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**INVESTIGATION OF PRESCHOOL TEACHERS PERCEPTIONS,
UNDERSTANDINGS, AND PRACTICES RELATED TO RESILIENCE
PEDAGOGY:
A QUALITATIVE SINGLE CASE STUDY**

by

Nancy Fern Ziobro

A Dissertation

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Services and Leadership
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Doctor of Education
at
Rowan University
March 8, 2018

Dissertation Advisor: JoAnn B. Manning, Ed.D.

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Acknowledgements

To my husband Caz, without your unwavering and selfless support and encouragement I could not have procured the realization of my life-long dream. I thank you for being a source of tremendous strength that has lifted me up through all the sacrifices we have collaboratively made throughout this journey. Your sense of pride in me has served to continuously engender my ability to complete this dissertation. Thank you for being my “superman” and always “being one call away.” My heart belongs to you for eternity.

To Dr. JoAnn Manning, Dr. Ane Turner Johnson, and Dr. Holly Seplocha, without your patience, advisement, and support, none of this would have been possible. Holly – you have been an esteemed mentor, colleague, and friend throughout my career. I cannot express how deeply I appreciate your continued encouragement throughout this process.

To my early childhood department team, thank you for profoundly believing in me and being a source of continuous strength and inspiration. Your compassion for the students and families created the impetus to conduct this research and continue my path toward further contribution to the field of early education and leadership.

To my study participants, this dissertation could not have been completed without your contributions. I thank you for allowing me to hear your perspectives and share your stories. My passion for leading the preschool program and for conducting this study was kindled by the admiration I hold for each one of you. Thank you for the care and education you provide to our youngest and most impressionable learners.

Abstract

Nancy Ziobro

INVESTIGATION OF PRESCHOOL TEACHERS PERCEPTIONS, UNDERSTANDINGS, AND PRACTICES RELATED TO RESILIENCE PEDAGOGY: A QUALITATIVE SINGLE CASE STUDY

2017-2018

JoAnn B. Manning, Ed.D.

Doctor of Education

The purposes of this qualitative single case study were to (a) understand the meaning of resilience through the lens of preschool teachers working in an elementary school in a small urban district and (b) to explore the impact of engaging preschool teachers in professional discourse with their colleagues regarding pedagogical practices that foster resilient behaviors in their students. Using focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and graphic elicitations this study discovered the meaning of resilience through descriptions of preschool teachers' understandings, perceptions, and teaching practices. Key findings indicate teachers viewed resilience in terms of the ability to persevere and recover in times of adversity through the development of social-emotional skills, trusting relationships and hopeful thinking. Findings also indicate preschool teachers' understandings were impacted by varying levels of trauma they experienced in their personal and professional lives. Lastly, findings indicate teachers engaged in professional development gained a deeper understanding of how their current teaching practices directly connect to pedagogy that nurtures the development of resilient behaviors in preschool students. This study offers a perspective on how to create an educational change that would empower students with the skills needed to develop into successful and contributing members of society.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Poverty and its effects on academic achievement continues to be a growing social issue in the United States. In a study conducted by the United States Department of Education (USDOE), findings clearly indicated that "student and school poverty adversely affected student achievement" (USDOE, 2001). The USDOE (2001) studied the effects of poverty on student achievement of third through fifth grade students from 71 high poverty schools. Findings showed that students living in poverty consistently scored significantly worse than other students in all years and in all grades (USDOE, 2001). An examination of contributing factors shows that it is the lack of resources and supports often available to families and children living in poverty that can directly impact a child's ability to succeed both academically and socially (Lacour and Tissington, 2011; McKinney, Flenner, Frazier, & Abrams, 2006). This lack of resources does not only include a lack of finances, but a lack of emotional, social, mental, spiritual, and physical resources and supports as well (Lacour & Tissington, 2011).

According to Simons, Simons, Conger, & Brody (2004), the effects of poverty is often exacerbated when high numbers of low-income families are living in one neighborhood. This "collective socialization" then creates a societal environment whereas accepted norms are those of "depressed attitudes and motivation thereby reducing urban children's expectations and hope for the future, and success in school" (Simons et al., 2004). According to Haberman (2004), the societal issues frequently evident within these impoverished areas such as crime, unemployment, lack of food and health care, and feelings of hopelessness and despair about the future is what often underlines the

consequences of poverty. It is; indeed, this concentrated poverty that poses the greatest challenge to urban schools. Although the population of poor people living in rural areas is great, urban communities are characterized by the highest concentrations of poverty (Kincheloe, 2010). According to Kincheloe (2010), there is a disproportionate percentage of minority students and their families being plagued by this concentrated urban poverty, which hampers their quest for academic success on many levels.

Students who are challenged with living in impoverished urban communities are often left with emotional burdens that leave them with a negative sense of self-esteem and self-worth. Subsequently, the effects of poverty can deeply impact a child's overall perceptions about their abilities, social interactions, and relationships. When students do not embrace a positive sense about who they are and what they are capable of, they will often struggle to meet or exceed their potential. Haberman (2004) shares that children from impoverished communities may have difficulty forming relationships with adults, avoid divulging information regarding themselves, and respond to others by complying with orders rather than asserting themselves. These characteristics often leave children disconnected and disengaged from school curriculum that lacks relevance to their individual lives. This disengagement from school is yet another contributing factor to academic failure.

There is, however, a growing body of research that indicates children can succeed both academically and socially despite living with severe adversities (Breslin, 2005, p. 47). Zolkoski and Bullock (2012) share that children who succeed in spite of adversity are identified as "resilient" (p. 2295). Although there is no universal definition of resilience, Brooks and Goldstein (2004) share that "a resilient mindset provides a basic

foundation and reservoir of emotional strength that can be called on to manage daily challenges” (p. x). A resilient mindset shifts our thinking from one of at risk of failure to one of strengths and capabilities. Identifying students’ strengths can be used to build capacity for successful engagement in school and ultimately result in overall healthy development. Using students’ strengths as a capacity building mechanism can transform their capabilities into resilience attributes (Benard, 2007). Results of studies have shown “applications of resilience to education reveals higher test scores, higher grades in core academic subjects, more involvement in positive youth, school, and community activities and less misconduct at school” (Brown, 2001, p. 50). When a community works together to foster resilience, a large number of our youth can overcome great adversity and achieve bright futures (Krovetz, 1999, p. 121). Therefore, fostering school communities that embrace this mindset will afford educators the opportunity to create school climates and cultures that emulate a caring community-based model whereas, building positive relationships and providing empowering and relevant educational experiences are the norm.

Teachers have the greatest potential to transform at risk behavior into resilient behavior. They have the power to do so by purposefully cultivating classroom environments that meet the children's basic needs of safety, love, and belonging (Benard, 2004). When classroom and/or school environments promote this culture of connectedness, where all student’s needs for support, respect, and belonging are met, motivation for learning is improved and students feel that they have a place in society (Benard, 2004). Additionally, teachers who intentionally plan for instruction using a

resilience pedagogy have a stronger likelihood of producing confident students who can overcome the impacts of poverty.

Teachers who work systemically to provide programs that embrace the development of caring relationships and give children the opportunity to express their opinions, make choices, solve problems, and help others are laying the foundation for fostering resilient behaviors (Newman & Dantzler, 2015). Affording children the opportunity to be essential partners in constructing an educational program that speaks to their interests, is relevant to their lives, and projects high expectations, can lead to life changing experiences (Kincheloe, 2010). Developing school programs that build from the individual strengths of each student rather than work from their deficits will give them the confidence they need to be successful in school and in life (Kincheloe, 2010). Therefore, perhaps it is time to move our conversations to one of at risk to one of resilience. Teachers embracing an understanding of the concept of resilience and the pedagogical practices attached to this phenomenon have the potential to move students from a place of at risk of academic failure to one of hope.

Problem Statement

For decades social science research has characterized poverty as the factor most likely to impact students' lives placing them at risk for academic failure and later for not reaching their potential in life (Newman & Dantzler, 2015). Many urban children are not experiencing academic success in school and are dropping out before they achieve the educational requirements needed to become productive and contributing members of society (Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007). Specifically, high school dropout rates are increasingly concentrated among low-income black and Latino students, and the rate at

which students leave school between grades 9 and 10 has tripled over the last few decades (Abrahms & Haney, 2004). The impact of these statistics on our country's economic climate is far reaching. High school dropouts are far more likely than high school graduates to be unemployed, imprisoned, living in poverty, in poor health, on public assistance, and have children who also drop out of high school (Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007; Rumberger, 2011) Rumberger (2011) further shares that the “low human capital of high school dropouts robs the economy of skills needed to fuel economic growth and enhance U.S. competitiveness in the global economy” (p.130).

With the pressures of accountability and standardized tests, education has become “a means to produce economically productive students” (Cardinal, 2011). As we, as a nation, consider the critical impact of students failing to reach their potential, we must consider our educational system essential to ending the cycle of poverty (Cardinal, 2011). Educators and leaders today are often drawn to focusing on what students cannot do rather than finding the personal strength of each child and building from that foundation. For too long we have focused our efforts to improve teaching and learning using an at risk of failure lens. Programs and interventions are often brought into schools to remediate the inadequacies of our students. Teachers are then measured by whether or not they can fix these inadequacies and succeed in preparing their students to get a passing grade. As shared by Elias, Zins, Gracyk, and Weissberg (2003), educators need to think about “remediating” with the perspective of giving students the maximum opportunity to reach their individual potential in order to succeed in society. Elias et al., (2003), further share that educators need to truly believe that all students have “greatness within them and they will stand committed to uncovering it by finding situations to nurture it” (p.

306). Therefore, teachers need to be given opportunities to intentionally plan for learning experiences that move outside their mandated curriculum and focus more on providing specific strategies to help their students lead successful lives (Cardinal, 2011). Cardinal (2011) adds that “in order to create an environment that is conducive to reducing the negative impacts of poverty, teachers need to build life skills and develop opportunities for postsecondary education or workforce training” (p. 26).

The reality of our current society is that many of our children and families are indeed managing numerous social and economic challenges. Children living in impoverished communities and facing continuing hardships may struggle to have a positive outlook on their future. However, research has shown that children and adults who are resilient can bounce back from adversity and lead very successful lives (Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Wright, Masten & Narayan, 2013). Therefore, if practitioners wish to move the educational agenda from one of student’s vulnerabilities and risk to one of strengths and possibilities, a resilience model must be considered (Wolin & Wolin, 2007).

Shifting our educational model has great potential to ameliorate the effects of the despairing social conditions children living in poverty are often faced with. Therefore, perhaps it is time for discourse regarding pedagogical practices that promote the strengths and abilities of our children and families. Brown (2001), shares that a focus on children and families’ capabilities has far more potential than continuing to work from an “at risk” focus. Brown (2001) further adds that working from a strengths-based model is more likely to produce “lifelong learners and lifelong thriving” (p. 46). Adopting a resilient mindset must be at the forefront of our thinking and planning if educators wish to impact the lives of children living in poverty. A resilience model “credits people with the strength and the

potential to recover and bounce back from hardship. It honors their power to help themselves and casts professionals as partners, rather than authorities, initiators, and directors of the change process” (Wolin & Wolin, 2007, p. 123). Educators that work to produce confident and capable students who graduate prepared to take their rightful place as a contributing member of society, have the potential to chisel away at the cycle of poverty.

Purpose of Study

In an effort to begin discussions with practitioners regarding pedagogical practices that promote the strengths and abilities of our youngest learners, this qualitative single case study was designed to understand the meaning of resilience through the lens of preschool teachers working in an elementary school in a small urban district in central New Jersey. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and graphic elicitations, this study discovered the meaning of resilience by describing perspectives, understandings, and teaching practices of preschool teachers. Additionally, this study explored the impact of engaging preschool teachers in professional discourse with their colleagues regarding pedagogical practices that foster resilience in their students. Actions begin with ones’ understandings; therefore, this study was designed to impact preschool teachers’ awareness of the concepts related to resilience and be a catalyst for how they plan for instruction.

Research Questions

This qualitative single case study afforded me the opportunity to seek answers to:

1. How do preschool teachers describe their perceptions and understandings regarding resilience?

2. How do preschool teachers describe the experiences they have had that have influenced their perspectives, understandings, and practices related to resilience?
3. How do preschool teachers describe the pedagogical practices they employ to awaken and nurture resilience in their students?
4. How do preschool teachers describe changes in their perspectives, understandings, and practices regarding resilience as a result of professional discourse between teaching colleague's?

Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) share that a conceptual framework “explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied – the key factors, variables, or constructs - and the presumed interrelationship among them” (p. 20). In a broader sense, Maxwell (2013) visualizes a conceptual framework as the “actual ideas and beliefs that the researcher holds about the phenomena being studied” (p. 39). As indicated in Figure 1, the conceptual framework for this study was constructed by examining the context, methodological assumptions, the researcher’s philosophical worldview, and existing research and theories.

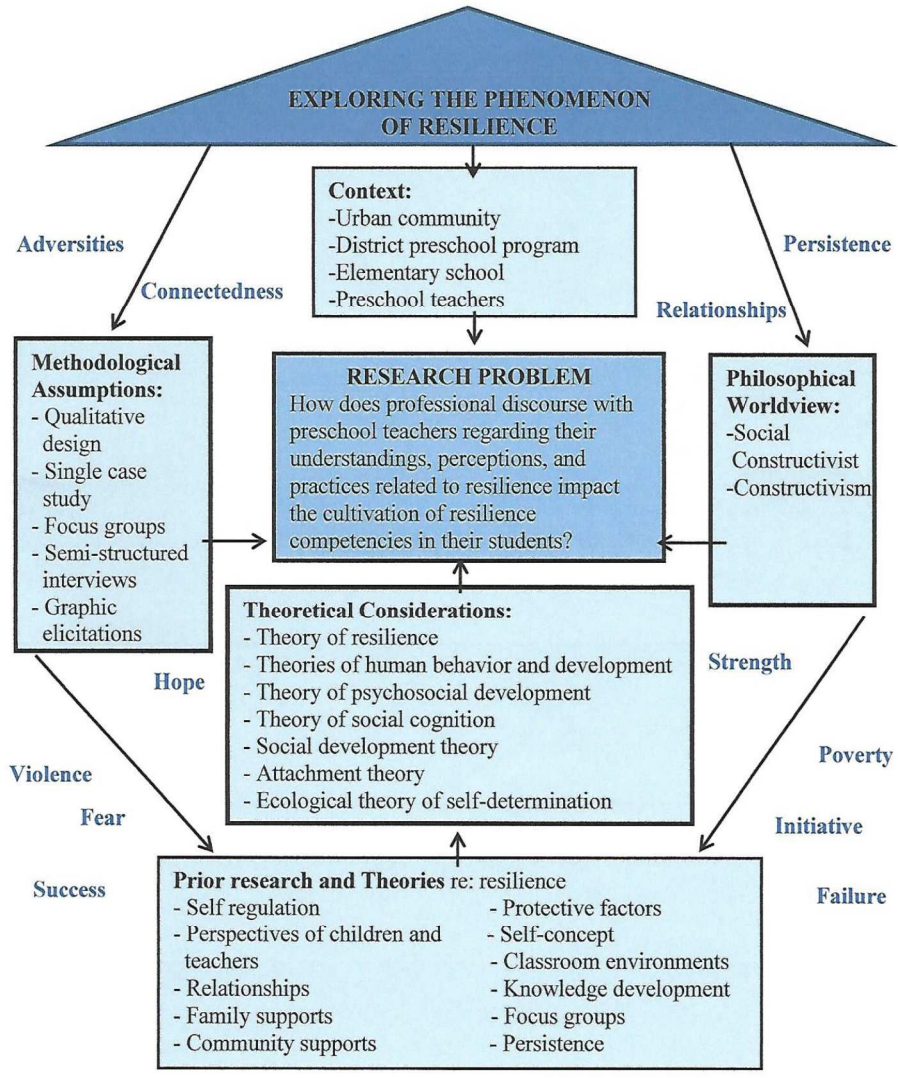


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Conceptual Framework

This study was conducted in an elementary school housed in a small urban district located in central New Jersey. The district is located in a 1.64 square mile city with a median household income of approximately \$23,081 and a median income for a family of approximately \$26,370 (United States Census Bureau, 2010). According to the United States Census Bureau (2010), about 29% of families and 40% of the population were below the poverty line. In addition, the unemployment rate was 9% compared to the United States average of 10% (United States Census Bureau, 2010). It is also a city that has been affiliated with a high crime rate. Drug and gang violence is prevalent and has been a persistent problem that has plagued the community. Excessive incidents of violence have made this city one of the most dangerous cities in New Jersey.

The public school system is a comprehensive community public school district serving pre-k through grade 12. The district is one of 31 former Abbott districts statewide. The school system is comprised of three elementary schools serving pre-k – 5th grade students, one middle school serving sixth through eighth grade students, and one high school serving ninth through 12th grade students. The enrollment over the past 10 years has declined by approximately 35%. The district is currently ranked in district factor group A; the lowest socioeconomic status across the state. Additionally, this city has one of the lowest performing districts in the state and has one of the lowest graduation rates.

Poverty and violence are part of the lived experiences of the children and families in this community; therefore, census data is a key element of the conceptual framework for this study. Children entering the preschool program as a 3-year-old are often

impacted by violence in their community, incarcerated parents, hunger, abuse, neglect, and fear. As a result, these children often bring with them a plethora of emotional and social burdens which creates a substantial concern to early educators. With this social context in mind, early educators need to first understand the consequences of the impoverished conditions many of their students and families are living within. They need to then think purposefully and plan differently. Early educators need to begin each child's educational journey by mapping out pedagogical practices that will cultivate resilient students who will be able to rise above the hardships so many of them are exposed to in their homes and in their community.

Philosophical worldview. There are specific beliefs that shape how qualitative researchers view the world and act upon it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 13). Guba (1990) refers to these basic set of beliefs as “worldviews” that researchers pack in their suitcase to bring with them along the research journey. A worldview is the researchers’ “philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research they bring to a study” (Creswell, 2014, p. 6). These beliefs are established through the researchers past experiences with and perspectives about the world they desire to study (Creswell, 2014, p. 6).

As an early childhood educator, trainer, and leader for the past 30 years, my perspectives and insights related to how young children and adults learn best have guided the formulation of a philosophical worldview. I believe that all children and adults learn best when they are active partners in the construction of knowledge. They learn best when the experiences they are provided with are both meaningful and relevant to their individual lives. When children and adults are given the opportunity to engage with

peers as a mechanism to bring deeper meaning to educational pedagogy, they are more apt to discover all there is to know about their world and the world of others.

With my philosophical beliefs about how individuals construct knowledge as a foundation, this study was developed through a constructivist worldview lens. As a social constructivist, I not only seek to understand the world in which I work, I believe all individuals seek this understanding as well. (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). Researchers who embrace this worldview will seek these understandings by capturing the individual views of participants by asking broad and general questions in an open-ended forum. (Creswell, 2014). This structure for gathering individual views allows participants to construct their own realities and meanings through interactions with others (Creswell, 2014, p. 8).

Constructivists acknowledge divergent viewpoints of participants related to the area of study and provide methods by which they can engage with others to collect these varying views about the world they live in. (Creswell, 2014; Kumar, 2011). Through participant engagement the social constructivist can discover new ideas and approaches related to the area of study.

Theory of resilience. There are numerous theories, both psychological and developmental that have also contributed to the construction of the conceptual framework for this study. To begin, the theory of resilience is founded from Maslow's (1943) theory of human development (Benard, 2004). Specifically, the theory of human development is grounded in the principle that all people have basic human needs such as love, respect, safety, belonging, and accomplishment (Maslow, 1943). The theory of resilience shares the same principles and understandings (Benard, 2004). It is when these basic human needs are compromised, that individuals need a coping mechanism to survive. This

coping mechanism is the interaction between an individual's inner capabilities and outer supports that ultimately awaken one's resilience. Benard (2004) would consider this interaction process individuals engage in for their resilience to be strong enough to manage times of adversity. Ultimately, Benard (2004) would argue that resilience is indeed a process and not an individual trait that only some are fortunate enough to have.

At the heart of Benard's (2004) theory of resilience are the protective factors that need to exist to nurture resilience in children, youth, and adults. These protective factors are what determine whether individuals' basic needs are met. They include developing caring relationships, maintaining high expectations, and providing meaningful opportunities for participation and contribution (Benard, 2004). It is when these three factors are present in any one environment such as home, school, or community that the awakening of resilience occurs. This theory has important implications for how our schools can be places that foster inner protective factors (social-emotional competence, temperament, etc.) and outer protective factors (relationships, safety etc.) so we can assist with the process of growing stronger children and families (Cairone & Mackrain, 2012).

Theories of human behavior and development. In the field of education, the theory of resilience seeks to understand the relationship between one's social behavior and academic success. Lev Vygotsky (1978), Albert Bandura (1997), and Erik Erickson (1963) have espoused theories of human behavior and learning that contribute to the understanding of this relationship. Their theories place an emphasis on the influence of social behavior on cognitive functioning (Malecki & Elliot, 2002). Vygotsky (1978) believed that the interactions and experiences children have with their families, teachers, and communities plays a substantial role in their ability to grow intellectually. He also

believed that children's social interaction with their peers was not only extremely valuable but a necessary part of the development of new skills and ideas. Therefore, he considered providing opportunities for fostering a child's social skills as an integral part of any early education program. The quality of interactions children have with both their peers and adults provide opportunities for them to learn from one another and build respectful and trusting relationships. It is these very relationships that provides one of the fundamental "protective factors" necessary for fostering resiliency skills.

Theory of psychosocial development. Erik Erickson's (1963) theory of psychosocial development delineates the various stages individuals go through during the span of their life to develop into socially and emotionally strong beings. His theory is particularly important to the work of early childhood educators as it provides a framework for how young children develop the foundational skills they will need to grow into confident and contributing adults (Erickson, 1963). Children in the early years develop trust, autonomy, and initiative which all contribute to one's ability to be resilient in times of turmoil or stress. Erickson believed that at a very early age, from birth to 12 months, individuals learn to either "trust or mistrust" the adults in their life (Erickson, 1963, p. 247). The bonds infants and toddlers create with the adults in their life have a significant impact on whether they will feel safe and secure and be willing to connect positively with other individuals. At this stage of psychosocial development children develop skills that foster a sense of connectedness and hope (Erickson, 1963). The experiences children have at this stage often determines the relationships they will be capable of engaging in as they mature.

As young children move into the second stage of psychosocial development, somewhere between the ages of 1-3, they begin to gain a sense of autonomy (Erickson, 1963, p. 251). When children gain this sense of independence, they develop a strong sense of self-esteem; feeling empowered to take risks and make decisions. As children gain this sense of security about who they are and what they can accomplish, they begin to develop the willpower to persist through challenges they are faced with (Erickson, 1963). Therefore, the experiences children have during this stage has significant impact on the development of tenacity and courage when faced with adversity. The third and final stage of psychosocial development that impacts the early years occurs when children are between the ages of 3 to 6 (Erickson, 1963). During this stage, children are gaining an understanding of how to take initiative and to have a purpose in mind (Erickson, 1963, p. 255). When children are afforded the opportunity to engage in experiences they can control, their confidence and competence grows. A focus on a child's strengths and independent thinking during this stage impacts their ability to persevere no matter what task is placed in front of them.

Theory of social cognition. Elliot Bandura's (1997) theory of social cognition also shows a connection between a child's social behavior and academic success. Bandura (1997) believed one of the ways children facilitate their own learning is "via internal self-regulation that develops by learning from the environmental influences around them." Children who possess self-regulatory skills are more capable of maintaining a focus on the task at hand and to pace themselves. Classroom environmental influences such as hands on teachers, engaging classrooms, welcoming and warm relationships, relevant and meaningful learning experiences, and safe, clean spaces are all

part of developing a school culture that provides protective factors needed to foster resilience. Teachers who assist children in developing self-regulatory skills are careful observers of children. They use their observations to plan to assist children at their individual developmental levels. Self-regulation can be considered an internal protective factor that enables a child to be resilient and persist with difficult tasks they may be presented with. This lends itself to more successful experiences in the classroom which in turn helps develop a strong self-esteem.

Social development theory. In addition to Bandura's theory of social cognition, the social development theory suggests that when children maintain strong bonds to their school, it will serve to protect them from engaging in socially unacceptable behaviors (Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbot, & Hill, 1999). Attachment and commitment are the primary components of these social bonds. Hawkins et al., (1999) share that when individuals show an attachment or commitment to a social group, and the standards of behavior for that group have been clearly delineated, individuals are more likely to engage in acceptable behavior. In essence, this attachment and commitment is what acts as a protective factor preventing individuals from engaging in harmful behaviors.

The social development theory also hypothesizes that the relationship between specific factors during a child's development influences the degree to which children can develop these bonds (Hawkins et al., 1999). According to Hawkins et al. (1999) one of the primary factors that impacts a child's ability to bond is their active engagement in both their family structure and classroom community. Children who are considered an important member of the family or the classroom and who are asked for their thoughts, ideas, and opinions, are more likely to bond with the adults. Two other essential factors

that affect children's bonding are the skills children acquire and apply while they are participating within the structure of families and classrooms and the responses of the adults to children's behavior within these groups (Hawkins, et al., 1999).

As has been discussed, the relationships children establish and maintain in their families, schools, and communities, are critical to the level of resilience a child will display. The bonds that are a primary component of the social development theory are, therefore, essential to conceptual framework for this study. Adults need to understand not only the importance of bonding with their children and students but the need to ensure they are positive role models as well. Children depend on the adults in their world to provide them with socially acceptable ways to manage their emotions and their behavior. Without this level of support, children will have difficulty being resilient enough to overcome any hardships that have the potential to steer them toward socially unacceptable behaviors.

Attachment theory. Directly tied to the social development theory is Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory. According to Bowlby (1988), attachment theories are based on the view that all beings have an innate desire to be accepted by others. Additionally, attachment theories are directly related to how responsive parents or guardians are toward their children (Bowlby, 1988). When children have a healthy bond or attachment to their parents, they are more capable of establishing a healthy view of who they are and who others are around them. It is these attachments that have an enduring effect on children; one they will carry with them their entire lives. Bowlby's (1988) attachment theory places the primary responsibility of a child's well-being on the family. He found that children who were deprived of early attachments with their mother, either by separation

or death, were those who had more of a likelihood to struggle throughout their lives. Additionally, Bowlby (1988) found that a parent's overall attitude toward their child could have life-shaping effects.

The establishment of these early attachments provides children with both inner protective factors and outer supports. These attachments are what contribute to the creation of a home environment where resilience can be nurtured and cultivated. The same certainly can hold true for educators and their students as well as the community at large. If children are deprived at a young age of a bond with family members, it is even more critical that they bond with a member of the school or outside community (e.g. teacher, coach, minister etc.). It is those bonds or attachments that protect children from adversity and help them have the hope they need to be resilient in times of turmoil.

