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*African American Parental Beliefs About Resiliency: A Delphi Study*

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*Abstract*

This study involved a Delphi inquiry concerning the characteristics of resiliency specific to African American children/youth. The study was conducted with a large group of African American parents who were considered experts in resiliency because they had graduated from high school and had at least one child who had graduated from high school. Through a series of three Delphi surveys, the parents moved toward consensus concerning the most important characteristics of resiliency that contributed to their success and the success of their child(ren); as well as those that hindered their success and the success of their child(ren). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis. The main characteristics of resiliency defined by the parents as contributing to or hindering their success or the success of their child(ren) included (a) spiritual/faith, (b) positive/negative personal traits, (c) family involvement/problems, (d) positive/negative educational supports, (e) inappropriate behaviors, and (f) resources.

**African American Parental Beliefs About Resiliency: A Delphi Study**

Resiliency, as a concept, has been discussed in anthropology, psychology, sociology, general education, and special education for over 30 years (Margalit, 2003; Murray, 2003; Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2003). A common thread in this discussion is the ability to triumph over adversity. It appears that for each child/youth experiencing difficulties in adverse situations there are twice as many who flourish and become productive individuals within society (Werner & Smith 1992). Researchers have labeled children/youth who rise above negative situations (e.g., home, school, community) as resilient (Ogbu, 2004; Patterson, 2002; Sagor, 1996). A variety of personal characteristics have been associated with resiliency. For example, optimism, internal affirmation, internal locus of control, intrinsic motivation, strong relationships with peers and

adults, and the ability to remove oneself emotionally from unfavorable situations are considered to be traits of a resilient person (Ford, 1994; Kitano & Lewis, 2005; Sagor, 1996). Werner and Smith (1992) described the resilient child/youth as one who works well, plays well, loves well, and expects well.

A subgroup of students who are disproportionately affected by negative perceptions from society and who often find themselves in adverse situations are African American children and youth (Ogbu, 2004). These students encounter less fit in public schools, have a higher propensity for at-risk behavior, and experience less favorable academic and social outcomes (Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994). This lack of fit is exacerbated when the child/youth is labeled as having a learning disability (LD) (Margalit, 2003). Children/youth with LD tend to form less secure relationships with others, resulting in insecure relational patterns often correlated with social and emotional maladjustment (Keogh & Weisner, 1993). It may be that the LD identification is an additional risk factor for these students as they move through school and beyond the boundaries of school (Morrison & Cosden, 1997).

### **Resiliency Defined**

Researchers continue to search for the variables that contribute to the development of resiliency (Patterson, 2002). In education, resiliency is defined primarily in terms of outcomes. That is to say, educational researchers define resiliency as the increased probability of academic and social accomplishments in spite of setbacks (Brown, 2001; Milstein & Henry, 2000).

In this study, a resilient person was defined as someone who embodies the characteristics of resiliency and draws on his or her self-worth to be a personal advocate (Harvey, 2007). A resilient child/youth was defined as one engaged in the school setting in spite of complicated and adverse experiences and who ultimately graduates from high school (Martin & Marsh, 2006).

### **Characteristics of Resiliency**

The specific characteristics of resiliency are globally defined as indicators of resilience (Miller & MacIntosh, 1999). The literature describes these as: (a) individual characteristics (e.g., the innate abilities that reside in an individual and remain centered during difficult times) (Condly, 2006), (b) relationship characteristics (e.g., a sense of connectedness and fit) (Booker, 2004), (c) community characteristics (e.g., the joining together of people with common values, beliefs, and interests) (Wang & Gordon, 1994), (d) cultural characteristics (e.g., knowing one's history and participating in a cultural tradition) (Ogbu, 2004), and (e) physical ecology characteristics (e.g., access to a healthy and safe environment) (International Resiliency Project, 2007).

However, these characteristics may be so global in nature as to lack specificity when discussing unique populations of children/youth (e.g., African Americans, students with LD) (Kitano & Lewis, 2005; Margalit, 2003). The heterogeneity of the population of students labeled as having LD, as well as societal and cultural values used to determine risk and protective factors for African American children/youth indicate that a discussion of resiliency characteristics must be specific in nature and take into consideration the disability as well as the cultural or ethnic group in which a child/youth functions.

Although extensive literature exists defining the characteristics of resiliency, in general terms, little exists in regards to African American students specifically (Kitano & Lewis, 2005). While social and academic outcomes are positive for African American students who exhibit resiliency (Patterson, 2002), it also indicates that African American students who lack resiliency often struggle with life's challenges and may be predisposed to negative outcomes in life (McCabe et al., 2007). For all of these students, resiliency is a multidimensional component to which situational (e.g., school, community), family (e.g., child-parent interaction), and cultural elements contribute (Parker, Cowens, Work, & Wyman, 1990).

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study implemented a Delphi inquiry concerning the characteristics of resiliency with a large group of African American parents. The goal was to bring specificity to the discussion of resiliency as it relates to African American children/youth.

The Delphi method is comprised of a series of surveys developed around structured opinion gathering in which several rounds of data are collected from expert participants to create a consensus (Streveler, Olds, Miller, & Nelson, 2003). Parents, for this study, were considered *experts* in resiliency if they had graduated from high school and had at least one child who graduated from high school (Daire, LaMothe, & Fuller, 2007). This study was a three-round Delphi in which the parents completed surveys as they went through three iterations of deliberation based on previous responses. The goal was to allow African American parents to define resiliency specifically in terms of their own experience and the experiences of their children. To do this, five research questions were posed:

1. What roles do individual characteristics play in achieving resiliency in African American children/youth?
2. What roles do relationship characteristics play in achieving resiliency in African American children/youth?
3. What roles do community characteristics play in achieving resiliency in African American children/youth?
4. What roles do cultural characteristics play in achieving resiliency in African American children/youth?
5. What roles do physical ecology characteristics play in achieving resiliency in African American children/youth?

