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CHAPTER 3

The nature, characteristics, development and appraisal of social competencies in middle adolescents within the school context.

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"If social intelligence is the ability to read the dynamics of a relationship or social setting then social competence is the ability to respond creatively to what one finds"
(Fuller quotes Egan, 2001:41)

3.1. Introduction

Life consists of a continuum of social events and relationships. Middle adolescents cross the threshold into a social world at birth and journey through this world by successfully manoeuvring through the labyrinth of social situations and relations they encounter. The way in which a middle adolescent thinks, feels and acts are influenced by the interaction and membership to families, friends and organisations; it forms part of the adolescent's anthropological essence of co-existential involvement. "*People are seen as shaped by and as active shapers of their social context. Thus, how we develop as individual persons is linked to the social structures, forces and relationships which make up our environment*" *(Donald et al., 1997:34).* In this light it is noteworthy that middle adolescents not only have to create a personal identity regarding who they are, but they must also form a social identity regarding their role and relationship with the members of the society in which they live. The formation of a social identity requires the ability to utilize social competencies to effectively interact, develop and sustain relationships with people and the environment.

An essential part of resilience is the middle adolescents' social competencies. Social competence encompasses learned behaviours that include cognitive and emotional processes, verbal communication and non-verbal behaviours that a middle adolescent uses in interpersonal situations and relationships. Weare and

Gray (2003:23) stresses that middle adolescents' behaviour is a consequence of their social and emotional development and reflect their mental health. Therefore behaviour is the communication of their emotional states and their application of social competencies which can be learnt. Social competencies forms part of the adolescents' resilient abilities that can be enhanced and with which they master social situations, relationships, interpersonal actions as well as potentially inflammatory stressors they might encounter. In the exploration of social competence as a facet of resilience, this chapter will briefly touch on the biological origin of social competence as this is not the main focus of the research but still relevant to understand the middle adolescent holistically.

Educational psychologists study behaviour and the mental processes of the brain to gain an understanding of how inherent biological factors can influence the behaviour of middle adolescents. Mwamwenda (1995:2) reiterates the importance of knowledge regarding brain functioning for understanding of behaviour as follows: "*to remain scientific in our research of psychology we concern ourselves with the observable and measurable. The role of the brain can therefore be inferred on the basis of behaviour*". This chapter will also address the development of social competence that can be influenced by the social environment, taxonomy and theories surrounding the construct as well as the appraisal thereof.

3.2.   Defining terms related to social competence

Social competence is a convoluted construct that requires elucidation due to the interchangeable use of the term with social skills and social intelligence. Although these terms are interrelated they are independent in their essence. Social cognition or intelligence can be conceptualized as the mental process with which middle adolescents think and reason about their social world, the people they interact with (family, teachers, peers and significant others) and the relationships with those people and groups in which they participate. Kihlstrom and Cantor (2000:44) define social intelligence as the middle adolescents' ability to get along

with others, their knowledge of social matters and how to respond to that as well as susceptibility to stimuli from other members of a group and insight into the underlying personality traits of strangers. Therefore observing the interaction with others is an indication of the middle adolescents' social intelligence.

One of the most noticeable changes in middle adolescence is the shift from the family influence to the peer group. Through identification with peers, middle adolescents begin to develop social judgements and values. Peer groups serve as dominant enforcers of what is socially acceptable and how middle adolescents need to behave. The authors Kihlstrom and Cantor (2000:29) are of opinion that social intelligence consists of three constituents namely that of social sensitivity, reflected in role-taking and social inference; social insight (social comprehension, psychological insight and moral judgement) and social communication as well as social problem solving. Social behaviours are an entwined network of verbal communication and non-verbal actions used in reciprocal interactions and interpersonal exchanges that require appropriate social skills to convey the desired meaning of the message.

Defining social skills can be problematic due to different viewpoints regarding what is considered as being effective and appropriate behaviour within various contexts. "*The difficulty in providing an adequate definition of social skills is partly because the construct is deceptively simple, yet relies heavily on a number of other psychological constructs and basic human traits such as personality, intelligence, language, perception, appraisal, attitude and behaviour-environment interaction necessary for their acquisition and performance. Each discipline such as Social work, Education, Psychology etc. has its unique perspective to define social skills*" (Merrell & Gimpel, 1998:3). For this reason, social skills refer in this research to the goal-directed social behaviour governed by social norms that allows middle adolescents to accurately perceive and effectively interact with others in their environment. The authors Merrell and Gimpel (1998:3) quotes Michelson, Sugai, Wood and Kazidin who proposed an amalgamation of the

different rudiments of various definitions regarding social skills into the following components:

- ❖ Social skills are principally acquired through learning (including observation, modelling, rehearsal and feedback from role models). These role models in middle adolescents can be the peer group and media.
- ❖ The skills include particular and distinctive verbal and nonverbal behaviours.
- ❖ Social skills include efficacious and apposite initiations and responses that are interactive and focus on the reinforcement of apt behaviour.
- ❖ The execution of these skills is shaped by the attributes of the participants and the environments in which it occurs (situation-specific).
- ❖ Social skills can be enhanced and developed.