These attachments can be developed when schools adopt a "caring community approach" (Baker, Terry, & Bridger, 1997, p. 3). A caring approach is grounded in the developmental perspective that "adequate psychosocial functioning is necessary for children to succeed academically" (Baker et al., 1997, p. 7). Examining a caring community approach through an attachment perspective provides insight into how children require caring relationships, so they may develop behavioral, emotional, social, and cognitive skills that help them adapt to school and maintain excellent mental health (Bowlby, 1982). Children who are involved in consistently caring relationships are those who have the sense of security and well-being necessary to be successful in any social setting including school.

Ecological theory of self-determination. Developing a caring community focus in our schools is an approach that can assist educators in cultivating a school atmosphere that provides children with supports and protective factors necessary to awaken resilience. This type of approach can be found in various psychological theories of human development and learning such as Bronfenbrenner's Ecological theory of self-determination (1979). Self-determination is a process that individuals engage in over their life-span. There are various factors that influence one's ability to be self-determined. The environment is one of those factors and is discussed as a primary component of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of self-determination (1979). According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the context within which development occurs as well as in which self-determination is used, coupled with any skills that support its acquisition is known as an individual's ecological system. Within this ecological system there can be various influences to an individual's environment that can either negatively or positively impact the course of their lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) Family, community, and school are part of this ecological system and can either provide the support needed to foster resilience or deny a child the experience of feeling competent enough to be self-determined (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A child who exhibits the ability to self-regulate, focus, and lead will readily show self-determination skills. These abilities come from living within an ecological system that provides the modeling and support necessary to acquire these skills (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This ecological context views an individuals' environment as one that has a great deal of influence on their capacity to be resilient.

Individuals employ a wide variety of capacities to gain control over their lives. When individuals have no sense of hope, they are less likely to show self-determination

and push forward. In these times of hardship, it is difficult for individuals, with a lack of self-determination, to set goals and make a plan for their future. If both internal factors (lack of motivation and control) and external factors (environment, family, school etc.) do not provide the supports or the protection needed, the resilience that individuals hold within them will not emerge. When children are exposed to adults who themselves show a sense of courage and self-determination, they will have the opportunity to refine their self-determination skills over time. Developing self-determination does not happen alone, it takes one's ecological system to embrace it so it may be acquired and refined.

The various theories discussed share common ideas and have collectively built a framework for the relevance of this study. To begin, all humans have the basic need to form relationships, be cared for and loved, to be part of a community, and have support from another adult. When these basic needs are met there is more of a likelihood of individuals being protected from risk and bouncing back from adversity. Establishing bonds and building relationships with other individuals provides the necessary protective factors to diminish the effects of impoverished conditions. Additionally, one's ability to self-regulate empowers them to stay the course even in times of adversity. When all these factors are in place, individuals are more likely to show determination even in times of risk; hence exhibiting resilient behavior.

According to Maxwell (2013), existing theories provide information about the phenomenon being studied and explanations of how it works (p.49). Maxwell (2013) further adds that useful theories provide the researcher with new insights and broader perspectives of that phenomenon (p. 49). For the purposes of this study, aligning existing theories with past and present research has brought clarity to the goals of the study.

Making these connections provided the researcher with a deeper understanding regarding the relevance and importance of studying resilience. As stated by Maxwell (2013), theories “illuminate the relationships that otherwise go unnoticed or misunderstood” (p. 50). Use of theories in this context gave the researcher added knowledge regarding resilience which in turn fostered richer conversations during focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, using the guiding principles evident in these theories assisted the researcher when interpreting the data collected from both interviews and focus groups.

Scope of Study

This proposal began by examining relevant research related to the phenomenon of resilience. A review of literature delves further into discussions regarding the protective factors necessary to awaken resilience and includes discourse regarding theoretical perspectives and classroom practice that supports this awakening. Furthermore, a review of literature examined both student’s perspective and teacher’s understandings regarding the phenomenon of resilience. Additionally, the literature review includes relevant research on the importance and impact of providing teachers with opportunities for professional discourse with colleagues regarding this phenomenon as a mechanism to impact the way they plan for teaching and learning environments. A summary includes a discussion regarding what general area the research has addressed and what gaps still exist.

The literature review is followed by a discussion of the research design and methods employed. Included within this discussion is the population and sample size, the context in which this study transpired, and how participants were selected. Methods also

include discussions regarding research questions, data collection, and analysis as well as how they align. The methods section also addresses issues as they relate to the validity and ethical considerations of this study. A summary is included to bracket what the intent of this study was and how the decisions related to the research design and method addressed the intent.

Significance of Study

As we look toward solutions for helping students living in poverty succeed both academically and socially, this study has profound implications for practitioners, educational leaders, and policymakers. With continued pressures from our local and federal government to meet annual yearly progress coupled with the adversities many of our children are subjected to, perhaps it is time to examine our educational system using a new mindset – a resilient mindset. Doing so has great potential to help positively impact our educational system and society as a whole. Examining school improvement using a resilience framework has the potential to ignite conversations with various stakeholders regarding the development of pedagogical practices that will significantly impact student’s success. This study has the potential to illuminate newly established priorities for policies and practice related to “nurturing and protecting the fundamental adaptive systems for human development that serve as a precursor to using other tools that may benefit the lives of children” (Masten & Powell, 2003, p. 17).

Research has shown us the value of nurturing resilience, in children at a very young age, as a mechanism for promoting competence which is one of the best ways to prevent problems (Masten & Powell, 2003, p 17). Teachers and families are typically more passionate about fostering success within their students and children then focusing

on their inabilities (Masten & Powell, 2003, p. 17). Preschool teachers have a unique opportunity – as their children’s first teacher- to have a positive effect on their student’s lives by establishing classrooms that embrace the idea that every moment of every day in a preschool classroom is a moment to promote children’s resilience (Cairone & Mackrain, 2012). Perhaps then providing teachers with the knowledge they need to develop resilience pedagogy can build an educational infrastructure that cultivates students who are capable, strong, and contributing members of society. This study illuminated the potential to heighten preschool teachers’ awareness of what their understanding and belief system is regarding resilience and have significant impact on how they plan for learning environments and instruction.

The results of this study have a great deal of potential for impacting how practitioners and policymakers view the success of today’s children. According to Masten and Powell (2003), focusing our collective attention on a resilience framework has significant implications for a model for change that indirectly or overtly can guide policy. Broadly speaking, it is my hope that results of this study has a significant impact on guiding stakeholders in the process of developing a vision and mission for changing the culture of classrooms grades preschool through 12 from one of deficits to one of strengths. Through the establishment of a new vision for change, the development of policies and practices can be examined in terms of redeveloping programs, so they may focus on “facilitating protection, enhancing or protecting assets, reducing vulnerability, and preventing or reducing risk” (Masten & Powell, 2003, p. 18). Overall, this study has the potential to serve as an impetus for creating goals that will drive new policies to guide how educational leaders, practitioners, and policy makers view school improvement;

therefore, creating more opportunities for students living in poverty to be successful in school and in life.

Social justice leadership. If educational leaders are to move a change agenda forward, viewing this study through a social justice lens provides a powerful stance to take with policymakers and practitioners. Research has shown the negative consequences of poverty on the academic success of children (Berliner, 2007). Social justice leaders take the time to examine and critique research to ensure educational professionals do not place blame on low-income students for the very real social challenges they face (Marshall & Oliva, 2010). They use research to establish a vision for creating a plan to move reform initiatives in the direction of eradicating the impact of poverty (Marshall & Oliva, 2010). They stand committed to providing school environments that are inclusive and promote academic success in order to create valuable citizens (Marshall & Oliva, 2010). Students who have been marginalized, due to the impoverished conditions they have been subjected to, often do not receive the education they deserve unless “purposeful steps are taken to change schools on their behalf with both equity and justice consciously in mind.” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 250). The results of this study have the potential to provide a foundation upon which social justice leaders can start conversations around the development of a resilience pedagogy with the intent of promoting the academic success of often marginalized students living in poverty.

Summary

In summary, through the discussion of current research and existing theories, chapter one has identified poverty and its effects on academic achievement as a major social issue and has laid the foundation for delving into a study related to the

phenomenon of resilience. Students living in impoverished conditions often do not have the supports and resources to protect them from risk. This lack of protection can leave students with a low self-esteem, no confidence, inability to persevere, and feelings of hopelessness and despair. Subsequently, students who carry these burdens all too often fail to successfully achieve the requirements to graduate high school and become contributing members of society. The impacts of high instances of drop outs on our economy is powerful; creating a multitude of negative societal and global effects.

However, research has shown that children can indeed persevere and go on to lead very successful lives when resilience competencies are cultivated and nurtured. When children feel a sense of belonging, are confident thinkers and problem solvers, can articulate their needs, self-regulate, and have a strong sense of self-efficacy, they are more likely to be resilient in times of hardship. Educators play an integral part in this process of nurturing these skills in our students. Specifically, early educators have the potential to begin to ameliorate the negative impacts of poverty through the purposeful planning of resilience pedagogy. If we are to awaken a child's resilience, then what is needed is a change in the overall mindset – from one of risk and inabilities to one of strength and capabilities. Working from a strengths-based approach rather than a deficit-based approach has great potential to move the pendulum from one of hopelessness to one of hope.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

For decades, the phenomenon of resilience has been researched by numerous scholars in the field of behavioral science, psychopathology, and counseling. Interest in this phenomenon was generated from the understanding that children who were being raised in some of the most extreme adverse conditions, often developed into confident and contributing adults. Researchers questioned why some individuals had the ability to overcome these adversities and some could not and became interested in the various factors that contributed to how individuals adapted (Doll & Lyon, 1998). As a result, researchers delved further into what innate abilities were evident in individuals who overcame adversities as well as what external factors were present. The primary focus of much of this research has been on understanding these contributing factors and using findings to establish models of interventions that promote resilience.

Today's research related to resilience has moved us away from examining risks from a deficit model where the end result is determining how we can fix individual problems. Instead, research is now grounded in a strengths-based model whereas, we are examining an individual's inner abilities to be resilient and how families, communities, and schools, are all responsible for providing the outer support system to awaken these abilities. According to Masten (2011), the primary objective of studying the phenomenon of resilience was and still is "to understand risk and resilience well enough to cultivate it and prevent harm" (p. 494).

An examination of literature related to the phenomenon of resilience has produced various themes and sub-themes which will be presented in chapter two. A review of the

various studies related to resilience will encompass defining resilience as it relates to overcoming adversities and protection from risk. This review will continue with an examination of studies related to cultivating resilience with a focus on various theoretical perspectives, perspectives of children and youth, and teacher's understanding. The researcher will then present studies related to educational factors, specifically examining relationships and classroom environments. To conclude, chapter two will provide a review of literature related to professional growth with a focus on knowledge development for teachers and focus groups.

Defining Resilience: Overcoming Adversities

One of the most comprehensive and noted studies regarding resilience was generated from Werner and Smith (1992), pioneers in this area of study. Werner and Smith (1992) conducted a longitudinal study of approximately six-hundred youths in Kauai, Hawaii beginning with children born in 1955. This study followed the birth group until their 32nd birthday, gathering data on them when they were 10 and then again at 18 years old. The researchers were determined to gain an understanding of what factors existed in the lives of their participants to help them overcome the numerous adversities they were exposed to in their community. The study began by examining the reproductive histories as well as the physical and emotional condition of the mothers from the fourth week of their pregnancies through delivery. The study continued to examine the effects of stress and family environment on the social, physical, and intellectual development of children from 2 to 10 years of age. When participants were 18, Werner and Smith (1992) looked at the long-term consequence of behavior and learning problems identified in childhood. In the follow up stage of this research, when

participants were 32 years of age, Werner and Smith (1992) examined the level of competence in their adult lives.

After an analysis of data collected through interviews, questionnaires, and documentation from the community over the span of this study, Werner and Smith (1992) found, that the majority of children studied developed into healthy and successful adults despite the high-risk environments they grew up in. They found that the number of buffers or “protective factors” a vulnerable child has growing up has more of an impact on their life course than does the number of stressful life events or “risk factors” (Werner & Smith, 1992, p. 186). In other words, when protective factors are prevalent, they outweigh the potential harmful effects of adverse conditions.

Werner and Smith (1992) found that the educational level of parents, the availability of caring adults outside the home, and supportive teachers in school, who acted like role models and assisted with the development of relevant educational goals, acted as a buffer to risk factors (p. 186). Additionally, they found that buffers to risk in early adulthood were strongly correlated to the level of emotional support from spouses and family, the power of faith and prayer, and opportunities they were given that developed a strong sense of who they were and what they could accomplish (Werner & Smith, 1992). Lastly, Werner and Smith (1992) found that in adulthood, predictors of success were dependent on participants “temperamental characteristics to include activity level, sociability, and emotionality” (p. 186). Participants who valued and sustained a positive mindset, spirituality, and friendships were those who tended to adapt easier to adversities and go on to lead healthy and happy lives.

Various other studies were conducted to determine what factors would contribute to individual's ability to overcome adversities. The research conducted by Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegan (1984) provided insight into how or if an individual's competency levels could act as a buffering mechanism against adversity. In a multi-level study consisting of both qualitative and quantitative methods, various cohorts of participants were engaged. The first cohort consisted of more than 200 children in urban settings in the United States whose parents were subjected to stressful life events. The second cohort consisted of a small group of 32 children whose infancy and early childhood were marked with the stress of a life-threatening congenital heart defect. The third cohort was comprised of 29 severely physically handicapped children who were faced with the stress of leaving their school for the handicapped to be mainstreamed into an inclusive setting at another school. Using interviews, questionnaires, and multiple rating scales, Garmezy et al., (1984) discovered that a child's competency level correlates to the level of resiliency they have to stressful events. Generally speaking, Garmezy et al., (1984) found that children who exhibited competence and who received competent care were far more likely to succeed under extreme conditions of stress. Children exhibiting competence were generally more confident and exhibited a strong sense of self-efficacy. This in return gave children the inner ability to persevere and exhibit a resilient mindset when faced with adversity.

As the results of these various studies emerged, patterns were also beginning to form. The correlation between the levels of risk an individual was managing with the strengths they have internally as well as the supports they have externally, were determinants of their success. In a later study examining resilience of American Indian

adolescents living on or near reservations in the upper Midwest, similar findings emerged (LaFromboise, Hoyt, Oliver, & Whitbeck, 2006). This study was conducted with 212 adolescents ranging in age from 10-15 years, enrolled in fifth through eighth grade. These children were exposed to specific risk factors to include discrimination, single family homes, and poverty. The purpose of this study was to first examine the self-esteem levels, level of spiritual engagement with their culture, maternal warmth, and community support (LaFromboise et al., 2006). Subsequently, the researchers set out to determine if these factors would act as buffers to the risks the children were living with. The results of this study show the highest correlations between risk and the child's level of resilience to be engagement within their culture, maternal warmth, and community support (LaFromboise et al., 2006). Findings regarding family and community support are consistent with earlier studies; however, the level of spiritual connection with one's culture is a new finding to be contemplated. LaFromboise et al. (2006), found that the more connected a child was to their culture, the more they felt they were part of a community that would support them as they found the strength to rise above their impoverished conditions.

As we consider the research regarding resilience, we are moving away from simply defining resilience as a phenomenon that is focused on an individual's inner abilities to overcome adversity. Instead, research has indicated that it is the presence and strength of families and communities that increases an individual's likelihood of demonstrating a resilient mindset when times of hardship are evident. In a participatory study conducted by Vindevogel, Ager, Schiltz, Broekaert, and Derluyn (2015), they examined the defining concepts of youth resilience in war-affected communities in

northern Uganda. Participants consisted of youth aged 12-25, parents with children aged 12-25, elders aged 55 years and older, leaders, and teachers from various communities living with the results of war. To capture the true essence of the conditions individuals in this region were subjected to, three communities were selected to participate; one urban, one peri-urban, and two rural villages. Participants living in these areas consistently experienced attacks, raids, abductions, evacuations, and overall deplorable living conditions (Vindevogel et al., 2015, p. 7).

Data were collected by engaging participants in a series of group discussions using a participatory ranking method (PRM) (Vindevogel et al., 2015, p. 5). Participants were first asked to consider characteristics of individuals they know who have succeeded despite living through difficult times. They were then asked to rank these characteristics in order of importance. As a final step to data collection, participants were asked to give meaning to the rationale behind the order in which they ranked characteristics.

A key finding in this study showed that the development of resilience in youth was not solely determined by their individual efforts to navigate their way through stressful life events (Vindevogel et al., 2015, p. 15). Rather, results showed a connectedness between an individual's capabilities and one's family, community, and societal relationships. This study provided evidence that individuals are more resilient, and communities bounce back quicker from the negative impact of war if they engage in "collective reflections, planning, and action" to deal with anything that threatens their well-being (Vindevogel et al., 2015, p. 15). Additionally, findings support the numerous theories that discuss the importance of a community-based approach to educating the whole child. It is this community-based approach that provides individuals with the outer

support system needed for resilience to be cultivated. Subsequently, when individuals are connected to family and community members, they have a greater sense of empowerment, feel protected from adverse conditions, and are more driven to succeed despite these conditions.

Defining Resilience: Protection from Risk

As noted in the findings of the various studies of resilience, children who exhibit resilience in the face of adversity or risk are those that are buffered by protective factors (Cairone & Mackrain, 2012; Shepard, 2004; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Shepard (2004) defines protective factors as “those traits, conditions, and situations that alter or reverse potentially destructive outcomes” (p. 210). Protective factors are “generated either from within each individual (e.g., personality, temperament, social and emotional competence), or from the family (e.g., loving relationships, consistent caregiving) or the environment (e.g., safe communities/neighborhoods)” (Cairone and Mackrain, 2012, p. 15). In addition to individual, family, and community/cultural protective factors, school also has the potential to protect children from risk. Specifically, school supports such as peer to peer interactions, positive teacher-child relationships, high quality curriculum, and intervention strategies all contribute to a child’s ability to rise above their adverse conditions and succeed. Additionally, Zolkoski and Bullock (2012) share that children who succeed are those who “possess certain strengths and benefit from protective factors that help them overcome adverse conditions and thrive” (p. 2295). Students that have the inner capabilities, such as a strong self-esteem, are more likely to persevere under a high level of risk.

Morales (2010) conducted a qualitative study of 50 academically successful low – socioeconomic students of color to determine if they had any protective factors in common and if so, how they contributed to their academic prowess. Interviews were conducted over an eight-year period following students from middle school through the completion of minimally 30 college credits. The results of this study showed valuable connections to the protective factors that contributed to their academic resilience. To begin, one cluster of students placed significant value on both internal and external protective factors such as their inner desire to learn and grow, caring school personnel, strong sense of hope, and obligation to their race/ethnicity (Morales, 2010). The second cluster of students all shared a strong work ethic, persistence, high self- esteem, ability to self-regulate, high parental expectations, and a mother who modeled strong work ethics (Morales, 2010). Again here, both internal and external protective factors had significant impact on the success of these students.

In a similar study, Williams and Bryan (2013), set out to examine both internal and external protective factors present in eight African American young adults living with adversity and determine if they were connected to their academic success. This qualitative study employed a series of interviews and focus groups as the methods of data collection. Data collected throughout this study clearly delineated the presence of protective factors in the home, school, and community that contributed to the participants' level of resilience when faced with adversity. Findings showed all participants shared that school-related parenting existed in their homes. This consisted of praising for good grades, setting high expectations, monitoring progress, supervision of homework, and disciplining as needed (Williams & Bryan, 2013). Additionally, all

participants shared that school based protective factors were present to include supportive school-based relationships. These relationships consisted of warmth, understanding, concern, and openness (Williams & Bryan, 2013). Lastly, community factors were present in approximately half of the participants. These included social support networks such as friends, family, neighbors, and other acquaintances within their communities (Williams & Bryan, 2013).

Cultivating Resilience: Theoretical Perspectives

Research related to resilience has long been associated with individuals who have experienced trauma or adversity. However, more current research on resilience has focused our attention on the identification of strengths, health, and well-being, all being factors of resilience (Zolkoski and Bullock, 2012). Examining the cultivation of resilience through this lens has moved us from thinking about resilience as an “adaptation skill to a common developmental phenomena ” (Svetina, 2014, p. 395). Studies have indicated that viewing resilience from this perspective is grounded in multiple theories of human development and learning.

Erick Erickson’s (1963) theory of psychosocial development delineates developmental stages individuals move through as they mature into adults. During this first stage of Erickson’s (1963) theory of psychosocial development children, ages birth to 12 months, develop a sense of trust that provides the foundation for the establishment of healthy relationships with the adults around them. When children, at this stage, do not establish this sense of trust, there is less of a likelihood that they will establish and maintain high quality relationships. In addition, Erickson (1963) believed that as children move into the second stage of psychosocial development, between the ages of 1-

3, they gain a sense of autonomy which gives them the self-determination needed to succeed at tasks.

Werner (1984) found that resilience is closely related to one's belief and confidence that even in times of adversity things will work out well. This confidence emerges when individuals have a basic trust for the environment which develops early in life. This very notion is described as one of the primary tasks in stage one of Erickson's theory of psychosocial development.

On a similar note, a longitudinal study conducted by Miller-Lewis, Searle, Sawyer, Baghurst, and Hedley (2013), findings have shown the perspectives within the theory of psychosocial development to be directly tied to the cultivation of resilience in young children. Miller-Lewis et al., (2013), embarked on this study to identify the numerous protective factors associated with preschool children's mental health resilience in times of adversity. Participants for this study included the families of 485 children attending the 27 government-funded preschools in one South Australian government schooling district (Miller-Lewis et al., 2013). Throughout this study, parents and teachers completed multiple questionnaires and surveys to examine and measure areas directly related to resilience such as, child's internal strengths, external relationships, and emotional well-being (Miller-Lewis et al., 2013). Additionally, assessments were used to determine the child's exposure to adverse conditions, family socioeconomic status, and parental distress (Miller-Lewis et al, 2013).

Miller-Lewis et al., (2013) found that high quality parent-child and teacher-child relationships, strong self-concept, and self-control were positively correlated to resilience outcomes in relation to children's level of family adversity (p. 17). Specifically, findings

indicated that these relationships and inner qualities evident during the preschool years were found to be most likely to serve as a precursor to managing any subsequent mental health difficulties emerging from times of adversity (Miller-Lewis et al., 2013, p. 17). These resilience-related findings show a distinct correlation with Erickson's theorizing regarding children ages birth to 3 years. As children achieve the basic developmental tasks of trust and autonomy they are more capable of exhibiting resilience in time of turmoil. Therefore, according to Sventina (2014) research suggests that "resolution of developmental tasks and resilience are interrelated concepts" (p. 395).

On a similar note, developments in neurological science and developmental psychology have shown that secure attachments are important for providing the foundation for healthy emotion regulation, the ability to cope with stress, and the capacity to foster healthy interpersonal relationships (Schore, 2001; Siegel, 2001). These developments directly connect to Bowlby's (1982) attachment theory where he posits that the bonds children make at a very early age are directly connected to their social emotional well-being and subsequently their ability to bounce back from adversity. Dwiwardani, Hill, Bollinger, Marks, Steele, Dolin, Wood, Hook, and Davis (2014) conducted a study whereas, they sought to examine the idea that "relational virtuous behaviors, such as humility, gratitude, and forgiveness, occurs from a foundation of attachment and the ability to exhibit resilient behavior in the wake of difficult circumstances" (p. 85). Participants included 245 individuals between the ages of 18 and 76. Through the use of questionnaires and various measurement scales, attachment styles, resilience, religiosity, gratitude, and forgiveness were measured and compared. Findings indicated that attachment and resilience were directly related to the cultivation of

relational virtues. Resilient behavior was found to be the essential component of establishing a healthy attachment and subsequent relationships with another adult.

Bowlby (1982) shares that one of the key developmental tasks at infancy is developing attachments to significant adults. Children who have established these secure attachments are more likely to have a positive vision of oneself as well as others; therefore, have a stronger probability of persevering through stressful times (Birneanu, 2014, p. 86). To further examine the correlation of attachment and resilience, Birneanu (2014) conducted a qualitative study to examine this perspective with children living in foster care. Participants included 92 neglected, emotionally, and/or physically abused children/adolescents in family foster care in Romania (Birneanu, 2014, p. 89). Through the use of structured interviews, data was gathered to determine the indicators that have influenced the foster parent child relationships such as the children's, peer relations, self-esteem, and level of secure attachments (Birneanu, 2014, p. 89). Findings indicated that children, who have had a history of dysfunctionality in their early relationship and as a result have not securely attached or bonded to a significant adult, exhibited a lower self-esteem (Birneanu, 2014, p. 95). Furthermore, findings show that attempts to form attachment to substitute families are constrained by the lack of trust and confidence these children exhibit. Therefore, it was indicated that the quality of foster care they receive may have significant impact on their ability to develop resilient behaviors.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of human development provides an alternate view regarding the cultivation of resilience. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theoretical perspective looked beyond individuals' inner capacities to be resilient in times of adversity. He theorized that it was the individual's interactions with their environment

as well as how the environment, to include home, school, and community, responds to individuals that determined their ability to manage stressful events (Harney, 2007; Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013). In other words, if the environment in which one lives provides adequate resources to manage difficult life events, that person is more likely to exhibit resilience (Ungar, et al., 2013, p. 353). Additionally, if a child grows up within an environment, both at home and at school, that is stable, safe, and encourages their positive development, they are more likely to develop the skills needed to be resilient. The concepts evident in Bronfenbrenner' (1979) ecological theory of human development, illuminated the environment as an outer protective factor necessary to the process of cultivating resilience; hence creating a parallel to various theories of resilience.

Cultivating Resilience: Perspectives of Children and Youth

What is often missing in the research regarding both risk and protective factors that children need to exhibit resilience, is the perspectives of children. In today's educational world, we are extremely focused on children's academic success yet we rarely if ever consider what students perceive to be important factors related to their success. Educators and leaders fail to recognize that students should have a voice in determining what supports and services they need to have their inner resilience cultivated.

In an effort to hear the voices of children, Downey (2014), examined the perspectives of children ages 8-12 living in the Rocky Mountain region who were faced with personal, social, and academic challenges. Through a series of various interview protocol the perspectives of these children regarding what they considered to be

important factors connected to their resilience was collected. Children identified eight factors that they considered to be connected to their academic success to include “intelligence, feelings, behaviors, home environment, family assistance, school support, community connections, and organized programs” (Downey, 2014, p. 56). Specifically, these findings indicated that children understood their role in their personal success however, clearly shared that they could not do it on their own. Children not only needed but wanted support from family, and members of the school and outside community. Additionally, children articulated the need for classroom environments that provided clear guidance regarding behavior standards, peer to peer communication, and a sense that parents and teachers were engaged in a mutual focus on their level of needs and support. Generally speaking, children’s voices clearly indicated that the establishment of educational resilience is not the job of one single person, but a collaborative effort among various key stakeholders - including the student.

