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# Promoting resilience : teachers' preceptions from the classroom

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PROMOTING RESILIENCE: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS FROM THE CLASSROOM

by

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A Major Research Paper  
Presented to Ryerson University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in the Program of  
Early Childhood Studies

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# PROMOTING RESILIENCE: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS FROM THE CLASSROOM

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Master of Arts  
Early Childhood Studies  
Ryerson University

## ABSTRACT

This paper examined seven teachers' interpretations of the terms 'at risk' and resilience, their perceived influential role, and universal teaching methods that were perceived to promote resilient behaviours in the classroom. 'At risk' was described as a more familiar term than resilience, with a stronger focus in schools on academic 'at risk'. Resilience was viewed to be predominantly a result of internal attributes. Four themes emerged from the one-on-one interviews with elementary school teachers. Responsibilities, high expectations, consistency, and social competence were perceived by the teachers as leading to resilience development among their students. This study adds to the growing body of research which aims at uncovering the processes leading to the development of resilience

Key words:

'children', 'school', 'early childhood education', 'teachers', 'at risk', 'resilience', 'social influence', 'diversity'



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## Introduction

*“Where you tend a rose, my lad,  
A thistle cannot grow.”*

*- Frances Hodgson Burnett  
“The Secret Garden”*

A developmental trajectory is not a smooth pathway through life. There are many twists and turns, and while some individuals have difficulty staying on track, many others succeed, demonstrating incredible acts of defiance in the face of adversity. Referred to as resilience, this phenomenon evokes images of endless possibilities for individuals who were once perceived to be limited by their negative life experiences. While eliminating the presence of risk factors in every individual's life is a seemingly impossible task, uncovering ways to overcome and defy the odds is a more feasible option (Goldstein & Brooks, 2005).

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) perspective of the ecology of human development suggests that development occurs within and as a result of interactions between an individual and their environment. Environmental context, therefore, plays a role in an individual's developmental trajectory, including the risks and experiences of resilience. The following study is influenced by this underlying theoretical perspective. It was in the interest of the researcher to further explore the role the social environment has in relation to the development of resilience in 'at risk' children. Children were the focus as the experiences of early childhood have been noted as having long term effects on an individual's later life (Friendly, 2004; Rutter, 1989). Children 'at risk' were singled out as Riley and Masten (2005) argue that there must be risks in order for resilience to occur.

## *Risk and Resilience*

Risk and resilience are two concepts that are extremely difficult to define. Risks are often described as complex and context specific events or experiences that can result in poor or ‘non-normative’ outcomes (Greenberg, 2006; Riley & Masten, 2005). They are not uniform aspects of a child’s life and it is important to note that there are multiple pathways that can lead to negative developmental outcomes (Cefai, 2004; Condly, 2006; Greenberg, 2006; Johnson & Wiechelt, 2004; Masten & Obradović; Waller, 2001). Risks are also cumulative (Condly, 2006; Riley & Masten, 2005; Waller, 2001). The more risks present in an individual’s life, the more likely they are to experience less than positive outcomes. It is these individuals who are often described as being ‘at risk’ (Friesen, Finney, & Krentz, 1999).

Resilience is as complex a notion as risk. Introduced as a term in behavioural science used to describe children who were developing well despite being considered ‘at risk’ for psychopathology, resilience has since comprised of many different meanings (Masten & Powell, 2003; Werner, 2005a). Resilience has been defined as an individual’s ability to ‘bounce back’ after experiencing hardships (Barankin & Khanlou, 2007; Dent & Cameron, 2003; Earvolino-Ramirez, 2007; Gu & Day, 2007; Levine & Wood Ion, 2002; Oswald, Johnson, & Howard, 2003). Others describe resilience as positive adaptation in the face of past or present adversity (Cohler, 1987; Masten & Obradović, 2006; Miller & Daniel, 2007; Riley & Masten, 2005; Waller, 2001; Werner & Smith, 1992). Resilience has also been defined as the achievement of developmental milestones despite significant risks (Masten, Hubbard, Gest, Tellegen, Garmezy, & Ramirez, 1999; Naglieri & LeBuffe, 2005). These definitions, however, place emphasis on the role of the

individual and do not take into consideration outside influences. As stated by Bronfenbrenner (1977), “human development demands going beyond the direct observation of behavior [*sic*] on the part of one or two persons in the same place” (p. 514). Resilience can, therefore, also be described as an interaction between individuals and their environments resulting in positive adaptation (Benard, 1991; Brooks, 2006; Cohler, 1987; Deater-Deckard, Ivy, & Smith, 2005; McMahon, 2007; Richman, Bowen, & Woolley, 2004; Ungar, 2004; Waller, 2001). It is this definition of resilience that the researcher of this study supports. However, it should be noted that just as risks can occur in many different forms, so too can resilience, leading researchers such as Naglieri and LeBuffe (2005) to state that “there is, as yet, no universally accepted definition of resilience” (p. 119).

With the varying interpretations of risk and the multiple manners in which they can manifest and affect children, it is understandable to perceive that any child can be defined as ‘at risk’ at some point in their development. Goldstein and Brooks (2005) have noted that the number of possible adversities children and youth may face are increasing, leaving no one immune from becoming ‘at risk’. However, with resilience also stemming from many different factors, perhaps, just as any child could be ‘at risk’, they could also be capable of being resilient. Condly (2006) has pointed out that resilience may not be a guaranteed outcome. A growing body of literature on resilience is uncovering that in children experiencing multiple risks, the majority can be considered to reflect resilient behaviour (Werner, 2005a). Resilience may not be a guarantee, but apparently, neither are the negative effects of risks.

### *Influences on Resilience*

Internal and external factors which lead to the development of resilience involve attributes, events, and experiences that occur within an individual and in their surrounding environment. Mandelco and Peery (2000) have defined internal factors as being “intrinsic, inherent, or generated from within an individual” (p. 101). External factors are defined as being “extrinsic, exterior, or generated from outside an individual” (Mandelco & Peery, 2000, p. 101). Several studies have demonstrated the role of both of these factors in the processes underlying resilience. In a study by Ungar (2005a), two case studies were used to uncover what youth needed in order to become resilient. Although it was a small study which made it very difficult to generalize to a broader population, Ungar determined that youth can be active participants in the process of resilience development. The youth in his study relied on such internal factors as self-awareness and motivation to navigate through help systems, extracting the external factors they deemed as being helpful.

#### *Environmental Influence*

In recent years there has been a shift in the focus of research regarding resilient behaviour in children and youth. Resilience literature of the past predominantly focused on the individual and the internal characteristics that influenced and factored into resilient behaviour (Barankin & Khanlou, 2007; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Waller, 2001). However, the focus has shifted towards examining the interactions between internal and external factors in developing resilient behaviours, with many firmly believing in the strong influential role of an individual’s environment (Deater-Deckard et al., 2005; Werner, 2005b).

Many studies have found that internal factors are actually secondary to the external factors that are present in the processes underlying resilience. It was discovered by Kim-Cohen, Moffitt, Caspi, and Taylor (2004), that external factors played a strong role. Using the data from the E-Risk study that included questionnaires and visitations with twin 5 year olds and their families, they aimed to, among other things, approximate how much both internal and external factors contributed to the development of resilience in children. Discovering the positive influential role external factors have within the family, they concluded that “the environment does play an important role...beyond any heritable influences” (p. 662). Although this study specifically focused on the effects of poverty on cognitive ability, it does provide an example of the strong role external factors have in promoting resilience in children.

#### *Influential adult.*

Studies have suggested that the presence of a supportive non-kin adult is a prominent external factor in promoting resilience in children and youth. Werner (1995) has argued that “a child identified as resilient usually has had the opportunity to establish a close bond with at least one competent and emotionally stable person who is attuned to his or her needs” (p. 83). In a study by Spilsbury (2005), 7 to 11 year old children’s views regarding their neighbourhoods and their help-seeking behaviours were examined. Using an ethnographic approach, Spilsbury discovered that community based librarians, crossing guards, and store owners were viewed by the children as being especially helpful. Acting as mediators, a refuge from bullies, and simply someone to talk to, these adults were utilized as external sources for support. Ungar (2004), using data from an earlier study of his involving 21 high risk youth, discovered that the supportive non-kin

adult is viewed by teens as playing essential roles in their abilities to be resilient. Both of these studies, however, involved small samples making them difficult to generalize to larger populations. Ungar's study demonstrated further limitations by having the clinicians who were working with the youth decide whether the teens were resilient. The clinicians' relationships with the youth led to biased views regarding the youth's resilient outcomes making it difficult to actually gauge the influence of supportive adults. Regardless, these studies point to the influence of supportive adults in the development of resilience.

*Influential teacher.*

Benard (1991) has noted that along with internal attributes and such external factors as the family and the community, the school can help to encourage the development of resilience in its students. Schools are cited as excellent locations to encourage and promote both internal and external factors that are believed to foster resilience (Benard, 1991; Brooks, 2006; Taub & Pearrow, 2005). In her longitudinal Kauai based study of children 'at risk', Werner (1995) discovered that perhaps it's not just the schools, but the teachers who influence the development of resilience in children and youth. Werner found that "all of the resilient high-risk children...could point to at least one teacher who was an important source of support" (p. 83). Oswald et al. (2003) found in their longitudinal study looking at teachers' beliefs and perceived roles in promoting resilience in the classroom that most teachers do believe they can and do foster resilience in their students. Oswald et al. stated that teachers were "major contributors within the network of protective factors" (p. 62) that lead to resilience development in children and youth. Both of these studies are limited by the fact that they relied on the



perceptions of participants as support leaving the significance of their findings potentially unreliable. They do, however, represent a cross-cultural view that strongly supports the role of the teacher in fostering resilience in children and youth.

### Purpose of the Study

It is clear that internal and external factors play a strong role in the development of resilience in children. The literature reviewed has demonstrated that non-kin adults, particularly teachers, are prominent external influences on children. Therefore, research focusing on teachers' beliefs and perceptions regarding risk and the development of resilience in their students can be insightful and informative.