Simon (2003:2) expanded on the previous authors' view on social skills and feels that it can also be seen as patterns of behaviours that someone has that result in either positive or negative reactions from other people or in successful or unsuccessful outcomes in social situations. Simon (2003:3) further divided these social skills into five main areas:

✠ **Verbal Communication**

- ❖ This includes the middle adolescents' ability to use and understand words effectively when speaking to others as well as their ability to modulate tone and volume of their voice to adapt to the situation.
- ❖ Exhibiting a sense of timing in a conversation.
- ❖ The ability to use appropriate topics of conversation suitable to the context.

✠ **Non-Verbal Communication**

- ❖ The middle adolescent's ability to understand what his or her body language is communicating and correctly interpreting the body language and facial expressions of others.
- ❖ The ability to use appropriate eye contact and facial expressions to convey interest or emotional reactions when listening to others.

✠ Social Behaviours

❖ Appropriate social behaviours include being on time, being organized and attentive.

❖ Furthermore it includes being well groomed and having good hygiene.

❖ Being responsible for the upkeep, running and care of one's own personal living space is an important social behaviour.

❖ The middle adolescent's ability to make independent, appropriate and informed decisions and ability to set realistic goals is important.

✠ Interpersonal Interactions and Relationships

❖ Feeling confident when meeting new people and knowing what to say and how to say it is evidence of social skills.

❖ Having a sense of comfort and adaptability in social situations such as parties and social gatherings and knowing how to appropriately interact with people who provide services, such as teachers and psychologists show appropriate social behaviour.

❖ It is important for middle adolescents to know how to interact and communicate respectfully with adult figures such as teachers, psychologists and doctors with self-confidence.

❖ Developing relationships with family members or caregivers that are interdependent versus primarily dependent and maintaining peer friendships at school and outside of school, make up an important part of middle adolescent's social skills.

✠ Academic and Professional Functioning

❖ Middle adolescents must exhibit an ability to achieve academic potential in school by having a realistic sense of their own strengths and weaknesses.

❖ Being able to behave and pay attention in the classroom and listening to and following directions is crucial social skills in the school setting.

❖ Furthermore having the skills to perform a job successfully for example being on time, taking responsibility for duties, having positive relationships with peers and communicating with the teacher shows appropriate social skills.

Social skills can therefore be seen as the outcome of utilizing and applying perception, knowledge and reasoning to a variety of social behaviours that are appropriate to a given interpersonal context. Middle adolescents who have an extensive repertoire of social skills and who are socially attentive and discerning are likely to be socially competent. Merrell and Gimpel (1998:9) summarize social skills as "*specific behaviours that an individual must exhibit to perform competently on a given task. Social competence is also an evaluative or summary term based on conclusions or judgements that the person has performed the task adequately. These judgements are based on the opinions of others (peers, parents, teachers and cultural or comparisons to some explicit criteria or normative group*". Social competence must therefore be seen as the super ordinate concept to social skills.

Social competence can be observed on a daily basis, but the intricacies are difficult to capture due to the interwoven transactional process that encompasses emotions and cognition. Social competence includes a complex arrangement of social learning, motives, social abilities, skills, habits and knowledge that determines social behaviour. Odom, McConnell and McEnvoy (1992:7) state that social behaviours are the building blocks of interaction with others and the foundation upon which social competence is based. Social competence is the middle adolescent's ability to select, actively engage and reflect on the appropriate actions within a culture-specific context that will lead to the establishment, maintenance and development of interpersonal relationships and the attainment of goals and tasks by effectively integrating and utilizing cognition, emotion and behaviour. "*Social competence is the ability to understand, manage and express the social aspects of one's life in ways that enable the successful management of life tasks such as learning, forming relationships, solving*

everyday problems and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development. The behaviour to achieve social tasks and outcomes valued in a host context and culture such as a school setting would include assessing the school curriculum successfully, meeting associated personal, social and emotional needs and developing transferable skills and attitudes of value beyond school" *(Elias et al., 1997:2).* The middle adolescent applies his or her skills, capacities, motivations, knowledge and personality attributes, all of which interact with the immediate social context such as the school to reflect the quality of his or her social interactions with family, peers and significant others. Fuller (2001:40) identified the key social competencies that underpin resilience as follows:

