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Abstract

Educational resilience is an important term for teacher candidates in Christian institutions to understand. Resilience can be nurtured and instilled in the lives of individuals with learning disabilities, and teacher candidates can play a vital role in that process. To assist in this course of action, a look at the definition and common characteristics of resilience are discussed. In addition, a closer look at four resilient individuals with learning disabilities is provided. Concrete suggestions on ways to incorporate resilient characteristics into students with learning disabilities are shared.

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V. Shelley Dugle and Peggy Grigorenko

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Educational resilience is an important term for teacher candidates in Christian institutions to understand. Resilience can be nurtured and instilled in the lives of individuals with learning disabilities, and teacher candidates can play a vital role in that process. To assist in this course of action, a look at the definition and common characteristics of resilience are discussed. In addition, a closer look at four resilient individuals with learning disabilities is provided. Concrete suggestions on ways to incorporate resilient characteristics into students with learning disabilities are shared.

Introduction

Education Resilience Concepts Defined

Today's schools have a major priority to close the achievement gap between those who are academically successful and those at risk for school failure. One area of research devoted to closing these gaps is the concept of educational resilience and building it in the lives of at risk students. To understand the concept of educational resilience, one must be able to identify at risk and resilient characteristics in students. There are typical signs of students identified as at risk including low reading scores, poor academic performance, poverty, abuse, and struggling family dynamics making them vulnerable for academic failure. Resilient students are those who succeed in school despite these characteristics and apparent obstacles encountered (Rutter, 2001). Furthermore, resilience can be defined as the outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging and threatening circumstances (Masten, 1994). The research in educational resilience identifies at risk individuals who have positive life outcomes despite those obstacles.

Because all individuals are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalms 139:14, The Bible), including those with disabilities, an important concept that should be taught to education program

candidates in Christian institutions is the concept of educational resilience. In general, individuals with disabilities fail to complete high school at twice the rate of their general education classmates (Special Education Dropout Rate, 1997). These dropouts then experience higher rates of unexpected parenthood, drug use, imprisonment, and welfare dependence (Coley, 1995). These students are oftentimes at high risk for poor school and life outcomes. Christians are charged to defend the cause of the weak and to maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed (Psalms 82: 3-4, The Bible). Therefore Christian institutions need to identify key ways in which resilient characteristics can be built into the lives of at risk individuals.

Education Resilience Literature

The study of resilience has found a place in research as being a worthwhile endeavor (Rutter, 2001; Masten, 1994). In Werner's longitudinal study of high-risk individuals, birth to 32 years, from the island of Kauai (as cited in Franklin, 2000), resilient adolescents were identified as being more responsible, being more successful in environments that provide structure, having more emotional support from family members, and receiving more interpersonal support from members in the community such as peers, ministers, and teachers. Moreover, resilient adolescents possess strong capabilities and context beliefs, respond well to positive influences in their lives, and are more oriented toward achievement. Resilient adolescents apparently use specific resources to accommodate and overcome encountered risks (whether being physical, emotional, or personal supports).

Students with disabilities have their own unique set of obstacles to overcome in order to educationally succeed (Bauer, Keefe, & Shea, 2001; Ellis & Friend, 1991; Brooks, 2001). Some researchers in the field have devoted their time to establish commonalities among those individuals who are educationally resilient and beat the odds in order to

obtain positive life outcomes (Werner, 1999; Miller & Fritz, 1998; Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1994). Educational resiliency among specific groups, such as individuals with learning disabilities, however is still a field that needs to be investigated more deeply. Once the factors contributing to resilience are identified, education programs in Christian institutions could be enhanced to include the necessary training to assist all individuals with learning disabilities to become more resilient. Also, the manner that teacher candidates interact with individuals with learning disabilities could be positively impacted. Questions such as, “How do we help students with learning disabilities compensate for their disability?” might be able to be systematically answered through the results of research conducted in the field of resiliency among individuals with learning disabilities. If the characteristics of resilient individuals with learning disabilities can be explored, then other students with learning disabilities might be able to be taught to possess resilient attributes as well.