The purpose of this study was to seek out universally successful teaching methods that teachers perceived helped to promote resilient behaviour in their 'at risk' elementary school students. Universally successful methods were reflected in the varying backgrounds, experience levels, and school environments of each participating teacher. Research questions for this study included:

- 1) What teachers believe constitutes 'at risk' and resilience
- 2) Whether teachers believe they play a role in promoting resilient behaviour in their students
- 3) How do teachers believe they promote resilient behaviour in their students

Researchers have proposed that there is a new wave of resilience study underfoot. Focus has shifted from identifying protective factors to actually understanding the processes behind them (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten & Obradović, 2006). Masten and Coatsworth (1998) suggest that studies of this kind offer "hope and guidance for those who seek to improve the odds of good developmental outcomes through policy and

prevention” (p. 216). By uncovering teachers’ perceptions of how resilience occurs in the classroom, this study is believed to have added to this fourth wave of research, having examined the processes behind the development of resilience.

## Methods

### *Research Design*

Qualitative research is recognized by Creswell (2008) as comprising three characteristics: “a...need to listen to the views of participants in our studies” (p. 51), “a...need to ask general, open questions and collect data in places where people live and work” (p. 51), and “a recognition that research has a role in advocating for change and bettering the lives of individuals” (p. 51). In the present study, the perceptions of teachers were sought after, data collected was in reference to their choice of employment, and the expected outcomes were intended to benefit future students. A qualitative method was clearly the best choice for this study.

A grounded theory design was perceived by the researcher to be the best mode of data analysis to be utilized. Grounded theory designs are used by researchers to “generate a general explanation (called a *grounded theory*) that explains a process, action, or interaction among people” (Creswell, 2008, p. 61). The aim of this study was to uncover the processes behind the development of resilience in students and to understand the role teachers may play. Since the study of the processes of resilience is still considered to be a relatively new field, the researcher found it necessary to use this opportunity to explore new theories that might explain this process to add to this expanding area of research (Cefai, 2004; Luthar et al., 2000; Masten & Obradović, 2006). A grounded theory design was expected to help the researcher to uncover themes that helped to explain this process and where and how teachers fit in (Creswell, 2008). A grounded theory design was also perceived to be beneficial as it generates theories that are ‘grounded’ in the data collected as opposed to applying pre-existing theories to the

findings that may not necessarily have reflected the experiences of these teachers (Creswell, 2008).

### *Participants*

The perceptions of seven elementary school teachers were included in this study. This relatively small sample size was selected to ensure the opportunity for what Creswell (2008) has identified as “an in-depth picture [which] diminishes with the addition of each new individual” (p. 217). The teachers’ present classes ranged from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 6, with the approximate average grades taught by these teachers being Grades 1 and 2. Primary grades were the intended focus as research points to the long term impact these early childhood experiences have on later development (Friendly, 2004). The experience of these teachers ranged from one year to seven years of teaching. In their collective years of experience, these seven teachers had taught all grades spanning from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 8 including time spent as a Physical Education Teacher, supply work, and split grade classrooms (Table 1).

Table 1: Teaching Experience

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Current Grade</b>	<b>All Grades</b>	<b>Years Teaching</b>	<b>Number of Schools</b>
<b>Kate<sup>1</sup></b>	2	1&2	2.5	1
<b>James</b>	1/2	1-8 All split classes	6	3
<b>Gillian</b>	6	6 1-3 Phys Ed. 7-8 Phys Ed.	6	2
<b>Ann</b>	1/2	1 1/2	7	1
<b>Heather</b>	K	K K-5 Supply	1	8 (From supply work)
<b>Jackie</b>	JK/SK	K & 1	7	1
<b>Madeline</b>	1	1&2	3	2

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<sup>1</sup> All names have been changed

The school environments described by each teacher presented a diverse wealth of experience (Table 2).

Table 2: School Environments

Teacher	Description of Schools	
	Current School	Previous School(s)
Kate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Multicultural student body</li> <li>- New community/school</li> <li>- Minimal parental involvement</li> <li>- High staff turnover rate</li> </ul>	N/A
James	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Minimal parental involvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong sense of community</li> <li>- High parental involvement</li> </ul>
Gillian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Multicultural student body</li> <li>- Middle to upper class working families</li> <li>- Supportive parental community</li> <li>- Minimal parental involvement</li> <li>- Supportive staff</li> </ul>	Same as Current School
Ann	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Homogenous student body</li> <li>- Academically successful students</li> <li>- High parental involvement</li> <li>- Educated parents</li> </ul>	N/A
Heather	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Multicultural student body</li> <li>- Low income neighbourhood</li> <li>- Over-populated school</li> <li>- Low parental involvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Multicultural student body</li> <li>- Various socioeconomic classes</li> </ul>
Jackie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Homogenous student body</li> <li>- Affluent neighbourhood</li> <li>- Educated parents</li> <li>- High parental involvement</li> </ul>	N/A
Madeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Affluent neighbourhood</li> <li>- Students well prepared for school</li> <li>- Academically successful students</li> <li>- High parental involvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Multicultural student body</li> <li>- Diverse socioeconomic ranges</li> <li>- Students with varying behavioural and academic needs</li> <li>- Low parental involvement</li> </ul>

### Procedures

#### Sampling

Teachers known to the researcher were first contacted and provided with the details of the study via email or Facebook (Appendix A). Utilizing snowball sampling, the researcher recruited further participants through the recommendations of the initial

teachers contacted. This use of purposeful sampling was to ensure that the findings of the study reflected its primary aims (Creswell, 2008). Gatekeepers in the form of school principals were also utilized, as they were in ideal positions to locate potential participants from their staff. Principals were randomly contacted through telephone conversations and email communication and provided with the details of the study (Appendices B and C). A request to have either the principal pass the information on to his/her staff or to present the details of the study and make a request for participants in person was made. No in-person presentations of the study in schools took place, however, many principals agreed to pass on the initial email they received to the teachers in their schools. Principals were informed that all potential teachers wishing to participate in this study were to directly contact the researcher.

#### *Data Collection Method*

In keeping with the grounded theory approach, open-ended interview questions were the dominant method of data collection. In using this method, opportunities for theories to emerge from the data collected were believed to be optimal (Creswell, 2008). Seven pre-determined questions were asked in an audio-taped interview at a location of the participants' convenience (specifically in the home or the classroom of the interviewee) (Appendix D). These questions were intended to focus on the teachers' thoughts on the concept of risk and the processes of resilience. Three icebreaker questions were meant to serve the purpose of relaxing the teachers and preparing them for the remaining interview questions (Creswell, 2008). These three questions were to also elicit an understanding of each teacher's background and wealth of experience. The remaining four questions were intended to target the teachers' understandings of the

terminology used ('at risk' and resilience) as well as their beliefs of where and how they perceive their role in the development of resilience among their students. These questions were based on the wealth of research that supports the notion that these are familiar terms and beliefs among teachers (Bondy, Ross, Galligan, & Hambacher, 2007; Cefai, 2004; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Howard & Johnson, 2000; Oswald et al., 2003; Laursen & Birmingham, 2003; Leroy & Symes, 2001). Following the advice outlined by Creswell (2008), spontaneous probing questions were asked to elicit more information from the participants. Observations made during the interview were also included, although minimally, to identify breaks taken during the interviews as well as suggestions or comments made once the audio-tape device had been turned off.

Interviews were one-on-one and the teachers were informed they were to run for approximately an hour in length, but may run shorter or longer depending on the needs of the participant. The majority of the interviews ran less than an hour. A break at any point was allowed to occur, again based on the needs of the participant. A few breaks in the interviews did occur to allow for teachers to answer phone calls or speak with their co-workers. Teachers were provided with the opportunity to view their transcript as well as the completed study upon request. All of the teachers requested to view their transcripts and were sent a digital version of each written interview via email.

### *Data Analysis Procedures*

In grounded theory design, data is analyzed through the systematic use of codes (Creswell, 2008). Upon the completion of the data collection, all audio-taped interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Minimal observations noted by the researcher during the interviews were added to the transcriptions to complete a full representation of the

interviews. The analysis of the data was done by both hand and computer. Initial coding and categorizing of themes was done by hand and reflected a content analysis, or more specifically, the constructivist design for data analysis of a grounded theory design. These preliminary codes and themes reflected the commonalities found in “the views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, and ideologies” (Creswell, 2008, p. 439) of the teachers. A word processing program was used to store and further categorize the codes and eventual themes.

#### *Authenticity and Trustworthiness*

It is essential for all research, including qualitative methods, for the researcher to maintain the accuracy of the findings and interpretations throughout the process of both data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2008). Steps were taken in the present study to ensure that the findings and interpretations of this study were valid. In a process designed to ensure the accuracy of findings and interpretations, the teachers were asked to participate in member checking (Creswell, 2008). The transcribed versions of the audio-taped interviews were emailed to each participant. Each teacher was asked to review the written transcripts and to ensure it reflected their beliefs, perceptions, and intended responses. As advised by Creswell (1998), to further verify and validate the findings and interpretations, literature supporting and conflicting with the data was referenced. The researcher has also been careful to not generalize the findings to a larger scale, as this is suggested by Dockett and Perry (2007) to damage the validity of a study.

#### *Ethics and Human Relations*

When undertaking research with human beings, many ethical considerations must be addressed. For the purposes of this study, these considerations included the



participants' confidentiality, clarity of the research purpose, and the disclosure of potentially harmful information (Creswell, 2008).

Participants' identities were needed to be known, as the chosen method of data collection was interviews. Furthermore, identification of participants with their interview results needed to remain intact for member checking to occur. However, to ensure confidentiality, participants were assigned pseudonyms in the presentation of the data. It has been suggested that new research has enabled participants to choose whether or not their identities are included in the presentation of the study (Creswell, 2008). However, to ensure that no connections can be made between teachers and potential students who may be referred to in the interviews, participants were not provided with this option. Upon the completion of the study, all documents identifying the participants will be securely stored in a locked office belonging to Dr. Angela Valeo at Ryerson University for one year and then destroyed (shredded, deleted, and disposed of).

At no point were anyone other than each teacher, the researcher, and the researcher's supervisor aware of that teacher's involvement in the study. This protection of each teacher's identity and participation is believed to have minimized the presence of coercion in their decision to participate. Employers (principals) and peers (particularly if the teacher was contacted through snowball sampling) of the teachers were not informed of an individual's decision to (or to not) participate in this study. It is believed that the ambiguity of each teacher's decision to participate in this study eliminated any pressure they may have felt from their employers or peers to be involved. No compensation was used to ensure all participants chose to be involved out of their own desire to share their experiences and to aid in this research. It can be noted that participants who were known

to the researcher may have felt a pressure to assist the researcher by participating in this study. Of the seven participants, two were known to the researcher. However, by using snowball sampling, it is believed that this potential pressure was curbed by providing the teachers with another outlet (informing other potential participants of the study) to aid the researcher without actively sharing their experiences.

