

Stories of Resilience of Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

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Assisting young people in becoming resilient is the topic of much research in the education community. My research utilised the life stories of four participants and sought to understand their experiences in their attainment of resiliency. Their personal accounts offered a unique perspective. Attachment Theory, Locus of Control Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory has much to offer the topic of resiliency and support the findings of my study. Results indicate that each of the participants had secure attachments, an internal locus of control and a strong personal self-efficacy. Optimism and hardiness were evident as each participant spoke about the process of attaining resiliency. Insights as to how educators can utilise the findings of this research and promote resilience were also addressed.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this piece of work to my late brother (Howard John Schellenberg) and to my late father, (Peter K. Schellenberg) both of who shared a love of education. I will always cherish their inspiration and motivation.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Resilience in children and young people has been a topic of interest in our society for many years. For the purpose of this study, I will utilise the following key terms: resilience, success and adversity. Resilience for the purposes of this study refers to the ability to bounce back from adversity and attain a state of equilibrium similar to the state before the adversity began. Resilience can be thought of as an *ideal* state of being. I believe in our society, we look at young people as either having or not having the ability to be resilient. I believe we also see resilient individuals as successful individuals. How youth develop the attributes commonly associated with resiliency appears to be quite complex. “From the start, research on resilience has focused on ways of understanding what distinguishes resilience in some children, with the ultimate goal of developing and promoting those traits or factors once revealed” (Hamill, p 116).

Looking at At Risk Youth

For the past several years, there has been a movement in research that has been predominately associated with at risk youth. It was thought that if children could be identified in terms of at risk factors, we would know which children were at risk for not developing resilience. As a result, funding was allocated to identify these risk factors and develop programs to teach resilience within the school system. “Given the widespread use of the risk orientation to determine funding and available resources to help students at risk, it was reasonable then to expect that key academic and health and safety indices would show improvement”(Brown, E’Emidio-Caston, & Benard, 2001, p 5). This

approach of looking at children through this risk orientation however, failed to produce resilient young people. Although this research was helpful, the realisation of the complexities associated with resilience became known.

Deficit-based perspective

Research surrounding children and youth at risk began to dominate the literature. “The risk orientation began with the application of a medical model to education”(Brown D-Emidio-Caston, & Benard, p 3). Thirty to forty years ago, education focused on risk factors in determining at risk behaviour. In our school system, this led to a focus on deficit behaviour, which suggested that punitive measure such as suspensions, and expulsions would be beneficial. The idea of inflicting more punishment on children, who were already suffering from adversity, gained widespread appeal. Unfortunately, what happened was that these deficit behaviours led to more deficit behaviours. Children and adolescents were viewed by their deficits and not by their strengths or assets.

The health field also began to look at deficits in determining a predisposition to disease. Patients were viewed by their deficits. This was referred to as the medical model. Preventative factors were often overlooked. Both the education and the health fields chose not to look at strengths or assets.

This model did not produce the desired effects. In terms of education, young people were not successful. Minimising the risk factors did not yield the improvement educators required. Young people did not attain resiliency. Researchers began to question the effectiveness of this risk orientation approach and began to shift towards looking at the strengths of the individual instead.

Strength-based perspective

Approximately twenty years ago, an approach focused on discovering the strengths of the individual and not just their vulnerability to risk began to develop amongst educators. “The participants would articulate a general strength perspective and holistic view of the individual over one’s life cycle, largely independent of a risk orientation” (Waxman, Padron & Gray, 2004, p 20).

A good example of this strength perspective was shown in the longitudinal study in Kauai. This study supported this approach and focused on the strengths of the individuals. This study produced interesting results in terms of resilience development. “A landmark study now spanning four decades has followed the development of children born on the Hawaiian Island of Kauai in 1955” (Masten, p 2). The study revealed that 1/3 of the children labelled as high risk developed well in terms of getting along with parents, peers, doing well in school and with overall mental health. This resilient group, now grown up, has continued to do well although they have found that “resilient adults from troubled families appear to be more cautious about marriage and intimacy, and also report health problems that could be stress related”(Masten, 1997, p 2) Interestingly, researchers also found that both this group and the resilient group had stronger resources than children who have not fared as well. This study suggests that people may have a capacity to be resilient despite adversity.

resiliency capability.

The notion that individuals are capable of becoming resilient despite their backgrounds and experiences with adversity began to surface in resilience research.

Benard, a well-known researcher of resilience literature, believes that everyone has a capacity to attain resiliency. She states, “we are all born with an innate capacity for resilience, by which we are able to develop social competence, problem-solving skills, a critical consciousness, autonomy and a sense of purpose” (Benard, 1995, p 1).

These skills, known as protective factors, are believed to help children develop resiliency even if the individual has not experienced an environment that has fostered these factors. Whether these factors are attained in homes, schools or communities, they are thought to greatly enhance the development of resiliency and may be able to reverse the negative factors limiting an individual in the attainment of resiliency. “The presence of protective factors in family, school, and community environments appears to alter or reverse predicted negative outcomes and foster the development, over time, of resiliency”(Finley, n.d., p 2). Current research on resilience appears to support the idea that the strength-based approach and the attainment of protective factors appear to yield positive results in terms of resilient individuals.

The Nature of Adversity

It would appear that although strength based approaches seem to fare better, adversity appears to affect some children and adults more than others. Adversity for the purpose of this study can be thought of as any difficult experience such as family discourse, difficulty in school, difficulty with peer relations, and various situations that create difficulty for those involved. In the study in Kauai, adversity appeared to actually assist people in attaining and maintaining resiliency.

The Nature of Success

Success is a term often referred to in the education resilience research. In my study, success will be associated mainly with academic achievement. The participants will speak about their success and how they feel about the success they have attained. Success may perhaps, be totally different for each person and may be based on others opinions rather than their own. It will be interesting to find out how the participants view their success.

Difficulty relating to others, substance abuse, dropping out of school, participating in illegal activities are just a few of the problems that occur when young people seem unable to attain resiliency. Throughout these situations of adversity, schools too, are often faced with the challenge of how to get young people back on the track of success. Educators often want young people to learn from these situations and simply bounce back to a state of resiliency. However, many of these problems are complex and many of our young people encounter much difficulty in this process.

One of the most serious problems occurs when young people drop out of school. Many educators believe that young people who don't attain these skills are unlikely to become successful in their adult lives. I agree with the following research, as it is these young people who require assistance not abandonment.

Today, we have a greater stake in achieving school success for all children. The costs of supporting our dropouts, and dumpouts as illiterate. Unemployable, violent or mentally ill citizens are staggering. We are literally abandoning the

persons whom we will ask to support us in retirement (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002, p 5).

Developmental Assets

As a result of this challenge, educational research has attempted to identify characteristics of resiliency and how to promote these within the schools. In the book, “Developmental Assets”, (Scales & Leffert, 2004), a synthesis of scientific research on adolescent development was conducted by analysing surveys completed by more than 217,000 students in more than 300 communities during the 1999 – 2000 school year. The following was created:

40 assets are grouped into eight categories representing broad domains of influence in young people’s lives: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations and constructive use of time are external assets (relationships and opportunities that adults provide): commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity are internal assets (competencies and values that youth develop internally that help them become self-regulating adults (Leffert & Scales, 2004, xiv).

Though the research surrounding the developmental assets sounds helpful, this research also suggests the importance of support, in particular, the assistance of caring adults. I have always believed that caring adults do far more for young people than the best programs and strategies. This research also supports this stance. If teachers are not enthusiastic and do not care about the overall welfare of their students, the best program will not be successful. Good teachers, I feel, are able to teach the assets as well as the

strategies of resilience. The caring approach then, may be key in promoting the strengths of young people. I have found in my experience, that if young people perceive an adult and/or teacher as judgmental they will not be open to listening and learning about new concepts. They will simply shut down.

The following quote highlights the difference between the approach used by the search institute and a traditional approach:

Search institute has highlighted the difference between an asset-building approach and more traditional problem-prevention efforts. Focusing on building strengths, on the role everyone plays in building assets, and on viewing youth themselves as resources and not just as sources of problems to be prevented often produces a greater sense of hope in communities than do more common approaches that focus on naming and reducing or preventing problems such as substance abuse or adolescent pregnancy. This review of the literature indicates that building developmental assets can have pervasive positive effects on youth outcomes (Scales & Leffert, 2004, p 216).

A Positive Learning environment

Along with a caring teacher/mentor I also believe a positive learning environment within the school is also important. I have seen a range of learning environments throughout my teaching career that can be characterised as either positive or negative. A positive learning environment seems to ensure that the students are more engaged and enthusiastic about learning. Research on students on school environments suggests why some achieve despite adversity while others do not. "Some average ability students do

well in inner-city schools despite coming from at-risk environments, and it is important to know why these resilient students succeed while other students (i.e. nonresilient students) from equally stressful environments do not”(Gray, Padron, & Waxman, 2004, p 3).

Within these positive learning environments, the literacy levels of the student are also very important. Many students have gaps in their learning and are not able to achieve at the level of their peers. This requires further instruction in terms of an assessment as well as a structured program that begins where the child is functioning. I feel that when children see the success of their learning they are more likely to work harder and become successful.

Family Stability

In my experience, I believe family stability is a huge factor affecting young people today. Families that are unstable do not provide the nurturing environment that a child needs in order to learn. I have spoken to children and teens so overwhelmed about what is happening at home that they are unable to focus on schoolwork. I have also witnessed children and teens get involved in risky behaviour when they perceive that their family or support network is no longer available to them. Often they appear to give up as if they no longer believe that they are capable of being successful.

I have come to the realisation that very often the individual’s story is not emphasised in educational research. Fortunately, the idea of taking an approach of resilience is gathering momentum in the research. “Taking a resilience approach means meeting a young person’s needs for belonging, respect, autonomy, and mastery of relevant and meaningful knowledge. It emphasises well-being by acknowledging

competencies and building upon unique talents, interests, and goals”(Brown, D-Emidio-Caston & Benard, 2004, p viii).

Values and Beliefs of myself as a researcher

The values and beliefs of myself as a researcher are important variables in this research and require consideration when conducting, reporting or reviewing the research. An explanation as to how my past experiences have led me to this type of research study is therefore very important.

My Background

I am a teacher and have held various positions throughout my teaching career. I have been a classroom teacher, teaching various individual grades and combinations of grades Kindergarten to grade six, as well as a student services teacher for various Kindergarten to grade six schools and grade seven to grade nine schools. I am currently a high school student services teacher specialising in both resource and counselling for grades 9-12 students.

I have found over the course of my career that many students seemed to experience difficulties putting them *at risk* in their school careers. Many of these children experienced difficulties from early childhood on which make it difficult for them to function in school and in the community. Although I have observed many of children experience adversity some children are able to find ways to attain resiliency and develop into successful adults.

I became interested a few years ago as to why some children seemed to grow and develop despite these adverse conditions. Over the many years of observing children at

various ages and stages of development, I was intrigued by how children, even those affected by adversity, manage to make good choices and become resilient, self-regulating, successful adults.

