RESILIENCE AMONG GRADUATES FROM ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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Research has shown that students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) typically have poor life outcomes. Students with EBD who are placed in an alternative education setting are likely to continue a path toward failure without carefully designed effective services. Existing studies have independently examined resilience in children and youth and alternative education settings. However, there is a gap in research examining resilience in students who have graduated from alternative education settings. Using semi-structured interviews, the present interpretive and descriptive qualitative study sought to explore factors of resilience in individuals who graduated from alternative education settings. The study sought to identify elements, specific to alternative education settings, that have contributed to resilience in young adulthood and to further our understanding of how alternative education placements have contributed to the participants’ current life status.

Findings revealed three themes specific to alternative education settings that contributed to participants’ resilience: teachers who show that they care about their students, a positive learning environment, and a small student-teacher ratio where participants were able to get more one-on-one instruction. Additionally, two other themes arose from the data: having a supportive family and an innate sense of self.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

According to the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS2), students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) drop out of school at a higher rate than those in other disability categories (Sanford et al., 2011). Moreover, students with EBD face greater academic failure (Brooks, 2006; Nelson, Benner, Lane, & Smith, 2004), suspension (Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; United States Department of Education [USDE], 2012), expulsion (Blackorby et al., 2005; USDE, 2012), and retention in grade (Wagner & Davis, 2006) than students in other disability categories. Although these characteristics differ from what is considered typical, they fail to explain the cause of these differences and offer little, if any, guidance regarding prevention and treatment (Quinn, Poirier, Faller, Gable, & Tonelson, 2006). Educators continually seek to increase their understanding as to why some students with EBD are not successful in traditional classroom settings.

Efforts have increased to improve educational services and opportunities for students with disabilities and challenging behaviors, particularly in general education settings (e.g., Education of All Handicapped Children Act [EHA], 1975; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 1990, 1997; Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act [IDEIA], 2004; No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2001). According to IDEIA (2004), students with EBD must receive appropriate education services in the least restrictive environment (LRE). However, for some students with EBD, the LRE may be an alternative education setting such as a program where specialized services are available (Flower, McDaniel, & Jolivette, 2011). These students often require academic and behavioral instruction in alternative education programs to improve their life circumstances.
Researchers are concerned that at-risk youth have only a small chance of attaining their full potential as adults (Brooks, 2006; Masten, 2001; Rak & Patterson, 1996; Resnick, 2000). Furthermore, there are uncertainties that youth at-risk may become dysfunctional to the point of being incapable of supporting themselves or establishing rewarding relationships with others. Individuals who succeed in spite of adversity have been identified as resilient, possessing certain strengths and benefiting from protective factors that help them overcome adverse conditions and thrive (Alvord & Grados, 2005; Brooks, 2006; Masten, 2007, 2011; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1991; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Rak & Patterson, 1996; Werner, 1986).

Statement of the Problem

As shown in the research, students with EBD typically have poor life outcomes. Without effective services, students with EBD are likely to continue on a path toward failure. Regardless of setting, it is imperative that students with EBD have the opportunity to make positive changes in their lives; and thus, potentially improve life outcomes (Quinn et al., 2006).

Purpose of the Study

Existing research has independently examined resilience in children and youth (e.g., Masten, 2001; Werner, 1984) and alternative education settings (e.g., Simonsen, Britton, & Young, 2010; Tobin & Sprague, 2000). There is, however, a gap in research examining resilience factors in individuals who have been placed in alternative education settings. The purpose of this study was to explore factors of resilience in individuals who graduated from alternative education settings. The objectives were to identify the elements, specific to
alternative education settings, that contributed to resilience in young adulthood and to understand in what ways alternative education placements contributed to the participants’ current life status.

Significance of the Study

Expanding existing research to include factors of resilience among graduates of alternative education programs is critical to reinforce the value of such programs that use effective strategies. Generally, students with EBD do not have successful life stories; therefore, studying outliers may provide key information to help more students with EBD find success.

Limitations

One limitation of the study is the sample size. Only two well-established alternative education programs were used, thus, creating a lack of generalizability. Additionally, due to the nature of self-reporting, it is uncertain if participants gave truthful responses. Furthermore, participants’ recollection of events that occurred while they were in school may have been less accurate due to a lapse in time since being in school. However, it is hypothesized that the findings address important issues regarding alternative school experiences of individuals deemed resilient.

Definition of Terms

- Emotional and behavioral disorder: A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child’s educational performance: (a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory
interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; (c) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; and (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with persona or school problems (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Section 300.8(c)(4)).

- Resilience: Resilience is defined as attaining positive results in the face of adverse or threatening conditions (Brooks, 2006; Masten, 2001; Masten et al., 1991), successfully handling traumatic experiences, and evading negative courses associated with risks (Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Werner, 1992).

- Alternative education programs: A setting for students with EBD whose behaviors interfere with their learning and/or the learning of others and whose behaviors are considered to be unacceptable in traditional education settings. Furthermore, alternative educational programs are considered a final opportunity to provide individuals with social/emotional and/or academic rehabilitation (Van Acker, 2007).

- Graduates of alternative education programs: Refer to students who met requirements of their alternative education programs and subsequently graduated.

Research Questions

In order to examine the area of interest, two research questions guided the study:

1. What elements, specific to alternative education settings, contributed to resilience in young adulthood as determined by interviews with former students?

2. In what ways have alternative education placements contributed to the participants’ current life status as determined by interviews with former students?
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to the Thirty-first Annual Report to Congress, with the exception of Asian/Pacific Islanders, emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) are among the five most prevalent disability categories for all racial/ethnic groups (United States Department of Education [USDE], 2012). A 15.3% increase has been associated with those served under the category of EBD. Moreover, students with EBD have the second lowest high school completion rate (36.7%) and drop out of school at a substantially higher rate (44.9%) compared to those served under other disability categories (Sanford et al., 2011; USDE, 2012). Furthermore, students with EBD are at greater risk than students in other disability categories for academic failure (e.g., Brooks, 2006; Lane, Barton-Arwood, Nelson, & Wehby, 2008; Nelson, Benner, Lane, & Smith, 2004), retention in grade (e.g., Wagner & Davis, 2006), suspension (e.g., Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006; USDE, 2012), and expulsion (e.g., Blackorby et al., 2005; USDE, 2012). Additionally, the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) reports that students with EBD had the highest rates of involvement with the criminal justice system (Sanford et al., 2011). Outcome data for students with EBD are not positive, irrespective of their educational setting (Lane et al., 2008; Simpson, Peterson, & Smith, 2011).

Academic achievement and social relationships are negatively affected by the difficult behavior of students with EBD (Gable, Tonelson, Sheth, Wilson, & Park, 2012). Furthermore, post-school adjustment for those with EBD is adversely affected. Students with EBD have higher rates of unemployment or underemployment and earn lower wages compared to those without disabilities or those served under other disability categories (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008; Mihalas, Morse, Allsopp, & McHatton, 2008; Sanford et al., 2011; Simpson et
al., 2011; Smith, Katsiyannis, & Ryan, 2011; Wagner & Davis, 2006). It is clear that the quality of education for students with EBD must significantly be improved (Bradley et al., 2008; Gable et al., 2012; Simpson et al., 2011).

Literature dating from the 1970s to 2012 was examined to provide extensive coverage of issues related to individuals with EBD who have participated in alternative education programs and the topic of resilience. Initially, the impact of schools on students with EBD is highlighted. Then, the chapter examines alternative education programs. Finally, resilience among children and youth is examined. An extensive search of multiple databases (e.g., Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost, Education Research Complete, ERIC) was conducted to explore issues related to resilience among individuals who graduated from alternative education programs using terms including and related to (a) alternative education, (b) resilience, (c) EBD, (d) children, and (e) youth.

**Impact of Schools**

Efforts have been made to improve educational opportunities and services for students with disabilities and challenging behaviors, particularly in general education settings (e.g., Education of All Handicapped Children Act [EHA], 1975; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 1990, 1997; Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act [IDEIA], 2004; No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2001). Frequently, schools utilize external discipline (e.g., surveillance, zero tolerance policies, consequences, suspensions, expulsions; Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010; Sugai & Horner, 2002) when responding to students who display disruptive behaviors. Although these procedures are intended to “teach” students that their “choice” of behaviors will not be tolerated (Sugai & Horner, 2002), punitive solutions are short-
term fixes to what are usually chronic and long-term challenges. Furthermore, research indicates that the frequency and intensity of antisocial behavior increase when short-term solutions are utilized (Dishion & Dodge, 2005; Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2005; Mayer, 1995; Mayer & Butterworth, 1979). Moreover, punishment and exclusion are ineffective without proactive systems (Mayer, 1995).

**Zero Tolerance**

The philosophy of zero tolerance dominated school discipline beginning in the early 1990s (Reynolds et al., 2008). Although zero tolerance was originally developed as an approach to drug enforcement, schools extensively adopted the term as a means for requiring the use of predetermined consequences. Typically, these consequences were severe and punitive in nature and were applied notwithstanding the magnitude of behavior, extenuating circumstances, or situational context. Although not documented by empirical research, the belief of those holding zero tolerance policies is that removing students who exhibit disruptive behavior will discourage others from disruption; consequently, establishing an improved environment for those remaining. However, there is a significant amount of research which overwhelmingly demonstrates the effectiveness of positive consequences for managing student behavior (Fitzsimons-Lovett, 2001; Fitzsimons & Monfore, 2003; Gottfredson, Gottfredson, & Hybl, 1993; Reynolds et al., 2008; Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, & Myers, 2008; Skiba & Peterson, 2000, 2005). A single approach has not been found to be effective for educating all students with EBD; however, a critical step is creating an environment in which caring is valued and emphasized (Cartledge, 2003; Mihalas et al., 2008).
Alternative Education

Beginning in the 1960s, alternative schools were used as an alternative to public education and predominately found in urban and suburban areas (Quinn, Poirier, Faller, Gable, & Tonelson, 2006; Van Acker, 2007). Defining alternative education became difficult as alternative programs grew. A three-level classification system was developed by Raywid (1994) to categorize the numerous types of alternative programs existing in the United States. Type I alternatives consist of innovative programs and strategies for students pursuing study in a more challenging school (e.g., magnet schools). On the other hand, type II alternatives are considered last chance programs for students prior to being expelled from school. Type III alternatives have a remedial focus for those in need of social/emotional, academic, or both types of rehabilitation. Van Acker (2007) believes that although the above topology is beneficial, the distinction between types is uncertain due to numerous alternative education programs with assorted strategies and objectives. Alternative schools include varied educational programs with models of service delivery planned for (a) charter schools, (b) advanced-placement, (c) home-schooled students, (d) at risk students, (e) disruptive students, and (f) students with special needs.

The number of youth served in alternative education programs expanded when the Gun Free Schools Act of 1994 (Cerrone, 1999) mandated students with disabilities whose behavior is believed to be unacceptable in traditional settings be placed in alternative education programs. Specifically, the Gun Free Schools Act stated that students could be expelled or sent to an alternative education program for at least one year for bringing a weapon to school. IDEA (1997) mandated that a placement, for up to 45 days, in an alternative education program could be specified in a student’s individualized education program (IEP). Additionally, the requirement of accountability was stressed in NCLB (2001) by emphasizing the importance of
providing alternatives to programs, which fail to meet NCLB standards. Unfortunately, little information is provided on the features of effective alternative education programs for individuals with and without disabilities (Atkins & Bartuska, 2010; Flower, McDaniel, & Jolivette, 2011; Leone & Drakeford, 1999; Quinn et al., 2006; Quinn & Rutherford, 1998).

As outlined in IDEIA (2004), students with disabilities are required to receive education and appropriate services in the least restrictive environment (LRE). In order to improve their life circumstances, these students may require academic and behavioral instruction in alternative education programs (Flower et al., 2011). However, without effective services, students with EBD will most likely remain on a pathway toward failure upon exiting the alternative setting. Students with EBD must receive educational opportunities equal to those without disabilities regardless of setting. Research specifies a vast quantity of information on providing quality services to students with EBD (e.g., Clark & Davis, 2000; USDE, 2012; Lewis, Jones, Horner, & Sugai, 2010; Melmgren, Edger, & Neel, 1998; Nelson et al., 2004; Wagner & Davis, 2006).

Implications for Practice in Alternative Settings

Upon entering an alternative education setting, it is highly plausible that students have experienced a considerable amount of failure, punitive measures, and exclusion (Flower et al., 2011). Successful outcomes should not be expected for students in alternative settings without implementation of effective practices. Creating an environment where teachers support and respect their students is imperative (e.g., Cartledge, 2003; Quinn et al., 2006). Research indicates that non-family role models (e.g., teachers, school counselors, after-school program supervisors) may serve as buffers for individuals at-risk for academic, social, and emotional failure (Beardslee & Podorefsky, 1988; Bolig & Weddle, 1988; Fitzsimons-Lovett, 2001;
Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984; Masten, 2001; Werner, 1984, 1986, 2000). While enrolled in alternative education settings, it is essential for students to have the opportunity to make positive changes in their lives (Quinn et al., 2006).

It has been hypothesized that at-risk youth have only a small chance of attaining their full potential as adults (Brooks, 2006; Masten, 2001; Rak & Patterson, 1996; Resnick, 2000). Moreover, there are concerns that individuals at-risk will become dysfunctional to the point of being unable to support themselves or establish satisfying relationships with others. Nonetheless, many children and youth who encounter adversity in their lives fair well regardless of being exposed to severe challenges (Alvord & Grados, 2005; Brooks, 2006; Masten, 2007, 2011; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1991; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Rak & Patterson, 1996; Werner, 1986). Those who succeed in spite of hardships have been recognized as resilient; thriving by embodying certain strengths and aided by protective factors supporting them in overcoming adverse circumstances, and thriving.

**Resilience Defined**

According to Alvord and Grados (2005), multiple definitions of resilience necessitate conditions of an identified risk or hardship followed by some distinct amount of positive outcome. Nonetheless, defining resilient behavior and determining an effective strategy for measuring the behavior and successful adaptation to adversity is still debated. Resilience is not a simplistic, dichotomous trait that a person has or does not have (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 1997). However, resilience demonstrates, in varying degrees, the possession of multiple skills that benefit a person’s ability to cope (Alvord & Grados, 2005). It has been suggested that an individual who is resilient must display positive outcomes across various facets of life for a
distinct period of time (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 1997). The commonality is that individuals possess the ability to lead more successful lives than anticipated, regardless of being at greater risk than most for serious difficulties (Brooks, 2006).

For this paper, resilience is defined as attaining positive results in the face of adverse or threatening conditions (Brooks, 2006; Masten, 2001; Masten et al., 1991), successfully handling traumatic experiences, and evading negative courses associated with risks (Garmezy et al., 1984; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Werner, 1992). The existence of protective factors assisting in encouraging positive outcomes or minimizing negative outcomes is an essential requirement of resilience (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Resilience theory, according to Masten (2001), focuses on strengths rather than deficits. Emphasis is on understanding healthy growth and positive outcomes despite being exposed to risks.

Masten and Coatsworth (1998) believe resilience is an inferential and circumstantial paradigm requiring two types of judgments. Specifically, there must be a substantial threat to a person’s development, and there must be perils (current or past) that could potentially upset typical development. In other words, the risk must be discernible. Generally, risks are essentially predictors of disadvantageous outcomes based on evidence that this condition is statistically associated with a higher likelihood of imminent bad outcomes (Kraemer et al., 1997).

At birth, all humans possess an innate capacity for resilience. “Resilient children work well, play well, love well, and expects well” (Bernard, 1993, p. 44). Typically, children who are resilient have five attributes: (a) social competence, (b) problem-solving skills, (c) critical consciousness, (d) autonomy (Bernard, 1993, 1995), and (e) sense of purpose (Bernard, 1995). Qualities of social competence include empathy, caring, flexibility, communication skills, and a
sense of humor (Bernard, 1993, 1995). Children with social competence have the ability to bond with their families, schools, and communities due to their ability to establish positive relationships with peers and adults. Problem-solving skills include the capability of thinking abstractly, which give children the ability to create alternative responses for cognitive and social difficulties. Two important problem-solving skills are planning and resourcefulness in asking for assistance from others. Critical consciousness incorporates having an intuitive awareness of structures of unkindness (e.g., alcoholic parent) and creating tactics to prevail. Autonomy involves an individual having a sense of his or her own individuality, aptitude to act independently, and capability to apply some control over the environment. According to Bernard (1995), sense of purpose consists of having goals, educational ambitions, and confidence in a positive future.

Risk Factors

Jens and Gordon (1991) suggest that the concept of risk has long been common in the medical field; yet, in the behavioral sciences, acceptance of the concept only began to emerge in the 1970s. In the United States, over the past three decades, concerning indicators (e.g., poverty, rates of divorce, teenage pregnancy) have occurred for child development (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998) triggering much attention to the status of children concerning behavior, physical and mental health, and school success.

On the path to adulthood, children and youth are faced with numerous risk factors (Brooks, 2006). Moreover, risk factors do not represent a magical box to simply categorize and file children away for safe storage; they are changing probability statements; the prospect of a gamble whose levels of risk are contingent on time and place (Werner, 1986). Variance is
expected when examining the predictive validity of early risk indicators in terms of (a) the time of assessments, (b) which developmental systems are assessed, and (c) individual differences in the reactions of children to the shifting situation of their caregiving environments.

**Biological Factors**

Primary among biological factors are low birth weight and congenital defects (Rak & Patterson, 1996). It is more probable that both will occur when low-income mothers fail to attain appropriate nutrition and medical care throughout pregnancy. Furthermore, children born to drug-addicted mothers may have serious physical and emotional problems at birth that arise from the environment.

**Environmental Factors**

Although children are born healthy, they may become at-risk due to (a) poverty, (b) family conflict, and (c) education level of the parents (Brooks, 2006; Luthar, 1991; Masten, 2011; Rak & Patterson, 1996). Moreover, negative life experiences (e.g., abuse, neglect, violence) are predictors of poor life outcomes. It is also predicted that children and youth will have poor life outcomes due to minority status (Luthar, 1991; Masten, 2011) and racial discrimination (Brooks, 2006). For instance, youth of African and Hispanic descent are frequently disproportionately disadvantaged as a result of living in extremely troubled neighborhoods with decreased availability to high-quality schools, community services, social supports, and employment opportunities.

Often, risks for common or specific difficulties in development co-occur (Masten, 2001). Accumulation of risks in a single instance or over a span of time is fundamentally associated
with poor outcomes (Brooks, 2006; Masten, 2001) including emotional distress, juvenile crime, mental health disorders, teenage pregnancy (Resnick, 2000), violent behavior (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Resnick, 2000), substance use (Brooks, 2006; Resnick, 2000), poor academic achievement, and school dropout (Brooks, 2006). The magnitude of problems, such as those listed above, must serve as an impetus for creating solutions that encourage positive development in children and youth. Risk characteristically infers the possibility for negative outcomes (Rak & Patterson, 1996); fortunately, evidence in the seminal works of the 1970s on child and youth resilience suggests that negative outcomes may be avoided (Resnick, 2000).

Protective Factors

According to Rutter (1979), “. . . many children do not succumb to deprivation, and it is important that we determine why this is so and what it is that protects them from hazards they face” (p. 70). Garmezy et al. (1984) and Rutter (1986) emphasized the importance of understanding the influence of life experiences on children. Moreover, understanding why life experiences provoke an array of responses in different individuals is critical.

Resilience is promoted by protective factors yet is also inhibited by risk factors (Alvord & Grados, 2005; Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Martinez-Torteya, Bogat, von Eye, & Levendosky, 2009; Masten et al., 1991; Rak & Patterson, 1996; Walsh, 2003). Protective factors change reactions to adverse events so that possible negative outcomes can be circumvented. Alternatively, risk factors increase the likelihood of poor outcomes. Protective and risk factors are not motionless elements; they are modified in relation to situations creating different outcomes (Walsh, 2003). When protective factors are reinforced at all
interactive levels of the socio-ecological model (i.e., individual, family, and community), resilience is enhanced (Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009).

**Individual Characteristics**

Perspectives regarding essential developmental personality factors that differentiate resilient children from those who are overcome by risk factors have been found through a number of longitudinal studies (e.g., Garmezy et al., 1984, Murphy & Moriatry, 1976; Rutter, 1985, 1986; Werner, 1984, 2000; Werner & Smith, 1982). According to Murphy and Moriatry (1976), resilient preschool children had a distinct autonomy and a strong social orientation. Werner (1984) determined resilient children have temperamental features that prompt positive reactions from family members and strangers. Other characteristics include (a) a close connection with a caregiver throughout the first year of life, (b) sociability in conjunction with a strong feeling of independence, (c) an optimistic opinion of his or her life experiences even amid distress, and (d) direct involvement in the act of required helpfulness (Werner, 1984). Additionally, internal motivation (Masten, 2001), coping skills, temperament, connections and attachments (Alvord & Grados, 2005), health, intelligence of a child, and gender (Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009) contribute to resilience.

**Self-Regulation**

An essential protective factor is self-regulation (Alvord & Grados, 2005; Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). An easy-going temperament and good self-regulation are protective factors identified by researchers in resilience (e.g., Buckner, Mezzacappa, & Beardslee, 2003; Eisenberg et al., 2003; Werner, 1993). In a longitudinal study,
Rydell, Berlin, and Bohlin (2003) found that low regulation of positive emotions and exuberance predicts low levels of pro-social behavior and externalizing challenging behavior. However, positive emotions and exuberance are linked to high levels of pro-social behavior.

Individuals who demonstrate confidence in their ability to overcome obstacles are seen as resilient (Werner, 1993). Werner and Smith (2001) found that resilient individuals utilize opportunities and resources around them. Adversities are seen as learning experiences. Those who are resilient have the ability to yield positive actions in their lives (e.g., participating in extracurricular activities, pursuing mentors, seeking educational opportunities). Teaching children to assist others is a helpful way of reassuring empathy, responsibility, and self-esteem (Werner, 1993).

Self-Concept

Researchers have found that self-concept plays a role in resilience (e.g., Beardslee & Podorefsky, 1988; Bolig & Weddle, 1988; Jens & Gordon, 1991; Marton, Golombek, Stein, & Korenblum, 1988; Rutter, 1986; Werner, 1984, 1986). According to Marton et al. (1988), positive self-esteem is associated with having a sense of self and significant attachment figures. Other researchers have found that stressful events serve to strengthen some at-risk children against harm and adversity rather than exacerbate their vulnerability (Bolig & Weddle, 1998; Jens & Gordon, 1991; Rutter, 1986; Werner, 1986). For some children, triumph over hardship magnifies a sense of self-concept rather than challenging coping abilities. Werner (1984) found that a fundamental component contributing to effective coping in the lives of resilient children is having confidence that things will work out.
**Family Conditions**

Based on information gleaned from a longitudinal study, Baumrind (1989, 1991) identified authoritative parenting style as being linked to ideal competence in children and adolescents. Further, he identified authoritative parents as being both responsive and demanding. Responsive parents provide a cognitively stimulating environment while also being supportive, warm, and loving. Responsive parents are not overbearing or controlling; however, they are demanding in the sense that they are firm, rational, and consistent. According to Eisenberg et al. (2003), children’s social competence and adjustment are associated with maternal expression of positive emotions. Other family protective factors include (a) family cohesion, (b) family structure, (c) supportive parent-child interactions, (d) intimate-partner relationships, (e) stimulating environments, (f) a stable and sufficient income, and (g) social support (Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009).

**Community Supports**

Role models outside the family can be possible safeguards for children at-risk (Beardslee & Podorefsky, 1988; Bolig & Weddle, 1988; Garmezy et al., 1984; Masten, 2001; Werner, 1984, 1986, 2000). Good neighbors, clergy, community center workers, teachers, school counselors, coaches, after-school program supervisors, and mental health workers are all potential role models outside the family.

According to Alvord and Grados (2005) and Benzies and Mychasiuk (2009), essential elements of an effective community include environments and social structures. Protective factors within communities include (a) safety in neighborhoods, (b) recreational facilities and programs, (c) applicable support services, (d) early prevention and intervention programs, (e)
religious and spiritual organizations, (f) accessibility to appropriate health services, and (g) economic opportunities for families.

*Other Factors*

Protective factors that effectively assist children to adapt and cope with hardships of life must be regarded in the framework of their individual cultures and developmental stages (Alvord & Grados, 2005). According to Grotberg (1995), faith functions as a strong protective factor in some cultures. Additionally, children’s abilities to use various protective factors are affected by their developmental and cognitive levels, as well as their internal and biological vulnerabilities. Benzies and Mychasiuk (2009) determined that resilience increases through children’s belief systems, training, and increased education.

*Models of Resilience*

Individual and environmental factors, as designated by models of resilience, enable the reduction or offsetting of negative effects of risk factors (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Garmezy et al., 1984; Rutter, 1985; Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994). Three models used to describe the influence of stress and personal attributes on the quality of adaptation were recommended by Garmezy et al. (1984): (a) compensatory model, (b) challenge model, and (c) protective factor model. Other researchers have defined additional types of protective factor models: (a) protective-stabilizing model, (b) protective-reactive model (Luthar et al., 2000), and (c) protective-protective model (Brook, Whiteman, Gordon, & Cohen, 1986, 1989).
Compensatory Model

According to Garmezy et al. (1984), exposure to risk is neutralized by a compensatory factor. The risk factor has no interaction; instead, the influence on the outcome is direct and independent (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994). For instance, youth are more likely to exhibit violent behavior when living in poverty than those not living in poverty. However, behavior being monitored by adults may help balance negative consequences of poverty (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Delinquency, psychopathology, or drug addiction is reduced through the direct effect of a compensating variable (Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994).