To ensure the participants understood the purpose of the study, teachers were provided with the consent forms prior to the interview (Appendix E). This enabled each teacher optimal time to review the intentions of this study and to clarify any questions they may have had. A face-to-face explanation of the study occurred prior to the beginning of each interview to ensure each teacher understood what they agreed to participate in. Informed consent was requested at this time. At no time were deceptive methods knowingly used throughout this study.

At the risk of participants sharing potentially harmful information about themselves or their students, teachers were informed (in the consent letter) that confidentiality would be broken and action taken. Harmful information was, however, not sought after as the nature of this study did not intend on researching that particular aspect of risk and resilience. The questions asked were not intended to elicit specific experiences that may have relayed harmful information about the teachers or their students. Risks were expected to be minimal and the benefits were expected to outweigh any potential harm. These measures, however, were taken as a precaution.

## Findings

### *Terminology*

#### *Teachers' Familiarity with Term: 'At Risk'*

The term 'at risk' was familiar to all of the teachers interviewed. The interviews unveiled that it was a term that was present in the school boards and schools of these teachers. The school boards and individual schools also appeared to be the primary location from which the majority of the teachers developed their understanding of the term. Many teachers had only heard the term 'at risk' in their schools. As Ann stated, "I've heard 'at risk' mainly through my board". The term, for many of these teachers, was discussed "through workshops and staff meetings". The teachers also mentioned that 'at risk' was not something they had heard throughout their teacher training. As Gillian noted, "I never heard, like...if I can remember back to...teacher's college, I never heard about 'at risk' in teacher's college". Other teachers felt their understanding of what 'at risk' means to have been shaped as a result of their experiences teaching. Heather commented on how, although she may have heard of the term 'at risk' at teacher's college, she remained unfamiliar of its meaning until she began teaching. As Heather stated, "I didn't hear ['at risk'] so much in teacher's college or I didn't understand it in teacher's college...they might identify it and then...through teaching I understood the meaning, or I better understand the meaning of an 'at risk' student". One teacher did voice that his understandings of the term were of his own accord, stating that he "just made [his explanation of the term 'at risk'] up [himself]". However, when asked if his school board discussed the term, he did acknowledge that it is a term that is "always talked about". The teachers' experience in their schools, either in their classrooms or via

meetings and workshops with their colleagues, appears to have played a strong role in shaping their understanding of the term ‘at risk’.

#### *Teachers’ Definitions of Term: ‘At Risk’*

##### *Academic aspect.*

When asked to define ‘at risk’, the majority of the teachers interviewed commented on both academic ‘at risk’ and social ‘at risk’. Academic ‘at risk’ was often discussed first by the teachers, and was applied to students who, for some reason, were not achieving the appropriate standards of their grade. As Ann noted, “um...I would believe ‘at risk’ would be to be at academic risk...not meeting the grade level expectations...”. Along with the school environment as a source for their understanding of the term ‘at risk’, teachers also noted school based programs that identified students who were academically ‘at risk’. For example, Jackie commented on a program that her school participates in to identify ‘at risk’ readers:

Jackie: the...the term ‘at risk’ for us, I know we’ve have....putting into context...the last two years...every term we have make...a list of ‘at risk’ readers...students who are ‘at risk’ for...not getting a B, not getting a level three...then we submit this then we work, we meet in small groups and we discuss how, what’s the problem, how can we help these students, what more can we give them?...so...we look at it, mostly at the reading.

Academic ‘at risk’ was represented as a significant issue discussed in the schools and school boards of these teachers.

##### *Social aspect.*

The majority of the teachers also described a child as being socially ‘at risk’. This type of ‘at risk’ was defined in two ways. Teachers found students to be socially ‘at risk’ when experiencing extreme problems in the home environment. As James pointed out, a student who is socially ‘at risk’ could be experiencing “some dangers at home...they’re

‘at risk’ of...um...maybe being abused”. Ann suggested that students socially ‘at risk’ might live in a home environment where Children’s Aid may be involved. Extreme risks to the child’s physical and emotional well-being were the predominant focus for the teachers who defined being ‘at risk’ socially as involving problems in the home.

Teachers also mentioned students whom they describe as being socially ‘at risk’ as having specific internal characteristics. A student’s behaviour was considered to be a factor in determining social ‘at risk’. As Heather pointed out:

Heather: ...socially ‘at risk’...behaviour wise they...exhibit, for me, aggression or they’re pretty remote...so it swings, they can be aggressive and...confrontational...they can be verbally aggressive...or they can be extremely remote...they can be...not willing to participate in any activities...just really removed.

Teachers also considered a student’s inability to conform to the social norms of the classroom as a characteristic of being socially ‘at risk’. Madeline defined these students as “not adapting socially in a way that’s appropriate, or like age appropriate”. For both academic and social ‘at risk’, teachers based their understanding on standards, either grade related or those of society.

#### *Teachers’ Familiarity of Term: Resilience*

Resilience, for some teachers, was a relatively new term. As Madeline voiced, resilience was something she had heard “more generally in life then [she had] like...applied to kids”. Unlike ‘at risk’, resilience did not seem to be a term discussed in the schools of these teachers. One teacher did, however, recall hearing the term used throughout the course of her education, although, not clearly explained:

Heather: I don’t hear it so much in teaching to be honest with you and I heard it more in teaching, in teacher’s college...but never used in, it was more like children are resilient...never sort of defined or...it was, or given examples really it was just children are resilient.

### *Teachers' Understanding of Term: Resilience*

While not a familiar term, each teacher provided a similar understanding of resilience. All felt resilience related to the internal abilities of their students to 'bounce back' or carry on despite adversity. These abilities predominantly included coping and adaptation skills. The teachers also mentioned resilience in children to be defined by such internal characteristics as mental strength, personal drive, a positive attitude, and confidence. Achieving some kind of success was used by the majority of teachers to define the ultimate goal of resilience.

While most teachers found resilience to be an innate phenomenon, Madeline did suggest that "it's something that needs to be teased out and sort of...developed". James mimicked this notion stating that a characteristic such as 'strength' is something that can be built up inside of a person. Resilience, according to these teachers, is a mix of predominantly internal factors with the potential to be influenced externally.

### *The Role of the Teacher*

All of the teachers interviewed agreed that they played some sort of a role in the development of resilience in their students. Many teachers found their role to be influential as a direct result of the amount of time they spend each day with their students. As Jackie pointed out, "well you spend so much time...well you spend more time with the students during the waking day than their parents do". Some teachers referred to the young age of their students as reasoning for their role in promoting resilient behaviours amongst these children. As Heather articulated:

Heather: ...they're so little and everything depends on what you say...and they're all about me so the more you can sort of be like, 'oh that was so wonderful, you did a great job' you know, that really does help...promote self-esteem and

resilience because...what...sort of whatever you say as a teacher in Kindergarten...is... 'oh my gosh, Miss Heather thinks I'm great'...

James pointed out how the training teachers have influences the role a teacher can play in developing resilience in their students, stating that he “would put a lot of onus on the teachers saying that...you guys have the strategies, you’ve been to teacher’s college...”. Regardless of their reasoning, the teachers perceived that they definitely played a role in developing resilience in their students. This role comprised of several responsibilities, including: teaching the curriculum and life skills; acting as a source of support, a guide, and a partner with parents; and creating classrooms where opportunities for growth and development are unlimited.

### *Teaching*

#### *The curriculum and beyond.*

Along with teaching the curriculum, all of the teachers interviewed mentioned other ‘lessons’ that they felt they were required to teach their students. Teaching their students how to think and how to study were suggested by some teachers as being an important role they played. James suggested that “it’s not just basic learning like reading, writing, phonics...it’s basic thinking skills...so it’s higher order thinking, trying to interpret different ways things are working and applying knowledge in different ways”. Kate mimicked this notion, suggesting it necessary to teach “...good...study and, and learning skills really right from an early age”.

#### *Problem solving and social skills.*

Teaching problem solving skills was another role the teachers felt they were responsible for filling. Problem solving was related to both the academic as well as social challenges these teachers’ students might face. Ann provided an example of

academic problem solving, suggesting it is her responsibility as a teacher to instruct her students on how to overcome an academic hurdle. She stated she would work with her students, asking such questions as, "...‘let’s find the strategies to work through this, can we change the answer, do you want a new piece of paper, what, what do you think we should do to solve the problem’...". James provided an example of where teaching social problem solving is a duty of his as a teacher, declaring that with:

James: ...kids in the school yard there’s going to be problems...we gotta teach kids how to deal with these problems, how to overcome these problems...if someone says that they’re...ugly or someone says they’re stupid...what can we do to let that student believe that they’re not that.

Teaching social skills, such as being able to work with others and controlling your emotions, were mentioned as being a crucial aspect of child’s non-academic curriculum.

As Madeline commented, her role includes:

Madeline: [providing her students] with instruction in the class...as to how best to deal with challenges generally that they can then apply to whatever challenges they might have in their own life. So social skills...cooperative learning, like being able to cooperate and collaborate with people, being able to...cool your emotions if you’re...if you’re feeling really frustrated, being able to not react physically because a lot of, like, for example, if a kid’s being...has a parent who always reacts physically towards them, in order to build resiliency in the kid I think, if resiliency’s going to mean that they can function normally.

#### *Internal abilities.*

The teachers interviewed found their role to include teaching their students how to develop those internal abilities that they viewed to be present in resilient children. Kate found it necessary to teach her students the value of “hard work and dedication”, while Ann found it important to instruct her class on ways to develop coping strategies. Independence was also believed to be another aspect of resilient behaviour. James found it crucial to teach his students “how to take care of themselves...how to think for



themselves, how to know that...in this world that...if someone doesn't give them this stuff that...how they can cope and how they can manage”.