My Own Perspective as Researcher

As a high school teacher, I have witnessed firsthand the dilemma of how some students manage to attain resiliency despite adversity while others succumb to their trials and don't attain resiliency. Strategies and programs at times seem to have little or no affect. Young people appear to resist assistance. Cognitive theories often describe changes in the way people think about their experiences. As children and adolescents develop cognitively, they develop the capability to develop more complex structures. "When life presents challenges or new information that existing cognitive structures cannot handle, the resulting dissonance or disequilibrium forces a new accommodation of the cognitive structure" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p 7). This dissonance can result in having an individual in either taking on a positive or a negative pattern. Too often when young people are confronted, they seem to take on a negative pattern rather than a positive pattern. It is frustrating to watch, as it seems they are capable of developing a positive cognitive structure.

As a teacher, I was intrigued by how students seemed to resist assistance that could help them become successful. I spent years continuing my education by taking graduate courses. This helped me to identify the behaviours of my students and learn about the risk factors that seem to hamper their success in learning.

I like many other educators was often at a loss as to what to do about the behaviours my students were exhibiting. Over the years, I have observed educators become disillusioned by the behaviours manifested by the risk factors. It sometimes appeared as though some of the educators had given up. These young people, though difficult to reach, often became unsuccessful and lacked resilience.

In my experience as a high school counsellor, I spend a lot of time listening and talking with adolescents. I found out about the adversity they encountered during their lives. All too often it seemed that these young people instead of coming up with a positive way to address the problem, became fixated on the hardships. This distressed me as a teacher and I vowed to never give up on my students. Using an honest no nonsense approach with my students seemed to help build a positive relationship. Using humour also offered much in the development of this relationship.

At times unable to develop a positive way of addressing the problem, these individuals begin to show signs of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Drug abuse becomes a pattern as they struggle to cope with difficult situations. Though aware that drugs and alcohol negatively affect their bodies, they would experiment with various substances. They would often share with me that it provides relief from their pain and suffering. In addition, many of these young people have family that are also having difficulty coping and are suffering with stress and adversity. When parents are unable to cope with their own difficulties, they seem to have little to offer their children. As home life reaches a crisis, intervention programs are often called in. The behaviours used to

cope become a pattern within the family and are often difficult to reverse. Attaining resiliency becomes difficult for the individual as well as the parents.

my perspective as a parent.

As a mother to a young adult, I have also observed how my child has responded to peers who have faced adversity. Growing up in the same community for almost twenty years, he became close with many of the children in our neighbourhood. Looking back, many of the peers that he grew up with seemed to live almost ideal lives. Their parents seemed to love and nurture them and provide countless opportunities for growth and development. Unfortunately, often during the teen years, things seemed to change dramatically. Children, who seemed to be in strong homes with strong attachments in their younger years, no longer appeared to have the support they needed. Losses and traumatic events seemed to shake the family structure. Ultimately, this affects the relationships between the teens and their parents. Many of these young people no longer had a family support structure they can count on.

My son would share about individuals who had become drug users or high school dropouts. He would also say that the teen no longer seems to have the support of his parents and was living somewhere other than the family home. Sometimes, the teens would enter intervention programs. Too often, the results appeared negligible. Teens appeared to be left to their own devices within the community. Negative peer influences would take over and the teen would abandon his/her previous past beliefs and values for the new beliefs and values of his/her new peer group. It was hard to believe that these childhood friends who seemed to have positive relationships with their families had

grown into teens with negative relationships with their families. Meeting the parents of these young adults, they would tell me that they got to a point where there was no longer anything they felt they could do. They felt defeated and worn out. Neither they nor their children had managed to attain resiliency.

Both the experiences of being a teacher and a mother have helped me to formulate this particular research. Both experiences left me wondering about why young people struggle with success and resilience. It is sad to see young people and their families once able to have a positive relationship, be caught up in a negative spiral.

Chapter Summary Outline

Chapter one will serve as an introduction to the research study and provides the background of the research.

Chapter two will present a literature review of the main bodies of research: Attachment Theory, Locus of Control Theory, and Self-Efficacy Theory. These theories will also be related to the topic of resilience.

Chapter Three will focus on the research design and the methodology utilised in this study. This chapter also provides details on recruitment of subjects; the data collection process and procedures, the data analysis, and the ethics of the study will be discussed.

Chapter four will discuss the findings of the study.

Chapter Five will summarise the findings of the study and also present recommendations for educators on resilience education.

Chapter Two

Review of the literature

In addition to resilience literature, three main bodies of work were used to support my research study. Firstly, the theory of attachment and its relevance to how young people need nurturance and guidance from their caregivers will be discussed. Secondly, the locus of control theory will be discussed in terms of how young people need to internalise values, beliefs and attitudes of resiliency, which serves to affect their choices and decisions as young people. Thirdly, the self-efficacy theory will be discussed in terms of how the person feels that he/she feels about himself, (his/her feelings of self-worth) and his/her ability to function in society as a resilient adult.

The intent of this review of the literature is to relate it to the main topic of resilience in my research. For the purpose of this study I will provide background information and a summary of each theory. Later, these theories will be related to the findings of my research.

Attachment Theory

Throughout my teaching experience, I have found that early attachments often have a dramatic impact on young children. “Researchers have identified a number of attachment patterns that have shown that the way children establish emotional ties with their caregivers, influences their development not only in childhood, but also in adolescence and adulthood.

Attachment to primary caregiver(s)

Attachment theory is associated particularly with the work of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. Their work focused on how children were able to develop different types of attachments with their caregivers. Ainsworth identified three basic types of caregiver-child attachments:

(1) Secure, in which the child and the caregiver develop a warm and loving relationship; this relationship is thought to foster feelings of safety and security, thereby giving the child the confidence necessary to explore his or her environment. (2) Anxious/ambivalent, in which the child develops a fearful relationship with his or her caregiver because of excessive concerns of abandonment; these fears results in the child seeking to maintain nearness with the caregiver. (3) Avoidant, in which the child establishes only minimal levels of attachment with his or her caregiver; this type of relationship is believed to produce emotional detachment (Byrd & Harvey, 2000, p 346).

The type of attachment a child has with his/her caregiver seems to profoundly affect the child's development. In terms of relating attachment theory to resiliency, it seems that attachment, (the secure type), is the most desirable type of attachment. The research also suggests that if a secure attachment is not there with his/her caregiver, growing up into a healthy adult is less likely. Ainsworth, who studied children in Uganda, (1963,1967), also found that her data supported the significant quality of mother and child interaction as follows:

In her study in Ganda she found that three attachment patterns emerged:

Securely attached infants cried little and seemed content to explore in the presence of mother, insecurely attached infants cried frequently, even when held by their mothers, and explored little, and not-yet attached infants manifested no differential behaviour to the mother. (Bretherton, 1992, p 15).

Although the infants; attachment systems are thought to develop by focusing on the primary caregiver, it must be emphasised that the system is dynamic and rapidly expands to allow infants to become attached to others such as the secondary caregiver (usually the father) as well as siblings. (Byrd & Harvey, 2000, p 346).

Further to this, there is also research that suggests once the attachment system has been internalised, it is consistent with other attachments that are made later in life. This attachment system may expand to others and remain quite consistent. “That is, if the infant develops a secure attachment with the primary caregiver, then it is likely that secure attachment with others will follow”(Byrd & Harvey, 2000, p 346). This evidence also suggests that not only is a strong secure attachment possible with the mother, but also with a secondary caregiver. Once established, the same type of attachment will extend to others. If the attachment is secure, it will serve the child well as they grow into adulthood.

Bowlby’s research stresses the importance of this relationship:

Bowlby’s major conclusion, grounded in the available empirical evidence, was that to grow up mentally healthy, the infant and young child should experience a

warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment (Bowlby, 1951, p 13).

In 1963, Ainsworth began another study with families in Baltimore in which she observed 26 different families by making home visits beginning with the baby's first month and ending at 54 weeks of age. She found some interesting dynamics were present between the mother and her children. "When mothers meshed their own playful behaviour with that of their babies, infants responded with joyful bouncing, smiling and vocalising. In contrast, "when mothers initiated face to face interactions silently and with un-smiling expression, ensuing interactions were muted and brief. "(Bretherton, 1992, p 16). This study suggests that an adult figure in the child's life has a significant influence on the baby in terms of confidence and nurturance. The following research supports the idea of other important caregivers in the child's life:

Although the majority of attachment studies have focused on mothers because mothers tend to fill this role most often, we do have evidence that infants can be attached to a hierarchy of figures, including fathers, grandparents, and siblings as well as to day-care providers. This implies that often one or a few adult figures in the child's life can provide the attachment that a child needs. Most central to healthy development, according to attachment theory, is infants' need for a committed caregiving relationship with one or a few adult figures (Bretherton, 1992, p 29).

Attachment to teachers

Following this research of other caregivers also being important in the child's life, research on teachers has also been explored. In an article by Heather Libbey on "Measuring Student Relationships to School: Attachment, Bonding, Connectedness and Engagement" several factors are looked at in order to determine a child's connectedness to school. "Teacher support was the most common theme that emerged from the variables reviewed. Student relationships with school often were operationalized as their relationship with their teachers"(Libbey, 2004, p 281). This research implies that the relationship with teachers is highly significant in terms of how the child feels about the school. This would suggest that teachers can become one of the significant mentors in a child's life and that strong attachment with a teacher can really benefit the child.

Attachment to peers.

Given the importance of attachment in childhood, what happens when children or teens are not attached to are attached weakly attached to an adult? Dr. Gordon Neufeld states that "it takes three ingredients to make parenting work: a dependent being in need of being taken care of, an adult willing to assume responsibility, and a good working attachment from the child to the adult"(Neufeld, & Mate, 2005, p 54). He suggests that parenthood is a very important relationship between the child and the parent. He talks about how the importance of commitment and values in homes. He has found with his research that attachment arranges adults and children in a certain order. "When humans enter a relationship, their attachment brain automatically ranks the participants in order of dominance"(Neufeld & Mate, 2005, p 60). He believes that when their parents properly

take care of children, a dynamic is created between them. In contrast, he feels that when children gravitate towards only their peers and stop listening to their parents, children are and parents no longer have this healthy dynamic between them. This concept of peer orientation may then take over as a result of the child having this weak attachment to his/her parents. "Role reversal with a parent, skews the child's relationship with the whole world. It is a potent source of later psychological and physical stress" (Neufeld & Mate, 2005, p 61). Overall, peer orientation explains how children and adolescents no longer relate to their parents as they turn to their peers for guidance and answers.

These findings suggest that children need secure adult attachments with adult caregivers. Of course children should have a peer group but research warns that when peers replace adult attachments, unhealthy relationships between the adults and the child are the result. Further, it serves to harm the child later on in terms of psychological and physical stress.

In summary, this research on attachment suggests that in order to grow up as healthy adults, children need secure attachments to their adult caregivers. These caregivers can include teachers, other family members and friends. If they are securely attached to their caregivers this extends to their adult relationships as well. Children not securely attached to their caregivers are at risk of becoming peer orientated where they gravitate to their peers for nurturance and guidance. This creates difficulty, as peers are seldom equipped to provide the nurturance required.

