



## **The Power of Resilience: A Theoretical Model to Empower, Encourage and Retain Teachers**

Janice L. Taylor

University of St. Thomas, Houston, Texas, USA

---

*Due to the many challenges that teachers face in today's classrooms to facilitate the academic success of all children and to meet federal and state accountability standards, having both the competence and the ability to adjust to meet these challenges are required. Teacher retention is an ongoing issue in the United States; teachers who lack these traits may have a negative impact on teacher retention. Resiliency is a critical element that teachers need to meet these challenges and remain in the education profession. In this study, the stories of four female African American teachers who taught in the same school district in a rural community in the South before, during, and after desegregation, were examined. Using qualitative methodology and a narrative inquiry technique, the data analyzed from the stories of the four women confirmed eight themes of resilience as identified in Polidore's Theory of Adult Resilience in Education (2004). An additional resilience theme, efficacy, also emerged. The additional theme provided an enhanced conceptualization and construct of Polidore's Theory of Adult Resilience in Education model. With the massive challenges facing educators today, the stories of the four teachers can be used to empower, encourage and retain teachers in the education profession. Keywords: Resilience, African American Teachers, Teacher Retention, Efficacy*

---

### **Introduction**

The problem of recruiting and retaining certified teachers is a complex issue. Ingersoll (2007) indicated that as many as half of those trained to be teachers never enter teaching and 40-50% of those who do enter teaching leave the occupation altogether in the first five years on the job. According to Page and Page (1991), the number of African American teachers began decreasing in the late 1970s, and the trend had shown little sign of reversing. However, over the past two decades, the growth rate of minority teachers entering the profession has been twice the growth rate of white teachers (Ingersoll & May, 2011). So, while there has been improvement in the number of minority teachers entering the profession, African Americans have had less stable careers and have left schools at higher rates (Ingersoll & May).

Teachers are leaving the teaching profession because of low salaries, lack of administrative support and teacher blame (Curtis, 2012). Ingersoll (2007) indicated reasons for teacher shortages result from two converging demographic trends, increasing student enrollments and increasing teacher retirements due to a graying teaching force; however, the impact of retirements on the teacher shortage is minor considering the number of candidates who are trained and never become teachers. Ingersoll further stated that the prominent causes of teacher turnover that account for almost half of all departures were because of job dissatisfaction, low salaries, lack of support from the school administration, student discipline problems, and a lack of influence over school decision-making. In a study conducted by Muller, Gorrow, and Fiala (2011), characteristics of teachers who persevered and remained in teaching, despite exposure to the same conditions indicated by Ingersoll, were explored.

Using a survey to measure six protective factors that were strongly associated with resiliency as defined by Henderson (2003), the researchers concluded that each of the six factors might contribute to developing resiliency for educators; however, they may not do so in an equal manner. The six protective factors are: (a) purpose and expectations, (b) nurture and support, (c) positive connections, (d) meaningful participation, (e) life guiding skills, and (f) clear and consistent boundaries.

Bobek (2002) stated that challenging conditions related to the teaching profession require that teachers be resilient. Furthermore, Bobek stated that when teachers are resilient, they are better able to assess adverse situations and determine options for coping, in addition to implementing the appropriate solutions. Bobek recommended that individuals be provided with the necessary resources to develop resilience: (a) significant adult relationships; (b) a sense of personal responsibility; (c) social and problem solving skills; (d) a sense of competence, expectations and goals, confidence, a sense of humor; (e) and a sense of accomplishment. Bobek maintains that teacher resiliency is a critical element in teacher retention. New teachers may enhance their resilience by fostering productive relationships with people who understand the trials and tribulations of teaching, and can offer insight on options available for dealing with various situations (Bobek).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of African American female teachers related to their (a) teaching experiences and (b) the characteristics of resilience that influenced their retention in education in a rural community before, during, and after desegregation in the South. For the purpose of this study, teacher resilience is defined as the ability to adjust to varied situations and increase one's competence in the face of adverse conditions (Gordon & Coscarelli, 1996; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990). The research questions for this study were developed to ascertain characteristics of resilience that may have led to career longevity in education for the African American female teachers. The two research questions were:

1. What were the teaching experiences of African American female teachers in a rural community before, during, and after desegregation in the South?
2. What characteristics of resilience emerged as themes that influenced the retention and longevity of African American female teachers in education in a rural community before, during, and after desegregation in the South?

### **Significance of the Study**

This research study was pursued for two reasons. First, the teacher shortage in the United States continues to increase; retaining teachers continues to be an imminent issue. As minority student enrollments continue to increase, the number of minority teachers, particularly African Americans, is underrepresented. In the 2008-2009 school year, only 16.5% of all teachers were minority while 41% of students were minority (Ingersoll & May, 2011).

The reasons why teachers leave the profession are widely known. However, the published research, which consists of valuable and comprehensive data collected from numerous empirical studies, still leaves questions to be explored for understanding the larger context of why teachers do not remain in the education profession. As significant and as useful as the research is to address the issue of teacher retention, it has not been enough to make a dynamic impact on retaining teachers. This researcher perceived that further research

was needed to explore the underpinnings and depth of how some teachers remained in the profession for many years, and others are currently choosing not to. Second, from this researcher's experiences as an African American in the rural community where the study was conducted, the researcher personally knew teachers who experienced unparalleled adversity during the court-ordered desegregation of schools, yet they remained in the teaching profession without the supports that have been touted to make a difference in teacher retention. These supports include quality teacher preparation programs, administrative support, sufficient salaries, adequate workplace conditions, mentors, and opportunities for professional development. Additionally, no study had paired Black feminist and resilience theories as the theoretical framework in which to examine the natural correlation between African American female educators and the phenomena of resilience. Through oppression, struggles, and marginalization, African American women have managed to confront injustices and to empower and affirm themselves with a self-defined standpoint. To conduct research on African American women without viewing their experiences through Black feminist lens is to risk normalizing their past and current stations in life to less oppressed or marginalized groups, and thereby diminish the integrity and contextualization of their legacy (Few, 2007). Therefore, using African American female educators as the medium to explore this topic, this researcher sought to determine how four retired African American female teachers continued their careers in education, despite subjugation to significant adversity. The researcher believed that an in-depth analysis of the experiences of the teachers who taught in public education during one of the most challenging times in the nation's history could provide valuable insight on retaining qualified teachers in the education profession.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Polidore's (2004) resilience theory, which was undergirded by Black feminist theory (Collins, 1989; Few, 2007; hooks, 1984), served as the theoretical framework of this study. Polidore's resilience theory was chosen for this study because if the number of teachers who remain in education is to increase, there must be an emphasis placed on building teacher capacity and longevity (Levine & Haselkorn, 2008). Retaining current teachers in the education profession cannot continue to center around only the current reasons for teacher attrition such as low salaries and the effects of No Child Left Behind legislation (Curtis, 2012). Rather building and fostering resilience could become the vehicle through which capacity is developed and retention of teachers is increased.

### **Resilience Theory**

Polidore's (2004) theory on resilience was developed using data obtained from three African American female teachers who participated in a qualitative research study. The three teachers had long careers in education despite subjugation to significant adversity. Polidore's resilience theory consists of eight characteristics or themes of resilience: religion, flexible locus of control, an individual's ability to view adverse situations positively or optimistic bias, autonomy, commitment, change, relationships, and education viewed as important. As corroborated by the informants in Polidore's study, these themes influenced their teaching experiences and retention in education before, during, and after desegregation in the South.

Two premises guided the framework of Polidore's study. The first premise was referred to as developmental perspective, which indicated that adults develop resilience, learn to cope, and adapt over a lifetime through multiple processes that may vary over time, rather than a set of fixed traits (Walsh, 2006). The second premise of Polidore's study was identified as ecological perspective, which consisted of the spheres of external or

environmental influences of an individual, such as family, school, work settings, or larger social systems across the life span (Walsh, 2006). The construct of this study also focused on the characteristics or themes of resilience as identified in Polidore's theory.

As shown in Figure 1, Polidore's Resilience theory was an original model.