These teachers found that they were responsible to take their role as a ‘teacher’ and expand it beyond the curriculum. They found it crucial to, as Madeline stated, “put those, sort of, building blocks in place” in order for their students to achieve success in life and be resilient. All of the teachers interviewed found value in teaching their students skills found in the curriculum and beyond.

### *Teacher Behaviour*

#### *Support and guidance.*

The teachers interviewed felt that part of their responsibility was to act as a source of support, a coach or guide, and as a partner with their students’ parents or caregivers. In being a source of support for their students, the teachers perceived encouragement, confidence building, and an overall focus on the positive as being important aspects of their role as a teacher who wishes to develop resilient behaviours within their students. Jackie parlayed all of these aspects immediately when asked what her role was in developing resilience in her students stating “encouragement...encouraging them, making them feel good about their achievements...even in Kindergarten, if it’s the littlest thing, it could mean a lot to them and...I guess showcasing...their success, and cheering them on”.

Coaching or guiding their students was another responsibility the teachers deemed to be necessary when encouraging resilience in their students. Success, as discussed earlier, was predominantly referred to as the ultimate outcome by which to define resilience in students. Teachers found it important to guide or coach their students to

achieve success; however, success was context specific. As Kate stated, it is her responsibility to push “[her] students to the best of their abilities and [guide] them at the same time”. Teachers, such as Kate, formulated their guiding for each student towards success based on the student’s own specific capabilities. This teacher, in particular, felt the process of acting as a guide to her students to be an “aim as a teacher”. Coaching and guiding their students towards success was a definite role these teachers found they played.

#### *Parental role.*

The discussion with these teachers highlighted the crucial role that they believed parents to play in their children’s resilient behaviour. The teachers found it a requirement to act as a partner with the parents of their students. As Gillian stated with regards to her role:

Gillian: ...well I think...I’m definitely part of it, I think...some of it also has to be...the family and what kind of role and support they’re getting at home...I think because I spend a lot of the day with the kids, then obviously I have a huge part in that but I think...I can only go so far and only do so much with some of the kids if it’s not happening, or, you know, things aren’t happening at home to promote resiliency then...I’m, my job is more difficult.

James described an experience where parental support was not necessarily happening in the home. While he mentioned that he does not rely on the role of the parents as much as other teachers, he still found it important to attempt to involve them:

Interviewer: ...now in this situation, because, the students are bussed in do you feel you have any connection with the parents at all or do you even bother trying, just kind of go through the students?

James: well I called a parent when you first came in...so I do a lot of phone communication...uh at my old school I had a website and I talked with parents on a website and I would post homework every night and post class information...but these parents aren’t online very much, so I don’t do that with them so most is by telephone...even newsletters often don’t get read or...kind of

get ignored so...there's many ways to communicate with parents but I find here the best way is just by phone.

While parental involvement may not be a definite for these students, the teachers felt it necessary to at least attempt to include their students' parents in order to develop resilient behaviours.

### *Creating Opportunities*

The seven teachers interviewed all felt it a responsibility to provide their students with opportunities. These opportunities included classrooms that allowed students to experience success as well as classrooms within which the skills taught to them (both in and outside of the curriculum) could be developed. Heather described her classroom, where students are encouraged to try what she called "safe risks". Heather gives her students activities that she knows they will successfully accomplish in order to develop their self-esteem. Her students are also provided with the opportunity to experience failure, but in a manner that will still build their confidence and encourage future attempts. As Heather stated:

Heather: ...also for them to just take risks, and I might not know the outcome, so they might...they might be successful or they, it might be a total bust and they aren't, but then giving the encouragement that 'you tried' and it was, you know, 'you, you did a good job' and... 'it's o.k. sometimes'...it's building their confidence in all areas whether you succeed or you, or you don't succeed and you have to try again.

Several of the other teachers described similar classroom environments where such "safe risks" were encouraged and activities were provided that were meant to boost self-esteem and confidence as well as motivate students to keep trying.

The social skills, internal resilient abilities, problem solving skills, curriculum, thinking skills, and independent mentality that teachers felt necessary to teach their

students were also given the opportunity to develop in the classrooms. As Madeline mentioned, her role involved “providing a safe place for [her students]...to...to be able to develop the confidence and develop the skills”. Ann described how her instruction could foster independent behaviour in her students by providing a learning environment where children are given the opportunity to coach themselves through a disruption in the day. Providing a safe environment for their students to experience success, failure, and to develop the skills teachers felt necessary for resilient behaviour was typical practice for several of these teachers.

### *Promotion of Resilient Behaviours*

#### *Fulfill Teacher Roles*

When it came to suggesting specific ways that resilient behaviours could or should be promoted or encouraged in the classroom, the teachers all alluded to the specific roles they felt they played. While the belief of teaching students skills found in the curriculum and beyond as well as providing situations for growth and development remained relatively the same, how a teacher should behave was expanded upon. Along with acting as a source of support, a coach or guide, and a partner with parents, these teachers felt it important for those wishing to develop resilience in their students to build a rapport with each child as well as being resilient themselves.

#### *Building rapport.*

Developing a relationship with their students was deemed necessary for teachers wishing to encourage resilient behaviour in their students. Gillian believed it important to make sure that “when the students come into the classroom that...they’re feeling valued and that you, they know you’re there to support them and care for them”. Heather

believed that students respond to and were influenced by their teachers because teachers are “warm...and [they’re] caring, and [they’re] interested”. Jackie described just how important having a relationship with your students can be to their success by outlining how a classroom in which the lack of a rapport between a student and their teacher could be detrimental to that student’s outcome:

Jackie: ...some years the teachers put a lot...into that child, to helping them realize their successes, and you know, what they’re able to do and, and other years you kind of...unfortunately...they might not have the connection with the student and that...affects...how much...effort and time they put into them and unfortunately that’s true.

These teachers perceived developing a relationship with their students was something that all teachers should be doing in order to promote resilient behaviours in the classroom.

*Being resilient.*

Along with the idea of teachers making that extra effort to build relationships with their students to encourage resilient behaviour, James brought up the concept of teachers, themselves, as being resilient. He believed that:

James: ...if you want to see kids...teach these kids to be resilient and be able to learn these things...you’re gonna have to do it yourself.....instead of just...giving up on these kids and saving that for at home you gotta keep strong and keep it going yourself.

Other teachers mimicked this idea of possessing an internal drive to help their students overcome adversity. Both Ann and Heather discussed the importance of having patience with their students, while Ann in particular advised other teachers to have “the perseverance to know that if you keep modeling and you keep explaining, and you talk it through with them...they can reach that...and it’s challenging, yes...”. The idea of being resilient as a teacher resonated with these individuals as being a crucial aspect for any teacher wishing to promote or encourage resilient behaviours among their students.

## *Expectations*

Many of the teachers interviewed voiced their opinions regarding the importance of having high, yet realistic, expectations of their students when intending to promote or encourage resilient behaviours. Ann advised teachers to “keep [their] goals high, like keep what [they] expect [their students] to be able to do high, not unattainable”. The idea of maintaining high, but reasonable expectations of their students was reinforced by the desire of several teachers to prevent the development of ‘learned helplessness’ in their students. As Gillian explained:

Gillian: ...well I don’t expect, you know, like I understand that they’re kids and I try to keep in mind their...their age and...whether or not, you know, some of them are on IEPs [Individual Education Plans] or, you know, just their different levels...but at the same time like I expect the best from them...so...you know, I don’t let any...anything like that...like they can’t use it as an excuse.

Jackie recommended using positive reinforcement, such as “a social reward or, or token...something [students] can hold on to” to help her students achieve her high expectations. She also modified her high expectations to ensure all of her students were achieving to the best of their abilities by giving her students “a long term goal, or a short term goal daily and then...by the week”. Setting the standards for their students to achieve, and only expecting the best of each student depending on the context was a common suggestion among the teachers for those wishing to promote or encourage resilient behaviours in their students.

## *Consistency*

Consistency was often mentioned throughout the interviews. Madeline commented on the importance of being consistent in her expectations of her students suggesting that, in regards to not allowing notions of ‘learned helplessness’ in the

classroom, “You have to kind of set that standard as a teacher because if you let that slide then it just sort of...is pervasive”. Heather discussed how a teacher’s role in a student’s life as an individual who is “here everyday, consistently, telling them nice things, helping them achieve other things” could be a reason why teachers can be so influential on their students. Finally, James described just how important he felt it was for students to experience consistency in their teachers’ promotion of their success throughout their education:

James:...and my hope is that...is other teachers will follow up with this...if they don’t it could be...um...kind of ruin the whole...stack of cards because right now I don’t think it’s a very stable, you know, kind of...resilience that I have, it’s like a stack of cards...and they can flop or they can let other teacher’s build on that...they can be pretty solid, these kids can learn the strategies to get through these things by themselves

Interviewer: ...so if you had teachers all throughout the grades with this uniform mentality that would really benefit...

James: for sure.

Whether it is consistency in their teaching, in their roles, or in their values, these teachers found it a necessary aspect in promoting resilience.

### *Promoting Social Competence*

A dominant theme throughout the course of the interviews was just how important it was for teachers to address the social risks their students may be facing and to prepare their students for future social experiences. Many voiced the importance of focusing on the social aspect of their students’ development as they felt the ‘social’ to be necessary to address in order to achieve the ‘academic’. For example, in talking about her experiences with children she believed to be resilient, Madeline found that:

Madeline:...the ones that have made the greatest improvements...really are, like I’m thinking of, I’ve worked with a couple of pretty extreme cases and they’re the ones who have been able to figure out how to control their anger...and to function in a way that’s appropriate for...society...like for their peers and for their

teachers. And once they do that, then you can get down to the business of....extra things, like figuring out the academic stuff, figuring out...you know, how best they can succeed in other areas. But if you can't get along with people, I really don't think....life is very easy for you.

Jackie suggested the behaviour of a student socially 'at risk' to "[infect]...[affect] the...the academic performance". She believed the behaviour to act as a "cover-up" for a student's academic insecurity. While she admitted finding ways to boost their self-esteem ("finding them being good, and finding good examples of their work") to be difficult, she maintained it necessary to put in the extra effort to find ways to develop their self-confidence and address their socially 'at risk' behaviours in order to eventually experience success, both academic and social. Ignoring the social risks students may face or be experiencing and focusing completely on academics was not a method these teachers perceived to help promote or encourage resilient behaviours in students. All seven teachers interviewed expressed how necessary it is for teachers to go above and beyond the academic curriculum for resilience to be fostered in their students. When it comes to promoting or encouraging resilience in students, these teachers agreed that it is necessary to, as James stated, give "the whole package".