- ❖ Attending to others, observing the cues (facial, tone, posture) that signify how others are feeling and what the norms of behaviour are in various social contexts;
- ❖ the accurate interpretation of social cues (reading, intentions, empathy);
- ❖ the generation of solutions to problems (perspective taking, moral reasoning);
- ❖ the realistic anticipation of consequences;
- ❖ transforming social constructs into appropriate habits (approaching others, asking questions, conversing with others);
- ❖ developing self-efficacy and optimism (regularly seeking out positive experiences);
- ❖ connecting with people to create a sense of belonging;
- ❖ ability to solicit and utilize social support.

An extensive taxonomy of social competence will be discussed later in this chapter. The Resilience Enhancement Kit incorporates these above mentioned social competencies and allows for middle adolescents to practice the skills through mirroring, role play and group work. The brain is without doubt the most complex organ in the human body and the cradle of social competence.

3.3.   Nature and origin of social competence

The brain is the wellspring of human functioning and a comprehensive discussion of social competence would not be complete without briefly considering the biological origin of social behaviour and competence in middle adolescence. Geake (2003:6) is of opinion that during adolescents frontal cortices undergo a growth spurt of new neurons and new connections that have practical applications for teachers in promoting classroom practices that engage frontal brain functioning. He suggest activities that include involving sustained attention, (solving maze puzzles), integrating and organising information (crossword puzzles), planning (organising fund-raising), meta-analysis (reading a play or novel for sub-text) and meta-cognition (in keeping a reflective diary). Knowing the location of social functioning in the brain, teachers and psychologists are able to develop activities related to the functioning of that part of the brain.

The Resilience Enhancement Kit could include activities that can reinforce the neural pathways for social resilience for example utilizing music that reflect appropriate social behaviours because the auditory processing are located in that section of the brain. Other activities in the Resilience Enhancement Kit could also include working in a group to plan and execute a project relating to forming relationships and utilizing a situation analysis to answer questions where the middle adolescent can apply the skills learnt about rebounding in relationships. Sylwester (2003:2) reiterate the importance of brain development in middle adolescents that affects social competence and indicate that the final maturation of reflective behaviours occurs during adolescents and early adulthood.

Social competence has multiple foundations in the brain structure. The success of social interaction depends on the development of brain systems that are engaged to processing information related to social interaction. "*Social intelligence and social competency's neurological substrate involves a balanced or integrated cortical subsystem which relies on long-term memory to make complex social judgments; a frontal dominant subsystem which organizes and*

generates social behaviours and a limbic-dominant subsystem which rapidly produces social-emotional responses to events" (Kihlstrom et al., 2000:13). The frontal lobe, in particular the prefrontal cortex is the anatomical region most associated with adaptive social behaviour. Sylwester (2003:2) reiterates the importance of the frontal lobe areas such as the anterior cingulated and the orbitofrontal cortex in developing and regulating social behaviour.

3.3.1. Areas in the brain involved with social competence
Illustration 4: (With permission: Appendix B)
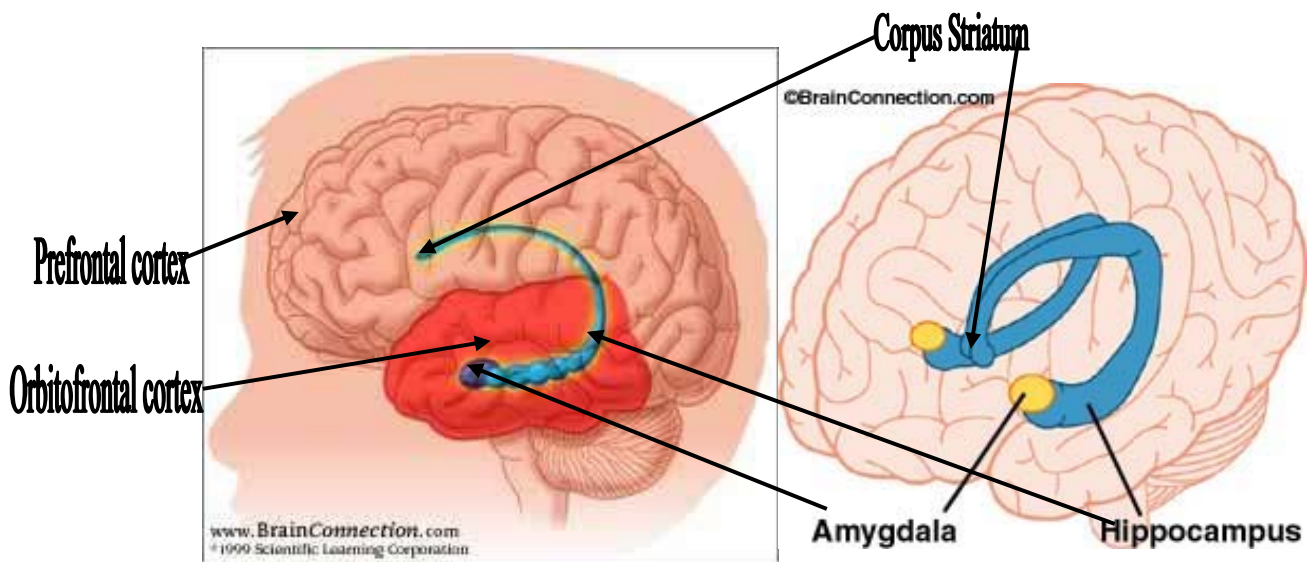
3.3.1.1. Prefrontal cortex situated in the frontal lobe