Internationally, resilience research is also attempting to begin examining the perspective of adolescents regarding what risk factors consist of and what contributes to resilience in the wake of risk. Morrison, Nikolajski, Borrero, and Zickmund (2014) conducted a qualitative study to capture the experience of adolescents in Juiz de Fora Brazil. Through the use of interviews, conducted at various stages of the study, Morrison et al. (2014), gathered the perspectives of adolescents regarding what conditions they felt led to risk behaviors, how they defined risk, and what factors could promote resilience. The aim of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how youth in this community navigated through the various adversities they were subjected to and how they coped with daily life. Findings concluded that risk, in part, was determined by a lack of support from

family members and no opportunities for socioeconomic growth (Morrison et al., 2014). Broadly speaking, youth believed that the government structural issues and the lack of support from governmental entities also contributed to risk factors. To clarify, youth believed social barriers, that minimized their ability to be included within the norm of society, contributed to an attitude of defeat and a push toward defiant behavior within their communities.

When examining the findings related to what factors adolescents felt promoted resilience, they articulated the need to be involved in youth programs to give them a sense of purpose and hope. Giving students a sense of hope and purpose has the potential to drive them to believe that they are connected to something greater than their present being and empower them to create personal goals (Truebridge, 2014). Additionally, when students have a sense of hope and purpose, their ambitions, faith, and level of persistence motivate them to achieve whatever they set out to accomplish. (Truebridge, 2014). The youths in this study shared that being involved in programs where they were obtaining life skills and where they could gain the confidence to be contributing members of their families, strengthened youths' perspectives of themselves. This in turn, increased the likelihood of adolescents being resilient enough to become contributing members of their family and community structures.

Theron, Liebenberg, and Malindi (2014), also believed that obtaining students perspectives regarding what type of school experiences they felt would facilitate the awakening of resilience, was critical in researching this phenomenon. As a result, Theron et al. (2014) conducted a mixed methods study to investigate school factors related to cultivating resilience of black South African youths living in poverty stricken, rural

communities. Participants in this study ranged from 13-19 years of age. The “Pathways to Resilience Youth Measure (PRYM)” was used to collect quantitative data in the areas of participants’ risk factors, available resources, school experiences, and resilience characteristics (Theron et al., 2014, p. 256). Qualitative data was collected using a select group of participants that the community described as resilient. These participants were asked to draw and describe the things they had experienced that aided them in exhibiting resilient behaviors.

Findings shared three primary factors youth believed served to foster resilience in school settings. Youth expressed, teachers who not only “taught them life lessons, but encouraged pro-social action and constructive choices fostered their resilience” (Theron, et al., 2014, p. 259). Overall, youth shared that teachers who engaged them in conversations beyond academics, to include support and guidance through the ebbs and flows of life, shaped their ability to persevere. Subsequently, students expressed that through their teachers’ support they were more self-determined and able to succeed in spite of the impoverished conditions they were living within. Youth also shared that teachers who “promoted dreams of a better future by consistently expressing the value of education” promoted resilience (Theron et al., 2014, p. 259). When teachers took the time to talk about concepts related to hope and encouraged students to think about the results of getting a good education, students were more likely to exhibit resilience and strive for excellence. Lastly youth shared that overall, school environments that “valued their rights of freedom of expression and provided opportunities to develop to their fullest potential” were environments that cultivated resilience (Theron, et al., 2014, p. 260). Generally speaking, students that felt there were supports and services available to them on a daily

and ongoing basis felt they were more adjusted and capable of exhibiting resilience in times of adversity.

Cultivating Resilience: Teachers' Understandings

As shown in the various studies examining the perspectives of students related to how schools can foster resilient behaviors, teachers play a critical role. Research has also shown that teachers provide positive role models in the lives of resilient children. Therefore, exploring what teachers understand about this phenomenon of resilience is extremely important. Oswald, Johnson, and Howard (2003) conducted a study with a random sample of teachers living in South Australia and working at least half time for the South Australia Department of Education. Data was collected through the use of questionnaires. Questionnaires were divided into two sections to a) determine what their views were on the factors that influenced the development of resilience in their students and b) determine what specific teaching practices they employed to foster resilience (Oswald et al., 2003). The first section of the questionnaire identified eight major resilience characteristics and provided statements related to situations related to school, home, community, peers, and self as sources of protective factors (Oswald et al., 2003). Teachers were asked to rank them on a 5-point Likert scale in order of what they perceived to be the greatest contributing factors related to the development of resilience. The second part of the questionnaire was used to measure what teachers believed they could or could not do to help at risk students manage through difficult times in their lives (Oswald et al., 2003).

Results of this study showed that teachers primarily identified being effective communicators, being attached to at least one adult, believing in one's capabilities, and

the acceptance of responsibility as the primary contributing factors to the development of resilience in their students (Oswald et al., 2003). Teachers believed it was primarily the “student’s personal pre-dispositions and character strengths” that had the most influence on their ability to develop resilience (Oswald, et al., 2003, p. 61). All factors related to family influence were secondary to a student’s inner abilities and community factors ranked last in their order of importance. Additionally, results showed that when teachers were faced with situations where there was an opportunity to assist a student amid a difficult time, they employed one of two approaches. Teachers either employed a method that included listening and supporting or a more teacher driven approach whereas counseling, problem solving techniques, or outside services would be provided. (Oswald et al., 2003).

In a mixed methods study of teachers’ in the South Australia Catholic sector, Green, Oswald, and Spears (2007), examined whether their understandings or misunderstandings contributed to the fostering of resilience in their students (Green et al., 2007). During the quantitative phase, 57 teachers were selected to engage in a questionnaire to collect data on their roles and what they do in their practice to foster resilience as well as how often they do it. In the qualitative phase, 14 teachers were selected to participate in an open-ended questionnaire to gain their perspectives regarding the meaning of risk and resilience. Questions were also created to obtain further data regarding how participants identify resilience in a student and what practices they engage in to foster resilience (Green et al., 2007).

The findings of this study determined that, generally speaking, teachers believed that the development of resilience in youth was primarily determined by the students’

willingness to work hard (Green et al., 2007). Teachers did, however, also believe a warm and welcoming classroom environment, where students felt supported in positive ways, contributed to fostering resilience (Green et al., 2007). Overall, the results showed that most teachers do not have a clear understanding of what resilience is and how it looks in their students. Teachers primarily described attributes of a resilient child in negative terms. Furthermore, teachers did not factor in the notion of risk when describing resilience and appeared to equate competency to resilience (Green et. al, 2007).

Truebridge (2014) would argue that only examining the understandings of educators is not enough. Rather, we must study beliefs of our teachers to gain the most meaningful data. According to Truebridge (2014) beliefs are defined as “socially constructed and often personal assumptions, conclusions, evaluations, and the like that we make about ourselves and the people, places, and things around us” (p. 32). One’s beliefs often drive their actions, therefore, engaging teachers in discussions regarding what they believe about resilience and how those beliefs impact how they instruct is where Truebridge (2014) believes educators need to begin. Once we can understand what drives our teachers, we will be in a better position to gauge their true understanding regarding this phenomenon and how to assist them in fostering an awakening of these skills.

Educational Factors: Relationships

Schools today must take an active role in the establishment of protective factors that act to shield students from the various risks they are living with. One of the protective factors research has indicated plays a critical role in the development of resilience is the quality of relationships children have with the various adults in their

lives. Research has shown us that the relationships students form with school personnel, peers, family, and community members is essential for protecting them from risk. Establishing and maintaining healthy relationships between students, teachers, and families is a key factor in school settings that awakens the inner resilience of our students.

Johnson (2008) sought out to determine what protective factors were viewed by students to be critical for teachers to foster within the classroom structure in order to awaken their inner resilience. In order to gather this data, Johnson (2008) conducted a qualitative longitudinal study to examine the concept of resilience in the lives of South Australian children living in disadvantaged communities. He was determined to examine the connection between healthy relationships in classrooms and being considered resilient. Additionally, he was determined to understand why some students living with adversity make it and some do not. The data he collected was used to retrieve comments made by students related to relationships with their teachers. Data from this study showed that students believed the little things teachers do on a daily basis is what makes them feel like they can achieve greatness (Johnson, 2008). Specifically, students shared that teachers who were available, listened, were positive and intervened when students were in trouble, had the greatest impact on them. Additionally, students shared that teachers who had a sense of humor, remembered personal events such as birthdays, reaching milestones etc., who respected them, and who could be themselves, were all important characteristics that needed to be existent for them to feel comfortable engaging in healthy relationships (Johnson, 2008). When students were able to connect with their teachers in this way, they tended to be more resilient when faced with adversity. These healthy

relationships served as a protective mechanism for them. Although the establishment of relationships would appear to be very basic information, the nurturing of relationships has certainly taken a back seat in many of our classrooms amidst the culture of accountability in our current educational system. The results of this study show us that we can never abandon the power of establishing and nurturing relationships with our students if we wish to facilitate a high level of academic engagement.

In a similar study, Miller- Lewis, Searle, Sawyer, Baghurst, and Hedley (2013) conducted a longitudinal study to investigate what child, family, and preschool resource factors were associated with the development of resilient mental health outcomes in children ages three to five years old. This study included 485 children attending government funded preschools in one South Australian government school district (Lewis et al., 2013). Through the use of various questionnaires and rating scales, the children's level of internal strengths and external strengths were measured. Internal strengths included self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-control. External strengths included quality of the children's relationships with parents and teachers, exposure to familial adversity, socioeconomic status, parental separation, early parenthood, parental psychological distress, and stressful life events (Miller-Lewis et al., 2013).

The outcomes of this study mirror outcomes of previous studies conducted with older children and within the states. This study found that the majority of the participants were living under some type of adverse condition. Furthermore, a relationship between the level of adversity and the child's mental health difficulties was evident. It was found that children exposed to higher levels of parent-child relationship quality, teacher-child relationship quality, self-concept, and self-control during their preschool years, were less

likely to have mental health difficulties during times of adversity (Miller-Lewis et al., 2013). Hence, these very children we more capable of exhibiting resilience in times of hardship. Therefore, time invested on the development of high quality family and school relationships at an early age, can only serve to strengthen programs and have healthier outcomes for our students and families. Additionally, the more time spent on fostering the skills that will produce children with healthy levels of self-esteem, the more productive classrooms will be.

In addition to the extremely important relationships children establish with teachers and peers, young children's relationships and attachment to their mothers also has a large impact on fostering resilient behaviors. When young children do not have the opportunity to connect, bond, and attach to a primary caregiver, they will often not be empowered with the social and emotional competencies needed to understand who they are and what they are capable of. Development of a child's self-esteem is weighted heavily upon the premise of child to caregiver attachment. When children do not have a strong self-esteem, they may be unable to feel confident or resilient enough to work toward their goals and succeed.

In an effort to further examine the importance of relationships, Kim and Cicchetti (2004) conducted a longitudinal study that aimed to investigate how child maltreatment and mother-child relationship quality are related to children's maladjustment, particularly as it relates to self-esteem and social competency. The researchers set out to determine whether or not the relationship maltreated children had with their mothers linked directly to protection from risk and resilience. The premise for this study was grounded in available evidence regarding the idea of inadequate child rearing negatively impacting

self-development. Participants included 345 children, both maltreated and non-maltreated, from economically disadvantaged families. These participants were enrolled in a summer program, where trained summer counselors administered several assessments measures. These measures tested the hypothesis that “perceived mother-child relationship quality predict children’s self-esteem and social competence, which, in turn, are related to later child adjustment” (Kim & Cicchetti, 2004, p. 346). Counselors, through their observations, interactions, and interviews of students were able to assess the capabilities of the children enrolled in the program. Findings showed there was a direct correlation between the quality of mother-child relationship and a child’s level of self-esteem for both maltreated and non-maltreated children (Kim & Cicchetti, 2004). When children did not have a healthy relationship with their mothers, they were more likely to be maladjusted and lack social-emotional competencies (Kim & Cicchetti, 2004). These same children were also more likely to demonstrate behavioral issues that often stagnated their academic abilities (Kim & Cicchetti, 2004). Schools have the opportunity to play a critical role in working with families to assist in the establishment of healthy parental relationships with their children. This can only serve to strengthen the family unit and strengthen children’s capacity to have successful school experiences.

Educational Factors: Classroom Environments

Various studies have shown that school communities play an integral part in the establishment of resilience. In an attempt to understand what classroom components need to exist in order to awaken resilience in students, Rivera and Waxman (2007) conducted a qualitative study of resilient and non-resilient Hispanic 4th and 5th grade students. There were 223 participants from one of the lowest achieving schools in the south-central region

of the United States. All students completed a survey and a sample of those students was observed in their classrooms using a classroom observation inventory. Data on student's perceptions regarding their classroom environments was collected and analyzed.

The results of this study showed that children who were identified as non-resilient had a low self-esteem and as a result struggled academically. Students who were identified as resilient were focused and on task, while non-resilient students had difficulty self-regulating (Rivera & Waxman, 2007). Classroom observations showed that instruction for resilient and non-resilient students was the same. In other words, there was no differentiation for those students who struggled. These results have significant impact on making a case for building classroom environments that foster resilience in all students. In order to accomplish this, teachers need to be provided with meaningful mechanisms to enhance their knowledge and grow their practice regarding the protective factors educators can be embedding into the school structure. This in turn has the potential to awaken resilience and produce more confident and academically successful students.

Research has consistently indicated the importance of relationship building in our schools as a protection from risk; however, creating high quality classroom environments that encompass the essence of educational resilience is also critical to awakening resilience in children of all ages. In a study conducted by Hall, Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart (2009) they examined whether children with multiple risks would benefit intellectually from attending a high quality preschool program. This study was conducted based on the idea that young children's ability to be resilient relies heavily on their intellectual resources (Hall et al., 2009). This longitudinal

study began in 1997 in England and aimed to examine the effects of preschool education on the development of approximately 3, 000 children ages three to five years old. Various instruments were used to measure the children’s cognitive development, risk factors, and quality of the preschool programs they attended. Quality measures included an examination of teacher-child interactions, overall environment, and opportunities for learning across all domains, safety, and health.

The findings of this study showed that as the quality of the preschool program increased, the relationship between risk and development decreased (Hall et al., 2009). Children who attended a high-quality program were more likely to exhibit high cognitive abilities even when faced with risk. High quality programs included a high degree of teacher to child positive interactions, a warm, welcoming, and safe environment, and learning experiences that fostered active participation and engagement. Based on their study, Hall et al., (2009) shared that attending a high-quality preschool can “protect” a young child’s cognitive functioning, therefore “displaying resilience to risk” (p.344).

High quality environments that foster educational resilience also include many opportunities for children to be engaged in prosocial skills that specifically teach children to care, show empathy, and bond with their peer group. Raybuck and Hicks (1994) conducted a study to examine the results of engaging children in “KIDS CARE, an educational program aimed at reducing youth alcohol and drug abuse through improving self-esteem, developing decision-making skills, and connecting with peers” (p. 34). Participants in grades K-3 were enrolled in this program that was administered in a retreat format. During this retreat, data was collected using various self-assessments and questionnaires. Results of this study showed that involvement in this program positively

impacted these high-risk students. These students exhibited better skills related to bonding with peers and as a result had improved self-esteem. Additionally, these factors increased their resiliency, therefore placing them at less of a later risk of abusing alcohol and drugs. The result of this study provides educators with valuable information regarding what opportunities for learning must be embedded within the structure of classroom environments.

When educators focus on fostering educational resilience within the construct of classrooms, students' self-esteem strengthens which has the potential to decrease the instances of behavior issues, and subsequently allows for more time on task with academic work. In a study conducted by Nesheiwat and Brandwein, (2011) they investigated the potential relationship between resilience, self-concept, and behavioral concerns. Participants in this study were comprised of preschool and kindergarten students, parents, and teachers from two urban districts in New Jersey. Data were collected using questionnaires and multiple self-concept assessments. These assessments gathered information related to specific characteristics students had that influenced their self-concept, behavior, and ultimately their resilience.

Research has identified that a student's level of self-concept has the potential to act as a buffer to risk in resilient students. However, this study did not show any significant correlation between self-concept and resilience. Instead, findings indicated that a "presence of protective factors, including initiative, self-control, and attachment predict the absence of behavioral problems" (Nesheiwat & Brandwein, 2011, p. 22). Working toward establishing classroom environments that develop a child's inner characteristics will serve as protection from risk and allow children to rise above

hardships rather than act out negatively. With the absence of negative behavior in the classroom, all children can benefit from being a member of a functional community of learners and possess the capabilities to soar to new heights.

Professional Growth: Knowledge Development for Educators

As can be seen from the results of various studies regarding protective factors evident in the lives of children and young adults living with adversity, exploring avenues to create schools that provide protection against risk is an important step educators must take. If children cannot find protection within their family and community structure and do not have the internal protection necessary to rise above adversity, we must minimally look to our schools to be places where cultivating resilience is part of its fabric – interwoven throughout each corridor and classroom space. One way to begin the process of creating classrooms that awaken resilience in their students is by providing teachers with opportunities for knowledge development. Professional development opportunities can engage teachers in the process of first understanding the significance of this phenomenon and subsequently planning affectively for environments and pedagogy that fosters these skills in students.

Jennings, Snowberg, Coccia, and Greenberg (2011), conducted two studies to determine if the “Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE)” program would have any effect on teacher performance. Specifically, the aim of these studies was to determine if this program could “improve educators’ ability to develop and maintain a well-managed learning environment and provide optimal emotional and instructional support to their students” (Jennings et al., 2011, p. 37). Ultimately, the goal was to

determine if providing this professional development would help create school-based programs that placed awakening resilience at its core.

The first cohort was comprised of educators working in an urban region in the northeast who were recruited from four low performing elementary schools in high poverty neighborhoods. The second cohort consisted of student teachers and their mentors working in a suburban/semi-rural area. Various questionnaires were used to gather pre-training data as well as post-training data. Additionally, questionnaires were used to collect data during focus groups. The results of these studies showed that teachers found this program helpful in developing better relationships with their students, establishing stronger classroom management, developing a better awareness of how to manage their own stress, and exercising self-regulatory skills (Jennings, et al., 2011). Teachers recognized that when they were able to focus on their skills, they, in essence were modeling for their students. Hence, this modeling then created embedded opportunities for students to exhibit resilient behaviors.

In an effort to determine if teachers' understanding of the phenomenon of resilience can be affected by exposure to professional development opportunities, Russo & Boman, (2007) conducted a similar study involving 92 teachers from three state schools in Far North Queensland, Australia. Teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire comprised of four components to include professional development, resilience knowledge, identifying skills, and capacity to assist (Russo & Boman, 2007). The goal of this study was to first, measure the level of professional development participants had been provided with and subsequently, determine whether there was a

link to the level of their knowledge regarding resilience, their ability to identify resilience skills, and their ability to be helpful in times of hardship.

The results of this study showed that although there was a tremendous lack of professional development provided regarding resilience, teachers' theoretical knowledge was strong (Russo & Boman, 2007). Additionally, teachers' perceived level of confidence in their ability to identify associated protective factors and employ teaching practices that nurture the awakening of resilience in their students was high (Russo & Boman, 2007). However, the results did identify a gap between teachers' theoretical knowledge of resilience and how they applied this knowledge into their classroom teaching practices (Russo & Boman, 2007). With the majority of teachers not involved in any training regarding resilience, this study shows the importance of providing teachers with professional development experiences to heighten their knowledge and application. If teachers are to be held accountable for providing students with a classroom environment and educational experiences that nurture their protective factors, perhaps more attention needs to be given to educating teaching professionals.

Baum, Cardozo, Pat-Horenczyk, Ziv, Blanton, Reza, Weltman, and Brom (2013) conducted a quasi-experimental, cluster randomized study to determine whether or not providing teachers with resilience building training would be effective in minimizing post-traumatic distress in students subjected to war. This study sought to evaluate the effectiveness of a "Building Resilience Intervention" (BRI) which utilizes teacher training to provide resilience building tools for teachers and their students in classroom settings (Baum et al., 2013, p. 341)). The study was conducted in a town in northern Israel that was subjected to bombing and substantial loss in the aftermath of war.

Approximately 280 student's grades, four to six housed in four of the five schools in the city, participated along with their teachers. Students completed a pre-survey prior to the teachers participating in the BRI training and a post-survey upon the completion of this training series.

This study was one of the first of its kind to show evidence that providing training on resilience to teachers working with students subjected to extreme adverse conditions will significantly reduce their level of post-traumatic distress and anxiety. The results showed the impact of empowering teachers through relevant and meaningful training opportunities. When teachers were provided with the tools they needed, they were more capable of embedding teaching practices that helped foster the skills necessary to build resilience in their students. This in turn gave students the inner and outer strength they needed to rise above their hardships. Engaging teachers in the BRI training proved to help teachers expand their skills so they may meet the mental health challenges their students faced.

As we consider the level of resilience needed for children who are living with the effects of war, we must also consider all the children who have family members in the military. They experience other stress factors that negatively impact their social and emotional well-being. They are faced with fear stemming from frequent separations due to deployment and changing residency, loss, sadness, and loneliness. Educators who are responsible for teaching these children need to be prepared to foster their resilience during times when are experiencing these difficulties and uncertainties.

In an effort to address strategies and programs that may help students of military families, Garcia, De Pedro, Astor, Lester, and Benbenishty (2015) conducted a mixed

method study to examine whether training social workers to engage students in an intervention program could help promote resilience. Participants were social worker interns who were placed in military-connected public schools that use the “Families Over-Coming Under Stress (FOCUS) School Based Skill- Building Groups (SBG’s) program (Garcia et al., 2015, p. 103). All participants were trained in the implementation of this program using a workshop format. Data was collected through interviews, reflective journaling, and surveys.

Results of this study show that the use of training for social workers was extremely welcomed and appreciated. Social workers shared that although they are working with struggling students of military families, they often find themselves lacking the resources and training necessary to best meet their needs (Garcia et al., 2015, p. 112). Social workers reported that providing training about a method of intervention that would foster resilience during times of deployment or loss was a critical and important step to helping their students succeed.

Professional Growth: Focus Groups

In addition to using training as an opportunity to empower educational professionals with the knowledge and resources they need to foster resilience, focus groups are another mechanism to engaging staff in professional discourse. Grisham-Brown and Pretti-Frontczak (2003), conducted a study to examine how preschool teachers describe the use of their planning time to individualize instruction for young children with disabilities. A total of 453 classroom based preschool teachers from 19 states participated in this study. Data was collected with the use of questionnaires and focus groups. Participants in the focus groups did not complete the questionnaires as

they were only engaged in the process of extending discussions based on the responses to questionnaires. Results indicated that using focus groups in conjunction with questionnaires was essential to giving teachers a collaborative voice and providing a forum for open and honest discourse regarding issues surrounding planning time. Focus groups discussions led to deeper responses to questions and as a result yielded richer data. Therefore, engaging staff in focus groups has the potential to provide facilitators with stronger evidence to support creating action steps to address a multitude of educational concerns.

The use of numerous focus groups was at the core of data collection in a study conducted by Harvey and Hill (2004). This study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of an Afrocentric and family rites of passage program on at-risk African American youths and their parents. This program was established to “reduce the incidence and prevalence of substance abuse and antisocial attitudes and behaviors by African American youths between the ages of 11.5 and 14.5 living in the District of Columbia” (Harvey & Hill, 2004, p. 65). Specifically, the MAAT program works from a strengths-based perspective and aims to promote resilience in at-risk African American Youths. Components of this program include an afterschool feature, family enhancement and empowerment activities, and individual and family counseling (Harvey & Hill, 2004, p. 68).

In an effort to determine the effectiveness of all components of this program a combination of interviews and various focus groups was employed. In depth interviews yielded the various success factors evident in this program. However, a series of focus groups that separately engaged youths, parents, court staff, and probation officers

presented the researchers with opportunities to collect data richly grounded in the personal stories of participants. Through the use of focus groups, themes emerged regarding the success of this program. Subsequently, facilitators of this program were able to truly embrace what were the life changing components of the program and enhance areas that needed more depth.

In another study related to intervention programs for children at risk, Ager, Akesson, Stark, Flouri, Oket, Mc Collister, and Boothby (2011) used a participatory focus group methodology to examine the effects of an intervention program for children at risk in northern Uganda. Children living in Northern Uganda are subjected to the state of conflict evident in that region. As a result, children are living in deplorable conditions often fearful of abduction, enslavement, and both physical and emotional trauma (Ager et al., 2011, p. 1124).

This study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of a psychosocial structured activities (PSSA) program used with these at-risk children. This multi-phased program was designed to use the children's natural resilience to help them recover from trauma with the end goal of enhancing child well-being (Ager, et al., 2011, p. 1125). In an attempt to gain insightful information regarding the usefulness of this program, extensive focus groups were conducted with parents, children, and teachers. As shared in previous studies using this methodology, focus groups provided participants with a forum to openly share their lived experiences with this program and provide researchers with rich data to use to support the further use of this intervention.

Summary

In summary, chapter two has presented both past and present research that seeks to understand the reasons why some children living with severe adversities have both the internal and external abilities to overcome these conditions and be successful academically and socially. Research has shown that children who are successful possess certain protective factors that shield them from risk. Children who are socially and emotionally competent, are engaged in supportive, loving relationships, and feel safe are more likely to exhibit resilient behaviors and persevere during times of hardship. Additionally, research shows schools that foster exceptional relationships and provide environments that are welcoming, relevant, and socially, emotionally, and intellectually engaging are those that promote a resilience pedagogy. Research has also shown that educators have great potential to foster resilience within their students when they are provided with opportunities to build knowledge related to this phenomenon.

For years, studies of resilience have been employing a longitudinal approach to research. Additionally, subjects of the majority of this research have been adolescents and adults. Although literature has shown that resilience begins very early in a child's life – perhaps as an infant - a review of literature has produced a small sampling of studies that focus on resilience in the field of early childhood education (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Specifically, a review has found little evidence of exploring preschool educators' understanding and perspectives related to this phenomenon and how they can purposefully plan for instruction using resilience pedagogy. Hence, a review of literature has irradiated a gap in current research, which has subsequently provided a rationale for embarking on this research journey. Therefore, a summary of both past and current

research has justified a need to conduct a study that seeks to discover and understand the meaning of resilience through the lens of preschool teachers working in an urban district by describing perspectives, understandings, and teaching practices. Additionally, based on research this study will seek to explore the impact of engaging preschool teachers in professional discourse with their colleagues regarding pedagogical practices that foster resilience in their students.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Maxwell (2013) shares that when planning to conduct research, it is essential to understand the goals that serve to motivate your work (p. 21). Specifically, Maxwell (2013) posits that the selection of research methods and design are driven by “personal, practical, and intellectual goals” (p. 22). It is those precise goals that determine how your research will be conducted. Selecting a qualitative design was grounded, in part, by my personal aspirations to bring a renewed perspective to an urban district that consistently produces students who fail to reach their potential. With this personal goal in mind, I facilitated discussions with district preschool teachers working in one elementary school in order to examine their understandings and perspectives regarding resilience pedagogy. Intellectually, choosing a qualitative design was driven by my desire to capture the essence of preschool teachers’ experiences regarding resilience in order to gain insight into how these experiences drive their understandings and teaching practices. From a practical standpoint, a qualitative design best met my intent to generate results that are not only understandable to the participants but to all educational practitioners (Maxwell, 2013, p. 31).

