

Brenda J. McMahon
Nipissing University

Resilience Factors and Processes: No Longer at Risk

This narrative study based on semistructured interviews seeks to further our understanding of students' experiences of resilience factors and processes and of educators' roles in engendering resilient environments. First, I provide a brief overview of current educational literature on resilience. Second, I draw on data from interviews with nine participants about their academic success in which they discuss personal resilience factors as well as resilience processes enacted in familial, friendship, and school environments. Last, I propose suggestions for further discussion and identify key issues for education administrators to be aware of in the creation and maintenance of school environments that foster resilience.

Cette étude narrative repose sur des entrevues semi-structurées et cherche à augmenter nos connaissances sur l'expérience que font les élèves des facteurs et processus de résilience, ainsi que sur le rôle que jouent les enseignants dans le développement d'un milieu qui inspire la résilience. Je commence par un survol de la littérature pédagogique actuelle sur la résilience. En deuxième lieu, je puise dans les données provenant d'entrevues auprès de neuf participants et portant sur la réussite académique. Les participants discutent de leurs facteurs de résilience personnels et des processus de résilience se déroulant dans des milieux familiaux, amicaux et scolaires. Finalement, je propose des sujets de discussion complémentaires et j'identifie des enjeux clés que devraient connaître les administrateurs d'écoles pour être en mesure de créer et maintenir des milieux scolaires qui favorisent la résilience.

In educational literature, discourse about student success and failure is evolving with shifts away from what are students' perceived deficits toward a focus on inherent strengths and supportive relationships. In an effort to understand how some children and adolescents overcome, or succeed in spite of, apparent risk factors and processes, researchers (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Benard, 1995; Bryan, 2005; House, 2005; Johnson, 1997; Kaplan, 1999; Norman, 2000; Pianta & Walsh, 1998; Reis, Colbert, & Hebert, 2005; Smokowski, Reynolds, & Bezruczko, 1999; Taylor & Thomas, 2001; Wasonga, Christman, & Kilmer, 2003) concentrate on conceptions of resilience and identify protective factors and protective processes that "ameliorate" or "buffer" a "person's reaction to a situation that in ordinary circumstances leads to maladaptive outcomes" (Taylor & Thomas, p. 9). Resilience is seen as existing both in individuals and in relationships between and among people that enhance rather than inhibit students' life opportunities and their achievement in schools.

Brenda J. McMahon is an assistant professor in the Department of Graduate Studies—Educational Leadership. She is co-editor of *Inclusion in Urban Educational Environments: Addressing Issues of Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice* and author of articles about risk, resilience, and engagement.

The philosophical perspective that informs this study can be identified as a conception of critical theory consistent with a critical constructive postmodern perspective articulated by Kincheloe, Slattery, and Steinberg (2000) and with critical theory, multiculturalism, and antiracism as depicted by Banks (1993), Dei, Holmes, Mazzuca, McIsaac, and Campbell (1997), and Kincheloe and McLaren (2000). My emphasis is on the significance of locatedness as realized by the relative presence and absence of power and influence and a belief in the importance of social transformation. As such, this conception of critical theory endorses pedagogies of resistance, possibility, and hope (Gay, 1995). In this framework, representations of race, class, and gender are understood as the result of larger social struggles over signs and meanings.

This article seeks to further understandings of students' lived experiences of resilience factors and processes and of educators' roles in engendering resilient environments. It is part of a larger qualitative inquiry (McMahon, 2004) that explores students' experiences of being marginalized by, and at risk of not graduating from, high schools to becoming academically successful in university settings. This research focuses on the influences that enhance student resilience. First, I provide a brief overview of current educational literature on resilience. Second, I draw on data from participants' narratives of their academic success to discuss personal resilience factors as well as resilience processes enacted in familial, friendship, and school environments. Last, I propose suggestions for further discussion and identify key issues for education administrators to consider in the creation and maintenance of school environments that foster resilience. This does not include discussions of the contested nature of language and the possibility that some conceptions of resilience may be problematic in their unwitting tendency to reinforce the status quo (McMahon, 2006). As with perceptions of risk, in spite of the difficulties inherent in some notions of resilience, this concept can still prove to be beneficial to our understanding of educators' roles and responsibilities in creating space for student empowerment in school environments and can provide a vehicle for discussing characteristics of individuals and relationships that enable students to be empowered in schools.

