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Can We Build It? An Action Research Study of Integrated Academics and Resilience

Shanda Jones
Gardner-Webb University, sjones46@gardner-webb.edu

CAN WE BUILD IT? AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY OF INTEGRATED ACADEMICS AND RESILIENCE

By
Shanda Alison Jones

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Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Shanda Alison Jones under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

_____	_____
Sydney Brown, PhD Committee Chair	Date
_____	_____
Michelle Bennett, EdD Committee Member	Date
_____	_____
Sara Newell, EdD Committee Member	Date
_____	_____
Prince Bull, PhD Dean of the College of Education	Date

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my past, present, and future students. Your faces, voices, and actions are what I consider when I describe the best of teaching. For all of you who taught me so much and so well; for all of you who made me brave; for all of you who trained me to laugh, to dance, and to enjoy the answer of "Yes," you are the reason I continue this journey. Thank you for being the most excellent educators I know. I love you all.

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Abstract

CAN WE BUILD IT? AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY OF INTEGRATED ACADEMICS AND RESILIENCE. Jones, Shanda Alison, 2021: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

This study was an action research project seeking to gather evidence regarding the impact of integrating academic objectives and resiliency-building topics. As the focus on trauma and mental health increased, literature provided rich descriptions of how trauma may negatively impact students. Research presented findings indicating potential physical, mental, emotional, social, academic, and behavioral effects resulting from trauma. What was lacking were studies investigating the impact of implementing trauma-informed instructional strategies. In an effort to address gaps in the literature and improve professional practice, action research in a mixed methods approach was conducted with two research questions exploring the impact, if any, the integration of topics, specifically chosen to build resiliency through reading and writing, have on student academic achievements and perceptions of resilience. An integrated unit in a sixth-grade English language arts classroom was studied, and data in the form of academic assessments, Brief Resilience Scale assessments, and reflective journal entries were gathered. Both quantitative and qualitative data indicated a positive impact on academics and resilience when the integrated unit was implemented.

Keywords: trauma-informed, responsive education, resilience, instructional strategies, protective factors

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

What makes successful people different? Throughout history and to the present day, some individuals have distinguished themselves among their peers. Resources and opportunities seem to be logical answers when considering such success, yet there are those who rise above their contemporaries despite similar circumstances such as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) or poverty. What makes them different? And can that difference be learned, acquired, or increased in others?

ACEs, traumas occurring during early life, may have a profound impact on both student learning and long-term quality of life. The list of ACEs includes abuse of any kind toward the child, witnessing the abuse of family members, neglect of any kind toward the child, separation or divorce of parents, living with family members who abuse alcohol or drugs, living with family members who suffer from mental illness, and the incarceration of family members (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Based on research gathered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020), 61% of adults surveyed across 25 states reported experiencing at least one ACE. According to Compassionate and Resilient Schools (n.d.), individuals experiencing ACEs have the potential to demonstrate disrupted neurodevelopment. There is also a risk of social, emotional, and cognitive impairment. Experiencing one or more ACEs can have a pronounced negative impact on student learning. Additionally, ACEs can have negative impacts on health (i.e., obesity, diabetes, depression, suicide attempts, sexually transmitted diseases, heart disease, cancer, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and broken bones), behavior (i.e., smoking, alcoholism, and drug use), and life potential (i.e., graduation rates, academic achievement, and lost time from work; Compassionate

and Resilient Schools, n.d.).

Poverty, often linked with trauma and sometimes considered a form of trauma, increases obstacles for students. “Poverty impacts children within their various contexts at home, in school, and in their neighborhoods and communities” (American Psychological Association, 2009, sect. 3). According to the American Psychological Association (2009), poverty can have a wide range of negative effects in areas such as academic growth and success, psychosocial well-being, and physical health.

To address the needs of students who have experienced trauma or poverty, classroom instruction must begin integrating strategies designed to build resilience. For example, teachers hoping to assist in resiliency-building may choose to keep in mind the background of students and consider student behaviors within the context of their histories, maintain predictable routines and preview changes in normal procedures, and/or make a habit of acknowledging specific strengths and skills students demonstrate (Minahan, 2019). Together, these strategies have the potential to positively impact students in the areas of academic performance and mental health. The purpose of this study was to determine what impact, if any, intentionally integrating social and emotional instruction with reading and writing standards had on the academic achievement, behavior, and resilience of sixth-grade middle school English language arts (ELA) students in a rural school in South Carolina.

Chapter 1 Overview

The introduction of this study includes multiple components. A brief connection of the topic to related research is followed by a discussion of areas in literature in which more information is needed. A description of the problem prompting the research and

purpose of the study as a whole provides the rationale for the project. Details of the research immediately follow. Research questions are declared. Afterward, the project's theoretical framework is described. I define the terms necessary to assist in the clarity of the work, and a discussion of the parameters including assumptions, delimitations, and limitations follows. To conclude the chapter, a review of the significance of the study is explained.

Related Literature

Traumatic experiences can have a crippling effect on students. According to Souers and Hall (2016), "For many young people who have experienced trauma, success–academic or otherwise–seems out of reach" (p. 10). As educators, it is important to understand that trauma is likely already a factor in the lives of many students. Souers and Hall advised awareness of the following truths:

1. Trauma is real.
2. Trauma is prevalent. In fact, it is likely much more common than we care to admit.
3. Trauma is toxic to the brain and can affect development and learning in a multitude of ways.
4. In our schools, we need to be prepared to support students who have experienced trauma, even if we don't know exactly who they are.
5. Children are resilient, and within positive learning environments, they can grow, learn, and succeed. (pp. 10-11)

Trauma, in its varying forms, is an issue that cannot go unaddressed. Prevalence alone brings a sense of urgency to the need for intervention. When considering the

consequences of trauma, educators are tasked with helping students navigate much more than academics.

The impact of poverty is equally far-reaching. According to Jensen (2019), "many poor students are different because many of their experiences are wiring their brains differently. The brain's neurons are designed by nature to *reflect* their environment, not to automatically rise above it" (p. 7). Based on the research of Jensen, educators must be mindful of the potential influence of poverty on students in the areas of physical health, stress, cognition, and social-emotional skills.

Perhaps the most alarming effect of trauma is its considerable impact on the brain. Van der Kolk (2014) explained, "The most important job of the brain is to ensure survival, even under the most miserable conditions. Everything else is secondary" (p. 54). Perry and Szalavitz, (2017) stated, "the stress response systems are among only a handful of neural systems in the brain that, if poorly regulated or abnormal, can cause dysfunction in all four of the main brain areas" (p. 19). Relating these brain functions back to students, Souers and Hall (2016) reported, "trauma is toxic to the brain as well as to the body" (p. 21). Additionally, Souers and Hall described the human response to extreme stress as the "flight, fight, or freeze response" (p. 21). Finally, Souers and Hall declared,

> Because the fetal, infant, and early childhood brain is so sensitive, chronically elevated levels of stress hormones can significantly disrupt the development of the brain in a multitude of ways, affecting learning, memory, mood, relational skills, and aspects of executive functioning–all required for success in a classroom setting. (p. 22)

For educators, awareness is not an adequate response to the trauma students may

experience. Instead, a trauma-informed model, a culture shift from fear-based to relationship-based, is needed (Sporleder & Forbes, 2016). It is critical that effective interventions be identified and implemented within the everyday classroom experience.

Deficiencies in the Literature

A vast amount of research exists on the prevalence of trauma and poverty and its impact on the human brain. Research has even begun to explore the ways that experiencing ACEs can inhibit positive behaviors, health, and life span. According to Compassionate and Resilient Schools (n.d.), people who experience ACEs are more likely to also experience the following: disrupted neurodevelopment; social, emotional, and cognitive impairment; depression; suicide attempts; and poor academic achievement. Finally, the need for schools to implement trauma-sensitive practices has begun to emerge in educational literature. Sporleder and Forbes (2016) described the focus as follows:

> The trauma-informed model works for all students–everyone benefits from being treated with kindness and connecting to caring staff. The trauma-informed model becomes a part of your everyday practice. It is not a model that is used to distinguish which students might be trauma-impacted or not. All K-12 students benefit from this approach and all will thrive. The reality is this, if it works with our most challenging students, certainly it will work with our less challenging ones. (p. 4)

What is lacking in current studies is the effectiveness of integrating regular academic standards with intentional instruction designed to build resiliency. An intervention, though well-intentioned, may or may not have the desired impact; thus, it is

vital for educational researchers to continue the study of how best to establish positive, lasting impacts on students. A cycle or series of cycles, which includes research, planning, action, evaluation, and reflection such as the action research model described by Koshy (2010), is a step toward measuring the results of such practice and analyzing the data for determining its impact.

Statement of the Problem

According to Children's Trust of South Carolina (2020a), 11,976 children in the state were identified as victims of founded abuse investigations during the 2018-2019 report. Of those, over 1,000 were identified in the area serving as the focus of this study. During the 2018-2019 term, 11,585 children in South Carolina were victims of neglect. More than 600 of those cases were found in the area serving as the focus of this study. Based on data gathered from the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2020), 246,000 South Carolina children were identified as living in poverty. Children's Trust of South Carolina (2020b) indicated that more than 20% of children living in poverty, or more than 15,000 children living in poverty, were residents of the area serving as the focus of this study.

In addition to obstacles such as abuse, neglect, and poverty, 100% of South Carolina students experienced the global COVID-19 pandemic's impact beginning March 15, 2020. At that time, Governor Henry McMaster issued Executive Order No. 2020-09 (2020) closing all schools in the state. Unknown to all students and educators at the time, March 13, 2020 was the last "normal" school day for children and school staff in South Carolina. Students in the county serving as the focus of this study completed their 2019-2020 school year virtually. For the 2020-2021 school year, students have attended school either virtually, in a hybrid model of virtual and face-to-face instruction, or in 5-days-a-

week face-to-face instruction with protective measures such as required face coverings, Plexiglas partitions around desks, and socially distanced transitions and breaks.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of intentionally integrating resiliency topics with academic standards in two areas: academic achievement and student perceptions of their own resilience. The impact on academic achievement was measured through a pre-assessment and post-assessment during the learning unit. The impact on student perceptions of their own resilience was measured through student written reflections and the use of the Brief Resilience Scale developed by Smith et al. (2008).

Participants included approximately one third of the sixth-grade ELA students in a rural middle school located in South Carolina. Four classes, two classified as college preparatory and two classified as advanced, consisting of males and females, participated in the action research study. No student was excluded based on gender or academic classification. Due to the prevalence of trauma and poverty in the area and experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, all students were considered likely to benefit from resiliency-building topics.

The choice to conduct action research aligned with the intent to improve my instructional practices. As Koshy (2010) explained, “action research opens up opportunities for practitioners to actually be involved in research which has an immediate relevance and application” (p. 36). Though the unit studied was one taught each year, the impact of integrating academics and resiliency-building topics had not yet been evaluated. In seeking evidence to determine what impact, if any, the unit might have on

both academic achievement and student perceptions of resilience, it was necessary to evaluate my approach. The findings of the study could both improve my instructional strategies and, potentially, the practice of other educators.

Research Questions

This study sought to introduce sixth-grade ELA students to an integrated unit that included both resiliency-building topics and South Carolina College and Career Ready Standards. The action research design involves cycles of planning, action and observation, reflection, and revision (Koshy, 2010); thus, the purpose of the study was to determine what impact, if any, integrating topics specifically chosen to build resiliency with reading and writing had on student academic achievement and perceptions of resilience.

1. What impact, if any, does integrating topics specifically chosen to build resiliency with reading and writing have on student academic achievement?
2. What impact, if any, does integrating topics specifically chosen to build resiliency with reading and writing have on student perceptions of resilience?

Theoretical Framework

This study was conducted according to an action research model. As explained by Koshy (2010), those who choose to conduct action research have improvement as their main objective. Action research supports a postmodernist view in which ongoing questions and revelations throughout the study allow beliefs to emerge (Koshy, 2010). Concepts of action research have their base in construction. “Action researchers are actively engaged in a process of *construction*. Their constructions are based on all the data they collect. They negotiate meanings which will emerge from their interpretations”

(Koshy, 2010, p. 23). As this study endeavored to generate an understanding of the impact on student academic achievement and perceptions of their own resilience through an integrated learning unit of resiliency-building topics and academic standards, it fits well within the postmodernist and constructivist frameworks.

When conducting action research, there are multiple tenets. Throughout this study, each tenet was connected to a specific action. Table 1 describes the connections to the study.

Table 1

Action Research Connections to the Study

Tenet	Connection the study
The objective is improvement.	To improve my practice, I explored the impact of integrating academics and resilience-building.
The study is designed to address a problem.	A large number of children in the area serving as the focus of this study had experience with trauma and/or poverty.
The study seeks to generate knowledge and enact change.	Findings of this study served to inform and improve my classroom practice and potentially the practice of other educators.
Participants are those for whom the study is designed.	I conducted this study with my students to inform current and future instructional practices.
The study is cyclical.	The study involved research, planning, action, evaluation, and reflection which continued even after the completion of this project.

Action research is first designed to address a problem (Koshy, 2010). In the case of this study, the research attempted to answer the needs of students who had experienced traumatic events, were experiencing ongoing trauma, or were living in poverty. Researching the impact of integrating resiliency-building topics within regular academic

content was an effort to generate knowledge and enact change, the second and third tenets of action research according to Koshy (2010). Fourth, those participating in the study were also those for whom the study was designed. In this case, the target was sixth-grade ELA students. According to Koshy, “Contrary to many other research paradigms, action research works *with* rather than *on* or *for* the researched” (p. 33). Additionally, functioning as the researcher and the classroom teacher, I was responsible for gathering the data that informed the instructional strategies. Finally, action research is a cycle (Koshy, 2010). This study involved research, planning, action, evaluation, and reflection which continued even after the completion of this project.

Conceptual Framework

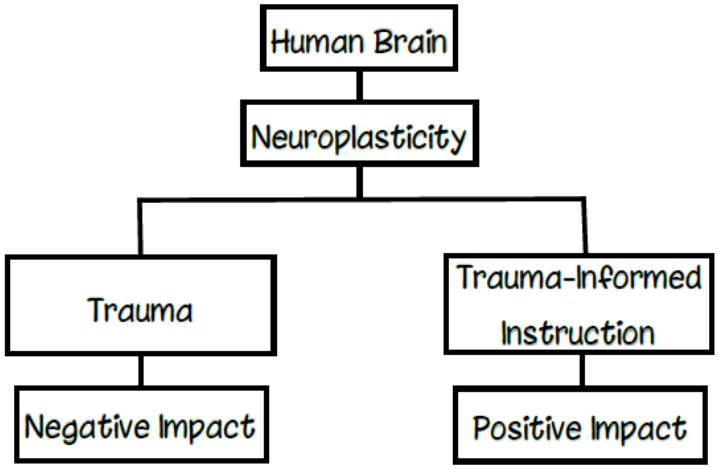
The literature indicated that trauma and poverty have a negative impact on those who endure such experiences. However, research also suggested that the human brain has the ability to grow, change, and recover through an ability known as neuroplasticity. According to Kelleher and Whitman (2020),

> Brains are never "set"; neurons are always being formed, connected, and pruned throughout our lives. The discovery of neuroplasticity is possibly the most important research-to-classroom instruction contribution from neuroscience. It means that all teachers must see themselves as "brain changers" and that every student, regardless of race, class, or gender, can learn through deliberate practice, scaffolded support, and positive relationships in school. (para. 5)

The research appeared to present a cause-and-effect relationship between external influences and the human brain through the ability known as neuroplasticity. Figure 1 describes the conceptual framework of the study.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



The action research conducted had its foundation in the agreement that if trauma and poverty can cause harm to the human brain, it is also possible that positive interventions known as trauma-informed instruction have the potential to counter the damage or lessen its effect.

Unfortunately, time is at a premium in many classrooms. Teaching resiliency-building strategies in isolation may not be an option for most educators; however, if resiliency-building was integrated with the prescribed academic standards and objectives, the impact on both academic achievement and student perceptions of resilience might be studied.

Sixth-grade ELA students in South Carolina are required to work with both literary and informational texts. As the classroom teacher and action researcher, I chose to approach the learning unit using informational texts. Current culture, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic continued, placed a great deal of emphasis on mental health and self-care. Typical sixth graders also experience an increased interest in themselves, not

just in needs and desires, but also in who they want to be as their bodies grow and change and as their peers become stronger influences in their daily lives (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020); thus, informational texts designed to help students understand themselves and grow into confident and empowered individuals were selected as the most likely to engage the learners based on interest and real-world relevance.

Definitions

Achievement

In education, achievement often refers to a student's mastery of an objective. The method of meeting such goals often involves effort from both teachers and students. It is the role of the educator to provide information and practice. It is the role of the student to employ the instruction to the learning and practice opportunities provided. "Achievement is what happens when you take your acquired skills and use them" (Duckworth, 2016, p. 42). Within the context of this study, reading and writing were measured by standards-aligned pre-assessments and post-assessments, learning menu activities, and journal prompts.

ACEs

Traumatic events may occur during all stages of life. ACEs refer to "traumatic events occurring before age 18" (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d., para. 2). Specifically, Child Welfare Information Gateway (n.d.) explained, "ACEs include all types of abuse and neglect as well as parental mental illness, substance use, divorce, incarceration, and domestic violence" (para. 2).

ELA

The academic subject of ELA refers to the study and practice of the English

language in all forms. According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2021), ELA specifically includes literature, informational texts, writing, language, speaking, and listening.

Poverty

Poverty is a term often used to describe financial conditions. However, it is important to note that while money is a key factor, it is not the only component of the condition. Payne (2019) defined poverty as, "the extent to which an individual does without resources" (p. 7). In addition to finances, resources may include emotional, mental/cognitive, spiritual, physical, support systems, relationships/role models, knowledge of hidden rules, and language/formal register (Payne, 2019).

Resilience

Resilience, as defined by the American Psychological Association (2012), is "the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress" (para. 4). Resilience may also be used to characterize those with an ability to "bounce back" (American Psychological Association, 2012) from difficulty.

Social and Emotional Learning

As our knowledge regarding the impact of adversity on learning has increased, social and emotional learning (SEL) has become a trending response to the concern. According to Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2020),

> SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and

caring decisions. (para. 1)

Trauma

Trauma is often misused as a term describing an event; however, the American Psychological Association (2021) explained, “trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event” (para. 1). Van der Kolk (2014) described trauma as, “unbearable and intolerable” (p. 1). Van der Kolk went on to state, “trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body” (p. 21).

Assumptions

During this study, multiple assumptions were made. First, it was assumed that among the participating students, some had experienced trauma and/or poverty. It was also assumed that while some students may not have experienced trauma and/or poverty, the experience of the state-wide school shutdown during the spring of 2020 and the unusual scheduling and safety measures of the 2020-2021 school year created stress for all students.

When completing the Brief Resilience Scale, available in Appendix A, it was assumed that students participating would understand the statements. It was also assumed that when completing the Brief Resilience Scale and reflections, students would answer honestly.

I also relied on sincere candor regarding student journaling. It was assumed that the responses to journal prompts were honest. I hoped that throughout the unit, students would create accurate, detailed entries sufficient to provide insight into their perceptions of their resilience. Journal prompts may be viewed in Appendix B.

Another assumption involved the resources used during the learning unit. It was assumed that the texts and activities were sufficiently able to assist in resiliency-building. Each text was selected based on its inclusion of topics such as stress management and/or empowerment. A list of the texts is included in Appendix C. It was also assumed that students would use the provided resources to complete assignments in their entirety.

Additionally, the unit's structure was aligned to strategies noted by Craig (2017) as effective for the development of resilience. Specifically, the unit included collaboration between students and their peers as well as between students and teachers, activities that integrated concepts from multiple disciplines, differentiation, dialogic teaching, formative assessments, high expectations along with scaffolding, and intentional inclusion of resiliency-building strategies. It was assumed that the unit's methodology would lead to effective implementation of the strategies recommended by Craig.

Delimitations

For the purposes of this action research project, certain delimitations were put into place. First, the study included only sixth graders. As I am a sixth-grade ELA teacher and the researcher, these were students in my care and under my influence. Additionally, while there were 12 ELA classes in the sixth grade at my site, only those I was responsible for teaching participated in the integrated learning unit. The texts used were obtained through grants, and there were not enough copies for the entire sixth grade. The grant-provided texts were available to the other ELA teachers, but their use of them was not required to align with the same learning unit and, of course, could not occur at the same time. Finally, I chose to use two different articles for students to analyze during the

pre-assessment and post-assessment. When taking the pre-assessment, students were provided an article not yet presented in class to analyze. Because students received feedback and referred to the article in their pre-assessment throughout the unit, I chose to change the article on the post-assessment to reflect a similar scenario and more accurately measure student responses to independently analyzed text.