Using these goals as a foundation, the purpose of this qualitative single case study was to understand the meaning of resilience through the lens of preschool teachers working in an elementary school in a small urban district in central New Jersey. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and graphic elicitations, this study discovered the meaning of resilience by describing perspectives, understandings, and teaching practices of preschool teachers. Additionally, this study explored the impact of

engaging preschool teachers in professional discourse with their colleagues regarding pedagogical practices that foster resilience in their students. Actions begin with ones' understandings; therefore, this study was designed to impact preschool teachers' awareness of the concepts related to resilience and be a catalyst for how they plan for instruction.

Research Questions

In an effort to bring meaning to resilience and guide pedagogical practices, this qualitative single case study sought answers to the following research questions:

1. How do preschool teachers describe their perspectives and understandings regarding resilience?
2. How do preschool teachers describe the experiences they have had that have influenced their perspectives, understandings, and practices related to resilience?
3. How do preschool teachers describe the pedagogical practices they employ to awaken and nurture resilience in their students?
4. How do preschool teachers describe changes in their perspectives, understandings, and practices regarding resilience as a result of professional discourse between teaching colleagues?

Rationale for and Assumptions of Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative research begins with certain assumptions that serve to inform the study (Creswell, 2013, p. 44). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), qualitative

research involves an “interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world whereas, researchers study things in their natural environment, attempting to make sense off or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Qualitative researchers do not place individuals in a laboratory setting or simply send them documents to complete on their own (Creswell, 2013, p. 45). Instead, they personally connect to participants by talking to them and watching how they engage with others over time and in their natural setting (Creswell, 2013, p. 45). When researchers situate themselves within the world of the participants, collecting relevant, meaningful, and rich data will most likely be the outcome.

Qualitative research also assumes that the researcher is a key element in the design of a study. Specifically, Creswell (2013), shares that in qualitative research the researcher is considered a “key instrument” and is central to the establishment and use of the tools necessary for data collection (p. 45). Rather than relying on instruments created by outside sources, qualitative researchers create their own instruments which are designed to collect open ended responses from participants (Creswell. 2013 p .45). Using this line of questioning allows the researcher to focus on the meaning participants share regarding the phenomenon being studied rather than the meaning the researcher brings (Creswell, 2013, p. 45). Qualitative research assumes that the varying perspectives participants bring to the study is at the core of data collection.

Rossmann and Rallis (2012) also share that at the foundation of qualitative analysis and interpretation is “thick description which provides researchers with details regarding the physical environment, actions, events, words, people and interactions related to the research site” (p. 269). This profound description helps to illuminate patterns and themes

within the data hence, providing further insight into the meaning of the phenomenon being studied (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 270). Ultimately, thick description provides a mechanism for “building a road map” for others so they can clearly see how the researcher analyzed and interpreted the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 270).

According to Stake (2010), “there is no one way of qualitative thinking but a grand collection of ways; it may be interpretive, experience based, situational, and/or personalistic” (p. 15). From an interpretive standpoint, there is an understanding that generated findings are based on researcher - participant interactions and the researcher is comfortable with these findings being connected to multiple meanings of the phenomenon under study (Stake, 2010, p. 15). Using a qualitative design afforded me the opportunity to be fully engaged in the process of data collection through participant interaction. It is through these interactions, both individually and collectively, that I was afforded the opportunity to collect varying perspectives and generate a diverse array of understandings. Allowing for diversity of responses also provided depth to research findings.

This study encapsulated the experiential characteristics of a qualitative design as well. A qualitative design was selected based on the field-oriented nature of this study. Participants were engaged in this study in their natural work environment; an environment where professional discourse is woven throughout their daily experiences. It is the experience of practitioners, both inside their natural work environment and outside in their personal lives, which has driven the data collection.

In qualitative research we seek to connect to “human activity” and base that activity on the experience of the practitioners (Stake, 2010, p. 56). It is this experience

that contributes to multiple meanings and interpretations subsequently, adding richness to data collection. Through engagement in semi-structured interviews and a series of focus group discussions, participants were given the opportunity to construct a new reality regarding the phenomenon of resilience (Stake, 2010, p. 15). Qualitative research, from an experiential view, allowed me to seek these multiple realities creating an opportunity to enhance classroom practice through developing resilience pedagogy (Stake, 2010, p. 63).

The personalistic nature of a qualitative research design was also a consideration in the constructing of this study. As previously stated, it was the intent of this study to work toward both individual and collective understandings. This work respected, encouraged, and valued each participants' unique reactions and responses (Stake, 2010, p. 15). I provided an empathic and trusting research environment for the purposes of allowing participants to speak freely about their personal experiences and understandings (Stake, 2010, p. 15). Therefore, selecting a qualitative design created opportunities to collect data in a way that supports my goals.

The ultimate goal of engaging in qualitative research is “learning through the transformation of data into something that will have a practical use” (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 18). This “use” may take on numerous forms, however for the purposes of this study the basis for using a qualitative approach was one of “enlightenment” (Rossman and Rallis, 2012, p. 19). Qualitative research, in this context, served to use the perspectives and understandings of preschool teachers to shape the way they think about resilience pedagogy, ultimately creating a newly found truth about its relevance. This study allowed me to use the voices of participants to focus on understanding the phenomenon of

resilience and how this understanding transforms into practice (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, using qualitative methods that seek to build this understanding and discover meaning were precisely the most appropriate for the purpose of this study. Through active engagement with participants, contributions were made to their overall knowledge about resilience, therefore, enhancing understandings (Rossman and Rallis, 2012, p. 19). Specifically, by engaging in a qualitative approach, I was focused on learning the meaning participants hold regarding resilience and capturing the perspectives and understandings that participants use to drive their pedagogical practices (Creswell, 2014; Hatch, 2002).

Researcher Epistemological Assumptions

Central to developing a rationale for selecting a qualitative study are a set of philosophical assumptions that ultimately shape the overall design. These assumptions provide a lens or a framework through which the researcher develops and constructs the study. Designing this study was grounded in a “constructivist paradigm” or framework (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). According to Haverkamp and Young (2007), a constructivist paradigm assumes that “knowledge or meaning emerges through interaction between individuals and is described as co-constructed; it cannot be observed but must be interpreted” (p. 268). Using a qualitative design allowed for this co-construction of knowledge to occur through, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and professional discourse related to elicitations.

Within the constructivist paradigm there are ontological assumptions in which the researcher operates in their search for new found knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 208). Ontological perspectives from a constructivist viewpoint assumes that the

researcher participates in the knowledge producing process with participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 210). It assumes that this knowledge producing depends on multiple realities based on individuals who experience the world from their own vantage points (Hatch, 2002, p15). Additionally, it assumes that the researcher will both value and report the varying perspectives as themes develop in the findings (Creswell, 2013, p. 21). This study was developed with the intent of my active engagement with participants as they collaboratively create new understandings, establish a diverse perspective among colleagues, and begin to construct pedagogical practices that focus on cultivating resilience in preschool children.

There are also epistemological assumptions evident within the rationale for selection of a qualitative research design. As it relates to qualitative research, epistemological assumptions refer to the researcher trying to get as close as possible to the participants being studied (Creswell, 2013, p. 20). From an epistemological perspective, the assumption is that there is a focus on the relationship between the researcher and the participants and that they are joined together in the process of co-construction of knowledge (Creswell, 2013, p 21; Hatch, 2002, p. 15). Additionally, the researcher spends time in the field becoming a part of the reality of the participants work lives. Selecting a qualitative design created opportunities for the participants and I to work collaboratively as we established the blueprint for developing an in-depth understanding regarding the phenomenon of resilience. Subsequently, it empowered participants to build a structure from which they may engage in resiliency pedagogy within their preschool classrooms.

Strategy of Inquiry

The strategy of inquiry will be conducted in the form of a case study using descriptive analysis of preschool teachers' perspectives and understanding as they emerge (Rossman and Rallis, 2012, p 103). Mills and Gay (2015) describe case study research as a "qualitative approach whereas, researchers focus on a unit of study such as individual teachers, a classroom, or a school" (p, 399). For the purposes of this research, the unit of study was comprised of a group of preschool teachers working in one elementary school in a small urban district. Using a qualitative case study was selected to engage in in-depth explorations of the phenomenon of resilience through extensive explorations of preschool teachers' perspectives, understandings, and practices (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The heuristic value of this strategy for inquiry ultimately served to illuminate the readers understanding regarding resilience pedagogy and its relevance to preschool teachers (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

Yin (2014) shares that there are various rationale used when researchers are engaged in the process of determining whether to use a single case or multi-case study. Consideration to the "critical case" as well as the "common case" rationales were factors used to select a single case line of inquiry (Yin, 2014, p. 51.) The "critical case" rationale is relevant to this research because it was the intent of this study to connect the theory of resilience to practical applications preschool teachers are engaged in. Furthermore, the intent was to examine whether the explanations teachers provide are relevant to the theory of resilience by either "confirming, challenging, and/or extending" the theoretical perspectives (Yin, 2014, p. 51). The potential of this single case to challenge or extend

the theory of resilience in the context of this research was also a consideration in selecting this line of inquiry.

The second rationale for selecting a single case study is the “common case” (Yin, 2014, p. 52). A “common case” rationale reflects the intent of a study to explore and examine “the circumstances and conditions of an everyday situation in an effort to provide specific lessons about the area of interest” (Yin, 2014, p. 52). It was the intent of this study to capture the essence of preschool teachers’ everyday teaching experiences within their school environment as it relates to resilience pedagogy. Therefore, a common case examined preschool teacher’s perspectives, understandings, and practices through shared conditions and circumstances.

Participants

Patton (2015) shared that in order to conduct an “in depth study” researcher’s need to select “information rich” cases (p. 264). These “information rich” cases are defined by Patton (2015) as “those cases from which we can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (p. 264). Hence, the rationale for choosing a purposeful sampling method was established. To achieve the desired richness of data collection, criterion sampling, one of the various ways to use a purposive sampling method, was used to determine participants in this study. Criterion sampling provided the opportunity to examine the meaning of resilience through the lens of a predetermined criterion of importance to this study (Patton, 2015, p. 281). The criterion selected for this sample was that all participants were preschool teachers actively serving in that role in a small urban district.

Based on the criterion set forth, a total of 11 district preschool teachers were initially asked to participate in this study. Participants were comprised of all preschool teachers housed in one of the districts' elementary schools. The 11 participants made up the entire preschool teaching staff at one elementary school and provided a range of experience working at this grade level. All teachers are preschool through third grade certified and approximately half are special education certified.

Data Collection

Prior to the collection of data, I met with all the preschool teachers to explain the study and ask them to participate. All participants were asked to sign a consent form prior to engaging in the process of data collection (See Appendix A). Data collection was triangulated by using three methods to include semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and graphic elicitations. Multiple sources of data were collected to gain a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon of resilience (Stake, 1995). Data triangulation also served to strengthen this study by providing multiple methods to collect “thick descriptions” of teachers’ perspectives, understandings and practices related to resilience pedagogy (Mills & Gay, 2015, p. 401; Patton, 2015, p. 316). Yin (2014) suggests that the purpose of collecting multiple sources of data is to assist the researcher in identifying “convergence” of findings. Conversely, Stake (1995) shares that using multiple sources of data collection assists in identifying “divergence” of findings. It was the intent of this study to use triangulation in order to identify both convergent and divergent findings. Furthermore, providing participants with the opportunity to share information both privately during interviews and publicly during focus groups gave depth and breadth to the data collected (Patton, 2015, p. 662). Therefore, in order to support the various ways

in which individuals are comfortable both learning and communicating, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and graphic elicitations were selected as data collection methods.

Interviews. The first method of data collection was semi-structured interviews. Qualitative interviewing provided me with the opportunity to engage in conversation with participants in order to reveal their unique perspectives and understandings (Hatch, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2012.) Using a semi-structured method, I focused the conversation on specific issues that were deemed essential to this study (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 21). Furthermore, using open ended questions and probing participants to extend their ideas during the semi-structured interview process allowed for flexibility and spontaneity (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Ultimately, using this method of data collection provided a forum for participants to privately share information they may not have been comfortable sharing in a group setting.

In an effort to encourage participants to speak freely and to ensure the interview process was welcoming and organized, I established a comfortable environment and ensured participants that responses to questions would remain confidential. To begin, all participants signed a consent form prior to engaging in the interview process (See Appendix A). The consent form specified that at no time would their names be used in any portion of this study and at any time they may choose to end their participation in this study with no recourse. An interview guide was established to provide a structure to the line of questioning (See Appendix B.) The questions guided the participants and I through an extensive conversation regarding resilience pedagogy and intentionality of

using these practices. All interviews were audio-taped and used for transcription and analysis.

Focus groups. The second source of data collection was focus groups. Focus groups allowed me to bring together a group of individuals that shared a common interest and common ideas (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 30). All teachers working with 3 and 4-year-old children, in one district elementary school, were asked to engage in a series of professional discussions related to their perceptions and understanding of resilience pedagogy. I established focus group protocol to guide these discussions (See Appendix C). The goal of these discussions was for the participants to “generate new understandings or explanations as individuals react and respond to what others say” (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 189). All discussions were audiotaped to ensure I captured the true essence of participants’ responses. The collaboration that occurred in focus groups under the direction of a moderator created opportunities for a broader range of responses to be collected. Ultimately, using focus groups in conjunction with interviews and elicitations provided me with a “complete picture of participants’ thinking rather than relying on the researchers’ assumptions about what is relevant” (Morgan, 1997, p. 25.). Additionally, focus groups allowed me to maximize the range of perspectives gathered in a short period of time (Morgan, 1997, p. 26).

The premise of gathering data using this method is founded on the idea that individuals construct knowledge by actively engaging in “interactive talk” with other individuals in a relaxed and informal setting (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 189). This active engagement has the potential to create what Stewart and Shamdasani (2015) refer to as “snowballing” as well as acting as a stimulus for deeper conversations (p. 46). The

potential richness of data collection often will be generated from one comment that then triggers responses from other participants, hence creating this “snowballing” effect (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015, p. 46).

Focus group discussions are most engaging when they are small enough to ensure everyone has an opportunity to have a voice and large enough to bring diverse thoughts and ideas to the forefront of discussions (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 6). Additionally, Krueger (1994) and Morgan (1997) suggest that conducting anywhere from three to six group meetings would be adequate to reach data saturation. Reaching data saturation was essential to this study as it brought me to a point where I had “heard the range of ideas and was not obtaining any new information” (Krueger and Casey, 2015, p. 23). Data saturation informed me of whether to continue or discontinue conducting additional focus groups. Therefore, this study used a total of four focus groups. Participants were given dates and times of the focus group discussions and were requested to attend all four group discussions over a period of one month. Coverage of classrooms during the teacher’s absence was provided. Each focus group lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and were audio-taped for transcription and analysis.

Graphic elicitations. The third source of data collection was graphic elicitations. This method of data collection was used as a visual method that engaged participants in the process of reflexivity and assisted me in gathering a more holistic picture of the area of study (Bagnoli, 2009). This visual method of data collection inspired participants to engage in “out of the box thinking” related to resilience pedagogy (Bagnoli, 2009). Elicitations enabled participants to express their thoughts and ideas visually; going

beyond verbal expressions and ultimately leading to data collection of greater magnitudes (Bagnoli, 2009).

For the purposes of this study, graphic elicitations were used as a mechanism to begin discussions during our first focus group as well as end our discussions during the last focus group. In an effort to facilitate discussions based on visuals completed by participants, they were asked to complete a pre-elicitation protocol (See Appendix D). This protocol was designed to capture the essence of what preschool teachers identify as important to resilience in their students. At the close of the series of focus group discussions, the participants who completed pre-elicitations were asked to complete a second protocol (See Appendix E). It was the intent to use data from these elicitations to determine if teachers' perceptions and understandings regarding resilience pedagogy were enhanced through professional discourse with colleagues related to this area of study.

Instrumentation. An interview guide as well as focus group and elicitation protocol were established as instruments for data collection (See Appendices B, C, D & E) The interview guide was established in order to ensure each participant interviewed would be engaged in the same basic line of inquiry while at the same time allow for spontaneity (Patton, 2015, p. 439). The guide assisted me in conducting interviews that elicited responses to open ended questions related to the area of study. It was my intent to ensure the guide acted as a conversation facilitator which allowed for opportunities to expand the data collected through probing participants to respond with greater depth and breath. The questions that were developed were done so with the intention of gathering data that served to illuminate teacher's understandings, perspectives, and pedagogical

practices related to resilience. Overall, the interview guide assisted me in making interviewing numerous participants more “systematic and comprehensive by delineating the issues to be explored in advance” (Patton, 2015, p. 439).

Focus group protocol was established to assist me in developing a “questioning route” to act as a map for taking the collaborative journey of data collection with the participants (See Appendix C) (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 39). The protocol was created to serve as the agenda for focus group discussions; each question individually being used as the impetus for starting conversations. It was my intent to use the focus group protocol to give participants time to enter into discourse that allowed for elaboration of responses. The content of focus group discussions became far richer when the designated protocol was simply used as a starting point and time was allotted for participants to explore areas they brought to the forefront (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 176).

Graphic elicitation protocols were also established as instruments for data collection. Protocols were designed to collect data using visual prompts to elicit artistic responses related to discussions of resilience pedagogy. For the purposes of this study two graphic elicitation protocols were established; one that was used at the start of focus group discussions and one that was used at the completion of a series of focus group discussions. The pre-elicitation protocol asked participants to examine a visual representation of a bare tree where each branch and root signified the essentials their students would need to grow the skills necessary to be resilient. They were then asked to label and describe how they awaken the resilience of the tree. It was my intent to obtain baseline data regarding teachers’ understandings, perspectives, and practices related to resilience pedagogy. The post-elicitation depicts a visual of a blank bulletin board and

asked participants to name and create a classroom bulletin board that highlighted a classroom that had intentionally planned for fostering resilience in their students. The intention of collecting this post-elicitation data was to determine if engaging in professional discourse related to resilience pedagogy had impacted teachers' perspectives, understandings, and practices.

Data Analysis

According to Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007) one of the most important steps in qualitative research is the analysis of data. Hatch (2002) shares that data analysis is the “systematic search for meaning” and a way to process data in such a way that findings can be fluently communicated to others (p. 148). Additionally, the analysis of data is a way for the researchers to organize and examine data in a manner that will allow them to “see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, critique, and generate potential theories” (Hatch, 2002, p. 148). Specifically, as researchers process qualitative data, Wolcott (2001) posits that they engage in what he identifies as “mind work” or using their own intellectual capacities to make sense of this data (p 148).

Transcription. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), the first step in analyzing data is to prepare a transcript that encapsulates “a full and accurate word-for-word written rendition of the questions asked and responses given” (p 190). Qualitative research typically uses words and interpretations of words as its primary source of data (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 192). It is this language that is critical to the process of participants conveying their beliefs, perspectives, and understandings (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p.192). Therefore, the analysis and interpretation of focus group and interview data began

through the careful examination of transcribed recordings. For the purposes of this study a transcription service was employed to capture, verbatim, discourse that ensued during each focus group and interview session. Stewart et al. (2007) further add that transcription will not only assist the researcher with analysis of data but will create a permanent record of group discussions that may be shared with other practitioners (p. 110).

Coding. In order to further analyze transcribed interview and focus group data as well as elicitation data, two cycles of coding were used. According to Creswell (2013) coding involves “the aggregation of text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from various databases in the study, and then assigning a label to the code” (p. 184). Codes are used primarily to allow the researcher to “quickly find, pull out, and cluster the segments relating to a particular research question, hypothesis, construct, or theme” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p. 72). As I analyzed the data, codes provided me with prompts that engaged me in deep reflection about the meaning of the data. Furthermore, the heuristic value of coding fully engaged me in the thorough reading of all data and the assigning of relevant and meaningful codes (Miles, et al., 2014, p. 73). Overall, coding provided a method to organize data and provide richness and depth to the analysis process.

In vivo coding was used as a first cycle method to encapsulate words and phrases from the participants’ own language during focus group and interview discussions (Miles et al., 2014, pg.74). Using this method assisted me in capturing words and phrases that were repeated in the various focus groups and interviews as a way to interpret the data with validity. Pattern coding was the second cycle used to further analyze the data. I used

the words and phrases captured in the first cycle of coding to identify patterns and/or themes that emerged from the participant's responses. This assisted me in streamlining a large quantity of material into more meaningful "units of analysis" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 86)

Descriptive coding was used as a first cycle method to analyze elicitation data (Saldana, 2013, p. 87). Elicitation protocol was designed to engage participants in sharing their understandings of terminology surrounding resilience. Additionally, these elicitations further probed participants to describe their ideas related to what teaching practices needed to be executed to awaken resilient behaviors in their students. The data collected was primarily descriptive in content, therefore descriptive coding was the selected method of sorting and labeling data to analyze topics that emerged.

Pattern coding was the second cycle method used to further analyze elicitation data (Saldana, 2013, p. 209). Pattern coding allowed for the development of themes to materialize. Through the analysis of first cycle coding, words and phrases began to emerge. These words and phrases essentially came together and formed several predominant ideas. As these primary ideas surfaced, themes were established. Furthermore, pre and post-elicitation data was examined and compared to determine if themes and patterns within participant responses were impacted based on professional discourse related to resilience.

When conducting a single case study, the primary task of data analysis is to provide the researcher with rich information from which they can understand their case (Stake, 1995, p. 77). Therefore, the outcome of data analysis for this single case qualitative study was one of "explanation building" and interpretation (Stake, 1995, p.

74; Yin, 2014, p. 147). Yin (2014) shares that “explanation building stipulates a presumed set of casual ideas about how or why something happened within the particular case” (P. 147). Ultimately, an analysis of data assisted me in reaching new meanings regarding how preschool teachers use what they know about resilience to enhance their practice and nurture resilience in their students. Using direct interpretation allowed me to understand what preschool teachers do on a daily basis to support the individual growth of their students and how they develop a rationale for this practice (Stake, 1995, p.74).

Validity

In qualitative research, validity is “the degree to which qualitative data gauge accurately what we are trying to measure” (Mills and Gay, 2015, p. 554). Maxwell (2013) shares that there are two primary validity threats that are often evident when employing a qualitative research design; “researcher bias” and “reactivity” (p. 124). Researcher bias, which may be disinterred from personal agendas, theories, and beliefs, can serve to invalidate findings of a study. Additionally, “reactivity” or “the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals studied” can also pose validity threats (Maxwell, 2013, p. 125). For the purposes of this study, served as an active member of focus group discussions and hence, was part of the world of the individuals being studied. This “reflexivity” is what Maxwell (2013) considers a “powerful and inescapable influence on research when engaging in any type of interviewing process “(p. 125). Therefore, me serving in this role had the potential to pose an additional threat to the validity of this study.

In an effort to address these validity threats, several techniques were used. To begin, through the process of reflectivity, I identified biases that may have impacted the

interpretation of findings and threaten the validity of this study (Creswell, 2014, p. 202). The bias that has the greatest potential to pose a threat is that I served in the role as supervisor of the preschool teachers being studied, have a long history in the field of early education, and have clear beliefs about what creates classrooms that address the social and emotional competencies in young children. Interpretations of the findings of this study may, therefore, may have been influenced by my background (Creswell, 2014, p. 202).

When considering the validity of a study, Guba (1981) shares numerous characteristics that the researcher should consider. One characteristic to consider is the credibility of the study (Guba, 1981, p. 54). According to Mills and Gay (2015), credibility refers to “the researchers’ ability to consider the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained” (p. 556). One way the credibility was addressed was through triangulation used during the data collection process. Data collection included semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and graphic elicitations. Creswell (2014) shares that when various data sources are used, the researcher is able to “examine evidence from these sources and use it to build a coherent justification for themes” (p. 201). Through the data analysis process, themes were established first by examining sources of data separately and then viewing them collectively. These themes were then converged to determine if the various methods used to collect information from participants yielded similar results. According to Creswell (2014), the process of collecting and analyzing multiple sources of data will contribute to the validity of this study (p. 201).

Peer debriefing was also used as a mechanism to ensure the credibility of the study. Patton (2002) shares that peer debriefing is a way to ensure accuracy of how the researcher analyzes the data. Additionally, peer debriefing “provides the researcher with the opportunity to test their growing insights through interactions with other professionals” (Mills and Gay, 2015, p. 556). A member of the preschool intervention and referral team, who has experience with conducting qualitative research and who is considered an expert in this area of study, was asked to examine data alongside the researcher. This support from a colleague engaged me in discussions about evolving hypotheses and findings from the study (Patton, 2002). Collaborative discussions surrounding the comparison interview data, focus group discourse, and elicitation representations ensured findings were established through the lens of someone other than the researcher. According to Creswell (2014) these interpretations beyond the researcher will add to the validity of the study (p. 202).

According to Guba (1981), confirmability is another characteristic the researcher needs to consider when ensuring the validity of their study (p. 57). Confirmability refers to the “neutrality or objectivity of the data that have been collected” (Mills and Gay, 2015, p. 556). Triangulation of data sources was also used to address the confirmability of the study. Employing a data collection process that engaged participants in rigorous discussions using a variety of sources and methods, was one way the researcher’s biases were tested as vigorously as possible (Guba, 1981, p. 57).

Role of Researcher

Qualitative research is essentially an interactive process whereas the researcher is engaged in a “sustained and intensive experience with the participants” (Creswell, 2014,

p. 187; Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 33). Conducting this study involved me working directly with participants in face to face interactions in what Glesne & Peshkin (1992) discuss as “backyard” research. This “backyard” research involves the researcher conducting a study within their immediate work setting (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). I worked in the district where the study was being conducted for ten years and had worked extensively with the preschool teachers who were participants in this study.

I have a comprehensive background in developing and sustaining high quality early education programs. Philosophically, I believe very firmly in using the environment as a teaching tool to build the social-emotional competencies young children need to be successful in school and in life. In my role as supervisor of the preschool program, I had spent a great deal of time observing, training, mentoring, and collaborating with the participants for this study. Over the past several years, I had been actively engaged with participants in the implementation of the preschool programs social-emotional curriculum. The preschool teachers had spent a tremendous amount of time focused on creating embedded and intentional opportunities for their students to grow socially and emotionally under their care and direction. Additionally, I had spent a great deal of time ensuring the participants were meeting and/or exceeding the state standards for the social and emotional development of all three and four-year-old children.