Locus of Control Theory

The concept of internal and external locus of control theory has much to offer in terms of this topic on resiliency. “The locus of control construct was defined as a person’s belief in the amount of control a person has on specific events in life.”(Serbin, 1996, p 4). Locus of control is a concept that relates to how an individual places responsibility, choice, and control for events in their lives. People either place control for their lives by thinking in terms of being responsible for their own behaviour (internal locus of control), or they believe they are not responsible for their own behaviour (external locus of control).

Widespread concern about youth has led to research as to whether or not young people who have internal locus of control differ from young people who have external locus of control. The following study speaks about how it is possible for individuals to attain an internal locus of control if they are seen as resilient:

A study was conducted which examined students who were classified as resilient because of their academic success despite minority status and low-income housing. These children were different from their unsuccessful or nonresilient and dropout peers in that they had a greater sense of control over their lives (Cole, Lynch, & Hurford, 2002, p 528).

This study would suggest that the children who were resilient and successful had a greater sense of control over their lives and appeared to have an internal locus of control.

Research by Weiner suggests that it is interesting to look at how individuals view events that happen:

Weiner referred to whether individuals saw an event as being caused by their own behaviour demonstrating an internal locus of control or as being caused by environmental factors that were independent of them; demonstrating an external locus of control (Uguak, Elias, Uli and Suandi, 2001, p 121).

This type of study reinforces the idea that an internal locus of control tends to coincide with people believing that their own behaviour controls their lives. Outside factors such as the environment appears to affect people who have an external locus of control. It is suggested that people who don't believe in outside factors may have an internal locus of control.

A field believed to be related to the concept of internal and external locus of control has to do with family style and origins. This research supports that the style of parenting may suggest why some children have an internal or external locus of control. "Parents who do not encourage age-appropriate independence may have children who develop external control beliefs in adolescence" (Cole, Lynch, & Hurford, 2002, p 529). This also has implications related to attachment theory in terms of how a person acts may be based on earlier influences and/or attachments in their lives. This too, may affect whether or not they will develop an internal or an external locus of control.

Overall, it appears that research supports that a person's orientation to either internal or external locus of control largely depends on his/her experiences, situations and events. These are also related to his/her earlier models such as his parents. Similar to

attachment theory, locus of control theory tends to affect the individual early in life.

There are also some thoughts as to whether or not people are aware of their orientation and whether this is lodged in their subconscious. This may be why people who have an external locus of control respond to things without actually being aware of what they are doing.

Several parenting factors have also been associated with children who have an internal locus of control. One factor has to do with the consistency of parental discipline. This research suggests that consistent parenting has been linked with a strong internal locus of control. A person with an external locus of control orientation may not have had the consistent parenting and therefore may look at events and situations and be unable to figure out how they personally could have been responsible for their own situations and events. On the other hand, a person with an internal locus of control orientation who may have had consistent parenting may be more able to figure out situations and feel more responsible for their own situations and events.

In summary, the research on the locus of control theory suggests that an internal locus of control appears to be linked with responsibility of one's actions. Further to this, it seems to be found in individuals who do not look to external factors when something happens to them. In terms of resilience and success, it would appear that persons with an internal locus of control might be more resilient and successful than those with an external locus of control.

Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy theory also relates to resiliency. “Perceived self-efficacy concerns people’s beliefs in their capabilities to produce given attainments”(Pastorelli, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Rola, Rozsa & Bandura, 2001, P 87). Contrary to ideas on self-esteem or self-worth, self-efficacy has more to do with the beliefs that the person can or cannot do something. Even if the person feels they have an internal locus of control orientation, they may not actually believe that they are capable of acting in a way that will actually produce the result they want. “People of high efficacy set challenging goals for themselves and regulate the effort necessary to reach the goal and overcome impediments or threats. Efficacy beliefs also exert a major influence on stress and depression and the choices people make”(Pastorelli, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Rola, Rozsa and Bandura, 2001, p 88).

There are three sources of efficacy: 1) the family is the first source of efficacy information, 2) one’s peers are the second source of efficacy information and 3) school is the third source of efficacy information. This would suggest that successful experiences and opportunities might have a lot to do with the attainment of self-efficacy.

How self-efficacy differs from self-esteem

It is important not to compare self-esteem however to self-efficacy. “Self-efficacy is concerned with judgement of personal capability, whereas self-esteem is concerned with judgements of self-worth”(Pastorelli, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Rola, Rozsa, and Bandura, 2001, p 88). Locus of control too, may be confused with self-efficacy. “In the case of the other comparisons, perceived self-efficacy is a stronger and more

connected predictor of diverse forms of behaviour than is locus of control” (Pastorelli, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Rola, Rozsa and Bandura, p 88). This research suggests that self-efficacy may be a stronger predictor of success and resilience.

Overall, this research suggests that people with self-efficacy really believe in their ability to do something. Researchers believe this is a stronger predictor than locus of control. As positive self-efficacy comes from the family, one’s peers and the school, this suggests that all these situations are important in helping the individual believe in their abilities. This theory would appear to be strongly associated with the ability to be successful and resilient.

Summary of literature

These three supporting bodies of literature: attachment, internal/external locus of control and self-efficacy all serve to point out that the likelihood of becoming strong healthy resilient individuals can result if these are present within the individual. I believe that conducting a study to examine individual perspectives would be very helpful in understanding the role these theories can play in the lives of individuals.

The Need to Study Individuals’ Own Perspectives

I feel what is missing in the research surrounding resilience, adversity and success is the need to examine the young person’s *own* perspective. I believe much of the current literature on resilience as well as attachment, locus of control and self-efficacy is from experts who have observed young people but not actually had the opportunity to develop a relationship and acquire their personal account of how they managed in the face of adversity. I believe that if an account of individuals who managed to attain resiliency and

success could be explored, this might provide answers as to how resiliency can actually be attained. Further to this, by developing a relationship with young people, this would increase the likelihood that the critical incidents surrounding resiliency would also be addressed. I believe this approach would provide much insight as to what can be done to foster resilient young people in our society.

Purpose of my Research Study

The purpose of my study was to examine the perspective of four young adults and how they have overcome adversity in their lives. Further to this, I examined what they felt and what they found most helpful to them in the process of attaining resiliency. To accomplish this, the four individuals were interviewed and encouraged to speak about the following:

- How adversity affected them in their lives and how they managed to overcome adversity.
- How they characterise their own resiliency or their ability to handle difficult situations.
- What factors were important to them in overcoming adversity and/or handling difficult situations.
- How adults assisted them in their lives.
- What they learned from their personal experiences.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Methods

In this chapter, I will provide an account of the methodological procedures that were used in this study to examine the perspectives of the young people based on their experiences of resiliency, adversity and success. I chose a blend of three types of research including qualitative, action, and narrative inquiry as a basis for my research. A qualitative framework provided a general design for my research. I chose action research orientation (Stringer, 2004), which guided me in developing a relationship with my participants. Finally, I chose narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000), to generate actual stories of resilience, which I wanted to be of foremost importance in looking at the complexities in the attainment of resilience.

As a researcher, I was personally interested in the perspectives of young people and more importantly, in how their perspective can influence educators in assisting them attain resiliency. I feel action research provided the opportunity for me to look carefully at the perspective of people for the purpose of attaining a deeper understanding of how they view their lives. “Research, more formally, may be defined as a process of systematic investigation leading to increased understanding of a phenomenon or issue of interest”(Stringer, 2004, p 3). This suggests that even though this topic may appear to be quite ordinary, using action research enabled me to look at it and see it differently by hearing the perspective of the subjects and their personal stories.

Recruitment of Participants

The four participants I used in my study were young people recommended to me by my colleagues. My colleagues consist of persons that I have known in a professional capacity. A letter to my colleagues (Appendix A) was sent to various colleagues introducing the study and listing the criteria I required for the subjects I wished to work with in the study. They were asked to recommend someone who fit the criteria as follows: 1) subjects will be between 18-28, 2) Subjects will have demonstrated resiliency in the face of adversity in the process of completing high school and 3) subjects will be willing to be a part of a research study. Once my colleagues had suitable candidates in mind, they were invited to forward me the names and their email addresses so I would be able to invite them to be participate in the study. I contacted the potential subjects who were recommended to me by providing an invitation letter, (Appendix B). The first four participants to send back their letter to me were chosen to participate in the study. I provided them with a consent letter (Appendix C) at the beginning of the first interview.

The participants in this study also happened to be all women. This was a simple consequence of using the first four persons who responded to the invitations to participate. The participants were all aged between nineteen and twenty-six. The participants had all attended urban schools in Winnipeg. Names of the participants as well as the names of the places they spoke about were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

Interviews

I interviewed each data source twice. Each interview lasted between thirty and sixty minutes. Both interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The first interviews took place during the month of May 2008. The second interviews took place during the following month.

In the first interview, I encouraged the participants to talk about their life story. The participants chose which events were of importance to them. The participants also chose whether or not to elaborate. During this interview, I recorded my impressions as they spoke. After the first interview was transcribed, I authored a narrative text for each participant. In order to construct each narrative text, I wrote a summative paragraph that characterised the reoccurring themes in their lives. Then I provided a chronological retelling of the elements of their stories. Please see (Appendix E) for the four narrative texts.

To open the second interview, I provided them with a copy of the narrative text and read it to them. I invited each participant to respond by adding, deleting or elaborating or any information that was presented. They all agreed that it sounded like their story and that they had never experienced hearing a narrative of their story before. All four participants valued the opportunity to elaborate further.

Limitations of my Research

It is necessary to mention some of the limitations of this study. First, the subjects were all telling their story according to what they recalled so at times they may have chosen to omit an event or a sequence of event. As I did not know any of their life

stories, I was not in a position to be able to prompt them to fill things in or add more details at any point. The purpose of this study was for them to share their own version of their story.

Second, I felt the subjects might have wished to seek self-approval from myself so they may have been less likely to bring up possible areas of controversy or disagree with the narrative script. As they were all very pleasant subjects and eager to be participating in the study, I feel it was somewhat unlikely but nevertheless, may have happened to some degree.

Third, as I had set the time limits for the interviews by the guidelines in the consent letter, I needed to keep things moving and this may have resulted in missing some information that they may have wanted to share. Although I tried to give them sufficient time to respond, I may have jumped too quickly to the next question and they may have not had adequate time to answer the question fully.

Fourth, I felt that as with any data collection, I might have made some assumptions from their first interview or second interview in terms of the information they shared with me. I was also watching their body language and although I tried not to have this influence the interpretation of the data, it may have had some effect.

Lastly, the stories of the young women were the only perspective that my study chose to examine. The perspectives of their parents, their teachers, their mentors and peers were not part of this study. If these other persons had been included as part of this study, their stories may have been interpreted differently.

Overall, although I did not feel these limitations impacted my data significantly, I felt I needed to share these points as they occurred to me during the collection of the data. data analysis.