Limitations

Limitations, or influences outside the control of the researcher, included the potential for subjectivity and broad generalization as well as a restricted timeline for data collection. Interpreting data may have involved subjective influencing. Because I, as the researcher, was also taking part in the project and had a preestablished relationship with the students, there was a risk of filtering results through background information or other details an outside researcher would not have been privy to when analyzing results. This information could have also contributed to a misinterpretation. For this reason, I chose to implement the practice of peer debriefing described by Creswell and Creswell (2018). Two colleagues who were familiar with sixth-grade ELA standards but not participants in the study were asked to review my analysis and offer feedback of affirmations or corrections regarding my qualitative findings. Additionally, due to the size and commonality of the subjects in the convenience sampling, findings had to be considered within the context of their demographics. Generalities could not be applied to a broader scope of students. Finally, the project took place within a single learning unit in one grading period. While a single unit is intended to be sufficient for academic growth, building resiliency is ongoing, even lifelong, and the measuring of changes over a lengthier period would have likely provided a more accurate indication of lasting impact;

therefore, the brevity of the intervention was also a limiting factor.

Significance

Determining the impact of intentionally integrating resiliency-building topics with academic standards may indicate a method for coping with and rising above the adverse effects of trauma and poverty. While researchers may refer to this study, educators stand to benefit the most. District-level administrators may choose to continue this research to identify effective instructional strategies for all classrooms. Site-based administrators may use the information for professional development to raise awareness and implement best practices for becoming a trauma-sensitive school. Classroom teachers may begin to apply new ideas or revise their own approaches to educating students who may have experienced trauma or poverty.

Summary

This action research project was built on the foundation of literature describing the impact of trauma and poverty. Based on the literature, it is clear that these experiences have the potential to negatively impact the lives of students on a long-term or lifetime scale. According to the National Education Association (2016), “The effects of these stressors from poverty and trauma are cumulative and work to impact brain structure and neuronal processes” (p. 8). These issues can no longer be avoided; thus, it is necessary to explore the impact of interventions.

This project sought to determine what impact, if any, integrating resiliency-building topics with academic standards might have on student perceptions of resilience and academic achievement. In the remaining contents of this study, a review of published research regarding trauma, poverty, and resilience is provided. The methodological

details of this action research project are described in the third chapter. Data gathered from the research are shared in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, a discussion of the findings follows and concludes the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Though the idea of countering trauma's impact may still be in its youth, the bank of research is rapidly growing. Throughout the creation of my study, I found it critical to stay within the parameters of keywords: trauma, poverty, and resilience. Following the existing literature was similar to walking a trail; beginning at the basic functions of the human brain, exploring trauma and its impact, and finally emerging with a clear understanding of applicable trauma-informed strategies. Integrating those strategies into an ELA learning unit designed to develop students academically and assist them in building their resiliency solidified the connection between the information gathered and the action research study.

Structure of the Human Brain

The brain, though only a small percentage of the physical makeup of the human body, is a remarkable organ. As explained by Mayfield Brain and Spine (2018),

> The brain is an amazing three-pound organ that controls all functions of the body, interprets information from the outside world, and embodies the essence of the mind and soul. Intelligence, creativity, emotion, and memory are a few of the many things governed by the brain. (para. 1)

According to Perry and Szalavitz (2017), the human brain is made up of 86 billion neurons (brain cells) which are organized into four main parts: the brain stem, the diencephalon, the limbic system, and the cortex. Each component is organized from the inside out with complexity increasing from the inner to the outer structure. As Perry and Szalavitz described,

> Our four brain areas are organized in a hierarchical fashion: bottom to top, inside

> to outside. A good way to picture it is with a little stack of dollar bills – say five. Fold them in half, place them on your palm and make a hitchhiker's fist with your thumb pointing out. Now, turn your fist in a "thumbs down" orientation. Your thumb represents the brainstem, the tip of your thumb being where the spinal cord merges into the brainstem; the fatty part of your thumb would be the diencephalon; the folded dollars inside your fist, covered by your fingers and hand, would be the limbic system; and your fingers and hand, which surrounds the bills, represent the cortex. When you look at the human brain, the limbic system is completely internal; you cannot see it from the outside, just like those dollar bills. Your little finger, which is now oriented to be the top and front, represents the frontal cortex. (p. 18)

Each of the four components of the human brain has varying responsibilities to the person as a whole.

Brainstem Function

The brainstem, perhaps the literal and figurative base of operations, is responsible for critical life functions. According to Perry and Szalavitz (2017), "[it] mediates our core regulatory functions such as body temperature, heart rate, respiration, and blood pressure" (p. 18). Van der Kolk (2014) described the brainstem as, "The most primitive part, the part that is already online when we are born…often called the reptilian brain" (p. 56). He went on to say, "The reptilian brain is responsible for all the things that newborn babies can do" (Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 56). As human brains develop from the lowest and most basic structures and functions first, the brainstem is the foundation.

Diencephalon Function

The diencephalon is a complex region of the brain. Made up of four substructures, the diencephalon includes the thalamus, hypothalamus, subthalamus, and epithalamus. The thalamus is a type of sensory processing center or "the 'cook' within the brain. The thalamus stirs all the input from our perceptions into a fully blended autobiographical soup" (Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 60). Nearly all human sensations pass through the thalamus before being sorted and sent to the appropriate "next stop" in the brain. The hypothalamus is a regulator. Seladi-Schulman (2018) explained the responsibilities of the hypothalamus as consisting of releasing hormones; regulating critical functions such as temperature, appetite, emotional responses, and sexual behavior; and maintaining physiological cycles. Van der Kolk (2014) also described the hypothalamus as a system that works together with the brainstem. The subthalamus is the portion of the diencephalon thought to help regulate sexuality, food and water intake, and cardiovascular activities (Crumbie, 2021). The fourth component of the diencephalon, the epithalamus, is involved in regulating circadian rhythms and connects the diencephalon to the limbic system (Crumbie, 2021).

Each component of the diencephalon is critical to supporting human life. According to Bailey (2019), "Despite being small and inconspicuous, the diencephalon plays a number of critical roles in healthy brain and bodily function within the central nervous system" (para. 2). Crumbie (2021) agreed, stating, "Each of the components of the diencephalon has specialized functions that are integral to life. The diencephalon acts as a primary relay and processing center for sensory information and autonomic control" (para. 2). Without the fully functional diencephalon, the quality of life has the potential to

decline significantly.

Limbic System Function

Working in tandem, "The diencephalon and the limbic system handle emotional responses that guide our behavior like fear, hatred, love, and joy" (Perry & Szalavitz, 2017, p. 18). Van der Kolk (2014) detailed the work of the limbic system as,

> the seat of the emotions, the monitor of danger, the judge of what is pleasurable or scary, the arbiter of what is or is not important for survival purposes. It is also a central command post for coping with the challenges of living within our complex social networks. (p. 56)

Though the limbic system's growth is a natural part of human development, it is important to note that life experiences also shape this part of the brain. According to Van der Kolk (2014), "The limbic system is shaped in response to experience, in partnership with the infant's own genetic makeup and inborn temperament" (p. 56). This link between natural progress and outside influences is critical to understanding responses to adverse experiences.

Cortex Function

The cortex of the brain, the top and outermost area, is the part that, according to Van der Kolk (2014), lends humans their separate and unique qualities from animals. As Perry and Szalavitz (2017) stated, "the cortex, regulates the most complex and highly human functions such as speech and language, abstract thinking, planning, and deliberate decision making" (p. 18). Van der Kolk credited the cortex as the part of the brain that allows humanity to reason, reflect, and even predict outcomes. Bailey (2020) explained that the cortex is also involved in determining intelligence, personality, and sensory

processing. The cortex is also the part of the brain that develops the slowest, not fully formed in most individuals until the mid to late 20s (Perry & Szalavitz, 2017). With the cortex playing such a critical role in higher functioning, negative experiences have great power over a person's ability to adequately and successfully process information and make decisions.

Neuroplasticity

A relatively recent discovery, neuroplasticity, also known as brain plasticity, is the current driving force behind many trauma-recovery methods. According to Van der Kolk (2014), neuroplasticity can be described as, "the flexibility of brain circuits, to rewire the brains and reorganize the minds of people" (p. 169). Brown et al. (2014) explained, "All knowledge and memory are physiological phenomena, held in our neurons and neural pathways" (p. 166). From birth, humans have approximately 100 billion neurons that connect to one another through synapses in order to pass signals along the neural network (Brown et al., 2014). "It's this circuitry that enables our senses, cognition, and motor skills, including learning and memory, and it is this circuitry that form the possibilities and the limits of one's intellectual capacity" (Brown et al., 2014, p. 167). While the majority of rapid synapse formation happens during the earliest stages of life, most knowledge acquisition takes place afterward (Brown et al., 2014). "The architecture and gross structure of the brain appear to be substantially determined by genes but...the fine structure of neural networks appears to be shaped by experience and to be capable of substantial modification" (Brown et al., 2014, p. 168).

An understanding of neuroplasticity provides the framework of trauma recovery. While it is true that trauma compromises the brain, there is also evidence to support a

positive impact from intentional efforts to heal and rebuild those areas or even establish and grow mental resilience.

> This vast increase in our knowledge about the basic processes that underlie trauma has also opened up new possibilities to palliate or even reverse the damage. We can now develop methods and experiences that utilize the brain's own natural neuroplasticity to help survivors feel fully alive in the present and move on with their lives. (Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 3)

Not a simple solution, Duckworth (2016) explained that being told it is possible to overcome a past or current adversity is not effective. An individual must also make efforts and experience successes and/or mastery of the brain's initial response to trauma to begin rewiring the neural circuits.

Trauma and Poverty

When defining trauma, the summation of all definitions could be considered simply a negative experience; however, to call trauma *only* a negative experience would not adequately describe its impact. The Center for Health Care Strategies, Inc. (2021) provided the following: "[Trauma] results from exposure to an incident or series of events that are emotionally disturbing or life-threatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, and/or spiritual well-being" (para. 1). According to the American Psychological Association (2021), "Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event" (para. 1). Van der Kolk (2014) described trauma as, "unbearable and intolerable" (p. 1).

Trauma, the responses of the mind and body to a negative experience, is not limited to the time and place of a single event. Rather, continuous adversity is often a

hallmark of trauma. Directly related to students, Sporleder and Forbes (2016) explained,

> For most, their trauma wasn't a one-time incident…it didn't happen overnight. It happened and continues to happen on a perpetual and long-term basis. Many of our students experienced years of toxic stress in toxic home environments that shifted them into living every moment of every day in survival mode. Their new "normal" is fear, reactivity, and failure. This is how they have survived. It is all they know. The result is that their brains are wired for fear...their brains are not "bad" and their reactivity isn't necessarily "wrong." They are products of their environments. They have survival brains and that's how they enter their classrooms every day. (p. 1)

The Center for Health Care Strategies, Inc. (2021) also noted a lack of assistance as a component of trauma: "Toxic stress is an emotional and/or physical response that occurs when a person experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity without adequate support" (para. 9). The absence of protective factors while a person attempts to navigate or simply survive trauma greatly compounds the impact.

Poverty, a specific kind of trauma, is defined by Payne (2019) as, "the extent to which an individual does without resources" (p. 7). Jensen (2019) described the need for considering poverty based on an increase in the amount of Americans experiencing poverty, especially as those once considered "middle class" begin to succumb to the loss of opportunities for well-paying employment with only high school diplomas, cost-of-living does not keep up with inflation, and technology replaces human resources. Payne was also careful to explain that resources are not limited to finances but also include assets in the areas of emotional control, mental/cognitive skills, spiritual beliefs, physical

health, support systems, relationships/role models, knowledge of hidden rules, and language/formal register abilities.

The impact of poverty is significant, especially for the human brain. As Jensen (2019) stated,

> Many poor students are different because many of their experiences are wiring their brains differently. The brain's neurons are designed by nature to *reflect* their environment, not to automatically rise above it. Chronic exposure to poverty affects the areas of the brain responsible for memory, impulse regulation, visuospatial actions, language, cognitive capacity, and conflict. (p. 7)

The similar responses of individuals who experience poverty to those who experience other forms of trauma cannot be ignored. This connection marks a justifiable inclusion of poverty in trauma-responsive research.

Effects of Trauma and Poverty on the Brain

Trauma, though experienced externally, evokes internal responses. Van der Kolk (2014) described the potential for continuous impact by explaining,

> While we all want to move beyond trauma, the part of our brain that is devoted to ensuring our survival (deep below our rational brain) is not very good at denial. Long after a traumatic experience is over, it may be reactivated at the slightest hint of danger, and mobilize disturbed brain circuits, and secrete massive amounts of stress hormones. (p. 2)

Continuing the link between trauma and survival instincts, Van der Kolk discussed the typical human response to danger: fight, flight, or freeze.

> If for some reason the normal response is blocked…the brain keeps secreting

> stress chemicals, and the brain's electrical circuits continue to fire in vain. Long after the actual event has passed, the brain may keep sending signals to the body to escape a threat that no longer exists. (Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 54).

Perry and Szalavitz (2017) also noted a link between over-signaled stress response and distractibility, impulsivity, and counter-productive decision-making.

While hyperactivity is a common response to trauma, it is important to recognize the potential for dissociation as a reaction as well.

> During dissociation, the brain prepares the body for injury. Blood is shunted away from the limbs and the heart rate slows to reduce blood loss from wounds. A flood of endogenous opioids–the brain's natural heroin-like substances–is released, killing pain, producing calm and a sense of psychological distance from what is happening. (Perry & Szalavitz, 2017, p. 50)

Some have so distanced themselves from emotional reactions that they no longer feel empathy or appear capable of compassion (Perry & Szalavitz, 2017). Whether the person who has experienced trauma has a hyperarousal response or dissociates, it is the ongoing response to danger, even after safety is ensured, that is of greatest concern.

Processing adversity is a natural part of life; however, extreme threats or continuous toxic stressors compound the risk of dysfunction in the brain. Van der Kolk (2014) stated, "trauma produces actual physiological changes, including recalibration of the brain's alarm system, an increase in stress hormone activity, and alterations in the system that filters relevant information from irrelevant" (pp. 2-3). As the thalamus processes and interprets sensory input in an effort to avoid danger and ensure survival, it has two options for signaling response: the amygdala which is rapid, automatic, and an

unconscious part of the brain; and the second choice, the frontal lobes, which are slower to reach but conscious and capable of reasoning (Van der Kolk, 2014). Van der Kolk likened the amygdala to a smoke detector and explained that sensing a threat, the amygdala triggers a whole-body response before the frontal lobes of the brain have come to a conscious understanding of the event. The frontal lobes, according to Van der Kolk, are more like a watchtower.

> Ordinarily, the executive capacities of the prefrontal cortex enable people to observe what is going on, predict what will happen if they take a certain action, and make a conscious choice. Being able to hover calmly and objectively over our thoughts, feelings, and emotions…and then take our time to respond allows the executive brain to inhibit, organize, and modulate the hardwired automatic reactions preprogrammed into the emotional brain. (Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 62)

In a healthy mind, there is a balance between the amygdala and the frontal lobes, but the brain damaged by trauma can experience a shift or an unbalance (Van der Kolk, 2014). According to Larson et al. (2017), "1 in 5 children and adolescents have a diagnosable mental health disorder that can cause severe lifetime impairment" (para. 1). This inability to process stimuli and respond appropriately causes a person to live in a significantly reduced state of mental and emotional health.

Effects of Trauma and Poverty on the Body

Considering its power to control most life-sustaining functions, it is no surprise to learn that a brain compromised by trauma is often connected to a body also experiencing adversity's negative impact. According to Perry and Szalavitz (2017), those who have endured traumatic events may suffer from hypertension, elevated heart rate, and sleep

disruption. The Center for Youth Wellness (2017) added that children who experienced adverse conditions or events are at risk for asthma, poor growth, frequent infections, heart disease, stroke, and cancer. Compassionate and Resilient Schools (n.d.) also described increased risks of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, broken bones, and early death. Based on the research, it is clear that trauma, no matter when it occurs, can be detrimental to a person's physical health.

Effects of Trauma and Poverty on Behavior

While trauma may wreak havoc on the body and brain, experiencing toxic stress due to events or ongoing negative conditions may also have a significant impact on a person's behavior. The Center for Health Care Strategies (2021) stated,

> People affected by trauma may develop coping mechanisms to help alleviate the emotional and/or physical pain they feel as a result of trauma. Sometimes, these strategies involve maladaptive behaviors–such as unhealthy eating, tobacco use, or drug and alcohol use. These coping mechanisms may provide some relief, but they can also simultaneously contribute to anxiety, social isolation, and chronic diseases. (para. 6).

Compassionate and Resilient Schools (n.d.) explained that children who experience trauma are also more likely to abuse alcohol, use illicit drugs, smoke tobacco products, demonstrate poor academic achievement, demonstrate poor work performance, experience financial stress, engage in early and dangerous sexual encounters which could lead to sexually transmitted diseases or unintended pregnancy, build relationships with violent partners, and attempt suicide.

Positive relationships may also be threatened when an individual experiences

trauma. Jensen (2019) listed socio-emotional relationships among the indicators of students who have experienced poverty. The Center for Health Care Strategies (2021) also noted,

> Regardless of the type of trauma a person has experienced, traumatic experiences impact relationships. This includes, but is not limited to, relationships between people, communities, and the delivery systems that support individuals' health and social needs. When a person experiences trauma, he or she may feel unsafe, betrayed, and/or have difficulty trusting others. This can lead to heightened emotions, such as anger or aggression, or a tendency toward shame, numbing, and/or isolation. (para. 7)

With positive and supportive relationships being a major factor in trauma recovery, the breakdown of a person's ability to form and maintain healthy relationships is a great concern.

Effects of Trauma and Poverty on Learning

A person who has experienced trauma is also at risk when it comes to learning processes. The Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (n.d.) explained, "traumatic experiences in childhood can diminish concentration, memory, and the organizational and language abilities children need to succeed in school" (para. 1). Jensen (2019) advised educators of students dealing with poverty to understand that a student's response to the trauma of a lack of adequate resources may include poor memory, higher distractibility, learned helplessness, apathy, deficient vocabulary, and poor reading skills. Payne (2019) noted that individuals who have lived in poverty may struggle with reading, writing, and computing skills along with a lack of knowledge in how to use appropriate formal

vocabulary required for school or work. The Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative stated,

> Learning to read, write, take part in a discussion, and solve mathematical problems rests on many underlying foundations—organization, comprehension, memory, the ability to produce work, engagement in learning, and trust. Another prerequisite for achieving classroom competency is the ability to self-regulate attention, emotions, and behavior. Not surprisingly, trauma resulting from overwhelming experiences has the power to disturb a student's development of these foundations for learning. It can undermine the development of language and communication skills, thwart the establishment of a coherent sense of self, compromise the ability to attend to classroom tasks and instructions, interfere with the ability to organize and remember new information, and hinder the grasping of cause-and-effect relationships—all of which are necessary to process information effectively. (para. 2)

It is a common belief that education is the key to helping a person rise above their circumstances. Unfortunately, traumatic experiences may be a lock that prohibits students from gaining the knowledge and skills necessary to secure a better life. It is imperative for educators to recognize that an academics-only approach is no longer effective, if it ever was.

Trauma-Informed Instruction

As the understanding of trauma and its negative impact grows, the question quickly moves from "What is happening?" to "What can we do about it?" Attempts to address the latter query have brought about a practice known as trauma-informed or

trauma-sensitive approaches. According to Sporleder and Forbes (2016),

> Trauma-informed refers to all the ways in which a service system is influenced by having an understanding of trauma and the ways in which it is modified to be responsive to the impact of traumatic stress. A program that is "trauma-informed operates within a model or framework that incorporates an understanding of the ways in which trauma impacts an individual's socio-emotional health. This framework should theoretically, decrease the risk of re-traumatization as well as contribute more generally to recovery from traumatic stress." (pp. 33-34)

Craig (2017) clarified by stating, "By definition, trauma-sensitive schools are safe zones, which buffer students from external forces that threaten their potential, while at the same time fostering the skills [students] need to regulate internal emotions and drives" (p. 5). Institutions that implemented school-wide trauma-informed strategies were coined "safe and supportive schools" by Rossen and Hull (2013), who explained,

> Safe and supportive schools have focused on the integration of academic competency, social and emotional functioning, healthy relationships, physical safety, and student health/well-being to foster positive learning environments for *all* students; this is particularly true for those with trauma histories. (p. 253).

Despite the many varied definitions, a summary of trauma-informed is one that includes an awareness that trauma exists and creates additional challenges for students, the belief that there is hope for recovery, and a commitment to addressing the impact of trauma while simultaneously meeting academic and behavioral standards.

Building Resiliency

Hope for recovery is a powerful weapon in the arsenal of a trauma-informed

teacher. Realizing that not only is a person able to heal, but they are also able to grow stronger after experiencing adversity led many to seek out strategies designed to support this development. Known as resiliency, Romero et al. (2018) defined the characteristic as, "the ability to recover or bounce back from difficult challenges" (p. 44). Souers and Hall (2016) declared, "Resilience can be learned and practiced; it is not a genetic trait that we inherit" (p. 154). Embracing the evidence that resiliency can be acquired and/or strengthened provided the foundation of trauma-informed practices.