Challenge Model

When the extent of stress is not extreme, a stressor (i.e., risk) is viewed as a potential enhancer of competence in the challenge model (Garmezy et al., 1984). According to Zimmerman and Arunkumar (1994), insufficient stress is not adequately challenging, but potential maladaptive behavior can result when high levels of stress leave the individual helpless. However, competence is strengthened when moderate levels of stress provide the individual with a surmountable challenge. The challenge model, described by Yates, Egelang, and Sroufe (2003), is a constant developmental process where children, when exposed to adversity, discover how to mobilize resources. As youth effectively overcome low levels of risk, they are more equipped to confront increasing risk (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). With continuous exposure to hardship as youth mature and age, their ability to succeed regardless of risk increases. Longitudinal data are required for this type of model (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994).
Protective Factor Model

With respect to adaptation, in what is also known as the immunity-versus-vulnerability model, there is a conditional relationship between stress and personal attributes in the protective factor model (Garmezy et al., 1984). The impact of stress as a variable can be diminished or intensified by personal attributes. Specifically, protective factors can work together with risk factors to decrease the likelihood of a negative outcome. For example, the connection between poverty and violent behavior is diminished for youth with high levels of parental support (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

Protective-Stabilizing Model

According to Luthar et al. (2000), the effects of risk are neutralized with assistance from protective factors in the protective-stabilizing model. Consequently, increased levels of risk are associated with increased levels of a negative outcome. However, there is no connection between risk and outcome with the presence of protective factors. For example, youth without an adult mentor (protective factor) and poor parental support (risk factor) may display delinquent behaviors (outcome); however, youth may not exhibit delinquent behavior in the presence of a non-parental adult mentor (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

Protective-Reactive Model

The correlation between risk and outcome is not completely removed with the existence of the protective factor; however, the relationship is weakened (Luthar et al., 2000). In this model, the association between risk and outcome is stronger when the protective factor is absent. According to Fergus and Zimmerman (2005), it is probable that youth who engage in risky
sexual behavior may be abusing drugs and alcohol. However, exposure to sexual education in schools may decrease this relationship as opposed to youth who have not received the same treatment.

**Protective-Protective Model**

Brook and colleagues (1986, 1989) propose that in the protective-protective model, the effects of one protective factor can be increased by another protective factor in creating an outcome. For instance, according to Fergus and Zimmerman (2005), the positive effect of academic proficiency may be strengthened by parental support in producing additional positive academic outcomes, above that for either factor alone. However, this model may not be thought to be a resilience-based model due to the presence of a risk being a requirement for resilience.

**Origins of Resilience**

Research on resilience began to emerge around 1970 in the behavioral sciences; historically, however, the origins of resilience have deep roots in the medical field (Cicchetti, 2006; Cicchetti & Curtis, 2006; Masten, 2007, 2011; Masten & Obradovic, 2006). Pioneering scientists, according to Masten (2011), maintained that crucial characteristics of human function and development, essential for comprehending and supporting prevention of, resistance to, or improvement from psychopathology, had been overwhelmingly ignored. Beginning in the 1970s, four decades of research on resilience ensued as scientists seized the challenge of the phenomenon (Masten, 2007). Three waves of research on resilience in development have occurred. Scientists seeking to comprehend and prevent the development of psychopathology came from the first wave of research (Masten, 2011; Masten & Obradovic, 2006). These
researchers recognized the significance of children who appeared to progress well under risky circumstances (Masten & Obradovic, 2006). The focus of the second wave of resilience research involved identifying the processes and regulatory systems, which accounted for protective factors linked with resilience. The third wave resulted from the necessity of concentrating on encouraging resilience through prevention, intervention, and policy for the well-being of children growing up with hardships.

According to Masten (2007), the science of resilience was shaped in large part by pioneering scientists and their students’ visions, collaborations, and influences embarking on a sustained task to understand, prevent, and treat mental health challenges as well as the significance of considerable threats to development (e.g., premature birth, trauma). Some of the pioneering scientists include (a) Manfred Bleuler (1984), (b) Lois Murphy (1962), (c) Irving Gottesman (1974), (d) Michael Rutter (1976, 1979), (e) Norman Garmezy (Garmezy et al., 1984), and (f) Emmy Werner (1971). These scientists acknowledged the implication of outcomes characterized by unexpectedly positive adjustment or recovery after adversity in the lives of those studied. The contributions of the aforementioned researchers provide unique insight into hot spots for integrating research across levels of analysis and also avoidable pitfalls for the fourth wave of resilience research (Masten & Obradovic, 2006).

Recent Advances

To develop explanatory models, theoretical treatments of resilience have focused almost completely on psychosocial levels of analysis (Curtis & Cicchetti, 2003). The emerging research in the area of resilience encompasses multiple areas (Alvord & Grados, 2005). Children from a variety of cultures have been included in some investigations. For example, Hart, Hofmann,
Edelstein, and Keller (1997) sought to replicate findings in a different culture, and Grotberg (1995) initiated an international resilience project; other studies (e.g., Curtis & Cicchetti, 2003; Rutter, 2002) have examined the impact of biological processes.

A follow-up Kauai study conducted by Werner and Smith (2001) discovered that individuals who had difficulties during adolescence were able to dramatically change the course of their lives by making practical choices and taking advantage of opportunities. For instance, upon reaching adulthood, some participants (a) continued their education, (b) enlisted in the military, (c) gained new skills, (d) moved to avoid at risk relationships with peers, and (e) selected healthy life partners.

The study of resilience in development, according to Masten (2001), has emphasized numerous negative theories and deficit-focused models regarding children growing up under hardship. Masten maintains that resilience is comprised of ordinary rather than extraordinary processes, suggesting an optimistic viewpoint on adaptation and human development. Specifically, everyone possesses mechanisms necessary for positive results. She believes that even if challenged, a child should develop appropriately if systems are complete. However, when compromised, either before or after being challenged, a child’s fundamental adaptational systems increase the danger of developmental difficulties. Furthermore, other studies of resilience (e.g., Garmezy et al., 1984; Rutter, 1979, 1986) have recognized protective factors in the histories of those who seem to have been shielded from the negative influence of the identified risks (Rak & Patterson, 1996).

With the intention of establishing factors contributing to individual resilience, longitudinal studies have analyzed the outcomes of those with learning disabilities and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD; Gerber, Ginsburg, & Reiff, 1992; Spekman, Goldberg, &
Herman, 1992; Werner & Smith, 2001). Research has shown that resilient youth with learning disabilities (a) seek personal control over their lives, (b) set goals, (c) display a powerful determination to thrive, (d) are prepared to pursue and receive support, and (e) exhibit extraordinary levels of persistence. A noteworthy difference between resilient and non-resilient students, according to Miller (2002), is individuals who are resilient display the capacity to recognize successful experiences, have the ability to identify their strengths, and demonstrate strong self-determination to succeed. Hechtman (1991) conducted a long-term prospective follow-up of young adults diagnosed with ADHD as children and discovered that the presence of an important person who believes in them (e.g., parent, teacher) is most significant. According to Murray (2003), efforts are being implemented to come to a better understanding of risk and resilience in high incidence disability categories (e.g., Margalit, 2004; Modesto-Lowe, Yelunina, & Hanjan, 2011; Wilmshurst, Peele, & Wilmshurst, 2011).

Washington (2008) conducted semi-structured interviews exploring the lives of five female adolescents. Specifically, participants included five ninth grade students who had been expelled from an urban school district and were enrolled in an alternative school. Washington determined that positive interactions with peers, current and/or past relationships with teachers, and other adults strengthened their coping efforts and allowed them to maintain a general positive opinion of school, regardless of their academic failures and being involved in an alternative school. Washington believes that positive academic and social environments can potentially diminish the risk of school failure and adversarial contact with the law.

In a five-year qualitative study, Todis, Bullis, Waintrup, Schultz, and D’Ambrosio (2001) examined resilience among formerly incarcerated adolescents. Correctional programs included caring adults providing structured schedules, expectations, and consequences allowing
respondents to experience success by obtaining a degree, job training, addiction management, and gaining coping skills and problem-solving abilities. Findings revealed that about half of the participants were successful (e.g., employed, going to school) while the others were less stable and at-risk of being rearrested. The researchers recommended restructuring post-correction transition services for incarcerated youth. They also suggested improving school-based supports.

Issues When Researching Resilience

According to Fergus and Zimmerman (2005), there are multiple concerns associated with research in resilience that trigger misunderstanding within the field and provoke criticism of resilience theory. Development of the field of resilience has been slowed due to differing definitions of resilience and central terminology (Luthar et al., 2000). It is thought by some researchers that resilience is a trait; however, resilience is not a quality of an adolescent that is present in every situation (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Conversely, risk and protective factors, outcome, situation, and population define resilience. In order to elevate the field, Luthar et al. (2000) recommend developing a common language. When discussing the process of competence in spite of adversity, Luthar and colleagues recommend using the term resilience as opposed to resiliency.

Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) cite additional problems with the theory of resilience. For example, to be considered resilient, the presence of a risk factor is required. Additionally, the obstacles youth face range from severe, short-term stressors to continuing long-term stressors, or to shocking traumatic events. Identical adversarial events or conditions in adolescents result in varied experiences. Moreover, to a certain degree, resilience research is limited in that it typically includes a single risk or protective factor; yet, most youth are affected
by numerous risks and may have access to numerous resources. Finally, Fergus and Zimmerman
believe investigating explanations for how resources work together with exposure to risk in
producing specific outcomes is underrepresented.

Resilience may be situational or content specific - meaning, an adolescent faced with
one type of risk may be considered resilient, yet succumb to a different type of risk (Fergus &
Zimmerman, 2005). It has been found that various assets may be associated with combinations
of risk and outcome (Crosnoe, Erickson, & Dornbusch, 2002; Gutman, Sameroff, & Eccles,
2002) making it difficult when trying to recognize universal protective factors. Additionally,
there has been concern that strength lists may be interpreted to function in the same manner for
all groups, situations, and outcomes (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

Cicchetti and Rogosh (2002) determined that the process of resilience might change for
differing groups of adolescents. For youth, resilience may vary contingent upon (a) location
(i.e., urban, suburban, and rural), (b) socioeconomic status, (c) gender, (d) immigration status
(i.e., immigrant or nonimmigrant), (e) early and late adolescence (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005),
or (f) parental control (e.g., democratic decision-making; Gutman et al., 2002; Sameroff,
Gutman, & Peck, 2003). Since the process of resilience is unique across various populations, it
is imperative that researchers and practitioners be cautious when attempting to make
comparisons of different groups of adolescents they may study (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

Theoretical Framework

Risk and resilience should be perceived through the prism of multiple, iterative
influencing interactions with individuals, families, and more pervasive social environments
(Walsh, 2003). The interaction of risk factors influences whether or not normal developmental
processes result (Brooks, 2006; Richardson, 2008; Werner, 1986). Consequently, resilience has been recognized as an ecological phenomenon, because having the capability to overcome adversity is not believed to occur exclusively within a person (Richardson, 2008). Moreover, risk factors and resilience do not ensue in isolation; rather, they continually interact.

An ecological viewpoint provides a framework for addressing problems with students systemically and necessitates an examination of the individual within the context of microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems of a situation in order to comprehend the course by which the student is influenced by any one system (Edwards, Mumford, Shillingford, & Serra-Roldan, 2007). The ecology of human development framework theorized by Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1977, 1979) has been utilized to explain why some individuals may be more resilient that others (Brooks, 2006; Edwards et al., 2007; Richardson, 2008; Walsh, 2003).

Observed as a whole, the ecological environment should be regarded as an interrelated structure, each encapsulated within the next (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1977, 1979). A microsystem is the multifaceted nature of relations between the individual and his or her immediate environment (e.g., family, school, peers). Mesosystems include the interrelations between major settings encompassing the individual at a specific point in his or her life. An exosystem is an extension of the mesosystem and includes community environments and social networks. Macrosystems refer to predominant institutional arrangements of the culture or subculture (e.g., educational, legal, political) of which micro-, meso-, and exosystems are the concrete indicators. What priority individuals and those accountable for their care have in such macrosystems is of significant importance in deciding how people interact with one another in various situations.
Bronfenbrenner (1976) maintains that, “if you wish to understand the relation between
the learner and some aspect of the environment, try to budge one and see what happens to the
other” (p. 6). All systems are represented as concentric circles, concurrently applying pressure
on youth as they develop (Richardson, 2008). Transactions occur between children, adults, and
systems creating behavioral, health, and developmental patterns that either enable or impede
normal developmental patterns. With a focus on resilience, interferences to developmentally
delicate interactions generate risk that necessitates a need for protective factors to offset them.
From Bronfenbrenner’s point of view, risk and resilience focuses more on introducing protective
factors into high-risk ecologies, as opposed to child-based problems.

Conclusion

Resilience research can possibly influence the development of effective interventions for
diverse populations (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2011). Effective practices must emphasize the
development of assets and resources for individuals exposed to risk as opposed to focusing on
risk amelioration (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). Experiences involving positive teacher influences
and opportunities to succeed, academic or otherwise, have been positively associated with
resilience (Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer, 2003). Consequently, it is essential
that alternative education settings implement practices that ensure positive outcomes for youth
who have experienced these settings. More information must be gathered in the area of
alternative education settings and resilience in youth. Much can be gleaned researching adults,
who as adolescents were a part of alternative programs, to determine factors of resilience.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter delineates the methodology that was used in this study. To begin, the purpose of the study is reviewed. The research questions are presented. Additionally, data acquisition, selection of participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis are discussed.

Purpose of the Study

Existing research has independently examined resilience in children and youth (e.g., Masten, 2001; Werner, 1984) and alternative education settings (e.g., Simonsen, Britton, & Young, 2010; Tobin & Sprague, 2000). There is, however, a gap in research examining resilience factors in individuals who have been placed in alternative education settings. The purpose of this study was to explore factors of resilience in individuals who graduated from alternative education settings. The objectives were to identify the elements, specific to alternative education settings, that contributed to resilience in young adulthood and to understand in what ways alternative education placements have contributed to the participants’ current life status.

Research Questions

In order to examine the area of interest, two research questions guided the current study:

1. What elements, specific to alternative education settings, have contributed to resilience in young adulthood as determined by interviews with former students?

2. In what ways have alternative education placements contributed to the participants’ current life status as determined by interviews with former students?
Data Acquisition

Two types of data acquisition were used for the current study: the Resilience Scale (Wagnild & Young, 1993) and semi-structured interviews. Information about the Resilience Scale and the interviews are presented.

Resilience Scale

Wagnild and Young’s (1993) Resilience Scale was used to measure participants’ perception of their resilience. The initial scale resulted from a qualitative study of 24 older women who successfully adapted following a major life event. From this research, five critical characteristics of resilience were identified (i.e., self-reliance, purposeful life, equanimity, perseverance, and existential aloneness) and were further defined and described through a comprehensive review of the literature on resilience (Wagnild & Young, 1990). The initial Resilience Scale contained 50-items, each a verbatim statement from the initial study of women. After preliminary analysis, the scale was condensed to 25-items, demonstrating five characteristics of resilience and was originally available and pretested in 1988.

The Resilience Scale focuses on positive psychological assets rather than deficits, can be self-administered, and is readable at a 6th grade level. The scale is a 25-item, 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1, disagree, to 7, agree (Wagnild & Young, 1993). Potential scores may range from 25 to 175 with higher scores representing higher levels of resilience. Specifically, scores greater than 145 indicate moderately high and high levels of resilience, scores between 125 and 145 indicate moderately low to moderate levels of resilience, and scores 120 and below indicate low levels of resilience (Wagnild, 2009).
Internal consistency has been consistently high with a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient ranging from .85 to .94 (Wagnild & Young, 2009). The reliability and validity of the instrument have been examined on adolescent populations (e.g., Hunter & Chandler, 1999; Rew, Taylor-Seehafer, Thomas, & Yockey, 2001), adult populations (e.g., Broyles, 2005; Nygren et al., 2005), males (e.g., Nygren et al., 2005) and females (e.g., Broyles, 2005; Humphreys, 2003; Nygren et al., 2005) across diverse levels of socioeconomic statuses and diverse populations (e.g., Humphreys, 2003; Hunter & Chandler, 1999; Rew et al., 2003).

Concurrent validity has been supported by high correlations on the Resilience Scale with well-established valid measures of constructs associated with resilience and outcomes of resilience (i.e., life satisfaction, morale, depression, and physical health; Wagnild & Young, 1993). The Resilience Scale has been found to be a reliable and valid tool utilized with a wide range of ages and ethnic groups (Ahern, Kiehl, Sole, & Byers, 2006; Wagnild, 2009).

**Interview**

The current interpretive and descriptive qualitative study utilized in-depth narratives to investigate participants’ knowledge, values, and thoughts regarding their experiences in alternative education (Cohen & Manion, 1989). Typically, data in qualitative studies involve interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002) because they allow for purposeful conversations for evaluating an individual in order to obtain data (Cohen & Manion, 1989). A predetermined semi-structured approach was consistently utilized for all interviews (Patton, 1990), allowing the researcher to explore participants’ interpretations of their experience (Hatch, 2002). As a measure of reliability, interview procedures were described prior to interviews and participants were asked the same questions.
Selection of Participants

Upon approval from the University of North Texas institutional review board (IRB) to conduct the study, contact was made with administrators of two alternative education programs located in the Northeastern part of the United States. Both have been recognized as being model programs and have received numerous accolades for their work with students with EBD, their families, and the community.

Administrators at the alternative education programs provided the researcher with contact information regarding potential participants. Participants were selected based on four criteria: (a) diagnosed with EBD; (b) graduated from an alternative education setting; (c) graduated from high school or obtained a certificate of high school equivalency (GED); and (d) currently employed, in the military, or pursuing post-secondary education (e.g., vocational school, university). All participants were required to be between the ages of 18 and 23. The researcher followed procedures designated by both alternative education programs in order to obtain names of potential participants for this study.

Contact was made with potential participants at which time they were informed of the purpose of the study and the expectations from the participants. Upon agreement to participate, individuals were given the choice to complete the Resilience Scale online or have a paper copy mailed to them. In addition, individuals were asked from where they would like a $10 gift card (e.g., Wal-Mart, McDonalds, Chipotle) for completing the survey (Head, 2009). Each participant signed a consent form (see Appendices A and B) prior to completing the Resilience Scale. Individuals were reminded that their participation was 100% voluntary and confidential. Additionally, they were informed of their right to remove themselves from the study at any point. Pseudonyms have been used for anonymity purposes.
Participants

Initially, the researcher was given contact information for 15 individuals ($n = 13$ males and $n = 2$ female). Of those, 13 individuals ($n = 11$ males and $n = 1$ female) completed the Resilience Scale; however, two participants ($n = 1$ male and $n = 1$ female) were excluded, as they did not fully meet the original criteria set. Fifty-five percent ($n = 6$) of participants identified themselves as Caucasian, 27% ($n = 3$) as Hispanic, and 18% ($n = 2$) as African American. After each participant ($N = 11$) completed the Resilience Scale, scores were examined and it was determined that five individuals (all male) qualified for follow-up telephone interviews.

Data Collection Procedures

In the paragraphs that follow, specific data collection procedures are delineated for the Resilience Scale and interviews.

Resilience Scale Procedures

Participants completed demographic information and the Resilience Scale online or via printed mail-in forms. Upon completion of the Resilience Scale, scores were calculated by adding the completed values for all 25 questions resulting in a comprehensive total score. Each individual who scored 140 points and above were invited to engage in a follow-up telephone interview.

Interview Procedures

Interviews were scheduled via telephone. Prior to beginning the interview, the researcher gave some background information and began a conversation to ensure the interviewee was
comfortable. Additionally, participants were asked if they had questions and if recording was acceptable.

Although a specific questioning route (see Appendix D), it was important to listen to the participant so additional relevant questions could be posed if further clarification was needed. Furthermore, follow-up questions were used to clarify meaning and encourage elaboration. Throughout the interview, notes were taken and any irregularities were recorded (e.g., silent moments, interruptions). The interviewees were asked for clarification throughout the interview. When the interviews concluded, a recap of the interview was shared with the interviewee. Participants were asked if there were questions or if they wanted to clarify any previous comments (Haper & Cole, 2012). An additional gift card ($25) was given to each participant for his time following the telephone interview.

Immediately following the interview, the researcher reviewed notes and added details as needed. Recordings were transcribed verbatim. The researcher sent a copy of transcripts to each participant to review, at which time the interviewees were able to verify information presented, make corrections, volunteer additional information, and summarize as a member check procedure (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data Analysis Procedures

Semi-structured interviews were the main source of data used for this study. Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), allowing for “continuous and simultaneous collection and processing of data” (p. 335). Qualitative researchers often utilize constant comparison to analyze data (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011), and
a consistent theory inherently develops as categories evolve through constant comparison of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Interview data were coded using NVivo 10 software as a tool to organize data, allowing relationships to be discovered. Coding leads to convergence, in turn, establishing themes and relationships (Guba, 1978). In the first step of the analysis process, inter-rater reliability was established in code and theme analysis; a method utilized to strengthen the interpretation of codes and themes associated with a study and remove bias (Marques & McCall, 2005). Two outside raters, graduate students with experience working with students with EBD in alternative education settings, coded all interview transcripts.

The graduate students and I read transcripts and coded data line-by-line. Sections of data were compared with one another within each interview transcript. Themes and concepts were then compared across all interviews, categorized based on the research questions, and reported in narrative form.

Trustworthiness of Data

When judging the trustworthiness of qualitative data, Guba (1981) proposed using “counterpart criteria” to quantify terms of reliability, internal validity, and external validity. Specifically, (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability are four constructs utilized by qualitative methodologies. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Skrtic (1985) encouraged the process of member checking as a crucial method to judge a study’s overall credibility - - the equivalent to internal validity in naturalistic inquiry. Member checks are an ongoing process wherein all participants will be given access to and approval of their initial transcripts, final finding, and interpretations of data throughout the duration of the study to
correct errors and challenge what are perceived to be wrong interpretations. To address transferability, similar to external validity, thick descriptions of the process, data, and findings will provide the researcher a “substantial basis for similarity judgments” (p. 201). The dissertation committee guided the research study, in turn, determining dependability and confirmability. Dependability is assessed by a systematic examination of the research process employed in the study to make certain data were obtained, managed, and stored in compliance with adequate research practices. Confirmability of findings validates the case report as a reflection of data collected.

Researcher’s role: Reflexivity within qualitative research is the act of critically reflecting on oneself as the researcher, the “human as instrument,” regarding his or her assumptions, biases, and relationship to the study and how this may affect the investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). I recognize that my own experiences and knowledge have an influence on how data were interpreted.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of the current interpretive and descriptive qualitative study was to explore factors of resilience in individuals who graduated from alternative education settings. The study sought to identify elements, specific to alternative education settings, that contributed to resilience in young adulthood and to further our understanding of how alternative education placements have contributed to the participants’ current life status. First, resilience scores and demographic information of the 11 qualified participants are presented in Table 1. Interview data from five individuals who met specific criteria for an interview will then be presented. Information generated in this study was analyzed using the constant comparative method.

Table 1

*Demographic Information and Resilience Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Resilience Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steven</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>148*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>142*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooper</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>144*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>152*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>140*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>104</td>
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<td>Scott</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>73</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Participants met criteria for an interview.
First, it is necessary to highlight answers to interview questions asked involving participants’ experiences prior to entering the alternative education program. Specifically, this section will discuss participants’ perspectives of their overall regular school experience including their views of (a) academics, (b) teachers, (c) discipline, (d) peers, and (e) what led them to their alternative education placement. Next, interview questions posed about participants’ experiences at their alternative education programs are delineated including participants’ perspectives about (a) academics, (b) teachers, (c) discipline, (d) peers, and (e) their perceptions as to the kind of person they are since graduating. Participants also discussed the obstacles they face as well as the goals they have for themselves. To conclude, participants gave their definition of success and resilience and shared what they believe school personnel can do to help students with EBD be successful.

Regular School Experiences

Participants were asked to describe their regular school experience. Specifically, participants gave their perspectives regarding academics, teachers, discipline, and peers. The participants’ views of their overall experience were not positive. This was evident within the codes “it was pretty much a nightmare,” “it sucked,” and “didn’t have good support” and through the descriptions of their experiences under each specific category.

Academics

The category of academics brought on mixed feelings for participants. Jordan did not believe that the schoolwork was hard. Frustration for Cooper came from having to stick to grade-level standards rather than his actual ability. John said, “They didn’t take the time to teach
me. I wasn’t really that good on reading and writing.” Steven felt he did not learn anything academically because “no one would show me how to do something”.

**Teachers**

In order to preserve participants’ experiences and feelings, the category of teachers was broken into two codes: positive and negative experiences. Overall, individuals had more negative feelings than positive ones when describing their teachers. Cooper explained that his kindergarten teacher told his mother that she could handle him, but at the end of the first day, she called for a conference. Jordan felt his teachers “didn’t want to be there or something.” Four of the participants believed their teachers did not care. For example, “… the teachers, they didn’t care about anything, like all they cared about was the money and stuff. Let’s just put it this way, they’ll give you a test for something you didn’t learn.” Michael said, “… some regular school teachers didn’t care whether you were passing or not. As long as you were doing your work; that’s all they really cared about.” John explained, “The thing that really made no sense was that the teachers there … even if you didn’t know it, they would just tell you to do it. They acted like they just didn’t care.” Steven did not believe his teachers were there to help him learn. Although Steven felt like he was picked on by the teachers, he also believed the teachers “picked on all the students.”

John described a situation where the behavior specialist “put his hands on me. He grabbed me by my shirt and lifted me up and put me against the wall.” John went on to explain an experience with a teacher when he was in detention:

There was this kid who was trying to pick a fight with me, and he [the teacher] was saying that he was going to let me out at the same time that the kid was going to leave. So I got mad about that and just left detention.
John also felt his homeroom teacher “picked on” him. To him, it seemed she would assume it was always him doing something wrong. On the other hand, John liked his first elementary school experience because there was one teacher that would let him go on the computer to calm down when he got upset. “Whenever I was mad or upset, I would go to her.”

Michael talked about his third grade teacher in a positive way. He thought she “was really nice” and would make certain he was doing well at the alternative school. She would check up on him to see if there were problems, and when he graduated from his alternative education program, she was “really happy for me, she congratulated me, and gave me a card.”

**Discipline**

The code word used under the discipline category was “punitive.” Jordan and Cooper talked about security guards and police officers being present at their school. From John’s perspective, he felt the school was “meant for kids to fight,” and he did not believe that the teachers would do anything to stop it. “After it’s [fighting] done, the teachers come in and send you to the principal’s office or whatever and discipline you like that.” Steven said he would spend most of the day in the office and “the office wouldn’t do anything.” All of the participants talked about getting suspended for their behavior (e.g., fighting, excessive talking). Michael stated that his school had in-school suspensions, which in his mind, “doesn’t help anyone.” He went on the explain:

> It really didn’t do nobody any good because all you’re doing is getting in a different classroom for the whole day. It doesn’t teach nobody nothing. I really don’t see the point in having all that stuff, but that was them, and I really couldn’t say nothing about it.

