Resilient Teachers: A Qualitative Study of Six Thriving Educators in Urban Elementary Schools

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RESILIENT TEACHERS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SIX THRIVING EDUCATORS IN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

by

Paul Giroux

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
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in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
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Department of Educational Leadership, Research and Technology
Dr. Sue Poppink, Advisor

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
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RESILIENT TEACHERS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SIX THRIVING EDUCATORS IN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Paul Giroux, Ed.D.
Western Michigan University, 2007

This qualitative research study used elements of phenomenological and narrative research methodology to explore the common characteristics and experiences of a sample of resilient elementary teachers working in urban schools. The six research subjects in this study’s sample each had at least eight years of teaching experience, and each participated in a cycle of three in-depth interviews designed to determine their degree of resilience and to develop a portrait of their personal and professional characteristics, experiences, attitudes and beliefs. Once the data collection phase was complete, data was coded and then analyzed to identify which of the characteristics and experiences were common to the research subjects. The significant findings of this study were that: (a) a sense of spirituality; (b) the presence of collegial and, or personal support systems; and (c) the development of personal connections with students were all common to the sample members at a strong level. The findings of this study suggest implications for the fields of educational leadership and teacher education, and for areas of study including resilience theory and positive psychology.
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Paul Giroux
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background: Burning out

Going to work that first September was hell. I remember snapping awake at
four-thirty each morning and trembling, dreading the day ahead. Back home, student
teaching had been such a joy, all smiles and laughs and mementos from the students
on my last day. This, however, my first paid position at an unfamiliar school in a
town I didn’t know, and where the students’ culture was largely foreign to me, was
torture. I was trying so hard, but the more I tried to plan and strategize about how to
navigate the snake pit I’d landed in, the more fangs ended up in my ankles. Finally, I
decided to quit. I couldn’t win. My Aunt Joann worked at a publishing house and I
had been an English major. That was my ticket out. Eight years have passed and I’m
still glad she didn’t answer when I called. Instead of Aunt Joann, my Uncle Bob
picked up the line. We spoke for a moment or two and as soon as he got wind of
what I was up to, he gave me a scolding like I hadn’t known since childhood. He
didn’t reason with me or gently urge me to stick it out. With the stern force of a
general addressing a private, he told me that I wasn’t going to quit. Uncle Bob, who
is usually mild and deferential, with a calm smile below his bushy black moustache,
was suddenly as fiery as a preacher in mid-sermon. He repeated his order that I must
not quit and told me that teaching provided me with, “an instant purpose in life that
no other job can give you.”
I followed his command and have never regretted it. Over the course of that first year, I gradually stopped seeing my job as a snake pit and started seeing it as a garden, and by June, as I said goodbye to that first group of children which I had tried to nurture and help to grow, I knew I was in the right profession. Still, as I go on in teaching and the satisfaction, joy and peace (which are the byproducts of sense of purpose that Bob’s speech proclaimed) continue to flourish in my life, I shudder a little because I was so close to giving it all up.

I still teach at the same school, and although I have moved up and down the various grades, and in the years since I have taught many of the younger brothers and sisters of that first crop of children, those students from my first year and the experiences I encountered are never far from my mind.

Eight years ago when I entered a classroom for the first time as a professional educator I was twenty three years old, had been born and raised in the outer suburbs of Detroit and was confident that I was well prepared and knew exactly what to do. The school family I was joining was just outside the city limits of Detroit and was 99% African American, with approximately 50% of the students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. The school enrolled about 650 students, many of whom were from various communities outside of the school district who took advantage of an open enrollment program called “Schools of Choice.” The staff was around 30 to 40% African American, the rest, myself included were Caucasian. The demographics of the school family are the same now as they were then, and there has been only moderate staff turnover (although other buildings in the district have had reasonably high attrition), but my attitude about my job has changed significantly. The district
offered several programs in association with a state college in Michigan, and as I took advantage of these opportunities, I found myself frequently reflecting on not only my surroundings, but also my own experiences as a teacher. Those early days from my first year seemed to keep popping up in my mind. What was wrong with my own training and preparation that made me so ill equipped to succeed in my initial days of teaching? What specific experiences, characteristics or attitudes contributed to my transition from hating teaching to loving it? Why did so many of the educators around me seem to hate it still? Why did so many of these unhappy teachers seem so certain that I would go back to hating my job if I would just “give it a little time”?

I wasn’t able to answer all of these questions, although the research to follow has helped me understand many of them in the time since, but I can pinpoint the time when I went from hating teaching to loving it. It was around late October that first year and although I was still dreading my job each day, I had resigned myself to stick it out. I had also begun picking the brains of other teachers in hope of gleaning a few tips for making it through the weeks with less and less damage. A lot of the teachers weren’t much help and my assigned “mentor” was practically knocking over the children to get out at 3:17, so I didn’t get much support there either, but a handful of people did open up to me. These few teachers, all of whom had many years of experience, didn’t fit the general mold of many of the others. They rarely complained, weren’t as cynical and seemed to get along much better with students, staff and parents. It was from these teachers that I encountered my first glimpse of resilience (although I had no descriptor for it at the time), and it was one of them who suggested that perhaps I should start a program for some of the gifted students, a
group that is often overlooked in favor of the children labeled “at risk.” Doing that, she said, would let me work on interacting with students without having to deal with the behavior problems that were always around in a regular education classroom. I followed her advice and started a school newspaper that met after school one day a week. From that moment, I began to find my focus, as I worked with that small group of students and was able to find some of the joy that had been missing. By Christmas I had more or less figured things out and, and by spring I was actually enjoying my days enough so that an outsider looking in would likely have not been able to tell there had ever been any problem to begin with. But I would always remember.

As my own level of scholarship continued to grow, I returned again and again to some of the questions that had been circling around in the back of my mind: "Why and how did all of this happen?" Why are some seasoned teachers still in love with their jobs, still excited, still joyful and inventive, while others, many others, didn’t give a damn and seemed to find no pleasure in their careers beyond the grim satisfaction of criticizing and complaining about nearly everyone and everything in the school? The term burned out seemed an apt enough description for this second group of teachers, but it wasn’t until I began researching the burnout literature that the term resilient emerged as the best term for the first group. Obviously, having spent a season at the beginning of my career in a state of burnout, it had become a priority for me not to have a repeat experience there if I could avoid it. Who were these resilient teachers I had observed and, more importantly, what would I have to
do to join their club? The search for the answers to those questions provided the purpose for this research study.

Purpose Statement

In my research, I addressed the specific problem of promoting resilience among elementary educators in urban schools. Although the literature has much to say on what causes burnout among many of the helping professions, particularly among educators, there has been significantly less in the area of resilience. The purpose of my study was to determine, using qualitative research methodology, what the common characteristics and experiences were among a small sample of seasoned elementary educators at urban schools, who have been identified as exhibiting the characteristics of resilience. For the purpose of this study, I will operationally define several frequently occurring terms for clarity. Although I will explore burnout and resilience in much more detail in Chapter II, for the moment the term burnout will be used to refer to teachers who, due to various occupational stresses are exhausted, depersonalized and feel a low sense of personal accomplishment. Resilient will refer to teachers who have encountered the same circumstances, but have transcended burnout and feel joy and satisfaction in their work. Resilient teachers experience a state of thriving despite conditions of adversity. Seasoned elementary teachers will refer to teachers who have been teaching in grades kindergarten through sixth for at least eight years. Urban will refer to elementary schools located within either the city of Detroit or one of the first-tier (urban fringe) suburbs, and have a majority of non-Caucasian students. Economically, schools that have a participation rate higher than 50% in the federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program (in addition to having a
majority of non-Caucasian students and a location in or around Detroit) will be included in my study’s definition under the term *urban*. Simply put, understanding what has made elementary teachers at urban schools resilient may be useful in helping future teachers avoid burnout and attrition as they join the profession. I chose to focus on teachers in urban schools rather than a sample from the general population of teachers for two reasons. First, the fact that the majority of research on burnout has been focused on urban environments (Abel & Sewell, 1999, p. 2), which would suggest that burnout is more prevalent among teachers there. The second reason for choosing to focus on teachers at urban schools exclusively comes from my own experience, which consisted of two years of induction at an elementary school in a suburb with higher SES and then eight years at an urban school with moderate to low SES. At the suburban school I didn’t see as many teachers who fit my working definition of burnout and I saw many teachers who appeared to be thriving. Meanwhile, at the urban school I have seen and have had to work with a great many teachers who suffer from various levels of burnout. These teachers would seem to have the greater need for knowledge about resilience, and are the ones I want my research to be able to help. This research, on a personal level, was important to me because I hoped it could shed light on what *I* can do as a teacher to stay resilient and that it might also allow me to help and inform my colleagues when they encounter stress and burnout.

Current research findings, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter II, suggest that one of the key consequences of burnout among educators is the intention to quit (Schwab, R., Jackson, S. & Schuller, R., 1986, p. 19). With attrition
as such an alarming problem (Bobek, 2002, p. 202) and the new focus on accountability requiring even more efficiency for educators, promoting teacher resilience is more important now than ever. However, it was not the purpose of this study to show a correlation between resilience and teacher efficacy. As research will show in the next chapter, burnout is essentially the absence of resilience, with feelings of reduced personal accomplishment (efficacy) as one of its key descriptors. To a reader for whom that reasoning is inadequate, I would pose this question: If your car needed repair and the following two mechanics (we will call them A and B) were available to choose from, which would you pick? Both are equally qualified, but A keeps his eyes glued to the clock in anticipation of the end of his shift, while grumbling ceaselessly about the poor engineering of cars “these days.” He is competent, but he just doesn’t care any more. Meanwhile, mechanic B eats, sleeps and breathes cars and seems to greet you and your grinding transmission as welcome guests. The choice is obvious. There is a need for resilience among educators, and the purpose of this study is to add to the knowledge base of what makes a teacher resilient.

I believe this study has the potential for significance because while there exists a large body of literature and research on teacher burnout, there is a much smaller one on teacher resilience. Most resilience literature and research involves a child’s resilience in stressful or traumatic circumstances and only a handful deal with teacher resilience. Some focus on the resilience of educators in urban schools, but the levels of schooling they cover and their findings are varied. For example some find that maintaining a focus on student learning is a key factor (Patterson, 2004, p. 6),
while others found a teacher's spirituality to play a major role (Stanford, 2001, p. 80). I believed that there was a need for a qualitative study of the personal characteristics and experiences of resilient elementary educators in urban schools. Urban schools have the higher rate of attrition (over suburban and rural) (Stanford, 2001, p. 75), and suffer from a lack of academic achievement in what is commonly known as the achievement gap (Young, Wright and Laster, 2005, p. 516). Establishing what makes up a resilient elementary teacher in an urban environment might help mitigate that crisis if the data produced can be feasibly incorporated into existing teacher education and professional programs in a manner that is more successful than the current attrition rate would indicate. I was interested in researching not just elementary teachers at urban schools, but seasoned teachers at those schools. My particular interest in studying seasoned, resilient teachers stems from my belief that these teachers will have had more opportunities to experience and overcome burnout than would those with less time in the profession, and therefore might have more to share.

As I have mentioned, I believed my study might be able to add to the knowledge base in the area of resilience, but it may also serve to validate the findings of other resilience studies, which I will discuss in later chapters. In addition to this, although my focus was on the experiences of the sample group, my own experiences played a small role in the data gathering process as well. I expected to find that the characteristics of resilience present in other studies would be present to various degrees among my research subjects, including support networks with colleagues and the development of their own professional skills (Bobek, 2002, p.203-4), and acting and making decisions from a set of personal values (Patterson, 2004, p. 5), but I was
also curious to see if forming personal connections with students emerged as a characteristic as well. Several years back, a guest speaker in a course I was taking spent a class session trying to convince the class (a group of teachers in a district serving primarily African American students) that for cultural reasons, the methods of pupil and teacher interaction practiced with white students was counter-productive when applied to many African Americans. He told us that in many cases teachers expect their students to perform and then bond with them based on whether or not, or how well the student completes the task. Often when students do not meet the teacher's expectation there is conflict, which causes stress in the classroom, which in turn can lead to burnout. For African American students, he argued, trust is a larger issue than most people realize and students that many teachers may have viewed as difficult or belligerent were simply in need of trust before they were willing to perform. African American students, he said, would go ten extra miles if they knew you cared about them, and if they felt you were connected. This lecture was an epiphany for me and both explained why working with the small group of students on the newspaper had improved my outlook on teaching (through forming connections with them as we worked and laughed and had a great time), and helped explain many of the other difficulties I had faced as well. Following the lecture, I put the speaker's principle into practice and I believe that it has been the most consistently successful activity in my teaching. I go to my students' basketball games and dance recitals, learn their pets' names and remember their birthdays. I tell them about myself and my own adventures outside of the classroom as well. Many teachers do that sort of thing, but I didn't always. There is a school of thought that argues that there should
be some distance between teacher and student so that the teacher is elevated and
commands respect. Since abandoning that type of thinking and devoting a great deal
of time to forming personal connections with students, many of the day-to-day
classroom stressors of student misbehavior and apathy have disappeared. Since they
know that I care about them, they seem more inclined to care about my expectations
for them. This, in turn, has helped me mitigate many of the stressors that I encounter
as a teacher and has promoted my own resilience. I was deeply curious about
whether or not this had been the case for the resilient teachers in my sample.
Although forming personal connections with students was not specifically listed as a
promoting factor for resilience in any of the resilience studies that my research has
uncovered, Nieto (2003) did mention it as an idea that veteran teachers who remain in
the profession utilize, and it was a characteristic and experience that I looked for as I
conducted my own research. I felt that establishing that forming personal
connections with students was a promoter of resilience would have positive
implications, because although many of the characteristics and experiences of the
resilient teachers in my study may or may not be feasibly integrated into current
teacher education and induction programs, I know that this particular aspect can. I
was exposed to it in a didactic classroom setting, and although it was not part of my
teacher education coursework, there is no reason that it could not have been.

Research Question

As discussed in the statement of purpose, my research question was as follows:

What are the personal characteristics and experiences common to a sample of
resilient, seasoned elementary educators teaching in an urban environment?
In addition to this research question, I planned to explore the data that I collected and ask a sub-question: Is forming personal connections with students a factor that members of my sample identify as having contributed to their own resilience, as was the case for me? As I have mentioned, there is some evidence within the general body of educational literature that personal connections play a role in teacher burnout and teacher stress. Although forming personal connections has not been found to be a key factor among the current studies that deal specifically with the resilience of elementary teachers in urban schools that I have researched, this could be due to the inadequate amount of resilience research in my specific area.

Rationale for the Study

From the preceding anecdotes about my own experiences with burnout and resilience, it should come as no surprise that for me, this was a very personal topic. I find it to be both fascinating and compelling, but who else might find significance in a study of the common characteristics and experiences of resilient urban elementary teachers? It is my primary goal that university faculty will. With the startling figures that illustrate new teacher attrition, it would seem clear that learning more about what makes some teachers able to thrive despite stresses and obstacles should be a priority. Speaking strictly from personal experience, my own teacher training consisted mainly of methods of instruction, assessment and curriculum. Nowhere in the program of study was there any exposure to, or preparation for the stresses and obstacles that teachers face in the classroom and school community. The university gave us an entire six weeks on how to find standard deviations and how to tell the difference between norm and criterion referenced tests, but not one single class session on best
practices for time management, or what to do if an angry parent confronts you. A decade has passed since my own induction, and some improvements may have surfaced in the way teachers are prepared for their jobs, but I found no research that showed a significant decline in the attrition rate in the past few years, and there have been only a handful of new studies on teacher resilience. Both of which suggest to me that there is still work to be done.

The findings of this study should also be of interest to elementary educators and administrators, particularly in urban schools. Knowing more about what experiences and characteristics resilient teachers have in common might aid administrators in making good selections from potential applicants, and may help current teachers, myself included, as they reflect on their own practice and try to grow as individuals. Finally, as burnout is a common occurrence among individuals whose work involves helping people (Weisberg & Sagie, 1999 p.333), resilience must also be a factor in careers beyond teaching. This study may be of interest to researchers studying resilience among other professions, such as nursing or social work.

Conceptual Framework

See figure 1 on the following page
Teacher attrition is one of the leading problems in the field of education. Research has found burnout to be one of the leading causes of teacher attrition. Burnout has been defined as a state in which a person suffers from:

- Emotional exhaustion
- Depersonalization
- Reduced feelings of personal accomplishment

Although all teachers may experience burnout at various points in their careers, some teachers suffer from it chronically, while others are able to transcend it. Teachers who are able to transcend burnout are referred to in my study as resilient. Resilience has been defined as, "The ability to adjust to varied situations and to increase one's competence in the face of adverse conditions" (Bobek, 2002), p. 202. Littler research has been done about what the characteristics and experiences are of resilient elementary teachers in urban schools.

Based on the current body of knowledge and research on resilience, I expect my research to show that resilient teachers at urban schools:

- Act and make decisions based on a set of personal values
- Place a high value on professionalism and on developing and improving their own teaching
- Have a support system among their colleagues, friends and family.

Based on my own personal experience, I expect my research to show that resilient teachers at urban schools:

- Form and maintain personal connections with their students
- In my experience, learning the value of making personal connections with students has helped promote my own resilience.
- I was able to learn the importance of personal connections with students at urban schools through a traditional university class (although not in teacher education)
- Therefore, I would make the assumption that many of the other characteristics and experiences that promote resilience may be taught to future teachers this way as well.

Teaching strategies and ideas that promote resilience as a part of teacher education may benefit new teachers and help deter new teacher attrition. This knowledge may be presented to future teachers in teacher education programs. Studying the characteristics and experiences of resilient teachers at urban schools should build new knowledge.

Poor teacher preparation has also been blamed for the high rate of attrition.
Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

Delimitations

The population to which generalizations may safely be made in this study is quite specific, although I believe my study can also have relevance to individuals outside of that population as well. The specific population delimited in my study referred to elementary teachers in urban schools. Although my sample consisted of educators having at least eight years of experience in an urban environment, those educators were experiences and characteristics that apply to, and may be cultivated among teachers at any point in their careers.

Limitations

Studying resilience comes with a certain amount of subjectivity. Who is to say whether a particular teacher is truly resilient or not? Were I to choose to use a large sample size and rely heavily on survey data, I might find my results skewed by responses from teachers who in actuality do not exhibit the characteristics associated with resilience. To prevent this, I planned to choose a small sample size (ideally seven, but no less than five), which I felt was necessary for me to conduct an in-depth and thorough qualitative study using several extensive personal interviews for each subject. My intent was that through this process, research subjects whom my initial informal inquiries had mislabeled as resilient would readily become apparent and could be removed from this study before the data analysis stage. I knew that unfortunately, using the small sample size that my research design called for might have caused several limitations. First, I predicted that this small sample size may not
have provide me with the large spread of data about the experiences and characteristics of resilient teachers that a study might if it used a larger sample. I thought that the specificity of my targeted research subjects may also limit the potential application of the knowledge the research would provide. More specifically, because I planned to limit my research subjects to seasoned elementary teachers at urban schools, I wondered if my goal of having the research data then available for teacher education and induction programs to use could then be limited. The data may be highly relevant to teaching candidates who plan to teach in an urban population, but would the specificity of my research subjects’ teaching positions keep what they have to say about resilience from being applied by future teachers in suburban and rural schools? I believed this was certainly a possibility. Another limitation worth mentioning is the strata of my study, by which I mean elementary teachers. There has been far more written in the literature about burnout and resilience among high school teachers, and although it is a plus that my study might add to an area of knowledge about which little had been written, the research suggested that the greater need for strategies that promote resilience was at the high school and middle school level.

Summary

Due to the large and problematic role that burnout plays in contributing to attrition among teachers, and because of my own experiences as a new teacher in an urban elementary school, forced to either become resilient or fail, I believed there was a need for greater understanding of what makes a teacher resilient at the k-5 level in urban schools. To promote new knowledge in this area, I planned to conduct a
qualitative research study using extended personal interviews, of what the characteristics and experiences were among a small sample of seasoned teachers at urban elementary schools in the metropolitan Detroit area. I would then examine the data I collected from my research subjects to determine if any of the characteristics and experiences they identified were things which may be facilitated, taught or fostered as a part of existing teacher education and induction courses. The next two chapters will explore the research that provided the foundation for my study, followed by a more extensive discussion of my research design, as well as my data collection and analysis techniques.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

My study’s purpose was to conduct a qualitative exploration of the common characteristics and experiences of resilient, veteran teachers in urban elementary schools. I planned to gather my data from between five and ten veteran teachers, each having at least eight years of classroom experience at urban schools in and around the Detroit metropolitan area, using extended personal interviews and field observations.

My review of literature had six areas of focus:

1. Resilience and burnout: What are they and how are they related?
2. What are the causes and characteristics of resilience?
3. Promoting resilience- Internal factors
4. Promoting resilience- External factors
5. Resilient teachers in the classroom
6. Resilience and teacher education/induction

Resilience and Burnout: What are they and how are they related?

In this section of my review, I will begin by defining both resilience and burnout in terms of the current literature, describe what has been written about the various dimensions of burnout and then discuss how the concepts of burnout and
resilience are not only related, but can even, in some cases, be characterized as opposite poles of a single state.

The idea of teacher burnout is not a cohesive concept, generally agreed upon within the field of education (like “phonics” or “transactional leadership,” for example), but is more comparable to a travel destination. Many people have visited, even more know someone who has been there, or have seen it from a distance, and so there is a general understanding of what the place looks, sounds and smells like. However, people get there by multiple modes of travel and along many different routes, and arrive at various points in their lives. People will interpret what they see there in many ways and are affected by their stay differently depending on the individual. Teacher burnout is like that. The literature, as I will shortly show, is in general agreement on what burnout looks like in the life of a teacher, but becomes much broader when describing the causes, consequences and treatment of burnout.

There are, however, elements and factors that emerge from one study to the next, and it is from these reoccurring ideas about what promotes or deters burnout that a picture began to emerge of what a resilient teacher looked like, and it was from there that the conceptual underpinnings of my own study began.

What is Burnout?

Much of the literature defining what burnout is funnels back to Maslach and Jackson’s study from 1981, where the researchers defined burnout as a condition having the core aspects of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and feelings of low personal accomplishment. Several other studies, including Schwab, Jackson & Schuler (1986), echo this definition. Others, including Brouwers & Tomic (2000) use
the same definition, but add to it slightly. Brouwers & Tomic, for example, use the same three aspects, but refer to burnout as a “psychological syndrome... that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity” (p. 239), and Hamman & Gordon (2000), mention physical and mental exhaustion in addition to the emotional exhaustion that Maslach & Jackson found (p. 34). Weisberg & Sagie (1999) describe this feeling of emotional, mental and physical exhaustion as the result of “a chronic state of cumulative pressure or stress at work” (p. 333). Byrne (1998) adds to this as well by indicating that burnout is not a one-dimensional state, “but, rather, is the end product of many elements” (p. 87). These statements and concepts are all reasonably congruent and circle around the same definition of burnout as a state where an individual is mentally, physically, and emotionally exhausted and has feelings of depersonalization and a reduced sense of accomplishment.

Who Experiences Burnout?

While common sense would indicate that under the right circumstances almost anyone could experience the symptoms mentioned above, research has shown that burnout is a phenomenon particularly evident in jobs that are considered “interpersonally oriented professions” (Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999, p. 2). Weisberg & Sagie (1999) echo this concept, noting that the symptoms of burnout have been found to be “prevalent in professional people such as teachers, social workers and police” (p. 333). The high attrition rate among educators (which I will discuss in detail later) also suggests that teachers have a high instance of burnout. Hamman & Gordon (2000) phrase teacher burnout well when they say:
Burnout can be compared to a cold. It’s not a matter of when you will get a cold, (almost everyone gets a cold eventually) - it’s more a matter of when you will get it, how severe it will be and how long it will last. If burnout symptoms are not detected early enough, or are left unchecked, however, they can intensify. (p.34)

**Symptoms and Characteristics of Burnout**

What then, are the symptoms of burnout? Physical, mental and emotional exhaustion, as well as a feeling of depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment are all symptoms implicit in the definition established earlier, but research has shown that there may be others as well. Weisberg & Sagie (1999) found that individuals suffering from burnout may develop “negative attitudes about one’s work and life,” and Byrne (1998) describes how at the time of a burnout attack, teachers “develop symptoms including feelings of malaise, fatigue and hopelessness” (p. 87). Hamman & Gordon (2000) list some of the symptoms characteristic of a person suffering from burnout as “sudden anger, frequent crying, yelling and screaming, boredom, high risk taking, increased drug and alcohol abuse, cynicism, and depression” (p. 34). They also describe a construct called “The Burnout Cycle” (p. 34), a series of five stages (Honeymoon, Fuel Shortage, Chronic Symptoms, Crisis, and Hitting the Wall) that comprise the entire spectrum of burnout.

“Honeymoon,” they say, is the first level of burnout, characterized by a loss of high energy. This first stage, they say, is one that most teachers experience a least once a year (p. 34). The stages increase in severity until a teacher arrives at the “Hitting the
Wall” stage. This level of burnout includes, “professional incompetence, impairment, and physical and psychological dysfunction” (p. 35).

Another study, this one by Byrne (1998) found that teacher burnout is likely to occur in the seventh year of teaching and then again in the tenth. Following that, he says, over the course of a teacher’s career, burnout “either attacks sporadically or is a chronic presence. Its presence brings devastating results affecting relationships with others, as well as affecting the physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual well being of the individual” (p. 89).

As one can gather, the symptoms of burnout are diverse, but many of those presented in the literature are focused within the context of the central symptoms of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and feelings of low personal accomplishment laid out by Maslach and Jackson. Schwab, Jackson & Schuler (1986), for example, report that emotionally exhausted teachers claim to feel “drained or used up,” and “are at the end of their rope.” They report that for these teachers, “waking up in the morning may be accompanied by a feeling of dread at the thought of having to put in another day on the job” (p. 14-15). Schwab, Jackson & Schuler go on to say that depersonalization is the result of emotional exhaustion, and that it is a strategy by which teachers “cope by depersonalizing their coworkers and students and put distance between themselves and others. They develop a ‘detached concern’, become cynical and feel calloused toward others in the organization” (p. 15). Vandenberghe & Huberman (1999) echo the concept of emotional exhaustion leading to feelings of depersonalization, and add that pupils, colleagues and principals “take emotional energy, but give little back” (p. 2). They go on to say that:
The quality of the relationship between teacher and pupils can be one of the most rewarding aspects of the teaching profession, but it can also be the source of emotionally draining and discouraging experiences. Because burnout has considerable implications for teachers' performance relative to pupils and colleagues— not to speak of the teacher's own well being— it is a problem with potentially serious consequences for both the teaching career and, more fundamentally, for the learning outcomes of pupils themselves. (p. 3)

Clearly then, the literature seems to suggest a link between the components of burnout. Emotional exhaustion fuels depersonalization. Teachers, I can say from personal experience, often put their heart and soul into their work and form close bonds with their pupils. When they become emotionally exhausted, they cope by putting distance between themselves and those around them. The close bonds deteriorate and elements of the teacher's work begin to suffer. While research shows that feelings of low personal accomplishment may develop separately of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, (Schwab, Jackson & Schuler, 1986, and Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999), the overall scope of the literature does present it as an interrelated aspect of burnout. As I reflect on what the research says, I would argue that while, as I have noted, there are symptoms of burnout outside of Maslach and Jackson's three main components, each of these others is actually a subcategory of those three (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment). Hopelessness, for example might seem to be a natural consequence for a person who is feeling a low sense of accomplishment, and anyone
who has ever lost a loved one or been through a divorce can tell you that a sense of emotional exhaustion can lead to physical and mental exhaustion as well. Cynicism, negativity and boredom, just to name a few, could easily be caused by depersonalizing one’s students, colleagues and administrators.

Consequences of Burnout

The research has much to say about how to characterize and describe burnout, but what does burnout do to a teacher? Hamman & Gordon (2000) argue that burnout may be “one of the leading causes of teacher ineffectiveness and a primary reason for a person’s decision to end a teaching career, especially among younger teachers” (p. 34). Weisberg & Sagie (1999) reinforce this when they state that a positive relationship has been found between burnout and a teacher’s intention to quit (p. 333) and that “Burned out individuals who are no longer able to tolerate occupational pressures and who are feeling totally overwhelmed by work are likely to reach a breaking point” (p. 333). The problem of burnout and attrition, they go on to say, is exacerbated by the fact that “many teachers are ‘locked-in’; they remain in the field of education and often in their jobs because of a low probability of finding another appropriate job” (p. 333). The aforementioned link between burnout and attrition, while a bleak prospect for the field of education, is only slightly less ominous than the last passage. That passages’ implication, that many burned out teachers stay in the classroom because of a lack of alternatives, is truly troubling to me because it is something I have run across in my experiences as a classroom teacher. Unlike the burned out teacher who moves on and is only a memory, the burned out teacher who would like to quit, but cannot, is a troubled face that returns, yelling and complaining,
year after year. My own experiences and observations of what burnout does to teachers are in step with what the literature has to say. Abel & Sewell (1999) describe several of the consequences of burnout as diminished job satisfaction, reduced teacher-student rapport, reduced pupil motivation and decreased teacher effectiveness in meeting educational goals (p. 287). Vandenberghe & Huberman (1999) state that “burnout has been linked to decrements in both psychological and physical well being and has been associated with various problem behaviors, both on the job and at home” (p. 1), and Byrne’s writing (1999) would seem to reinforce this:

Overall, teachers who fall victim to burnout are likely to be less sympathetic toward students, have a lower tolerance for classroom disruption, be less apt to prepare adequately for class and feel less committed and dedicated to their work. (p. 16)

Burnout, as the research and literature has shown here, is a serious and complex problem among teachers, and the next two sections will explore factors that promote and deter burnout in more depth.

First, I would like to return for a moment to the image of the yelling, complaining, burned out teacher that I described earlier. As troubling as it was for me to see those characteristics in other teachers (or in myself on occasion), especially when I was new (and the teachers showing the symptoms of burnout were well seasoned) there was another image that filled me with hope. A few teachers were at the same stage in their careers and teaching under the same set of circumstances, but were almost the exact opposite of the previously mentioned group. These teachers were excited about teaching and positive in their attitudes. They were well connected
with and respected by their students and eager to share ideas with me. I didn’t know it then, but these teachers fell into a category that the current research calls resilient.