### ***Method***

The Delphi process was used to develop consensus among African American parents concerning the characteristics of resiliency contributing to their own success and the success of their child who graduated from high school. The Delphi survey focused on internal and external predictors of resiliency.

### **Participants**

#### **Parents**

The participants in this study (n = 227) were African American parents living in a large southwestern city. The Delphi process requires that only persons with expertise in the area under

investigation participate (Linstone & Turoff, 2002). Experts were defined as parents: (a) who had graduated from high school, and (b) who had a least one child who had graduated from high school. Table 1 shows the demographic information for the participants.

In order to maintain anonymity of all participants, in each Round of the Delphi, parents received a demographic form to complete as the first page of the Delphi (e.g., Round One, Round Two, Round Three). If a parent had not participated in the previous round, they were directed to complete the demographic sheet first. If a parent had participated in the previous round, they were directed to the survey. The Delphi does not require that all participants remain constant throughout the process, it only requires that the participants meet the test of expertise (Barnette, Danielson, & Algozzine, 1978).

### **Data collectors**

There were five data collectors, one at each site, to assist parents in completing the Delphi surveys and the demographic sheet. The data collectors were African American women who were active in the churches in which the data were collected. They were trained in a 2-hour session concerning the collection of information in the Delphi process. Each data collector received a script to read to the parents so that all data were collected in a systematic manner.

### **Setting**

The pastors of five churches agreed to allow their churches to serve as data collection sites for the study. The congregations were predominantly African American and composed of a wide range of educational, vocational, and economic groups. African American churches were selected as the data collection sites because of the importance these institutions play within the community, serving as a social, historical, and cultural hub of the community (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Payne, 1995). Data were collected on Wednesday evenings and Sunday afternoons.

### **Instrumentation**

The Delphi method is a technique used to facilitate communication among groups of people who do not physically meet (Barnette, Danielson, & Algozzine, 1978). It allows participants to generate ideas and share special knowledge without having contact with each other (Nehiley, 2001). This study employed a three-round Delphi process, each round of the Delphi allowing the participants an opportunity to contribute information they felt was important. Each survey built upon responses from the previous survey, thus items were removed from the survey or came onto the survey based on participant responses over time.

### **Round one**

The first round of the Delphi was open-ended regarding responses from the participants, with the focus on generating a large data pool of *characteristics* the African American parents believed: (a) contributed to or hindered their own personal success (i.e., graduation from high school) as well as (b) the characteristics that contributed to or hindered their child's success (i.e., graduation from high school). This first round generated unique responses from the participants that were then used in the second and third rounds. The independent responses collected in Round One served as the basis for further investigation and as the main source of data for qualitative analysis. Eight prompts focused the initial participant responses (see Table 2).

The responses to these eight prompts were organized into a comprehensive list of all responses. These unique items were extracted from the participant narratives as individual thought units much like determining t-units (Smith, Lee, & McDade, 2001) used in essay scoring. From this list of unique items, responses that were similar in meaning were combined into single aggregated responses. See Figure 1 as an example of how similar response items could be combined into one aggregated response.

The aggregated responses were assigned a numeric value equal to the number of unique response items from which the aggregated response was created (e.g., The aggregated response in Figure 1 would have a value of 3). A rank-ordered list was developed based on the value of each aggregated response. From the rank-ordered list, the top 10 items associated with each of the eight prompts (e.g., internal characteristics that contributed to your success; external characteristics that hindered your child's success) were determined.

### **Round two**

In round two of the Delphi, participants were given a survey comprised of the Top 10 aggregated responses for each of the eight prompts (i.e., 80-items in total) that were developed from data collected in Round One of the Delphi. The number of unique responses from which each aggregated item on the survey was constructed was also included on the survey and explained to the participants. The participants then were asked to rate each item on the 5-item Likert instrument as: 1-did not impact my or my child's success, 2-had very little impact on my or my child's success, 3-had some impact on my or my child's success, 4-had considerable impact on my or my child's success, and 5-strongly impacted my or my child's success. Additionally, participants were directed to select the *top three most important* items listed for each of the eight prompts. Analysis included the construction of a *top-three* list of items for each of the eight prompts along with descriptive statistics for each. See Figure 2 for an example page of this survey.

### **Round three**

The final data collection round in the Delphi process also utilized a survey with the same Likert scale. The survey items on this round of the Delphi were drawn from the top-three most important items list, which was developed as part of the data analysis process in Round Two. This instrument, then, consisted of 24 survey items, three from each of the eight prompt categories (see Figure 3).

### **Interscorer Agreement**

Interscorer reliability was conducted for each round of the Delphi process. To develop aggregated responses from unique responses and to develop categories from aggregated responses, 25% of all responses were checked to ensure reliability and placement agreement. Interscorer agreement was determined by  $[\text{agreements} / (\text{agreement} + \text{disagreements})] \times 100 =$  percent of agreement. Interscorer agreement was 96% on the unique-to-aggregated responses and 100% on aggregated responses-into-categories for both Round One and Round Three.

## **Qualitative Analysis**

From round one of the Delphi, items from the aggregated response list were coded in order to identify thematic and categorical similarities among the responses. Using the five areas of characteristics outlined in the research questions (i.e., individual, relationship, community, cultural, and physical ecology) as top-level thematic units, domain analysis (Spradley, 1980) was then used to identify, code, and place the aggregated responses into a new set of categories. These categories expanded and collapsed to accommodate the data until all data were classified. Once the categorizing was complete, the categories were cross-referenced with the top-level themes to show relationships across: (a) the themes, which reflected the focus of the research questions, (b) the categories, which were developed directly from participant data, and (c) the individual aggregated responses. Aggregated response items were placed into finalized categories, which were combined into finalized themes. These themes and categories were also cross-referenced against the eight prompts from Round One (e.g., internal characteristics that contributed to your success; external characteristics that hindered your child's success).

## **Descriptive Quantitative Analysis**

### **Aggregated response items**

From the comprehensive list of all unique responses from all participants for each prompt, a shorter list of aggregated response items was created. Similar items from the list of unique responses were combined into aggregated responses items and those aggregated items were assigned a frequency value equal to the number of unique response items from which it was developed.