A Biblical Foundation

I Thessalonians 5:14-18 urges believers to help the weak, be patient with everyone, and give thanks in every situation. Educational resilience shares the same idea that there is a possibility to positively impact students' lives. Teacher candidates must understand that it is possible to strengthen at risk students by increasing resilient characteristics. Oftentimes educators assume that too many risk factors mean it is impossible to positively impact their students' school and life outcomes. Also educators do not know where to begin to help their students make some positive changes. Showing compassion alone does not build resilience qualities into students but truly encouraging the timid and helping the weak by giving them supports can make a difference.

Portraits of Resilient Individuals

Portraits are a way to showcase true situations and real emotions within the research of a specific topic. This paper is to present four real portraits of resilient adolescents with learning disabilities through an extensive review of files and written interviews. The intention is to show the process these individuals utilized in developing their own resilient characteristics in order to overcome obstacles created, in part, by their learning

disabilities. This paper will also focus on the teachers of these individuals and the way that these teachers developed resilient characteristics in their students. The intent is that education program candidates can use this information to facilitate the development of resilient characteristics with their own students with learning disabilities.

Method

Participants

Originally the multidisciplinary and cumulative files of twenty two individuals with learning disabilities were reviewed for this study. These individuals qualified as having specific learning disabilities through their local school district based on the district's interpretation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. These participants were classified as either juniors or seniors currently enrolled in high school (based on GPA requirements). In addition, these participants were nominated by their teachers as being “resilient” and “likely to graduate” based on their class performance, GPA, and current school performance.

The participants of the study all attended one high school in a rural Appalachian school district consisting of approximately 1700 students with varying ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds. From these twenty two participants, four were randomly selected to be interpreted in detail using a phenomenological approach based on the three following areas: at risk characteristics, school leaving characteristics, and resilient characteristics (Dugle, 2007). With these four participants, a narrative format was chosen to tell their stories determined by the information gathered on each one. Of the four portraits, three are Caucasian, one is African-American. In addition, two are male and two are female.

Data Analysis

All twenty two participants were coded using marker variables established in the categories of at risk characteristics, school leaving characteristics, and resilient characteristics (Dugle, 2007). The marker variables were chosen from the current educational research in at risk, school leaving, and resiliency current literature (Werner, 1999; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994) in addition to common themes that naturally emerged from the data. The

marker variables established for at risk characteristics are as follows: low reading scores, academic struggles, poor communication skills, low socioeconomic status, emotional issues, and health issues. Marker variables established for school leaving characteristics consist of family issues (one parent homes, absent parent, parent incarceration, and education of parents), personal issues (discipline problems, external locus of control, traumatic life experiences, and a dislike of school), school issues (grade retention, truancy and absences), and social issues (delinquency, assistance from outside agencies, and multiple changes of schools). Resilient characteristics have the following marker variables: appreciates structure, personality elicits positive response from others, seeks assistance when needed, educational aspirations, persistence, ability to compensate for disability, positive outlook on life, emotional support from family, extra curricular involvement, social competence, and deep connections with at least one positive adult contact.

Themes and patterns among all twenty two participants and their marker variables have been examined and recorded as means of the data analysis. In addition a complete, personal picture of four participants has been created. These portraits are not intended to make generalizations of all individuals with learning disabilities but provide a microanalysis of resilient characteristics of these four individuals in order to expand theoretical constructs about the concept of resilience. Therefore this is a phenomenological study which examines the human experience of four individuals with learning disabilities through detailed, personal descriptions.

The overcoming one.

At age seven, Max was an African-American male with evidence of risk factors and school leaving characteristics for students with learning disabilities. He also exhibited resilient tendencies throughout his school career. Max was pre-referred for special education at age seven. At that time his family background revealed that Max was being reared by his mother, who is a high school graduate and employed at a day care center. Max's father, at that time, drove a fork lift. There was no data about his father's high school completion. His parents were divorced and Max was being reared solely by

his mother at that time; Max also qualified for free lunch.

Max reportedly met all the typical developmental milestones within normal limits in walking, talking, and toilet training. At age seven, Max's grandfather had a heart attack and this was described as a traumatic experience for Max. Paperwork also indicated that Max attended Head Start prior to kindergarten. Attendance and behavior had not been problematic at that time, and Max generally liked to go to school and interacted well with other students.