My background, experience, and relationships with participants had led me to have certain assumptions as it related to outcomes for this study. I assumed that based on the consistent focus on social-emotional learning evident in the preschool program, the participants would have foundational knowledge of what social emotional competencies need to be cultivated as well as what teaching practices need to be planned for. In

addition, because I knew the participants had not been engaged in professional discussions and/or professional development related to resilience, I assumed they would be unable to correlate these competencies to awakening resilience. It was these very assumptions that had the potential to shape my interpretations throughout this study (Creswell, 2014, p. 188). The work I had accomplished with the preschool teachers and my experiences working in the preschool program may have created influential factors that impacted outcomes. Specifically, according to Creswell (2014) these experiences may cause me to lean toward certain themes as data is analyzed, intentionally look for evidence that supports my position and/or beliefs, and influence either favorable or unfavorable conclusions about participants (p. 188).

Ethical Considerations

Qualitative researchers conduct research that allows them to get close to the action and to their participants (Hatch, 2002, p. 65). As a result, qualitative researchers need to anticipate ethical issues that may arise throughout their study and put assurances in place to prevent them (Punch, 2005). Creswell (2014) argues that ethical concerns must be extensively considered as they are evident throughout the entire research process (p. 92). For the purposes of this study numerous ethical assurances were enacted in order to conduct research that was ethically grounded.

Conducting qualitative research in educational institutions creates the potential for ethical issues to arise when asking teachers to participate. Hatch (2002) posits that teachers are a vulnerable occupational group who often perceive themselves to be “in a subordinate position in relation to the educational researcher” (p. 67). Specifically, teachers may have viewed me as an expert in the field and believed that if they declined it

may have been perceived that they were attempting to hide something (Hatch, 2002, p. 67). Additionally, when educational administrators are actively engaged in the study, teachers may find it difficult to decline an invitation to participate (Hatch, 2002, p. 67). Therefore, in an effort to be sensitive to the teachers' vulnerability and respect their right to refuse participation, all participants were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix A) asking them if they would like to volunteer their time to take part in this study. This consent clearly stated that at any time participants may withdraw from this study without prejudice. In addition, in order to protect their identity and maintain confidentiality, the consent informed them that at no time would their names be used in any documentation.

Ethical issues are also relevant to the various stages of a focus group research design to include both implementation and presentation (Barbour & Kitzinger, 2001, p. 17). Confidentiality is one of the primary ethical concerns when engaging participants in this type of group interview (Barbour & Kitzinger, 2001, p. 17; Linhorst, 2002, p. 219). The structure of focus group discussions is the sharing of information and statements being made to an entire group. I had little control over whether individuals share this information outside of the focus group arena. Confidentiality can be particularly problematic when participants know one another, which was primarily the case for this study (Linhorst, 2002, p. 219).

In an effort to protect the confidentiality of focus group participants, ground rules were established at the commencement of the various focus groups and all audiotaped conversations were stored in a locked cabinet. Collaboratively, I engaged participants in a discussion related to confidentiality and recorded what the group designated as appropriate rules for their individual groups. At the beginning of each focus group, these

rules were restated as a reminder to all participants of their ethical obligation to maintain confidentiality.

In addition to the ethical concerns evident when engaging participants in focus groups, interviews also pose ethical concerns. For the purposes of this study, where “back-yard research” was conducted, I was mindful of not placing judgement on responses and/or straying away from the intent of the interviews (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In addition, Patton (2015), shares that when participants are taken through this extensive process of self-reflection during the interview process it will often leave them feeling as though they have not done what is expected of them and may find out things about themselves that they may not have known (p. 63). With me serving in the role as the supervisor of all the participants, this may have posed a particular ethical concern. Therefore, maintaining confidentiality throughout the interview process was essential to maintaining standards of ethics for this study. In an effort to ensure I was maintaining confidentiality, each participant was asked to sign a consent (See Appendix A). The consent form informed them that their participation was voluntary, at any time they could end their participation without judgment, and that at no time would their names be used.

In a final effort to establish ethical assurances, I had my research plans reviewed by the Internal Review Board (IRB) on the university campus. IRB review and approval were a mechanism to ensure the rights of participants were protected (Creswell, 2014, p. 95). This review ensured that I had considered all potential risk and ethical concerns and had put processes in place to address them.

Summary

In summary, chapter three has provided a comprehensive discussion of all the methods and processes I engaged in to answer the delineated research questions and provide a solid structure for this study. According to Seidman (2013) one of the primary ways for a researcher to investigate processes within educational institutions is through the perspectives and experiences of the individuals working within the educational setting (p. 9). Therefore, employing a qualitative single case study design using semi-structured interviews, focus groups and graphic elicitations as methods of data collection, I intended to capture preschool teachers' perspectives, understandings, and teaching practices related to resilience pedagogy. Using data collected through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and graphic elicitations, the intended purpose was to gather information regarding how preschool teachers defined and related to resilience. It was also my intent to determine whether engaging preschool teachers in professional discourse related to resilience pedagogy would impact their perspectives and understandings regarding the skills children need to exhibit resilience competencies. Additionally, I intended to discover whether this professional discourse impacted how teachers intentionally plan for an environment and program that nurtures these competencies.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to seek to understand the meaning of resilience through the lens of preschool teachers working in one elementary school in a small urban district. Through the use of focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and graphic elicitations, the intent of this study was to discover the meaning of resilience through teachers' descriptions of perspectives, understandings, and teaching practices. Additionally, the intent of this study was to explore the impact engaging preschool teachers in discourse with colleagues regarding pedagogical practices that cultivate resilience in their students would have on how their perspectives and understandings as well as how they plan for instruction. Chapter four will present the findings of this study, which were guided by the following research questions:

1. How do preschool teachers describe their perceptions and understandings regarding resilience?
2. How do preschool teachers describe the experiences they have had that have influenced their perspectives, understandings, and practices related to resilience?
3. How do preschool teachers describe the pedagogical practices they employ to awaken and nurture resilience in their students?
4. How do preschool teachers describe changes in their perspectives, understandings, and practices regarding resilience as a result of professional discourse between teaching colleagues?

Specifically, this chapter will provide details regarding the participant sample and setting to include any factors that may have influenced the information obtained during the data collection process. Furthermore, the data collection process will be delineated to include details regarding duration of data collection, how data was recorded, and any variations or deviations from the proposed data collection process. Ultimately, chapter four will outline and describe the “transformation of data into findings” (Patton, 2015, p. 521).

Participant Sample and Setting

This qualitative single case study occurred in an urban school district of approximately 1,800 students grades pre-k through 12. The district houses students in three preschool through fifth grade elementary schools, one fifth through eighth grade middle school and one ninth through twelfth grade high school. Preschool students are also housed in four private provider locations throughout the city. The location for this study was one of the three elementary schools serving approximately 400 pre-k through fifth grade students. The preschool program for this building was comprised of approximately 83 students and 30 staff to include teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff. This location was selected based upon the building principals’ openness to the study, willingness to release teachers, and available space within his building. Additionally, I was housed in this building, which afforded me more flexibility and familiarity with the resources I needed to have data collection occur successfully.

The case for this study was all preschool teachers working primarily within the selected elementary school. This sample included a total of 15 potential participants. All 15 preschool teachers were asked to attend a meeting where the study was explained and requests for participation were made. At the completion of this meeting, the participant

sample increased from the original plan of 11 preschool teachers to include 14 out of 15 potential participants. All participants were given time to review and sign consent forms to partake in focus groups and indicate if they would be willing to be interviewed (See Appendix A). Additionally, all participants were informed in writing and verbally that pseudonyms would be used to identify them to guarantee confidentiality.

As shown in table 1, all 14 study participants were Caucasian females ranging in age from 29 to 58-years-old. Participants level of experience working with three and four-year-old students ranged from seven to nineteen years. Participants included four general education teachers, four special education teachers, one self-contained teacher, two float teachers, and three master teachers. Including these participants allowed for a broader range of perspectives as it relates to level of experience working with preschool students as well as varying areas of expertise.

Table 1

Characteristics of Preschool Teachers

Characteristics	Number
Age	
26-35	1
36-45	8
46-55	4
56-65	1
Gender	
Female	14
Race	
White	14
Years of Experience Teaching 3-5-year-olds	
5-10	6
11-15	1
16-20	7
Role	
Pre-k General Education Teacher	4
Pre-k Special Education Teacher	5
Pre-k Float Teacher	2
Pre-k Master Teacher	3

Focus group discussions and completion of pre- and post-elicitations occurred in a common planning area of the study location. Providing this convenient and familiar setting for the preschool teachers to engage in focus group discussions made this an ideal location. To ensure teachers were not distracted with concerns about classroom coverage in their absence and being provided a lunch break, substitutes were assigned to each participants room and lunch and snacks were provided at each focus group session.

The setting selected for focus groups and completion of elicitation protocols was not only used as a common meeting area for all building staff, it also served as one staff

members office space. Therefore, to secure this space for focus group discussions, several meetings were held with the building secretary to establish a schedule and notify any staff affected by the change in use of the room. Although careful consideration was given to ensuring no disruptions would occur when groups were in session, there were several instances when announcements were made throughout the school, interrupting the flow of conversations and level of focus completing elicitation protocols. Additionally, on several occasions, the noise level in the corridor outside the room posed an additional distraction from gathering recorded conversational data as well as participants ability to focus on elicitation protocols.

Interviewing occurred in my office which was housed in the location of the study. This location was selected to ensure teachers would have a convenient and comfortable space to be interviewed. To avoid interruptions, the building secretary was notified of all scheduled interviews and signage was placed on the office door alerting other staff that recording was taking place. Although these measures were taken, school announcements did occur during two of the five interviews, stifling the flow of conversations.

Overall, other than minor distractions and scheduling challenges, the study environment was primarily stable and posed no threats to participants as well as the data collection process. There were no changes in staff during the span of this study nor were there any environmental elements that negatively impacted teachers' availability and full presence during all phases of data collection.

Data Collection

Data for this qualitative single case study was collected through a series of focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and pre-and post-graphic elicitations. The data

collection process for all three instruments transpired over a six-week period commencing early February and ending mid-March. Prior to the collection of data, focus group and elicitation protocol as well as an interview guide was established. To eliminate any potential gaps in the data collection process, data analysis was woven throughout the data collection period for both focus groups and interviews (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p. 71). Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) share that engaging in this interwoven process of data collection and analysis allows the researcher to examine existing data and make adjustments as needed to data collection strategies (p. 70). Transcribing recorded data into text after each focus group and interview and subsequently examining and coding the data, initiated the process of reflection and analysis during the collection phase of the study.

Focus groups. Focus groups, lasting approximately an hour and a half, occurred once a week for four consecutive weeks. A total of 14 preschool teachers participated in focus group discussions. All focus group discussions were recorded using a digital voice recorder. Focus group protocol was comprised of 10 questions focused on igniting professional discourse related to teachers' perspectives and understandings of resilience and the connection to their daily classroom practice (See Appendix C).

The first focus group began with discussions regarding how teachers define and describe resilience as well as what experiences they may have had that has influenced their descriptions. Following in depth conversations regarding these ideas, teachers had dialogs about whether they believed resilience was an attribute individuals were born with or if they can be taught. Discourse during the second focus group centered on whether teachers believed resilience was relevant to their work with 3 and 4 -year-olds

and if, as teachers, they could foster or awaken resilient behaviors in their students. With all teachers in agreement that resilience can be taught, the greater part of our time together during focus group two was comprised of discussions about how teachers can intentionally plan for resilience pedagogy.

To further delve into discussions regarding resilience pedagogy, during focus group three teachers were engaged in conversations regarding how planning for daily routines connects to embedded opportunities to teach resilient behaviors. Discussions regarding the home-school connection and relevance to fostering resilience in their students also transpired. During our fourth and final focus group teachers had the opportunity to review what had previously been discussed and add any further thoughts if they so desired. Teachers then conversed specifically about what role they believed relationships played in cultivating resilience and if so, how they could intentionally plan for relationship building. Additionally, teachers had an opportunity to share specific activities and experiences they believed would comprise a vigorous plan for resilience pedagogy.

At the completion of each focus group, recordings were transcribed into text and then coded to identify emerging themes. Coding enabled me to organize and classify collected data into categories that shared similar characteristics (Saldana, 2013, p. 9). Three themes began to emerge as I reflected on the data. The first theme that emerged from focus group discourse was recovery. Teachers descriptions regarding resilience repeatedly included language indicative of ones' ability to recover through times of adversity. Descriptions used encompassed the skills and characteristics individuals may need to call upon to exhibit resilience.

As teachers engaged in conversations regarding what experiences they may have had that has influenced their descriptions, the second theme of trauma began to emerge. Teachers specifically shared their individual experiences which all connected to varying levels of trauma. Their descriptions related directly to what kind of supports and skills they had to manage through times of difficulty. As this topic continued to be explored, teachers shared how these traumatic events shaped who they were and what they believe defines the essence of resilience.

Relationships emerged as the third theme from focus group discussions. Teachers' descriptive language spoke directly to the characteristics and skills that are necessary for individuals to be engaged in successful relationships. Teachers language was also directed toward what their role was in teaching their students how to build positive relationships with their peers and the value in doing so.

Interviews. Semi-structured interviews took place over a two-week period and included five study participants. Each interview occurred at the participants' place of work at a time convenient for them and lasted approximately 30 minutes. Interviews were audio taped using a digital recorder. The interview guide was structured to include 12 open ended and follow up questions related to resilience and its relevance to teachers' classroom practice (See Appendix B) (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 176). During the interview process both scripted and unscripted follow up questions were asked to generate deeper understandings and allow for the "unfolding" of teachers' perspectives to take place (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 177). The interview guide addressed six broad topics as indicated below.

1. Defining Resilience

2. Experiences that Have Impacted Teachers' Perspectives
3. Characteristics of a Resilient Child
4. Relevance of Resilience to Classroom Practice
5. Planning for Pedagogy
6. Relationships

In addition to these broad topics for discussion, at the end of each interview participants were asked if they had anything else they wished to add. Overall, protocol was designed to engage participants in conversations regarding the areas we discussed during focus group sessions. This gave participants an opportunity to share stories and perspectives they may not have felt comfortable sharing in a group setting.

At the completion of each interview, recorded data was transcribed and coded. Data collected during the interview process generally reflected what had been previously shared in focus groups. However, when discussing experiences teachers may have had that has impacted how they define and describe resilience, participants stories became more personal. Additionally, conversations transpired regarding teacher's ability to exhibit resilience when their students are struggling with their often-traumatic lives.

As I reflected on interview data, four themes began to emerge to include recovery, trauma, relationships, and professional growth. Teachers defined resilience in terms of what abilities an individual would need to bounce back from hardship. They spoke specifically about the importance of being able to regulate your emotions, so you may think rationally when going through challenging life experiences. Teachers' personal stories of trauma often shaped how they described resilience. Participants related their personal stories of trauma to what constitutes resilient behavior and what resources they

needed to demonstrate those behaviors. When conversing about pedagogy that cultivates resilience, relationship building was at the core of participants thinking. As we did in focus groups, we spent a great deal of time talking about this topic during the interview process. Teachers related relationship building to the social-emotional curriculum they are using. Participants spoke specifically about how engaging in professional discourse related to resilience pedagogy incited new understandings about how the social-emotional skills they teach daily are directly linked to fostering skills their students need to exhibit resilience. Additionally, participants' language was directly connected to a heightened awareness of specific activities and experiences their students can be engaged in to develop these skills.

Graphic elicitations. Pre-elicitation protocols were completed by all participants at the opening of the first focus group session (See Appendix D). As indicated in Figures 1 and 2, participants were given a picture of a bare tree with roots exposed and informed that each branch and root signified the essentials their students would need to grow the skills they need to be resilient. They were then asked to awaken the resilience of the tree using colored pencils.

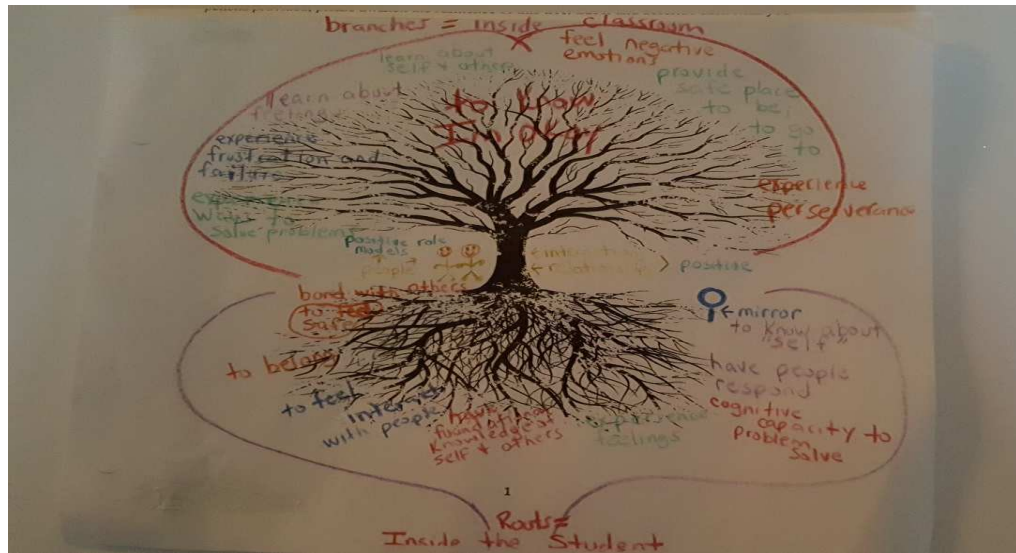


Figure 2. Pre- Elicitation Sample



Figure 3. Pre-Elicitation Sample

Most participants immediately began to complete the elicitation protocol while some struggled with conceptualizing how to approach the task. Participants were given any additional time needed to finalize the protocol. Data collection from the completion of pre-elicitations was then reviewed and coded. During the coding process skills emerged

as the overall theme. Teachers descriptive language was directly linked to what they believed were specific skills their students would need to exhibit resilient behavior.

Post-elicitation protocols were completed at the end of the fourth focus group (See Appendix E). As indicated in Figures 4 and 5, teachers were given a picture of a blank bulletin board and asked to design a board that highlights a preschool classroom focused on resilience pedagogy

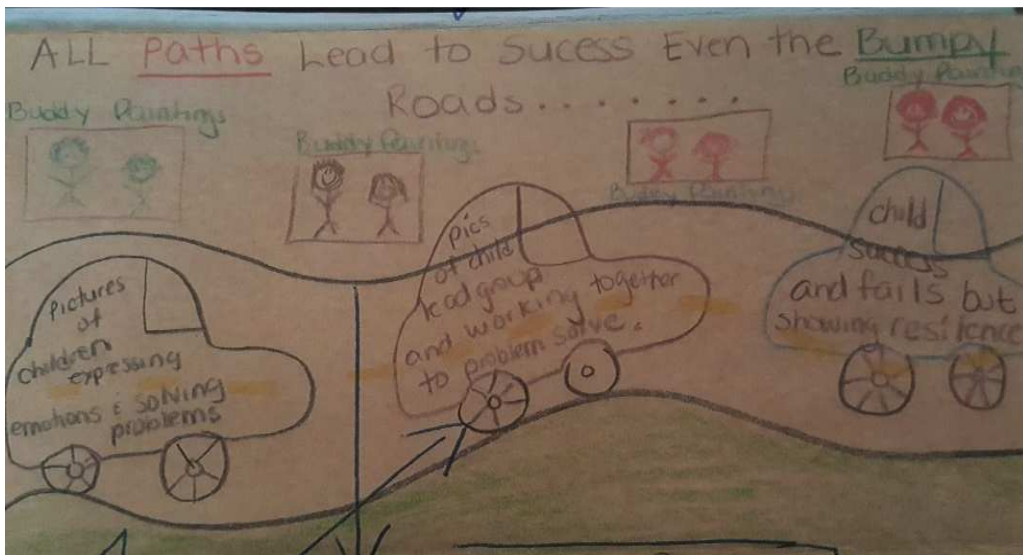


Figure 4. Post-Elicitation Sample

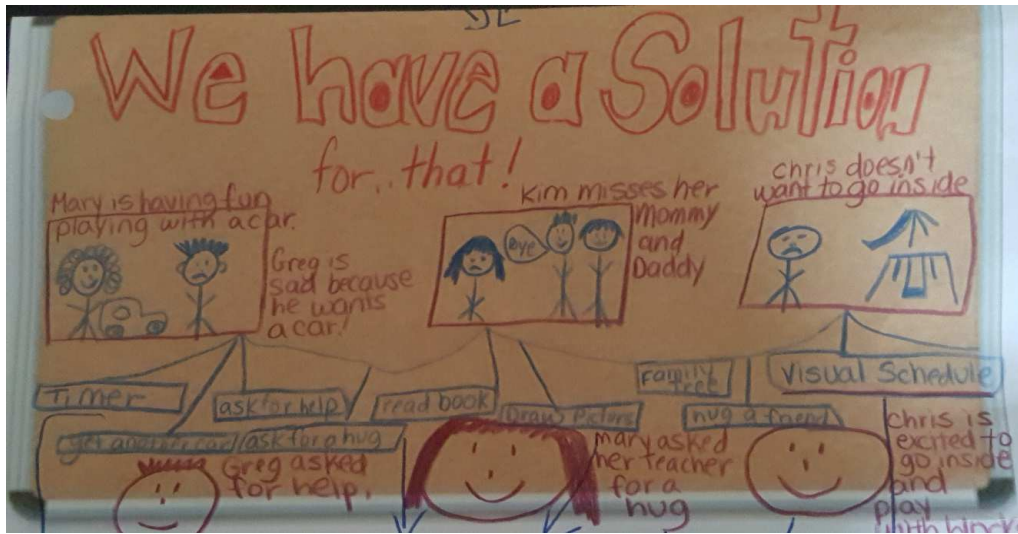


Figure 5. Post-Elicitation Sample

Again here, some participants struggled with how to approach this task. Therefore, additional time was allotted to ensure teachers could comfortably complete the protocol. During the completion of this protocol most teachers appeared to have a more energized approach than they had during the completion of the pre-elicitation protocol. This was evidenced in the level of participant chatter and the creative use of miscellaneous materials that were on the table. For example, one participant used sticky notes to enhance her visual representation.

Data collected from the post-elicitations was reviewed and coded. Instructional strategies was the theme that emerged from the coded data. Teachers descriptive language attached to their visual representations shared the characteristics symbolic of varying teaching approaches participants might include when developing resilience pedagogy. Additionally, post-elicitations focused on classroom interest areas and materials that would be used to engage in these teaching practices.

Data Analysis

According to Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002), “the purpose of analysis is to bring meaning, structure, and order to data” (pg. 31). As stated by Patton (2015) the greatest challenge of qualitative analysis is “the reduction of the volume of raw data collected, sifting the trivial from the significant, identifying significant patterns and themes, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data revealed.” (p. 521). The analysis process for this study began with the examination and interpretation of transcripts generated from recorded focus groups and interviews as well as pre-and post-graphic elicitations. Two cycles of coding were employed for each data collection instrument. Coding was used to engage in the process of deep reflection, condense the volume of data into chunks, establish emerging patterns and themes, and discover meanings regarding the content (Miles, et al., 2014, p.73).

Focus groups and interviews. Focus group and interview data was transcribed and coded after each session was completed. In Vivo coding was the first cycle used to capture words and phrases repeated during various focus group and interview discussions (Miles, et al. 2014, p.74). This cycle of coding was used to ensure the voice of participants were honored by identifying pieces of data that appeared to significantly highlight their descriptions, perceptions, and understandings regarding resilience (Miles, et al., 2014, p. 75; Saldana, 2013, p. 93). Once data was thoroughly examined and the first cycle of coding was completed an initial summary of segments of relevant data materialized. I then used pattern coding as a second cycle of coding (Miles et al., 2014, p. 86). Using pattern coding, I grouped these segments of data into smaller units with shared characteristics allowing themes to emerge.

As shown in table 2, during the process of coding of focus group data, there were 21 code occurrences of language directly related to the idea of recovery as a relevant component of resilience. There were also 36 code occurrences of language that connected trauma to defining and describing resilience. Lastly, there were 167 code occurrences that delineated language specifically connected to relationships and its relevance to resilience.

Table 2

Focus Group Themes

Themes	Codes	Code Occurrences
Recovery	Adjust, persevere, faith, trust, adversity, capacity, goals, vision, purpose, reflection, processing, overcome, optimistic, focus, drive, management, tolerance, determination	21
Trauma	Support, family, friends, colleagues, faith, resources, persistence, protection, encouragement, challenges, difficulties, abuse, divorce, loss, worry, addiction, health concerns, neglect, spirituality, strength, hope, attitude, goal setting, teachers, skills, coping	36
Relationships	Empowerment, resources, social/emotional, nurture, model, empathy, consistency, predictability, problem solving, communication, reinforcement, goal setting, socialization, optimism, self-esteem, self-awareness, tolerance, frustration, support, self-regulation, emotional awareness, strategies, tools, feelings, patient, flexible, connect, peer models, kindness, cultivate, safe, respectful, interests, value, understanding, acknowledgement, reflection, attachment, guidance, expectations, welcoming, inviting, facilitation, collaboration, partnerships	167

Generally speaking, the process of coding of interview data produced codes and themes that mirrored that of focus group data. As shown in table 3, coding of interview data generated 12 code occurrences of language that spoke to recovery as a function of resilience capacity and 37 code occurrences of language connected to trauma and an individual's ability to persevere. There were also 84 code occurrences of language linked to relationships and its relevance to cultivating resilience. Additionally, coding generated 17 code occurrences of language specifically connected to engagement in professional growth opportunities.

Table 3

<i>Interview Themes</i>		
Themes	Codes	Code Occurrences
Recovery	Adjust, persevere, bounce back, reflect, overcome, function, learn, recover, reflection, processing, cope, strength, optimistic, elasticity, focus, self-regulation	12
Trauma	Support, family, friends, colleagues, faith, resources, persistence, protection, death, guidance, parents, encouragement, counselors, therapists, journaling, challenges, difficulties, abuse, divorce, loss, worry, financial despair, alcoholism, addiction, health concerns, death, emotional, hope	37
Relationships	Resources, social/emotional, nurture, model, empathy, consistency, predictability, problem solving, communication skills, reinforcement, ownership, goal setting, socialization, self-esteem, self-awareness, tolerance, contributions, friends, leaders, confidence, play, interactions, welcoming, inviting, dependability, connections, understanding, listening	84
Professional Growth	Activities, experiences, reflective, valuable, enlightened, awareness, insightful, collaborative, connections, validating, therapeutic, educational, expressive, resource, assistance	17

Graphic elicitations. Visual and textual data, gathered from pre-and post-elicitations, was aggregated into smaller groups of information using two cycles of coding as well (Creswell, 2013). The coding process for pre-and post-graphic elicitations began with the use of descriptive coding. Descriptive coding was used to assign labels to text that described participants visualizations. Ultimately, descriptive coding was used to summarize relevant pieces of data (Miles et al., 2014, p.74). Pattern coding was then used

as a second cycle of coding to collapse these labels into emerging patterns and themes. Pre-and post-elicitations were first analyzed separately and then a comparison was done. This comparative analysis was completed to determine whether the content of participants' descriptions and visualizations showed a change in teachers' perceptions, understandings, and practice because of professional discourse with their teaching colleagues.