**Peers**

Generally speaking, the participants did not get along well with their peers. Steven
explained, “Kids at my other school [regular school] were preppy and trying to be hard-asses.” Cooper said that he did not get along with his peers. However, John talked about having a best friend who “looked out” for him. Michael said that previously he was involved with people that he “probably knew I shouldn’t have been.”

Jordan and Michael described experiences where they felt “bullied.” For example, Jordan said, “Ever since I started school, I’ve been picked on. I’ve been bullied, I’ve been hurt, like mentally, psychologically, emotionally, and sometimes even physically.” He went on to explain that every day “there would be something waiting for me when I would go into school.” Jordan felt he had no friends except for one person and “he sometimes picked on me as well. It made me wonder, why is he even hanging around me?”

Michael said during a lot of his regular school years he was “picked on, bullied all the time.” He went on to explain:

A lot of people did not like me because of my reputation because I was the type of guy who had the reputation of you know, just don’t bother me, and I won’t bother you. You know, I’m just the type of person that’s going to mind my own business, and I wasn’t a fighter. A lot of people like to pick on people that is not a fighter because I was always the quiet type. Some people still don’t learn today that the quiet type can be the worse ones you want to mess with so some people still did not learn that so they had to learn the hard way. I’m not saying that, … I made them learn the hard way, but eventually they did. What’s ironic is that one day, when I made some of them learn the hard way, that’s what got me out of the public school setting … they thought I was a dangerous student in the school because I started defending myself.

**Reasoning for Alternative Education Placement**

The main reason behind three of the participants being placed in an alternative education program was fighting. John explained, “Well, back in those days, I wasn’t really that good of a person. I would act out a lot. I got suspended, expelled because of throwing a desk.” After John was expelled he had a private teacher, but was then sent to his alternative education placement.
based on the court system’s recommendation. Michael was also expelled for “defending” himself. He had home instruction until he was asked if he wanted to go back to his regular school or attend the alternative education program. He had been at the same alternative program in elementary school and felt it would be best to go back to the alternative school. He explained, “I thought it was going to be much easier for me. I think I thought it was much safer for me to go back to my alternative school.”

On the other hand, two participants were less physical and were placed in an alternative program for other reasons. Jordan explained that he did not really have any behavioral problems. “I have emotional problems: mental, psychological, neurological.” He went on to say that he had an adult at his regular school that defended him. “She fought for me to get me out of that school because they weren’t helping me academically or emotionally.” After visiting three different schools, Jordan and his mom decided that the alternative school he went to was the best choice for him. Cooper would “act out” and was “disruptive.” He felt his regular school “wanted me gone” and kept trying to push him out. His medical doctor, who worked at the alternative school part-time, suggested an alternative education placement. After his mother visited the school she “saw the light,” and he changed schools.

Alternative Education Experiences

Similar to questions regarding regular education experiences, participants were asked to describe their alternative school experiences. Specifically, participants gave their perspectives regarding academics, teachers, discipline, and peers. Overall, all of the participants had positive experiences at their alternative school. However, Michael did note that the school was full of “kids who had criminal records … you know, too many kids who didn’t really know what they
want with themself.” On the other hand, he said he missed his school and his teachers. Also, four of the participants talked about liking the small student-to-teacher ratio and found it to be helpful. For example Steven said, “The program was one-on-one; if you needed help, they would come over and help you with it.”

**Academics**

Cooper liked that his school grouped by ability rather than grade because he felt his needs were better met. “Making accommodations” was a code found under the category of academics. Cooper felt as though his teachers went “to extreme lengths just to provide” instruction. Jordan was diagnosed with dyscalculia while at the alternative school. “They really helped me with my math … budgeting really stuck with me.” John explained that he did not want to go to college so the school “set up the curriculum that was needed outside of school. We worked on balancing checkbooks, taxes, and reading.” Steven’s program helped him get his high school diploma by “actually teaching” him.

**Teachers**

All of the participants had positive words to say about their teachers. This section was coded based on teacher attributes such as “cared,” “kind, helpful, understanding, and “passionate and understanding.” Michael explained, “They actually did care. They wanted kids to get out of there and go back to regular school … do something better.” All of the participants felt as though their teachers helped them a lot. Specifically, Michael said that his teachers helped him with his writing and they “helped academically” on things he did not like to do. According to Steven, “The teachers would actually stand there and discuss something with you. They would
actually show you.” He went on to say that they gave him “motivation to do it.” Jordan said, “They wanted to be there, they wanted to help us, and they wanted to help me graduate. John explained:

My teachers were nice, they actually taught me. They took the time to explain how to do things. Because of my regular school, I wasn’t really good on reading and writing … they took the time and taught me through that. My alternative school’s teachers were kinder. They were helpful when teaching the students. They understood the students, and they always never allowed situations to escalate.

Another code that was found under the teacher category was “they were hard on me.” Michael explained that he acted like he did not want to do well even though he really did. He felt like his teachers were “hard on him” because they knew he was “going to make it” so he decided to “put more effort into it.” Similarly, Steven said, “They aren’t going to take any shit from me so I decided to work then.”

Discipline

Discipline at the alternative school was positively based as evidenced by the codes in this category such as, “point system,” “earning privileges,” “step system,” and “positive reinforcement.” Jordan explained the point system, which was based on specific standards, as, “you collect enough points and you can go to the school store and you can get stuff there.” He also described a fair that happened at the end of the year where “you save up enough points that you convert into tickets so you can go to the rides and stuff.” Steven talked about a “special point system” that if you were doing well, “they would take you out of school on a special day or let you go out to lunch.” Cooper talked about a “step system” where each day you earned points based on specific expectations: “be there and be ready, be responsible, be respectful, hands and feet to yourself/personal space, and follow directions.” He went on to say they created another
one just for him, “quietly raised hand. If you earn enough points in a specific number of days in a row then you move to the next step.” Each step offered extra privileges. Michael talked about privileges that could be earned such as “field trips” and “go outside across the street to the park.” He went on to explain that privileges could be taken away “if you weren’t doing what you were supposed to be doing.” Michael then explained, “It was the same thing like in public school; it was just a different way of putting it.”

“Behavior management strategies” was another code used. Cooper talked about “debriefing or problem solving” where a teacher would take the time to talk about a situation that had occurred. John explained that he was given strategies to use when he got upset such as “breathing techniques,” “counting to 10,” or “listening to music to relax and focus.” Teachers and counselors would also help him “take time to see what would happen if things continued and see what could have been done to prevent the situation, or what could have been done differently.” John shared that he “loved to talk about what was bothering me.” He explained that someone listening to what was upsetting him helped him calm down. He was also given the opportunity to take a break or walk around. Similarly, Steven would “go outside and get some fresh air, cool out, walk around a little bit.”

Peers

Steven believed his peers at the alternative school “cared about their school. They were there for an education.” Jordan, who was “bullied” at his regular school, liked his peers at the alternative school because people accepted him there. Michael said at the alternative school he learned to open up more to his peers. Previously, Cooper did not get along with people very well; however, he made three friends while at the alternative school. He explained, “I would
keep to myself and not allow anyone in. People wouldn’t even, as result, bother trying to open me up; they made a step where I didn’t. I relaxed and opened up too.”

**Personal Characteristics**

Participants were asked about personal characteristics they believe they possess that enable them to deal with challenging situations as well as what can hinder their success. Cooper believes his “strengths are shadowed by their double function as a weakness.” He gave an example of how his sense of humor can help make friends, but it can also drive them away. Cooper also talked about his “enthusiasm” and his “ability to connect with teachers and professors.” Michael talked about his ability to “keep focus on positive things and to not let the negatives get to me;” however, he is really quiet and “will remain quiet until spoken to.” John does not believe he has any characteristics that hinder his success because he “looks towards what I want.” He went on to explain, “I look in terms of long term type of goals that I can actually achieve.” He also believes he is able to get along with everybody. He explained that “being a good person to them” helps him out. Jordan said, “I suffer from depression and anxiety, but I work hard.” He continued to explain that he does not give up even if something gets hard. “I feel close to giving up, but I’m not; not till I kick the bucket.” When Steven wants to do something, he works at it until he gets his goal accomplished. However, he explained that his attitude is sometimes a problem.

**Personal Factors**

When participants were asked what personal factors contributed to their success, “parents” was coded. For example, Michael said, “I learned a lot from my parents even though
they are still kind of hard on me. Steven explained, “My family was really supportive.” He went on to say that “they’ve helped” and “stuck by my side.” Cooper is appreciative of his mother and what she did for him. Jordan feels as though his parents helped him because “they’ve always been on my case.” He also believes “friends and God” have helped him with his success. John explained that he made a choice to “not end up like my brother.” He went on to say that his brother did not graduate from high school, and if he continued acting like he was he would end up “not graduating or being in jail or something like that.” After John “decided to change,” he ended up doing very well in school. He explained, “I was always really smart, I just really hated school.”

Participants were asked how the alternative school helped or hindered their success. Each participant discussed how his alternative school helped him. Jordan explained that his alternative school “helped him with his confidence.” Michael believes that he “learned how to be more social and learned how to help people more.” He also feels he learned how to “handles challenges now.” Steven explained that the alternative school helped him get his diploma. Cooper believes if he had not gone to his alternative school, he would “probably have just gone downhill in public school until they put me into a mental asylum.” He went on to say, “I’m afraid to ponder the thought. I would have been suspended or just given up and forgotten.”

Obstacles

Although the participants in this study are considered resilient, they are not without obstacles. Jordan, who suffers from dyscalculia, has not done math in over a “year.” He explained:

I’m actually going to take math in my next semester … but I’ve forgotten so much. If I’m not doing math constantly, I’m not going to remember it. It isn’t because I’m not
interested in it; my brain can’t just keep those in there.

Cooper said, “I’m not yet socialized, but I definitely am compared to before.” He went on to say that he is “erratic and eccentric” and he says “stupid things for the sole purpose of being blatantly ridiculous.” Sometimes it makes Cooper “insufferable.” Steven believes that sometimes his “attitude” can be an obstacle, but anytime a challenging situation occurs he will “just take a break from it; walk away from it and come back to it.” For Michael, “getting use to people that I never knew or have seen” is a challenge. Michael also said:

Sometimes, I still have my setbacks. I still have those days when I think I can’t handle this; I just have to stop when I know it’s time to stop … something I’ve learned is … don’t do it until you’re ready for it.

“Funding” is an obstacle for Jordan. He went on to say, “My family is getting poorer by the second.” Jordan also has Tourette’s Syndrome, which started when he was seven or eight. He explained:

Before my Tourette’s, I was playing guitar, and I was great … my parents were impressed and my teacher was impressed, but when my Tourette’s started, it burst out of nowhere, it got so bad that I couldn’t even hold a guitar in my hands, and that pretty much traumatized me up to this day that I can’t start something and stick with it.

John “still lives at home with his parents” and he believes that is an obstacle for him. He explained that his older brothers moved out, and he wanted to make sure his parents will “be all right before I leave.” John gets frustrated with his parents because “they would always compare me to my brothers … saying how good I’m doing, what I’ve done that my brothers have not done.” However, he “does not want to be compared to other people.” He’s afraid that his brothers will “resent him.” He said that he has “tried to explain that” to his parents, but it did not help. He continued to explain that he got into “a little trouble to see if they [his parents] can stop comparing me to my brothers.” However, he did not realize the extent of trouble he had gotten into. “It was almost a felon for taking packs of DVDs.”
Goals

“Continuing education” and “continue working” were phrases coded in the goals category. However, for John, his “first priority is to pay off the fines” from when he got in trouble. He would also like to get a car and move out on his own. John went to a “Vo-tech school” which was part of the alternative education program he went to and has a masonry certification. John has had two job opportunities; however, he broke his hand so he is unable to work until his hand heals. Steven is going to continue working as a tow truck driver, which is something he believes he was “born to do.” Steven explained that he “loves it” because he would “rather be helping people” than doing any other job.

Cooper is currently in college. He explained, “I’m planning to get my PhD and teach modern military history.” Although Michael is currently in college, he is thinking about getting an automotive technology certification and “turning that into a career.” However, the campus to get the automotive technology certification is several hours away. Jordan is also continuing his education at the community college in his city. His goal is to “go to a school that will help develop his art skills more.”

Success

Each participant gave his own definition of success. Participants’ definitions were each coded separately. For Cooper, success is “being what you want to be, what you need to be, and what you enjoy to your fullest dreams.” Jordan said, “Choosing something, sticking with it, and doing well in it.” Michael explained, “Success has so many definitions, but my definition of success is … do what you are supposed to do and do what is necessary.” Success for John is “knowing what you want and being able to get it.” Steven said, “Success means to get stuff done
that you want to get done and, like my job, I’ve wanted this job for awhile, and I stuck to it. I’ve been working here at the same company for three years.”

Resilience

Participants were also asked to give their own definition of resilience. Similar to success definitions, each resilience definition was coded separately. However, “just keep going” was a phrase that two of the participants used. Specifically, Jordan explained, “Even if you feel like there is no point to it, just keep going; even if you’re like me like you felt like the bullying is never going to stop.” He went on to say, “Choose something, stick with it, and not backing down regardless of what life throws at you.” Michael believes that the definition of resilience is “just keep going, and just don’t stop, … not matter what difficulties you come across, no matter what problems you catch up on to, you just keep doing what you’re doing until you actually get that goal accomplished.” Cooper believes resilience is “about getting up no matter what happens.” He went on to explain:

It’s not just how many times you fall. If you can get back up, or at least have faith that you can and thus try, you’re resilient. You have to try; you don’t have to succeed trying because as long as you’ve tried with full effort and have faith, you have succeeded.

Jordan believes being resilient is to “keep hope.” Resilience to John is “never quitting.” Steven believes resilience is “someone who’s successful.”

What Schools Can Do

Participants were asked how schools could give students a better chance at success. The code used under this category was “participants’ ideal teacher,” which was further broken down to preserve participants’ thoughts, and included “adjust and compromise,” “be helpful,” “be
more understanding,” “patience,” “show students you care.” Steven explained, “If they [students] need help, just help them. What’s the big deal with doing one-on-one?” He continued to say, “Administrators and teachers have to act like they care and individualize things.”

Michael said, “At least show the students that they [teachers] care about them.” He believes “most teachers don’t care about students.” John wants teachers to “be more understanding.”

Specifically:

> When you grow up, nobody sees the way that kids do anymore. When you’re an adult, your point of view switches to a certain perspective; that’s all that they see. There should be more understanding and see through their [students’] eyes how they’re feeling. Try to see their [students’] point of view.

John believes that teachers and administrators should sit down and ask what the students want at the school, which is what the alternative school did for him. He explained, “For me, it was learning what I would need outside of school because I didn’t want to go to college. Cooper feels that teachers should have “better education.” He went on to say, “Mandate that they take more psychology classes, not just simple basic intros … more advanced, in-depth ones, with people who have first-hand experience.” Jordan does not believe extracurricular activities and incentives for students should be taken away. He continued, “My old school … threatened to take away the music department.” He also believes that teachers should be paid more because “if teachers were paid more, they’d want to go to school and teach more.”

**Discussion**

EBD is among the five most prevalent disability categories (USDE, 2012). Moreover, an increase has been seen with those served under the category of EBD. Although efforts have increased to improve outcomes for students with EBD, poor life outcomes continue to be associated with students with EBD (Quinn et al., 2006). Without effective services, students
with EBD are likely to continue on a path toward failure. Students with EBD must have the chance to make positive changes in their lives while enrolled in school, thus possibly improving life outcomes (Quinn et al., 2006). Educators must seek to increase their understanding of why many students with EBD are not successful. It is clear, however, that the quality of education for students with EBD must improve significantly (Bradley et al., 2008; Gable et al., 2012; Simpson et al., 2011).

It has been theorized that youth at-risk have few opportunities to reach their full potential as adults (Brooks, 2006; Masten, 2001; Rak & Patterson, 1996; Resnick, 2000); yet, many youth who have faced difficulty do well despite being exposed to severe challenges and are considered resilient (Alvord & Grados, 2005; Brooks, 2006; Masten, 2007, 2011; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1991; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Rak & Patterson, 1996; Werner, 1986). Expanding existing research to include factors of resilience among graduates of alternative education programs is critical. Studying outliers may provide important information in helping future students with EBD find success. The purpose of the current study was to explore factors of resilience in individuals who graduated from alternative education settings.

The first objective of this study was to explore participants’ perspectives on what elements, specific to their alternative education settings, contributed to their resilience. Three themes emerged from the coded data to answer what elements of the participants’ alternative education setting contributed to their resilience including: (a) feeling that your teachers care about you and your education, (b) having structured positive discipline procedures where students have an opportunity to learn behavior management strategies, and (c) being in an environment that has a small student-to-teacher ratio and is able to make accommodations to meet goals of students.
One element that was extremely important to participants was having teachers who cared about them. Each participant gave examples of how his alternative school teachers showed they cared about their students. Participants felt that their teachers believed in them, were supportive, and wanted them to succeed. Moreover, the participants’ ideal teacher is one that is helpful, understanding, patient, and shows students that he/she cares. Cothran, Kulinna, and Garrahy (2003), Hechtman (1991), and Todis and colleagues (2001) found similar results. According to Demaray and Malecki (2002), youth lacking adequate, sustained relationships with caring adult mentors throughout childhood and adolescent years is a fundamental reason for problematic behavior. Generally, when there is a level of trust, respect, and communication between students and teachers, students are more willing to engage in appropriate behaviors and strive for higher levels of achievement (Mihalas et al., 2008). Moreover, teachers who are sensitive to the students in their classrooms nurture more positive student perceptions about teachers’ levels of caring for students (Cothran et al., 2003).

Prather-Jones (2011) found that characteristics of teachers working with students with EBD include flexibility and a genuine interest in the children with EBD they teach. According to Mihalas et al. (2008), due to the diversity of students with EBD, no single process effectively addresses all students’ social, emotional, and behavioral needs. However, Mihalas and colleagues suggest seven practices to nurture caring teacher-student relationships with students with EBD: (a) assume the role of student advocate, (b) get to know students and the lives they live, (c) invite students to be partners in their education, (d) actively listen to students, (e) ask for students’ feedback, (f) consistently problem solve with students, and (g) celebrate success with students. Research has shown that experiences involving positive teacher influences are
associated with resilience (e.g., Beardslee & Podorefsky, 1988; Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984; Masten, 2001; Olsson et al., 2003; Werner, 1984, 1986, 2000).

Having structured positive discipline procedures where students have an opportunity to learn behavior management strategies was another element participants liked about their alternative program. Research supports the effectiveness of positive consequences for managing student behavior (e.g., Gottfredson et al., 1993; Simonsen et al., 2008; Skiba & Peterson, 2000, 2005). However, when responding to disruptive behaviors, schools frequently utilize external discipline (e.g., suspension, surveillance, expulsion; Osher et al., 2010; Sugai & Horner, 2002). From Michael’s perspective, suspending students does not teach them anything, which is supported by research (e.g., Dishion & Dodge, 2005; Mayer & Betterworth, 1979).

Participants talked about their alternative school utilizing positive discipline systems through the use of point systems or step systems. Nelson, Sprague, Jolivette, Smith, and Tobin (2009) and Tobin and Sprague (2000) identified the use of positive behavior management techniques as an effective practice to reduce inappropriate behaviors; in turn, increasing the percentage of students engaged in assigned activities. Moreover, without intervention, youth facing significant adversities have a greater likelihood of encountering problems as they navigate their developmental paths (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). The risk of school failure and adversarial contact with the law can potentially be diminished when students are exposed to positive environments (Washington, 2008).

Being in an environment with a small student-to-teacher ratio and having the ability to make accommodations to meet goals of students were other important elements of alternative education programs for participants. Participants felt as though their needs were better met having more one-on-one interactions with their teachers. They also appreciated the alternative
schools’ ability to make accommodations to meet their post-academic needs. Tobin and Sprague (2000) identified a low student-teacher ratio as an evidence-based practice in alternative education settings. Teachers have more time for each student, which allows for higher levels of school engagement, bonding, and commitment.

Students with EBD must receive appropriate educational services in the least restrictive environment (LRE; IDEIA, 2004). In order to improve life circumstances, the LRE for some students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) may be an alternative education setting (Flower et al., 2011). However, it is essential that the alternative education settings use evidence-based practices to best meet the needs of students with EBD. Tobin and Sprague (2000) identified several effective practices that can be used in alternative education settings including (a) low student-teacher ratio, (b) highly structured classrooms, (c) emphasizing positive rather than punitive measures, (d) having an adult mentor at school, (e) functional behavioral assessments, (f) social skills instruction, (g) highly academic instruction, (h) involving parents, and (i) positive behavioral interventions and supports. Using evidence-based practices assists students to develop assets and resources needed to ensure positive outcomes (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000).

The second objective of this study was to determine how participants believe their alternative education placements contributed to their current life status, which is linked to objective one. Without caring adults, positive learning environments, and having the opportunity to learn, participants would not be where they are today (i.e., employed or continuing education). As Cooper said, “Without the alternative school, I would have gone downhill.” Both of the alternative school programs used evidence-based practices, which, in turn, became protective
factors for the participants. As a protective factor, the program was able to help change the participants’ reaction to adverse events so that potential negative outcomes were avoided.

Two additional themes presented themselves through analysis of coded data: supportive parents and an innate sense of self. When asked what personal factors contributed to their success, “parents” was coded. Participants felt as though their parents were supportive and were there for them. Tobin and Sprague (2000) list parental involvement as an evidence-based practice used in alternative education programs. Family conditions can be a protective factor for children and youth (Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009). Furthermore, resilience is enhanced when protective factors are reinforced at all interactive levels of the socio-ecological model (i.e., individual, family, and community; Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009).

Although some of the participants continue to face obstacles, each participant had specific goals he wanted to accomplish. They each used phrases such as “keep going,” “know what you want and get it,” “never quit,” and “keep hope.” Werner (1993) found that individuals are considered resilient when they have confidence in themselves to overcome obstacles. Participants’ statements support Bernard’s (1995) idea of having a sense of purpose by having goals, educational ambitions, and confidence in a positive future. Furthermore, John’s desire to not end up like his brothers supports the idea of critical consciousness (Bernard, 1993).

Conclusion

Bronfenbrenner’s (1976, 1977, 1979) theoretical ecology of human development framework has been employed in explaining why certain individuals demonstrate more resilience than others (Brooks, 2006; Edwards et al., 2007; Richardson, 2008; Walsh, 2003). According to Bronfenbrenner (1976), nested systems of relationships influence each other to enable or impede
normally developing patterns. His opinion states that the introduction of protective factors into high-risk ecologies is the focus of risk and resilience. In his theoretical framework, the emphasis of risk and resilience is based more on introducing protective factors into high-risk ecologies. The researcher identified three specific protective factors specific to alternative education: having caring teachers, a positive learning environment, and a small student-teacher ratio. Additional information gleaned showed that involved parents and an innate sense of self were also protective factors for the participants. With a focus on resilience, protective factors identified in this study have offset the negative risks of the participants’ environment prior to entering their alternative education program.
CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The current interpretive and descriptive qualitative study explored factors of resilience in individuals who graduated from alternative education settings with the intent to identify elements, specific to alternative education settings, which contributed to resilience in young adulthood. Moreover, the study sought to understand in what ways alternative education placements contributed to the participants’ current life status.

Directors of two well-established alternative education programs identified 15 potential participants based on specific criteria set: (a) diagnosed with EBD; (b) graduated from an alternative education setting; (c) graduated from high school or obtained a GED; and (d) currently employed, in the military, or pursuing post-secondary education (e.g., vocational school, university). The age requirement was set between 18 and 23. Eleven qualified participants completed the Resilience Scale (Wagnild & Young, 1993). Of those, five individuals scored moderate to moderately high levels of resilience, qualifying them for follow-up phone interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through this process themes emerged to reveal participants’ perspectives on what elements, specific to their alternative education setting, contributed to their resilience. Having teachers that cared about the students was one theme that emerged from the data. Participants did not feel cared about at their regular school; however, this was not the case in their alternative school placement. The type of discipline at the alternative school was another theme that arose from the data. Specifically, their regular school experience was met with detention, suspension, and expulsion, e.g., Michael stated, “Does not
teach anyone anything.” On the other hand, discipline at the alternative school was based on point systems where participants earned privileges and learned behavior management strategies. The third theme that arose from the data was having a small student-teacher ratio, which allowed participants to get more one-on-one attention.

Additionally, themes emerged to reveal participants’ perspectives on ways their alternative education placement contributed to their current life status. Specifically, without the alternative education placement, participants would not be where they are today (e.g., graduate of high school, continuation of education, employment). It must be noted that having a supportive family and an innate sense of self were other themes that arose from the data. These findings provide valuable information for educators and administrators alike in the education of students with EBD in alternative education programs.

Implications

The current study extends the body of research on resilience among those who have been a part of alternative education programs. The continuation of poor outcomes for students with EBD are directly associated with the need for effective practices being used in schools so students with EBD have the most optimal chance at success. Instead of looking in terms of poor outcomes for students with EBD, we must start looking through the eyes of resilience. Finding out why certain people with EBD are successful in adulthood is one key element to the future success of others with EBD.

To each of the participants, having a caring adult who helped was a simple action, yet made a huge impact on each of them. They could not understand why their regular education teachers did not seem to care. Once the participants realized that their alternative education
teachers “actually cared,” the participants began to put effort in and make changes. Additionally, a positive environment that was structured and gave participants an opportunity to learn behavior management strategies was extremely important. The future of education for students with EBD can be impacted in a major way with those two “simple” things: creating a positive learning environment with teachers who care about their students.

One method to achieve a positive learning environment was highlighted when John made the point that he wished teachers would see the perspectives of their students. Seeing students’ perspectives may eliminate misunderstandings and help ground the context of student-teacher interactions. Educators who understand the perspectives of students and demonstrate cultural awareness create an empathetic and helpful connection.