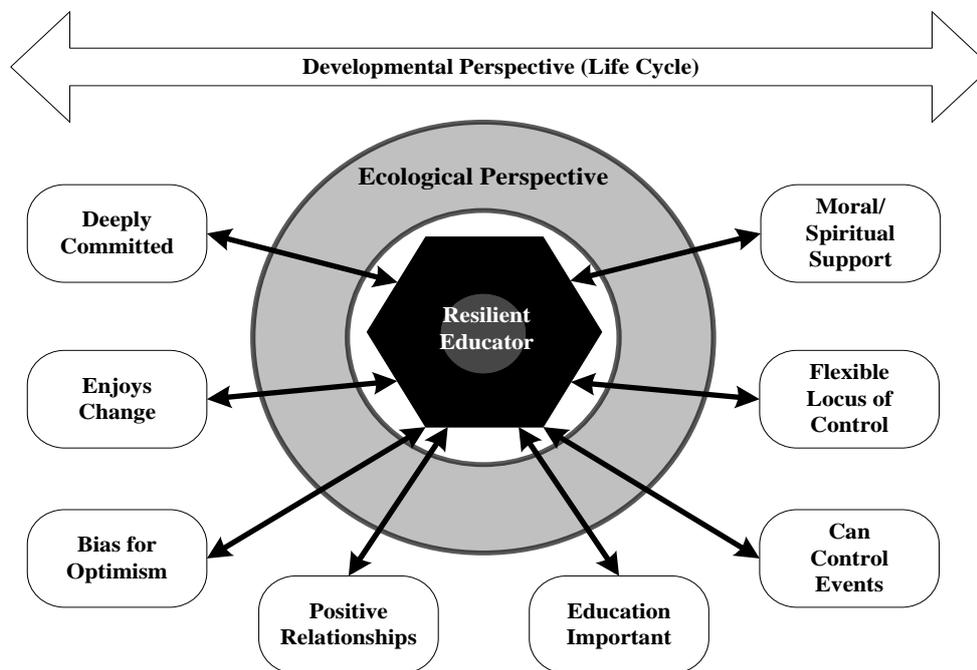


Figure 1. Graphic conceptualization of resilience in education theoretical framework. From *The teaching experiences of Lucille Bradley, Maudester Hicks, and Algeno McPherson before, during, and after desegregation in the rural south: A theoretical model of adult resilience among three African American female educators* (p. 28), by E. Polidore, 2004 (Doctoral dissertation, Sam Houston State University). Copyright 2004 by E. Polidore. Reprinted with permission.

### Black Feminist Theory

Black feminist theory was the undergirding component of the theoretical framework for this study. Collins (1989) defined Black feminist theory “as a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize human vision of community” (p. 30). The concept of Black feminist theory resulted from Black feminist activists’ and scholars’ perceptions of not fitting in or experiencing a disconnection to White, middle-class, liberal feminist discourses (Few, 2007). Collins (2003) argued, “at the core of Black feminist thought lie theories created by African American women which clarify a Black woman’s standpoint—in essence, an interpretation of Black women’s experiences and ideas by those who participate in them” (p. 15). Black feminist thought has been produced by ordinary African American women in their roles as mothers and teachers (Collins, 1989). Black feminist thought supports an African American woman’s standpoint and assumes that African American women have a unique perspective of their experiences with certain commonalities shared by other African American women. The Black feminist concept allows for fostering dialogues among African American women; however, what is most important is that Black feminist concept reconceptualizes the intellectual writings and history of African American women who have struggled with injustices (Collins, 1998). The informants’ experiences can be used to contribute to the empirical body of research on the on-going issue of teacher

retention, and also positively impact the current discourse, development, and evolution of best practices that pertain to properly equipping teachers with the intangible, yet necessary tools, needed to remain in the education profession.

Combining the tenets of both Poldiore's resilience theory and the Black feminist theory in a qualitative study allowed this researcher to: (a) give the African American female informants an authoritative voice about their experiences; (b) allow a more thorough and comprehensive examination of their perspectives about their teaching experiences before, during, and after desegregation in the South; and (c) gain an understanding about who or what caused them to remain in education, and how they were influenced to continue their careers despite subjugation to adverse experiences during a historical and life-altering transition period in their lives. From this researcher's own self-concept as an African American woman, the Black feminist theory concept provided an additional dynamic in which to examine the perspectives of the informants. Additionally, using Black feminist theory provided intellectual space and allowed this researcher to navigate the challenges of misrepresentation and substitution of her own experiences (Few, 2007), in lieu of the informants, that may occur in this type of qualitative study.

### Methodology

This research study used the historical biography method with a narrative inquiry technique to examine the perspectives of four African American female teachers as related to their teaching experiences and the characteristics of resilience that influenced their retention in education in a rural community before, during, and after desegregation in the South. Using qualitative methodology, this researcher chose to *give voice* to four African American women, who served as the informants in the study. Through semi-structured interviews, the informants engaged in reliving and restorying their teaching experiences, which occurred during a challenging era in our nation's history. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) stated that qualitative research can "advance a democratic project committed to social justice in an age of uncertainty" (p. 667). This study, which is about female teachers' stories, included first-hand accounts of individual teachers and undergirded the educational importance of teachers' stories and how teachers' stories provide "theoretical ideas about the nature of human life as lived to bear on educational experience as lived" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 3).

Narrative inquiry technique, which is a practical research method for this type of qualitative study, can be used to advance the discourse on the topics of teacher retention and teacher resilience from the experiences and stories of the purposive sample. Narrative inquiry is a process of collaboration that involves mutual storytelling between the researcher and the informant and restorying as the research proceeds. "Narrative as inquiry is grounded in the doubt that is essential to creating and re-creating" (Hendry, 2009). Using narrative inquiry technique allows *voices* to be shared between the researcher and the informant (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). According to Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk (2007), both the researcher and the informant "have a voice with which to tell their stories." The expression *giving voice* comes from feminist and other liberation movements and refers to empowering people who have not had a chance to tell about their lives in order to bring about social change (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Narrative theorists have indicated that narrative research is shaped by broad social and historical occurrences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This technique was chosen because narrative inquiry is increasingly used in educational research in which humans are storytelling organisms, who, individually and socially, lead storied lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Denzin and Lincoln stated that being provided an opportunity to narrate a significant life event facilitates positive change for some people. Using the narrative inquiry technique in this study permitted openness, depth, and rich detail in understanding the

concept of resilience and its influence on teacher retention before, during, and after desegregation.

### **Context of the Study**

Qualitative researchers are concerned with the context of the study and should go to the place where the event naturally occurs (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Therefore, to preserve the integrity of the study's context, this researcher traveled to the site of the study. The context of this historical, biographical research study was a rural community in the South, which was a thriving and prosperous city, primarily due to the railroad era (Campbell, 1983). In the 1960s, students organized the first sit-ins in a move to end segregation of the public schools in the community. In the Fall of 1970, all the rural community's public schools were integrated. The 1970-71 school year proved to be a pivotal year for the community's public school system when the transition from a segregated, dual system to a unitary, desegregated school system occurred.

### **The Informants**

A purposive sample of four African American female teachers was chosen for this study. Purposive samples are used to provide the researcher with rich information that yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations (Patton, 2001). With the assistance of one of the informants, a list of six other African American female teachers who taught during the defined time frame of the study was developed. Four of the seven teachers were available at the time that the study was conducted. Three of the informants were interviewed in their home in the rural community where the study was conducted. One informant was interviewed in another city while on a visit to her daughter's home. The sole criterion for the informants in this study was that they had taught in a public school in the rural community where the study was conducted before 1970, and continued their career in teaching after 1970 until they resigned or retired from education. The participants ranged in age from 73 years to 86 years old! Volunteering their time as informants in this study, each of the retired teachers provided written permission to participate in the study and to use verbatim interview excerpts.