Max was referred for special education due to concerns about reading decoding, limited sight vocabulary, spelling, getting thoughts onto paper, math operation, attending to task, working independently, and self-discipline. Max reportedly displayed common risk factors of low reading scores, struggling academically, and low ability and academic failure. In addition, Max had a poor attendance record during his first few years of school.

As a result of Max's diagnostic evaluation, Max was deemed eligible for having a specific learning disability in reading and math. He also qualified to receive the related service of language therapy. The school psychologist also determined that while Max had adequate socialization skills, his daily living skills and communications skills were inadequate. To meet Max's needs, he was involved in general education with remediation in the resource room for reading instruction.

At age nine, teachers reported that Max was persistent in his efforts made in the classroom although he continued to struggle academically with sentence structures and paragraph development, specifically in writing. Resilient characteristics were exhibited and noticed by his general education teacher who stated Max was a "hard working student" who was "well behaved" and "gets along well with all of his peers." Some of his additional teacher observations did state that Max was "friendly, mannerly, and helpful, cares for others," indicating his personality elicited positive response from his teachers.

At eleven, Max displayed inconsistent behaviors in the classroom. His social studies teacher stated, "Max is delightful. He tries hard!" while his other teachers continued to see a student struggling to concentrate and to keep on task in the classroom.

Several teachers noticed that Max did not put forth the effort to complete assignments. There were no significant changes to his IEP, and Max also continued to play basketball. Paperwork also noted at this time that his father was not currently visiting Max or spending anytime with him. His mother believed that this was negatively affecting his school performance.

There were no significant changes or indicators in his personal school history until Max entered high school at age fourteen. At this time, Max began playing football and worked hard to keep his grades up in order to qualify to play. After football season, however, paperwork noted that his grades began to slip and he showed little interest in improving them. As a result, the IEP team decided to continue his present area of disability but to change his least restrictive environment to be in the resource room for specifically designed instruction for language arts, social studies, science, and math due to low grades. By the tenth grade, the resource room continued to be his placement for English, algebra, physics, and chemistry.

During Max's eleventh grade IEP meeting, several resilient characteristics were mentioned. His teachers had all positive comments to share including the fact that Max did a great job in class and was a great student to have in class. His teachers also stated that he did his work and did his work well. He was noted to never have a problem in class and to never be tardy, and his teachers enjoyed having him in class. He continued to receive the majority of his instruction in the resource room and did also continue to be below average in achievement. However, Max was reported to be above average in socialization and daily living skills. One of his teachers stated his resilient spirit this way, "Max has worked hard to overcome his difficulties in reading and math." For his transition plan, Max showed a desire to attend a four year institution and wanted to play football there. Throughout his school career Max's teachers acknowledged his overcoming spirit and his persistence despite several obstacles. His teachers "helped the weak" as clearly stated in I Thessalonians 5:14 by giving Max the remediation and extra assistance needed for classroom success.

The maturing one.

Tammy, a Caucasian female, was referred for special education services at the age of nine. At the time of the referral, Tammy was living with her mother, grandmother, uncle, two sisters, and a brother. Her parents were divorced and Tammy had no reported contact with her father. According to her family background questionnaire, Tammy's mother was employed at a fast food restaurant and had a high school education. Her father's educational level and career choice were not known.

Based on her medical questionnaire, Tammy had undergone heart surgery and at age three she was involved in an automobile accident being sent through the windshield. At the time of this referral, Tammy was taking medication for the two conditions of depression and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Tammy was referred for special education services based on teachers' concerns with her basic reading skills, reading comprehension, written expression, math reasoning, and task completion. During third grade, Tammy demonstrated a low ability in all subject matter by maintaining failing grades and continually struggling with her academic coursework. Up to this point, Tammy had repeated first grade and she had attended two elementary schools. Tammy received free lunch at school and attendance had not been problematic at this point.

Although Tammy did exhibit risk and school leaving characteristics in her background, family, and medical history, some resilient characteristics were noted during her referral time for special services. Tammy was typified as having emotional wellness, self-control, positive social judgment, effective interpersonal skills, self-help skills, and using positive problem solving strategies.