Finally, the alternative education programs used in this study were chosen because they are recognized as using evidence-based practices in a consistent manner. While not all alternative education programs use best practices to meet the needs of their students, without effective services, upon exiting the alternative program, students are likely to continue a path toward failure. It is imperative that programs focus on using the best, most effective practices that meet the students’ needs.

Recommendations

This study gives a snapshot of prior students’ experiences in regular education and alternative education. The findings support the importance of continuing research in the area of resilience in students with EBD to help other students with EBD find success. Additionally, learning what practices from the alternative education programs past students believe to be
beneficial may help inform future practice, not only in alternative education programs, but also in regular education programs.

In the future, a similar study could be conducted with a broader age range. Additionally, future research may focus on those who meet original criteria for resilience (i.e., diagnosed with EBD; graduate from an alternative education setting; graduate from high school or obtained a GED; and currently employed, in the military, or pursuing post-secondary education) but do not perceive themselves as being resilient according to the Resilience Scale (Wagnild & Young, 1993). This may reveal a more in-depth understanding of resilience, EBD, and alternative education programs.
APPENDIX A

INVITATION LETTER AND CONSENT FORM FOR POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

ONLINE LETTER
Dear Former Student,

My name is Staci Zolkoski, and I am a graduate researcher at the University of North Texas. My research focuses on individuals with special needs. Currently, I am studying a phenomenon known as resilience, which is defined as a person achieving success despite overwhelming hardships.

I am conducting a study to examine the connection between alternative education programs and resilience. Specifically, I am interested in examining resilience factors for individuals who, at some point in time, have been identified as having an emotional and behavioral disorder (EBD) and who have graduated from alternative education settings.

Due to your experiences at your program, you have been recommended to participate in this study. Should you choose to participate, a potential risk may be that past experiences are painful and difficult to recount. However the information you provide will help future students with special needs find success and may evoke change in school experiences for students with EBD.

Participation in this study is 100% voluntary and confidential. Data collected will be used for research purposes only. Participants will be identified with a pseudonym and have the right to exclude any information or withdraw participation at any time. You will be asked to complete a simple survey (about 10 minutes) and potentially take part in a one-on-one interview that will last no more than 90 minutes. You will receive a $10 gift card for your participation in the survey and a $20 gift card if you are asked to take part in the interview.

By clicking on the button below, you indicate your voluntary agreement to participate in this study.

I appreciate the opportunity to communicate with you. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact us. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Staci Zolkoski
Doctoral Candidate, Department of Educational Psychology
APPENDIX B

INVITATION LETTER AND CONSENT FORM FOR POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

MAILED LETTER
Dear Former Student,

My name is Staci Zolkoski, and I am a graduate researcher at the University of North Texas. My research focuses on individuals with special needs. Currently, I am studying a phenomenon known as resilience, which is defined as a person achieving success despite overwhelming hardships.

I am conducting a study to examine the connection between alternative education programs and resilience. Specifically, I am interested in examining resilience factors for individuals who, at some point in time, have been identified as having an emotional and behavioral disorder (EBD) and who have graduated from alternative education settings.

Due to your experiences at your program, you have been recommended to participate in this study. Should you choose to participate, a potential risk may be that past experiences are painful and difficult to recount. However the information you provide will help future students with special needs find success and may evoke change in school experiences for students with EBD.

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I appreciate the opportunity to communicate with you. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact us. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Staci Zolkoski
Doctoral Candidate, Department of Educational Psychology

Your signature below indicates that you have read the above information and agree to participate in the study.

_________________________________  _____________________ ________________
Printed Name    Signature    Date
APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION
Demographic Information

Please answer the following questions by clicking on the appropriate item.

1. What is your gender?
   a. Male
   b. Female

2. What is your age?
   a. 18
   b. 19
   c. 20
   d. 21
   e. 22
   f. 23

3. How do you define your ethnicity?
   a. African American
   b. Asian
   c. Caucasian
   d. Hispanic
   e. Native American

   Other (Please state ___________________________)
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONING ROUTE
The following questions are representative of what will be used during interviews. However, questions may be modified following information gleaned throughout the interview.

1. Describe your regular school experience. How was your regular school experience different from your alternative school experience? How would you describe your peers in both settings?

2. Let’s talk about what your regular and alternative school teachers were like. How were your teachers different in the alternative school versus the regular school?

3. Describe your alternative school. How was your alternative school different from your regular school environment?

4. What personal experiences and challenges lead you to enter the alternative school?

5. How did your experience at an alternative school help or hinder your academic success?

6. How did your experience at an alternative school help or hinder your personal success?

7. What have you done since completing high school?

8. What obstacles have you encountered?

9. How have you overcome the obstacles that you have encountered?

10. Reflecting on your experiences as an adolescent, how do you deal with challenges now versus when you were in school?

11. How do you define success?

12. How would you define resilience?

13. What personal factors contribute to your success?

14. How can schools give students a better chance at success?

15. What characteristics do you possess that enable you to deal with challenging situations?

16. What characteristics do you possess that could potentially hinder your success?
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS
Interview with John

S-Hi John this is Staci, how are you?

John: Hi, I’m good. Um, I’m actually translating for my uncle, um, right now, I’ll be free to talk in another 20 minutes.

S: Ok, sure. I’ll call you back in 20 minutes thank you, bye…..called back and asked if it was ok to record interview. He said it was ok….polite conversation about holidays….I really appreciate you taking the time to talk to me today. I’m excited to get to talk to you so thank you very much. I really appreciate it.

John: You’re welcome

Would it be ok if I recorded our conversation so that way when I’m transcribing it I make sure that I get your words the right way?

S: Ok, great. Thank you. So um, let me tell you a little bit about myself and what I’m doing since you are going to tell me about yourself. I, um, I’m working on my doctorate right now, this is my dissertation to finish up in special education. I am really interested in success stories of students and um why, and what has specifically, what has helped you to be so successful. Um, and, and so that way, hopefully I can help other people….are you there?

John: Yeah

S-Sorry, I thought I heard you say something.

JOHN: no, that was just my mom talking

S-Oh, ok. So, I actually taught kindergarten and 4th grade for several years and then am going to school full time. I’m from Ohio but moved to Texas and have been in Texas, gosh, this is my 11th year I guess in Texas. I’ve got 2 small kiddos. My son will be 5 in March and my daughter is 3. So then um, and then I have a husband, a dog, and 2 cats! So, if you hear a dog barking it’s because my ferocious beagle hears a noise and he thinks he needs to bark about it.

John: Ah, for me, I’m more of a bit bull kind of person.

S: Oh you are?

John: Yep

S:I really, really, really, really would love to have a Great Dane, but my husband thinks that’s a terrible idea. He says they’re such big dogs, they are like a horse, and says do you know what kind of poop they have? That’s like a man poop. JOHN: laughs

S: So, it’s not looking good. Do you have a Pit Bull?

John: No my cousin well both, well 2 of my cousins both have pit bulls and I’ve always liked dogs, basically all animals, I don’t really have a preference, but in terms of species, like for pets,
I don’t really know, well there’s different kinds of cats, for dogs Pit bulls would be it for me, or Huskies.

S-Yeah, Huskies are really pretty especially the ones with the bright blue eyes. I can only imagine the hair. Are you getting snowed in right now?

John: No, not really right now. It’s supposed to start snowing around 1:00, but right now it’s not snowing, just kind of cold.

S: My mom lives still in Ohio, near lake Erie, and they’re supposed to get 10 inches of snow, and I think it’s like 5 degrees or something like that. Something crazy ridiculous, and they are supposed to get more. I guess it took my dad over an hour to shovel the driveway

John: Wow,

S: Be prepared for a snowstorm, a winter wonderland.

John: Yeah,

S: So, I’ve got about, 10 to 15 questions to ask you so if you’re ready, I’m ready. If at any time you want to stop just let me know, ok?

John: Alright

S: So, you went to Alternative school, right? With Dr. G

John: Yeah

S: Before we talk about Alternative school, can you talk to me about the school you went to before you went to Alternative school? Like describe that experience for me.

JOHN: Well, the school I went to before Alternative school was Middle School and before, like after I got to middle school, it was a typical school day, but ah, the thing that really made no sense was that the teachers there, um, went, you know…you know how some teachers sometimes………even if you didn’t know it they would just tell you to do it? And they acted like they just didn’t care. That’s how some of the teachers there were. And other teachers, there was a behavior specialist there, and he actually put his hands on me. He grabbed me by my shirt and lifted me up and put me against the wall.

S: uh, why?

JOHN: Well, back in those days I wasn’t really that good of a person. I would act out a lot, but at that moment I sitting being quiet and you know just sitting there not saying anything. He eventually got mad and just picked me up and put me against the wall.

S: Oh my goodness

JOHN: So, um, well back then I didn’t really deal well with people putting their hands on me so I actually hit him.
S: wow, so is that how you ended up going to Alternative school.

JOHN: Well, not really. I got expelled from there because of my aggression. I kind of threw a desk at a student. But not really directly at the student. It hit the floor and rebounded fro floor and onto a desk, and from that desk onto another desk and from that desk to the kid.

S-Ok, so what do you think, why, you described yourself as being aggressive, why, um, what would get you so frustrated?

JOHN: um, I don’t know, it’s just like, uh, it’s not really like things that people do, it’s just if they come up to me, step up to me in the wrong way, like they want to hit more or something like that. Usually just that.

S: so kind of feeling provoked then?

JOHN: Yeah

S: Were you frustrated about the school work? Was that hard, or was it too easy

JOHN: No, the school work at Middle school it wasn’t hard, it’s just that they wouldn’t teach us how to do the work. It wasn’t anything, like every single time I came home, I would always have to ask my older brother or sister to tell me how to do it because they (teachers) wouldn’t.

S: So would they just pass out worksheets or something?

JOHN: um kind of.

S: Wow, that sounds exciting.

JOHN: Yeah

S: No wonder you didn’t like being there.

JOHN: Yeah, and when I was in detention, um, my one teacher, Mr. Z, I think his name was, he ah, there was this kid who was trying to pick a fight with me, and he was saying that he was going to let me out at the same time that the kid was going to leave.

S: Say that again

JOHN: um, the teacher, when I was in detention, he was telling me that this kid was trying to pick a fight with me, he was like, ok, I’m about to leave, I’m going to let you leave at the same time that the kid who wanted to pick a fight with me at the same time.

S: Oh no, oh gosh

JOHN: So I got mad about that and just left detention.

S: I would leave too. Especially if I’m afraid I’m going to get hurt by somebody. So, it sounds like you didn’t have a great experience with the teachers then either.
JOHN: yeah, that was the thing that was really different for me. I mean, I don’t know how it is now, but back then it was basically just a school that was meant for kids to fight basically.

S: Oh

JOHN: That’s all they did there.

S: and the teachers didn’t do anything to stop it?

JOHN: No, they would, no, most of those people they are just so use to it that don’t wanna be any fighting. After it’s done the teachers come in and send you to the principal’s office or whatever and discipline you like that.

S: Ok, so if there was any fighting or whatever, you’d go straight to the principal’s office. You’d go to detention or get suspended or whatever?

JOHN: Yep

S: did you have in-school suspension or out of school suspension? Or both?

JOHN: um, I don’t think I’ve ever been in in-school suspension because I don’t really remember. But uh, I did get suspended from school a bunch of times from Middle school, mostly for fighting.

S: So then your peers, they were not all that fantastic then at Middle school.

JOHN: No, I mean the only thing was cool was one of my best friends, we looked out for each other and everything.

S: Oh ok, that’s great. Um but other than your best friend, your peers were just, everyone was against each other. Why do you think that was? Why do you think there was so much fighting?

JOHN: I don’t know. It might be problems at home that they have or whatever, but they would just come and just be aggressive.

S: So then how did you end up at Alternative school?

JOHN: Well, I got suspended, expelled because of the throwing the desk at the student and uh, then I went to, I got like a tutor basically to, uh, um, because since I was expelled I wasn’t getting any classes so I was getting taught by a private teacher and then, until I got into Alternative school.

S: Oh, ok, so did the middle school help you get into Alternative school, or was that something your mom did?

JOHN: No, it was something, like when I got expelled, I think there was something through the court.

S: So did you have to go through the court system then?
JOHN: Yeah

S: Because of throwing the desk or because of hitting the teacher?

JOHN: Um, I don’t think the teacher thing had anything to do with it, I just think that it was like an overall thing.

S: Ok, so the court system decided that you needed to go to Alternative school?

JOHN: Yeah

S: Ok, so then talk to me about your experience at Alternative school?

JOHN: Um, well at first it was a little rocky because I was still pretty much uh, a hot head, uh, so when I got there it was uh, kind of ok. I mean…

S: How old were you?

JOHN: I was 12. Um, I was uh, um, I got there close to the end of the school year and...

S: let me think, would 12 be 8th grade or 7th grade?

JOHN: No, no, I was in the 6th grade, I was 12 years old and in the 6th grade and um. My first day there was ok. It wasn’t all that bad. Most of the students were there because they were fighting a lot. So there was this one kid, I didn’t really say nothin’ to him and he started cursing me out in Spanish. I was like, you don’t even know me, but since I didn’t really have that much self-control I chased him down and started slamming his head against the floor. Luckily he didn’t really get hurt, he just had a big bruise on his head. Then, well, you can’t really call it blacking out because I can see what is happening, I just have no control over what happens.

S: Ok, so you just can’t, like once you get to a point when you’re really upset, it’s like an out of body experience I guess?

JOHN: Kind of, no but I can see through my eyes what is happening, um, it’s just like, think of it as me steering a car and you control the car, and the car is just steering itself.

S: Ok, wow. So after that first day, then how did things go?

JOHN: um, well after that day, I think that I’m pretty sure that after that day I had to go to like some kind of like young juvenile court thing with the kid but he started it so I was let off the hook. Like, I never start fights. I never really pick, I never throw the first swing. If someone throws it at me, that’s when I start to swing. That’s how I’ve always been. Even if I’m angry, I never ever start a fight. But, um, I had to go to the junior something court room and they just made us apologize to each other and I was let off the hook because he started it so, I don’t know what they did for him. Like I don’t really know what happened to him. I just know it was more of an apology that we had to give each other and then they let me go and that was basically it for that day. Um, the rest of the day, like towards my 6th year, it was easier. My teachers were nice, they uh, they actually taught me, they took the time to explain how this is done, how this is done,
uh, cause, like because of Middle school, I wasn’t really that good on reading, writing, like I could write and read, just not quickly. Uh, they took the time and taught me through that. Let’s see, what else. Um

S: That’s cool that they took the time. So do you feel like if you were to compare your teachers at Middle school versus your teachers at Alternative school, were they, um, were they, how would you compare the two?

JOHN: Um, Alternative school teachers were kinder, they were helpful when teaching the students, um they understood the students um and, they always never allowed situations to escalate. Like, with students fighting, they wouldn’t let it keep on fighting. They would separate the students before it goes any further or especially before it even starts.

S: So that’s a lot different then, um at Middle school.

JOHN: Yeah, basically the complete opposite of Middle school.

S: Um, so then I guess was there a smaller student to teacher ratio at Alternative school?

JOHN: Um, well in every classroom, there was about 3 teachers each.

S: Oh wow

JOHN: Yeah, and uh, the students their, the desks were lined up in rows of three and there was about, like 12 desks and basically in each room kind of.

S: So um, do you think, what do you think helped you to be successful at Alternative school? What was it about Alternative school that helped you?

JOHN: Um, at Alternative school they um, they, because of um, your IEP, it’s specifically designed to help you. For me, it was, like, I didn’t want to go to college, so what they did for me was set up the curriculum stuff that I would need outside of school. We worked on like, balancing checkbooks, taxes, um, a whole bunch of math stuff that I had to do with what I would need out here. Um, in reading, it would be like reading current events that happened. I was reading about a kid who was heavily medicated, uh, I think he was like a five year old kid that was over medicated, cuz he didn’t do go a like a doctor psychiatrist, he went to a doctor, doctor. Like a pediatrician or something like that and that doctor prescribed a whole bunch medications so the kid ended up being slobbering and things like that. And when they took him to a regular doctor, a psychiatrist or something like that, they just, um, his diagnosis was that he had like ADHD or something like that. So he was taken off everything except for 1 or 2 pills that he was on.

S: So then, did that help you, reading stuff like that, did it help…

JOHN: Yeah, like understanding what happens out here. Stuff like that.

S: Yeah, ok, so then you decided you didn’t want to go to college, what do you do for your job?
JOHN: Well, right now I’m unemployed, but I did go to a votech school.

S: Oh, ok

JOHN: Yeah, uh, I didn’t go to college because, stuff that, it takes too long to get a diploma for college so I decided to get certified for doing masonry, which is for building houses, or

S: It’s a certification in what?

JOHN: Masonry

S: Masonry, oh cool, so you like to build houses and do things like that?

JOHN: Yeah, I could like, I didn’t really get the chance to build; we did work um around the school. It was called B

S: Ok, was that through Alternative school?

JOHN: Yes, I started that around my, my senior year, um, usually it takes 3 years to get your certification and that’s school, because of my IEP, I was able to stay at the school until I was 21.

S: Oh, ok

JOHN: Yeah, so I stood there until, I stood there a 2nd year past my senior year and then um, I stopped going to Alternative school and kept going for BABET because I’d finished my, um, I got my certification, uh somewhere around, yeah, I got it in 2 years.

S: Oh wow, that’s awesome! So then what would you like to do?

JOHN: well, if I had a preference, well, like I don’t really have a preference on what I’d like to do, I just chose masonry because I’m better with my hands then anything else and you get a lot of money for doing that if you’re really good at it. When I was there, the teachers considered me more accurate then most of the students, but in terms of speed, that’s where I was lacking. But the teacher told me like, it’s better to be slow and accurate then fast and sloppy.

S: That’s exactly right! I would much rather have accurate then quick for sure. So then, what are you doing right now?

JOHN: uh, well, I was just in with, helping my mom translate for an appointment with my uncle. Um, and right now, I’m just, sitting and talking to you.

S: I’m sorry, what are you going to do about a job, what are you going to do to find a job or what are you interested in doing? Like, what’s your next step I guess?

JOHN: Well, um, I did have, I have like 2 job opportunities and uh, um, and at a warehouse but I had to turn them down because I kind of broke my hand a little bit

S: A little bit?
JOHN: It’s just the bone in my little finger in my hand, it broke, and I had to get 3 screws in it.

S: How did you do that?

JOHN: Um well, see my hand fell onto the fence and my hand kind of um, like, when I fell, I fell backwards, and I put out to catch me from falling onto the ground hard and I fell into the fence and my whole weight went down onto it.

S: Owe

JOHN: It didn’t really hurt as bad as you would think, it just hurt, it was just one of those pains where you would need to catch your breath.

S: But you have 3 screws in your hand, that’s bad!

JOHN: It doesn’t hurt though

S: You’re tough! So, I guess you have to wait for your hand to heal before you can…

JOHN: Actually do work, yes.

S: Darn, so I hope it gets better soon, when did that happen?

JOHN: Um well, this happened about, 4, like 4 ½ weeks ago

S: Owe, well, I hope it gets really quickly.

JOHN: I’m basically already healed. I’m already able to make an entire fist.

S: Oh ok, that’s good. So, how do you think um, you talked to me about how Alternative school helped you academically learning, with your reading, writing, math, and all the different skills that you gained, what about personally? How do you think, you know, how did they help you, like you talked about being a hothead and being aggressive, how did Alternative school help you work through that?

JOHN: um, well, they have counselors there, but mostly it was a choice that I made. When I was in the 7th grade, it was kind of ah, a choice, because I was going to end up like my brother, um, my older brother, he didn’t graduate from high school. And at some point in the 7th grade I was just like, if I end up being like my older brother and going like this I could, uh, end up not graduating or being in jail or something like, like he was. Um, so I decided to change and ended up getting straight A’s kind of, most of the time. See I was always really smart; I just really hated school.

S: Well, it sounds like it wasn’t really a great environment at the middle school that you were at. I don’t know anybody who would want to be in that sort of situation.

JOHN: yeah

S: how was elementary school?
JOHN: Um, my first elementary school was Elementary school and it was ok, uh, because it was like, there was this one teacher who would always allow me to uh, let me go on the computer to play video games to calm me down when I got mad or upset I would always go to her, and my one teacher in the home room that I was in, I would always get mad at her because she would, she would be really strict for no reason whatsoever and assume that I was getting you know, she was kind of picking on me, you know, that’s what it seemed like. That school kind of stunk too, but the thing that kind of made it better was these two friends that I had. I don’t know if they were friends or girlfriends at that time, but I think they were kind of into me because they both pulled me to the side and both kissed me.

S: Nice, well that’s a good indication I would say

JOHN: Yeah, but since I was like, I was young; I didn’t really see them that way at the time.

S: Well, you were in elementary school, I hope not! (laughs)

JOHN: But, I didn’t really mind it (laughs). I was ok with it. I wasn’t going to deny it, if they want to kiss me, they should kiss me. I wasn’t going to say, no, no, no kissing. (laughs)

S: So, it sounds like at your regular school in elementary that you had a couple of teachers that, or the one that helped you and understood you needed a break to calm down, but other teachers that kind of picked on you.

JOHN: yeah

S: So then at Alternative school, um, you know you talked about having counselors, and kind of making a decision to change, do you feel like at Alternative school that they gave you strategies to help you when you’d get upset?

JOHN: Yes, a lot of the strategies that they would show us would be more like, um, kind of like breathing, counting to 10, you know, um, breathing techniques, they would also be, lets see, kind of like visually what happened and the type of situation that you’re in, like take time to see what would happen if things continued and see what you could have done to prevent that or what could you do differently, stuff like that.

S: Oh so that seems like that could even be helpful now at least little bit.

JOHN: Yeah

S: So, so that’s great. So, you talked about getting to, getting through the tech school and what not, have you encountered any obstacles since you’ve graduated? Besides breaking your hand.

JOHN: Um, yes, ah, living with your parents is a major obstacle.

S: Living with your parents?

JOHN: yeah, I’m living with my parents because I was the last one to stay, because all of my older brother moved out and my younger brother moved out because you know, he had a kid, so
I was the last one to stay, and I figured if I do leave, I want to make sure that my parents are going to be alright before I leave. So, I ended up staying and its nuts living with your parents because it’s still their house, their rules. Even though I’m 22 years old they still treat me like I’m a little kid because I live in their house.

S: That’s got to be hard.

JOHN: Yeah, it kind of is, I mean on the one hand I don’t really mind it because my mom, like, because of the way that she is, treating me like a little kid, even if I’m capable of doing stuff for myself she goes, “nah, I’ll clean your room and this and that, just try to not get it too messy or whatever. Basically, there’s kind of an upside to staying here. I don’t really want to stay here forever. Um, the other obstacle is that, um, living with family, kind of makes you go nuts sometimes. For me, it was a little more, like it was a little harder for me to deal with because even when I talk to my parents it doesn’t really work that well. They always, they would always compare me to my brothers, like saying how good I’m doing, what I’ve done that like my brothers should be like me, but I don’t want, like even if it’s like a praise to me, I don’t want to be compared to other people or them to me because it could be me resenting them or them resenting me and I tried to explain that but they were like, um, we don’t do that, but they don’t realized that they do that. So at some point I was just got into a little trouble, um, to see if they can stop comparing me to my brothers, but I didn’t realize how bad I was ah, how bad of trouble I was going to get in to.

S: uh-oh

JOHN: Yeah, I have a fine to pay now for it, but it’s ok, because it was just like, I didn’t really get into any really anything bad. This is the first time I’ve gotten in trouble with the law since I was 18. Uh, so they left me off with a warning. All I have to do is pay the fine and it will be erased off my record as soon as the fine was paid off.

S: may I ask what you did?

JOHN: Uh, it was um, retail theft. Yeah, it was just, like I wasn’t even trying to get away with it too, I let them catch me cuz I even saw the cops there. Like, there was a cop close to the door on my right and a few outside waiting for me. Like I took a pack of DVDs. They were like turn them over and I was like ok but I didn’t really knew how much. It was almost a “felon” for how much I stole. A little more and it would have been a felon.

S: Well, I’m glad you didn’t do that.

JOHN: No, it was just, ah, like I wasn’t really keeping track of how much I was, uh, how much the DVDs were worth, but you know, in the end it wasn’t really worth it, but it did get my parents off the topic of comparing me to my brothers so..

S: Yeah, that’s got to be a lot of pressure.

JOHN: yeah
S: too be under. So next time, since we don’t want to have this happen again, next time you know, what can you do? What will you do different next time?

JOHN: Just do my usually, going to, like, what I do is listen to music to relax myself and focus, calm down. Music is the go-to to basically ever problem that I have.

S: Oh, ok, what kind of music do you listen to?

JOHN: Oh I have a variety of music. I have a little bit of country, rap, R&B, rock, Spanish songs, Christian songs, uh..

S: You sound like my husband. One minute we will be listening to Michael Buble and the next we’ll be listening to like Eminem with his IPod on shuffle. So you just like all music then.

S: What do you think you can do, besides listening to music, I know you talked about wanting to help your parents out, but then it’s also hard because you’re living with your parents and you’re 22. What is your next goal after your hand heals?

JOHN: Um, I’m trying to, well, my first priority is to pay off the fines, then actually be to get a car. I actually don’t even have a permit. I never bothered to learn since I always had my bike. I always rather ride my back then wanting to drive. Then probably just move out on my own.

S: Yeah, well it sounds like you, um, you know, not comparing you to anyone else, but you, you, when you put your mind to something, you go ahead and just do it. To have all of the challenges that you’ve had and to be standing at the end is pretty great. Not many people can say that they do that so, you’ve got some inner strength there that you can use to your benefit for sure.

JOHN: Yeah, in terms of goals, I could have a whole bunch of goals and getting there, I kind of live day to day, like go with the flow. If something’s in my way but I want it to happen then that’s great and if it doesn’t it’s not like I’m going to whine about it or whatever.

S: yeah, that makes sense.

JOHN: I was going to say, as long as it leads towards me completing my goals then I’ll be good.

S: That’s a great outlook to have. So when you are reflecting on your experiences as an adolescent, how do you deal with challenges now versus when you were in school.

JOHN: When I was in school, I would, I would love to talk about what was bothering me. It wasn’t even about them giving me tips on how to, how to fix the problem, it was just more them just being there to listen. Just them listening to me helped me calm down, you know, relax. So, uh, there was that and they would also allow me to take a break and you know walk around if you need to and then come back to class when I was ready.