In analysing the data, basically four aspects were utilised. First, the data were read carefully as an individual story scrutinised in order to look at the events. Second, the data were looked at in terms of commonalties among the participants. Third, I looked at the themes of attachment, locus of control, and self-efficacy. I was able to relate each of the participant's stories to each of the themes. Although each of the participants viewed their attainment of resiliency somewhat differently, each of these themes was acquired by each of the participants. They all referred to having strong attachments throughout their lives, the development of an internal locus of control, and a personal self-efficacy that assisted them in being able to regulate their lives.

As each individual spoke about how they managed to attain resiliency, they alluded to optimism and hardiness in the process. Each of them spoke about how they were able to keep a positive outlook in the midst of adversity. One of the individuals even used the word *optimistic* and felt that she felt and acted in this manner, much like her mother.

An interviewer's journal was also utilised to record impressions, reactions and other events that happen during the data collection phase. These were used to write the profiles on each of the participants. In addition, many analytic memos were written throughout the data collection and these were used to identify points that need to be clarified. I also identified themes pertaining to the three primary interests of a)

attachment b) self-efficacy and c) internal/external locus of control and how these affected the perspective of each of the participants. I engaged in a narrative conversation with each of the participants during the second interview and asked them to expand on their ideas. The interview data, journal notes and analytic memos were analysed. Transcripts and notes were read and coded according to the emerging themes, concepts and ideas.

The ideas presented in the next chapter emerged from my interpretations of the findings given by the participant's perspectives. These ideas were also related to the overall themes of attachment, locus of control and self-efficacy. Differences in their perspectives will also be discussed. All indented material and material within quotation marks are direct quotes from the interviews. Pseudonyms were used to assist in protecting the anonymity of those used in the study.

Chapter Four

Discussion of the Findings

Information on the Participants

The participants were women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-eight. I spoke with colleagues I have known from my teaching career to recommend names as potential participants. I received a number of recommendations from my colleagues. I followed up on each recommendation with a letter of invitation. The participants who accepted the invitation were then selected on a first come first serve basis. They came from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. All of the women had grown up in Winnipeg. They all attended schools in Winnipeg. One of the participants was also home schooled for a few years. They all graduated from Grade 12 although two of them graduated from alternative high schools. One of these participants graduated a few years later than her peers. All of the women were single and one of the participants was also a mother of two children. All four experienced difficulties with school work. Two of the women were diagnosed with learning disabilities in the early years. All of the women spoke about difficulties with peers. They all grew up with at least one biological parent. Overall, the women had many similarities. As previously stated, I used the notes I took during the interviews to formulate each of the following profiles.

Profile on “Kaley”

Kaley was a talkative young lady. She became comfortable with the interview process almost immediately. She was friendly, outgoing and seemed to enjoy the

prospect of being part of a research study. She was very comfortable talking about her past although I got the impression that she hadn't often talked about her life.

Kaley also gave me the impression early on that she was a person blamed others for her difficulties. She gave a lot of information throughout both interviews and seemed committed to giving as many details as possible. When I called her up to arrange the second interview, she was very eager to meet with me again. She seemed excited at the prospect of meeting again. As I read her narrative script to her she seemed very pleased. She seemed very appreciative of the opportunity she had to participate in a research study. I got the impression she felt affirmed in her perceptions. She seemed very confident about how she had handled her choices and decisions. In summary, I got a sense from Kaley that the research experience was a positive experience and she seemed to enjoy having the opportunity to reflect about her life and who she was as a person.

Profile on "Alice"

Alice struck me as a young lady who had a great sense of humour and a zest for living. She seemed to feel very comfortable with the task and seemed eager to be part of a research study. She also gave me the impression that she had not really told her life story before, but that she was eager to do it. She did seem concerned about some periods in her life and almost seemed as if she wanted to figure out things as she was talking. She was interested in why things happened as they did.

As the interview progressed, she would add information that indicating that she had never really thought about things before. She seemed eager to do some soul searching as she reflected on past events in her life.

When I called her for the second interview she responded as well with anticipation and was eager to meet with me again. She seemed pleased to hear her story and was eager to talk further about it. I got the impression from Alice that the narrative affirmed her strengths and the fact that she had worked through many points in her life and was now feeling more successful.

Profile on “Christy”

Christy was a fairly articulate young lady but quite shy in her demeanour. I learned from her that she had grown up in a French speaking home so English was not her first language. She had attended a French speaking school throughout her life. At times she would say things that gave me the impression that she was translating and searching for the English words to describe the things she wanted to say. She seemed to warm up quite quickly to the idea of the research but was somewhat reluctant at times to share in-depth details about her story. I felt I needed to be enthusiastic so she would feel more at ease.

I felt that Christy also had more issues than she was admitting to, particularly in her teen years. She mentioned that she had some anger issues in the past but was somewhat reluctant to elaborate on them. I also got the impression that she felt pressure to succeed in school. She also spoke about leisure and sport activities that she didn't really enjoy and how she decided to discontinue participating in these activities.

Overall, Christy was the subject that I had to work the hardest with, as I needed to expend a lot of energy in trying to make her feel confident and comfortable. I felt she

was unsure and often lacked confidence. Overall, I felt that sharing her story was quite a challenge for her.

profile on “Elly”.

Elly was a spirited, vibrant young lady who wanted to have fun and enjoy herself. Elly was very eager to be a part of the study. She was the oldest woman in the group. She seemed to have spent the most time reflecting on her past and she also seemed to have told her story before.

Elly was aware of the critical events in her life and spoke about them in a meaningful way. She also spoke about how important her two children were to her. She spoke about how she did not want her daughter going through the same issues.

Her story was both the most complex and the most interesting. She was aware that her life had been difficult. At this point however, she was very enthusiastic about her life and how she was figuring out things on her own.

Relating Research to the Theories

This section will discuss the research findings and relate them to the theories of attachment, locus of control and self-efficacy. I will examine some of the thoughts on the existing literature on attachment theory, control theory and social learning theory (self-efficacy) in order to relate it to the perceptions of the participants.

Attachments related to the Study

According to the work of Ainsworth and Bowlby, we know that attachments formed early in life are very important in terms of the likelihood of becoming healthy

individuals. We know that out of the three types of attachments, secure, anxious or avoidant, individuals fare better with secure types of attachments in their lives.

Overall, all of the women acknowledged that they had a safety network of people that were very important to them. Each of them spoke about their close relationship with their mothers as well as the support they received from other adults including teachers, mentors, friends and family. Each of them included these adult supports in their life stories.

Attachment - Caregivers

Each of the subjects had unique ways in which to describe their mothers and/or parents. Kaley described her parents as “Oh, It was great! I mean like I have the same relationship as I did before. My parents, you know, they’d just let me get it out. (stuttering). (p4 1st interview with Kaley). Alice described her mother as “Cause you know, mothers absolutely love their kids, right? At least my mother does to us, so.”(p 7, 1st interview with Alice). Christy described her Grandma as a lot like her Mom. “I guess she’s just really friendly, generous and . . . yeah. I just love, love like the way she, I don’t know, says things. She’s a lot like my Mom.”(p 27 1st interview with Christy). Elly’s description of her mother was “I mean my mother, like she had my back 100% on everything. And um, I don’t know, my mom always, my mom always me feel like, she never made me feel like I couldn’t do anything. “(p 16 1st interview with Elly).

Overall, all of the subjects felt a close bond to their parents and in particular, their mothers. This data suggests that each of the participants had an initial secure type of attachment with their parents. It also suggests that as they had this secure attachment,

they were able to form other attachments in their lives. They all spoke about reaching out to others such as teachers and adults. I believe that due to this secure attachment, they were able to form a strong network of attachments in their lives.

Attachment - Teachers

All of the subjects had fond memories of the teachers who helped and supported them. Interestingly, few of the subjects recalled elementary teachers. Most of the participants referred to the teachers they had in their later years. Alice and Elly both spoke about the teachers they had in their later school years as being particularly helpful.

Kaley spoke of her best teacher, Ms. Ward in grade 8 as the one who helped her out the most. She said, “She was very optimistic about everything and she helped me out even without, even having school stuff going on, I would always come to her for things. And she helped me out a lot. Like she taught me a lot more than probably anybody”(p 8 1st interview with Kaley). Alice spoke about some of the teachers but also had a general comment about teachers. She said, “I mean there were some teachers like everybody absolutely loved and they were great teachers and there were some that oh, they were so rotten.” (p 24, 2nd interview with Alice). This suggests that while there are teachers that were loved, there are also teachers that were not.

When asked if any of the teachers stood out, Christy replied, “Um, actually my Spanish teacher. I was really close to her. She really liked me and I was one of her best students” (p 18, 1st interview with Christy). Elly was the only subject who spoke of her grade six teacher as someone who was a great teacher but also someone who made grade six a great year. She said, “She was like one of my all time favourite teachers. She was

just very understanding and I never had any problems with her whatsoever. Yeah that was probably grade six, was probably one of my favourite years in school ever”(p 7, 1st interview with Elly).

The positive characteristics attributed to teachers by the participants in my study included: friendly, understanding, loving and optimistic. This would suggest that it is these attributes in a teacher that really stands out for young people. When looking at teachers or mentors that would be beneficial in programming for young people, it would be advisable to choose adults with these characteristics.

Attachment - Schools

In terms of education, all of the participants spoke about how education was very important to them. All recalled both successful and unsuccessful educational experiences. This suggests that both types of experiences stood out for them.

Kaley experienced a time in her school career where she was diagnosed to have a learning disability. She spoke about how frustrating that made her feel. She also spoke about how she felt when she was diagnosed and given easier work to do.

She said, “my dad kind of knew that he had like a learning disability and then it turned out that I, I just can’t do multiple choice. It’s just . . . I don’t know what it is, I just, I can’t do it. I can’t I don’t know if it’s I read half way in and then I stop and then somehow go in between or something, but I have difficulty, so I um, I did a learning disability test. And so ended up saying that I had this wrong and that wrong and all this stuff, which I don’t think it was . . . like I don’t know what the standards are for all that stuff, but they would tell me that I had a learning

disability, so they would give me all these easier tests. Which helped me out I guess in, in a kind of a way, but it kind of also, was like, ok well, you know it's kind of the dummy version for me"(p 5 1st interview with Kaley).

Alice experienced home schooling and then went on to finish her high school in a re-entry program. Although not formally diagnosed with a disability, she spoke about how she got behind and how she felt about that experience.

Alice said, and since I stayed in one grade for 3 years, I had to kind of re-enter high school. And so I caught up 2 years in 1. So "cause there's like 4 semesters I think in 1 year. So you learn a lot more, like faster. So from there I said you know, this is really cool, you know? So, I began to take it in adult education. And so that's where it really kicked off, right? So I went and I did grade 11 and 12 in that and I got very excellent marks (p 14, 1st interview with Alice).

Christy talked about how school seemed to go quite well although she admitted her parents, who were both teachers, did not like her marks. She recalled how she made the choice to study to get good marks. She said, "I did pretty good in school. I had good marks, studied hard, and I didn't go out that much with my friends, I just I was a study type. I just studied and that's it" (p 12, 1st interview with Christy).

Elly spoke about how some difficulties she faced in school. She described a key time in her life in terms of feeling that education was important was when she was 16.