## Discussion

This paper aimed to examine universally successful teaching methods used by a group of teachers and perceived to help promote resilience in their students. The findings have suggested that there are several similarities in the teaching methods and beliefs of this unique group despite their diverse range of experience. These findings and how they relate to relevant literature are explored in greater detail below. Based on the research questions of the same topics, three realms have been identified; the terminology, the role of the teacher, and how teachers promote resilience.

### *Terminology*

The seven teachers were asked to define their interpretations of the terms ‘at risk’ and resilience. This was deemed to be an important aspect of uncovering methods teachers used to promote resilience in their students as it allowed for the creation of a common ground to base their suggestions and experiences. Universal teaching methods were the intended goal of this study, therefore, it was crucial to uncover a universal meaning of ‘at risk’ and resilience. What was uncovered was a dominant focus on academic ‘at risk’ and an ambiguous familiarity and person-centred focus on resilience.

#### *‘At risk’*

The term ‘at risk’ was described by these teachers in both an academic and social context. Academic ‘at risk’ was typically mentioned first by the teachers, underlined by the notion that this form of ‘at risk’ was the predominant focus of their school boards. The Ontario Ministry of Education (Ontario, 2003) have defined students ‘at risk’ as those who are performing below the provincial standard, an explanation mimicked by many of the teachers. Furthermore, in a study by Friesen et al. (1999), it was suggested

that “experiences shape [teachers’] ideas about teaching and learning” (p. 925).

Therefore, if these teachers’ dominant experience with the term ‘at risk’ surrounds academic capabilities, it is no wonder they would shape their primary understanding based on what is discussed in their schools, and identify academic ‘at risk’ first.

Any programs designed to identify students ‘at risk’ were described by the teachers as centering around the students’ grade specific academic shortcomings. This interpretation contradicts the perspective of Leroy and Symes (2001), who discussed the importance of identifying children who are socially ‘at risk’ in order to positively affect their school performance. This did not appear to be the case in many of the experiences of these teachers. As Jackie noted, “well we don’t make lists of [students who are socially ‘at risk’] or, or talk about that”. However, the notion of ‘at risk’ referring to social aspects in their students’ lives was mentioned by the majority of these teachers. The common perspective of these teachers of what defines students who are socially ‘at risk’ was similar to those of the teachers in Leroy and Symes’ study, who perceived this type of ‘at risk’ to be extreme and obvious. The teachers of the present study described children who are socially ‘at risk’ as having difficulties in the home of extreme measures, such as experiencing abuse or requiring the involvement of such agencies as Children’s Aid. The teachers also found students who did not fit the behavioural norms of their age group to be socially ‘at risk’. Overt aggression, being socially withdrawn, and having some form of a Learning Disability were a few examples provided by teachers that were also described in the study by Leroy and Symes.

An interesting point surrounding the teachers’ understanding of students ‘at risk’ was a lack of attention paid to certain characteristics often identified by research.

Poverty, parental factors (i.e. single or absent parents and parent education), and cultural barriers are all often cited as being characteristics found in children who are defined by research as being 'at risk' (socially and/or academically) (Aronson, 2001; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Leroy & Symes, 2001; West & Pennell, 2003). When asked to describe their school environment, many of these characteristics were identified and discussed in detail. Many of the teachers identified parental support (or lack thereof) when describing their school environments, and used these 'at risk' characteristics described by research as reasoning. Gillian mentioned how the dominant middle to upper social class of her school environment resulted in parents not being as involved in the classroom:

Gillian:...both schools were really nice to work at...very supportive staff...parent community very supportive...supportive but not as involved...like a lot of families were, like, working families...middle to upper class, both schools...parents are just at work and sort of don't have time...to volunteer.

Ann described a strong level of parental involvement in a school, similar to Gillian's, with a predominantly higher social class:

Ann:...[the parents] want to be very involved, very involved....our parents are very well educated...and a lot of families, there's a mom who stays at home or a dad that stays at home...and they either work from home or they, you know, one parent works and the other one's at home so...

While Gillian found low parental involvement in her middle to upper class school community, Heather found minimal parental involvement in a school community with a low socio-economic status and a high number of immigrants. Heather justified the lack of involvement from parents by stating:

Heather:...I think because if you come from a low income area, parents are expected to either work two jobs, they have a fear of school...because they didn't like school so sometimes they...don't want to come around schools so much...and I think just...other interests...language barriers...cultural beliefs or customs, like sometimes mothers might not come out as often...

Only one teacher, however, linked a cultural obstacle, a language barrier, to the term ‘at risk’. Kate stated that:

Kate:...it’s really hard to determine whether a student is ‘at risk’ because of their language barrier – in the sense that English is not their first language – or if it’s actually because they are...are not thriving, there’s something preventing them from succeeding.

Leroy and Symes (2001) uncovered that teachers used the term ‘at risk’ cautiously, only applying it when bountiful evidence was present. Perhaps the teachers of the present study were also cautiously using ‘at risk’, and for some reason economic status, parental factors, and potential cultural barriers did not provide enough evidence. While research found these factors to be crucial aspects in defining students ‘at risk’, these teachers did not.

### *Resilience*

Resilience was defined by the majority of the teachers as being able to ‘bounce back’ and experience some form of success in the face of adversity. This definition of resilience was not only common amongst the teachers but is common in resilience literature (Barankin & Khanlou, 2007; Dent & Cameron, 2003; Earvolino-Ramirez, 2007; Gu & Day, 2007; Levine & Wood Ion, 2002; Oswald et al., 2003). What these teachers perceived actually made an individual resilient was, however, not similar to what is commonly found in literature.

The teachers predominantly perceived resilience to derive from internal attributes. Coping and adaptation skills, mental strength, personal drive, a positive attitude, and confidence were all cited as being crucial for the development of resilience and are all internal characteristics. While these internal aspects of a child are noted by research as affecting resilience development (Barankin & Khanlou, 2007; Earvolino-Ramirez, 2007;

McMahon, 2007), the interaction of both internal and external aspects are the predominant focus of recent research on the development of resilient behaviours (Deater-Deckard et al., 2005; Dent & Cameron, 2003; Edwards, Mumford, Shillingford, & Serra-Roldan, 2007; Howard & Johnson, 2000; Johnson & Whechelt, 2004; Judge, 2005; Mandelco & Peery, 2000; McMahon, 2007; Miller & Daniel, 2007; Shumow, Vandell, & Posner, 1999; Waller, 2001). In particular, external factors such as an individual's family, community, overall environment, are cited by recent research as being predominantly influential in the development of resilience in children (Barankin & Khanlou, 2007; Benard, 1991; Johnson & Howard, 2007; Kim-Cohen et al., 2004; Laursen & Birmingham, 2003; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004; Riley & Masten, 2005). Johnson and Howard (2007), in their longitudinal study of the development of resilience among students in Australia, devalued the role of internal factors, uncovering "that resilient and non-resilient behaviours are learnt" (p. 13). With resilience being dominantly discussed in reference to external influence within the literature, it is interesting that these seven teachers viewed the importance of internal factors in how they defined resilience.

### *Familiarity with Terms*

Literature surrounding resilience has shifted focus over the past 50 years (Benard, 1991; Werner, 2005a). Research at one point was typically retrospective (Benard, 1991; Werner, 2005a). These studies were problem focused, examining the lives of those who "had failed in school, become delinquents or criminals, or suffered from serious mental health problems" (Werner, 2005a, p. 3) and exploring the factors that led to such pathologies (Benard, 1991; Werner, 2005a). The introduction of prospective longitudinal

studies of individuals 'at risk' of developing any number of pathologies uncovered and documented the presence of resiliency (Benard, 1991; Werner, 2005a). However, over the past 50 years of resilience literature, many argue that there is still a focus on negative outcomes and what is required to avoid them (Cohler, 1987; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Werner & Smith, 2001). Exploring the website for the Ontario Ministry of Education, this focus on the negative can be suggested from the simple comparison of the number of hits received when searching the terms 'at risk' versus resilience. On July 27, 2008, 1148 results appeared when 'at risk' was searched, while a meagre 34 results appeared when a search for resilience was conducted (Ontario, 2008a; Ontario, 2008b).

This emphasis on the term 'at risk' versus the notion of resilience was also found in the teachers' discussion of the two terms. While 'at risk' was a common and familiar term for all of the teachers, resilience was not. The teachers cited workshops and staff meetings that were devoted to the notion of students 'at risk'. As Kate pointed out, "...75% of our staff meetings deal with 'at risk' students...we constantly talk about, there's at least three PA days throughout the year that are spent, the entire PA days, on 'at risk' students". A great deal of time and effort appears to be placed in these teachers' school boards on students 'at risk'. Why had no teacher mentioned workshops or staff meetings devoted to the notion of resilience? Johnson and Howard (2007) have suggested that "schools in particular need to be alert to the fact that they can often disrupt negative chain effects in children's lives and teach new, more constructive ways of behaving" (p. 13). Understanding and being able to identify a student 'at risk' should be only half of the battle. Resilience should not be an unfamiliar term in a classroom.

### *The Role of the Teacher*

Once an understanding of the teachers' interpretations of 'at risk' and resilience was established, the role each teacher felt they played in promoting resilience in their students needed to be addressed. Oswald et al. (2003) found that junior primary teachers perceived that the school was an influential place for the promotion of resilience in their students while primary and secondary teachers felt it played a less influential role. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, it could not be assumed that each teacher perceived they played a role in fostering resilient behaviours in their students. However, all seven of the teachers in this study were confident in their abilities to positively influence resilient behaviours in their students. They cited many reasons for their influence, notably the time they spent with their students, the age of their students, and the training that they had received.

Research that addresses the role teachers play in promoting resilient behaviour both supports and contradicts these teachers' beliefs. Many of the teachers felt that the large amount of time they spend with their students a day places them in a position to influence the development of resilient behaviour. Oswald et al. (2003) agree with these teachers having stated that "teachers are in contact with children for a significant portion of a child's daily life...[providing] teachers with opportunities to observe, relate with and exercise influence over students' learning and development" (p. 52). The young age of the students, a factor these teachers deemed important in defining their influential role, was not as well supported by literature. Much research notes that teachers play influential roles for their students at any age, from early childhood to adolescence (Bondy et al., 2007; Howard & Johnson, 2000; Oswald et al., 2003; Werner & Smith, 1992).