S: so that helps you now just because you have the strategies that you need, you know what helps you to calm down or get what you need to deal with those challenges.

JOHN: yeah
S: How would you define success.

JOHN: For me, I would probably define success as probably knowing what you want and being able to get it. That’s probably the easiest way for me to explain success.

S: I like it. How would you define resilience.

JOHN: Resilience, never quitting.

S: never quitting, I like that too. Now what do you think, what personal factors do you have that have contributed to your success?

JOHN: Personal factors, you mean like my character?

S: Yeah

JOHN: Um well, when, well for me, I don’t really, when I look towards what I want, I look in terms of long terms type of goals. Like that I can actually achieve. And also, uh, being, like getting a long with everybody, like things going my way, for them wanting to help me out, you know, being a good person to them, that helps out.

S: Yes, that’s great. What do you think schools can do to help students be more successful? If I were to go and talk to a bunch of principals and teachers, what would you want me to tell them to help kids to be successful? What could they do?

JOHN: Well, what my school did was, they sat down and asked what the students wanted at the school. For me, it was learning what I would need outside of school because I didn’t want to go to college. Because most people don’t want to go to college. They only do that because their parents want them to go to college and they don’t have the guts to tell them no I don’t want to go to college, that’s not what I want to do. I do agree that some people, they need to go to college if they don’t know what they want to do in life because that’s what college is for.

S: So schools should talk to kids about what they want to do when they get out of school. What else can school do?

JOHN: Um, be more understanding. See, like when you grow up, nobody sees the way that kids do anymore. When you’re an adult your point of view switches to well, a certain perspective, that’s all that they see. There should be more understanding and see through their eyes how they would, like how they’re feeling, and try to see their point of view on what they’re doing makes them feel and whatever.

S: Ok, anything else what schools can do better?

JOHN: mmmmmm, not that I can think of, it’s just those two things that I found helpful.

S: Yeah, those are good, those are good examples. Well, um, I really appreciate your help in talking to me and taking the time today to talk to me. Do you have any questions for me?
JOHN: mmmm, what kind of doctor, like are you trying to be psychiatrist?

S: I am actually, um, my doctorate will be in special education and I want to be a college professor.

JOHN: ahh

S: I never thought I wanted to be a college professor. I want to help people, that’s my big thing but as a college professor, I can help teachers to be more understanding of students. Like what you were talking about to see from other people perspectives and so I’m hoping through my teaching I can help teachers to be better, and I also want to help other students and through my research, like talking to you right now, to make a change, to make things better. So you are helping me do that, thank you very much!

JOHN: You’re welcome

S: I do have one more question for you. Where do you want your gift card from?

Interview with Jordan

S-I really appreciate you um, being willing to talk to me. I’m excited to hear um, your story and, and things like that. Ah, first, I would like to record, ah this session so that way when I go back and transcribe it I can make sure that I can get your wording correctly. Is, is that ok with you?

JORDAN-Yeah

S-Ok, great. Awesome, thank you. Ah, so let me first tell you a little bit about what I am doing. I’m sorry, I have two dogs. One belongs to me and the other one is a friends, and they’re like, she’s a nervous nelly and is barking at nothing so I apologize for barking.

JORDAN-Let me quick put on my headphones because it seems whenever I um speak, your audio cuts off. Let me see if this works.

S-Ok

JORDAN- Give me a second. I hate these headphones. They are such a mess!

S- I like the old school ones were they’re big, just on your ears. I don’t like the ones that go inside my ears.

JORDAN- Yeah, I have a pair of those um, just, that’s a pain too because they are so bulky.

S – Yeah

J – I can never find the perfect headphones.

S – Is that better?
JORDAN- Yeah, I think that’s better now.

S – Ok

JORDAN- It is starting to cut off too. I think it’s our connection. Let me try to calling you back to see if that works.

---------Hang up and JORDAN calls back----------

S – How’s that?

JORDAN – I think that’s better.

S – alright, we’ll go with it.

JORDAN - Alright, yeah.

S- Ok, so I um, I’m originally, let me tell you a little bit about myself since you are going to get to tell me about yourself.

JORDAN – Ok

S – I’m from Ohio actually and I live in Texas now. I got a job teaching in Texas and, and moved. I taught kindergarten for five years and then I taught 4th grade for three years and decided to back to school to work on my doctorate. I’m really interested in, I had a, when I was teaching I seemed to do really well with kids that had a hard time in school. They couldn’t sit still and things like that, and I, I worked really well with those kiddos so I wanted to go to school to, to figure out, you know, ways to help and, and what not. So, I’ve got two kiddos, a 4 ½ year old and a 3 year old, a little boy and a little girl, and a husband, he’s awesome and a dog and 2 cats. So, so um what I am doing for my dissertation is looking at alternative schools and how….a lot of alternative schools….you got really lucky because your alternative school is really great (JORDAN shakes his head yes) and, and um is doing really good things for people. And I want more schools to be like that. Not just alternative schools, but regular schools too and so I am looking at people, success stories. So, you are a success story! Way to go! And um, I want to hear, I want to show people, teachers, principals, parents perspectives of prior students and so we can get better, um, I want more success stories for, for um kids, adults, young adults. You’re not a kid anymore. So do you have any questions for me?

JORDAN – um…. Well, regarding what?

S – Anything, anything I have gone over so far?

JORDAN – No, no, no actually

S – Ok, well if you, if you have a question or you want to stop at any time, you just need to let me know, ok?

JORDAN – Ok
S – Ok, so can you talk to me about your regular school experiences.

JORDAN – Like besides Alternative school?

S – Yeah, yeah, the school that you were at before you went to Alternative school and be brutally honest.

JORDAN – Yeah, um that would be….high school. (Long pause). Up till my first year of 12th grade, because I had to repeat 12th grade a couple of times, or a few times, it was, it was pretty much a nightmare.

S – Why was it a nightmare?

JORDAN – um. Well, pretty much all my life, up to 12th grade for some reason, um, and don’t take this as a statistic for every kid because it doesn’t matter if it’s 12th grade or not. It’s just an anomaly, it’s just something random. But, ever since I started school, I’ve been picked on, like I’ve been bullied, I’ve been hurt, like, mentally, psychologically, emotionally, and sometimes even physically. So um when I got up to high school, it was just the same stuff over and over and over again of what I’ve experienced my whole life. I got into my 2nd fight of my whole life in, in, in 9th grade and um, my 3rd fight I guess, I forget, how many fights I’ve been in. It wasn’t much, it wasn’t much because, like, I’m not a very , I don’t like that kind of stuff, I don’t like fighting. Um, but yeah, I’ve been picked on my whole life because of my mental disabilities and my Tourette’s, because I have Tourette’s. So, it was, every day, literally every day there would be something waiting for me when I would go into school.

S – That makes it really hard, it makes you not want to be in school.

JORDAN – hm-um, I literally had no friends except for one person and he sometimes picked on me as well. It made me wonder, why is he even hanging around me.

S – So, your peers, they just were awful for you at your regular school and it was just a really crummy experience. (J shakes his head yes). So them um, tell me how was this different from when you went to Alternative school?

JORDAN – um, people accepted me, pretty much. That is the one thing that I found great about Alternative school. People accepted me there. They didn’t, they didn’t like, excuse me, I don’t think there was one, well not one, but like, excuse me I just had lunch. (Laughs) I don’t think there, there were very, very, very few times where a student made me feel bad.

S- Wow, that’s really cool. So, tell me about your teachers at your regular school.

JORDAN- um, well, they, not just the teachers, but a lot of the staff there, like there were security guards there too. Most of the staff there were, I know they were interested in teaching the students, but they were kind of like, the ones that were irresponsible, they were pretty lenient, like, like they didn’t want to be there or something.

S- Ok, so then what about your teachers at your alternative school, at Alternative school?
JORDAN – The complete opposite.

S- They were helpful?

JORDAN – Yeah, they, they um, they were, how do I explain it? Like they wanted to be there, they wanted to help us. And they wanted to help me graduate.

S-ok, that’s really, that’s really awesome. Um, tell me, you know, the alternative school itself, how was that different. How was Alternative school different from the high school you were at before?

JORDAN- Well, first of all it was an extremely smaller class size. Do you know anything about Alternative school?

S- Tell me about it?

JORDAN- Um, 4 of us graduated. That’s how small our graduating class was.

S-Wow, so how many kids would have been in your regular school, like in a class, in any class?

JORDAN- up to, I wan to exaggerate and say up to 30, but I think it was somewhere around there, somewhere near there.

S- ok, then you know, what kind of discipline procedures did they have at your regular school versus at Alternative school? You said something about that they had security guards and things like that at your regular school.

JORDAN- mhm, they even had police near the end of my time there.

S- did they really? All the time? Was it because there was a lot of violence or?

JORDAN- um, well, pretty much there was a lot of violence but it was not, not to the point that people portrayed it to be.

S- so they made it seem worse than it really was?

JORDAN- They got a bad rap because of the media

S- oh, ok, so then, you know, was it kind of like a negative feeling at your regular school or you know, was it like, oh, there’s a term called zero tolerance, like if you mess up it didn’t matter what it was, there wasn’t any tolerance for anything. Was it harsh like that?

JORDAN-Give me an example

S- like um, I don’t know, like if you are talking or something like that you would get suspended or something like that.

JORDAN-No, no it wasn’t that extreme no
S- So at Alternative school, what kind of discipline was there at Alternative school?

JORDAN-There was um, it was much stricter

S- At Alternative school?

JORDAN-mhm

S- Ok, so it was real loosey goosey at your regular school then?

JORDAN-It was and it wasn’t

S- So it just depended on your teacher at your regular school?

JORDAN- um, it was dependent on what the infliction was, what the, what the, what the person did. What the student did.

S- At your regular school?

JORDAN- Yeah, like for example if they brought in weapons or drugs, then there would be zero tolerance but like at Alternative school, um, we had this point system that we had. Um, pretty much every day you would have a sheet, a chart, where, I can’t remember what the standards were, but it was like, yeah, I can’t remember right now. But there were standards and you got some points if you did well or bad in those standards.

S- Now were everyone’s standards the same? Or did you each have things you needed to work on?

JORDAN-Yeah, yeah everyone had the same. It was school wide? I think, I’m not sure, but I think it varied with the grades. Pretty much I discovered it was like a schoolhouse. It wasn’t like a full fledge school, well it was but it wasn’t you know. I’m going to say as low as 1st or 2nd grade or 3rd grade up to high school, seniors. It was like a 100 students. But anyways, I’m getting off track

S- You’re fine, so when you had this point system. Tell me how that worked.

JORDAN-Pretty much, if you, if you messed up in a certain area, like say, you spoke when you weren’t supposed to, and you didn’t, and the teacher corrected you the first time and you were sort of defiant, even a little bit defiant, they would, they would take points away.

S- Ok, so then how,…you felt like Alternative school, you know saved you, why do you feel that way. What did Alternative school do that was so different that your regular school didn’t do?

JORDAN-Well like going back to the bullying, there was, for me, there was no bullying towards me. Even the, even the sort of bad kids, um they didn’t treat me badly, they respected me.

S- um, so what exactly took you to Alternative school? My understanding is that Alternative school is a school you go to when you can’t go to your regular school anymore because of your behavior
JORDAN-I never really understood that. I don’t really have any behavioral problems. I have emotional problems. Mental, psychological, neurological. But I don’t have any behavioral problems.

S-So then, how did you get to go to Alternative school?

JORDAN- Well, um, I can’t seem to recall right now. I remember, I have, I use to have a person who would defend me in school, like a, like an adult. She fought with me to get me out of that school because they weren’t helping me academically or um emotionally so I ended up in that school after seeing different schools and I guess Alternative school was the best choice.

S-Ok, so there were different options and then for you Alternative school was the best option.

JORDAN- hmh, yeah because the other schools were zero tolerance schools, and I did not feel comfortable. Well, one of them was zero tolerance and the other one wasn’t so much zero tolerance, it looked really cool, but I forget why I didn’t chose that one

S-Ok, so it was kind of up to you then? You got to decide?

JORDAN-yeah, there was kind of, there was a lot of pressure on it too, on choosing what school I wanted to go to.

S-So what made you choose Alternative school over the other 2?

JORDAN-I guess the more intimate, um what’s the word I’m looking for? The more intimate air of the school. Cuz like I said, it was a school of 100 children and teenagers, more or less

S-So you liked the small class sizes. Do they use, I know that you said that they were real strict with their standards and what not, but did they use positive approaches, positive reinforcement?

JORDAN-shakes head yes

S-yeah, did they do that at your regular school at all?

JORDAN-They had nothing of the sort, well, for the whole school they had um, near the end of my high school career there, um for the PSSAs, it’s the state exams, they had incentives, I never got the incentives, I don’t know why, but for students who did well on the PSSAs there were certain prizes and stuff you could get. That was, they just started that one, that was my junior year

S-But as far as doing things, um, oh, just for behavior or what not, because you know when I was teaching we had where if you saw somebody doing something good you could give them tickets, they could collect a certain amount of tickets and earn points and stuff like that. Um, and just being more positive with their approaches, versus just assuming you would know what was going on, or how to act, or what not.
JORDAN- yeah no, um, with the point system, you collect enough points and you can go to the school store; you can get stuff there, and um, like at the end of the school year, like in the spring, there is this fair you could go to. They have this fair that they make on the lawn.

S-Fun

JORDAN-yeah, so there was like um, you know those things where you have those batons where you try and knock each other off? They had that there um, they had a dunk thing

S-Yes, I’ve been one of those dunkees before

JORDAN- laughs, yeah, they had a lot of cool stuff there, it was fun

S-cool

JORDAN-yeah, you save up enough points for that, for that you save up enough points to convert those points into tickets so you can go to the rides and stuff

S-So how do you think Alternative school helped you academically?

JORDAN- Well, they did help me but only for the time being, honestly, I hate to say that, but I have dyscalculia. Do you know what that is?

S-No

JORDAN-It’s like dyslexia but for math

S- Oh, ok

JORDAN- So I have that. I just got diagnosed with it recently. I think it was actually that same year that I was at Alternative school that I got diagnosed with that. So at the time, when I was at Alternative school, they really helped me with my math. And, one thing that has stuck with me was budgeting.

S-Good, that’s important!

JORDAN- so that stuck with me, but unfortunately, since I have dyscalculia, I, since I haven’t done math, literally like, in such a long time, for a year actually. I’m actually going to take math in my next semester, basic math, but I just, I’ve forgotten so much. So if I’m not doing math constantly, I’m not going to remember it, I’m not going to retain it. It isn’t because I’m not interested in it, my um, my brain can’t just keep those in there.

S-Right, the wires aren’t saying connected.

JORDAN-laugh

S-So how do you think Alternative school helped your personal success?
They’ve made me more confident and stuff. Although lately I haven’t been confident in myself. I’m going through some stuff, but um, they’ve shown me not to care what other people think about myself. Honestly, I’ve been going through, I’ve been caring about what other people think of me since I was a kid and I’ve had enough so.

S-It’s hard, you know in school we care so much about what other people think and when you get into the real world, it doesn’t seem like, you know, everyone’s kind of doing their own thing and you can kind of get into your little group of people and you just kind of stick together, you know?

JORDAN-hmh

S-the people that were in your past, they are in your past, and you don’t really, it doesn’t really matter what they use to think, it’s not important.

JORDAN-yeah

S-So, um, when you say that Alternative school helped you with your confidence, how did they do that?

JORDAN-Well, um, we had a talent show,

S- I want to know your talent! What did you do?!

JORDAN-I sang,

S-You can sing?! Awesome, what kind of music do you sing?

JORDAN- Um, I don’t really have a style actually. I haven’t, I use to sing chorus at my regular school. Ever since I repeated 12th grade a couple of times I haven’t song um officially. Up till today, it’s taken a toll of my voice a lot, I’m actually, that’s one of the things that I’m not feeling confident because I want to do a talent show this year, I mean next year, but I haven’t practiced and the auditions are in a couple of weeks.

S-Well, you better start cracking! So Alternative school helped you with your confidence because you got to be in a talent show?

JORDAN-yeah, and then everybody liked it. Everyone loved me, pretty much

S-Did you get signatures from all of your fans

JORDAN-laughes, actually I think I did sign some. Oh my gosh!

S-Do you play any music like any instruments?

JORDAN-Um, I use to play instruments, but it seems like I can’t stay with one. Not because I can’t choose between them, well I like them all, but also because which goes back to my self-esteem. When I started with my Tourette’s I was learning to the guitar. That’s when I was like 7 or 8. So before my Tourette’s I was playing guitar I was great. I was, my parents were
impressed and my teacher was impressed, but when my Tourette’s started, it started, it burst out of nowhere, it got so bad that I couldn’t even hold a guitar in my hands and that pretty much traumatized me up to this day that I can’t start something and stick with it and that applies to everything in my life.

S-so you don’t know what brought on, on the Tourette’s?

JORDAN-No, I mean, we don’t have any history of Tourette’s in our family.

S-And it just surfaced when you were about 7 or 8?

JORDAN-It just surfaced out of nowhere.

S-Wow, You can’t, but talking to you now, I mean you don’t (interrupted)

JORDAN-Yeah, I know because um I’m calm right now, I’m very calm. But um, but if I show you, if I flipped the camera around you would see that my feet are constantly rubbing against each other. That’s one of my Tourette’s, my ticks, I can’t sit still like you, you know. I can’t sit still in school, especially when I’m doing a homework assignment, which right now, I’m calm right now but, after, say if I would hang up, um, I have this thing that’s been bugging me. I have these three assignments that I have to turn in, um, and then I have my finals coming up and that’s been turning me into a nervous wreck. S-yeah. JORDAN-So like, I’ve been, I’ve been, that’s my Tourette’s, I flick my, I flash my hands around, my, and my body. I flash my body around and I twitch certain muscles.

S-Ok, so do you have any strategies to help you. Have you learned….JORDAN-to help me calm down? S-mhm

JORDAN-No, not really. I’ve tried strategies, and nothing really calms me down.

S-It’s just really hard I’m sure. So, you graduated then, high school from Alternative school?

JORDAN-mhm

S-That’s really cool. I’m glad that you um, you didn’t give up. That shows you, you should be proud of yourself right there for not giving up and sticking with it because I think a lot of people would not have done that.

JORDAN-Yeah, school is pretty much the only thing that I’ve stuck with, but I can’t seem to figure out why that is. Why I can only stick with school and nothing else because, and that’s what scares me because when I graduate from college because I’m thinking of transferring, when I graduate, what then? I wouldn’t know what to do with me life. I have tried taking jobs, I’ve tried working and um, well let’s just say, first of all, I can’t do manual labor. I suck at manual labor, and those are the jobs that I’ve been doing. Um, the last job I had was at a movie theater and that didn’t work out either.

S- Is it, why didn’t it work out?
JORDAN- I just, it involved a lot of standing, and I, that’s another thing, I don’t have just mental and emotional and psychological problems, I have physical problems as well. So like standing for long periods of time, pretty much obliterates my legs and my feet.

S- So, um so since you finished at Alternative school, um, you know graduated from Alternative school, you’ve been working and going back to school again?

JORDAN-Yeah

S-So where are you going to school?

JORDAN-um, I’m going to the, the community college in my city

S-do you like it?

JORDAN-Yeah, it’s ok, I mean, the campus is pretty boring honestly. That’s just my opinion because there is, there is stuff to do, just not stuff that interests me.

S-Ok, so what do you, you were saying you were thinking about transferring schools, what school would you like to go to?

JORDAN-I’d like to go to, but I can’t because there’s nothing around, I’d like to go to um a school that will help me develop my art skills more. When I say art, I say like art in general. Like um, music, cinematography, drawing, stuff like that. Also I like media, not like journalism, but stuff like music video photography, um, that stuff.

S-Are there, are there not any schools like that around you?

JORDAN-There’s no art schools around me. They’re all, there all in the Philadelphia area. That’s like an hour away

S- And that makes it hard for traveling purposes

JORDAN-Yeah, so I’d like to do that stuff, but there is nothing in my city, nothing. I mean, they, they just opened, um a new program at, at this one school that’s, that’s really close to me, but it’s a private school.

S-And you can’t go to the private school?

JORDAN-I can’t afford it…S-ok, yeah, it’s too expensive,…JORDAN-I can’t afford it…S-oh mercy, well surely, maybe you can, maybe you can save up some cash and move to Philadelphia so you can go to the other school.

JORDAN-I’m not moving to Philadelphia, honestly, I don’t like that city.

S-No, Not even for the school?

JORDAN-Nope, like even downtown scares me.
S—does it really?

JORDAN—Yeah, I feel more comfortable going into New York.

S—Oh wow, well then I guess you’re just going to have to move to New York then!

JORDAN—If I could find the money for rent!

S—I know, New York is so expensive, it’s crazy!

JORDAN—I know,

S—So, so what obstacles have you encountered since leaving, since graduating from Alternative school?

JORDAN—Say again?

S—What obstacles, what things have been challenging since graduating from Alternative school?

JORDAN—um, well, um, let me think of one, mmmm, I know there are some, they just aren’t coming to my mind, um, continuing school. Well, not really because um, I studied somewhere else, not an actual school but um, a training facility for IT

S-ok

JORDAN— but that in itself was really hard to do because um, the content near the end of the, of me studying there, it was very difficult, it was networking, and I could not grasp the concept of networking, and I don’t know how I completed that course because I don’t know anything of networking but that wasn’t the only thing obviously. There was computer repair and there was Microsoft Office, but even, again that was a difficulty as well, because um what I did there was, what I should have done was um taking notes like crazy because honestly I don’t even take notes, I didn’t need to take notes because it was the lecture and in the book, but what I was doing was watching lecture on the computer because it was pre-recorded, watching the lecture and reading along with the book and if I wanted to I could take small notes, but what I did at the beginning of the term was jot down notes, jot down notes, writing everything that the person told me on the screen and I shouldn’t have done that so I got very behind, really behind, and somehow I managed to complete the course, but now, I almost wasted that money because I should’ve been study for um, the certification examine, and I was studying, but what was happening was I wasn’t getting, I was supposed to take a practice exam, and I was doing that and I kept getting low scores, not the bare minimum score that I was supposed to get so actually, um, um, the, the um, what was I saying, what was I saying.

S— you were talking about taking the practice…JORDAN-certification exam thank you….S—Yeah

JORDAN—um, but I was supposed to do was take the certification examine by yesterday. Like yesterday was the last day to take the examine and of course I didn’t take it because I wasn’t prepared and now I have to pay out of pocket to take that examine.
S-ouch, that stinks,

JORDAN-yeah, and it’s 3 examines, it’s 3 of them, about $100 each

S-wow,

JORDAN-yeah, like I had vouchers for all 3 examines that was paid for in the tuition but I couldn’t take advantage of them

S-I’m sorry that happened, that stinks

JORDAN-yeah, I really hate myself for that because I could’ve not gone to college and be making money, a lot of money right now. I, it just boggles my mind of how stupid I was.

S-Well, I guess you can learn from your mistakes and know for next time, you know, we all make mistakes and we just gotta take the mistakes and figure out how we can learn from them so we don’t, so we don’t do it again. So, looking, you’re in school right now, which is awesome, going to classes, and all your papers, and examines and all that kind of stuff. That’s a lot. How do you try to overcome your obstacles so you don’t have a situation happen like with your examines?

JORDAN-Um, well right now I’m having trouble doing that because um, I think I mentioned early, I have these 3 papers that I have to turn in by the end of the semester and I’ve been having trouble writing them. Well, I’ve written 2, I need to write one. And the first 2 that I’ve written, I need to edit them according to the notes that my professor gave me. I’ve just been having trouble correcting them because I correct one thing, and he finds something wrong with that thing, or something else wrong with another thing because it’s a writing course. So like…writing is hard….JORDAN-Yeah, and that’s one of my, one of my dreams that I have is to become a writer for video games.

S-Oh cool, that’d be awesome!

JORDAN-Yeah, and it bugs me a little bit because I just found out that there’s not really much demand for them.

S-Oh yeah, and that seems weird because there are so many video game choices

JORDAN-yeah, it seems weird because there are so many, there’s so many games out there that I could write stories for, there are so many developers that would like ah well, I don’t know, it’s weird, but um, what was I saying again, I’m getting off track.

S-Just talking about your different experiences and what you want to do um, you like writing and being a video game developer.

JORDAN-Um, well let’s just say I have a lot of things that I want to be (laughing). I wanted at one point to be a musician, but then I got, every time I want to do something, or be something, something breaks me down, to not want to do it anymore. Whether it be my parents not supporting it or me not, me stopping it half way, because like what I told you before about me
not finishing things. Um, it’s a lot, it’s a lot of stuff that I go through like in my mind on a daily basis. That’s just one of the things that, that keep me from, that’s just one of the reasons why I have these mental things. I suffer from depression and anxiety, so um, those 2 things are aggravated by those depressing things that bother me.

S-Yeah, just kind of all piles up on you. Gets overwhelming I’m sure. You just have to have a little faith in yourself!

JORDAN-That’s what I don’t have!

S-You need to find some because you’re doing it. Look at everything that you’ve, you’ve um accomplished so far. You should be really proud of yourself and you’re doing it right now. You just have to take it one day at a time and you’ll find you niche and where you’re supposed to be and what you’re supposed to be doing. You just gotta keep on keeping on. All these little things are just going to make you stronger in what you’re doing. You just can’t, can’t give up!

So, how would you define success?

JORDAN-Um, (long pause) Choosing something, sticking with it, and doing well in it.

S-Ok, how would you define resilience?

JORDAN-(long pause) again, choosing something, sticking with it, and not backing down regardless of what life throws at you.

S-SO what do you think, let’s talk about the personal factors you have. What do you think you have that have helped you be successful? Because you are successful, you’ve completed high school, you know, you’ve maintained jobs and are going to school right now, so in my mind, you are successful and you are resilient. Even though you’ve had so many different obstacles in your way, you know, what do you think, what personal factors do you think contribute to your success?

JORDAN-My parents. They’ve always been on my case, ever since I’ve started school….S-that’s what we’re for!...laughs, JORDAN- So like, even though I hate it when they yell at me for stuff that I’m already doing, they’ve been a great big help. I appreciate that.

