the whole story. As Nicholas Hobbs said, 'Trust between a child and adult is essential, the foundation on which all other principles rest, the glue that holds teaching and learning together, the beginning point for re-education.' The better we connect to our students, the better we can teach them.

Participants emphasized the need to “address challenging behaviors in a proactive manner” rather than in a “reactive way” and urged new teachers to “be patient.” As one respondent put it, “[y]ou need to love children completely and feel a passion for teaching. Teaching is one of the most important and powerful professions there is. You must have the passion or you are shortchanging both the students and yourself.”

Responses also focused on helping students to communicate and express themselves more effectively. “You have to…help children develop language to express what’s going on with them,” wrote one respondent. Another stated that it was “absolutely critical…[to allow] students to be who it is they are while guiding them to do it while also being considerate of others so that they are accepted by society.” In general, respondents felt that a large and important part of the teacher’s role is to “help [students] to feel that their voice is being heard.”

Another area of guidance was for the novice teacher to develop her own self-awareness. Among the responses were comments such as, “don’t take it personally” and to “not…assume all children had your childhood… [and many] have gone through more in 5 or 6 years than many adults will ever experience.” One respondent felt that self-reflection had allowed her to be a better and more aware teacher: “In becoming more aware of my own emotional being, I am more able to become aware of the little emotional beings in my care.”

Some participants also suggested that collaboration with families and colleagues should be emphasized for new teachers. Many respondents gave examples of how working with families had supported their own work with students, and provided pieces of advice like “work closely with families” and “talk to colleagues who may have insights into behaviors, family situations, [and] suggestions for what's worked in the past."

Overwhelmingly, respondents were passionate about the importance of nurturing the social and emotional growth of their students. One teacher wrote, "I think this is the most important work we do," and this sentiment was evident throughout the responses received. Respondents felt that the work not only had immediate impact on classroom community and teacher-student relationships, but that the social and emotional learning students do can have big payoffs in the future. As one teacher said, "[b]e positive and nourishing. You are planting seeds with these children and they may not germinate the year that they have with you but later on some comment that you have made can come back to them and make an incredible impact."

Interpretation

Several key themes emerged in the analysis of the data: establishing close relationships with students, creating positive classroom community, developing social and emotional skills, out-of-school factors, the importance of teacher education and staff development, and barriers to effective practice. Each of these themes will be discussed and connected to the literature in the following section.

Establishing close relationships.

Both the literature and the survey responses reflect the importance and potential impact of establishing close, personal, and trusting relationships with children. These relationships, whether with teachers, family members, coaches, or other significant adults, support children in understanding and expressing their feelings, navigating future social relationships, and provide a safe space in which to discuss the difficult things the children may face in their everyday life.

In their discussion of educational resilience, Cunningham and Swanson (2010) named “developing caring relationship that teach social skills while providing unconditional positive regard” as a “critical protective factor” (p. 475). Knowing that an adult is interested and invested in them and their success can help children develop a stronger and more positive self-concept, as they learn to feel valued and worthy of attention and care. Most of the survey respondents felt that these relationships with individual students were crucial to establishing a comfortable, respectful, and open class environment. Although every child can benefit from a close, supportive relationship, there are certain students in particular need of an adult connection. Many respondents made special efforts and exceptions in order to really connect with these children, a practice that is strongly supported by the research (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007; Boorn, Hopkins Dunn, & Page, 2010; Cunningham & Swanson, 2010).

This was especially apparent in the anecdotes about individual students. Without individual outreach, Katherine may have continued feeling and acting disconnected from the class. Because her teachers noticed her withdrawal and made specific, individual efforts to reach out to her, Katherine began to develop a trusting relationship with her teachers in which she felt comfortable sharing her feelings about all that was going on at home. Similarly, by allowing him to enter the classroom early and intentionally, William’s teachers found a simple way for him to adjust to the classroom environment. This allowed him to begin his days calmer and to feel more competent and included throughout the day.

Creating positive communities.

The school and classroom environment is important and unique in its ability to address and strengthen the emotional and social skills of students (Boorn, Hopkins Dunn, & Page, 2010), and the importance of intentionally creating a classroom community that is positive, structured, safe, and consistent was frequently mentioned among survey respondents. This emphasis was also mirrored in the literature; as Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, and Hambacher (2007) state, “the teacher built a caring learning community where connections with and among students created a safe place to learn and an emotional climate where students could take risks, laugh, and trust one another and their teacher” (p. 329).

This kind of caring community was clearly evident for Alvin. Moments like the one described, in which he expressed his frustration at the state of his classroom, are a result of consistently open and honest communication during community meetings. This type of communication, modeled and practiced at school, can help students see that if they express their feelings effectively, problems can be resolved more easily and completely. Respondents discussed the need for students to feel a sense of belonging and to have a safe space in which to talk about the challenges of their outside lives; these can only occur in an environment in which conversations are welcomed and encouraged. By facilitating discussions and encouraging open communication, teachers can help students create a community that is honest and safe.

Classroom management was a clear priority among both respondents and researchers (Freiburg, Huzinec, & Templeton, 2009; Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007; Lowenthal, 2001). In order to be a place where children feel safe, the classroom needs to have predictable routines and norms. Many teachers mentioned including students in the development of these structures, and this was also supported by the research, which shows that this practice gives children additional control and choice within their environment (Bickart & Wolin, 1997; Lowenthal, 2001).

Developing social and emotional skills.

Many respondents also emphasized the need to provide modeling and explicit instruction in key social and emotional skills. This took many forms, including whole-class lessons in recognizing and understanding feelings, individualized behavior charts, and opportunities to practice communicating and making social connections. This sort of instruction is essential for students experiencing difficulty in their out-of-school lives. The ability to regulate emotions and make positive connections with peers and adults is important to developing resilience.

Explicit teaching in recognizing and understanding emotions, combined with a safe classroom environment and the teacher’s belief in his students, allows children to take the risk of expressing their feelings. Many responding teachers helped guide students through decision making, reflecting on their choices, the outcomes, and alternatives. This was clear in the example of Issac, who was able to use individualized visual support to better understand cause and effect and to anticipate potential consequences of his actions. With this personalized tool, Issac felt more control over himself and his environment.