Heather, in particular, suggested that as a result of her students' young age, the children were more likely to absorb her attempts to promote resilient behaviour. According to the literature, whether Heather teaches Kindergarten or Grade 12, her attempts might still be influential.

James perceived that the amount of training he and fellow teachers received prepared them to play a role in promoting resilient behaviour in their students. However, when reviewing the transcripts of each teacher, it is unclear if teachers do in fact receive the appropriate training to encourage resilience in their students. As discussed, a strong focus on students 'at risk', particularly in academics, is present in the schools of these teachers while resilience is an unfamiliar term. Heather noted that resilience was a term she had heard in teacher's college, however, it was never clearly defined or explained. As Heather stated, resilience was "never sort of defined or...it was, or given examples really it was just children are resilient". If the majority of these teachers are not receiving or understanding any training devoted to the promotion of resilience in either teacher's college or within their schools, then where are they receiving this training? Bondy et al. (2007) have suggested that while teacher educators agree of the importance of classrooms that are focused on resilience development, they often "have provided insufficient practical tools for implementation of these values" (p. 346). Research shows that teachers can and do play an influential role in their students' development of resilient behaviours (Aronson, 2001; Bondy et al., 2007; Howard & Johnson, 2000; Levine & Wood Ion, 2002; Oswald et al., 2003; Werner, 1995; Werner & Smith, 1992; Werner & Smith, 2001). Teachers are in a position to influence resilient behaviours in their students of any age. If these teachers have been successful with the minimal preparation they



have suggested, one can only imagine the influential role they may play with more resilient focused training.

### *How Teachers Promote Resilience*

The final step of this study was to uncover what these teachers did to encourage resilient behaviours in their classrooms and whether or not any commonalities existed. The teachers enthusiastically discussed many teaching methods and behaviours that they utilized in the classroom. These methods were perceived to be crucial for any teacher wishing to promote resilience in their students. Commonalities were present and can be organized into four main themes: teaching responsibilities, high expectations, consistency, and promoting social competence.

### *Fulfill Teaching Responsibilities*

The seven teachers all expressed a belief that in their role as a teacher there are certain responsibilities they hold that can and do promote resilient behaviours in their students. What they teach their students, how they act with their students, and what they provide for their students were all aspects of their jobs that they believed encouraged resilience in their students. The following will explore these three responsibilities in more detail.

### *Teaching.*

Teaching skills that were curriculum based as well as those that were not, were cited by these teachers as being important when intending to promote resilience in their students. Aronson (2001) cited “learning how to learn” (p. 73) as being a common adversity to educational success for students. This factor was present in many of the teachers’ beliefs that it is crucial to not only instruct their students with regards to the

curriculum but to also teach them methods and ways to actually learn and apply what they were learning. This idea is also valued by students as Howard and Johnson (2000) suggested in their study examining teacher and student perceptions regarding students 'at risk' and resilience. The children interviewed believed that "the single most important category....concerned the school's ability to provide special help in learning achievement" (p. 331).

Along with teaching students how to learn, these seven teachers believed they held a responsibility to teach their students problem solving and social skills that would inevitably help in the development of resilience. These sorts of skills are dominant in programs and interventions intended to focus on the social and emotional learning (SEL) of students in order to achieve some form of success (Elias, Parker, & Rosenblatt, 2005; Lynch, Geller, & Schmidt, 2004; Zins et al., 2004). They were also skills mentioned by the teachers involved in the Australian based study by Oswald et al. (2003). This perception of teachers from two separate continents as well as SEL program designers suggests the importance of teaching students problem solving and social skills when resilience is the intended goal.

A final aspect of the teachers' responsibility to teach their students surrounds the idea of instructing students how to be resilient. These teachers, when asked to define resilience, predominantly focused on internal attributes of their students, such as coping and having a positive attitude. One method they perceived to be important in promoting resilience was to teach their students how to develop those internal attributes. Oswald et al.'s (2003) findings mimic this belief, as teachers interviewed in their study noted offering "students guidance, information and practice in the use of different coping skills"

(p. 59) and teaching “students to look on the bright side of things and be positive and optimistic” (p. 59) as being ways in which they fostered resilience in their students. As Jackie noted, students “need to learn what’s right, what’s not right, what’s acceptable, what’s not acceptable”. For a student to succeed at school and eventually succeed in life, these teachers believed in the importance of learning how to learn, problem solving and social skills, and overall resilient skills. However, if there is no one available to teach students these skills, how will they ever learn?

#### *Teacher behaviour.*

The teachers believed that in their classrooms, they wore many different hats. When attempting to develop resilience in their students, the varying roles these teachers perceived they played included acting as a source of support, a guide, a partner with parents, a caring adult, and as resilient beings themselves.

Supporting and guiding their students towards some form of success is a role these teachers perceived to be important in promoting resilience among their students. It is also a role that is supported by research (Bondy et al., 2007; Oswald et al., 2003; Rutter, 1976; Werner & Smith, 2001). The teachers interviewed in Bondy et al.’s (2007) study of how teachers promoted resilience for students ‘at risk’ on the first day of school perceived that for their students “to succeed, they had to feel supported” (p. 334). The teachers interviewed in Oswald et al.’s (2003) study cited opportunities to offer guidance to their students as being crucial in their attempts to promote resilient behaviours. Both research and teacher perceptions support the importance of teachers acting as sources of support and guidance for their students.

Partnering with parents was also valued by these teachers as many viewed parental involvement in the classroom and in the home to be relevant to a student's ability to develop resilient behaviours. As Friesen et al. (1999) uncovered in their study of teachers of students 'at risk', "sometimes helpful, sometimes not, nevertheless, these teachers recognized the need for [parental] involvement" (p. 928). However, teachers also perceived the importance of building a rapport with their students, acting as a caring adult. Research has suggested that a strong and caring relationship between an adult and a child can and does promote resilience (Barankin & Khanlou, 2007; Benard, 1991; Brooks, 2006; Edwards et al., 2007; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Laursen & Birmingham, 2003; Luthar & Zelazo, 2003; Werner & Smith, 1992). Luthar and Zelazo (2003) have also suggested that a strong relationship between a teacher and a student can actually compensate for what may be lacking in the family environment. These teachers make efforts to act as partners with parents, involving them in their children's school lives. The relationships the teachers are building with their students may be making up for those parents that are not as positively involved in their children's lives.

Another role many of the teachers perceived as being important to play when attempting to foster resilience in their students was being resilient themselves. Friesen et al. (1999) recognized this important role when they noted that the "role demands significant before and after school attention. Teachers find this extra work to be a significant part of what teachers of at risk students do, and a source of considerable stress for them" (p. 927). Yet, despite the difficulty of their job, the teachers they interviewed had developed coping strategies that enabled them to not be "overwhelmed by the rapidity and unpredictability of classroom life...[and] develop an obligation to these

students that goes beyond the usual purposes of school” (Friesen et al., 1999, pp. 929-930). Friesen et al. (1999) found that teachers do demonstrate resilient behaviours. Gu and Day (2007) have suggested that research which wishes to improve the quality and standards in classrooms, needs to focus on what it is that enables teachers to be resilient. Perhaps if more is uncovered regarding how teachers are and can be resilient, how they teach and act in their classrooms can be positively affected towards promoting resilience in their students.

*Creating opportunities.*

The teachers believed that a part of their responsibilities as an educator involved providing classroom environments that allowed for opportunities for their students to develop the skills they had learned (both curriculum based and beyond). For example, several teachers discussed providing their students with risk taking opportunities where success would be the most likely outcome. This experience of success was intended by the teachers to provide their students with opportunities to boost their confidence and to motivate them to try new and perhaps more difficult challenges. Confidence and an internal drive to succeed were both noted by teachers as being internal attributes of resilience in children. Both Bondy et al. (2007) as well as Oswald et al. (2003) provide evidence for classrooms where safe risk taking is encouraged and opportunities for students to develop, apply, and practice the non-curriculum based skills taught to them are plentiful. Providing classroom environments where resilience can actually develop appears to be a common belief among these teachers, as well, in how to best foster resilience in their students.

## *High Expectations*

Many of the teachers interviewed cited having high expectations of their students' capabilities as being crucial to the development of resilience. This idea can be linked back to Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) *Pygmalion in the Classroom* study. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) based their study on the perception that "one person's prophecy of another's intellectual performance can come to determine that other's intellectual performance" (p. 31). Applying this to resilience in the classroom, it suggests that if a teacher perceives his/her students to be incapable of resilient behaviour, their students will not be resilient.

Research supports the role of high academic and social expectations of a teacher of his/her students in leading towards resilient behaviour (Benard, 1991; Bondy et al., 2007; Brooks, 2006; Brophy & Good, 1975; Laursen & Birmingham, 2003; McMahon, 2007; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Benard (1991) suggested that high expectations from a teacher are successful in promoting resilience as children end up internalizing the message and gain "high expectations for oneself" (p. 16). Laursen and Birmingham (2003) found adults with high expectations of children to simply be more likely to encourage children to participate in activities that facilitate resilience. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) explained the relationship between a teacher's high expectations and their student's success by some ambiguous communication that occurred between the two that "may have helped the child learn by changing his self concept, his expectations of his own behavior [*sic*], and his motivation, as well as his cognitive style and skills" (p. 180). For whatever reason, the teachers of this study and much research from the past 50 years supports the belief that high expectations leads to positive outcomes in students.

While in agreement of the importance of high expectations in promoting resilient behaviours, the teachers of this study suggested that these expectations must be within reason. Context must be considered. The teachers felt that high expectations without taking into consideration the student's actual capabilities would negatively affect a child's ability to develop resilient behaviour. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) believed that teachers relayed their expectations through ambiguous communications with their students. Whether the teachers in this study communicate slightly lower expectations than they believe they are based on the contextual factors for each student is something to consider. In stating that expectations must be high, but within reason, many teachers suggested a conflicting message regarding how their behaviour promotes resilience in their students.

