

# **Pre and Post Reflection: Teacher Candidates' Responses to Their 90 Hours Field Experience**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the emergence of resilience in the context of reflective practice facilitated during a 90 Hours field experience. The surveys administered to teacher candidates (n=90) preceding and following the field experience comprise the data. Among the five questions in the surveys, the focus question looked at teacher candidates' expectations of themselves and their cooperating teachers. The resilience factors, including the personal resources of courage and motivation, along with the contextual resource, mentor relationships, emerged from an analysis of the data. However, continued analysis of the data revealed a confluence of the personal and contextual resources. The personal resources, courage and motivation, were supported by the contextual resource, the mentor relationship with the cooperating teacher. Continued discussion includes teacher candidates' comments, while

drawing connections among reflection, resilience, and the success of teacher candidates in their field experiences.

**Keywords:** teacher candidates, field experiences, reflection, resilience

Reflective practice has long been considered central to teacher learning and growth (Bainer, 1992; Dewey, 1910). As a self-assessment practice, reflection can help build resiliency (Leroux and Théorêt, 2014; Mansfield, 2016). The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the emergence of resilience in the context of reflective practice facilitated during a 90 hours field experience. Standard 9 Vision, in the Standards for Teacher Educators, applies to the study. The standard, “Accomplished teacher educators embrace their role as change agents, understand the impact teacher education has on classroom practices, and are early adopters of new configurations of learning” (Rogers, 2003, as cited in Association of Teacher Educators, 2020, p. 8). The Indicator, “Actively participate in learning communities that focus on educational change” (Association of Teacher Educators, 2020, p. 8), relates to this study. Resilience connects to the standard and indicator as a contributing factor in positive learning communities, sustaining the growth and development of teacher candidates, while facilitating success. Within the field of teacher education, resilience plays an important role in understanding teachers’ lives as well as career choices (Gu & Day, 2007; Hong, 2012; LeCornu, 2009). Concurrently, resilience contributes much to the effectiveness of new teachers (Tait, 2008). Nevertheless, studies of resilience at the pre-service level are limited (Mansfield et al., 2016, p. 78). In discussing resilience, personal resource factors interact with the external environment, also identified as contextual resource factors (Hong, 2012; Mansfield et al., 2016). Accordingly, the

goal of this paper is to bring attention to the connection among reflection, resilience, and success during the teacher candidates' 90 hours field experience.

### **Literature Review**

Resilience can be defined as meeting the challenge of difficult circumstances, a situation with an inherent level of challenge. Current parlance uses “bouncing back” as a definition of resilience. People bounce back from trauma, risk, and stress. However, resilience is also seen as “bouncing forward”. The ability to respond to adversity with resilience provides the momentum to meet the next task by strengthening the skills and attitudes necessary to advance (Grotberg, 1999). Toward this end, LeCornu (2009) emphasizes the important role reflection plays in building teacher resilience. Reflection is a self-assessment practice that can help teacher candidates build resilience (Leroux and Théorêt, 2014; Mansfield, 2016). Furthermore, Tait (2008) refers to the importance of resilience-building activities, including reflection, for students in teacher education programs. Resilient teachers have resources that yield positive responses and strategies while working in stressful situations in the classroom or school environment (Gu & Day, 2007; Hong, 2012). Therefore, resilient teacher candidates, are building skills and attitudes commensurate with success.

Personal and contextual resources are inherent to the concept of resilience (Mansfield et al., 2016). The conceptualization of resilience extends further within the education field. For example, Mansfield, et al. (2016, p. 79) note, “In the context of the teaching profession, resilience may be conceptualized as a capacity, a process and also as an outcome.” Although the personal resources might be apparent, the interactions in family, school and community contribute to the development of resilience (Li, Eschenauer & Yang, 2013). Accordingly, as teacher candidates build their personal resources such as motivation and courage, the contextual

resources such as mentor relationships also impact the resilience demonstrated by preservice teachers in the field (Adams, 2017; LeCornu, 2013; Mansfield et al., 2016). In sustaining resilience in our teacher candidates, the external contextual resources should support the internal personal resource factors (Crosswell & Beutel, 2017; LeCornu, 2013).

### **Research Questions**

The essential (key) research question guiding this study was: What factors of resilience emerge in the context of reflective practice facilitated during a 90 hours field experience? What factors contribute to teacher candidates' resilience?