Many teachers also ensured that students had the chance to experience both success and failure in small ways so that they could begin to cope constructively with the strong feelings that can be associated with both outcomes, such as anger, frustration, disappointment, pride, and intimidation. Strategies like these help children develop the skills associated with resilience, such as an internal locus of control, effective communication skills, and a positive self-concept.

Out-of-school factors.

One theme that was prevalent throughout the survey responses was the importance of paying attention to students’ out-of-school lives. There was a clear sense that respondents saw their role as a caretaker in addition to an educator. Teachers were aware of the ways in which outside factors affected the classroom environment and their students’ behaviors. Beyond just being aware, participants also proactively reached out to students and ensured that there was space within the day for students to discuss issues at home.

Howey (1999) argues that many teachers “do not understand well these out-of-school conditions, let alone how to respond effectively in school” (p. 32), but the teachers responding to the survey appeared to have a very strong orientation towards these issues. One teachers’ school provided support with basic necessities such as school supplies, food, and grooming. Not only does outreach like this help meet students’ basic needs, it also creates a connection with families who may feel closer with and more included by the school. It is crucial that teachers and schools understand and proactively address students’ out-of-school challenges and experiences.

Teacher education and staff development.

In general, novice teachers feel unprepared to address social and emotional needs in the classroom, a fact reflected in both the surveys and in the literature. Respondents indicated that they had little training in classroom management or in skills and strategies to create the kind of classroom environment that cultivates and supports the development of resilience. Many other studies have found similar results (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, &

Hambacher, 2007). While teachers are always learning and adjusting their practice, the insufficient attention paid to the social and emotional side of classroom management has serious implications for teachers and students. Successful application of the strategies above depends on the proactive establishment of classroom norms and routines and student-teacher relationships. If teachers enter the classroom without this knowledge, any interventions they do implement will be reactive rather than proactive.

Many participants indicated that there was not a school-wide emphasis on social and emotional needs. Although some respondents had access to school- or district-organized trainings, most teachers in this study felt that they had to take on this task independently. Through reading, collaboration, and extra courses, teachers educated themselves in various programs and approaches, then adapted these to suit their classrooms. Many respondents felt effective after years of self-education and experience in the classroom, but indicated that they wished for a more comprehensive, collaborative, and cohesive philosophy and approach within their school. The literature echoed this desire, recommending more staff development across the year (Freiburg, 1993) and stating that whole-school professional development “creates a sense of cohesion and consistency among personnel, students, and staff” (Freiburg, Huzinec, & Templeton, 2009, p. 66). According to survey responses, the teachers that used families and coworkers as resources felt more informed, creative, and ultimately effective.

Barriers to effective practice.

In addition to lack of preparation and continuous training, respondents named many obstacles that prevented them from addressing social and emotional needs as effectively as they would like. As mentioned above, many respondents wanted more cross-staff collaboration and communication in terms of an approach to general social and emotional needs as well as interventions implemented with individual children. Participants felt that in order for this to occur, the administration needed to be involved and invested in this work as well.

Overwhelmingly, respondents named time as a barrier to the work they wished to do. The current educational atmosphere places a premium on strictly academic work, as measured by standardized tests, and many schools are following this model. With such pressure to perform academically, many teachers are sacrificing the essential social, emotional, and behavioral learning that should happen in the classroom as well. Unfortunately, without the emotional skills that should develop first, children are less able to perform cognitive and intellectual tasks (Boorn, Hopkins Dunn, & Page, 2010; Lantieri, 2008; Greenberg, 2006). However, teachers feel that there is hardly enough time in the day to attend to all of the academics, let alone to incorporate the explicit and individualized emotional teaching discussed above.

Implications

In this section, implications and recommendations for teachers, school leaders, and teacher educators will be discussed, and conclusions presented.

Implications for Classroom Teachers

Teachers need to create a classroom community that encourages open conversation, celebrates successes, and fosters close relationships. This requires strong classroom management that includes children in the process of developing classroom routines, rules, and norms. Within this structure, students will begin to feel safe to express themselves and to take risks. Teachers must proactively connect with each child as an individual through honest communication and obvious care.

Teachers must be sensitive to the issues that arise for children outside of school. Within classroom routines, there must be space for students to discuss the challenges they face beyond the classroom, and guidance in how to deal with the many emotions that may arise from these challenges. Explicit lessons on recognizing, expressing, controlling, and responding to strong feelings help children develop these essential skills. In addition, individual students may require specific, alternate interventions. Whether this is having a personal journal in which to record their thoughts and feelings or a behavior chart that helps them track the decisions they make and the consequences of those decisions, some children need a tangible, visual way to understand their own behavior and emotions.

Implications for School Leaders

School leaders can have a significant impact on the development of resilience in their students, through the support and training of their teachers and other staff. First and foremost, school leaders must recognize that the emotional and social health of students affects their ability to learn and succeed academically. Administrators can then form and communicate a school philosophy that supports this priority and increases cohesion and cooperation (Freiburg, Huzinec, & Templeton, 2009). In such an environment, school staff and teachers would communicate regularly about specific student needs and all adults would approach work with students from a supportive and caring perspective (Boorn, Hopkins Dunn, & Page, 2010).

In order for a school to have such a cohesive approach, all faculty and staff must be educated about the reasons behind it. School leaders should schedule professional development cycles that contain information about the importance of social and emotional needs, their impact on student resilience, and strategies for adults to help support positive student development. These trainings and professional development sessions will increase staff confidence in their ability to respond to student needs, as well as their actual skills in doing so. In addition, school leaders can provide consistent and regular follow-up with individual teachers in the form of supervision and coaching in these skills.