Review of the Literature

Masten, Best, and Garnezy (1991) address the situational nature of resilience terminology by distinguishing between distal risks such as social class that are mediated for a child, and proximal risks, for example, incompetent parental figures or ineffective schools that directly impinge on a child. Even given these distinctions, there are still questions about the effects of individual instances of adversity and cumulative or chronic risk stressors. It is also often difficult to draw clear distinctions between personal vulnerabilities and environmental adversities because school performance and marginalized group membership influences how individuals are perceived by others and how they configure their own life chances. Norman (2000) supports a view of the contextual or relational nature of resiliency with his contention that "a resilient or adaptive outcome is a process of interaction between environmental and personal factors. If circumstances change, outcomes may be different" (p. 4). According to Hixson and Tinzmann (1990), being academically at risk is exacerbated by expectations of failure by both teachers and students. This downward spiral of

poor performance becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy for both teachers and students. Dei et al. (1997) report that due in large part to a lack of encouragement by teachers, students internalize negative self-concepts that serve to compromise both personal and cultural self-esteem. This contention is supported by researchers (Fine, 1995; Polakow, 1995; Tabachnick & Bloch, 1995) who find that low socioeconomic status and minority racial group identity play more significant roles in terms of negative consequences than they do for middle-class students who are members of the dominant culture.

Theorists (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Norman, 2000; Smokowski et al., 2000; Wang, 1997; Westfall & Pisapia, 1994) identify personal attributes differentiating resilient children from their peers who are vulnerable or at risk. These protective factors are seen as facilitating the process of overcoming adversity and include an absence of organic deficits; having an easy temperament combined with increased responsiveness, flexibility, and adaptability; an internal locus of control; and a sense of humor. They also include social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose and a strong sense of self-efficacy. Kaplan's (1999) depiction of resilience as hardiness also includes commitment, control, and challenge, which is "the belief that change is normal and represents a positive rather than threatening circumstance" (p. 21). The conclusion that students who are future-directed in spite of being marginalized and at risk is evident in studies by McMahon and Armstrong (2003) and House (2005), who reports that in a survey of grade 9 students about career aspirations, almost 90% of "low-achieving minority students said they intended to go to college" (p. 15). Because a college education is not probable for many of these students, resilience as academic achievement must entail more than individual characteristics or desires.

Extending beyond individual attributes, resilience exists in interpersonal dynamics; specifically, student resilience is fostered by support from family members, peers, educators, and social and community organizations. Research by McMillan and Reed (1994) indicates that parental pressure in the form of high academic expectations combined with positive "parent-child relationships and supportive attachments appear to act as protective factors from the environment" (p. 138). In addition to family, Johnson (1997) highlights the significance of school and community "as potentially protecting students from risk factors or as potentially compensating for personal and social disadvantage" (p. 45). According to Benard (1997), "protective processes can be grouped into three major categories: caring and supportive relationships, positive and high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation" (p. 1). Pianta and Walsh (1998) also contend that rather than being characteristic of children, families, or schools, resiliency is produced by the interactions among multiple relationships between the child, family, peers, school, and community.

As an arena where interactions and relationships among individuals, groups, and systems occur, schools have a significant role to play in the creation of environments that serve as protective processes conducive to resilience. Benard (1995) contends that

reciprocal caring, respectful, and participatory relationships are the critical determining factors in whether a student learns; whether parents become and

stay involved in the school; whether a program or strategy is effective; whether an educational change is sustained; and ultimately, whether a youth feels he or she has a place in this society. (p. 3)

This assertion is supported by House (2005) and Smokowski et al. (2000) in their findings that the “relational bonds” between teachers and resilient adolescents were important in buffering risks and facilitating adaptive development. “Favorite teachers were among the most frequently cited positive role models in the lives of children. The teachers were not simply instructors facilitating academic growth, but also became confidants—positive models for personal identification” (pp. 427-428). This is reinforced by high expectations for students as learners. According to Westfall and Pisapia (1994), resilient relationships are formed between pupils and educators who have “positive expectations and that push the students while remaining very supportive and understanding” (p. 3).

Participation in the life of the school beyond the classrooms is an important factor in student resilience. Westfall and Pisapia (1994) report that students frequently mention the significance of positive use of time and meaningful involvement in school and/or other activities that are not designated for at-risk students or students with specific problems. Success in these activities and involvement in leadership initiatives enhance self-esteem by providing recognition and a sense of accomplishment and have the potential to connect students with their peers and the school in meaningful ways. These findings are consistent with studies by Dei et al. (1997), McMahon and Armstrong (2003), and Solomon and Levine-Rasky (2003), which include Black students’ voices in examining the experiences of students who have been marginalized and silenced in schools. They make recommendations to school administrators for developing inclusionary school environments including: having high expectations for all students, academically and socially; broadening conceptions of what and whose voices constitute valid knowledge; and recruiting, hiring, and promoting teaching, counseling, and administrative personnel with whom students can identify visually and experientially.

Bryan’s (2005) and Reis et al.’s (2005) studies emphasize the role of school counselors in fostering student resilience in urban settings that have implications for the role of educational administrators in creating learning communities. For example, Bryan’s examination of school-community partnerships in urban schools supports findings that developing positive relationships “among the school, home, and community increase students’ chances of success by removing some of the stressors and systemic barriers to academic and personal success, especially for poor and minority students” (p. 226). Furthermore, Reis et al. suggest that “school counselors and teachers could work closely together to ensure that academic experiences are commensurate with students’ abilities and learning styles” (p. 217). Rather than streaming students who are underachieving into lower academic pathways, they argue for the placement of underachieving students in academically challenging classes.