### **Instrumentation**

Narrative inquiry, at its core, is about asking questions (Hendry, 2009). Feminist researchers insist on using female's narratives as the primary source of data (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Black feminists use traditional data such as interviews to ask questions and to examine the lives of African American women and their families (Bell-Scott, 1995). Therefore, a research instrument consisting of 45 questions, which was the secondary instrument, was used to gather qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. This researcher was the primary instrument. Using semi-structured interviews allowed the informants to reconstruct their past experiences that were focused on the central purpose of the study. Each initial interview lasted approximately two hours. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed at a later date for analysis and interpretation. Prior to the scheduled interview, the questions were mailed to each informant. The research instrument was used to guide the stories told by the informants during the semi-structured interviews. The interview guide (a) ensured that the same course of inquiry was used with each informant interviewed; (b) provided topics in which the researcher was free to explore, probe, and establish a conversation with the focus on a particular subject that had been

predetermined; and (c) systematically maximized the time for comprehensive interviews to be conducted (Patton, 2002). Probing questions were also used to solicit elaboration to some responses provided by the informants. The interview questions were specifically designed for unstructured responses, and allowed me as the researcher to gain the informants' insights and perspectives on their teaching experiences and characteristics of resilience that influenced their retention in education. Relevant to the purpose of narrative writing, the interview questions consisted of three critical dimensions of human experience, significance, value, and intention (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Questions related to the past lives of the informants conveyed significance, which included biographical information and their teaching experiences. Questions related to the informants' present lives conveyed value and included current perceptions about the education profession and their community involvement. Questions related to their future conveyed intention and included each informant's perspective about her legacy.

### Data Analysis

This researcher analyzed the teaching experiences of the four informants for emergent themes of resilience against the backdrop of Black feminist theory. Narrative strategy was used to discern the differences, complexities, and commonalties in the teaching experiences of each informant in the study, all of which may have influenced the development of a similar theme of resilience. As a narrative researcher, three voices - authoritative, supportive, and interactive - were used to interpret each narrative. This researcher used her authoritative voice in the interpretation of the narratives by focusing on the meaning of the informant's experiences, specifically what and how the informant was communicating her story. She used her supportive voice to "create a self-reflective and respectful distance" between her voice and that of the informants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Finally, as a narrative researcher, reflections of her experiences, worldview as an African American and female personal relationships with the informants, were used in the narrative strategy that displayed her interactive voice. As an African American female, this researcher provided facts and theories based on the perspectives of the African American women in the study that were used to clarify their standpoint about their teaching experiences that may be of benefit to other African American women.

Cross-case analysis, an inductive analysis approach, was used to aggregate the emergent themes of resilience and to establish themes that were grounded in the context and the theoretical framework of the study. Cross-case analysis also allowed the researcher to deepen her understanding of the empirical data. Noblit and Hare (1983) suggested that cross-case analysis be supported by a social explanation that preserves the uniqueness and comparison of the study's development and context, thus an appropriate choice for this qualitative study and its relation to social justice. Analyzing the data from the narrative of an African American female, Johnson-Bailey (1999), recommended using data analysis tools that preserve the voice and maintain the meaning of the narrative. Using the analytic tools as recommended by Johnson-Bailey, this narrative researcher made meaning of the data by listening to the *voices* and the culturally distinctive communication techniques of African Americans, as the informants reflected on the political and social contexts surrounding their teaching experiences before, during, and after desegregation in the rural South. This historical, biographical research study was based on three assumptions. The first assumption was that at least one characteristic of resilience would emerge as a theme from each informant's interview. A second assumption was that all of the informants would respond truthfully and thoughtfully to the questions during the guided interview. According to Savin-Baden and Van Nierkerk (2007), "people tend not to hide truths when telling their stories."

The final assumption was that the informants' responses would include most of their experiences and observations during their teaching experiences prior to 1970, and until their resignation or retirement from education. Comprehensive responses from the informants would allow this researcher to thoroughly examine their perspectives for characteristics of resilience. The voices of the four African American teachers offered insights and information regarding their resilience and longevity in the education profession.

### **Validity and Reliability of the Study**

Creswell and Miller (2000) stated that qualitative researchers use the participants in their study to establish validity. Consequently, the informants in this study were used to establish validity. Internal validity of this study was provided by audio taped interviews. The validity of this study was also established using the strategies of member checking, triangulation, peer review, and trustworthiness. As the daughter of an African American woman who taught during the defined time frame and context of this study, this researcher also used the validity strategy, reflexivity. The strategy was used by the researcher to self-reflect and enhance the interpretation and presentation of the informants' narratives. However, great care was taken by the researcher during the interviews to develop the awareness needed to control for biases and to maintain the focus on the teacher's perspectives. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990),

We restory earlier experiences as we reflect on later experiences so the stories and their meaning shift and change over time. As we engage in the reflexive research process, our stories are often restoried and changed as we, as teachers and/or researchers, *give back* to each other ways of seeing our stories. (p. 9)

The value of this study was enhanced using four strategies of trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

#### **Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that building trust is a developmental task that occurs with each informant, and is the ultimate credibility of the findings in a study. The credibility of a study also depended on the extent to which trust had been established. Noted as a bias in this study, this researcher had a prior relationship with the informants that were interviewed, which served to strengthen the trustworthiness of this research. It was this researcher's hope that the prior relationships with the informants would serve as a catalyst for them to be freely forthcoming during the interviews.

#### **Credibility**

Credibility, also a strategy that ensures validity, is used to establish one of the criterion for trustworthiness in a qualitative study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that the researcher should spend enough time with the informants to allow them to become accustomed to the researcher and to check their responses during their participation in the interview. Since this researcher was familiar with each of the informants that were interviewed, the credibility of this study was established based on the prior relationships. Krefting (1989) stated that the reframing, expansion, and repetition of questions would increase a study's credibility. Repeating questions for each of the informants was done, if needed. Informants were also given an opportunity to elaborate on their responses. Creswell

and Miller (2000) stated that qualitative researchers employ a constructivist perspective and establish credibility when readers of narratives are transported into a setting or situation and given thick description and vivid detail. A narrative account of the stories of the informants provided credibility for this study.

### **Transferability**

Krefting (1991) stated that researchers must provide comprehensive background information about the informants and the context of the study to allow others to determine how transferable the findings are. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that it is the researcher's responsibility to provide sufficient data that will allow others to judge transferability of the data. Since the intent of this qualitative study was not to make generalizations about the findings, but rather, to present findings that represented the perspectives of the teaching experiences of African American female teachers who taught in a rural community before, during, and after desegregation in the South, and to determine the characteristics of resilience that may have influenced their retention in education, transferability was not relevant (Krefting).

### **Dependability**

Guba (1981) stated that the dependability of a study is related to the consistency of findings, although qualitative methods are designed for a specific or unique research study, where the findings may not be repeatable. Lincoln and Guba (1985), therefore, suggested that qualitative researchers densely describe the exact methods used to collect, analyze and interpret data, in order to achieve the criterion of dependability. The methods used to collect, analyze and interpret the data in this historical, biographical research study were described in detail in this section, and therefore met the criterion of dependability; however, the methods were designed specifically to achieve the purpose of this study. Dependability strategies included in this study were triangulation of data, data coding, and peer review.

### **Confirmability**

Guba (1981) suggested that the confirmability of a study can be achieved if another researcher was given the same set of data and the research context, and arrived at a similar conclusion. Using field notes, tape recordings, thematic categories of interpreted data, and other documents such as photos, this researcher used the major technique referred to as audit trail to achieve the criterion of confirmability of this qualitative study.

An audit trail was used to establish reliability of the study. Notes were maintained as the data were examined that consisted of questions, and ideas generated during the data collection and analysis. The reliability of the study was also established and supported should another researcher choose to use the same instrument to solicit the perspectives of teachers in another location on the issues of retention and resiliency.

## **Results**

The teaching experiences of the informants consisted of both similarities and differences. The researcher used the data from the four cases to establish emergent patterns or themes in response to the two research questions.