Implications for Teacher Educators

Teacher educators must do a better job of preparing teachers for the diverse student needs that will confront them when they enter the classroom. Teachers not only need to know how to teach and how to assess students' academic skills, but also need to know how to develop and strengthen their emotional and social skills. Courses on community building, positive classroom management, and teaching emotional awareness and expression would all be immensely useful to the incoming teacher. In addition, teachers need to have a strong understanding of the ways in which student behaviors and abilities to focus and learn are affected by the adversity that they may face outside of school. Some institutions, particularly those with a more progressive lens, do provide these types of courses. However, even within those schools, courses on social and emotional teaching are often optional or less emphasized than courses in academic instruction and assessment.

Although these courses should be provided prior to entering the classroom, continued attention needs to be paid to these same issues throughout teachers' careers. Although many of the issues outside of the classroom remain the same, new approaches are always being developed. Teacher educators should offer multi-session trainings in the above named topics. These trainings could be offered as continuing education courses for teachers or as professional staff development to be offered through a school or district.

Conclusion

This study has shown that attention to social, emotional, and behavioral needs in the classroom are critically important and highly influential in terms of student resilience, academic and otherwise. Schools and teachers have an opportunity to prioritize these needs and impact students’ lives even more deeply. When the classroom community is thoughtfully created, students have the space and the safety to discuss their feelings and the challenges they are facing. In addition, when students play a role in creating this community, their commitment to and sense of control over their environment increases. Teachers need to be prepared to create and maintain this safe and open community, providing clear and predictable structures within which students have opportunities to make choices and express themselves. Teachers can provide role modeling and explicit teaching in key skills and strategies for emotion and stress management, decision making, and conflict resolution.

Many of the teachers surveyed for this study wanted to address these needs, and most found ways of doing so independently. However, to be most effective, school administrators and teacher educators also must play a role. Just as teachers create a classroom community, school leaders create a school community. In order for teachers to be supported in the work discussed above, the school community should be based on a philosophy of educating the whole child, of acknowledging and addressing the out-of-school needs that influence in-school behavior and performance. This consists of clear communication and collaboration, as well as consistent professional development for all staff in ways to foster a consistent and caring environment throughout the school.

Aspiring teachers frequently come to teacher education programs with values and beliefs that reflect the above priorities. However, too often novice teachers are leaving teacher education programs without concrete ways in which to achieve these goals. It is not enough that some teacher education programs provide instruction in addressing social and emotional needs in the classroom; all programs need to acknowledge that students will learn best and do better in the long run if teachers are prepared to support the development of resilience in their students.

Both the literature reviewed and the survey responses collected in this study reflect a strong emphasis on students’ emotional, social, and physical well-being. Attention to these needs will not detract from the cognitive development of students; rather, students will feel safer, more capable, and more confident, and thus will be better able to attend to the academic tasks at hand. Students educated in environments that provide positive adult relationships, caring communities, and opportunities to practice decision-making and self-expression will possess more characteristics associated with resilience.

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Appendix A: IRRB Approval Letter

The Bank Street
College of Education

Graduate School of Education

Bank Street

December 13, 2012

Ellen Ferrin

Dear Ellen,

Your proposal and consent letters and forms for working with human participants for your Independent Study have been approved. You may commence your work with human participants. If you make any significant changes to your work with human participants, you need to inform the IMP Committee in writing of your plans. Please place a copy of this letter along with unsigned copies of any consent letters and forms in a Permissions section at the end of your appendix. Keep the original signed forms in a safe place for five years.

The best of luck with your study. We look forward to having the completed copy in the Bank Street College Library.