Methodology

This article focuses on data gathered from interviews with students currently experiencing academic success in universities who had previously experienced academic failure in high schools. The critical stance referred to in the introduction is evident in the methodology, notably as it relates to the primacy of voice and locatedness, recognizing “that society is structured by class and status, as well as by race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 6). The emphasis is on the significance of locatedness as realized by the relative presence and absence of power and influence and a belief in the importance of social transformation. According to Lincoln and Guba (2000), knowledge and truths are located “in specific historical, economic, racial, and social infrastructures of oppression, injustice, and marginalization” (p. 167).

The narrative inquiry employed in this study is consistent with this critical perspective. It informs this study in the selection of interviewees, the structure of the interview questions, and the analysis of the data.

Gitlin and Russell (1994) report that traditional academic research in the humanities and social sciences in general use dominant perspectives of knowledge and knowledge creation that “helps create a great divide between those who regularly produce specialized forms of knowledge and those who are supposed to be informed by that knowledge” (p. 184). Furthermore, as Seidman (1998) contends in educational contexts in particular, even though there is an abundance of research conducted on schooling in North America “little of it is based on studies involving the perspective of students [etc.] ... whose individual and collective experience constitutes schooling” (p. 4). The diversity of stories and voices of the storytellers in this research is contrary to these notions of educational research. Students were interviewed in order to understand their lived experiences better so that they participate in the production of “knowledge that is seen as legitimate” (Gitlin & Russell, p. 182). This focus on students’ perspectives is in keeping with Norum’s (2004) suggestion that narrative inquiry as a form of qualitative research “creates a space for and values personal voice and the sharing of personal perspectives ... people’s stories are brought to the forefront and become the data” (p. 4). The students’ stories that are generally left untold in educational research bring their historical, economic, racial, and social realities into academic resilience discourse.

To access potential participants, I contacted program directors of transitional and articulation programs in a large metropolitan center in Ontario that admit students into university who are deemed to have the potential, but who have not yet consistently demonstrated the knowledge, skills, and/or self-confidence required for successful completion of university curriculum. A blind mailing was sent to recent graduates of the programs currently registered in university. The interviewees either had not graduated from secondary schools or had done so without attaining high enough grade point averages in a sufficient number of prerequisite courses for direct admission to university. This elite sample of participants who have demonstrated both risk and resilience were chosen for two reasons; first, they are identifiable and accessible; and second, their high levels of academic achievement make it difficult for theorists and practitioners who promote streaming underachieving stu-

Table 1
 Respondents' Background Information

Background	Anthony	Barbara	Carol	Deanna	Elaine	Frank	Greg	Hannah	Jennifer
Black female				•	•				
Black male	•								
White female		•	•					•	•
White male						•	•		
Early 20s							•	•	
Mid- to late 20s	•		•	•	•				
Mid-30s						•			
Early 40s		•							•
High school grad	•		•	•	•		•	•	
Currently married									•
Currently parenting		•	•						•
Low SES	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•
Two-parent family of origin							•	•	
Father university grad							•	•	
Mother university grad	•								
Sibling university grad		•							

dents into workplace programs to dismiss their experiences. A description of the participants' backgrounds is presented in Table 1.

Data for this article were obtained through semistructured interviews that I conducted with nine respondents. Each participant was interviewed for between 60 and 120 minutes and was informed of his or her right to refuse to answer any questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. Following these interviews, respondents were provided with transcripts to make corrections, deletions, or additions. Subsequently, I conducted and transcribed follow-up interviews of 30 to 60 minutes with three of the interviewees to obtain further information. They were again given the opportunity to review and revise the transcripts. Using open-ended questions allowed me to gain an understanding of their lived journeys, analyze responses, and obtain informa-

tion that is “richly descriptive” (Merriam, 1998, p. 8). This is consistent with Clandinin and Connelly’s (1994) contention that “experience, in this view, is the stories people live. People live stories, and in the telling of them reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones” (p. 415). Although it is the voices of students experiencing academic failure as well as the current academically successful students that I am seeking to understand, it is only through the lens of their present situatedness that I am able to access information about their past experiences. Their experience of resilience factors and processes may facilitate their ability to come to terms with feelings associated with their academic failures.

Findings

Sample questions for this study ask participants to indicate their career goals/aspirations; describe qualities they possess that enable them to achieve academically; identify family, friends, and community social supports that encourage their academic achievement; and describe educational factors that enhance their academic achievement. I use pseudonyms to represent accurately each person and “take into consideration issues of ethnicity, age, and context of the participant’s life” (Seidman, 1998, p. 104). This ensures respondent confidentiality by protecting their identities.