She said, I was put on, I was put on um, Risperidone for that. And then I went to school there and actually that was probably like the best I ever did in school, like, like grade wise. Like when I actually realised that I was smart. Like I was actually capable of doing the work that was given out to me in classes. Like I, on tests I got, I never got less than like 85% on a test that year (p 12, 1st interview with Elly).

Despite some challenges, all of the participants spoke about how they managed to achieve success in their school experiences as well. The participants recalled how important their successful experiences in school were to them. They also spoke about the fact that they finally managed to achieve in school and how that really stood out for them. My data suggests that learning was very important to the young women in this study and that even though they may have had difficulties and/or disabilities, they valued their accomplishments.

attachment to peers.

The role of peers appeared to be very important to each of the subjects. All of the subjects recalled incidents where peers were instrumental in helping them through adversity. They also spoke about times when peers were either the cause or a contributor to the adversity. Peers seemed to be both positive and negative influences in their lives. The subjects also spoke about the importance of fitting in with their peers and how important that was in their earlier years. In particular, Elly, Kaley and Alice experienced much adversity through their interactions with peers. Alice also admitted that it was the

main type of adversity that she encountered. In addition, the participants used the following words to describe peers: mean, nasty and cruel at times.

Kaley, who felt that stuttering was of the greatest source of adversity, recalled the following about her peers:

You know kindergarten and all that stuff, nothing really happened until probably about grade four and then kids really didn't know anything, so they really didn't say anything. But then after in high school, you know kids can be pretty cruel. But um, that's just kind of when things got worse with that (p 3 1st interview with Kaley).

Kaley also spoke to the idea of trying to fit in and how tough that was for her.

She said, it still made me feel frustrated, because . . . you wanted to be like everybody else. You want to be in the same sort of situation as them. So then you don't think, oh well, you know kind of thing. Like kids, again, could be, like can be cruel and if your friends are saying that, obviously you're going to feel like you know, so like almost put like um, a front up (p 7 1st interview with Kaley).

Kaley also recognised the positive influence of peers and how they could help her and support her. When asked about a memory that stood out for her, Kaley spoke of her friend Tessa.

She said, I would say, Tessa, actually. Cause when my friend will be like, when my friend Edna died ah, September of two years ago, she was there for me when, like. . Edna and I, we had difficulty problems ah, before I left for Beaumont. Like her and me were best friends, hanging out all the time and I couldn't do that

anymore. And then when I found out that, you know I kind of broke away from her, she had cancer. And Tessa was there, to know you know like let's go out, let's just go for supper or go out somewhere else. So she helped me out a lot to get my mind off things (p 11 1st interview with Kaley).

Alice, of all the participants, appeared to experience the most difficulty with peers and could recall few positive interactions in her earlier years. She even referred to her difficulty with peers in grade two as adversity. She said, "You know, I'd mainly say it started to stand out, well like a little bit in grade two, there was a little bit of adversity, I think. You know, just mean little kid in class, right? But I think it peaked probably around, I think grade four? No, grade three actually" (p 4 1st interview with Alice). In terms of fitting in with her peer group, Alice spoke a lot about her difficult experiences. When she finally made a best friend in grade three, she recalled how she would hang out with her and how wonderful it was to have a friend.

Alice said, So it kind of got to the point where um, honestly, like I was kind of the only person, kind of like segregated from the group. My friend was a little bit; she was almost in between, like a fence sitter kind of thing. Um, she was sort of, she was more accepted than I was, but she still hung out with me (p 5 1st interview with Alice).

This incident suggests how lonely Alice was and how segregated from the group she felt. She did not fit in. Alice's difficulties with peers grew worse and by grade eight, she experienced depression. Later on however, she experienced positive friendships and

spoke about how she felt about that positive support. She spoke about how she had this friend in grade three. She said, “So, I mean she, for the first while she was, you know, she gave me this ability to have a friend, someone to communicate with, someone to talk to in periods where it was, you know it was really tough, right”(p 10 1st interview with Alice).

In looking back, Alice admitted that she had never really had peers to turn to. She spoke about how she never really went to her peers for support. She said, “You know it’s kind of you are more by yourself and so you don’t really even want to ask people for help. Like you can ask your teacher, but you know that’s not like your peer” (p 8 2nd interview with Alice).

Christy thought of herself as having a lot of friends but when she spoke it seemed as if she had few friends. She described how she had been with the same peers in school from grade two to twelve. When asked how she felt, she replied, “Ah, I was sort of in-between I guess, cause I talked to everyone.” (p 12 1st interview with Christy).

She described how her friends changed when she came back after being in Europe for a year with her parents. She found that her friends were different when she came back. She said, “Then when I got back it was like, I was more stubborn and stuff like that. I don’t know. That’s what they told me” (p 9 1st interview with Christy). Christy too, felt she had some positive peers as well. When asked who she would say were the most important people in her life she answered, “Um, definitely, my friends. Like my friends that were friends with me “till, from grade two to grade twelve (p 17 1st interview with Christy). Throughout these various experiences, Christy emphasised that friends were still very important in her life.

Elly spoke about how as she grew up, she lacked friendships in her life. She spoke about the many moves in her early grades, which she felt affected her in terms of friendships. She spoke about the negative impact peers had on her. She recalled in detail a story of what happened to her in grade one:

And our teacher, it was only in grade one and our teacher wanted us to imagine different things that they could also be. And I was like saying that they could be crayons, but I couldn't say crayons. And then I think the kids laughed at me, cause of the way I was saying it. But . . . yeah. I don't know. It upset me then (p 5 1st interview with Elly).

Although this story happened about twenty years ago, I was amazed at how Elly was still able to recall specific details. This suggests how this negative peer experience had such a profound impact on her. Unfortunately, Elly continued to have few friendships in her school years. Elly admitted that she had never really had a best friend until grade eight. She described her friend as someone who was not a good combination for her but that she wanted to finally have a best friend and fit in. She described her as follows:

She said, and she was kind of like, she smoked and she would drink and I had never done anything like that before, but I had also never had like a best friend before, so it was just one of those things that, like I wanted, I guess I wanted to do it, because I wanted to have that kind of a friendship with somebody (p 9 1st interview with Elly).

This story speaks to how she wanted so desperately to fit in that even though she knew she shouldn't be doing these things, she did them anyway. Fortunately, Elly also

experienced positive peer interactions and met some good friends later on. She spoke about how they became a positive influence in her life.

My friends that I have right now are probably like the best friends I've ever had, my two girl friends. Um, they went to school with me, that's where I met them. And they both have children too and we're, we're very, like they're like family to me. Like we're together almost everyday of the week (p 17 1st interview with Elly).

Overall, all of the women recalled difficult experiences with their peers and how these experiences had either a positive or a negative impact on them. I was surprised at how some of the negative experiences had such an impact that they could recall almost every word. This suggests that negative peer influences can have long lasting effects on them. Fortunately, all of the subjects also had positive, supportive experiences with peers as well although this often did not happen until their much later teen years. Overall, this data would suggest the importance of positive peer interactions and how these need to be fostered throughout childhood and adolescence.

Locus of Control related to the Study

In examining this theory, it is interesting in how the individuals in my study chose to speak with an internal locus of control even though at times, they admitted to being out of control. They all admitted to having experienced situations of adversity, which challenged them and made them, feel out of control. They all spoke about how they all consciously or unconsciously came to a turning point in their lives where they decided to

take control of their lives once again. The turning points then, speak to their attainment of an internal locus of control.

Alice, one of the subjects gave the most articulate account of her turning point. She described it as, "I guess it was like a realisation that you know, it almost just hit me. It wasn't like this slow gradual process." You know, I've been staring that in the face for how long. It's like a process of thought that happened."(p 17 2nd interview).

Kaley was able to articulate what she felt she could do at this point.

Well, I definitely know that I can change situations on my own. Like I mean, with the stuttering. I mean, I, I asked for a referral. Like I mean, I want, I wanted it. So I mean, and even with my job, like if I want to leave, I mean I have that opportunity. So I feel if back in high school, like I, I definitely stand up for myself now than I did before. Life I've had a lot of disappointments in my life, but then also I know how to change that" P 11, 1st interview with Kaley).

Alice was also able to talk about how her ability to handle difficult situations once she had come to the realisation that she was in control of her life.

To be able to, you know, it's, usually like before you know people's opinions have a lot of effect on you and therefore they control your decisions and whatever and what you do, but now it's like you know, yeah, I'm in control of my life and you know, like they'll treat me, you know, if they're disrespectful, yes you know, go tell them. This is, you know, I don't like to be treated this way and to have that control to stand up for yourself, definitely. People, you know, you got to have that (p 15 1st interview with Alice).

Christy was aware of her resiliency but had difficulty articulating it. She said, “I believe in myself whenever I’m, like something rough. Like I know I can surpass it and keep going down, yeah, the good road and I wouldn’t just give up like that easily, you know, I’m actually quite stubborn, so. Yeah (p 25, 1st interview with Christy).

Elly admitted to being out of control for a period in her life:

Like I was pretty much an out of control teenager and I didn’t really have any control over my emotions at the time. Like it was more I had anxiety attacks over certain things and that’s what she thinks it was, cause for the most part now, I’m, I’m happy and I, I don’t ever get depressed. I’m hardly every upset about anything. So . . . I’m pretty much, yeah in control (p 18, 1st interview with Elly).

Overall, the realisation of a turning point led to feelings and statements about being in control. This suggested they had attained an internal locus of control. In contrast, they admitted to being out of control and this suggested this was the time in their life when they had an external locus of control. All of the participants seemed to realise how important this realisation was and therefore, how important having an internal locus of control was in their lives.

Self-Efficacy related to the Study

This theory used in this research study had to do with attaining a personal self-efficacy. According to the literature discussed in Chapter two, it is possible to attain self-efficacy from family, peers and school. In each of the four subjects, they received strong

messages from home that they did have the ability to do things and that they possessed the intelligence as well. Although they seemed to go through rough times, they emerged at this point of their lives, with a strong personal self-efficacy.

Two subjects, Kaley and Elly were told that they had learning disabilities and yet managed to develop and grow intellectually. All four women were able to articulate what their expectations were for their lives and for the future. They were able to describe what they wanted to do and in most cases, how they would be able to meet their goals.

Interestingly, according to the research, people who attain self-efficacy do not have difficulty with stress and depression as they are focused on the belief that they can attain what they wish to attain. This would suggest that though they now have self-efficacy, at some point in their lives, they did not have it. An example of this was Alice who was depressed in her Gr. 8 year and managed to articulate that she had been at a low confidence level at the time and was even able to describe how she got out of it. She said, “It was more of a, you know, it takes a little while to sort of wean yourself off this habit you’ve gotten into of you know, just beating yourself up and you know listening to other people’s comments, but . . . it was probably um, probably during the home schooling years and after grade 8” (p 19 2nd interview with Alice). This realisation shows that despite the level of adversity that Alice experienced, she was able to attain personal self-efficacy.

Personal Self-Efficacy

I felt the confidence level of each participant greatly increase during the second interview. I feel that because I was able to establish a positive relationship with each of

the participants, they were able to share openly with me. It was delightful to see the expressions as they heard their narrative scripts. I feel strongly that all four participants found the scripts to be a positive affirmation of their lives.