The front of the brain, behind the forehead is important for executive functions like planning ahead and anticipating the consequences of one's actions. "*The principal frontal lobe capabilities include devising a useful solution to a novel challenge; developing effective cognitive routines to use when confronted by familiar challenges and the ability to anticipate the motives, intentions and behaviours of others. It forms the basis of judgments and spontaneity in interacting with others" (Sylwester, 2003:2).* Lieberman, Iacoboni, Knowlton, Molnor-Szakacas (2002:12) further explain the function of the prefrontal cortex, as it plays an important role in analyzing social relationships and considering the

implications of those relationships by referring to the following "*the prefrontal cortex sustains effective social relations by unreflective day dreaming and conscious meditation on the potential implications of past social events imaging solutions to social relationship problems and explicitly and implicitly planning for future eventualities.*" The prefrontal lobes of the brain have been associated with behavioural inhibition, the ability to control emotions and impulses as well as the area where decisions about right and wrong, cause-effect relationships are processed. Talukder (2000:1) emphasizes the fact that while adults can to use rational decision making processes when facing emotional decisions, middle adolescent brains are not yet equipped to reason in the same way and judgement cannot be learned if the brain does not have the capacity to incorporate it. For example, when deciding whether to ride in a car driven by a drunken friend, an adult can usually suppress their desire to conform and is more likely to make the rational decision against drunk driving. However, a middle adolescent's immature frontal lobes may not be capable of such a rational approach and the feelings of friendship may be likely to overcome any levelheaded decision.

Middle adolescents are characterised by exhibiting social behaviour such as risk-taking and impulsive behaviour by participating in activities that can be associated with "thrill seeking" or communicating what ever comes to mind without considering the consequences. Crum (2003:2) agrees with the views held by Talukder regarding the maturity level of the prefrontal cortex and state that adolescent behavior is not simply a matter of willful stubbornness or determination to annoy parents and teachers but that thinking and reasoning impact their behaviour which is guided by the underdeveloped prefrontal cortex. The decision making centers of the brain continue to develop in the adolescent phase and the middle adolescents can be guided by teachers and psychologists to manage their social behaviors in an appropriate way. The Resilience Enhancement Kit is therefore important in assisting the teachers and

psychologists to guide middle adolescents effectively. The corpus striatum and amygdala are the second important brain area that regulates and equips the middle adolescent to effectively function socially.

3.3.1.2. Corpus Striatum and Amygdala

The corpus striatum forms part of the basal ganglia that is the largest subcortical structure in the brain. The caudate nucleus is bounded on one side by the lateral ventricle and is divided into a head, body and tail. It contains endorphins that produce a positive emotional state. Emery; Capitanio, Mason and Amaral (2003:3) state that the corpus striatum helps middle adolescents judge social situations correctly. The amygdala is part of the basal ganglia but it is attached to the tail of the caudate nucleus. "*The macaque amygdale is located within the anteromedial temporal lobe and consists of thirteen individual nuclei or cortical regions. It receives extensive inputs from brain areas associated with sensory modalities. Outputs from the amygdale project back to the striatum, hypothalamus, hippocampus, brainstem and areas of the neocortex associated with the control of social behaviour, homeostasis, hormonal state and physical action. The connectional anatomy of the amygdale supports the idea that this structure is involved in processing social information and in contributing to social responding. The amygdala is required for perceiving specific attributes of the face such as facial expressions and for attaching and retrieving the social meaning to facial stimuli* " *(Emery et al., 2003:3).* The amygdala is involved in instinctive "gut" reactions, including "fight or flight" responses as well as reading of body and facial language.