The respondents, although they do not explicitly call them resilience factors, identify intrapersonal characteristics they possess and continue to develop as well as interpersonal relationships and support as enhancing their academic achievements. Their intrapersonal skills include being future-directed, committed, perseverant, tenacious, determined, optimistic, and socially competent. External supports that contribute to their successes exist primarily in relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and instructors as well as institutional factors such as inclusive curriculum, counseling, and financial assistance.

Personal Factors

The respondents’ reflections are consistent with protective factors or characteristics identified by researchers (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Norman, 2000; Smokowski et al., 2000; Turner, 2000; Westfall & Pisapia, 1994) including perseverance, determination, social competence, self-efficacy, problem-solving skills, reflectivity, autonomy, and a sense of purpose and future. Although the participants refer to the development of their self-esteem as integral to their academic success, they express the evolution of a positive sense of self in differing ways. Anthony says that his success in the transitional program “reinforced the fact that I could do this, that I wasn’t dumb. That I am a smart person, that I can do all these things.” Barbara describes herself as having “more faith in myself than I ever had,” and Hannah says her self-esteem “definitely shot up and it’s very good right now ... I’m definitely in a healthy place.”

Perhaps because she does not construct her identity as constrained by her level of academic achievement, Deanna is the only respondent to question the assumption of a causal relationship between academic success and self-esteem, “I don’t think my academics have anything to do with my personality, nor would my personality affect my academics.” This being said, she acknowledges changes in her feelings of self-worth concurrent with her academic

achievements, "I've become more self-assured, more self-aware, self-love—all that positive stuff directed towards yourself and I've become less angry, less judgmental—less of all the negative things and more of all the positive." Elaine, on the other hand, attributes her positive educational experiences with her changes in esteem.

It gave me a lot of confidence. It gave me a lot of willpower. It let me know that I could do anything I really want to do and if I'm doing it for myself it makes it a million times better. Although I have a long way to go, I feel that there are a lot of things that I don't only want to do, but can do.

All the respondents are currently focused on graduating from university and moving on to vocations that they identify as personally and financially rewarding. Seven of the participants articulate as fundamental to their future careers a desire to help, work with young people, and give something back to their communities. McMillan and Reed (1994) claim that resilient students are future-directed and have high educational aspirations to the extent that "they have hope, despite all the negative circumstances in their lives, and confidence that they can achieve their long-range goals" (p. 138). According to Jennifer,

I can taste it. It consumes me. It really is an obsession. I've had this obsession for years and it's finally come true ... Commitment is huge and I am so focused ... on a real track to succeed. I want to do something in my life.

In the same vein, Barbara's says,

I really do have a strong desire to achieve something for myself academically. I missed out on too much learning in my past and now I finally realized what I missed out on and I want to be a part of it.

Hannah's description of herself is "I'm very passionate. If I like something I give it my undivided attention."

Reflecting on the past, anticipating the future, and connecting current academic achievements with other aspects of her life resonates throughout Carol's narrative, "I think I want this so badly and I put it off for so long and ... I just think wanting it then everything else seemed to just fall into place once I started going after this." Anthony says he came to the realization that not only was academic success something he desired, it was also achievable, "It became a reality that I was going to finish school then it became a reality that ... university was a possibility." This desire to achieve is expressed by Deanna as not wanting to fail or

to go backwards no matter what happens. If I'm frustrated by marks that I got, and I think that I want to quit ... I just like take whatever comments I get and try to move on and do something else.

Her framing of success as not failure is consistent with research findings by Smokowski et al. (2000) such that "resilient adolescents described themselves as struggling against this tide [of succumbing to risk processes], afraid that getting off track would lead them down the same bleak path" (p. 445).

Deanna also calls herself determined, noting that she "can be tenacious at times." Tenacity is reported in one way or other by all the respondents. For example, Frank says that even though he did not consider this to be his strength, he realizes that he "was determined at the beginning to take my best

shot at it, persevering. The whole thing all along has been self-discipline." Westfall and Pisapia (1994) claim that resilient students attribute an "internal locus of control and personal responsibility for their successes and failures" (p. 2). Anthony equates his inner locus of control with sacrifice,

The key word was sacrifice. I remember at the time my friends who were in music doing shows and I was stuck full time doing school. I was doing full time courses during the day and night courses as well as working part-time.

This is also evident in Elaine's depiction of adopting new strategies "to study in a different way for the next test or exam," as apposed to giving up. Furthermore, she says,

I also learned, as I got older that I don't have to be the way people want me or expect me to be. I can be a student who's come from there and I can still achieve. As long as I want to do it and believe I can do it, I can do it. That's helped me to be successful in many aspects of my life.

Although this trait is evident for all participants, the only ones to specifically identify innate intelligence as integral to their academic achievements are Greg and Hannah. Perhaps this is because as the only two white, middle-class respondents, unlike the other interviewees, their cultural capital has always been valued in their schools. Greg feels he might "grab information a little faster than some people," and Hannah says that she has "a lot of natural ability and talent." The other participants are able to articulate multiple examples of their academic "intelligence." For example, Frank identifies this as a perfectionism that he claims

makes things difficult on myself but I end up writing decent papers and stuff because I'm not satisfied with it unless I think it's good and I really go through a lot to do my assignments. So that's worked out pretty well so far.

