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AN EXAMINATION OF THE SOURCES OF RESILIENCY POSSESSED BY  
TEACHERS OF STUDENTS AT-RISK OF NOT MEETING GRADUATION  
REQUIREMENTS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Education

By

John H. Mayberry

December 2013

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John H. Mayberry

2013

**DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY**  
**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**  
**Department of Counseling, Psychology and Special Education**

*Dissertation*

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)

**Executive Counselor Education and Supervision Program**

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**December 18, 2013**

AN EXAMINATION OF THE SOURCES OF RESILIENCY POSSESSED BY  
TEACHERS OF STUDENTS AT-RISK OF NOT MEETING GRADUATION  
REQUIREMENTS

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## ABSTRACT

# AN EXAMINATION OF THE SOURCES OF RESILIENCY POSSESSED BY THE TEACHERS OF STUDENTS AT RISK OF NOT MEETING GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

By

John H. Mayberry

December 2013

Dissertation Supervised by Dr. James E. Henderson

Teacher shortages exist in the fields of special education and alternative education, particularly for students who suffer from behavioral and emotional disorders. Significant attrition, high stress levels and burnout indicates organizational cultures may not provide adequate support for teachers' resiliency. There are teachers who find a way to survive and even thrive in less desirable environments with limited support (Patterson et al, 2004). Resiliency attributes include a personal sense of competence, belonging and optimism (Bernshausen and Cunningham, 2001). The lack of qualified teachers willing to work in alternative educational settings threatens the quality of education that students with behavioral and emotional disorders receive. There is a genuine need to identify and foster the qualities that successful teachers possess in order to insure quality and consistency in special education and alternative education (Otto and Arnold, 2005).

A collective case study was designed using Ryff and Keys's six-dimensional model of well-being as described in van Horn et al, 2004. Four teachers with a minimum of five years experience across three different sites and rated as excellent by their supervisors participated in this study. Also participating in the study was a supporting colleague selected by the supervisor to provide collegial testimony as to the resilience of the teacher. Eighteen questions were asked representing the six domains of well-being. The domains were personal growth, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, self acceptance, autonomy and purpose in life. The study revealed six internal sources of resiliency. They are a genuine caring and compassion for others, the ability to bounce back from very difficult circumstances, the belief that they make a positive difference in the lives of their students, the ability to de-escalate adverse situations, the ability to forgive and move on and the ability to separate professional from personal life.

## DEDICATION

To my wife, Pam

This was not possible without you.

To my sons, Matt and Kevin

Education is a life-long journey.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to recognize my wife Pam, and my children, Matt and Kevin, for their support throughout my journey through Duquesne University and the IDPEL program. I am eternally grateful for their encouragement and understanding.

I am grateful to all of the teachers who participated in this study. Their gifts of time and sincere responses were greatly appreciated. I learned so much from each of them and I have developed an even greater appreciation for the work that they do.

I would like to thank my dissertation committee for their patience with me through this process. It was an honor to be a student of Dr. Henderson and Dr. Miller. They have taught me more than you can imagine. I would like to pay them the highest compliment that I can. They are great teachers. Dr. Davis and I have a long history and she has always been a constant source of help and encouragement, especially coming down the home stretch with this dissertation.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### “The Star Thrower”

Once a man was walking along a beach. The sun was shining and it was a beautiful day. Off in the distance he could see a person going back and forth between the surf’s edge and the beach. Back and forth this person went. As the man approached he could see that there were hundreds of starfish on the sand as the result of the natural action of the tide.

The man was struck by the apparent futility of the task. There were far too many starfish. Many of them were sure to perish. As he approached, the person continued the task of picking up the starfish one by one and throwing them into the surf.

As he came up to the person he said, “You must be crazy. There are thousands of miles of beach covered with starfish. You can’t possibly make a difference.” The person looked at the man. He then stooped down and picked up one more starfish and threw it back into the ocean. He turned back to the man and said, “It sure made a difference to that one!”  
(Unattributed; based on an essay by Loren Eisely)

Aspiring or beginning teachers start their careers with the high expectation that they will be able to overcome the unique challenges faced and posed by their students. In a relatively short period of time, many are unable to cope with the seemingly insolvable realities provoking a sense of failure, stress, job frustration and dissatisfaction (Bobek, 2002). What are the sources of resiliency that allow the man in the above-mentioned story to persist and persevere?

My first administrative leadership position was a principal’s position at an alternative high school. The school served up to 100 students from nine surrounding districts. I inherited a veteran staff of seven teachers. With the exception of one teacher,

they all had five or more years of experience. One of the teachers, “Al,” was in his thirty-fifth and final year. While all of my other teachers exhibited symptoms of burnout, despair and different levels of apathy, Al was positive and resilient throughout the year that we spent together. His attitude toward his work and his students was consistently positive. I remember a smile on his face more often than not. Al’s students, although difficult to teach and generally uninspired, exhibited greater respect for him than the rest of the staff. This included the principal. As a result, Al experienced considerably fewer violations of the code of conduct than his peers and his students exhibited progress in his social studies classes. He demonstrated genuine care for his students’ well-being that extended beyond the classroom. On a daily basis, Al demonstrated resiliency along with personal and professional integrity. This is not to say that my other teachers didn’t care about their students and their learning. I firmly believe that they did. This was an extremely challenging environment. I feel they lost the belief that their students could be successful. They lost faith in their ability to make a meaningful difference in the lives of their students. Al, the most senior member of the staff, never lost faith in his students or himself. Why was Al successful not only for a year but his whole career? My greatest disappointment from the year that we worked together was that I never found out why.

#### Statement of the Problem

Severe teacher shortages exist in the field of special education, particularly for students who suffer from behavioral and emotional disorders. Significant attrition, high stress levels and burnout in education indicate organizational cultures may not provide adequate support for teachers’ resiliency. Resiliency attributes include a personal sense of competence, belonging and optimism (Bernshausen & Cunningham, 2001).

The American Association for Employment (2004) reports considerable shortages in six fields of special education. The shortages will most likely continue to grow due to increasing enrollments and the growing number of diverse learners (Tissington & Grow, 2007). Programs for students that live and exist in at-risk environments face the most critical shortages (Schlichte et al., 2005). For the purpose of this study, at-risk students will be defined as students who are in danger of not meeting graduation requirements. These students may or may not have an individualized education program (IEP). They are more than likely to have a low socioeconomic background. Their educational placement may be a “school within a school” in their local school district or they may be placed in an alternative setting. Students considered to be at-risk may also carry the label of a reluctant learner. These students do not complete tasks, often avoid challenges and are satisfied with just getting by. They may be capable of excelling but are not concerned with school (Sanacore, 2008).

While numerous definitions of alternative education exist throughout the literature, this study will use that of the United States Department of Education. An alternative school is defined as “a public elementary/secondary school that addresses the needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school” and one that provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school or falls outside the categories of regular special education or vocational education (United States Department of Education, 2002. p. 55).

The terms students at-risk, reluctant learners, alternative students and students with emotional and behavioral disorders categorized under special education will be used interchangeably throughout this study not because they are one in the same but because

they all may end up in the same classroom taught by the same teacher. Collectively, these students suffer from low self-esteem and do not have high expectations for their future (Lehr & Lange, 2003).

The lack of qualified special education teachers and regular education teachers willing to work in alternative settings threatens the quality of education that students with disabilities and/or at-risk students receive. There is a genuine need to identify and foster the qualities that successful teachers possess to insure quality and consistency in special education and alternative education. Otto and Arnold's (2005) study of experienced special education teachers' perceptions of administrative support and teacher attrition in special education as teachers change positions (to regular education) or leave the profession all together reveals teacher burnout and attrition are epidemic in the field of special education. Annual attrition rates for special education teachers have been estimated to be between 8% and 10% (Washburn-Moses, 2005). Fore et al. (2002) have expressed the critical concern of retaining special education teachers. Fore et al. identified several reoccurring components of strategies for attrition reduction. According to this study, proactive stress reduction combined with an effective plan for managing stress are needed. He cites reduction in class loads and class size as necessary for the reduction of stress in teachers. Fore et al. also views mentoring as effective when satisfactory results are received across multiple areas. They include emotional support, provisions for information about the school system, a provision for system information about special education, interaction with others, provisions for adequate resources and materials, assistance with problems in curriculum and instruction, assistance with discipline and help with management. It is Fore's contention that if mentoring or peer



coaching exists across multiple areas the retention rate of special education teachers can be enhanced.

In a study by Stempian and Loeb (2002), 200 teachers across five school districts participated in a research project to determine job satisfaction. Participants completed a five-page Lickert scale inventory to determine job satisfaction. Part of the study focused on a specific area of special education, emotionally impaired students. Teachers of emotionally and behaviorally impaired students rated themselves lower in job satisfaction than teachers did in general education. They showed the highest levels of disagreement with statements such as “I feel satisfied with my present job” and “I find real enjoyment in my work.” Specifically, teachers of emotionally and behaviorally impaired students agreed with statements such as “I am disappointed that I ever took this job” and “I am often bored with my job.” Stempian and Loeb (2002) concluded that many teachers of students with severe disabilities seem to be finding fewer and fewer rewards compared to their colleagues in general education.

While studies show a relationship between the working environment and resiliency, not all teachers emerge in the same way from the same or similar environments. Patterson et al., in their 2004 study on teacher resilience, selected sixteen teachers from four urban school districts that had students’ scores equal to or higher on reading and mathematics assessments than the state averages. These teachers were viewed as successful based upon their students’ achievement. A purposeful sample was used consisting of two teachers and two teacher-leaders from each of the four districts. Results of this study concluded that resilient teachers do not view themselves as victims. They take charge

and solve problems. Teachers who are resilient stay focused on their children and their learning. Resilient teachers do whatever it takes to help children become successful.

### Conceptual Framework

For the purpose of this study resiliency will be operationally defined as the ability to respond actively and positively to life conditions, stress, and trauma in such a way that one is able to bounce back and continue to approach life with positive action.

Resiliency will be examined with the conceptual theories of self-efficacy and belief studies through the work of Vartuli (2005) and Bondy and McKenzie (1999). Also, the work of Van Horn et al (2004) and Ryff and Keys (1995) will place resiliency in the context of emotional well-being.

### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to determine the source(s) of resolve, intestinal fortitude and resiliency in successful teachers of students considered to be at-risk. There is a genuine need to identify and foster the qualities that successful teachers possess in order to insure quality education for those students who are at-risk of not meeting graduation requirements. This need is driven by teacher shortages that will most likely continue in the future.

### Research Questions

1. How are teachers able to maintain resilience in challenging educational environments?
2. Why do resilient teachers keep teaching?
3. How do resilient teachers' colleagues view them?

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Maintaining an adequate supply of special education teachers and teachers of at-risk students is a major challenge in today's teaching market. In particular, serious shortages of teachers of children with emotional disturbances jeopardize delivery of appropriate special education and alternative education services to this population (Henderson et al., 2005). Shortages of fully qualified teachers have been a problem in special education since the inception of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975). This is amplified today through federal and state mandates such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and high stakes testing (Brownell et al., 2002). Special education faces the continuous challenge of increasing the supply of teachers and at the same time upgrading the quality. Attrition and retention of teachers are areas of focus in much of the literature regarding the state of special education.

There is a growing concern in the United States about the education of students regarded as the least likely to succeed. Excessive teacher turnover in low-income urban communities appears to have an impact on student achievement. The high teacher turnover rate results in a low teacher commitment for many urban high schools where teachers are poor adult role models and choose not to engage students (Barth, 2001). Students who are considered to be at-risk and least likely to succeed present a unique and challenging teaching and learning environment. In the broadest of terms, "students at-risk" refers to students who are in danger of not meeting graduation requirements. These students may or may not have a special education label or an individualized education

plan (IEP). These students may receive educational services in their home school or an alternative placement. Quite often, students at-risk suffer from behavioral or emotional disorders. Driven by a shortage of qualified special education and alternative education teachers, the need exists to identify resilient qualities of teachers aspiring to work with students who are considered to be at-risk of not meeting graduation requirements. Equally important, a working environment must exist that fosters resiliency for the teachers of this most challenging population of students.

First addressed will be an examination of existing teacher shortages in the fields of special education and alternative education along with reasons and claims for their continued existence. This is intended to provide support for the need to identify and foster resilient traits and qualities in teachers.

Second will be an examination of resiliency development as it applies to teachers at-risk of experiencing stress and occupational burnout.

Third will be an examination of best practices and attitudes that teachers who are considered successful and have maintained longevity possess. This will also include characteristics of students who are considered to be at-risk. Alternative education programs will be reviewed to determine their current issues and challenges.

Next examined will be studies and narratives that claim that there are successful teachers and practitioners who have achieved success and remained successful in the most difficult and demanding working environments with extremely challenging students. While these studies will show a relationship between environment and resiliency, there are teachers who succeed in the most adverse conditions.

A theoretical framework will follow which examines the conceptual context of occupational well-being. Resiliency studies making the claim that resiliency in teachers can be fostered and burnout can be avoided are also examined to determine the strategies that foster resiliency for teachers of at-risk students.

### Teacher Shortages in Special and Alternative Education

Teachers of students with behavioral and emotional disturbances face enormous instructional and management challenges. This area of special education has the highest rate of attrition within the field (Henderson et al., 2005). In a survey of career center directors and school education leaders conducted by the American Association for Employment Education (AAEE, 2004), it was reported that considerable shortages exist in mathematics and six special education fields, including severe disabilities, emotional and behavioral disorders and learning disabilities. The AAEE cites special education, specifically teachers of students with behavioral disorders, as the teaching areas with the highest demand in the United States. In 1977, the National Center for Educational Statistics predicted the need to hire more teachers in the field of special education than college and universities could adequately prepare. This ten-year projection has proven to be accurate. In the following years after the inception of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), there has been a growing percentage of teachers not fully qualified. From 2000 to 2002, the percentage of teachers working without full certification jumped from 9.9% to 12.1% (U.S. Department of Education as cited by Sindelar, 2005). This data suggests that these teachers are among the least qualified teachers. For many students with disabilities, the promise of a free and appropriate public education will go unfulfilled (Sindelar, 2005). Sindelar further claims that the inadequate supply of highly

qualified teachers in special education, the low number of people who enter the field and those who enter the field through unconventional preparation programs threaten quality education.

### Causes of Existing and Continuing Shortages

The difficulties that special education teachers face, particularly novice ones, are undeniable. The inability to cope with the realities of their profession is a major contributor to young teachers leaving the profession. A growing awareness of the less exciting realities of teaching can be followed by feelings of loneliness, ineffectiveness and alienation from the profession (Schlichte et al., 2005). In Schlichte's case study involving five first-year teachers, the reoccurring themes of high caseloads, less than positive work environments and a lack of administrative support emerged as reasons for dissatisfaction with their initial experiences as a professional.

Teacher shortages in the United States seem to exist in specific areas or regions. Johnson and Birkeland (2003) call this phenomenon migration and found that it accounts for a high percentage of turnovers that many schools experience. The impact of migration is unevenly and inequitably distributed among schools. Low-income schools experience a disproportional share of migration leading to a steady loss of teachers. Johnson and Berkeland (2003) further claim that migration coupled with the likelihood that one in five new teachers will leave the profession within their first three years compound the problem of teacher shortages for financially disadvantaged school districts. According to Krider, "In American society, we have a system that sows seeds unevenly, which leaves some land barren and unproductive. While the dominant group is cultivated by having their needs met, others are truncated in their growth" (Krider, 2008, p. 222).

In a study intending to provide insight into the ability to retain qualified special education teachers, Kaff (2004) surveyed 341 special educators regarding their future employment plans. Nearly half of the respondents reported that they planned to leave the field within five years. The most significant group within special education was teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD). Of these, 63% indicated their desire to leave the profession. They cited a lack of administrative support, the complexity of problems that accompany EBD students, high caseloads and the expectation of performing multiple roles without adequate resources. Cross and Billingsley (1994) found that teachers of EBD students reported greater stress and role-related problems than did other special education teachers. It was also determined that the effect of stress on job satisfaction and commitment was greater in teachers of students with EBD. Cross and Billingsley further claim that occupational stress plays a significant role in the loss or migration of teachers of students with EBD. These teachers are at greater risk of dropping out of the field when compared with teachers in other disability areas.

In a validation study using Center and Callaway's Teacher Stressors Questionnaire for EBD Teachers (1999), Center and Teventon (2001) examined the relationship between susceptibility to job related stressors, job commitment and personality in EBD teachers. Teachers identified as most likely to leave the profession identified stressors as disrespect from students, acts of cruelty, administrative duties, lack of parent involvement and students' lack of motivation. Brownell et al. (1999) found that attrition rates varied among special education teachers in different disability groups.

Higher attrition rates are found for teachers of students with emotional disorders. Singh and Billingsley (1996) examined 159 teachers of students with EBD.

The most important determinant to staying in teaching was workplace conditions. Specifically, job satisfaction had a strong positive impact on the intent to stay. Role-related problems such as a perceived lack of administrative and collegial support had a negative impact. George et al. (1995) reported that the most critical shortage area was among teachers of students with emotional disturbances. Nearly 37% of teachers sampled planned on leaving the profession within the next year. Johnson and Birkeland (2003) attempted to explain respondents' reasons for staying in their schools, moving to new schools or leaving public teaching through longitudinal interviews. The number of teachers that claimed a desire to leave the profession because they viewed teaching as a short-term commitment was 11 of the 50 respondents. Each planned to pursue another career after a short stay in the classroom. Eight respondents followed a more predictable path for leaving claiming excessive workloads, lack of curriculum and resources and a lack of administrative and collegial support. Of the 28 respondents who remained, 15 were not satisfied with their school or their choice of careers.