**What is Resilience?**

Bobek (2002) presents the definition teacher resilience as “the ability to adjust to varied situations and increase one’s competence in the face of adverse conditions” (p. 202), and Patterson (2004) says it is “using energy productively to achieve school goals in the face of adverse conditions” (p. 3). Bernshausen & Cunningham (2001) present an even simpler definition of resiliency as “the ability to bounce back when faced with adverse conditions” (p. 3). Where burnout is a state of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion, combined with depersonalization and a diminished sense of accomplishment, resilience (although not nearly as thoroughly researched or discussed in the literature) is defined here as a state of thriving despite conditions of adversity.

**Connecting Burnout and Resilience**

As I began searching for literature on resilience it quickly became apparent that burnout, the negative extreme of a teacher’s state of being, had been studied to a much greater extent (in both volume and detail) than resilience. As I began to explore the literature in depth however, it soon became clear that burnout and resilience were not necessarily separate concepts, but rather opposite sides of the same coin. As I will discuss in section two, certain factors that were referenced in one article as mediators or reducers of the symptoms of burnout, were described in another source as promoting resilience.
Although in the first section I defined and described burnout and resilience separately (and will do so briefly at the beginning of the second section), based on what the literature has shown, I will proceed with my review of literature in the sections to follow by taking the position that since most of the characteristics of resilience would seem to be the opposite of burnout, factors that reduce burnout, should also promote resilience and vice versa. I will discuss the literature accordingly, in most cases dropping the term “burnout” for the sake of clarity, as I get deeper into the second section. In other words, a concept from an article about reducing teacher burnout, for example, while conceptually and textually unchanged in its presentation (in both quotations and in my own narrative), would be included and presented with data and information about promoting resilience to avoid confusion.

What are the Causes and Characteristics of Resilience?

In this section, I will begin with a discussion of the relationship between stress and resilience, followed by a list of factors that deter resilience or promote burnout. Next, I will describe what the literature and research have to say about the characteristics of resilience and finally how teacher retention or attrition and resilience are connected.

Stress and Resilience

Stress, as an area of study, has been around for decades and much research has been done to define and explore it. A great deal of research about stress has focused on educators, and so there is general agreement about what teacher stress is. Brown
and Nagel (2004), for example, drawing on previous research, define teacher stress as:

A response to negative affect usually accompanied by potentially pathogenic physiological and biochemical changes resulting from aspects of the teachers job and mediated by the perception that the demands made upon the teacher constitute a threat to his self-esteem and well being and by coping mechanisms activated to reduce the perceived threat (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1979, p. 89). (p. 35)

Resilience literature, while much more recent, does reference stress in many areas, although much of it involves listing stressors that deter resilience or promote burnout, which I will discuss in the next area of this section. Conceptually, how are stress and resilience related? Abel & Sewell (1999) explain that, “Prolonged stress can result in burnout” (p. 287). In other words, stress can deter resilience. Before the emergence of resilience literature, according to Truch (1980), the focus of managing burnout was largely based on stress management. Behaviors Truch recommends include deep relaxation, a positive attitude and awareness, regular exercise and diet (p. 58).

Teacher stress can be mediated and thus promote resilience in many ways. These include coping mechanisms that are “activated to reduce the perceived threat [to the teacher’s self-esteem and well being]” (Brown and Nagel, 2004, p. 35). A positive school climate may also mediate stress and promote resilience, as may preventative stress programs and healthy working conditions (Truch, 1980, p. 73). Both Truch and Brown & Nagel also describe the school administrator as an important mediator of stress.
While the literature describes how stress is a construct that can deter resilience and may include coping mechanisms to protect the individual as well as external mediators, much more has been written on the factors that actually cause stress in teachers. The following discussion will describe this in more detail

Factors that Deter Resilience or Promote Burnout or Both

As I explored the research and literature about burnout and resilience, several reoccurring causal factors kept appearing. The lack of empowerment, autonomy, or decision making power was consistently mentioned. Sparks and Hammond (1981, for example say, “Teachers often feel powerless....Powerlessness by itself does not produce tension and stress [but rather] feelings of failure and hopelessness often result from unrealistic goals, or working against the grain of a situation [italics added]” (p. 4-5) and Byrne (1999), finds that the lack of decision making power is a major source of stress for teachers (p. 25). The second most frequently mentioned factor in deterring resilience was the absence of a collegial or personal support system (Schwab, Jackson, & Schuler, 1986, p.16, Abel & Sewell, p. 288, Byrne, 1999, p. 25). These support systems may include other teachers, or friends and family, and serve as a safe environment for teachers experiencing stress to vent their frustrations, relax, or simply listen to others who are experiencing the same stresses and know they aren’t alone. The third and final frequently mentioned factor in deterring teacher resilience was the lack of administrative support. (Hamman & Gordon, 2000, p. 35, Dworkin, 1986, p. 169, Bobek, 2002, p. 203), which will I will cover in detail in the fourth section.
Many other factors are mentioned in the literature, and although I found none discussed as thoroughly as the aforementioned, several do seem worth including in this discussion. The first has to do with the teacher's personality. Brown and Nagel (2004) say that, "Studies have linked an association of burnout in human service fields to personality characteristics like idealism, excitability and compulsiveness" (p. 38). The notion of teachers being idealistic is logical enough, but Schwab, Jackson, & Schuler (1986) suggest that it may actually be a trait that can lead to burnout when expectations of what they can accomplish become unmet (p. 17-18). In other words, teachers come into the profession with the idealistic expectations, some of which may be unattainable given varying circumstances, and when they realize that their expectations are being unmet, they experience stress, which may deter resilience. Another factor that the literature suggests may deter resilience is role conflict (Byrne, 1999, p. 22, Schwab, Jackson, & Schuler, 1986, p. 16, and Howard and Johnson, 2002, Review of the Literature, ¶ 1). Role conflict exists when a teacher has obligations or responsibilities that may be in conflict with one another, and must make a decision. Like most teachers, I have experienced role conflict in my career on many occasions. Once, for example, a district produced a curriculum that was thrown together to save money and was substandard, in my opinion, and I had to decide whether or not to follow it. Following it, I thought, would not be in my student's best interest, although not following it would be insubordinate on my part. This instance of role conflict caused me a great deal of stress, as did others.

Byrne (1999) also mentions role ambiguity as a factor that may promote burnout (p. 22). Role ambiguity is similar to role conflict, although instead of
conflicting expectations or responsibilities, in this case stress is caused by a lack of clarity. Teachers are unsure of what they are supposed to do. Both of the previous factors are connected with a third factor in Byrne’s research, which is an external locus of control (p. 26). When teachers have an external locus of control, they feel that forces outside of their own power control their lives and activities. Individuals with an internal locus of control feel that they are in charge of their own fate. Among educators, those with an external locus of control may be teachers who feel powerless and experience stress that comes with thoughts like “Why is this happening to me?” or “I can’t do anything about it, so why bother?” Those with an internal locus of control take charge and feel that making changes or solving problems is within their sphere of influence. Also found to deter resilience was stress from clerical demands or bureaucratic duties (Abel & Sewell, 1999, p. 287, Patterson, 2004 p. 7).

Finally, Patterson (2004) discusses two relatively recent factors in deterring teacher resilience, which are the stress associated with accountability and standardized testing, which she claims may affect urban teachers (who usually have fewer resources) to an even greater degree (p. 3), and the stress that comes with reforms aimed at deterring burnout among educators, but which in the end actually end up promoting it (presumably through stress associated with change) (p. 2). The stress associated with accountability, particularly after the No Child Left Behind (2002) legislation is a common topic of discussion among myself and my own colleagues as it is that we, and many other teachers working in the United States after the first few years of the new millennium have experienced. You do not need a page of research citations to know that when a person’s job is threatened (as the jobs of
teachers in districts in danger of losing funds for underperformance are), it can lead to stress and deter resilience.

**Characteristics of Resilience**

What does resilience look like? Is it simply the absence of burnout, or is it's mirror image? Is it emerging into the light once more after surviving a dark period of burnout? The literature gives some insight into this. Patterson (2004) says that resilient teachers are those individuals who, "use energy effectively despite adverse conditions" (p. 3). Howard & Johnson (2002) found that:

Resilient teachers consistently demonstrated

1. **A sense of agency**- a strong belief in their ability to control what happens to them
2. **Moral purpose**- Belief in their ability to make a difference
3. **A strong support group and administrative support**
4. **Competence and a sense of accomplishment**

(p. 11)

These findings are supported by Patterson (2004), who describes resilient teachers as having a strong support system, making decisions that are guided by a personal set of values and placing a high value on professional development (p. 5). All of this information, when compared to the factors that promote burnout suggests that in some part, burnout and resilience are simply inverse aspects of one state. For example an external locus of control is a factor in the literature that research claims leads to burnout, while the sense of agency that Howard and Johnson show as a characteristic of resilience in the citation above is essentially an *internal* locus of
control. The same is true for a support group. The absence of one appears to lead to burnout, while the presence of one is a characteristic of resilience.

In the previous section, I demonstrated that a lack of empowerment among teachers was a factor listed by several studies as a promoter of burnout. Truch (1980) seems to argue for increasing empowerment as an avenue for reducing burnout and thus increasing resilience. "If it doesn't come, go out and get it. If it is still not there, create it. Do what you need to do." (p. 95). Patterson (2004) confirms this idea and the importance of the previous one as well, when she lists the key strengths of resilient teachers as: taking charge, having personal and professional support, and staying positive in spite of adversity (p. 4). Several other characteristics of resilience are repeated in the literature, particularly having a mentor (Howard and Johnson, 2002, Resilience: Competence ¶ 5), and mentoring others (Patterson, 2004).

High morale is another trait of resilient teachers, which Stanford (2001) described by, "a positive attitude, being enthusiastic about teaching, being involved in their work," and teachers who "are themselves" (p. 76) In keeping with high morale, Bobek (2002) finds a sense of humor to be a key factor in developing teacher resilience (p 202), which is a trait that I have tried to develop and incorporate into my own classroom practice. Many teachers who have attempted to do the same will tell you that on a day when nothing is going right, laughter can get you through and lift you up.

Other characteristics and factors are mentioned sporadically in the already sporadic resilience literature, but they, like a sense of humor, usually fall into one of the four main categories that the literature and research say makes up resilience: (a) a
strong support group or administrative support, (b) empowerment or an internal locus of control, (c) enthusiasm and a sense of purpose, and (d) professional competence or a sense of achievement.

Teacher Retention and Resilience

The need for resilience is evident in the body of research surrounding teacher attrition and retention data. Teacher attrition has been reported at over 30% for teachers in the first five years of teaching in the nation’s urban areas (Stanford, 2001, p. 75). Shen (1997) states that, “The retention of public school teachers has been an issue of continuing concern in education” (p. 81). Weisberg and Sagie (1999) describe how burnout, “leads to an early leaving of the profession and is a predictor of both thoughts about leaving and actual turnover.” (p. 333) Schwab, Jackson, & Schuler (1986) support this when they report that people experiencing high levels of emotional exhaustion (an aspect of burnout) were more likely to leave teaching (p. 26). Add to this the claim cited by Patterson (2004) that “resilience is a key factor in how a teacher will hold up in an urban school” (p. 3), and it becomes clear that promoting resilience is a crucial goal in the overall improvement of the field. This goal is addressed in more detail in the following section. First, however, I will discuss internal factors that promote resilience and then follow with a discussion of external factors.

Promoting Resilience- Internal Factors

This section is the first of two, which will review what the research and literature has to say about specific factors that promote resilience. These factors fall into two broad categories, which I characterize as internal and external. Although in
practice there may be some overlap depending on a particular teacher's locus of control, for the purpose of this section, internal factors may be thought of as things which come from within the teacher and external factors are that which comprises a teacher's environment.

Internal Factors that Promote Resilience: Professional development and career competence

A theme which stood at the top of all of the others as I examined internal factors was career competence. The literature repeatedly suggests that teachers who feel a sense of achievement or efficacy tend to be more resilient. Howard and Johnson (2002), for example, found that competence and a sense of achievement are dimensions of resilience that were linked in their study (Resilience: Competence and a sense of achievement ¶ 1), While Dorman (2003) found that "Teaching efficacy has a significant direct effect on personal accomplishment" (p. 44). Personal accomplishment, as stated in earlier sections is one of Maslach & Jackson's (1981) dimensions of burnout. In other words, the more competent you are, the more you will achieve and the better your chances of maintaining resilience. Bobek (2002) echoes this, and takes it a step further when she suggests that an important part in developing resilience is not just experiencing accomplishment and success, but "Being recognized for that success" (p. 204). She also says:

Teachers whose efforts are congratulated and reinforced may be better able to develop and maintain resilience, which enables them to be able to forge ahead despite other discouraging experiences. (p. 204)

But what leads resilient teachers to this stage of career competence? Patterson (2004) says it is due to the high value that resilient teachers place on professional
development. Her study found that resilient teachers were willing to do whatever they needed to do to get the necessary skills and training, including going outside of their district and seeking out other teachers (p. 6).

A second large idea was repeated often in the literature involving career competence and resilience is that of locus of control. Locus of control may be either internal or external, and generally refers to how you feel that events in your life are determined. If a person believes or feels that they are the victims of circumstance, or that powers beyond their control are guiding their decisions, they are said to have an external locus of control. In contrast, if a person feels that they have the power to guide their own destiny, they are said to have an internal locus of control. In his study on burnout, Dorman (2003) links this to resilience when he says that, “Clearly, teachers with an elevated external locus of control tended to have reduced self-esteem, which then reduced personal accomplishment” (p. 44). Howard & Johnson (2002) reported similar findings in their study. They use the term agency synonymously with locus of control, and found that it was a consistent feature of the resilient teachers in their study. Patterson (2004) also references an internal locus of control as a characteristic of resilient teachers when she says, “Resilient teachers are not victims. They take charge and solve problems.” (p. 5)

One final characteristic that did not fit neatly with either of the above factors (and yet is connected to both) is that of self-reflection. I have noticed in my own experiences that the more resilient teachers tend to examine their own practice from time to time in order to improve. Nieto (2003) draws on this concept:
Excellent teachers don’t develop full blown at graduation; nor are they just “born teachers.” Instead, teachers are always in the process of “becoming.” Given the dynamics of their work, they need to continually rediscover who they are and what they stand for...through deep reflection about their craft. (p. 125)

It stands to reason that while this self-reflection will aid in developing the career competence skills mentioned earlier, self-reflection is unlikely to occur without the internal locus of control also mentioned as a characteristic of resilient teachers. A teacher with an external locus of control will look outside themselves for solutions (or, more often, excuses), and are not likely to self-reflect in the first place.

**Resilience and Classroom Practice**

Many of the sections I am presenting on factors that promote resilience reference classroom practice to a greater or lesser degree, and the data I will collect will be strongly focused there as well. With this in mind, there are a few points worth mentioning in the existing literature about what specific practices are common among resilient teachers.

Bobek (2002) talks about one characteristic, which I have frequently observed among resilient teachers, and one that I have spent a great deal of time integrating into my own classroom instruction: *A sense of humor*. Humor, Bobek says, “Is vital to strengthening a teacher’s resilience. A teacher who cultivates a sense of humor and the ability to laugh at their own errors has an excellent medium for releasing frustrations” (p. 204). One of the more useful things that was passed on to me in my own teacher induction came from a veteran teacher who confided to me this simple
advice: “Play practical jokes on your students. Trust me; you’ll be glad you did.” He was right. In my class, for example, practical jokes such as a plastic skeleton arm hidden in a desk, or a trick deck of “psychic” cards (which fool some, but not all of the students, although no one has yet figured out the secret of how I always can guess whether the card is a circle or square or star and so on) always lightens the class’s mood and makes management much easier. Creating a classroom atmosphere that includes smiles and laughter has helped immeasurably in promoting my own personal resilience.

A second classroom practice of resilient teachers is adaptability, and it is discussed by Patterson (2004), who says, “Resilient teachers are not wedded to one best way of teaching and are interested in exploring new ideas” (p. 5). Another way of saying this might be, “Resilient teachers don’t fear change.” In my own experience, the more burned out a teacher is, the more changes in routine, scheduling, or technique (even small changes) can become a flashpoint for stress.

In the subsection about factors that deter resilience, I discussed unmet expectations as a promoter of burnout. One characteristic that resilient teachers share, says Patterson, is that in the classroom they “know when to get involved and when to let go” (p. 5). A teacher who attempts to solve every problem they encounter will soon find themselves frustrated. Resilient teachers, Patterson seems to suggest, realize that you have to choose your battles.

This notion of “when to get involved” is an appropriate transition into what will be one of the larger focuses of my own data analysis: Personal connections with students. As I noted in Chapter I, and will discuss in detail in section five of this
chapter, forming personal connections with students has been the most powerful promoter of my own resilience, but was not referenced in quantity within the resilience literature. Nieto (2003) does touch on this concept, however, and supports my own initial observations when she states, “Teaching is first and foremost about relationships with students...” (p. 122). She goes on to say that, “All teachers, whether new or veteran, also need to know more about the students that they teach” (p. 125).

Resilience and a Sense of Purpose and Personal Values

It is common knowledge that many teachers enter the profession so that they might “make a difference.” While research shows that this can deter resilience when a teacher’s expectations are unmet (Schwab, Jackson & Schuler, p. 17), other studies do support the notion that resilient teachers feel a moral purpose in their work and act and make decisions based on a set of personal values. Howard and Johnson (2002), for example, found that a moral purpose was a quality possessed by resilient teachers, but added that, “Far from being naïve, zealous crusaders, our participants seemed to have a pretty realistic understanding of what and how much they could do” (Resilience: Agency ¶ 2). Stanford (2001) reports similar findings where a moral purpose is concerned. Persevering teachers, according to her study, shared “A love and commitment to children, especially ‘these’ (urban) children” (p. 77). This sense of purpose is connected to another similar characteristic that research has found among resilient teachers, specifically a sense of personal values as a guide for decision making (Patterson, 2004, p. 5). Finally, one infrequently mentioned, but in my eyes a crucial internal component for resilience is a teacher’s spiritual life.
Stanford’s study of resilient urban educators (2001) found that, “Teachers’ spiritual and church lives were a strong source of support” (p. 79). Patterson (2004) also finds spirituality linked to resilience, saying:

> Although not solicited by the interviewers, 12 of the 16 teachers and teacher leaders [in this study] pointed to their personal spirituality as a source of resilience. Irrespective of the nature of spirituality, whether it was mainstream religion or metaphysical beliefs, these teachers reported turning to a higher power for strength on difficult days. One teacher reported [speaking about their resilience], “I pray a lot about it...A lot of it has to do with my faith. I don’t know that I would be this resilient without my faith.” (p. 6)

Spirituality is an internal characteristic of resilience that I have witnessed among many resilient teachers (and have similarly experienced myself), but like the notion of personal connections with students as a promoter of resilience, was rarely referenced. I was be curious to see if it would emerge among my research subjects.

**Resilience and Relaxation and Stress Relief**

Resilient teachers, like all teachers, encounter stress. Stress, in some form or another, is inescapable. It is, however, manageable and research shows that resilient teachers use strategies to relieve stress. If teachers can be taught to manage stress, according to Brown & Nagel (2004), it may benefit more than just the teacher (p. 39). Presumably, a teacher who can manage their stress properly is more effective in the classroom and healthier at home. Hamman and Gordon make several suggestions as to how a teacher might use stress relief and relaxation to deter burnout (promote resilience). These strategies include: Taking a stress reducing vacation, changing
one’s diet, balancing work with leisure, and exercise (p. 36). At first glance it might seem that these strategies may work for any stressed individual regardless of their occupation, but consider that teachers, particularly when they are driven by the moral purpose mentioned above see their work as more than just a job. Speaking from personal experience, we may often feel guilty taking much needed time off, even if it is so that we may be better able to help our students in the long run.

In the previous discussion, I have presented internal factors that research has shown to promote resilience. In the next section, I will discuss the far more thoroughly researched area of external factors.

Promoting Resilience- External Factors

While the research above shows that resilience is promoted by characteristics unique to the individual, research also shows that there are factors outside of a teacher’s own individual characteristics, experiences and personal decisions (although not necessarily outside of their control or influence) which can promote resilience. These external factors are by far the most thoroughly explored topic in the resilience literature that I examined. As I explored the research, these factors seemed to fall into five general categories, which are: administrative support, empowerment, and collegial and personal support systems.

Resilience and Administrative Support

The importance of having administrative support is illustrated well by Dworkin, who says, “It cannot be emphasized too strongly... that principals, much more than teachers or unions, have the power to alter the level of burnout in their schools” (1986, p. 169). He goes on to explain that teachers who see their principals
as supportive, “Are less likely to report feelings of burnout” (p. 158) Byrne supports this argument when she claims that empirical evidence has indicated a “significantly positive relationship between supervisory support and teacher burnout” (1999, p. 25).

My own observations are much in line with what the research and literature have to say on this topic. Much of my time as a K-5 teacher has been spent at a school with an exceptionally supportive administrator. We have high morale and have experienced very low attrition. Meanwhile, at another K-5 school (with an almost identical student population), many of my friends and coworkers have labored under a rigid, unsupportive principal whose teachers appear to experience higher burnout and who have a much higher attrition rate. These teachers would likely agree with Bernstein (1997) when she says, “A hostile environment strips teachers of morale, authority, and their natural love of teaching” (p. 63). Unlike internal factors such as career competence or personal values, which were discussed previously, administrative support may often be well outside of a teacher’s sphere of influence, yet the research continually demonstrates that it is a crucial element in promoting resilience. Byrne (1999), for example, found that problems with administrators were a chief cause of burnout (p. 87), and Bobek (2002) reports that:

A primary reason that teachers give for leaving the profession is poor administrative support....New teachers thrive in environments where school personnel endorse collaboration, flexibility and nonjudgmental attitudes and high expectations. (p. 203)

While this makes it clear that poor administrative support can promote burnout, it is conversely true that the presence of supportive administrators can promote resilience.
Brown and Nagel (2004) say that, “The principal of a school can be a mediator of stress... the principal’s responsibility is to create a positive work environment. In this environment teachers feel empowered” (p.38). Hammond & Onikama, (1996) agree, claiming that strong administrative support can protect teachers from being at risk (p. 6). Truch (1980) takes the concept of administrators as promoters of resilience in a slightly different direction, suggesting that principals who, themselves, are able to manage stress (burnout) effectively present a model for teachers to use (p. 73). Perhaps the clearest case is made by Friedman (1999), whose writing suggests an understanding of the multiple stressors that exist for teachers and how they are compounded by unsupportive administration. Friedman, writing about creating a healthier workplace for teachers says that:

Principals should provide the kind of support that reduces the effect of existing environmental stressors. This support should essentially be directed at increasing a teacher’s autonomy and sense of job satisfaction. The principal can take steps to boost teaching staff morale by allowing them, for example, to implement ideas that bring about success and encouraging them to tackle tasks or areas in which they perform well. (p. 175)

Friedman is talking about empowerment, of course, which is the external factor that promotes resilience that is focus of the next section. This is an appropriate spot to make such a transition, because despite the arguments of a few, who may claim that empowerment comes from within, I would argue that most public schools in urban districts are top-down, hierarchical structures, and without some measure of
empowerment from the upper levels, a teacher’s sense of accomplishment (present in resilience and absent during burnout) can disappear.

Resilience and Empowerment

The idea that giving teachers a greater hand in their own destiny and in decision making leads to increased resilience and reduced levels of stress and burnout is repeated often in the literature. Survey participants in Byrne’s study (1998), for example reported that the, “number one recommendation to those in power in order to cure or heal burnout would be to end the top-down style of management” (p. 88). Byrne (1999), in a separate study also discusses the problems that may occur if teachers are not empowered:

[A] major stressor for teachers is their lack of involvement in decisions that bear directly on the quality of their work life...Participation in the organization decision-making process has emerged as a critical factor in maintaining worker morale...teachers in general are permitted only minimal input into decisions that directly concern them... over time the cumulative effects lead to job stress and ultimately burnout. (p. 25)

When discussing causes and consequences of burnout among educators, Schwab, Jackson, & Schuler (1986) report that, “Several researchers (e.g., Maslach & Pines, 1977; Pines, Aronson & Kafry, 1981) have noted that the lack of control or autonomy on one’s job also leads to burnout” (p. 16). Bernstein (1997) elaborates on this concept in her narrative about the pitfalls present in schools with an unsupportive administration. She suggests that empowering teachers is important because:
When teachers can take part in the lifeline of a school, they feel a greater amount of ownership. They drive themselves to do more and receive great satisfaction from the success of the children. This success encourages them to do more, forming a constant feedback loop. (p. 66)

The success that Bernstein is referring to is another incarnation of the feelings of personal accomplishment that promote resilience when high, and create burnout when low. Shen (1997) found that teachers who had an influence over school and teaching policies were associated with lower attrition (p. 87), and Holloway (2003) supports this, saying “Fostering teacher empowerment can help schools keep experienced teachers in the classroom and increase their job satisfaction” (p. 88).

Each of these researchers and writers is adding their voice to an argument that is central to western thought: liberty is preferable to tyranny. They are arguing that a school where teachers are allowed input into decisions that will affect them should produce more resilient teachers than one where a dictatorial principal issues directives.

*Resilience and Collegial and Personal Support Systems*

Another external factor in promoting teacher resilience that the research frequently mentions is that of support systems, either collegial (among fellow teachers), or personal (among friends and family). These support systems can often help to improve situations where the teacher empowerment mentioned previously is missing. Truch (1980) writes:

If your principal doesn’t appear to be moving in the direction you feel is needed or if you feel that teachers need to have a mechanism for
communicating their feelings about the school in a positive way, then there is no reason why a group of teachers cannot effect these changes provided everyone is willing to work together… One of the healthiest things a group of teachers can do is to band together for a specific purpose. This can serve two needs: providing an emotional support system and a sounding board for current ideas and feelings among colleagues, and as a means of letting administration know, in an assertive, nonaggressive way, the teachers ideas for improving matters. (p. 76)

Key in this passage is the phrase “providing an emotional support system,” for as the literature has shown in earlier sections, as emotional exhaustion rises, resilience can drop and burnout can emerge. Patterson (2004) identifies creating a climate of personal and professional support as one of the “key strengths that bolster school leader’s resilience” (p. 4), and Hammond & Okinama (1996) suggest that personal support systems can protect teachers from being “at risk” (p. 6). This idea is echoed in several reports and expressed well by Sparks & Hammond (1981) who claim that in order to bolster a teacher’s self esteem in the stressful environment that surrounds a teacher, “it is extremely important that teachers find ways to assist and affirm each other in the school setting” (p. 15), and by Bernstein (1997) who says:

Teachers working in an unsupportive environment can burn out if they do not have a support system. When teachers band together they can provide encouragement, support, creativity and constructive criticism that can help a teacher thrive in the most hostile environment. (p. 63)
The passage above warns of burnout as a consequence of the absence of a support group, as do others (e.g., Schwab, Jackson & Schuler, 1986), and several researchers specifically cite that the presence of a support group directly promotes resilience. Stanford (2001) found that the research subjects who had persevered (i.e. shown resilience) had the support of “colleagues, their church communities, personal spiritual lives and family and friends” (p. 78), and Howard & Johnson (2002) found that the resilient teachers in their study all had “diverse, caring networks of family and friends outside school…. [and had] caring partners with whom they could talk about their work” (Resilience: A strong support group ¶ 1). Finally, Bobek (2002), suggest that new teachers:

May enhance their resilience by fostering productive relationships with people who understand the trials and tribulations of teaching… the relationships that new teachers cultivate provide networks of support that can ease the transition into teaching and help sustain new teachers over time. A new teacher’s support persons may include more seasoned teachers, administrators, and parents. (p. 203)

Anyone who has experienced the complex life that is teaching can speak to the potential for isolation that exists. We spend each day involved and interacting with our students, but have much less opportunity for interaction with our colleagues than do people in many other professions. This, combined with the various stresses mentioned in previous sections, can create an ironic situation where a teacher is surrounded by people all day (students), and yet isolated and often lonely at the same time. The research in this section suggests that such isolation can impact a teacher’s
emotional exhaustion (one of the three factors that promotes burnout), and that the presence of a support system can help mediate this, and when the support systems are strong and sustained, can promote resilience. In my own personal experience, my least resilient time in teaching was the first year (episodes of which I describe in some detail in Chapter I), which was— not coincidentally— the year in which I had the least amount of support, both at home and at school. For the past several years, as my own resilience has grown, I have maintained a stable core of three other individuals in my building to whom I can turn, and for whom I am available for support and advice. This support system has prevented my own emotional exhaustion on many occasions, and in turn has allowed me to help others do the same.

Resilience and Mentoring

Mentoring, an external factor that my review of literature found frequently mentioned as a promoter of resilience, is strongly connected to the support systems mentioned above. Mentoring is the process of having more experienced teachers guide those who are new to the profession through their first year(s) and support them by being there to listen and problem solve, offering advice when appropriate. Bobek (2002) reports that “New teachers are twice as likely to leave teaching after three years if they have not participated in some type of mentoring program” (p. 203), and Holloway, citing a study by Eberhard, Reindhardt, Mondragon, and Stottlemeyer, says, “Teachers in the study who did not receive such sustained mentoring had a smaller chance of being successful and making an impact as they gained experience” (p. 88). Schwab, Jackson & Schuler (1986) also support the idea that mentoring is crucial to building resilience. Their study suggests, as a strategy to reduce burnout,
"[The] encouraging of the development of mentor relationships between older, master teachers and new faculty so that issues of unrealistic expectations, reality of classroom life, and technical questions about teaching could be shared" (p. 27). In terms of promoting resilience, this relationship is not just beneficial to the younger teacher who is the recipient of the mentoring. Patterson (2004) finds that one of the commonalities of the experienced, resilient teachers who were her research subjects was having provided mentoring to others (p. 5), which suggests that the act of supporting others may offer a certain satisfaction that can promote resilience. I know from personal experience that helping newer teachers succeed and overcome obstacles can be as rewarding as watching my own students do well.

In the previous four subsections, I have discussed what research has to say about external factors that promote resilience. The three strongest factors, as evidenced by the frequency with which they were mentioned, were administrative support, teacher empowerment and the existence of collegial and personal support systems (including mentoring) for teachers. In the next section, I will discuss what, according to the literature, teacher resilience looks like in the classroom.

Resilient Teachers in the Classroom

Thus far, in my review of literature I have attempted to define resilience and explore its components and causes, relationship to burnout, and the internal and external factors that may promote or deter resilience. In this section and in the next, I will make a transition into the practical need for more resilient teachers, which is part of the motivation for my study and which will better inform my own research. This section will deal with several elements surrounding resilient teachers in the
classroom, and the following section will be concerned with resilience and teacher education and induction.

