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Plenary Session C Enhancing Education Outcomes

**Resilience, social connectedness and
education in challenging contexts.**

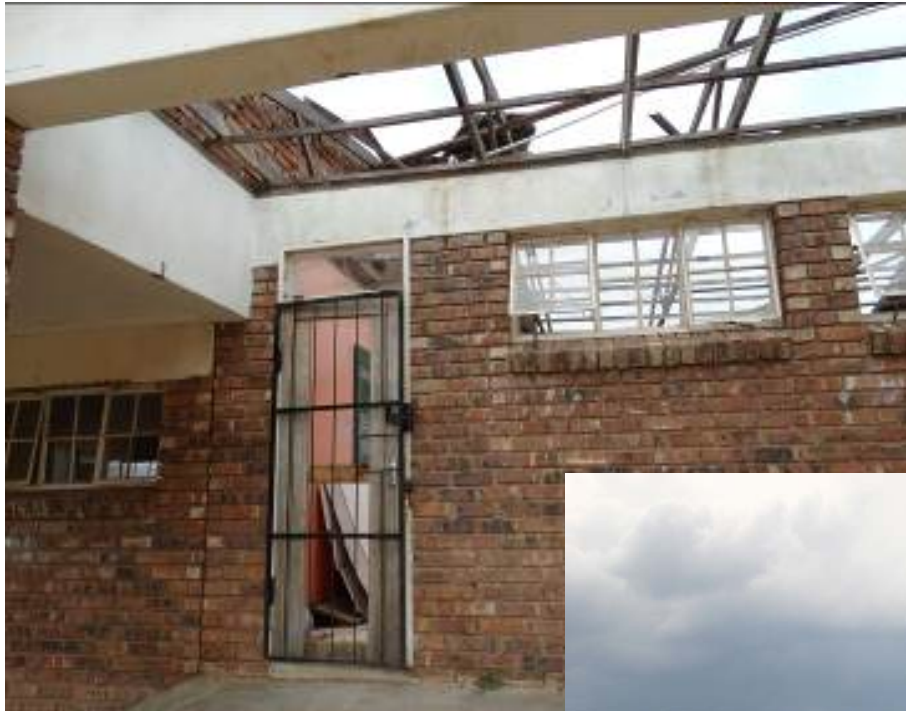


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South Africa**

How do teachers keep on teaching and students keep on learning in the presence of on-going poverty?

How do they craft their lives to manage chronic adversity and remain in schools to teach and learn with positive outcomes?



Thesis

- in challenging contexts with continued high structural disparity
- (comparable to that of SA)
- negative education effects can be mitigated by using interventions that:
 - support teacher- and student resilience
 - are based on findings that social connectedness (manifested in relationships, social support and socio-emotional competence) positively impacts on the attainment of positive adaptation outcomes
- despite on-going contextual hardship.

...a tale of two schools....

*‘it was the best of times, ...
it was the worst of times...’*

some of the story in:

World Education Research Association. (2015). *Task Force White Paper: Poverty & Education*.

Ebersöhn, L. (2012). Building generative theory from case work: relationship-resourced resilience. In volume (M Wissing, *Wellbeing research in South Africa*) of international scientific series (“Cross-cultural advancements in Positive Psychology”, main editor: Antonella Delle Fave). Springer.

Ebersöhn, L. (2014). Teacher resilience: Theorising resilience and poverty. *Teachers and Teaching Theory and Practice, Special Issue on Teacher Resilience World-Wide*, 12/2014; 20(6):717-735.

Ebersöhn, L. (2012). Adding ‘Flock’ to ‘Fight and Flight’ as Responses to Persistent Adversity: A Honeycomb of Resilience where Supply of Relationships meets Demand for Support. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 22(1) 29-42.

Ebersöhn, L. (Ed.). (2008). *From microscope to kaleidoscope – Reconsidering educational aspects related to children in the HIV/AIDS pandemic*. Rotterdam, Sense.

Picture this.....

A school in an informal settlement community.

The school grounds are deserted.

The classrooms are empty.

The only sounds are the wind and cars on nearby roads.

... a ghost town windswept and desolate...

The administrative buildings have locked security gates and closed doors.

I call out that I am there.

A lone teacher peeps cautiously from behind a door.

Seeing me, she comes and unlocks the gate.

We talk.

...I travel down the road to an adjacent school,
about a kilometre away, in the same community...

This school is vibrant.

Children stand in small hubs together - laughing and talking.

Doors to classrooms are open and show images of ongoing learning:
open books, writing on blackboards, chairs askew.

This school is alive.

I turn to a teacher accompanying me with a questioning face.

She says: *'This school gives food. The children come to school.'*

(Female teacher, School 13).



...the similarities are predictable...

in both schools poverty is apparent



...the differences are astonishing...

The way schools respond to ongoing and multiple challenges is different:

In one school risk is obvious:

- students & teachers (and consequently teaching and learning) are very much absent –
- high percentages of:
 - teenage pregnancies,
 - criminal youth activity,
 - school drop out
 - bullying.

The other school is functioning (learning and wellbeing is evident):

- students & teachers & caregivers are very much present
- partnerships with social workers (home visits for absent children)
- links with social development (social grant applications)
- collaboration with clinic nurses (health care)
- networks with NGO's (after school programmes, in-service training)
- connections with businesses (supply library books, computers, furniture).



**What makes the responses of two such similar schools so different...?
*What enables (in the same context) - positive adaptation in one school,
and maladaptation in another school?***

1. Adversity requires resilience (adaptation processes for positive outcomes).
2. Resources are used during adaptation processes.
3. When social resources function prominently & effectively in adaptation processes an environment is created where people are connected and where support is provided.
4. Students do better academically and developmentally in such connected and supportive (school) settings.
5. For lifelong positive wellbeing (including positive education) outcomes:
 - social connectedness matters,
 - relationships (as manifestation of social connectedness) matters,
 - social support (as social coping response) matters, and
 - socio-emotional competence (skills) matters in order to navigate relationships and negotiate social support.

What is resilience?

(significant) risk	adaptation processes	resource use	positive adaptation outcomes
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- risk management and development in the face of adversity (Strümpfer, 2013).
- succeeding despite considerable risk with a ‘better than expected’ result – ‘positive deviance’
- instances in which individuals at risk exceed expectations by accessing limited educational opportunities and performing well.....
- dynamic (Masten, 1994), interactive (Rutter, 2012), transactional-ecological (Ungar, 2012)
- protective resources include:
 - traits (personality traits/learnt skills; i.e. relationship skills, grit / hardy)
 - social capital & cultural capital

South Africa

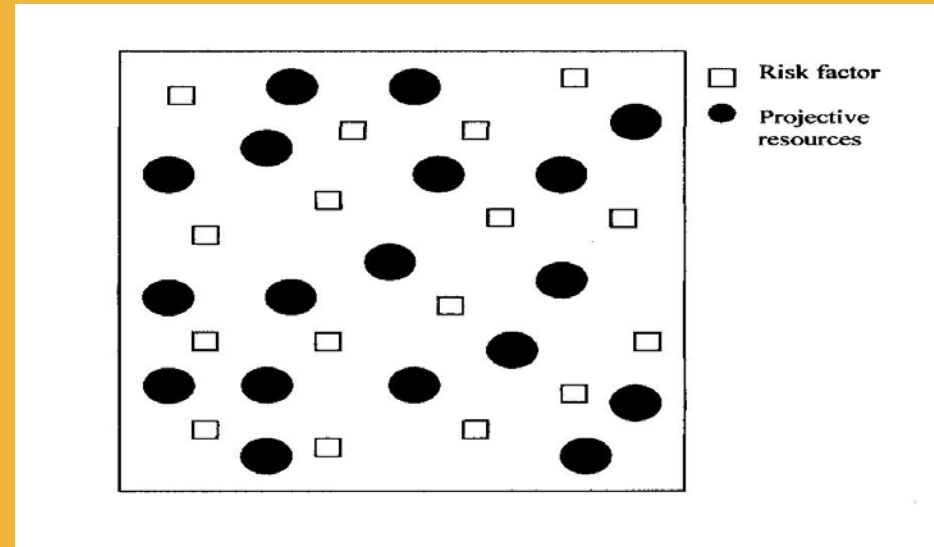
- an emerging economy, postcolonial, young democracy, global south setting
- on the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) (Schwab, 2014),
 - South Africa ranks as 56 out of 144 countries.
- most unequal society in the world (World Bank, 2012)
- Country-economy (Schwab, 2014)

Indicator	South Africa
Population (millions)	53.0
GDP (US\$ billions)	350.8
GDP per capita (US\$)	6.621
GDP (PPP) as share (%) of world total	0.69

Contextual resources and challenges South African teachers live and work with is mirrored in Latin American countries:

- Chile (33rd), Panama (48th), Costa Rica (51st) and Barbados (55th);
and in *sub-Saharan Africa*:
- Mauritius (39th)

Significant adversity in South Africa



Poverty rate: 56.8% in 2009 (IES, 2013)

- over 65% of SA students receive meals at school in government-driven school nutrition programme
- 4.6 million SA-ans are unemployed (25.2% unemployment rate)

Related social challenges:

- high incidences of violent crime: 23% indicated experienced @ school
- health problems:
 - estimated 5.26 million people living with HIV&AIDS in 2013
 - 7% of students attending schools are orphans
 - over 51 000 students attending schools reported giving birth, over 14 000 reported being pregnant

Systemic transformation (social, political, education):

- lack of books, large classes with too many students, high school fees, poorly maintained facilities, lack of teachers

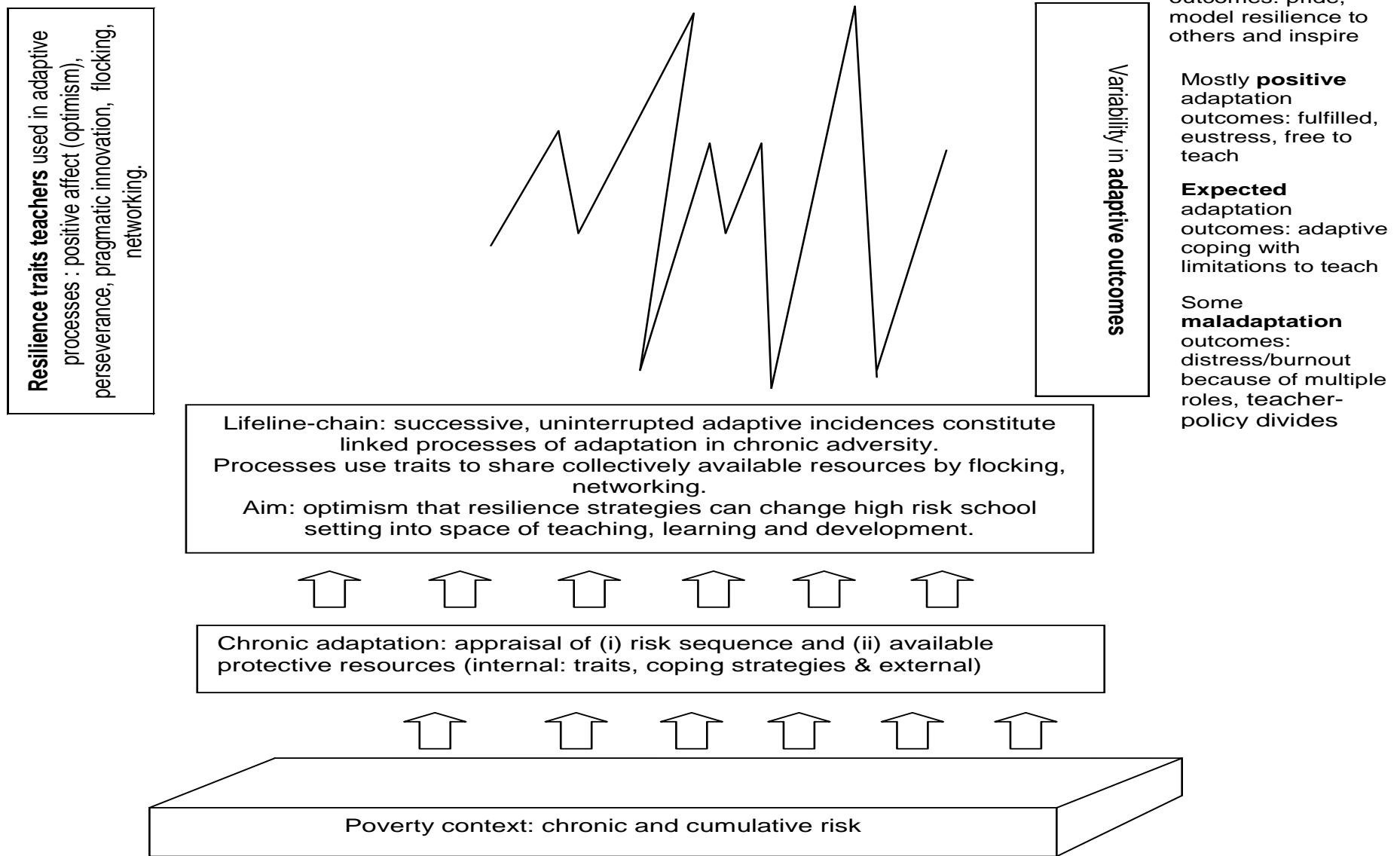
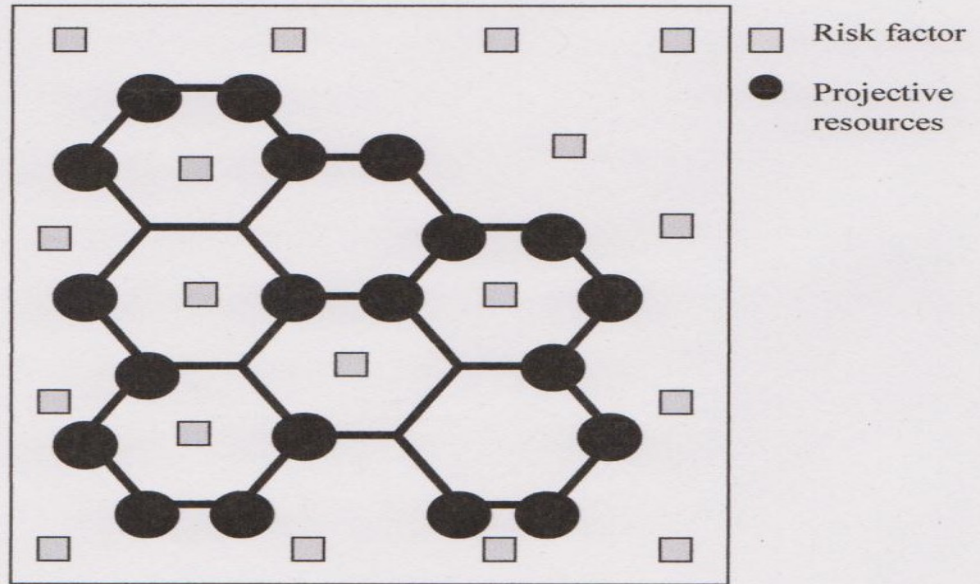


Figure 3: Lifeline of resilience: constant adaptation to chronic adversity

Ebersöhn, L. (2014). Teacher resilience: Theorising resilience and poverty. *Teachers and Teaching Theory and Practice, Special Issue on Teacher Resilience World-Wide*, 12/2014; 20(6):717-735.

**Same context
different scenario
due to social
support.**



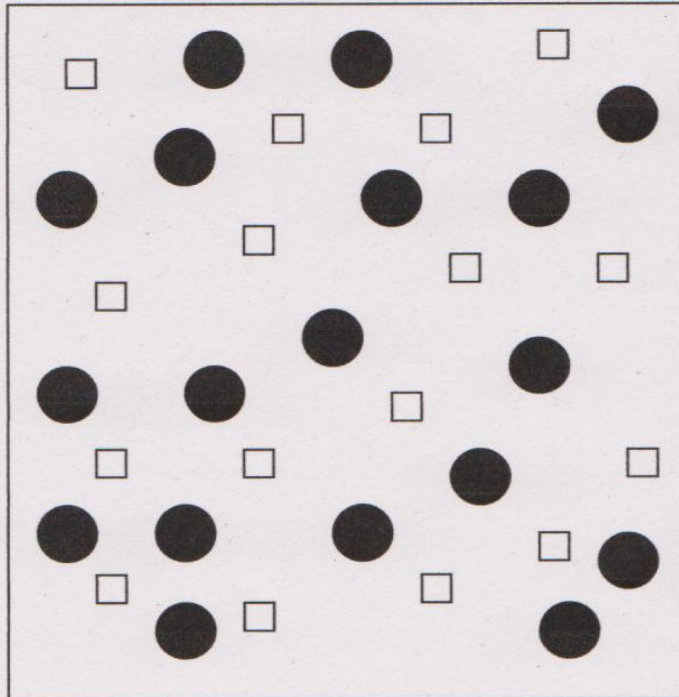
Relationships *link individuals* (isolated) to:

- to each other,
- to each others' resources, and
- to friends', acquaintances' available resources (human capital, institutions, services)

Social connectedness & social support

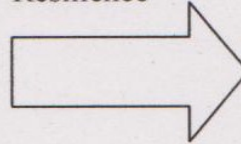
- SA studies: evidence that social connectedness and social support matter for positive education outcomes in challenging contexts (Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, 2014; Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2012; Theron, 2015; Pillay, 2012; Malindi, 2014)
- relationships use social support to link resources (conduits for resource allocation in transactional-ecological processes).
- risk continues to be present and multifarious.
- relationships and resources are superimposed onto the risk like a swimming pool net:
 - relationships provide safety and protects although the threat remains a constant.

Connecting the dots - A Tale of Two Schools

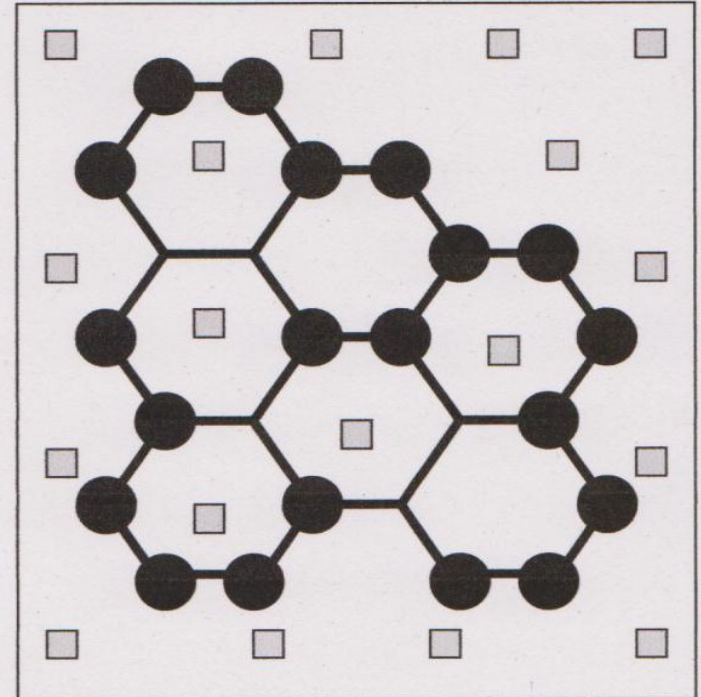


Maladaptation:
Distress
Helplessness
Passivity

Relationship-
Resourced
Resilience



Reconfiguring
the ecology



Positive adaptation:
Eustress
Hopefulness
Agency

Social connectedness matters

Basic human driver for lasting and positive attachments with other human beings (Smith & Mackie, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Baumeister & Leary, 1995):

- underlie social behaviour & social learning
- likened to sense of belonging and social inclusion

Also cultural dimension:

- “cultural template” for generations to come (Putnam, 2000) - rooted in attitudes, language, values and norms, acquisition of knowledge (Kilpatrik *et al.*, 1998)
- African cosmology: close, intimate - being present, being there even when you have no financial or material resources to contribute.
 - Nguni: ‘*ubuntu*’ – I am because we are; human kindness; virtues of compassion & humanity
 - Nguni: ‘*imbeleko*’ – carry you safely on my back to where care is available
 - Yoruba: ‘*eniyan l’aso* ’ literally meaning that the people (family, relatives, friends, community) around you function as the clothes on your back: the clothes protect you, cover your nakedness (your secret is our secret), shield you from the weather, and beautify you.

Socio-emotional competence matters

Social connectedness requires skills for utility in relationships and social support.

SEC (enabling) school climate:

- supportive & relationship-oriented
- relationships that make learning challenging, engaging, and meaningful leads to the best learning

Requires the development of relationship skills (SEC: socio-emotional competence) through socio-emotional learning (SEL) (Santrock, 2009):

- ‘understand & manage emotions; set and achieve positive goals; feel and show empathy for others; establish and maintain positive relationships; and make responsible decisions’.
- navigate towards social resources and negotiate access to social resources (Ungar, 2012)

Socio-emotional competence:

- critical to being a ‘good’ student, citizen, and worker.
- prevention / reduction many risky behaviours (e.g., drug use, violence, bullying, and dropping out)

Relationships matter

Social connectedness manifested in social behaviour, interaction: relationships.

Health (objective & subjective) outcomes (epidemiological: Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010; Harvard adult development studies - Grant & Glueck):

- are less aligned with economic resources,
- and more aligned with well-being correlates, namely:
 - being connected to (in relationships with) meaningful others & belonging to a group
 - experiencing a happy, functional childhood (including support to access services - health, education, welfare, attachment)

Early relationships are crucial (close and physical relationship with a caregiver(s) (attachment).

Relationship connection transcends family relationships – schools, teachers.

Disconnected:

- detrimental psychological effects in addition to loneliness (Lee, Keough & Sexton, 2002).
- stigmatised and criticised (Rotenberg, 1998).

Social support matters

Social connectedness can manifest as coping response when need is high and resources are constrained (Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, 2014; Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2012).

instrumental social support (Taylor, 2011):

- explicit social support: draw actively on existing social networks
- implicit social support: benefit from emotional comfort & others in their lives to support them

health benefits of social support and social contact:

- well documented in literature (Taylor, *et al.*, 2005)
- linked to less adverse caregiving experiences and better adjustment to traumatic events (Pakenham *et al.*, 2006; Pakenham, *et al.*, 2007)
- acts as a buffer with regard to negative consequences as a result of life stress (social resources available to individuals)
- influences the emotions, cognitions and behaviours of individuals and as a result influences the mental and physical health of individuals (Cohen, Goolieb & Underwood, 2000)

Social connectedness pathways to buffer poverty-effects in education

How leverage for positive deviance in education?

- Strive, at education level/sector, for well-being and equality by combining state investment & civic engagement.
- Align learning and development agendas *less* with economic provision & *more* with:
 - school communities using social support to function as units of care and support
 - enable schools, households, neighbourhoods to use social support to foster functional (´happy´) childhoods
- Imagine, develop, implement, evaluate education curriculum, policy & teacher development to this effect.
- Investment focus: targeting well-being indicators for quality assessment in education.

Social connectedness pathways to buffer poverty-effects in education

Use policy mechanisms to allocate resources towards developing, implementing, policy that enables, rewards civic action aimed at creating opportunity-structures for well-being and learning

Well-being indicator	Education focus – policy supports:
<p>School communities functioning as units of care and support, <u>places of belonging</u>. Who is engaged in the school? Which supportive partnerships are active? Who participates in decision-making? Students engaged in positive activities?</p>	<p>Partnerships for school-communities as spaces of belonging. Mechanisms to monitor absenteeism. Go-2-mentors (teachers, parents, peers). Places of pride: aesthetic. Teachers & parents/families as partners. Inclusive practices.</p>
<p>Ability of schools, households, neighbourhoods to foster <u>happy, functional childhoods</u>. SEL-curriculum? Can students & their families access services (welfare, health)? Are students holistic wellbeing & development supported?</p>	<p>After school programmes. Programmes to educate parents/caregivers. Homework support. Neighbourhood watch for safety (travel). Access to services (health, nutrition). Identify, refer vulnerability.</p>

School-based interventions for positive adaptation, social connectedness & social support

Social support

Families-in-schools:

- access and use resources (time, skill, connections):
 - after-school, reading, mentors, job opportunities, training opportunities)

Students:

- homework support
- extracurricular activity support
- nutrition / feeding
- SEC in curriculum

Teachers:

- SEC in training
- informal teacher professional development

Positive education outcomes

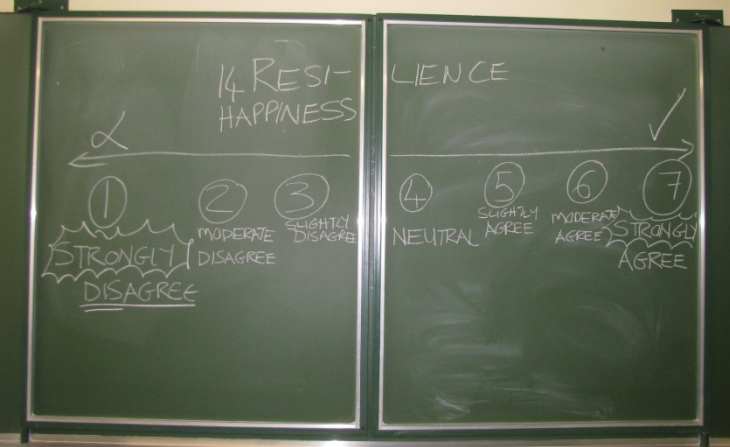
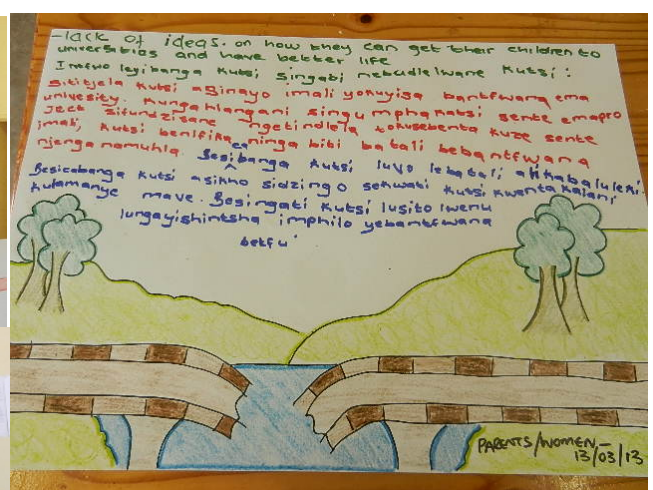
- increased access & retention
- increased aspirations
- increased school attendance
- increased student enrollment
- increased pride & confidence (student, teachers, families) to persevere with teaching and learning
- increased caregiver involvement
- decrease maladaptive behavior

An education system that capitalises on social connectedness beliefs, capitalises on knowledge that:

- schools, teachers and students living in adversity
- benefit with regards to learning & development outcomes
- when they use social resources (social support, relationships, socio-emotional competence)
- during adaptation processes to respond to adversity.

Children can not learn (and teachers can not teach) properly in the *absence of social connectedness*:

- if they are isolated:
 - if they lack a sense of belonging, are isolated or bullied;
 - if they are disconnected from their language, worldview and culture;
 - if they feel bad, ashamed about who and where they are
- if they have limited and limiting relationships
- if they lack of skills to access and use social resources
- if they lack social support to provide for essential developmental health, welfare and education needs (if they are hungry, ill and worried about their families, feel unsafe).



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Centre for the Study of Resilience longterm study on Resilience in High Risk Schools

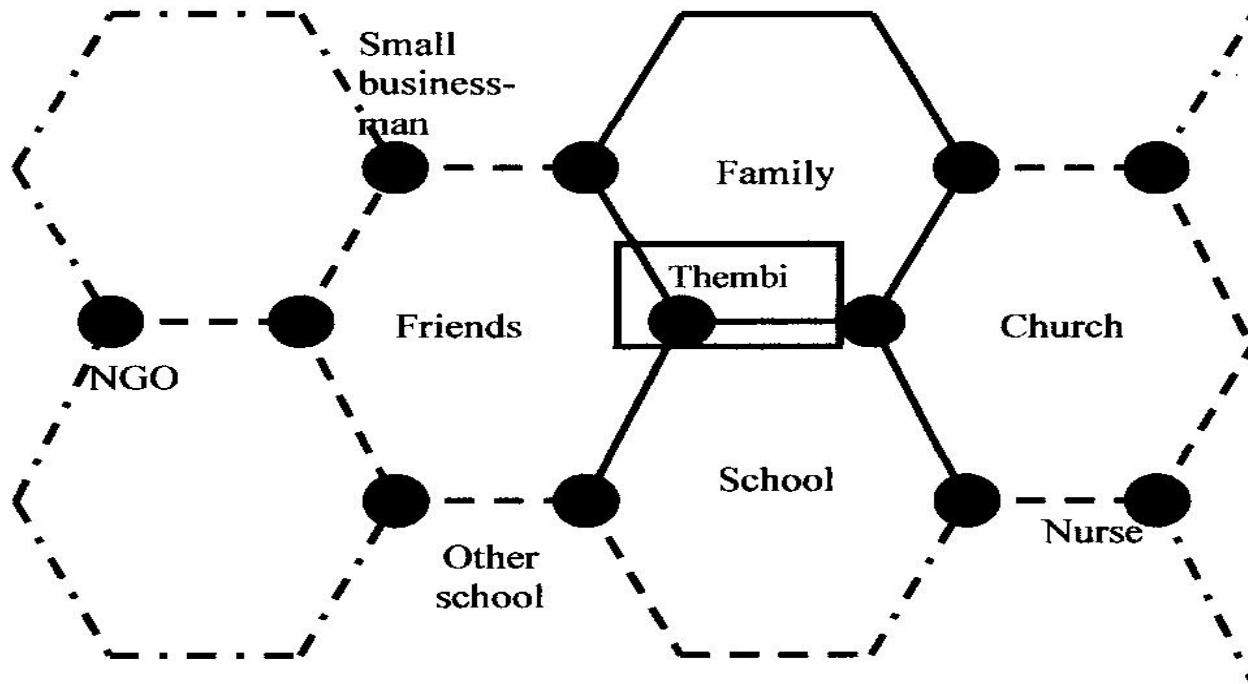
Long-term ethnographic sample of high risk case schools and educators as participants reporting/demonstrating adaptation

Timeframe of participation in PRA-partnership	School	SA province	Primary school	Secondary school	Educators	Principal as participant	Rural	Urban
2005-ongoing	A	Mpumalanga	0	1	19	1	1	0
2010-2013	B	Mpumalanga	1	0	3	0	1	0
2010-ongoing	C	Mpumalanga	1	0	3	1	1	0
2013- ongoing	D	Mpumalanga	0	1	3	1	1	0
2013- ongoing	E	Mpumalanga	1	0	3	1	1	0
2013- ongoing	F	Mpumalanga	1	0	3	1	1	0
2003-2007	G	Gauteng	1	0	8	0	0	1
2010-2012	H	Gauteng	1	0	12	0	0	1
2010-2012	I	Gauteng	1	0	1	0	0	1
2003-2013	J	Eastern Cape	1	0	10	0	0	1
2008-2013	K	Eastern Cape	1	0	2	0	0	1
2008-2013	L	Eastern Cape	1	0	10	1	0	1
2010-2012	M	Eastern Cape	0	1	5	0	0	1
2010-2012	N	Eastern Cape	0	1	5	0	0	1
TOTAL	14	3	10	4	87	6	6	8

Social connectedness and -support matters

Maladaptation exacerbated by:	Well-being correlate	Positive adaptation assisted by:
low social status ashamed	esteem social status (identity)	feel good about who they are amongst the people they know
early life stress distrust	childhood	being support / attachment increases trust
lack of friends/ acquaintances outsider	belonging	having friends (not being isolated) - able to resist stress (greater trust leads to co-operation, cohesion and a sense of belonging)
Stressed Unsupported feeling (a-)shamed because view self as 'needy' / dependent	stressed society (inequality)	individuals integrated in their community life evaluate their social status as 'good' – have pride, confidence, aspiration.

Thembi Dyasi: a honeycomb of support – a chicken wire of protection



a honeycomb of support – a chicken wire of protection

individuals live in and with multiple and ongoing risks - they can not be taken out of their at-risk environments

- they live together with the risk
- protective resources implies similar staying power
- the environment has to buffer the effect of the risk sustainably

individuals in high risk & high poverty environments:

- are able to initiate and sustain support
- through social connectedness, social support

when teachers use what they believe in and have in abundance, they are able to create a lattice of care:

- create a school climate of camaraderie,
- engaged and integrated within a community
- where the school can buffer
- the effect of risk on student's development
- – enabling positive adaptation outcomes

Negative education effects of a challenging SA context

Education outcomes - TIMS & PIRLS – international benchmarking (Spaull, 2013):

- mathematics & science (Gr 9)
 - low performance (similar to Botswana & Honduras)
 - score of 352 (some improvement on 285 points in 2002)
- Language
 - English and Afrikaans (Gr 5) = score of 421
 - the lowest for benchmarking participants
 - not developed basic skills required for reading (equivalent international Gr4 level)
 - 59% schools – no libraries (2nd only to Morocco)

How does resilience look in South African education?

risk factors: cumulative & chronic	weak policy implementation; limited access to services (health, welfare, housing transport); unemployed / migrant caregivers (low household income); low literacy levels; multilingualism; variation in teacher preparedness; unsafe infrastructure (sanitation, safety); violence & bullying; dropout; absenteeism (students & teachers); obj & subj illness (incl substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, suicide); low self-esteem; low sense of belonging
adaptation processes	student-context teacher-context school leadership-context families-context
use protective resources (to make the most with ltd resources)	cultural capital: collectivism – using what ‘we’ have to help ‘us’ with ‘our’ challenges social networks: friends, family, neighbourhood, role-models, acquaintances, individual traits: (perseverance, emotional regulation, study skills)
positive adaptation outcomes	school attendance; academic performance; advancement/progress; high self-esteem & aspiration; functional relationships; access to services for health & wellbeing
‘negative’ adaptation outcomes	drop-out, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, violence & bullying, gangsterism, absence of support to access services for wellbeing & development

What do we know now about resilience in challenging SA school settings?

- chronic adversity requires:
 - teachers, students, caregivers to
 - ceaselessly adapt (lifeline chain of resilience)
 - in a sequence of linked mini-processes of adaptation
 - to respond to a procession of risks
 - by using familiar social support practices as robust, novel innovations
 - as new risks arise.

- successive, not incidental

- resource use:
 - their own traits/characteristics (relationship acuity)
 - familiar social support practices (socio-cultural capital)
 - to identify and use what is available in their environment
 - support adaptation of students (and others at-risk)

What do we know about resilience outcomes in challenging SA school settings?

resilience outcomes in high adversity & resource constrained setting:

- sometimes thrive, (when schools are supportive spaces despite high risk)
- sometimes feel distressed, (when students or teachers feel isolated, and ashamed & not acknowledged for adaptation attempts), and
- mostly function effectively as teachers and students (relentless adaptation to teach and learn on a day-to-day basis despite chronic & cumulative adversity)

Adult Development Studies – Harvard

Findings that social connectedness matters as a protective resource during adaptation processes

Grant Study

- 75-year longitudinal study of 268 healthy (physically- and mentally) Harvard college sophomores (classes of 1939–1944)

Glueck Study

- a second cohort of 456 disadvantaged nondelinquent inner-city youths who grew up in Boston neighborhoods between 1940 and 1945.

what matters most in life are relationships

powerful correlation between the warmth of your relationships and health and happiness over the life-span

Opportunity High	Protective Resources Buffering Education (agency irrespective of social origin)	Risk Factors as Barriers to Education	Opportunity Low
<p>Protective efforts: well-being resources mobilised to access education and perform</p>	<p><u>Positive institutions/forms of capital (availability & access):</u> Functional family, school, community, neighbourhood, FBO, health & welfare services Belonging to a group, being an insider, being supported, social connectedness</p> <p><u>Intrapersonal resources:</u> Positive affect Positive temperament High individual self-esteem</p>	<p><u>Intrapersonal barriers:</u> Lack of positive affect Lack of positive temperament Low individual self-esteem <u>Lack of and inaccessible positive institutions/forms of capital:</u> Dysfunctional family, school, community, neighbourhood, FBO, health & welfare services Being an outsider, not having friends, isolated without support, being disconnected</p>	<p>Risk efforts: lack of effort hampering opportunity to access education and perform</p>
<p>Inequality Low</p>			<p>Inequality High</p>

Challenging context with continued high structural disparity

less equal epidemiological classification (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010)

- chronic (on-going) stressor to adapt to
- cumulative risk to adapt to

high structural disparity = barriers to development, learning, wellbeing:

- transforming democracy: ineffective policy implementation for reform, differences in teacher professional-levels, governance dissonance
- health: TB; HIV&AIDS illness and care, bereavement, orphans, absenteeism
- socio-economic: unemployment, low literacy levels, substance abuse, violence (bullying)
- infrastructure: (esp. remote, rural) unsafe - scarce, inadequate housing and school buildings; limited transport, no libraries
- service delivery: barriers to access limited quality services
- psychological risk: low self-esteem, low sense of belonging, unfortunate childhood

high diversity = barrier and opportunity

- multilingualism: language of instruction
- power and decision-making
- diverse worldviews and patterns of adaptation to draw on for solutions

South Africa: challenging context

- Postcolonial past:
 - high inequality, and
 - unequal distribution of (already) scarce resources
- Resource proven significant to resile :
 - Social capital – especially relationships
- IKS research have found that social connectedness is also an embedded cultural resource
- How leverage these resources for better educational outcomes
- one such resource (unequally distributed),
 - YET available to be leveraged for social justice action
- A social justice imperative therefore implies that ‘business as usual...’ in HE is not ideal
- Argument: in a global South context (such as that of SA) an institutionalised social justice agenda in HE can be operationalized via community engagement partnerships to mobilise HE-resources with mutual benefits of social change AND academic output.