All the participants demonstrate strong social skills, and Anthony, Hannah, and Jennifer make reference to social competence as an aspect of their resilience. This is in keeping with Turner's (2000) finding that students "with good social and connection skills tend to be more resilient" (p. 33). Consistent with McMillan and Reed's (1994) contention that "resilient at-risk students possess temperamental characteristics that elicit positive responses from individuals around them" (p. 137), Jennifer says,

I believe that you don't burn bridges. Along the way I've made some very good connections and made it a top priority to thank those who have helped me along the way. I'm very outspoken and at the same time when I'm very thankful to people they know it. I think being outgoing helped me.

In comparing himself with his less resilient peers, Anthony suggests that whereas he uses resources, a lot of other people do not. Pianta and Walsh (1998) claim that "resilient children and adolescents are thought to utilize social support systems more effectively than their peers" (p. 413).

Although not explicitly acknowledged in resilience literature, balance is important for the respondents. Its meaning varies with the locatedness of the respondents in that the men mentioned their need to focus on more than school work for their individual well-being. For example, Anthony explains,

I was trying to play sports in the school because that was always an outlet for me to relax myself. It was my form of meditation. If I could go to school and do sports it was a good balance.

For single mothers such as Carol, balance has to do with others and means being able to care for her children and complete her school work.

Relationships with Family and Friends

Educational literature that examines resilience processes for students focuses on children and adolescents and not on students who are adults. There are similarities, however, as all the respondents refer to the importance of relationships with significant others as realized by either the presence or absence of either family members or friends or both. They talk about esteem-building relationships that support their resilience traits that are consistent with Johnson's (1997) assertion that human relationships are "a central and unifying force in the model of at-risk student resiliency" (p. 46). This is juxtaposed with Norman's (2000) claim that the absence of relationships is important for resilience, specifically of having "the ability to psychologically step back from a dysfunctional environment and to maintain a healthy separateness from the maladaptive patterns of significant others, otherwise known as adaptive distancing" (p. 7). Deanna, Carol, and Jennifer speak of the significance of moving away from destructive relationships. For Carol this involves distancing herself from her family members, and for Deanna and Jennifer it entails ending prior friendships.

In keeping with findings by Reis et al. (2005) about the importance of resilience-building support networks, all the respondents mention positive effects of interactions with family members and/or friends. As the only participant who is currently married, Jennifer says that she has "a wonderful understanding husband" who provides both instrumental and emotional support. Several respondents identify the importance of the financial support they receive from their parents. According to Anthony, "I have my family support. They are there. If I ever really need anything like if I'm ever stranded I can go to mother." Greg speaks of his parents' financial support and adds that they are also there for him emotionally. "When things get stressful they seem to be able to calm me down pretty fast, as well as offering all the guidance I could ever need." Siblings also act as positive influences in the development of resilience. Of her brother Elaine says, "For some reason he always thought that I was smart and that smart people should always go to school because that was the only way to be." The respondents who have siblings attending postsecondary educational institutions seem to derive support through a combination of shared experiences and sibling competition. Greg describes his incentive from his younger sister who recently completed a college program, "I think she has kind of given me an unintentional push/pull by providing some friendly competition." In a similar way, Hannah and her sister have an overt rivalry. She describes her sister as "very tough on me because if you want me to do something, you need to be tough on me because if you are really nice to me, I won't get anything done."

Of the women who are single, Barbara and Deanna refer to relationships with their boyfriends as having positive effects on their lives. Deanna says, "I

think my biggest supporter would be my boyfriend because ... when I may feel like today's a blah day and I don't have the energy, he'll give me the extra push that I need." The men all see their relationships with girlfriends as influences on their remaining focused in the achievements of their goals. Specifically, Greg and Frank speak of being able to share what they are experiencing with their girlfriends as crucial. In addition, Greg credits his girlfriend, who is a recent university graduate, with being "well versed in how everything works around here. She's helped me out with a lot of the administration and that kind of thing."

Apart from relationships with girlfriends and boyfriends, men and women responded differently when asked about the importance of emotionally supportive friends. Anthony sums up the feelings of the male participants about relations with friends. "Emotional support is just knowing where your friends are and where they stand. I don't really go to my friends for emotional support. It's not what guys do." Men in this study see support from friends in concrete terms, as Frank explains, "It's just asking about it or showing an interest or saying 'way to go' or 'keep it up' and that's about the extent of it." Conversely, the female respondents for the most part acknowledge the influence of emotional support from friends. For example, Elaine says, "I was lucky enough to meet people who encouraged me, people who were on the same path as I was ... I had a lot of people telling me the opposite so that encouraged me immensely." Having friends with similar academic and career goals is also important for Hannah, who says that her friends "are people who are very school oriented and they know that this is not some big party where we came to. It's sort of our ticket to a better life I guess."