_Resilient Teachers in the Classroom: Attrition and retention_

The definitions of resilience, which I presented in section one, all boiled down into one central idea: thriving in the face of perceived or potential adversity. Although the data on teacher attrition and retention is not presented in the literature as explicitly due to an absence of resilience, by definition it would seem implicit that thriving teachers, by and large continue to teach and grow and are not the victims of attrition. Many studies list the attrition rates for teachers in the U.S., and most, like those cited by Bobek (2002), Brown & Nagel (2004) and Stanford (2001) put the rate at near 30% for the first three years and then jumping to 50% after five years, “while even higher attrition rates are found in disadvantaged (urban) districts” (Brown & Nagel, 2004, p. 34). Stanford (2001) reports that “over half of the teachers in the United States are expected to retire within the decade” (p. 75). The attrition data I cited previously suggests that the jobs these retiring teachers leave behind will be, in many cases, filled by new teachers, over half of whom will teach for less than five years, and if the trend continues, half of these will also leave and be replaced by more new teachers and so on. As with any other field, time on the job builds experience. I think of my own growth as a teacher, and while my early years were certainly filled with creative energy, the students who sit in my class now have a much better teacher than did those students who were present in the first classes at the beginning of my career. Dworkin (1986) brings to light a troubling issue. He points to the nation’s urban areas, already behind in resources, and suffering greater teacher attrition
numbers, which are forced to "expend a significant portion of their resources in attempts to reduce the level of teacher turnover" (p. 153). As my study deals specifically with resilient teachers in urban environments, this fact is particularly troubling. It is clear that many teachers choose not to continue to teach in this environment, but who are the teachers that do? What are their characteristics? The next subsection explores the role of resilient teachers in an urban environment.

Resilient Teachers in the Classroom: Resilience in an urban environment

In Chapter I, I operationally defined the term urban for my specific study as referring to elementary schools located within either the city of Detroit or one of the first-tier suburbs, and which have a majority of non-Caucasian students. I also included as urban those schools that have a participation rate higher than 50% in the federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program (in addition to having a majority of non-Caucasian students and a location in or around Detroit).

In examining the literature, the definition needs only to drop "the city of Detroit" and replace it with "one of the U.S.'s large population centers," as the scenario is similar in most large American cities. In this subsection, I will briefly explore some of what teachers are experiencing (with regard to resilience and burnout) in many urban environments. As I illustrated from my own experience in Chapter I, the difference in working conditions between urban schools and their suburban counterparts can be stark. I left student teaching in a suburban district with moderate SES eight years ago for a teaching position in an urban district that is even now, struggling to catch up (both in technology, and curriculum development) to where they were then. It is frustrating. Abel & Sewell (1999) report on the
challenges facing urban districts, finding in their study that teachers in urban districts suffer from:

Significantly greater self-reported stress [than their rural counterparts]...from poor working conditions, that is, inadequate salary and poor promotion prospects, lack of recognition for good teaching, and lack of or inadequate equipment and resources for teaching, and poor staff relations, that is, lack of friendly atmosphere among staff and lack of support among colleagues and from the administration [italics added]. (p. 289)

This is even more troubling when one considers that two of the three main external promoters of resilience (administrative support and collegial support systems) are mentioned here specifically as deficiencies. Patterson (2004) says that, “Resilience is a key factor in how well a teacher will hold up and perform in an urban school” (p. 3), and from the previous passage it seems clear that the schools for whom resilient teachers are needed most are missing the external factors that can promote it! Abel & Sewell also found that urban teachers were more likely to, “feel little recognition for good performance and were also more negative in their evaluation of the school curricula, academic standards and level of funding” (p. 290).

So who stays and teaches in urban districts? Dworkin (1986) found that, “The more a teacher defines the composition of the student body as desirable, the less likely it is that the teacher will report having experienced burnout” (p. 155). He also found that, “The more a teacher is racially isolated from the student body, the more likely it is that the teacher will plan to quit teaching” (p. 155). Essentially then, teachers whose race is that of the students they teach tend to stay, as do teachers who
have a positive view of that race. To really understand this concept and put it into context, consider Shen's (1997) finding that, "after controlling for district differences, Black teachers are less likely to leave teaching than White teachers" (p. 82). Although other factors (such as career goals) may play a part, this could suggest that African American teachers are likely to be more resilient than White teachers. I was curious to see if my own research would be able to address this issue in any way.

**Resilient Teachers and Student Achievement**

The connection between resilience and student achievement is implicit in the definition of resilience (and, to a degree, burnout as well). Resilience is thriving in the face of adversity, and, if looked at as the absence of burnout as well, a lack of emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization and the presence of high feelings of personal accomplishment. For a teacher to be thriving and have high feelings of personal accomplishment, students must necessarily be achieving. That is what teachers are here to accomplish. Holloway (2003) reinforces the connection between a teachers sense of accomplishment and student achievement when he reports that, "most teachers derive personal satisfaction in seeing improved student achievement" (p. 88). Patterson (2004) adds to the connection between student achievement and resilience when she suggests that one of the main things teacher leaders can do to promote resilience is to, "maintain high expectations for students" (p. 4).

Just as resilience seems to have a positive effect on student achievement, the absence of it (and the presence of burnout) can have a negative impact. Abel & Sewell (1999) report that one of the consequences of burnout is, "decreased effectiveness in meeting educational goals" (p. 287). Dworkin (1986) also finds a
link between attrition (which I have shown to be an effect of burnout in section 1), and low student achievement. Dworkin says that “the higher the level of teacher turnover in a school, the lower the achievement gain of students assigned to that school” (p. 162). Clearly then, in the area of student achievement, promoting teacher resilience is a factor worth consideration.

Resilient Teachers in the Classroom: Personal connections with students

In Chapter I, I described how forming personal connections with students, more than empowerment, or collegial and administrative support, was what has kept me resilient in the latter half of my career so far. I’ve found that forming these connections, (which is not the same as trying to make friends- maintaining the boundaries of roles and retaining respect and authority set such relationships apart from friendships) is more about knowing who they are beyond the work they turn in: their family life, their dreams and interests, and in turn sharing stories and experiences from my own life as well. It is a process that in my experience, has made students more willing to put forth their best effort. Forming personal connections is about developing mutual trust, and in the end, who does not work harder for someone they trust? As time passed, these connections grew beyond the students to connections with the students’ families as well. A student and their family led me to a church, and another’s family regularly includes me in family functions. A student’s family even handled the mortgage on my home. I often get odd looks from some of the other teachers who prefer to keep a distance from the population of people they serve, students and parents alike, but for me this has created a sense of community that is deeply satisfying. I said in Chapter I that I was curious to see if any of my
research subjects shared this as a characteristic that has promoted their own resilience, since stated links between resilience and personal connections in the literature I explored was slim and oblique at best. Nieto (2003), however, does seem to share my view, claiming in a discussion of teacher resilience that, “Teaching is first and foremost about relationships with students,” and that “all teachers need to know more about the students they teach” (p. 125). Friedman (1999) presents the need for personal connections with students as a way to create a healthier work environment for teachers. He argues that among the many steps to this end:

the level of primary importance involves relationships between teachers and pupils (Friedman, 1995d). Freidman and Krongold (1993) indicated that pupils seem to need to receive warmth from their teachers and feel that teachers should offer them guidance, advice, and assistance in solving personal as well as learning problems. They expect teachers to relate to them not only as their students, but also, and more important, as individuals with feelings, needs and difficulties. Even during classes, pupils expect the teacher to treat them with warmth...Teachers too appear to prefer a warm relationship with pupils and perceive expressions of closeness with their students as signs of personal and professional esteem. (p. 174)

This passage by Friedman supports my own experience with personal connections impacting resilience, and conversely, Able & Sewell (1999) report that one of the consequences of burnout is, “reduced teacher-pupil rapport” (p. 287). This leads me to ask the question, is the act of forming personal connections with students a factor
that may promote resilience or a characteristic of resilient teachers? Again, I was looking for my own data to provide insight.

Resilience and Teacher Education and Induction

The sixth and final section in my review of resilience literature deals with what the research has to say about how teacher education and induction programs impact resilience. Since there is such a small body of data on this topic, I will present the different areas all within one section and eliminate the use of subsections.

Why consider teacher education as a component in a study on resilience? Bemshausen & Cunningham (2001) report that one of the most common reasons that teachers cite for attrition is "lack of adequate preparation" (p. 3). As I mentioned in Chapter I, my own preparation certainly left much to be desired. But could university programs realistically "teach" resilience? Certainly external factors like administrative support and teacher compensation are out of the question when it comes to resilience promoters that can be taught in a classroom, but internal factors such as career competence, finding a sense of purpose, and forming personal connections with students could be taught (and forming personal connection was taught in my own case). Research supports the idea of resilience as a teachable concept. Howard and Johnson’s (2002) study reports that "all our teachers believed that they had learned the strategies and dispositions that made them resilient" (Conclusion ¶ 3). Bemshausen & Cunningham (2001) go a step further, suggesting that, "A major goal of pre-professional teacher preparation must become the development of resiliency" (p. 4).
How do researchers suggest improving university courses and content with regard to resiliency? Dworkin (1986) says that changing the method by which teachers are introduced to the field is the answer. He claims that after receiving their degree:

they [teacher candidates] should also serve as interns in school districts, serving under the guidance of master teachers. These internships would differ from practice teaching [student teaching] in that the teacher candidates would be supervised closely by the master teachers and socialized into the organizational environment of the school. In short, the internship would approximate the resident training of medical school graduates or the clerkships of law school graduates. (p. 167)

In addition to incorporating the added rigor that Dworkin suggests, researchers have also argued for improving teacher education (where promoting resilience is concerned) by altering the focus from strict classroom instructional delivery to the more social aspects as well. Friedman, for example, (1999) writes that:

Teachers must be equipped with skills to help them in their classroom leadership role--in particular those skills involving the “social” aspect of classroom life (ability to create class solidarity, support, and nurturing the group’s sociability). Promoting this aspect of teaching during early training or inservice training may assist the teacher in overcoming work-related stress. (p. 175)

And Nieto, (2003) when discussing ways to keep teachers in the field, argues for “a major shift in the culture of teacher preparation,” arguing that too often teachers
“enter the field with very little idea of what to expect in [actual] teaching” (p. 124). She goes on to say that instead of simply focusing on methods and procedures, teachers need to know that teaching is also “a way of thinking about learning and [about] one’s students, and of what will be most useful for them” (p. 125). It would appear from this passage that Nieto is suggesting learning the value of personal connections in the pre-service experience, which supports my own thinking, based on the personal classroom experiences I described in Chapter I.

Other researchers approached improving resilience among future teachers by dealing directly with the factors that promote resilience. Bernshausen & Cunningham (2001) suggest, when considering how teacher education programs can improve the resiliency of the teachers that it is preparing, that the following questions should be addressed:

1. **Competency.** In what ways are individual and group competencies [career skills] developed?...
2. **Belonging.** In what ways are educators encouraged to belong? [this dovetails with the idea of support systems]...
3. **Usefulness.** In what ways are educators encouraged to feel useful? [a sense of achievement]...
4. **Potency.** How is the educator made to feel potent? [empowerment]...
5. **Optimism.** Feelings of competence, belonging, usefulness and potency lead to optimism once a person reaches a sustainable level of resiliency. (p. 6)
These notions address most of the major internal and external factors of resilience, although they lack the more specific details that a complete program suggestion might include. While Bernshausen & Cunningham focused on promoting resilience, Brown & Nagle (2004) suggest preventing burnout by the “integration of stress management techniques” into existing teacher education programs, suggesting that the induction experience (and not the first year of teaching, as it is for so many) ought to be when a teacher learns how to “identify and manage sources of stress” (p. 39).

Each of these suggestions by researchers addressed specific factors of burnout and resilience addressed in earlier sections of this chapter, but none give the level of specificity that would seem necessary to effect real change. I was curious to see what clues my own research would give on how teacher education impacts resilience.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented a definition of both burnout and resilience, and described the ways in which they are connected. From the literature I have presented an operational definition of resilience as a state of thriving despite conditions of adversity. I explored the causes and characteristics of resilience, as well as the internal and external factors that research says can promote it. I found the primary internal factors to be:

1. The level of career competence
2. A teacher’s classroom practices (such as a sense of humor, expectations, adaptability and personal connections with students)
3. A sense of purpose/ internal or personal values
4. Relaxation and stress relief strategies
The external factors I found consisted of:

1. Administrative support
2. Teacher empowerment
3. Collegial and personal support systems
4. Mentoring (both providing and receiving)

Next, I showed examples of how the literature describes resilient teachers in the classroom, focusing on attrition and retention, and on the urban environment that is the focus of my own study. Finally, I described the strategies that researchers suggest for improving teacher education, strategies which largely deal with promoting the internal and external factors mentioned in sections three and four of this chapter. This data provides a good debarkation point for my own research, the methodology for which will be the focus of the next chapter.

As I completed my review of literature, I was looking forward to examining the data my own research subjects would provide to see if it confirmed or conflicted with the internal and external factors mentioned in Chapter III. I was also curious about whether or not any of them shared the factor of forming personal connections with students, the element that had been so central to my own resilience.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

To help me most effectively facilitate my research on the qualities and characteristics of resilient teachers, I decided to use a qualitative research design. Although the term *qualitative* is as recent as the 1960s, the strategies and approaches that researchers employ to conduct it have been used among anthropologists and sociologists for over a century (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 2), and have been implemented among educational researchers as a response to quantitative strategies that too often created contrived situations “in which the research participant was placed within an experimental situation far removed from his or her personal experiences” (Creswell, 2005, p. 42). In contrast, qualitative research takes place in a more natural environment. A qualitative researcher “often goes to the site of the participant to conduct the research. This enables the researcher to develop a level of detail about the individual or place and to be highly involved in actual experiences of the participants.” (Creswell, 2003, p. 181). Qualitative research methods enable a researcher to develop an in-depth understanding of the topic and embrace active participation from the researcher. Clearly, as I described in Chapter I, I had a personal interest in, and experiences with teacher resilience that would inform my own research and influence my interpretation of data. Qualitative research

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acknowledges this phenomenon among researchers, and in many cases even utilizes it to guide the researcher as the study emerges.

Qualitative research that used elements of both *phenomenological* and *narrative* design seemed the optimum choice for my research because it was congruent with my belief that the lives, stories, and beliefs of the educators who will be my subjects will be my best source of data about their resilience. Clandinin & Connely (2000) define narrative inquiry as, “a way of understanding experience.” They go on to say that:

It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place, or series of place, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories and experiences that make up people’s lives, both individual and social.

Simply stated...narrative inquiry is stories lived and told (p. 20)

Narrative research is a distinct form of qualitative research, with it’s own special advantages. Creswell (2005) argues that:

For educators looking for personal experiences in actual school settings, narrative research offers practical, specific insights. By conducting narrative studies, researchers establish a close bond with the participants...Additionally, for participants in a study, sharing their stories may make them feel that their stories are important and that they are heard...In this way, narrative research captures an everyday, normal form of data that is familiar to individuals. (p. 474)
It is both this bond between the participants and me as the researcher, and the
familiarity that people have with storytelling, that I believed would help my research
subjects convey to me a higher quality data than a survey or questionnaire, or another
type of qualitative research would provide. To put it another way, if a researcher
wanted to gather data on the qualities and characteristics of my own resilience as a
teacher, the only way I could give them any substantive data would be after a period
of reflection and dialogue. I didn’t think I could encapsulate my own resilience on a
survey. With this in mind I needed to get to know my own research subjects in order
to understand what had made them resilient and how they have maintained it.

Yet these elements of narrative research are only the “how”. The “why” of
my study was more closely related to the domain of phenomenology. Yes, I was
interested in the narratives of my research subjects, but that interest existed within the
context of what those experiences said about the overall phenomenon of resilience.
Creswell (2003) describes it as research “in which the researcher identifies the
‘essence’ of a human experience concerning a phenomenon, as described by
participants in a study” (p. 15). He also lists the procedures used in a
phenomenological study as quite similar to what I intended to do (and which I will
describe in the following pages), explaining how, following the presentation of
questions to sample members, “The investigator then collects data from individuals
who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation. Typically this
investigation is conducted through long interviews” (Creswell, 1998, p. 54).

Following these two methodologies, I thought a snapshot of my study would,
ideally, be as follows: After reflecting on what research has said about the teacher
resilience among elementary teachers at urban schools, I would personally contact various individuals in the field of education (administrators, curriculum specialists, and fellow teachers primarily) whom I know have experience working in urban districts. I would explain my research in person, and network with them to help identify ten (or as close to ten as possible) teachers who fit the definition of resilience that I have established in this research. After obtaining permission from the potential research subject’s supervisors (where applicable), I would contact each personally first in writing, then via telephone or school mail, explain the purpose of my study and inquire about whether or not they might be interested in participating.

The amount of contact time would ideally be three one-hour interviews (or more depending on the level of rapport I could establish).

Of those ten I estimated that seven would consent to participate in my study, but as few as five would have been acceptable provided they were from different districts.

Next I planned to conduct in depth tape-recorded (where consent is given) interviews with each subject. Ideally, the interviews would be in each subject’s classroom. Conducting interviews in the classroom when possible would allow me to collect notes of physical data and provide a “feel” for the narrative I was to collect. Such data may be useful in either reinforcing or lending doubt to the subject’s narrative.

These interviews would be only semi-structured. I would have a set list of questions, but my main goal would be to collect data that emerges in dialogue rather than as direct answers to questions.
When all of the data had been collected, I planned to transcribe it into document form, code it by theme and then analyze it for patterns. I would then interpret this data within the context of established theory and present a summary of my findings.

To provide a more detailed picture of how the steps I have outlined above would look in practice, as well as the rationale for my choices, the rest of this chapter will describe in greater detail my sample, strategies of inquiry, data collection methods and data analysis techniques.

Population and Sample

As I mentioned in Chapter I, the population from which I planned to draw my sample would consist of elementary teachers who have been working in an urban environment (see Chapter I for operational definitions of urban and elementary) for at least eight years. I was interested in teachers with at least eight years because, according to the literature cited in Chapter II, attrition is highest within the first five years of teaching (Bobek, 2002, Brown & Nagel, 2004, and Stanford, 2001). Teachers who are still in the classroom after eight years are obviously not victims of early attrition and presumably these teachers have had more time than a newer teacher to both accumulate experience and wisdom to have developed skills and strategies to promote their own resilience. Limiting my sample to teachers working in an urban environment was obvious enough, given my area of interest and the background setting for my own career. I wanted to understand what makes teachers in an urban environment resilient. My focus was not on suburban or rural teacher...
resilience, and so including them in my sample would not have provide me with the data I was seeking.

Given the large amount of time that would be required to gather, transcribe, code and interpret and analyze the interview data that my narrative research design calls for, I believed my sample size must necessarily be low in order for the project to be manageable. With this in mind I felt that ideally seven, but no less than five research subjects would give me enough data to maintain a measure of validity, while still remaining manageable. Additionally, as I explored the data and research about resilience, I found that several studies with similar designs used comparable sample sizes, including Nieto (2003), Howard and Johnson (2002) and Patterson (2004), so I believed that my intended number was not unreasonable.

Strategies of Inquiry

As I have presented in the previous section, I planned to study a phenomenon using narrative inquiry methods. Narrative research is concerned with the stories of individuals. It is a form of research that spans all of the human sciences (Creswell, 2005) and is still developing. Narrative research is particularly relevant in the field of education today, as Creswell illustrates:

First, there is an increased emphasis of teacher reflection. Second, more emphasis is being placed on teachers' knowledge- what they know, how they think, how they develop professionally, and how they make decisions in the classroom. Third, educators seek to bring teachers' voices to the forefront by empowering teachers to talk about their experiences. (2005, p. 475)
Narrative research may take many forms, but is consistent in that it (a) collects the stories and experiences of individuals, (b) codes the stories for themes, and (c) includes elements of collaboration between the researcher and participants.

I would like to share a final thought on phenomenology. Essentially, phenomenological research is similar to narrative research, but while narrative research often only explores the lives of one or two individuals, phenomenological research looks at the experiences of several in order to understand the essence and meaning of a phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). While that may sound a great deal like what I intended to do, and I suppose it is a lot like what I intended to do, I’m not prepared to say unequivocally that this study was a phenomenology rather than a narrative study. Ultimately, phenomenological research is philosophically based, where my research aim was rooted in practicality and problem solving. I wanted to collect these stories for the simple purpose of helping other teachers to become more resilient.

I believed that using narrative research would influence much about how I asked questions, and the steps of my data analysis, and while I will go into greater detail in the next two sections, let me say for now that the primary difference that using a narrative design had on questioning and analysis was that I believed my questions would be primarily for prompting rather than for specific responses (which did not always turn out to be the case, as I will discuss later.) I felt this way because in narrative research, the data emerges in the form of stories, and it is in these stories that the qualities and characteristics of resilience would emerge, rather than one or two sentence responses to specific questions. In the analysis phase, the primary
difference would be that I would rely on coding the sections of each story or experience for themes, although I would be adding to this coding the phenomenological research design element of exploring emerging patterns as well.

Data Collection Methods

Subjects

How then, would my data collection be conducted in actual practice? Let me begin with the individual research subjects. In qualitative research, particularly narrative research, the subjects are usually purposefully selected, and I decided that mine would be no exception. As I have discussed in several previous sections and chapters, my subjects would be elementary teachers with at least eight years of teaching experience in the elementary classroom, and who would be identified, either by my professional contacts, or by myself as having demonstrated the established traits of resilience. In plain speech this meant that my research subjects would be seasoned teachers from urban districts who, although having worked under adverse conditions, appeared to have been able to thrive and still find joy in teaching. Once I had identified these individuals, and had received consent to contact them (where applicable), I would do so. I planned for my first contact with the individuals that I personally knew and had identified as having characteristics of resilience would be in a face to face setting, where I would explain what my research was about and inquire if they were interested in participating. For the teachers whom my contacts had identified, I planned to contact them via email or US mail initially, although if they and my contact were close, I planned to try to arrange a phone call if my contact was able to do so without any awkwardness. My reasonably informal approach to
research subject acquisition was not this way out of a lack of scholarly savvy, or professionalism. As a teacher, I am familiar with the bulk of “junk” mail that swarms into a teacher’s box (both digitally and physically) each day, and considering how little time most teachers have at their disposal, I know my chances would be better to receive consent if a person first heard of my project in person, from another person than as a clinical name on a sheet of stationary, especially when one considers the level of trust that must be present if one was to share their personal and professional stories with me. I know that were I approached as a study participant by a researcher, unsolicited envelopes would get little attention, while a personal invitation, either from—or through someone I know would at least get an audience with me. Assuming I could get verbal consent in this way from the ideal seven out of ten of my research subjects (and provided, from verbal probing in my initial conversation with them, that they seemed to have some of the cursory identifiers of resilience that match what I have been told about them), I would next provide them with a written document (Appendix A) explaining in moderate detail who I was, and what I was studying, as well as a prompt to begin their own reflection on resilience. I would also give them any required university consent documents that they needed to attend to. Following that we would schedule the actual interviews that would produce my study’s data.

Setting

I had hoped for the setting for my interviews to be in the teacher’s current classroom whenever possible. I would not discount a teacher who, for example, could only find time to meet with me on a weekend and couldn’t gain access to their building at that time, but I would push as much as possible for the interviews to take
place in the teacher’s daily environment. Doing so, I felt, would afford me the chance to gather data beyond the classroom by allowing me to collect field notes of my observation of the teacher’s physical environment, which might, in some cases, provide insight that may support or contradict the teacher’s words, or even give information beyond what they are saying, either by inference or by prompting me to ask questions that give information which might not otherwise have been supplied.

It was unlikely that I would be observing the teachers as they actually taught, however. Despite the fact that research has shown resilient teachers as individuals who value collegial relationships, and despite the many tips and bits of advice that one teacher can almost always offer another when they get together and talk, it had been my experience that teachers in urban schools are often leery of letting outsiders observe their work. There are several reasons for this. First, in my experience, urban schools often suffer from a pejorative administrative structure where teacher observation is not meant as a constructive collegial tool to aid in a teacher’s growth, but as an evaluative and often punitive moment where a teacher’s success is measured by how quiet and well behaved a teacher’s class is and how neatly his or her lesson plans are laid out. From this they (or we, if I am to be truthful), develop a suspicion of visitors that was something I was well aware of and planned to respect, unless I was invited to observe. Additionally, my research was concerned with the characteristics and experiences of resilient teachers, and I am of the mind that although watching a resilient teacher give a math test (while his or her class puts on their best and most artificial “visitor behavior”) may have provided bits of insight, the true data would be
in the stories that teacher has to tell and from memories of moments in the past that no outsider was there to see.

*Types of Data*

As I have mentioned in the previous section, I would be conducting interviews as my primary data collection tool. These interviews, I had hoped, would be only semi-structured, with questions that were meant to guide the dialogue rather than elicit a specific response. The interviews would be tape-recorded (provided the subject consented) and would be conversational and informal in their delivery. As I have mentioned in previous chapters, I was of the mind that a person engaging in an informal dialogue with a fellow teacher is more likely to feel the comfort necessary to share a personal story than a research subject who feels “studied” by a detached clinician. I would, when appropriate share my own experiences with the subject. I would also, in the event that an interview was flagging, or if the dialogue with the participant was headed in a direction that is clearly not relevant to my research (and I was aware that even things which seem irrelevant may provide insight when fully examined in various contexts), use a set list of specific questions (this is included in my interview protocol and will be discussed shortly in the section on data recording procedures) if it seemed necessary to facilitate a more productive interview.

In addition to the interview data, I would also take detailed field notes of both the setting and the participant as I conducted the interviews. These field notes would be added to the recorded interview data at analysis time and would, I believed, be useful in both confirming or disconfirming various characteristics and experiences of
resilience for a particular teacher, and in identifying patterns within the body of data as a whole.

I foresaw both advantages and disadvantages to using these particular data collection methods. One particular advantage that stood out where interviews are concerned is that the researcher has an opportunity to question the research subject about their responses, which can be a valuable tool in establishing validity. For example, if data is collected as a written response on a survey, the researcher may be hindered from a deeper understanding of the data by factors beyond their control, including a possible lack of context, the mood of the respondent, or the level of honesty with which they have responded. In an interview setting, however, if a response is unclear, unexpected or even dubious, the researcher has an opportunity to pose questions that may aid in establishing clarity, context and understanding.

Similarly, participants who may not be able to take the time or effort out of their busy days to write autobiographical or historical anecdotes may be more willing to provide such data in a setting where sharing is as simple and as natural as holding a conversation.

Advantages to using the personal observations and field notes that I felt would accompany my interview data included: the ability to notice and record data that the research subjects themselves may not be aware of or perhaps had not noticed, the opportunity to comment or reflect on the how congruent the interview data provided by the subject is with both their environment, demeanor and personality, their own previous comments (useful for establishing validity), and the opportunity to have a safety net in the unfortunate event that any recording equipment should fail.
I believed that some of the limitations present when using interview data included the fact that the data will be "'Indirect' information (that is) filtered through the views of interviewees" (Creswell, 2003, p. 186). Creswell also points out that the very presence of the researcher in the interview setting may cause a bias and that not all of a researcher's subjects are going to be equally perceptive (p. 186). When making personal observations and field notes, the researcher is limited both by his or her own subjectivity and perception, and by the abundance or scarcity of meaningful items or events present to observe and record.

In spite of the limitations inherent in the data collection methods that I would employ, I believed the advantages presented by the use of personal interviews and observations coupled with field notes made them the best choice for gathering data in my particular study.

Data Recording Procedures

I would be guided by protocols for both the recorded observational and interview data in this study. The observational protocol would be quite simple. It would consist of pages split vertically in the center with the left hand column representing descriptive observations and the right hand column representing reflective observations.

The interview protocol (Appendix B) would include a heading for recording the research subject's name, time and date of the interview as well as the set list of questions mentioned previously, and general probing questions. There would be space at the bottom for additional notes. Each interview would be recorded on audio tape, provided the interview subjects gave consent.
Data Analysis Techniques

The process of analyzing the data once it is collected would consist of several sequential steps. The first step would be to transcribe the interviews and type the field notes and observations. These documents would then be collated into packets, which would each correspond to a particular research subject. This step would be time consuming, but it would also provide a platform for me to begin my own process of reflection as I looked at the data that emerged. The second step in this process would be to actually read through the data that I collected. As I did so, I would need to ask some general questions, such as: *What first impressions do I have of what I have collected?*, and *What portions of the data seem particularly credible or dubious?* I would need to take detailed notes of my own thought reflections and observations as this process takes place. The third step in this process was be to begin to code the data according to themes or patterns that emerge. I expected these to match the internal and external promoters of resilience that the research mentions (professional competence, internal locus of control, administrative support and empowerment, just to name a few), but I also would be looking for new themes as well. Once I had used the coding process to establish themes, I would look specifically for connections among my research subjects. What qualities, characteristics, dispositions and experiences did they share? I would explore how the different themes and experiences were connected among the research subjects and then reflect on the implications these connections suggested. Next I would use graphic organizers and concept maps to develop an outline for expressing the emergent themes, patterns and connections in a narrative form. Finally, I would use
this outline to formulate and express my own interpretation of the meaning of my findings, how they corresponded to both existing research and to my own personal experiences and observations as a teacher. Finally, I would express my own suggestions for further resilience research for which my study might serve as a foundation.

Validity

Validating my research would be crucial if it was to have any real meaning, and with this in mind, I planned to employ several strategies to promote my study's validity. The first measure I would take will be the simple act of constantly examining and re-examining the data collection and analysis process for questionable facts and data, as the study progressed. Such an ongoing examination may help to weed out spurious facts 'on the spot' so that they did not fall into the mass of data that would be collected and get lost in the shuffle (or perhaps it would be more accurate to say included in the shuffle). Another strategy that I felt should promote the validity of my study would be to clearly present, when evident, negative or discrepant information. I believed that such inclusion was crucial because it might serve to illustrate a measure of objectivity by showing that data which does not necessarily support either prevailing thought (or my own), is of equal importance. I would also seek to make my study more valid by clarifying, in the narrative on my findings, my own role as a researcher and the inherent bias that must also exist. Such discussion would help promote the honesty of my narrative. Finally, I would have my narrative undergo peer debriefing, and, if possible, member checking, when still in draft form so that I could have an outside opinion as to whether or not any elements of my study
seemed less than credible. I planned for the peer debriefer to be an educator with at least some background in scholarship at the graduate level and whose perspective was likely to be both critical and trustworthy. In the case of member checking, the peer debriefers would be actual members of my sample who would review my findings and comment on the accuracy of it from their perspective.