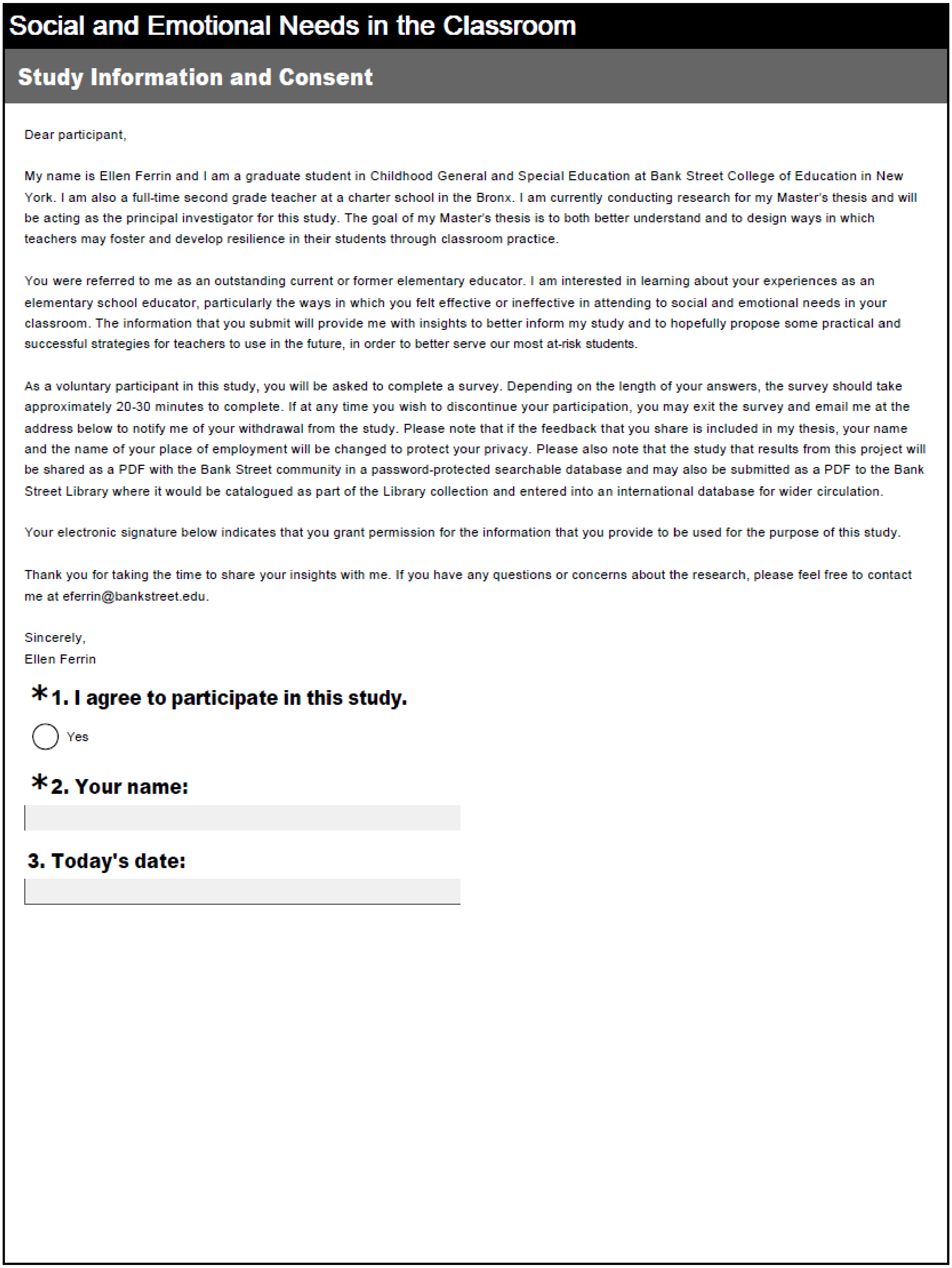
Sincerely,

Nina Jensen

Nina Jensen, Chair

Integrative Master's Project Committee

Appendix B: Survey Consent Form



Social and Emotional Needs in the Classroom

Study Information and Consent

Dear participant,

My name is Ellen Ferrin and I am a graduate student in Childhood General and Special Education at Bank Street College of Education in New York. I am also a full-time second grade teacher at a charter school in the Bronx. I am currently conducting research for my Master's thesis and will be acting as the principal investigator for this study. The goal of my Master's thesis is to both better understand and to design ways in which teachers may foster and develop resilience in their students through classroom practice.

You were referred to me as an outstanding current or former elementary educator. I am interested in learning about your experiences as an elementary school educator, particularly the ways in which you felt effective or ineffective in attending to social and emotional needs in your classroom. The information that you submit will provide me with insights to better inform my study and to hopefully propose some practical and successful strategies for teachers to use in the future, in order to better serve our most at-risk students.

As a voluntary participant in this study, you will be asked to complete a survey. Depending on the length of your answers, the survey should take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. If at any time you wish to discontinue your participation, you may exit the survey and email me at the address below to notify me of your withdrawal from the study. Please note that if the feedback that you share is included in my thesis, your name and the name of your place of employment will be changed to protect your privacy. Please also note that the study that results from this project will be shared as a PDF with the Bank Street community in a password-protected searchable database and may also be submitted as a PDF to the Bank Street Library where it would be catalogued as part of the Library collection and entered into an international database for wider circulation.

Your electronic signature below indicates that you grant permission for the information that you provide to be used for the purpose of this study.

Thank you for taking the time to share your insights with me. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me at eferrin@bankstreet.edu.

Sincerely,
Ellen Ferrin

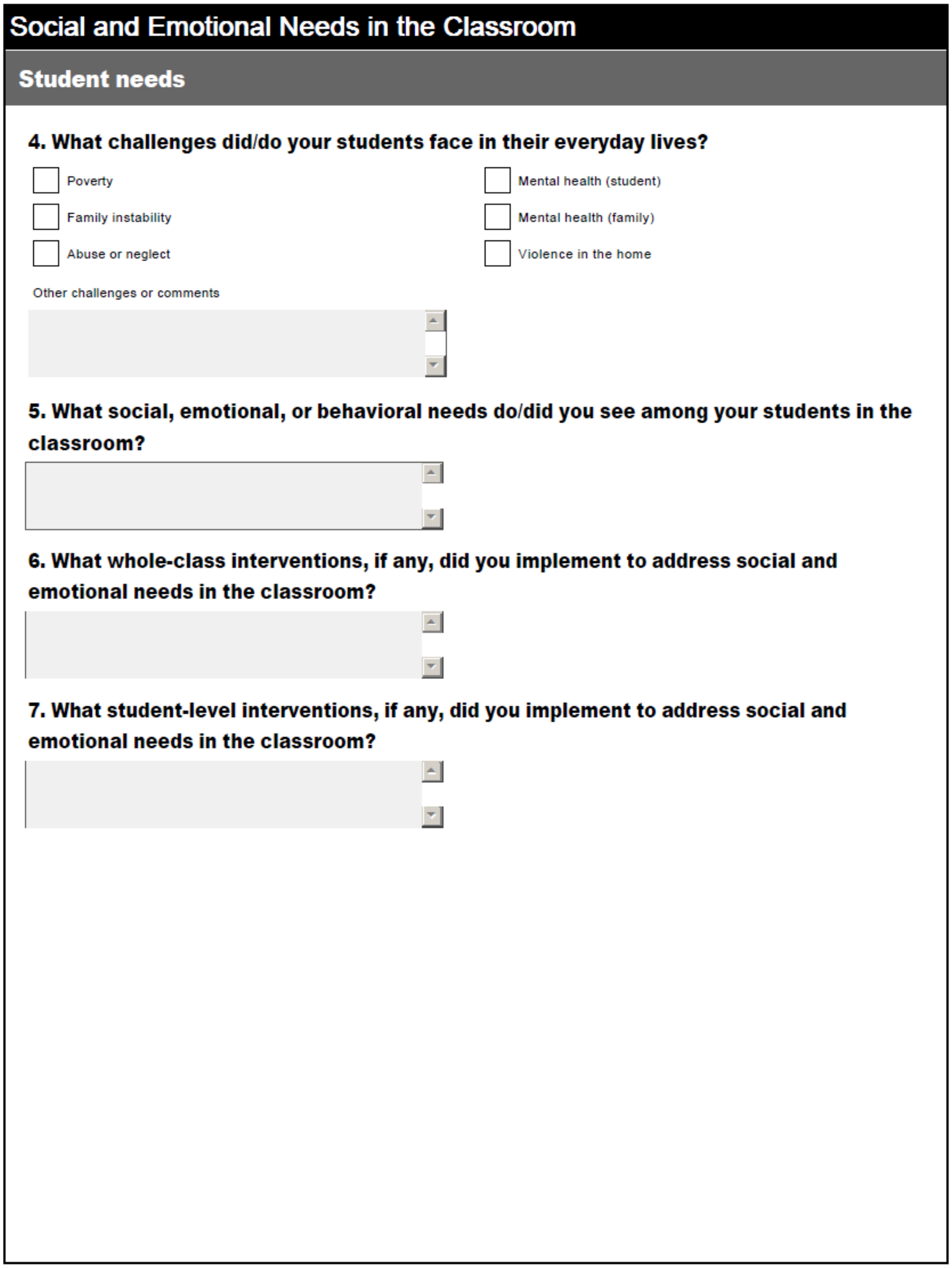
***1. I agree to participate in this study.**