As shown in table 4, the process of coding of pre-elicitation protocols produced 61 code occurrences of language that described varying skills that children would need to exhibit resilient behavior. As shown in table 5, coding of post-elicitation protocols generated 30 code occurrences of language directly related to instructional strategies relevant to cultivating resilience.

Table 4

Pre-Elicitation Themes

Theme	Codes	Code Occurrences
Skills	Communication, goal setting, self-assessment, verbal, listening, social- emotional, cognitive, connectedness, emotional management, patience, adaptability, confidence, problem solving, self-regulatory, coping, spiritual strength, perseverance	61

Table 5

Post-Elicitation Themes

Theme	Codes	Code Occurrences
Instructional Strategies	Strengths-based, peer mentoring, studies, curriculum, art, social-emotional, literature, blocks, outdoors, play-based, schedules, intervention, resources, positive behavior supports (PBS), materials, home-school, dramatic play, discovery, water, sand, writing, self-talk	30

Data analysis was completed by integrating themes that were generated from each data collection instrument to formulate cumulative themes directly connected to research questions. Participant descriptions as shared during focus group discussions, elicitation protocols, and interviews were collapsed into four collaborative themes as indicated below.

1. Defining Resilience: Perseverance and recovery from adversity
2. Teachers Understandings: Traumatic experiences impact perspectives
3. Cultivating Resilience: Relationship building stimulates resilient behaviors
4. Professional Growth: Focus group discussions generate heightened awareness

of practice.

Results

Analysis of participants descriptions of perceptions, understandings, and practices related to resilience facilitated a deeper understanding of what preschool teachers believe about the impactful nature of resilience pedagogy and their current practice. Evidence generated from all data collection instruments are presented below.

Defining resilience: Perseverance and recovery from adversity. All study participants referenced, in various ways, an individual's ability to persevere through times of adversity as a key defining element of resilience. Specifically, a person's ability to persevere was linked to their ability to engage in forward thinking; to have a sense of hope that adverse conditions will improve. A participant shared:

To me resilience is the ability to persevere. The ability to handle different situations where failure, a hardship, a loss of some kind [occurs] and the ability to move on from it. To know that there is a light at the end of the tunnel or that there is the ability to pick up and start again or to start over or try again. So, it's the ability to bounce back and to learn from what happened and move forward in a positive way.

Another participant commented:

It is that you're always striving for something and even though you're not getting at it, you keep going, even though you might fall, fall short of your goal, that it's not a bad situation, something that you're always striving and keeps you motivated to do, but a big part of it was definitely faith.

Teachers further described one's ability to persevere as an internal capability that gives you the strength to focus and show flexibility when managing hardships. A participant said:

I think resilience is something that a person possesses inside of them and is something that they can [use to] continue moving forward when they [are] feeling that they [are] in a difficult situation. So, it's almost like an elasticity or a strength or a character where the person almost decides to continue or not continue.

Study participants also viewed the notion of recovery and reflection as essential to defining resilience. Teachers described these ideas as interconnecting in the sense that an individual's ability to reflect on their lives, present, past, and future, is critical to recovering from hardships. A participant remarked:

Resilience to me means the ability to be able to recover from something [or] get through something. [It is the ability to] relate to past experiences to help you make the decision to get out of whatever situation is causing the issue and then the ability to move on, look back, and learn for the future.

To bring further clarity to what defines resilience, most study participants expressed the significance of self-regulation and the management of emotions as factors that contribute to one's ability to show resilience in times of hardship. Teachers believed that individuals who have these abilities are more capable of remaining focused and are subsequently able to set manageable goals to move forward. A participant shared:

Resiliency means to me the ability to overcome or still be successful when you're faced with a really challenging situation or really challenging past.

[It is] just the ability to kind of function in society in general and be able to regulate your emotions to move forward.

Overall, results found that teachers descriptions regarding their perceptions and understandings regarding resilience focused on an individuals' ability to persevere and recover during times of frustration, turmoil, and extreme adverse conditions.

Furthermore, results indicated that resilience is something that everyone possess inside of them which they can use in times of adversity. However, results further indicated individuals need other internal skills and abilities and external supports in order to use the power of resilience when needed. Specifically, teachers' descriptions of perceptions and understandings regarding internal skills and capabilities were defined in terms one an individuals' ability to reflect, show flexibility, self-regulate, exhibit self-confidence, and engage in hopeful thinking. Deeply embedded in these defining terms was the teachers' beliefs about how managing one's emotions is essential to being able to accomplish this process of reflection, recovery, and perseverance. Additionally, teachers descriptions of understandings and perceptions regarding external supports was grounded in the establishment and sustaining of relationships with nurturing adults to include teachers, counselors, parents, and guardians.

Teachers understandings: Traumatic experiences impact perspectives. Most study participants revealed instances of personal trauma and/or hardships that have impacted how they define and describe resilience and/or the characteristics of resilient behavior. Teachers spoke about various times in their personal and work lives that were emotionally and sometimes physically challenging. They further discussed how their ability to persist during these difficult times was most often the result of the presence of

significant adults that they looked up to as caring, warm, and nurturing role models. Most study participants agreed that without a bond to a caring adult, they were uncertain if they could have exhibited resiliency during these times. A participant shared:

I had a traumatic experience when I was young; when I was 16 my father passed away. I couldn't understand why my father passed away at 48 years old and he was such a good person and, you know, it was so sudden, so I shut down. It took a while but then those core people [like] teachers and friends that I met along the way in college kind of reopened me up. [You] constantly need those people, those core people, along the way to keep you being resilient. I think a huge part of [my resilience] [was] that support. I think it was the people around me. Seeing that others could persevere and that others were able to move on or not move on in a way that they were able to accept it and get back to their normalcy and everything else; that was like a modeling for me. So, part of it was modeling, part of it was support and encouraging me that I will be okay with time; that everything takes time but you will be okay. Seeking resources was also important. I did speak with somebody that helped me talk it through and to find other ways to deal with my emotions. I journaled, and I found resources that helped me as well. So, I think that it's a combination of a lot of things, but I think support, modeling, and resources are huge.

Another participant stated:

I was reflecting back that I think it's because of all the people and influences that were with me in those traumatic phases of my life. Like my mother was

an alcoholic, probably a drug addict, [and] I was like abandoned, like really horrible different things that happened, but the core people I was [with] like my father was always very steady. Things were happening away from what he was not aware of so as soon as he was aware of these things we were moved in with my grandmother and my father for like, a short period of time and then he raised me from a very young age where, I'm still with him now but every person that he put in my life was very core and supportive. So, I feel like even when it comes from the childhood, there was always a core support and really good strong valued people who shared all those things with me. Through college and I always reflect back to my colleagues and everybody because they were core supports so I think that all the values and tools that were provided to me helped make me be stronger and more resilient.

In addition to study participants sharing the importance of having a strong connection to a loving adult, they discussed the significance of consistency and structure when managing adverse conditions. Teachers discussed the importance of adults providing structure and a strong foundation both at home and at school. They believed that when essential adults gave them consistency and structure, their motivation was stronger to push through difficult times. A participant commented:

I grew up in a house where my father was an addict. He's an alcoholic and a drug addict. As a kid that's a really hard thing growing up because there's not consistency, you don't really know what's going to happen next. So, I think that my ability to be resilient through that is because my mom was amazing and I had that great foundation, but also, I had great

teachers in school and they really helped us with a lot of things; they were really there to support us and to be there for us. So, I guess my resiliency in that was still being able to perform in school, I still went to school, I had my basic needs met through my mom and then also to grow up and not have those struggles as an adult. You know when everybody else was experimenting and doing things I had a different background, so I kind of, you know pushed that aside and was able to focus more on the big picture.

Study participants went deeper into their discussions as they spoke not only about essential individuals that assisted them through trauma, but the importance of one's faith during these times. They discussed how these significant adults empowered them by believing in the promise of their futures; by instilling that sense of faith and hope in them. A participant stated:

I also had a very traumatic childhood and I would definitely agree that even though I did not have my parents, and I was raised by an aunt who I didn't get along with, I had my grandparents who were always strong, core value people who always taught me to strive to be a better person. On top of that I think you have to have a lot of faith in that things are going to get better and to always look at the positive of the situation and I was always able to do that so I think that's important.

Findings provided insight regarding what experiences preschool teachers have had that has influenced their perspectives, understandings, and practices related to resilience. Preschool teachers' ability to persist during times of personal trauma impacted

how they defined resilience and what they believed was essential to infusing in their practice to nurture these skills in their students. Preschool teachers descriptions of home environments that exposed them to fear, abuse, loss, and tumultuous conditions shaped their perceptions about their own ability to cope. These experiences impacted their understandings of when resilience is needed and how it is used to find strength to endure these conditions. Furthermore, the personal experiences preschool teachers described impacted their understandings regarding who supported them and what strengths and abilities they had in order to bounce back and go on to lead successful happy lives. Preschool teachers' descriptions indicated that their attachments to immediate and extended family members, teachers, and work colleagues were critical to what they perceived as significant when demonstrating their resilience capabilities. Additionally, feelings of self-worth was characterized as a primary skill these critical adults nurtured in them which impacted their ability to show resilience.

Cultivating resilience: Relationship building stimulates resilient behaviors.

All participants referenced the establishment and sustaining of positive relationships as crucial to fostering resilient behaviors in their students. Throughout the data collection process, study participants spoke intensely about all facets of relationships to include adult to child, child to child, and adult to adult. Participants all shared, in varying ways, the connectedness between healthy relationships and a child's ability to exhibit resilience when faced with challenges. Teachers defined healthy relationships in terms of trusting, empathetic, supportive, warm, and kind partnerships with their peers, students, and families. Teachers shared that having healthy relationships with their students provided them someone to seek out when they were struggling in the classroom or at home. As

previously shared, teachers believed having even one trusting adult in your life would give you the ability to persevere in times of difficulty. A participant shared:

A relationship with someone is huge because if they know that you're taking the time to get to know them and that you're building a relationship with them, they are going to trust and confide in you. Those are huge things that they need to be able to do in order to be resilient in the classroom because they are going to face problems [and] they are going to have conflicts. They are going to have situations that come about suddenly that they have to deal with and they need to know that they can come to you. That what you're saying to them is real [and] truthful, because you've instilled this relationship with them that they can trust you.

Another participant remarked:

You can't do anything until you form a relationship with the children in the classroom. They have to be able to trust you. They have to know that you're there. I think children can tell. I mean I've witnessed it. I think the teachers who have the most trouble with behavior issues are the ones who don't take the time to form relationships with their children at the beginning of the year.

Another participant added:

I also think that [you] have to have good relationship[s] to be good models. We talked about how many you know, different relationships there are you know the adult [to] adult, a partnership within the classroom, adult [to] child, child to child, peer relationships, and then you bring the parent in so you have the parent [to teacher] relationship. Then support services like

therapists and things like that; there needs to be relationships there and then the relationship between the [teacher] and the therapist.

Teachers conversations related to the establishment of relationships with their students' families focused on the relevance of partnerships to support their children. Participants spoke about how important it was for their students to see and experience home to school connections, so they would understand and benefit from one strong unit of support. Teachers believed that when all essential adults were collaboratively working toward the students' success, there was a stronger likelihood that they would exhibit resilient behaviors both at home and at school. Additionally, teachers spoke about the significance of engaging in healthy relationships with their students' families as it relates to a parent and/or guardian's ability to exhibit resilient behaviors under adverse conditions. Teachers believed that in doing so, they would be helping families be role models for their children. A participant shared:

Making that connection with their families brings them to feel that my teacher has a relationship with my family and my family has a relationship with my teacher and we're all connected so we together can lean on each other to persevere through a situation. So, I think once that relationship is established, it really does help them to be more successful in the classroom and then when they feel successful in the classroom they're able to be resilient.

As study participants delved deeper into discussions regarding the connection between relationships and resilience, they spoke very specifically about the implications of students living without the presence of a parent. Teachers discussed the rise in

students coming to them without an attachment and/or a bond to their parents and/or guardians and how it has impacted their understandings regarding the momentous nature of relationship building. Teachers believed that without an attachment to a parent and/or guardian, children have a difficult time trusting others and would be less likely to exhibit resilience when faced with changes – both minor and significant. A participant stated:

Relationships [are] critical. I think sometimes we have a lot of children who lack the attachment to an adult. Whether it was because they had absent parents, physically and/or mentally, or their parents were young, or they are not with their parents, or just a lack of attachment and presence. So, some children come to school and they are confident that they are going to see their mother again when she drops them off, they know they can trust an adult and some children really just don't know what to expect. There are people in and out of their life constantly, there's no predictability, there's no routine, so they lack that ability to adjust to change, and to seek out an adult for comfort.

Study participants further shared that social-emotional learning was at the foundation of cultivating resilience skills. Teachers believed their pedagogy needed to be grounded in helping students build relationships with their peers, so they could learn to navigate through their emotions. A participant commented:

I feel like it is very important because you need a support system no matter what you're doing. No matter, if it's a different support system in part of your life than it is for the beginning part of your life, you need people. I think it's just part of human nature because you need to be able to communicate. You need that social interaction. And if you're completely

shut off, and you have no one to talk to [then] you need to be able to build how do I relate to another person?

Participant discussions were often centered around the importance of setting up the classroom environment and developing activities that provide students with opportunities to work together and problem solve. Teachers shared that students who learn these skills early and continue to be given these opportunities are more likely to be able to reach out for help when needed, develop positive relationships with adults, and develop a plan to push through challenging times. A participant stated:

Having areas that enable child collaboration provides opportunities for social growth, attachment, and empathy, because they're working together. Like we have our block area where up to 4 children can work together, dramatic play, they're working together, toys and games they're working together. In preschool, it sets the tone for that feeling of, if I can't finish it then I can go to one of my friends to help me.

Another participant commented:

Making sure that your environment is very inclusive of all the tools and skills that you [need] to teach them and that [materials and supplies] are present in the environment so its readily available for you to show and reflect with the children. Encouraging students to help support each other in the classroom and simply with the kindness keeper it's making the children more self-aware of their skills and being able to apply it with others so that helps a lot.

Teachers spoke specifically about developing pedagogical practices where students are purposefully engaged in activities that allow them to experience a certain

level of frustration. They believed that to cultivate and practice using resilience skills students must be placed in varying play-based scenarios that are facilitated by the teacher. Doing so, provides children with opportunities to understand and manage how they are feeling, set goals, and develop a plan for successful learning to occur. A participant shared:

You need the [classroom/center] items and the [environment] set up with everything but without a supporting adult or without children to interact or have problems you don't really have the opportunity to experience perhaps something to be resilient about. So even though the tools are there, you need the supports and the experiences to work through it.

Results found teachers' descriptions regarding pedagogical practices they employ to awaken and nurture resilience in their students were grounded in the development of relationships which occurs within the structure of robust social-emotional components of the preschool program. Descriptions indicated that embedding the teaching of social and emotional skills in the preschool program would directly impact the development of the skills children need to exhibit resilience. Relationship building was at the foundation of every learning experience they believed their students needed to be exposed to. Teachers descriptions of relationship building included pedagogy that develops the children's' ability to communicate, solve problems, and negotiate. Additionally, results indicated that preschool teacher's instructional strategies needed to help children develop the ability to set goals, plan, and expedite a plan; all skills they believed children needed to exhibit resilience. Findings also revealed preschool teachers' beliefs about structuring their

classroom environments and pedagogy around opportunities for preschool students to strengthen their self-regulatory skills which subsequently would impact their ability to manage emotions, focus, and optimize learning. Teachers also described the importance of consistency, structure, and daily opportunities to practice these skills as key components of establishing resilience pedagogy. Therefore, their descriptions of pedagogical practices they employ encompassed the importance of setting time to purposefully plan for how and when to embed these opportunities into their current curriculum model.

Professional growth: Focus group discussions generate heightened awareness of practice. Study participants consistently shared their feelings of inspiration related to engaging in professional discussions with their colleagues. Teachers believed that although focus group discussions only took place once a week for 4 weeks, their level of growth was significant. This growth was in part due to the process of reflection teachers engaged in during and in-between focus groups. Having the opportunity to step outside of the classroom and have collaborative and intimate discussions with their peers was both powerful and rewarding. A participant commented:

It was very insightful, and it was a reflective process. I think that individually anyone who was a part of it grew. Collaboratively [we] just made that connection – that wow these are things that we can really do to make a difference in our own lives and in our child’s lives and in our families lives.

Another participant remarked:

I think being a part of this research it has made all of us look at [resilience]

in a different way. For myself it's not like resilience was something that was unheard of. So, it wasn't a new concept or vocabulary. But I don't think we've ever taken the time to in-depth consider it. So, I think that perhaps if there are teachers within this research project that are not resilient, they are at an educational level where they can learn the aspects of being resilient. So, they're self-reflecting like where am I in my resilient level? How can I become more resilient? How can I incorporate that into my classroom? And probably how can I incorporate that in my home life with my own children, with my own family?

Teachers further discussed how professional discourse around resilience validated their personal journeys and provided them with new ideas and resources to explore for their professional practice. Participants found focus group discussions enlightening as it relates to their level of understanding and how this understanding can be extremely impactful when planning for pedagogy. A participant shared:

A lot of it was like, validating what we already do. But then it was also getting realistic, real life examples of how it's being used in other classrooms. It validated our feelings and our frustrations. We all feel the same way, we all face the same challenges, and certain people deal with it [in] different ways, and we were able to share that with each other.

Another participant stated:

I think I've learned more from the focus groups, from other teachers, than I've learned from any other training, or course, or book, or anything.

Study participants referenced how focus group discussions moved them from a place of understanding the numerous facets of resilience in both children and adults to a place of identifying what constitutes resilience pedagogy. Teachers discussed current practice and expressed the ability to transfer that practice to pedagogy that cultivates resilience in their preschool students. A participant commented:

I have taken so much from this experience and I think it's been wonderful.

And I can't wait to put more of it into practice in the classroom. I've learned a lot and got a lot of great ideas too from the experience, from the focus groups.

So, I just hope that others felt the same and I think that if that's the case, we're going to see that growth in the classroom as far as children walking out with the ability to be a little more resilient than they came in with.

Another participant shared:

This has been wonderful coming together and having these [focus] groups where we talked about resilience and really what is it and how it looks in your classroom. When you talk about it in a group of teachers and professionals and then you go back into your classroom, it makes you re-evaluate what you're doing, and you can take it either way. You can say, oh look I'm doing A, B, C, D, and E, oh but I could still be doing X, Y, and Z and a lot of things you don't realize until you discuss it and you open your eyes more to the concept.

A comparison of pre-and post-elicitations showed further evidence of a shift in teachers thinking following a series of focus group discussions. The use of descriptive language on pre-elicitations was primarily focused on the characteristics of resilient

behavior, whereas, post-elicitation descriptions and design was primarily focused on instructional strategies teachers could use in the classroom. Post elicitations clearly showed teachers making connections to what they know and understand about resilience to infusing resilience pedagogy into their current curriculum model. Teachers descriptions and visual representations were focused on what they needed to do to enhance curriculum studies and classroom interest areas. These enhancements were directly connected to cultivating classroom pedagogy that is focused on fostering resilient behaviors.

Findings showed that preschool teachers described changes in their perceptions, understandings, and practices regarding resilience in terms of a shift in their thinking from the skills and abilities children need to exhibit resilient behaviors to the instructional strategies they need to enact to nurture these skills and abilities. Furthermore, findings showed that teachers engaged in professional discourse with teaching colleagues gained a deeper understanding of how their current teaching practices directly connected to nurturing the skills their students need to exhibit resilient behaviors. Evidence revealed teachers' extensive knowledge regarding the relevance of their current practice, however, did not initially show the connection between their current knowledge and practice to a classroom that focused on cultivating resilient behaviors in their students. Results of the study showed that engaging preschool teachers in professional discourse through a series of focus groups illuminated this connection.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The authenticity of the data was confirmed by using triangulation and peer debriefing. Multiple methods of data collection were used to include semi-structured

interviews, focus groups, and pre-and post-elicitations. This triangulation of data sources allowed for a “systematic process of coding and establishing themes by eliminating overlapping areas” therefore, providing a more succinct account of findings (Creswell & Miller, 2017, p. 127). Triangulation gave me the opportunity to examine evidence from varying data points rather than rely on one single account; hence adding to the credibility of the study (Creswell & Miller, 2017, p. 127).

Peer debriefing was used during the data analysis process to further add to the credibility of findings. A professional colleague, who has experience conducting qualitative research and who is considered an expert in the social-emotional development of preschool children, examined interview and focus group data. Peer debriefing allowed me to have a colleague examine and compare the data to ensure there was accuracy regarding how data was analyzed and interpreted.

Summary

The analysis process for this qualitative single case study has produced findings relative to what preschool teachers working in a small urban district perceive and understand about resilience and creating pedagogy that cultivates resilient behaviors in their students. Preschool teachers defined resilience as a child’s ability to persevere and recover in times of adversity. Teachers’ understandings about what constitutes resilient behavior was impacted by varying levels of trauma they experienced in their personal and professional lives. Teachers believed that sustaining healthy positive relationships, support systems, role models, and a sense of spirituality were at the core of recovering from trauma.

The building of trusting relationships with children, staff, and families was at the foundation of establishing classroom and school climates conducive to nurturing resilient behaviors in students. A child's ability to reflect, plan, problem solve, show optimism, and self-regulate were essential characteristics of a child who exhibits resilient behavior. Therefore, these were all key elements of planning for preschool classroom environments and pedagogical practices that support the emergence of resilient behaviors. The teaching of social-emotional skills was a primary component of developing a resilience pedagogy. Teachers viewed their role in fostering these skills as role models and facilitators of safe, welcoming, respectful classrooms that focus on a child's self-worth. They viewed their role in developing resilient behavior as part of the daily practice of providing consistency and predictability in the lives of preschool students.

Teachers engaged in professional development gained a deeper understanding of how their current teaching practices directly connect to pedagogy that nurtures the development of resilient behaviors in preschool students. Teachers mindset shifted from one of understanding varying perspectives regarding resilience to developing a purposeful plan for instruction to foster resilient behavior. Additionally, focus group discussions gave teachers a new sense of connectedness to their colleagues. Interpretations and implications of these findings as well as recommendations for practice, policy and research will be addressed in chapter five.

Chapter 5

Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

For decades social science research has identified the ongoing societal problem of poverty as the factor most likely to put a child “at risk” for school failure (Benard, 1997; Newman & Dantzler, 2015). Children living in impoverished conditions may lack resources and supports needed to help them succeed both academically and socially and often leave them with feelings of hopelessness and despair about their futures (Lacour & Tissington, 2011; McKinney et al., 2006; Simons et al., 2004). Children impacted by poverty may be laden with social and emotional scars leaving them with negative perceptions regarding their ability to engage in relationships, social interactions, and become contributing members of their communities (Haberman, 2004). However, studies have shown that when a resilient mindset is evident, children living in poverty can overcome these negative consequences and go on to lead successful lives (Benard, 2007; Breslin, 2005; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Additionally, studies have shown that resilience can be fostered in children who currently lack these skills (Knight, 2007). Therefore, teachers have the power to potentially transform student’s lives by “tipping the scale from one of risk to resilience” and begin to ameliorate the impacts of poverty (Benard, 2004, p. 69).

The intent of this study was to ignite innovative conversations surrounding the intentional planning for school environments that embrace “resilience as a practice” thus; creating opportunities for social change (Knight, 2007, p.550). This study investigated understandings and perceptions of preschool teachers, working with young children in an impoverished community, regarding the phenomenon of resilience and the impactful

nature of a resilient mindset on their teaching practices. Through the engagement of preschool teachers in professional discourse, the intent of this study was to seek to heighten preschool teachers' awareness regarding pedagogical practices that focus on cultivating resilient behaviors in their students. The study examined teacher's prior knowledge regarding resilience and what personal factors may have influenced this knowledge as well as any changes in their understandings following a series of focus group discussions.

Theme development during the analysis process produced the following key findings:

1. Preschool teachers were consistent in how they defined and described resilience. Teachers generally viewed the concept of resilience in terms of persevering and recovering from adverse and/or traumatic conditions. Germane to these perceptions was an individual's ability to reflect, set goals, and exhibit a sense of hope about their future.
2. Preschool teachers consistently connected their personal stories of trauma and hardship to how and why they described and defined the characteristics essential to their ability to show resilience in times of adversity. Additionally, teachers consistently shared the connectedness of maintaining a sense of spirituality and faith to their ability to exhibit resilience.
3. Preschool teachers consistently shared their belief that resilience pedagogy has a direct connection to the development of their student's social and emotional competencies. Creating pedagogical practices that cultivate resilience in their students was primarily founded on their ability to establish

and sustain warm and nurturing classroom environments where healthy relationships with their students, families, and other adults in the school and community flourish. Attachments and bonding to a significant caregiver was at the core of their student's abilities to exhibit resilience. Essential to developing resilience pedagogy was the inclusion of opportunities for students to manage their emotions through understanding, reflecting, planning, and setting goals.

4. Providing preschool teachers with opportunities to engage in professional discourse with colleagues had a positive impact on their knowledge and understanding regarding resilience as well as the significance resilience as a pedagogical practice has on their student's lives. Preschool teachers who participated in a series of focus group discussions showed a shift in their overall mindset regarding their current practice and the connectedness to resilience pedagogy.

Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this study confirmed and/or extended various key concepts noted in the literature review. Interpretation of findings showed a direct connection between teachers' descriptions of understandings and practices to what current and past research has shown regarding the various factors to be considered when defining and cultivating resilience. Interpretation of findings also showed a connection between the various aspects of resilience competences to a child's overall academic success. Furthermore, interpretation of findings identified a connection between providing teachers with

professional development that affords them the opportunity to engage in professional discourse with peers and the breadth and depth of their understandings and perspectives.

Defining resilience: Overcoming adversities and protection from risk. One of the most seminal resilience studies conducted by Werner and Smith (1992) found individuals living in high risk environments went on to live successful lives when many “protective factors” were evident (p. 186). These protective factors include consistent emotional support from significant adults, faith, spirituality, prayer, opportunities to gain a positive sense of self, and strong social and emotional competencies (Cairone & Mackrain, 2012; Shepard, 2004; Werner & Smith, 1992; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012;). Similarly, other studies showed the association between exhibiting resilience in times of risk and/or adversity and being engaged in community and school-based relationships whereas, reflection, planning, and goal setting is accomplished (Bullock, 2012; Vindevogel et al., 2015;). Furthermore, studies have shown that educational institutions define resilience in terms of protection from risk by setting high expectations for students and providing an environment that supports nurturing and warm relationships (Bullock, 2012; Morales, 2010).