Summary: The qualitative narrative

The final product of the data collection and analysis process would be a qualitative narrative. This document would, in addition to the information presented in this proposal, recount in clear, first-person narration what patterns emerged from the data. It would also discuss what the analysis of these patterns had to say about teacher resilience among elementary educators in urban schools, how it corresponded to existing research and accepted thought in the field, and how these patterns informed my own perceptions as a researcher and as an educator. The qualitative narrative might also include quotations, scripted conversations and interview questions and answers, as well as anecdotes from the participants. Finally, the narrative would summarize the findings of my study and present readers with suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The following chapter will provide a description and explanation of the results of my study. The organization of this chapter will be as follows: I will begin on the next page with Table 1, which offers an overview of my research subjects. Then I will offer a more detailed description of my sample, and then a brief review of my research question. Next, I will describe the data collection and coding process and will present Table 2 and Table 3 as graphic representations of the characteristics and experiences relevant to resilience, which were evident in my sample, and the degree to which they appeared to be manifested. I will then begin my presentation of the results by highlighting Figure 2, which breaks down the results of this study, and then move into a larger section describing the results of my study in more depth. This larger section will explore the results, both in comparison to my own expectations based on previous literature, and results that were specific to my sample alone. Finally, I will offer my own reflections on the research process and my sample, and discuss the significant findings.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Total Number of Years Teaching</th>
<th>Years Teaching Elementary Grades in Urban Schools</th>
<th>Classroom Experience</th>
<th>Characteristics or Experiences Expressed as the Primary Promoters of Their Resilience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Angela</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6 yrs. 2nd, 7 yrs. 3rd</td>
<td>“Spirituality, because my faith guides me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Avery</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11 yrs. Sp. Ed, 15 yrs. 4th &amp; 5th, 1 yr. 2nd Grade</td>
<td>“The good feelings that come from teaching and interacting with the students.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Dobbs</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4 yrs. Sp. Ed, 19 yrs. 1st Grade, 1 Sp. Ed.- A.I.</td>
<td>“Knowing that the parents are requesting me.” “My spiritual life. It makes me more patient.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Hines</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8 yrs. Middle School Reading, 15 yrs. Elem. Music</td>
<td>“I would say interest in and excitement about my subject matter (music), because I feel that I can reach kids that can’t be reached in other ways.” “The second most important thing in helping me stay resilient had been my own learning and professional development.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Myers</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1 yr. Pre-K, 29 yrs. Sp. Ed.</td>
<td>“I would say my spiritual life is the biggest thing that keeps me resilient. I’m a patient person, even though I may lose my patience from time to time, but when you are a spiritual person, it can bring you back down and center you when you lose your patience or get upset.” “Supportive colleagues would probably be the second most important thing that keeps me resilient.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Taylor</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7 yrs. 4th grade, 1 yr. Title 1 Rdg.</td>
<td>“My spirituality, for sure. Following that would be professional development.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Sample

The sample I utilized in this research study matched the criteria outlined in Chapter III. My total number was six teachers, all having at least eight years of experience teaching at the elementary level in an urban environment. All were between the ages of forty and sixty, with the majority being in their mid-to late fifties. One was an African-American male, two were African-American females and three were Caucasian females. A list of their teaching assignments would be misleading as far as establishing an identity for the group as a whole, as many of them were at new positions within teaching after years in another grade, subject area, or specialty. However, within my sample's career experience, all grade levels (K-8) were represented, as well as music and special education. This is outside of what I expected when I set up this study. My assumption was that if one of my subjects was, for example, a 4th grade teacher, and had been for a significant amount of time, he or she would provide me with data based on that experience. That was hardly the case. It quickly became evident in the data collection and interview process that teachers' experiences were not a function of simply where they were at that particular moment in their career (or even for the past several years), but of all of the placements they have encountered as well as any new locations they found themselves in at the present time. For example, Mr. Taylor, one of the first resilient teachers I identified, had the bulk of his teaching experience in 4th and 5th grade, but at the time of the first interview, found himself in a Title 1 position, where he was more involved in policy than instruction. It quickly became evident in the interview process that his responses
and feedback were only partially being informed by the past eight years in fourth and fifth grade, and many of his answers were much more strongly based around his perceptions and experiences in his new position.

Conversely, another teacher, who had been teaching at the elementary level for the last nine years was drawn again and again to an experience as a middle school teacher, which was almost thirteen years earlier. A special education teacher was significantly influenced by general education experiences in her past, and conversely, a general education teacher found her resilience being born in a special education setting in the 1980s. In other words, despite my attempt to limit this variable in my sample, these teachers, all of whom were elementary teachers with at least eight years of experience in urban schools, as my criteria required, brought a multitude of experiences to the data collection process that I hadn’t anticipated, but probably should have. The personalities of the teachers in the sample were quite varied. Several were outgoing and gregarious, while others were more subdued. I would describe all of them as “positive” people to a greater or lesser degree, and I discovered during the interview process that maintaining a positive attitude was something that several of them actively worked to maintain, as I will show later in the next chapter. All of the teachers in my sample, based on the interviews and on my own observations as a researcher, met the criteria I set forth for resilience, which was to experience a condition of thriving despite conditions of adversity. In fact more than half of the sample members were individuals whom I have had extensive opportunities to observe in my own career as a teacher, and who have, in fact, served in my own mind as models of what a “resilient teacher” was even before the kernel of
inspiration for this study had begun to germinate. For these teachers (many of whom I had worked closely with learned from and observed for almost a decade), establishing whether or not they were thriving in conditions of adversity was simple, and even a little superfluous. It was analogous to asking my own mother to show me her driver’s license to determine her identity. I felt immense gratitude to them for agreeing to participate in my study and found the data they provided to be highly enlightening.

The balance of my sample consisted of teachers whom I knew only a little, but suspected may be resilient, either based on reputation or just a few infrequent observations, and teachers who were completely unknown to me prior to our interviews, but who were recommended to me as models of resilience by trusted colleagues. Unlike the teachers whom I personally identified as resilient based on years and years of close contact, conversation and observation, I had to use the interview process itself to determine whether or not these teachers, who were either strangers or only brief acquaintances, actually were resilient before I could begin collecting data in earnest. To accomplish this I set forth a group of questions within my interviews that were intended to focus on and highlight whether or not a sample member was thriving despite conditions of adversity.

Establishing conditions of adversity was not particularly difficult. All of the districts included within my study had experienced serious financial woes in recent years (including the current year in which I gathered my research), all have had to lay off teachers this school year, and all of the districts have scored significantly lower on Michigan’s MEAP test than their suburban counterparts. All sample members were
from districts which matched my study's operational definition of "urban" (which includes both inner city and urban fringe). Each came from a district with over 50% participation in the federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program, as well as a majority of non-Caucasian students and a location in or around Detroit. The responses of my sample members to questions about stress, and several other topics (such as school culture and climate) indicated that indeed all of the sample members were experiencing conditions of adversity. But what about thriving? I designed questions to focus on this, and weed out people who were suffering the diminished job satisfaction and effectiveness that is so often absent in individuals who are experiencing burnout (Abel & Sewell, 1999, p. 287). My first question was simple and direct: "How is this year going for you?" I would ask. I would then listen, not for a positive or negative assessment of the year (as we all have our good and bad years), but for how they were coping and what they were doing to improve a negative situation, or maintain a positive one.

Other questions included: "Describe a typical Friday," and "How do you feel on Mondays?" My assumption was that an individual who was not thriving would indicate a more positive response toward Friday and a more negative attitude toward Monday. Other questions asked the teachers themselves to reflect on their own resilience. These questions, and others like them were helpful, but certainly not foolproof. For example, while most indicated no particular preference or passion for Fridays, nor disdain for Mondays, one research subject indicated that they loved Fridays and absolutely hated Monday. Taken by itself, this response might have led me to conclude that the individual may not have been thriving, but many of their
other responses, as well at their joyful personal and professional demeanor and
conduct clearly refuted this idea. I came to learn that the evidence necessary to
identify a teacher as “thriving despite conditions of adversity” (and thereby continue
to include them in this study) was not present simply as answers to these resilience
barometer questions, but in many cases present as nuggets scattered throughout the
interview. For example, when asked about what role the students play in her
resilience, Mrs. Dobbs said:

Looking back on the first graders, when they walked in, you could always tell
which ones felt defeated, and of course those where the ones I targeted first.
By the last day of school I don’t want anyone to feel defeated and I think I do
a pretty good job at that. Bringing up their self-esteem, even if they’re not on
grade level, brings up mine too. Seeing their successes makes me want to
keep going. I get motivated by the students.

Evidence of resilience also existed in the form of observational data, like the upbeat,
patient tone of voice and the matching smile that was still on Mrs. Avery’s face
during one of our interviews, even after a long, stressful day, or the way Mrs. Dobbs
lit up when discussing her new class of Autistic students. Much of this observational
data, which is so embedded with qualitative research (Maxwell, 2005, p. 94) wouldn’t
have come out if I would have sent out fifteen hundred Likert scale surveys to
individuals I never would meet. I remember my first interview with Mrs. Myers,
whom I had never previously met. Actually walking down the wide, early twentieth-
century hallway of her enormous K-8 elementary school as the dismissal bell rang
and hundreds of inner city students poured out around me gave me a me a particularly
acute perspective on the interview that would unfold moments later. I was able to meet and talk with her students, look around her classroom at the children's work and the bulletin boards, and when she began to talk with me I remember thinking how her calm and patient words were put into a completely different context than they would have been if I had gathered the data some other way. Her resilience was in her eyes and her relaxed body language, and was both framed and contrasted by the frenetic surroundings; shouts and harsh barks of laughter from older students still in the building, and the weary expressions on the faces of the other teachers. I suspected that nothing she said in the interview would provide me with as much evidence of her resilience as those first few intangible observations.

Such was frequently the case among members of my sample, and I felt fortunate early on in the interview process as it became clear that my entire sample had given me ample data (both observational and textual) to support the claim that they were all resilient. All, for example were eager to participate in my study and despite the lengthy contact it would require. Consent to participate was one of the first bits of evidence of teacher resilience that I was to collect. In my own experience, I have observed that teachers who are not thriving are eager to find the nearest exit at the end of the day and are not likely to be interested in additional work- in this case aiding the body of educational research by sitting in an empty classroom with me and my trusty tape recorder. It is also worth noting, however, that the level of resilience seemed to exist as more of a continuum than a line to be crossed. In other words, although all of the teachers in my sample appeared to be thriving despite conditions
of adversity, some seemed to be thriving a bit more or less in relation to the others. This is something I will discuss a bit more in Chapter V.

Review of Research Question

As I presented in previous chapters, the research question that my study was concerned with answering was: *what are the personal characteristics and experiences common to a sample of resilient, seasoned elementary educators teaching in an urban environment?* In Chapter I, I operationally defined *resilient teachers* as individuals who have encountered circumstances of adversity, but have transcended burnout and feel joy and satisfaction in their work. Resilient teachers thrive despite adversity, in other words. *Seasoned elementary teachers* referred to teachers who have been teaching in grades kindergarten through sixth for at least eight years. *Urban* referred to elementary schools located within either the city of Detroit or one of the first-tier (urban fringe) suburbs, and have a majority of non-Caucasian students. Economically, schools that have a participation rate higher than 50% in the federal Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program (in addition to having a majority of non-Caucasian students and a location in or around Detroit) were included in my study’s definition under the term *urban*. Deciding what would be a “common” characteristic, attitude, experience or belief among the sample was something I didn’t wrestle with until the analysis phase, and it offered me quite a challenge. Obviously if all of my six sample members shared a trait or experience it would clearly be common. The same could be reasonably said about things which were present for five out of the six. But what about four out of six? What about three out of six? Could something shared among only half of the members reasonably be called common? What about

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experiences or characteristics that were only mentioned by one or two teachers, but which were crucial elements in their resilience? These clearly were not "common," but certainly seemed worth addressing. As these questions emerged, I realized the real weight, and occasional restrictions, of the word "common" in my research question. I will expand more on how I answered these and other questions stemming from my research question later in this chapter, and to some degree in Chapter V as well. For now let me say that although the numerical majority implicit in the word "common" was a strong factor in my analysis of the data, the spirit of my study is to explore what makes up resilient teachers, and so I made the decision that I would, in addition to reporting the "common" characteristics and experiences, also leave room among the results and discussion sections for those things which were not common to the sample, but were, in my opinion as the researcher, significant enough to earn mention. Finally, where my research question is concerned, as I began to gather the interview data from my sample, it became evident that I would have to expand my research question to include common attitudes and beliefs as well as common personal characteristics and experiences. For the sake of clarity, however, from this point forward let us assume interchangeability between the phrases "factors of resilience" and "characteristics and experiences," and let us further assume the inclusion of attitudes and beliefs in both phrases.

Data Collection and Analysis

I began the data collection process shortly after obtaining the informed consent required by Western Michigan University’s HSIRB. The first two subjects to join my study were individuals whose resilience I had observed informally, and who
had, in some part been models that helped shape my perception of what resilience looked like in practice. I had discussed separately with both of them what I was planning to do in this study long before I officially proposed it and at many of the steps along the way, and both were excited about participating. The third, fourth and fifth research subjects were also individuals whose resilience I had long suspected, but were slightly less familiar to me. The sixth and final subject was located by a colleague who presented them with my consent document and found them interested in participating.

I conducted my first interview with the research subject with whom I was the most familiar, in part to develop my own skills as an interviewer within my own comfort zone. My only prior practice as an interviewer took place in a graduate course much earlier in my studies, and I remembered it being quite a bit more challenging than I had anticipated, particularly when it came to getting subjects to expand beyond short, simple answers to the question I asked. With this in mind, I used the first two interviews not just to gather data, but to brush up on how to conduct useful sessions. One of the first things I learned was to trust the tape. In that first interview I made a mass of quasi-shorthand notes on the subjects responses as I was engaged in the questions and answers. My fear was that if I didn’t, and the tape failed, I would be left with only my memory as I tried to cobble together a transcription. The problem was that I was so busy scribbling that I wasn’t as focused on the content as I could have been, and so there were several times when I failed to ask my subjects immediate expansion questions based on the responses they had just
given. I could have drawn out much more data if I had just let the tape run and been a better listener, posing new questions as the emerging data prompted them.

I also learned that while the tape was recording what we were saying, if I was going to write *anything*, it needed to be useful field notes of my observations. Of course I knew from the start that I should be making these field notes, but it wasn’t until a few interviews into the process that I got a feel for how truly limited my memory was and how much I needed those written snapshots of my observations to pair with the text of my transcriptions. I also learned quickly the importance of developing useful questions. That first interview was full of interesting conversation, but it was not nearly as focused on uncovering what the subjects characteristics and experiences were, and how resilience was manifested and maintained for them. I knew very shortly into that first transcription of it that I needed to improve and re-focus my questions. Developing useful and more focused interview questions proved to be the most useful lesson that I learned.

As I stated in Chapter III, my plan was to conduct a cycle of three interviews with each subject, and that is how I proceeded. All but a few interviews took place in the research subjects’ classrooms. Several others took place in a conveniently located public library, and one actually was conducted in the quiet comfort of my own living room— at the research subject’s request! All interviews were approximately one hour in length and all were tape-recorded. In addition to the tape recordings, I also took field notes to record my own observations of the setting and the sample member.

I had planned to use only a small list of probing questions to initiate conversation that would, in turn, provide me with data on each subject’s resilience,
but I soon found that method to be cumbersome and ineffective. I then switched to a longer list of questions, each focused on a particular factor that previous research says promotes resilience. As other characteristics and experiences emerged in interviews with other sample members, I added questions about those as well. I actively tried to pose my questions conversationally as opposed to a more detached, clinical list-reading approach, and this seemed effective. It quickly became evident that some of my questions prompted members of my sample to share more specific data related to their resilience, while others took us in directions that although often interesting, didn't appear as relevant to the phenomenon I was studying. The later I phased out in subsequent interviews.

During the interview process I would ask all, or most of the specific questions on my list in the first two interviews. These were usually spaced about a month apart depending on the sample member's schedule. Prior to each subject's third interview I would transcribe the recording of the previous two, omitting names and descriptions that might potentially pose a threat to confidentiality. Next I would create new, personalized questions for each subject based on the data provided in interviews one and two, and designed to draw out further (and hopefully more focused and detailed) data. Although the transcription process was wearing for me, with approximately three to four hours of word processing for each hour of taped interview time, the interviews themselves were both enlightening and enjoyable, for me as well as my subjects. All were eager to participate and were actively engaged. I found none of the "let's get this over with" body language or facial expressions that I have observed in the past from other teachers (although not any in my sample) at staff meetings,
workshops, or other professional contacts taking place at the end of a long school day. I was treated as a guest in most cases and was frequently offered snacks and soda. Once all three of the interviews in a particular sample member's cycle were finished and I had completed their transcription, I provided each with the pseudonym by which I would refer to them in the text of my research, as well as a copy of the transcription. I asked each research subject to review it and return the transcription to me if they saw any data that they thought would compromise their confidentiality, or which would make them uncomfortable. None did.

Coding

To code the research data, I created a list of all of the factors of resilience, both internal and external, which were evident in my review of previous research and literature. Next I created a separate list of factors, experiences, attitudes, etc. that were manifested in my sample, but which had not been significantly discussed in the research and literature I reviewed. I then created a document that I labeled "annotated coding index." Each page of this annotated coding index contained one characteristic, experience, attitude, belief or other factor that was evident in the interview data. Below that were the names of each of my sample members. I then copied the data from each interview and inserted it in what I believed to be the most appropriate location on the annotated coding index. Often data went into more than one location. For example, everything that a particular subject said about a factor such as administrative support would go into that section and then the same for the next sample member, and so on, until I had a page (or several pages) with all of the research data on administrative support grouped together. I repeated this for all of the
characteristics and experiences on the three lists mentioned above. Sometimes data didn’t appear to fit with any of the listed factors. When that happened, I did my best to examine the particular bit of interview text and if it appeared to be at all relevant to the subjects resilience, I kept it and created a new category in the index. If, after examining the data, I judged it to not be relevant or connected to the subject’s resilience, I omitted it.

Once the index was complete, I analyzed each page to determine how strongly the interview data suggested that that particular page’s characteristic or experience played a role in each sample member’s resilience. I created a continuum ranging from having a strong impact to having no impact, and also included a rating for when the factor was evident, but it’s presence actually appeared to deter the subject’s resilience. The results of this analysis are shown in tables 2 and 3 on the following two pages:
Table 2
Thematic Coding Index
Internal and External Factors from Previous Research that Promote Resilience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal factors from previous research that promote resilience</th>
<th>Ms. Angela</th>
<th>Mrs. Avery</th>
<th>Mrs. Dobbs</th>
<th>Mrs. Hines</th>
<th>Mrs. Myers</th>
<th>Mr. Taylor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prof. development/ career competence</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of humor</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing when to get involved /let go</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of purpose/ personal values</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxation/ stress relief</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal locus of control</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External factors from previous research that promote resilience</th>
<th>Ms. Angela</th>
<th>Mrs. Avery</th>
<th>Mrs. Dobbs</th>
<th>Mrs. Hines</th>
<th>Mrs. Myers</th>
<th>Mr. Taylor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegial/personal support system</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation/ Pay</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative support</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

S= Strongly evident  M= Moderately evident  L= Low evidence, but still present in some way
N= No evidence/ data not collected, or not applicable  D= Factor present, but helped deter resilience
### Table 3
Thematic Coding Index—Mutual Experiences, Characteristics, Attitudes, and Beliefs of Resilient Teachers in this Study's Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(\text{Mutual experiences, characteristics, attitudes, and beliefs of resilient teachers in this study's sample} )</th>
<th>Ms. Angela</th>
<th>Mrs. Avery</th>
<th>Mrs. Dobbs</th>
<th>Mrs. Hines</th>
<th>Mrs. Myers</th>
<th>Mr. Taylor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need For service/helping others</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making changes (within teaching)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coming to teaching later in life</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have experienced stress</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have experienced burnout at some time</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban teaching environment deters resilience</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher education promoted resilience</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always wanted to be a teacher</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspired to teach by childhood experiences</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work to maintain a positive attitude</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of accomplishment/value</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a passion for teaching</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective thinking</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief that teaching is something they were “meant to do”</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop personal connections with students</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(S=\) Strongly evident  \(M=\) Moderately evident  \(L=\) Low evidence, but still present in some way  
\(N=\) No evidence/data not collected, or not applicable  \(D=\) Factor present, but helped deter resilience
Results

Upon constructing the two thematic coding indexes shown in tables 2 and 3, I then examined the data that they displayed in the context of my research question. This meant searching for common characteristics and experiences. Before I could do that I needed to establish an operational definition of what would constitute “common” characteristics and experiences. I also had to take into consideration that I had given a degree value to each factor as well. How would I reconcile a characteristic or experience that was evident in all sample members, but at a low level, against a factor that was only present in two members, but was very significant for them? I decided the best way to proceed would be to sort each factor by the degree of evidence among research samples. To this end I decided that only factors present in at least four out of the six subjects (67%) would be considered “common,” and that I would only include factors that appeared to be at a strong or moderate level of evidence and exclude those that appeared to have low- or no evidence among sample members. I then sorted the remaining factors into the chart that is figure 2 on the next page.
Figure 2
Results Chart
Characteristics and Experiences Sorted by Degree of Evidence in Research Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors, characteristics, beliefs and experiences relevant to resilience that were <strong>strongly</strong> evident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strongly Evident in 83% of sample</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Having a collegial or personal support system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strongly Evident in 67% of sample</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developing personal connections with students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors, characteristics, beliefs and experiences relevant to resilience that were at least <strong>moderately</strong> evident</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderately Evident in 100% of sample</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sense of humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Professional development/ career competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Possessing an internal locus of control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sense of purpose/ personal values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sense of empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderately Evident in 83% of sample</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have experienced significant stress as a teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Experience feelings of accomplishment or value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reflective thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderately Evident in 67% of sample</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Making changes within teaching (grade level, position, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Appear to possess a passion for teaching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I will proceed with my presentation of the results of my research by first reviewing what expectations I brought to this study, based on my review of literature and previous research, and then follow with a presentation of what the actual results were. Next, I will present where my results match those of previous research, and then which items not mentioned in previous research emerged in my own study. Finally I will present several characteristics, experiences, beliefs, etc. which were not “common” to the sample, but which were significant factors in promoting the resilience of the individuals in whom they were evident, and as such, I felt merited reporting.

*Results and My Expectations Based on Previous Literature*

Based on my review of previous literature, I expected the common characteristics of my sample to include both *administrative support* and *the presence of collegial or personal support systems* as those were the most frequently mentioned factors of resilience in the literature. I also expected *relaxation and stress relief* to be present as it was also mentioned to a large degree, although not as extensively as the first two. The rest of the factors of resilience referenced in the literature and previous research (see table 2) were much less frequently mentioned, although certainly evident among other studies, as such, none stood out in my estimation as more probable than the others to be a common characteristic or experience in my study. This is not meant to imply that I didn’t expect them to occur at all. In fact I was certain to see most or all of the factors manifested in at least a few teachers, but in terms of being common to the group, *administrative support, collegial and personal*
support systems, and relaxation and stress relief were the only ones from the literature that I anticipated as likely to be factors common to my entire sample.

Results Specific to My Sample

I would like to divide my reporting of the common characteristics and experiences of my sample into four sections:

1. A description of the common characteristics and experiences from previous research which were also common in my study.

2. An overall report of which common characteristics in my sample were strongly evident among sample members, and then which ones were moderately evident.

3. A list of which of the strongly- or moderately evident common characteristics present among my research subjects were not significantly mentioned in previous research, but became emergent in my study.

4. Finally, I will present several characteristics and experiences, which were not common in my sample, but which were of particularly strong significance to a portion of my sample, and which I believe merit inclusion with the balance of my results.

Common Characteristics and Experiences from Previous Research in My Study

In practice, the factors of resilience from previous research that were also common to my sample were: (a) the presence of collegial and, or personal support systems; (b) a value for professional development and career competence; (c) a sense of empowerment; (d) an internal locus of control; (e) a sense of humor; (f) a strong sense of purpose and or personal values; and (g) a feeling or sense of spirituality.
Strongly Evident Characteristics and Experiences

The following common characteristics and experiences were evident in my sample at a strong level in 83% of my sample: (a) spirituality, and (b) collegial/personal support systems.

The following common characteristic was evident in my sample at a strong level in 67% of my sample: (c) developing personal connections with students.

No factor was strongly evident for one hundred percent of my sample.

Moderately Evident Characteristics and Experiences

The following common characteristics and experiences were evident in my sample in at least a moderate level for 100% of my sample: (a) a sense of humor; (b) a value for professional development and career competence; (c) possessing an internal locus of control.

These common characteristics and experiences were evident in at least a moderate level for 83% of my sample: (d) possessing a sense of purpose or personal values; (f) empowerment; (g) having experienced significant stress as a teacher; (h) experience feelings of accomplishment or value; (i) reflective thinking.

The next group of common characteristics and experiences were evident in at least a moderate level for 67% of my sample: (j) making changes within teaching; (k) appear to possess a passion for teaching.

Characteristics and Experiences Not Significantly Mentioned in Previous Research Which Emerged in My Sample

The common characteristics which were strong- or moderately evident among my research subjects, and were not significantly mentioned in previous research, but
were emergent in my study were: (a) possessing feelings of accomplishment; (b) having a passion for teaching; (c) regular engagement in reflective thinking; and (d) the development of personal connections with students.

**Significant Uncommon Characteristics**

The final aspect of my results that I would like to present is a set of characteristics and experiences that did not fit with my operational definition of “common,” but which were of particularly strong significance to a portion of my sample and which I believe merit inclusion with the balance of my results. I will go into further detail about why I chose to include the following data in Chapter V, but for now let me say that these characteristics and experiences were of special significance to the sample members who exhibited or experienced them, and were, in this researchers opinion, even more important to promoting the overall resilience of my sample than many of the factors that were “common.” I would like to illustrate this by comparing the “common” characteristic of possessing a sense of humor (100% of my sample, but at a moderate level for all six) to that of possessing a need for service, which was not “common.” On paper, sense of humor appears to be of greater significance, with my entire sample appearing to possess it. In truth, when I conducted the interviews, a sense of humor was clearly evident in all subjects at a moderate level, which qualifies it as a “common” characteristic, but few of the subject members indicated that it was crucial to their resilience. Possessing a need for service, on the other hand, was a very important factor for the three sample members who indicated it, and came up in their data again and again. Each of the
following significant factors which emerged in my study were significant, but not "common":

1. Coming to teaching later in life
2. Being an individual who always wanted to be a teacher, or was inspired to teach by childhood experiences
3. Actively working to maintain a positive attitude
4. Possess significant patience
5. Believe that they were "meant" to teach
6. Possess a need for service/helping others
7. Have experienced mentoring
8. Have had significant administrative support.

Summary of Results

At least four out of my six sample members had to share a characteristic or experience for that factor to be included as a "common" characteristic or experience.

The common characteristics and experiences in my sample were:

1. Spirituality
2. Sense of humor
3. Professional development/ career competence
4. Possessing an internal locus of control
5. Sense of purpose/ personal values
6. Sense of empowerment
7. Have a collegial or personal support system
8. Have experienced significant stress as a teacher
9. Experience feelings of accomplishment or value

10. Reflective thinking

11. Making changes within teaching (grade level, position, etc.)

12. Appear to possess a passion for teaching

13. Develop personal connections with students

Of these, the most strongly evident characteristics were: (a) spirituality, (b) having collegial and personal support systems, and (c) developing personal connections with students. Several other characteristics and experiences were not "common" to my sample, but were strongly evident and crucial to the resilience of several teachers in my sample. Chief among these were: (a) patience, (b) a need for service or for helping others, and (c) having always wanted to teach, or having been inspired to teach by childhood experiences. In the next few sections, I will reflect on the research process that produced these results, and present a discussion of the results listed above.

Personal Reflections of the Research Process

Reflections on My Sample

In this sub-section I will focus on description of, and more specifically, reflections on my sample and research subjects. I will occasionally touch on characteristics that may or may not be discussed later in this chapter, and although I might mention a characteristic or experience common to my subjects, my discussion at this point will be within the context of sample description and not a discussion of my study's analyzed results, which will occur in the next section.
Up to this point in my study, I have found it interesting that maintaining confidentiality and the establishment of a sample identity seems to have created a buffer between the teachers I interviewed and the results presented thus far. I spent six months interacting with and interviewing my subjects. For hours after each interview I listened to their voices as I slowly transcribed the interview data. I deeply considered their individual characteristics and experiences as I sorted through their data, finding patterns and categories until I had my thematic coding indices and results chart. It feels odd now, as I discuss my results, that my subjects themselves seem so removed from the final product. When I was interviewing and transcribing they were individuals. I often had a chuckle or a raised eyebrow when a subject would say something in an interview that either supported or conflicted with data that I had collected from one of my other sample members, but by and large, looking into each face as the tape in the recorder turned and they shared their life’s experiences with me, the prominence of each member’s individuality was staggering.

Now, as I look at my two thematic coding indices and my results chart, which condensed hundreds of pages of peoples’ personal and professional lives onto one page, I find it slightly bittersweet that with this condensation of data, the individuality of each teacher in my study is surrendered both for their own confidentiality and for the establishment of the sample’s identity. This is necessary in order to answer my research question, but at the same time, I can’t help but be troubled by the absence of my subject’s voices up to now. I would like to be able to give a detailed profile of each sample member, presenting and discussing the unique skills, personalities and idiosyncrasies of each person, so that readers and future researchers might be able to
see them as I did, but because of the small sample size in my study, I believe that doing so could put each teacher's confidentiality at risk. With that in mind, I am forced to be content with a discussion of the sample as a whole, although I will have several opportunities to give voice to individual sample members later in this chapter.

*Establishing My Sample*

As I mentioned earlier, most of my sample members were individuals with whom I was already familiar. The degree of familiarity varied between individuals with whom I'd worked closely with for years, and those whom I knew only slightly. As I was planning this study, I spent a good deal of time wrestling with how much of my sample should consist of people I already knew. Should I rely more on individuals whom I had never met, or use a sample containing people I knew, and whose resilience I could be more certain of? There were plusses and minuses to both plans. If I chose a sample that had more people who were unknown to me, then my own preconceptions would play a much smaller role in filtering data as the interview and analysis phases proceeded. As I interviewed a stranger, I knew I wouldn't be listening to their responses to questions and juxtaposing their answers against their previous actions as I would (and in fact often *did*) with people whom I already knew. In other words, I anticipated that a sample of strangers would more likely cause me to be a more open and receptive listener.