Beginning special education teachers are two and one half times more likely to leave their positions than their general education counterparts (Gehrke & McCoy, 2007). Through a mixed-methods study of beginning teachers, Gehrke and McCoy examined the responses of beginning special education teachers through a framework of teacher socialization and workplace factors. This study contributes to the growing body of research that describes effective support for beginning teachers, positive interaction with colleagues, accessing resources that support teacher practices, opportunities for



professional development, beginning the school year with an assigned mentor and a welcoming professional culture as necessary factors for teachers desiring to remain in the profession.

Piotrowski and Plash's (2006) investigation of retention issues based upon a study involving 117 special education teachers in Alabama attributes a lack of mission and vision on the part of school districts. Other factors in teacher turnover were job stress, administrative apathy, large class size and caseloads and excessive paperwork.

Washburn-Moses (2005) identifies difficulties relating to general education colleagues as another work-related stress factor and deems support from the principal as necessary for a teacher's sense of well-being. Otto and Arnold (2005) support these claims and further add that the field of special education has been and continues to be greatly impacted by the high turnover of teachers.

In Billingsley's (2006) national study of teachers of students with EBD, a profile of characteristics and preparedness as compared to other special education teachers was developed. This study examined factors related to workforce quality. Teachers of students with EBD are disproportionately male and have fewer years of teaching experience than colleagues teaching in other areas of special education. They are less likely to have taken the Praxis or licensure exams. Billingsley further reports that students with EBD constitute 8% of students with disabilities. These students tend to be identified later than students in other disability areas. They are more likely to be absent from school consistently make lower grades, fail more courses and have higher dropout rates. Bullock (2007) adds that students with EBD are at a greater risk for alcohol and drug usage and a disproportional number of these students are arrested three to five years out

of high school. Billingsley (2006) describes EBD students as a most formidable challenge to teachers and school personnel. Their study is significant because the empirical literature comparing students with EBD to other areas of disabilities is limited. Christiansen et al. (1997) adds that students with EBD suffer from low self-esteem and may have a low socioeconomic status. AAEE studies (2004) that track teacher shortages in every region in the country consistently find teachers of students with EBD to be among the highest need areas.

Through an analysis of teacher shortages, the claim is made that the problem is not recruitment; it is retention (Gersten, 2001). In Gersten's study of the relationship between a teacher's intention to stay in the field and factors such as job satisfaction, commitment to stay in special education (as opposed to changing to regular education) and job design, several predictable themes emerged. Feelings of isolation and lack of collegial support were identified along with the lack of quality mentoring and induction programs. There was a general lack of awareness of the stressors that novice teachers face. "We train them poorly; treat them badly, so they leave" (Gersten, 2001, p. 455).

Along with having fewer credentials and years of experience, a high percentage of teachers of students with EBD teach in isolated program settings of alternative schools. They face critical behavioral management tasks and are less likely to believe that they are making a significant impact on their students (Henderson, 2005). Due to NCLB and other state mandates, it is becoming increasingly difficult to staff alternative programs with teachers who have appropriate certification in particular subject areas or in special education. The educational needs of students become a secondary concern because of logistics and pragmatic issues (Lehr, 2003). These mandates are viewed as having a

negative impact on the supply of new teachers with respect to the demand for highly qualified teachers (AAEE, 2004). NCLB, the education act of 2001 and IDEA compound problems of special education shortages. These laws require special educators to meet increased requirements to teach. Special educators must also demonstrate competence in core academic subjects (Billingsley, 2006).

The shortages of teachers for exceptional children have led to alternative programs for teacher certification. While these alternative routes may satisfy immediate personnel needs, they may be lacking in areas of pedagogy and methodology. To date, there is limited empirical literature regarding the nature and efficacy of these “fast track” programs. Many of these programs fail to produce quality instructors for students with EBD or insure positive academic and behavioral outcomes (Sindelar, 2005). Sindelar further states that while alternative routes to certification may be inevitable, reform is needed in teacher education preparation because fast track programs lack pedagogical training. Special education preparation programs are producing fewer graduates and these graduates are widely dispersed; no two are likely to be working in the same kind of environment. Alternative programs for teacher certification need to demonstrate increased outputs of qualified teachers. Innovations in teacher programs must be disregarded if no credible measures of their success are demonstrated in their program assessments (Sindelar, 2005). Similarly critical of the lack of pedagogical training of those teachers who have gained certification through nontraditional means, Bullock et al. (2006) make the claim that we cannot expect that appropriate educational programming will occur without teachers who have an understanding of EBD students. These teachers also must have the passion and skill to plan management and instructional strategies that

meet the individual needs of students. Bullock further claims a need for pre-service preparation for those teachers. The preparedness of alternatively trained teachers does not match the realities of the first year teaching experience.

### Teachers At-Risk and Resiliency Development

Much literature makes the claim that habits fostering resiliency can be developed and burnout can be avoided. Teacher satisfaction is based upon levels of autonomy, perceived and recognized accomplishments and supportive collegial relationships. Teachers who use their resources to develop resilience will successfully confront the ongoing challenges of teaching and prevail within the profession (Bobek, 2002).

Understanding the at-risk factors that cause stress and burnout in teachers is a critical need for this study and the focus of a qualitative study as described by Howard and Johnson (2004). Teachers at risk of stress and burnout may experience the following fairly regularly:

- Students who are unmotivated and noncompliant
- Students who act violently towards each other and the teacher
- Students who come from severely disadvantaged, abusive and/or neglectful backgrounds
- Time and workload pressures
- Change (organizational, administrative, professional, personal)
- Difficult relations with colleagues

Teachers displaying resilience often:

- Demonstrate effective strategies for working with difficult students
- Respond appropriately to violent behavior
- Respond to critical incidents and students' personal problems and needs in a genuine but emotionally self-protective ways
- Manage relations with colleagues effectively
- Manage time and workload successfully
- Handle change flexibly and creatively

Teachers displaying resiliency in the face of adverse situations have developed the necessary coping strategies to avoid stress and burnout (Howard & Johnson, 2004). In Sumsion's (2004) study of early childhood teachers and their constructions of their resilience, teachers referred to intrinsic rewards as contributors to their resilience. They value a commitment to ongoing learning. Resilient teachers have self-insight to their awareness. They identify contributing influences such as collegiality, personal freedom, employer support and recognition by others necessary for their sustainability. Teachers who demonstrate career resiliency on a consistent basis have a moral purpose and embrace a philosophical stance at the center of their value system.

The role of teacher effectiveness was examined by Gu and Day (2006) in a study of three resilient teachers in the early, middle and later years of their careers. Profiles of these teachers were used to explore the interaction between self-efficacy, their professional and personal identities and their management of the interaction in each life phase. Gu and Day concluded that in the early years of teaching the importance of in-school supports was a dominating factor in the enhancement of resiliency. The nature of resilience is determined by the interaction between the internal assets of the individual and the external environments in which the individual lives and grows or does not grow. In other words, teachers are more likely to stay in the profession if there is a clear sense of purpose.

In her study of American high school teachers, Nieto (2003) described teaching as an “intellectual endeavor which involves love, anger, depression, hope and possibility” (p. 122). Nieto further describes that which keeps teachers going was the “emotional stuff.” (p.122). Fredrickson’s (2001) theory of positive emotions from a psychological

perspective contributes to the understanding that the resilient qualities of teachers who are doing a good job are themselves, emotional by nature.

An examination of ways to develop resiliency is worthy of examination. Resiliency can be attained through successful teaching experiences (Franklin, 2005). Franklin advocates that teaching from a social justice perspective will help engage diverse learners where traditional methods will not. He further stipulates that using a social justice perspective will (1) provide opportunities for all students to engage in significant intellectual work; (2) build on what students bring to school with them (knowledge and interests); (3) teach skills and bridge gaps; (4) work with, not against individuals, families and communities; (5) use diverse forms of assessment; and (6) integrate concepts of inequity, power and activism as part of the curriculum. Teaching through a social justice perspective advocates that people learn to question society, see through versions of the truth, not accept unfairness and inhumanity and become empowered to envision and work toward a more humane society (Freire, 1970).

Billingsley (2004), a leading researcher on the topic of special education and teacher retention, makes the claim that resiliency can be fostered. She places the onus directly on policy makers and administrators who are responsible for the working environment. Solving problems of job design, caseloads and poor climate are critical to retaining teachers, particularly young ones. Billingsley further claims that the incident rate of teacher burnout can be reduced through a positive and nurturing environment. To foster resiliency and reduce burnout, a system-wide buy-in must be in existence. Malloy and Allen (2007) conducted a study involving 28 teachers working in an identified resiliency-building school. The study focused on retention factors and school climate.

Throughout the interview process, teachers gave high marks in the areas of caring and support, high expectations and meaningful support. Teachers expressed support from both their colleagues and administration. High expectations were established in the school as evidenced by a high number of teachers articulating the school's vision for all learners. Throughout the interviews it was determined that teachers experienced a high level of meaningful participation. A sign exists in the teacher's lounge that encourages teachers to: (a) stick to the goals; (b) accept new challenges; and (c) keep trying. Malloy and Allen make the claim that resiliency can be fostered not only in the individual but also throughout the school.

In the Patterson et al. (2004) study on teacher resilience, the characteristics of teachers who work in less desirable environments were identified through qualitative investigation. Resilient teachers do not view themselves as victims. They have a personal set of values that guide decision-making. They place a high premium on professional development and find ways to achieve it. Resilient teachers take charge and solve problems. The significance of the Patterson et al. study lies in the fact that those teachers work in environments that offer limited resources. Barone (2002) claims that successful practitioners value teaching that includes voices of students as well as teachers. Teachers must assess the knowledge that children bring to the classroom and develop instruction based upon the strengths and needs of their students. Successful teachers help their students see failure as a temporary condition. This creates a motivational climate to develop self-monitoring and problem-solving skills. Teachers convince students that one disappointing performance does not make them a failure (Steinberg & Gano-Overlay, 2003).

It is assumed that teachers of students at-risk who are viewed as resilient also foster and help to create resiliency in their students. The goal is to create an environment leading to academic success in the presence of adversity. Downey's (2008) synthesis of current research on resiliency articulated 12 recommendations for classroom practices that can foster educational resilience for students at-risk for academic failure. Through a content analysis approach, Downey organized the 12 recommendations into the following four clusters: (a) student rapport, (b) classroom climate, (c) instructional strategies; and (d) student skills. Within the cluster of student rapport, Downey's findings overwhelmingly indicate that at-risk students who achieve academic success in the presence of significant obstacles tend to have at least one teacher who serves as both a role model and supportive adult. The closer a teacher gets to a student the better. The recommendations for the creation of a conducive classroom environment for at-risk students include conveying to students that they are personally responsible for their academic success, creating a caring classroom community and providing opportunities for meaningful student participation. There is value in aligning instructional strategies with activities that help to build a supportive network for students. Downey also claims that teachers need to provide learning approaches to the curriculum, such as problem-solving and hands-on inquiry that will lead to a high level of student engagement. The recommendations for increasing students' skill levels are centered on developing transferable skills such as communication and interpersonal skills and effective literacy skills (Downey, 2008).



## Best Practices, Traits and Characteristics

Good teaching is charged with positive emotions. It is not just a matter of knowing one's subject, being efficient, having the correct competencies or learning all of the right techniques. Good teachers are not just well-oiled machines. They are motivated, passionate beings that connect with their students and fill their work with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy (Fredrickson, 2001). Unfortunately, many teachers in schools labeled as at-risk make assumptions about parents' lack of interest in their child's learning and this contributes to lower teacher expectations and lower student achievement (Brophy, 1983). The nature of instruction at at-risk schools tends to be dominated by teachers giving directions, asking questions, making assignments and monitoring seatwork. As teachers experience frustration in their teaching, they tend to excuse themselves from responsibility and blame students or families (Brophy, 1983).

Excellent teachers know their subject matter and how young minds work. They care deeply whether their students are engaged in learning and about their academic success (Jones, 2002). Factors that influence teacher retention and resignation exist beyond resiliency. Resiliency alone may not be enough to sustain a career. Wilson (2008) argues that it is critical for teachers to develop effective methods of teaching including quality interactions with others early in their training to form a solid base on which to build a satisfying teaching career. Wilson also claims that failure to engage in positive interactions may lead to career burnout.

Weasmer et al. (2008) investigated the factors that enhanced a teacher's development into a stage of their careers marked by enthusiasm and growth. Teachers who were categorized as enthusiastic and growing are teachers who embrace innovative

practices and seek out new practices in order to benefit their students. Teachers identified as enthusiastic and growing are driven by a desire to avoid slipping into ruts and becoming repetitive with instruction. Their awareness of student responses and student excitement spurs their use of innovative practices. Enthusiastic and growing teachers are able to strike a balance between school time and personal time (Weasmer et al., 2008).

How do teachers achieve sustained success, particularly with students considered to be at-risk? What are their best practices, techniques and methods? Johanessen (2004) suggests that cognitive approaches to teaching and learning enable students to make connections with their out-of-school experiences and engage them in powerful thinking strategies. The traditional solution for dealing with low achieving or at-risk students has been through an emphasis on basic skills. Johanessen claims this approach underestimates what students are capable of doing and postpones more challenging and interesting work for too long. The basic skills approach deprives students of a meaningful context for learning. A cognitive approach to teaching and learning focuses on complex, meaningful questions and problems that make connections with students' out-of-school experiences and cultures. Johanessen (2004) offers a problem-solving approach using the following eight principles of instruction:

- Focus on complex, meaningful questions and problems so that students' reading and writing can be in service of genuine inquiry. Keep the level of tasks high enough so that the purposes are apparent and make sense to the students.
- Embed basic skills instruction in the context of more global skills, such as including reading comprehension and composing skills in introductory reading or writing activities or instruction.
- Make connections with students' out-of school experiences and culture.

- Model powerful thinking strategies for students. For example, lead the class through a discussion aimed at figuring out a difficult passage before you ask them to try it on their own.
- Encourage students to use multiple approaches to academic tasks and have students describe their answers aloud to the class so that all students hear different ways to solve problems.
- Provide scaffolding to enable students to accomplish complex tasks: for example, provide prewriting activities designed to help students learn to use specific sensory details before you ask them to write a personal narrative.
- Make dialogue with students the central medium for teaching and learning. One example of this is reciprocal questioning in which groups of two or three students ask and answer one another's questions after a lesson or presentation.
- Use teaching strategies that will help students internalize the questions that good readers ask when they read literature and good writers ask when they tackle complex writing tasks (p. 639).

In a study from the nursing profession that also experiences severe faculty shortages, Poorman et al. (2008) examined how faculty help and hinder students at-risk through narrative pedagogy and the interpretation of shared stories. The hermeneutic analysis of data collected revealed several themes. In an attempt to reveal helpful ways educators can embrace their students and foster success, Poorman et al (2008) identified a need to identify what students' problems are rather than suppose what they might be. The term attending was used in this study to identify how teachers and students experience learning as well as what teachers do that is helpful to struggling students (Poorman et al. 2008). Attending teachers engage their students in dialogue for the purpose of sharing their experiences and seek knowledge with questions like: How can I help you?; What can I do to enhance your learning?; and What are your concerns and fears? Much attention needs to be paid to what students are experiencing rather than making hasty judgments. Attending teachers seek to create equity in the student-teacher relationship. "These partnerships between students and teachers can create limitless possibilities and result in mutual growth" (Poorman et al. 2008, p. 274).

What is it that teachers do to create and sustain high levels of morale, motivation and performance for their students? Bowman (2007) argues that exceptional teachers guide their students by inspiring them to discover where their talents and passions intersect. A struggling classroom teacher often attempts to change behavior and motivate students with rewards and incentives. Bowman's claim is that motivating students through tangible, traditional rewards can limit student potential. Points, grades and treats are not a means for developing pride and deep fulfillment. Exceptional teachers understand the fundamental difference between motivation and inspiration. Bowman describes inspiration as something that is a result of a trusting, caring mentoring relationship with a student. "Inspiration is something an extraordinary individual lives. Motivation is something an individual does" (Bowman, 2007, p.81). Secretan, (2005) describes the primary function of a teacher as inspiring others to do things that they might not otherwise do. Good teachers guide students to channel their energies and passion toward their strengths (Secretan, 2005). Successful teachers are adept at getting students to anticipate how proud they will be when their behavior and achievements mirror class or societal expectations (Bowman, 2007).

Richards (2006) claims that successful teachers have an understanding of student engagement. Along with strong knowledge and skills, they consider such factors as time, space, materials and relationships. Successful teachers anticipate the most appropriate ways of using time. They are usually in constant motion in the classroom because they realize close proximity leads to greater engagement. Materials are ready and available when lessons begin. Teachers who experience high levels of student engagement use hands-on materials whenever possible. Perhaps the most powerful influence a teacher

can have on students comes from their personality, the ability to smile, express praise, have a caring attitude and a sense of humor.

### Successful Teachers Exist in Difficult Environments

The claim has been successfully made that resiliency can be enhanced through association with caring and nurturing people. Strong mentoring and induction programs, professional development, collegial relationships, recognition of professional achievement and administrative support are some of the ways known to support teachers who work in difficult environments. When attempting to discover special traits or characteristics that allow some people to do good work or even flourish in difficult and desperate environments, perhaps a starting point would be an examination of a person's intentions.

Why do resilient teachers do what they do? Houston and Sokolow (2006) claim the why behind what we do is as equally important as what we do. This statement is supported by the authors' example of a school leader's desire to raise achievement scores of students. The school leader's intention may be to look good in the eyes of his constituents, make more money and achieve longevity in his position. The leader's intention also may be to gain tangible evidence that students have learned and have made progress. Perhaps it is a combination of both scenarios. Each reason has a different focus. The question can be asked, is the focus on you or is it on others? It is Houston and Sokolow's claim that the more your intentions focus on benefiting others, the more you will receive support from those around you. "Our satisfaction and sense of fulfillment increase whenever our intentions are focused on the needs of others" (Houston

& Sokolow, 2006, p.2). A reasonable assumption may be that successful, enduring teachers more often than not have intentions that are focused outside of them.