This study confirmed findings found in the literature review related to defining resilience in terms of overcoming adversities and protection from risk. Teachers showed a keen awareness of the factors essential to defining resilience. Although teachers did not speak specifically about protecting children from risk as defining resilience, their descriptive language was directly in line with what research studies have found. Whether speaking about their student’s ability to show resilience or their personal stories of

resilient behavior, teachers spoke adamantly about defining resilience in terms of forward thinking created by a sense of faith, hope, and an ability to reflect.

Interpretations of these findings indicate that for young children to show resilience in times of trauma, understanding the concepts of reflection and hope are necessary components of a high quality preschool program. These concepts are not typically spoken about in the context of preschool education nor are they intentionally planned for when designing instruction. Therefore, when considering developing pedagogical practices that nurture a young child's resilience capabilities, exploring developmentally appropriate activities that engage preschool children in hopeful thinking and reflective practice should be examined as a central focus.

Findings also confirmed what research has said about the connection between sustaining supportive and nurturing relationships as well as exhibiting vigorous social-emotional capabilities to an individuals' ability to overcome adversities. When interpreting these findings, the visualization of a large umbrella that serves to help individuals weather storms, provides further clarification to how resilience can be defined in terms of protection from risk. The development of resilience capabilities sits under the umbrella of social and emotional development. The social and emotional development of a young child involves numerous complex skills and abilities; to include managing emotions, self-regulation, forming and sustaining relationships, and negotiation. Therefore, interpretations indicate resilience needs to be considered a life skill all preschool children must develop if they are going to be protected from adverse conditions.

Cultivating resilience: Theoretical perspectives. The conceptual framework for this study was comprised of various theoretical perspectives. To begin, the findings of this study confirm concepts evidenced in varying espoused theories of human behavior and learning contributed by Lev Vygotsky (1978), Erick Erickson (1973) and Albert Bandura (1997). Vygotsky (1978) placed a high level of importance on the development of a child's social skills. He believed that when children are engaged in social interactions with their peers, families, and teachers, there are exchanges of new ideas and concepts which leads to their intellectual growth (Vygotsky, 1978). Findings confirmed that one of the most important aspects of a quality preschool program is the development of the children's social and emotional skills.

This study also confirmed the concepts evident within Erick Erickson's (1963) theory of psychosocial development. He believed that within the first six years of a child's life they develop the ability to either trust or mistrust adults, a sense of autonomy, self-esteem, empowerment, and initiative (Erickson, 1963). Preschool teacher's voices confirmed the critical nature of nurturing these skills at an early age, so the greatest impact would be attained. They believed that without the development of trusting relationships young children will not feel safe and secure, thus hindering their willingness to take the educational risks necessary for learning to occur. Furthermore, when teachers are remiss about ensuring all experiences young children are engaged in focus on developing their sense of self-worth, providing opportunities to show initiative, persistence, and problem solve, they are missing a critical time in a child's life to cultivate resilient behavior.

The various concepts delineated within Elliot Bandura's (1997) theory of social cognition were also confirmed by this study. Bandura (1997) believed that a child's social behavior directly influenced their academic success. He believed that when a child was able to exhibit self-regulatory skills, they would then be able to maintain the level of focus needed to engage in the learning process. Furthermore, Bandura (1997) believed that self-regulatory skills could be learned through a child's interactions with a classroom environment and pedagogical practices that focused on nurturing resilient behaviors.

Interpretations of findings indicate that managing emotions and the ability to form relationships are interrelated and involve complex life skills. A child's ability to manage their emotions is indicative of their temperament, ability to focus, reflect, and their willingness to access a support system. A child's ability to form relationships is contingent upon whether they feel empowered, can initiate conversations, use negotiation skills, and exhibit persistence. When children can identify their emotions and manage and/or regulate them, the development and sustaining of healthy relationships is more likely to occur. Therefore, the interpretation of findings sheds light on the need to examine the social and emotional development of preschool children with greater depth.

In addition to confirming the concepts embedded within Erickson's (1963) theory of psychosocial development and Bandura's (1997) theory of social cognition, this study confirms the concepts evidenced in both the social development theory developed by Hawkins et al., (1999) and Bowlby's (1982) attachment theory. Hawkins et al. (1999) believed that developing bonds and attachments to a social group, such as school communities, serves as a protective factor for children who may consider engaging in harmful behavior. The social development theory embraces the notion that when children

form these bonds or attachments, they are more likely to be motivated to contribute to their learning experiences in positive ways. When all members of the school community act together as one bonded unit, they can act as a shield to a child specifically when they are facing challenges. This bond then assists children with their level of perseverance and ultimately impacts their overall success.

Similarly, Bowlby's (1982) attachment theory discusses the notion that all beings have the innate desire to be accepted and loved by others. Bowlby (1982) also shares the significance of a child's early bonding or attachment to a parent and their capability of viewing themselves in a positive productive fashion. This early attachment and subsequent development of a strong self-esteem has shown a direct connection to an individual's ability to persevere through traumatic and stressful life events (Birneanu, 2014, p. 86). This study confirmed that preschool teachers have consistently experienced students coming to school without having an attachment to a parent and/or guardian and those children often struggle with managing emotions, establishing relationships, and ultimately showing resilience under stressful conditions. Preschool teachers, as a child's first teacher, have the important role of connecting, attaching, and bonding to every child, particularly those who are living in homes with an absent parent or parents. Teacher's voices confirmed that without this understanding of attachment there will be missed opportunities to nurture resilient behaviors.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of human development is also evidenced in the conceptual framework for this study and has been both confirmed and extended by the findings. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory examines the conditions within the environment an individual is exposed to and its link to the development of resilient

behavior. Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that it is the interactions and level of support an individual has within their environment that determines whether their lives will take a negative or positive path. Specifically, he theorized that members of families, communities, and schools have the power to either provide or deny children the supports they need to foster resilience, so they may grow into confident self-determined adults (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The skills children need to exhibit resilient behavior can be acquired from environments where adults are the role models for these behaviors. When this occurs, the environment, whether it is within the home, school, or community, provides children with another level of protection from risk.

This study confirmed that preschool teachers viewed both the home and classroom environments as essential components of a child's ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Preschool teacher's personal accounts of home environments that placed them at risk for failure by creating inner struggles of self-determination was evidenced. Additionally, teachers account of students coming to their class from challenging and/or traumatic home environments, where support systems and role models were not available, directly tied to those students social and emotional struggles.

Interpretations of findings indicate that nurturing resilience capabilities involves the entire family and community structure. Cultivating resilience goes beyond the relationships and bonds between teachers and their students. The connectedness of the entire school community, both inside and outside the school building, provides children with the highest level of protection from risk. Additionally, families need to be given the opportunity to go beyond simply being involved in their child's education to being deeply engaged in their child's educational journey. Family engagement, viewed as the highest

level of connectedness with each child's family structure, can provide one of the first and most important steps taken toward nurturing both child and family resilience.

This study also extended knowledge as it relates to the connection to an individual's environment and their ability to exhibit resilience. Teachers who were exposed to traumatic and sometimes violent home environments were able to exhibit resilience whereas their siblings who endured the same conditions and had the same level of support within the environment could not. Furthermore, extension of this perspective was evidenced in further discussion of birth order and genetics as factor that may or may not influence and individual's ability to exhibit resilience under traumatic conditions.

In addition to confirming the essential nature of supportive home environments, high quality preschool classroom environments were confirmed as an important component of developing pedagogy related to cultivating resilience. Preschool teachers supported and understood the critical nature of providing classroom environments that are warm, welcoming, safe, respectful, and provide relevant instruction across all content areas as fundamental in the development of resilience pedagogy. Interpretation of these findings indicate an extended view of a preschool teacher's role in the development of high quality preschool classrooms is needed. The teacher's role goes beyond developing lesson plans and designing the physical layout of the classroom space. Teachers most critical role is to develop and facilitate the cultivation of a child's resilience capabilities through a well-structured and nurturing environment. Additionally, understanding the purpose of their planning and instruction is critical to their role as a teacher and subsequently can bring the greatest level of knowledge to their students.

Generally speaking, interpretations of findings regarding theoretical perspectives that serve to cultivate resilience competencies indicate engagement of preschool teachers in thoughtful thinking regarding theoretical perspectives may ignite intentional and purposeful planning for resilience pedagogy. Although teachers did not speak specifically about theories evidenced in the conceptual framework for this study, interpretations of findings indicate their current practice is driven by concepts which embrace these theories. Opportunities to connect theory to practice can only serve to enrich teachers understandings and insight a new-found purpose for their work; ultimately heightening their practice.

Cultivating resilience: Constructivist worldview. Constructivists view the attainment of knowledge as a process that occurs “when individuals come together to exchange ideas, articulate their problems from their own perspectives, and construct meanings that make sense to them” (Gordon, 2008, p. 324). Furthermore, Gordon (2008) shares that using a constructivist lens, knowledge development occurs through “a process of inquiry and creation, an active and restless process that human beings undertake to make sense of themselves, the world, and the relationships between the two” (pg. 24). A constructivist approach to education offers individuals the opportunity to co-construct knowledge through a level of connectedness which encourages a collaborative interpretation of materials and subject areas.

This co-construction of knowledge embraces the notion of classrooms becoming learning environments whereas students and teachers are partners in the learning process. A classroom environment that views teaching and learning through a constructivist lens provides students with opportunities to openly contribute their ideas and opinions, make

choices, and partner in the development of curriculum based on interests and relevance to their lives (Kincheloe, 2010; Newman & Dantzler, 2015). The findings of this study confirmed the importance of developing classroom environments that respect each child's ideas and contributions. Participants believed doing so produced empowered and confident children who have a sense of ownership over their learning and development. Interpretation of findings indicate when children act as collaborative partners in the co-construction of knowledge, it impacts their level of self-confidence and self-esteem which in turn serves as inner protective factors essential to a child's ability to exhibit resilient behaviors.

Knowledge development through engaging participants in focus group discussions was also grounded in a constructivist view. Teachers came together to become "active and scholarly participants in the learning process so they could gain a much deeper understanding of the content than they would in more traditional teacher education programs" (Gordon, 2008, p. 326). Teachers confirmed that participation in professional development that afforded them the opportunity to share their perspectives and understandings was a far more powerful experience than a lecture style training. Overall, participants valued being co-constructors of knowledge regarding the impact of resilience pedagogy in preschool.

Interpretations of findings indicate the most effective way of educating young children mirrors the most effective way of educating adults. Whether involving children or adults in the respectful exchange of viewpoints and discovery of collaborative new meanings, empowerment is inevitable. If leaders commit to abandoning the idea of

traditional methods of staff development, the level of classroom instruction can be significantly impacted.

Cultivating resilience: Teachers understandings of educational factors.

Similarly, this study confirmed what research has delineated as essential components of creating educational systems that cultivate resilient behaviors within students. Studies have shown that educational institutions that create environments where students are provided with various levels of personal, positive, and ongoing intellectual, social, and emotional support, are those that contribute to fostering resilience (Green et al, 2007). Studies have also shown that school environments that place a high level of importance on both establishing and sustaining close relationships with their students, colleagues, and families are laying the foundation for the development of resilient behaviors (Hall et al., 2009; Kim & Cicchetti, 2004; Lewis et al., 2013). Overall, school communities that provide high quality, vibrant, inclusive environments that ignite the cognitive energy of all those who walk through the doors are those that will have the most success in establishing “resilience as a practice” (Hall et al., 2009; Knight, 2007, p. 550).

Furthermore, the results of this study confirmed what research has stated about the connection between sustained positive relationships and an individuals’ ability to exhibit resilience. Preschool teachers believed that it is challenging to make learning occur if relationships with students and families are not established early on and continue to grow stronger as the school year progresses. They confirmed that it is these very relationships that provide the structure, role modeling, partnership, and support necessary for students to develop a sense of trust, empathy, and capability to connect to peers and adults. Additionally, they believed that when this happens, children will have a greater sense of

confidence making them more capable of reaching out for assistance when faced with challenges. Ultimately, findings confirmed what research has shown us about the connection between the early development of a child's social-emotional competencies and their ability to establish and sustain positive relationships and persevere when encountering any type of frustration or adverse conditions.

Interpretations of findings indicate that relationship building needs to be engrained within a teacher's repertoire of instructional practices and must be intentionally planned for. The development of relationships is generally not addressed as a set of skills teachers are responsible for teaching to their students. However, when an expanded view of relationships is examined, there is far more to consider in preschool than the forming of friendships. Interpretation of findings further indicate that planning with intent involves a rich understanding of the purpose of relationships and how they support the cultivation of resilience capabilities.

In addition to confirming relationships are a primary factor related to fostering resilient behavior, the voices of preschool teachers confirmed what research says about the impact high quality learning environments has on nurturing resilience competencies. Studies have shown that children who attend a high-quality program are more likely to have higher cognitive abilities and self-esteem, form relationships, show initiative, and self-control (Hall et al., 2009; Nesheiwat & Brandwein, 2011; Raybuck & Hicks, 1994). When program quality is high, children are more likely to be protected from risk by developing the skills needed to show resilience in times of adversity (Hall et al., 2009).

Preschool teachers articulated a deeply rooted understanding of all components of a high-quality preschool program as noted in the Early Childhood Environment Rating

Scale-Third Edition (ECERS-3) (Harmes, Clifford, & Cryer, 2015). This classroom quality assessment instrument is used across New Jersey by the Department of Education to ensure all funded preschool programs are sustaining high quality educational programs for children and families. The ECERS-3 examines all components of preschool programs to include space and furnishings, personal care routines, language and literacy, learning activities, interactions, and program structure (Harmes et al., 2015, p. 13). Teachers knowledge was strong due to their ongoing interaction with this instrument through coaching, professional development, and state observations. This study confirmed that developing resilience pedagogy involved intentional planning for classroom environments structured to use every opportunity to engage children in learning the skills they will need to exhibit resilience.

Although teacher's knowledge of the impacts of high quality programs was quite vast, the connection to resilience was not initially as evident. As the level of discourse deepened, teachers confirmed what research has shown about the connection between establishing high quality classroom environments and instituting resilience pedagogy. Interpretations of these findings indicate that the environment of a preschool classroom serves as one of the most powerful teaching tools available to preschool teachers.

Cultivating resilience: Impact on academic achievement. Research indicates schools that embrace a resilient mindset are far more likely to produce students who are academically successful (Benard, 2007; Brown, 2001; Krovetz, 1999). Schools that incorporate pedagogical practices that nurture a young child's strengths and abilities serve to protect them from risk of failing to achieve academic success. (Benard 2007; Kincheloe, 2010). Studies have shown schools that support the development of a child's

social, emotional, and self-regulatory skills are fostering the protective factors children need to exhibit resilience and go on to thrive both socially and academically (Cairone & Mackrain, 2012; Morales, 2010; Shepard, 2004). Furthermore, research has indicated that when children are engaged in trusting and supportive relationships, they are more likely to succeed even under adverse conditions (Cairone & Mackrain, 2012; Williams & Bryan, 2013).

Although participants did not speak directly in terms of academic achievement, they confirmed what research has shared regarding the impact of nurturing the skills and abilities children need to exhibit resilient behavior on their academic success. Specifically, findings confirmed the critical nature of supporting the development of a young child's social and emotional skills as well as the development of relationships. Overall, findings confirmed that if attention is not given to developing these skills and abilities, children will more likely struggle to succeed academically.

Interpretations of findings indicate that attention given to teaching children how to recognize and manage emotions can avoid implications of behavioral concerns. All too often a child's inability to manage their emotions, exhibit self-control, and interact with peers appropriately are viewed as acts of misbehavior that require disciplinary action. These disciplinary actions often leave scars on a student's academic record and diminish their feelings of self-worth; ultimately impacting their school success. Additionally, interpretations indicate that a child's success is dependent upon the development of healthy relationships with the entire school community. When these relationships exist, learning and teaching can be more invigorating and meaningful. When this occurs, children are more invested in the teaching and learning process and in turn strive for excellence.

Professional growth: Knowledge development for teachers. Research has demonstrated that practitioners who are provided with meaningful professional development opportunities related to resilience are more empowered to reflect on their current teaching practices and develop a strengths-based approach (Baum et al., 2013; Garcia et al., 2015). Studies have also shown that providing resilience training gives teachers a new lens to look through when working with children who have experienced trauma and/or lack the resources necessary for their educational and personal success (Baum et al., 2013; Garcia et al., 2015). Specifically, engaging practitioners in focus groups gives them quality time to extend discourse related to the subject matter by listening, reflecting, and responding to the perspectives and practices of colleagues (Grisham-Brown & Pretti-Frontczak, 2013; Harvey & Hill, 2004).

This study supported what research indicates regarding the impactful nature of engaging teachers in professional discourse with colleagues regarding resilience. Findings confirmed that having the opportunity to examine preschool teacher's personal beliefs and perspectives regarding resilience further developed their understandings. Additionally, being given the opportunity to hear the varying perspectives and practices of their colleagues during focus groups enlightened, empowered, and validated them. This study also confirmed that participation in focus groups not only extended teachers' knowledge, it also helped them make critical connections between their current practice and the development of resilience pedagogy. Overall, this study showed a clear connection between designing professional development related to resilience and inciting change in teachers' understandings and perspectives.

Teachers who are reflective, empowered, and validated through their engagement

in focus group discussions are demonstrating the very skills needed for children to exhibit resilience capabilities. Therefore, interpretations of findings indicate when practitioners are given the opportunity to work as a collaborative team during professional development sessions, there are opportunities to foster the resilience capabilities of teachers. This in turn has the potential to impact their ability to nurture these skills in their students.

Implications

Poverty continues to be a growing issue in our country with almost half of our nations' children affected by this "large, persistent, and serious problem" (Schubert & Marks, 2016, p. 21). Policy makers and child advocates have consistently debated solutions to break the cycle of poverty and the effect it has on the healthy development of children (Anthony, King, & Austin, 2011). However, the cycle of poverty continues to have a negative impact on the academic achievement of our youth. From an early age, children growing up in impoverished communities are confronted with obstacles as they attempt to meet academic, personal, and social success (McKinney et al, 2006). The adverse effects of poverty emerge from a lack of resources and support systems, relationships, and role models and often produce negative cognitive outcomes, social and emotional behavior problems, poor economic outcomes as adults, and poor health outcomes (Anthony et al., 2011; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Moore, Reed, Burkhauser, Mbwana, & Collins, 2009; Schubert & Marks, 2016). These outcomes often lead to deeply rooted discouragement, a sense of hopelessness, and dropping out of school; accentuating the impacts of poverty and having major implications for our society (Lacour & Tissington, 2011; McKinney et al, 2006).

When children are exposed to any type of trauma or adverse conditions, whether it is from the impoverished environments they live within or events that are often too prevalent in today's world such as acts of terror, weather related disasters, and school shootings, it overwhelms their ability to cope (Wright, 2013). An inability to cope often leave our youth vulnerable, fearful, emotionally, and socially detached, and distrustful. Educators, families, and community members have the influence to provide protection from the undesirable outcomes of living in poverty and experiencing trauma. Research has indeed informed us that even the most traumatized child can show resilience and go on to lead exceptional lives (Benard, 2007; Breslin, 2005; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). However, as shared by Benard (2007), "Young people are resilient, but they are not invincible" (p. 6). Therefore, practitioners, policy makers, families, and community members would be remiss if they depended on children to simply make it. (Shapiro, 2015).

This study has shed much needed light on how schools, communities, and families can protect children from the effects of adversity and/or trauma and has created implications for both educational and societal change. This study has also incited further implications for transforming educational organizations by changing the lens through which practitioners and leaders view the academic success of their students. Furthermore, this study has major implications for embracing societal change by eradicating the impacts of poverty on our youth. As shared by Shapiro, (2015) "If we are to reduce the suffering of our youth and promote greater social justice, we need to acknowledge and accelerate the discovery of the ways in which individuals, families, and communities innately maintain their well-being in the context of adversity" (p. 7). The good health and

well-being of our children is not something that simply occurs because we hope for it; it must be “nurtured, protected, and preserved” in our homes, communities, and schools - “all the places where children live, learn, and play” (Schubert & Marks, 2016, p.21).

Educational change. Over the past century, the field of education has been inundated with consistent calls for new innovative practices and improvement of our schools (Nicoll, 2014). Yet so many of today’s schools continue to struggle with issues surrounding both the academic and social success of their students. To address the ongoing flood of state mandates, that all too often prevail in our educational institutions, policymakers and educational leaders have responded by “tightening up structures, standardizing curriculum, focusing on student test performance, and making schools accountable” (Peterson & Deal, 2009, p, 7). These types of responses tend to only pressure school personnel to change some of their instructional methods which may temporarily raise test scores rather than have a long-term effect on the academic and social lives of the students (Peterson & Deal, 2009).

As an educational leader I have all too often observed school practice focused on measuring a student’s capacity to learn by their ability to memorize rote facts and pass a test. This coupled with segregated curriculum components and disconnected intervention programs and strategies are collectively created to produce academically successful students. I have seen educators spending many of their days drilling down skills, so their students can indeed show this level of success. However, when these programs and instructional strategies fail to produce academically successful students, school administrators will often examine students lack of abilities or the weak instructional methods of the teacher. If schools continue to embrace this view of producing

academically successful students, they are perpetuating an educational and societal issue that has plagued our communities for far too long.

Children around most of the world spend the majority of their formative years attending school (Eccles & Roeser, 2012). In most societies schools play a critical role in preparing children for taking their place as contributing citizens of their communities and valuable members of the workforce (Masten, 2014). Indicative to this role is a schools' potential to nurture the adaptive skills children will need to manage whatever challenges they may face both inside and outside of their school environment (Masten, 2014,). A commitment to providing children with protection from risk by shaping their resilience capacity is a commitment to developing children who will likely flourish both academically and socially. This study has provided implications for how schools can begin to generate “transformative change” through developing a mind shift from one of students and families' inabilities and “failure to thrive” to one of strengths and abilities (Nicoll, 2014, p.49; Wright, 2013, p. 42). Ultimately, the findings of this study have implications for how to begin by implementing new perspectives regarding the establishment of school cultures that embrace “resilience as a practice” and honor the concept of creating a community of practice (Knight, 2007, p. 550).

According to Fullan (2007) changing our schools is not just a matter of putting the newest policies in place, it is far deeper a process of changing the culture of classrooms, schools, and districts. Changing the culture of schools begins with establishing collective understandings and shared meanings regarding what their children need to lead happy, healthy, successful lives (Fullan, 2007). For the most effective educational metamorphosis to occur, children need to feel the protective power of schools both inside

and outside their doors. This can happen when all members of the school community are empowered to learn collaboratively and act collectively on behalf of best practice for their students.

Embracing a “resilience as a practice” mindset goes hand in hand with developing schools that implement a community of practice approach as well (Knight, 2007, p. 550). A schools’ strength is generated from the ability and willingness of all personnel to work in partnership to design and orchestrate a community of learners where all children, families, and staff have the highest level of connectedness. This connectedness then allows for the intentional and purposeful planning for pedagogy that is meaningful and relevant to the lives of students and families. When schools take this approach to transformative change, practitioners become the very role models for creating environments conducive to cultivating resilience and for developing those critical relationships needed to show resilience in times of adversity.

Change agenda’s that embrace “resilience as a practice” are those that have recognized what researchers and theorists have informed us of for centuries regarding the impact of resilience building (Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Knight, 2007, p. 550). This study has unearthed a level of understanding with preschool teachers that is grounded in numerous theoretical perspectives connected to the development of resilience capabilities. Therefore, this study has implications for how educational institutions can activate the process of change toward creating a culture that embraces pedagogical practices entrenched in nurturing resilient behaviors. In today’s schools we spend a great deal of time talking about what programs and interventions teachers need to learn in order to address the students lack of skills. We are not engaging staff in discourse related to

basic theories of human behavior and development, attachment, self-determination, and social development. This is where we need to begin; with proven theories that have guided best educational practices for centuries.

Generally speaking, developing resilience pedagogy is an educational change that fosters the health and well-being of the whole child and family structure. Moving our educational models from one of risks and inabilities to one of strengths and capabilities will focus our schools on nurturing students who are empowered, competent, confident, and self-motivated; skills that will produce adults ready to contribute to society with optimism and constructive power. Therefore, it is critical for this mind shift to be at the forefront of today's schools change agendas.

Societal change. When schools become places where children and families are given the tools they need to be protected from risk and/or adversity, they are promoting a broader level of change. Schools that employ their potential to prevent the negative consequences of living in poverty are those that advocate for a “societal investment” in children and ultimately in our future (Shapiro, 2015, p. 7). According to Shapiro, (2015) building school communities that work together to create pedagogical practices grounded in maximizing a child's resilience capabilities are organizations that seek to “simultaneously reduce adversities experienced and disrupt the casual relationship between adversity and undesirable developmental outcomes” (p. 7). The influence of this investment has the potential to begin to ameliorate the impact of poverty on our nation's most precious resource, our children. As shared by Schubert & Marks (2016), “the future of our society and of our nation is tied to the success of our children” (p.21).

The cost of poverty places a great strain on an individual's hope for a better life (Schubert & Marks, 2016). This sense of hopelessness can often produce added negative results that create a tragic impact on society. So many of our youth who are living with impoverished conditions do not have the skills necessary to show resilience and are therefore, not equipped to believe in themselves and their future. Even the youngest learners frequently exhibit a lack of care and/or concern about their immediate presence or what lies next. All too often the light of hope, that should shine brightly in a child's eyes, dims or goes out due to their exposure to traumatic life experiences. On a broader level, children are often not experiencing the academic success needed to graduate and go on to successfully enter the work force. High rates of school drop outs will often produce higher rates of unemployment, criminal behavior, lower incomes, and medical, psychological, and emotional problems (Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007; McKinney et al., 2006; Rumberger, 2011). If we, as educators and leaders, do not tend to sparking a new sense of hope within our youth, we will never know their potential and may deny their contributions to society. Simply stated, if left unaddressed, these results can create societal consequences that will impact the economic growth of our nation (Rumberger, 2011). Therefore, the findings of this study have implications for how to illuminate the extreme importance of developing resilience pedagogy that can have far reaching benefits.

Recommendations

This study has provided me with new insights regarding the critical nature of focusing on resilience pedagogy in preschool classrooms and beyond. As indicated previously, the implications this study has on changing perspectives and practices has the

potential to pave the way toward both educational and societal change. Examining past and present research as well as the findings and implications of this study has given me a voice to make recommendations for practice, policy, social justice leadership, and future research. These recommendations are described below.

Practice. The following are recommendations for broadening the mindset of practitioners regarding pedagogical practices that both protect and nurture a child’s most fundamental adaptive systems. These recommendations are delineated to begin the process of schools supporting a “resilience as a practice” focus. (Knight, 2007, p.550).