The advantages to choosing a sample that contained more people whom I already knew and whose resilience I had either observed first hand, or knew of by reputation were many. First, unlike a subject who was identified to me by another person, I believed I was much more likely to gather a sample of truly resilient
teachers if I picked them out. After all, I was the one who had been reading about resilience for all this time and I was the so-called expert. It stands to reason that I would be a better choice for sample selection than someone who hadn’t studied resilience and all of its facets. In the end, I decided that since I was aware of the drawback present in choosing the sample myself (I might listen to their data with bias), I could take steps to mitigate it as much as possible, and so I decide to use a sample consisting primarily of people I was familiar with. In practice, I don’t believe my own preconceptions or past observations of subjects affected validity in any significant way, and in fact they may have helped the accuracy of data collection in some cases. As I interviewed my first subject, whom I have mentioned is a colleague I have worked very closely with for some time, I was able to use my past knowledge and observations of the individual to develop meaningful questions that in ways that I couldn’t do for subjects whom I didn’t know as well. I can’t recall a time when I listened to a subject responding to a question or recounting a story and thought to myself, “Yeah, right. That doesn’t fit with what I’ve seen from you in the past!” In the end, I believe choosing a sample that I was reasonably familiar with and whose resilience I could be more certain of was the right thing to do.

I did attempt, however, to gather several subjects from other districts and who were unfamiliar to me. As I mentioned in Chapter III, my plan was to use colleagues whom I trusted to put me in contact with these potentially resilient teachers by explaining my study to them and then having them pass it along to a teacher who they thought might be both resilient and interested in participating. My colleagues were willing enough to help, but nothing ever came of it. I started interviewing the five
sample members whom I had identified in October, and by the start of December
nothing had happened with the colleagues who had said they would put me in touch
with someone. I didn’t want to press them either, because I didn’t want them to hand
the consent document to the nearest teacher (whether resilient or not) simply to get
me off their back. I had just about accepted that I was going to be stuck with five
sample members, which was within my established limits for the study, but was one
less than I wanted, when something unexpected happened. I had a student teacher in
my class that semester and she had a university professor guiding and observing her.
I had seen the instructor around our building in the past, but we hadn’t been
introduced yet. When the day came for my student teacher’s first observed lesson,
the professor and I had our introduction. After the observation was complete the
professor began talking with me and the topic of my research came up (as it often
does!) She was fascinated by it and my student teacher was unexpectedly left to
give the students and improvise an extension to her lesson as the professor and I
talked excitedly for nearly a half hour. After commenting on how useful she thought
my study would be, she told me that she had student teachers placed at districts all
around the Detroit area (and at many schools that fit my study’s definition of urban),
and she knew many teachers who might fit my study’s definition of resilient. She left
my class with a handful of consent documents and promised to find me some more
sample members.

I am accustomed to people promising to do something and then despite their
best intentions, having it slip their mind. Many of the colleagues who had previously
agreed to help me locate resilient teachers for my study (but never got around to it),
had initially shown the same spark of interest as the professor, and so when I didn’t hear anything from her after three weeks, I was a little disappointed, but I wasn’t all that surprised. Then, without warning a manila envelope with four signed consent documents appeared on my desk. By this point I was knee-deep in the interview and transcription process and had developed a clear understanding of just how labor intensive and time consuming it was going to be. It was certainly within my abilities, but it went well beyond anything I had read in the qualitative research methodology texts. I decided to use only one or two of the teachers out of the four who consented. In the end only two of the four returned my calls and emails, and of those two it was Mrs. Myers who became my sixth and final sample member.

In the earlier section describing my research sample, I discussed how although I hadn’t previously met Mrs. Myers, it didn’t take long to see evidence of her resilience. Her job setting, which was a frenetic, high-poverty inner-city school, was startling when juxtaposed with her calm, patient demeanor. She seemed to radiate peace. I remember feeling, as she let me into her classroom and out of the cacophonous hallway, where students jostled and teachers with harsh, furrowed brows shouted admonishments, that her room was an island of tranquility. As I mentioned earlier, Mrs. Myers interview data was valuable, but her resilience was clearly evident though the intangibles I picked up just being around her. The interview data did appear to support the claim that she was resilient, and I remember speculating at what the odds would be, were I to choose names of teachers whom I’d never met at random out of a hat, of selecting someone who seemed as resilient as Mrs. Myers.
Of the sample members that I was able to identify on my own, what characteristics or observations made me suspect that they were resilient? I would like to take a closer look at each of them at this point, although I will keep a cautious eye on confidentiality as I proceed. Starting with Mr. Taylor, I first suspected he might be resilient when I watched him in contrast to the members of his fourth grade team. No matter what happened, and no matter how up in arms the other teachers became over the latest fire that had to be put out, he stayed patient and calm. I watched him with his class on a daily basis, and even on days when I knew from conversations earlier in the day that he was experiencing a crisis outside of school (or at least outside of the classroom), his patience and enthusiasm with the children didn’t waver. He was consistently positive, no matter how much adversity was in his way.

Mrs. Dobbs was also easy to identify and shared many qualities with Mr. Taylor, particularly the positive attitude and the rapport with students. I didn’t know her as well on a personal level, but she was generally considered by the staff to be the best teacher in the building and she regularly received the most parent requests for placement. She was always a model of professionalism and seemed miles above the daily drama that existed in the school at the time. She was clearly, at least in my view, thriving despite adversity. Mrs. Angela is different than the rest of the teachers in my study in many ways. She is strongly independent, almost isolated at times and not as eager to discuss teaching as the other sample members. So why choose to include her? My decision to include her goes back to the first chapter of this study, when I illustrated how forming personal connections with students was perhaps the single most important factor in maintaining my own resilience. Ms. Angela was my
model in this regard. I have known her for almost a decade now and have never once heard her raise her voice to her class. They have such a strong connection and she had such patience and love for them that walking into her class is like walking into a large family’s living room. I suspected that although she never was one to sing the praises of teaching as some of my other sample members had in the past, beneath her quiet exterior she was thriving despite the conditions of adversity that we all faced. Mrs. Hines and Ms. Avery both were both slightly more unknown to me, but I suspected that each might be resilient, and in the end my suspicion was justified. I chose to include Mrs. Avery for one simple reason: Despite working at the toughest building in her district, one known for low test scores and surly, argumentative teachers, she was always smiling. Always! I had even seen her upset on a couple of occasions, and her smile simply dropped a few millimeters, like a light bulb dimming slightly when the air conditioning kicks on and draws off some of the juice, but it was still a smile. Mrs. Hines was a different story. I knew she had faced some difficult years, and some administrators who were less than supportive, but when I watched her interact with students, she was always excited to see them and teach their lessons. Her enthusiasm for teaching actually prompted me to sit in on her classes a few times and I observed a teacher who was very passionate about her work.

Similarities and Differences in My Sample

My sample members had a wide variety of experiences. As I mentioned in previous chapters, all of them had been teaching in an urban environment at the elementary level for at least eight years. Within that framework, they came to my study with an array of perspectives. Some had wanted to teach since earliest
childhood, and had followed that direct path right through from college. One discussed at length how they had "been born to teach," but had not been mature enough after graduation:

I did not go right into teaching and part of the reason was that I did not feel that I was ready... children look to you as a role model, and my whole thing was that I wanted to have personal integrity when I stood in front of kids. You could say I had some issues that I had to work through. I knew all of my life that I wanted to be a teacher, even when I was in college, having enough understanding of how I was personally, and how I desired to be, I knew I wanted to be a person of integrity and character when I stood up in front of children.

Other teachers, like me, hadn't planned on teaching, but ended up in the classroom and found that it was their calling. One quote that was echoed several times was "I didn't know that I wanted to become a teacher until I became a teacher!" I didn't notice either a surplus or deficit in the level of resilience that I perceived among members of the two subgroups (teachers who had always wanted to teach and those who found their calling later), but as I examined my data, I did notice a pattern among the characteristics and experiences. The three sample members who indicated that they had always known that they wanted to be teachers each experienced feelings of accomplishment at a strong level, all felt that their spirituality was a strong promoter of their resilience, and all indicated that professional development was a strong or moderate factor of resilience for them as well. Upon reflection, while spirituality was a strong element for almost all of my sample members, it makes sense that
professional development, which is teachers talking about teaching, would be a strong factor for those who always wanted to teach. Likewise, it is reasonable to assume that one who always wanted to teach and who now is, (and successfully, in the case of these three particular teachers) would experience the feelings of accomplishment that accompany meeting a lifelong goal. Despite this emerging pattern, there was nothing to set these two subgroups apart where their resilience was concerned. There was no stark contrast between teachers who had always wanted to teach and those who hadn’t. In my opinion, the reason for this is because for teachers who have been in the classroom as long as my sample members had, there were so many factors at play in each one’s story, that the characteristic of where the impetus to teach came from was just one of many. Special education, for example, was a common experience for many of my teachers. For one individual it was emerging in a special education setting after a stressful year in general education that let her know she had finally found a home in teaching. For another teacher, special education was a crucible which toughened her up before she emerged as a general education teacher, and for yet another, it was her experiences as a parent of a child with special needs that infused her with the desire to give back to the society that had been so patient and nurturing with her own child.

As I will discuss later in this chapter, a characteristic that was common to almost everyone in my sample was spirituality. In fact, three of them responded that it was the most important factor in helping them stay resilient in their career, and two others said it was the second most important factor for them. Also, with the exception of one teacher, a supportive group of colleagues was a factor which was
strongly evident among may sample. A personal observation that I collected as I gathered the data for this study was that the teachers in my sample appeared to be significantly more professional, in both attitude and behavior, than most of the teachers I’ve encountered in my career.

It also appeared, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, that resilience wasn’t a benchmark to be reached, but was more of a continuum. Everyone in the sample met my definition of resilience, but all were in different settings, had different personalities and experiences that they brought to teaching, and therefore appeared to have varying levels of resilience. I speculated, for example, on the fact that a sample member whom I will call Teacher A, seemed to be much more resilient than another, whom I will call Teacher B. However, Teacher A also indicated that they had experienced extremely supportive administrators in their career, while Teacher B had not, which might help explain the discrepancy in their apparent levels of resilience. Taking things like that into account helped me gain perspective on this continuum of resilience and to avoid mentally ranking these teachers based on who seemed the most resilient, which wouldn’t have helped my study (or so I believe) in any case.

I also found it interesting that although all of the teachers in my study were resilient by the definition I had established, they were notably different from one another in terms of personality, teaching style, attitude, and many other ways. Further, I suspect several of them would be surprised to learn that others in this group were selected for participation. In other words, Teacher X in my study may not have the have the highest regard for Teacher Y, who is also in my study, and vice versa, but from my study’s perspective, they are both models of resilience in action. I
remember once, as one of my sample members was conversing with me prior to an interview, they recounted a story in which one of my other sample members appeared in a negative light. The teller of the story didn’t know that one of the players in the study they told was a fellow research subject, and the subject who told the story and the subject who appeared in it have very different personalities and teaching styles. I remember finding it interesting, as I reflected on how my subjects were unknown to each other (although all resilient from my study’s perspective), that they might even be put off if they were to discover who else was in the study with them. Would they agree with my assessment of the sample members’ resilience, or would personality conflicts cloud their judgment? For me, this experience served to reaffirm the need for confidentiality among my sample.

One troubling aspect of my sample, where resilience is concerned, was knowing that despite a strong belief that my methodology was the best way to answer my research question, I also knew that there were many other resilient elementary teachers at urban schools in the Detroit area, and my study wouldn’t be able to utilize them. The more data I collected from my own sample, the more curious I became about what I might be able to learn, perhaps in subsequent research, from another sample. In the end, I was satisfied that both the resilience of my sample members, and the quality of the data that they presented were more than sufficient to address my research question.

Even before I formally began to analyze the data, it became clear that the sample, as a whole, was a group of professional, positive and giving individuals. Regardless of how stressful the preceding workday had been, I left each interview
session feeling refreshed. The data collection process was very fulfilling for me as a researcher, not just because of the quality of the data I was amassing, and because of the opportunity to develop professional relationships with six terrific individuals, but because the experience gave me ample opportunity to reflect on my own practice as well. This reflection led me to make several comparisons that I would briefly like to explore in the next subsection.

**Comparing My Sample to Me**

As I discussed in my introduction to this study, the idea for my research wasn’t born in a vacuum; it came from my early experiences with burnout as a teacher and my subsequent development into a teacher who loves his job, despite all of the challenges that surround it. Any assumptions I brought with me to this study that did not develop out of my review of other research came from my own experiences. As I began to conduct my interviews, I was eager to see where both the individual characteristics and patterns within the sample were similar to and different from my own experiences. I particularly wanted to explore how crucial the development of personal connections with students was for my sample, in light of the large role it played in encouraging my own resilience.

One difference that quickly became evident was that not everyone had experienced some sort of serious burnout in their career. In fact only three of my sample members had. The rest reported times when they were “wore out,” or had, as Ms. Angela has reported, “gotten to the point where I needed a break,” but they did not believe it constituted actual burnout. This surprised me. It had been my assumption (based on both my own experiences, and inferences from the current
literature), that in some form resilience was a product of having transcended burnout in some way. Not so, according to my sample. Upon my reflection it appears as if in the case of the members of my sample, each individual who was able to avoid burnout either came to teaching with the tools necessary to manage their difficulties, or didn’t have to deal with the more serious crises that other members had.

Again, to use an example, two of the sample members who reported never having experience burnout, also had supportive administrators and long stretches of time teaching grades they had become comfortable with. Mrs. Hines, in contrast, was teaching in a district that experienced a budget crisis and cut the elementary music program that she had been a part of. She was forced to move from music education at the elementary level (which was her specialty), to a troubled middle school where she was assigned a reading class. It was eight years before she was able to transfer back to elementary music, and in her time at the middle school, she reports experiencing serious burnout. “It was hard,” She reports, but “the collegial staff at that middle school really got me through it. I still have friendships that were formed back then.”

In my own case, burnout came at the very beginning of my career and was the product of not having the tools or disposition necessary to deal with a particular problem, but such experiences among my sample members were not limited to the early years of teaching. After more than twenty-five successful years in the classroom, the last fifteen of which were spent teaching upper elementary students, Mrs. Avery experienced burnout from an unexpected source. As a Caucasian teacher, she reported always trying to be aware of culture and the role it plays in her primarily African American classes. As a warm, friendly person, she had never experienced
any racial issues or tension in all of her previous years in the district. Two years prior to the interview, however, she encountered a small group of students who seized upon Mrs. Avery's own ethnicity and used it to create division and chaos in the classroom.

"For some reason they saw me as 'the white teacher' instead of no color, and that wasn't something I had experienced before. I've never thought that the kids saw me as the 'white teacher'...(that behavior) rubbed off on the other students and it was like a domino effect. I found that I didn't want to come to work."

As I listened to the sample members who, like me, had experienced situations that had led them to burnout, a question emerged that I will pose here, and again in my suggestions for further research: When looking at my own experiences and those of the other teachers who experienced burnout, is whether or not a teacher experiences serious burnout more a function of the tools and disposition a teacher possesses, or is it determined more by the severity of the crises they encounter?

Another question that developed from this reflection came from a teacher who mentioned that during her period of serious burnout, she was also experiencing serious health problems. I too had a large measure of personal hardship at home stoking the fire alongside my own classroom challenges during the period of burnout I experienced early in my career. However, my sample really didn't provide me with the data to explore the role of personal (or home) stress as a contributor to burnout or a hindrance to resilience.

I was struck, in large part, by how little overall stress my sample reported, given the district and classroom challenges that each was facing. There were times,
in fact, where I noticed characteristics and experiences that I didn’t share with my sample members, or which I possessed, but at a much lower level. These moments sometimes made me question just how resilient I actually was!

In the next subsection I will discuss my reflections on the research process, both in terms of my data collection and the analysis.

Reflections on the Research Process

This was my first time conducting this type of study, and I encountered many unexpected dilemmas during the research process. One that stood out in particular was my own interactivity. I was always eager to hear the subjects’ responses to my questions and I was a particularly animated listener. Since I knew many of the sample members and conversation was easy, I would often (although unintentionally) anticipate what they were going to say before they had a chance to say it. I had to learn to suspend my own beliefs, opinions and predictions and allow the subjects narrative and beliefs to come forward. In the first interviews, before I learned to curb myself, if a subject was too slow, or seemed to be searching for the answer to a question, I would jump in with what I thought their answer would be before I could stop myself. I often thought I knew what a subject was trying to say, and I really had to learn to hold myself back from leading them and let them express their thoughts without interrupting. Occasionally, before I learned not to do it, I would lead the subject with an answer and then, to my chagrin, they would say “No,” or “That’s not really what I meant.” I discovered that a bit more patience on my part as a listener made the question and answer time take a bit longer, but in the end, the research subjects always knew what they were trying to say better than I did! I also discovered
that I was, at times, doing too much talking as I conducted the interviews. I needed to cut back on responding to subjects with things like, "Wow, really?" or "I know just what you mean!" which I was doing far too much. Instead, I needed to focus more on listening and data processing as the interviews were in progress so that I could improvise new questions on the spot in response to their answers, and elicit even more useful data.

As I mentioned in the last chapter, one element of my research that underwent an evolution as the data collection phase proceeded was the way I used and constructed my interview questions. My initial plan, as I have said, was to use a short list of prompting and probing questions to stimulate a lengthy dialogue, which would flow naturally and contain all of the nuggets that I needed to gather the characteristics and experiences relevant to resilience that a subject had to offer. In retrospect this proved rather impractical, as I discovered in the first interview. I quickly learned that while yes, using that method could facilitate a terrific and enlightening conversation with a research subject, if I really wanted to learn something specific in relation to resilience, I was going to need to ask about it specifically, or at least pose a question that would lead us down the correct path. To that end I spent a great deal of time developing an extensive list of questions which was specifically tailored based on individual sample members. Even this list, while a vast improvement on the "probe and see what comes out" approach, still required modification. Many of my questions proved troublesome, particularly those such as "How is this year going for you so far?" and "Tell me about your class this year." which I designed to give me a
general feel for whether or not an individual was “thriving despite adversity,” as my definition of resilience required.

These questions were well intentioned and in most cases gave me a rough idea of where a sample member was in terms of resilience at that moment, but didn’t give me much information in the big picture, and in most cases led to a lot of discussion which was interesting, but not relevant to resilience. I know scholars might argue that anything a subject has to share should be considered important. Within the scope of my study however, although I am exploring the common characteristics and experiences among my sample, I am doing so within the context of resilience and so I feel comfortable saying that not everything a subject said needed to make it into my coding process. Consider this example: Should, in the course of our dialogue, all six of my sample members happen to mention that their favorite breakfast cereal is Cap’n Crunch, would it be reasonable to make the inference that eating Cap’n Crunch promotes resilience? While I’m sure the advertisers at Quaker, who make that particular product would love to have a study say just such a thing, I would argue that such a claim is a bit dubious. To this end I focused my questions more tightly around factors that research says promote or deter resilience. I also began asking subjects to reflect directly on resilience itself in their career and to rate several characteristics and experiences they previously mentioned to determine the strength and prominence of each factor in relation to others. Making these changes greatly increased the flow of useful data in my interviews and, I believe, greatly improved the overall quality of my findings.
Another noteworthy facet of the research process occurred when I was confronted with getting sample members to move beyond their own self-perception and really reflect on their experiences and attitudes in a critical way. This wasn’t always easy. Sometimes, particularly with sample members whom I knew well, they would provide an answer to a specific question about their personality that didn’t seem at all congruent with my previous observations, or even with data they had provided earlier. In situations like that I would repeat the question, but add on more specific context, being careful not to lead them, and see if the same response was given.

One subject, for example, who is perhaps the most resilient of the sample in my own estimation, and who is also very familiar to me, was at a loss when I asked him to discuss times when he had experienced serious stress and burnout. Having shared some very stressful times with this person as a longtime colleague, I had to suppress an urge to remind them of several specific examples. Instead I repeated and refined the question and elaborated on my study’s definition of stress and burnout and in the end I was able to collect some data. Situations like the example above happened with some frequency, and it took me a while before I was able to finesse data from subjects when it came to elements like experiencing stress, which they may have perceived admitting to as a sign that they were less than resilient. This reluctance to take ownership of characteristics that could potentially be seen as negative may have come from a residual fear of evaluation, which my relaxed and relatively informal interview setting and personal mannerisms wasn’t able to mitigate. It is also noteworthy that when it came to freely reflecting on these things that could
be perceived as negative, such as the answer to questions like “what would you describe as your weaknesses” (this one proved particularly tough for many of the sample members), those subjects who had experienced significant burnout in their careers were much more willing to examine themselves, warts and all.

Although I believe that my methodology was effective for collecting the characteristics and experiences necessary to answer my research question, I can say with some confidence that there was still more that I could have learned from my research subjects in terms of resilience. I suspect that with some people, what made them resilient was so internalized that even if they were normally a reflective person, they didn’t always have the perspective to put it into words, and so I couldn’t always draw it out with my questions, despite my best efforts. I further suspect, based on my experiences with Mrs. Myers, who was unknown to me at the start of my study, and who in retrospect remains the most elusive sample member in terms of the data volume I was able to collect, that my own familiarity with my research sample helped me get more data than if I had selected a sample with whom I was unfamiliar. I also believe that the benefits of my approach outweigh the drawbacks mentioned earlier, such as my own initial tendency to anticipate the responses of sample members whom I knew well. If I had it to do over, I would not make any major changes to my sampling method.

Another interesting aspect of the research process became evident in the analysis phase. Once all of the data was sorted by theme, and coded by apparent strength of evidence for each sample member, I noticed that the emergent patterns didn’t always match what I had observed in the interviews. I have mentioned in the
previous chapter that there were emergent characteristics and experiences that were not common to my sample, but which were crucial to the members who possessed them, and likewise, there were also factors that appeared on paper to be stronger than they really were. Because of the nature of my study’s coding process, the final presentation of data, while including an approximation of the strength of each factor for each subject, doesn’t capture the passion (or lack of) with which the subject spoke. Although I am comfortable saying that I believe my results are accurate (within the context of my original plan for this study), in a few cases, specifically the ones I will share below, I was frustrated at what was lost between when the tape recorder was rolling and my subjects were sharing their experiences, and the time the collected data was displayed in tables 2-3 and figure 2 of Chapter IV.

To illustrate this, let me use two factors, spirituality and having a collegial or personal support system. Each of these were exhibited at a strong level for five out of six of my sample members. On paper, they appear to have nearly the same impact in my sample, but in actuality, spirituality was mentioned with much more passion, frequency and emphasis than collegial support. Conversely, sense of humor was a factor that all six of my sample members had at a moderate level, but in the actual interview setting it was mentioned with much less fervor than characteristics and experiences which appear of less significance on paper. This discrepancy between what appears in the final presentation of the results, and my perceptions based on the live interviews was limited and was not often the case beyond the examples I shared above (and what I will share later in this chapter when I discuss factors that weren’t
common, but were significant), but I felt it deserved mention here. I will reference this aspect of my research again when I discuss validity later in this chapter.

After I had recorded the interview data for each sample I was faced with the question of how to conduct my transcription. I had several options to choose from. First, I could transcribe every syllable exactly as my sample members uttered them, including "um"s and "uh"s, and only omit specific names or locations that would jeopardize confidentiality. Another option would be to paraphrase the interviews for the sake of speed and efficiency. I decided, upon reflection that neither option was sufficient. The former would be needlessly cumbersome and ultimately would provide less understandable data considering that most of us don’t converse with the same rhythms, syntax and word choice that we use when we write, and the latter method would be too subject to my own opinions and could potentially marginalize the thoughts of my sample members. In the end, I felt the best course was to edit the transcriptions for clarity and confidentiality, but to avoid paraphrasing whenever possible. This meant eliminating the "um"s, but keeping the transcription as true as possible to the recorded text. Some things were omitted from the transcription altogether such as small talk that would occur from time to time as we diverged from an interview question, and specific references that would impact confidentiality. It is worth mentioning that on several occasions research sample members requested that I shut off the tape recorder so that they might share a particularly sensitive experience or memory that they wanted to discuss, but did not want to appear in my finished document. Those opportunities were powerful moments for me, both as an individual
and as a researcher, and they also provided vivid evidence of what it took for several of my sample members to truly transcend burnout.

Now that I have thoroughly discussed both my sample and my research process, the time has come to explore my findings in depth. In the next section, I will present a detailed discussion of the common characteristics and experiences that were strongly and moderately evident in my sample, as well as several significant uncommon characteristics.

Discussion of Significant Findings

*Strongly Evident Common Characteristics and Experiences*

In my study, having a sense of spirituality was one characteristic which stood out more prominently than all of the others, and was manifested by all but one of the teachers in my sample at a strong level. That one teacher, however, was still at a moderate level, making this factor more “common” than any others. My sample included members who practiced multiple faiths, including Judaism and Christianity. Before proceeding with the discussion, I would like to take a moment and define spirituality as it appears in my study. First, as my study was conducted exclusively in public schools where there is a clear separation of church and state, no references to spirituality in any way involve the teaching of scripture or any other religious doctrine in the classroom setting. Rather, spirituality, as it appears in this study refers to a teacher’s own personal belief in a higher power, and the way in which they feel that faith guides or supports them. This would appear to be congruent with current thinking on spirituality. Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) offer a definition of spirituality that is “a more personal belief and experience of a divine
spirit, or higher power” and is “about how we construct meaning...and what we individually and communally experience and attend to and honor as sacred in our lives.” They also point out that spirituality and religion, “are not the same” (p.201). Pargament & Mahoney (2005) elaborate on this distinction when they say “religion is institutional, dogmatic and restrictive, whereas spirituality is personal, subjective and life-enhancing.” (p.647).

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, data that appears on paper here as my charted results has sometimes lost some of the passion that my subjects initially presented it with. That is certainly the case for spirituality. My interview question that probed for this factor was simply, “Are you a spiritual person?” I had anticipated that most people would say yes, because of the stigma that often attaches itself to the lack of faith in our society. My hope was that I could further probe and first determine the extent to which it was a significant factor in their lives, and then discover what, if any role it played any role in the subjects resilience. I will let the Ms. Angela’s words illustrate what I found:

I believe in God and I carry myself in that way, and I hope that I always have Him in the front of everything that I do, including teaching. In terms of my resilience, whenever something does become too much, you look to what you believe in and who you believe in for guidance. I ask for guidance, and when you truly believe in that, it usually comes through. Prayer is always a good thing. As a teacher, and as a person, it keeps me going. God has always been very good to me.

Mr. Taylor had something similar to report:
Yes (I am a spiritual person). One of the things that I always did (as a teacher) was I always made a point to get to work early and pray. I would read some devotionals and meditate and read scripture. That got me centered. I would pray for my class as a whole. I would also use that time to pray for specific student that I had concerns about. That really set up my day in a positive way. It provided me with a point of reference when dealing with students. Sometimes as the students walked into class I would say a short blessing to them in my head, and ask the Lord to remove whatever cares and concerns might be troubling them.

Mrs. Avery expresses some of the same experiences:

Before I start class I say a prayer for myself and for the kids, that they will be successful and that it'll be a worthwhile day. It (Spirituality) keeps my head together. It helps me not to sweat the small stuff. It also helps me let my conscience guide me. I always pray before I walk in. Where does (my enthusiasm) come from and how do I maintain it? I guess it comes from my spirituality.

The more I probed into the factor of spirituality, the more I was struck by how directly my subjects experiences with, and attitudes about their spiritual lives were connected to resilience. Consider the following excerpt from my interview with Mrs. Myers:

I used to get up a little earlier and have some quiet time for prayer and exercise and I really miss doing that. It seems like when I used to do that it gave me more energy in the mornings and I was more alert. I used to do that a
lot and I'm going to get back into it again soon. I'm more resilient when I do that. You really do have to have something else to focus on because our kids come in with so many different problems and if you let that get to you, it will drive you stone crazy! You have to have some other outlet.

Mr. Taylor's interview revealed the following:

*It sounds like you haven't experienced much, if any burnout. How come?*

It is because of my spirituality. I pray to always be able to discern the good in each individual. That doesn't mean that I always like individuals, no, but I love everybody. I'll say this: my faith teaches me to love everyone, but there are deeds and acts that people do, where you don't like the act, but you love the person. Like and love aren't interchangeable. There are times, for example, where I don't like my youngest daughter, but I always love her.

Now with my students, there may be times when I do not like them, and why I do not like them may be because of some things they are doing, but I always try to understand why they do what they do at a given time. The reason I am the way that I am, a positive, uplifting person, is because of my vertical connection, because of my spirituality, and that is the one thing that always keeps me centered. And in that I find faith in mankind and am able to understand that children are children and that they are growing up. I can't speak for everybody because there may be people who say "I'm just as spiritual as the next person." it all comes down to my spirituality, to my faith, and in that I'm always eternally hopeful. Now every now and then I may get
slapped in the face, and have to recoil and say, "Man, I don’t like this," but after prayer, after processing, I’m always hopeful and determined.

Mrs. Dobbs also reported spirituality having a strong impact on her life as a teacher:

*Are you a spiritual person? If so, does your spirituality play any part in your role as a teacher?*

Absolutely! On some days I pray for help getting through the day, or thanks for getting me through the day. I think prayer and spirituality helps. Those people who are having a hard time in teaching, sometimes I think some of it may stem from the fact that they may not necessarily be as spiritual. I’m thinking of some of people I know in teaching and they don’t like their job, they’re frustrated at home, I mean it all ties in.

For Mrs. Hines, spirituality was manifested in a slightly different way, but was also significant:

I’m very religious, but I have a very strong sense of the separation between church and state, particularly in music. Teaching is my stewardship or evangelism. This is how I live out my religious beliefs, in the way I teach. I believe everybody is equal, and teaching gives me a chance to reach out. For me, my spirituality is connected to teaching through my strong sense of social justice. My first child was severely multiply handicapped, and that colored everything I did in my life from then on. Equality, and how you view other people took on a whole new meaning. I think I feel sort of a spiritual calling, and this job is a way of giving back to the community. I’m getting paid, but
it's about service. It affects my resilience because it lets me perform the service that I really feel like I need to provide.