○ Yes

***2. Your name:**

3. Today's date:

Appendix C: Survey



Social and Emotional Needs in the Classroom

Student needs

4. What challenges did/do your students face in their everyday lives?

☐ Poverty
☐ Family instability
☐ Abuse or neglect
☐ Mental health (student)
☐ Mental health (family)
☐ Violence in the home

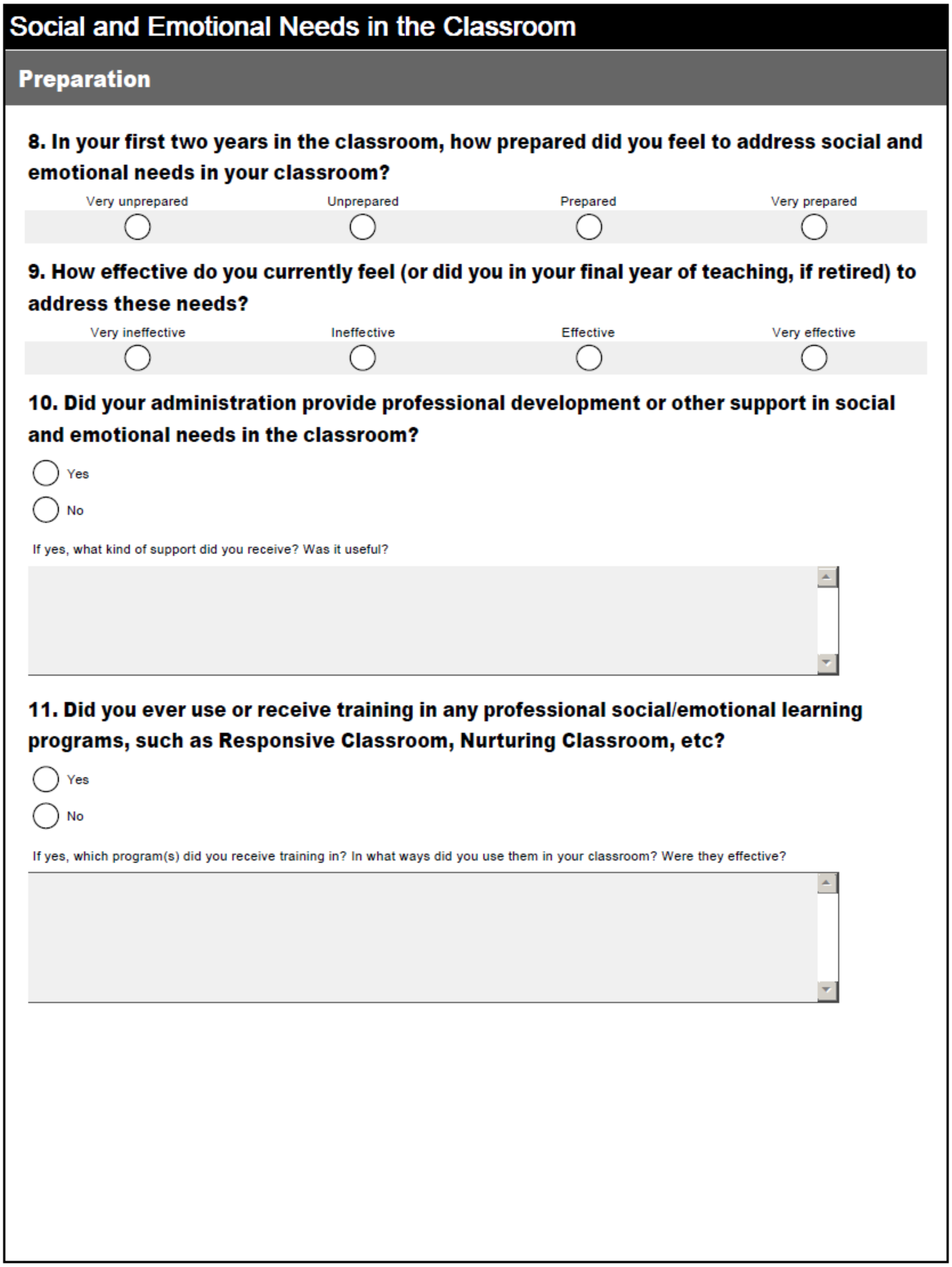
Other challenges or comments

5. What social, emotional, or behavioral needs do/did you see among your students in the classroom?

6. What whole-class interventions, if any, did you implement to address social and emotional needs in the classroom?

7. What student-level interventions, if any, did you implement to address social and emotional needs in the classroom?

Appendix C: Survey



Social and Emotional Needs in the Classroom

Preparation

8. In your first two years in the classroom, how prepared did you feel to address social and emotional needs in your classroom?

Very unprepared	Unprepared	Prepared	Very prepared
○	○	○	○

9. How effective do you currently feel (or did you in your final year of teaching, if retired) to address these needs?

Very ineffective	Ineffective	Effective	Very effective
○	○	○	○

10. Did your administration provide professional development or other support in social and emotional needs in the classroom?

○ Yes

○ No

If yes, what kind of support did you receive? Was it useful?