Broaden understandings regarding the impact of developing and sustaining trusting and nurturing relationships on a child’s capability of exhibiting resilience. In education, the development and sustaining of relationships all too often take a back seat to preparing students academically. Practitioners talk about developing relationships with their students and families, however these discussions typically occur in the beginning of the school year and are focused on getting to know the makeup of the classroom roster. Once the school year is well on its way, relationship building is often assumed to have taken place. Additionally, the term relationships have become one that is often incited without individuals truly understanding the reciprocal nature of relationships as well as the complexity of what healthy relationships mean and can produce. What is often missing is what all members of the school community need to do in their daily practice to ensure their students understand how to develop and sustain healthy relationships with their peers and all school personnel.

To begin, students need to be provided with embedded opportunities to practice relationship building skills and to gain an understanding of the value of healthy

relationships on their well-being. Teachers need to plan instruction that develops children's abilities to communicate, negotiate, cooperative, empathize, and manage their emotions constructively; all critical attributes of maintaining healthy relationships. The level of connectedness that is needed for children to develop resilience capabilities must be intentionally planned for all day every day.

Furthermore, broadening perspectives regarding relationships creates a platform for schools to become role models for what healthy relationships look like as well as how to manage the ebb and flow of relationships. A commitment to creating a school culture where relationships is a central focus has the potential to bring the level of relationships from one of just knowing names, addresses, and phone numbers to one of caring, support, and connectedness to the entire school community and beyond. School leaders can foster this practice by modeling relationship building with all members of the school community as well as placing expectations on all school personnel to do the same for the students and families. For example, the entranceway and corridors of the school can be filled with language related to the skills and abilities all individuals need to develop and sustain healthy relationships. All meetings as well as the start of every child's day can begin with relationship building activities. Daily messages related to broadening perspectives regarding relationships can be shared over the intercom by school personnel and students. Lastly, school leaders can establish a team of school personnel who are responsible for developing creative pathways for sustaining a school community whose central focus is on relationship building. This is one way to ensure new perspectives and understandings continue to broaden and schools become places that nurture resilience.

Establish classroom instructional practices that embed opportunities for students to engage in hopeful thinking. As research has indicated, the negative consequences of living in poverty may lead children to a sense of hopelessness. Therefore, it is imperative that when thinking about developing resilience pedagogy, promoting hopeful thinking is at the core (Lopez, 2013). Even our youngest learners can begin to understand how to be hopeful when they are given daily opportunities to reflect, set goals, and plan. These are life skills that individuals need to stimulate their resilience capabilities, so they may face any challenges life brings them.

Building a hopeful classroom can begin by engaging students in conversations about what defines hope; as it is hope that truly helps individuals think about a plan to make their life better and gives them the motivation to persevere (Lopez, 2013). Conversations regarding hope can lead to further discourse about each child's personal short and/or long-term goals. For example, a preschool child may hope to make a friend or that daddy will read them a book. "I hope" replaces "I want" and this language becomes part of the fabric of the classroom and ultimately the school community. Once teachers facilitate the development of the concept of hope, they can then foster their student's awareness of the art of reflection, setting goals, and planning. For instance, if a preschool child wants to make a friend, they may need to reflect on how they believe a friendship should make them feel, what steps they need to take to develop that friendship, and what they will need to do if their friend is not kind or disagrees with them. If a preschool child wants their daddy to read them a book, they may need to reflect upon how they can get that message to him, what book they want him to read, and if they don't have a book, where they can get one. All the answers to these simple questions require

some level of planning and goal setting. When practitioners begin integrating these skills into preschool, it lays the foundation for using them on a broader level as children move up through the grades.

Lastly, if educators desire to create hopefulness in their classrooms and schools, they will need to shift their thinking about how a child's goals are generated. In today's educational systems, goals for children are primarily discussed as it relates to the results of child assessment data and test results. They are rarely discussed based on a child's hopes for making their school and life experiences more successful. Students need to be afforded the opportunity to think about what they hope for and design personal, relevant, and meaningful goals. If their goals and plans to meet those goals are consistently designed and provided for them, they are being denied the growth of essential life skills.

Develop pedagogy that connects directly to students interests and modalities of learning by partnering with students in the teaching and learning process. Schools can support the nurturing of resilience capabilities when they create a culture that embraces a community-based approach to teaching and learning. To do so teachers need to begin by sharing leadership over their classrooms with their students. Expanding the relationship of student to teacher to a partnership in the learning process creates rich opportunities for the development of skills children will need to exhibit resilience. When children are embraced as important members of the school community and empowered to discover their own meaning through personally relevant learning experiences, their level of self-worth and confidence is heightened.

Teachers can begin to accomplish this collaborative approach by creating pedagogy that connects directly to each child's interests and mode of learning. Children

need to participate in the development of learning experiences and be given the tools to construct their own meanings in a manner conducive to their individual learning style. To begin, teachers need to take time to engage in rich conversations with children and their families to obtain a deep understanding of what their interests are and subsequently develop areas of studies around those topics. Getting to know their communities and their cultural background can also assist in the co-development of studies that are relevant and meaningful to their lives. Once these interests are established, children, even at a preschool level, can engage in the process of mapping out the questions they have about the varying topics and begin to search for the answers through an intentionally planned learning environment (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). When schools commit to moving away from a set curriculum and allow students to have a strong voice in planning their educational experiences, teaching and learning becomes more developmentally appropriate and interesting (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Furthermore, it makes coming to school a far more powerful experience that motivates students to persevere.

Promote teaching and learning that recognizes the strengths and abilities of students and cultivates the skills they need to exhibit resilient behavior. If educators are going to nurture resilience capabilities in their students, developing pedagogy around strengths and abilities is also essential. Working from a strengths-based model produces students that are more likely to stay focused and accomplish whatever they set out to do. Again here, this is going to involve a shift in thinking for educational practitioners. Schools today often focus on the tasks students are unable to complete rather than on what they can achieve.

To begin, teachers need to converse with their students about what they believe their strengths are and work to highlight them in the development of their practice. If a child is unable to identify their strengths and abilities, teachers need to help to identify them. Whether in some small or grander way, all children have the potential for greatness and need to feel proud of what they can accomplish. Teachers need to find that potential and capitalize on it by placing high expectations on their students and unearthing their sense of pride. Educators should never assume that students are not capable of achieving far reaching goals. When high expectations are placed on children and that is coupled with the full emotional support from a caring adult, children are more likely to exhibit the drive to push forward even under challenging circumstances.

Lastly, student's strengths and abilities need to be celebrated. When teachers take the time to celebrate and honor the work and achievements of their students – no matter how small – it sends a clear message that they are valuable contributing members of the school community. For example, teachers can incorporate a kindness keeper in their classroom and allow the child to ring a bell or hit a gong anytime they acted in a kind way to a classmate. Once they celebrate their kind act, the entire class can stop and cheer for the child who conducted the kind act and that child can add a kindness scoop to a chart or in a container. When the chart or container gets filled up, the whole class can have a celebration acknowledging all their kind acts.

Develop a school community of practice by engaging all school staff in meaningful and relevant professional development that embraces “resilience as a practice” as a model for change (Knight, 2007, p. 550). One of the most critical recommendations I can make for creating classrooms and schools that foster resilience is

to ensure all school personnel are provided with varying opportunities to gain new perspectives and understandings regarding the impactful nature of “resilience as a practice” (Knight, 2007, p. 550). The culture of schools cannot change until all members of the school community are respected enough to be included in the process of creating the agenda for change. All too often change agendas are already mapped out for staff when they begin a new school year, or they welcome a new administration. Giving professional staff the opportunity to be part of the process of change promotes a message of respect. Respect begets respect, and this will spread throughout the corridors of the school and allow for a community of practice to be born.

When teachers believe they are respected members of the school community, they are more likely to nurture a classroom community of learners; an important component of developing schools that foster resilience. The journey toward schools that foster resilience can then continue by giving professional staff time to engage with their colleagues by providing ongoing meaningful professional development experiences. These experiences need to embed time for deep reflection on the part of practitioners regarding their beliefs and understandings about resilience. Additionally, these professional development experiences need to be designed to give practitioners a safe platform for sharing their personal stories of resilience.

When schools commit to providing staff with time away from their classrooms, give them a warm and welcoming space to meet, and allow them to guide the discussions, it will serve to strengthen the community of practice and provide great insight into what drives their work. Engaging professionals in this fashion is an important step toward shifting the mindset of staff and developing resilience pedagogy. Furthermore, when

professional staff are engaged in this way, schools are modeling the very skills we hope to impart on the students; relationship building, respect, and reflection.

Policy. If schools are going to become organizations that support a caring community-based environment, that nurtures the resilience capabilities of their students, they must be supported by policies generated through the same lens. The following are recommendations to support educational policies at both a state and local level.

Re-create measures of accountability through the establishment of school policies that promote the development of resilience pedagogy. Educational institutions are consistently under scrutiny regarding their ability to produce academically successful students who are prepared to meet 21st century workforce challenges. Schools are held accountable for percentages of students who pass state mandated tests and for how many students successfully graduate from high school. Teachers and school leaders share the pressures of accountability to meet state mandated academic and professional standards. However, accountability measures characteristically have a strong emphasis on programs, assessments, and interventions designed to address the deficiencies of students, staff, and leaders of the school community.

Accountability is typically looked at as a process of gathering information such as student's grades and school as well as district assessment reports and then preparing reports so that school administrators and state agencies have information they believe is relevant (Earl & LeMahieu, 1997). Earl and LeMahieu (1997) would call this "accounting not accountability" (p. 163). Accounting involves "gathering, organizing, and reporting" various pieces of information that describes a student's performance (Earl & LeMahieu, 1997, p. 163). The concern here is that test scores and student grades only

paint one piece of the picture of a student's skills and abilities. What is missing is embedded accountability measures design to examine and understand how the whole child is functioning to include socially, emotionally, and cognitively.

What is recommended is a shift in how policymakers view accountability. To truly support the full well-being of all students and families, it is time for policymakers to develop an understanding of the significant impact fostering resilience has on the academic lives of students. Policies need to be established that hold school communities accountable for the collaborative development of pedagogy that cultivates the resilience capabilities of all students. Policies for developing accountability measures that examine whether or not student's resilient capabilities are being nurtured also need to be in place. When policies are created that directly connect to a resilient mindset, schools will be held to a level of accountability that produces children who have the greatest potential to succeed both academically and socially.

Promote an “ethic of care” (Noddings, 2005, p. 21) and school policies that place expectations on school personnel for establishing environments that nurture resilient behaviors. Educational policies have consistently focused their attention on the cognitive and intellectual functions of students and minimized the role relationships and emotions play in the educational process (Davis, 2007). For schools to embrace a resilient mindset, policies need to be in place that support what Davis (2007) refers to as “affective reform” (p. 51). Policymakers need to work toward designing policies that recognize the importance of both “cognitive and affective dimensions of teaching and learning” (Davis, 2007. p. 51). If this can be accomplished, the potential for higher levels of both academic and personal success is evident.

To accomplish creating school environments that nurture resilience, it is recommended that policies are established that develop schools who promote an “ethic of care” (Noddings, 2005, p. 21). School policies that promote this practice are those that place expectations on school personnel for nurturing resilient behaviors through the intensive attention on the strengths and abilities of their students. Additionally, adopting an “ethics of care” policy supports the significance of developing and sustaining relationships and gives districts permission to abandon one size fits all curriculum and assessments (Noddings, 2005, p. 21). Policies that promote an “ethic of care” concern themselves more with developing instruction that respects each child’s unique life experiences and mode of learning (Noddings, 2005). Putting policies in place that seek to examine creating school environments that foster each students resilience capabilities, has great potential for changing the focus and design of educational practices. Focusing our collective attention on ensuring schools place a child’s social and emotionally well-being at the forefront of a their educational programs, will serve to improve their overall success in school.

Leadership. The following are recommendations for school leaders to begin the process of developing schools that cultivate resilience.

Embrace and develop a social justice leadership mindset to begin eradicating the impacts of poverty on our youth. Leadership for social justice supports a process that recognizes, respects, and empathizes with children who are often marginalized due to the impoverished conditions they have been subjected to (Theoharis, 2007). A social justice leader commits to acting by investigating possible explanations for this marginalization and proposing solutions to eliminate societal inequities (DeMatthews & Mawwhinney,

2014; Marshall & Olivia, 2012). If educational leaders wish to begin eradicating the impacts of poverty on their students, they need to heed to the call of social justice by developing a clear understanding of the phenomenon of resilience and reflect upon how this impacts the students in their buildings and communities.

Social justice leaders need to consider the development of a resilient mindset as an alternative framework for providing all students with the greatest chance for success. To fully achieve a commitment to social justice, leaders must collaborate with members of their communities, both inside and outside the school building. Doing so ensures they develop and sustain deeply rooted connections to the lived experiences of their students and families.

When leaders connect to their school families and community members, the experiences they share will become the driving force for social justice leaders to put a change initiative in place that gives often marginalized students living in poverty the same opportunities to thrive than students who have not experienced these conditions.

Capitalize on the professional standards for educational leaders and develop a plan for embracing school environments that nurture resilient behaviors. The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015) developed the professional standards for educational leaders to support and guide their practice. The newly revised standards provide educational leaders with extensive guidelines for establishing the most effective learning environments and for ensuring students have what they need to become successful learners (The National Board for Educational Administration, 2015). These standards are often what is used to evaluate the work of school leaders and/or to assist

them in establishing their goals and professional development plans. However, these standards are then typically just placed on a shelf and forgotten about.

An examination of these standards produced language indicative of leadership practice that nurtures the resilience of their students and families. Specifically, these standards delineate a leader's responsibility for developing the well-being of their students, recognizing student's strengths, providing them with support, showing perseverance, developing relationships, building respect, and fostering a community of learners (The National Board for Educational Administration, 2015). Although this document does not mention the word resilience, the roles and responsibilities of leaders clearly connect to nurturing resilient behavior. Therefore, it is recommended that these standards be viewed through a new lens; a lens that illuminates the significance of a resilient mindset.

These standards can provide a systematic way for developing leaders with understandings regarding resilience and igniting a change in perceptions about their roles and responsibilities. Additionally, school leaders can use these standards as a spring board for discourse with all members of the school community regarding what everyone can do to create a school environment that nurtures resilient behaviors. Conducting this work collaboratively provides an opportunity for the development of a community of practice to emerge. When all members of the school community understand what leaders are responsible for and develop a plan to accomplish it, there is great potential for a mind shift to flourish.

Research. The following are recommendations for future research regarding the relevance of resilience in the field of early childhood education.

Support a comprehensive preschool through grade 3 educational system by extending research regarding the impact of developing students' resilience capabilities beyond pre-k. A review of literature produced minimal studies related to resilience research conducted specifically with early childhood professionals and consequently, has produced an opportunity for future research in this area. Therefore, it is recommended to extend this current study to reach beyond preschool to all early childhood grade levels – preschool through grade 3. Extending this research to encompass preschool through grade 3 supports the promotion of an aligned, comprehensive, and seamless early educational system designed to provide children with the most impactful learning experiences (Graves, 2006; Kauerz, 2006; Reynolds, Magnuson, & Suh, 2010). Furthermore, facilitation of focus group discussions with all early childhood practitioners has the potential to provide data with greater depth and breadth. A focus on developing common understandings regarding resilience also has the potential to impact teaching practices on a much broader scale.

To extend this research further, the recommendation is to conduct a comparison of the perceptions and understandings regarding resilience from grade level to grade level. A comparative analysis may provide great insight into the potential variations of how relevant teachers at different grade levels believe this subject matter is. It is also recommended to extend this study by conducting classroom observations using an instrument designed to capture resilience building activities and interactions. An analysis of this data has great potential to determine if teachers' perceptions, understandings, and descriptions of practices connect to their daily classroom practice.

Extend resilience research to include what factors may impact the teacher's personal capabilities to exhibit resilient behaviors and how their resilience impacts their ability to teach these skills to their students. One of the research questions which guided this study related to what experiences preschool teachers had that may have guided how they perceive and describe resilience. Focus group discourse showed an overwhelming openness to teachers sharing their personal stories of resilience. In an effort to delve further into teacher's personal stories of resilience, it is recommended that further research be designed to gain an understanding of early childhood teacher's resilience capabilities and how it impacts their capacity to nurture resilience in their students. Furthermore, it is recommended that teacher resilience capabilities are measured not only by their personal stories of resilient behavior, but professional stories as well. Obtaining this level of data has the potential for discovering what kind of school environments cultivate resilient behaviors in their staff and create further implications for leadership to examine if they are nurturing resilience in their teachers.

Conclusion

The consequences of living in poverty have a profound and far reaching impact on the academic lives of our youth. Due to impoverished conditions so many of our youth do not have the supports and resources needed to reach their potential. Schools are entrusted with the responsibility of cultivating students that vehemently embrace all the world has to offer and to inspire each child to reach their fullest capabilities. They are charged with developing the skills and abilities students will need to become contributing citizens of our communities and our country. This then raises the question of why they

are not charged with and held accountable for creating school environments that promote and nurture the resilient capabilities of their students.

In today's educational environment practitioners and leaders spend a great deal of time discussing the significance of developing our students 21st century skills. In the field of early education discussions regarding the development of a child's social and emotional skills are at the foundation of creating high quality programs. However, educational conversations do not specifically include a focus on resilience. This study allowed for the emergence of preschool teachers' understandings and perceptions regarding resilience and pedagogical practices that connect resilience building to their focus on social-emotional development. Nevertheless, this is just a beginning. It is time for conversations that go beyond the cliché of 21st century skills to much richer discussions regarding resilience as a significant skill all students require to prosper in today's society. Certainly, it is time for schools to be held accountable for protecting our children from risk through the intentional planning for resilience pedagogy.

Resilience is viewed as a critical component of fostering the health and well-being of our youth and a mechanism for providing a "life-long buffer" to circumstances that may create a threat (Khanlou & Wray, 2014, p. 65). Children at a young age should be empowered with the skills they need to persevere as they work through challenging tasks, solve problems, and experience frustration. Cultivating resilience must begin with our most impressionable and youngest learners and carry on as they continue their educational journey. As stated by Khanlou and Wray (2014), "an investment in resilience of our youngest learners is a powerful step toward promoting their health and well-being

with life-long benefits including potential improvements in school, employment, and pro-social outcomes – as well as an equalizer in socio-economic differences.” (p. 65).

Cultivating the resilience capabilities of our youth must be viewed as a national imperative. Poverty, trauma, and acts of violence all contribute to our children’s loss of hope for a better future. The results of losing hope manifests itself in our schools, communities, and country and has major implications for our success as a nation. The field of education has the power to re-ignite a sense of hope in children experiencing these adversities. Providing our children with school environments that serve to protect, uplift, and nurture will serve to protect the future of our communities and our country.

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Appendix A
Consent Form

Dear _____,

I am a doctoral student at Rowan University and am currently engaged in the dissertation process. I am conducting a study that seeks to gather perspectives, understandings, and teaching practices of preschool teachers regarding resilience pedagogy. I will be collecting data through the use of interviews, focus groups, and graphic elicitations. A total of 4 focus groups over a one-month period will be conducted. Each focus group discussion will take place for approximately 60-90 minutes. Additionally, interviews will take place and will last approximately 1 half hour. All interviews and focus group discussions will be audiotaped. Participants should understand that they may be quoted directly but their names will not be used in any part of the report. I will protect the identities of participants through the use of pseudonyms in this and any future publications or presentations. Please understand that you may withdraw from the study at any time, without prejudice. I would greatly appreciate your willingness to give your time to this study and assist me in my growth as a professional and leader in my field.

Thank you,

Nancy Ziobro

Doctoral Candidate

I have read the above and discussed it with the researcher. I understand the study and I agree to the following:

I agree to participate in a study entitled "Investigation of preschool teacher's perceptions, understandings, and practices related to resilience pedagogy: A qualitative single case study," which is being conducted by Nancy Ziobro, a Doctoral student at Rowan

University.

I understand that my responses will be confidential. I agree that any information obtained from this study may be used in any way thought best for publication or education provided that I am in no way identified and my name is not used.

I understand that there are no physical or psychological risks involved in this study, and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without penalty.

I understand that my participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator.

If I have any questions or problems concerning my participation in this study, I may contact Nancy Ziobro at (732) 828-2157 or ziobro91@students.rowan.edu.

Participant Name (Please print)

I agree to be audio recorded:

(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

By signing this form, the participant understands and acknowledges all of the terms listed above, and the participant had chances to ask questions about the study.

(Signature of Investigator/or person explaining the form)

(Date)

Appendix B

Interview Guide

I would like to first thank you for meeting with me. I want to remind you that your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time. Today I will be talking to you about your perceptions, understandings, and practices related to resilience.

1. Please describe what resilience means to you.
2. What experiences have you had that have impacted your description?
3. Does resilience matter in a preschool classroom? If yes, how so? If not, why?
4. Please describe what characterizes a resilient child?
5. Are children born with the inner capacity to be resilient? Please explain your response. If not, can these skills be taught? If yes, how so?
6. How do you incorporate pedagogical practices that create classrooms that cultivate resilient children?
7. Describe how the daily routines in your classroom assist in building skills needed to cultivate resilient children?
8. Describe how the overall environment of your classroom contributes to cultivating resilient children? How do you intentionally plan for a classroom environment that accomplishes this?
9. Are relationships a key component of a program that cultivates resilient children? If yes, please describe why and how you intentionally plan for relationship building in your classroom? If no, please elaborate on your response.

10. What activities and experiences in your classroom contribute to cultivating resilient children?
11. Are the partnerships between teachers and families an essential piece to creating classrooms that cultivate resilient children? If yes, why and how do you intentionally plan for this home to school connection? If no, please elaborate on your response.
12. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your perceptions, understandings, and practices related to resilience?

Thank you for your participation in this interview.

Appendix C

Focus Group Protocol

The protocol below will serve as questions to engage focus group participants in discussions regarding perspectives, understandings, and pedagogical practices related to resilience.

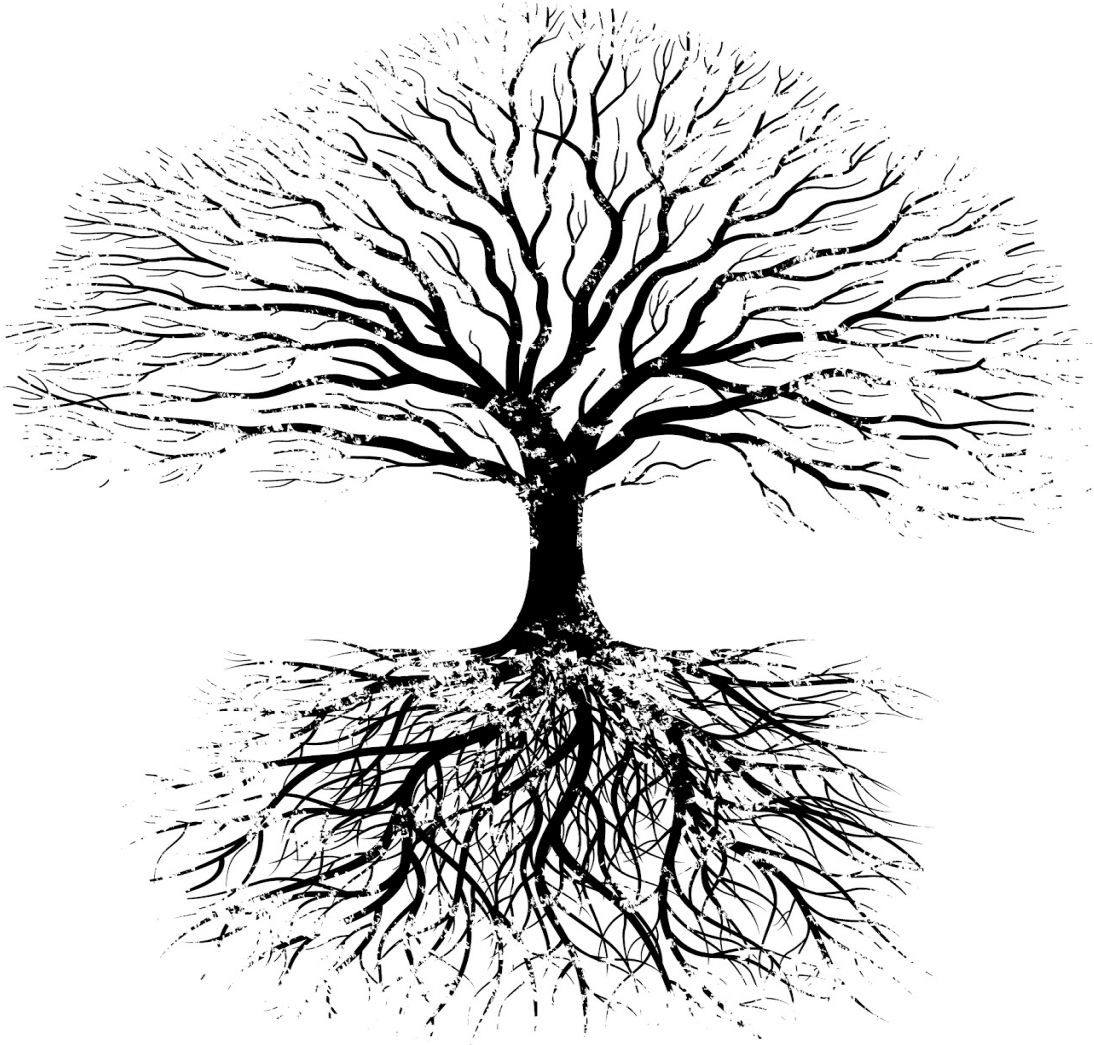
1. As you think about how to define and describe resilience, what key words and phrases come to your mind?
2. What experiences have you had in your life that has informed how you describe and define resilience?
3. Can individuals learn to be resilient or are some just born with the ability to bounce back from adversity? Please explain the rationale that supports your response.
4. Please share how resilience may or may not be relevant to your work with 3 and 4-year-old children.
5. In your work as a teacher of preschool students, is it possible to foster or awaken resilience in your students? If so, how can this be accomplished? If not, why not?
6. How can you intentionally plan for a classroom environment that elicits resilience pedagogy?
7. What role do you believe the structure of your classroom daily routines plays in providing opportunities to foster resilient behaviors in your students?
Describe how you can intentionally plan for routines that support these skills.

8. What are your thoughts about how family engagement and/or the connection between home and school produces resilient children? Describe how you can intentionally plan for family engagement opportunities.
9. What role do you believe relationships play in cultivating resilience? Describe how you can intentionally plan for a classroom that builds relationships.
10. Describe what activities and experiences you intentionally plan for using resilience pedagogy.

Appendix D

Pre-Elicitation Protocol

Instructions: The purpose of this exercise is to elicit data regarding your perspectives regarding how to create classrooms that cultivate resilient students. Each branch and root signifies the essentials your students will need to grow the skills necessary to be resilient. Using the colored pencils provided, please awaken the resilience of this tree. Label and describe each item you include.



Appendix E

Post-Elicitation Protocol

Instructions: Using the colored pencils provided, please design a bulletin board that highlights a classroom that has intentionally planned for fostering resilience in their students. Please give your bulletin board a name.