Teachers seemed to feel that their spirituality had a large impact on how they dealt with children, which appears to improve both patience and personal connections with students (each factors of resilience in their own right), and in the following quotation from Mrs. Myers, it even was tied to the factor of collegial support:

I have been in the church since I was a kid, but as I've gotten older, church has gotten into me. A lot of the things that I get taught in church really apply to my life and it makes it so things don’t bother me that otherwise could. For example, a lot of people in this building have had to move their classrooms and it’s got some people so upset, and I was just wondering, what are they so upset about? It's just a change. I try not to let simple things like that bother me. Also, I try to seek God first. If you try to be Christ-like, to emulate Him you won’t get as upset. If you notice, He never really got angry, He never really let anything upset Him, and so if you try to have that type of attitude in the classroom, it can really help. You might get a student whose goal this week is to get you upset, and to get you to fly off the handle. But if you just keep your cool and go on with what you’re doing, they might see that they can’t get to you and they might change what they’re doing. Spirituality also played a part in that we had a little prayer group here a while back. We’d say something real quick and sweet, it was about five teachers, and we’d get together first thing in the morning and encourage each other.

Do you think It helped?
I think it did. A lot of times when stuff is going on you need someone you can talk to so you won’t pull your hair out.

Clearly then, spirituality was not simply common to my sample, but was also a characteristic that was perceived by every member as something that actually promoted their resilience, and in some cases, as illustrated, promoted other factors of resilience as well, such as patience, personal connections with students, and collegial support.

The other strongly evident factor among my sample that I would like to discuss is that of having a collegial or personal support system or group. This factor was strongly evident among five of the six sample members, and unlike spirituality, was referenced frequently in previous research and relevant literature (see Chapter II). Sample members didn’t speak of it quite as passionately as they did for spirituality, and for one sample member it wasn’t a factor at all, but it was certainly a significant finding in this study, and it’s presence supports past research (Truch, 1980; Patterson, 2004; Stanford, 2001). A good example of the role that collegial and personal support played in the lives of my sample members is illustrated by Mrs. Myers:

Supportive colleagues would probably be the second most important thing (after spirituality) that keeps me resilient. When you have supportive colleagues, someone who you’ve grown to know and who really knows you, they’ll give you an honest answer when you go to them. They’re not afraid to tell you when you are wrong. That’s important for me. I need people who will be that way for me and I respect when they can offer that kind of honesty.

Mrs. Hines reported that:
There's always someone who picks you up. Maybe it's a teacher or a student, or an administrator. Usually it's another teacher or a student, though, that picks you up and provides a wonderful example. There are people who model to me how I want to be, even teachers much younger than me, and I can learn a lot from them. Even when they aren't actually right next to me, I still know that they are "there." They are very important. They help me stay resilient because there are times when the outside world thinks that what we do is basically playing and getting paid a lot of money to do it. Sometimes I really think they don't support us, and having that support group means that I know there are other who believe what I believe about the importance of what we do, and that mutual understanding helps me stay resilient.

*Why has your experience with the cohort been so special to you. How is it connected to your resilience? (this was a doctoral program that was a partnership between Mrs. Hines' district and a major state university that took place several years back).*

The cohort was a group of very disparate people, but we found that we had a lot in common. We did a lot of talking, and it was very important to me in terms of developing an awareness of the people that I worked with and our interconnectedness. It was collegial, and it also provided us with a voice we might not have had otherwise, and it was also a big step in my own professional development.

Mrs. Avery also reported having collegial support as a strong factor in helping her stay resilient:
I think it’s not just about helping me, but that we help each other. That’s important. We have camaraderie. I couldn’t go to just anyone, but the group is there. We do group activities like Weight Watchers, but we’ll also help each other by asking, “How was your day?” Little things like that from people you trust really helps you stay resilient.

Support for my sample came not just from colleagues, but from outside of the school building as well. Family members played a huge role. Mrs. Avery speaks about a time when she experienced severe stress and doubted her ability to continue teaching:

It was horrible. I remember the exact date even now. I drove home crying and I told my husband that I couldn’t do it. He told me that I could. I had no idea what to do, but he was so helpful in so many ways, setting up the classroom, establishing rules. He and my mentor were the ones who really got me through.

Mrs. Myers, similarly, reports that having a support system at home made a difference:

*Tell me about the role of family in keeping you resilient.*

You have those days when you go home with a lot on your shoulders, and going home to a supportive family, well, I think it’s something you have to have if you are going to stay resilient. You need supportive, patient people, because there are days where you have so much frustration or anger, or whatever and when you go home, if someone is there listening and comforting, it will keep you from exploding and calms you down. They can help you see that something that upset you is really not such a big deal after
all and keep you from stressing. They can also give you feedback when you
need it.

A common theme within the topic of having collegial or personal support is that for
many teachers, it was one of the key things in helping them transcend burnout. Mrs.
Dobbs reports that her supportive coworkers were the main thing that got her through
her first year of teaching over two decades ago. Collegial support also became a
factor again this year, as she entered into a new special education setting in which she
was suddenly outside of her comfort zone after nineteen years in first grade.

Regarding this new challenge, Mrs. Dobbs said:

This year I have a group to rely on to help with the new paperwork and
changes coming back to special education. It’s tough, and I don’t regret doing
it, but occasionally I wonder if someone could do it better than I could. That’s
when the support group comes in. They get rid of that idea in a hurry.

So they give you moral support?

Absolutely. We eat lunch together and see each other throughout the day as
well as emailing. We go to movies. I had a support group when I was in
general ed as well, but I wonder if this group, by virtue of being special ed, is
tighter. But even so, at my last school, and even back in Texas, my core
group has always stuck together.

To add my own experiences to the discussion, I too noticed in my own career that
having a support group to turn to was a large factor in helping me stay resilient. For
several years I had a group that I ate lunch with. We discussed our challenges and
hopes together in a more professional and positive way than the endless crabbing and

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complaining that could be found down the hall in the teacher’s lounge. This year was my first year without the group, which was split up as layoffs and promotions scattered our grade level teachers to other places. As I conducted the interviews and listened to teachers talk about how important their collegial and personal support groups were to them, I mourned the loss of mine even more, although the personal reflection and awareness that conducting this research has provided me with may have mitigated the loss to a degree.

The final strongly evident common characteristic in my study that I would like to discuss in detail is that of forming personal connections with students. As I have said repeatedly, this was of special significance in the development of my own resilience, and although it was not referenced significantly in the literature, I was curious to see if forming personal connections was a common characteristic of my sample. As figure 2 illustrates, it was strongly evident in four out of six of my sample members, or 67%. The two other sample members still manifested this characteristic, but at what I determined to be a low level.

Part of my interest in this characteristic as a potentially important factor in maintaining resilience has to do with the setting from which my sample members come, which is that of predominantly minority schools. As I mentioned in earlier chapters, Dr. Charles Warfield of Western Michigan University lectured to a group of teachers from my district several years back on how unlike their Caucasian peers, minority students often tend to need an established connection with a teacher prior to performing, and once that connection is established, will be significantly more willing to perform. I saw immediate results in both student behavior and my own job
satisfaction (and in turn my own resilience) as I began forming these connections. This past year I was in the audience as another speaker, Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu said essentially the same thing to a gathering of teachers from urban districts in the area. I hypothesized that there might be other teachers, who, like me, found their resilience strengthened by forming these connections. As I began to collect data, however, I began to see that my experiences were divergent from those of the sample. Most teachers in my study formed connections with their students, or at least actively worked at it, but it wasn’t an element of their pedagogy so much as a facet of their personality. Where I was by no means a cold, distant person, forming personal connections was, to some degree, something I had to learn to do in order to help me reach the students. Looking back, I think the burnout I was experiencing had led to a certain amount of depersonalization in that first year, and so learning to connect was a very helpful strategy. But it was a strategy… at first. Forming personal connections has since become second nature for me and has, to a degree, spread beyond the school setting and has made a positive impact in my personal life. In terms of the classroom, I think that because forming connections was something I learned, and was not something that developed unconsciously (as many things in a teachers practice do over time), it has been able to stay at the forefront of my practice. My sample members appeared to be a different story. For many of them, it was just who they were and how they were. Many of them formed personal connections not just with their students, but with their colleagues as well. For several of them it appeared as if connecting came from caring, and was a part of how they lived, regardless of the setting. Mrs. Avery, for example, has a particularly warm demeanor, and from my
observations of her teacher-student interactions just prior to our interviews, she appeared to connect particularly well with her students. In reference to forming personal connections, Mrs. Avery said:

A lot of it (enthusiasm) is also from the kids. They really energize me. Every morning we have a class meeting on the rug, and we get through a lot of academic stuff, but we also share and bond. That energizes me. When the kids are down, and I get to nurture them, that kind of thing, being a woman, is energizing as well. Seeing them turn around and knowing that I could make them feel better about being at school makes me feel better and energizes me. A lot of them see me as very motherly and that can make a big difference. For example I have one boy whose mom is away six weeks and then back home for a week because she travels and he looked at me and told me, “I need a good Mama hug.” That kind of thing lets me know what I am to them, beyond just teaching. I have gone to basketball games, and I try to have lunch with the kids. That’s a big one. Although the liability things in education today make me back off more than in the past. I used to make home visits, and even now, when I see kids outside of school, they and the parents are always excited to see me...I’m enthusiastic, even though I’m old. I try to be fresh. I try to come up with new things and new ideas. I always have a smile on my face. I try not to convey when I’m not feeling well. I greet them all with a handshake or a hug at the door every morning and at the end of the day. I try to say something nice to each one of them, some sort of compliment every morning when I take attendance. I try to be more patient and I always
try to physically drop down to their level when we talk, and sit with them as well. I actually started reading *Jet* and *Ebony*, just to understand the culture of the kids I teach a little bit better. I had to make a change, I had to initiate. I don’t think a lot of people are willing to do that.

I discussed earlier in this chapter how Ms. Angela was particularly prominent among my sample when it came to forming personal connections with students, perhaps more so than any teacher I’ve observed in my career thus far. She not only connects with students in a way that makes her management appear to be a quieter, more effective version of the Pied Piper, but she also uses those connections to stress community and understanding as she shared in the following exchange:

*How are you different from those teachers who become burned out and stay burned out?*

I bond, or connect with the class. I’m very honest with the students. We are like a family. It’s not always ice cream and cake, my students and I may have issues or disagreements with each other, but we stay bonded, we stay connected. A lot of my positive mindset comes from the kids. They are always able to give me something positive. They really motivate and inspire me.

*Beyond classroom instruction and classroom management, how else are you involved or connected in the lives of your students?*

I think the biggest way is that we “get” each other. I get them and they get me. There are a lot of things between myself and the students that are unsaid, yet we understand each other. I don’t necessarily go to churches and family
gatherings, but the invitations are always there and it means a lot to me. They need a little separation, but in terms of connections, I start my class of each year as a family, and we are going to have our highs and lows, our ups and downs, but we love each other and we stick together.

*Does forming personal connections with your students influence your resilience in any way?*

Oh definitely. The kids, I think, a lot of times get confused with the fact that I’m not actually a family member. I’m not a sister, I’m not an aunt, but we’re that close. I’ve had kids call me everything from cousin to mom, to whatever. I feel really good when that happens because it tells me that they are really connecting with me. When we’re in class, I try to get across that we’re a family. Sometimes we’re going to like each other, sometimes we’re not going to like each other, but we go with it, because we know we are all connected. It keeps me resilient because I get to really identify with the kids. I know what’s in store for them because (as an African-American) I have been there. I had to struggle as a student. I wasn’t a problem, but I certainly wasn’t the brainy kid either, and I knew that in order to be a success I was going to have to put a lot of time in. Some teachers may think that things come really easily. If this kid can do it, so can this one, but I have a different perspective. I know what they may be going through, but I also know, firsthand, how important it is to stick with things. Forming those connections helps me identify with them, and that keeps me resilient.
In the final analysis of this factor and its significance within my study, despite being both strongly evident and common among my sample, I found myself asking: was it as prominent in the lives of my research subjects and in their resilience as it was in my own? Yes and no. Although forming personal connections with students was common to the sample, the transcribed interview data and my own observations as a researcher suggest to me that forming those connections was more of a byproduct of individuals with caring, nurturing personalities, and not a strategy developed to make their job easier and more effective, as it was for me. In both cases the impact on students is that they have teachers who are connecting with them, but I suspect that in cases where forming personal connections stems from personality, when or if burnout occurs, with symptoms that often include a sense of depersonalization (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), those connections could be lost more easily than when they are an actively developed element of one’s pedagogy. In other words, I suspect that when a person purposefully thinks about forming personal connections with students as part of his or her role as an educator, it is easier not to let them slip away when stress or burnout comes along.

**Moderately Evident Common Characteristics and Experiences**

As there were many more moderately evident characteristics and experiences common to my sample than strongly evident factors, my discussion of individual moderately evident characteristics and experiences will have to be streamlined somewhat in order to accommodate the relevant discussion without being too lengthy. To this end, I will limit my discussion of the moderately evident common
characteristics of my sample to those that appeared to me the most directly related to the resilience of my research subjects.

The first moderately evident factor common factor to my sample that I will discuss is that of making changes. As I developed this study and reviewed current literature, much was made of the problem of attrition. In fact articles specifically about the problem of teacher attrition greatly outnumbered those directly focused on teacher resilience. This influenced my thinking, and I began to operate under the general assumption that for teachers, change and attrition went hand in hand. In hindsight it seems obvious, but I have to admit to my surprise when the idea of making changes within teaching began to emerge as a significant common factor among my sample members. For them making changes was something that promoted their resilience. It didn’t mean leaving the profession, but came in the form of switching grade levels, subjects areas, and even specialties, such as moving from special education to regular education and vice versa. The reasons sample members had for making changes included finding a niche that was more suited to their strengths, moving to what they hoped would be a less stressful position, seeking new challenges and avoiding stagnation and burnout. For some sample members this factor was particularly significant, as Mrs. Avery illustrates in the following exchange:

*How are you different from teachers who become burned out and stay burned out?*

I made a change! (to a different grade level). Making changes is so important. I looked at myself in the mirror and reflected and said, “What can I do
different?” and then I acted on it. I had to make a change, I had to initiate. I don’t think a lot of people are willing to do that.

Mr. Taylor also discusses how making changes affected his resilience:

Has the idea of making changes (either in position, practice, etc.) made an impact in your resilience?

Yeah. You know what? Challenges always gave me that “drive.” I was teaching fourth grade and after my third year, I needed to do something different. I started eyeing fifth grade and looking at the problems and I started to visualize myself teaching that grade. I put it out there that I wanted to try fifth grade because I needed a challenge. I needed to push myself. I wanted to do something different. I wanted to be more on the edge. I wanted to master something new, which is kind of like what led me to this Title I job. I was, and am again now, a rookie all over again. There are more expectations and more to do, I’m taking my licks, but even so I’m thinking ahead to next year and what I’ll do then. Making changes has really added to my resilience, yes, because it gives me a new perspective on the things I can have an impact on. Challenges don’t necessarily equal stress for me. I’m not burned out partly because challenges give me a chance to work on my credo, which is to work smarter, not harder. The harder I work, the smarter I find I become.

Conversely, it is worth noting that making changes can have it’s drawbacks. A previous example related how Mrs. Hines was forced to move from her position as an elementary music teacher to a middle school English teacher when budget cuts
eliminated her program. That unrequested change led to one of the most stressful times in her career as a teacher.

The second moderately evident common characteristic I want to discuss is reflective thinking. This is not a factor that elicited extensive data from my sample, but it was certainly evident and significant enough to merit mention here. As was the case with forming personal connections with students, reflective thinking appeared to be more of a personality characteristic for my sample members rather than a intentionally developed pedagogical strategy. In several cases, reflective thinking was something that also led to the factor I just discussed, which is making changes. Mr. Taylor also mentions reflective thinking as an element that helped him avoid burnout:

*What makes you different from teachers who experience burnout, but stay burned out?*

Staying reflective and introspective and asking, “What can I do?” I’m a reflective person, and the things that happen I try not to take personally. I try to look at the issue or conflict and not the people or persons behind it. I try to look at things as evolutionary. I look at every day as an opportunity to get things right and renew my challenges. I go in to each day thinking “I’m gonna catch that roadrunner because I’ve got a better plan.”

Mrs. Hines mentions reflective thinking as an element that has helped her stay resilient:

*An unexamined life is not worth living. You sit back and you say things like “Am I teaching my all-day Kindergarteners as much as I taught the half-day*
kindergarteners in years past?” Or am I using my time effectively?

Reflective thinking means I have to revisit my expectations from time to time.

I reflect on what I’ve done and I ask if I’ve done it to the best of my ability
and I ask how or if I could have done it differently. Reflection refocuses my
objectives and goals. It prompts me to make changes and it keeps me resilient
because it keeps life interesting.

Actively engaging in professional development and maintaining career competence is
another moderately evident characteristic that was common to my sample. For some
teachers it was a particularly strong factor in their resilience. Mr. Taylor explains:

It (professional development) helps me put things in perspective. One of the
reasons that I participate in so much professional development is that it allows
me to interact outside of my building and district and it keeps me going. I can
use those new perspectives to bring new things into the classroom. It helps
me to be more resilient because it lets me know that my pedagogy is quality
and is in the best interest of the children. If I didn’t have those encounters
with people outside of the district, I would have a narrower focus and I would
have the ability to connect and perform at the level that I have now.

*It makes it so you can do your job better.*

Absolutely, hence the term “Professional Development”! It’s empowering.
It helps me stay resilient because it keeps me current and helps me to not
fixate on just what’s going on in my building, but rather it lets me interact
with my professional colleagues from other buildings and districts. It gives
me a new perspective and a point of reference as well.
Even when professional development was not an option, but a district requirement, teachers such as Ms. Angela still found value in it. “The more information you have, the more strategies you can rely on when you face challenges.”

The next common characteristic which was moderately evident in my results was that of possessing a passion for teaching. Data on this factor was not collected from a direct question, but rather from a collage of how they responded to other questions, as well as my observations of the enthusiasm and passion with which they spoke about their job. I found clues to whether or not a sample member possessed a passion for teaching in responses such as the following, from Mrs. Hines:

I’m never going to run out of new things that I want to teach. My content area (music) is so large, and I know it so well, that I don’t see myself running out of new things to teach, or new ways to deliver it. I really love what I teach. That’s what keeps me from becoming burned out... We’re here to make the kids successful. I’m here to teach kids. And if I have a kid who is always in the office and always in trouble, but I can let them know that they have the most glorious voice in the world and they get excited and feel good about themselves and sing, sometimes that can carry over (for the student) into the next subject.

Mrs. Dobbs reported similar experiences:

I’m here for the kids, and I really look forward to coming to work and seeing their faces. It just lights up my day.... Looking back on the first graders, when they walked in, you could always tell which ones felt defeated, and of course those where the ones I targeted first. By the last day of school I don’t
want anyone to feel defeated and I think I do a pretty good job at that.

Bringing up their self-esteem, even if they were not on grade level, brings up mine too. Seeing their successes makes me want to keep going. I get motivated by the students. Also, this current group is so needy. When I was in first grade, I felt like anyone could do what I was doing. I don’t feel like that with this group. Not everyone could do what I’m doing. I’m better for these kids than someone else would be. Knowing that gives me satisfaction. Conversely, I know that I wouldn’t be nearly as successful in, for example, and E.I. room. That takes a different kind of person.

The connection between possessing a passion for teaching and it’s possible impact on resilience is intuitive. A person who has a passion for an activity is more likely to find satisfaction in engaging in that activity than someone who doesn’t. It is also reasonable to infer that an individual who is satisfied would appear to have an advantage over one who is not when it comes to being able to thrive when faced with adversity. I should note, however, that while the two examples above both show a sample member’s passion for teaching, one refers to a passion for the subject matter, and one to the students themselves. This is a distinction within the category that I didn’t differentiate during the interviews, but which should be separated and analyzed as distinct from one another in future research studies that choose to explore this factor of resilience in greater depth.

The common characteristic of possessing a passion for teaching provides a good lead-in to the next moderately evident characteristic I want to discuss, which is possessing feelings of accomplishment. This was often closely related to possessing
a passion for teaching, and also is related to resilience in a manner which is rather intuitive. I operationally defined resilience in my study as thriving despite conditions of adversity. Accomplishment and thriving can be thought of as nearly synonymous within the context of education. Mrs. Dobbs talks about accomplishment when she discusses how knowing that parents are requesting that their children be placed in her class far more than others gives her a strong feeling of accomplishment and validation, which in turn keeps her resilient.

The final moderately evident common characteristic evident in my sample that I will discuss in this section is empowerment. Empowerment appeared to be one of the most significant external factors where promoting resilience was concerned. Previous research repeatedly showed that lack of empowerment (and to a large degree administrative support as well) was a large contributor to teacher burnout (Schwab, et al., 1986; Byrne, 1999). I hypothesized that an abundance of empowerment might conversely lead to greater resilience, and this was confirmed by my data. Each of the three teachers who reported that they had not experienced serious burnout in their careers also reported having experienced a strong, or moderate amount of empowerment in their career. Conversely, the teacher who reported the most severe level of burnout also reported experiencing much less empowerment that did the rest of my sample.

**Strongly Evident Uncommon Characteristics**

My research question asked what the common characteristics and experiences of resilient elementary school teachers working in urban schools were. In this section I will discuss several factors which were not common to my sample, and so are
technically outside of the original scope of this study as I first established it, but which were of great significance to the sample members who exhibited them, and relevant to their resilience, which I feel merits their inclusion.

The first of these factors, which I will refer to as uncommon characteristics, is a need for service, or helping others. This characteristic was evident at a strong level for three out of my six sample members. I suspect it may have been evident in a higher level in the others as well, and a more extensive interview process may have revealed it. In any case, for three of my sample members, this need for service to others was both a motivating factor and an element that promoted their resilience.

Consider the following exchange with Mrs. Hines:

_Talk to me about working in an urban environment. How do you think it has affected your resilience?_

I think I feel sort of a spiritual calling, and this job is a way of giving back to the community. I'm getting paid, but it's about service. It affects my resilience because it lets me perform the service that I really feel like I need to provide.... I think we just owe something back to society because of what we have. We have so much.

Mrs. Dobbs makes similar comments when discussing what helps her stay resilient:

I think it's just being able to help someone that is so appealing. Having the need to help someone and then helping people to feel better about themselves. I had a younger brother, so there was a nurturing aspect that I developed.

*So it's something within you that directed you to teaching.*
Yes. It’s my personality. I’ve always had the desire to help somebody. It’s service. I think it’s more of a social thing, making the world a better place and all that, but you have to target the individuals if you want to get there...That’s one reason why I wanted to come back to special ed. I felt like I could reach more individuals, just because it was a smaller environment. I thought I would be able to reach more kids more often.

For several of the subjects this idea of having a need for service kept repeating and for them was also connected to other characteristics and experiences which were common to the sample, such as spirituality and possessing feelings of accomplishment. For them, this need for service provided a mission to continually try and fulfill, and the successes (and challenges as well, for a few sample members) helped keep them resilient.

Patience was another characteristic that was strong among the sample members who exhibited it. Like the need for service mentioned above, patience was another factor that, while uncommon, was tied to several characteristics that were common in many cases. Mr. Taylor, for example reported that his patience came about as a result of his growth as a reflective thinker, and Mrs. Dobbs said that her spiritual life was what made her more patient. Some sample members reported not having enough patience and finding it continually emerging as a skill to be developed and improved, while for Mrs. Myers it was a personality characteristic she had possessed since childhood. Again, this is another characteristic whose connection to resilience is obvious. When a person works to develop his or her patience, he or she is working on a skill that will help them problem solve more effectively when faced
with adverse conditions. Mrs. Angela expresses it well in the following interview excerpt:

You have to be patient. It’s a trying job at times. Kids are kids, and they have their own problems and their own issues, and some days there will be a conflict between you and the students. You always have options for how to deal with it, and one of the options is to just ride it out and be patient. You can’t do that for every issue every time, you can’t wait forever, but certainly, if you can just be patient, they’ll come around. Patience definitely helps me stay resilient.

The next uncommon characteristic that I will discuss is actively working to maintain a positive attitude. While many of my sample members were positive people with positive attitudes, one sample member in particular stood out. This sample member had more severe encounters with burnout than the others reported experiencing, but is just as positive. I have observed on many occasions just how upbeat she is, and aside from wishing I could adapt what she was modeling into my own life as a teacher, I have noted that her positive demeanor is more consistent than that of others who my observations would lead me to characterize as “positive” people. The reason for this, she reports, is that she has made maintaining a positive attitude a focal point of her practice. I found this compelling in light of the volume of stress she reported encountering in contrast to other sample members (many of whom were not as positive). This sample member reports:

I really have to work at staying positive. Sometimes I have to sort of pretend to be positive until the feeling actually happens. Fake it till you make it. My
positive outlook is not genuine all the time, but if you keep it up, you start to feel positive after a while. Also, just getting to sing and getting the children pepped up at the beginning of the day tends to get me in a more positive mood. Music also helps refocus me and get me positive when I’m not feeling it. I remember a story about going to a wedding. The only person I knew was the groom’s mother, a teacher in a far off district. She seated my husband and I at a table with a bunch of teachers, and at first I was thinking I was going to be so comfortable, but as I started listening to those teachers, all of whom were my age, and all of whom came from different schools and different settings, all they did was whine, bitch, moan and complain. It was miserable! It made me think. They were all representatives of what I do, and I thought to myself is this how I want to represent myself and my school? It was a great revelation for me.

*How do you stay positive when you’re in a negative environment?*

I have a unique position, because unlike a regular education teacher, I have to give the same lesson, with the same level of energy and enthusiasm at the end of the day that I gave at the beginning. If I don’t, teachers with classes late in the day will complain that their children’s music class isn’t getting a fair deal compared to the ones who came at the start of the day. Meanwhile, in a regular education class, at the end of the day, you may be winding down and packing up to go. That’s quite a challenge. To stay positive? I have to focus and remember that the kids deserve an energetic, engaging lesson, and you just do it!
While many of the common (and uncommon) characteristics manifested among my sample were also common to me, the following one was not, and I hadn’t anticipated it’s presence, let alone how significant it appeared to be for several of my sample members. This uncommon experience is that of having wanted to be a teacher from childhood, or of having been inspired or influenced to go into teaching from childhood experiences. Both were certainly foreign to me, but for three of my sample members, those childhood experiences translated into lifelong goals that they got to see realized on a daily basis. This appears to have led to the common characteristic of experiencing feelings of accomplishment. Mrs. Dobbs elaborates:

I think teaching is either something that you were either meant to do or you weren’t. Just because you went to school and got a degree, that doesn’t make you a teacher.

_Sounds like it is internal._

Exactly. In those first years there wasn’t anything else I wanted to do and there still isn’t... Growing up, that’s all I ever wanted to do. I think it’s just being able to help someone that is so appealing. Having the need to help someone and then helping people to feel better about themselves.

Mr. Taylor also reports strong feelings about this experience:

_What made you decide to become a teacher?_

There was something in me...it was something I always wanted to do. I often tell people I was born to teach. For me, I didn’t just fall into teaching. I was born to do this. I don’t know if that is true for everyone. A long time ago, when I was in the first grade, I had a teacher who was very patient and kind
and that made an impression on me, and as I matriculated, I had an appreciation for the patience and the knowledge that teachers had.

The next uncommon factor that I would like to discuss in this section is administrative support. A lack of administrative support was a factor that my review of current literature and research frequently mentioned as a particularly significant promoter of burnout (Dworkin, 1986). I expected this to be the case for my study as well. Upon analyzing my results, I saw that while this factor was not common to my sample, the results did fit the general pattern, which was present in previous studies. As I have mentioned repeatedly, my entire sample demonstrated enough evidence to qualify as resilient under my operational definition. Still, teachers who had the strongest reported administrative support had the least reported burnout, and the teacher who reported the lowest level of administrative support also experienced the most severe burnout. In both cases the factor itself, whether present as positive or negative influence, was significant. For the teachers whom it was not a significant factor, they reported that it was because they were either independent, or had learned strategies to adapt to administrations with a lack of support.

The final uncommon, but significant factor that I would like to present for discussion is the experience of having come to teaching later in life. While many teachers, myself included, came to teaching immediately following their undergraduate work, and in their early twenties, others come into the classroom after having other careers or other life experiences following college. This experience was shared by three of my sample members and for all three it was a factor that was of
special significance and which provided them with perspectives that have helped them stay resilient. Ms. Angela explains some of the advantages:

(Because I came to teaching later in life) I know what’s out there. I know the world outside of teaching. I think the later you come into teaching, the more you know, just by experience, that everything is not going to be perfect. A lot of young people come in expecting to change the world and then get disappointed. You’re not going to change the world, and that’s okay. I think coming to teaching later on makes you more realistic. You have more life experience, you’ve had other jobs and you’re likely to be less naïve. You become more comfortable in yourself, and you aren’t so much of a follower.

Mr. Taylor talks about knowing when he was and was not ready to begin teaching and expresses advantages that came about as a result of having come to teaching later in life:

Do you think that coming to teaching later in life has added to your resilience? Without a doubt. I brought a different set of life experiences to it than most. My set of experiences has served me well. I’m probably a lot more resilient than I would have been if I had started right out of college. One thing about it is that I knew all of my life that I wanted to be a teacher. When I was in college, having enough understanding of how I was personally, and how I desired to be, I knew I wanted to be a person of integrity and character when I stood up in front of children. Even in my first career, working as a supervisor in a hospital, I was happy to be there, because I knew I wasn’t yet where I wanted to be as a person, but having that job, it was amazing how
when people got to know me they would comment on how they just knew I
was meant to be a teacher. I had a pretty good life in my first career, I was a
manager of people, and so I always had people skills. I could get them to buy
into my vision and that type of thing. That job also toughened me. There
were tough conditions that I just had to deal with and still perform at a high
level. In other words, coming to teaching later in life gave me a chance to
toughen up. I also prided myself on my work ethic, I had that mentality, and
when I became a teacher, I brought that mindset with me. I would be the first
one at work and the last to leave. Also, I made up for what I didn’t know with
effort. That toughness and work ethic wouldn’t have been there if I had come
to teaching right after college. Teachers, I’ve noticed can sometimes be
spoiled babies, complaining about little things, and whining about anything
remotely physical. I know what rough working conditions really are! If they
could have walked in my shoes they wouldn’t be so quick to complain.

As I began to reflect on these strongly and moderately significant common
characteristics, and the strongly evident uncommon characteristics as well, I was
struck by how disproportionately large the number of internal characteristics and
experiences were when compared to external factors. Spirituality, developing
personal connections with students, reflective thinking, a sense of purpose; each were
important to the development of my sample members’ resilience, and each come from
within. The only external factors of any real significance among my key findings
were collegial and administrative support. I suspect that if many unsatisfied, or
burned out teachers were aware of just how much impact the characteristics that they
already possess could have (if only they were to develop them a bit), they might be less apt to place blame for their professional challenges and obstacles on external forces (such as administrators, parents and society), and they might become more resilient.