S-Anything else?

JORDAN- um, my friends. The few friends that I’ve had um because yeah, I have friends now.

S-So Alternative school helped with that huh? Are your friends, friends from Alternative school or are they new friends.

JORDAN-Well, actually, I’ve tried to contact them but I haven’t had much luck, but I think one of them requested a friendship on Facebook so I’ll have to check that. I’m not sure. Um, 2 of them actually, I think. But friends from my old school.
S-Oh, ok. Anything else besides your friends and your family that have helped you with your success?

JORDAN-Well, God honestly

S-Very cool, well, if you were to go back and talk to your schools, how do you think schools can give kids a better chance at being successful? What can schools do?

JORDAN-um, well, offer more extra curricular activities and incentives for students who do well. Um, yeah, um, not take away stuff. That’s what my, I don’t know what the status of that is right now, but that’s what my old school did. They threatened to took away the music department

S-Oh and that’s your true love! JORDAN-Yeah exactly….S- we can’t do that! JORDAN---I know, the students, the alumni that were in my class they were going on a campaign to not take that away. I think they did, I think they accomplished what they wanted to do but I’m not sure

S-What else do you think teachers and schools can do to help students/

JORDAN-Um, well honestly I hate for this to be the reason but if teachers were paid more they’d want to go to school and teach more. I mean some teachers I guess, I don’t know, I mean they’ve laid off a lot of teachers in my area.

S-Have they really?

JORDAN-Like over 100

S-Oh wow, that’s crazy. That makes it really hard.

JORDAN-That’s what I think it was, yeah.

S-So what characteristics do you think you need to have in order to deal with difficult situations?

JORDAN-Characteristics?

S-Yeah

JORDAN-Well, like you said, resilience. Even if, even if you feel like there is no point to it, just keep going. Even if you’re like me like you felt like the bullying is never going to stop.

S-Just not giving up

JORDAN-Yeah, keep hope

S-So, what do you think could potentially hinder your success?

JORDAN-Funding

S-The money
JORDAN—Because that’s what’s happening now. Like my family is getting poorer by the second. They’ve threatened to take away our health insurance and I’m not sure but they might have succeeded.

S—And that makes it really hard

JORDAN—Yeah. Like I’m living off of the government so. That’s pretty much our only income

S—Wow, and it makes it really hard when you’re trying to just make ends me to continue on I’m sure.

JORDAN—Yeah, and also since I’m working, since I’m living off of the government, it’s really hard for me to get a job and earn a certain amount of money. Because if I earn a certain amount of money that they don’t like, they’re going to take away my, what they’re giving me, and I’ll have to fend for myself which I’m not ready for that.

S—Yeah, that’s scary. Well, you’re in school now and all of us people in school, we gotta keep doing the school and when we’re done with that we can find a good job. So what are you, what are you, you said you were at the Community College, what are you trying to accomplish? What do you want to do?

JORDAN—That’s what I don’t know yet like I was saying, because I have so many things that I would like to do.

S—Well it’s good that you’re getting the core, the basics out of the way. Everybody has to take those basic things and give yourself some time to know what you want to do.

S—Is there anything else you’d like to add to what we’ve talked about so far?

JORDAN—(talking to someone in the room) long pause…if I were to say something to kids that are in my similar situation, just don’t give up. Even if you don’t believe in anything, at least believe in yourself. That way, like, you have something to hang on to.

S—I think that is the best advice you could ever give and you have to remember that for your own self too. Never give up!

JORDAN—Yeah, I’m not giving up right now. Like I, I feel close to giving up, but I’m not. Not till I kick the bucket.

S—that’s right. Well, thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate the opportunity to get to talk to you and to hear your story. Like I said, you should be just so proud of yourself for everything that has been, all the different obstacles that have been put in your path, you’re still standing on top of your tower so that’s pretty cool. You should hang your hat on that for sure. Are you interested in another Amazon gift card?

JORDAN—Sure,

S—Ok, I will send you $20 right now.
Interview with Cooper

Cooper- Hi

S- It's Staci! How are you today?

Cooper- I'm well, thanks. how are you?

S - Doing really good! It was really foggy here this morning

Cooper - oh

S - Where I'm from in Ohio, on foggy days there are 2 hour school delays but they don't do that here!

Cooper – hm, so what questions did you wanna ask me

S - Thank you so much for being willing to talk with me! I really appreciate it!

Cooper - no problem

S - I would like to save the transcripts from our "conversation" so I can use them to make sure I get your wording correct in my paper. Is that ok with you?

Cooper - yes

S - Also, if you want to stop at any time let me know. Sound good

Cooper - yes

S - Do you want to talk on the phone instead or is this ok?

Cooper - this is good

S - Okie dokie. I want you to be as specific as you can in your answers. Can you describe your regular school experience?

Cooper - I will try my best. You mean high school? Specifically Alternative school or also N high school?

S - Let's start with N high school. You can even talk to me about the school you went to before Alternative school, do you remember that long ago?

Cooper - ok. well, the first year back upon transition from Alternative school was chaotic. I had had an "aid" and I would be disruptive. I once ran through the halls to get water they had said I couldn't have, and the security guards ran after me. I was often in ISS because I would argue endlessly...the 2nd year, it was better, not the best. Next year, I was full-time in regular ed classrooms. I used to think most teenagers are scum, but I've made 3 friends, Ian Miller, Kevin Kunkle, and Alyssa Fogel. Ok well back before Alternative school, even worse than the first
year back to N. I was in the principal's office everyday, and ironically I had honor roll every marking period

S - Oh wow, that must have been really hard.

Cooper - the school system at the time didn't have good support for the Asperger’s type, considering kindergarten was 1999-2000

S- Yes, very true. I would like to hope that it's gotten better but I'm not sure that it has everywhere like it should.

Cooper - as my mother tells it, the kindergarten teacher told my mother she could handle me, and the first day of class, after she came to pick me up, she called for a conference

S - How was your experience at Alternative school?

Cooper - I'm not....well, not the same level of disruptive. I sometimes cut people off and I do often argue, but I don't hold on as obsessively anymore. Alternative school was suggested by my MD who at the time worked part-time there. It was a major improvement from public school. The public school wanted me gone but then they wanted me back. With the help of Alternative school, that was able to happen. They're big on behavior modification and the teachers are loose and understanding.

S - Why was Alternative school a major improvement for you?

Cooper - They do a much better job than assuming because I act out a lot [previously], that I must have a learning disorder, putting me in learning ed, though I don't have that

S - What is an MD?

Cooper - medical doctor, sorry

S - Sorry, should have guessed that one! lol

Cooper: I was at Alternative school from the middle of the 4th grade to graduation.

S - So can you describe the difference in the actual school environment between N and Alternative school?

Cooper - well, Alternative school was a work in progress. It took time and time again, years. Even when I did transition, they only did it because I was one of the few who...in my mother's and the administration's words, "had a college future" since a lot of them are other types of disabilities, i.e., ODD, other forms of P.D.D., mainstream autism, retardation, etc., and so they've made an exception. N elementary or high school to Alternative school or both?

S - both

Cooper: ok, well, N administration wasn't too patient. They weren’t willing to make changes and adjustments and learn. All they did was what they’ve been doing for the past years since, as
said, this was before Asperger’s was more commonly known. They had said that I would never
get to college and make it in life. I’ve overheard my mother on the phone a couple nights ago,
not sure if that had been with you, where she's said that that ticked her off. It was stressful, a lot
of battles between my mother and the administration.

S - Yes, that is very stressful! I can't even imagine someone saying that to anyone!

Especially school personnel.

Cooper: yes, well they didn’t know much. I still have somewhat of an angst-driven frustration
toward them, occasionally I go on and on babbling of how they're awful...just like I do with y-
care. Alternative school has its share of nastily angry temper-tantrum children and even adults,
sometimes even literally taking down a door, but it also had the safety of the one-on-one teacher
methodology

S - So there were smaller class sizes at Alternative school versus your other schools?

Cooper - yes, some classes more than others. As said, I was one of the few with Asperger’s, so
they didn’t have the supply since the teachers are students. And they had to teach the teachers to
teach me...in the 11th and 12th grade, I’ve had a class with another aspie

S - So you were frustrated with Alternative school too then?

Cooper - at times, but only temper-tantrums, not long-term and not with how they handle it. Just
in-the-moment anger, I am not violent though, never was, I was the one who would follow
teachers around, talking, but that's changed. I can still be hyper but also extremely quiet. Within
limits

S - It's seems like academically you are at a much higher level than anyone else around you.

Cooper - I'm not claiming to be an Einstein, but in personae, I am claiming to be a Sheldon
cooper. He's also from Texas in the show

S: You're funny!

Cooper: I hope I'm not talking too much. Sorry

S - No, you are GREAT!!

Cooper: ok

S: No need to apologize at all!!! :-) It had to be difficult/frustrating to be a school where you
knew more than those around you. Did some of your frustration stem from being bored?

Cooper: Maybe a bit when I would get into arguments, for instance, why Microsoft is better than
apple

S - You are passionate about what you believe in. I just got a Mac. I've always had PCs. I like
it. :-)
Cooper - and well, I would occasionally make it up to, I'm assuming you know the step system - step 3, and always drop back down to 2, because I couldn’t meet good enough days, but they were 85%s and above. They just weren’t 85% in each expectation. I will try to remember those, long time: be there be ready, be responsible, be respectful, hands and feet to yourself/personal space, and follow directions.

S - Talk to me more about that. What kind of behavior system did Alternative school have?

Cooper - they had to make a special 6th one only for me, quietly raised hand

Cooper: They have "take 5s" which are tickets you can use in the award ceremony. you could win 500 points if your ticket is picked from the collective basket

S: So, they individualized things at Alternative school then? Based on each kids needs?

Cooper: well in a lot of cases, but only what modern culture might call the "special" cases. However you wanna interpret that, handful or otherwise

S - That sounds like fun. You could buy things with your tickets?

Cooper: anyway, they also had bus tickets picked for burger king. I don’t eat fast food. I prefer my grease from parkay and my sugar from the college bookstore. I didn’t even put in my tickets anymore, I would just throw them away because I almost always had "missing work" due to not paying full effort to class either by making jokes or arguing/interrupting, and so I could never go to the school store, and the points just amounted. They reset at each end of the school year, but I would have over 20 thousand by each year often

S - Ha! Your idea of sugar is a good book?

Cooper: no I mean actual candy. They only have otherwise, textbooks which you need an order for, and the personal need to handle it

Cooper: speaking of candy, my father took my credit card away for just yesterday spending $21.49 on candy and soda. I had to have a bag in which to put it. The store worker asked me, in fact seriously, if I’m treating the whole class, because apparently students do that in dorms at the end of the semester

S - I see, I never go to the school bookstore. I like buying my books on Amazon. They are much cheaper!

Cooper: well my parents often do that, but they also like to rent. I don’t handle finances. I just buy pseudo/processed-food/junk/drinks/gum/etc.

S - So, how was the discipline system at your regular schools different from Alternative school?

Cooper: well, for starters, in regular ed, if you don’t do the work in class, and if the teacher doesn’t make an exception with allowing you to hand it in the next day, then you would lose points per late day. Same as college, but in high school I would rarely get homework done on
time, in college, I ironically do. My one statement in health class at Alternative school was: "space aliens stole my homework. If we build a rocket, we can get it back within a few light years.” Speaking of health, that’s another thing of Alternative school - as said, they didn’t have good supply. So the health teacher was teaching the same thing to elementary as high school so I would be doing the same work over and over since 4th grade...in the end, I gave up, and just fooled around. I wasn’t learning anything anyway. Not my best choice for the stress of the teacher, but I won’t lie, it was sort of funny. But I don’t do that anymore, for the record

S- So, let me see if I understand correctly...The health teacher was teaching the same thing to everyone?

Cooper: yes, but that was because they only had one health teacher

S- I wonder why

Cooper: as said, they’d teach other teachers extra classes just to give me what I need

Cooper: For instance, statistics/calculus, and my teacher has gone to extreme lengths just to provide it...in fact it was the same teacher throughout high school, stood by me, despite the stress

S - Oh, so was everyone in the health room together taking health? All grades?

Cooper: and no, it was per class

Cooper: and for the record, they have a separate gym teacher, and the health teacher shared an office. I was more fond of the gym teacher though because we are both conservative

S- So a lot of times you had a one on one teacher?

Cooper: yes, but that’s a good thing

S: Seems like it was what was best for you.

Cooper: yes, it definitely was

Cooper: (S-talking about gym teacher) not strictly only because he's conservative. it was also because the same stuff didn’t happen. The political talk was just a nice bonus. My most favorite teachers were not the same party. Well, I coped. I emailed the teachers a lot. If I needed help, I would ask them. When I started to socialize, I would ask for their help to prod me

S: That is nice that they made a connection with you. These teachers were from Alternative school?

Cooper: which ones? You mean the politics thing? That would be Alternative school. Albeit I would also talk politics to my N teachers. I liked them as well. A big change from the elementary not only in teachers, but probably in part because of my maturity

S- So you liked your teachers at both schools then?
Cooper: yes

S: In elementary school it was much harder

Cooper: aside from elementary at N, that is...but I did have one teacher my whole family myself included liked: Mrs. C. Another, Mrs. O. Harder stress-wise, but they wouldn’t level to my abilities. Only grade-level standard. That was something Alternative school improves on. Alternative school does it by the ability, not grade

S- Do you think that is better? Grouping by ability vs. grade?

Cooper: ability all the way. One of the reasons Alternative school is the best. N high school is better than 2000s elementary, but then even they only have remedial, normal, and honors and college prep. I always lagged in test scores because I would be anxious to get to the computers after, and because I would get hung up over grammar and the test proctors would get annoyed after a while...so they didn’t fully believe I was ready for honors, though they didn’t explicitly say it...but I did college prep.

S: If you did something you shouldn't have at your regular school, what would happen to you? How would the teachers or principals react?

Cooper: Well, depends on what you mean: something I shouldn’t do that I DID or WOULD do...or something I didn’t and would NOT do...aka violence I would never do but it would involve police, or something I DID and WOULD do, which is repeat, interrupt, and call out, argue - which would, at N, be, if I wouldn’t stop when the teacher tells me within actually a generous amount of time, ISS. But the 11th and 12th grade, I didn’t go to ISS

S: Was that at N?

Cooper: yes

S: Let's see, what would happen at N if someone were violent?

Cooper: anyway well, once there was a fight. Only once - didn’t see what happened. But the police chief of N frequented the halls. When I was selling chocolates for DECA (entrepreneurship club, and I’ve even gone to states and nationals), he bought some. Apparently he fit the cop stereotype because I’ve been told he, no lie, actually does love donuts

S: LOL! You would have to go to ISS at N if you talked too much?

Cooper: Only if beyond excess. That happened like 5 times total in my whole time. I would also get in trouble there for telling on people using their phones. There were less-than-friendly teachers there too, when I would ask for a Band-Aid or Neosporin. Well, one in particular. I don’t know his name.

S: What would happen at Alternative school if you talked too much or got upset?
Cooper: rarely would be ISS. In fact ISS stopped in I think the 9th or 10th grade, but so did my behavior improve. And it only happened if you have a write-up 3 times...sometimes they’ll make an exception even if its one or 2 write-ups, they’re called dbrs or problem solving.

Cooper: also sometimes starting in the 10th or so grade, I would ASK to problem solve, rather than rant, even though prior to that, I would often refuse to go to problem solving even if its nothing even bad, because the general purpose of a problem solving/dbr is a bad connotation

S: Alternative school taught you to problem solve or debrief when you got upset?

S: what is a dbrs?

Cooper: I never knew what it stands for. I just know its a sheet where the teacher puts the student, class, behavior, and what you could do differently to prevent it next time, and you put what they could do, and what solutions to take effect such as make-up work, and then you both sign it. Oh, it stands for debrief. Well, actually it was by call of the teacher. They didn’t teach me to want to. I taught myself that, because if I could actually get their attention, one-on-one, I could argue my point rather than going on and on which they ignore me anyway. Only to problem solve later and a few times, they’ve actually insisted there’s no need to problem solve, but we did because I knew we WOULD be if it WERENT for me acting before it started being incredibly over-the-top disruptive

S: So, it was more effective to problem solve that way?

Cooper: I didn’t recognize its efficiency early on. It took years until I realized it, but yes

S: How were your peers at school?

Cooper: Generally good. Granted, I’ve made a few mad in one of my classes for telling on them with phones....I stopped doing that and the 12th grade year was great

S: what was so great about 12th grade?

Cooper: as said, I’ve made 3 friends, unthinkable previously and also because I was able to get along with my teachers

S: Why was it unthinkable before?

Cooper: because I didn’t used to get along with people that well

Cooper: I’m still not the best, but I can take a punch, so to speak, and I am not as easily bent out of shape. I have learned to not be so literal, and be more trusting of teenagers since before that, I had thought they’re just all one of those kids who text while they drive and go on fb and twitter...which I still don’t do...and definitely didn’t do then

S: Why? What changed?
Cooper: well, compared to earlier times where I would be kept to myself and not allow anyone in, and people wouldn’t even, as a result, bother TRYING to OPEN me up, they made a step where I didn’t. I relaxed and opened up too. To think actually the one friendship started with me telling on him for saying the t word meaning breasts....but it ironically was my best friendship 12th grade. Not many people are that understanding, and I did apologize.

S: That's good. :-)

Cooper: once I realized he wasn’t being malicious. He liked rap, I like metal, but K likes metal. B is republican like me. Al likes the band ADTR and also believes in the death penalty.

S: So, what have you been up to since finishing high school?

Cooper: mostly history books and cyber security research. I like dissecting malware and coding extensions for the browser Maxton. I also listen to music and play fable 2/3 and sky rim. I also eat sugar, salt, and butter, of course

S: Who doesn't?

Cooper: I love this sort of thing. Well the implication was, I eat more than most others do. And I’m planning to get my PhD and teach modern global military history at Cornell or Bucknell.

S: How are your college classes?

Cooper: they’re good. I generally like my professors. There have been and are some cases where the relationship isn’t the best, but generally, its good. I even have one professor this semester who has Asperger’s. 2 of my professors so far have children with Asperger’s and one has a granddaughter with another form of, albeit, high-functioning autism, and I’ve made a few friends. I’m not one of those people who meet with them in real life. I’m the person who asks for their emails and talks there, when not in class or after the semester is over

S: Oh wow, so you have something in common. That makes things nice

Cooper: yes

S: What obstacles have you encountered since graduating?

Cooper: I’m not yet socialized, but I definitely am compared to before.

S: Reflecting on your experiences as an adolescent, how do you deal with challenges now versus when you were in school?

Cooper: honestly, whereas it used to be hard, it’s relatively easy now. I have some moments where I have to struggle to keep in my angst, but it’s definitely a lot easier

S: Because of your problem solving skills or something else?

Cooper: I suppose part of it is an inhibition that has grown out of necessity, from the realization that I need to succeed at college, and while I could get away with it in primary/secondary school,
that I can’t in college...that this is the make or break. before was the training wheels. Now if I fall, it’ll be much harder to get back up

S: When you encounter an obstacle or challenge, how do you handle it?

Cooper: just a more natural ease, rather than telling myself. As said, there are instances...one example, I was a bit rowdy the one day, and I was arguing with a visiting speaker over why there ARE hashish bars in Denmark, that I was NOT thinking of Netherlands, because Netherlands allows drugs, but Denmark doesn’t, though the police don’t do anything to curb it in certain areas. I had to hold it in. I kept looking at the clock, so I could talk to the professor at the end of class. But I did it and when he wasn’t interested, I took the hint, ...albeit, I’ve sent one email, but then I’ve apologized, and also to my note-taker included. But that’s just one instance. Usually, it’s just natural, which wasn’t thinkable previously

S: You should be proud of yourself and all you have accomplished! You have learned lots of strategies that you put into good use every day.

Cooper: I’ve done exceptionally well...in fact my parents were scared when I would be going off to college...now they are proud...but they’re now again scared because I don’t always take my meds when I have the day OFF. I suppose [didn’t wanna sound egotistical, hence the neutral reaction]

S: You aren't being egotistical!

Cooper: sometimes its more of unintentional and unknowingly

S: You've worked really hard and should be proud of that!

Cooper: and not myself actively thinking of myself, but perhaps sounds like a subconscious admission

S: How do you define success?

Cooper: success is being what you want to be, what you need to be, and what you enjoy to your fullest dreams

S: How would you define resilience?

Cooper: resilience is about getting up no matter what happens, not just how many times you fall

S: True that!

Cooper: if you can get back up, or at least have faith that you can and thus, try, you’re resilient. You have to try; you don’t have to succeed trying, because as long as you’ve tried with full effort and faith, you have succeeded.

S: I love that!!

Cooper: which one
S: BOTH! :-) What personal factors have contributed to your success?

Cooper: hrm, I have to think on that one, for a moment...most of my strengths are shadowed by their double function as a weakness for instance, humor can make friends, it can also drive others away

S: You know, I think that our biggest strengths are also our weaknesses.

Cooper: you’re definitely right about that. I don’t have much common sense...perhaps mostly intelligence, spread-out abilities as opposed to a specific, super-confined expertise. Maybe also enthusiasm, the ability to connect with professors and teachers especially my music interests, politics in a sense [not always, as that too can drive others away]

S: That is great!

Cooper: and also I don’t curse which is favorable by some people

S: Do you think that Alternative school contributed to your success at all? If so, how?

Cooper: well as Alternative school would say, say the positive do's, not the don’ts, even if the don’ts are a good thing. If it weren’t for me going there, I would probably have just gone downhill in public school until they put me into a mental asylum. But more on a serious note, perhaps I would have been suspended or just given up, and forgotten. I’m afraid to ponder the thought, but maybe even expelled, if it went on

S: Do you think that N (elementary and high school) didn’t have the right strategies to help you be successful?

Cooper: as said, it was never anything violent or criminal, but considering it was a serious amount of stress in its own way, and if it goes on for even MORE years, they already have had enough, they would have had much less rope left if it took longer before such a decision had, in fact, in this case, been made. High school, the only year was the year back, 10th grade, 11th grade had its struggles, but it wasn’t bad...it just wasn’t exactly always optimal. 12th grade was fine. Most of that was about me getting back into comfort, considering this is an overcrowded school and teachers I didn’t have over and over and with whom become familiar like at Alternative school, but elementary, no, they didn’t have the right strategies...that’s where Alternative school would come in. It took a long time, but I’ve pulled it off, not alone, I’ve had teachers, friends, and my parents

S: That had to have been a really hard adjustment going from a small school to a big one!

Cooper: yes

S: You put your strategies into good use I’m sure!!

Cooper: especially since in 2000, even the elementary was small. Now, it’s just as overcrowded as the high school/middle school but smaller building
S: How do you think schools can give students a better chance at success?

Cooper: public schools or specialty WIP ones like Alternative school? or either

S: Either...start with public schools like N

Cooper: ok, well, ...I like to think through my constant misbehavior, I’ve had a shaping on the development of the N school district administration, but you also have laws to thank for that, and greater understanding, incrementally better over time. But historically speaking, better education of the teachers. Mandate that they take more psychology classes, not just simple basic intros...more advanced, in-depth ones, with people who have experienced it first-hand and more patience, patience is a must. Willingness to adjust and compromise, improvise

S: More education so they can have a better understanding of kids and how to handle situations better?

Cooper: better grasp on being easy-going. From not some person who simply has a PhD, but from a person who either has the diagnosis him or herself, and/or knows someone who does, or works with those who do

S: They didn't know how to best handle you or your situation?

Cooper: not in elementary N, but I am speaking historically, since it’s improved a lot. In high school, well, the problems were, in THAT case because of my adjustment since even the ones who gave up on me and handed me over to other counselors and got angry at me all the time, eventually were laughing. Goes to show you, it takes both sides to mature

Cooper: Yes, and learn. But whereas in elementary, it was both my misbehavior and their mismanagement, in high school, they were understanding. I just went too far that even an extremely patient person couldn’t be THAT extent of understanding

S: What do you think schools like Alternative school can do to give students a better chance at success?

Cooper: it depends on the student

S: Overall?

Cooper: actually nothing comes to mind, honestly, not to sound like a utopian optimist. The way they do it now, individualized. It works, something the public ones don’t do or have. They have too few staff or too few capable staff available per over-excess of student, so rarely is it individualized. I was one of the few that in high school, WAS individualized, but as I have said before, I was a .... "special case", however you wanna interpret that, good or bad. I can laugh about it now

S: Almost done...you've been awesome!
Cooper: ok I hope I haven’t taken up too much of your time. Perhaps I’ve become a bit too comfortable in our chat and when I’m comfortable, I babble

S: No, not at all! I'm having a great time; you aren't taking up my time at all! Chat away, I just don't want to take up YOUR time!

Cooper: that’s another thing. Alternative school was fun because I was comfortable, so I could communicate and have fun, which didn’t happen in elementary

S: It definitely makes a difference when you feel comfortable and can be yourself. What characteristics do you possess that enable you to deal with challenging situations?

Cooper: you’re more understanding than most others. Most will say and believe people should be themselves, but then a limit comes when they see it bypassed with.

I’ve become lax, carefree. It doesn’t always fare well with my more important obligations, but it takes away a lot of the stress, leaving for ease with tough situations emotionally, but even with the obligations, I ironically have done well. 10-page paper in 19 mins, 95%

S: Holy moly! I wish I could write a 10-page paper in 19 minutes!

Cooper: I would probably say that was simple luck, but its fun to brag about it

S: No kidding!

Cooper: well actually I just can come out with a lot in little time, as you see here not least for a paper. I’ve probably written more than 10pages worth of messages here. albeit, more than 19 mins

S: Ok, last question for you. What characteristics do you possess that could potentially hinder your success?

Cooper: I am bit erratic and eccentric. For myself, I am sort of a dramatist. I like to explore realms of insanity, like being goofy to an extreme extent, and saying stupid things for the sole purpose of being blatantly ridiculous. It’ll make others laugh when conducted properly, but at times, it just makes me insufferable

S: It amuses you to see what reactions your gonna get? ;-)

Cooper: For the record, I have sort of a weird sense of humor, maybe a bit esoteric. Well, as long as it’s positive even if positive for me. I like to self-ridicule. I feel I have to be able to make fun of myself in order to have fun. I can admit all my flaws, and not deny them when someone suggests

S: That's a good quality to have. A lot of people aren't like that.
Cooper: otherwise, by refusing what is or might, might not be true, if someone says it, ill get too upset. I call my mother, sometimes a hypocrite. She gets out of shape. I’m the biggest hypocrite on the block. Everyone is...by saying one's not, you’re just not being proud of yourself

S: Never a dull moment, huh?