### **Surveys**

Placement of each item within the survey did reflect its frequency value (i.e., number of unique responses comprising an aggregated response) as a ranking and its frequency value was provided on the survey. Means were calculated for each aggregated item on the initial survey. Response items with the highest mean scores (i.e., top ten) were the focus of further quantitative analysis. A mean score of 4.0 was selected as indicating consensus on this Delphi (McCallister, 1992).

### **Themes, categories, and response items**

Based on the results of the qualitative analysis, the number of unique response items assigned to each category and corresponding theme was calculated. Aggregated responses were reported based on: (a) the percentage of participants who provided a unique response from which the aggregated items were developed, as well as (b) the actual number of unique responses from which the aggregated items were developed.

### **Top three**

Participants, as part of Survey Two, identified the three most important items. The parents provided a list of their top-three response items from the survey in order of importance regarding resiliency. Frequency of the top-three items was calculated. The frequency reflected how many different times the item was selected by the participants as a top-three choice.

## ***Results***

A qualitative analysis of the data provided an understanding of the breadth of content in the responses, while a descriptive quantitative analysis provided a metric for determining and assigning importance to the content. This dual-coding process provided results that addressed the research questions on both scope and consequence.

### **Round One of the Delphi**

The parents who completed the first survey in the Delphi provided a total of 3,216 unique responses for the eight original prompts given (see Table 2). These 3,216 unique responses were organized into a comprehensive list. Responses that were similar in meaning were combined into a single aggregated response (see Figure 1). This process was repeated three times resulting in a total of 281 aggregated responses.

For the *About Yourself* portion of Round One, there were 28 aggregated responses for the internal characteristics that contributed to success, 45 for internal characteristics that hindered success, 18 for external forces that contributed to success, and 55 for external forces that hindered success. For the *About Your Child* portion of Round One, there were 38 aggregated responses for the internal characteristics of the child that contributed to success, 37 for internal characteristics of the child that hindered success, 29 for external forces that contributed to the success of the child, and 31 for external forces that hindered the child's success.

From these 281 aggregated responses, a *top-ten* list was determined based on the frequency of unique responses that contributed to each of the aggregated responses for each of the eight prompts. Thus, for each prompt 10 aggregated responses were selected based on the highest frequency of unique responses.

The *top-ten* list for each of the eight prompts was reviewed and a process initiated through which the 80 resulting aggregated responses were placed into categories that were descriptive of the responses. This process resulted in the identification of 10 categories. The categories that were determined and the number of aggregated responses that fit into each of the categories included:

1. Educational traits, with 6 response items.
2. Good environment, with 3 response items.
3. Family involvement/problems, with 9 response items.
4. Positive educational supports, with 7 response items.
5. Racism, with 3 response items.
6. Lack of resources, with 6 responses items.
7. Positive and negative personal traits, with 35 response items.
8. Spiritual/faith, with 4 response items.
9. Extra-curricular, with 3 response items.
10. Inappropriate behaviors, with 4 response items.

These categories were then cross-referenced with each of the eight prompts as well as with the themes (i.e., research question foci).



### **Round Two of the Delphi**

In Round Two of the Delphi, the top-ten aggregated responses identified in Round One were organized around each of the original eight prompts. The participants were given a survey that provided them with information concerning the rank order of each response (i.e., 1-10) and the number of unique items from which the aggregated response was created from data obtained in Round One. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with each aggregated response using a Likert-scale (1-disagree to 5-agree). Upon completion of the Likert-portion of the survey, the participants then selected the top-three most important items from the 10 aggregated items and listed them in a separate section of the survey. Thus, in Round Two of the Delphi, participants provided two sets of information, their rankings of the 80 aggregated items from Round One (i.e., 10 for each of the eight prompts) and their selection of the top-three items for each of the eight prompts.

### **Round Three of the Delphi**

The final data collection round also utilized a survey instrument with the same Likert scale (1-disagree to 5-agree). The survey items on this instrument were drawn from the list of top-three most important items selected by participants as part of the data collection and analysis process in Round Two. This instrument, then, consisted of 24 survey items, three from each of the eight prompt headings. The response items were listed in rank order as the top three items in each of the eight categories. The mean scores from this final survey were used to reconfigure the final top-three lists, with the rank order by mean scores on the survey supplanting the rank order determined in Round Two.

A series of eight comprehensive response-table figures were created, providing a final look at the outcome of the Delphi consensus-building process (see Figures 4 through 11). Each figure represented the number one choice of the top-three response items. In addition to the quantitative data from Round One and Round Two, the response-table figures connect each of the number one aggregated response items to the qualitative analysis by indicating which of the 10 categories (e.g., faith, family, personal traits) the item was associated with; as well as the research question(s) that are best informed by the consensus outcome regarding the item.

Specifically the response tables include:

1. The prompt category from which the item was generated (e.g., internal characteristics that contributed to your success; external characteristics that hindered your child's success).
2. The aggregated response item (developed from survey one) itself.
3. The number of unique response items from which each aggregated item was developed along with a minimum of four verbatim samples of those unique responses.
4. The number of participants who provided a unique response from which the aggregated response item was constructed.
5. Its mean score and rank order from Survey Two.
6. Its rank in the top three items of importance list from Survey Two.
7. Its mean score from Survey Three.
8. Its final rank in its particular prompt category.
9. The overall qualitative category into which the item was placed.
10. The research question to which it most closely relates.

The final 24 items for each of the eight prompts were reviewed and the items were placed into the categories identified in Round One. As this process proceeded, it became clear that the 10 categories identified in Round One of the Delphi process had been reduced to six categories in Round Three. This provides an indication that the participants had reduced their focus down to six specific categories of resiliency. These categories then were related to the associated research themes (research question foci) (see Tables 3 and 4). The final six categories relating to resiliency as identified by the participants were related to all five of the research questions posed in the study.