In the next section I will discuss my findings in light of existing research about resilience and compare my data to what has been previously collected.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Introduction

In the last chapter I focused on presenting the results of this study, as well as my own personal reflections on the research process, an overview of the significant findings, and a closer look at the subjects themselves. In Chapter V, I will take on the task of enriching the results with both context and comment. The organization of this, the final chapter of my research study will proceed as follows: I will begin with a section that considers my study’s findings in light of existing research and then discuss the implications of my study on current theory. I will then examine and discuss how my study and the results I obtained compared to my own expectations. Finally I will discuss the limitations in my study which might affect the validity or generalizability of the results, and then conclude with my own recommendations for further research.

Consideration of My Findings in Light of Existing Research

Within the text of both my presentation of the results in Chapter IV, and the discussion of them here in Chapter V, I have discussed how my findings were similar and different from what has already been explored in previous research and literature. In this section, I will present a closer look at how my findings match up to five previous studies which are similar to mine and which are specifically focused on
resilience. I will discuss similarities and differences between each and my own study and the significance of those similarities and differences.

My review of literature included a great deal of discussion on burnout, which prior to my research appeared to me as a major element when considering the idea of resilience, this discussion, however, will be primarily restricted to the topic of resilience itself. The general topic of teacher resilience has been sparsely explored compared to the vast body of knowledge that has been collected on teacher burnout over the years, and specific research on the common characteristics and experiences of resilient elementary teachers in urban schools has been particularly limited. I was only able to locate a handful of studies that bore any similarity to my own, and some of these also commented on the lack of empirical research on teacher resilience (Bobek, 2002, p. 202). However, five studies specific to teacher resilience were reasonably similar to mine, and provide a useful platform for comparison. Figures 3-7, on the following pages, compare and illustrate how my findings were similar to and different from these studies. These will be as follows:

1. My findings compared to Stanford’s (2001)
2. My findings compared to Bobek’s (2002)
3. My findings compared to Patterson’s (2004)
4. My findings compared to Howard and Johnson’s (2002)
5. My findings compared to Nieto’s (2003)

I will briefly discuss each of these comparisons following the diagrams on the next five pages:
Figure 3
Comparing My Findings to Other Resilience Studies

Key Findings for Stanford Only

- Sample members developed personal connections with students
- Sample had strong or active spiritual lives
- Sample found deep meaning in their work
- Sample had a commitment to making a difference in students’ lives and learning

Key Findings for Both Studies

- Sample has strong collegial, personal or family support
- Sample had strong or active spiritual lives

Key Findings for My Study Only

- Sample members developed personal connections with students
- Sample members had a strong sense of purpose and, or personal values
- Sample members experienced feelings of accomplishment or value

Similar to

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Comparing My Findings to Other Resilience Studies

**Key Findings for Bobek Only**
- Sense of humor was important in the development of resilience
- Relationship between parents and teachers can promote resilience
- Resilience may be enhanced for new teachers by taking personal ownership

**Key Findings For Both Studies**
- Developing supportive relationships with colleagues positively impacts resilience (or was common to sample)
- Professional learning and development positively impacts resilience (or was common to sample)
- Sense of accomplishment promotes resilience (or was common to sample)

**Key Findings for My Study Only**
- Sample members had strong or active spiritual lives
- Sample members developed personal connections with students.
- Sample members possessed an internal locus of control

*Figure 4*
Comparing My Findings to Other Resilience Studies

**Key Findings for Patterson Only**
- Sample provided mentoring to others.
- Resilient teachers do whatever it takes to help children be successful.
- Resilient teachers are not wedded to one best way of teaching and are interested in exploring new ideas.
- Resilient teachers are not victims – they take charge and solve problems.
- Resilient teachers stay focused on the children and their learning.

**Key Findings For Both Studies**
- Sample had strong collegial and personal support networks
- Sample valued professional development
- Sample had a set of personal values that guides their decision-making.

**Key Findings for My Study Only**
- Sample members had strong or active spiritual lives.
- Sample members developed personal connections with students.
- Sample members possessed an internal locus of control.
- Sample members possessed a passion for teaching.

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Comparing My Findings to Other Resilience Studies

My Findings Compared To Howard and Johnson’s Resilient Teachers: Resisting Stress and Burnout (2002)

Key Findings for Howard and Johnson Only

Sample reported that they had learned the strategies and dispositions that made them resilient

Sample had strong collegial and personal support networks

Sample valued competence or professional development

Sample had a set of personal values that guides their decision-making.

Sample members possesses possessed a strong sense of achievement or accomplishment

Sample possessed a sense of agency

Different from

Sample members resilience was a mixture of learned strategies, external factors and internal characteristics

Sample members had strong or active spiritual lives

Sample members developed personal connections with students.

Similar to

Sample members possessed an internal locus of control
Comparing My Findings to Other Resilience Studies

Key Findings for Nieto Only

Teaching is about democracy

Autobiography can affect the staying power of teachers

Teaching necessarily involves love and respect

Teaching is about relationships with students and colleagues

Developing communities of learning among teachers is necessary

Key Findings For Both Studies

Professional Development is key, or was present in sample

Key Findings for My Study Only

Sample members had strong or active spiritual lives

Sample members developed personal connection with students.

Sample members had strong collegial support systems

*Similar to*

*Similar to*
Discussion of My Research Compared to Five Similar Studies

Figure 3 shows my study in comparison to Stanford’s study from 2001. Stanford’s study took a grounded theory approach, with a similar methodology and sample size, although her sample members had been teaching longer on average, and were all African American women. As you can see in figure 3, my study supports her findings where spirituality is concerned, although Stanford’s was the only study of the five illustrated above for which that is true. She explains that:

“Historically in the African American culture people deeply wove religion into their daily lives (and), it should not surprise us to find that teachers did the same, even though they were teaching in public schools” (p. 80).

I find it interesting that even with a sample which was not composed exclusively of African Americans, my study produced a similar result. Her study also reported sample members with strong collegial or personal support groups, as well as two other factors which were similar to common characteristics manifested in my study. Her sample had a commitment to making a difference in students lives, which roughly corresponds with the way my sample members experienced feelings of accomplishment or value, and her sample found deep meaning in their work, which was similar to the strong sense of purpose that was common to my sample.

Figure 4 shows my research in comparison to Bobek’s study from 2002. Although her study was slightly different in its approach, it was similar in that it was focused on the ultimate goal of promoting teacher resilience. Bobek’s research utilized a sample of young adults who had experienced adversity and explored what characteristics and experiences had made them resilient. Bobek then reframed her
findings within the context of their application or possible role in teacher resilience. My study shared several findings with hers, including collegial support, professional development and sense of accomplishment as factors of resilience, although her study contained findings that were not evident in my study, including sense of humor, which she found to be very important in the development of resilience. While sense of humor was common to my sample, it didn’t appear to have the level of significance that was evident in other factors. She also found that the relationships between parent and teachers can promote resilience, which didn’t emerge in my study although it stands to reason. Likewise, my study’s key findings included spirituality and the development of personal connections, which were not mentioned as evident in her work.

Figure 5 looks at my research beside Patterson’s 2004 study of teacher resilience in urban schools. Patterson’s work, like Stanford’s, shared a relatively similar sample and methodology to my own. Patterson’s study also shared one of my key findings, which was a sample that developed strong collegial and personal support systems, although she reported several key findings that my study did not have. These findings included a sample that provided mentoring to others, that resilient teachers do whatever it takes to help children be successful, and that resilient teachers are not wedded to one best way of teaching and are interested in exploring new ideas. I found this very interesting, because I suspected that many of these same factors may have emerged in my own work if I had been able to engage in even more extensive research with this sample.
Figure 6 illustrates the similarities and differences between my study and Howard and Johnson’s 2002 study. This study had a similar approach and sample size in comparison to my own, and although the research was conducted in Australia, the sample was drawn from challenging schools in disadvantaged areas (p. 1). My study supports the key findings of Howard and Johnson where collegial support is concerned, and although they did not report finding a strong spiritual life, or developing personal connection with students as common characteristics, they did report that sample members possessed a sense of agency, which corresponded to my study’s common factor of having an internal locus of control. I found one facet of their results particularly interesting: their sample members reported having learned the strategies and dispositions that made them resilient, which was not the case for my sample. Although some of my sample members (and myself as well) learned and developed many of the characteristics that made them resilient, it appeared to me that the majority of my subjects were resilient because they already possessed characteristics which in turn aided their resilience. Mrs. Myers’ patience, which she reports having even as a very young child, comes to mind as a prime example. The same is true of Mr. Taylor’s boundless faith and Mrs. Avery’s enthusiasm and positive attitude. None was a “learned” strategy. Each is a characteristic that is internal and is tied to the individual’s very being, unlike many of the learned characteristics that Howard and Johnson’s sample contained.

The final comparison I would like to discuss (displayed in figure 7), shows my study’s similarities and differences in comparison to Nieto’s 2003 study. Her research, which became the book What Keeps Teachers Going (2003), is a study on a
somewhat larger scale than my own work. Both explored resilience (although she
didn’t directly reference resilience as a term, her description is congruent with my
own), and both interviewed resilient teachers and reported on common factors among
the sample. The main connection between Nieto’s key findings and my own was that
both studies found a strong emphasis on, and value for professional development.
Her study didn’t report spirituality as a key finding, as mine did, but it did report that
resilient teachers believed that teaching is about relationships with students and
colleagues, which is similar to my key findings that resilient teachers developed
personal connections with students, and had strong collegial support systems.

An additional consideration I would like to discuss as I compare my study to
previous research is that of burnout. In earlier chapters, I presented Maslach and
Jackson’s definition of burnout (1981), which was defined as a condition having the
core aspects of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and feelings of low personal
accomplishment. Hamann & Gordon (2000) state that “Burnout can be compared to a
cold. It’s not a matter of whether you will get (it)...- it’s more a matter of when you
will get it and how long it will last” (p. 34). My findings are slightly contradictory
here. A conclusion that I believe my study supports is that teacher resilience does not
mean (as I initially thought upon undertaking the study), that a teacher has managed
to survive burnout. Despite my own personal experiences, which informed this
hypothesis, and the suggestions of Hamann & Gordon (2000) above, only half of my
sample (all of which have been teaching for a significant amount of time) actually
reported experiencing burnout at some point in their career, and only two of the three
appeared to have experienced strong or severe burnout. The data would suggest that
one reason for this may be that most of the subjects were equipped with the skills or
dispositions to mitigate circumstances that might lead to burn out. These skills
included (but were not limited to); reflective thinking, which led to making necessary
changes; the inner peace and patience that they perceived came from their own
spirituality or faith; and supportive colleagues who were able to advise and nurture
them through difficult time. Further supporting this line of reasoning was the lack of
relaxation and stress relief as a significant factor among my sample. Research on
burnout has pointed to relaxation and stress relief as a major factor in mitigating
burnout (Hamann & Gordon, 2000, p. 36; Brown & Nagel, 2004, p. 39.), but the
absence of relaxation and stress relief as a strongly evident factor in my study
supports the argument that burnout truly wasn’t a common factor for my sample.

An overall pattern emerges when my study is compared to previous, similar
research. My research supports the overall findings of previous studies, which found
that the presence of professional development or professional learning to be a
characteristic common to resilient teachers, and that resilient teachers maintain
collegial and personal support systems. My study adds to previous research by
suggesting that developing personal connections with students, and the presence of
spirituality, are also characteristics that may be strong in resilient teachers.

In the next section, I will explore the implications that my study may have on
current theory.

Implications on Current Theory

Based on my analysis of the key findings of this study, it appears to me that
my study has implications for several major areas of theory and practice, including:
(a) educational leadership, (b) teacher education, (c) teacher resilience, (d) general resilience theory, and (e) positive psychology. In this section, I will detail how my study may provide additional input to add to the body of knowledge in the areas mentioned above.

Implications for Educational Leadership

One of the three key areas for which my key findings seem to have implications is within the area of educational leadership, where current trends, theory and practice have become sharply focused of accountability, shared leadership and professional learning communities. My findings seem to suggest that for leaders in education, understanding the need for providing significant opportunities for teachers to interact and develop positive support systems is of great value where resilience is concerned. Although developing positive support systems does not happen overnight, and is no easy task in itself, administrators could set the direction. In my own experience, we, as teachers, are often gathered together in professional settings, but the vast majority of the time is spent with the teachers’ attention focused on the speaker or facilitator, and any interpersonal interaction is frowned at as an unnecessary distraction. Implementing common planning, and providing teachers with scheduling that allows for common lunch and, or break periods where they are free to interact and network, might help promote the sort of collegiality that was common in my sample of resilient teachers, and in turn promote the resilience of others. These opportunities to interact may also come in the form of cohort groups or professional learning communities. My study clearly suggests that the current trend toward increased mentoring (Goldstein & Noguera, 2006, p. 31) and the employment
of cohort groups as professional learning tools (Seifert, 2006, p. 1296-7) is a step in the right direction. Cohort groups and mentoring programs for teachers could each supply the sort of collegial support and opportunities for professional development that were common to my sample of resilient teachers. Mrs. Hines, one of my sample members who found great value in participating in cohort learning, discusses her experience:

The cohort was a group of very disparate people, but we found that we had a lot in common. We did a lot of talking, and it was very important to me in terms of developing an awareness of the people that I worked with and our interconnectedness. It was collegial, and it also provided us with a voice we might not have had otherwise, and it was also a big step in my own professional development. That (cohort learning) gets me excited and keeps me going. I just really found the cohort to be so wonderful. I even think sometimes that I would like to be a principal just so I could start a learning cohort!

Although faith and spirituality are also touchy subjects in the present social and political climate, I believe that my findings imply a need to continue to develop a dialogue within the field of educational leadership, about the role spirituality plays in teacher resilience. As I will discuss later in this section, research has suggested that spirituality is separate from religion (Kiesling, Montgomery, Sorell & Colwell, 2006, p. 201), and therefore need not be avoided as a topic of discussion for fear of becoming a church-state issue. As a discipline, educational leadership should be concerned with finding and retaining resilient teachers, and if faith or spirituality can
help as identifiable individual characteristics in the quest to find and retain those teachers, why not explore the role of spirituality in resilience a bit further?.

*Implications for Teacher Education*

The next area of study that my key findings may have implications for is teacher education. One long-time trend in teacher education, particularly in urban schools, is teacher attrition (Dworkin, 1986, p. 153). My findings may be used, along with the work of Bobek (2002), Stanford (2001), Patterson (2004), Howard & Johnson (2002), and Nieto (2003) to help establish an increased emphasis on characteristics such as professional development and learning, collegial and personal support systems, personal values, and striving for a sense of accomplishment, as factors that teacher education programs might attempt to facilitate among pre-service educators in order to help them promote their own resilience as they enter teaching. My own findings may be used, with the support of future research, to include the formation of personal connections and spirituality into this as well. My findings also imply that while preparing teachers for an urban environment is important, it is also important to prepare teachers for themselves. My results suggest that much of what keeps a teacher resilient is internal, and it is possible that if teacher education programs study the possibility of focusing a reasonable amount of time on internal capacity building as well as the preparation for the external environment that pre-service teachers are likely to face, it might lead to a net gain for the resilience of those teachers.

Also implicit for teacher education, based on my key findings, is the need to make teachers aware at an early stage of their induction of the importance of forming...
personal connections with students as a possible way to help them promote their own resilience. Kunjufu (2002), comparing various types of teachers, profiles a high-level category of teachers whom he calls coaches. Coaches, says Kunjufu, “understand subject matter and pedagogy, but also understand the need to bond with students first... They fully understand that there can be no learning until there is a significant relationship” (p. 46-7).

Implications for Teacher Resilience

Another area of study whose theory my study may have implications for is that of teacher resilience itself. As I have stated earlier, teacher resilience has not received the volume of scholarly attention that teacher burnout has. Perhaps it is due to our fascination with failure over success (e.g., the lead stories on the evening news), perhaps it is because the consequences of burnout are so much more prominent than the consequences of resilience, or perhaps it is because there appear to be more teachers suffering from burnout than benefiting from resilience. For whatever reason, teacher resilience research is much less common. Even so, there is a small body of literature, to which my study may contribute. While my study’s key findings matched some of the findings of earlier research, such as the presence of collegial support groups and a value for professional development among resilient teachers, I found other common characteristics in my sample, particularly spirituality and the formation of personal connections with students to be evident as well. Neither was mentioned with any frequency in similar studies.

Conversely, some of the similar studies mentioned above had key findings which were not directly evident in my sample, such as: (a) having learned the
strategies that made them resilient (Howard & Johnson, 2002), (b) promoting resilience through proving mentoring to others, (c) that resilient teachers do whatever it takes to help children be successful (Patterson, 2004), and (d) Autobiography as a promoter of teacher ‘staying power’ (Nieto, 2003).

In the end, however, none of the key findings of these similar resilience studies were elements that seemed completely incongruous with my own. Given a larger sample and a more lengthy time to gather data, I believe it is reasonable to hypothesize that either my study or one of the similar ones I discussed could have brought forth findings that were present in the others. I would argue that this implies that the body of knowledge about teacher resilience (particularly where it involves teachers in an urban environment) still needs to be expanded and its elements explored in relationship to one another before more intense research and scholarship begins to narrow the definition of what comprises teacher resilience and how it is achieved. The general level of understanding about teacher resilience seems to be still in the early stages of development. If I were to choose an analogy to compare the body of knowledge regarding teacher burnout, which is reasonably well established, to that of teacher resilience, which is not, it would be this: Picture the body of knowledge on teacher burnout and teacher resilience as dinosaur skeletons discovered by paleontologists. Teacher burnout would be on display in a museum in a decade old exhibit, complete with a bronze plaque detailing its dimensions, history, characteristics and habitat. Many people have passed by and snapped its picture over the years and it’s been written about by experts ad nauseam. The skeleton of the dinosaur representing teacher resilience, however, is still in the ground. A few giant
white vertebrae and claws are visible, perhaps even a jaw and some big old teeth, enough anatomy to intrigue people who hear about it, and enough so that people are sure that it is a dinosaur, but a lot of it is still waiting to be excavated. Until it is, people will disagree on just what it looks like, both as a whole creature and in the parts that are still under the soil, suggesting their shapes by the contours of the earth atop of them. So it is with teacher resilience literature. My study and others share enough common findings for patterns to emerge (such as the importance of collegial support and professional development), but the majority of the work to be done on this topic is in the future. It is waiting to be written about by future researchers, and I hope to be one of them.

Implications for General Resilience Research

While the area of knowledge concerning teacher resilience has not yet been fully explored by researchers, the area of general resilience theory has received substantial examination, although usually within the context of adolescence, and not as the foundation for teacher resilience. Although general resilience theory certainly falls under the umbrella of positive psychology, I am separating it from the rest of my overall discussion of this study’s implications for positive psychology for the sake of balance, and because of its obvious significance for this study. The following discussion of how my results may inform general resilience research will be followed by a section dealing with the implications it may have for positive psychology.

When considering the impact of my findings on current theory, I would be remiss if I didn’t mention it’s relevance to the overall idea of resilience itself (as opposed to teacher resilience). Although I have repeatedly mentioned the shortage of
studies about teacher resilience (when compared with other topics in education),
general resilience has had an established field of study for some time. Its primary
focus has been on adolescents who have been abused, encountered traumatic or
highly stressful experiences, or who have been otherwise at-risk. Clearly, there is a
difference between the experiences of a child in an at-risk environment and a teacher
in an urban school, but despite those differences, there is an underlying similarity in
the overall framework: both are unique groups of individuals who are able to thrive in
an environment where many others may not. Just as portions of the resilience theory
surrounding children in at-risk environments may be adapted as a conceptual model
to better explore and understand teacher resilience, so the results of my study can, to
some degree, inform the overall body of general resilience theory as well.

Current theory on resilience includes the idea protective factors, which, when
present in an individual are qualities or characteristics “that matter when risk or
adversity is high” (Masten and Reed, 2005, p. 75). It would seem that the results of
my study, particularly the factors that the subjects themselves identified as things that
promoted their own resilience, could stand as potential protective factors when
developing the overall study of teacher resilience. In fact, there appears to be a
substantial overlap between the protective factors present in resilient children and the
significant findings of my study. Masten and Reed (2005) report that faith, a positive
outlook on life, and a sense of humor were, among others, all protective factors for
resilient children (p. 83). Likewise, spirituality (which is in many ways synonymous
with faith) and a sense of humor were both common factors in my sample, and
working to maintain a positive attitude, while not “common” by my operational
definition, was nonetheless present at a strong level in half of my sample. Perhaps in
time, based on my study and the work of the others that preceded it, the body of
knowledge that is developing around teacher resilience will begin to incorporate this
idea of protective factors, many of which (such as collegial support, and a value for
professional learning, which have appeared in multiple studies) have already
emerged, but have yet to earn classification as such.

Another intersection between my study and current thinking on resilience
theory involves identifying resilient individuals. Masten and Reed (2005) say:

Resilience must be inferred because two major judgments are required to
identify individuals as belonging in this class of phenomena. First, there is a
judgment that individuals are ‘doing OK’ or better than OK with respect to a
set of expectations for behavior. Second, there is a judgment that there have
been extenuating circumstances that posed a threat to good outcomes.
Therefore, the study of this class of phenomenon requires defining the criteria
or method for ascertaining good adaptation and the past or current presence of
conditions that pose a threat to good adaptation.” (p. 75)

Perhaps my study, along with the others represented in figures 3-7 can serve as
models to reinforce this idea. The concept of resilience as a subjective judgment was
a strong motivating factor in my choice to use qualitative methodology as best avenue
for exploring this phenomena. Given the multiplicity of variables that shape who a
teacher in an urban environment is, I believe that it is crucial that the “criteria or
method” that Masten and Reed refer to should include (but not be limited by)
qualitative methods, many of which allow the extended opportunities for dialogue and
interaction between the researcher and participant. As was the case in my study, this one-on-one interaction can provide researchers with more data and opportunities to evaluate whether the individual is, as Masten & Reed put it, “Doing OK.”

When I think of the many teachers that I have gotten to know over the years, there were several whom I’m quite certain would have identified themselves as resilient, despite providing anyone willing to stand near them long enough with a litany of complaints and sarcastic comments that would quickly contradict any claim of resilience. Some, upon hearing of my study, even volunteered or hinted that they wanted to be a part of it. I didn’t select these individuals because, unlike my sample members, my long term observation of them did not lead me to make the judgment that they were “doing OK.” Perhaps the interview process would have proven me wrong, but I strongly doubt it. Regardless, it was only through both my prior observation before selecting my sample members, and the interview process itself, that I felt comfortable stating that the subjects in my study were resilient.

Whether it is accurate or not, anyone can claim that they are resilient. In fact, I believe that teachers would be much more likely to exhibit self-deception in such a case than the children whom general resilience research has targeted, and without a methodology that offers the opportunity to explore an individual’s attitudes, experiences, beliefs and perceptions, making an inference about a teacher’s resilience can be dubious.

When comparing my study to the established resilience theory, one thing really jumped out as being absent in my study, and that was achievement. In the general resilience literature, the achievement of the individual is a factor that
researchers explore and measure. Most resilient individuals have been found to function in a normal achievement range, “despite heroic survival or media accounts” (Masten & Reed, 2005, p. 76). In my study, I didn’t include the teacher’s level of achievement as a variable, or even as a criteria for inclusion, but with the benefit of hindsight, I feel now as though before teacher resilience can grow to its potential, the achievement of these resilient teachers needs to be taken into account in some form. I am not recommending the use of standardized test scores. The achievement gap is one reason, as is the fact that many resilient teachers (because of the very factors that make them resilient), are often given more challenging classes, populated with lower achieving students because administrators feel the teacher “can handle them.” Still, there should be an element in future studies that considers effectiveness in some form, even if it is just relative to the other teachers at a research subject’s school or specific grade level.

Masten & Reed (2005) say that, “Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities, but from ordinary human systems,” (p. 85). That may be true for the children that have been the focus of general resilience research, but when studying teachers, the ordinary things that make them resilient begin to seem extraordinary compared to others who lack those characteristics, particularly the deep sense of spirituality that seemed to set many of my sample members apart from other teachers I’ve encountered. I would argue that the overall scope of my study supports the aim of resilience research, and positive psychology in general. My study suggests that learning more about the protective factors that have promoted the resilience of urban teachers may lead to answering “questions about how naturally occurring resilience
works and whether or not these processes can be initiated or facilitated by design in policies or practice” (p. 86).

**Implications for Positive Psychology**

In addition to the obvious example of resilience theory, there are many ways in which my study informs, intersects, and draws from the field of positive psychology. Positive psychology is a relatively recent branch of the field, which seeks to supplement the traditional approach of fixing what is wrong with a new emphasis on identifying what is right and seeking to build on it (Seligman, 2005, p. 4).

Seligman, one of the pioneers of positive psychology, speculating on why psychology has been so focused on the negative, suggests that:

“negative emotions or experiences may be more urgent and therefore override positive ones” This, he says, may be evolutionary. “In contrast, when we are adapting well to the world, no such alarm is needed. Experiences that promote happiness often seem to pass effortlessly...perhaps we are oblivious to the survival value of positive emotions precisely because they are so important. Like the fish is unaware of the water in which it swims, we take for granted a certain amount of hope, love, enjoyment and trust because they are the very conditions that allow us to go on living.” (2005, p. 7)

To observe the relevance of Seligman’s sentiment to my study, one only has to look at the disproportionate volume of studies on teacher burnout in comparison to teacher resilience. In the case of teacher resilience, my study runs parallel to this idea from the very beginning, where I posit that focusing on teacher resilience over teacher
burnout may be a much more effective way of learning how to mitigate attrition and even teacher burnout itself. The second way that my study adds to this notion of building on strengths is both more practical and simpler: The whole point of this study is to identify strengths.

As I have maintained, such strengths (which I have thus far referred to as “factors of resilience”, and which include internal characteristics such as reflective thinking, sense of humor, feelings of empowerment and spirituality) may be incorporated into a broader understanding of what contributes to a teacher’s resilience, and then facilitated among pre-service teachers or teacher education students as a strategy to promote professional wellness and positively impact the high attrition rate. This reasoning echoes Seligman’s position concerning optimism, where he argues that elements of positive psychology (such as optimism) can be taught to people to effectively treat depression and anxiety (2005, p. 5). Following this, it would seem reasonable to claim that fostering the traits of resilient teachers (such as the ones established in this study, and the works that preceded it) may likewise mitigate burnout to some degree.

Seligman goes on to say:

“We have discovered that there are human traits strengths that act as buffers against mental illness: courage, future-mindedness, optimism, interpersonal skill, faith…perseverance…Much of the task of prevention in this new century will be to create a science of human strength whose mission will be to understand and learn how to foster these virtues…” (p. 5)
The results of my study may serve to add to the body of knowledge that Seligman is referring to. My subjects, whose resilience is presumably aligned with the perseverance he mentions, each had their own variety of inner strength. It was manifested in the form of their spirituality, their sense of purpose, their desire to stay competent and knowledgeable, or, in the case of Mrs. Hines, her ability to put a smile on her face for the students, even when it didn’t belong, and then keep it there until it felt like it did.

**Implications for Positive Psychology: Spirituality**

Within the framework of positive psychology, there are several specific areas for which my findings seem relevant. The primary one that I would like to explore is the area of spirituality. When considering the implications of my findings on current theory, particularly in the area of positive psychology, my finding that spirituality was one of the most important factors among my sample members in promoting resilience would seem to be significant. Overall, psychology has tended to avoid serious discussion of the role of individuals’ spiritual lives. Pargament & Mahoney (2005) expand on this when they discuss how spirituality has been largely ignored by most 20th century psychologist, saying that along with being difficult to study, psychologists have “a tendency to ignore the power of spirituality” because they (psychologists) “manifest considerably lower levels of religiousness than the general public” (p. 646).

Kiesling, Montgomery, Sorell & Colwell (2006) support this. Their research, which studied spirituality and identity, mentioned the surprising lack of research and understanding about individuals’ sense of their spiritual lives (p. 1269). They
comment on how this lack of research “is notable in light of Erickson’s profound interest in spirituality.” Erickson, they point out, “juxtaposed faith with doubt and maintained that healthy adults nurture their spiritual tendencies” (p. 1269). I believe that my study has some relevance to the Erickson study they reference. Quite simply, teachers who were spiritual were also resilient in my study, and their spirituality often contributed to other characteristics also associated with resilience (e.g., patience, or the need for service). Kesisling et al. (2006) offered some insight into the topic of spirituality, and their research provided me with an opportunity to connect spirituality even more strongly to some of the characteristics of resilience that were common among my sample members. They report finding in their study of spirituality and identity, that spiritually developed individuals “were often highly reflective, exemplifying the human capacity to draw on spiritual resources to construct meaning out of a personal struggle” (p. 1276). My findings, which show that among my sample members resilient teachers were also reflective thinkers, would seem to supports this.

Early on, as I reviewed current literature on teacher resilience and teacher burnout in preparation for this study, I found the same lack of attention given to the spiritual lives of teachers. The recent work in positive psychology, however, appears to be turning away from the stance of the last century and calling for more exploration into the role spirituality plays. This study didn’t set out to do so, but in light of the significant findings, the final analysis of its implications is well in line with the changing trend that Pargament & Mahoney (2005) discuss below:
Psychologists and other scientists are beginning to learn that spirituality holds a number of important, often positive implications for human functioning. To develop a deeper understanding of the process, we will need to study it at closer hand by getting to know spiritually oriented people. Researchers need to gain some basic education in the psychology of religion and spirituality and to examine their own preconceptions and attitudes toward spirituality. Research in this area may well be worth its initial costs and challenges, for the study of spirituality holds promise not only for understanding a neglected dimension of life but also for practical efforts to help people enhance their well-being.

My findings clearly support the idea that in the realm of urban schools, spirituality may indeed be a factor with the “positive implications for human functioning” that Pargament & Mahoney discuss. My sample members found functioning (in this case maintaining their resilience) much easier as a result of their spiritual lives. This also supports the work of Watson (2005), who reports “People who describe themselves as “spiritual” or “religious” report higher levels of happiness than those who do not; this effect has been observed in both the United States and in Europe” (p. 113). I believe it is quite possible that for many individuals, their spirituality provides the “connectedness” that is missing in individuals who experience the symptom of depersonalization that is common in individuals experiencing burnout.