### **Methodology**

#### **The Study Design**

Pre and post surveys were used with the teacher candidates in the 90 hours field experience course, Co-Teaching Co-Planning in the Inclusive Setting. A qualitative design investigated how the participants' 90-hours field experiences impacted personal perception, specifically through reflection about expectations before and after the field experience. A basic qualitative research approach suggests meaning emerges as individuals engage in an activity or experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 23). The analysis focused on the survey question about candidates' expectations regarding the 90 hours field experience.

#### **Participants**

Our course, Co-Teaching Co-Planning in the Inclusive Setting, included a 90 hours field experience. The teacher candidates were primarily first semester seniors or graduate students in an M.A. program. Pending Praxis II, most participants intended to student teach during the following semester. The majority were females. Each teacher candidate had a dual major in the liberal arts and either elementary or secondary education. Both elementary and secondary

programs lead to a certificate of eligibility with advanced standing and endorsement as a Teacher of Students with Disabilities. Given eligibility criteria, the elementary level students could also secure a middle school endorsement in a liberal arts area.

### **Data Source**

The data source was comprised of open-ended survey questions that preceded and followed the 90 hours field experiences. The questions asked participants to communicate their general feelings and thoughts, expectations, strengths, opportunities for growth, and their own question's answer. The key difference between the pre and post surveys was the post survey's reference to the application of concerns or strengths to future classroom experiences. The surveys were in a letter format to the cooperating teachers. The letter format helped teacher candidates identify with the reality of their field placement.

Given a review of pre and post surveys, the expectations question responses were used in this study. The pre expectations question was, "What do you want to get out of the 90 experience? i.e. expectations for self, for teacher." The post expectations question was, "What did you "get out" of the 90 experience? In what ways did you fulfill expectations for yourself, for your cooperating teacher?"

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected as pre and post surveys, gathered from 90 teacher candidates (n = 90) as part of course assignments. Although 104 students participated, both pre and post surveys were not available for 14 teacher candidates. The pre and post surveys were formatted as a letter to the cooperating teacher. The cooperating teachers were not involved in the surveys' construction nor in the students' responses. Rather, the surveys were a reflective part of the

course taken with the field experience. The data was collected throughout a 6 school year period during 7 semesters: 2012-2018.

### **Data Analysis**

Among the survey questions, the expectation question surfaced as a key component in the analysis of the data. A qualitative inductive process was used whereby patterns emerged as the data was analyzed by total group, class, and individual. While analyzing individual responses, the process can be defined as a three part sequence (Eryilmaz & Aypay, 2016). First, significant phrases or sentences were highlighted as indicating factors of resilience in the pre and post surveys. The findings for the pre and post surveys were kept separate. Then, the material was highlighted as either personal or contextual factors of resilience. Finally, patterns were extracted that showed a clustering of personal factors, contextual factors, and a confluence of the two. A coding framework noted specific factors of resilience and matched the resultant phrases and sentences to the specific resilience factors.

### **Findings**

The purpose of this study is to examine the emergence of resilience factors within the context of guided reflection surveys relating to a 90 hours field experience. The survey was taken during the corresponding class. Pre to post survey responses revealed the development of resilience. Post survey phrases and sentences demonstrated specific factors of resilience. In addition, the post survey responses about fulfilling expectations yielded 96.7% positive responses from participants.

The following discussion supports the general findings with reference to three specific factors: the personal resources factors of courage and motivation, and the contextual resource factor of mentor relationship. The mentor responses emphasize the importance of the

relationship with the cooperating teacher. The confluence of personal resources and contextual resources became apparent; personal resources were supported by contextual resources.

Following is a selection of teacher candidates' responses. In reviewing the data, these three excerpts are representative of participants' responses and highlight specific factors of resilience.

### **Courage**

The first teacher candidate excerpt illustrates courage, a personal resource factor. Courage can be defined as "the capacity to move into situations where we feel fear or hesitation" (Jordan, 2006, as cited in LeCornu, 2013, p.6). The post comments reflect the personal challenges experienced at the onset of the experience. Yet, the individual was willing to proceed and provide an effective learning experience for themselves and their students.

#### ***Teacher Candidate 1 - Grade 3, Inclusive Setting: Courage***

**PRE:** As a part of the 90 hours experience I want to build my self-confidence and be able to learn from experiences I have in the classroom. I want to be involved in every way I can be. The expectations I have for the teacher is the he/she will be tough on evaluating each lesson I teach but also offer words of encouragement and wisdom.