Cooper: well never a dull moment. I have a lot of fun making people laugh and I like the friendly tease-back I get

S: :-) 

Cooper: I am, sad to say, seldom serious unless I absolutely need to be, and even then, it depends and often takes prodding though, for the record, all that I’ve told you, IS serious because well, I understand the importance of such a study I wont mar it with stupid jokes [I’m an academia too]

S: Yes, I know you are. I really appreciate your honesty with me. Do you have any questions for me?

Cooper: is it weird or offensive if I ask how old you are? Not everyone is ok with that. Feel free not to answer

S: Actually, I will be 34 on Friday! Thank you so much for your time. I truly appreciate your help.

Interview with Michael

S: Would it be ok if I record our interview so that way I can make sure I get your words the way that you say them.

MICHAEL: Um, sure.

S: Great, thank you. So how are you doing today?

MICHAEL: I’m fine, how are you?

S: I’m doing great. Are you staying warm?

MICHAEL: Yes, I am.

S: That’s good. I’ll start off by telling you a little bit about what I’m doing and about myself so that way you know something about you before I start learning about you! I’m working on my dissertation right now, I’m going to graduate in August, um, and I before I started working, going back to school, I taught kindergarten for 5 years and 4th grade for 3 years and then decided to go back to school full time, and so that’s what I’m working on right now. I have 2 kiddos at home. I have my son, Colton, he’ll will be 5 in March and my daughter, Zoe, is 3, and let’s see, what else I have a husband, 2 cats, and a dog. Um, and right now, I am looking at studying resilience in individuals who’ve graduated from alternative education programs, and um,
learning how, um, so what you are doing is helping me be able to help others to be successful kind of like you are, and um, seeing exactly what schools can do better to help kids to be more successful. So that’s it in a nutshell. Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

MICHAEL: Um, how long have you been studying that resilience?

S: I have been studying resilience, that’s a really good question, probably for, really in-depth, for probably the last 2 ½ years so, um, I think it’s really great to look at, you know, to look at success stories. We all have things in our lives that might bring us down and learning, you know, I think it’s so interesting how some people can pick up by their boot straps and keep on going but others are able to do, to do that. So, just kind of trying to figure out why and specifically what can be done on educators’ ends to help with that process so more people can be successful.

MICHAEL: Ok

S: Any other questions for me before we get started?

MICHAEL: Um, what made you, like, what made you want to learn about people that graduated um from alternative education in schools?

S: Ooh, that’s another really good question. I, ah, one of the things that you have to do before you can start working on your dissertation is take this test. It’s called a qualifying examine, and what you do is, you basically have to write, you memorize, my professor gave me topics and um that I could potentially be writing on and you basically have to write papers from memory and it was awful. I studied my butt of for that thing, but in my studies, you have to go back and look, in way back in the history of education, and it seems like a lot of kids that, if they started out having a hard time in school, they just weren’t successful later on, and we’ve known this for a long time and I’m tired of seeing these bad statistics about kids, and what can we do to make it better? So that’s where it kind of came on to looking at resilience and what we can do for kids to make it better and start seeing more positive outcomes for kids who have a hard time in school. So that’s what I’m looking to do is help other people. So you are getting to help me to help other people so thank you, I really appreciate it.

MICHAEL: Ok, and um, so how did you know about, like, the people who graduated, like I think ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL must have told you that they know that I graduated.

S: Yeah, so what I had to do, I had to do lots of different, lots of research. My professor, he knows Dr. , from the ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL program. Do you know Dr. ? I’m pretty sure he runs the ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL program, he oversees everything, but I don’t know how involved he is in the actual school itself in um day-to-day stuff. Anyhow, the ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL program is really well known school for helping kids and doing best, things that are best practices for students, um, and so, what I did was, I talked to um, a man that works at the ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL program, his name is Dr. Martin and he’s part of the research team. I talked to him and I had to fill out all this paperwork. There’s a bunch of different criteria you have to follow in order to do research because the main thing with the ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL program is they want to be able to protect their students and do what’s best for students so I fill out all of their paperwork and answered all their questions and um, and then,
they told me that they would allow me to do my research and um, but before I could do that, they would be the ones to find participants for me. I believe they sent out forms requesting, or asking if I, specifically me, could contact you.

MICHAEL: I remember, I remember, I got that letter.

S: Yeah, and I had specific criteria that I was looking for, um, individuals who have graduated from high school or have their GED, and people that, oh, who are pursuing some sort of post secondary education, going back to school, working, or in the military. Those are my specific criteria, and once they found people for me and got the permission slips back, they gave me your phone number so I was able to contact you. So it’s kind of a long process. So what else, what else do you have for me?

MICHAEL: Um, I think that’s it for now.

S: ok, well, if you think of anything else you just let me know. You’re good at this; I think I need to hire you so you can be my right hand man! You want to move to Texas? (laughs)

MICHAEL: Woow (Laughs)

S: it’s warmer here than it is there

MICHAEL: well, true

S: It’s 30 degrees and people are just like freezing and it’s so windy. I thought I was going to get blown over today when I was walking up to my office.

MICHAEL: the only thing I would have to get use to is, I’d have to get use to new temperatures, new state, different people, and that’s going to be a long little process.

S: I know it, I know. So I’m looking at graduating in August and we are going to have to potentially move. My family still lives in Ohio, ooh, kind of near, are you familiar with Cedar Point?

MICHAEL: Yeah, from where I live to get to Cedar Point I think it takes a good 2 to 3 hours

S: Oh does it really? Ok, I’m near Cedar Point, near Lake Erie, I’m not, but my parents are. That’s where I’m from. A little teeny tiny town called Oak Harbor. So I’m looking to move closer, back to home, so hopefully I’ll be back to Ohio or Indiana land. It’s hard, I came to Texas, um, I graduated from college and moved to Texas and I didn’t know anybody. It’s a, I’ve lived here for 12 years now. I know it’s a scary thought to have to move away, but it’s like I know I can do it. I did it once before.

So what I am going to do is ask you different questions, um, at any point that you want to stop or whatever you just let me know, ok?

MICHAEL: Ok
S: Be thinking at the end, or if you know now, where you’d like a $20 gift card to for helping me out with my study.

MICHAEL: Ok,

S: Ok, to start off with, can you describe for me your experiences at your regular school? The school that you went to before you went to the ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL Program?

MICHAEL: Um, well, to make it sound crazy before I started school I was at ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL. I was at ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL, I would say, I think, I’m not sure, I think I was in public school when I was in kindergarten, I think. I think I was in ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL when I was in first and second grade and went back to public school in third grade and after I went, after I went to ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL I was, after I graduate from ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL I was in um, I went to Elementary school. I went to Elementary school for 3rd and 4th grade. Half of 3rd grade because I was in Elementary school part time, um going half day at Elementary school and half day at ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL. Then when I graduated ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL in the 3rd grade I was in Elementary school; I was in public school fulltime. So I went to Elementary school for the rest of 3rd grade, um Elementary school 4th grade, and I was at Middle school, which sounds crazy, I was at Middle school for 4 years which drove me crazy because Middle school was at first an elementary school which I was in, in 5th grade. Then after 5th grade they changed it into a middle school so I was there for 6th, 7th, and 8th grade. Then I went to Euclid high school half 9th grade. Half of 9th grade and then a little, like a lot of those years, a lot of those years in school I was getting picked on, bullied all the time. I was the type of person that never wanted to fight back and cause more trouble. In 9th grade, actually in 8th grade I’d had enough, and I started defending myself and then when I got into high school I did the same thing, they thought I was causing trouble, they thought I was doing the most trouble so they decided to exclude me from Euclid for defending myself because they think I was causing more trouble which I think is very ridiculous. But then I went back to ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL. No actually, the rest of the 9th grade year I had home instruction and I still passed then after that they asked me if I wanted to go back to Euclid or go back or go to ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL or something and I thought it was best for me to go back to ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL until I felt like I was ready to go back to Euclid and apparently I went back to ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL and I was there from 10th throughout my rest of my high school career. It wasn’t too bad but I had to get use to the different kids, different environment and everything. Back then, ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL was in Euclid back then, then they moved to South Euclid and I just heard they moved back to where they use to be Euclid so.

S: That’s funny, I wonder why it keeps moving around?

MICHAEL: I’m really forgot why. I just know, I remember I liked where they were at, at first. I really liked it where they were at, at first. Then they moved to South Euclid but then where they were at in South Euclid wasn’t too bad. It was an old church that they turned into a school or it was like a bible school and they just made it into a ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL school and then I liked the little area over there. Across the street was a little playground and it had picnic tables outside so if it was nice or something outside we could go outside and just enjoy the fresh air just to get out of the classroom. Other than that it was pretty nice, it was ok for the 3 years there.
S: So, looking back at your regular school experiences, before you went to ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL and after you came back to the regular school. Talk to me about the school environment and the teachers and stuff.

MICHAEL: Um, hmm. I don’t really remember all my teachers by heart most of them, but I remember most of them. My 3rd grade teacher, she was um, my 3rd grade teacher was really nice and she would make sure that I made sure I was doing good in my alternative school setting and so she always made sure I was ok and see that there was no problems or nothing like that. And after I graduated from ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL she was really happy for me, she congratulated me, gave me a card, and stuff like that.

S: Oh that’s cool

MICHAEL: After I finished that year, I went to uh, after that 3rd grade year I went to 4th grade. In that school they had different sections for different grades. Like kindergarten and 1st grade was in one section of the hallway. 2nd and 3rd was in a different section and then all of 4th grade was in a different area. It was, the school was ok. Right after Elementary school, it had a nice, it was a real big playground and swing set and there was a little hill with a small basketball court. Um it was pretty descent. It wasn’t a bad school but it was pretty descent.

S: Do you feel like it was a positive experience for you? Looking from you know like, your middle school and the start of high school?

MICHAEL: It was a good, it was a good experience. After Middle school in the 5th grade everything was just, you know, a whole lot different. Everybody from different elementary was coming because it was a middle school so and then one thing about Middle school was, Middle school was, um, I forgot how to describe it, but it’s a real big story about how Middle school, you know, began, and how they had so many students from different elementary because I thought, back then, well I just now noticed I thought most kids chose to decide what middle school they wanted to go to, but I think it depends on where you live at, it depends on where you’re going to go. A lot of people, I live at least, let’s see, from here to Middle school, I can walk there in within 30 to 40 minutes, but I think I was too young to do that so I didn’t even do it so.

S: I know, I was just going to say, that’s a long walk!

MICHAEL: I mean, all I have to do is just walk around like 2, 3 streets, I live in a condominium, I could just walk down the street, turn 1street, then turn another street, then I have to walk straight down 260 which is a long street down a hill and up a hill and it’s a straight walk. It really isn’t too bad

S: How was your regular school experience different from your ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL school experience?

MICHAEL: well, regular school experience, I mean, you still had to deal with a lot of kids who, the only thing similar, the only thing I kind of didn’t like about ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL school and public school was the similarity was, you know, they were both going to have, you know some kids who have behavior issues or you know problems with them and stuff like that.
That was the only thing I kind of didn’t like. Now as far as um, ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL school, you know, it was a lot of involvement with kids who had a criminal record, um, just you know, too many kids who didn’t really know what they want with themself. Now, public school, it was the same thing, but at least it was better, a better view of people. Like not everybody was judging people, you know, not back then. When I was in middle school, in middle school nobody was really judging people. The only thing they would judge you on is what school you came from, which was funny to me. Um, now when I got to high school, everything completely changes. I was just in an environment surrounded by, you know, not only people that was my age, but people that was older than me, adults, and it was, I have to admit, it was kind of uncomfortable because I didn’t want to be swarmed in an area full of seniors and I’m a freshmen in high school, so I just didn’t like the feeling of high school for a minute. Um, now, then I went back to ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL after 9th grade then I really became, um, how can I say, you know, um, I looking for that word. I was, I was involved with people that I probably knew I shouldn’t have, but I made a big mistake, but at the same time going back to Euclid high school period. It didn’t matter if I stayed there or went back there because either one, there was going to be people there, I was going to act the same as I did in public school. Now teachers in ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL that I had, they I mean, they was hard on me because they know I was going to make it. I was the type of person that just acted like didn’t want to make it so they was hard on me for a minute and I think, I felt a little bad about it but at the same time I wasn’t because I know they want me to make it and they know I can make it. I just gotta, I gotta put more effort into it. And I remember all my teachers that I had the last 3 years at ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL, especially one teacher, was hard on me and I had him for 3 years straight so that was kind of crazy. He was like that too, he always made sure I was ok and like, even when I was getting picked on that school, he made sure, he knew that you know one day I was going to start defending myself against people who were picking on me and he was afraid it was going to happen. Then one day it did and he became more hard on me because he didn’t want me to turn out like those kids there at that school.

S: yeah, I think that’s probably a good thing. He was on your side even though he was being hard on you.

MICHAEL: Can you say that again?

S: I was just saying that it was probably a good thing that he was being hard on you; he just wanted you to be successful.

MICHAEL: Yeah, I remember on the day of my graduation, he actually stood and spoke to me from what he thought, how he felt about me graduating, how I felt about being there for 3 years that during his 3 years in the class with me, he learned a lot from me. He learned, he learned, you know, the one thing that not only him, but the other teachers that I had there that 3 years, I was always the quiet type. I would not talk to anybody, because I mean, I’m just the quiet type, what the problem with me not talking, and I mean, that’s the type of person I am today, I will remain quiet until I’m spoken to and sometimes they thought I was crazy for that, but then I don’t want to get into nothin’ that has none of my business that my name should not be in so I just chose to keep my mouth shut and they decided, they thought I needed to be more social so I learned how to be a little bit social but at the same time I still have my quiet days. You know, it took me a minute for them to convince me to talk more so, it took them a good minute.
S: That’s funny. So, talk to me about your peers at both settings. Especially once, you know from the junior high to the 9th grade and then into the ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL program. How were your peers?

MICHAEL: um, some of my peers, some of them were ok but then I ended up making nice friends throughout my junior at my middle school year. Come to find out I have quite a few people from middle school that I still talk to today. And there’s somebody that went to ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL with me when I was younger and then we grew up together and we was still in the same, when I went back to ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL she was still there which is kind of crazy but me and her, we remembered each other from being kids and we caught up on history and then after we graduated we kind of lost touch. We still have our talks about days back when we was in school.

S: Yeah, that’s cool

MICHAEL: Now, a couple people from ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL, um, I still see today a little bit but not much. Now, I remember one person, I think you also spoke to him who went to ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL with me. I think his name is Thomas.

S: Oh yeah, yeah

MICHAEL: Yeah, and he, I still see him; the last time I saw him was at Community college. Last semester was the last time I saw. I remember he told me that you all spoke.

S: Oh that’s funny.

MICHAEL: Yeah, me and him had different classes but we always saw each at one particular point in time.

S: Well, that’s great. You talked a little about people not being all that nice, can you talk to me a little more about that.

MICHAEL: ooh, that’s a big little story. A lot of people did not like me because of my reputation because I was the type of guy who had the reputation of you know, just don’t bother me and I won’t bother you. You know, I’m just the type of person that’s going to mind my own business and I wasn’t a fighter. A lot of people like to pick on people that’s not a fighter because I was always the quiet type. Some people still don’t learn today that the quiet type can be the worse ones you want to mess with so some people still did not learn that so they had to learn the hard way. I’m not saying that, I’m not that I made them learn the hard way but eventually they did but and then, and what’s ironic is that one day when I made some of them learn the hard way, that’s what got me out of the public school setting because they thought I was a dangerous student in the school or something because I started defending myself. I really don’t see how they would do that. Euclid public schools is one of the worst districts ever back then but now they have a new superintendent so I’m sure it’s going to be a little better now, but back then, the superintendent that we had, when I was in Euclid, he was the type of person that made me want to get out of Euclid schools. He wasn’t doing nothing, like we kept telling him about the kids picking, bullying me, and all he kept saying is ok, we’ll handle it, we’ll handle it but he didn’t do anything. That kind of made me upset about that school district. I ain’t going to lie, I still kind
of regret going to that school district. As I said if it wasn’t for them, I wouldn’t be where I’m at so I can’t really complain.

S-Yeah, that’s hard. It’s hard to think that you say, hey this is what’s happening and nothing, you know, they aren’t doing anything about it. Um, even going to the superintendent. But the school, the teachers and the principal weren’t being helpful?

MICHAEL-Um, basically no. Now I have that one public school that actually stood up and did something. That was at Middle school in 8th grade, he wasn’t the main principal, he was the assistant principal and 7th grade, they had different principals for the grades. One principal for the 6th, one for the 7th, then one for the 8th, he was the principal of the 8th and the whole school. You know, if something was serious, you take it to him, other than that it would be different. Now, the assistant principal for the 7th grade, he actually stood up and made sure I wasn’t getting picked on. He actually stood up to make sure I was cool. Now the main principal, at Middle school, the principal that I had from 5th 6th, and 7th he um, he really, he didn’t really do much, he did a little something but not really enough and after 8th grade, after 7th grade I think he resigned from being the principal at that school and then we had a new principal. Him and the assistant principal actually stood up and um, you know, made, actually made a change and…

S-What did they do to change?

MICHAEL- um, even if people didn’t know it, when I was at Middle school, they always, they always had people go outside and what’s crazy, Middle school still has this today. I don’t know what it is, it’s like an oversized tennis court and nothing but, I mean, it’s a tennis court with no nets on it just for people to run around, walk around, stuff like that, and they had small, real small little basketball court area, and they had a baseball diamond in one corner where everyone wanted to play kickball, catch, or something like that; it was ok. Then, at one point in time they made us go over here to the one tiny playground and during the big football field, because Middle school had a football team, and that’s where they play at. Then when it got cold, they either let us do 2 things, they would let us play in the gym, either eat in the cafeteria and play in the gym or eat in the cafeteria and be in the auditorium. The auditorium got real boring after awhile. Um, but then again people would be acting crazy in the gym, but it would be so different because it’s a very close environment. You know, if you’re walking around bumping into each other it’s going to cause aggravation.

S-Yeah, what kind of, you know, discipline procedures did they have at your regular school?

MICHAEL- That’s a very good question, uh, I honestly probably wasn’t paying attention to most of the discipline procedures but, I know that some of them was, they had a thing called in-school suspension, which really didn’t teach, it really didn’t do nobody any good because all your doing is getting in a different classroom for the whole day and your not getting mistreated like in the cafeteria (unrecognizable) so it didn’t really teach anybody nothing so.

S-So they had in-school suspension, did they have out of school suspension too?

MICHAEL- Yeah they did, but that still doesn’t teach nobody nothing. I really don’t see the point in having all that stuff, but that was them I really couldn’t say nothing about it.
S-How was this different from ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL?

MICHAEL-Well I know ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL would, they would get you know, they just take everything away from you, they just make sure you, they just make sure you don’t do anything special. You don’t get to go on field trips here and there, this and that. I mean, that was the same thing like in public school, it was just a different way of putting it. I mean, to me, it was the same to me. It’s just a little different from ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL, but the same thing as public school which didn’t really affect me none but in a way it did just not as much.

S-So, let me see if I understand what you are saying. So at, um, your regular school they would do suspension and stuff like that if you got into trouble, but then at the ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL program instead of doing suspensions, they would just take stuff away, like positive stuff, like getting to go to the school store and trips and what not?

MICHAEL-um, yeah, that’s basically how they did it.

S-So for the ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL program it was more that, it was kind of positive stuff or you would earn points? Tell me how that all worked at ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL.

MICHAEL-Um, uh

S-I know it was awhile ago, I’m sorry!

MICHAEL-Yeah, uh, ooh, that’s a good question, wow, that’s a very good question because the way ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL was, they were just a little different, but at the same time, I understand where most of the teachers come from and how they decided to change how things were around there.

S-Describe that to me. What do you mean? How was it different?

MICHAEL-Um, I mean sometimes, like if you’re cool, they’ll um, like sometimes, they’ll um, like they’ll just tell you, you can’t do this, you can’t do that. Back then at ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL we were the type of kids that, you know, we wanted to go outside to chill. We wanted to you know either play cards or just play board games, just to keep us entertained and we was on like the discipline way, they would say you couldn’t do that, you would have to sit and do your work or just, you have to do something, you just couldn’t play with the other students.

S-So if you weren’t doing what you were supposed to be doing they wouldn’t let you play cards; you’d have to do work instead.

MICHAEL-Yeah, like I said, it depends, like let’s say there if you were to get into a fight it would be 3 days of you having no privileges, I think it was 2 to 3 days of having no privileges if you got into a fight. Um, yeah, and I can’t remember what everything else was. I just know that, if you got into a fight you couldn’t um, you couldn’t have no privileges for 2 to 3 days.

S-What privileges were you able to earn?

MICHAEL: If I was in that predicament?
S-Yeah, what privileges could you earn at the ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL program.

MICHAEL-Um, field trips to go to like to go on a field trip. You know, like if you wanted to go outside across the street to the park or something if it was a nice winter or something. If you was able to go, you could go, but if you weren’t you’d have to stay in.

S-Did they have a school store where you could buy stuff?

MICHAEL-No, not really no. ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL is a whole lot different then public schools. It wasn’t like that.

S-No stores. Did they have that at your regular school where you could buy stuff with earned points and stuff like that?

MICHAEL-No, the book store, they had a little store in school but you had to use cash.

S-See I’m talking, because when I taught school, one of the things we had were called Longhorn Loot so anytime we saw kids making a good choice, we would give them a Longhorn Loot, and once they earned so many Longhorn Loot they could take that to the school store and they could cash in their loot for certain prizes. It could be something simple for 5 or 10 loot for a pencil or eraser or something or something really big were you take 100 loot and they could eat with the principal or something like that. SO that’s what I was talking about with a school store, not something that you would necessarily buy, you know with actual money, but stuff you could buy with earned points of doing good things.

MICHAEL-oh ok

S-So talk to me about what experiences led you to the alternative school. Why did you end up in the alternative school when you were younger?

MICHAEL: That’s a very good question. All I know is my mom thought it would be easier for me to, you know, get out of, you know learn. I really don’t remember because I was a child. I don’t really remember the whole story my mom told me about it so.

S: Was it something that you were getting in trouble or…

MICHAEL: I honestly cannot remember (laughs)

S: I guess it was quite awhile ago, I understand that. Then you were saying that you went to ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL after your 9th grade year again because of being picked on by the other kids?

MICHAEL: Right and I thought it was going to be much easier for me, I think I thought it was much safer for me to go back to ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL then to stay there in my opinion.

S: Yeah, that makes sense, and ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL, it’s a smaller school environment too isn’t that correct?
MICHAEL um?

S: there were less kids?

MICHAEL: Yeah, it was kinda small in a way, yeah.

S: Do you find that it is easier when there are less kids around then when there, then in a big school?

MICHAEL: Um,

S: did you like that small environment?

MICHAEL: Honestly no. I just didn’t like having to deal with a lot of different people that I didn’t really know because I’m dealing with people coming from different high schools, you know different settings and not every school setting is the same so I had to get use to it.

S: Yeah, it’s hard to make adjustments to new surroundings for sure. It’s easier to do what you are comfortable with and know then to try and do something different.

MICHAEL: yeah and that was the hard thing for me.

S: Once you got use to the ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL program and the teachers and the people, did you find it easier?

MICHAEL: Um, a little bit, but it was still a little uncomfortable.

S: How were your teachers at your regular school vs. at the ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL program?

MICHAEL: Um, mmm, mmm, uh, that’s another really good question. The people that were at regular school, you know some regular schoolteachers didn’t care whether you were passing or not. As long as you were doing your work that’s all they really cared about. Now as far as around at ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL, they actually did care. They didn’t want the kids there for a long time. They actually wanted kids to get out of there. Like, they actually wanted kids to get out of there and go back to regular school and you know, do something better. Just like they did when I was there. I had that one teacher that was hard on me. He made sure that I was doing what I need to do so, and then the crazy thing, the whole school, all the teachers in the school knew who I was. Some of the teachers remember me, some of the teachers that were there remember me from when I was there before. And some of them, even though I wasn’t there, my name was still brought up in some point in time and I graduated, it’s like a made history at the ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL school.

S: You’re a celebrity because you’re so charming.

MICHAEL: (laughs) Naw, now after I graduated from there after my senior year, my name was being brought up still because, I mean because, I really forgot why, but one time when I went to go visit Eastwood just to see how, and I wanted to see if the main teachers that was hard on me
was still there, but come to find out he’s teaching at a different school now. I was really upset that he wasn’t there.

S: Oh yeah,

MICHAEL: Yeah, that was one of the main people I wanting to see. Um, but then one time I remember one of my teachers told me that, that you know, that they’d heard of me, and I asked my one teacher how they heard of me, how did they hear of me and they were told about my success in that school and that’s why some of the kids that, when they brought up, when they heard my name, they was like, ain’t this the person you was telling me about. I’m like dang; you all brought up my name in certain situations? So I was kind of surprised.

S: That’s cool. You should go back there, they’d hire you lickety split to help other kids.

MICHAEL: That sounds like a good idea but at the same time I probably wouldn’t. (laughs)

S: (laughs) So how did your experience at the ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL program help or hinder your academic success? Talk to me about academically at the ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL program. Do you feel like they helped you or…

MICHAEL: Oh yeah, they helped me a lot. Even though my worst subject is history still. It was ok. I was the type of person who didn’t like to write a lot and I learned how to do some nice writing skills from them even though I kinda hate writing today, but it’s better than it used to be. Um.

S: How did they help you? They helped you with your writing skills, how else did they help you academically?

MICHAEL: They just helped me academically on stuff they know I didn’t really like to do. The one thing they do that I really hated to do was reading out loud because I was the type of kid, I was the type of person that was like we’re all you know, adults, why do we have to read out loud like we are talking to a bunch of kids. I knew how to read, it’s just that I hated reading out loud. So, I was just the type of person that liked to read.