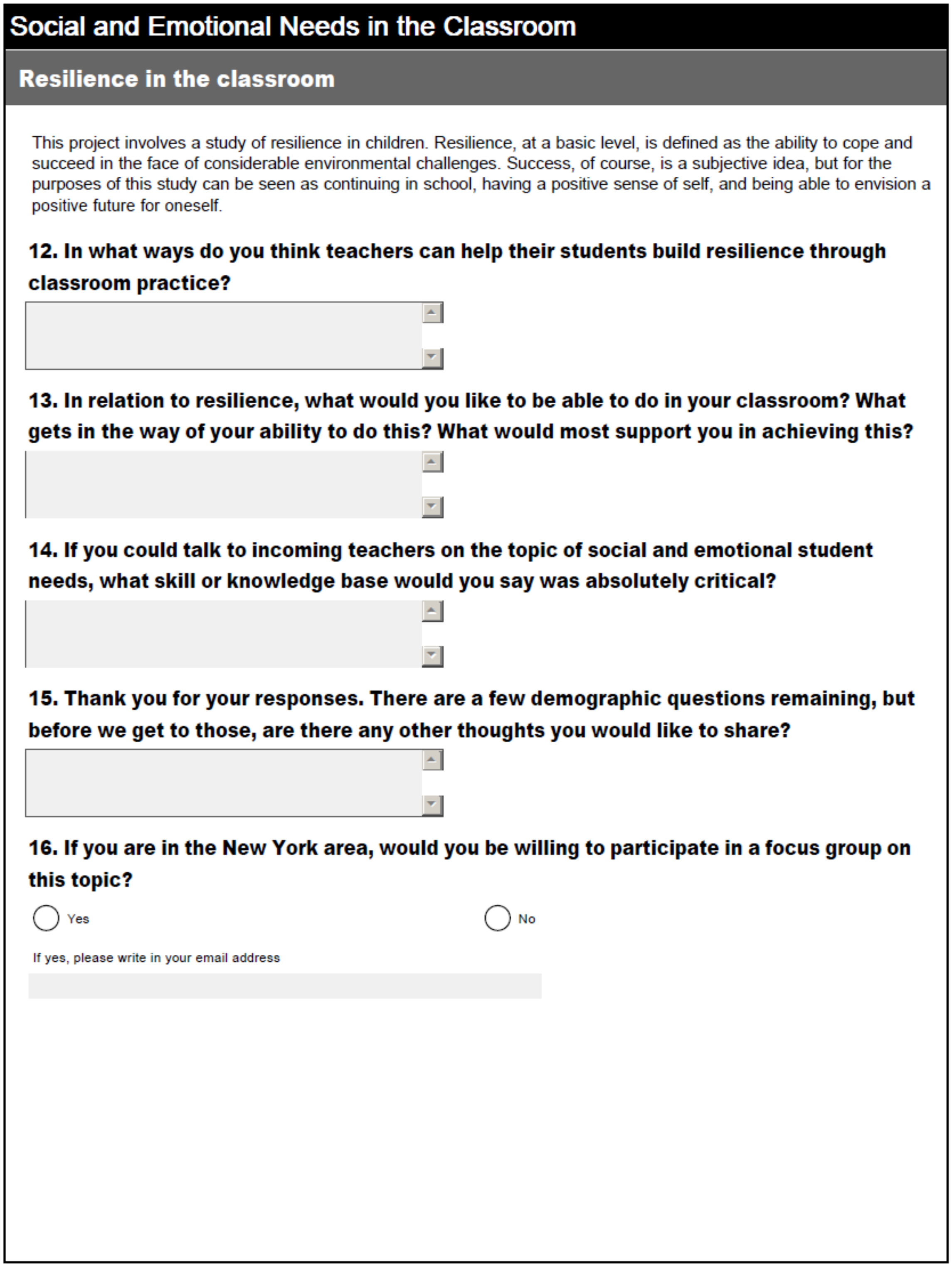
11. Did you ever use or receive training in any professional social/emotional learning programs, such as Responsive Classroom, Nurturing Classroom, etc?

○ Yes

○ No

If yes, which program(s) did you receive training in? In what ways did you use them in your classroom? Were they effective?

Appendix C: Survey



Social and Emotional Needs in the Classroom

Resilience in the classroom

This project involves a study of resilience in children. Resilience, at a basic level, is defined as the ability to cope and succeed in the face of considerable environmental challenges. Success, of course, is a subjective idea, but for the purposes of this study can be seen as continuing in school, having a positive sense of self, and being able to envision a positive future for oneself.

12. In what ways do you think teachers can help their students build resilience through classroom practice?

13. In relation to resilience, what would you like to be able to do in your classroom? What gets in the way of your ability to do this? What would most support you in achieving this?

14. If you could talk to incoming teachers on the topic of social and emotional student needs, what skill or knowledge base would you say was absolutely critical?