**POST:** I fulfilled my expectations by actually not collapsing before I taught a lesson and having a good strong lesson for my advisor to come see me teach. For my cooperating teachers, they have fulfilled my expectations by allowing me to teach lesson the way I wanted but also guiding me. Also, by being there for me and allowing me to bounce my ideas off them to see if it would work with the students.

This teacher candidate demonstrates courage, by coping with anxiety and fear, while sustaining a positive field experience, one in which students are engaged and learning. The

contextual resources factor, mentor, is communicated as gratitude for the assistance and support of the cooperating teacher. As noted by LeCornu (2013), affirmation and encouragement, as contextual resources, reinforce personal resources.

## **Motivation**

This excerpt illustrates the teacher candidate's motivation, a personal resource factor. Mansfield (2015) states motivation can be aligned with locus of control and inner drive. When associated with locus of control, motivation implies self-direction, confidence, and an intrinsic ability to set and realize goals.

### ***Teacher Candidate 2 – Kindergarten, Inclusive Setting: Motivation***

**PRE:** I hope during my time with you I can get a better understanding of how I want to run a classroom. I am interested in seeing all of your ideas and comparing them to my own. I hope to achieve the sense of satisfaction that I succeeded and that I helped to better the learning process of your students.

**POST:** I taught more than 8 lessons that were expected of me. Mrs. P. did not have anyone else in the classroom helping her so when she had to do individual assessment with children, I took over for the rest of the class. I made copies, took the kids to lunch and recess, read stories, cut out items for art projects, organized papers filed papers and anything else she asked me to do. I said going into the experience that I was going to do anything I was asked both to gain respect from the cooperating teacher and gain knowledge for myself. I had a great lesson planned for when my supervisor came, and I really worked hard to make sure all the kids were able to learn from me.

This motivation sample shows a confluence between personal and contextual factors. The teacher candidate communicates motivation as inner direction, while identifying the hopes,

plans and direction for the field experience. The belief in her cooperating teacher is expressed, along with a willingness to learn. Once again, the relationship, a contextual factor, can facilitate the emergence of personal resources.

### **Mentor**

This teacher candidate excerpt highlights mentor relationship, a contextual resource factor.

#### ***Teacher Candidate 3 - Grade 6, Middle School Math: Mentor Relationship***

**PRE:** From this field experience, I would like to gain more confidence in front of the classroom. I tend to get the “butterfly feeling” which I know is normal. But I would like to gain strategies to overcome that feeling. In addition, I would like to gain insight about being a middle school teacher from you. I am eager to learn your strategies and techniques that work with the students.

**POST:** Throughout the experience, I definitely gained more confidence standing in front of the classroom. ... As for my cooperating teacher, she absolutely stunned me. Her charisma and content knowledge were astonishing to observe along with how receptive the students were to her teaching style. She provided guidance and instilled belief for me. She reassured my passion for teaching mathematics. I wish my fellow classmates all had her as a cooperating teacher.

These comments illustrate the important role the cooperating teacher plays in supporting and encouraging the teacher candidate. The personal resource, motivation, links to increased confidence.

### **Discussion**

The key point of this study is to explore how the personal and contextual resilience factors work together (LeCornu, 2013; Mansfield, 2016) to help students fulfill expectations and

build confidence, while using reflection as the context and the 90 hours field experience as the setting. In our course, guided reflection was an integrated component that focused on strengths and recognized opportunities for growth (Dewey, 1910). Through reflective practice, the ability to work with possibility and achieve outcome builds awareness and lessens anxiety (Bainer, 1992). Throughout the course, teacher candidates reflected on the 90 hours experience in their journals while sharing in class conversations and peer teams. Communication aimed to facilitate meaningful interaction. Each class became a community of learners who supported each other. Although sometimes frightened or even disheartened, the teacher candidates continued in their incentive to learn and to secure their goal, to succeed and to help their students succeed. The factors of resilience are apparent in their personal resources of courage and motivation, supported by the contextual resource of mentor relationship with their cooperating teacher. An important finding in this study is that in seeking to develop and sustain resilience in our teacher candidates, it is necessary that the contextual resources support the personal internal resource factors (Crosswell & Beutel, 2017; LeCornu, 2013). New teachers enhance resilience by their interaction with mentors who understand the challenges and rewards of teaching (Tait, 2008). In this study, the mentors were the cooperating teachers. Although, the teacher candidates possessed personal resources, the confluence of personal and contextual resources brought the teacher candidates' expectations to fruition.

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