I think all of the subjects were in a position in being able to reflect about their personal experiences. They also appeared to have learned about their personal experiences as well. They seemed confident in speaking about their ability to make choices and decisions. I feel my study provided each of the participants to have a chance to share as hear their life story. I feel my data suggests that a new level of confidence profoundly impacted themselves as participants and their personal self-efficacy or sense of self was reached when they realised they had the capacity to articulate the story for themselves.

The Turning Point

The way each of the women described how they were now able to make decisions and take charge of their lives was very interesting. It was amazing to learn that all four participants at some point in their lives, felt they were able to take charge of their lives and make decisions and choices for themselves. It was also interesting that each of the participants, particularly after the second interview, seemed more confident about talking about and being in control of their own choices.

Kaley stated emphatically, So, I mean. . I've learned that, if you want something, like if you want a different, you know, group of friends whatever, like you can't have, have the stupid ones around you. You have to get away from that. So I

mean . . . and that, that took a lot of learning. And so you know like you learn from your mistakes (p 23 2nd interview with Kaley).

Summary of the findings

The stories shared many similarities. All of the women seemed to understand that they had some sort of ability to be resilient and had shown this at different points in their life. They all seemed to be confident in their abilities and secure in the idea that they will continue to be resilient in the future. Many of them talked about opportunities in their future and what they wished to do. They all felt they had a strong supportive network of family and friends. All had parents that had been very supportive and were supportive up to this date. They seemed to feel this support was very important in their past lives and would continue to be in their future as well. They all had friends as well, although some had fewer friends than others. They all seemed to feel that their friendship circle was adequate at this point but all of them felt that in the past, their friendship network was not what they would have liked.

Each one of the women experienced adversity differently in their lives. Each of them chose to address the situations of adversity differently as part of their life story, which was perhaps the most interesting part of the study. Interestingly, a couple of the participants referred to one main area of adversity in their lives whereas the other two participants chose to focus on different areas of adversity. Kaley chose to address the main issue for her, which was stuttering. Although she told her life story, much of it was related to her difficulties with the stuttering issue and how she worked on it. Her story spoke about the steps she took throughout her life and how she finally dealt with the issue

and managed to overcome it. She actively sought out supportive adults and opportunities to assist her. She spoke about how her supportive family, teachers and friends helped her learn from her experiences. She spoke with pride as to how she is now able to put all of this in perspective and feel that these situations had helped become who she was.

Alice chose to focus on situations involving her peers, which she referred to as adversity. She experienced much difficulty with her peers and spoke of bullying issues that plagued her up until her teen years. She also spoke about a dark time in her life and how she managed to get out of it with the realisation that she was loved and turned to her Mom and her family for solace. Her reoccurring theme of coming to terms with others opinions was something she admitted in the course of her life story and slowly she grew to realise that she was in control and that she had a right to set boundaries. Although she stated that she was still mystified as to why kids teased her and picked on her, she managed towards the end of her story to say that opinions no longer bother her and that you ultimately need to decide which opinions are important.

Christy spoke about a variety of adverse situations in her life. She spoke to a couple of reoccurring issues which had to do with her parents pressuring her into doing better with grades, activities, and sports. Although she really considered this to be adversity, she was hesitant in talking about it as she admitted that her parents were good to her and that she was very close to them. She also spoke of other situations such as difficulty getting along with peers, getting used to home after being away for a year, and how she quit a number of activities such as piano and swimming. When asked about how

she managed to deal with crises, Christy admitted to being angry and then having to apologise.

Elly's life story spoke about the many things she encountered in her life. The recurring theme in her story was the dilemma of not having friends to grow up with. To add to this, she also was diagnosed with learning disabilities. Elly came to the realisation that she was her own person and that she was happy with her abilities and her life circumstances. She managed to overcome her difficulties with school and had found support in an adult education program. She felt great pride in talking about how she finished high school in 2006. She also found friends through these programs and continues to have a strong supportive network of friends. Overall, she has come to a point in her life where although she admits to having many different adverse situations, she managed to overcome it and felt she was finally in control of her life.

Following a turning point, each of the women was able to put their particular situation into perspective. They spoke about how they were able to believe in themselves and put themselves back in control. Alice, reflecting on this time, stated, "you know, just be yourself and they can take a hike if they want to and you know they can say all the things they want." (p 18 2nd interview with Alice). These data suggests that for all of the participants, they had strong attachments, they developed an internal locus of control through a turning point in their lives and they were able to attain self-efficacy as they spoke about how they now believe in themselves and can make choices and decisions for themselves. My data would suggest all of the participants though they experienced adversity, were able to attain resiliency.

Optimism & Hardiness

In this study, it is clear that not only have the individuals attained an internal locus of control and personal self-efficacy but also optimism and hardiness in terms of how they began looking back at their lives. Clearly, optimism and hardiness emerged as characteristics of each of these women as they attained resilience in their lives.

The concept of hardiness came from the medical literature and was identified by Kobasa as a resistance factor in the late 1970's. What they found was individuals who experienced high levels of stress but still remained healthy were found to have a different personality structure than those who became ill. "According to Scheier & Carver in 1985, in contrast to hardiness, the concept of optimism grew out of the psychological literature and reflects an individual's expectation of a positive outcome in most situations" (Bissonnette, 1998, p 4).

Optimism was then paired with goal setting or developing expectations. Interestingly, resilience is said to be strongly related to self-efficacy and optimism is believed to be related to self-efficacy. Optimism it thought to happen when personal self-efficacy is reached. Optimism and hardiness are also themes that are linked to long term resiliency as they suggest that if a person responds with optimism, they are better equipped to handle adversity as it affects their lives.

For the purposes of this study, optimism and hardiness are most likely linked to resiliency and were shown in each of the subjects as they shared their stories. I believe that Optimism in particular, became evident when the women reached a sense of self-efficacy in their lives. In summary, my research showed that the women had secure

attachments, a strong internal locus of control, a personal self-efficacy and had also gained a level of optimism and hardiness in the process of attaining resiliency.

Chapter Five

Summary and Recommendations

Summary

My results of this research suggest that it is definitely helpful to study the individual perceptions of young adults who managed to overcome various forms of adversity. I feel this is a much more beneficial way to find out about resiliency than consulting with experts who speak mostly about their observations of young people. This study demonstrates the actual *voices of young people that* are so often underrepresented in today's research.

I also feel this type of study can only be done if a relationship is built between the researcher and his/her participants. In my study, a positive relationship with each of the participants was evident throughout the study. The women were not only co-operative but also almost seemed to welcome the idea of sharing their story. I felt that each of them had acquired a sense of pride as to who they had become as individuals. They demonstrated that they were strong women who had attained an internal locus of control, personal self-efficacy and a sense of optimism and hardiness in the process of becoming resilient.

Factors in my study that proved to be important for their attainment of resiliency included: supportive parents, supportive teachers, a view of successful experiences within school, supportive friends and the ability and capability to make decisions. My data strongly demonstrates that relationships with caring adults was key in this process. The turning point that occurred for each of the women further suggests that supportive adults become of utmost importance at this time in their lives. Fortunately, for each of the

participants they were able to access supportive adults throughout the process of becoming resilient.

Recommendations

The findings of this research suggest some interesting ways to explore how to develop resilience within students in our schools. Although this study focused on the personal stories of four women, the stories of their schooling experiences suggested that there were a number of areas that could be further explored by educators. In looking at the way these women looked at their childhood school experiences, educators could surmise that relationship building was of utmost importance in helping these women attain or not attain success. The recommendations for educators to explore have to do with the role of a) teachers b) peers and c) parents.

Firstly, the stories of how instrumental supportive teachers are in this process cannot be emphasised enough. This data suggests that it is the teachers, more important than anything else that can make a big difference in the lives of young people. All of the women related stories of teachers in their teen years as being supportive and helpful. Interestingly, none of the women cited counsellors or resource teachers but referred only to regular teachers. The participants, with the exception of Elly, also chose not to relate a story of a teacher who stood out in the earlier grades. I find this interesting that for whatever reason, these teachers did not come up as being supports to them and clearly many of the participants had much difficulty with their earlier years of schooling.

I would recommend on the basis of these findings, that early year's teachers examine ways that they can build relationships with children and support them in their

early years of schooling. I would also recommend that regular teachers and support specialists in later grades discuss ways to foster relationships with the students to ensure that there are many opportunities for young people to access supportive adults in the schools.

Another interesting point that came up regarding teachers, was the fact that few of the participants spoke about resource/counselling strategies and programs as being helpful. Elly spoke about a resource intervention program that she remembers as being isolating and did not feel that separate resource instruction was beneficial. She contrasted this with a resource instruction in her later elementary years as being more successful as she was working in the classroom with a teacher. This suggests that the programming should be inclusive, as children need to be with their peers. Further, this suggests that strategies and programs provided to students should include a positive relationship with the teacher. If these programs are not seen as positive, children are less likely to make acquire success. Overall, I would suggest that when a child requires assistance, the program be child-centred and based on a positive relationship with the teacher.

Secondly, the role of peers needs to be explored among educators. Many of the participants referred to negative experiences with peers in their early years of schooling. My data shows that the participants experienced teasing and bullying in their early years. This suggests a lack of social skills among young children, as the interactions tend to be negative rather than positive. This also suggests a lack of meaningful interventions in order to stop these negative interactions.

I believe educators need to play more of a key role in observing and acting on the social interactions of these young students. I feel that especially in Alice's case, if there had been some positive intervention by teachers, she would have had more positive interactions with her peers and probably had a more positive school experience. I would recommend that teachers of young children look at ways of fostering more positive interactions among their students.

Thirdly, the stories of the young women refer to their parents as being key players throughout their lives. However, the data suggests that there was little positive interaction between their schooling experiences and the parents. I feel strongly that parents need to feel supported by educators throughout the schooling process. In the case of both Elly and Alice, their schooling experiences in their Gr. 8 year became very difficult. Both participants did not speak about anyone from the school assisting them during this difficult time.

Interestingly, this was also the time that many of the participants began to question their lives and try to discover their identity. I believe supportive teachers and school personnel could have provided some much-needed assistance to the participants and their families at this time. I would recommend those educators working with middle year's student's work with students in the process of developing their identity. Educators need to support both the students and their parents throughout this process.

In summary, the data suggests that educators need to be more supportive to children and adolescents during their schooling experiences. The data also suggests that the participants cared about school and although they experienced much difficulty, they

wanted to achieve and be successful. One point that was especially interesting to me as a high school guidance counsellor is that all four participants spoke about their supportive classroom teachers and did not mention the guidance and/or resource specialists. They also did not mention specific programs or strategies aimed at teaching resiliency skills. I know many of these programs and strategies do exist in many high schools, it was interesting that the stories of these young women did not reflect these interventions.

Overall, I feel the positive relationships did the most in assisting the young women in becoming resilient. As teachers are found to be included among adult caregivers, educators need to take their role of supporting students very seriously make the schooling experience positive for all students.