S: Hey, I still don’t like to read out loud because reading was always hard for me and you know, especially comprehending, understanding what I read, and if I had to read out loud, even now it still makes me real nervous and I don’t like to read stuff out loud either. I always thing I’m going to pronounce a word wrong or something, it makes me real nervous. So I understand where you are coming from on that. Um, talk to me about how you feel, how did the experience at the alternative school help or hinder your personal success?

MICHAEL: mmmm, after I graduated ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL I learned how to be more social, like I learned how to help people more because I was the type of person that was selfish, be like hey, if you don’t know, you’re on your own because I was in a different environment with kids at ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL and then when I went to Community college I still had my days where I was like I can’t help you, you’re on your own. I was involved with a group of unknown people so I had to you know, I had to you know, be not very defensive, but defensive
enough. Um, other than that, I learned how to be helpful and just help certain people when they were in need. So, it was ok after a little while

S: They helped you go outside your comfort zone?

MICHAEL: Basically, yeah.

S: It’s hard to do that. Um, what have you been doing since you’ve completed high school?

MICHAEL: Well, right now I’m still at Community college going for an associates in arts degree then I’m debating on whether or not I want to change my major but at the same time I mean, that seems like an easy major, but at the same time, I’ve been told that major is only good if you’re planning on going to a four-year school and honestly I don’t know if I can handle college for another 4 years so that’s going to be a little difficult for me to debate on so I’m thinking about going to go to automotive technology to get that 2-year associate and turn that into a career and then I also, I just spoke to someone in my math class from Community college. He said he knows some people how graduated with an associates in arts masters and some people have areal good career out of that so I’m still debating on what, you know what’s best for me so.

S: Well, it sounds like you’ve got some good options.

MICHAEL: Yeah, but the only thing I would hate there, if I was going to do the automotive technology, at Community college has 3 campuses. They have eastern, metro, and western campuses. I’m at the eastern campuses right now. If I wanted to do automotive technology I would have to go all the way to the western campus, which I really probably would not want to go for. That’s all the way in Harlem and I live in Euclid and that’s a good 2 hours, an hour to 2 hours.

S: Oh, that’s far.

MICHAEL: Right because I already take an hour to get from where I live to the Eastern campus. It already takes an hour to get there. I can’t imagine having to get from I live.

S: Yeah, that would be a long, long trek that’s for sure. I drive an hour everyday to an from my office and I’m tired of driving so far. I’m ready to live closer to where I work. So obstacles have you encountered since completing high school?

MICHAEL: Obstacles, like?

S: Like challenges or difficulties.

MICHAEL: Um, challenges was you know just getting use to people that I never knew or never seen, that I wasn’t use to. A challenge was to learn something about people. But I had a challenge for myself when I first went to Community college that if I’m going to learn about somebody, not only am I going to talk to them, like see how they are you know, when they’re around other people, like how they act around certain friends, or when they’re in a certain place. I learned a little bit by watching my surroundings. I had to learn one way or another from that. Um, challenges was that I played basketball. I had to get use to people taller and older playing
basketball. The challenges was to get as good as the older and better people and I remember playing with the ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL kids, I’ve gotten better playing with them, but at the same time playing with older college kids really got me better. I’m learning a lot more now then I did when I was in ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL a little bit.

S: Did the strategies that you learned at ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL to kind of meet other people, and kind of put yourself out there, did they give you strategies that you could still use, that you could use today?

MICHAEL: Um, that’s a good question, I really do not know.

S: Ok, that’s alright. Looking back at your experiences as an adolescent, how do you deal with challenges differently now vs. when you were in school?

MICHAEL: How do I handle the challenges now, most of the time I would tell people to go for it and see how it is but at the same time I still back down for a challenge and that’s what I did when I was at the ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL program, I would back down from so many challenges, but then as I grew up and became an adult I said, you know I can’t run away from it for too long so. I actually started doing challenges. Some challenges turn out to be easier than I thought but not too easy.

S: It’s funny how that works, huh.

MICHAEL: Yeah, I had to learn that, I had to learn that the hard way a little bit so, yeah, but I learned quite a lot from doing that.

S: That’s good, so how would you define success?

MICHAEL: Success has so many definitions, but my definition of success is like to me it’s like, if you did what you was supposed to do and you did what was necessary, basically if I wanted to complete everything that I have on my list right now, I would call that success because Not every goal that a young adult like me is going to do is going to be easy for anybody, but I mean, with me being young I can handle some challenges, but if I was older I probably wouldn’t be able to handle it. I think what I’ve been told a lot of time, if you’re young and you’ve still got challenges, do it because when you get older you probably won’t be able to do have another challenge like that again.

S: That’s good; I like that. How would you define resilience?

MICHAEL: The funny thing is, I have a nickname that people call me, well I’m called that now, because I went through a lot when I was in high school and some of the people I went to high school with and what’s funny is that some people call me the resilient one because I went through so much to get where I was at and I never gave up on it so what people will say, when they call me the resilient one, I thought of resilient, my definition was, if you go keep, it’s like just keep going and you just don’t stop, it’s like, it’s like no matter what difficulties you come across, no matter what problems you catch up on to, you just keep doing what you’re doing until you actually get that goal accomplished. So my definition of resilient is just keep on going and
fighting, fighting for what you know you can do, what you know you can accomplish, something like fighting for what’s right, but in a different way.

S: I understand what you are saying. That’s great, that’s a great definition. So what personal factors do you have that have contributed to your success and your resilience?

MICHAEL: Can you repeat the question again?

S: What personal factors do you have that have contributed to your success or your resilience?

MICHAEL: Personal factors, um.

S: Yeah, it could be anything.

MICHAEL: That’s a good one, I’ve never personal factors.

S: Say that again?

MICHAEL: I’ve never really been asked about personal factors and anything that has involved a personal factor so.

S: Ok, personal like, personal, like, it could be like a parent or a teacher or who you are as a person. Factors are things like that. What personal things have contributed to your success?

MICHAEL: Well, one personal thing is that um, I just learned a lot from my parents, um, even though my parents are still kinda hard on me but you know, now that I’m a full grown adult, they now know that I should know what I’m supposed to do and here and there a little bit. Personal factors as far as friends-wise, I still have friends at the same time I’ve lost a lot of friends over the years because, actually I’ve lost some friends because, you know I’m such a busy person doing all my school and stuff, I got people who think that, you know, ignore them in school, they know I’m busy trying to be a busy person so why would they think I’m trying to neglect them when I was just I mean, I still talk to them, I just don’t talk to them as much anymore so.

S: Do you feel like the ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL program helped you at all, or do you feel like the ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL program contributed at all to your success?

MICHAEL: Actually, they kind of did, yeah so.

S: How do you think that, can you go into that? How do you think they helped you, or contributed to your success?

MICHAEL: I mean, well, I remember when I was trying to get into Community college, before I started, I tried to get in there, and I needed a copy of my high school transcripts so I had to get the transcripts from ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL. So, this is what I did, but then I got the transcripts from ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL, but then they said it wasn’t the right transcripts, so I had to go to Eastwood and tell them what the problem actually helped, they actually made sure my transcripts were actually correct and right so um, for me to get in the school because they actually helped out a lot. Helped get my transcripts together and then after the transcripts were
settled I was able to get in. Because I had to get the transcripts for not only the time I was there in 10th grade to 12th grade, I still had to get the transcripts I had when I was at Euclid in the 9th grade and I had to get them all in one transcript and that was the problem. They figured it out and they did it and once they did it they mailed me the actual transcripts plus a copy of it so I could see how it was, how I did, and I just took it to Community college and I got accepted into school just like that.

S: That’s awesome. So what characteristics do you have to help you be successful? What about you makes you successful?

MICHAEL: Um, I don’t know what about me makes me successful. I was helpful at one point in time. Some people come to me and ask my opinion about it. I give my best opinion and my best advice for them. I was always a person that had a good choice of words, if they ask for an opinion, sometimes they would ask me for what I think of something, if I know something about it. If I know nothing about a topic then I can’t express my opinion about it, but you know, um. A lot of people like to come to me because I’m just a nice person to talk to.

S: That’s good; do you think you have any other characteristics that help you? You know, what characteristics do you have that help you get through hard, or difficult situations?

MICHAEL: um, I really don’t. That is a good question. I’ve never really been in a lot of very difficult situations, so I really don’t know that answer to that yet. The one characteristic that I have when I was in one difficult situation was that I just kept my focus on positive things and to not let the negative get to me, I was trying, you know, to not let the bad get to me so I want lose focus, stuff like that.

S: That’s great, that’s perfect. That’s why you don’t feel like there’s challenging situations because you don’t let it be challenging, you just do it!

MICHAEL: Sometimes, but it just depends, it depends on what the situation is.

S: Ok, that makes sense. What characteristics do you have that might, um, make it hard for you to be successful?

MICHAEL: something Um, one time, like sometimes I still have my setbacks, I still have those days when I think I can’t handle this, I just have to stop when I know it’s time to stop and sometimes it can stop me from being successful at one point in time but it’s still hard for me to say, it’s hard for me not to say, I give up, at the same time it’s also hard to keep going because something I’ve learned is that something that keeps up with you; don’t do it until you’re ready for it.

S: That’s a good points, that’s a very good point. Ok, last question, what do you think schools can do to give students a better chance at being successful? If you could change anything about schools, what would you change to help other kids?

MICHAEL: I would, I would change schools, that’s a good question because, um, I would say it depends on where I live it might be easier because here in Cleveland, I don’t think it’s helpful
changing anything here in Cleveland because Cleveland is so far, it’s one of the top 10 worst cities to be in, in the USA right now. It really shocked me when I heard about that.

S: What do you think schools could do to make that better?

MICHAEL: I would say, you know more protection, more security wise and a lot of people have been shot in school settings so, you know, that kind of disturbed me. I’m actually happy that I’m out of school now because I wouldn’t want that to happen to me even though I’m still in college, I’m talking high school-wise.

S: I understand; what else can schools do?

MICHAEL: At least show, at least show the kids, at least show the students that, at least show the students that they care about them, about getting out. You know, most teachers don’t care about, you know students, they just don’t care if you pass or fail. Some teachers, they just worry about their money so. I think most teachers should actually start showing that they care about their students making pass, you know stuff like that. Actually, I got more teachers in my college right now, I have a math teacher who I’m taking right now who I took last semester too, and I can tell he’s a teacher that shows he wants people to make it. He’ll actually help people on certain math problems in situations, he’ll actually help you to make sure you know what you’re doing so I notice my math teacher who I have right now, he’s one of the best math teachers I’ve ever taken in my whole entire life so and I remember my one teacher in ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL who taught math, I liked him too, um he was very nice too, that’s the one that was always hard on me too so, you know I really, my teach others……and he was really good to my family, really nice to my family like my mom, I mean, I’m pretty sure, I’m pretty sure most of the people don’t know all the teachers at the ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL that are there now, I know that one teacher who was there I was still upset that he left there, he taught at another high school. He was the person I wanted to go see and talk to after I graduated so I could tell him what I learned. I wanted to thank him for all that he stuff he taught me all my school, all my school years there so; it was tough for me to not see him because he’s a high school teacher now, he teaches math so one day if I have to catch him, I have to catch him outside of school.

S: Yeah, I’m sure he would love to um to hear from you. Well, do you have anything else that you would like to add?

MICHAEL: Um, I can honestly say that I’m going to miss the ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL program, you know I’m going to miss from the ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL program the teachers and the fun that I had and just the little fun that I had.

S: Well, I’m glad it was a good experience for you and that they helped you, um, you know, and you are where you are today and I think that’s fantastic. You truly are an inspiration for those that will continue to come. You should be very proud of yourself. Ok, I’m sorry go ahead.

MICHAEL: I am kind of proud of myself for that because now that I’ve graduated my name has been mentioned. Now so I think more people hear about me…

S: Yeah, if you can do it, so can other people too. So where would you like me to send a gift card to?
MICHAEL: Um, Wal-Mart.

S: Wal-Mart, okie dokie, I can do that.

MICHAEL: Now, is there a time with an update for the interview……..

S: Yeah, I will follow up with you and once I’m done transcribing everything and make sure that I got your words the way that they, the way that you intended them to be and um, I can definitely follow up with you as I continue on with this little project.

MICHAEL: Ok,

S: Sound good?

MICHAEL: Sounds good

S: Ok, well I hope you have a great day.

MICHAEL: You too.

S: Alright, bye-bye.

MICHAEL: bye-bye.

Interview with Steven

S-can I record our conversation so that I can make sure that I get everything, you know, you say, that I get it correct? Is it ok if I record our conversation?

STEVEN-Don’t matter, do what you need to do

S-You are awesome! Do you have any questions for me to start off with?

STEVEN-Nope

S-Ok, so um, we are going to talk about your regular school, the school you went to before you went to the ALTERNATIVE program. Um, I want you to be as honest; you don’t have to be nice about it. I want you to say whatever you want to say. I don’t want you to feel like you have to sugarcoat anything. Just tell me like it is! So, I want you to describe your regular school experience, the school you went to before you went to the ALTERNATIVE program.

STEVEN-Let’s just say it sucked.

S-Why did it suck? Be specific. Was it the teachers? The school? The parents, not the parents but…
STEVEN-The teachers, they didn’t care about anything, like all they cared about was the money and stuff. Let’s just put it this way, they ‘ll give you a test for something you didn’t learn.

S-so they weren’t there to help you learn…STEVEN-yeah….S-they just…STEVEN-yeah they’re out for the money.

S-That had to be really frustrating

STEVEN-Yes it is.

S-And did it seem like, it probably didn’t feel like they really cared all that much

STEVEN-Yeah

S-Did you feel like they weren’t, I guess “towing the line” it was, you know, a major issue?

STEVEN-say that again.

S-If you weren’t the cookie cutter kid were you not necessarily picked on, but targeted by the teachers or anything?

STEVEN-Not really, more like they picked on all the students.

S-oh ok, so it wasn’t just you. So, if something was going on and someone wasn’t doing something that they were supposed to, what would happen?

STEVEN-Nothing really

S-Did they ever use like positive reinforcement or anything or was it just really punitive?

STEVEN-Real punitive

S-What would happen?

STEVEN-They would send you to the office. The office wouldn’t do anything. You’d just spend most of the day.

S-You would spend most of your day in the office?

STEVEN-Yup

S-And that doesn’t really help anything does it?!

STEVEN-NoSuch, what about your, you know…how was that different from when you were at the ALTERNATIVE program?
STEVEN-The ALTERNATIVE program was like one-on-one if you needed help or something they would come over and help you with it one-on one and stuff so…

S-How were the teachers different?

STEVEN-The teachers would actually like stand there and like and discuss something with you, like, “Oh, this is how you do this, this is how you do that.” Stuff like that. They would actually show you.

S-Ok, now do you feel like they were caring or that they cared about you and what was going on with you?

STEVEN-Yeah, yes they did.

S-And I’m sure that was really helpful.

STEVEN-Yup

S-So, what about your classmates at your regular school and at the ALTERNATIVE program. How were, you know, the other kids?

STEVEN-Let’s just say, kids at my other school were preppy and trying to be hard-asses, excuse my French but…S-oh you’re fine, so they weren’t really people that you’d like to be around I guess.

STEVEN-Not really, no

S-What about at the ALTERNATIVE program? How were the kids there?

STEVEN-They were like, they cared about their school

S-So at the ALTERNATIVE program it seems like everyone was there to be, you know, they…STEVEN-they wanted to get out of school, like…S-they wanted want to be in the school?

STEVEN-They wanted to be in the school but they, I don’t know how to put it. They were there for an education.

S-Ok, So um, so then what, you kind of talked about, oh, tell me about the ALTERNATIVE program. Tell me what kind of, you know, what do you do there? How were they with the discipline and things like that?

STEVEN-Well, their discipline was pretty harsh. Yeah, if you start throwing stuff they will put you down to the ground. There’s no screaming or stuff like that. If you start getting in fights and stuff they will put you right down to the ground.

S-Did they use positive reinforcement at all or you do you positive things that you get incentives for things?
STEVEN—Yeah like, let’s see, if you were doing so good, they would take you out of school on a special day and let you go out to lunch and stuff.

S—That’s fun. Did they have, oh, like um, would you get special tickets for things or did you have a certain point system? How did that work.

STEVEN—yeah, we had a special point system, I can’t remember about it because it was so long ago.

S—Did each kid have specific things that they had to work on, or was everyone basically the same?

STEVEN—It as basically the same,

S—Tell me, what experiences or challenges led you to the alternative program?

STEVEN—Getting kicked out of school so many times and too many fights

S—So you got kicked out of school for fighting too much?

STEVEN—mhm

S—and at the ALTERNATIVE program there was no fighting allowed?

STEVEN—Yeah, there was no fighting allowed.

S—But at the ALTERNATIVE program they wouldn’t kick you out right?

STEVEN—Yeah, they wouldn’t kick you out. That’s one thing if you had a fight they wouldn’t kick you out that way you wouldn’t miss school; miss stuff.

S—And when you’re not in school you can’t learn and so that makes it hard.

STEVEN—Yep

S—Do you feel like, academically you were more successful at the ALTERNATIVE program?

STEVEN—Yes,

S—So when you got to the ALTERNATIVE program did you try with all your might to see what you could do or what you could get away with to see what they were going to do?

STEVEN—yes I did

S—And then once, it didn’t work so…

STEVEN—No, so I just gave up. They aren’t going to take any shit from me so I decided to work then.
S-you might as well get to work then, huh? Did, you know, when you were at the ALTERNATIVE program did they kind of help you work through different way, different strategies so you wouldn’t necessarily want to fight with other people?

STEVEN-Yes they did

S-What strategies did they give for you?

STEVEN-They would let me go outside and get some fresh air, cool out, walk around a little bit.

S-So do you think, how do you think the ALTERNATIVE program helped you in your personal success? You told me that academically they were, um, they helped you get through school, what about, you know, personally?

STEVEN-(unrecognizable sound)...They helped me to become a tow truck driver because my dad used to do it. They just like gave me the motivation to do it.

S-They kind of pushed you and made you think that you really could do it, huh?

STEVEN- Yep

S-That’s cool, so you wanted to do what your dad does?

STEVEN-hmh

S- So is that what you’re doing now?

STEVEN-yep

S-Do you like it?

STEVEN-I love it

S-That’s awesome! This is the perfect weather right? You should bring your truck to Texas! You could help a bunch of people who pretend like they know how to drive in the ice.

STEVEN-We have enough of those people out here.

S-What is up with people, even in their 4-wheel drive trucks think that they…

STEVEN-They think they’re badasses!

S- laughs, come on, just because you’re in a big truck doesn’t mean you aren’t going to skid in the ice, dumb, dumb.

STEVEN-The bigger the truck, the further they fall.

S-What have you been up to since you’ve completed high school?
STEVEN- I’ve been working, spending time with my family.

S-Tell me about your family.

STEVEN-Oh, my family isn’t anything to talk about.

S-Oh, you’re not such a fan?

STEVEN-No, not particularly. Well, sometimes we don’t get along, but most of the time we do. You know. It’s all good.

S-I understand, family is family. You gotta love them, but sometimes you don’t like them!

STEVEN-Yep

S-So do you feel like your family wasn’t very supportive when you were going through a hard time?

STEVEN-No, my family was really supportive.

S-Oh good

STEVEN-But my grandma, not so much.

S-Your grandma’s not supportive

STEVEN-No, but my mom, my dad, and my sister, yeah

S-Well, that’s good, I’m sure that really helped out a lot.

STEVEN-Yep

S-What obstacles do you feel like you’ve encountered?

STEVEN-What do you mean?

S-Just challenges, what things have been challenging for you?

STEVEN-Nothing really, like…

S-That’s good, that’s a good thing, that’s why you’re considered resilient. You don’t view stuff as obstacles, you just get it done!

STEVEN-mhm

S-So, if you have something that is kind of in the way of you getting a task complete, what do you do to overcome that?

STEVEN-I just take a break from it, walk away from it and come back to it.
S-And try and tackle it again?

STEVEN-Yep

S-So, how do you think you deal with challenges differently now then when you were at the ALTERNATIVE program or before then?

STEVEN-I think I do pretty good with them now.

S-What did you learn from the ALTERNATIVE program that you use today?

STEVEN-I just don’t give up, like try your hardest, if you have to, just walk away and come back to it. You don’t just say, screw this, I’m done and start going crazy and stuff.

S-How would you define success?

STEVEN-Like?

S-Like to you, what does success mean?

STEVEN-Success means to get stuff done that you want to get done and, like my job, I’ve wanted this job for like awhile now and I stuck to it. I’ve been working here at the same company for three years so.

S-Oh wow, that’s awesome, congratulations!

STEVEN-Thanks

S-What did you have to do? Is there something that you had to do in order to be able to do, you know, drive the tow truck?

STEVEN- Yeah, I had to work there….at first I volunteered there for like 2 months, and then they put me on payroll to clean up and stuff and then I had to ride with the boss man for 6 months.

S-Oh my heavens!

STEVEN-yep

S-Wow, so you really had to stick with it, especially the volunteering part. You just volunteered and just did little stuff around the shop and what not?

STEVEN-yep

S-wow, that’s impressive

STEVEN-I really wanted to work there so….

S-and now you’re the big man.
STEVEN-yep

S-So, how would you define resilience?

STEVEN-what do you mean?

S-What do you think that means? I would say you are resilient.

STEVEN-Someone who’s successful

S-Think about you as a person, what do you think has contributed to your success and your resilience?

STEVEN-getting my high school diploma and stuff. Going to PROGRAM and getting one-on-one, like, this is how you do this, this is how you do that. They stood by me, they were on my side.

S-That’s really cool. Did you integrate back into your regular school or did you graduate from the ALTERNATIVE program?

STEVEN-I actually graduated from my high school, but I wasn’t there, there. I graduated from both of them.

S-did you go back for any classes at your regular school or did you just stay with ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM?

STEVEN-No, I didn’t want to go back to my regular school so I stuck with ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM.

S-Yeah, I don’t blame you. I think if you have a good thing going, why go back to the other way.

STEVEN-yep

S-did they let you, did you say, I don’t want to go back to my regular school, can I please stay here?

STEVEN-yeah, basically. My mom kinda helped out with that one

S-oh that’s good. You had the momma bear saying this is what it’s going to happen people. You better listen because I’m the mom.

STEVEN-I’m sure my school didn’t want me back because I was a trouble maker and stuff in school

S-Oh well, they didn’t know how to best handle somebody like you, right? When did you go to the ALTERNATIVE program? How old were you?

STEVEN-I can’t even remember, I think 15, 16
S-so was even elementary school hard?
STEVEN-no not really
S-When did it start getting hard for you? Like…
STEVEN-in middle school, I didn’t want to show up for stuff.
S-Why not?
STEVEN-Because it started way too early. I’m not use to getting up at 6:00.
S-I bet you have to now driving the truck.
STEVEN-No, I work 8pm to 4 am
S-Oh, ok, wait, did you say 8pm to 4am?
STEVEN-yes I did
S-Holy guacamole! Who can stay up all night long?
STEVEN-(laughs) I’m like a night person
S-You’re like nocturnal or something
STEVEN-(laughs)
S-I turn into a pumpkin past 11:00, good night! Well, that’s good! There’s gotta be people like you out there to take care of stuff and help the other people who are nocturnal.
STEVEN-A bunch of drunks
S-How do you think schools can do to help kids have a better chance at success? What do you think schools should do differently?
STEVEN-If they need help, just help them, like, what’s the big deal with doing one-on-one?
S-Ok, so being helpful. What about the principal? Was the principal any good or was the principal terrible too?
STEVEN-Let’s just say, I punched him in the face.
S-Wait, did you just say the principal punched you in the face?
STEVEN- No, I punched him in the face
S-What did the principal do to make you so angry?
STEVEN-Oh because, like he expelled me the last week of school

S-Why would they suspend you the last week of school? That’s not cool

STEVEN-I think the principal hated me because me and my brother went to the same school and my brother probably really pissed him off.

S-Oh, so he was kind of taking it out on you.

STEVEN-Yes,

S-well, that’s not your fault. Ok, so administrators and teachers have to act like they care and individualize things for you. What else? Is there anything else that schools can do better or differently?

STEVEN-no that’s about it.

S-What do you think you have that helps you deal with challenging situations

STEVEN-What do you mean?

S-What characteristics do you have that helps you deal with the challenging situations

STEVEN-my knowledge

S-You’re a smart cookie

STEVEN-I don’t know like, that’s a hard one, I really don’t know.

S-Well, it seems like once you have something in your mind you definitely follow through and that’s a great characteristic. Even if it’s hard, you are still going to get it done.

STEVEN-yep

S-it takes a lot for someone to have a goal like you had and follow through, even volunteering and kind of doing the job that no one wants to do, you did it just to say, I want to stick this out. Most people would’ve said, forget this and moved on.

STEVEN-back when I was 13 I use to work for the city and that was during the summer time, but that wasn’t my thing and I was like, no. My old man was like, you should go and get a government job, like I had one, and I didn’t like it too much. I was getting paid for it, it just wasn’t my thing. I would rather be outside. Like my job that I’m doing right now, I love it. I was raised to do it. I would rather be just helping people out then working, I don’t know.

S-what did they have you do when you were 13?

STEVEN-I was sweeping up and cleaning up city vehicles.

S-oh yeah, I don’t like to clean my own house let alone someone else’s car.
STEVEN—I didn’t like it, but I knew I had to do it.

S—So what characteristics do you have that could potentially hinder your success where it would be hard to get what you want done. What characteristics do you think you have?

STEVEN—Like my knowledge of my job. I really don’t know, family members I guess?

S—They’ve helped you or they’ve made it hard for you?

STEVEN: They’ve helped, stuck by my side.

S—What part of you could make it hard to be successful?

STEVEN—My attitude sometimes

S—Yeah, we all probably have that sometimes more than we should. Well, is there anything that you would like to add that I haven’t asked? Is there anything that you would like to say? Or do you have questions for me?

STEVEN: No not really

S: Well, I really appreciate your time. Thank you for talking to me. I need to know where you want your gift card to be from.

STEVEN: I guess Walmart.

S—Alright, I will get that in the mail for you. Thank you
REFERENCES


Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Public Law 105-17, 105th Congress, (1997).