## Research Question One

The first research question was developed to report the perceptions of each informant's teaching experiences during the defined timeframe and context of this historical, biographical study. Twenty-three questions from the secondary instrument to guide each interview specifically addressed question one. Research question one stated: *What were the teaching experiences of African American women teachers in a rural community before, during, and after desegregation in the rural South?*

### Teaching Experiences before Desegregation

Each informant began her teaching career before the 1970-71 school year in a school that consisted of all African American children, teachers, and administrators; however, there were both similarities and differences in their teaching experiences. Each of the informants worked in African American schools; however, one informant also participated in an initiative to desegregate the teaching staff in a White elementary school. The informants perceived that African American schools had relaxed environments, fewer discipline problems, and cooperative and supportive parents. In general, the informants perceived that they were well respected as competent educators. They also maintained a strong belief in their own abilities. The informants focused on serving as positive role models, fulfilling their commitment to education, and instilling in African American children the importance of an obtaining an education. The emergent themes of resilience were positive relationships, autonomy, optimistic bias, education viewed as important, and religion.

### Teaching Experiences during Desegregation

The teaching experiences of the informants during the 1970-71 school year varied. Each informant experienced some challenges. All of the informants were transferred to schools that had consisted of predominantly White students prior to 1970-71. They each indicated that they had access to current resources and that they worked in better facilities. While maintaining a strong faith in God and a belief in their own abilities, their commitment to educate all children, regardless of the school setting, historical context, or political climate within their rural community did not change. The emergent resilience themes were flexible locus of control, enjoys change, education viewed as important, autonomy, commitment, optimistic bias, and religion.

### Teaching Experiences after Desegregation

In the years subsequent to the 1970-71 school year, there were more similarities than differences in the teaching experiences of the informants. The desegregation of schools did not influence how two of the informants taught their classes. Each of the informants continued to demonstrate a strong work ethic and commitment to the teaching profession, just as they had before the desegregation of schools. Because parents and administrators of other races and cultures questioned their abilities and skills, the informants continuously perceived that they had to prove their competence as professional educators. Although their abilities were questioned, the informants' own beliefs about their competence never waned. The informants' dedication to the teaching profession and their love of children allowed each of them to form lasting relationships with their students and to remain in education for many years. The emergent themes of resilience were positive relationships, autonomy, commitment, education viewed as important, and religion.

## Research Question Two

Research question two stated: *What characteristics of resilience emerged as themes that influenced the retention and longevity of African American female teachers in education in a rural community before, during, and after desegregation in the South?*

The eight themes of resilience, as identified in Polidore's (2004) Resilience theory, were used to answer research question two. Three questions from the secondary instrument were used to guide each informant's responses. Each of the eight themes of resilience emerged throughout the narratives of the informants and influenced the desire of the teachers to remain in their chosen career as educators for many years, despite subjugation to taxing and uncertain times during a poignant period in the rural community's history. One additional theme of resilience, efficacy, emerged as an overarching theme to two of the identified themes in Polidore's Resilience theory model. Verbatim quotes were taken from in-depth analyses of each of the four cases. The verbatim quotes reflected the empowerment given to each of the four teachers to use their unique vantage point as African American women and give voice to their teaching experiences by looking through their own lenses. The quotes also provided a deeper understanding of the informants' experiences.

### Resilience Theme 1: Religion

All informants expressed the resilience theme of religion and its implications on their lives. Its significance in their lives was anchored in their early childhood. While there were not many activities in the community for them to be involved in as children, they were actively involved in youth activities in their church. Their spirituality was experienced through their involvement in organized religion in both the Methodist or Baptist church and their faith, which helped them during times of adversity. Religion remains an important and fulfilling aspect of their lives as evidenced from their on-going involvement in church activities for many years.

I came from a very religious home. They [parents] were Baptist, which meant that I respected my elders, any older person really, it didn't have to be my parents, and if any older person told me what to do, I'd better listen....I was different only in the fact that I had a religious background. That taught me to love everybody and I couldn't help but love them [White teachers and administrators] even though they might not have wanted my presence....I was taught if you were going to do a job you are just going to have to stick to it and you had some determination. You got to work hard. You can't give up on life and the fact that I was from a religious environment that taught me that you are going to face struggles, and you've got to face them and you've got to live up to them, you don't give up, you work harder and you overcome....In church, they called me the business manager at the church. But that's because I had some business training and I'm superintendent of my Sunday school and that is because I love children and I love to deal with them. And one of my greatest accomplishments is to see my kids enjoying their snacks on Sunday mornings. (Informant #3)

We [siblings] attended Sunday school and church each Sunday. We were involved in church related activities....Well, the main thing that I attribute my success to remaining in education is my faith in God, the support of family and liking what I was preparing students to become through innovative

methods of teaching....My faith in God, because through him all things are possible, wanting a better way of life, serving as a role model for my children and other children, a love of the profession with my many co-workers through the years helped to sustain me for 38 years....Well, I'm involved in church related activities, and also civic activities. I'm involved in Bible study at Church on Wednesday evenings and I volunteer to decorate for special events, that's something I really enjoy doing. (Informant #4)

Walsh (1998) stated that one's faith develops early in life when fundamental meanings are being shaped. All of the informants had core beliefs that were grounded in religion, spirituality, and faith. Introduced to organized religion at a very young age, the informants remain active members of their churches and find meaningfulness and value from their religious affiliation. During the challenges of desegregation, their religious upbringing and faith helped to sustain them and reminded them of how to treat others, including administrators, teachers, students and parents from other races and cultures.

### **Resilience Theme 2: Flexible Locus of Control**

Flexible locus of control, a concept based on one's ability to use both internal and external loci of control, was exhibited throughout the narratives of the informants. The informants demonstrated their ability to endure challenges encountered while growing up in the segregated South and during their teaching careers when the schools were desegregated. Upon being transferred to new and unfamiliar schools, the informants' narratives revealed that they worked diligently to meet the expectations of their new environments and to prove their competence as classroom teachers to administrators, parents, students, and teachers of other races and cultures, which reflected a belief in internal locus of control. In contrast, some of the informants did not feel that desegregation impacted how they taught or their commitment to teaching, which reflected external locus of control.

I never really thought about it [segregation] because this was the only community in that I knew. We knew what we could do as Blacks, and what we could not do. There were stores that we could not go in, there were seats that we were not allowed to sit in that our parents just taught us to go around and do what we needed to do.... If you wanted a job you had to do whatever you were assigned to do. No one wanted to go home. So, we had to adjust to whatever the situation. That was the main thing. You gained more respect from the faculty, the principal, and that helped and encouraged me, even though I don't know what I would've done, because you had no other job here. (Informant #1)

I was so well-trained by my parents because that is what they knew before me. And since they were so well schooled and understood the segregated South, they trained me very well so that I would not run probably into the same things they ran into....I had no trouble with segregation because I was so well taught what it was and I was able to go about my business without any incidents because I will never put myself in the way of it....Frankly, I had no particular or unusual feeling about desegregation, maybe a little curious. Having the experience of teaching, I felt that I could adjust to the new factors. (Informant #2)

As stated by Walsh (1998), resilient individuals benefit from the use of each locus of control, both internal and external. The informants knew that the desegregation of schools was in the power of others, which indicated a belief in external locus of control. Their behaviors, which included their teaching methodologies, were changed only if they perceived the need to change. The informants believed that they were competent individuals who sincerely cared about the well-being and academic success of their students, therefore, when the schools were desegregated, the values they possessed did not change simply because the students in their classes became an ethnically diverse group. Change only occurred in the individuals when they controlled their environment as Werner and Smith (1982) indicated, and if they saw a need to change. For example, one informant stated that she spent more time preparing her lessons in order to challenge all students in her classes during desegregation. Another informant would adjust her lesson plan if she perceived that the students were not receptive to the lesson presented or did not understand the concept being taught. The ability of the teachers to traverse back and forth between loci indicated flexible locus of control. This ability was beneficial to them and to their students during desegregation.