Terkel (1972) in his collection of stories of people working describes two impulses existing in people simultaneously: a search for meaning and a search for daily bread. “It is a search for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor... for a sort of life rather than Monday through Friday sort of dying” (Terkel, 1972, p.xi). Terkel writes of the “happy few” who find something to savor in their daily job and bring meaning to their work that extends well beyond the paycheck.

To illustrate how people find meaning the inner meaning of their work Terkel (1972) talked with Pat Zimmerman who started an alternative school in 1969 with eight students in a storefront church with donated books, desks and a few tables. “I knew the kids were getting in trouble around here. I simply helped them and made their troubles less” (Zimmerman, 1972, p. 489). Within four years Zimmerman’s school had a population of 68 students and gained accreditation.

Pat Zimmerman’s career was spent with neglected students full of rage and despair, who didn’t believe things would get better. Zimmerman was in tune with the feelings of his students and let them know when they touched upon his feelings. He wanted them to be able to share their feelings with others. Zimmerman described similarities from his personal readings about life in concentration camps with life in poverty-stricken ghettos. His description of the invisible walls of the ghettos draws a powerful parallel to the lives of people without hope. Zimmerman saw great value in being able to have his students share their hurt feelings with others and know how to help others who have been hurt by the same things. Throughout much of his early career

Zimmerman's work extended into Saturday afternoons and Sunday evenings. As he describes,

The weekdays often extended past 6:00 PM. I run into people who say that they admire what I do. It's embarrassing. I don't make any judgments about my work, whether it is great or worthless. It's just what I do best. It's the only job I want to do. I work hard because I have to. I get tired. I don't feel bad about it. This is my life. I just am (Zimmerman, 1972, p. 493).

It is reasonable to assume that Pat Zimmerman is the kind of person that Houston and Sokolow (2006) described as having a primary focus outside of themselves and on others.

William Sadler is described by Prestidge (2008) at the time of his retirement as a man who made a career out of picking up students who stumbled. Sadler's work with at-risk youth led to the creation of the Georgetown School that serves middle and high school students in Hanover, Maryland. The Georgetown School serves students who have gotten into trouble and are at least one year below grade level in academic achievement. The school grew from a single classroom to its own facility over a seven year period. Sadler employed a philosophy of taking the world and slowing it down. Sadler maintained a focus on the student, on improving grades and doing things on the inside in order to develop self-worth and a sense of achievement (Prestidge, 2008).

George Keefer began work as a General Education Degree (GED) math teacher in 1973. He remained at the Maryland Training Center for over thirty-four years preparing many last-chance, reluctant learners for the GED exam. Mr. Keefer believes his most important achievement is helping more than 4700 students receive their GED during his

teaching career. George Keefer is a past recipient of the Spirit of Correctional Award from the Maryland State Department of Education (Anonymous, 2007). Like Pat Zimmerman, both William Sadler and George Keefer exemplify teachers who have their primary focus outside of themselves and on others.

If we look at the end of one's career, what tangible pieces of evidence would we find that would allow us to believe that a master teacher occupied a room? Sarah Lorenz (2000) describes in great detail what she hopes that her successor will find and value in what she leaves behind upon her retirement. She describes her filing cabinets as a scrapbook of her career. Lorenz hopes her replacement will find and read shelves of classroom anthologies, full of wonderful stories and pieces of passionate writing by every student she has taught. There will be several binders full of published pieces written by her students for newspapers, journals, the yearbook and young adult collections. There will be files of book reviews on index cards written by students about books they had read and loved or hated. There will also be shelves full of dog-eared, worn books that had been read over and over by many students. There will be personal shelves crammed with professional books, some new and some old. Lorenz's hope for the new teacher is to view these materials as a goldmine. She describes,

Whether I am in Antigua or heaven, I'll be satisfied that my legacy isn't lying with the remains of yesterday's lunch waiting for the rubbish truck. I'll know that I didn't just mark time in the classroom, reading Hamlet for the forty-ninth time and losing touch with the right hairstyle, but I created a legacy of literature, love and language that left its imprint on paper, on my profession and on people's lives (Lorenz, 2000, p.20).



Stories of successful teachers who do not have the advantages of adequate resources, collegial and administrative support, and recognition for their hard work can easily be found. In spite of their environments, successful teachers persist and persevere. Through a qualitative study, Nieto (2005) makes the claim that resilient teachers reflect a sense of mission that includes community activism and engagement on behalf of the oppressed students they serve. One salient theme emerging from Nieto's work is the description of resilient teachers as those who seek to develop and maintain relationships as part of shaping futures and helping to change the lives of their students. Successful teachers in adverse environments suspend preconceptions and beliefs that limit students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Successful teachers move away from deficit approaches and negative configurations of students at-risk while working with students to identify strengths and aspirations (Nieto, 2005).

What is it that good teachers recognize with regard to experiencing continued success in the classroom? Bryson and Hand (2007) claim that student engagement lies on a continuum from disengaged to engaged and that high quality teaching implies that students must be engaged within a context of learning that is likely to enable them to reach understanding. Through case study research Bryson and Hand concluded that students are more likely to engage when the teaching staff supports them. Enthusiastic and engaging teachers are a prerequisite for student engagement. Teachers who demonstrate a willingness to share power, not use assessment as discipline and establish a sense of community in the educational setting are more likely to inspire their learners. Teachers who are able to actively engage their students recognize the need to give sufficient attention to issues that matter the most to students (Bryson & Hand, 2007).

Calabrese and Goodwin (2005) describe successful teachers working with at-risk youth in disheartening conditions as being able to transcend those conditions by becoming difference-makers. An appreciative inquiry model was used to identify attitudes and traits of teachers that supported effective teaching in an ethnically diverse urban high school with a large at-risk population, low graduation rates and low achievement scores. In short, an attempt was made to understand what good teachers do. Calabrese and Goodwin determined that teachers with effective attitudes and traits were seen as having the ability to integrate into the school and the surrounding community (Calabrese and Goodwin, 2005). Effective teachers are described as being culturally responsive, seeking small successes and being flexible and caring. These are teachers with a sound knowledge base who actively engaged with the make-up of their academic discipline (Singham, (2003). They have a firm understanding of how students learn.

In attempting to discover sources of satisfaction and support for teachers working in distressed areas of Washington D.C., Stanford (2001) selected 10 teachers based upon principals' recommendations, longevity and characteristics matching a Profile of Teachers with High Morale. Teachers with high morale are: (1) positive in attitude and treatment of others; (2) enthusiastic about teaching; (3) involved in their work; and (4) themselves with regard to attitudes towards teaching and thoughts on their resiliency. The length of teachers' experience ranged from 10 to 33 years and teachers were selected from two schools that were described as seriously distressed. Stanford's qualitative study sought data through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and ranking activities. Several patterns emerged to help explain why these teachers had remained positive for so long. Most important was their love of and commitment to children.

Veteran, positive urban teachers seemed to have endured for so long and so well because they had found deep meaning in their work. Stanford describes the teachers' commitment to making a difference in their students' lives and learning as a prominent motivation (Sanford, 2001). There exists a strong belief within these teachers that they can make a difference in the lives of their students. There also exist similarities in their sources of support. Colleagues, family and friends, and their personal spiritual lives were identified strongly. These teachers also identified the ideal classroom as containing no more than twenty-one students, adequate resources and supportive parents (Sanford, 2009).

Daugherty (2003) examined anecdotal and survey responses from Sallie Mae Award winners to determine common characteristics of successful first-year teachers. The Sallie Mae Award is given annually to teachers nominated by their district superintendent for exhibiting superior instructional skills and excellent interaction with students, faculty and parents. Defining characteristics of winning teachers include a genuine concern regarding the welfare of their students, a commitment to the success of all students, enduring enthusiasm, a consistently encouraging attitude and a resolve to not be intimidated by challenges (Daugherty, 2003).

### Theoretical Framework

Over the past several decades, the focus of resiliency research has developed from identifying personal traits and protective factors to investigating underlying protective processes and how protective factors may contribute to positive outcomes (Luther, 1996). Resiliency will be examined through a theoretical framework of teacher efficacy as well as the structure of psychological well-being.

Many definitions of resiliency exist throughout the literature. Christiansen et al. (1997) define a resilient individual as one who is responsible, positive, self-reliant, committed and socially skillful. Resiliency is the ability to respond actively and positively to life conditions, stress, and trauma in such a way that we are able to bounce back and continue to approach life with positive actions. Bondy et al. (1999) offer a closely related definition that describes resiliency as the ability to spring back and adapt in the face of adversity and develop social, academic and vocational competence despite exposure to severe stress. Bondy et al. also describe resiliency as a phenomenon that allows an individual to achieve successful outcomes when facing challenging or threatening situations. Perhaps the most meaningful description of resiliency as it applies to teachers was authored by Sumsion (2004). Sumsion defines career resilience and thriving as the ability to continue to find deep and sustaining personal and professional satisfaction despite multiple adverse factors and circumstances that have led many to leave their profession. This is an accurate description when applied to reasons special and alternative educators give in deciding whether to stay or leave the teaching profession.

Occupational well-being will be examined as it applies to the identification of one or more factors fostering resiliency. In the van Horn et al. (2004) quantitative study of 1252 Dutch teachers, Ryff and Keys's (1995) six-dimensional model of well being was described as a positive evaluation of various aspects of one's job. Ryff and Key's six dimensions of resiliency are: (1) Self Acceptance: a positive evaluation of oneself and one's past life; (2) Environmental Mastery: the capacity to effectively managing one's life and the surrounding world; (3) Autonomy: a sense of self-determination and the

ability to resist social pressure to think and act in certain ways; (4) Positive Relations with Others: expressed by a genuine concern about the welfare of others; (5) Personal Growth: the sense of continued growth and development as a person as well as openness to new experiences; and (6) Purpose in Life: the belief that one's life is purposeful and meaningful and that one has something to live for.

Building on the work of Ryff and Keys (1995), van Horn et al. (2004) developed a multidimensional model of occupational well-being that examined affective, cognitive, professional, social and psychometric dimensions. Positive results (high satisfaction) in the professional, social and affective dimensions in particular, constituted a high level of occupational well-being. Results indicate that satisfaction or dissatisfaction is multi-dimensional.

An examination of resiliency in teachers also needs to include a discussion and theoretical background on individual belief systems and self-efficacy. Vartuli (2005) makes the claim that those teachers who are excellent in the classroom base their actions on a system of beliefs that help them choose logically between possible actions. These beliefs are formed from personal experiences, education and values. Vartuli further claims teachers' beliefs are often unarticulated, yet they influence perceptions, judgments and discussions and direct teachers to act in certain ways. Perceived self-efficacy is defined as a person's judgment of their capability to organize and execute courses of action to attain types of performances. Therefore, self-efficacy is based on teachers' perceptions of their own competence and influences how teachers feel, think, behave and are motivated. The strength of teachers' self-efficacy helps to determine how resilient they will be when faced with adversity (Vartuli, 2005). This is supported by Bondy and

McKenzie's (1999) claim that teachers who are confident and optimistic are likely to look for students' strengths rather than focusing on their deficiencies.

### Summary

Claims have been made through the work of Tislington and Grow (2007) as well as Schlicte et al. (2005) that programs that serve at-risk students and reluctant learners currently face critical teacher shortages and will continue to face these shortages in the future. Claims have also been made that burnout in teachers can be avoided in many cases and the attrition rate can be reduced. Billingsley (2004) and Bobek (2002) are among many who claim positive professional development, realistic case loads and working conditions and administrative and collegial support enhance teacher retention and resiliency. Downey's (2008) study serves as a strong indicator that through daily positive interactions and adherence to best practices, academic success can be enhanced and supported for at-risk students who are in danger of academic failure.

Moving forward from this point, gaining an understanding of why some teachers demonstrate resiliency in adverse conditions while many others do not is worthy of investigation. Working conditions, including administrative and collegial support and class size, no doubt have an effect on the sustainability and resiliency of teachers. Content mastery and knowledge of best practices are also determining factors. Terkel's (1972) description of the "happy few" along with the lifework of Pat Zimmerman and William Sadler seem to indicate that some people have a great passion for their work, perhaps a calling. There are people who have found and maintained success in careers that many try to avoid. There appear to be qualities within individuals that may not be dependent upon professional development and induction programs. Zimmerman and

Stadler along with the teachers described through the work of Nieto (2005) suggest that best practices may in part exist within some individuals. Implications for the development of best practice for teacher selection may result from further inquiry as part of my study.

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

#### Introduction

Stake (1995) describes case studies as a “bounded integrated system of integrated parts” (p.13). Case studies investigate perspectives of people from a variety of contexts on an event or process. Stake (2000) describes and differentiates three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental and collective. An instrumental case study is defined as a case studied to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization. When an instrumental case study involves looking at several cases and the researcher is able to investigate a phenomenon, population or general condition, the instrumental case study becomes a collective case study. For Stake (1995), a case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied.

The case study approach has been used as a strategy to focus on understanding the dynamics present within single settings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The attempt has been made to build theories through case study analysis. Case study data have been collected through thematic analysis, a process that involves coding and then segregating the data by codes into data clumps for further analysis and description (Glesne, 2006). However, both within-case and cross-case analysis allow the opportunity for making meaning of the data collected through the interviewing process (Shank, 2006). Using within-case and cross-case analysis of the case studies offers the possibility of making theoretical claims (Shank, 2006). Because each of the cases studied is initially researched and analyzed as a stand-alone entity, a within-case analysis allow unique patterns to emerge before making a push to generalize patterns across cases



(Eisenhardt, 1989). Then, the use of cross-case analysis allows a search for patterns and helps to avoid leaping to conclusions based upon limited data. Cross-case comparisons are used to look at data in different ways (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Within-case and cross-case data displays allow the researcher to move from data description to explaining patterns and variables within the data. A context chart consisting of a list of behaviors observed within each case assist with the organization of the data. The context information creates a network showing the impact of these factors on behaviors (Shank, 2006). A cross-case display can be used as a focus for seeking order. While each individual case analysis is preserved, the sum of the individual cases was used to build a bigger picture. Each individual case is a source for the cross-case analysis (Shank, 2006).

The purpose of this investigation was to examine a population of identified successful teachers of students at-risk and identify how these teachers were able to remain resilient and why they were able to maintain longevity in the profession. Another important aspect of this study was determining how resilient teachers' colleagues view them.

Resiliency can be described as a social phenomenon and this study generated theory through data collection and analysis. Questions asked through the interviewing and observation process also represent the qualitative mode of life history. A good life history will illustrate the uniqueness, dilemmas and complexities of a person in such a way that it causes readers to reflect upon themselves and bring their own situations and questions to the story (Glesne, 2006).

## Constructivist Paradigm

Scientific realism is the view that our theories chart, map, or refer to real features of the natural world and that scientific objectivity is identified as an accurate representation of what exists in the real world. In contrast, constructivists reject scientific realism and hold that there is no objective knowledge beyond a set of socially constructed artifacts of what exists in the real world (Schwandt, 1997).

When examining resiliency, the constructivist paradigm reflects that there are no simple patterns or events that create resiliency. The social artifacts as described by Schwandt reflect a complex nature in individuals. This paradigm reflects the hypothesis of the researcher that resiliency is arrived at through a complex set of events, conditions and life experiences. Therefore, this collective case study uses a constructivist paradigm to examine the following research questions: (a) How are teachers able to maintain resiliency in challenging educational environments?; (b) Why do resilient teachers keep teaching?; and (c) How do resilient teachers' colleagues view them?

Research questions for this study were based upon the definitions of resiliency from Christiansen et al. (1997) and Bondy et al. (1999). Christiansen et al. define resiliency as the ability to respond actively and positively to life conditions, stress and trauma in such a way that one is able to bounce back and continue to approach life with positive actions. Bondy et al. describe a resilient individual as one who demonstrates the ability to bounce back and adapt in the face of adversity and achieve successful outcomes when facing challenging and threatening situations. Working from these definitions of resiliency, interview questions were generated using Ryff and Keys's (1995) six dimensions of well being as described by van Horn et al (2004).

## Interview Codes and Questions

The following codes were used to represent Ryff and Keys's six-dimensional model of well-being: (1) SA: self-acceptance; (2) EM: environmental mastery; (3) A: autonomy; (4) PR: positive relations with others; (5) PG: personal growth; and (6) PL purpose in life.

The following questions were asked in the semi-structured interview process:

1. (PG) How have you grown as a person since the beginning of your teaching career?
2. (PG/SA) Can you describe what it means to have a purposeful and meaningful life?
3. (A) How have you resisted and continue to resist social and job pressures and maintain a sense of self-determination in this setting?
4. (EM) How do you keep going when faced with apathy and misery?
5. (SA) Are you happy and/or satisfied with your personal life?
6. (SA) Are you happy and/or satisfied with your professional life?
7. (PL) How do you balance the needs of your job as a teacher with the pressures and demands of your surrounding world?
8. (PL) Can you recall situations in your life (trauma, health issues, family issues, friends etc.) that you would consider life altering? How did you respond? What were your supports?
9. (A) Please discuss difficult, stressful or traumatic situations in your professional career. How did you respond to any/all of these situations? Were the results positive? If so, why?