### *Discussion*

This study involved a three-round Delphi process with a large group of African American parents in order to create a consensus concerning resiliency specific to African American children/youth. The ultimate goal was to identify the characteristics of resiliency that parents agreed both contributed to and hindered their success and the success of their child(ren). Through the Delphi process, the parents defined and re-defined resiliency in terms of the African American experience. The consensus concerning resiliency revolved around the characteristics related to each of the five research questions (e.g., individual, relationship, community, cultural, and physical ecology).

#### **Individual Characteristics (Question 1)**

In Round One of the Delphi, *individual characteristics* were identified in all of the eight prompts. Specifically, the theme of *individual characteristics* was comprised of the categories of positive/negative personal traits, spiritual/faith, and inappropriate behaviors.

#### **Round one of the Delphi**

The appearance of *individual characteristics* in Round One of the Delphi in terms of overall category identification and frequency of responses indicated that for African American parents and their children *individual characteristics* (both positive and negative) play a major role in resiliency. Examples of responses for the parents ranged from *I was highly motivated* to *I experienced low self-esteem* and for their children from *My child has a positive attitude* to *My child procrastinates*.

#### **Round two of the Delphi**

As the Delphi became more refined, the spiritual/faith category appeared more and more often across prompts and themes. While public school educators cannot deal with spiritual/faith issues in the school setting, it is important for them to understand how deeply rooted this is in the African American culture (Lincoln, 1990; Payne, 1995).

The second portion of Round Two of the Delphi asked parents to identify the top-three items from the list of 10 aggregated items in each of the eight prompts. When the parents selected their top-three items, *My faith helped me succeed* was selected 38 times by the parents and became the top item in this category.

### **Round three of the Delphi**

For the third round of the Delphi, the parents completed a Likert survey that contained the top three items for each of the eight prompts from Round Two. In this round, for the Your Child Internal Contributed prompt, all of the top three items were related to the positive/negative personal traits category and the spiritual/faith category, both considered *individual characteristics*. And for the Your Child External Contributed, all items were related to the family involvement/problems and positive educational supports categories, both considered *individual characteristics*. Continuing with the About Your Child portion of the Delphi, for the prompt Your Child Internal Hindered, all three items were from the positive/negative personal traits category; and for the Your Child External Hindered, the top three selections were from the family involvement/problems and inappropriate behaviors categories, all of which were considered *individual characteristics*.

In Round Three of the Delphi for the About Yourself top-three portion of the survey, the top three items for the internal-contributes prompt were related to the positive/negative personal traits category and the spiritual/faith category, both considered *individual characteristics*. For the About Yourself External Contributed prompt, two of the items were considered *individual characteristics* (family involvement/problems, educational traits). For the About Yourself Internal Hindered prompt, all three items were related to positive/negative personal traits or educational traits categories, both representative of *individual characteristics*. For the About Yourself External Hindered prompt, one item (family involvement/problems) was related to *individual characteristics*.

### **Summary**

The parents reached consensus on the fact that the resiliency construct of *individual characteristics* both contributed to and hindered themselves and their children both internally and externally. The parents ultimately provided 20 out of 24 responses that were related to *individual characteristics*. While the responses varied over the identified categories (e.g., spiritual/faith, positive/negative personal traits), they provide a discussion starting point for parents and teachers concerning important *individual characteristics* related to resiliency for this population of children/youth.

### **Relationship Characteristics (Question 2)**

The second question in this study focused on the roles that *relationship characteristics* play in achieving resiliency in African American children/youth. In Round One of the Delphi, *relationship characteristics* were identified in all of the eight prompts. Specifically, the theme of *relationship characteristics* was comprised of the categories spiritual/faith, family involvement/problems, positive educational supports, extra-curricular, and inappropriate behaviors.

### **Round one of the Delphi**

The appearance of *relationship characteristics* in Round One of the Delphi in terms of overall category identification and frequency of responses indicated that for African American parents and their children *relationship characteristics* (both positive and negative) play a major role in resiliency. Examples of responses for the parents ranged from *Family support contributed to my success* to *My choice of friends was not good* and for their children from *My child received lots*

*of encouragement from family to My child spent too much time involved in social/recreational activities.* This high frequency may indicate one area on which educators and parents should focus as they work with African American children/youth to develop the forming of positive relationships that can have an impact on school success, community success, and social/emotional success.

### **Round two of the Delphi**

The mean scores from the Likert portion of Round Two indicated that some of the aggregated responses had higher levels-of-agreement than expected from the frequency count conducted in Round One. For example, for the About Yourself External Contributed prompt, *My belief in God* had a frequency count of 64 responses from Round One of the Delphi and a mean score from the Likert scale in Round Two of 4.53. Conversely, *I received lots of support from my family*, had a frequency count of 111 from Round One and a mean score of 3.82 from Round Two. Thus, the two items exchanged positions as items one and two. This same pattern occurred across the eight prompts for the parents and children. Participants were beginning to refine their responses and move toward closer toward consensus in this round of the Delphi.

In the second part of Round Two of the Delphi, when the participants selected their top-three items, *I received lots of support from my family* was selected 26 times by the participants and became the top item in this category, *I had good friends* was selected by 16 participants, and *Teachers or other mentors helped me achieve* was selected by 13 participants. Thus, the participants went through several ponderings before coming to consensus in Round Two on *I received lots of support from my family* as the top resilient *relationship characteristic* for Yourself Internal Contributed. Had data collection stopped with Round One, the data would have reflected *I received lots of support from my family* as being the top item for Yourself External Contributed. With the selection of the top-three items, participants further reconsidered their thinking and went back to their original choice of *I received lots of support from my family*.

### **Round three of the Delphi**

For *relationship characteristics* in this round, the focus was on the external prompts. Parents indicated that for themselves as well as for their child, *relationship characteristics* were in the external contributed and external hindered prompts. The categories represented were family involvement/problems, positive educational supports, and inappropriate behaviors.