### **Resilience Theme 3: An Individual's Ability to View Adverse Situations Positively or "Optimistic Bias"**

Despite the challenges regarding growing up in the segregated South, the personal challenges and the difficulties that occurred during the teaching careers of the informants in this study varied. From teaching with outdated textbooks to working in substandard facilities prior to desegregation, to the critical transition period when schools were required to merge from a segregated, dual school system to desegregated, unitary school system, the informants always remained hopeful and optimistic. Their optimistic bias yielded successful teaching careers and various other positive experiences within the community in which they lived. Instead of focusing on adversity, the informants remained confident in their talents and abilities to positively impact children, all children. Optimistic bias was a prevailing theme throughout various chapters of each informant's life.

During that time you had no choice of jobs, so I loved children and I wanted to work with children to see what I could do to help out children in the public school....I look back over some of the students that I had in my class and what they accomplished, the positions they now hold, and I think it was a great help to encourage them. I think the words of encouragement mean more than anything. (Informant #1)

After learning my students, as far as talents and dispositions and acceptance of new teachers, they saw that I had the ability to teach. They [administrators, teachers, parents, and students from other races and cultures] saw my intelligence. Remember that theme, *the triumph of intelligence over ignorance* [italics added], they saw my integrity. My mother taught me integrity. My mother taught me character, they saw that in my ability to discipline. They [Black and White students] had to be taught about the arts, about the expectations of how to live, about how to treat other humans, how to treat each other. There were so many common things that White and Black children had to be taught, and I thought it was my job to see to this that both White and Black, and a few Hispanic children and one or two Africans. I had no trouble in bridging these differences as one because they all needed to learn, and it was my job to see to it that they did. (Informant #2)

Resilient individuals remain optimistic in spite of difficulties (Werner & Smith, 1989, 1992). Each of the informants had personal challenges that they endured before and during their teaching experiences. The personal challenges included limited financial resources needed to realize a college degree, personal illness, living separate from their spouses out of necessity, and divorce. Throughout all of the challenges, the informants never lost their optimism. When they found out that the schools would become totally desegregated, collectively, they had mixed reactions. Recognizing that individuals outside the classroom had designed the desegregation plan, which yielded some demoralization and discouragement, the informants remained hopeful and determined in spite of the adversities that they experienced. Prior to desegregation, the informants knew that they did not have up-to-date textbooks and they had limited resources, but they kept their optimism, and learned to improvise. Their sense of hopefulness and optimism was shared with their students through their encouragement and an emphasis on the importance of obtaining an education. When the schools were desegregated, and the informants were transferred to predominantly White schools, the informants maintained their optimism throughout the difficult transition period. When their competence was questioned as parents from other races sat in their classrooms, and when administrators spoke threatening words to them, they still remained optimistic.

#### **Resilience Theme 4: Autonomy**

Although the context of this study included adverse circumstances surrounding the desegregation of schools, the informants' narratives indicated that their upbringing served as the catalyst for the development of self-confidence, a sense of worth, and a healthy self-esteem. Additionally, the informants were secure in their knowledge, competence, and abilities to effectively teach children before, during, or after desegregation in their rural community.

The teachers, parents, and students from other races respected me because they recognized my intelligence, my knowledge of the subject matter, the ideas that I projected. They knew that I wanted to help and they saw that I looked upon students first as human beings. I often told them [students] that I am here to teach you and I am as interested in you as my very own children. (Informant #2)

I taught first grade in the elementary school, and it was some of the greatest experiences I have ever had because that is the age where the children will love you if you show love to them. During those years, the parents were eager for their children to get the best education, and they respected anyone who had an education, and the fact that I had finished school indicated to them that I knew what to teach the children and they trusted me. And because they trusted me, I tried to do a good job. And believe it or not the children themselves loved me. They still love me. I know they loved me, and even today, if I ever see any [students] out, they are still just in love with me, and I still love them. (Informant #3)

Resilient individuals take responsibility for their own actions (Walsh, 1998). The teaching profession can be very isolating and solitary; however, prior to desegregation, the informants enjoyed the opportunities to be on their own and innovative in meeting the needs of their students. Teachers, parents, and administrators from other races and cultures brought new circumstances that interfered with the ability of the informants to be completely

autonomous as their competence, skills, and prior teacher preparation were questioned. However, determined to remain autonomous, and to prove themselves as capable and competent individuals, the informants took responsibility for their own thoughts and actions when the schools were desegregated. They took the initiative to make adjustments where needed, both inside the classroom when designing lessons for their students and outside of the classroom when interacting with teachers, parents, and administrators from other races and cultures. They also respected the views of others and did not allow them to control their thoughts and actions. They only attempted to change their views by continuing to do what they had always done, to work hard and to recognize when another course of action was needed. For example, when one of the informants was made to feel uncomfortable by an administrator from another race, she chose to stay out of his way. To the extent possible, the informants maintained their need to be autonomous, a characteristic of resilient individuals. Through their own creative efforts, they maintained their individuality and desire to connect with their students during and after desegregation.

### **Resilience Theme 5: Commitment**

The resilience theme of commitment was an overarching theme found in the narratives of the informants. Their commitment to their families, teaching career, and the community in which they resided parlayed their success as teachers and longevity before during, and after desegregation. The academic success of their children was a priority.

Being in touch with parents, making sure the children understood their assignments that they [parents] were able to help them, and if I knew that I had a problem, I would maybe have to do that at recess, take someone in and give them [students] a bit more time, maybe change the wording sometimes, in other words, just go step by step. (Informant #1)

Well, I thought I had to plan more in-depth because there were some sharp kids in my classes, and I felt the need to be able to challenge them. So, I had to dig deeper in my studying in order to be able to challenge them. (Informant #4)

The commitment of resilient individuals is often intertwined with positive relationships and faith (Higgins, 1994). Fueled by the positive relationships that the informants had with their families, friends, colleagues, and students, they were dedicated to the teaching profession, as evidenced by their total number of years of experience before they retired. They described themselves as hard workers and diligently worked through challenging situations to provide a positive academic experience for their students. Their dedication to educating children transcended the classroom. Outside of school, the informants mentored children and served as positive role models as respected citizens of the community. Although the context of their teaching careers included adverse conditions, their commitment to teaching did not falter when they were transferred to predominantly White schools during desegregation.

### **Resilience Theme 6: Enjoys Change**

Throughout the narratives of the informants, their attitudes and behaviors indicated their willingness to adapt to change during the various circumstances that arose in their lives, which included their teaching careers. When the schools were desegregated, and the

informants were transferred to new schools, they made successful transitions to their new environments, although challenging and uncertain at times, because of their capacity to change.

We [African American teachers] had mixed emotions because we didn't know. I didn't know how we would be received. What they [principals] did, they would choose teachers to go to certain schools. They would select and I was one of the ones that they chose to go and then some [African American teachers] left. In other words, that's what they would do if they [principal] thought you were doing a pretty good job. There were three teachers from different schools chosen to desegregate one of the teaching staffs in 1970. (Informant #1)

In the traditional African American community, change is imminent. Either through circumstances, relationships, or out of necessity, change is certain to happen with those who live in the African American community, especially with African American women, whose marginalized and oppressed lives emanate from undergoing constant change. The survival of African American women has resulted from their capacity to change. The concept of total desegregation was a new experience for the informants, and the unfamiliar faces in the context of their impending daily struggles were also new. Yet, the African American women in this study were naturally equipped to endure the changes and the challenges brought forth by the desegregation of schools. Throughout the changes that occurred over time, they forged relationships with their new colleagues, administrators, parents, and students and made the best of the situation.

### **Resilience Theme 7: Positive Relationships**

Positive people in their lives surrounded all of the informants in this study. Included in their circle of support were family members, such as parents and siblings, other relatives, caring spouses, encouraging colleagues, and friendships made from various club memberships and community organizations. These positive relationships contributed to their overall sense of well-being, self-esteem, purpose-driven lives, and efficacy. These relationships were especially significant throughout the challenges endured by the informants during the desegregation of schools.

