**Artifact #3**

Resiliency and Optimism

In Children and Adolescents

Summer 2009

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Final Project

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“A Pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.”

-Sir Winston Churchill

I couldn’t agree with this quote from Winston Churchill more! I have been an optimist my entire life and I really do think that it is an asset that has helped me throughout my life. As a teacher, I see many students with a pessimistic outlook. I know that this affects their academic and social performance at school. Without optimism and self-esteem, some of these children may fall through the cracks in school. I always wondered if optimism could be something I could actually teach to my students, like I teach them Math and Reading. If I taught optimism, would it help some of these at-risk children be more resilient to stressors in their lives? When I started taking this class, I thought it would be the perfect opportunity to research these ideas further.

In this paper I will be defining optimism and traits that are related to it, exploring the idea about optimism being a teachable trait, how optimism affects resiliency, and possible research I can do in the 2009-2010 school year to prove my ideas.

Optimism is defined in the dictionary as a “tendency to expect the best possible outcome or dwell on the most hopeful aspects of a situation.” Pessimism is the opposite-a “tendency to expect the worst possible outcome or dwell on the most hopeless situation.” People usually think that being an optimist or a pessimist is a part of their personality that is unchangeable. Most of the time it seems like a harmless way to describe oneself. There are many cute sayings people use to describe this part of their personality. “I see the world through rose colored glasses,” or “ I tend to look at the glass as being half-empty.”

Optimism and pessimism are actually a little more important that those cute ways to describe a personality. Research shows that optimism can actually be associated with a number of positive outcomes in one’s life. Optimism is associated with physical and psychological health. If the general population knew this, they might be more focused on learning to become an optimist! Our country is so concerned with health that this would be important information to pass along. Psychological health is such a broad topic. The psychological issues that I see in school most often are depression, anxiety, and anger issues. If teaching optimism to my students could help with these issues I think it would be very beneficial.

Optimism is also associated with a person’s coping skills, recovery, and resiliency. There are many stressors in life. I see my students dealing with them every day. The most common stressors of my 5th graders are dealing with divorce, neglect at home, poor academic skills, and friendship/social issues. I see some children who have been through a lot, but still manage to come out of it all with a sense of purpose and optimism in their life. On the other side, I see children who cannot deal with these stressors and then they start to take over their lives. This prevents them from setting goals or making friends.

Because optimism can be associated with so many beneficial factors, one would assume that pessimism would be associated with the opposite. Research has shown that pessimism is associated with depression and illness. Reading these findings made me even more interested in finding out how to teach optimism to my students. Being resilient to stress is a life skill that will help my students deal with not only school stress, but any stress they might encounter outside of school as well.