10. (A) What processes do you go through after you have experienced a traumatic or difficult day? Why are you able to bounce back while others are not?
11. (SA) Do you believe in yourself and your abilities as they pertain to your ability to teach and motivate your students?
12. (PG) Have you always believed in yourself or has this belief grown over time?
13. (PL) Does your work with students extend beyond academics? If so, please elaborate.
14. (PR) How do you cultivate and maintain positive relationships with your students? Can you recall a time when a student was particularly resistant?
15. (EM/PG) Do you consider yourself well-versed in the best practices of teaching?
16. (EM) How do you measure success with your students?
17. (PG) Describe your academic career as a student.
18. (EM) Have you been afforded opportunities for professional development? Please describe them.

#### Participants

The following were the criteria for the selection of the teachers for the study:

1. A minimum of four years of teaching experience in an alternative setting
2. Satisfactory evaluations for each year of teaching
3. Responsibility for providing direct instruction to students

4. Current employment at an alternative school, a “school within a school,” or another challenging educational setting
5. Excellent recommendations by the building administrator

Four teachers were selected for the study from a minimum of three sites in the western Pennsylvania area. Initial inquiry was made to Local Education Agencies (LEA) through a phone conversation, a letter requesting the identification of a veteran excellent teacher and a face-to-face meeting. Supervisors were asked to refer to PSSA data, pre- and post test data and classroom observation data as criteria for measuring ongoing success in the classroom. The goal of this inquiry was to develop a purposeful sample of teachers who met the eligibility criteria. The meeting with a supervisor also led to opportunity sampling or snowball sampling. Delmont (2002) describes these sampling opportunities as seizing the chances of a setting or respondent when the opportunity arises.

After an initial list of qualified teachers was compiled, those teachers were extended an invitation to participate. A screening process was not necessary because only four teachers emerged through the initial inquiry. A detailed description of the study was provided along with the purpose of the study. Each of the four teachers agreed to participate. Informed consent was extended at this time.

Administrators were asked to identify other teachers that could speak in an informed manner about the resilient teacher. It was preferable that the colleague was currently working on site with the participant teacher. The colleague interviewed was asked to provide testimony, examples and stories that validated the selection of the

resilient teacher. The following questions were used to generate dialogue with the colleagues selected to speak on behalf of the participating teacher:

1. How long have you worked with (participating teacher)?
2. How has (participating teacher) demonstrated resilience beyond most teachers with whom you have worked?
3. How has (participating teacher) demonstrated care and compassion for his/her students?
4. How does (participating teacher) speak about his/her job?
5. What personal qualities do you see that make (participating teacher) resilient?

Based upon the data collected four teachers and four colleagues were selected from three sites. Invitations were extended again, this time for continued participation in the remainder of the study.

#### Procedure

After four respondents were selected from the purposeful sample, an individual meeting was scheduled with each participant. At the meeting an overview of the study was explained in detail. Two of the meetings were phone interviews while the other two were face-to-face. Although informed consent had already been secured, procedural safeguards was revisited.

The purpose of the research was explained as gaining an understanding of the sources and causes of resiliency of teachers of students at-risk. It was also explained that the benefits gained from this research could influence processes as they relate to the hiring of teachers of students at-risk. Resilient participants completed a 60 to 90 minute semi-structured interview and received a transcript of their interview for review. The

interviews were audio-taped and the review of the interview transcriptions was completed through the mail with the participating teacher.

Additionally, 45 minute interviews were conducted with participants selected to provide testimony and validation of the resilient teacher. It was explained to all participants that all information would remain anonymous and confidential. Informed consent was also secured from each participating colleague prior to the interview.

### Data Analysis

This study involved the interpretation of four participants' extended dialogue through a semi-structured interview process. Each extended dialogue was a separate case. Included in each case study were interviews of professionals that could speak credibly about the identified teacher. A thematic analysis was used that involved coding and then separating the data by codes into clumps for further analysis and description (Glesne, 2006). Glesne describes early data analysis techniques of memo writing through a reflective field log, maintaining analytic files organized by general categories and rudimentary coding schemes as a means of easy access to the data. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and testimonials provided by colleagues. Data analysis was done simultaneously with data collection. Each participant was written up into a context-situated case study and then a cross-case analysis was carried out to look for patterns across cases (Stake, 2000).

Throughout the process of data analysis I attempted to go beyond the data to develop ideas based on the participants' accounting of their sources of resiliency. These sources of resiliency lead to an in-depth analysis of four resilient teachers. There is

nothing optional about the generalization and use of ideas in qualitative research and analysis: theorizing cannot be divorced from analysis (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

Steps were taken in the process of data collection to insure the trustworthiness of the interpretations. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) pose four questions to reflect upon throughout the data collection process. First, what do you notice? The researcher needs to be constantly aware that when you notice one thing, you don't notice something else. Second, why did you notice what you noticed? One needs to be a constantly aware of one's own subjectivity, bias, and theoretic dispositions. Third, how can you interpret what you notice? This is best achieved through prolonged engagement and persistent observation. Fourth, how can you know your interpretation is the right one? This is accomplished when one shares information with research respondents to check for accuracy of the depiction.

### Summary

This chapter described the methodological framework on which this study is based. In order to answer the above-mentioned research questions, a constructionist paradigm allowed access to the individual's personal history that led to longevity and successful teaching. It also provided access to the coping skills used when individuals faced adversity in the classroom. Were these teachers able to describe their sources of resolve and intestinal fortitude as they related their professional responsibilities? Did these skills, traits and abilities exist on a conscious level? This chapter also described the procedures, selection processes and data analyses that were used to determine the sources of resiliency of successful teachers of at-risk students.



## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

Based upon the belief that successful teachers exist in difficult and challenging environments while working with at-risk students as defined by Lehr and Lange (2003), this chapter examined teachers who have demonstrated the ability to maintain resilience, continue successful teaching over a long period of time and are viewed by colleagues as successful. What is it that makes them difference makers as described by Calabrese and Goodwin (2005)? Through Ruff and Keys's six dimensional model of well-being (1995), and van Horn et al.'s multi-dimensional model of occupational well-being (2004), eighteen questions were developed to represent the criteria that describe successful teachers in alternative settings working with students living in at-risk conditions.

In selecting participants for this study, four candidates and only four candidates emerged through my inquiry of three principals/supervisors in three different educational settings in western Pennsylvania. Each school existed for the purpose of educating students that had been placed by surrounding public schools. These students ranged from seventh to twelfth grade. They more likely had demonstrated behaviors that did not allow them to remain in their home school and were most likely failing courses and not on pace to graduate. All of the teachers recommended by their principal/supervisors agreed to participate in the study.

All four teachers were female and met the selection criteria. First, they received satisfactory evaluations for each year of teaching. Next, they were recommended as excellent by their building administrator or supervisor. Third, each teacher was

employed at an alternative school and had experience well beyond four years. Finally, each teacher was also responsible for direct instruction. After gaining informed consent, I asked the principal and the participating teacher to identify a colleague that could speak in an informed manner regarding the participant's qualities that allowed her to be successful and resilient. Through phone contact, a call was placed to each potential supporting colleague. I explained my study and asked if they would be willing to participate. All agreed. I followed up with a letter explaining the research study. I was able to schedule each interview to follow my interview with the participating teacher. At the time of the interview with the supporting colleague, procedural safeguards were explained and informed consent was secured.

#### Collective Case Study

A collective case study was used because data were collected from eight people. Data were organized through both within-case and cross-case analysis leading to theoretical claims.

#### Within-Case Analysis

Because variables were determined ahead of time through the work of Ryff and Keys (1995) and van Horn et al. (2004), a checklist matrix was used to break down responses into components and the data were used to create a checklist (Shank, 2006). No effort was made to rank or order the components. The checklist reflected Ryff and Keys's (1995) and van Horn et al.'s (2004) dimensions of occupational well-being. To review, the six dimensions and their codes were: (1) SA: self-acceptance; (2) EM: environmental mastery; (3) A: autonomy; (4) PR: positive relations with others; (5) PG personal growth; and (6) PL: purpose in life.

## Cross-Case Analysis

Each of the four cases was used as a source of data. Answers to each of the eighteen questions remained a variable of interest. The responses were grouped within the six dimensions which allowed the researcher to see patterns or differences across the teachers.

### The Participants

Amy and Andrea both work at Western Alternative school in northwestern Pennsylvania. Amy currently teaches math and biology. She is certified in both subjects. Amy is single and has over 15 years of experience. Andrea is currently teaching English and pre-algebra in the same location. She is certified in elementary education and English. Andrea has 20 years of teaching experience. She is married and has three children.

Linda teaches at Woodhaven Alternative School located in northeastern Pennsylvania. Upon graduation from college, she accepted the position she currently holds. She has 13 years of teaching experience. Linda is married with one child. She is certified in social studies and English and is a reading specialist.

Jackie is a math teacher at the Bufford Career and Vocational Center. This school also houses an alternative high school of approximately ninety students. She is certified in elementary education. Jackie has 16 years of teaching experience, seven in her current position. She is married with one child.

## Collegial Testimony

Through conversations with supervisors and the participants, a colleague was identified to speak on behalf of the participating teacher. Each colleague has worked for several years with the teacher in a collegial relationship.

Andrea, also a participant in this study, provided testimony on behalf of Amy. They have worked in the same setting for over 15 years.

Jack has worked with Andrea for 13 years, 11 as a colleague. For the past two years, Jack has assumed the role of an administrator. He has agreed to speak on behalf of Andrea.

Judy has known Linda for over 10 years and they have been colleagues for six years. Judy provided testimony regarding the resiliency of Linda.

Karen began her career by substitute teaching at Jackie's school. Her first assignment was to fill in for Jackie while she was out for a funeral. Karen's first impression of Jackie was through her classroom and students. She continued to substitute until she was hired as an English teacher. She considers Jackie to be her unofficial mentor. They have worked together for four years.

## Personal Growth

Through the domain of personal growth, each teacher was asked how they have grown as a person since the beginning of their teaching career. They were asked to reflect on their personal academic history and career. What kind of student were they?

Amy had aspirations of teaching in a public school upon graduation but has resigned herself to the probability that the alternative school is where she will remain.

After a rather long reflection, Amy believes that she has gotten better at what she is doing (teaching). She considers the needs of her students more now than when she started teaching. She claims to rely less on theory and more on compassion for her students. “Through my 15 years of experience, I have matured personally,” Amy stated. Over the years Amy also claims to have matured professionally as well. She describes herself as a goal-setter and strives to meet those goals.

When asked to describe her own academic career, Amy described herself as an average to good student throughout high school and stated,

I did what I needed to do. I was not always motivated nor did I have much of a direction of where I wanted to be. I went to college because that was what was expected of me. I became a much better student as I progressed through college.

Andrea has 20 years of teaching experience in alternative education, 14 years at her current school. She has past experience as a teacher in a group home and as a teacher at an alternative setting in a different county. Marriage and the need to change location brought her to her current position as an English and pre-algebra teacher. When Andrea took her current position she thought it would be short-term. She thought she would spend a few years here and move on. Andrea made several attempts to gain a public school position but none ever materialized. Andrea has recently accepted that teaching at her current school is what she is going to do.

Andrea described her job as sometimes depressing, particularly because of the families that she must deal with. Andrea stated,

In the past year or two, I have come to terms with the need to be a more patient person and I can do this job. Otherwise, I would not still be here. I used to come

to work with a feeling of dread. What are they going to do today? Now, I am going to do what I have to do and that is just the way it is. I think that I have a pretty good rapport with the kids. They see that I am at peace. I can have a good time with them sometimes and sometimes not. I understand that this is where I am and this is where I am going to be. I have learned what is important. I don't let the job interfere with my family.

When Andrea reflected upon her academic career and history, she thought she was better than she actually was. Andrea stated,

I pulled out my report cards recently and I saw some D's. I was always respectful but I do remember sleeping through history class. In my elementary grades, I was on top of things. I went to a catholic school. I was shell-shocked when I went to public school in ninth grade. I was a little lazy at times.

Linda was very quick with her response to the question regarding personal growth. She believed that her growth could be attributed to being more accepting of differences. Linda said,

That is probably the biggest thing that makes me successful here, realizing that all of the students are different here. First, you have the impression that they are all going to be bad kids and then you find out that there are a lot of really good kids. I also expected them to be at the same level and that is not the case at all.

Linda appeared to have a very clear memory of her academic history and career. She claimed to have cried the first time that she missed school in first grade. She related, Somewhere between first grade and junior high I started to hate school. I missed a lot of school throughout high school. I think I can relate to students that have an

attendance problem. Most of my friends moved on to vocational school. I stayed back but all of my friends were gone. I did graduate. Sometimes I even made the honor roll. My mom sort of allowed me to miss school. She would put out note cards that were excuses that she pre-signed and all I had to do was fill in the date. Then you learn the hard way that it was a mistake. I learned on my own that you have to go to school if you are going to succeed. In college I did well but I took some time off after high school.

Jackie's teaching career began 16 years ago and she describes her current position as "Honestly, I am where I never thought that I would be." Her first two teaching experiences were long-term elementary substitute positions. Unable to find a public school position, she taught math at a technical school for five years. The policies at a for-profit institution caused Jackie to seek employment elsewhere. She has worked at the Bufford Career Center for the past eight years as a math teacher for alternative students. Jackie describes her growth as becoming more open to change. She explained,

As a math teacher, we are usually so linear; it has to be this way or that way. Now, after being here I have learned that there are many ways to take things and still get them done. I am more hands on. Wherever I go from here it is going to be easier. When I first got here I didn't think I would have gotten to the point where I would be teaching calculus concepts. The kids wanted it. For me it was such a learning curve from what I thought I was going to do compared to what I am doing. The kids are driving the learning.

Describing her academic history and career, Jackie said,

I was always a pleaser. I am the youngest of four girls. My oldest sister was an excellent student. Because I am a people pleaser, I had to do as well as she did. It was a struggle. I was in the high academic program. I had many AP classes. I did well because that was what was expected of me. I tried to live up to that. I was fortunate to have had the same math teacher in high school for algebra, trig and calc. In class, he could make you cry, outside of class he would work with you until you got it. He taught me not to take everything so seriously. He showed me different ways of doing things.

### Self-Acceptance

Within the domain of self-acceptance each teacher was asked a series of questions to help determine their acceptance of themselves, not only as teachers, but also in their personal lives. Do they believe there is meaning in their life and profession? Each teacher was first asked what it meant to have a meaningful and purposeful life. Along with meaning, teachers were asked if they were happy in their personal and professional lives. Also within the domain of self-acceptance, teachers were asked to express whether they had a belief in themselves as it pertained to teaching and motivating students.

Amy referred back to the importance of setting goals as a key to self-acceptance. She explained,

It is the establishment of goals that allows me to have meaning and purpose. The meaning and purpose comes from attempting to achieve those goals. To set goals even if you don't always see the success, to see meaning even if I am not having success is what I always strive to do.

When asked if she was happy with her personal life, Amy stated,



I think so. I am single. I have never been married. I lived with my parents until they both died. I live the good life. I come and go as I please and I live six miles away from the school.

Professionally, Amy described herself as very happy at this school in this setting and said, "I have no desire to teach at a traditional school with more of a mainstream population." Amy values getting to know all of her students. She also knows many of her parents and works to get to know at least some things about each of her students.

I like to make a personal connection and I have that ability in this setting. It is not unusual for me to call at least one parent each day. There are still many parents involved in their children's education. Parents are used to getting bad calls. I try to give them positive comments. We have the misfits of public school and they all fit together here (affectionately stated).

When asked to comment on her belief in her abilities to teach Amy said, "I think not as much as other people do." I wasn't sure what she meant by her response so I asked for more clarification. Amy felt others have more confidence in her than she has in herself. She added, "I have never had self-confidence. When I am in front of a class I have some authority so I am ok. When I am around peers I don't feel as confident. "

Andrea framed her response to self acceptance in the knowledge that she makes a difference for people. This was especially important to her as she stated, "We don't get that many success stories around here." Andrea gave an example of a former student who was truant much of the time. He happened to be in school on a day that Andrea was absent. She relates,

When I returned he became very inquisitive about why I was not in school the day before. I had a personal day and he had questioned why I was not at school. He made me feel that I was needed even though his attendance was not very good.'

Andrea described another student who had written an excellent response to the Robert Frost poem, *The Road Not Taken*.

He wrote about how he had come to a fork in the road and how he had choices to make. He wrote about taking the wrong road and then came back. I thought WOW! This is a student who didn't seem to have much personality and then comes up with that. It makes you feel good that some of the kids who at times you feel have no hope have things very good inside of them.

Andrea considers these incidents as little successes and what keeps her going. She stated, "That makes me feel that I have a purpose here. As far as feeling purposeful, sometimes I don't." Interestingly, Andrea referred to coming to peace with her situation. When asked to include her personal life in her response, she quickly responded that she has three children and her work at school has helped her grow as a parent. Her meaning and purpose is centered on her children. "I am a very cautious parent" Andrea stated.

Andrea stated that she is happy in her personal life. She again talked about her three children and the fact that she has a husband to come home to. Andrea described a very busy life with her family. She talked about a day recently that she had all to herself. "My husband had our son at camp and our daughters spent the night at their cousins. I had been waiting for this moment forever and I actually hated it."

Andrea touched upon her happiness at work several times. She felt needed. Even though the job was difficult, stressful and challenging, she had a sense of pride in her

work. She said, "Every once in a while you have a day that you really feel you are making a difference. That's what keeps me going"

In answer to how she sees herself as a teacher, Andrea has a strong belief in her abilities. She explained,

Yes, I think I do a pretty good job. I focus on the kids that want to learn. I have learned not to take things personally. Students come in with attitudes that I didn't cause. I don't give my students rewards (pop, candy, etc.). I try to positively reward proper behavior and good work. Many of my students respond well to this.