While battling some health issues, and even after my father died at a very young age, he was 42 years old when he died; she [mom] was always there for us [her children] when we needed her. She was there for us through troubled marriages and when we needed help taking care of our children, her grandchildren. She always had an open door for her children. She was always there for us. My mother represented perseverance, tenacity, strength, and determination. Her actions taught me that I could achieve any goal that I wanted to achieve. She taught me to not let anything become an obstacle in my life – to not let anything or anyone keep me from doing what I wanted to do in life. I have tried to model this for my two daughters. My mother's actions taught me and my siblings that we could always depend on family that we should always be there for each other. To this day, we are there for each other through good and difficult times. (Informant #4)

Werner (1993) stated that resilient individuals become successful, despite being raised in adverse situations, because they had at least one unconditional relationship. Positive relationships were a lifeline for the informants in this study before, during, and after the desegregation of schools. All of the informants, African American women, were born during the height of segregation, which in itself presented great odds against them, yet they managed to lead successful lives and careers because they had many positive relationships. Parents, siblings, colleagues, and friends helped them to endure the challenges presented by the desegregation of schools. Relationships with spouses represented special sources of refuge during times of disparity and discouragement. As teachers, they also enjoyed the camaraderie established with colleagues in predominantly Black schools. Each informant's ability to remain focused on educating the children, despite the personal struggles she faced, enabled her to be an effective teacher. Although some students presented some behavioral challenges, these teachers did not focus on the difficulties experienced, but rather, they focused on the relationships formed with their students that have lasted over the years.

### **Resilience Theme 8: Education Viewed as Important**

From a very young age, various individuals espoused the value of an education to the informants in this study. Not only had the importance of an education been instilled in the informants by their parents, their ultimate career choice was the education profession. Through their love of teaching, the informants modeled and instilled in their students the importance of obtaining an education. The students of the informants, before, during, and after desegregation, were encouraged to work hard in order to realize their potential

All of the informants chose to continue their pursuit of learning even after obtaining a college degree by taking additional college hours. Two of the four informants earned a masters' degree. As a result of their commitment to being life-long learners, education became a way of life for the informants and continues through their involvement in various education-related activities.

My parents really believed in education. My dad never had any [education], and it was a long desire of his to get it. She [mother] was qualified as a teacher in the day, but she never really got to use her profession too much because she married my dad and started having children. My high school experiences were great and I finished as valedictorian of my class, and I was excited about that. I found out because my parents were teaching me the importance of education when I was so young. I did nothing but studying. I finished high school around fifteen or sixteen. (Informant #3)

Although she had ten children, she [mother] served as a role model for us to complete high school, and to continue our education, if we desired, by completing her GED when she was in her late 60's! She would walk to the local community library to get her materials to study. She even went on to take some college courses through correspondence...My college career began the year I finished the high school for colored students. After going to college, I returned home because of a lack of funds. Soon, thereafter, I gave birth to my oldest daughter, but I still had the yearning to complete my college education. Funds were made available through the National Defense Student Loan Program. I applied and qualified for the loan. I was on my way again to earn a degree in elementary education. (Informant #4)

As Polidore (2004) also indicated, education became a way of life for the informants in this study. From the time that the informants were young children, their parents emphasized the importance of education to them. Through difficult times that involved walking miles to school or relocating to another community in order to go to an accredited school, the informants were taught that no sacrifice was too great to obtain an education. Their parents emphasized to them that education was the key to their success, and as a result, it became the profession they chose and ultimately a way of life for them. Obtaining a college degree was a goal to be realized, regardless of the financial circumstances. Their educational attainment served as the catalyst for them to become dedicated teachers and to encourage their students to take their education seriously. In addition to the classroom setting, the informants fulfilled their on-going desire to be life-long learners by taking graduate courses, mentoring new teachers, and through memberships in community and social groups.

### **Efficacy – An Additional Emergent Theme of Resilience**

In addition to the eight themes of resilience included in Polidore's (2004) Resilience theory, another theme of resilience, efficacy, emerged as an overarching theme to the resilience themes optimistic bias and positive relationships. The term efficacy refers to the strong beliefs held by some African American female educators about their professional competence, self-confidence, and both their moral and social purpose to serve as uplifters within African American communities (Collins, 2000). Bandura (1997) stated that the individual beliefs a person has can influence how much effort is put forth, how long they will persist when faced with obstacles, and how resilient they are when attempting to cope with demands and challenges. The theme, efficacy, or teacher efficacy, which is a type of self-efficacy, resonated throughout the narratives of the four African American female teachers in this study, and influenced their natural role as uplifters in their community. This theme had far reaching effects that impacted the teachers' beliefs about student achievement, parental and peer relations. This theme was not identified in Polidore's Resilience theory model. For example, in the workplace, Informant #3's efforts to uplift teachers of other cultures and races were demonstrated through her jovial personality and positive attitude when she went into the teachers' lounge at the school where she was transferred to during the pivotal 1970-71 school year. Informant #3 stated, "When I was in there, I would smile and make them talk to me anyway. I would go in there and say, How ya'll doing today? What y'all doing in here? Can I help ya'll do something?" Figure 2 is a graphic conceptualization of resilience in education theoretical framework (Polidore 2004) with efficacy as an overarching theme of positive relationships and optimistic bias.

Collins (2000) indicated that African American female educators strongly believed in their role to serve as uplifters by empowering African American communities. Each of the informants in this study had confidence in their competence and intelligence as educators. Even though parents, teachers, and administrators from other races and cultures questioned their competence during the desegregation of schools, they remained confident in themselves and their abilities to effectively teach and empower children through education. Their strong beliefs also enabled them to serve as advocates of social change within the African American community with their involvement in community and church activities for both youths and adults.

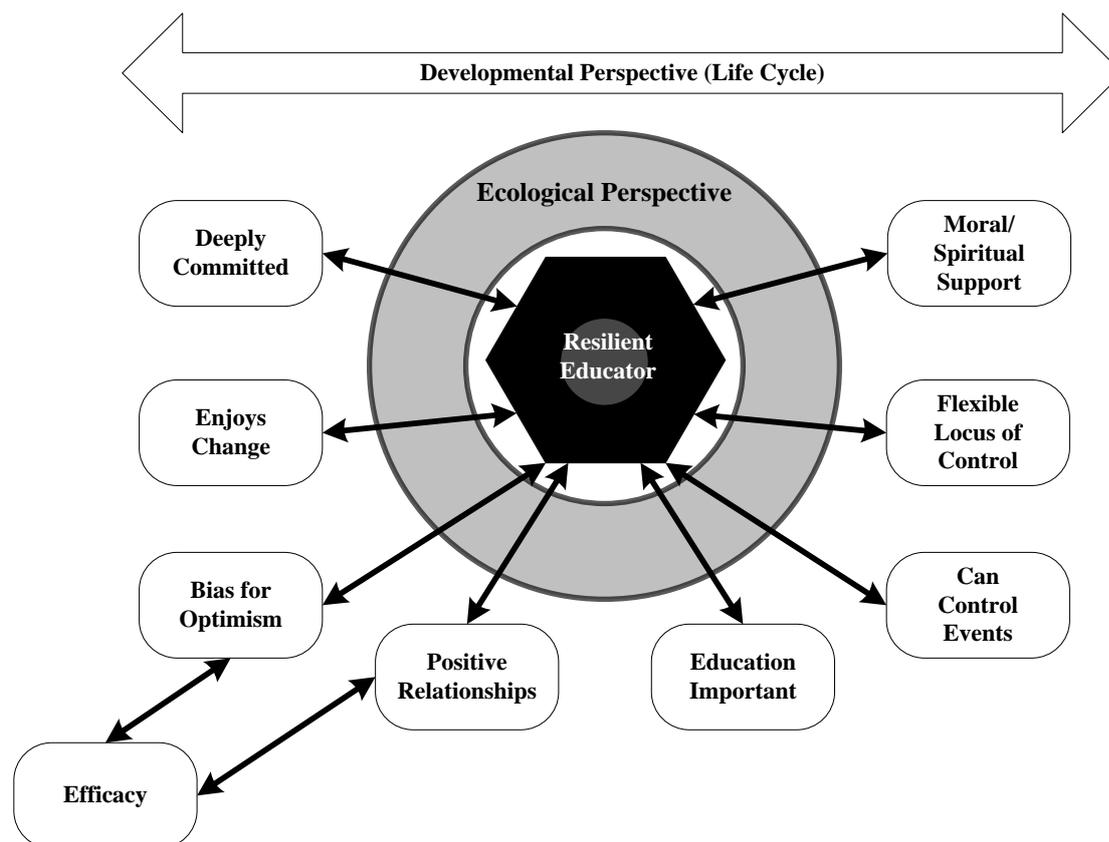


Figure 2. Graphic conceptualization of resilience in education theoretical framework modified. From *The teaching experiences of Lucille Bradley, Maudester Hicks, and Algeno McPherson before, during, and after desegregation in the rural south: A theoretical model of adult resilience among three African American female educators* (p. 28), by E. Polidore, 2004 (Doctoral dissertation, Sam Houston State University). Copyright 2004 by E. Polidore. Adapted with permission.