The stories of these four young women presented many interesting thoughts and perceptions. My study suggests there is much educators can do to facilitate young people within the schools by following the recommendations stated in terms of the role of teachers, peers and parents. A future study on how educators can *further foster resilience by building strong relationships* with students, peers and parents would be an excellent way to continue the work begun in my study.

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*Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba Letterhead

Appendix A – Letter to Colleagues:

Dear _____;

It's been awhile since we've talked. I am currently in the process of completing my Master's of Education degree at the University of Manitoba.

As a high school guidance counselor, I have always been interested in how young people thrive in the face of adversity. The topic I have chosen for my thesis requirements has to do with this topic.

In terms of ethics, I will not use past students from my own school division so this is why I am approaching you. I am hoping you can recommend someone who fits the following criteria. My criteria for referral are as follows: 1) subjects will be between 18-28 (young adults only). 2) Subjects will have demonstrated resiliency in the face of adversity in the process of completing high school and 3) subjects will be willing to be a part of a research study.

Please feel free to contact me at my email and forward me the names and email addresses of any potential subjects. I will then proceed by sending each of them a letter inviting them to participate as subjects in the study.

Looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely yours;

Audrey J. Siemens
Graduate Student
University of Manitoba

*Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba letterhead

Appendix B – Letter of Invitation

Dear _____;

I would like to invite you to be a subject in a research study. My name is Audrey J. Siemens and I am a graduate student currently conducting a research study as part of my Master's of Education program thesis requirement. I am also a qualified guidance counselor and resource teacher. This research concerns the perceptions of young people using their "life stories". The study will consist of you sharing your life story with me and at a later meeting, discussing the meaning the story has for you.

If you participate, I would interview you twice, each time for not more than 60 minutes. The interview dates and times will be arranged at your convenience and will likely taken place between April/2008 and June/2008.

Participating in the study is completely voluntary. You would be free to withdraw from the study at any time as well as choose to have something you said omitted from the interview at any time. The comments that you make in any interview will be kept confidential. You will be compensated for your participation at each interview in terms of a drink and a snack of your choice, as well as you will receive a \$20.00 gift card for a coffee shop of you choice upon completion of the interview.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please indicate this fact by signing your name, your email address, and your telephone number on the form below. This will enable me to contact you to make more specific arrangements and to describe the study in more detail.

Sincerely yours;

Audrey J. Siemens
Graduate Student
University of Manitoba

Name: _____

Telephone number(s): _____ Email: _____

*Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba Letterhead

Appendix C – Letter of Consent

My name is Audrey J. Siemens and I am currently conducting a research study as part of my thesis requirements towards a Master's of Education degree at the University of Manitoba. I am also a qualified guidance counselor and resource teacher. The study concerns the perceptions of young adults using their "life stories". The study will consist of you sharing your life story with me and at a later meeting discussing the meaning that your story has for you.

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Purpose of the research: The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding from you as a subject, about the topic of overcoming adversity in your life. You will be asked to share your life story and to elaborate specifically on the following terms: resilience, success and adversity. These stories will be used to gain a deeper understanding of what you as an individual experienced and how you view your experiences in terms of resiliency, success and adversity.

Procedures: As a subject in this study, you will be asked to participate in an initial interview involving open-ended questions about your past experiences. In a subsequent interview you may be asked to clarify the information or to ask you further questions about how resiliency, adversity and success influenced your life. The initial interview will last no more than sixty minutes and the follow-up interview will last no more than sixty minutes. You as a subject will be audiotaped in order to transcribe the information into field-notes, which will be shared for clarification at the next interview. It may be necessary for the research to include direct quotations from your interviews. At anytime during the study you are free to withdraw from the study or ask that a comment not be included in the field-notes. You can notify me at the interview or by email. If you decide to withdraw from the study all data taken that pertains to you, as a subject will be shredded immediately.

Risk: There is minimal risk for you as a subject, to be involved in this study. As stated in the procedure, you are free to ask to omit something you said during the interview or you are free to withdraw at any time. At no time will you as a subject be probed for personal information. There is no potential harm to you as a subject in this study.

Recording devices: The audiotape machine will be utilised in order to capture what is said during the interviews for the purpose of transcribing the interviews into field notes. In addition, I may also take some notes while you are speaking. A transcriber recommended to me by researchers at the University of Manitoba will then transcribe the information from the audiotape machine. The transcriber will take a confidentiality pledge to ensure all the information is kept confidential.

Confidentiality: At all times confidentiality will be maintained with you as a subject in the study. Pseudonyms will be utilised for you as a subject in order to protect your identity. The research site will also be kept confidential and every precaution will be taken to ensure that your identity will be protected. The information collected will be kept in a locked drawer and no one other than myself and my research advisors will be able to access the information collected. After the study is completed, the data will be shredded and destroyed. (no later than December 30/08)

Feedback: During the interviews, you as a subject will be sharing personal information relating to your experiences. As a qualified counsellor I need to inform you that if at any time issues of safety or illegal activities are shared, I will need to notify the necessary authorities. If you as a subject finds the information you are sharing uncomfortable, I will as a trained counsellor, assist you in terms of responding to you in an empathic manner. As a subject, you will also be shown the field-notes after each interview for verification and accuracy. For purposes of the study, some of the information may be quoted directly in the study. At the end of the study, a summary will be made available to you if you wish to have a copy.

Remuneration: The participants will be given refreshments in terms of coffee and muffins/donuts during and after the interviews. A gift card will also be given at the end of the study for a coffee shop in the amount of \$20.00.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Audrey J. Siemens, Principal Researcher

Research Advisor: Dr. Kelvin Seifert

Email address: seifertcc@umanitoba.ca

This research has been approved by the Fort Garry Campus Research Ethics Board Protocol. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122 or e-mail margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher and/or Delegate's Signature

Date

Appendix D – Initial Interview

Initial Interview

Open-ended Responses

****This will be read to each participant before beginning the interview:***

I am interested in your view of your life story. I would like you to share events, beginning from your earliest memories, of your life experiences, things that happened to you that stand out as important for you, and describe how these things influenced you as you grew up. I would also like you to tell me in the course of telling me your life story, what went well for you, what didn't go well and how you managed to deal with things in your life.

A 1) Can you tell your life story and recall experiences from your early childhood until now.

B 1) Over the years what do you feel you were good at?

2) Did people give you credit for the things you were good at?

C 1) Who would you say were the most important people in your life?

2) What memory stands out for you of someone that helped you through a crisis?

D 1) Would you describe yourself as being able to be in control of your choices and decisions?

2) Did you ever feel not in control of something in your life? What made you feel that way?

E 1) Did you usually feel that you were doing well even when you experienced some rough times?

2) Were there any times when you wondered whether you would make it?

Appendix E – Narrative Scripts:

Kaley's Narrative Script

I would like to thank you Kaley, for sharing your life story with me. I wrote this story because I wanted to understand your life so I thought I would piece together your perspective and share it with you. I hope these impressions describe you and how people and events have shaped your life.

You describe your childhood as being pretty good overall. You felt you had supportive parents and family that supported you all through your childhood. Although you stuttered as a child, you became aware that you stuttered through your experiences at school. Your friends began to notice and it became tough to say certain words and to do presentations in front of the class. As you got older, more specifically, high school, this issue became even more difficult for you. Students would notice it and the more nervous you got, the worse the stuttering became. An incident that stood out for you occurred in a Grade 10 English class where you were actually docked marks for stuttering. You felt discouraged and frustrated as you spoke to the teacher about it. You felt that at the time, you had little control over your stuttering and that this was not understood by the teacher.

Throughout your school career, you not only had parents that supported you but teachers as well. You recalled how a teacher in your junior high class was someone you could talk to. You began to go to her for help you with your problems. Three teachers in high school continued to support you and help you work out any problems that occurred. They became supports, which assisted you through the high school years. It sounds as if

the high school teachers saw you as a proactive type of person and you saw the importance of sustaining a relationship with them.

Later on, a speech therapist also became your friend and helped you with your stuttering problem. You felt proud that you had persevered and worked on your stuttering until it was ratified. It sounded as if you were becoming in control of your stuttering issue, as you grew older.

When you were in grade eight, you also became aware that you might have a learning disability. You were aware that your Dad had a disability and you noticed in particular, that you weren't able to do multiple choice questions. You were tested the assessment indicated that you couldn't do certain things. You talked about how you didn't find the assessment that helpful. It did not seem to provide answers you needed in order to solve the difficulties you were having. You were given some easier work and tests, which you considered to be the "dummy version". This bothered you as you found the tests easier but that in the long run, they weren't that helpful to you. Later on, as you grew older, you looked for ways to find better ways to study and in particular, how to work on multiple choice questions.

You have come to understand what you can expect of friends, and you seem to have learned the importance of sustaining friendships. Friends in junior high presented a challenge. They didn't always treat you well so you didn't really call them your friends. You had one good friend in your school years that who you were close to. However, when you moved to Brandon to go to college, you somehow drifted apart. Your friend then developed a serious illness and passed away a couple of years ago. This was a very

hard experience for you as you. Not only did you lose a childhood friend but you felt things between you were not the same when you moved away and you felt somewhat out of control as you could not help her get better. You had a friend “Tessa” who helped you through this time and is still a friend to you today.

You describe yourself as optimistic, much like your mother. You mentioned that you don’t like to see things as negative. You feel that you have had many opportunities to try things out and that your parents have always been supportive.

After high school you decided to move to Brandon and pursue some courses in radio and communication. They told you that you would need to do something about your stuttering in order to complete the course. You were worried about stuttering on the radio. When you heard yourself on the radio, it was difficult. You made a decision to get help to get through it and used the strategy of counting down in order to get through it.

You also became determined to do something about your stuttering so you moved back to Winnipeg and found a speech therapist. She really helped you out with your stuttering and became someone you really liked as a friend. Your stuttering decreased a great deal. Voice lessons and controlled breathing you felt also helped.

You talked about how your old job with your old manager was fun and how your old manager not only helped you out but also was someone you could confide in. You went on to describe your present work situation which is much more difficult. You explained how you were having difficulty with the manager and how you feel everyone is not working as a team. You felt you would like to be able to work things out but at times it is hard to figure out what to do. You described how you don’t like to feel down but

that the job is very stressful at this point. You realised that you need to do something but that it is hard to know what to do.

You talked about how you persevered throughout your life with a stuttering problem and how you finally managed to solve the problem. You seemed to be making progress in your assertiveness even beyond the issue of stuttering. You also talked about how you are able to look at new situations and try to figure out what to do. You know that situations can be complex but you feel there is always something that can be done to better the situation.

Overall, you have a positive outlook on life and a way of looking at problems as a challenge and not as a problem. You have acknowledged supportive friends and family that have helped you get through various situations. I am encouraged by your story and want to thank you for sharing it with me.

Alice's Narrative Script

I would like to thank you Alice, for sharing your life story with me. I wrote this story because I wanted to understand your life so I thought I would piece together your perspective chronologically and share it with you. I hope these impressions describe you and how people and events have shaped your life.

As you began sharing your earliest memories, it became evident to me that you felt your life as young child went fairly well. You shared that you had two brothers and both parents. As you recalled some childhood disagreements with your brothers, I felt that although there were disagreements among your brothers, you learned how to manage and talk things out.