Linda responded to the question about a meaningful and purposeful life with a response very similar to Andrea's. Linda stated, "I guess I will tell you the meaning of life. I guess for me it means making a difference. I know that I am leaving something behind for someone else."

Linda was happy and satisfied with her personal life. She had a difficult experience when she became pregnant in college. Now that her son is twenty years old and she has a supportive husband, her personal life has stability and she is happy.

Linda was also happy and satisfied with her professional life. She said, I get a lot of rewards from working with these kids. The goal is to get them back to their home school and see them graduate. When this happens, it is very satisfying. I would only leave this job for the money and that is not a good reason to leave.

When asked if she believes in herself and her abilities as a teacher, Linda stated,

Absolutely, there are times when I feel like I could have taught something better. After all of this time you learn and you teach it better. There are times when I have an off day. I do believe that I make a difference.

When pressed further, Linda felt that the belief that she has in her teaching abilities has grown over time. She has made the effort to return to school to gain an additional certification (reading specialist). She explained,

I did this partly because I wanted to be a better teacher. My son was struggling with reading at that time and I thought how can this be? I am a teacher. When I originally trained to be a secondary teacher, it was more about the content. I was amazed about how little that I knew about how to teach until I went back to school.

Linda's confidence came from her experience and also the knowledge she has gained through her own pursuit of professional development.

What gave Jackie meaning and purpose was that teaching was the only job that she ever wanted. As she stated,

It is my gift. It is what I knew I was going to do. That being said, learning has not always been my gift. It has sometimes been a struggle for me. I am not afraid to be honest with my students. I think that is what makes me work well with all of my students. I understand their struggles.

Jackie is working at a school that will be closing at the end of the school year and was currently looking for a job. Jackie appeared to be very honest when she expressed her desire to remain at her school. She indicated,

If the program was not closing, I would not be looking. A person can do a lot here. I can help struggling students in a smaller setting. It feels good to get them to succeed when they have failed in the past.

Jackie stated that being happy and satisfied in her personal life has taken some time and stated,

We tried to have a baby for a long time. We finally had the baby and that brought a different kind of stress. Now, it is better than it has ever been. With the uncertainty of the job, we have worked it out that if I get furloughed and can't find another job I will stay at home with the baby and work part time.

Even though Jackie is concerned with the impending furlough, she expressed happiness and satisfaction with her professional life. She maintained,

With what I am doing here I am happy and I wish that I could stay. I am frustrated with the way the board is handling everything. Every one of the board members tell us that we are doing a great job and we do great work but they still leave us hanging with transfers. The fact is they say they want what is best for the kids but they are looking at the bottom line. In this day and age they have done this and I understand that. As far as the support (administration) that we get here and the professionalism that exists here I am happy.

#### Environmental Mastery

Within the domain of environmental mastery, three questions were asked to help determine each teacher's capacity to manage her life and the surrounding world. Each teacher described her ability to keep going when faced with apathy and misery. They

were asked to judge how well-versed they are in the best practices of teaching. They were also asked how they measure success with their students.

In response to the question regarding apathy and misery, Amy focused on the positive and stated,

I try to reward honesty when approaching students to find why they are doing what they are doing. I had a professor give me the advice of always trying to look for the good in people. I always try to look for the good. Even if they are the worst behaved student in the building they have still done some good things.

Amy was then asked if she was well-versed in the best practices of teaching. She replied,

Yes, but I don't always employ them. I use what works but I am getting better at it. For years I had students make a model of a cell. I started providing students with options such as making a power point, creating a drawing electronically or any other way to demonstrate understanding. I am trying to work on differentiated instruction and alternative forms of assessments. Now, no one chooses the model. I was afraid to do this in the past. I have noticed that many of the kids want to do the different assignments to prove that they can.

When measuring the success of her students, Amy looked to the short term successes and illustrated,

One example is a boy who never speaks in class or reads out loud. He felt safe in my class to read aloud. I look at individual, small successes. I always try to reinforce that success so that it will continue.

When asked to expand her answer to include long term successes, Amy referred to graduation and continuing relationships with her students. She said,

Obviously graduation, but also when they come in for a visit or we have a conversation outside of school. It makes me feel that I had something to offer. I see success in some of the social relationships that I have been able to maintain.

Andrea credited her team with helping her deal with apathetic students and misery at work. She stated,

We have a very good team here. We can get together and laugh about situations. I know that at the end of the day getting together and discussing the day is something that keeps me going. I think that is amazing in this setting. We have a really good thing here. We help each other out. Our staff is experienced. The youngest teacher has five years of experience.

Andrea also mentioned the ability to forgive and described,

We have a girl here who in the past had called me disrespectful, horrible names. She had to be removed from class. I did not call attention to her when she returned to class. I approached her after class, one on one and asked her what caused her to behave that way. She said that she was having a bad day. I said ok but those were some pretty harsh words. She said I know and now she is one of my biggest supporters. I guess because I was willing to forgive, if that is the word, our relationship improved. Also, keeping in mind that this is my job and not my entire life helps to balance me. I can do this job but I know that there is more for me outside of school.

When asked about being well-versed in best practices Andrea paused and said, “We do not receive much in-house training.” She felt progress has been made with curriculum. Andrea said that they did get training from time to time but that it is probably limited in comparison to what public school teachers receive.

Andrea measured success with her students individually and said, “With one student, it may be coming to school every day. With another student, it may be getting him to relate positively to others. You must look individually for successes rather than putting a blanket over the whole program. It all depends where they are coming from.”

Linda had a strategy for dealing with the apathy and misery that kids come to school with and related,

“Any success is a success. Getting kids to do any amount of work can be a very big step with some students. I accept a lot of effort more than accuracy at the beginning with my students. Because we are small, we may see the same student three different times in a day. If you have a problem with a student, you may not get a day’s buffer to recover. You will see him shortly. You must look at every minute as a new minute.”

I asked Linda if she felt well-versed in the best practices of teaching. She responded,

“There were more opportunities in the past when budgets were better. The school has helped me with my tuition. I have returned to school in recent years so I believe my education and practices are more current than many of my colleagues. I have worked to be a better teacher and I believe that I am. I admit that I am



behind with the use of technology. We have smart boards but I don't use it whether it is because of my age or lack of training.

Linda measured success of her students through their progress. She explained, Progress, from where they are now to where they are when they leave. Did something change? I have a student currently who is 15 years old and in eighth grade. Obviously there is a reason. He is very smart. If he stays in eighth grade when he is 16, then we didn't help him. I need to see some sort of progress.

Many lack consistency over time. We have students from 9 to 12 months, in some cases, as long as two years. We want to move them to graduation.

When asked how she dealt with the apathy and misery that students brought to school, Jackie didn't need to reflect any farther back than today. She shared,

I was frustrated! That was my attitude with a couple of my classes today. I think part of handling frustration is that there are at least one or two people in the class that get it. They understand your frustrations. I was very frustrated with one of my classes today and I thought to myself, I can't stand the apathy. I had one girl in my class who was answering all of the questions. There were five others sitting there. One was sleeping and the others were not paying attention. There are days when I say ok that is that day. Then, there are other days that are better. I always have to remember where these kids are coming from. Many are raising themselves. They may be dealing with parents that are alcoholics. I always try to remember their backgrounds. The fact that they are here is because someone has failed them. I have to bring them out of it. I try to do the best that I can. What helps is sometimes, it is like I said, there is always at least one in the class. I had

a girl say that she was mad because I was trying to teach and others were not letting you. So I sat with that one student and worked while the others didn't do much. Sometimes they pair up and help each other and I have to realize that my way is not always the best way.

Jackie tried to be well-versed in the best practices of teaching. She admitted, There are things that I know that I can do better. I am good with technology. We do have smart boards. There will always be things that I know that I can do better. I am well-versed in many software programs but I don't always use them. We do a lot of cooperative learning in my classes and I try to differentiate instruction as much as I can. Sometimes the class will have only two or three students on any given day.

For Jackie measuring student success, was much more than assigning a grade . She added,

I mean, I want them to get the (a good) grade. Some students, if they get a D, I consider that successful. In some cases I have gotten them past the point of apathy where they care. I want them all to graduate. Sometimes we have kids that are so smart but they refuse to do the work.

### Autonomy

Three questions were asked to each teacher within the domain of autonomy to gain a sense of self-determination and their ability to resist social and job pressures. I began by specifically asking each teacher about their sense of self-determination and their ability to resist social pressures. The follow up questions were designed to see if there

were past experiences that influenced this ability or any processes that they went through after they had experienced a difficult or traumatic experience?

Amy was not sure as to how she resists social and job pressures and maintains a sense of self determination. She revealed,

Honestly, I am not sure. I have a positive attitude and show them that they have a future. I constantly give them ideas about what they can do with their future. I have a 17 year-old student who constantly talks about quitting school. We have talked about him thinking this through. I think he will quit but eventually come back. I deal with this because I have a positive attitude. Every day is a new day. Twice a day we meet to discuss students. I know some students come in with the intention of disrupting. I have to focus on the other students and try to find a way to reach that student.

Amy described the death of her own parents as life-altering. Her parents were married until their death. She related,

We ate dinner together every night. My dad died last December and my mom two years ago. There was support throughout my entire life. It was difficult. It was life-altering. I had to buy the house and buy my dad's car. So until recently, my life had been stable for 47 years. I think because I have had so much stability I have been able to focus on my life and my job. I have family and friends around me. I always have friends that I meet for dinner every Friday night. At the end of the day our students leave at two o'clock and we gather as a staff to hash out the day. I have always felt that I can go to my supervisors and talk to them. I have always felt that I have been heard. I think that we have a little community here.

When asked to provide examples of traumatic situations in her professional life, Amy only had to think back to the week before to find a very difficult encounter with a student. She remembered,

I had a boy come in to class in the morning and I asked him what he wanted for lunch. He said he would rather eat a pig's rear end only he didn't use those words. Then he followed with some choice words. So I knew to leave him alone. Later in the day he was in my math class. When I handed out a worksheet he told me that I might as well keep it because he was not going to do anything. A girl in the class said what are you going to do, be a bum all of your life? He got up and threatened her. I yelled for help while trying to get the girl out of the classroom because I knew that she would blow. That is her history. Had she known what he was like in the morning she would not have asked him the question. I told my supervisors that if she settles down to send her back. She did come back to class but he did not. The boy was having issues that prompted his response about lunch and his response to the girl. I would have welcomed him back but he was not ready. He returned to school after being out for several days and apologized for his behavior. All in all he is back and the results are somewhat better. I have seen teachers intervene and sometimes make the situation worse. I have done that. I try to remember, what happens next depends on what I do now. I offer the kids a stable place. They know that I am not going to jump ship and leave them.

Amy again mentioned a positive attitude when asked about the processes that she goes through after a bad experience or day. She explained,

I am always looking for something good. I ask students to assess their own behavior. I have them name two positive things that they have done today. You do many good things throughout the course of a day but we are very good at picking out the bad things. This is their chance to blow their own horn. This is what I did good today! Kids have difficulty doing this. They think the only thing they did well was to bring a pencil to class. Not that they read or answered questions. I try to get them to see that they do more good things than bad. Even outside of school I try to look for good things.

Amy also cited the debriefing process that they do every day as a process that helps her regroup. She values the support of her colleagues.

While discussing her self-determination and her ability to resist job and social pressures, Andrea referred back to her ability to separate the job from her personal life. Her self-determination came from a comparison of her life to that of her students. She said,

When I see what the situations are in here I think I have a wonderful life. I think of my parents and the amazing job that they did. I have a very nice life outside of here. I come here and take care of my students but it is not my entire life. I have pictures of my family on my desk and that reminds me that this is not my life.

I got a sense that Andrea was able to maintain a clear separation between her work and personal life.

When asked if she had traumatic situations in her life that may have helped shape her identity, Andrea said that she thinks about that all of the time. She pondered,

I have always had the feeling that something bad has to happen to me. I almost have the feeling of impending doom. I have had grandparents die but I have not really had any trauma in my life. My husband is good to me. I had a miscarriage once but other than that I have not had bad things happen to me. I guess I feel guilty about that.

Since there was no identifiable trauma in her personal life, Andrea referred to collegial support that is ongoing at her school. She elaborated,

As far as any de-escalation processes with regard to the job, we can get together and debrief with colleagues at the end of the day and actually laugh about situations in the day. We are a help to each other.

At first, Linda did not understand when questioned about her ability to resist and continue to resist social pressures and maintain a sense of self-determination at school. Instead, I asked her to speak to her resiliency. She answered,

Like I said earlier, I really didn't expect to be here this long. To be honest, I expected to get a public school job. I guess what keeps me coming back are the kids. I now look at public schools, not to put them down, but they appear to be too rigid. There is more of a community expectation and I would not have as much freedom. I do get to know my kids more. As I told you, I have seven kids in my room. That is different from thirty.

I felt the need to push her for a little more detail. I mentioned that even though you only have seven students in your class, they are a tough seven. She responded that this was true and expanded,

I like the feeling that I don't have to be micro-managed like I might be in a public school. There is still accountability. I think just knowing that they are not coming from white, middle class America. They come from different backgrounds with different priorities. They might not have had dinner last night or even have been home. I really try to look at things from their point of view. Their pressures are greater than my pressures.

Linda cited becoming pregnant in college as a traumatic experience. She related, I became a single parent. I was single and I needed to stay in the area. It made me stronger. I was taking care of myself and my son. I have since remarried so it has all worked out fine.

When asked to describe traumatic experiences at school, Linda described traumatic experiences at school as kids sleeping, not doing work and bad language. She stated,

Sometimes there will be altercations between students. There are some passive aggressive behaviors that are challenging. There have been times that I have had to call for support. Much of their behavior stems from teenage hormones and posturing. I usually respond through some type of helping dialogue. I am fond of saying that I still like you. You can't lose your composure with these students.

Linda relied on the support of her colleagues as a process that helped her make sense of the day. She said,

One nice thing is the support of my co-workers. Most of my co-workers have the same or similar experiences that I do. At the end of the day we talk. You might run your mouth a little bit and you get it out of your system.

One of the ways that Jackie resisted social and job pressures and maintained a sense of self-determination in this setting was to not take things personally. She responded,

My first few years I got attitudes from kids and I would allow it to bother me. I developed the attitude that I am not going anywhere. I am still going to be here no matter how mad I get at them and I'm not giving up. It is hard because you see so many and you lose some of them. I try to remember the ones that I am helping. I am friends with many of the graduates on facebook. When we were fighting to keep the school open, many of the graduates came back to speak to the board. I have to compartmentalize the job. I have to leave it here. I don't talk about work at home with my family. I leave it here.

Jackie identified becoming the caregiver for her father-in-law as stressful, traumatic and life-altering. She described,

It was like, wait a minute. I have to grow up now. We became the caregiver for him after he had a quadruple bypass. This along with working was difficult. Our life was totally altered for a while. He did get better and is fine now. I actually think that I am a little more willing to speak up for myself. In my classroom, I am totally confident. That was not always the case. Outside of my classroom I am a huge chicken. The experience with my father-in-law has taught me to pick up the phone and say ok this is what I need for him. That was huge. I no longer have the fear of picking up the phone and asking for something if I need it. Making a call because a bill is wrong is easier for me now. I would not have done that



before. The next example is my son Henry. It took us so long (to conceive). We went through so many different procedures. It taught me perseverance.

Driving home and thinking about the day was a process that Jackie went through each day. She elaborated,

I think ok what went wrong? Why did it go wrong? I try to resolve it in my head. There are those nights when it is three o'clock in the morning and it is still running through my head. When it is a behavioral issue I have to remind myself where these kids are coming from and what they are dealing with. So I try to remind myself of that. A lot of times I pull them in and talk to them when nobody else is around. This happened. I don't know why it happened but I want to put it behind us. This can't happen anymore. This is how we work. We want to learn and have fun. It is a matter of thinking about why it happened. Then they come back and they are either better or they or not. Some kids you can talk to like that others you can't. Sometimes you have to involve Bob (principal). Sometimes when it is in the classroom and there is an issue, I am very laid back and they don't see me get angry. If I do blow up, they know it is something bad. Another thing that freaks me out is that I can blow up at a student and thirty seconds later talk to another student like it never happened. I have a horrible temper and it took me a long time to learn how to control it. Whenever I am thinking about things that are going wrong I have to remember that I know how they are feeling. They cannot turn it off (anger) as easy as I can because I have twenty years of experience doing it. If it is something that I am having trouble teaching them I

explore different ways of teaching them. Is there a different way? I surf the net for hours sometimes looking for alternative ways.

Jackie also cited that debriefing with a few of her colleagues helped put the day to rest.

### Purpose in Life

Two questions were asked to have teachers reflect on a sense of purpose in their lives. Teachers were asked to explain how they balanced the needs of their job as a teacher with the pressures and demands of their surrounding world. They were also asked if their work with students extended beyond academics and perhaps the school day.

When asked how she balanced the needs of her job with the pressures and demands of her surrounding world, Amy quickly responded,

I wonder how people with families do it. When the school year starts, I do not do much of anything else. I like to go to hockey games and concerts but I really have to plan ahead. When summer comes I don't think about school. We have a program that goes year round but I don't teach in the summer. The time away is important. We spend more than forty minutes a day with our students. We may have some of them several times a day. We even eat lunch with the kids.

Amy believes that her work with students extends beyond academics. In the classroom, Amy feels she deals with behaviors 60% of the time and academics about 40%. Because she lives in her community she sees kids all of the time outside of school. She stated,

At one time we were all teacher/caseworkers. We strive for an equal balance. I was taught when I first started that you have to get into their quality world. You

strive to make some kind of connection. I try to find something that I have in common with each student. I show an interest in them. I talk to them. These kids will put up barriers. Try and if they resist, try again later. I get visited by graduates or see many of them on the street.