The Resilience Enhancement Kit might therefore be useful in making the middle adolescent aware of body language and facial expression (emotions) as cues for social responding. Based on the amygdala's function to regulate behaviour that applies to safety responses ("fight or flight"), the Resiliency Scale might also include a question such as "I am able to create my own safety when faced with

physical threats or when I am exposed to violent situations". The amygdale appears to be an important area in the brain for middle adolescent's social behaviour. Cooke (2004:2) emphasizes that the amygdala controls the way middle adolescent act and they do not think the way adults do because they can't do that yet. Cooke further refer to research that discovered that adults think with the prefrontal cortex (the rational part of the brain) while middle adolescents process information with the amygdale (the instinctual, emotional part of the brain). Middle adolescents for example don't think, 'Binge drinking is very dangerous and irresponsible' but they rather reason, 'a chugging contest! Wouldn't it be cool if I won?' Cooke (2004:2) observed that parents and teachers watch the middle adolescents hurtle through life manipulated by the impulses of the amygdala, home to primal emotions such as fear and rage which is further complicated by the amygdala's interaction with hormones making middle adolescents moody, unpredictable and irrational.

The influence of peer groups and relationships with significant others also play an important role in influencing how middle adolescents ascribe meaning to social situations and how they will react to gain favor with the peer group and react socially. Therefore the activities in the Resilience Enhancement Kit could focus on working in groups and building and maintaining relationships. The third anatomical region important for social competence is the limbic frontal lobe or orbitofrontal cortex.

3.3.1.3. Orbitofrontal cortex (Limbic frontal lobe)

The Orbitofrontal cortex (limbic frontal lobe) is that part of the frontal lobe that lies on top of the orbit of the eyes. This area plays an important role in behaviour. Driesen (2004:4) explains the role it plays in behaviour in that the orbitofrontal cortex receives direct inputs and provides the various brain areas with information about what is happening in the environment and what plans are activated by the rest of the frontal lobes such as physiological responses. Furthermore, Hendry and Niebur (2004:1) are of the opinion that the orbitofrontal

cortex plays an important role in the processing of rewards and punishment, which is a requirement for the multifarious and flexible social behavior.

Therefore, the teacher and psychologist can modify a middle adolescent's behaviour by reinforcing positive behaviour through praise and acknowledgement. In the Resilience Enhancement Kit the reinforcement of positive behaviour can be facilitated through tokens, verbal praise and group praise from the various group members. Resilient middle adolescents are capable of using intrinsic rewards to motivate themselves. Keeping this in mind a question that can be posed in the Resiliency Scale could be "I take time to celebrate my successes" and "I do not let criticism and negative comments from family, friends and teachers bother me".

The research into how the brain functions appears to have an influence on how teachers and psychologists perceive the behaviour of middle adolescents and also how they can assist them in developing appropriate social competencies. Talukder (2000:2) summarizes the discussed role of brain functioning in social competence when he states that the middle adolescent brain is a work in progress but parents, educators and psychologists can assist the progress of brain development necessary for social competence through open communication, instruction and clear boundaries. In an effort to fully comprehend the middle adolescent's social competency various theories emerged to illuminate the construct.

3.4.   Theory of social competence

Odom, McConnell and McEnvoy (1992:5) refer to James Baldwin, who some believe was a precursor to Piaget, as one of the foremost researchers to discuss the importance of social interactions for the development of adolescents. Research into the development of children's social functioning, interaction and the development thereof started in the 1920's. Odom, McConnell and McEnvoy

(1992:5) also refer to the following research and contributions for social functioning:

- ❖ Thorndike in 1920 proposed that social intelligence was one of the forms of intellect. Currently Gardner labeled social intelligence in terms of intra- and interpersonal intelligence. Sternberg in 1985 embedded social competence in his triarchic theory of intelligence.
- ❖ Piaget in 1926 emphasized the importance of engaging in social interactions with peers for the development of cognitive abilities.
- ❖ Parten, Moreno and Mead in the 1930's made contributions in terms of implementing assessment and intervention systems for social behaviour.
- ❖ Tredgold in 1937 and Doll in 1941 proposed that the measurements of social competence or adaptive behaviour be incorporated into the criteria employed for diagnosing mental states. Doll continued to develop the Vineland Social Maturity Scale that provided a standardized assessment for measuring social abilities and competence.