In Round Three for the About Yourself top-three portion of the survey, the top three items related to *relationship characteristics* again revolved around the external contributed and external hindered prompts for both the parents and children. For the About Yourself portion, the external contributed responses were related to the categories of family involvement/problems and positive educational supports and the external hindered responses focused on family involvement/problems. For the About Your Child portion, the external contributed responses focused on the categories of family involvement/problems and positive educational supports and the external hindered responses were related to the categories of family involvement/problems and inappropriate behaviors.

## Summary

The theme of *relationship characteristics* appears to be related to resiliency for the African American parents and their children who participated in this study. By Round Three of the Delphi, the parents had reached consensus that *relationship characteristics* of resiliency reside externally and can either contribute to or hinder one's success. The aggregated responses from these parents provide food for thought for educators and parents as they work to instill resiliency in African American children and youth. The parents provided 9 out of 24 responses related to *relationship characteristics*.

The parents repeatedly cited family involvement, positive educational support, peer pressure, friendships, and teachers/mentors as contributing to resiliency. While these responses may not be new to educators, they do provide support for a renewed effort in these areas when working with African American children/youth.

## Community Characteristics (Question 3)

The third question in this study focused on the roles that *community characteristics* play in achieving resiliency in African American children/youth. In Round One, *community characteristics* were identified in all of the eight prompts. Specifically, the theme of *community characteristics* was comprised of the categories of spiritual/faith, lack of resources, good environment, positive educational supports, and extra-curricular.

## Round one of the Delphi

The appearance of *community characteristics* in Round One of the Delphi in terms of overall category identification and frequency of responses indicated that for African American parents and their children, *community characteristics* (both positive and negative) play a major role in resiliency. Examples of responses for the parents ranged from *My community influenced my success* to *I lacked resources to support my success* and for their children from *My child received spiritual insight from family, church, and community* to *A negative environment hindered my child*. The participants in this study indicated that *community characteristics* have an impact on resiliency and as such it is prudent that educators become aware of the various characteristics of a community that impact the development of resiliency by the children/youth who live in a community.

## Round two of the Delphi

It is interesting to note that as the Delphi became more refined, the theme of *community characteristics* appeared with less frequency. In fact, *community characteristics*, while appearing across the eight prompts, appeared with less frequency than did *individual characteristics* and *relationship characteristics*.

When parents were asked to identify their top three items in this category, fewer community items appeared, although two items became prominent as parents refined their thoughts (i.e., *My child was overly influenced by peer pressure* and *A negative environment influenced by child*).

## Round three of the Delphi

In this round of the Delphi, resiliency as defined by the theme *community characteristics* was represented in the About Yourself prompts for internal contributed and external hindered and for

About Your Child for internal contributed, external contributed and external hindered. The items revolved around the categories of spiritual/faith, lack of resources, positive educational supports, and inappropriate behaviors. The resiliency theme of *community characteristics* was represented in only six out of the final 24 aggregated responses in the third round.

### **Summary**

While the African American parents in this study did include *community characteristics* as a contributing factor to resiliency, the connection was weaker than was made for *individual* and *relationship characteristics*. This may have been due to the fact that these parents did not share a community in which they lived, but rather shared a church community.

### **Cultural Characteristics (Question 4)**

The fourth question in this study focused on the roles that *cultural characteristics* play in achieving resiliency in African American children/youth. In Round One of the Delphi, *cultural characteristics* were identified in five of the prompts (i.e., About Yourself, internal/external contributed and About Your Child, internal contributed/hindered, external contributed). Specifically, the theme of *cultural characteristics* was comprised of the categories of positive/negative personal traits, spiritual/faith, and inappropriate behaviors (for the children).

### **Round one of the Delphi**

The appearance of *cultural characteristics* in Round One of the Delphi in terms of overall category identification and frequency of responses indicated that for African American parents and their children *cultural characteristics* (both positive and negative) were identified in terms of religious experience and inappropriate behaviors (but only in regard to the children). Examples of responses for the participants ranged from *My faith helped me to succeed* to *My belief in God* and for their children from *My child is successful due to spiritual beliefs* to *My child is influenced by peer pressure*. The frequency of appearance of aggregated responses placed into categories associated with the theme of *cultural characteristics* was lower than the previous three themes. Overall, for this group of African American parents, the only cultural categories that emerged were spiritual/faith and inappropriate behaviors for the children. Educators must consider that peer pressure can become a negative *cultural characteristic* for certain populations of youth and the negative impact on resiliency needs counter measures in the environments of school, community, and home.

### **Round two of the Delphi**

Other than the spiritual/faith category and inappropriate behaviors regarding the children (peer pressure), there were no responses that could be coded as cultural. The construct of culture and its contribution to the resiliency of African American children/youth warrants further investigation.

In the second part of Round Two of the Delphi when the parents selected their top-three items, *My faith helped me succeed* was selected 38 times by the parents and became the top item in this category replacing the previously selected items.

### **Round three of the Delphi**

For the Third Round of the Delphi, the parents completed a Likert survey that contained the top three items for each of the eight prompts from Round Two. In this round, for the About Yourself portion only one prompt for internal contributed was related to *cultural characteristics*. This

was the aggregated response *My faith helped me succeed* associated with the category spiritual/faith. For the About Your Child portion, three prompts were associated with *cultural characteristics*, internal contributed (*Spiritual beliefs played a big part in my child's success*), external contributed (*My child received spiritual insight from family and/or the church community*), and external hindered (*My child was overly influenced by peer pressure*). These aggregated responses were associated with the categories of spiritual/faith and inappropriate behaviors that were associated with the *cultural characteristics* theme.

### **Summary**

From the low number of responses that could be associated with *cultural characteristics*, it appears that, for the parents in this study, culture did not have a major impact on the definition of success/resiliency. While in the end, the parents reached consensus on the aggregated responses that were placed in categories associated with the *cultural characteristics* theme, the parents provided only four out of 24 responses associated with culture and primarily associated with culture in terms of the spiritual/faith category.