### *Consistency*

Levine and Wood Ion (2002) have stated that "children need a sense of predictability and stability of routine and ritual. They need to know that those who care for them are reliable, dependable, stable, and there in good times and in bad" (p. 289). This consistency is considered by Levine and Wood Ion (2002) to be a necessity when increasing "resilience potential" (p. 284). The teachers in the present study also perceived consistency to be important when attempting to foster resilient behaviours in their students.

Consistency in their expectations of their students' abilities was cited by some teachers as a necessity to minimize 'learned helplessness' or self doubt, increasing student capabilities and resilience. As referenced earlier, Benard (1991) perceived consistent high expectations from a teacher to be internalized by a student. This

internalization produces personal high expectations in the students themselves, perhaps limiting 'learned helplessness' and overall negative self-concepts that could minimize resilient behaviour.

The teachers also perceived their consistent presence in their students' lives as caring adults to be beneficial in the potential development of resilience. Ungar (2005b) noted that "caregivers who offer continuity in relationships...will help the child sustain resilience in more than one part of his/her life" (pp. 6-7). Perhaps in instances when consistency is not present in a relationship between a student and their caregiver, a consistent relationship with a caring teacher seen by a student approximately eight hours a day, five days a week, might act as a substitute.

A consistent focus on promoting resilience throughout a student's education was also suggested by teachers to be influential in the development of resilient behaviours. Luthar and Zelazo (2003) support this idea, having suggested that consistent supportive student/teacher relationships over time can promote resilience by compensating for 'at risk' experiences such as "difficult family situations" (p. 545). Mortimore (1995) expressed a belief that a lack of consistency between classroom expectations can actually decrease confidence levels in their students. This inconsistency would deflate one integral internal aspect of resilience identified by the teachers of the present study. James viewed resilience to be fragile, a "stack of cards" that could easily "flop". A school environment where all teachers consistently encourage and reinforce resilient behaviour appears to be essential.



### *Social Competence: The Root of Resilience*

The importance these teachers felt regarding teaching their students academic and social skills and providing them with opportunities to develop these skills has already been discussed. However, the strong belief that these teachers had in regards to the relationship which is present between academic and social skills and how that leads to resilience has not yet been examined. The promotion of social competence, how it encourages academic development, and how this relates to resilience is discussed below.

Social competence was viewed by teachers as being a crucial aspect leading to both academic and social success in school. Zins et al. (2004) have expressed support for this belief, having argued that learning is a social process where collaboration with peers, teachers, and families can either make or break a student's success. Success was defined by Zins et al. as incorporating student attitudes and behaviours as well as academic achievements. Success of any form was identified by the teachers of the present study as being an indicator of resilience in their students. These teachers valued instructing all of their students in social competence which, in turn, allow for these social learning interactions which help to develop resilient behaviour. As Madeline noted:

Madeline:...whether it's that you're struggling with academics, or you're struggling with a difficult home environment....I sometimes think, and you know, I've spoken with other teacher colleagues...the most important thing, in a way, that you can teach your kid is how to get along with other kids...because, when you think about adults that are alienated or adults that are frustrated or...having troubles it's, a lot of the time it's because they feel disconnected from...society at large. And if you feel disconnected you feel...you know...if you feel lonely then it's really difficult, in some ways, to function normally. So it's almost as basic as being able to...to not piss people off.

Madeline's description of the effects of an adult lacking social competence describes a situation where two of Zins et al.'s descriptors of success suffer; attitudes and behaviours.

Many of the teachers noted that when social competence was lacking in a child, Zins et al.'s final descriptor of success, academic achievement, was negatively affected. Social competence appears to be an important factor for these teachers in fostering resilient behaviour in students.

What is interesting about the teachers' perceptions in this study, regarding the importance of addressing the development of social competence in the classroom is how it contradicts much of what is considered important in their school boards. Students academically 'at risk' were described as the predominant focus of these teachers' school boards, and many of the school based interventions designed to identify and assist these students focused predominantly on academic achievement. However, these teachers clearly believe that students academically 'at risk' are also often experiencing social difficulties that are creating or perpetuating their academic difficulties. Teachers may not be able to eradicate all of the negative events a child who is socially 'at risk' may be experiencing. However, the teachers of this study have suggested that by focusing on the development of social competence, they can minimize some of the social difficulties students may be facing. Social competence appears to be at the root of both academic and social success for the students of the teachers in this study.

## Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be noted. The researcher has followed Bronfenbrenner's (1977) perspective of the ecology of human development and has the assumption that a child's environment can and does influence resilient behaviours. In arranging this study to focus on uncovering universal teaching methods that promote resilience, the theoretical bias of the researcher was overtly expressed to potential teachers willing to participate. The teachers' unanimous belief that they play a role in promoting resilient behaviour in their students could be a reflection of the researcher's personal belief. Future research in this area which either does not identify its purpose to participants or comes from researchers with varying theoretical beliefs would be beneficial.

As a result of the method of data collection, findings are directly related to the perceptions of each participant. It is unclear whether the beliefs and methods suggested by each teacher accurately represent their classroom experiences in promoting resilient behaviours. Utilizing classroom observations or the testimonials of other individuals involved in the classroom (i.e. students, colleagues, principals etc.) may be beneficial in future research to further validate findings.

It cannot be assumed that the responses in the interviews are a direct reflection of each teacher's beliefs and perceptions. Each teacher was provided a copy of the consent form prior to their interview, providing them with the opportunity to research and discuss the topic of resilience which may have influenced their responses. However, it is deemed by the researcher invaluable to provide participants of a study with the opportunity to

thoroughly review and understand the details of a study before agreeing to participate. Therefore, this was a step taken in the research process that was necessary.

The relatively small sample size of this study limits the findings and interpretations. As the goal was to find universal teaching methods, a larger sample might have provided more support for the findings or perhaps more perceptions and beliefs. Any future research in this area may benefit from using a larger sample.

The exclusion of context in the collection of the data suggests that the teaching methods may not be the sole influence leading to resilient outcomes. While teaching experience and school environments were described by the teachers, this information was used only to depict a representation of the wealth of diverse experience of each teacher. Future research may benefit by cross-examining teachers' perceptions with the contextual elements of the teachers' backgrounds and school environments.

## Conclusion

The focus on resilience has shifted over the past 50 years. Research in this area once focused on the processes leading to pathologies and overall negative life outcomes (Luthar et al., 2000). Resilience research then developed into studies which focused on identifying specific traits or events (both internal and then later, external) that were common in individuals deemed to demonstrate resilient behaviours (Luthar et al., 2000). In what Masten and Obradović (2006) have referred to as the fourth wave of resilience research, a new focus has developed. Researchers of resilience have studied the ‘what’ and the ‘why’ of resilient behaviours. The new focus for research surrounds uncovering the ‘how’ (Masten & Obradović, 2006).

The present study aimed to explore this new area of focus in resilience research. Influenced by Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) perspective of the ecology of human development, this study aimed to uncover how social influences affect resilient behaviour. In seeking out universally successful teaching methods that teachers perceived helped to promote resilient behaviour in their ‘at risk’ elementary school students, many processes which were suggested to lead to the development of resilient behaviours were uncovered. The seven elementary school teachers included in this study provided their perceptions regarding the terms ‘at risk’ and resilience reflecting a dominant focus in their schools on academic ‘at risk’ and a vague familiarity and understanding of the concept of resilience. While the majority of the teachers initially cited internal abilities as being predominant influences over potential resilient behaviour, all felt that they could and did play a role in promoting resilient behaviours in their students. The processes cited by these teachers which were believed to foster resilient

behaviours in their classrooms were represented in four common themes: fulfilling teacher responsibilities, high expectations, consistency, and promoting social competence.

Condly (2006) has stated that early intervention and prevention programs seem to increase the likelihood of developing resilience. School is a commonality in the lives of billions of children and youth. The classroom, therefore, is an excellent location for such intervention and prevention programs to reach many young individuals. Teachers are a constant presence in these schools and subsequently in the lives of children and youth. These educators are in a great position to provide interventions and preventions aimed at developing resilience. The teachers of this study all felt they played a role in developing resilience in their students and all could identify methods by which to do so. In fact, many of their methods are common in professional resilience focused intervention and prevention programs (Elias et al., 2005; Lynch et al., 2004). Yet, these teachers identified 'at risk' to be a more familiar term used in the school then resilience. If teachers believed they were promoting resilience in the classroom without an understanding or awareness of the term, what could they be capable of doing if more time in schools and in their training was spent on developing resilient behaviour promotion techniques?

There is a gap in the research surrounding the exploration of the complex interplay of the external influences on the internal influences of resilience (Werner, 2005b). In particular, Leroy and Symes (2001) have suggested that more needs to be known about the beliefs and perceptions of teachers regarding students 'at risk', resilience, and how these beliefs and perceptions affect or are reflected in their teaching.

The present study has demonstrated the perceptions of seven teachers of varying backgrounds and experience. This study is believed to have drawn some insight into the processes behind resilient behaviour in children ‘at risk’ and the influential role external influences can play. Werner (2005a) suggests that it is unlikely that research in this area will ever uncover “a single coherent intervention program that will succeed every time with every youngster who grows up in adverse circumstances” (p. 10). However, what was uncovered in this study indicates that teachers believe they are influential when promoting resilience in their students and certain, albeit broadly themed methods have been suggested to be effective for a wide range of students. Future research which continues this focus on the beliefs and perceptions of teachers may not uncover what Werner calls a “magic bullet” (p. 10) which promotes the development of resilience in every child and in every circumstance. However, this research would greatly add to the growing repertoire of resilience research exploring the interaction of internal and external influences on resilience and uncover findings that may potentially benefit many individuals. Each year, billions of children are left in the care of a teacher. With risks being as varied, complex, and unpredictable as they are, it is next to impossible to alleviate negative life experiences for all children. However, with a strong understanding of the processes leading to resilience, particularly those that can and do occur in the classroom, a successful developmental trajectory can be possible for any child.