In addition to the higher levels of happiness that Watson references, Pargament & Mahoney (2005) show how spirituality also may help individuals reframe negative experiences as well, saying “In their empirical studies, researchers
have shown that individuals who interpret negative life events within a more benevolent religious framework generally experience better adjustment to those crises" (p. 653). Here again my results have implications. Could it be that another reason so few of my sample members reported experiencing significant burnout was because their spirituality provided them with a reframing mechanism that allowed them to subvert or redirect stress that may have otherwise been internalized?

Another contributor to current theory on resilience that I would like to reference is the work of Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007). They define spirituality as a "personal belief and experience of a divine spirit or higher purpose, about how we construct meaning, and what we individually and communally experience and attend to and honor as the sacred in our lives" (p. 200). They also cite earlier work by Tisdell (2003), who developed seven assumptions about spirituality, including the notion that "Spirituality and religion are not the same," that "spirituality is always present (although often unacknowledged) in the learning environment," and that "Spiritual experiences most often happen by surprise" (p. 210). The latter two seem particularly significant given the unexpected, but clear presence of spirituality itself as a significant factor in this study. It was present, and it was a surprise, both to me and to several of my sample members, who were surprised that the rest of the sample shared spirituality as a key promoter of resilience. Merriam et al. (2007) also report that in previous studies, participants’ sense of spirituality "increased significantly" in later adulthood (p. 199). This merits speculation of whether or not the age of my sample had an impact on the prominence
of spirituality as a factor, and whether or not a younger sample of teachers would have elicited a decrease in the reported significance of spirituality on resilience.

Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007) also discuss some of the established characteristics of spirituality (reference in the literature here as 'grace') and say that it "is healing." They point out that "stress, anger, grief, the most impoverished can find healing in moments of Grace" (p. 203). In the context of teaching, it is sensible to assume that something that is healing might significantly promote resilience. Other researchers, however, appear to doubt the potential emergence of spirituality as a topic within education. Graves (1997) discusses this by observing that "if grace (spirituality) ever comes into pedagogy, it will be there not because it was planned, but because the conditions were right and because some sensitive soul had the wisdom not to thwart it" (p. 20).

There may be several other reasons why, with the exception of positive psychology, so little theory on spirituality (particularly in relation to teacher resilience) has been developed and researched. The nature of faith, its intangibility, and its history of incompatibility with (and opposition to) science, make it a difficult subject to approach (outside of theology and divinity) when discussing theory. Still, according to the my subjects, spirituality had a clear presence in promoting their resilience, and I would not consider it unreasonable to suggest that the role faith and spirituality play in their lives as teachers is a topic that should be explored among future teacher resilience studies. This finding may also be useful to people of faith who are looking for doctrine-neutral examples of the role that spirituality may play in secular life.
In the next section, I will present a brief commentary on how my results supported and didn’t support my own expectations.

Results and My Own Expectations

In earlier sections I discussed how the results of my study matched previous research, I suggested possible implications on current theory, and from time to time I gave brief mention to my various suppositions being either confirmed or shattered. In this section I will return to where I started, which is with my own personal observations. They led me to contemplate what made some teachers appear resilient, while others in the same setting were not, and in this section I will explore how and where my study both confused, surprised and reassured me.

I would like to begin this discussion of my own expectations with the strongest of my key findings, which was spirituality. I knew as I began my research, both from Stanford’s results (2001), and from conversations with a deeply spiritual teacher who I hoped would be a part of my sample, that spirituality would make an appearance in my results. I did not, however, expect it to be as strongly evident as it was, and I certainly didn’t expect it to be at the top. In retrospect, I think I held this view simply because spirituality just wasn’t something that got much face time, either in professional teachers’ workshops that I had attended, or in the teacher leadership coursework that I had been a part of. Also, while I had discussed with my colleagues many of the other topics that would later emerge in my sample as common characteristics of resilience, spirituality was something I felt was too personal to bring up in casual conversation. Even in the more formal setting of my interviews, I was careful to preface my questions about spirituality with the caveat that it was a
personal question, which the subject didn’t have to answer if they didn’t feel comfortable. In the end, most subjects seemed as comfortable talking about how their spirituality related to their resilience as they were about any other topic, which led to the emergence this particular finding. As I reflected I couldn’t help but speculate on how many other studies, either directly or peripherally related to teacher resilience, have avoided asking about spirituality for fear that it would be too personal.

On an individual note, although I am spiritual person, my growth in this area is relatively recent. I wasn’t particularly connected spiritually many years ago, when I first envisioned this study, nor did I didn’t go looking for a significant connection between resilience and spirituality beyond what my review of literature had provided, and was as surprised as anyone to see it come out as one of the strongest promoters of resilience in this study. Having it emerge in such an important way in my research has prompted a bit of self-reflection on my part, however, and looking back on my own experiences, I would have to agree that in the past year or so, along with maintaining personal connections with students, my own spirituality has been perhaps the strongest factor in keeping me resilient as well.

Another expectation that I held, as I discussed in Chapter I, was that personal connections would be a common factor among resilient teachers. This held true, but not in the manner I had anticipated. I expected that this characteristic, when present, would be manifested in a manner similar to my own experiences. In my case, developing these connections with students was a pedagogical strategy that I learned in order to better serve the urban students I taught (see discussion of significant findings within this chapter for more). For my sample, however, this was not the
case. For these individuals, connections with students came about because of the personality characteristics they already contained, and was a natural, not planned product of this. Sometimes making these connections with students was something that sample members were aware that they were doing, but more often, it was just another part of how they operate and interact.

One of the most surprising things about my study, at least where my own expectations are concerned, was the role of burnout. I discussed in Chapter I how burnout, and the circumstances that promoted it, were a sort of “trial by fire,” from which I emerged stronger and more resilient. I assumed that most of my sample members would have had similar experiences. After all, the research that I found said that burnout was all but unavoidable (Hamann & Gordon, 2000, p. 34), and it seemed reasonable to assume that if you were resilient it was because you had (as my study’s title suggests), transcended burnout in some way. The results were quite a bit different. While a few subjects had shared similar experiences to my own, the majority of my sample reported that they had not experienced burnout in any significant way. They had encountered stress, they said, but not burnout. I was intrigued and I spent a lot of time considering why this might be, based on the data that I was collecting. At first, I was actually a little doubtful. I wondered if perhaps they were posturing a bit so as not to appear vulnerable, or because they were giving me what they thought was the right thing to say so they might appear as resilient as possible. I soon decided that that wasn’t the case, as they began to share more and more experiences and bits of themselves. As I learned more about them, I slowly began to understand that the reason they didn’t report experiencing burnout was
because they possessed (or appeared to possess) the necessary skills to mitigate their stressors and were able to elude stressful situations all together. Whether it was patience, collegial or administrative support, or making changes at the right time, each of these individuals had been able to continue to avoid burnout by utilizing many of the internal characteristics that I reported among my results. This made me reflect on my own resilience, and experience with burnout. I realized that when I experienced burnout, I was just out of college and brand new to teaching. I began to speculate that perhaps my own period of burnout was a result of not having the tools and disposition in place that I was able to develop later on. Was that often the case for others as well, I wondered? If so, it would be more evidence in support of further research into the characteristics of teacher resilience with an eye toward developing those characteristics within pre-service teachers.

Several of my expectations for this study were informed by previous research. Based on the work of researchers such as Holloway (2003), who reference the satisfaction that most teachers get from improved student achievement (p. 88), I expected student achievement to be of some importance. I am not prepared to say that it was not important to my sample members, but in terms of contributing to their resilience, it did not emerge as a factor at all. I don’t believe this means that teachers in my sample were oblivious of their students’ progress, only that the feelings of accomplishment that my sample members possessed weren’t tied strictly to academics. These teachers reported feelings of accomplishment (a factor of resilience for my sample) coming from knowing that they are making a difference in the overall lives of their students, knowing that they are frequently requested by parents over
others, and from the overall growth that their teacher-student interactions facilitate on a daily basis. I would conjecture that it is likely that lately, as student achievement has become synonymous with the often punitive, and always pressure-filled standardized tests that are mandated by the NCLB legislation, and for these teachers (or most others, one could argue), there is little about those tests, or the environments they encourage, that promotes resilience.

Another expectation that I had for my findings, based on previous research, was that the urban environment in which my sample members taught would play a role, either as a promoter of resilience, or as a deterrent (citation here). Abel & Sewell (1999) mention the difficulties facing teachers in urban districts (p. 289), and it is generally accepted that urban schools have many more challenges than their suburban counterparts, from funding, to school violence, to teacher turnover. I anticipated that the urban environment may have been a major source of stress for some of my sample members. On the other hand, I speculated that based on the fact that some teachers (myself included) would find satisfaction in overcoming the challenges present in an urban environment, that the satisfaction itself may actually promote resilience. In the end, with two exceptions, the environment didn’t appear to be a significant factor for my sample where resilience is concerned. The first exception was Mrs. Dobbs, who mentioned that she thought the opportunities to “make a difference” were more ample in her district than in suburban districts with which she was familiar, and this helped her stay resilient. The other exception was on the other extreme, and was the example recounted in this chapter, when Mrs. Avery reported her unexpected run-in with racial tension from several troubled students.
Aside from these, the environment was not mentioned by my sample as a factor in their resilience, either in a positive or negative way.

I was also interested to see that overall, race didn’t appear to be a significant factor where any of the characteristics and experiences of resilience were concerned, although in a few cases it did have a noticeable impact. Two of the African-American teachers reported that being the same race as the bulk of their students often made it easier to connect with and reach out to them, however this did not appear to be a major contributor to their resilience. Conversely, being a different ethnicity than the students (despite the one exception mentioned by Mrs. Avery) didn’t appear to be a deterrent where resilience was concerned.

Research also informed my expectations for this study when it came to the characteristic of resilience which Patterson (2004, p. 5) refers to as, “knowing when to get involved and when to let go.” In addition to being a finding among Patterson’s sample, I have observed many teachers struggle with serious stress because they did not let go, or didn’t know that they could, or should when faced with certain problems. Some of this came from idealism about teaching, which Schwab, Jackson, & Schuler (1986) find may actually be a trait that can lead to burnout when teachers’ expectations of what they can accomplish become unmet (p. 17-18). From this I inferred that resilient teachers, as Patterson suggests, must be able to let go of unreasonable expectations. This idea was mentioned by two of my sample members, but it was by no means a common characteristic in my sample. Several sample members, in fact, were resilient in spite of their own admitted lack of the ability to let go. They said that they almost never let go when it came to trying to help a student or
improve a situation. Presumable the feelings of accomplishment that came from their successes must have been enough to offset any stress that was caused by continuing to wrestle with difficult situations, and this allowed them to remain resilient.

Several of my study’s findings were quite unexpected and caught me by surprise. Each of the following findings was a factor that was not common to my sample, but significant enough to the sample members who exhibited it to bear mention. The first was that for three of my sample members, the experience of having always wanted to be a teacher, or having been inspired to teach through childhood experiences, appears to have promoted their resilience in several ways (see Discussion of Significant Findings, earlier in this chapter for more detail on this). The second was that for some of my teachers, their resilience was very strongly promoted by coming to teaching later in life. For these teachers, starting teaching later gave them an opportunity to grow and develop as individuals, and when they came to teaching, they had more tools from which to draw, and more life experience to provide perspective. The final unexpected finding for me was one that was common to my study, and was very strong for the individuals who experienced it. This factor was making changes within education as a method of promoting resilience. As I mentioned in earlier chapters, based on my review of the literature on burnout and resilience, I anticipated that the main change teachers made was to leave the profession. I now see that I was way off the mark. Teachers in my sample changes grade levels, subject areas, and specialties as circumstances dictated. They did this to reduce stress, find their niche, or as a way of seeking out new challenges. This last finding prompted a lot of reflection on my part, as did all of the findings that
I had not anticipated, or for which my expectations were wrong. My surprise at many of these findings reveals as much about me, as a researcher, as it does about my sample. Looking back, a lot of what I anticipated was based on my own experiences and attitudes as much as it was on the previous research I was examining. It appears now that if an experience was not within my own biography, I probably wasn’t going to anticipate it. I’m not ready to saddle myself with a label such as “narrow minded,” or “imperceptive,” but through reflection on my research and its results, I definitely learned that in the future I would need to expand my thinking beyond my own set of experiences as much as possible when setting up my studies.

In the end, however, I was pleasantly surprised at the findings of this study where my expectations were concerned. I believe that my findings both support much of the current resilience data that has been established (i.e., the importance of collegial support and valuing professional learning and development), and present interesting new findings as well, in particular, the strong connection between spirituality and resilience.

*Impact on the Researcher*

The process of conducting this research study had a profound impact on me, both as a teacher who aspires to be resilient, as a researcher, and as a person. For one thing, looking at some of the factors that were significant promoters of resilience for my sample members made me reevaluate their importance in my own life. I look at professional development differently, for example. Prior to this study, I often treated it as something of a burden based on the way it was usually presented to me at my school. Now that I have seen how important it can be in maintaining resilience, and
how those teachers sought it out rather than simply waiting for it to come to them in the right package, I have a completely new perspective and aspire to model what I have seen. The same is true for several other factors, particularly (and not surprisingly) spirituality. It was almost as if hearing my sample members talking about how their spiritual life, or their relationship with God (in whatever form it took) made them more resilient, made it easier for me to examine its role in my own life.

Another unexpected benefit was finding how thoroughly I enjoy research, particularly this topic. Conducting this study made me curious about the other facets of teacher resilience. Asking my questions only made me want to learn more! I had pictured myself continuing to teach for several more years and then making a transition to a university position, where I would teach teachers. As this study went on though, I began to see myself conducting more studies in the area of teacher resilience, and helping to develop a body of knowledge about it. This new ambition for my own future was partly because of the small acts of helpfulness that conducting this study allowed me to engage in. As I learned more about teacher resilience, particularly near the end of the data analysis phase, I was able to talk to several stressed and struggling teachers that my travels brought me in contact with, and I was able to share the results of my study, and what was necessary for an individual to stay resilient. Those opportunities would fill me with a new sense of purpose each time I saw a bit of relief flash across a stressed out face. I think that in turn, that sense of purpose helped me to retain enough resilience to complete this study and strive to conduct even more research in the future.
In the next section I will discuss limitations of my study which may affect the validity of the results. This discussion will take place in two parts. First, I will present my anticipated limitations, and then report what limitations became evident as I collected and analyzed my data, and what steps I took to mitigate them.

**Limitations**

As I designed this study I expected my limitations to include several factors. The first was my own subjectivity. Qualitative research often must acknowledge some degree of subjectivity:

"Particularly when the data must 'go through' the researcher's mind before they are put on paper, the worry about subjectivity arises. Does, perhaps the observer record only what he or she wants to see, rather than what is actually there? Qualitative researchers are concerned with the effect that their own subjectivity may have on the data and papers they produce (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 33)."

My study is certainly not an exception to this. I was often concerned about whether or not I was recording accurately, or providing my own slant based on what I expected, or wanted to hear. Although this may certainly prove to be a potential limitation to my study, I did take steps to mitigate this concern. For one thing, as Bogdan & Biklen (2003) point out, "Qualitative studies are not impressionistic essays made after a quick visit to a setting, or after some conversations with a few subjects" (p. 33). My interview cycles were extensive, and I attempted to reframe similar questions to confirm previous data. In addition to this, simply acknowledging the potential for subjectivity in this type of study provided me with a certain level of
awareness of it as I conducted my research. As I proceeded, I anticipated that this awareness would keep my own subjectivity in check. In fact that was the case. I reflected often as I collected data, on both my own opinions and my own urge to frame or project meaning on to what I was hearing from my subjects, and this awareness was able to guide me away from being too subjective. I had varying degrees of prior knowledge about some of the members this sample, and, as I have discussed earlier, it was often difficult to set aside my own preconceptions or previous observations when gathering data, but I think being aware that not doing so would be a threat to the quality of my study, and to it’s overall validity made me more cautious and reduced my own subjectivity to some degree.

I also anticipated that my small sample size could have been a possible limitation to the study. While I would be interested in seeing the results of a similar study undertaken with a significantly larger sample size, there were many benefits to having a small sample, particularly where data volume for individual subject is concerned. In the end, I do not believe that my sample size was the limitation that I anticipated that it could have been. I am much more certain of the data’s quality for several reasons. First, since the sample size was so small, I had more time available to really get to know my research subjects and determine with greater certainty at what level there resilience appeared to be. This in-depth knowledge meant that I was able to collect a greater volume of data about my individual sample members than what would have been possible with a larger sample.

The final limitation that I anticipated as I gathered my research was the specificity of my sample. I anticipated that my sample, which contained teachers at
urban elementary schools with at least eight years of experience, may provide data that would not be generalizable for, or relevant to teachers outside of that group. Secondary teachers, for example, might have a different set of experiences that inform and promote their resilience. Would my study provide meaningful data for them? What about suburban teachers, or those with only a few years of teaching experience? In the end, I think the specificity of my sample provides a certain amount of limitation as to who my findings are relevant for, but I think the limitation is small. It is worth repeating something that I mentioned earlier when discussing my sample: despite my attempt to target a specific area for my sample, the data they provided me with was informed by a wide variety of life experiences that included many different settings within education (including regular, special, and music education, and pre-K through middle school). Also, none of the key findings were characteristics that appeared to be the sole province of elementary teachers. For example, other settings beyond the elementary level could certainly produce collegial support groups and opportunities for professional learning and development. Had experiences emerged within my sample that were specific to an elementary setting, such as engaging in play time with students during a recess, or watching children learn to read, I might be more inclined to think my targeted sample was more of a limitation, but I believe it is reasonable to hypothesize that my three key findings (spirituality, collegial support, and forming personal connections with students) are factors that could certainly be present in a sample of secondary teachers as well.

Several limitations which I had not anticipated became apparent as I conducted my research. The first had to do with my data collection and analysis. I
noticed early on that the difference between the emphasis and expression with which my sample members presented data, and the connotation the data took on as text on a page, was startling. Things which sample members spoke of with great passion often lost their significance and sense of importance when I transcribed them, and other factors, which did not seem particularly important in the actual interview, or about which my subjects spoke with little or no regard, occasionally appeared to be more significant than they should have been depending on the word choice. Sense of humor is a prime example of this. As I have mentioned in earlier chapters, no one made much of a fuss about sense of humor and it's impact on their resilience, but in my transcription, the wording my subjects used gives that factor a significance that it was missing when discussed in person.

Another unexpected limitation within my data collection process had to do with the frequent disparity between the amount of data different sample members shared in their interviews. Some sample members were gregarious and spoke at length on any question I posed. For these sample members, data collection was much easier than for those who gave only short responses and had to be prompted any time I wanted them to elaborate. The more they said, the more data I had to work with. This imbalance is potentially limiting because it did not always provide for an equal amount of data to be compared when analyzing my sample as a whole, and so those who said more about one particular topic might have sometimes been able to skew the data in their direction.

These unexpected limitations in my study also included aspects of my sample and sampling technique. For example, one limitation was that I knew several of my
sample members prior to this study. It is quite likely that I could have been more objective with strangers. This was possibly a limiting factor where validity is concerned, but I don't believe it was a significant one. As I said early on in this section, I was aware of the potential for subjectivity, and that awareness made me more cautious when collecting and analyzing data. Another possible limitation was that as teachers, my sample members might have had a latent fear of evaluation that may have caused them to be less willing to admit to characteristics or experiences with potentially negative connotations, such as having experienced burnout, or being monetarily motivated to persevere in teaching. I do not believe this to be the case, based on how extensive the data collection process was, but I cannot entirely rule it out as a possibility, and so it stands as a possible limitation. Also limiting where my sample was concerned, was my own ability to recruit study members, which was stretched only as far as my own social and professional capacity to network. I have mentioned earlier that I would frequently lament the fact that there were many other resilient teachers out there for me to learn from, but they wouldn't get a chance to be in my study. Had I a larger network from which to draw sample members, and more time with which to gather my data, perhaps I could have expanded the sample size.

My own lack of experience as researcher may also have been a limitation for this study. This is my first attempt at conducting research on such a large scale, and although I am satisfied with the final product, my inexperience both as an interviewer, and with data collection and analysis are sure to have been limiting factors to some degree. I learned a great deal throughout this process, but, like any novice, I also made a lot of mistakes and had to make adjustments along the way.
These adjustments could have had an impact on the uniformity of my study from time to time. Developing my interview questions is a good example of this. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the first interviews I conducted lacked the kind of focus I was looking for where resilience was concerned and so I learned to focus my questions to get optimum data. Although everyone had specific personalized questions for the third interview, this meant that later subjects were presented with a different set of questions for interviews one and two.

To help mitigate the limitations of my study and improve its validity, I decided to conduct member checks. I believed that if my sample members had an opportunity to view and comment on my key findings, they could offer insight from a different perspective and might see irregularities that escaped my notice. Although all of my teachers are highly literate, well-educated individuals, I felt it best to limit the volume of dense, scholarly text I presented them with when conducting the member checks. Each subject will receive a completed full-text copy of the research when the entire study has been completed and defended (which they may read at their leisure), but for the member checks, I thought it would be too overwhelming to present subjects with all of the two hundred or so pages of this study, or even the seventy or so that make up the chapters presenting results and discussion. I decided the best course was to limit documents I actually put in their hands to a short packet containing tables 2-3 and figure 2.

The member checking process took place once all of the data I collected had been coded and analyzed. I was able to conduct member checks with five out of my six sample members. During the member checks, each of which took approximately
twenty minutes, I presented each subject with the packet and summarized my analysis of their own level of evidence for the various characteristics or experiences that I observed, and my findings for the sample as a whole. I then asked each sample member for comments, and engaged in a dialogue about whether or not my findings for the sample and my perception of the data they presented seemed accurate and reasonable. I made field notes of their responses and referenced them against this text to help inform the validity of my research. For one subject, whom I was not able to meet with in person, I completed the member check via email and received their input the same way.

Sample members found that, overall, the data made sense and was reasonable. Several subjects registered surprise to see spirituality so strongly evident. I speculated that, since faith and spirituality are such deeply personal topics, they may be misconstrued as interfering with the separation of church and state if discussed too carelessly among certain audiences. Perhaps resilient teachers have tended to keep their thoughts about the role of spirituality muted, and so it hasn’t emerged in professional dialogue on resilience the way that collegiality or reflectivity and metacognition have. My sample also registered surprise that factors of resilience such as having a passion for teaching and reflective thinking were not more strongly evident (although both were common to my sample).

During the course of the member checks, I learned early on that tables 2-3 (which show how strongly evident each factor was for each subject based on my interpretation of their interview data), needed to be presented thoroughly and carefully. Two sample members, upon first glancing at tables 2 and 3, interpreted
them as evaluations and became slightly defensive. After I explained that my rankings of factors (strongly evident, moderately evident, etc.) was based solely on what they said in the interviews and was in no way intended to be a portrait of who they were, or worse yet, some sort of evaluation, they relaxed and were happy to give me feedback. I further explained that since the rankings in tables 2 and 3 were based on how these factors appeared to play a part in their resilience, it was quite possible for a sample member to possess one of the characteristics, but have it *not* be a factor in promoting their resilience, as was the case for several sample members. Mrs. Myers, for example, possessed the characteristic of independence, but based on the data I collected, independence did not appear to be at all significant in promoting her resilience. I also reminded them that if *every* teacher in my study had reported that *every* factor I asked them about promoted their resilience at a strong level, besides being rather dubious, such data would provide no patterns to explore and my results would likely have little or no value.

I quickly learned to begin my member checks with the discussion mentioned above before attempting to share any data, and doing that made my sample members much more receptive. Overall, each of the sample members found my analysis of their specific data to be accurate, although Mrs. Hines remarked that she thought empowerment was a stronger factor in her resilience than I indicated in my results. Mrs. Dobbs thought patience, reflective thinking and possessing a passion for teaching were stronger in her case as well.

Mrs. Dobbs also brought up an interesting point about my key finding of forming personal connections with students. Based on her experience as a first grade
teacher, where the students youth (in comparison to their upper elementary peers) provides them with fewer life experiences and less developed communication skills, she wondered if it was easier for upper elementary teachers to form personal connections with their students. Overall, the member checking experience provided me with valuable perspectives on my data and reassured me that the key findings of my study are reasonably accurate.

A final limitation that I faced, which may affect the validity of this study has to do with my presentation of the implications of my study on current theory. As a full time classroom teacher trying to conduct the largest scholarly endeavor I’ve ever undertaken, my role both helped and hindered me. Being a teacher (and a resilient one, or so I like to think) gave me special perspectives on my specific topic, which a researcher without my set of experiences might not have found, however it did limit me as well. Much of my current professional reading has necessarily been in the direction of best practices for classroom instruction, as well as my readings specific to resilience and it’s peripheral elements. This has curtailed the breadth of my exposure to the most up to the moment scholarly work about some of the more general current theory in educational research. I am also limited as a researcher by the absence of my own professional learning community at the post-graduate level. Because of this, my ability to network is less than it would be if I were able to engage in theory-related dialogue with peers in educational leadership. The net result of this deficit is that my ability to suggest implications of my key findings on current theory is more abbreviated than it might have been if I were the on-campus professional researcher that I hope to be in the future.
In the next section, I will present some suggestions for further research based on my findings, which future scholars and resilience researchers may wish to consider.

Suggestions for Further Research

In order to help augment the body of knowledge about teacher resilience, future researchers might want to consider some of the following questions as they design similar studies:

1. What is the role of spirituality where teacher resilience is concerned? Stanford (2001, p. 79) suggests exploring this question, and I would echo it here based on my results. Similarly, does a teacher’s age or ethnicity play a role in how spirituality affects their resilience?

2. Does the act of forming personal connections with students play a significant role in teacher resilience? My study suggests that it does, but I am curious to see if future research will support this finding. If, so, does the teacher’s level (elementary, secondary, etc.) play a part? Is there a difference where resilience is concerned, between actively forming connections as a pedagogical strategy (as I was taught to do), and forming them unconsciously as a result of specific personal characteristics?

3. What is the role of internal factors vs. external factors in a teacher’s resilience? How much of a teacher’s level of resilience is a matter of having the tools and disposition to deal with problems, and how much is
the good fortune to have avoided serious crises despite adverse conditions?

4. Is making changes within teaching a significant promoter of resilience? This is a factor that was common to my sample, and although it wasn’t mentioned often in the research I reviewed, I believe it may be quite significant. I am eager to see if it, along with spirituality, would emerge as significant in other studies as well.

5. Is teacher burnout more a function of the extent to which a teacher possesses the factors of resilience necessary to mitigate it, or is it determined more as a result of the severity of the individual crises that a specific teacher encounters? I am curious to see this question addressed in future research, and I am posing it based on my surprise at finding that not all of the resilient teachers in my study reported experiencing burnout, as I had expected they would.

6. Does a teacher’s ethnicity appear to play a role in resilience? This was not a variable that I specifically explored, and my study doesn’t provide much data in this regard. I would be curious to see if sharing the same ethnicity with the students is found to have any impact on resilience in future studies. Dworkin’s findings (1986, p. 155) suggests that it may.

7. What is the relationship between teacher resilience and teacher effectiveness? I would not suggest using student’s standardized test data
as a metric of effectiveness, however. Many resilient teachers (because of the very factors that make them resilient) are often given more challenging classes, populated with lower achieving students because administrators feel the resilient teacher “can handle them.” Still, there should be an element in future studies that considers effectiveness in some form, even if it is just relative to other teachers at the same school, or who teach in the same grade level.

8. To what extent do the nation’s teacher education programs attempt to foster the characteristics that research has shown promote resilience, as they prepare pre-service teachers? Can teacher resilience be improved by incorporating its established characteristics and elements into current teacher education curricula?

9. How does a person’s life history, or experiences outside of teaching influence resilience? This was a variable that was absent from my study, but could certainly be explored as a part of future research.

Collecting more data on any of these questions could improve the level of understanding we have on teacher resilience. This area of knowledge should benefit from more frequent and intense study. In turn, students may benefit. As our understanding of what promotes teacher resilience grows, we can actively work to cultivate it among pre-service teachers, who may then be better equipped to transcend burnout and thrive as they educate future generations.
Appendix A

Introductory Letter to Individual Research Participants

Greetings!

If you are reading this, you are among a select handful of unique educators who have been identified as “resilient” by their peers, and you have consented to let this researcher pick your brain over the course of several interviews. Thanks in advance!

My name is Paul Giroux. I am a doctoral student at Western Michigan University, and have been an elementary school teacher for the past eight years. Teacher resilience has been a strong personal interest for me since my earliest days in the classroom and now, as a researcher, I am interested in discovering what the common characteristics and experiences are among resilient teachers at urban elementary schools.

In my study, “resilient” refers to teachers who continue to thrive and find joy in teaching despite the many obstacles that we, as educators, may face. Ideally, our interviews will be more of a dialogue or conversation than a strict question and answer session. I am interested in the stories that you have to tell. To this end, I thought it might be helpful if I asked you, my resilient interviewee, to spend a moment reflecting before we meet to talk. Please don’t look at this as work- or worse yet, homework. You don’t have to write anything down (unless you really want to), but a little reflection now will bring memories, attitudes and perspectives to the surface before we talk. With this in mind, consider the following:

• Have you experienced a time in your career when you felt burned out? If so, how did you get through it?
• What do you think makes you different from those peers of yours who may be less resilient?
• What are your biggest strengths and weaknesses as a teacher?
• How has your teaching changed over the course of your career?

These are not all of the questions I will ask, but they should serve as a starting point as we begin our dialogue. I am eager to begin and I am looking forward to learning all that you have to share!

Sincerely,
Paul Giroux
Western Michigan University
Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Resilient Educators in Urban Elementary Schools

Researcher- Paul Giroux
Research Subject _____________________
Date__________
Time__________
Location ______________________________

Probing Questions and Comments:

- How would you characterize your role as a teacher?
- What does the idea of resilience mean to you?
- How do you feel that you are different from a teacher who is not, in your opinion, resilient?
- Can you recall your most stressful time, or the most stressful events you’ve encountered as a teacher? How did you handle it?
- Is there anything in your personal life that you feel makes you resilient?
- Have you experienced a time in your career when you felt burned out? If so, how did you get through it?
- What do you think makes you different from those peers of yours who may be less resilient?
- Tell me about how you interact with students.
- Tell me about your school’s environment.
- What are your biggest strengths and weaknesses as a teacher?
- How have your teaching practices changed over the course of your career?

Notes:______________________________
Appendix C

HSIRB Approval Document

Date: September 28, 2006

To: Sue Poppink, Principal Investigator
    Paul Giroux, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 06-08-21

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled “Transcending Burnout: A Study of the Characteristics and Experiences of Resilient Elementary Educators Teaching at Urban Schools” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: September 28, 2007
BIBLIOGRAPHY