As you began school, you felt things had gone quite well for the first couple of years. You shared that in grade two, problems with peers began to develop. You reflected that this was the starting point of things not going well in terms of your peers. You described this age as the time when students begin to “pick out each others weaknesses”. You used two words to describe what commonly happened when conflict came about and those words were *separate* and *segregate*. In grade three, you changed schools and you met a good friend who you still have contact with today. You shared that although things went well with her as your friend, conflicts with the other girls began to appear. You shared that although this girl stuck up for you, the other girls still picked on you. You described the situation as “I don’t know what it was to this day, why that I was singled out, but you know, it just, they, they attack you and then they’ll put you down and they just shove you in a corner, right?” (1st interview w/Alice p 5)

You described how these conflicts continuing well into grade five, which was when you actually ran away from, school. You shared that although you received attention and that even though the principal was involved, it was only a quick fix and the problems persisted. You changed schools for grade six and though it was more of a relaxed school, but in grade seven, difficulties began to surface again. You described yourself as begin shy and *tucking it away and hiding it inside* but this you shared, was not the best thing to do.

In grade eight, you described a time in your life that was very difficulty. You described being affected emotionally from the difficulties with your peers, which you believe led to a sort of depression. You describe yourself as beginning to shut others out, even your Mom. You described yourself as being in a little box.

You spoke about how during your grade 8 year; you began home schooling together with your two brothers. You shared that one of them had a spinal injury and the other one suffered from headaches. You spoke of not doing that well schooling wise but how you felt it was more relaxing.

You spoke about how you experienced a turning point, which led to a personal change in you. You stopped blocking things out and decided that you could look at this experience and grow from it. You described how you thought about others opinions and described them like “belly buttons” as in everyone has one. You described how you began to *weed* out the opinions that weren’t helpful.

You also talked about how your artwork-helped make a difference in that people would criticise your work but that you learned how to pick out what was valuable. You

spoke of your love of horses and how many of your photos reflected your love of horses. You shared how supportive your family was throughout your experience with art and how they even had an art show for you with your relatives. You also reflected about how you also had an artist as a mentor and how he would critique your work. Overall, art for you seemed like a very satisfying and rewarding experience.

You shared that all through your life your parents played a critical role. You also spoke about your first friend, who you felt was your first true friend in Gr. 3 and how she helped you through some rough times. You also mentioned though that now you have limited contact with her and that in many ways your lives are now different. You also spoke about your boyfriend who is helping you with your career and how you are in a good relationship with him.

You also spoke of how when you went through a crisis; it was difficult for you to let people help you. You mentioned that on that note you felt stuck at times. It seemed to me that you felt that you liked to figure out things for yourself and that having people help you weren't something you usually do. You shared that you sometimes struggle with that sometimes.

You reflected about how you have learned to stand up for yourself and control your decisions. You mentioned that you felt respect and boundaries were important in relationships and that you set boundaries. You spoke of how you feel that at this point of your life you are doing well and have many things going for you such as supportive family, friends, and a nice home.

Christy's Narrative Script

I would like to thank you Christy, for sharing your life story with me. I wrote this story because I wanted to understand your perspective of your life. I thought I would piece together your thoughts and share it with you. Hopefully, these impressions describe you and how people and events have shaped your life.

Your early childhood experiences relate to how people in your life influenced you, mainly your mother and the people in the old neighbourhood that you lived in as a young child. Once you went to school, kindergarten was an experience in which you recalled that you enjoyed the nap times and doing fun activities such as drawing and gluing things together.

The school years after kindergarten were described as much harder due to hard work, cursive writing and homework. You described how the subjects just got harder and harder and yet you felt that you did well in school and got fairly good grades.

Friends presented some interesting challenges. Although you had the same friends from Grade two to Grade twelve, you described yourself as a loner sometimes and one who spent a lot of time studying rather than going out with friends. In grade five you went to France for a year with your family and found things very different when you returned home. Firstly, your friends seemed to have changed and were different towards you and the work at school was so different from what you did in France. You didn't do so well in school the year you came back from France. You reported that you felt lost in some ways as everything in school was so different from what it had been like in France. In France, you had many friends who especially liked your accent. You also came back

with a different attitude or viewpoint towards things. Some people told you that you were more stubborn and you sometimes describe yourself as being stubborn.

In your junior high and senior high years, you felt you became more independent. You noticed that there seemed to be different classes of people, the popular students, the nerds, etc. You classified yourself as kind of in-between, the person who could talk to everyone but was also shy and quiet. Studying hard became important to you and you saw yourself as a hard worker. Participating in sports was important to you and you were involved with soccer, horseback riding and swimming. Your parents were always supporting you and on the soccer field, they would cheer super loudly. You also were involved in playing piano and Karate.

You made a comment that you would get sick of doing certain things and then quit. You also mentioned that you had been forced to swim and to play piano and that you lost interest later in your teen years. Swimming, piano and Karate were all things that although you attained high levels in them, you quit them. You truly became interested in art similar to your Grandpa. You had pictures up in your home as your mother bought frames and hung them up.

In terms of teachers, you mentioned that you had a Spanish teacher that really out for you. She liked you and you were one of her best students. She was a happy person and she made you happy as well. In terms of peers, you got close to the peers you played sports with such as the soccer team. Although you enjoyed hanging out with them, you haven't really seen them for some time and no longer see many of them.

You couldn't really think of many crises in your life. You felt peers seldom bullied you because your Dad was a teacher in the school. This was somewhat awkward and you found you just kept quiet in his classes. Your best friend was always there and she supported you.

Anger was an emotion that you talked about. You said that sometimes you got really mad, especially at your parents. Controlling your anger was sometimes hard for you and that you get angry quite easily. You never really thought about what others thought about you and you didn't want to be a cool kid. You described yourself as someone who would not join in if people were going to do things like smoke drugs. You felt that you knew better than that.

Knowing what to do in your future is something you are unsure about. You have thought about what to do but have not made up your mind. You want to be like your grandmother, as she possesses qualities that you like. She is a good cook, she is in good shape, and she is really friendly and generous, a lot likes your Mom. Your Grandpa's artistic talent is also something you admire, as you too like to paint with acrylics just like him.

You have gone through some interesting experiences. You seem to enjoy friendships with peers and yet you also like to be by yourself. You have had some struggles in school but yet you are also a good student. You are hoping to figure out what you want to do. I want to thank you for sharing your story with me.

Elly's Narrative Script

I would like to thank you Elly, for sharing your life story with me. I wrote this story because I wanted to understand your perspective of your life. I thought I would piece it together and share it with you. Hopefully, these impressions describe you and how people and events have shaped your life.

You described your early childhood experiences as being hard to remember as you were born in New Zealand and didn't recall much about your first few years. You recalled how your parents divorced when you were around four years of age. A series of moves in your life then took place, first to Edmonton for a year, then to Winnipeg where you and your mother moved in with your grandmother (for your Kindergarten year), then to River Heights where you moved in with your new step dad (for the next four years) and then to St. Vital where your parents still reside. You recalled how you attended two different schools in St. Vital, one for grade five & grade six and one for junior high. Your high school years were spent attending schools associated with your various home placements.

You mentioned that you didn't really like school, as it was really hard for you. You recalled that you didn't have friends in elementary school until you got to grade six. The best year of schooling was in grade six where you had supportive teachers and friends.

When you were in grade one your Mom wanted you assessed for learning disabilities. She had experienced difficulty with learning so she wanted to have you assessed as soon as possible. You were found to have ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder)

and to have difficulty with reading. You were also found to have speech difficulties and you recalled a story of how kids laughed at you for trying to say the word, crayon. You attended a special program in grade four for half days and you attended school for the other half day. Other children you felt were mean to you and you felt very segregated from the rest of the children as you attended only half days with them. Teachers and resource teachers did not seem supportive to you during these years.

When you moved schools in grade five, you had a teacher who did not understand that you needed to move around due to your Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). This was very frustrating for you as she used to yell at you. You felt that you were not moving intentionally and that although doodling or doing something would have helped, the teacher did not allow you to do that. Grade six was the year you had your favourite teacher. You remembered that she kept you in the class and would have the resource teacher work with you there. You also had good friends and you described this time in your life as “one of my favourite years in school ever”.

After grade six, you and your friends were all moved to different junior high schools. This was difficult as that meant you were all split up – some in one school and some in another. School became very difficult for you again as you described that grade six being the only year that you had friend and then to be put into a school where you didn't know anybody. A conflict with some girls led to complete isolation in grade seven. In grade eight, you found a best friend. You described how friendship was so important to you as you had experienced so few friends up until that point. Your friend and you

were not the right “combination” and you began to get into trouble like skipping school, smoking and drinking.

Your Mom sent you to New Zealand during the summer of your grade eight year and you felt a lot of separation anxiety being away from her. When you got back you got into trouble with the law and you were not to be with your best friend. You hung out with her anyway and the court ordered you to go to a locked up group home where you attended school. While you were there you received another diagnosis, bi-polar disorder. You were put on medication and you found that when you began to study, you were getting good marks for the first time in your life. You began to realise that there was more to you than getting in trouble and hanging out with friends and doing stuff that you shouldn't have done. You then moved to a foster home and continued to do well in school. You stopped your medication and found you did not get into trouble. You had a boyfriend who was in trouble with the law and you then discovered you were pregnant with your daughter.

Faced with the decision of whether to have her or not, you came to a point where you decided there was more to life and that you wanted to be a mother. When she was about a year and a half you started a program called “Taking Charge” where mothers on social assistance can finish off their education. You had some difficulty getting along with a girl in the program and decided you could finish off your grade twelve in Adult Education. Graduating in 2006, you were proud of your accomplishments. You gave birth to your son shortly after and are currently waiting until he is two years old before going back to school or work.

Interests such as tap-dancing which was important to you in your childhood are still important to you. Making crafts and working on art related activities have also made you feel successful. Your mother has been a great source of support throughout your life, especially when you experienced crises. The birth of your daughter especially came at a time when your mother and step dad supported you throughout that process which was helpful for you. You described your mother as “she had my back 100% on everything.” Friends became more important to you as you grew older. The two friends that you met in the “Taking Charge” program became like your “family” and you all best friends. They are people that you confide in and you get together with as they have children as well. They have become like a support network to you.

You speak about your being in control of your emotions at this point in your life to the extent that you are hardly every anxious or upset about anything. Education too is now something you feel in control of whereas you feel for most of your earlier school life you could not grasp concepts and you felt very frustrated. You also now feel capable of doing things and making decisions. You are looking forward to planning what you will do when your son gets a bit older and you want to look at other things in your life. When asked what you wanted to add you spoke about the time when you realised you were not alone. You realised there were others you had similar difficulties and that you were smart and always had been. You spoke of how shocked you were when others asked for your help and you realised that you could help others as well.

I see you as having gone through a lot of changes and a lot of difficult situations in your past. You now know however, that you have the ability to be in control of

decisions and make changes to better your own life. I want to wish you well in your future endeavours. It was a pleasure getting to know you.