Merrell and Gimpel (1998:8) indicated that the Second World War and Cold War interrupted research into the areas of social functioning in children and adolescents and it was during the 1970's that the disciplines of Education and Psychology brought it to the forefront. The theorists concerned with the development of children and adolescents incorporated their views of social functioning in their theories which included the role that social cognition play in social competence.

Merrell and Gimpel (1998:31) also refer to Harris who is of opinion that the five aspects of social cognition that are essential contributors to social competence are peer interaction, perspective taking or role taking, interpersonal problem-solving strategies, moral judgement and communication skills. "*Across developmental periods, pro-social skills (friendly, cooperative, helpful behaviours) and self-control skills (anger management, negotiation skills, and problem-solving skills) are key facets of social competence. Social cognitive development is the process whereby changes in cognitive functioning allow the developing*

child to engage in a hierarchy of increasingly complex and potentially meaningful social interactions with other persons and develop the necessary skills." *(Merrell et al., 1998:30).* The middle adolescent phase is characterised by the influences of the peer group that shape their behaviour where they learn the social skills and attitudes necessary for social competence.

Middle adolescents establish greater independence from their parents by spending more time with their peers and through identification with peers, adolescents begin to develop group norms and values and define their own identity. The role of the peer group according to Gouws and Kruger (1994:120) include the following:

- ❖ The group identity influences the development of an individual identity;
- ❖ providing social acceptance and support ;
- ❖ creating an environment where they can experiment with different behaviours and ideas;
- ❖ giving the opportunity for healthy competition;
- ❖ expressing thoughts and feelings when spending leisure time;
- ❖ developing relationships and roles with the same and opposite genders.

Being accepted by peers has important implications for resilient adjustment during middle adolescence. Those who are accepted by their peers and have mutual friendships have better self-images and are able to use their friends as resources when faced with a problem and as a support system. Preoccupation with how their peers see them can become all consuming to middle adolescents. The intense desire to belong or to be "cool" can also influence middle adolescents to participate in activities they would otherwise not engage in that could include misbehaving in the classroom or being rude to others. It is the role of the teacher and psychologist to create guided opportunities where the peer group's positive influence can be harnessed to foster social competence. Gouws and Kruger (1994:71) reiterate the importance of creating guided opportunities for middle adolescents when he states the following: "*educators should provide*

abundant opportunities for adolescents to engage in social interaction since they are helped by this means to rid themselves of their egocentrism and to learn that people with different opinions from their own may be right while they may be wrong". Classroom discussions about how to initiate conversations with peers, give genuine compliments, be a good listener, share private information appropriately, and keep confidences are all part of forming and maintaining positive relationships as well as working effectively in a group, which can enhance social competencies.

The Resilience Enhancement Kit could utilize activities such as group work and role-playing to enhance social competencies. Group work and role-playing give the middle adolescent an insight into their own behaviour where consequences of actions can be discussed. These activities also allow the middle adolescent to practice the new competencies to identify effective and ineffective behaviour and communication styles, and in so doing enhance their level of confidence to apply the social competencies in a real life setting. Killen (2000:75) suggests the following advantages of group work that also includes role-playing as a group activity:

- ❖ "*Group work helps learners to respect each other strengths and weaknesses and to co-operate with one another;*
- ❖ *group work allows teachers to vary the learning tasks and adapt strategies for learners who have particular needs, interests and abilities;*
- ❖ *it encourages learners to verbalise their ideas and feelings and help them understand the subject matter and also allow learners to be effective at explaining ideas to others in a language they find easy to understand;*
- ❖ *group work gives an opportunity to contribute ideas and attempt to master the content in a non-threatening environment;*
- ❖ *the learners are actively engaged in learning and this can enhance their understanding and retention of the content taught;*

❖ *group work can increase the possibility that learners will look at problems from several perspectives because they are exposed to other people's ideas;*

❖ *group work allows learners to experiences roles as leaders, peers and subordinates and to experience a range of social contacts*

❖ *group work can be fun and therefore motivate learners as well as activating their prior knowledge in reconstructing their understanding of the content.*"

It must be kept in mind that the teacher and psychologist should monitor the learner's interaction and co-operation during group work or role play activities to ensure that the activity is effective in its aim to foster social competence. The Resiliency Scale should also include questions related to relationships, specifically working in groups and might be stated as follows: "I work well within a group at school, even with someone who has different opinions to mine" and "I watch and learn from how others cope with similar problems to my own". In summary the role of the peer group play a significant part in learning social competencies during the middle adolescent years.