## Discussion

Each of the four retired teachers in this study, who taught in a rural community in the South before, during, and after desegregation, was considered resilient. As they navigated two worlds simultaneously, first as women, and second as African Americans, they each had a unique standpoint. Through their developmental perspective and spheres of influence, their resilience empowered them to remain in education and to learn to live with what was beyond their control. Over the course of the teachers' experiences, the resilience themes as identified in Polidore's (2004) Resilience theory model, religion, flexible locus of control, optimistic bias, autonomy, commitment, enjoys change, positive relationships, education viewed as important, and one theme this researcher added, efficacy, validated Polidore's study, and sustained them during times of discomfort and the uncertain realities of the historical context in which they taught. The themes of resilience resonated throughout the teaching experiences and the lives of the four informants in this study. The adversities that the African American female teachers experienced may never be entirely comprehended; however, they prevailed in their profession during extremely negative conditions, as indicated by their tenure in the profession. Their stories clearly depicted that their teaching experiences did not focus on what was lost during the desegregation of schools, such as familiar faces on students, colleagues, parents, and administrators, comfortable settings in predominantly substandard African American schools, outdated textbooks, doubts about their competence that had to be

eradicated, or disparaging treatment from administrators, teachers, or parents of other cultures, in the rural community where the study was conducted in 1970-71. Rather, the informants focused on what could be gained from the desegregation experience by everyone affected. The informants never lost their focus on doing the best job possible for the benefit of children. Their current perspectives about the desegregation of schools still convey more benefit than not for all children of all races and cultures. Although some of the resilience themes were more dominant than others, autonomy, change, optimistic bias, flexible locus of control and positive relationships, it was apparent that each theme of resilience was influential and played a role in helping them to remain in education for many years. In addition to the eight themes of resilience, another theme of resilience, efficacy, emerged as a construct of the resilience themes optimistic bias and positive relationships, which influenced their natural role as uplifters in the community.

According to Black feminist theory, as defined by Collins (1989), the stories shared by the informants in this study clarified their standpoint as African American females who taught before, during, and after desegregation. As the informants were given voice, they acknowledged the struggles that they faced due to their gender and race during a historically critical period. Each of the informants had a unique perspective of their teaching experiences; however, there were some commonalities that were predicated upon four themes as described by Collins (1989). The African American female informants in this study (a) empowered themselves and repelled the negative stereotypes through community involvement, pursuing graduate school, and maintaining positive relationships; (b) did not allow themselves to become oppressed by the adversity they faced as they transitioned to different schools during desegregation; (c) merged their intelligence and political ambition, if desired, and (d) used the skills they had to resist daily discrimination by teachers, parents, students, and administrators from other races and cultures in order to maintain their dignity and self-respect. As Collins (1990) indicated, the African American women spoke with authority about their teaching experiences, and affirmed how they survived the adverse conditions associated with before and during the desegregation of schools. The African American female teachers were empowered with the ability to clearly define themselves and to validate their own standpoint. The talents, skills, and desire they had to give back to their community as educators defined them. As hooks (1984) indicated, the four African American female educators in this study had lived experiences that were powerful, cannot be refuted, and may help to shape the worldview and consciousness of African American women.

This study was delimited to a purposive sample of only African American female teachers who taught in public schools in one rural community in the South before, during, and after desegregation. Another delimitation of this study was the time frame in which the African American female teachers were requested to emphasize their perspective of their teaching experiences. The rich data supplied by the informants in this historical biographical study were based on their teaching experiences during the defined timeframe prior to 1970, and until their resignation or retirement from education. Depending on the age of the informants and how long they taught, this timeframe varied. The intent of this study was not to generalize the findings to a larger population of teachers, but to provide insight on the characteristics of resilience that influenced the retention of the African American female teachers. This insight may be applied to the recruitment, employment, and retention practices of African American female teachers today.

A limitation of this study was the researcher's inability to corroborate the impact of the 1970 desegregation plan in the rural community where the study was conducted on the retention of African American teachers. No public education data management system for student demographic and academic performance, personnel and finances existed for the local district or for the state during the defined timeframe of this study. Therefore, this researcher

was not able to corroborate the number of teachers who were retained as classroom teachers, reassigned to non-teaching positions, or left the education profession altogether after the 1970 desegregation of schools in the rural community where the study was conducted. However, the stories of the four informants are rich, their legacies are indelibly preserved, and their contributions to history are everlasting. Their stories of resilience have implications for current and future teachers, administrators, teacher recruiters, teacher preparation programs, and state and local policy makers.

### **Implications**

As public school administrators experience greater challenges for their students to be successful on standardized tests and for their schools to meet state and federal accountability standards, such as No Child Left Behind, retaining a highly qualified teacher workforce is critical to their success and to that of their students. To retain both new and experienced teachers requires that teachers be provided with the necessary resources and administrative support. Additionally, administrators must model resilience and provide professional development opportunities for teachers to learn how to become resilient. Administrators can develop models of resilience using the modified conceptualization of Polidore's (2004) Resilience theory model to retain teachers as shown in *Figure 2*.

### **Resilience – From Theory to Application**

Administrators, when developing a resilience model to apply to teachers, may include the following components and correlating resilience theme.

#### **Positive Relationships**

Professional learning communities provide teachers with the opportunity to build positive relationships and to engage in professional discourse in settings that encourage collegiality and foster the support needed to build resilience. Meaningful relationships with experienced mentors may also have a profound impact on the decision of early-year teachers to stay in education. Administrators who (a) demonstrate appreciation for teachers, (b) seek their input, and (c) trust them to do their job may ultimately impact teacher resilience and teacher retention.

#### **Autonomy**

As the focus of accountability and high stakes standardized tests continues to heighten, there is an even greater emphasis being placed on school administrators and teachers to successfully meet the academic needs of their students. Often times, teachers are required to use prescriptive instructional strategies to meet these needs. However, dedicated teachers have the personal need to connect with students through non prescriptive ways by using creativity and innovation. Therefore, teachers must be given the flexibility and the resources to exercise autonomy by administrators. It is important for administrators to both understand and provide what teachers need to sustain their energy and passion for the teaching profession.

### **Flexible Locus of Control**

Learning to exercise flexible locus of control enables teachers to know when and how to adjust their behavior appropriately. Administrators can assist teachers in understanding how locus can influence their choice of behavior in order to resolve situations positively, alleviate unnecessary stress, and experience greater job satisfaction.

### **Enjoys Change**

In public education, change is constant. In order to retain teachers, administrators must arm them with strategies and tools to cope with the changes associated with increased workloads, struggling students, and general demands of the profession. Keeping teachers in the pipeline regarding research-based best practices and providing the training needed to acquire and develop the skills to handle and adapt to challenges will benefit teachers, students and administrators.

### **Commitment**

Administrators can demonstrate commitment to teachers by providing them with relevant and targeted staff development opportunities and by allocating the time to *give them voice* and listen when concerns are expressed. Of course, timely and appropriate actions by the administrators should follow. In turn, teachers can demonstrate their commitment to their students by listening to them and by helping to encourage and foster a can-do spirit in them.