### **Physical Ecology (Question 5)**

The fifth question in this study focused on the roles that *physical ecology characteristics* play in achieving resiliency in African American children/youth. In Round One of the Delphi, *physical ecology characteristics* were identified in five of the eight prompts (about yourself, external contributed/hindered and about your child, internal hindered and external contributed/hindered). Specifically, the theme of *physical ecology characteristics* was comprised of the categories of positive educational supports, good environment, lack of resources, racism, and extra-curricular.

### **Round one of the Delphi**

The appearance of *physical ecology characteristics* in Round One in terms of overall category identification and frequency of responses indicated that for this group of participants, physical ecology had an impact, particularly for the external hindered prompt. However, for Round One, *physical ecology characteristics* were only represented in five of the eight prompts at a relatively low frequency rate. One interesting finding was that racism, as a category, was only identified for the external hindered prompt (yourself and child) and was placed in the physical ecology theme in this study. While racism became a category and represented a frequency of 32 responses, it did not represent a majority of the unique responses nor did it receive a high rate of frequency in Round One of the Delphi.

### **Round two of the Delphi**

Based on mean scores and frequency of responses, it appears that for *physical ecology characteristics* participants remained the most consistent in their responding. There was little movement in the items.

The second portion of Round Two of the Delphi asked parents to identify the top-three items from the list of 10 aggregated items in each of the eight prompts. For About Yourself, participants selected no items related to *physical ecology characteristics* to move into the top three items. For About Your Child, participants selected *physical ecology characteristics* for the prompt items: (a) external contributed (*My child had a positive educational environment*) and (b) external hindered (*A negative environment influenced my child*). This indicated that *physical*

*ecology characteristics* appeared to have the weakest link to resiliency as identified by this group of parents.

### **Round three of the Delphi**

For the third round, the parents completed a Likert survey that contained the top three items for each of the eight prompts from Round Two. In this round, the About Your Child External Contributed prompt provided one category (positive educational supports) related to *physical ecology characteristics*. Two prompts were related to About Yourself: (a) external contributed (positive educational supports) and (b) external hindered (lack of resources).

### **Summary**

From the few unique items and aggregated responses ultimately related to the research theme of *physical ecology characteristics* provided by the African American parents in this study, it appears that the resiliency concept of *physical ecology characteristics* has little impact on resiliency for this group. The parents ultimately provided four out of 24 responses that were related to *physical ecology characteristics*.

### **Conclusions**

By the final round of the Delphi, the parents had refined their responses from the original 281 aggregated responses to 24 aggregated responses and from ten response categories to six. The final round of the Delphi also indicated that the responses provided by the parents fell primarily into the research themes (questions) of *individual* and *relationship characteristics*. That is to say, that these two themes best defined resiliency for this large group of parents. There is less support from this study for the resiliency themes of *community, cultural, and physical ecology characteristics*. In short, seven conclusions maybe drawn from this study:

1. Resiliency can be defined for African American students using similar terms used to define resiliency for the general population of students (e.g., individual, relationship, community, cultural, physical ecology characteristics). However, the fine-tuning of these characteristics may differ from other groups (e.g., spiritual/faith, positive/negative personal traits, family involvement/problems, positive educational supports, and inappropriate behaviors).
2. There appears to be some reluctance on the part of African American parents to rate items that are negative (e.g., hindered success) concerning their or their child's success. This may be due to the fact that data were collected in a church or that parents do not want to contribute to negative stereotyping.
3. There are six categories of resiliency that emerged from this study that should be targeted when working with African American children/youth. These are spiritual/faith, positive/negative personal traits, family involvement/problems, positive educational supports, inappropriate behaviors, and lack of resources.
4. This study indicates that the link between community characteristics and resiliency needs further exploration and definition. It may be that community characteristics are situation specific and cannot be generalized across communities.
5. This study found that African American parents are active participants in building consensus concerning their children. The large participation sample indicates the



willingness of these parents to provide information, input, and ideas impacting their child's education.

6. This study found that the role of culture in resiliency is unclear for this population of African American parents and their children. It may be that culture outside of the spiritual/faith realm is not a primary factor for this group.
7. The relationship between physical ecology and resiliency was not revealed in this study. Parents provided few responses associated with physical ecology and it did not occur in a high enough frequency or with a high enough mean to draw any conclusions about its relationship to resiliency for this population.

### ***Implications***

Because students from diverse backgrounds comprise 33% of the public school enrollment (NCES, 2005), 13% of which are African American students, identification of the unique resiliency characteristics of this subgroup of students must occur to provide educators and parents evidence-based information. This study provides one step in this direction in that it provided African American parents with a vehicle through which they could provide information specific to their experiences and the experiences of their children.

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Figure 1. An Example of the Process for Creating Aggregated Response Items

Unique Response Items from Narrative with Similar Meanings
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. My grandmother always read me a bedtime story.</li><li>2. We used to always read fairy tale stories from the <i>Book of Knowledge</i>.</li><li>3. I had heard all the children's stories before I started to school because my mother read them to us.</li></ol>
A Single Aggregated Response Item
Reading aloud was a common occurrence during childhood. (Value = 3)

Figure 2. Sample Page From Round Two of the Delphi

Page 4

**About Your Child:**

**Internal characteristics that contributed to his or her success**

Top Ten Items	Number of times someone said it	What the participants said in the first survey.	Disagree-----Agree ←-----→ Circle Your Choice
1.	39	My child would <b>strive</b> hard for what he/she wants to achieve.	1 2 3 4 5
2.	30	My child was full of <b>determination</b> .	1 2 3 4 5
3.	27	<b>Family involvement</b> played a big part in my child's success.	1 2 3 4 5
4.	24	<b>Spiritual beliefs</b> played a big part in my child's success.	1 2 3 4 5
5.	22	<b>Persistence</b> was an important characteristic in my child.	1 2 3 4 5
6.	16	My child was highly <b>motivated</b> .	1 2 3 4 5
7.	13	My child was very <b>intelligent</b> .	1 2 3 4 5
8.	12	My child had a <b>positive attitude</b> .	1 2 3 4 5
9.	10	My child was successful due to <b>good study skills</b> .	1 2 3 4 5
10.	8	<b>Loyalty</b> was a top characteristic related to my child's success.	1 2 3 4 5

- (1) Select the top three items YOU think are most important from the 10 statements above.
- (2) List them in order of importance below.
- (3) Write the reason why each item is so important.