At the time of testing, assessments showed that Tammy struggled with reading comprehension, math reasoning, and written expression, and she qualified for a severe learning disability as a result. In addition, Tammy was weak in the areas of daily living skills, communication, and socialization. Therefore, the IEP team determined that Tammy would receive support in the general education classroom with resource room instruction in the area of reading.

During Tammy's next annual IEP meeting, the team decided to continue with Tammy's present disability category, educational setting, and

objectives. At this meeting documentation stated that Tammy's mother refused to allow Tammy to be involved with the school based counseling program. In addition, Tammy was still under a doctor's care for depression, and she continued taking medication for depression and ADHD.

There were no significant changes to her IEP at her meeting when she was eleven years old. Her IEP stated, at this time, that Tammy had some social problems in school but there had been improvement since she was now living with her grandmother (her mother and father both currently not present). Her teachers tried to modify work as much as possible to avoid Tammy experiencing failure. This also seemed to result in academic improvements for her.

At age twelve, Tammy began visiting her father in Ohio (previously absent from her life). She had grades ranging from B's to D's and had no discipline problems to date. She expressed an interest in playing with her siblings, reading, and painting, and Tammy even said she would like to become a doctor. Tammy also shared concern she had for her home finances. During this time, she was referred to a youth services center for assistance. As part of a routine reevaluation, the school psychologist found that Tammy still rated low in expressive and written communication, domestic skills, community skills, and interpersonal relationships.

By age thirteen, Tammy's teachers began to notice several resilient characteristics. "Tammy works very hard in class. She has matured and contributes in class more, speaks up when she needs help or has a problem, and turns in her work most of the time." Another teacher stated, "She has made a lot of progress and I will miss her." Through these statements, Tammy displayed persistence, and orientation to achievement, responsibility, and an ability to compensate for her disability.

At the start of her freshman year in high school, Tammy's mother was in jail and temporary custody was given to her grandmother. With her grandmother's support, Tammy still continued to academically improve. One general education teacher said, "Tammy tries very hard but really struggles with the material. Great effort and behavior!" Her other teachers shared that she was a hard worker, needed one-on-one assistance for success, and was "a delight to have in class."

To increase the success of her sophomore and junior year, Tammy's IEP team recommended that she be placed in the resource room for all subjects except for language arts and humanities which were to continue in a collaborative, general education setting. Paperwork reported that Tammy was on track for graduation at this time with no information on Tammy's plans upon graduation. Throughout Tammy's schooling she matured greatly in the areas of asking for assistance when needed and persisting despite her academic struggles. Tammy's teachers "encouraged the timid" (I Thessalonians 5:14) by getting her to the point where she was comfortable asking for assistance when needed.

The improving one.

As a Caucasian female, Mandy was referred for special education services at the age of twelve. Her background information revealed that Mandy was a Ward of the state living with her foster mother. Mandy's biological father signed over her educational rights to her foster mother. At this time Mandy lived with her brother and sister in addition to several foster sisters and brothers in the household. Mandy had no contact with her parents and has been in foster care for several years. There was no prenatal or developmental history on Mandy at this point except for a few key pieces of information. Mandy did have a history of head injuries and of sexual abuse prior to age six. There was also alcohol abuse in her home prior to living in foster care. Mandy attended three schools in the county and has been retained two times. Her foster father died when Mandy was eleven years old and was reported as being a traumatic experience for her. School paperwork also acknowledged that Mandy received free lunch and Medicaid.

At the time of referral, Mandy's teachers were concerned with her academics in the areas of reading, written expression, math, and organizational skills as well as the completion of homework. During her initial IEP meeting, Mandy was determined to be eligible for a learning disability in the area of math. Reading and writing were noted as being within the low average range but did not fall under the eligibility guidelines. The school psychologist also noted that Mandy had good socialization and adequate daily living skills but communication was less developed. As a result, the school psychologist recommended continuation in the tutoring program. Counseling needed to

continue also because of her background and family history.