Resilience Processes in Educational Institutions

The data highlight the importance of resilience processes for a sense of belonging in school communities where educators value students as learners and respect them as humans. This concurs with Benard's (1997) findings on the effect of teachers in students' development of resilience, in particular that "turnaround teachers/mentors provide and model three protective factors that buffer risk and enable positive development by meeting youth's basic needs for safety, love and belonging, respect, power, accomplishment and learning, and, ultimately, for meaning" (p. 2). Respect is especially vital to Anthony and Elaine as risk in their experience was connected to disrespect based primarily on their racial and secondarily on their economic locatedness. Anthony's experience in a resilience-enhancing environment in contrast to his previous formal education was "a whole different story. They were very good, vice-principals, guidance counselors, teachers ... were on the same page when it came to me ... Most important of all, everyone treated me with respect." His experience is echoed in Elaine's account of her experience attending a school where being Black was not judged as a negative trait,

It was refreshing. They encouraged me to come back to school ... it's going to be an "uphill climb," but you can do it ... From the beginning everyone was very nice and very patient. As a result, I became very comfortable and focused on school.

The respondents referred to the importance of supportive educators, which concurs with Taylor and Thomas (2001), who point out the importance of scaffolding in fostering resilience, the goal of which “is to gradually allow students to take some, then more and more, control of their own learning” (p. 12). Jennifer identifies this element as the strength of transitional or bridging programs. She observes, “the two years I spent were a phenomenal way to ease you into the university life ... A lot of hand holding ... They really gave me the encouragement and the confidence I needed.” This strength and confidence for Deanna is due at least in part to the fact that for her, “everyone seems real there. They seem genuine and seem aware like, if you come to them and say, I’m going through a lot of difficulties because of this, they’re like, okay, we understand, you’re not the first.” In agreement with Benard’s (1995) claim “that when schools are places where the basic needs for support, respect, and belonging are met, motivation for learning is fostered” (p. 3), Hannah observes, “there are times when you are behind in your work and they make you think that you can make it.” This observation is supported by Smokowski et al. (2000) in their findings that the relational bonds between teachers and resilient adolescents were important in buffering risks and facilitating adaptive development. “Favorite teachers were among the most frequently cited positive role models in the lives of children. The teachers were not simply instructors facilitating academic growth, but also became confidants—positive models for personal identification” (pp. 427-428).

Carol and Frank mention the importance for their resilience of a sense of community developed with supportive peers in the transitional program. Carol recalls,

I think because I was amongst people that had dropped out and come back and I think because I made more friends there than I ever did in high school. I think the friends, sort of, kept me coming back.

This is similar to Frank’s experience; he says that although the

faculty there were really supportive and helped a lot it was even bigger with having a lot of other comrades who everybody felt the same way ... it’s so intimidating so you had that camaraderie and we had sort of a tight knit group and everybody was together so you felt that you couldn’t just suddenly quit because you’d be letting everyone down.

Carol attributes previous graduates of the transitional program with enhancing her resilience. This sense of community extends beyond stand-alone transitional programs. Anthony and Frank report experiences that reinforce Westfall and Pisapia’s (1994) findings that participation in curricular and extracurricular activities is important to students’ resilience processes. Particularly for Anthony, success in coaching and involvement in varsity sports and fraternity activities serve to enhance his self-esteem by providing a sense of accomplishment and awareness of previously unforeseen possibilities through connections with his peers and the university.

Carol and Barbara acknowledge the significance of the financial support they were able to access through the transitional program for contributing to their resilience. Although the literature on risk reports the contributing nature of an absence of financial resources, resilience research does not credit a com-

parable infusion of economic support with resilience processes. Other pragmatic resilience processes implemented by transitional and bridging programs mentioned by participants include things as diverse as counseling services and writing workshops, and as Anthony claims, just “being able to discuss something briefly and get some advice on how to attack a certain project.”

Only two participants offer any negative observations about their transitional or bridging programs, and although still overwhelmingly positive about the support they receive, identify aspects of them that run counter to the resilience-building discourse. Greg expresses concerns about the regimentation and the prescribed nature of his articulation programming, suggesting that it is designed for some subject disciplines over others and not flexible enough to accommodate the needs of adult learners. Greg speaks of surprise and frustration at errors and omissions that were made during his transition from the bridging program to the university with which it is associated. He also refers to marking schemes that he claims he has found to be more stringent than at the mainstream university level. This latter claim is echoed by Deanna who says that even with the support that is available, she is still aware that university is a competitive process, and “they are still trying to weed you out, no matter what they say.”

Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Discussion

The findings from this study support mainstream resilience research (Johnson, 1997; Smokowski et al., 2000; McMillan & Reed, 1994) depicting resilient adolescents as able to develop strategies and coping skills that enable them to adapt to life’s stressors and attain outcomes that are better than have been anticipated for them. The respondents, who were previously identified as at risk, currently demonstrate characteristics of resilience. Their narratives speak to the importance of congruence between their aspirations and significant others, including and perhaps especially educators’ beliefs in their capabilities. Respondents’ conceptions of respect indicate the need for pervasive and systemic moves from the disrespect they have experienced based on race, sex, and/or socioeconomic status. They identify the presence of resilience factors and processes that support their academic achievements. Internal factors of self-efficacy, self-esteem, future-directedness, and problem-solving abilities co-exist with supportive, caring relationships in educational environments that enable these participants to envisage possibilities for success and develop skills in pursuit of their goals. They highlight the importance of congruence between their aspirations and those of significant others, including educators’ beliefs in their capabilities.

This study neither supports nor refutes claims for or against isolated, stand-alone programs as resilience-building vehicles. Although the participants all temporarily attended separate college and university sites, several spoke of resilience-building processes that existed in conventional high schools and universities. The data do have implications for school leadership conducive to creating climates where risk is reduced and resilience is fostered. The conception of school leadership most congruent with this research is one that Ryan (2003) and other educators call emancipatory, meaning that it is shared, democratic, and authentic. Respondents’ narratives invoke Foster’s (1986) metaphor of coming to terms with a piece of literature as analogous to understanding that

schools are multifaceted entities that tell a story, complete with characters, plot, and setting. The role of the administrator is not to pretend to be sole author. The literary metaphor enhances our understanding of schools as living organisms. As characters in the form of students, teachers, support staff, and administrators enter and exit, and as political, economic, cultural, and racial locatedness changes in the school communities, the plot by necessity either evolves or fails to tell the story. Foster's metaphor can be extended with the recognition that life in schools is not captured by a singular plot. Instead, several interwoven texts and subtexts in the form of explicit and implicit curriculum coexist and intermingle. Administrators need to listen to the silences generated by the untold stories belonging to the silenced and sometimes nameless characters, relegated to the sole purpose of providing a backdrop for the major characters accorded center stage. Educational leaders must bring to consciousness their multiple, continually shifting roles as critic, actor, director, co-author, and spectator.

The significance of relationships, connectedness, and feelings of community in the data speak to the importance of administrators working in conjunction with students, parents, and teachers to examine definitions of success and the means used to measure and achieve it. It is incumbent on educators to take responsibility for school and board roles in students' resilience processes. Administrators need to work proactively to create respectful, welcoming communities that encourage parents to be equal partners in their children's education. Parents and students need to be involved authentically and meaningfully in the implementation of school-wide program initiatives to develop the potential of all students. In a climate of standardized testing and the publication of school and board results, Maynes (2001) reports that through the adoption of the above suggestions in a particular site, not only does the school fulfill its obligation to inclusion, but scores on externally generated tests also increase.

In addressing the hidden curriculum, administrators need to ensure that their recruitment, hiring, and promotion practices generate staff that is representative of their student populations and ensure that all teachers value the strengths of all students in our schools. In examining their roles and moral responsibilities in the creation and maintenance of conditions that place students at risk, administrators need to move beyond what Placier (1996) calls superficial responses such as new labels and special programs that are ineffective in addressing the real problems inherent in educational structures and ideologies.

Educators' commitment to a climate that focuses on possibilities rather than on deficits involves providing meaningful opportunities for student participation and leadership. Having high expectations for students; providing challenging, relevant curriculum; and supporting students academically, socially, and emotionally provides the coherence necessary to ensure equitable outcomes. Resilience-building pedagogical approaches and strategies that encourage students and teachers to challenge existing hegemonies can be facilitated through open dialogue with students, their parents, and communities.