	Item number	Your reason goes below
A		
B		
C		

Figure 3. Sample Page From Round Three of the Delphi

**About Your Child:**

Top Three Items	What the participants said in the second survey	Disagree ← = → Agree ← =      = → Circle Your Choice
<b>Internal characteristics that <u>contributed</u> to his or her success</b>		
1.	<b>Family involvement</b> played a big part in my child's success.	1 2 3 4 5
2.	<b>Spiritual beliefs</b> played a big part in my child's success.	1 2 3 4 5
3.	My child had a <b>positive attitude</b> .	1 2 3 4 5
<b>External characteristics that <u>contributed</u> to his or her success</b>		
1.	My child received lots of <b>encouragement</b> from family.	1 2 3 4 5
2.	My child received <b>spiritual insight</b> from family and/or the church community.	1 2 3 4 5
3.	My child had positive <b>educational</b> support.	1 2 3 4 5
<b>Internal characteristics that <u>hindered</u> to his or her success</b>		
1.	My child was overly influenced by <b>peer pressure</b> .	1 2 3 4 5
2.	My child had a low level of <b>self-esteem</b> .	1 2 3 4 5
3.	My child could not seem to <b>focus</b> on important things.	1 2 3 4 5
<b>External characteristics that <u>hindered</u> to his or her success</b>		
1.	My child experienced adverse <b>family problems</b> .	1 2 3 4 5
2.	My child suffered from <b>low self-esteem</b> .	1 2 3 4 5
3.	A <b>negative environment</b> influenced my child.	1 2 3 4 5

<b>Spiritual beliefs played a big part in my child's success.</b>				
<b>1.</b>	Number of Unique Responses: 24	<b>2.</b>	Persons Who Said It: # 24	17.65%
<b>3.</b>	Mean from Survey 2: 4.30	<b>4.</b>	Rank Order from Survey 2: 4	
<b>5.</b>	Rank from Top 3 Importance: 1	<b>6.</b>	Mean from Survey 3: 4.65	
<b>7.</b>	Final Rank for Your Child, Internal, Contributed: 1			
<b>8.</b>	Qualitative Category: Spiritual/Faith	<b>9.</b>	Research Question Informed: 1,2,3,4	
Examples from Unique Response Items: 1. Godly teaching 2. Prayer 3. Attending church 4. Applying faith				

Figure 4. *Your Child – Internal – Contributed: Number 1 Most Important*

<b>My child received lots of encouragement from family.</b>				
<b>1.</b>	Number of Unique Responses: 113	<b>2.</b>	Persons Who Said It: # 113	83.09%
<b>3.</b>	Mean from Survey 2: 4.59	<b>4.</b>	Rank Order from Survey 2: 1	
<b>5.</b>	Rank from Top 3 Importance: 1	<b>6.</b>	Mean from Survey 3: 4.61	
<b>7.</b>	Final Rank for Your Child, External, Contributed: 1			
<b>8.</b>	Qualitative Category: Family Involvement/Problems	<b>9.</b>	Research Question Informed: 1,2	
Examples from Unique Response Items: 1. Nurturing from family 2. Maintained high expectations for my child 3. Child knew that I cared 4. Extended family and grandparents supported my child				

Figure 5. *Your Child – External – Contributed: Number 1 Most Important*

<b>My child could not seem to focus on important things.</b>					
<b>1.</b>	Number of Unique Responses: 13	<b>2.</b>	Persons Who Said It: # 13	9.56%	
<b>3.</b>	Mean from Survey 2: 2.18	<b>4.</b>	Rank Order from Survey 2: 3		
<b>5.</b>	Rank from Top 3 Importance: 2	<b>6.</b>	Mean from Survey 3: 2.65		
<b>7.</b>	Final Rank for Your Child, Internal, Hindered: 1				
<b>8.</b>	Qualitative Category: Positive or Negative Personal Traits	<b>9.</b>	Research Question Informed: 1,2		
Examples from Unique Response Items: 1. My child struggled to focus in school 2. My child experienced a lack of motivation in school 3. My child was easily frustrated in school 4. My child had difficulty maintaining focus					

Figure 6. *Your Child – Internal – Hindered: Number 1 Most Important*

<b>My child experienced adverse family problems.</b>					
<b>1.</b>	Number of Unique Responses: 33	<b>2.</b>	Persons Who Said It: # 33	24.26%	
<b>3.</b>	Mean from Survey 2: 2.23	<b>4.</b>	Rank Order from Survey 2: 2		
<b>5.</b>	Rank from Top 3 Importance: 1	<b>6.</b>	Mean from Survey 3: 2.44		
<b>7.</b>	Final Rank for Your Child, External, Hindered: 1				
<b>8.</b>	Qualitative Category: Family Involvement/Problems	<b>9.</b>	Research Question Informed: 1,2		
Examples from Unique Response Items: 1. No father figure 2. Divorce 3. Rape/Pregnancy 4. Mother's substance abuse					

Figure 7. *Your Child – External – Hindered: Number 1 Most Important*



<b>My faith helped me succeed.</b>					
1.	Number of Unique Responses: 49	2.	Persons Who Said It: # 49	36.03%	
3.	Mean from Survey 2: 4.43	4.	Rank Order from Survey 2: 3		
5.	Rank from Top 3 Importance: 1	6.	Mean from Survey 3: 4.59		
7.	Final Rank for Yourself, Internal, Contributed: 1				
8.	Qualitative Category: Spiritual/Faith	9.	Research Question Informed: 1,2,3,4		
Examples from Unique Response Items:					
1. Having a relationship with the Lord					
2. Faith in God					
3. Belief in God to guide me					
4. Inspired by God to keep pushing					