For this initial IEP, the team determined that Mandy would receive instruction in the general education setting with the exception of twenty minutes a day spent in the resource room for math assistance. During her annual IEP review at age thirteen, Mandy's teachers noticed several resilient characteristics. One teacher declared, "Mandy has made tremendous gains this year. She completes her work and her attitude has improved 100%." Another teacher said, "Mandy is working much harder in the room. Her attitude has improved greatly. Her grades have improved this year as a result of effort and attitude change." A teacher interview also revealed that Mandy was seeking assistance from teachers when help was needed, and she was well liked by her peers. In addition her self-help skills were age appropriate. Therefore, at this time, it was decided that Mandy would be in the general education setting the entire school day with no more resource room for math assistance.

Towards the end of Mandy's seventh grade year, another IEP meeting was called to adjust her IEP placement. Because of Mandy's continued improvement in math, the team decided that Mandy would no longer go to the resource room for math instruction but would receive collaborative support in the general education setting for all math. During this time, Mandy's teachers continued to report positive observations such as, "Mandy does a very good job in my class. She remains on task and overall she does exactly as instructed. She is a very fine student and I am glad to have her in my class." Another teacher stated that Mandy continued to struggle with basic math facts but did ask questions for understanding. In addition, her math teacher also stated that it takes Mandy a little longer to grasp concepts, but it was nice to know that Mandy felt comfortable enough to ask for help. Through these statements, Mandy succeeded because she was comfortable seeking assistance, and she persisted to overcome her academic struggles.

During Mandy's eighth grade year, her IEP team decided to continue Mandy's general education placement with math support, but also added collaboration in science because of her teacher's comments of "Capable of doing basic assignments but often shows a lack of effort, concern, and motivation to complete assignments. Often does not

work with small groups and does not contribute. Quick to become defensive when asked to complete a task. Assignments are often late, missing, or incomplete." In addition, Mandy's language arts teacher said, "Mandy has done well completing her writing assignments this year. She does require assistance with organization and with completing some classroom assignments. She did benefit from extra assistance in after school tutoring."

At the start of Mandy's ninth grade year, she was reevaluated as part of her continuation in special services. For Mandy's updated family history, her foster mother stated that Mandy did enjoy going to school. Teacher questionnaires also reported that Mandy was a sweet and quiet girl who appeared to have an excellent rapport with her foster mother. A rating scale determined that Mandy was still in the low to moderate range for low daily living skills, expressive and written communications, and low communication skills. She also continued to have a weakness in math.

Mandy's IEP team during her ninth grade year continued her placement based on her school performance. Her teachers noticed resilient characteristics such as persistence, responsibility, assistance seeking, and the ability to compensate for her disability. Teachers stated that Mandy was a hard worker and a pleasant young lady.

Mandy's sophomore and junior years contained better grades after Mandy began receiving collaborative support on all subjects except language arts as determined by her IEP team. Mandy's teachers agreed that she responded well to one-on-one assistance and modifications such as extended time on assignments. One teacher stated, "Mandy is generally cooperative and engaged in her work." Another shared, "She seems to put forth her best effort consistently." At this time, Mandy was on track for graduation and no statements were recorded concerning her future plans after high school. Throughout Mandy's schooling she improved her effort in the classroom and also improved her grades. Mandy had to be encouraged along the way by her teachers who did not give up on her because of her background or her weak performance in the classroom. Her teachers displayed patience with her (I Thessalonians 5:14) while they increased her resilient characteristics to positively impact her education.

The assistance seeking one.

At age nine, a male Caucasian named Terry was referred for special education services. At the time of this referral, Terry lived with his biological mother and had limited contact with his father who was not employed. According to his family history, Terry's mother completed two and a half years of college and his father completed high school through the tenth grade. Additional background information concerning Terry stated he has not been retained and his attendance and behavior had not been problematic at this time. He was included in the free lunch program for his school district.

Terry was referred for special education services regarding his poor academic skills and his current school performance. His general education teachers noted that Terry was immature compared to his peers. In addition, he had a short attention span, was slow completing assignments, spent little time on task, became frustrated easily, and had an excuse for every time his work was not complete. Some positive observations of Terry were he displayed super manners, and he typically had a positive outlook on life. His teachers also shared Terry's social strengths of good interactions with peers and adults, acceptance of rules and corrections, and he was generally cooperative.