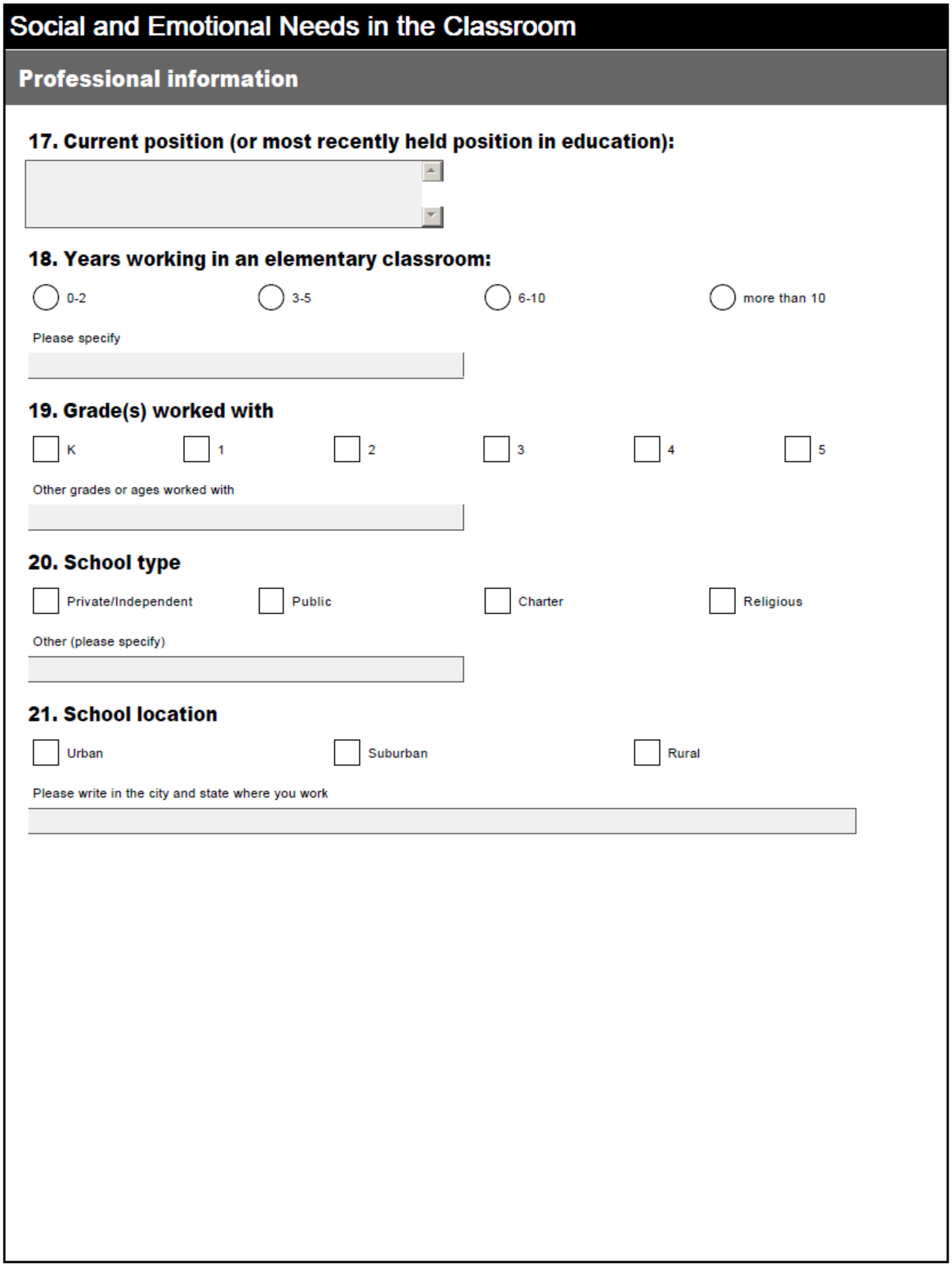
15. Thank you for your responses. There are a few demographic questions remaining, but before we get to those, are there any other thoughts you would like to share?

16. If you are in the New York area, would you be willing to participate in a focus group on this topic?

○ Yes ○ No

If yes, please write in your email address

Appendix C: Survey



Social and Emotional Needs in the Classroom

Professional information

17. Current position (or most recently held position in education):

18. Years working in an elementary classroom:

○ 0-2 ○ 3-5 ○ 6-10 ○ more than 10

Please specify

19. Grade(s) worked with

☐ K ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Other grades or ages worked with

20. School type

☐ Private/Independent ☐ Public ☐ Charter ☐ Religious

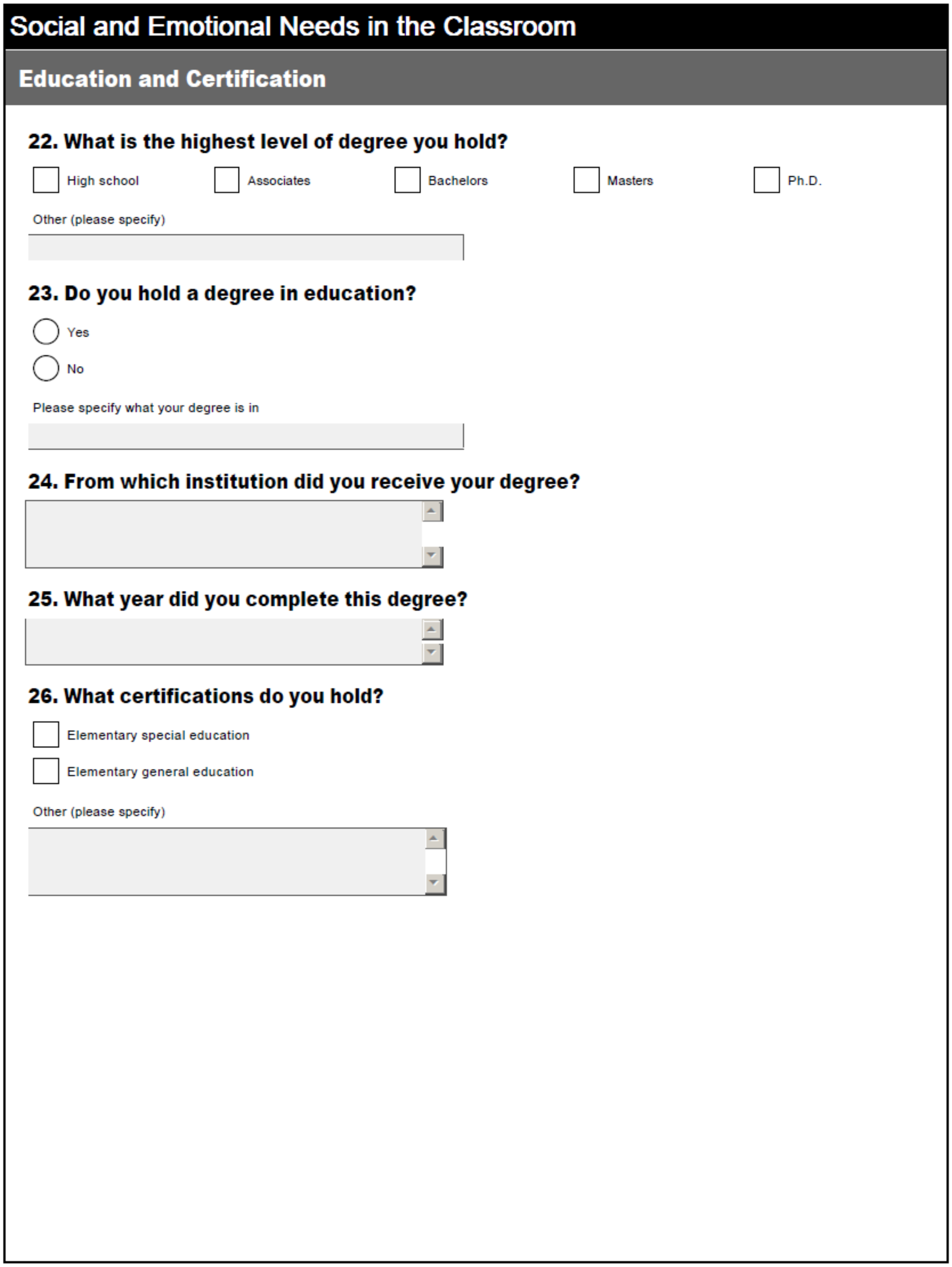
Other (please specify)