Figure 8. *Yourself – Internal – Contributed: Number 1 Most Important*

<b>I received lots of support from my family.</b>					
1.	Number of Unique Responses: 101	2.	Persons Who Said It: # 111	81,62%	
3.	Mean from Survey 2: 3.82	4.	Rank Order from Survey 2: 1		
5.	Rank from Top 3 Importance: 1	6.	Mean from Survey 3: 4.23		
7.	Final Rank for Your Child, External, Contributed: 1				
8.	Qualitative Category: Family Involvement/Problems	9.	Research Question Informed: 1,2		
Examples from Unique Response Items:					
1. Mother made sure I did well					
2. Love and support from parents					
3. Extended family					
4. High expectations from family					

Figure 9. *Yourself – External – Contributed: Number 1 Most Important*

<b>I was fearful in my quest for education.</b>				
1.	Number of Unique Responses: 20	2.	Persons Who Said It: # 20	14.71%
3.	Mean from Survey 2: 2.22	4.	Rank Order from Survey 2: 2	
5.	Rank from Top 3 Importance: 1	6.	Mean from Survey 3: 2.69	
7.	Final Rank for Yourself, Internal, Hindered: 1			
8.	Qualitative Category: Positive or Negative Personal Traits	9.	Research Question Informed: 1,2	
Examples from Unique Response Items: 1. Fear of failure 2. Failure to follow through 3. Fear of success 4. Scared of change				

Figure 10. *Yourself – Internal – Hindered: Number 1 Most Important*

<b>A lack of finances hindered my ability to succeed.</b>				
1.	Number of Unique Responses: 39	2.	Persons Who Said It: # 39	28.68%
3.	Mean from Survey 2: 3.20	4.	Rank Order from Survey 2: 1	
5.	Rank from Top 3 Importance: 1	6.	Mean from Survey 3: 2.67	
7.	Final Rank for Yourself, External, Hindered: 1			
8.	Qualitative Category: Lack of Resources	9.	Research Question Informed: 2,3,5	
Examples from Unique Response Items: 1. Financial issues 2. Finances 3. Lack of money 4. Lack of funds				

Figure 11. *Yourself – External – Hindered: Number 1 Most Important*

Table 1  
*Participant Demographic Information by Church*

Characteristics	A (n=61)	B (n=47)	C (n=43)	D (n=36)	E (n=40)
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	10	13	4	6	7
Female	51	34	39	30	33
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Ethnic-Background</b>					
Hispanic American	0	0	0	0	0
American Indian	0	1	0	0	0
Asian American	0	0	0	0	0
African American	61	45	43	36	40
European American	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	1	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Marital Status</b>					
Married	37	27	14	21	15
Widowed	3	7	0	1	8
Divorced	11	9	17	10	6
Separated	6	1	4	4	3

*(table continues)*

Characteristics	A (n=61)	B (n=47)	C (n=43)	D (n=36)	E (n=40)
Never Married	4	2	6	0	6
Living w/Partner	0	1	2	0	2
<b>Educational Background</b>					
High school graduate or GED	17	14	5	7	7
Post-secondary but no degree	29	11	19	14	24
Associate or Bachelors degree	12	20	14	15	7
Graduate degree	3	2	5	0	2
<b>Number of children who graduated from high school</b>					
Male	72	56	46	43	34
Female	66	43	59	39	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Children in Special Education</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>

Table 2

*Prompts For Round One of the Delphi*

*About Yourself*

1. **About Yourself Internal Contributed:** Please list three *internal characteristics* of yourself that have contributed to your success.
2. **About Yourself Internal Hindered:** Please list three *internal characteristics* of yourself that have hindered your success.
3. **About Yourself External Contributed:** Please list three *external forces* that have contributed to your success.
4. **About Yourself External Hindered:** Please list three *external forces* that have hindered your success.

*About Your Child*

1. **About Your Child Internal Contributed:** Please list three *internal characteristics* of your child who graduated from high school that have contributed to his or her success.
2. **About Your Child Internal Hindered:** Please list three *internal characteristics* of your child who graduated from high school that have hindered his or her success.
3. **About Your Child External Contributed:** Please list three *external forces* of your child who graduated from high school that have contributed to his or her success.
4. **About Your Child External Hindered:** Please list three *external forces* of your child who graduated from high school that have hindered his or her success.

Table 3

*About Yourself Final Categories and Themes*

Prompt	Category	Associated Research Theme (Question)
Internal Contributed	Spiritual/Faith	Individual Characteristics
	Positive/Negative Personal Traits	Relationship Characteristics
		Community Characteristics
		Cultural Characteristics
Internal Hindered	Positive/Negative Personal Traits	Individual Characteristics
External Contributed	Family Involvement/Problems	Individual Characteristics
	Positive Educational Supports	Relationship Characteristics

		Physical Ecology Characteristics
External Hindered	Family Involvement/Problems	Individual Characteristics
	Lack of Resources	Relationship Characteristics
		Community Characteristics
		Physical Ecology Characteristics

Table 4

*About Your Child Final Categories and Themes*

Prompt	Category	Associated Research Theme (Question)
Internal Contributed	Spiritual/Faith	Individual Characteristics
	Positive/Negative Personal Traits	Relationship Characteristics
		Community Characteristics
		Cultural Characteristics
Internal Hindered	Positive/Negative Personal Traits	Individual Characteristics
External Contributed	Family Involvement/Problems	Individual Characteristics
	Spiritual/Faith	Relationship Characteristics
	Positive Educational Supports	Cultural Characteristics
		Community Characteristics
		Physical Ecology Characteristics
External Hindered	Family Involvement/Problems	Individual Characteristics

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Inappropriate Behaviors

Relationship Characteristics

Community Characteristics

Cultural Characteristics

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