His diagnostic evaluation determined that Terry struggled with basic reading concepts with low average scores in reading. He also fell in the below average range in math calculation and math reasoning. Inadequate performance in written expression was also identified. Socially, paperwork stated that Terry displayed adequate socialization skills but was moderately low in adaptive behaviors such as communication and daily living skills. According to the testing completed, recommendations were made that Terry should receive placement in the special education program for having a learning disability in reading, math, and writing. Additional recommendations stated that he should have increased responsibility at home and in the school setting to improve his adaptive behavior skills. Speech therapy was also determined to be necessary for Terry.

Terry's IEP team placed him in the resource room for reading, written language, and math. In addition, Terry received collaborative support in the general education setting for social studies and science.

During Terry's next IEP review at age ten, the team decided that Terry showed improvement in reading and as a result decided to place him in the general education setting for reading instruction. Along with this placement Terry continued in general education for social studies and science. He stayed in the resource room for math and writing and continued to receive speech therapy.

At age eleven, Terry's school paperwork revealed that his mother was in a car accident and was hospitalized. At the same time, his father was in jail. Terry lived with his aunt while his mother was in the hospital. His IEP team during this school year reported mixed reviews concerning Terry's academic performance. His science teacher positively stated, "Terry is always a pleasant child. He works well with others when doing group work. He tried to do his best." His social studies teacher said, "Terry gets frustrated easily. He has not been putting forth much effort in social studies lately. He seems to be moody and easily distracted. His grades are reflecting his behavior." Terry's IEP team decided to give him general education support for all classes including modifications and he would no longer be placed in the resource room.

Before Terry turned twelve years old, he was reevaluated for special education services. This reported indicated that he had grades ranging from A's to C's during this school year. He was absent three times and had no formal discipline problems. A release form was signed at this time for social services to access Terry's school paperwork. Assessment revealed that he continued to be weak in reading, math, and writing as well as moderately low in communication and domestic skills. Terry also revealed low functioning abilities in personal skills, interpersonal relationships, coping skills, and leisure skills. Recommendations were made that Terry's IEP committee should discuss his adaptive behavior to determine needed interventions.

Terry's seventh grade paperwork noted that he lived with his mother and her boyfriend. His mother at the time was unemployed. Terry's IEP team at this time recorded positive and negative aspects of school performance. His teachers noted that he was a hard worker, but it was off and on throughout the school year. Another teacher said that he was a dedicated student and was always willing to complete his work. His social studies teacher stated, "Terry is a polite young man who tried hard. If he

doesn't understand something he gets so frustrated and quiet." Other teachers commented on his problem with work completing and organization.

At the end of his freshman year Terry was recorded as receiving A's through D's on his report card, and both his social studies teacher and math teacher stated positive comments concerning him. His social studies teacher said, "Terry will tell me if he needs help." His math teacher stated, "He is a delight to have in class." Terry continued to receive general education with supports and modifications. Apparently at this time Terry no longer received resource room support for direct instruction.

Terry's IEP paperwork did not clearly address his home life at age fifteen, but his school paperwork noted that Terry had some family problems at this time. At the end of his sophomore year, Terry's father was still in jail and his mother was still unemployed due to a disability from the car accident she previously experienced. Paperwork also identified that Terry did not get along well with his mother's boyfriend. A family friend reported that Terry was thrown out of his home by his mother and boyfriend with, "Only the clothes on his back and no coat in frigid weather." The family friend also reported, in a letter to the school, that there was alleged abuse by his mother and boyfriend. The friend also stated that Terry was told not to return home, and therefore he was currently living with the family friend. The incident was reported to local social services by this friend, but at the time reported, no follow up had been conducted by the office.

Concern was shared by this family friend who stated Terry's mother had not reported a missing child's report once he was not living with her. In addition, the mother was not aware of Terry's whereabouts. It was also reported that Terry's mother gave him mother gave him no money when she abandoned him. This family friend also reported that a permanent home was trying to be located through her church and there were a few families possibly willing to take Terry. At this time, Terry was afraid to return home due to potential abuse.

At the end of Terry's sophomore year, he was documented to be on track for graduation with all passing grades and continued improvement in his academic performance. The family friend continued to be a strong advocate for Terry in the school

setting by making several attempts to get Terry an appropriate alternative home placement due to Terry's continued fear of being placed back home with his mother and her boyfriend. Local social services reportedly encouraged Terry to move back home which he did not want to do.