### **Optimistic Bias**

Teachers can be encouraged by administrators to see the glass as half full, even in the most challenging situations – difficult parents, unruly students, and curriculum changes. Furthermore, teachers who are optimistic and confident may help a child to deal with their own adversity by enhancing their personal characteristics and resilience. These teachers help to build a child's resilience by focusing on his strengths, rather than his weaknesses.

### **Education Viewed as Important**

Resilient teachers play a key role in emphasizing the importance of education to students in their daily interactions with them. Helping students to make connections between short-term and long-term goals, while emphasizing how education will make the goals more attainable, should be encouraged by administrators. Positive, long-term outcomes for all stakeholders may result.

### **Religion**

Regardless of ethnicity or culture, teachers, administrators, and students often come from homes where one's life is anchored in a higher power. While maintaining awareness and respect for the various religious beliefs represented in schools today, administrators must model and inspire tolerance, sensitivity, and appreciation for all stakeholders while implementing district policies and procedures.

## **Efficacy**

Teacher efficacy can positively impact student beliefs and achievement, parental relations, teacher performance, collegiality, and the school organization as a whole. Administrators must encourage efficacy beliefs amongst both experienced and novice teachers by providing specific feedback about job performance, providing assistance in areas where needed, and encouraging life-long learning. Providing opportunities for teachers to acquire and apply new skills and knowledge through professional development should be facilitated by administrators.

## **Summary**

The retired African American female teachers in this study served as classroom teachers for 134 years! Currently, the attrition rates for new teachers are higher than those of older and more experienced teachers (Curtis, 2012). High teacher attrition rates have a negative impact on student achievement and result in substantial losses to local school districts. The chances are greater for students to experience success from teachers who stay in the profession longer; districts also benefit financially. (Levine & Haselkorn, 2008) Levine and Haselkorn estimated the costs to be \$15,000 to \$20,000 per teacher. It is in the best interest of everyone involved in education reform and accountability - teachers, administrators, recruiters, educator preparation programs, local and state policy makers - to understand the importance and to take the necessary steps to build capacity in teachers by fostering resilience in order to keep them in the profession. Not only should teachers be equipped with tangible resources to experience job satisfaction, teachers must also be provided the tools needed to successfully adapt to the on-going changes in the education profession.

As the voices of the four African American women resonated throughout this study, their stories validated the importance of resilience in teachers in order to retain them in the education profession. Their voices also validated the use of qualitative methodology, specifically narrative inquiry technique, to emphasize the significance and quality of this research as it relates to the vital issues of teacher retention, teacher resiliency, and the advancement of social justice. Through the lens of four retired African American female teachers, their storied lives of resilience have provided significant insight about their teaching experiences before, during, and after desegregation. Their stories of resilience have value for educators today.

## **References**

- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York, NY: Cambridge University.
- Bell-Scott, P. (1995). *Life notes: Personal writing by contemporary Black women*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Bobek, B. (2002). Teacher resiliency: A key to career longevity. *Clearing House*, 75(4), 202.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn-Bacon.
- Campbell, R. B. (1983). *A southern community in crisis: Harrison, County, Texas, 1850-1880*. Austin, TX: Texas State Historical Association.
- Collins, P. H. (1989). The social construction of Black feminist thought. *Signs*, 14(4), 745-773.

- Collins, P. H. (1990). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York, NY: Routledge, Chapman & Hall.
- Collins, P. H. (1998). *Fighting words – Black women & the search for justice*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Collins, P. H. (2003). The politics of Black feminist thought. In C. R. McCann & S. Kim (Eds.), *Feminist theory reader: Local and global perspectives* (pp. 318-333). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2-14.
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 124-130.
- Curtis, C. (2012). Why do they choose to teach – and why do they leave? A study of middle school and high school mathematics teachers. *Education*, 132(4), 779–788.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). *Handbook of qualitative research*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Few, A. L. (2007). Integrating Black consciousness and critical race feminism into family studies research. *Journal of Family Issues*, 8(4), 452-473.
- Gordon, K. A., & Coscarelli, W. C. (1996). Recognizing and fostering resilience. *Performance Improvement*, 35(9), 14-17.
- Guba, E. G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Educational Resources Information Sources Information Center Annual Review Paper*, 29, 75-91.
- Henderson, N., & Milstein, M. (2003) *Resiliency in schools: Making it happen for students and educators*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.
- Hendry, P. M. (2009, Nov/Dec). Narrative as inquiry. *Journal of Educational Research*, 103(2), 72–80.
- Higgins, G. O. (1994). *Resilient adult overcoming a cruel past*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- hooks, b. (1984). *Feminist theory from margin to center*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- Ingersoll, R. (2007). *Misdiagnosing the teacher quality problem*. (CPRE Research Brief No. RB-49). Philadelphia, PA: The Consortium for Policy Research in Education.
- Ingersoll, R. M., & May, H. (2011, September). The minority teacher shortage: Fact or fable? *Phi Delta Kappan*, 92(1), 62–65.
- Johnson-Bailey, J. (1999). The ties that bind and the shackles that separate: Race, gender, class, and color in a research process. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 12(6), 659-670.
- Krefting, L. (1991). Rigor in qualitative research: The assessment of trustworthiness. *The American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc.*, 4, 214-222.
- Levine, A., & Haselkorn, D. (2008). Teaching at the precipice. *Education Week*, 28(11), 32-34.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Masten, A. K., Best, M., & Garmezy, N. (1990). Resilience and development: Contributions from the study of children who overcome adversity. *Development and Psychopathology*, 2, 425-44.
- Merriam, S. B., & Associates. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Muller, S. M., Gorrow, T. R., & Fiala, K. A. (2011). Considering protective factors as a tool for teacher resiliency. *Education*, 131(3), 545–555.

- Noblit, G. W., & Hare, R. D. (1983, April). *Meta-ethnography: Issues in the Synthesis and replication of qualitative research*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Canada.
- Page, F. M., & Page, J. A. (1991). *The teaching profession as perceived by African-Americans*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.
- Patton, M. Q. (2001). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Polidore, E. (2004). The teaching experiences of Lucille Bradley, Maudester Hicks, and Algeno McPherson before, during, and after desegregation in the rural south: A theoretical model of adult resilience among three African American female educators (Doctoral dissertation, Sam Houston State University, 2004). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 65, (08), 2924A.
- Savin-Baden, M., & Van Niekerk, L. (2007, September). Narrative inquiry: Theory and practice. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 31(3), 459 – 472.
- Walsh, F. (1998). *Strengthening family resilience*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Walsh, F. (2006). *Strengthening family resilience second edition*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Werner, E., & Smith, R. (1982). *Vulnerable but invincible: A study of resilient children*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.
- Werner, E., & Smith, R. (1989). *Vulnerable but invincible: A longitudinal study of resilient children and youth*. New York, NY, Adams, Bannister and Cox.
- Werner, E., & Smith, R. S. (Eds.). (1992). *Overcoming the odds: High risk children from birth to adulthood*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Werner, E. E. (1993). Risk, resilience, and recovery: Perspectives from Kauai longitudinal study. *Development and Psychopathology*, 5, 503-515.

### Author Note

Dr. Janice L. Taylor is an Executive Director in Human Resource Services in the Klein Independent School District, Klein, Texas. She has served as a High School Principal, Intermediate School Principal and Teacher in Texas public schools. She is also an Assistant Professor at the University of St. Thomas, Houston, Texas. Her research interests include teacher retention, teacher resilience, and teacher efficacy. She has published and presented at state and national conferences, and she is a contributing author to the Handbook of Educational Theories. Dr. Janice L. Taylor is a University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA) David L. Clark Scholar. Correspondences pertaining to this article may be addressed to: Janice L. Taylor, Ed.D.; Email: [taylorjl1@stthom.edu](mailto:taylorjl1@stthom.edu) or [janiceltaylor54@msn.com](mailto:janiceltaylor54@msn.com); Telephone: 713.854.9531.

Copyright 2013: Janice L. Taylor and Nova Southeastern University.

### Article Citation

Taylor, J. L. (2013). The power of resilience: A theoretical model to empower, encourage and retain teachers. *The Qualitative Report*, 18(70), 1-25. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR18/taylor70.pdf>

---