Andrea got done what she needed to get done while she was at work. She explained,

Because I have been doing this for so long in one place, I don't need to take a lot of things home. Once in a while I will take papers home to check. For the most part, I make good use of my time at school. I am organized and get my work done here because when I go home I have other things to deal with. I try to keep family and work separate by making good use of my time at school. I have three kids and a husband to come home to.

Andrea believed that much of her work with her students went well beyond academics. She said,

I try not to be a counselor but there is still a lot of questioning and guiding them to make better choices in and out of school. Much of what I do is informal. I don't have counseling sessions with kids. I will informally talk to them about what is going on in their lives.

Linda said that her ability to strike a balance between her position as a teacher and her surrounding world has changed over the years. She described,

When my son was younger, he required much of my time and as a beginning teacher that also required a great deal of time. Now the job is almost on autopilot

and so is my son. I had to set limits. I also got a dog. I have a reason to leave (care for the dog). I had to set limits because there is always something to do.

Linda said that her work with students absolutely extends beyond academics. She related,

Most of my students are lacking in organizational skills. I am constantly in their business trying to help them get and remain organized. Also, I try to do things, create situations for them to be responsible. Take this home and bring it back tomorrow. Many of these things you would expect an elementary teacher to teach. Somewhere along the way they didn't have it. My job is part counselor but you have to be careful with that. Sometimes it is I can't do my work... let me tell you how bad my night was last night. When I was younger, I would listen to any sob story out there. I think that I have learned for the most part when to counsel them and when to push them to work.

Jackie balanced the needs of her job with her surrounding world by trying to keep them separate. She stated,

When they do overlap I try to schedule it. When I do need to bring something home or I have to prep because I am doing something new I schedule with my husband so he can watch the baby. If I have budgeted an hour and I am not finished, I need to cut it off. I need to have time to decompress. Quite honestly, the past few weeks have not been that way and I am feeling the stress. The baby is not the problem. It is trying to fit everything else into the schedule. I want every free moment possible to spend with my family. I normally pick up Henry

after work. There are times when my husband will get Henry so I can stay at work and not have to bring things home.

Jackie considered academics to be only a part of her job. She added,

Sometimes they just need someone to listen. Sometimes I want to kill them when I listen to them (jest). Sometimes it is hard to keep that fine line between teacher and friend. You have students that want to step over the line. There has to be that line there. I am 100% invested in them. Some of them have my cell phone number. If they need something, they will call. I had a kid's mother who called the school to have me forced to stop texting her daughter. She claimed that I was trying to undermine her authority. That is part of resiliency. You do lose kids sometimes. Sometimes they even die.

#### Positive Relations with Others

Within the domain of positive relations with others, each teacher was asked how they cultivate and maintain positive relationships with their students. They were also asked to recall a situation when a student was particularly resistant and how they responded.

Amy's response restated an answer to an earlier question. She always showed an interest her students and tried to steer them in the right direction. She stated,

I always talk to them and it is not always about school. I add academic- related games to my classes. We play things like the Genius Quiz and Silly News. It helps to open them up and put them at ease.

Again, because Amy lived in town and very close to the school, she saw students and parents outside of school more than most teachers. She was visible in the community. She shared,

I have respect for my students and I think they know that. I rarely have face to face confrontations with students. I have learned to avoid that. When things are going badly I do not escalate the situation. I always try to remember that what I do now will affect what happens next.

At this time I told Amy that I had a sense that she had a philosophy of allowing time to work for her. She responded, “Yes, that’s why I play Silly News and Genius Quiz as an opening to class. It puts them at ease and helps make the class run smoothly.”

Amy recalled the young boy who responded so negatively to her when she asked him what he wanted for lunch. She knew to leave him alone. Again, she allowed time to work for her. She maintained a positive relationship with that student. Amy said, “You try to look for positives to help you through the situations.”

Andrea maintained positive relationships with her students by being positive herself. She stated,

I try not to let things that are bothering me affect what I am doing. I always try to add a little humor to get things going. I ask students if they have any funny stories to share. I try to share things about myself and my family. I try to let them know that I want to know them as a person as well as a student. Some students work hard not to let you in.

I asked Andrea if the ice melted over time. She replied,

With some kids it does. The depressing part is I don't know what it takes to reach some kids. I have a student that spends all of his time in the special education room. He has lots of anger issues that are still unresolved. You learn what battles to fight.

Andrea talked about resistant students in general and stated,

I don't get caught up with students who don't care. I always turn my attention to the students that are willing. This can change daily. Someone who is resistant one day may be willing to work the next day. My attention goes to those who want to work. When I don't pay attention to them, they are more inclined to tune in.

In the attempt to maintain positive relationships with students, Linda always tried to remain respectful, even under difficult circumstances. "I am careful not to escalate the situation. Every teacher wants to be able to help every kid but the reality is you won't. I don't take their behavior personally," she related.

Linda had a student who was resistant to almost everything and elaborated, "He puts his head down. When you ask him a question he may say chicken nuggets. There has to be a reason for his behavior. Sooner or later he will come around." I asked Linda if she uses time as a means of reaching students. Linda said, "Time is a factor, knowing when to intrude and knowing when to back off."

Jackie maintained and cultivated positive relations by letting students know that she was there and trying to be helpful. She explained,

I am not trying to be their friend and I am not trying to be a martinet. It is not this way or the highway. I try to let them know that I am not out to get them. My

classroom looks like it should be in an elementary school. That is what keeps me from going crazy. I try to stay child-like so they don't see an old person. They will come and talk with me because I have a connection with them. The trust that I develop with them comes from my work with them in the classroom. I do what I can with what I have. I have a feeling that God has put me here to do what I am doing. There also has to be a reason that this place is closing and I will be going somewhere else.

I asked Jackie if there was a spiritual component to this. She responded quickly and positively,

Yes. I always ask for help to be patient. I think it comes back to, I get it! I get the anger. I understand that you can't get the answer right. I have been there. That's what keeps me going.

Jackie does not give up easily when dealing with resistant students. She stated, I try to reinforce to them that I am here to help them. When they are screaming at us they may not realize it. One of my fears is that I don't want to lose a student. I want to do the best that I can for them. In time most of them come around. I think is has a lot to do with trust.

#### Collegial Testimony

Seeking the input from a colleague allowed for a different perspective to enter into each teacher's story. One doesn't always see oneself as others do. A colleague's testimony can also reinforce how the teachers' view themselves. This added credibility to each teacher's story. Each colleague was asked five questions designed to contribute



additional evidence supporting the resiliency of the teacher. Perhaps a side of the teacher may have come out that did not surface in the interview.

Andrea has worked with Amy for over 13 years. When asked how Amy has demonstrated resilience beyond most teachers that she had worked with Andrea asked me a qualifying question. “Do you mean how she bounces back?” I responded, “Simply put, “yes, you are both successful but maybe different.” Andrea offered,

Yes, we are very different. She is very consistent. She is very fair. I think she bounces back very quickly. We get together and laugh about things. Sometimes, I don't know how she bounces back. She makes her students follow the rules. She keeps plugging away. I see her coming back after a difficult day and she seems refreshed and ready to go. I know she plans ahead. Because she does not have the same family obligations, I think she plans in the evenings.

I asked Andrea if she can recall a particular time when Amy demonstrated care and compassion for her students. She replied,

She is good at rewarding positive efforts. She brings things back from vacations for her students. She is very caring towards her students. When they have a problem, she tries to talk to them. She always seems to be thinking about the kids...how she can help them be successful. Amy's actions speak more about how she feels about her job that she does. For all of the reasons that I just mentioned she really cares deeply about what she does here. She comes in early every day. She is here every day at 6:30.

I mentioned to Andrea that Amy described a philosophy of every day is a new day. Andrea agreed , saying, “I think she lives that philosophy.”

Andrea described personal qualities that allow Amy to be resilient and stated, Every day she comes in ready to go even if she had a horrible time yesterday. She is willing to focus on the kids who are not doing what they need to do and try to fix them. She spends a lot of time worrying about what she can do to help those kids. Again, she is always thinking of what she can do, even when she is outside of here. I saw her in her room this morning getting all of those cups out preparing for her science class.

When I asked if she cares Andrea responded that she did.

Jack has worked with Andrea for over 12 years, 7 years as colleagues. Jack has since assumed the position of dean of students at the school. I asked Jack if he feels Andrea has demonstrated resilience beyond what he has seen in most teachers over the years. He responded,

Absolutely, she has all of the normal frustrations with the job, especially when she does not see success with her students. She will come and talk to me. Andrea is very open. When she has frustrations, she likes to talk about them. I think that helps her. I don't think she takes her frustrations home with her. She takes her successful accomplishments home with her. She changes every year. Some teachers don't. She changes her curriculum. I think that helps keep her motivated. Andrea has a great personality. She is able to talk to the kids. She understands that a lot of these kids have very different backgrounds and this school may be a safe haven for many of them. I think that because she is a mother and has three kids allows her to see things through a parent's eye.

I shared with Jack that one thing that has surfaced throughout all of my interviews was the notion that every day is a new day. That was one common thread that surfaced with all of them. I asked Jack if he saw that in Andrea. He replied,

In an alternative setting you have to do that or you will not survive. You will... I don't want to say battle, but kids will have difficulties. You have to put it behind you and start fresh the next day. They can call you a name, be verbally or sometimes physically abusive. You have to shake it off and be able to give them a chance the next day. If not, you are going to have a lot of frustrations.

Jack has seen Andrea offering care and compassion many times. He described, She is always willing to help a kid. Sometimes she will go to our Yes program and make an extra effort to meet with a kid. She will offer her prep time to meet with a student. She is at the door in the morning. She is one of the teachers that engage them right at the start of the day. She also engages students that are not on her roster. She sees every kid who walks through the door in the morning. She is even part of the searches. She does it in a positive way.

I asked Jack how Andrea talked about her job and if he got a sense that there was a real passion there. He stated,

I do, I do! I do have an example. She has a passion for her position as an English teacher. Last year, I needed to move a teacher over to our Yes program. Andrea works well individually with kids and I thought she would be ideal because she has very strong math and English skills and she is also a reading specialist. When I told her I was going to assign her there she came to me and told me that she would prefer to stay on the side of the building with the alternative kids. She

thought that she would be more beneficial with the alternative kids even though she would still be surrounded by more behavioral issues as opposed to acting as a tutor for individuals or small groups. She could have had it a lot easier over there, less behavioral problems and less stress. She has no regrets about her decision.

Jack described personal qualities that made Andrea resilient. “She is very dependable. She does not allow herself to be drawn into any of the drama that goes on around here. She talks about her children a lot. Her home life is very important to her.”

I told Jack that I had a sense that Andrea was very good at separating the job from home. He agreed saying,

She has learned over the years to take things lightly. She can shrug things off.

Andrea drives a long distance to get to work and she is always ten to fifteen minutes early. She is also one of the last people to leave.

I also told Jack that I sensed a passion in Andrea for this population of students. He agreed that it was there and easy to see. Jack said, “There are not many superstars in this setting so it is easy to see when it is there.”

Judy has known Linda for over 10 years. They were colleagues for over six years and Judy has supervised her for the last four years. Judy believes that Linda has demonstrated resilience over the years because she has watched her grow into an excellent teacher. She explained,

She started out in a program where she had the same kids every day, all day long.

It was an incredibly tough job and I knew that it was taking its toll on her. We would get together and talk. I could see that she was exhausted at the end of the day. These were difficult kids, very tough to handle. We tried to brainstorm

some ideas and because I think she knew her kids so well she knew what would work for them. She developed a plan that if they would go five days without any confrontations she would get them McDonalds. That changed the atmosphere in her room. She was able to increase to five days, then ten days, then fifteen and twenty days. It really worked. It changed the dynamics in her room. She made it through that year when most others would have failed. She focuses on the positive and I think kids really need that. In all of the years that I have known her, I have never heard her raise her voice.

Judy described several ways that Linda demonstrated care and compassion for her students and stated,

She bakes things. She knows the birthdays of all of her students and brings a little something in for them. She gives up her prep period to help kids. She has stayed after school to help kids. Rather than take time to get a cup of coffee or grade papers, she will use that time to work one-on-one with a student.

Regarding the personal qualities that allow Linda to be resilient, Judy described a great work ethic. Judy said, “If she is given one tiny bit of critique that is it. It will be corrected. She is not defensive. She wants to do well.”

Judy said that Linda talks about her job in waves of students and emotions. She shared,

I think that is true for most of us. With the group of kids that we have here, sometimes you are beat down when you get home. I think deep down she enjoys it. I think she takes pride in the fact that she can handle these kids because not everybody can.

Without mentioning that Linda has an everyday was a new day philosophy, Judy said that Linda started over every day. “She has gone back to gain additional certification without the intent of leaving. She is positive. She can connect with kids.”

Karen spoke on behalf of Jackie who was her unofficial mentor before they became colleagues. Karen believed she learned much about Jackie from substituting for her before they ever met. Karen stated, “I thought that she set up her classroom great and found that her students held up their end of the bargain. She unofficially mentored me. I never left after subbing for Jackie. Our classrooms are side by side.”

I asked Karen, now that she had five years of experience, if she believed that Jackie demonstrated resilience beyond most teachers in this setting. Karen responded, Absolutely, she is the teacher that... I think I tend to take things personally. Jackie has the ability to understand when to step in. She can shut it off for a second. She will not let things harm the classroom. That is an incredible quality for a teacher to have in this environment. You cannot fix or solve every problem and she knows that. She is able to step back enough to do her job. In my first year I heard something that didn't seem right. I wanted to get involved and the student got mad and I had a mess on my hands. Jackie knows when to give them their space. If it is a real problem, she will step in. She knows what to let go. She has mastered the art of that. She is so incredibly caring. She does not have a lot of conflict with students. Other teachers in the program may set a kid off every third day. It is rare for that to happen to Jackie.

Describing Jackie as being very nurturing, Karen elaborated,

She demonstrates care and compassion every day. We had a student who had a miscarriage recently. Jackie was so kind and nurturing to her. They had talks on a daily basis. She does not step over boundaries. She is the nurturer of the program. Some of these kids need that more than anything. When some of our girls who have parents that don't or can't act like parents, you see those girls go to Jackie. They think of her as a mom.

Karen quickly responded to the question about how Jackie talked about her job.

She shared,

She loves it. I probably tell Jackie once a year that I hate this place, I need to quit. She respects me but she also keeps me grounded. When I say what am I doing here she says Karen, you have never worked anywhere but here. I have worked other places. Maybe you need to get out. You need to see more. She has no intentions of working in another place. She loves it here. She loves these students. This is her calling. This job requires self-nurturing. She has the ability to take care of herself. I think some people come into this job with one foot out the door. This is not her.

Karen believed it was Jackie's past experience that allowed her to be resilient and explained,

On a personal level, Jackie has an immense amount of spirituality. She believes things will work themselves out. She always gives 150% of herself. She has the ability to see the best in all of her students. She is so human with the students. She gets mad at them but every hour is a new hour. She does not hold grudges against them. She is forgiving.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

In this chapter I will share a brief discussion of the research methodology selected for this study as well as the procedures used for verifying meaning. Following this initial discussion I will examine the data within and across each case to seek reasons and themes that have led to the success and resiliency of the participating teachers. Using the data from the cross-case display and the collegial interviews, I will also respond to the research questions that have driven this study. Finally, I will make assumptions about and discuss the limitations of this study and implications for practice and future research.

A qualitative methodology was selected for this study. When attempting to discover meaning and make sense of information gathered through semi-structured interviews, the researcher himself matters. There are times when the researcher must dig deeper to gain information that may not exist on the conscious level of the interviewee. For the purpose of this study, the researcher is more than a gatherer of information. He is an active part of the research process itself (Shank, 2006). If we are to believe that resiliency is arrived at through a complex set of events, conditions and life experiences (Swandt, 1997), qualitative inquiry allows for the enrichment of meaningful understanding.

After completing the interview process for each of the four teachers as well as the colleagues providing testimony, all participants were provided a copy of the interview transcript. All participants were satisfied with the accuracy of the transcripts.



From the transcripts, a data display was created using the codes from Ryff and Keys's six-dimensional model of well-being along with the names of each teacher. To review, the six dimensions were: (1) SA: self-acceptance; (2) EM: Environmental Mastery; (3) a: Autonomy; (4): PR; positive Relationships with Others; (5) PG: Personal Growth; and (6): PL: Purpose in life. While the data display revealed some similar responses to several questions, many other responses were as different as the individuals responding to the questions. The data display was first examined in narrative form for each teacher in a within-case analysis. Then, data was analyzed for common responses and/or themes emerging from the domains across each case in a cross-case study

It is helpful to make a few general statements regarding each teacher before I analyze the data by each of Ryff's six dimensions. It is clear that all four teachers are in a place professionally that they did not believe they would be in at the start of their careers. There are no Pat Zimmermans (Terkel, 1972) within this group. All expected to be public school teachers working with a more mainstream group of students.

Amy, the first teacher interviewed leads a less complex life as compared to Andrea, Linda and Jackie. She has been single all of her life. Amy lived with her parents until their death and remains in the same house. She lives within the community that she works and has a few close, personal friends that she shares her life with outside of school.

Andrea, Linda and Jackie lead more complex lives. They are each married with children. It is clear through their responses across multiple domains that their marriage and children are the prime focus of their lives.

## Self-Acceptance

The most similar responses across all four teachers come from their acceptance of where they are both personally and professionally. Each describes themselves as happy and satisfied in their personal and professional lives. Amy, the single teacher, describes a good, satisfying life. She values the ability to come and go as she pleases and feels very much a part of her community. She has a few close personal friends that make up the majority of her social life.

Andrea, Linda and Jackie are each very family-focused. Each claim to have supportive spouses who allow them to devote the time necessary to do their jobs. Andrea, Linda and Jackie speak in positive terms about their children as a source of happiness and purpose in their lives. Each has children at different stages of development but their feelings toward their families are consistently positive.

All four teachers express that they are happy with their professional lives although the path to this acceptance differs for each. Amy no longer desires or pursues a public school position. She is very happy at her school and in an alternative setting. She values getting to know all of her students and as many parents as possible. Amy values making connections and believes that she has the ability to do this in a smaller setting. Amy freely admits that she is not always confident and that others have more confidence in her than she does.

Andrea describes “coming to peace” with her professional life. It seems to have taken her longer to reach this stage the other three teachers. She is secure in the knowledge that she makes a difference for her students. The little success stories are what keep her going. She realizes that she will not reach all students all of the time. This is

something Andrea has learned through experience. She has also learned not to take things personally. She feels needed on days where she believes that she has made a difference. Andrea, unlike Amy, has a strong belief in her teaching abilities.

Linda also expresses happiness in her professional life. She is at the point where she would only leave her job for more money and quickly qualified that that would not be a very good reason. Linda claims great satisfaction when she can return a student to their home school for graduation. Linda absolutely believes in her teaching abilities and believes that she makes a difference in the lives of her students. This belief has grown over time. She has gained confidence through continued professional development. This is supported through her attainment of a reading specialist certification that has helped her become a better teacher.

Jackie strongly desires to remain in her current position. Unfortunately, she is expecting to be furloughed at the end of the school year. There is a strong possibility that her school will close. Jackie values the small setting that she works in because she feels that she can provide the individual attention students need and help them to achieve. She understands their struggles and feels good when they succeed when they have failed in the past.

Amy was very specific with regard to meaning and purpose in her life. I feel her answer to this was her strongest response of our interview. Amy is a goal-setter. Her meaning and purpose in life comes from attempting to achieve those goals whether it is working with a student or something in her personal life. Amy strives to do this even though the goals may not always be attainable. The process of goal-setting is very important to her.

Meaning and purpose in life for Andrea is centered on her three children. She also derives meaning while making a difference in the lives of her students. Linda gets many rewards from working with her students. She gains meaning from making a difference for her students. Jackie claims that teaching is the only job that she ever wanted and it is her gift. Along with her husband and son, she has a very purposeful feeling about the work that she does. This is supported by her desire to remain in her current position. She keeps in mind the students that she is charged with helping.

### Analysis

Several common themes emerged within the domain of self-acceptance. All four teachers have come to a level of satisfaction about the job they do and where and with whom they do it. These are teachers who believe in their ability to teach. Even Amy who appears to lack confidence exhibits a strong desire to succeed and works tirelessly to make connections with her students. I sense a fear of failure on her part. At this point in each of their careers they have not only accepted where they are, but they also exhibit pride in the work they do. There is a sense within all of them that they are doing a job that not everybody can do. They each have seen many teachers come and go throughout their careers. Whether they have lost interest in pursuing a public school position, come to peace with their professional life or would only leave for money, these teachers are satisfied with and successful in their current positions.

Having a meaningful and purposeful life is driven by their families. It does not matter the age of their children or the length of their marriages. Family is at the center of their existence. Even though Amy is single, it is very apparent to me how much her parents meant to her throughout her life. The values that she brings to the classroom are

rooted in her upbringing. Andrea's life is very hectic with three children. Jackie has a toddler and an ailing father in-law. Although Linda's son is 20 years old, she is still driven by family needs.

A clear picture emerged that the teachers had meaning and purposeful lives with regard to their professional careers. All of them made reference to making a difference in the lives of their students, including celebrating small successes, helping them attain goals or helping them succeed where others did not. The theme of helping students succeed was prevalent throughout each of the interviews across several domains.

Three of the four teachers expressed a strong belief in their teaching abilities. Andrea, Linda and Jackie all have grown to believe strongly in their ability to teach and help their students. While Amy is reluctant to express confidence, she has given me the impression that she works and prepares at a very high level.

#### Environmental Mastery

Amy is not a proponent of "best practices." At least she is not aware that she is. She mentioned that she learned to provide her students more options and this has helped her reach more students. She may not be aware that differentiated instruction is considered to be a best practice although she tries it in her classroom. Amy has learned to reinforce success wherever it occurs. She celebrates small successes. Amy credits a willingness to forgive and look for the good in people. Within an environment of apathy and misery she attempts to stay positive. She adopts the philosophy of every day is a new day.

Andrea also believes a forgiving nature is essential for success in this environment. She looks for success in individual students and it may be as simple as

getting students to improve their attendance. She has not been provided many opportunities for professional development so she is somewhat reserved when discussing best teaching practices. She does believe that collegial discussions with other teachers have helped.

Linda believes that any success is a success. She feels getting some students to do any amount of work can be considered a success. Linda accepts effort over accuracy. She considers any student progress as a measure of success. Due to the fact that Linda may see a student multiple times in one day, she views every minute as a new minute. She views the ability to move past conflicts as important in her job. Linda believes her education is current because she has completed graduate school. She has been exposed to best practices of teaching to a greater degree than the others.

Jackie considers herself well-versed in the best practices of teaching. She practices cooperative learning and differentiated instruction on a regular basis. Jackie views success as more than a grade. She believes a D at times can be successful. The challenge for Jackie is to get some students past the point of apathy. She wants them to graduate.

### Analysis

Measuring and defining success are different across each teacher. If defining success is having everyone in a classroom succeed then each teacher may feel like a failure. Instead, there appears to be a tendency to look for individual successes in students. There is also a wide range of criteria that can be considered for success. Although each has a different idea about what success is perhaps the most important theme emerging for this domain is that they are all looking for and finding successes.

This can occur in large or, more likely, small ways. Finding successes allows hope to exist. All have mentioned graduation as the ultimate goal. In many cases, success seems to be keeping students interested enough to keep coming to school.

### Autonomy

Responses to the question regarding resisting social and job pressures were varied across each teacher. Amy could not identify a reason for this except that she always tries to maintain a positive attitude. Very similar to the other teachers, Amy focuses on the students who want to work on that particular day. Like all teachers working in this environment she faces misery and apathy on a daily basis. Amy has the attitude that every day is a new day. She seems to have become a master at not escalating a difficult situation. She has a philosophy of believing that what happens next depends on what she does now. She offers her students a stable place and stresses to them that she is not going to “jump ship” and leave them. Amy also says gathering with colleagues at the end of the day is very helpful. She finds it therapeutic to debrief and laugh with staff members.

Andrea has the ability to separate her job from her personal life. Her self-determination comes from comparing her life to that of her students. Andrea believes that she has a wonderful life. She takes care of her students but does not view her job as her entire life. She tries to keep in mind the background of her students and where they are coming from. Andrea also feels greater autonomy working in this setting. She believes that she is not micro-managed and has greater academic freedom. Andrea also mentions that having the support of her co-workers helps to de-escalate the day.

Linda feels accountable for the work she does but does not feel micro-managed. She is constantly aware of her students’ backgrounds and looks at situations through their

point of view. She believes that their pressures are greater than hers. Linda credits being a single parent for many years as making her stronger. She has a survivor's attitude. She also seems to have the ability to de-escalate altercations. Linda warns against losing one's composure with these students. One of her favorite things to say when faced with an enraged student is "I still like you." Linda also participates in a debriefing process with colleagues that she finds very helpful.

Jackie has learned to compartmentalize her job. She leaves it at work. She has developed the attitude that she will never give up and she is not going anywhere. Jackie tries to remember that her students are the ones that she is helping.

Several of the teachers have had life-altering experiences that they consider to be traumatic with the exception of Andrea. Amy had trouble dealing with the death of her parents in close proximity. She is still surrounded by family and friends. Linda became a single parent in college which drastically changed the course of her life. She believes the experience has made her stronger and more independent because she had to be. She has since married and leads a traditional life. Jackie found herself as the primary caretaker for her father-in-law while working and caring for an infant. Although her husband was helpful and supportive, the experience was overwhelming for her. Fortunately, her father-in-law recovered and life became more manageable. The experience caused Jackie to speak up for herself more as a result of advocating for her father-in-law. She has also learned perseverance through undergoing procedures over time to become pregnant. Jackie credits decompressing on her drive home as her way of putting the day behind her. She is also happy with the support of her administrators and colleagues.



## Analysis

Each teacher has the ability to separate the job from their personal life. As serious and committed as each teacher is, the ability to leave school at school is essential. Andrea, Linda, and Jackie have very active family lives and Amy recognizes the need to get away by being very guarded with her free time. They each refer to having more freedom than a public school teacher both in this domain and others. The ability to work with smaller groups of students and not be micro-managed is important to all four participants.

Each teacher credits experience and collegial support with helping them through traumatic situations. They all have become masters of de-escalation. They have become skilled at not allowing a situation to worsen through their actions. Responding to a traumatic situation sometimes means not responding. Each teacher admits to losing students over time and the results of traumatic situations are not always positive. All four teachers mentioned that having a philosophy that every day is a new day enables them to bounce back. The ability to put the past behind them was discussed in the context of this domain and others as well. Collegial support is something that they all rely upon as a means of putting the day behind them. All express a genuine desire to help their students which also keeps them coming back.

### Positive Relationships with Others

Positive relationships with others is another domain that I have a sense of mastery across each teacher. Amy shows her students that she is genuinely interested in them. She talks to them about their interests. Amy believes that her students know that she respects them. She is at the point in her career that she rarely has face-to-face

confrontations with students. Amy constantly searches for positives to help get through difficult situations.

Andrea maintains positive relationships by being positive. She shares stories about herself and her family. She fashions herself as a bit of a humorist as well. She has learned what battles to fight and turns her attention to those willing to accept her help. Linda has learned not to take behavior personally. She uses time as a strategy of when to intrude and when to back away. Her goal is to help every student but realizes that the reality is she can't. Jackie lets students know that she is there and tries to be helpful. She has a great fear of losing students and does not give up on them easily. She believes that God has put her here to do what she is doing. Jackie realizes that in order to be successful with her students she must build trust. Each teacher can recall students that were resistant. Each can ignore poor behavior with the hope the student will respond. Each claims some success as well as failure.

#### Analysis

Without saying the word caring, each teacher clearly cares about their students. This does not mean that they won't sever ties, at least briefly, because their focus is on students who are responding positively to them. Ignoring seems to be a strategy mentioned throughout each interview and being masters of de-escalation fosters relationships. They each want to help each student but they each realize they won't reach everybody. This seems to be the reality of this environment.

## Personal Growth

Amy, Andrea, Linda and Jackie have all demonstrated personal and professional growth throughout their careers. Without it, I doubt that they would have remained teaching in alternative settings.

They are all in places they didn't think they would be. All four have made attempts to teach in public schools, although none recently.

Amy believes that she has become a better teacher over time. Although she gives the appearance of being the least confident she exhibits an underlying determination to succeed. Amy is happy with her job and has no intentions of leaving her school. She refers to goal-setting as a means of striving to achieve. Amy describes her own academic career as average although she believes she improved through college. Andrea's attitude is more matter-of-fact. She has learned to be more patient over the years and believes she can do this job effectively. She has come to the realization that this is where she is and this is where she will stay. Andrea expresses an attitude that she does what she has to do and that is just the way that it is.

Linda's growth is attributed to being more accepting of differences. She feels what makes her successful is realizing that all kids are different. She came to appreciate that there are many good kids in her school. Linda describes herself as an average student who at times had poor attendance.

Jackie's growth stems from evolving from a linear thinker (math background) to learning and understanding that there are many ways to get things done. Being patient and learning how to teach and interact with this population has aided her personal growth. Jackie was always a pleaser as a student and a good student who had to work

hard. Because she sometimes struggled herself he understands when her students struggle.

### Analysis

Amy, Andrea, Linda and Jackie have all developed the skills necessary to be effective with this population of students. They are all, at the very least, accepting of the jobs they have and know this is where they will remain. This would be true for Jackie as well if she were not facing an impending furlough. Amy, Andrea and Jackie seem to have developed a passion for this population. Linda appears more resigned to where she is but is no less of an effective teacher. Jackie was the best student of the four. Her struggles have helped make her empathize with students who have difficulty learning. It is difficult to make a judgment on how the academic careers of Amy, Andrea and Linda have influenced their teaching careers.

### Purpose in Life

Balancing their jobs with the rest of their lives does not appear to be a difficult task for each teacher. Although Amy does not understand how people with families do this job, she states that she creates a clear division between home and school. She is a strict planner who believes time away is important. She consistently turns down opportunities to teach in the summer. When school starts that becomes her main focus. As stated earlier, Amy leads a life with fewer family demands. Andrea also strives to keep the job separate from school. She has learned to set limits, particularly with time. Andrea will not allow her family to be short-changed. The balance of work and the surrounding world have shifted for Linda over the years. Today her child is full-grown and she is happy in her marriage. When Linda was single in her youth with a small child,

the balancing act was more difficult. Linda seems to do whatever she needs to do. I get the sense that she had fewer options. She had to make the job work and she had to meet the needs of her son. She balanced her life simply because she had to. Jackie works to create the separation between her job and her surrounding world. She is a strong scheduler and budgets her time well. She values her job but also values her family. There have been difficult times for her with the job, a baby and providing care for her father-in-law.

In no other domain than purpose of life did their passion for their students emerge. They all view themselves as part counselor, part teacher, and in some instances, part case worker. All four have helped their students with relationships, home life, child care, etc. Nothing was off limits. These students in many ways live in more of an adult world than the average high school student. They may be making payments, working, caring for a child or looking for a place to sleep at night. The work of these teachers extends beyond academics.

Amy is a self-esteem builder. She recognizes the need to attempt to break down the barriers that kids put up. She strives to make connections and foster a sense of belonging with her students. Amy works hard to find something in common with each student. Andrea takes pride in having a good rapport with her students. She genuinely cares for them. Her understanding of their backgrounds provides Andrea with empathy for her students. This is not a weakness. Andrea may have the greatest sense of the four of how hard to push her students. Linda recognizes that she has good kids who have much to offer and she has a strong desire to help them. She is constantly in the business of helping her students stay organized. She creates situations for them to demonstrate

responsibility. Jackie is 100% invested in her students. She is very conscious that these students need someone to listen to them. Many students have her cell number and call her. Jackie has learned through a difficult experience with students phoning her about where to draw the line in her relationship with them. It was her passion for her students that caused her to blur appropriate boundaries with them.

### Analysis

All of the teachers strive to make a difference in the lives of their students. They recognize that their students have needs beyond academics. They each have different personalities and success with their students is achieved in different ways. While family has to be considered the central theme within Purpose of Life for Andrea, Linda and Jackie, their passion for what they do with their students is evident. Being successful in their job is important to each one. Again, they realize everybody cannot do what they do. They have all seen too many teachers come and go over the years. I consider Amy to be a teacher first and foremost. She values what she does and the success that she experiences. She is truly about relationships and enjoys following up with students outside of school in the community and after graduation.

### Analysis of Collegial Testimony

Collegial testimony supports that these four teachers demonstrate resiliency beyond most teachers in the alternative education field. The testimony of each colleague mirrors what the teachers describe about themselves. The discussion with each colleague confirms what the teachers say about the ability to bounce back from bad experiences and bad days and to see every day as a new day. Each is described as having the ability to recover quickly from difficult experiences.

Care and compassion for their students also surfaced through interviews of each teacher's colleague. There is willingness for each teacher to help students that emerges from each colleague. Along with all of the above, each teacher is described as having a strong work ethic by their colleague. If nothing else the collegial testimony serves to validate the teacher's responses and my own impressions of each one.

#### Analysis of Research Findings and Responses to the Research Questions

The first research question asks how teachers are able to remain resilient in a challenging educational environment. It is apparent that there are several paths to success for teachers serving students in alternative settings. There was no expectation by the researcher to discover another Pat Zimmerman (Terkel, 1972) or William Sadler (Prestidge, 2008). These were men who seemed to be answering to a higher calling. However the teachers in this study have many differences between them, it is what they have in common that has allowed them to become and remain successful as teachers of students at-risk.

In answering how teachers are able to remain resilient in a challenging educational environment I will begin with care and compassion. This theme consistently was part of the dialogue throughout each interview with each teacher. It was also supported through collegial testimony. In environments that can have their share of misery and apathy, each teacher described their ability to compartmentalize. They find students who want their help and focus their intentions on those students. Successes for these teachers are individual more often than not. They are either supported by strong marriages and loving families or are very content their with circle of family and friends. It is also apparent that these teachers have developed the skills necessary to navigate

through very difficult situations. They have learned not to escalate situations and make them even more volatile. They all have a forgiving nature. One can't be a teacher and hold grudges, particularly in this environment. Perhaps the most important characteristic that all of these teachers have is the ability to bounce back from a bad or even terrible day. The theme of every day being a new day emerged from each teacher. Without the ability to bounce back, attributes of care and compassion, strong support from family and friends, finding small and individual successes and a strong skill set may not be enough to sustain and maintain resiliency.

The second research question asks why resilient teachers keep teaching. These teachers continue because they are good at what they do and take pride in the job that they do. They gain satisfaction knowing that not everyone can do what they do. These are all veteran teachers and because of that they are somewhat locked in to their position. They have achieved a salary that parallels their years of experience and are not likely to be offered a job in a public school. As a result, they also keep teaching because they have to. Resilient teachers find a way to be positive about and proud of their professional lives.

The third research question asks how resilient teachers' colleagues view them. Five common themes emerged through discussions with colleagues. First, the teachers consistently exhibit a strong work ethic. Second, they have the ability to move on from difficult situations. Next, they are resilient and bounce back quickly. Finally, these are teachers who care and have compassion for their students.