As part of the middle adolescent's social cognitive development Merrel and Gimple (1998:30) also referred to Bandura who suggested in 1986 that the nature of social cognitive development could be explained in terms of five human capabilities that effects a middle adolescent's behavioural functioning. They include (Merrel et al., 1998:30) the middle adolescents':

❖ "***Symbolizing capability*** *which involves the use of various symbols, including language as a means of altering and adapting to different environments.*" In the Resilience Enhancement Kit this aspect of the middle adolescents' social cognition might be utilized by asking them to use symbols as found in pictures and drawings as well as language that are characteristic of they way middle adolescents speak to create an advertisement which reflect their understanding of relationships that can help them rebound for example friendship.

❖ "***Forethought capability*** *that projects anticipation of likely consequences of behaviour and is demonstrated by intentional and purposeful actions that are future orientated.*" This aspect relates to the emotional and cognitive competencies as well, for example ego-resiliency and having a future goals and plans. The resilient middle adolescent has an understanding of how his or her behaviour affects others and themselves (self-perception and identity) and therefore he or she will think before acting. In the Resilience Enhancement Kit this forethought capability might be utilized to include activities such as interviewing classmates to identify how they can be a support system in terms of being a positive influence on their behaviour and how that person might help them achieve their goals. The Resiliency Scale could also include questions related to this forethought capability such as "my life has meaning and purpose".

❖ "***Vicarious capability*** *allows that not all learning must result from direct experience but can occur through the observation of other person's behaviours and the consequences that follow them.*" The Resilience Enhancement Kit can include discussions and demonstrations by the teacher or psychologist to model the correct social behaviour and also give the middle adolescents the opportunity in pairs to practice learnt appropriate social behaviour. Activities such as identifying a role model from society that exhibits resilient behaviour and studying their example can also allow the middle adolescent to model appropriate behaviour. The Resiliency Scale could also include questions such as "I watch and learn from how others cope with similar problems to my own" to measure the middle adolescent's ability to learn resilient behaviour through observation.

❖ "***Self-regulatory capability*** *that affects the development of the person's own internal standards and self-evaluative reactions to their behaviour. Thus discrepancies between internal standards and actual behaviours serve to govern future behaviour.*" The middle adolescents who have strong sense of internal standards and who are able to utilize self-

evaluative processes to adjust their behaviour reflect a resilient sense of self which includes a positive self-identity and self-efficacy. The Resilience Enhancement Kit can include activities that foster the middle adolescents' sense of self that allow them to know themselves better by means of identifying and describing personal characteristics (values and beliefs) and the steps towards being assertive. The Resiliency Scale might include questions such as "I have self-disciple and I am capable of handling difficult tasks or situations on my own"; "I stand up for myself without putting others down" and "I have enough confidence in myself to stand by my beliefs".

❖ "***Self-reflective capability*** *which involves self-consciousness or the uniquely human ability to think about and evaluate personal thought processes.*" This self-reflective capability is also closely related to cognitive competence (metacognition). This self-reflective capability can be included in the Resilience Enhancement Kit by asking the learners to write down (journal) how they react, think and talk whilst busy with a group project. This will give the middle adolescents insight into how they typically think and react when confronted with a challenge. Gaining insight through note keeping can allow the teacher or psychologist to talk about how thoughts affect behaviour and how it can be changed to allow the middle adolescent to become more resilient. The Resiliency Scale might state a question regarding the self-reflective capability as follows: "When I decide to change my thoughts and behaviour, I am successful".

The above-mentioned theories regarding social cognition are related to general social functioning that reflects the middle adolescent's social competence. There are however, various theories that aim to explain social competence as a holistic construct. The frameworks for social competence have been developed to measure and explain the processes necessary for adaptive and constructive social behaviours and skills necessary for children and adolescents to be well adjusted and successful (resilient). Bortoli and Brown (2002:4) underline the

importance that the theoretical frameworks for social competence have for teachers and psychologist because it empowers them to understand how middle adolescents acquire skills, process social information and how interaction difficulties can be overcome. There are three significant theories related to the understanding of social competence. Bortoli and Brown (2002:4) refer to the social information-processing framework developed by Dodge and the social problem-solving framework developed by Rose-Krasnor and Rubin, which were expanded by Ladd and Crick. The social co-construction theory of Valsiner is the third theory on the development of social competency.