Educators who promote and strive to build resiliency in students implement protective factors for all students. According to Sporleder and Forbes (2016), "Protective factors are resources, skills, strengths, and coping mechanisms available to those impacted by trauma to help them more effectively handle the stress and reduce the long-term effects of trauma" (pp. 42-43). Table 2 lists protective factors for students who have been impacted by trauma.

Table 2

Protective Factors That Promote Resilience

External	Internal
Caring and supportive relationships	Competent and efficient social skills
Supportive and safe environments	Problem-solving skills
Challenging but obtainable expectations for success	Autonomy
Opportunities to belong	Sense of purpose
Opportunities to have meaningful interactions with others	Feelings of being effective
Connection to community	Sense of being "all right"
	Vision of better future
	Self-regulatory skills

Note. Adapted from *The Trauma-Informed School: A Step-By-Step Implementation Guide for Administrators and School Personnel*, by J. Sporleder and H. Forbes. Copyright 2016 by Beyond Consequences Institute, LLC.

Supportive and positive environments, relationships, and interactions are critical, yet the integration of academic and/or cognitive protective factors are also important to student development of resilience. Specifically addressing academic strategies, Craig (2017) recommended collaboration between students and their peers as well as between students and teachers, activities that integrate concepts from multiple disciplines, differentiation, dialogic teaching, formative assessments, and high expectations along with scaffolding. Most notably, it is not only students who have experienced adversity who may profit from intentional resiliency-building. "Every student, whether impacted by trauma or not, stands to benefit from the academic environment providing more tools

for sustainability with a focus on social and emotional development" (Sporleder & Forbes, 2016, p. 43). While educators may create plans with students who have experienced trauma in mind, all students have the opportunity to grow their resilience as a result of those strategies.

Action Research

Research, in any form, is an attempt to gain understanding. Within the realm of education, ideas on best practices are ever-changing. The development of strategies and approaches may be based on evidence or even an instructor's intuition. Action research is a methodology that assists educators in distinguishing justifiable beliefs from mere opinions. Its features include an overall purpose of improving practice; a cycle of action, evaluation, and reflection; evidence-based changes in practice; researchers as participants; a situation-based study; may involve problem-solving; and an allowance for findings to emerge as action develops (Koshy, 2010). A detailed description of the action research cycle conducted in this study is provided in Chapter 3.

Connections to the Study

Although it is a regular part of the annual curriculum, the learning unit students experienced during my action research was intentionally designed with trauma-informed strategies in mind. According to state ELA standards, students are required to analyze informational texts and evaluate the strength of authors' claims and arguments, cite text evidence to support analysis of conclusions drawn from explicit and inferred ideas, identify text features and structures that support authors' claims, and provide objective summaries of informational texts with two or more central ideas. These objectives were demonstrated through tasks included in a learning menu that students called a Book Club

Catalogue or BCC. A pre-assessment and post-assessment were used to measure the overall growth regarding informational text standards. These assessments are available in Appendices D and E. Basic writing objectives in the form of journal entries were aligned to state standards that require students to write routinely for a variety of purposes, write with logical organization, and demonstrate a command of standard English grammar and conventions (capitalization, punctuation, and spelling).

Integrating resilience-building with ELA may be beneficial for both areas. According to the Center for Responsive Schools (2021), "Literacy in particular provides rich opportunities for reflecting on the connections between our thoughts, feelings, and actions; taking on someone else's perspective; and using language and writing to navigate social dynamics and build relationships" (para. 5). The connection to resilience-building in this unit lies in its structure and the texts studied. Students participated in small groups they called book clubs. The small groups allowed students to collaborate with peers and with me. The texts provided for book clubs were researched and chosen based on their content. Those selected were designed to assist readers in addressing topics such as self-empowerment and stress management. As noted previously, Sporleder and Forbes (2016) listed protective factors that promote resiliency to include supportive environments and relationships; opportunities to connect, belong, and have meaningful interactions; the use and growth of social, problem-solving, and self-regulatory skills; and sense of purpose and effectiveness. In their small groups, students had the opportunity to explore and practice each of these.

The unit also included academic resiliency-building factors noted by Craig (2017). Students read and worked with concepts across disciplines, specifically ELA and

science. I offered whole group mini-lessons, but the majority of my instruction was completed through one-on-one and small group dialogue. As students moved through the tasks on their Book Club Catalogues, they received formative, actionable feedback for each. Additionally, though each student needed to demonstrate the meeting of each objective, tasks were differentiated for students who needed enrichment and for those who needed extra support. Successful completion of book clubs is always a challenge, but through the use of one-on-one and small group instruction, I scaffolded instruction to best suit the needs of each learner.

Summary

When choosing to study trauma, it was necessary to begin where trauma is first experienced, in the mind. Recognizing how a healthy brain functions clarified the overall negative impact of adverse experiences. As a result of the damage, individuals may experience multiple forms of cognitive, social, and even physical dysfunction. The discovery of neuroplasticity became the foundation for recovery practices among doctors and counselors and for the trauma-informed instructional strategies implemented among educators. From the literature, the action research study, an exploration of the impact of intentional resilience-building integrated with ELA academic standards, was developed.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The literature clearly demonstrates the significant and comprehensive negative impact of trauma and poverty. There remains a need for further study on the effectiveness of intentional attempts to build resiliency as a counterbalance to this negative impact. Specifically, what impact, if any, does the integration of resiliency training with academic standards have on both scholastic achievement and perceptions of resiliency? A mixed methods study in which quantitative data in the form of assessment scores and Brief Resilience Scale ratings and qualitative data in the form of journal writing analysis was necessary to complete the action research.

Setting

This study took place in a rural middle school in South Carolina. While the site was not served by federal Title I funding, nearly 60% of students were classified as "students in poverty," based on participation in the following programs: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, foster care, and/or homeless/migrant housing assistance. The middle school contained students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades and served approximately 850 students. Table 3 describes the demographic data of the students.

Table 3

Approximate Student Demographics

Demographic category	Approximate number enrolled	Approximate percentage enrolled
Female	435	51.2%
Male	415	48.8%
Caucasian/White	520	61.1%
African American/Black	190	22.3%
Hispanic/Latino	60	7.1%
Asian	20	2.4%
American Indian, Alaskan Native, Hawaiian Native, or Pacific Islander	5	0.6%
Two or More Races	55	6.5%

The number of female and male students was almost equally split with female enrollment being slightly higher. The largest ethnicity represented was Caucasian/White, with nearly 520 students in the category. Approximately 190 students were African American/Black. Approximately 60 students were considered Hispanic or Latino. Approximately 20 students were identified as Asian. Five students represented ethnicities of American Indian, Alaskan Native, Hawaiian Native, or Pacific Islander. Roughly 55 students claimed two or more races.

Further broken down, the sixth-grade demographic data are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Approximate Sixth-Grade Student Demographics

Demographic category	Approximate number enrolled	Approximate percentage enrolled
Female	135	50%
Male	135	50%
Caucasian/White	170	63%
African American/Black	50	18%
Hispanic/Latino	20	7%
Asian	10	4%
American Indian, Alaskan Native, Hawaiian Native, or Pacific Islander	5	2%
Two or More Races	15	6%

The number of female and male students was equally split. The largest ethnicity represented was Caucasian/White, with 170 students in the category. Approximately 50 students were African American/Black. Approximately 20 students were considered Hispanic or Latino. Approximately 10 students were identified as Asian. Five students represented ethnicities of American Indian, Alaskan Native, Hawaiian Native, or Pacific Islander. Roughly 15 students claimed two or more races. Just as the sixth-grade demographics aligned with the site's overall population, the classes participating in the unit also reflected the sixth-grade and site-wide breakdowns.

Literacy skills were measured by two benchmark tests, STAR Reading and iReady Reading. STAR Reading scores indicated student reading levels. Teachers at the site specifically used Lexile levels provided by STAR Reading reports to analyze

achievement. iReady Reading also measured student reading levels; however, beyond simply providing assessment, iReady Reading was also an instructional tool that provided students with individualized lessons based on assessment results. Every student in each grade level was tested in the fall, winter, and spring. According to STAR Reading, 38% of students site-wide and 43% of sixth graders were working at or above grade level. Data from iReady Reading indicated that 34% of students site-wide and 35% of sixth graders were working at or above grade level in literacy. A concern for the literacy of students within the school exists and is a continuation of concerns from years past.

Participants

Participants for this study included students in four sixth-grade ELA classes at the school. Approximately 70 students were enrolled in the classes, and all took part in the unit. Those enrolled were split nearly equally between females and males, and all ethnicities recorded in the school-wide population were represented. Additionally, students scoring within each testing range of working below, at, or above a sixth-grade level in literacy were included.

Participants were chosen based on their enrollment in my classes, a form of convenience sampling. “In convenience sampling, the researcher generally selects participants on the basis of proximity, ease of access, and willingness to participate” (Urdan, 2017, p. 3). As the researcher, choosing to work with participants under the influence of my own instruction was practical for proximity and fidelity in the implementation of the unit. Being the only teacher in the study ensured that unit plans were followed in their entirety and that data gathered were analyzed through a consistent lens. Because I am solely responsible for the instruction in four of the 12 sixth-grade

ELA classes, my sample represented an estimated one third of sixth graders participating in face-to-face instruction. While the site served students who elected to enroll virtually, teachers instructing face-to-face did not serve those who participated in the virtual academy.

In this study, I took on the responsibility of teaching the integrated unit and the role of the researcher. An advantage of choosing the action research method as noted by Koshy (2010) was, "researchers can be participants–they don't have to be *distant* and *detached* from the situation" (p. 25). With the intention of exploring and improving instructional practice while addressing the social and emotional needs of students who have experienced trauma or poverty, the decision to function as the project's researcher aligned with Koshy's description of action research's ability to address practical problems.

> [Action research] generally involves the identification of practical problems in a specific context and an attempt to seek and implement solutions within that context. As the project is situated within the workplace, the ownership of change is a priority and the goal is to improve professional practice. (Koshy, 2010, p. 33)

During the action research project, I was engaged with the learning and growth of current students, and I was also seeking evidence to support my own professional development and benefit future students.

Research Design

As an action research project, this study was modeled after the cycle described by Koshy (2010) in which research, planning, action, evaluation, and reflection were conducted. To improve my practice, I elected to study a learning unit that is a normal part

of my annual curriculum. During this unit, students participated in book clubs and worked together in those small groups to read and respond to texts designed to promote resilience. A complete list of the titles offered is provided in Appendix C. Text levels were intentionally not shared with students. Instead, students were encouraged to make their selections based on interest. Long considered a "best practice," Parrott (2019) explained,

> Student choice makes students active participants in their educations, thereby increasing levels of engagement. Notably, researchers highlight the fact that such autonomy is generally associated with greater personal well-being and satisfaction in educational environments as well as in terms of academic performance. (para. 11)

Although students were not required to know or read within certain levels, I did work to ensure a wide range of texts were available. Book levels ranged from a Lexile level of 410L to 1270L, which covers offerings significantly below grade level, on grade level, and significantly above grade level. Additionally, all texts were informational which aligned to the standards the unit addressed.

The unit was implemented during a 3-week time period. Figure 2 is an overview of the unit lessons.

Figure 2

Unit Scope and Sequence

Informational Text Book Clubs Scope and Sequence

Day	Activities
1	1. Academic Pre-Assessment 2. What is Resilience? (mini-lesson) 3. BRS Reflection Journal 1
2	1. Brief Resilience Scale Assessment 1 2. BRS Reflection Journal 2 3. Book Club Book Shopping
3	1. Book Club Catalogue Introduction 2. Book Club Formation 3. Text Selections 4. Clubs Establish Reading Plans
4	1. Mini-lesson: Citing Text Evidence (purpose and stems) 2. Book Club Collaboration 3. Teacher Conferences
5	1. Mini-lesson: Citing Text Evidence (supporting conclusions and inferences) 2. Book Club Collaboration 3. Teacher Conferences
6	1. Mini-lesson: Identifying Informational Text Features and Purposes 2. Book Club Collaboration 3. Teacher Conferences
7	1. Mini-lesson: Identifying Informational Text Structures and Purposes Evaluating Claims and Arguments 2. Book Club Collaboration 3. Teacher Conferences
8	1. Mini-lesson: Identifying Author's Claims and Arguments 2. Book Club Collaboration 3. Teacher Conferences
9	1. Mini-lesson: How Features and Structures Support Author's Claims and Arguments 2. Book Club Collaboration 3. Teacher Conferences
10	1. Mini-lesson: Evaluating Author's Claims and Arguments 2. Book Club Collaboration 3. Teacher Conferences
11	1. Mini-lesson: Writing Objective Summaries 2. Book Club Collaboration 3. Teacher Conferences
12	1. Mini-lesson: Frequently Asked Questions Addressed 2. Book Club Collaboration 3. Teacher Conferences
13	1. Academic Post Assessment 2. BRS Reflection Journal 3
14	1. Brief Resilience Scale Assessment 2 2. BRS Reflection Journal 4
15	1. Book Club Catalogue's Finest Showcase

To launch the unit, students were given an academic pre-assessment. This assessment was created to provide a baseline of information regarding the knowledge and skills students possessed before the unit began. The unit's pre-assessment may be viewed in Appendix D. The pre-assessment was carefully aligned to the standards I intended to address throughout the unit. Table 5 provides the questions-to-standards alignment.

Table 5

Academic Pre-Assessment Standards Alignment

Question/task	Standard
1. Which of the following identifies the central idea of the text?	***Base question leading to the following: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
2. Which section from the text best supports the answer to Question 1?	Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
3. What is the author's argument in the text?	Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.
4. Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Question 3?	Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.
5. Consider the author's argument noted in Question 3. Are the reasons and examples the author uses strong enough to support the argument?	Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.
6. What is the author's purpose for including the illustration on Slide 1? Do you believe this illustration helps support the author's argument?	Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not. Identify text features and structures that support an author's ideas or claim.
7. Please provide an objective summary of that article using five sentences or less.	Provide an objective summary of a text with two or more central ideas; cite key supporting details.

When completing the academic pre-assessment, students were given an opportunity to demonstrate their current knowledge and ability. Specifically, students were measured in areas that included citing text evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences, tracing and evaluating arguments and claims, identifying text structures and features that support an author's ideas, and creating objective summaries.

The academic pre-assessment intentionally included opportunities for students to demonstrate knowledge and skill in a format used for other ELA assessments throughout the year and one in which students were both familiar and adept at navigating. While some questions were multiple choice and could either be scored as only correct or incorrect, the assessment also included three extended-response questions. The questions requiring extended responses provided students the freedom to exhibit skills using the language most accessible to their individual vocabularies. For example, questions in which students must evaluate an author's choice were scored based on the student's ability to describe the author's choice, the strength or effectiveness of that choice, and evidence from the article to support their evaluation. Much like analyzing journals for themes, I read each response looking for key words and indicators of student abilities to identify the author's argument, reasons, examples, and informational text features. Additionally, responses must include text evidence to support the evaluations. To assess the objective summarizing, students must accurately provide a summary of the article with all arguments/claims and without analysis or evaluation. Extended responses could achieve scores of correct, partially correct, or incorrect.

Before attempting to measure resilience, I wanted to ensure that each student had

an opportunity to become familiar with the vocabulary and meanings used throughout the unit. For this reason, I taught a mini-lesson describing resilience as the ability to bounce back from adversity, to work through challenges, and to overcome obstacles. Students were then asked to complete a journal entry in which they predicted where they expected their score on the Brief Resilience Scale to fall: low, normal, or high range. Finally, students completed the Brief Resilience Scale assessment and were asked to again journal about their responses to their scores. The Brief Resilience Scale is available in Appendix A, and journal prompts may be viewed in Appendix B.

Launching the reading portion of the unit required students to individually browse all reading options. While students were given a copy of the book list included in Appendix C, I also asked students to peruse hard copies of each text in order to view the structure, style, and language of each. Students were then asked to consider and choose the participants of each book club. Once clubs were formed, each group made a final decision regarding the book it would read for the unit. With club members identified and copies of their texts in hand, students were provided with Book Club Catalogues. This document was issued to assist students in keeping up with the tasks required throughout the unit and may be viewed in Appendix F.

After completing all the initial steps required to begin book clubs, students followed a daily routine of participating in a mini-lesson taught to the entire class, working in their small groups, and conferencing with me. To help keep students focused on the unit's objectives, I issued weekly guides which were referenced in their Book Club Catalogues and are available in Appendix G. Weekly guides not only provided students with clarity and practice regarding the academic objectives on which to focus each week,

they also included opportunities for students to describe connections between their texts and resiliency. These connections were discussed during group conferences and one-on-one conversations based on the sensitivity of the responses. As this was an integrated unit, I was intentional in directing the focus toward both the academic objectives and resiliency-building.

To complete the unit and provide a means of measuring growth, students were given the academic post-assessment. This assessment may be viewed in Appendix E. Just as the pre-assessment, the post-assessment was carefully aligned to the standards taught throughout the unit. Table 6 provides the questions-to-standards alignment.

Table 6

Academic Post-Assessment Standards Alignment

Question/task	Standard
1. Which of the following identifies the central idea of the text?	***Base question leading to the following: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
2. Which section from the text best supports the answer to Question 1?	Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
3. What is the author's argument in the text?	Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.
4. Provide two details from the text that support the answer to Question 3?	Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.
5. Consider the author's argument noted in Question 3. Are the reasons and examples the author uses strong enough to support the argument?	Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.
6. What is the author's purpose for including the photograph on Slide 1? Do you believe this illustration helps support the author's argument?	Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not. Identify text features and structures that support an author's ideas or claim.
7. Please provide an objective summary of that article using five sentences or less.	Provide an objective summary of a text with two or more central ideas; cite key supporting details.

When completing the academic post-assessment, students were again given an opportunity to demonstrate their current knowledge and ability. Specifically, though I changed the article, students were still measured in areas that included citing text evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences, tracing and evaluating arguments and claims, identifying text structures and features that support

an author's ideas, and creating objective summaries.

Like the pre-assessment, the academic post-assessment intentionally included multiple choice and extended response questions. Multiple choice responses could only be scored as correct or incorrect. Extended response questions required students to evaluate an author's choice and were scored based on the student's ability to describe the author's choice, the strength or effectiveness of that choice, and evidence from the article to support their evaluation. Objective summarizing expectations included an accurate summary of the article with all arguments/claims and without analysis or evaluation. Extended responses could achieve scores of correct, partially correct, or incorrect.

To measure growth in resilience, students repeated a similar process to that which took place at the beginning of the unit. Students were asked to complete a journal entry in which they predicted where they expected their score on the Brief Resilience Scale to fall: low, normal, or high range. Finally, students completed the Brief Resilience Scale assessment and were asked to again journal about their responses to their scores. The Brief Resilience Scale is available in Appendix A, and journal prompts may be viewed in Appendix B.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered concurrently and used to guide instructional best practices. Table 7 describes the alignment of the research questions to the data gathered.

Table 7

Research Questions and Data Alignment

Question	Data
What impact, if any, does integrating topics specifically chosen to build resiliency with reading and writing have on student academic achievement?	Academic Pre-Assessment – quantitative Academic Post-Assessment – quantitative
What impact, if any, does integrating topics specifically chosen to build resiliency with reading and writing have on student perceptions of resilience?	Brief Resilience Scale 1 – quantitative Brief Resilience Scale 2 – quantitative Journal Entries - qualitative

At the beginning of the learning unit, quantitative data in the form of the unit's pre-assessment and initial Brief Resilience Scale rating were gathered alongside the qualitative data of student opening journal reflections. The unit's pre-assessment measured student mastery of the academic standards. The Brief Resilience Scale measured student perceptions of their own resilience. Upon completion of the unit, a post-assessment and second Brief Resilience Scale rating were conducted to complete the quantitative component of the study. Again, the unit's post-assessment measured student mastery of the academic standards, while the Brief Resilience Scale measured student perceptions of their own resilience. Student journal reflections, four in total, were analyzed for the qualitative portion of the data. Journal prompts provided students with an opportunity to make predictions and reflect on their perceptions of their own resilience.

Data Analysis

After gathering academic pre-assessment, academic post-assessment, initial Brief Resilience Scale, and final Brief Resilience Scale data, dependent samples *t* tests, also

known as paired samples *t* tests, were conducted. According to Urdan (2017), "In the real world of research, dependent *t* tests are often used to examine whether the scores on some variable change significantly from one time to another" (p. 94). The means of the pre-assessment and post-assessment were compared and analyzed for statistical significance. Likewise, the initial and final Brief Resilience Scale ratings' means were compared and analyzed.