References

- Banks, J. (1993). Multicultural education: Development, dimensions, and challenges. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 75, 22-28.
- Barr, R., & Parrett, W. (2001). *Hope fulfilled for at-risk and violent youth: K-12 programs that work* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Benard, B. (1995). Fostering resilience in children. *ERIC Digest*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 386327)
- Benard, B. (1997). Turning it around for all youth: From risk to resilience. *ERIC/CUE Digest*, 126. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 412309)
- Bryan, J. (2005). Fostering educational resilience and achievement in urban schools through school-family-community partnerships. *Professional School Counseling*, 8(3), 219-227.
- Clandinin, D.J., & Connelly, F.M. (1994). Personal experience methods. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 413-427). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dei, G., Holmes, L., Mazzuca, J., McIsaac, E., & Campbell, R. (1997). *Reconstructing "drop-out": A critical ethnography of the dynamics of Black students' disengagement from school*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Fine, M. (1995). The politics of who's "at risk." In B. Swadener & S. Lubeck (Eds.), *Children and families "at promise": Deconstructing the discourse of risk* (pp. 76-94). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Foster, W. (1986). *Paradigms and promises: New approaches to educational administration*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Gay, G. (1995). Mirror images on common issues: Parallels between multicultural education and critical pedagogy. In C. Sleeter & P. McLaren (Eds.), *Multicultural education, critical pedagogy, and the politics of difference* (pp. 155-190). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Gitlin, A., & Russell, R. (1994). Alternative methodologies and the research context. In A. Gitlin (Ed.), *Power and method: Political activism and educational research* (pp. 181-202). New York: Routledge.
- House, N.G. (2005). Reclaiming children left behind. *School Administrator*, 62(1), 10-15.
- Hixson, J., & Tinzmann, M.B. (1990). *Who are the "at-risk" students of the 1990s?* Portland, OR: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.
- Johnson, G. (1997). Resilient at-risk students in the inner-city. *McGill Journal of Education*, 32(1), 35-49.
- Kaplan, H. (1999). Toward an understanding of resilience: A critical review of definitions and models. In M. Glantz & J. Johnson (Eds.), *Resilience and development: Positive life adaptations* (pp. 17-83). New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum.
- Kincheloe, J., & McLaren, P. (2000). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 279-313). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kincheloe, J., Slattery, P., & Steinberg, S. (2002). *Contextualizing teaching: Introduction to education and educational foundations*. New York: Addison-Wesley.
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (2000). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 163-188). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. (1999). *Designing qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Masten, A., Best, K., & Garmezy, N. (1991). Resilience and development: Contributions from the study of children who overcome adversity. *Development and Psychopathology*, 2, 425-444.
- Maynes, B. (2001). Educational programming for children living in poverty: Possibilities and challenges. In J.P. Portelli & R.P. Solomon (Eds.), *The erosion of democracy in education* (pp. 63-82). Calgary, AB: Detselig.
- McMahon, B. (2004). *Small steps and quiet circles: Student transformations through the enactment of resilience processes*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto.
- McMahon, B. (2006). Conceptions of resilience: Compliance or transformation? *Educational Forum*, 71(1), 49-58.
- McMahon, B., & Armstrong, D. (2003). Racism, resistance and resilience. The 3 R's of educating students of Caribbean origin in Canadian schools. In T. Bastick & A. Ezenne (Eds.), *Teaching Caribbean students: Research on social issues in the Caribbean and abroad* (pp. 249-284). Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies.
- McMillan, J., & Reed, D. (1994). At-risk students and resiliency: Factors contributing to academic success. *Clearing House*, 67(3), 137-140.
- Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Norman, E. (2000). The strengths perspective and resiliency enhancement—A natural partnership. In E. Norman (Ed.), *Resiliency enhancement: Putting the strengths perspective into social work practice* (pp. 1-16). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Norum, K. (2004, April). *What stories tell: Storying and restoring public education*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans.
- Pianta, R., & Walsh, D. (1998). Applying the construct of resilience in schools: Cautions from a developmental systems perspective. *School Psychology Review, 27*(3), 407-417.
- Placier, M. (1996). The cycle of student labels in education: The cases of culturally deprived/disadvantaged and at risk. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 32*, 236-270.
- Polakow, V. (1995). Naming and blaming: Beyond a pedagogy of the poor. In B. Swadener & S. Lubeck (Eds.), *Children and families "at promise": Deconstructing the discourse of risk* (pp. 263-270). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Reis, S. Colbert, R., & Hebert, T. (2005). Understanding resilience in diverse, talented students in urban high school. *Roeper Review, 27*(2), 110-120.
- Ryan, J. (2003). *Principals and inclusive leadership for diverse schools: Vol. 2. Studies in educational leadership*. Hingham, MA: Kluwer.
- Seidman, S. (1998). Dislodging the canon: The reassertion of a moral vision of the human sciences. In S. Seidman (Ed.), *Contested knowledge: Social theory in the postmodern era* (2nd ed., pp. 171-343). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Smokowski, P., Reynolds, A., & Bezruczko, N. (2000). Resilience and protective factors in adolescence: An autobiographical perspective from disadvantaged youth. *Journal of School Psychology, 37*(4), 425-448.
- Solomon, R.P., & Levine-Rasky, C. (2003). *Teaching for equity and diversity: research to practice*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Tabachnick, R., & Bloch, M. (1995). Learning in and out of school: Critical perspectives on the theory of cultural compatibility. In B. Swadener & S. Lubeck (Eds.), *Children and families "at promise": Deconstructing the discourse of risk* (pp. 187-209). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Taylor, E., & Thomas, C. (2001). Resiliency and its implications for schools. *Journal of Educational Thought, 36*, 7-16.
- Turner, S. (2000). Resilience and social work practice: Three case studies. *Families in Society, 82*(5), 441-448.
- Wang, M. (1997). Next steps in inner-city education: Focusing on resilience development and learning success. *Education and Urban Society, 29*(3), 255-276.
- Wasonga, T., Christman, D., & Kilmer, L. (2003). Ethnicity, gender and age: Predicting resilience and academic achievement among urban high school students. *American Secondary Education, 32*(1), 62-68.
- Westfall, A., & Pisapia, J. (1994). *Students who defy the odds: A study of resilient at-risk students*. Richmond, VA: Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium.