

**THE ABILITY TO BOUNCE BEYOND:
THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE SCHOOL
ENVIRONMENT TO THE RESILIENCE OF DUTCH
URBAN MIDDLE-ADOLESCENTS FROM A LOW
SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND**

MARGARETHA EWDOKIJA MARIA ENTHOVEN

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA, SOUTH AFRICA

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A LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

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MARGARETHA EWDOKIA MARIA ENTHOVEN

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FACULTY OF EDUCATION
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SOUTH AFRICA

Supervisor
PROF AC BOUWER
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
SOUTH AFRICA

Co-supervisor
PROF EMERITUS JC VAN DER WOLF
UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM
UNIVERSITY OF PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATION UTRECHT
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SUMMARY

Pupils from a low SES differ in their development within the same school context. It is argued that *the mechanisms* through which education and the school environment as a whole can contribute to the successful development of children from a low SES should be identified and mapped. Therefore a focus on the mechanisms that lead to children with a low SES *succeeding*, in addition to discussing the reasons for these children not succeeding is proposed.

The present research is drawn upon bio-ecological and symbolic interactionist theories of human development in an effort to understand resilience as involving person-context transactions. Specifically, the resilience of adolescents in the school context is studied as a joint function of personal characteristics and social contextual affordances that either promote or thwart the development of person-level, resilient-enhancing characteristics.

The study employed inductive as well as deductive methods for knowledge development. Firstly, the concept of “resilience” was defined and operationalized in a Resilience Questionnaire (VVL). This questionnaire was validated on 399 middle-adolescents from five Educational Opportunity Schools in the Netherlands. Secondly, the inductive “Grounded Theory” method was followed with 21 middle-adolescents from three of the five Educational Opportunity Schools.

In answer to the main question “*How does the school environment contribute to the resilience of middle-adolescent students?*”, the school environment can contribute to resilience through facilitating *safety* and *good education*. Resilient and Not-Resilient middle-adolescents differ in their dependence on the school environment for their access to these resilience-enhancing circumstances and factors. In relation to the first sub question, “*What are resilient middle-adolescents’ perceptions of the contribution of the school environment to their resilience?*”, the school environment contributes to the resilience of resilient middle-adolescents by challenging them (e.g with high expectations) and by offering opportunities to create constructive relationships with

adults and fellow students in the school environment (e.g through informal conversations and through keeping order in the classroom). In answer to the second and third sub questions, “*What are the perceptions of not-resilient middle-adolescents of the contribution of the school environment to their state of resilience?*” and “*How can the comparison between these two perceptions be explained?*”, Not-Resilient middle-adolescents identify and utilise the services and potentially protective factors in the school environment less of their own accord than Resilient middle-adolescents do. The school environment can contribute to the resilience of Not-Resilient middle-adolescents by facilitating *an overview, insight* and *positive future expectations* in a very direct, controlling manner: An *overview* over risks for one’s own development and the presence of potential resources to assist one’s own development; *insight* into his or her own abilities to deal with possible risks; and *positive future expectations* on the improvement of a situation after a problem or risk has occurred.

In summary, the daily situations in the school environment offer enough tools to contribute to the resilience of resilient and not-resilient middle-adolescents. These should, however, be recognised by both the middle-adolescent and the adults in the school environment as opportunities for development, which should subsequently be grasped in order to learn to deal with these challenges constructively.

KEY WORDS

Resilience

Adolescence

Disadvantaged students

Secondary Education

School Environment

Resilience Questionnaire

Symbolic Interactionism

Grounded Theory

Effective learning environments

Positive Psychology

The content of this thesis was translated from Dutch to English. I hope the strong meaning of the adolescents’ words is kept and honoured in English.

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List of abbreviations

SES	Socio Economic Status
Ministerie van OC& W	Ministerie van Onderwijs Cultuur en Wetenschappen/ <i>Department of Education, Culture and Science</i>
VMBO	Vorbereidend Middelbaar Beroepsonderwijs/ <i>Preparatory Secondary Vocational Education Schools</i>
PO	Primair Onderwijs/ <i>Primary Education</i>
VO	Voortgezet Onderwijs/ <i>Secondary Education</i>
VVL	Veerkracht Vragenlijst/ <i>Resilience Questionnaire</i>
NPV-J	Nederlandse Persoonlijkheidsvragenlijst voor Jongeren/ <i>Dutch Personality Questionnaire for Youngsters</i>