21. School location

☐ Urban ☐ Suburban ☐ Rural

Please write in the city and state where you work

Appendix C: Survey



Social and Emotional Needs in the Classroom

Education and Certification

22. What is the highest level of degree you hold?

☐ High school ☐ Associates ☐ Bachelors ☐ Masters ☐ Ph.D.

Other (please specify)

23. Do you hold a degree in education?

○ Yes

○ No

Please specify what your degree is in

24. From which institution did you receive your degree?

25. What year did you complete this degree?

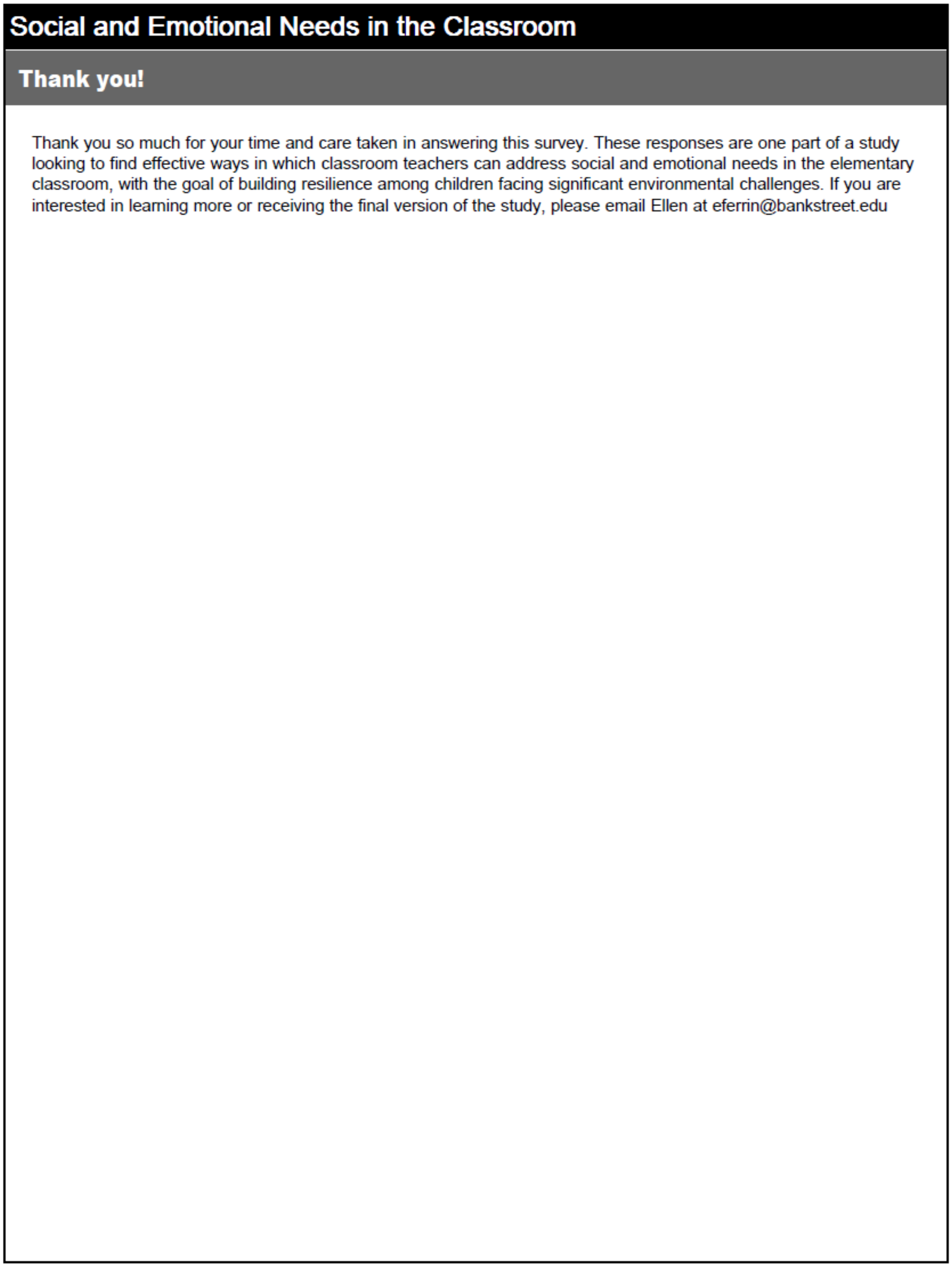
26. What certifications do you hold?

☐ Elementary special education

☐ Elementary general education

Other (please specify)

Appendix C: Survey



Social and Emotional Needs in the Classroom

Thank you!

Thank you so much for your time and care taken in answering this survey. These responses are one part of a study looking to find effective ways in which classroom teachers can address social and emotional needs in the elementary classroom, with the goal of building resilience among children facing significant environmental challenges. If you are interested in learning more or receiving the final version of the study, please email Ellen at eferrin@bankstreet.edu

Appendix D: Bibliography

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