## Appendix A: Email/Facebook Message to Potential Participants

Mr./Mrs./Ms. (teacher)<sup>1</sup>

I am a Master of Arts student at Ryerson University, participating in the Early Childhood Studies program. I am currently preparing a research study in which I plan to speak with elementary school teachers. I am contacting you in the hopes that you, or someone you know, may wish to be a participant in this study.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of my paper is to seek out universally successful teaching methods that teachers perceived helped to promote resilient behaviour in their elementary school students. I am hoping to include the thoughts of approximately ten elementary school teachers will participate in this study and will principally comprise of those teaching at the primary level. A minimum of five years teaching experience is ideal. Data will be collected through one time audio-taped interviews that will be approximately an hour in length. These interviews will occur at a location of the participant's convenience (classroom, participant's home, home of the researcher, boardroom in the School of Early Childhood Education at Ryerson University).

If you, or someone you know, are interested in potentially participating or you have further questions regarding this study please feel free to contact me, at [mproulx@ryerson.ca](mailto:mproulx@ryerson.ca) or my supervisor, Dr. Angela Valco at [avalco@ryerson.ca](mailto:avalco@ryerson.ca) or 416 979-5000 ext 7696.

It is believed that effective interactions between students and teachers that might be discovered as a result of this study will add to a fourth wave of research regarding resilience in which the processes behind its development are the focus. The information uncovered in this and future studies, if applied to intervention and prevention programs, could have the potential to enhance adaptive outcomes for all students. Any help will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your time,

Meghann Proulx

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<sup>1</sup> Depending on the level of known relationship between potential participant and researcher, potential participants may be referred to by their first names

<sup>2</sup> Depending on the level of known relationship between potential participant and researcher, a more casual introduction may be utilized



## Appendix B: Telephone ‘Script’ to Principals<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

Hi Mr./Mrs./Ms. (name of principal)

My name is Meghann Proulx and I am a Master of Arts student at Ryerson University, participating in the Early Childhood Studies program. I am currently preparing a research study in which I plan to speak with elementary school teachers. I am contacting you in the belief that you may be in a position to aid my recruitment of potential participants. I was wondering if it might be a possibility for me to either speak with your staff or have you contact them on my behalf, regarding my study and willing participants.

### Purpose and Description of the Study

- The purpose of my paper is to seek out universally successful teaching methods that teachers perceived helped to promote resilient behaviour in their elementary school students.
- Approximately ten elementary school teachers are hoped to participate in this study
- Ideally these teachers will principally comprise of those teaching at the primary level and have a minimum of five years teaching experience.
- Data will be collected through one time audio-taped interviews
- Interviews will be approximately an hour in length.
- These interviews will occur at a location of the participant’s convenience (classroom, participant’s home, home of the researcher, boardroom in the School of Early Childhood Education at Ryerson University).

### Contact Information

- Meghann Proulx at [mproulx@ryerson.ca](mailto:mproulx@ryerson.ca)
- Dr. Angela Valeo at [avaleo@ryerson.ca](mailto:avaleo@ryerson.ca) or 416 979-5000 ext 7696

### Significance of Study and Conclusion of Conversation

It is believed that effective interactions between students and teachers that might be discovered as a result of this study will add to a fourth wave of research regarding resilience in which the processes behind its development are the focus. The information uncovered in this and future studies, if applied to intervention and prevention programs, could have the potential to enhance adaptive outcomes for all students.

Thank you

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<sup>2</sup> This is intended to provide an overview as to what may be discussed in a telephone conversation with a Principal. All contents may not be repeated verbatim.



## Appendix C: Email to Principals

Mr./Mrs./Ms. (name of principal)

I am a Master of Arts student at Ryerson University, participating in the Early Childhood Studies program. I am currently preparing a research study in which I plan to speak with elementary school teachers. I am contacting you in the belief that you may be in a position to aid my recruitment of potential participants.

The purpose of my paper is to seek out universally successful teaching methods that teachers perceived helped to promote resilient behaviour in their elementary school students. I am hoping to include the thoughts of approximately ten elementary school teachers will participate in this study and will principally comprise of those teaching at the primary level. A minimum of five years teaching experience is ideal. Data will be collected through one time audio-taped interviews that will be approximately an hour in length. These interviews will occur at a location of the participant's convenience (classroom, participant's home, home of the researcher, boardroom in the School of Early Childhood Education at Ryerson University).

I was wondering if it might be a possibility for me to either speak with your staff or have you contact them on my behalf, regarding my study and willing participants. Potential participants can contact me at [mproulx@ryerson.ca](mailto:mproulx@ryerson.ca) or my supervisor, Dr. Angela Valeo at [avaleo@ryerson.ca](mailto:avaleo@ryerson.ca) and 416 979-5000 ext 7696.

It is believed that effective interactions between students and teachers that might be discovered as a result of this study will add to a fourth wave of research regarding resilience in which the processes behind its development are the focus. The information uncovered in this and future studies, if applied to intervention and prevention programs, could have the potential to enhance adaptive outcomes for all students. Any help will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your time,

Meghann Proulx



## Appendix D: Interview Protocol

### Interview Protocol<sup>3</sup>

Project: How Teachers Promote Resilience in their Students: A Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies Major Research Paper

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

- Explain the purpose of the study here. Identify the characteristics of participants and the sources of data that will be collected. Explain how the data will be protected to ensure the confidentiality of the participant. Outline the expected time frame of the interview.
- Have participant sign the consent form
- Test digital audio recorder

Questions:

- 1) How long have you been teaching for?
- 2) What grades have you taught?
- 3) How many schools have you taught at?
  - a. How would you describe these schools? i.e. community, student body, class environment etc.
- purpose for these questions:
  - put teacher at ease, discussing aspects of their career they would be knowledgeable of
  - understand the background of my participants, their experience level and the contexts of these experiences
- 4) Have you ever heard the term 'at-risk' before?

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<sup>3</sup> This Interview Protocol is based on the sample provided in Creswell (2008).

- a. If so, please explain your understanding
  - b. If not, what would you assume it to mean?
- purpose for these questions:
    - want to understand each teacher's own personal belief regarding 'at-risk' as research shows that teachers are often cautious of this term and have varying interpretations of its meanings (Howard & Johnson, 2000; Leroy & Symes, 2001)
      - this information may be useful for understanding the teaching methods chosen by participants for aiding resilient behaviours among 'at-risk' students
- 5) What do you believe resilience to mean?
- 6) Where do you perceive your role to be in the development of resilient behaviours in your students?
- 7) How might you suggest resilience be promoted/encouraged in the classroom?
- purpose of these questions:
    - by asking what a teacher believes resilience to mean I am creating a contextual ground to base the remainder of his/her responses on (also, have not found a lot of research that has done this)
    - by not specifically stating that these questions are in reference to 'at-risk' children I will be leaving my findings open to the interpretation that these methods can benefit all students, not just those obviously 'at-risk'
    - Much research has demonstrated what teachers do in the classroom to promote resilience (Oswald, Johnson, & Howard, 2003; Aronson, 2001; Bondy, Ross, Galligane, & Hambacher, 2007). There is not as much to support what teachers believe they are to do and have actually experienced success in doing. These questions (specifically the one asking about their experiences) will hopefully provide insight into this area.
- inform the interviewee of the methods employed to ensure confidentiality
  - inform the interviewee of the member checking process
  - thank the interviewee for their cooperation and participation



**Ryerson University  
Consent Agreement**

**How Teachers Promote Resilience in their Students: A Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies Major Research Paper**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

**Investigators:**

Meghann Proulx, B. A., MAECS student, Ryerson University. [mproulx@ryerson.ca](mailto:mproulx@ryerson.ca)  
Professor Angela Valeo, PhD, Master of Arts Program in Early Childhood Studies,  
School of Early Childhood Education, Ryerson University. [avaleo@ryerson.ca](mailto:avaleo@ryerson.ca) 416 979-  
5000 ext 7696

**Purpose of the Study:** This study aims to seek out universally successful teaching methods that teachers perceived helped to promote resilient behaviour in their elementary school students. Approximately ten elementary school teachers will participate in this study and will principally comprise of those teaching at the primary level. A minimum of five years teaching experience is ideal.

**Description of the Study:**

THE FOLLOWING DATA GENERATION/COLLECTION TECHNIQUES WILL BE EMPLOYED:

- one-on-one interview consisting of 13 questions
- interviews will occur at a location of the participants' convenience (ideally a classroom, the participant's home, home of the researcher, or the boardroom in the School of Early Childhood Education at Ryerson University)
- interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed
- researchers' observations throughout the interview will be noted and incorporated into this transcription
- participants' will be offered the opportunity to review their transcripts and provide feedback to the researcher

SOME SAMPLE QUESTIONS INCLUDE:

- 1) What grades have you taught?
- 2) Have you ever heard the term 'at-risk' before?
- 3) What do you believe resilience to mean?

**What is Experimental in this Study:** None of the procedures used in this study are experimental in nature. The only experimental aspect of this study is the gathering of information for the purpose of analysis.

**Risks or Discomforts:** Because of the nature of the questions asked, potentially harmful information about participants or their students might be shared. Under these circumstances, confidentiality will be broken and action taken. Harmful information, however, will not be sought out during the interview process. These measures, however, will be taken as a precaution.

**Benefits of the Study:** It is believed that what might be discovered as a result of this study will add to a fourth wave of research regarding resilience in which the processes behind its development are the focus. The information uncovered in this and future studies, if applied to intervention and prevention programs, could have the potential to enhance positive outcomes for all students. I cannot guarantee, however, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:** All data that will identify the subjects (audio-taped interviews and transcriptions) will be securely stored in a locked office belonging to Dr. Angela Valeo at Ryerson University for one year. At this time, all data identifying subjects will be shredded, deleted, and disposed of. Participants will be provided the opportunity to review and edit the transcriptions prior to any publication. Pseudonyms will be utilized in the final presentation of this study to protect the identities of the participants and those mentioned throughout the course of the interview process.

**Voluntary Nature of Participation:** *Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed.*

*At any particular point in the study, you may refuse to answer any particular question or stop participation altogether.*

**Questions about the Study:** If you have any questions about the research, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact.

Principal Investigator/Study Coordinator: Meghann Proulx  
[mproulx@ryerson.ca](mailto:mproulx@ryerson.ca)

If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, you may contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board for information.

Research Ethics Board  
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation  
Ryerson University  
350 Victoria Street  
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3  
416-979-5042

**Agreement:**

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I wish to review the transcript of my interview:

☐

Yes

☐

No

If Yes, please provide an email or home address you would like to have the transcript sent to: \_\_\_\_\_



## References

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