In addition to quantitative data gathering and analysis, I collected student journal entries for qualitative analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Students completed journal entries before and after each Brief Resilience Scale assessment. During journaling, students described their predictions or reflections on their personal resilience levels. Journal Prompts 1 and 2 were created to gather initial thoughts and feelings about student resilience after participating in a mini-lesson designed to define or clarify resilience. Journal Prompts 3 and 4 were created to gather student thoughts and feelings about their resilience after completing the unit. Journal Prompts 1 and 3 invited students to discuss their predictions of their resilience level according to the Brief Resilience Scale which classifies scores into three categories: low resilience, normal resilience, or high resilience. Journal Prompts 2 and 4 asked students to reflect on the Brief Resilience Scale scores and describe their agreement or disagreement with their outcomes as well as their thoughts on factors that may have contributed to the results. Journal entries were organized and coded to identify themes. I was specifically looking for descriptions of strength and growth or a lack thereof. Defining resilience as the ability to bounce back from adversity, to work through challenges, and to overcome obstacles, I expected to find themes that included recovery from trials, problem-solving, and moving beyond internal and external

hindrances. Specific areas in which resilience may or may not be noted included but were not limited to academics, extra-curricular interests, and relationships. The actual themes identified were summarized and aligned to the research questions for analysis. Qualitative validity, a procedural approach for maintaining the accuracy of findings, was accomplished through multiple strategies: member checking–allowing participants to check themes for accuracy, rich description–providing detailed setting descriptions, and peer debriefing–allowing a person unconnected to the research to review and ask questions of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For the establishment of qualitative reliability, I documented the steps of the process as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018).

Ethical Considerations

The unit implemented was one in which students would participate regardless of the action research study. Past students have participated in book clubs and used texts covering social and emotional topics. Academic standards have not changed since the creation of the unit, and objectives to be met to demonstrate skill-mastery also remained the same. Pre-assessments and post-assessments are used each year. Learning menus and journal entries have also always been included in the unit.

What does change from year to year are the titles available to students due to my continued grant writing and adding to our library. I also vary the materials used in mini-lessons due to student interest or newfound resources. This year, I added the Brief Resilience Scale to our unit. Students used their scale results as topics for reflective journal entries, and I used scale results as a quantitative measurement of student perceptions of social and emotional strengths.

Although the action research was work that would be completed during a regular school year and the unit was one that would be taught regardless, I wanted to be especially diligent in protecting the rights of my students. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained, “The ethical considerations that need to be anticipated are extensive, and they are reflected through the research process” (p. 90). First, approval for the use of the Brief Resilience Scale was obtained from district- and site-level administration. While this tool was used by students as a topic of self-reflection in journal entries, it was a new component in the unit this year. For the sake of transparency and student protection, seeking administrative approval seemed prudent. Additionally, when recording and analyzing data, students were not identified by either name, true identification numbers, or demographics. Instead, all data attributed to individuals were given a randomized number. Finally, all data were stored on a USB drive used solely for this study’s data. The USB drive will be stored in a secure safe for 3 years after the completion of the study and then destroyed.

Researcher’s Role

While it was appropriate for me, as the researcher, to also be a participant in the action research study, it was also important to note my role as the classroom teacher. I have been a classroom teacher in the same district where the study was conducted for the past 16 years. Additionally, for the majority of the students, I was their only sixth-grade ELA teacher. Approximately 15 learners transferred from a virtual school setting or other schools during the spring semester. For those students, I was their sole ELA instruction provider during the time of the unit, but I was not their first ELA teacher of the 2020-2021 school year. As the classroom teacher, I worked to build classroom communities

and establish positive relationships with each student throughout our time together. When approaching this study, I was open to the results provided by the data, but I also understood that I had a protective passion toward the participants which could bias my findings.

Summary

To assess the impact of intentional integration of resiliency-building and academics, the action research took place during a preestablished ELA unit for sixth-grade students in a rural South Carolina middle school. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and analyzed. I used pre-assessments, post-assessments, and journal entries to measure academic growth and the Brief Resilience Scale and journal entries to measure perceptions of growth in resilience. Though this unit would have been taught regardless, student privacy was maintained due to the use of their work in the study. As the classroom teacher, I also functioned as the researcher and analyzed the findings with the understanding that the purpose of action research is to improve practice.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was both teacher- and student-driven. In an attempt to improve my professional practices and to provide students with academic, social, and emotional tools, I chose to implement an action research project designed to determine the impact of an ELA unit intentionally integrated with resilience-building topics and strategies. Though the unit is a regular part of annual instruction, a study of its effectiveness had not been conducted in previous years.

Research Questions

The unit taught and examined through the action research study served a dual purpose. When designing the original unit in 2018, it was my intention to develop a collaborative project in which students might grow academically and potentially gain pointers or encouragement for living positive lives.

As with other units, instruction and student responses were aligned to academic standards. Specific objectives included analysis of informational texts and evaluation of the strength of authors' claims and arguments, citing text evidence to support analysis of conclusions drawn from explicit and inferred ideas, identifying text features and structures that support authors' claims, and providing objective summaries of informational texts with two or more central ideas. These standards were addressed through mini-lessons and conferences and assessed during the academic pre-assessment and academic post-assessment.

The texts studied were part of a resiliency-building library I compiled over time. Books were obtained through grants and other financial opportunities. All texts were written to address resilience and/or empowerment. A complete list of the options

provided to students during the 2020-2021 school year is available in Appendix C. It is also important to note that the resiliency-building library is always growing and changing. For example, as new funding is obtained, new titles are added. Additionally, as students provide feedback regarding the texts they are reading, some books may be removed from the set due to lack of interest and/or engagement or incorporated into the regular classroom library due to overwhelming popularity.

Book clubs were planned and structured as a way of promoting student engagement in the standards-aligned unit. When students participated in book clubs, they were given two choices: which book within the resiliency-building library they would read and which classmates they would work with to study their chosen book. Once texts were selected and clubs were formed, each group created their own set of working norms which included both expectations and group actions if norms were violated. These choices and governing decisions provided students both a sense of empowerment and belonging. Additionally, students were given the authority to solve problems among themselves. I made it known that I was willing to assist when resolving conflicts or thinking through logistical problems, but I was pleased to observe most groups attempting to handle these tasks among themselves. The reading of books took place among students. Texts were not read aloud as a whole group. Instead, I taught daily mini-lessons regarding academic objectives and then conducted group and one-on-one conferences. This decision encouraged students to collaborate with peers and with me. Conferences also allowed for opportunities to correct, affirm, and extend understanding. To maintain the focus of the project when students were not working directly, I provided weekly guides in which students practiced the focus skills of the week and connected

their texts back to resilience and their personal lives.

With the unit evolving each year and the overwhelming literature suggesting a high prevalence of trauma among students, I began to seek evidence of an impact on academics and social and emotional health. For this action research study, two research questions became the focus:

1. What impact, if any, does integrating topics specifically chosen to build resiliency with reading and writing have on student academic achievement?
2. What impact, if any, does integrating topics specifically chosen to build resiliency with reading and writing have on student perceptions of resilience?

To answer each question, I collected and analyzed data gathered throughout the unit. Specifically, academic pre-assessments and post-assessments, Brief Resilience Scale scores, and journal entries were examined.

Chapter 4 Overview

When conducting the action research study, I collected data concurrently. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered in a pre-unit and post-unit strategy to measure growth or a lack of growth to align with my assessment of impact. To present the findings, I chose to group data by research question. To address the first research question, "What impact, if any, does integrating topics specifically chosen to build resiliency with reading and writing have on student academic achievement," I present and analyze the data from the academic pre-assessment and post-assessment. To address Research Question 2, "What impact, if any, does integrating topics specifically chosen to build resiliency with reading and writing have on student perceptions of resilience," I describe and analyze Brief Resilience Scale Assessments 1 and 2 and Journals 1, 2, 3, and

4.

Maintaining the Integrity of the Data

To support the reliability and validity of the findings, certain methods were established. Students submitted responses through assignments I uploaded to their Google Classrooms. Once responses were completed, I exported each into a Microsoft Word document. Using a Word document instead of a Google document provided an extra measure of data security. Results were not stored on the Internet, and assignments were removed from the Google Classroom after they were exported. Responses were arranged by numbers which were randomly assigned to maintain the privacy of each student.

Analysis of quantitative data, including academic and Brief Resilience Scale assessments, required more than comparisons of averages or means. In addition, pre-assessments and post-assessments were also analyzed for statistical significance. As Urdan (2017) explained, "[researchers] are still interested in determining whether the difference in the means we observe in some sample(s) on some variable represents a true difference in the population(s) from which the sample(s) were selected" (p. 100). To determine whether a true difference was accomplished, dependent samples *t* tests also known as paired samples *t* tests were conducted for the academic pre-assessments and post-assessments as well as for the two Brief Resilience Scale assessments.

Qualitative data required a different form of analysis. As student journal entries were not assigned numeric results, it was the organization and determining of themes that were required. Additionally, given that qualitative data may be at a greater risk for subjective interpretation, I chose to implement strategies recommended by Creswell and

Creswell (2018), including member checking, rich description, peer debriefing, and documentation of the steps of the process.

Research Question 1

The first research question, "What impact, if any, does integrating topics specifically chosen to build resiliency with reading and writing have on student academic achievement," was specifically designed to address curriculum and academic concerns. To explore this question, I collected and analyzed data from the learning unit's academic pre-assessment and academic post-assessment.

Academic Pre-Assessment

Before completing the learning unit, students were assigned an academic pre-assessment comprised of multiple choice and extended response questions. Standards required students to analyze informational texts and evaluate the strength of authors' claims and arguments, cite text evidence to support analysis of conclusions drawn from explicit and inferred ideas, identify text features and structures that support authors' claims, and provide objective summaries of informational texts with two or more central ideas. Each question included in the pre-assessment was directly aligned to one or more standards. Table 5 depicts the academic pre-assessment and standards alignment. As a review, Table 5 is presented.

Table 5

Academic Pre-assessment Standards Alignment

Question/task	Standard
1. Which of the following identifies the central idea of the text?	***Base question leading to the following: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
2. Which section from the text best supports the answer to Question 1?	Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
3. What is the author's argument in the text?	Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.
4. Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Question 3?	Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.
5. Consider the author's argument noted in Question 3. Are the reasons and examples the author uses strong enough to support the argument?	Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.
6. What is the author's purpose for including the illustration on Slide 1? Do you believe this illustration helps support the author's argument?	Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not. Identify text features and structures that support an author's ideas or claim.
7. Please provide an objective summary of that article using five sentences or less.	Provide an objective summary of a text with two or more central ideas; cite key supporting details.

Because the first assessment was a pretest, grades were assigned but not entered into the grade book. It was important to me that students had a numeric baseline for their scores before completing the learning unit. This would allow them the opportunity to reflect and draw conclusions regarding their progress when the unit was completed. Students were provided their percentages and feedback regarding their individual

responses. Table 8 describes the overall results of the academic pre-assessment.

Table 8

Academic Pre-Assessment Scores

Score range	Letter grade	Standards achievement	Number of students	Percentage of students
90%-100%	A	Pass	1	1.43%
80%-89%	B	Pass	3	4.29%
70%-79%	C	Pass	9	12.86%
60%-69%	D	Pass	7	10%
50%-59%	F	Fail	16	22.85%
40%-49%	F	Fail	10	14.28%
30%-39%	F	Fail	6	8.57%
20%-29%	F	Fail	12	17.14%
10%-19%	F	Fail	3	4.29%
0%-9%	F	Fail	3	4.29%

After scoring the academic pre-assessment, I chose to organize scores by percentage ranges that could be aligned to the numeric and letter grades students would have earned if the pre-assessment had been entered into the grade book.

On the academic pre-assessment, only 20 students, or 28.58%, earned what would be considered a passing score. Among those, only four students, or 5.72%, earned an A or B, which are the letter grades necessary for students to be included on the honor roll. Though it is not an idea that is promoted by teachers and administrators, most students and their families consider grades high enough to qualify for honor roll status a measure of success beyond simply obtaining a passing grade. Based on the academic pre-assessment, 50 of 70 students, or 71.43%, were not able to meet the unit's standards; 71.42% of students would have had failing grades if the pre-assessment was entered in the grade book.

Academic Post-Assessment

After completing the learning unit, students were assigned the academic post-assessment. As stated previously, I chose to have students analyze an article different from the one used during the pre-assessment. Because students were given feedback on the pre-assessment and the article was addressed during mini-lessons and conferences, I wanted to ensure that the post-assessment would measure the skills taught and not simply the memory of correct answers. Again, the same standards assessed in the academic pre-assessment and taught in the learning unit were measured, and the questions were either similar or the same. In review, students were expected to analyze informational texts and evaluate the strength of authors' claims and arguments, cite text evidence to support analysis of conclusions drawn from explicit and inferred ideas, identify text features and structures that support authors' claims, and provide objective summaries of informational texts with two or more central ideas. Each question included in the post-assessment was directly aligned to one or more standards. Table 6 depicts the academic pre-assessment and standards alignment and is presented as a review.

Table 6

Academic Post-Assessment Standards Alignment

Question/task	Standard
1. Which of the following identifies the central idea of the text?	***Base question leading to the following: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
2. Which section from the text best supports the answer to Question 1?	Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
3. What is the author's argument in the text?	Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.
4. Provide two details from the text that support the answer to Question 3?	Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.
5. Consider the author's argument noted in Question 3. Are the reasons and examples the author uses strong enough to support the argument?	Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.
6. What is the author's purpose for including the photograph on Slide 1? Do you believe this illustration helps support the author's argument?	Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not. Identify text features and structures that support an author's ideas or claim.
7. Please provide an objective summary of that article using five sentences or less.	Provide an objective summary of a text with two or more central ideas; cite key supporting details.

Unlike the pre-assessment, students were made aware that post-assessment scores, like any other unit test, would be entered in the grade book. Feedback was again provided in both percentages and written and verbal comments for the purposes of growth and continued learning. For this study, results of the academic post-assessment were organized as those of the pre-assessment. Table 9 depicts the overall scores.

Table 9

Academic Post-Assessment Scores

Score range	Letter grade	Standards achievement	Number of students	Percentage of students
90%-100%	A	Pass	18	25.71%
80%-89%	B	Pass	14	20%
70%-79%	C	Pass	13	18.57%
60%-69%	D	Pass	9	12.86%
50%-59%	F	Fail	9	12.86%
40%-49%	F	Fail	0	0%
30%-39%	F	Fail	4	5.71%
20%-29%	F	Fail	2	2.86%
10%-19%	F	Fail	0	0%
0%-9%	F	Fail	1	1.43%

After scoring the academic post-assessment, I again chose to organize scores by percentage ranges that could be aligned to the numeric and letter grades students would receive in the grade book.

Of 70 students, 54, or 77.14%, earned what was considered passing scores. These students were able to meet the academic standard. Thirty-two students, or 45.71%, achieved an A or B, which is necessary for honor roll status, an unspoken standard of success among many students and families. The academic post-assessment indicated that 16 of 70 students, or 22.86%, earned a failing grade and were not able to meet the unit's standards.

Changes in Academic Assessments

When comparing the academic pre-assessment and the academic post-assessment, it became evident that many changes occurred. Figure 3 indicates the changes between the academic pre-assessment and the academic post-assessment.

Figure 3

Changes Between Academic Pre-Assessment and Academic Post-Assessment

Students Increasing Scores Between Pre-Assessment and Post Assessment	Students with No Change in Scores Between Pre-assessment and Post Assessment	Students Decreasing Scores Between Pre-Assessment and Post Assessment
84.29%	4.29%	11.43%

From the comparison, I discovered that 84.29% of students increased their scores between the academic pre-assessment and academic post-assessment. There were 4.29% of students who saw no change in results between the two assessments. Another 11.43% of the students saw a decrease in their scores.

A comparison of individual assessment averages provided compelling evidence of positive impact; however, it was also important to know whether the difference in the scores of this group of students was due to random chance or could be attributed to the intervention of the instruction and instructional strategies. To make that determination, it was necessary to analyze the change in test scores for statistical significance (Urdan, 2017); thus, a dependent samples *t* test, again also known as a paired samples *t* test, was conducted. Figure 4 illustrates the results of the *t* test.

Figure 4

Academic Assessments Dependent t Test Results

Paired Samples T-Test

Paired Samples T-Test

			statistic	df	p
Pre-assessment	Post Assessment	Student's t	−8.69	69.0	< .001

Descriptives

	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Pre-assessment	70	47.7	50.0	21.4	2.56
Post Assessment	70	73.9	78.6	21.8	2.60

While the dependent samples *t* test provided a wealth of statistical information, it was the *p* value that provided the information I most sought, whether or not the difference between pre-assessment and post-assessment scores was statistically significant. *P* value is the probability value of data occurring by random chance rather than as a result of the intervention the researcher introduced (McLeod, 2019). A smaller *p* value indicates stronger evidence that random chance was not responsible for the gathered data, and *p* values less than .05 are considered statistically significant (McLeod, 2019). After conducting the dependent/paired samples *t* test for the academic assessments, I discovered the *p* value was < .001. The data were not likely to have occurred by random chance. This indicated that the learning unit's impact on academic achievement was indeed statistically significant.

Research Question 2

The second research question, "What impact, if any, does integrating topics

specifically chosen to build resiliency with reading and writing have on student perceptions of resilience," concerned student perceptions of their own resilience. To address this question, I conducted both quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative data were gathered from the Brief Resilience Scale assessment. As with the academic assessments, students took the Brief Resilience Scale before and after the learning unit. Differences between pre-unit and post-unit results were compared and analyzed. Qualitative data were gathered from reflective journal entries. Students completed four journaling activities during the learning unit: an entry before the first Brief Resilience Scale assessment, after the first Brief Resilience Scale assessment, before the second Brief Resilience scale assessment, and after the second Brief Resilience Scale assessment. Journal entries were organized and grouped according to responses and coded for themes indicating resilience or a lack thereof.

Brief Resilience Scale Assessment 1

To measure student perceptions of resilience, both quantitative and qualitative methods were implemented. The quantitative tool known as the Brief Resilience Scale created by Smith et al. (2008) provided students with six statements. Students responded by providing their agreement or disagreement to each statement. The Brief Resilience Scale may be viewed in Appendix A. To complete this assessment, students were first provided with a mini-lesson created to frontload the vocabulary necessary to understand our working definition of resilience. As a review, we described resilience as the ability to bounce back from adversity, to work through challenges, and to overcome obstacles. After the mini-lesson, students responded to a reflective journal in which they predicted the outcome of their first Brief Resilience Scale test. Students then completed the first

Brief Resilience Scale assessment and were provided with both their numeric scores and the resilience range in which their scores aligned.

Gathering and interpreting the results of the Brief Resilience Scale assessment involved only a few mathematical steps prescribed by Smith et al. (2008). Again, when completing the Brief Resilience Scale, students were given six declarative statements. After each sentence, students chose a response: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, or strongly agree. Each response was pre-assigned a number. At the end of the assessment, students would have a raw score ranging from 6 to 30. To determine the results of the scale, the total score was then divided by 6. Brief Resilience Scale scores ranged from 1 to 5. Ranges were classified as follows: 1 to 2.99 was considered the low resiliency range, 3 to 4.30 was considered the normal resiliency range, and 4.31 to 5 was categorized as the high resiliency range.

After completing the Brief Resilience Scale, students were provided with their results and the resiliency range in which their score was classified. Having this information was essential to student reflective journaling as students made predictions and responded to their results. Additionally, the results of the first Brief Resilience Scale assessment provided students a baseline from which they could measure their progress from the beginning to the end of the learning unit. Table 10 provides the results of the first Brief Resilience Scale assessment.

Table 10

Brief Resilience Scale Assessment 1 Results

Score range	Score range interpretation	Number of students	Percentage of students
1–2.99	Low resiliency	34	48.57%
3–4.30	Normal resiliency	31	44.29%
4.31–5	High resiliency	5	7.14%

Once all scores were recorded, I chose to organize the data based on the resiliency ranges indicated by the results of the assessment.

The first Brief Resilience Scale assessment indicated that 34 of 70 student responses, or 48.57%, fell within the low resiliency range. These students may struggle to bounce back from adversity, to work through challenges, and to overcome obstacles a significant amount of the time. Thirty-one of 70 students, or 44.29%, scored within the normal resiliency range, meaning these students may be able to bounce back from adversity, work through challenges, and overcome obstacles with the exception of trials causing extreme stress and/or trauma. Only five of 70 students, or 7.14%, gave responses resulting in a score within the high resiliency range. These students may have the ability to bounce back from adversity, work through challenges, and overcome obstacles the majority of the time regardless of the intensity of the trial experienced. Students were nearly evenly divided between those who scored in the low resiliency range and those who scored in the normal or high resiliency ranges.

Brief Resilience Scale Assessment 2

After completing the unit, students were again assigned the Brief Resilience Scale assessment. Just as with the first assessment, students were provided with their results and the resiliency range in which their score was classified. Table 11 provides the results

of the second Brief Resilience Scale assessment.

Table 11

Brief Resilience Scale Assessment 2 Scores

Score range	Score range interpretation	Number of students	Percentage of students
1–2.99	Low resiliency	19	27.14%
3–4.30	Normal resiliency	41	58.57%
4.31–5	High resiliency	10	14.29%

Once all scores were recorded, I again chose to organize the data based on the resiliency ranges indicated by the results of the assessment.

The second Brief Resilience Scale assessment indicated that 19 of 70 student responses, or 27.14%, fell within the low resiliency range. Forty-one of 70 students, or 58.57%, scored within the normal resiliency range. Ten students of the 70, or 14.29%, gave responses resulting in a score within the high resiliency range. As stated, 19 of 70 students, or 27.14%, gave responses resulting in low resiliency range categorization, while 51 of 70 students, or 72.86%, provided answers resulting in scores within the normal or high resiliency range.

Changes in Brief Resilience Scale Assessments

As with the academic assessment, there were changes in the results between the first and second Brief Resilience Scale assessments. Figure 5 illustrates the changes.

Figure 5

Changes Between Brief Resilience Scale Assessment 1 and Brief Resilience Scale Assessment 2

Students Increasing Scores Between Test 1 and Test 2	Students with No Change in Scores Between Test 1 and Test 2	Students Decreasing Scores Between Test 1 and Test 2
68.57%	1.43%	30.00%

Brief Resilience Scale assessment data indicated that 68.57% of students increased their scores, 1.43% saw no change between Tests 1 and 2, and 30% experienced a decrease in scores.

I again turned to the dependent samples, or paired samples *t* test, to determine whether the results were truly significant. Figure 6 depicts the results of the *t* test.

Figure 6

Brief Resilience Scale Assessments t Test Results

Paired Samples T-Test

Paired Samples T-Test

			statistic	df	p
Assessment 1	Assessment 2	Student's t	−3.95	69.0	< .001

Descriptives

	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Assessment 1	70	2.98	3.00	0.738	0.0883
Assessment 2	70	3.29	3.33	0.754	0.0901

As previously explained, the dependent samples *t* test provided a variety of statistical information. Yet again, it was the *p* value that provided the information I needed most, whether the difference between Brief Resilience Scale Assessment 1 and

Brief Resilience Scale Assessment 2 scores were statistically significant. After conducting the dependent/paired samples *t* test for the Brief Resilience Scale assessments, I discovered that the *p* value was < .001. The data were not likely to have occurred by random chance. This indicated that the learning unit's impact on student perceptions of their own resilience was statistically significant, based on the data from the Brief Resilience Scale.

Reflective Journals

Before and after the learning unit, students were asked to complete reflective journal entries. Prompts were provided to give topical guidance only. Students created and submitted their journals electronically and anonymously. Each journal entry was organized and coded for themes. The qualitative data gained provided a deeper understanding of student experiences and personal perceptions.

Journal 1. In the first reflective journal, students were given the prompt, "You will soon begin an assessment known as the Brief Resilience Scale. Before you begin, spend some time describing your thoughts. Do you believe your score will land in the low, normal, or high resilience range?" I expected to find students describing themselves and predicting their assessment results to indicate either low, normal, or high resilience. In most cases, that did occur; however, a small percentage were undecided and described expecting to fall between two ranges. Table 12 was created to quantify the number of students providing each response.

Table 12

Themes of Journal 1

Themes	Subthemes	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
Low resilience prediction		9	13.43%
	Sense of powerlessness over emotions	6	8.96%
	Death	2	2.99%
	Personal trauma	1	1.49%
Low to normal resilience prediction		10	14.93%
	Sense of powerlessness over emotions	6	8.96%
	Negative habits	2	2.99%
	Lack of self-esteem	1	1.49%
	Compassion for others	1	1.49%
Normal resilience prediction		40	59.70%
	Situationally appropriate emotions	25	37.31%
	Sense of power over emotions	8	11.94%
	Supportive relationships	4	5.97%
	Faith	2	2.99%
	Sense of powerlessness over emotions	1	1.49%
Normal to high resilience prediction		5	7.46%
	Situationally appropriate emotions	3	4.48%
	Positive mindset	2	2.99%
High resilience prediction		3	4.48%
	General lack of emotional responses	2	2.99%
	Problem-solving	1	1.49%

Prior to completing the learning unit, students predicted the outcomes of their Brief Resilience Scale assessments which naturally led to expected themes of low, normal, and high resilience range predictions. Of the 70 students participating in the unit, three students either did not complete Journal 1 or submitted unclear responses. For this reason, only 67 journal entries were included in the data. What was not expected was a percentage of students who were undecided, leading to themes of low to normal and normal to high resilience range predictions. Subthemes included reasons or justifications for predictions such as a sense of powerlessness or situationally appropriate emotions. Additionally, some subthemes were present in multiple main themes.

Theme 1: Low Resilience Prediction. When completing the first reflection journal, 13.43% of students indicated a belief that they would fall into the low resilience range when taking the Brief Resilience Scale assessment. Among those, 8.96% described a sense of powerlessness over their emotions. As one student wrote, "I can't ever think about good things when a bad thing happens to me." Another 2.99% indicated experiences with death as reasons for predicting a low resilience range score. One student wrote, "I can't overcome things that hurt my heart." Finally, 1.49% described personal trauma as justification for the likelihood of scoring in the low resilience range.

Theme 2: Low to Normal Resilience Prediction. The second theme was the first unexpected theme to emerge during the first reflection journals. I did not anticipate students describing an undecided or divided resilience range prediction; however, with 14.93% of students making this prediction, it was clear it would be unwise to attempt forcing each noncommittal response into an anticipated theme. Reasons and examples were both rich and compelling. As with those who predicted scoring in the low resilience range, another 8.96% described a sense of powerlessness over emotions. One student bluntly stated, "You literally *can't* [stop thinking negatively]." Within this group, 2.99% of students described personal negative habits such as holding onto grudges and "cutting off" or ending friendships. Another1.49% of students gave descriptions indicating low self-esteem, stating, "I'm not really confident in myself," and "I get mad at myself." The most surprising subtheme was the indication of compassion for others as a reason for predicting a score between the low and normal range. Finally, 1.49% mentioned concern for the health of injured and ill loved ones as a key factor holding them back from feeling resilient.

Theme 3: Normal Resilience Prediction. The third theme included the largest number of students, with 59.70% predicting a score within the normal resilience range on the Brief Resilience Scale. Among those, 37.31% described situationally appropriate emotions, the first subtheme in the group, as a rationale for their predictions. As one student wrote, "I sometimes have bad days and sometimes have good days…no one is perfect." Another, describing the same subtheme, optimistically explained, "I believe the more you're going through, the better it will feel to get out of the situation." This is also the first theme in which a subtheme of empowerment emerged. In this group, 11.94% described a sense of power over their emotions. A student indicating agreement with this subtheme stated, "I have to understand and tell myself I can't change what happens in life. Instead, I ask myself, 'It happens for a reason, right?' This helps me just look on the bright side. Everything happens for a reason." Another student summed up their thoughts, writing, "When I take the time to give myself that extra space, I can bounce back." Another 5.97% described supportive relationships as a reason for their predictions. One student credited those who encourage them as directly responsible for helping them maintain a normal resilience, sharing, "I have people all around telling me that I can do it," and "I might also struggle with some things, but I know that those people have my back." Within this group, 2.99% indicated their personal faith as a reason they would likely score within the normal resilience range. "I pray, 'God, help me,'" shared one student who explained that belief in and prayer to God gave them access to the support to make it through tough times. Interestingly, 1.49% within this group also described a sense of powerlessness over emotions. According to one student, "I can get over things, but my mind is still thinking about it. Sometimes, you can set your mindset back and not

really the rest of you."

Theme 4: Normal to High Resilience Prediction. As previously stated, a theme of falling between two score ranges was not expected, yet again, some students were not willing to commit to predicting a definite score. Among them, 7.46% indicated a belief that they would fall between the normal and high resilience ranges. Another 4.48% described situationally appropriate emotions. One student gave the matter-of-fact explanation of, "I am happy when it's happy and sad when it's sad," which effectively summarized others' responses. Finally, 2.99% described a generally positive mindset as the reasoning for their predictions. One student stated that despite multiple losses of loved ones, "I look for the good," while another explained, "I try not to worry." One student also secured their reasoning by explaining, "Being stressed can lead to a lot of different things like your head hurting, madness, sadness, and more. There you go. That's why you don't need to worry about so much life. We are only kids."

Theme 5: High Resilience Prediction. Though it was an anticipated theme, the prediction of high resilience only represented 4.48% of students. Among those, 2.99% described themselves as unaffected or unemotional in general. One student wrote, "I don't have a lot of emotions," while another declared, "I'm not affected by much. I can deal with stuff very well. Not much gets under my skin. I roll with the punches." Finally, 1.49% mentioned an ability to problem solve as their justification for predicting a high resilience range score. As one student explained,

> I know how to find a way out of the problem. It doesn't matter if I will have to create my own little tool to overcome it. I will call people for advice and once I get that one piece, then I know what to do.

Student responses are analyzed in comparison to the literature on resilience in the next chapter.

Journal 2. After completing the Brief Resilience Scale assessment for the first time, students were again asked to share their thoughts via reflective journaling. Students were given the prompt, "Now that you've taken the Brief Resilience Scale assessment, spend some time describing your thoughts. How do you feel about your score? Do you think it describes you accurately? Share some ideas about how you believe you got the score you did." Table 13 quantifies student responses based on the number of students who provided each.

Table 13

Themes of Journal 2

Themes	Subthemes	Number of student responses	Percentage of student responses
Accurate brief resilience scale score		54	81.82%
	Situationally appropriate emotions	29	43.94%
	Commitment to honesty answering questions	9	13.64%
	Personal traumas	5	7.58%
	Sense of powerlessness over emotions/behaviors	5	7.58%
	Sense of power over emotions	4	6.06%
	Negative generalized response	2	3.03%
Inaccurate brief resilience scale score		12	18.19%
	Possess characteristics contrary to score results	5	7.58%
	Question test accuracy	3	4.55%
	Surprised yet accepting	4	6.06%

Of the 70 students participating in the unit, four students either did not complete

Journal 2 or submitted unclear responses. For this reason, only 66 journal entries were included in the data. When reading reflective journal entries created after the first Brief Resilience Scale assessment, I expected to find themes aligning with the journal prompt. During this activity, students did indeed create responses that indicated their agreement or disagreement with their results and provided a rationale for the scores. Some expressed positive or negative reactions, yet the majority were neutral or unspecified.

Accurate Brief Resilience Scale Score. During the second journal entry, 81.82% of students expressed agreement with their first Brief Resilience Scale assessment scores. Each explained that they feel their scores accurately described their personal resilience levels. They were not required to share their specific scores or resilience ranges.

While not every student noted which resilience range their results fell into, 43.94% described their scores as accurate because they felt their emotional responses to life events were situationally appropriate. One student wrote, “I normally like to just go with the flow of things. That’s why my score is right.” Another explained, “The reason I’m okay with sad things is because I know I’m going to get over it at some point.” Yet another advised, “People shouldn’t stress because they can’t think as well when they do.” Interestingly, this percentage is similar to the number of students, 44.29%, who scored within the normal resilience range on the Brief Resilience Scale assessment. Situationally appropriate emotions were also noted among those who initially predicted scoring in the normal and normal-high ranges in their first journal entries.

Among those describing their scores as accurate, 13.64% attributed their own commitment to honesty as a rationale for their accurate ranges. One student stated, “I just want to get to know myself,” while another explained, “I actually thought about the

questions and didn't just click through them." Multiple students made a point of writing, "I answered truthfully." One student described attention to the questions as a reason for shifting their initial result prediction:

> At first, I believed I would get a normal score, but going through the BRS questions made me change my mind. At that moment, I knew I would get a low score, and yes, I did answer the questions honestly anyway.

One group of students, 7.58% connected the accuracy of their Brief Resilience Scale scores to specific, personal traumas. One student stated, "I felt like I would be on the edge of low and [normal] resilience because of how things go in life. Sometimes it's just hard." The same student then described the death of a pet and an embarrassing moment in elementary school. Adding to the embarrassing moment was the worry that classmates would also remember the event. Another child explained their agreement with their score's accuracy by calling it "bad" and followed this assertion with their own history of being bullied. A different student stated, "I knew that I had low resilience. One of the reasons is that I don't know my parents."

Another 7.58% of students wrote from a position that conveyed a sense of powerlessness over their emotions and behaviors. One student shared, "I am honestly fine with being sort of low. A lot of rude/mean comments affect me majorly. It is what it is." Another stated, "My score is accurate. I just feel everything." A different child created a list, in narrative form:

> I didn't do well. I did bad because I'm always stressed. I am always just wanting to give up…I'm constantly getting called mean names, and I have family issues, and it just all sucks. I mean, every time I get an animal, it dies a few years later. I

> feel depressed. I try to smile, but I just can't. I've been bullied, and people don't know what I've been through. It pushes at me, and it makes me so mad. I HATE drama and yet I'm always pulled into it. I don't have a lot of resilience. Or I just don't have any at all.

While able to connect their Brief Resilience Scale scores to their lives, those students had not yet come to understand that there were some things within their own control.

Interestingly, another group of 6.06% students took the opposite approach and described a sense of empowerment. As one student wrote, "At first, I thought I should be offended, but it turns out that I just have low resilience. I will try harder to move on from difficult times." Another child shared their rationale while maintaining a positive mindset:

> I wasn't really surprised that I have low resilience. It's just 2.83, not bad. I sometimes take things personally depending on what the person said, but I was close enough to normal and not so low that I'm the grumpiest person in the world.

One student exhibited an exceptionally positive mindset, stating,

> I guessed correctly. My score was low. I'm not very surprised although I wish I would have gotten at least a normal score. I'm not upset. I'm more excited. I'm excited to change and become better at resilience, social skills, people, etc. I'm glad I just learned something new about myself so I can know to change for the better.

These students demonstrated an awareness of their own ability to make positive changes in their lives. A sense of both empowerment and a positive mindset was evident in their writings.

Finally, 3.03% indicated a negative reaction to their Brief Resilience Scale assessment results they perceived as accurate. One student stated, “I don’t like it at all, but it does describe me accurately.” Though choosing not to declare their result specifically, the student explained, “It is hard for me to bounce back.” Another student exhibited a fearful response explaining, “Now, I’m kinda scared, not gonna lie.” What was most interesting was how the negative response did not coincide with ideas of powerlessness. While neither surprised nor pleased with their first Brief Resilience Scale scores, the students also described their determination to improve.

Inaccurate Brief Resilience Scale Score. While the majority of students indicated agreement with the first Brief Resilience Scale assessment scores, 18.19% described their results as inaccurate. As the second reflection journal entry prompted, students were asked to explain their agreement or disagreement with their resilience ranges and provide reasoning to support their views. Students were not asked to specifically name the range their scores fell into, though some chose to add that detail during their rationale.

Among those who felt their Brief Resilience Scale assessment scores were inaccurate, 7.58% did so based on the characteristics of the range they fell into being contrary to the characteristics they believed they possessed. In one journal, a student wrote, “I think that this is not completely accurate because I think I do have some ability to bounce back from things.” One student expressed their disagreement explaining, “The test I feel kinda got me wrong because I kinda get back up from the fight when I’m sad,” and later added, “When something bad happens, I will let it roll off my shoulders, but I don’t want to be talked to about it.” Yet another student stated, “I get through things fine typically. One thing I noticed was that I was very close to the normal range of resilience

which leads me to believe that I do get through most stuff as well as I predicted." In their own words, each child declared themselves more resilient than their results indicated.

Another group of students, 4.55%, felt their Brief Resilience Scale assessment scores were inaccurate based on factors outside their own behaviors and mindsets. These students questioned the validity of the test itself. According to one student, the test was flawed because there were only three ranges: low, normal, and high resiliency ranges. The student felt there should be some "in between" ranges and lamented their result, saying, "My score fits me, but not just perfect." Another student connected the Brief Resilience Scale assessment to a previous learning unit on credible sources. This student argued, "Most online quiz things like that aren't really accurate. Some of them are very accurate, but that's very rare." A level of analysis was evident in their assertion that their score was not accurate. Yet another student explained that the results of the Brief Resilience Scale likely changed based on what those taking it are currently going through. This student pointed out, "The score never actually proves what you are at all." As the student shared, scores may increase or decrease based on circumstances, not necessarily based on a stable level of resilience within a person. Given the emphasis on supporting evidence in sixth-grade work, this student also demonstrated analysis while disagreeing with their score.

A final group among those who disagreed with their Brief Resilience Scale assessment scores indicated surprise followed by acceptance; 6.06% of students felt their results were inaccurate, but each also provided a rationale that expressed acceptance of their scores. Some students felt their results were too low, yet they went on to describe characteristics of those who fall into the low resiliency range as characteristics they also

exhibited. As one student explained, “I think I got that score because sometimes I shut down,” and “That happens pretty often.” Another differentiated between resilience levels when surrounded by loved ones and when going through trials alone, stating, “but when I’m alone it is a hard time.” Interestingly, one student felt their score was too high, writing, “When I got in the normal section, I was a little surprised about it because I thought I would have been in the low section,” “I think I got the score of normal because it can take me a little while to get over things, but I can just go along with life,” and “I think I scored normal because a lot of people are just like me.” While each of these students initially disagreed with their ranges, each seemed to come to a realization and acceptance during the actual journaling process.

Student responses are analyzed in comparison to the literature on resilience in the next chapter.

Journal 3. At the end of the unit, students were asked to again complete reflective journals before and after taking the second Brief Resilience Scale assessment. For the third journal, students were given the prompt, “Now that you have finished your book clubs, you will complete the Brief Resilience Scale assessment for a second time. Before you begin, spend some time describing your thoughts. Do you believe your score will land in the low, normal, or high resilience range? Do you believe your score will be lower, the same, or higher than your first score? What reasons do you have for your score prediction?” Table 14 quantifies the number of students who provided each response.

Table 14

Themes of Journal 3

Themes	Subthemes	Number of student responses	Percentage of student responses
Decreased resilience prediction		3	5%
	Sense of powerlessness over emotions	3	5%
Maintain the same resilience prediction		19	31.67%
	Unchanged emotions	5	8.33%
	Situationally appropriate emotions	2	3.33%
	Book club texts were positive but not entirely effective	6	10%
	Book club texts were not helpful	5	8.33%
	Did not complete work	1	1.67%
Increase resilience prediction		38	63.33%
	Improved circumstances since first assessment	3	5%
	Implemented resiliency-building strategies	12	20%
	Book club texts were helpful	17	28.33%
	Book club texts and positive relationships were helpful	4	6.67%
	Book club assignments were helpful	2	3.33%

Of the 70 students participating in the unit, 10 either did not complete Journal 3 or submitted responses that were unclear. For this reason, only 60 journal entries were included in the data. When coding Reflective Journal 3, three major themes were evident: predictions of decreased resilience, maintained resilience, or increased resilience. Not surprisingly, these themes seemed to develop naturally from the prompt. Subthemes of justifications or rationale for predictions within each theme also emerged.

Decreased Resilience Prediction. When completing their third reflective journal entry, 5% predicted that their resiliency scores would decrease between the first and second Brief Resilience Scale assessment. Interestingly, each of the students in this category also expressed a sense of powerlessness over their own emotions. One student cited personal sensitivity as the reason for their predicted decrease in resilience score, while another explained that their ongoing battle with anxiety makes growth in resilience a challenge. Though they did not name a specific issue, one student simply declared, "It is hard for me to bounce back from things."

Maintain the Same Resilience Prediction. Before completing the second Brief Resilience Scale assessment, 31.67% of students predicted that their resilience scores would remain the same during their third reflective journal. While not the largest group, this is the theme in which the most subthemes were evident.

Among those who expected to maintain their resilience scores, 8.33% mentioned unchanged emotions as the most likely reason for obtaining the same results. One student wrote, "Nothing has changed," while another shared, "I still don't have much resilience." Even more to the point, one child stated twice in the same entry, "I don't really feel any different." Though each student indicated that a lack of change in emotions would sensibly predict a lack of change in resiliency, one particular student presented a detailed explanation:

> I think that I haven't changed. Nothing really changed. I am still just me. I feel like there is nothing that really changed because I am doing the same things. I am not bouncing back from stuff. I'm not really building any resilience. I think that this didn't help, but it was fun having a book club.

While each student in this group described a lack of change, what was noticeably missing was a tone of disillusionment or defeat. Instead, students wrote honestly and appeared to have a general acceptance of resilience levels.

Another 3.33% of students who predicted that their Brief Resilience Scale scores would remain the same believed that their scores were reflective of their natural responses to triumphs and trials. These students maintained that their emotional reactions were and continue to be situationally appropriate. One student explained, “I really just go with the flow.”

Within this group, many referred to the texts they selected for their book clubs. Ten percent felt that while their books were positive, they were not entirely effective in helping them build resilience. One issue noted was the lack of what students considered new information. As one wrote, “I think I will stay the same because most of the stuff in the book I’m already doing.” The other major concern was the struggle to apply texts to real-life situations. One student shared how their text helped them think of themselves with a more positive lens but that their struggle was ongoing. “I still feel sad sometimes even though I try not to,” the child explained. Another student pointed out that while their chosen book provided helpful strategies, there was still personal work to be done. Ironically, while unacknowledged, the student was still able to demonstrate a mindset shift, stating, “Even though I have been reading helpful tips and tricks on how to become less stressed or how to bounce back from hard times, I still haven’t quite gotten there…yet.”

Another group of students, 8.33%, disagreed, explaining they felt their texts were not helpful at all. Some felt that simply reading a book in general was ineffective. One

student declared, “Just a reading a book? I didn’t feel it affected me at all.” Another student wrote, “Even though I can relate to the book, I don’t see how that could improve my score.” The student went on to conclude, “It doesn’t help me understand my problems completely, nor does it help me with them much.” Others felt disappointed with their specific text choices. In one journal entry, a student explained,

> I believe that my score will stay the same because my book was not the type of book that changed your thoughts on the world. It more or so changed your vision [of] school and how to make it a better place. But when I take my resilience scale assessment, I don’t think of just school.

This perspective, feeling that a book’s topic was too narrow for major impact, continued to arise. Another student wrote,

> My book really did not have much to help with resilience. The book only told you what to do and what not to do about middle school. It helped me a little in the beginning, but it turned out to be a whole ‘nother book than I thought.

Another student named their text and explained, “It didn’t change my perspective on anything. I guess I always saw things the way I was supposed to.”

A small percentage of students, 1.67%, who felt their Brief Resilience Scale assessment score would remain the same, did so because they admitted they did not complete their work. In each of these cases, students indicated that the breakdown in activity completion was due to distractions during the small group work. One student shared,

> I think I will have the same score as last time because I truly don’t think I have grown during these book clubs. It is sad but very true. A reason I think this is

> because I would get super distracted during the time we had to read. I would pay more attention to the things around me than do what I was supposed to. I am just being honest because honesty is the best policy and hopefully I don't get in trouble.

Interestingly, none of the students who admitted to not completing their assignments mentioned distractions during independent working opportunities or teacher conferences.

Increase Resilience Prediction. During the third reflective journal, the majority of students, 63.33%, predicted that their scores would increase between their first and second Brief Resilience Scale assessments. Five subthemes emerged among this group. Four of the five subthemes, expectedly, cited components of the learning unit as a rationale for improvement.

One unexpected subtheme addressed changes in life circumstances. Five percent of students described improved situations since taking the first Brief Resilience Scale assessment. As one explained, "A lot of bad things had been happening." In each entry, students connected their test results to personal trials and explained that their scores would likely increase due to their previous negative circumstances changing for the better.

Among those who predicted an increase in their Brief Resilience Scale scores were 20% who cited the implementation of resiliency-building strategies as their rationale. Several wrote in generalities using phrases such as, "My resilience has grown," and "I have learned a lot." Others were more specific regarding areas of improvement. One student shared, "I know how to recover from my mistakes and move on with my life." Some students described specific strategies they implemented. For example, one

shared about choosing to move away from negative influences. “When I am in a place where I don’t like it, then I walk away. It’s kinda like bouncing back to where I like to be,” the student explained. Another student detailed a strategy adapted for their own preference:

> I have learned some things that make me even more resilient like the positive walk. The positive walk is where you think about all the things you’ve been blessed with. For example, family, food, water, and a house. I started doing this just in my go-cart. I call it the positive drive. I think I will be a bit better just because I do the positive drive twice a week.

Whether generally or specifically, each child in this group attributed their growth to changes in their thoughts and behaviors.

The majority of students who felt their Brief Resilience Scale scores would increase on their second test described their chosen texts as reasons for this prediction, and 28.33% fell into this category. Again, many wrote in generalities such as, “My book has shown me some ways of building resilience.” One wrote, “I’ve read my book and have learned much more about resilience and overall how to bounce back from things in a positive way.” Others were more specific. According to one student, “Now that I have read this book, it’s easier to understand that there is so much more I can do than just be stuck in my emotions.” Another student explained that through the lessons in their book, they had begun to identify negative triggers and move away from those influences. The student specifically mentioned social media and unkind commenters. One student described using strategies in their book to “turn my anxiety into a little bit of courage.” Others addressed their own mindsets. For example, “This book has taught me to be more

patient with myself." Citing their faith and expectations, the students went on to explain their belief that God is good and can be trusted even when life seems cruel. A student declared, "I have to be patient with God" in addition to their commitment to giving themselves patience and grace.

Another group, 6.67% of students who predicted that their Brief Resilience would increase, felt that both their book club texts and positive experiences with people were the greatest contributing factors. Several students cited making new friends as a positive rationale for their predictions. As one student wrote, "I really do think reading [my book] and talking with Ms. Jones and [my book club] helped. I made a new friend because of the book clubs." Another explained, "[My book] is an amazing book, and some parts made me stop and think about my life and about resilience." The same student continued, "I also think my score will be higher because of my grandpa. He has been helping me when he can, and that has helped me when I'm really stressed out." One student shared specific mindset changes:

> I feel like I have definitely grown over this time. The book that I read definitely helped me a lot. I felt like I wasn't alone. I also had help from Ms. Jones. She made me realize that I have a place in this world, and I deserve to be here. I have gained some self-confidence, and I have released a lot of stress. I have had help from friends and family too.

While texts were a factor, it was clear among these students that positive relationship experiences were also beneficial.

Finally, 3.33% considered their book club assignments helpful to their growth. This led them to predict an increase in the scores between their first and second Brief

Resilience Scale assessments. One student described growing in their overall understanding of resilience; what resilience is and what it looks like practically. Another student mentioned the discipline required to be successful in keeping up with "all the little assignments" as a factor for growth in resilience. The child explained that the book club project seemed overwhelming, but learning to break down large expectations into smaller, more manageable tasks was helpful academically and also in building self-confidence: "I didn't know I could do it until after I did."

Student responses are analyzed in comparison to the literature on resilience in the next chapter.

Journal 4. After completing their second Brief Resilience Scale assessment, students were asked to complete a fourth and final reflective journal entry. Students were provided with the prompt, "Now that you've taken the Brief Resilience Scale assessment, spend some time describing your thoughts. How do you feel about your score? Do you think it describes you accurately? Share some ideas about how you believe you got the score you did." Table 15 quantifies the number of students providing each response.

Table 15

Themes of Journal 4

Themes	Subthemes	Number of student responses	Percentage of student responses
Accurate brief resilience scale score		53	86.89%
	Do not feel resilient	9	14.75%
	Do feel resilient	11	18.03%
	Honest brief resilience scale answers	5	8.20%
	Increased understanding of resilience	7	11.48%
	Book clubs were helpful	13	21.31%
	Positive mindset shift	5	8.20%
	Positive relationships	3	4.92%
Inaccurate brief resilience scale score		8	13.11%
	Surprised yet accepting	6	9.84%
	Question test accuracy	2	3.28%

Of the 70 students participating in the unit, nine students either did not complete Journal 4 or submitted unclear responses. For this reason, only 67 journal entries were included in the data. As with previous reflective journals, themes aligned with the prompt. For the fourth journal, 86.89% of students felt their second Brief Resilience Scale assessment scores accurately reflected their resilience ranges, and 13.11% disagreed with the results of their second Brief Resilience Scale assessment.

Accurate Brief Resilience Scale Score. After completing the Brief Resilience Scale assessment for the second time, 86.89% of students felt their results were accurate. This percentage was a slight increase from the 81.81% of students who expressed agreement after the first test. Also increased was the number of subthemes that emerged. While there were five represented in Reflective Journal 2, seven were evident in the fourth set of journal entries.

Among those who agreed with the results of the second Brief Resilience Scale assessment, 14.75% described their scores as accurate because they do not feel resilient.

With the exception of one student who explained that a new trial had occurred since the beginning of the unit, each described ongoing challenges with components of resiliency, especially the ability to bounce back from adversity. As one explained, “To be honest, hard times take a while to get over.” Other students shared, “It takes me a long long long long time to get over specific things,” and “I just don’t suck it up.” Some referenced characteristics such as being naturally emotional or angry.

Another group of students, 18.03%, agreed that their second Brief Resilience Scale results were accurate because they do feel resilient. Students mostly wrote in generalities. For example, several wrote about an ability to bounce back from adversity, but they did not name any specific trials. One student reasoned that bouncing back is a necessary skill because “life moves on.” Another stated, “I just don’t want to stay down on something useless,” describing how they now perceive the typical middle school personality clashes as inconsequential. “I am strong, and I *can* get through things,” exulted a student who saw an increase from their first Brief Resilient Scale assessment.

One unexpected subtheme was honesty; 8.20% of students who felt their second Brief Resilient Scale assessment results were accurate cited the choice to be honest on their test as the overall reason for their score’s accuracy. Most students in this group described responding to the assessment questions with “full” or “total” honesty; however, some shared that they were not entirely truthful on the first test which resulted in some differentiation between first and second scores. As one student wrote, “I think I got the score I did because the first time I did it, I didn’t tell the full truth. My second time taking it, I was one hundred percent honest.”

Although, I anticipated this subtheme, only 11.48% of students credited an

increased understanding of resilience as the rationale for the accuracy of their second Brief Resilience Scale assessment scores. As I expected, some described their increase in understanding as the reason they saw a decrease in the results between their first and second tests. As one shared,

> Like Ms. Jones said, I know I didn't really know what the word resilience was. But after I understood, I knew how to answer the questions on the test. I think I scored too high in the first place, but now I understand what [resilience] means. I do think [my second test result] describes me accurately.

Others had the opposite experience and felt their new knowledge was the greatest contributing factor for the increase in their results between the first and second assessments. One student wrote, "I understand resilience now and how it works. I have also been getting better at resilience. I predicted that my score was going to go up, and it did." Realizing that students could connect an increased understanding of resilience to both decreases and increases in Brief Resilience Scale assessments was a surprise.

The largest number of students who believed their second Brief Resilience Scale assessment scores were accurate were those who acknowledged the positive impact of book clubs, with 21.31% of students citing various components of the book clubs as helpful, and each of those referred to building or increasing their resilience. A few mentioned learning activities and the opportunity to work with friends as especially fun and useful. Most students, however, specifically referred to the books they chose for book clubs. Some wrote about growing more positive mindsets as a result of reading their texts. One stated, "Ever since I read [my book], I have stayed positive even through negative times. Everyone has a bad day, but we can conquer those bad days." Another

student wrote,

> After reading my book, I realized that it doesn't matter what you look like as long as you like yourself. You're a beauty in the Lord's eyes. Also, a couple of days ago, I played wiffle ball with my brother, and on the very first pitch, he hit me. But I had grit. I knew I was bigger and stronger than him, and I didn't sink down to his level. Before I knew it, I had hit [the ball] over the fence. That's one way how I handled adversity.

Other students described strategies learned from their books. For example, one shared, "I have been using a couple of the steps that the authors had thought of that would help in [my book] like meditating and deep breathing." Another student declared, "I definitely did not expect a book could change me the way it did. I for sure underestimated the power of a book." It was clear many were applying or attempting to apply their learning to their "real life" situations.

Another group of students, 8.20%, agreed that their second Brief Resilience Scale assessments were accurate and credited shifts toward a more positive mindset; however, these students did not cite any specific origins of their new thought processes. All of the students in this category mentioned becoming empowered to choose how they emotionally respond, or not, in various situations. As one wrote, "I have been getting better at solving my problems. What has helped me is to not care what other people think." Another student shared, "I have been working on myself," and described strategies implemented to manage their anger and solve or prevent problems. One of the most interesting journal entries included a description of how a student's mindset shift not only impacted the student but others:

> I feel as though I have changed personally. I notice how I react to things now, and I notice how people react to how I react now. It's almost like I can tell how much I've changed by the environment I'm surrounded by. I don't let people's words get to me anymore. Now, no one is coming to tell me what someone said about me. I encourage people to believe in themselves. Now, no one has to tell me how bad their days was. Most of all, I'm progressing in maturity. People want to be around me more. They want to learn from me.

Though it was never included in the unit, the student was able to connect self-improvement to positive influence.

Among the final group to agree with their second Brief Resilience Scale scores were the 4.92% who noted positive relationships in their rationale. God, family, friends, and even school personnel were mentioned in the fourth journal entries. One student shared,

> Well, as I said yesterday, I knew I was gonna get a higher score, and it was pretty accurate. I believe I got the score I gained from teachers at my school. They really helped me with my feelings and thoughts. They also gave me good tools to use at home and school. I also talked with guidance counselors and my mother to help me deal with my intrusive thoughts.

While research suggests that positive relationships are among the greatest protective factors, it was interesting that this was one of the least referenced contributors among my students.

Inaccurate Brief Resilience Scale Score. Though it was a slight percentage compared with the number of students who found their resiliency ranges accurate, some

students expressed dissent. When students received their scores for the second Brief Resilience Scale assessment, 13.11% disagreed with the results. Among those who felt their scores were inaccurate, two subthemes emerged.

Within the group of students who disagreed with their second Brief Resilience Scale assessment score, 9.84% initially expressed surprise. As these students continued in their journaling, however, they began to provide a rationale for their scores which resulted in conclusions of acceptance. For example, one student wrote, “I thought I grew, but I actually went down in my resiliency scale.” The student went on to explain a continued struggle in their personal life concluding with, “I am stressed. If I wasn’t so stressed, then I wouldn’t have a score as low as I do.” Interestingly, each of the students described similar situations of feeling as though they have improved yet acknowledged that some components of resilience continued to be a challenge.

Again, as with the first Brief Resilience Scale assessment, some students questioned the test itself, and 3.28% fell into this category. One student wrote in frustration about getting a lower score than expected before, stating, “It is an online survey so it’s not 100% accurate.” Another student explained, “I wish [the test] would ask more questions.” These students applied analysis and evaluation strategies taught during a previous unit on credible sources.

Summary

Data from the academic pre-assessment and academic post-assessment seemed to indicate that integrating topics specifically chosen to build resiliency with reading and writing had a positive impact on student academic achievement, and 84.29% of participants saw an increase in their scores between the first and second tests. Running a

dependent or paired samples *t* test provided further evidence that the impact was positive and statistically significant. Similarly, data from Brief Resilience Scale Assessment 1 and Brief Resilience Scale Assessment 2 seemed to indicate that integrating topics specifically chosen to build resiliency with reading and writing had a positive impact on student perceptions of their own resilience, and 68.57% of the participants saw an increase in their scores between the first and second tests. Again, conducting a dependent or paired samples *t* test offered supportive evidence of positive impact and statistically significant change. To strengthen the finding of a positive impact on student perceptions of their resilience, qualitative data from reflective journal entries offered insight into positive shifts in mindsets from the ideas of generalized or abstract power to the acknowledgement and use of resources as positive protective factors.

Student responses are analyzed in comparison to the literature on resilience in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In the site serving as the focus of this study, students clearly experienced trauma whether from home and family circumstances or simply as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a review, over 1,000 children were identified as victims of founded abuse investigations, and more than 600 children were recognized as victims of neglect according to the 2018-2019 South Carolina Child Maltreatment Data Profile published by Children's Trust of South Carolina (2020a). Over 15,000 children in the area serving as the focus of this study came from households with incomes below the poverty level based on data published in the 2020 South Carolina Child Well-Being Data Profile (Children's Trust of South Carolina, 2020b). In addition to abuse, neglect, and poverty, 100% of the students experienced the global COVID-19 pandemic's impact. On March 15, 2020, South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster issued Executive Order No. 2020-09 (2020) closing all schools in the state. Students did not have face-to-face instruction but were schooled virtually for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. During the 2020-2021 school year, students attended school either virtually, in a hybrid model of virtual and face-to-face instruction, or in five-days-a-week face-to-face instruction with protective measures such as required face coverings, Plexiglas partitions around desks, and socially distanced transitions and breaks.

The research gathered regarding abuse, neglect, and poverty was an alarming call to action. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic solidified my belief that trauma, whether increasing in occurrence or simply increasing in awareness, could and should be addressed in the classroom. Though public school teachers are not at liberty to choose their instructional schedules or teaching objectives, some avenues lend themselves to

integrating resilience-building and academic standards. With these factors in mind, I chose to study the impact of a learning unit intentionally integrated with resilience-building topics on academic achievement and student perceptions of their own resilience.

My project took the form of an action research study. Sixth-grade students in my ELA classes participated in an ELA learning unit which was designed to meet the following state objectives: analyze informational texts and evaluate the strength of authors' claims and arguments, cite text evidence to support analysis of conclusions drawn from explicit and inferred ideas, identify text features and structures that support authors' claims, and provide objective summaries of informational texts with two or more central ideas. During the unit, students selected and chose informational texts to read and respond to in small groups called book clubs. As a review, Figure 2 illustrates the daily processes and objectives throughout the unit.

Figure 2

Unit Scope and Sequence

Informational Text Book Clubs Scope and Sequence

Day	Activities
1	1. Academic Pre-Assessment 2. What is Resilience? (mini-lesson) 3. BRS Reflection Journal 1
2	1. Brief Resilience Scale Assessment 1 2. BRS Reflection Journal 2 3. Book Club Book Shopping
3	1. Book Club Catalogue Introduction 2. Book Club Formation 3. Text Selections 4. Clubs Establish Reading Plans
4	1. Mini-lesson: Citing Text Evidence (purpose and stems) 2. Book Club Collaboration 3. Teacher Conferences
5	1. Mini-lesson: Citing Text Evidence (supporting conclusions and inferences) 2. Book Club Collaboration 3. Teacher Conferences
6	1. Mini-lesson: Identifying Informational Text Features and Purposes 2. Book Club Collaboration 3. Teacher Conferences
7	1. Mini-lesson: Identifying Informational Text Structures and Purposes Evaluating Claims and Arguments 2. Book Club Collaboration 3. Teacher Conferences
8	1. Mini-lesson: Identifying Author's Claims and Arguments 2. Book Club Collaboration 3. Teacher Conferences
9	1. Mini-lesson: How Features and Structures Support Author's Claims and Arguments 2. Book Club Collaboration 3. Teacher Conferences
10	1. Mini-lesson: Evaluating Author's Claims and Arguments 2. Book Club Collaboration 3. Teacher Conferences
11	1. Mini-lesson: Writing Objective Summaries 2. Book Club Collaboration 3. Teacher Conferences
12	1. Mini-lesson: Frequently Asked Questions Addressed 2. Book Club Collaboration 3. Teacher Conferences
13	1. Academic Post Assessment 2. BRS Reflection Journal 3
14	1. Brief Resilience Scale Assessment 2 2. BRS Reflection Journal 4
15	1. Book Club Catalogue's Finest Showcase

As noted in the unit's scope and sequence, students completed academic pre-assessments and post-assessments, two Brief Resilience Scale assessments (one before and one after the unit), and four reflective journal entries. The academic assessments, Brief Resilience Scale assessments, and journal entries provided the data from which I determined findings. Data gathered were aligned to the two research questions: "What

impact, if any, does integrating topics specifically chosen to build resiliency with reading and writing have on student academic achievement?" and "What impact, if any, does integrating topics specifically chosen to build resiliency with reading and writing have on student perceptions of resilience?"

Based on the data gathered, the learning unit, which was an intentional integration of reading, writing, and resiliency-building topics, had a positive impact on both academic achievement and student perceptions of resilience. In the area of academics, it was found that 84.29% of students increased their scores between the pre-assessment and post-assessment. According to the Brief Resilience Scale, 68.57% of students increased their scores between the first and second tests. Changes in both the academic and Brief Resilience Scales assessments were determined statistically significant after conducting dependent sample *t* tests. Journal entries provided the qualitative support for the positive impact of the integrated learning unit. Over four reflective journal entries, the majority of student writings demonstrated growth in both the understanding of resilience and the development of resilience.

Interpretation of Findings

After students completed the learning unit, all data gathered were sorted and analyzed for meaning. To address Research Question 1, "What impact, if any, does integrating topics specifically chosen to build resiliency with reading and writing have on student academic achievement," an analysis of the academic pre-assessment and post-assessment was conducted. To address Research Question 2, "What impact, if any, does integrating topics specifically chosen to build resiliency with reading and writing have on student perceptions of resilience," I analyzed Brief Resilience Scale Assessment 1, Brief

Resilience Scale Assessment 2, Reflective Journal 1, Reflective Journal 2, Reflective Journal 3, and Reflective Journal 4.

Academic Assessment Analysis

To analyze the impact of integrating topics specifically chosen to build resiliency with reading and writing on student academic achievement, my first step was to compare differences between the academic assessments. As a review, Figure 3 indicates the changes between the academic pre-assessment and the academic post-assessment.

Figure 3

Changes Between Academic Pre-Assessment and Academic Post-Assessment

Students Increasing Scores Between Pre-Assessment and Post Assessment	Students with No Change in Scores Between Pre-assessment and Post Assessment	Students Decreasing Scores Between Pre-Assessment and Post Assessment
84.29%	4.29%	11.43%

A comparison of individual assessment averages provided compelling evidence of positive impact; however, it is also important to know whether the difference in this group of students could likely be applied to a larger group. To make the determination, a dependent samples *t* test was conducted finding that the *p* value was < .001. As the *p* value was less than 0.5, the changes were deemed statistically significant.

While it is natural to suggest that improvement is linked to instruction regarding the specific academic objectives assessed, the large percentage of students increasing their scores between the academic pre-assessment and post-assessment offered insight into the specific instructional approaches implemented as well. As noted earlier, this unit was aligned with strategies determined effective in developing resilience by Craig (2017). Students were able to collaborate with peers and me during book clubs, conferences, and

one-on-one conversations. The unit integrated ELA standards and resiliency-building. Both instruction and book options were differentiated. Students were able to choose their books and book club participants, and students created norms for the acceptable behaviors of each member. This allowed a sense of both ownership and belonging, as recommended by Sporleder and Forbes (2016). Finally, it was always acknowledged that book club was a large and rigorous project; however, there was no contingency plan for failure. Instead, students were provided with scaffolded support and enrichment so each could experience success. Each of these factors, based on the research, was considered effective for developing achievement and resilience.

Research Question 1 asked, "What impact, if any, does integrating topics specifically chosen to build resiliency with reading and writing have on student academic achievement?" The increase in scores between the academic pre-assessment and post-assessment indicated an increase in academic achievement. Implementing the dependent samples *t* test found the changes statistically significant as well. From the application of research-based trauma-informed instructional strategies and the analysis of data, I found strong evidence to support the conclusion of a positive impact on academic achievement when students participated in the integrated academic and resiliency-building unit.

Brief Resilience Scale Assessment Analysis

As with the academic assessment, my first step in analyzing the Brief Resilience Scale assessments was to compare the results between Test 1 and Test 2. As a review, Figure 5 illustrates the changes.

Figure 5

Changes Between Brief Resilience Scale Assessment 1 and Brief Resilience Scale Assessment 2

Students Increasing Scores Between Test 1 and Test 2	Students with No Change in Scores Between Test 1 and Test 2	Students Decreasing Scores Between Test 1 and Test 2
68.57%	1.43%	30.00%

When simply comparing scores between the first and second Brief Resilient Scale assessments, there seemed to be some indication that student perceptions of their own resilience had increased, and I again turned to the dependent sample, or paired sample, *t* test to determine whether the results were truly significant. After conducting the dependent/paired samples *t* test for the Brief Resilience Scale assessments, I discovered that the *p* value was < .001, a result indicating the changes were statistically significant.

While I was not surprised that changes occurred as both increases and decreases between the first and second Brief Resilience Scale assessment scores, I felt it was important to explore each change. Increases in assessment results were supported by self-reports of growth during and from activities taking place in the learning unit. Decreases in scores, interestingly, did not dispute the effectiveness of the activities. Rather, among those who agreed that their second Brief Resilience Scale assessment results were accurate were students who saw a decrease between their first and second attempts. Factors contributing to lower scores included a greater willingness to answer test questions honestly and an increased understanding of resilience. It was the opportunity to reflect on changes through journaling that provided the rationale for both increases and decreases.

The information gathered from the Brief Resilience Scale was encouraging and

aligned with Research Question 2's interest in the impact of the learning unit on student perceptions of their own resilience. It did seem as though the learning unit had a positive impact on student perceptions of their own resilience; however, perceptions are not easily measured or fully understood within the boundaries of a single test. To strengthen the data, the research was not limited to a single quantitative assessment and analysis. As previously stated, it was through journaling that students were able to give voice and reasoning to their changes.

Reflective Journals Analysis

When analyzing reflective journal entries, several themes and subthemes emerged including those expected and some that were not. To maintain focus, it was important to work within the boundaries of the preset research question, "What impact, if any, does integrating topics specifically chosen to build resiliency with reading and writing have on student perceptions of resilience?" I was specifically looking for descriptions of strength and growth in the area of resilience or a lack thereof. As a review, we described resilience as the ability to bounce back from adversity, to work through challenges, and to overcome obstacles.

Descriptions of Resilience. In the first journal entry, students were asked to predict their Brief Resilience Scale score ranges. Upon the completion of the test, participants would receive a score between 1 and 5. Scores between 1 to 2.99 fell within the low resilience range. Scores between 3 and 4.30 were the normal resilience range. Scores between 4.31 and 5 were considered to be within the high resilience range. Initially, 71.64% of students predicted that their results would indicate ranges of either normal or high resilience. From this group, I began to analyze journal entries in search of

descriptions indicating student abilities to bounce back from adversity, work through challenges, and overcome obstacles.

After delving deeper into the journal entries containing predictions of normal or high resilience ranges, I sifted another 4.48% from the total amount of students expressing strength or growth. Although these students predicted positive results for themselves, their rationales indicated contradictory evidence: a sense of powerlessness over their emotions or a general lack of emotions. This left 67.16% of students describing evidence of strength in resilience. The majority of these students, 37.31%, cited situationally appropriate emotional responses. While initially hesitant to categorize situationally appropriate emotions as a strength, it soon became clear that students were describing an ability to resist allowing trials to consistently overwhelm their mental and emotional spaces. Several shared that even though they do feel negative emotions such as sadness, fear, or anger during challenges, these emotions do not last and are quickly replaced when help or resolution occurs. Another 13.44% of students provided descriptions of protective factors in their lives. To review, "Protective factors are resources, skills, strengths, and coping mechanisms available to those impacted by trauma to help them more effectively handle the stress and reduce the long-term effects of trauma" (Sporleder & Forbes, 2016, pp. 42-43). Though I had not given students the vocabulary of "protective factors" or described such supports and their relationship to those who have experienced trauma or general trials, students in this group shared about the impact of supportive relationships, faith, positive mindsets, and problem-solving skills in their belief that their resilience range would be normal or high. Finally, 11.94% of students described a sense of power over their emotions. Students in this group

provided examples of intentionally choosing to find goodness in all situations.

Journal 2 was completed after students took the first Brief Resilience Scale assessment. In this journal, students were asked to explain their feelings on the accuracy of their results and provide a rationale. Although 71.64% of students predicted that their results would indicate either a normal or high resiliency, only 51.43% of students did obtain those scores. Interestingly, 81.82% of those students also indicated their agreement with their results. Among those students who agreed with their scores, 43.94% again cited either situationally appropriate emotions or a sense of power over their own emotions. That percentage was much closer to 51.43% who did fall within the normal or high resiliency ranges.

In the third reflective journal, students were asked to predict the results of their upcoming second Brief Resilience Scale assessment: increase, maintain, or decrease between first and second scores. Interestingly, of the 95% of students who predicted they would either maintain or increase their scores, only 3.33% noted situationally appropriate emotions, and no students described a sense of power of their emotions. Instead, 68.33% cited protective factors. Specifically, students mentioned resources gained during the learning unit: books, strategies, relationships, and practice opportunities. Though they did not use the exact vocabulary, student descriptors aligned with several of the practices noted by Craig (2017) for their effectiveness: collaboration, integration of multiple disciplines, scaffolding, and the intentional inclusion of resiliency-building strategies. The extreme decrease in crediting situationally appropriate emotions and a sense of power over emotions was compelling, but I was hesitant to draw conclusions until students completed their fourth and final reflective journal entries.

After completing the Brief Resilience Scale assessment for the second time, students were asked to consider their results and discuss their agreement or disagreement with their scores. In this case, 86.89% described their results as accurate. Again, situationally appropriate emotions and a sense of power over emotions decreased, this time to nonexistent. Instead, 18.03% of students explained that they feel resilient and provided general reasonings such as an ability to bounce back from adversity, the internal protective factor of feeling effective as described by Sporleder and Forbes (2016). This agreement and rationale seemed to coincide with the 11.48% who cited an increased understanding of resilience as an ability to bounce back from difficulty (American Psychological Association, 2012). Another 34.43% noted protective factors such as book club texts and activities and positive relationships as the rationale for the correct results they received, both external protective factors described by Sporleder and Forbes. Combined, 63.94% described indicators of resilience or growth in resilience. It is again an intriguingly close percentage to the 68.57% who experienced an increase in Brief Resilience Scale assessment scores.

Descriptions of a Lack of Resilience. When students were asked to predict which range their resiliency score would fall into on the first Brief Resilient Scale assessment, 28.36% felt their results would indicate ranges between low and normal resilience. Of those, 17.92% described a sense of powerlessness over their emotions. Many used phrases such as, “I’m emotional. That is just who I am.” Another 4.48% explained that personal trials were currently a struggle, and yet another 4.48% described personal negative habits such as poor self-talk and tendencies to isolate or hold grudges. While I did not pry into background information of these students and only knew what

was explicitly shared, their writings were reminiscent of the explanation that trauma is not just a single event but also the long-term imprint of the experience (Van der Kolk, 2014). It seemed that either disposition or, more likely, experience had trained them to believe and/or behave as though there was no possibility of positive change. Interestingly, this was only about half the number of students who went on to obtain scores within the low resiliency range.

In the second reflective journal, students were asked to agree or disagree with their Brief Resilience Scale assessment results and provide a rationale for their thoughts. In this case, 18.19% of students who felt their scores were accurate cited reasons that seemed to indicate a lack of resilience such as lingering emotions regarding personal traumas, a sense of powerlessness over emotions and behaviors, and generalized negativity. Such rationale described the opposite of our working definition of resilience which included the ability to bounce back from adversity, to work through challenges, and to overcome obstacles. Reasons aligned with categories described in the first journal, while percentages shifted. After taking the first Brief Resilience Scale assessment and completing the second journal entry, only 7.58% seemed to describe a sense of powerlessness over their emotions. This was a decrease of about 11.83 percentage points.

It was during the analysis of Journal 3 that indicators of change began to take shape. The third journal prompts asked students to predict which changes, if any, they would see in their scores on the second Brief Resilience Scale assessment. Only 5% anticipated a decrease in scores, and each of those again expressed a sense of powerlessness over their own emotions. This perception of powerlessness, though at an unsteady rate, decreased each time students were asked to write about their ideas

concerning their resilience. Though I did not provide all classes with the term "neuroplasticity," many students appeared to embrace the concept as they were given opportunities to practice and experience success, a strategy suggested by Duckworth (2016). It seemed as though the idea of a lack of control was debunked throughout the learning unit.

The fourth journal entry asked students to agree or disagree with their second Brief Resilience Scale assessment results. Of the 86.89% who found their scores accurate, 14.75% explained that they simply do not feel resilient. For a variety of reasons, these students felt that they had not yet reached the resiliency levels they considered normal, high, or healthy. Again, these appeared to be the students who had circumstances or emotional responses to past experiences yet to be overcome. This inability to recover and move forward is aligned with the description of those who may be living with extended adverse effects of trauma (The Center for Health Care Strategies, Inc., 2021).

Reflective Journal Conclusions

Though students wrote from a variety of experiences and perspectives, there seemed to be one overarching progression of thought. From the beginning of the learning unit to its conclusion, there was a shift in the idea of empowerment. Over time, participants decreased their citations of generalized power, or a lack thereof. Instead, those ideas began to shift to resources and circumstances. Although not every student increased their resiliency score or at least fell within a normal or high range, those students who described ongoing struggles with their resiliency were able to draw connections between resiliency and circumstances. Many expressed the hope of future growth, leading me to conclude that no child was under the impression that they were

irrevocably bound to a life of low resilience. Because of this mindset, it seems that further instruction and practice in building resiliency could likely increase the positive impact. These changes are closely aligned with several of the external and internal protective factors noted by Sporleder and Forbes (2016). As a review, Table 2 describes the factors noted as effective for promoting resilience.

Table 2

Protective Factors That Promote Resilience

External	Internal
Caring and supportive relationships	Competent and efficient social skills
Supportive and safe environments	Problem-solving skills
Challenging but obtainable expectations for success	Autonomy
Opportunities to belong	Sense of purpose
Opportunities to have meaningful interactions with others	Feelings of being effective
Connection to community	Sense of being "all right"
	Vision of better future
	Self-regulatory skills

Note. Adapted from *The Trauma-Informed School: A Step-By-Step Implementation Guide for Administrators and School Personnel*, by J. Sporleder and H. Forbes. Copyright 2016 by Beyond Consequences Institute, LLC.

Among the students who presented evidence of resiliency and growth in resilience, the abstract citation of empowerment began to fade. Instead, students became aware of their resources whether they were books and strategies or relationships and the honing of skills. This shift in thinking seemed to indicate that the hopeful objective of the

learning unit, to assist students in building resilience, was accomplished.

Additional Findings

During the analysis of data, findings were not limited to expected outcomes such as changes in academic achievement or resilience ranges. These findings, though surprising, were instrumental in guiding revisions to the following year's learning unit.

Among some students, there was difficulty understanding resilience outside the lens of current circumstances. For example, several who appeared to experience this confusion described situationally appropriate emotions in their reflective journals as indicators of resilience. Others mentioned changed conditions as a rationale for changes in their Brief Resilience Scale scores. When preparing students to participate in this unit during the 2021-2022 school year, I will be adding a component to the initial resilience-defining mini-lesson to address this misunderstanding.

Another group of students described their increased understanding of resilience as reasons for both increases and decreases in their Brief Resilience Scale scores. Again, I intend to also address this at the launch of the unit; however, to begin building an understanding and working knowledge of the vocabulary associated with resilience, I will also intentionally incorporate this language and resilience concepts into lessons and conferences throughout the year.

As stated previously, the texts I offer in the resiliency-building library tend to change from year to year. In many cases, I add titles as financial opportunities arise. Occasionally, certain titles become so popular that I feel it would be a disservice to students to withhold those texts from participants who chose other books. When that occurs, I add those books to the regular classroom library so all students have an

opportunity to read them whether it was their book club selection or not. Unfortunately, I have also discovered texts that were so disliked by students that these titles were named in the rationale for decreases in resilience. As a result, those titles will be removed from the resiliency-building library. Moving forward, I will be tracking student text selections not only for popularity but also to assess connections between titles and indicators of changes in resilience.

Finally, though I am not a mental health professional, this study uncovered information that led me to refer students for further social and emotional support. As students shared connections to resilience during conferences and journal writings, some described past traumas. There was also a small group that described situations and/or events that were current. In these cases, I offered opportunities to meet with our school guidance counselors. In two other cases, student current experiences were concerning enough to warrant intensive support. For each, I was able to work with the students, their families, the guidance counselor, and school administration to refer them for counseling with the school's mental health liaison. These findings, though unexpected, were a strong reminder of the relevance of the project.

Implications

As noted in Chapter 1, while researchers may choose to explore this study, educators are the ones who will likely glean the most benefits. The findings indicated a positive impact on both academic achievement and student perceptions of resilience when participating in a learning unit intentionally integrated with resilience-building topics. District- and school-level administrators interested in implementing trauma-informed practices may find this study helpful in guiding curriculum decisions; however,

classroom teachers would likely see the greatest benefit.

Academic achievement is certainly a high priority. Understanding that the integrating of resiliency-building topics did not impair learning supports the case for using resilience as a unit theme or even an ongoing component of the "real world" connections students are expected to make to all learning. Although literacy may appear especially amenable, each academic content area may find ways to acknowledge examples of resiliency and practice resilience. Additionally, trauma-informed practices such as allowance for choice, small groups, peer collaboration, and one-on-one teacher conferencing can be implemented in all subject areas. Finally, as Souers and Hall (2016) implored us to remember that resilience is not a trait present or not present from birth but one that can be developed, there appears to be evidence not just of positive impact but also of a need for integrating resiliency-building topics in academic learning units. While creating units such as the one studied during this project was not a quick or simple process, the small changes described above could begin the culture shift first in classrooms and eventually into entire schools, districts, states, and beyond.

Connections to Theoretical Framework

This study was conducted as action research. Using the model described by Koshy (2010), I created a research plan. In review, Table 1 describes this project's connections to action research.

Table 1

Action Research Connections to the Study

Tenet	Connection the Study
The objective is improvement.	To improve my practice, I explored the impact of integrating academics and resilience-building.
The study is designed to address a problem.	A large number of children in the area serving as the focus of this study had experience with trauma and/or poverty.
The study seeks to generate knowledge and enact change.	Findings of this study served to inform and improve my classroom practice and potentially the practice of other educators.
Participants are those for whom the study is designed.	I conducted this study with my students to inform current and future instructional practice.
The study is cyclical.	The study involved research, planning, action, evaluation, and reflection which continued even after the completion of this project.

The research conducted in this study followed the five tenets of action research closely: the objective of improvement; the design to address a problem; the desire to obtain knowledge and create change; the participation of those for whom the study is designed; and a cyclical approach of ongoing planning, action, evaluation, and reflection.

The action research model aligns with the postmodernist view in which beliefs emerge while ongoing questions and revelations arise throughout the study (Koshy, 2010). As noted previously, the learning unit studied was one that was created and evolved over time. It was the result of questions regarding the unit's impact that prompted me to conduct the action research. Using the data gathered to gain understanding and generate evidence of the impact of the learning unit demonstrated action research's foundation in constructivism in which researchers allow the

interpretation of their data to assist in the construction of ideas (Koshy, 2010). Through the data gathered during this study, I was able to find evidence that seemed to support integrating academic objectives and resiliency-building topics as a practice with positive impact.

It is important to note that action research is a continuous cycle. While the evaluation of the learning unit has been completed, the findings and conclusions will be applied to future units. For example, as some students noted an increased understanding of resilience as a reason for a decrease in Brief Resilience Scale scores, future units will include a series of mini-lessons defining resilience before the unit begins in hopes of eliminating confusion and having a more accurate baseline as students explore their own resilience. Other students applied lessons on credible and reliable sources to their hesitancy to accept the validity of their Brief Resilience Scale results. Future units will include student-friendly background information of the assessment to assist in encouraging honesty and willingness to truly analyze their results rather than dismiss them completely because the test was administered electronically. Finally, there will be an adjustment in the texts offered for each book club. While some books became wildly popular and a need for more copies was evident, other titles were overwhelmingly criticized by students. I intend to obtain more copies of the books students held in the highest esteem and provide more detailed descriptions of each text so students will be less likely to choose a book they may find disappointing.

Recommendations

As students continue to experience the effects of trauma, it seems critical that classroom practices continue to improve. Becoming a trauma-informed educator requires

both research and application. Currently, there appears to be a trend in gaining knowledge regarding trauma and its impact. According to Tate (2019), data suggesting an increase in depression and anxiety among students ages 13 to 17 possibly exacerbated by ever-present technology have prompted educators to respond by employing mental health professionals and targeting what is being known as “the whole child” through SEL. It is no longer enough to continue supporting the idea that trauma is prevalent and responsible for a myriad of adverse reactions; the task now is to respond to those data.

Make the Small Changes Now

Among trauma-responsive practices are strategies educators may implement at any time. As explained by Sporleder and Forbes (2016), some of the most effective protective factors that promote resilience include supportive relationships, opportunities to belong, and meaningful interactions with others. Craig (2017) recommended collaboration between students and their peers as well as between students and teachers, activities that integrate concepts from multiple disciplines, and high expectations along with scaffolding.

Building relationships with each student begins with simply learning their name. As Brunzell et al. (2015) explained, some students who have experienced trauma do not feel safe or noticed in the classroom. It is critical for educators to begin with small, simple steps that communicate the, “I see you, and I am glad you are here,” message. From there, educators may be able to provide opportunities for students to express their interests and find common ground. This information may also be used when choosing themes for learning units; use student interests to integrate learning objectives across multiple disciplines. For example, in rural areas where nature is a priority, such topics

can be built into each subject area's content over time.

Allowing students to feel as though they belong, as recommended by Sporleder and Forbes (2016), is often accomplished by providing them with opportunities to take ownership. Student participation in the development of class norms and procedures is a natural first step. Craig (2017) suggested building in opportunities for small group work and teacher conferences as schedules and curriculum allow. Additionally, Craig advocated for continuing to hold students to high expectations while also providing them with the necessary supports to reach those lofty goals.

It is not enough to adhere to only special needs accommodations. Remember that each student brings strengths and weaknesses as noted by Zacarian et al. (2017). Through small group instruction and one-on-one conferences, work with the students to identify specific questions, misunderstandings, or needs in addition to their own strengths and proficiencies. From there, responsive teaching may occur and support success for all students.

Provide Opportunities for Trauma-Informed Curriculum Design

As often noted, many classroom teachers are at the mercy of schedules timed down to the minute. Creating research-based curricula requires a great deal more time than daily planning periods typically provide. It is highly recommended that schools and districts offer opportunities outside of planning periods for the development of learning units that integrate state standards, resiliency-building topics, and trauma-informed strategies. Summer collaborative groups, unencumbered teacher workdays, or compensated time during the school year outside of regular hours may be feasible options depending on the environment and needs of the site. Additionally, guidance in the form

of a teacher leader with experience in trauma-informed practice or the creation of an electronically accessible data bank of trauma-informed strategies may assist in the development of such learning units.

Provide Ongoing Professional Development

As with all learning, new research consistently provides new ideas and approaches. Schools and districts must maintain a focus on continued development in trauma-informed practices for veteran teachers. It is also critical that beginning educators be provided the foundational knowledge of trauma's definition, its forms, and its impact before being expected to implement trauma-informed strategies. This knowledge provides new teachers with the purpose or "why" behind the practices deemed important and effective.

Continue the Research

This project was the study of one ELA unit taking place over a period of 3 weeks or 15 school days. While my findings provided significant evidence to support the positive impact of integrating resiliency-building topics with reading and writing objectives, the study was still limited. While my study showed significant academic growth in identified standards as a result of the unit, I did not compare this growth to other units to determine additional significance. This additional comparative data would provide a deeper understanding related to the strength of the impact of this particular unit. This type of comparison could be extended to units focusing on resiliency-building in other disciplines. In addition to measuring academic growth, a comparison of the impact of these units on resiliency-building could be explored.

Finally, it is recommended that resilience be integrated and measured over a

greater length of time. If student perceptions of resilience were measured multiple times over the period of a single school year, would the impact change? To solidify the conclusions drawn from this project, such questions should be answered.

Conclusion

As noted previously, there is a wealth of literature available describing trauma and its negative impact. The need for trauma-informed schools has also begun to emerge in research and writings. What still exists is the need for responsive strategies with measurable positive impact. Instructional time in public school classrooms is at a premium, and the influence of trauma on students of all ages is undeniable. Through this action research, I sought to find evidence of the impact of addressing both the issue of limited time and extensive trauma simultaneously. What impact, if any, does integrating topics specifically chosen to build resiliency with reading and writing have on student academic achievement and perceptions of resilience? Though limited in its scope, my findings seem to indicate that such integrated units do have a positive impact on each. It is no longer a question of what we can do. Rather, now is the time to answer with action that declares, “This is what we know. This is how we will effectively respond.”

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Appendix A

Brief Resilience Scale

Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)

Please respond to each item by marking one box per row		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
BRS 1	I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
BRS 2	I have a hard time making it through stressful events.	☐ 5	☐ 4	☐ 3	☐ 2	☐ 1
BRS 3	It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
BRS 4	It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens.	☐ 5	☐ 4	☐ 3	☐ 2	☐ 1
BRS 5	I usually come through difficult times with little trouble.	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
BRS 6	I tend to take a long time to get over set-backs in my life.	☐ 5	☐ 4	☐ 3	☐ 2	☐ 1

Appendix B

Journal Prompts

BRS Reflection Journal 1

You will soon complete an assessment known as the Brief Resilience Scale. Before you begin, spend some time describing your thoughts. Do you believe your score will land in the low, normal or high resilience range?

BRS Reflection Journal 2

Now that you've taken the Brief Resilience Scale assessment, spend some time describing your thoughts. How do you feel about your score? Do you think it describes you accurately? Share some ideas about how you believe you got the score you did.

BRS Reflection Journal 3

Now that you have finished your Book Clubs, you will complete the Brief Resilience Scale assessment for a second time. Before you begin, spend some time describing your thoughts. Do you believe your score will land in the low, normal or high resilience range? Do you believe your score will be lower, the same, or higher than your first score? What reasons do you have for your score prediction?

BRS Reflection Journal 4

Now that you've taken the Brief Resilience Scale assessment, spend some time describing your thoughts. How do you feel about your score? Do you think it describes you accurately? Share some ideas about how you believe you got the score you did.

Appendix C

Unit Texts List

Resiliency Building Book Club Options

Author	Title	Synopsis
Bachel, B. K.	What Do You Really Want?: How to Set a Goal and Go for It! A Guide for Teens	Students are taught how to set and stick to goals along with how goal setting can relieve stress/anxiety, increase concentration, and develop an overall sense of well-being.
Carnegie, D. D.	How to Win Friends and Influence People for Teen Girls	Young women will learn to practice empathy and its power in making friends and building leadership skills.
Catherman, J.	The Manual to Middle School: The Do This, Not That Survival Guide for Guys	In this illustrated book, young men learn to tackle 100 topics that are most likely to be issues in middle school.
Clinton, C.	It's Your World: Get Informed, Get Inspired & Get Going!	This book is designed to empower students to take action in the areas that concern them.
Covey, S.	The 6 Most Important Decisions You'll Ever Make: A Guide for Teens: Updated for the Digital Age	The author uses the seven habits of highly effective people to help students address topics such as self-esteem, parents, and friends.
Gordon, J.	The Garden: A Spiritual Fable About Ways to Overcome Fear, Anxiety, and Stress	A fable is used to train students how to effectively deal with fear, stress, and anxiety.
Gordon, J.	The Positive Dog: A Story About the Power of Positivity	Students learn the how-to guides and benefits of a positive mindset through fictional characters.
Gordon, J. and West, D.	The Coffee Bean: A Simple Lesson to Create Positive Change	In this story, students learn how mindsets can change the impact of challenging circumstances.
Harris, A. and Harris, B.	Do Hard Things: A Teenage Rebellion Against Low Expectations	Two young authors empower students to view their teen years as a time for action, not simply a time to view life from the sidelines.

Hipp, E.	Fighting Invisible Tigers: Stress Management for Teens	In this book, students learn practical strategies for stress management.
Jain, R. and Tsabary, S.	Superpowered: Transform Anxiety into Courage, Confidence, and Resilience	The authors use scenarios to help students recognize when they're feeling anxious and empower them with coping skills to overcome the worried thoughts.
Johnson, S.	Who Moved My Cheese? for Teens	Change is a natural part of life, but it isn't always easy. Students are taught to view and handle change positively.
Lewis, B. A.	What Do You Stand For? For Teens: A Guide to Building Character	Students are invited to consider and select the positive character traits they want to have.
Manecke, K.	Smile & Succeed for Teens: A Crash Course in Face-to-Face Communication	Confidence and presence are strong qualities. In this book, students are taught the people and communication skills necessary for success.
Reynolds, L.	Surviving Middle School: Navigating the Halls, Riding the Social Roller Coaster, and Unmasking the Real You	The author uses humor and real-life examples to help students address topics such as bullying, parents, grades, pressure, and relationships.
Sundem, G.	Real Kids, Real Stories, Real Challenges: Overcoming Adversity Around the World	Students are encouraged to persevere by reading stories about kids who have overcome great challenges.
Sundem, G.	Real Kids, Real Stories, Real Change: Courageous Actions Around the World	Students are inspired to actively pursue positive changes in their world.
Sundem, G.	Real Kids, Real Stories, Real Character: Choices That Matter Around the World	Students are empowered to exhibit courage, creativity, kindness, persistence, resilience, and responsibility by reading about peer role models.
Thompson, L. A.	Be a Changemaker: How to Start Something that Matters	The author offers practical advice on how students can use their talents to create the changes they hope to see in their world.

Appendix D

Academic Pre-Assessment

Unit Pre-Assessment

Before you begin working in your Book Clubs, let's get some information about what you already know. Please read the article and the answer that questions that follow it. (This will continue for multiple slides.)

A Quick Note on Getting Better at Difficult Things

By Ta-Nehisi Coates
2015

Ta-Nehisi Coates is an American writer, journalist, and educator. Coates is a correspondent for The Atlantic *who often writes about cultural, social, and political issues, especially as they relate to African Americans. In this text, Coates discusses how to get better at difficult things and shares his own struggles learning a new skill. As you read, take note of the obstacles that the author encounters and how he overcomes them.*

"Learn French" by Leo Reynolds is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

I have been studying the French language, with some consistency, for three years. This field of study has been, all at once, the hardest and most rewarding of my life. I would put it above the study of writing simply because I started writing as a 6-year-old boy under my mother's tutelage.[1] I always "felt" I could write. I did not always "feel" I could effectively study a foreign language.

But here I am, right now, in a Montreal hotel. I spoke French at the border. I spoke French when I checked in. I spoke French when I went to get lunch. I don't really believe in fluency.[2] If there is such a thing, I don't have it. I mishear words. I confuse tenses. I can't really use the subjunctive. Yet.

Something has happened to me and the something is this — I have gotten better. I don't know when I first felt it. I didn't feel it this summer at Middlebury,[3] despite the difference in my entrance and exit scores. I didn't feel it when I first arrived in Paris in January. I felt, as I always feel, like I was stumbling around in the dark. I still feel like that. But I also feel like I am getting better at stumbling.

I am emphasizing how I "feel" because, when studying, it is as important as any objective[4] reality. Hopelessness feeds the fatigue[5] that leads the student to quit. It is not the study of language that is hard, so much as the "feeling" that your present level is who you are and who you will always be. I remember returning from France at the end of the summer of 2013, and being convinced that I had some kind of brain injury which prevented me from hearing French vowel sounds. But the real enemy was not any injury so much as the "feeling" of despair. That is why I ignore all the research about children and their language advantage. I don't want to hear it. I just don't care. As Carolyn Forché would say — "I'm going to have it."

1. support
2. **Fluency** *(noun)* the ability to speak or write a foreign language easily and accurately
3. Middlebury College is located in Vermont. They offer a 6-week summer graduate school program for students who want to learn French. Students who attend must pledge to speak only French for the entire time they're there.
4. **Objective** *(adjective)* neutral
5. **Fatigue** *(noun)* extreme tiredness

Unit Pre-Assessment

To "have it," I must manage my emotional health. Part of that long-term management — beyond French — is giving myself an opportunity to get better at difficult things. There is absolutely nothing in this world like the feeling of sucking at something and then improving at it. Everyone should do it every ten years or so.

I don't know what comes after this. I have said this before, and will say it again: Studying French is like setting in a canoe from California to China. You arrive on the coast of Hawaii and think, "Wow that was really far." And then you realize that China is still so very far away. "Feelings" come and go. Likely, someone will say something — in the next hour or so — which I do not understand and I will feel a little hopeless again. But right now, I feel high. And one must savor those moments of feeling high, because they are not the norm. The lows are the norm. The Struggle is the norm. May it ever be thus.

1. Which of the following identifies the central idea of the text?

A. It is important to accept and expect struggle when learning a new skill.

B. It is likely you will never fully master a new skill, but it is the journey that is important.

C. French is one of the hardest languages to learn, so people who attempt to learn it must be mentally tough.

D. It is better to find something that you excel at, rather than struggle with something that doesn't come naturally.

Replace the Blank with Your Answer: _____

2. Which section from the text best supports the answer to Question 1?

A. "I would put it above the study of writing simply because I started writing as a 6-year-old boy under my mother's tutelage. I always 'felt' I could write." (Paragraph 1)

B. "I didn't feel it when I first arrived in Paris in January. I felt, as I always feel, like I was stumbling around in the dark. I still feel like that." (Paragraph 3)

C. "To 'have it,' I must manage my emotional health. Part of that long-term management — beyond French — is giving myself an opportunity to get better at difficult things." (Paragraph 5)

D. "Likely, someone will say something — in the next hour or so — which I do not understand and I will feel a little hopeless again. But right now, I feel high." (Paragraph 6)

Replace the Blank with Your Answer: _____

Unit Pre-Assessment

3. **What is the author's argument in the text?**

A. Failure is a good thing.

B. Keep working hard, even if something is difficult.

C. Nothing can be rewarding if it's not challenging.

D. Learn a foreign language since that's a necessary skill in the 21st century.

Replace the Blank with Your Answer: _____

4. **Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Question 3?**

A. "I spoke French at the border. I spoke French when I checked in. I spoke French when I went to get lunch." (Paragraph 2)

B. "If there is a such thing, I don't have it. I mishear words. I confuse tenses. I can't really use the subjunctive. Yet." (Paragraph 2)

C. "There is absolutely nothing in this world like the feeling of sucking at something and then improving at it." (Paragraph 5)

D. "I have said this before, and will say it again: Studying French is like setting in a canoe from California to China." (Paragraph 6)

Replace the Blank with Your Answer: _____

5. **Consider the author's argument noted in Question 3. Are the reasons and examples the author uses strong enough to support the argument?**

Replace the Blanks with Your Answer:

_____

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Unit Pre-Assessment

6. What is the author's purpose for including the illustration on Slide 1? Do you believe this illustration helps support the author's argument?

Replace the Blanks with Your Answer:

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7. Please provide an objective summary of that article using five sentences or less.

Replace the Blanks with Your Answer:

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Appendix E

Academic Post-Assessment

Unit Post-Assessment

Now that you have finished working in your Book Clubs, let's find out how you've grown. Please read the article and the answer that questions that follow it. (This will continue for multiple slides.)

Noticing Mistakes Boosts Learning

Children who pay closer attention to mistakes improve skills more quickly, study shows

By Alison Pearce Stevens
2017

In this informational text Alison Pearce Stevens discusses a study by psychologist Hans Schroder about what happens when we make mistakes. While making a mistake might feel like a negative experience, noticing these mistakes could be the key to learning. As you read, take notes on how growth mindset and fixed mindset impact children when they make mistakes.

Mistakes get a bad rap. People often brush them aside by saying, "I'll do better next time." But students who pay close attention to their mistakes actually do learn a task faster than kids who ignore them. Focusing on what went wrong helps us learn, a new study shows.

"Young teen doing schoolwork at home..." by Annie Spratt is licensed under CC0.

Hans Schroder is a psychologist at Michigan State University in East Lansing. He and his team wanted to know how people's brains respond to mistakes. People can ignore a mistake by simply pretending it never happened. Or they can mull it over.[1] They can try to figure out what went wrong and where. Schroder suspected that which response people chose might strongly affect how well they learned.

To find out, the team recruited 123 children, all six to eight years old. This is an important time in a child's life. It is when most kids are beginning school. How well they do in school can be related to their mindset about learning and intelligence.

A mindset is a particular attitude about a situation. Students who have a "fixed" mindset tend to believe that they are born with a certain level of intelligence. They don't believe it can ever change. Students with a "growth" mindset, however, think they can get smarter through hard work. Scientists have shown that this mindset can affect how well students learn.

To figure out whether each child had a fixed or a growth mindset, Schroder asked the recruits a series of questions. He then put a special cap on each child's head. That cap held 64 small sensors called *electrodes*. The cap held these against the child's scalp and recorded electrical signals as they sparked between the child's brain cells. This let Schroder spy on patterns of activity inside each child's brain.

1. to think deeply about something

Unit Post-Assessment

While wearing the cap, children played a computer game. In it, they rounded up animals that had escaped from a zoo. Players had to press the space bar when they saw one of the escaped critters. But the game came with a twist. Three orangutans were also helping round up the animals. When players saw the orangutans, they were *not* supposed to press the space bar. The children could make two kinds of mistakes — either responding when they shouldn't or not responding when they should. As they played, the electrodes recorded their brain's activity.

When Schroder examined the data, he found a clear pattern. Small regions of the brain responded in the children who had a fixed mindset. Each response lasted just 150 milliseconds. The brains of children with a growth mindset showed much more activity. What's more, a larger network of areas responded. And those areas did so for longer periods — up to 500 milliseconds. This shows that these brains were paying attention to mistakes, Schroder says.

Children with growth mindsets were also better at bouncing back after their mistakes. "They were more likely to get the next trial right," Schroder says. "It was almost as if the children with growth mindsets were willing to engage with their mistakes in order to correct them." In contrast, "those with fixed mindsets wanted to ignore their mistakes," he says.

His team's results appear in the April issue of *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience*.

"This research demonstrates one way that a growth mindset helps you learn more," says Allison Master. She is a psychologist at the University of Washington in Seattle. She was not involved with the study. "When you face your mistakes and are ready to learn from them," she says. "Then you can get better over time. But if you run away from your mistakes and try to ignore them, you'll never improve."

1. **Which of the following identifies the central idea of the text?**

A. Accepting and learning from your mistakes helps you improve when you try again.

B. Students have been taught to avoid mistakes rather than accept them.

C. Making mistakes shows that you're someone who's not afraid to take risks.

D. People with fixed mindset don't learn from their mistakes because they don't make them often.

Replace the Blank with Your Answer: _____

2. **Which section from the text best supports the answer to Question 1?**

A. "Mistakes get a bad rap. People often brush them aside by saying, 'I'll do better next time.'" (Paragraph 1)

B. "It is when most kids are beginning school. How well they do in school can be related to their mindset about learning and intelligence." (Paragraph 3)

C. "Students who have a 'fixed' mindset tend to believe that they are born with a certain level of intelligence. They don't believe it can ever change." (Paragraph 4)

D. "Children with growth mindsets were also better at bouncing back after their mistakes. 'They were more likely to get the next trial right'" (Paragraph 8)

Replace the Blank with Your Answer: _____

Unit Post-Assessment

3. **What is the author's argument in the text?**

A. Readers should make as many mistakes as they can.

B. Adults hurt students' intelligence by discouraging mistakes.

C. Mistakes can help you learn.

D. Readers should determine if they have a growth mindset or fixed mindset.

Replace the Blank with Your Answer: _____

4. **Provide two details from the text that support the answer to Question 3?**

Replace the Blanks with Your Answer:

Detail 1: _____

_____

Detail 2: _____

_____

5. **Consider the author's argument noted in Question 3. Are the reasons and examples the author uses strong enough to support the argument?**

Replace the Blanks with Your Answer:

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Unit Post-Assessment

6. What is the author's purpose for including the photograph on Slide 1? Do you believe this illustration helps support the author's argument?

Replace the Blanks with Your Answer:

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7. Please provide an objective summary of that article using five sentences or less.

Replace the Blanks with Your Answer:

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Appendix F

Book Club Catalogue

Resiliency-Building Book Club Catalogue

Learning Objectives	Must Do (Complete All)	May Do (Complete 2)
<u>Priority</u> Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not. Identify text features and structures that support an author's ideas or claim. Provide an objective summary of a text with two or more central ideas; cite key supporting details. <u>Embedded</u> Read grade-level text with purpose and understanding. Engage in whole and small group reading with purpose and understanding. Read and respond according to task and purpose to become self-directed, critical readers and thinkers.	*<u>Each individual must have their own copy:</u>* 1. Weekly Guide 1 -reading log -conferencing record -skills practice -questioning -connections 2. Weekly Guide 2 -reading log -conferencing record -skills practice -questioning -connections 3. Weekly Guide 3 -reading log -conferencing record -skills practice -questioning -connections 4. Book Review -objective summary -evaluation of author's claims -endorsement or criticism of the book	*<u>All may be submitted individually OR as a group:</u>* Create a series of "Tweets" or <u>other social media posts</u> to describe a claim the author made in your text. Create a comprehension quiz for future readers of your text. Make a video of an imaginary interview with the author of your text in which the author describes their purpose and claims. Create a comic strip that teaches one of the lessons you consider a "take away" from your text. Create a fiction story, movie script, or poem that teaches one of the lessons you consider a "take away" from your text. Present an alternative activity *<u>for teacher approval</u>* to demonstrate your understanding of the text.
CHECK!		

Appendix G

Weekly Guides

Resiliency Building Book Clubs Weekly Guide 1

Who is in your club?

Name(s)	Email(s)

What book did you choose?

Title	Author	Why?

How many pages do you need to read each day?

How many pages are in your entire book?	
Divide that number by 10.	
How many pages should your group read each day?	

You have three reading days this week. Keep track of your reading.

Wednesday	I read pages _____ - _____.
Thursday	I read pages _____ - _____.
Friday	I read pages _____ - _____.

You need to conference with Ms. Jones at least once this week.

I conferenced with Ms. Jones on _____.	We discussed _____.
	I will _____.

Answer these questions using text evidence.

What is the overall topic of your book?	
Why do you believe the author has written your book?	

What questions has your book caused you to ask?

Questions	Answers

How does your book connect to building resilience?

What do you want to tell Ms. Jones about your book or Book Clubs this week?

Resiliency Building Book Clubs Weekly Guide 2

Friendly reminder!

How many pages should your group read each day?	

You have five reading days this week. Keep track of your reading.

Monday	I read pages _____ - _____.
Tuesday	I read pages _____ - _____.
Wednesday	I read pages _____ - _____.
Thursday	I read pages _____ - _____.
Friday	I read pages _____ - _____.

You need to conference with Ms. Jones at least once this week.

I conferenced with Ms. Jones on _____.	We discussed _____.
	I will _____.

Answer these questions using text evidence.

What is one claim your author has made?	
Is the claim supported by reasons and examples that are strong enough?	
What informational text features have you noticed in your book?	
Do the informational text features help support the author's claim or argument?	
What informational text structure do you believe your author is using?	
Does the informational text structure support the author's overall argument?	

How does your book connect to building resilience?

What do you want to tell Ms. Jones about your book or Book Clubs this week?

Resiliency Building Book Clubs Weekly Guide 3

Friendly reminder!

How many pages should your group read each day?	

You have your FINAL two reading days this week. Keep track of your reading.

Monday	I read pages _____ - _____.
Tuesday	I read pages _____ - _____.
FINISHED READING ENTIRE BOOK	

You need to conference with Ms. Jones at least once this week.

I conferenced with Ms. Jones on _____.	We discussed _____.
	I will _____.

Answer these questions using text evidence.

What is the overall argument your author makes (for the entire text, not just one section).	
Are the reasons and examples strong enough to support the argument?	

Write an objective summary of your text. (Hint: You can use this for Must Do #4!)

How does the ability to be resilient and the content in your text connect to YOU?

On Friday, you as an individual OR your book club as a group will present one of your "May Do" creations to the class in a Book Club Showcase. Which one will you choose? Why?

What do you want to tell Ms. Jones about your book or Book Clubs this week? (This is your last week!)