During Terry's junior year, he began taking vocational classes for welding, floor and wall framing, and blueprint reading. He displayed an interest in working in construction following graduation or possibly wanted to become a police officer. Terry realized the importance of seeking assistance to increase his likelihood for academic success. In return, his teachers and key individuals in his life identified the importance of being there for Terry especially through his rough, weak times (I Thessalonians 5:14).

Conclusion

In summary, these four individuals all displayed resilient characteristics directly identified in the current resiliency literature. From the established marker variables and educational resilience literature, the following four tiers have been established concerning resilient characteristics: people pleasing behaviors, changing mindsets, acquired skills, and school responsibilities (Dugle, 2007). Table 1 briefly gives descriptive words for each tier, and these tiers will be examined in lieu of the four given portraits. First of all, resilient individuals display people pleasing behaviors (Werner, 1999). This can be seen in the way that others positively respond to them in conversation and manner. People pleasing behaviors also involve how some individuals respond well to the positive influences in their lives.

Next, resilient individuals are able to have generally positive outlooks on their lives due in part to their ability to compensate successfully. These individuals have learned how to set goals and have education and career aspirations too (Werner, 1999). The next common resilient characteristic is the acquired skills these individuals possess. They have learned to be responsible, persistent and to seek assistance when needed (Miller & Fritz, 1998; Rutter, 2001). The final area of resilient characteristics has to do with the impact that the school system and significant others can have on these individuals. Often times, having one positive role model in the life of an individual can make

such an impact and begin the process of building resilient characteristics into that person (Werner, 1999).

Although this paper is not intended to generalize to all individuals with learning disabilities, it should be noted that the four established tiers are reflected in the four portraits of this study. Therefore, in order to potential use these personal stories to positively impact similar adolescents with learning disabilities, it is important to understand these tiers. First of all adolescents with learning disabilities need to understand that they have to develop their own people pleasing behaviors. They need to be taught appropriate social skills and they need to learn how to interact with individuals in order to be “likeable”. Secondly adolescents with learning disabilities need to hear from others that they have potential. They need to know that they have career options and the possibility for a bright future. They also need to be taught specific ways to compensate for their disability in order to reach their career goals and have successful futures because these skills do not always happen naturally for these individuals. Teacher candidates must learn to teach their students how to compensate for their disabilities (asking for help when needed, explaining their disability to others, etc.) This will allow the candidates to truly strengthen the weak. Thirdly these adolescents need to be taught to be persistent, responsible, and to seek out assistance when needed. And fourthly these students need strong supports from their teachers and other adults established as role models in their lives. These four tiers of resilient characteristics have been modeled, in a realistic way, by the four students of this study and the teachers who worked to build the resilient characteristics into their lives.

Because resiliency is a timely and important topic in regards to individuals with learning disabilities, education programs of Christian institutions should examine to identify if educational resiliency is being incorporated into curriculum. The challenge for Christians is to help those with a history of weakness. Increasing resilient characteristics into the lives of students is an excellent way to strengthen the weak and give hope to those in need. In order to do this, teacher candidates need to be taught the definition of resilience along with current research in the field (Rutter, 2001, Masten, 1994, Franklin, 2000). Teacher candidates also need to

read and understand personal accounts of resilience. Then teacher candidates can begin to see the importance of instilling resilient characteristics into the lives of their students. Resiliency can be nurtured in students and is an area where growth can be seen (Werner, 1999). Often times, just one caring adult can start the resilient process in students. Teacher candidates can purposefully address resiliency and feel good about this effort. Teaching, as a ministry, is such a wonderful privilege and building resilient skills is a concrete way to show compassion to students while also increasing their chance for positive life outcomes.

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Table 5. Summary of Marker Variables Established for Resilient Characteristics Combined into Four Tiers

People Pleasing Behaviors: Personality elicits positive response from others Responsive to positive influences
Changing Mindsets: Educational/career aspirations Ability to adapt/compensate for disability Positive outlook on school/life
Acquired Skills: Responsible Seeks assistance Orientation to achievement Persistence
School Responsibilities: Structures Strong emphasis on positive encouragement to students

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