## Limitations and Researcher Perspectives

My experience as an alternative education principal could be viewed as a bias. My initial interest in this study was motivated by “Al,” a teacher that I viewed as resilient and successful throughout his career as a teacher working with students at-risk of not graduating from high school. I was familiar with his skills and personality traits that I believed helped make him successful. I probably entered the interviews with ideas about what I would hear. With this in mind, I believe I was able to keep an open mind with each participating teacher.

My skills as an interviewer grew stronger with each interview. Each interview took longer to complete than the previous interview. Amy was the first participating teacher interviewed and I did not press her as much with follow-up questions as the remaining three teachers.

Four teachers across three settings met the criteria for this study. A larger sample of teachers would have added more credibility to the research. All participating teachers in the study were female. A male’s perspective would have provided a more representative sample.

The length of time that the principal/supervisor has served in their current position was not a consideration in this study. Their skill as an evaluator of teachers was not accounted for in the selection process.

## Implications for Practice

The first implication for practice resides with the principal/supervisor. The creation of a collegial environment in which teachers have the opportunity to meet with each other on a frequent basis is essential to occupational well-being. It is the

responsibility of the principal/supervisor to engage the faculty and build a culture that offers trust support. There needs to be a warm, caring environment where teachers are free to share their passion for their students and their jobs. They also need to be free to laugh or even cry with each other.

A second implication would be crafting interview questions for the hiring process that can reveal a candidate's sense of well-being. This may help to determine their ability to be successful in an alternative environment. Although the questions used in this study were designed to gain information from experienced teachers, they are questions that may provide useful information about a candidate. Does the theme of helping others manifest when questions are asked about their purpose in life? How do they maintain a sense of self-determination when situations become difficult? Do they have the ability to compartmentalize their life? Can they describe times in their lives where they had to be resilient? What situations or circumstances have helped to make them stronger? Can they describe a situation in which they had to demonstrate care and compassion for a prolonged period of time?

A third implication concerns structures within the organization of schools that may impact teacher resiliency. For example, opportunities for professional development may help teachers learn to meet the needs of resistant students. Common planning time within the contractual school day would support the development of teacher collegiality which is important in fostering teacher resiliency. Master schedules with breaks between teaching periods may help teachers recover from difficult class periods.

## Implications for Future Research

Each teacher in this study developed resiliency over a period of time in their career. Teachers were not asked as to pinpoint a moment of acceptance that they would stay teaching in an alternative setting. Yet each teacher decided not to apply for another job. . They have accepted that this is where they will work for the duration of their careers. The question needs to be asked if a successful teacher in this environment has a defining moment of acceptance. Was there a specific moment or was it gradual?

It was determined that positive collegial relationships and administrative support are needed for the well-being of teachers in this environment. They need time with their colleagues to debrief, discuss students, discuss what is working and what is not working, vent, laugh and cry. A study of the leadership in alternative settings would reveal what influences they have on the culture of the setting. Is there a culture of trust? Is time provided for teachers to meet regularly? Does a caring and nurturing environment exist? What is the turnover of teachers teaching in alternative schools with positive collegial relationships and administrative support compared to alternative schools without those characteristics?

## Conclusion

This was a collective case study of four teachers in alternative education settings who worked with students at-risk of not meeting graduation requirements. The purpose of this study was to determine their sources of resiliency in working with this student population. Of the sources identified, one, collegial support, was the result of relationships between teachers. Six others were internal sources, including a genuine caring and compassion for others, the ability to bounce back from terrible days, the

ability to de-escalate adverse situations, the ability to forgive and move on, the belief that they made a genuine difference in the lives of their students, and the ability to separate professional from personal life. Because the majority of sources of resiliency come from within the teachers themselves, one has to ask how resiliency, like leadership, may be developed over time.

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Appendix A: Letter of Request to the Supervisor



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idpel@duq.edu  
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Date (after IRB approval)

Dear (Supervisor's name),

I am currently the principal of Hance Elementary School in the Pine-Richland School District and a doctoral candidate in the Interdisciplinary Program for Educational Leaders (IDPEL) at Duquesne University. Prior to being named an elementary principal, I spent the past seven years working with students who were considered to be in danger or at-risk of not meeting graduation requirements. I am very interested in scheduling an interview with you to discuss my research. I believe that my research topic can have positive implications for the hiring practices of administrators hiring teachers aspiring to work with students who, for a variety of reasons, are at risk of not meeting graduation requirements.

The purpose of my study is to examine the sources of resiliency possessed by successful teachers of students who are in danger of not meeting graduation requirements. As you are aware, many teachers who work with this challenging population of students suffer from burnout, apathy and tend to move to other areas of teaching or leave the profession completely.

The following is the criteria for the selection of teachers for the study: (a) minimum of four years of teaching in an alternative setting; (b) satisfactory evaluations for each year of teaching; (c) responsible for direct instruction to students; (d) currently employed in an alternative setting, a "school within a school" or another challenging setting; and (e) recommended as excellent by the building administrator or direct supervisor. Your recommendation of a teacher who meets these criteria is greatly appreciated. You will also be asked to identify a teacher that can speak in an informed manner regarding the selected teacher. The colleague will be asked to provide testimony, examples and stories that validate the selection of the teacher.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Participants must be able to safely and honestly participate or choose not to participate. Given that all potential participants are 18 years of age or older, informed consent will be obtained from each participant. Students are not part of this research design. As a component of the IRB safeguards, the confidentiality of the participants will be addressed in detail within the consent form. Participants will have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (724) 443-1541 ext 3602 or [jmayberry@pinerichland.org](mailto:jmayberry@pinerichland.org). You may also contact my dissertation chairman, Dr. James Henderson at (412) 396-4880 or [Henderson@dug.edu](mailto:Henderson@dug.edu).

Respectfully,

John H. Mayberry  
School of Education  
Duquesne University

Appendix B: Letter of Request to the Teacher



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Date (after IRB approval),

Dear (teacher's name),

I am currently the principal at Hance Elementary School in the Pine-Richland School District and a doctoral candidate in the Interdisciplinary Program for Educational Leaders (IDPEL) at Duquesne University. Prior to being appointed as an elementary principal, I spent the past seven years working with students who were considered to be in danger or at-risk of not meeting graduation requirements. I have met with your principal, Mr./Ms. ( ), and you are described as an excellent teacher who is passionate about teaching and learning and have proven to be a resilient practitioners. I believe that my research can have positive and practical implications with regard to the selection and hiring practices for administrators of teachers of this demanding population of students.

The purpose of my study is to examine the sources of resiliency possessed by successful teachers of students who are in danger or at-risk of not meeting graduation requirements. As you are aware, many teachers who work with this challenging population of students move to other areas of teaching or leave the profession completely.

It is my desire to have you consider participating in this study to help me examine and understand the qualities that have allowed you to establish and maintain resilient behavior and successful teaching practices over a prolonged period of time. I am seeking teachers who are willing to participate in two, one hour semi-structured interviews. I will also seek the aid of a colleague of yours through the help of your principal who will speak in an informed manner that validates your selection. The following is the criteria for the selection of teachers for the study: (a) minimum of four years experience; (b) satisfactory evaluations for each year of teaching; (c) responsible for the direct instruction of students; (d) currently employed in an alternative setting; and (e) recommended as excellent by your building administrator or direct supervisor.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Participants must be able to safely and honestly participate or choose not to participate. Given that all candidates are 18 years of age or older, informed consent will be obtained from each participant. Students are not part of this research design. As a component of the IRB safeguards, the confidentiality of the participants will be addressed within the consent form. Participants will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (724) 443-1541 ext. 3602 or [jmayberry@pinerichland.org](mailto:jmayberry@pinerichland.org). You may also contact my dissertation chairman Dr. James Henderson at (412) 396-4880 or [Henderson@duq.edu](mailto:Henderson@duq.edu).

Respectfully,

John H. Mayberry  
School of Education  
Duquesne University



Appendix C: Letter of Request to the Supporting Teacher/Colleague



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Date (after IRB approval)

Dear (supporting teacher),

I am currently the Principal of Hance Elementary School in the Pine-Richland School District and a doctoral candidate in the Interdisciplinary Program for Educational leaders (IDPEL) at Duquesne University. Prior to my appointment as an elementary principal, I spent the past seven years working with students who were considered to be in danger or at-risk of not meeting graduation requirements. I believe that my research topic can have positive implications for the hiring practices of administrators hiring teachers aspiring to work with students who, for a variety of reasons, are at-risk of not meeting graduation requirements.

The purpose of my study is to examine the sources of resiliency possessed by successful teachers of students who are in danger of not meeting graduation requirements. As you are probably aware, many teachers who work with this challenging population of students suffer from burnout, apathy and tend to move to other areas of teaching or leave the profession completely.

The following is the criteria for the selection of teachers for the study: (a) minimum of four years of teaching in an alternative setting; (b) satisfactory evaluations for each year of teaching; (c) responsible for direct instruction to students; (d) currently employed in an alternative setting, a "school within a school" or another challenging setting; and (e) recommended as excellent by the building administrator or supervisor.

You have been selected by (participating teacher and/or supervisor) as someone who can speak credibly regarding the resiliency, accomplishments and success of (participating teacher). It is my hope that you will participate in an approximately 45 minute interview as part of my study. You will be asked to provide testimony, examples and stories that validate the selection of (participating teacher).

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Participants must be able to safely and honestly participate or choose not to participate. Given that all potential participants are 18 years or older, informed consent will be obtained from each participant. Students are not part of this research design. As a component of the IRB safeguards, the confidentiality of the participants will be addressed in detail within the consent form. Participants will have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (724) 443-1541 ext 3602 or [jmayberry@pinerichland.org](mailto:jmayberry@pinerichland.org). You may also contact my dissertation chairman, Dr. James Henderson at (412) 396-4880 or [Henderson@duq.edu](mailto:Henderson@duq.edu).

Respectfully,

John H. Mayberry  
School of Education  
Duquesne University

## Appendix D: Informed Consent (Teacher)



**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY  
TEACHER FORM**

**TITLE:** An Examination of the Sources of Resiliency  
Possessed by Successful Teachers of Students Living  
in At-Risk Situations

**INVESTIGATOR:** John Mayberry  
3261 Unionville Road  
Cranberry Twp. Pa. 16066  
(724) 776-2208

**ADVISOR:** Dr. James E. Henderson  
IDPEL Program Director  
Department of Foundations and Leadership  
(412) 396-4880

**SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** This study is being performed in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Education in the Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program  
for Educational Leaders at Duquesne University.

**PURPOSE:** As a teacher who has been identified as successful  
and resilient, you are being asked to participate in a  
research project that seeks to investigate and examine  
the sources of your personal and professional  
resiliency and longevity. Hopefully, this study will  
have positive implications for teacher search,  
recruitment and hiring practices for local education  
agencies charged with hiring teachers charged with  
teaching students considered to be at-risk of not  
meeting graduation requirements.

**YOUR PARTICIPATION** You will be asked to participate in a ninety minute  
semi-structured interview as well as a forty-five  
minute follow-up/debriefing interview at a later date.  
Both interviews will be audio taped and a

transcription will be provided for your review and approval. The interviews will take place at your workplace in an unoccupied room or office at a time that is convenient to you. These are the only requests that will be made of you.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:**

There are no risks greater than those encountered in everyday life. Possible benefits of this study include the potential for administrators to foster and enhance the resiliency of teachers with the hope of increasing the longevity of teachers of this challenging population of students. Also, positive implications for the recruitment and hiring of teachers may emerge from this study. Local Education Agencies will have no involvement beyond recommending eligible teachers for the study. Results will not be shared with district administrators.

**COMPENSATION:**

This study will require no monetary cost to you and participants will not be offered any compensation.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Your involvement in this study will remain confidential. For teachers participating in the study, audio recordings will be transcribed for your review and approval. Pseudonyms will be used for teachers and colleagues as well as any references to students and other school personal. The researcher is aware that identifying material can exist beyond the use of names stated in interviews. All identifying material as well anyone the speaker talks about will be removed in the transcription. After identifiers are removed, portions of the transcript may be used for direct quotation or discussion in the final report. All written materials, consent forms and audio tapes will be stored in a locked file in the researcher's home and retained for five years after the study's completion. Your responses will only appear in data analysis and summaries.

**RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:**

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time without risk or consequence

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS:**

A summary of the results of this research will be provided to you at no cost. You will also receive a transcription of your interview session as part of the data analysis for review.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT:**

I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project. I understand that should I have any further questions regarding my participation in this study, I may call John H. Mayberry (see above information) and/or Dr. James Henderson (see above contact information) and/or Dr. Paul Richer, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board (412) 396-6326.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Appendix E: Informed Consent (Colleague)



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**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY  
COLLEAGUE FORM**

**TITLE:** An Examination of the Sources of Resiliency  
Possessed by Successful Teachers of Students Living  
in At-Risk Situations

**INVESTIGATOR:** John H. Mayberry  
3261 Unionville Road  
Cranberry Twp. Pa. 16066  
(724) 776-2208

**ADVISOR:** Dr. James E. Henderson  
IDPEL Program Director  
Department of Foundations and Leadership  
(412) 396-4880

**SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** This study is being performed in partial fulfillment  
for the degree of Doctor of Education in the  
Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program for Educational  
Leaders at Duquesne University.

**PURPOSE:** As a teacher and a colleague, you are being asked to  
provide testimony and validate the selection of  
(teacher's name) as a teacher who is successful and  
resilient. You will be asked to provide specific  
examples of resilient behavior and also make  
determinations regarding the source(s) of the  
teacher's resiliency and longevity. Hopefully, this



study will have positive implications for the recruitment and hiring practices for local education agencies charged with hiring teachers working with students considered to be at-risk of not meeting graduation requirements.

**YOUR PARTICIPATION:**

You are asked to participate in a forty-five minute interview. The interview will be audio taped and transcribed for your review and approval. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants. The interviews will take place at your workplace in an unoccupied room or office at a time that is convenient to you. This will be the only request made of you.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:**

There are no risks greater than those encountered in everyday life. Possible benefits of this study include the potential for administrators to foster and enhance the resiliency and longevity of teachers charged with working with this challenging population of students. Also, positive implications for the recruitment and hiring of teachers may emerge from this study. Supervisors/administrators will not be involved beyond recommending you selection as a teacher who can provide testimony and validation of (teacher's name).

**COMPENSATION:**

This study will require no monetary cost to you and participants will not be offered any compensation.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Your involvement in this study will remain confidential. For colleagues participating in the interview, the audiotape will be transcribed. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants including any references to students or other school personnel. The researcher is aware that identifying material can exist beyond the use of names by the speaker and anyone who the speaker talks about will be accounted for in the transcripts (deleted or the use of pseudonyms). After identifiers are removed, portions of the transcript may be used for direct quotation or discussion in the final report. All written materials, consent forms and audiotapes will be stored in a locked file in the researcher's home and retained for five years after the study's

completion. At that time, all materials will be destroyed. Your responses will only appear in data analysis and summaries.

**RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:**

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time without risk or consequence.

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS:**

A summary of the results will be provided to you. You will also receive a transcription of your interview session as a part of the data analysis process.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT:**

I have read the above statements and understand what is being asked of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project. I understand that should I have any further questions regarding my participation in this study, I may call John H. Mayberry (see above for contact information), Dr. James E. Henderson (see above contact information) and/or Dr. Paul Richer, Chair of the Duquesne University Institution Review Board (412) 396-6326.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix F: Interview Questions and Codes

### Interview Codes and Questions

The following codes will be used to represent Ryff's (1995) six-dimensional model of well-being: (1) SA: self acceptance; (2) EM: environmental mastery; (3) A: autonomy; (4) PR: positive relations with others; (5) PG: personal growth; and (6) PL: purpose in life.

The following questions will be used for the semi-structured interview process in this study:

1. (PG) How have you grown as a person since the beginning of your teaching career?
2. (PG/SA) Can you describe what it means to have a purposeful and meaningful life?
3. (A) How have you resisted and continue to resist social and job pressures and maintain a sense of self-determination in this setting?
4. (EM) How do you "keep going" when faced with apathy and misery?
5. (SA) Are you happy and/or satisfied with your personal life?
6. (SA) Are you happy and/or satisfied with your professional life?
7. (PL) How do you balance the needs of your job as a teacher with the pressures and demands of your surrounding world?

8. (PL) Can you recall situations in your life such as trauma, health issues, family issues, friends etc. that you would consider life altering? How did you respond? What were your supports?
9. (A) Please discuss difficult, stressful or traumatic situations in your professional career. How did you respond to any/all of these situations? Were the results positive? If so, why?
10. (A) What processes do you go through after you have experienced a traumatic or difficult day? Why are you able to bounce back while others are not?
11. (SA) Do you believe in yourself and your abilities as they pertain to your ability to teach and motivate your students?
12. (SA) Have you always believed in yourself or has this belief grown over time?
13. (PL) Does your work with students extend beyond academics? If so, please elaborate.
14. (PR) How do you cultivate and maintain positive relationships with your students? Can you recall a time when a student was particularly resistant?
15. (EM/PG) Do you consider yourself well-versed in the best practices of teaching?
16. (EM)How do you measure success with your students?
17. ((PG) describe your academic career as a student.
18. Have you been afforded opportunities for professional development?  
Please describe them,

## Appendix G: Questions for Supporting Colleagues



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The following questions will be used to generate dialogue with the colleagues selected to speak on behalf of the participating teacher:

1. How long have you worked with (participating teacher)?
2. How has (participating teacher) demonstrated resilience beyond most teachers with whom you have worked?
3. How has (participating teacher) demonstrated care and compassion for his/her students?
4. How does (participating teacher speak) about their job?
5. What personal qualities do you see that makes (participating teacher) resilient?