3.4.1. Social information processing framework

Bortoli and Brown (2002:4) quotes Guralnick as saying: "*the social information processing framework views social competence within social goals and social tasks that are present in the social environment that enables researchers to see how children integrate skills in their developmental domains. A social task is a higher order process that involves the integration, organisation and sequencing of social behaviours that influence how children become socially engaged and determine their social attention state*". This theory of Dodge suggests that middle adolescents would gain as much information as possible from the social situation in order to set specific goals. The goals are related to the developmental task inherent to that age group for example the middle adolescents are concerned with presenting an acceptable image to their peer group to gain peer acceptance and gain entry into this group and therefore their behaviour will be guided by this goal. The middle adolescent will observe how the other peers are behaving and imitate the behaviour, which could include the way they dress, talk and act. The Resilience Enhancement Kit could focus on the positive behaviour exhibited by the peer group and utilize group work (positive peer pressure) to modify the middle adolescents' behaviour with the guidance of the teacher and psychologist.

3.4.2. Social problem solving framework

The theory of Rose-Krasnor (Bortoli & Brown, 2002:4) implies that middle adolescents would set specific goals for themselves in terms of what they want to achieve in a particular situation. The behaviour the middle adolescent would exhibit will therefore depend on the cognitive strategies to solve the presenting problem or achievement of the goal. Alterations to behaviour would only be made depending on the result obtained in terms of the expected goal and resolution of the problem. Ladd and Crick expanded on the theory of Rose-Krasnor and Rubin. Ladd and Crick (Bortoli et al., 2002:5) proposed that "*in a social situation children will pursue goals which are driven by self-perceptions and emotions. A social exchange precedes behavioural enactment. The goals the child wants to achieve in the social exchange are viewed as the precursors to the behavioural enactment and determine the particular behavioural strategy to be selected by the child. The child's attributions and feelings will determine the outcome of their social exchange.*" This implies that the middle adolescents' emotions will have an effect on the behaviour displayed during the social exchange for example sulking or whining to get what they want.

As discussed previously in the biological origin of social functioning middle adolescents' behaviour is driven by the emotional area in the brain which is characterized by fluctuating moods. Middle adolescents tend to be idealistic and often offer "simplistic" solutions to complex problems. They often assume that significant others think about the world as they do and concerned about the things they are (for example their appearance) and therefore must regard their problems in the same light which can cause conflict with their parents or teachers. Middle adolescents will also utilize argumentation and reasoning to persuade adults to agree with the solution to their perceived problems.

It is therefore important that in the Resilience Enhancement Kit the middle adolescent should be taught how to work together as a team to analyze a problem realistically and use the combined efforts of the entire group's strengths

and assets to solve problems appropriately which can help the middle adolescent in the future to rebound against adversities by utilizing significant others as resources.

3.4.3. Social co-construction theory

Bortoli and Brown (2002:11) give Valsiner's view on social competence as follows "*the middle adolescent's actions have no meaning in isolation and that their actions only acquire meaning when negotiations and interpretations between partners (parents, teachers and peers) are present. Effective social interaction is a result of knowledge and understanding of social scripts. Social competence emerges mainly from experience in close relationships and these social experiences are likely to serve as the foundation for the development of social adjustment*". This theory implies that the middle adolescent's social behaviour is influenced and facilitated by learned social scripts from significant others. The social scripts differ from the expectations of parents and teachers to that of the peer group. Middle adolescents appear to exhibit an indifference to adults, especially teachers and parents. Middle adolescents seem to be embarrassed by their parent's behaviour and are critical of parents and teacher's ideas of acceptable behaviour resulting in complaints such as "adults are cramping their style". Changes to behaviour are often brought about when the exhibited behaviour of the middle adolescent is in contrast with the norms, values and expectations (social scripts) of excepted social behaviour.

The Resilience Enhancement Kit utilizes the facilitator (teacher or psychologist) to model appropriate behaviour for middle adolescents and together with the learners set goals that will guide them to identify, manage and apply the social competencies in every day life. Group discussions and examples given by middle adolescents related to the social competencies acquired in the Resilience Enhancement Kit could aid with the meaning attribution and relevance of the content to their life world.

Any discussion of theories should include a critical reconsideration of their limitations. The theories discussed previously are primarily focused on the cognitive processes involved with social interaction. Each theory focuses on a single aspect for example social problem-solving, social goals and tasks or the influence of social scripts without integrating all the relevant aspects into a holistic framework that includes the emotional aspects. An amalgamation of the social competence models of Reschly and Gresham as found in Merrell & Gimpel (1998:14) and Guralnick as found in Odom; McConnell and McEnvoy (1992:41) summarizes the above mentioned theories and takes into account the emotional functioning of middle adolescents.

The models of Reschly and Gresham as found in Merrell & Gimpel (1998:14) and Guralnick as found in Odom; McConnell and McEnvoy (1992:41) can be illustrated as follows:

Diagram 6: (With permission: Appendix B)
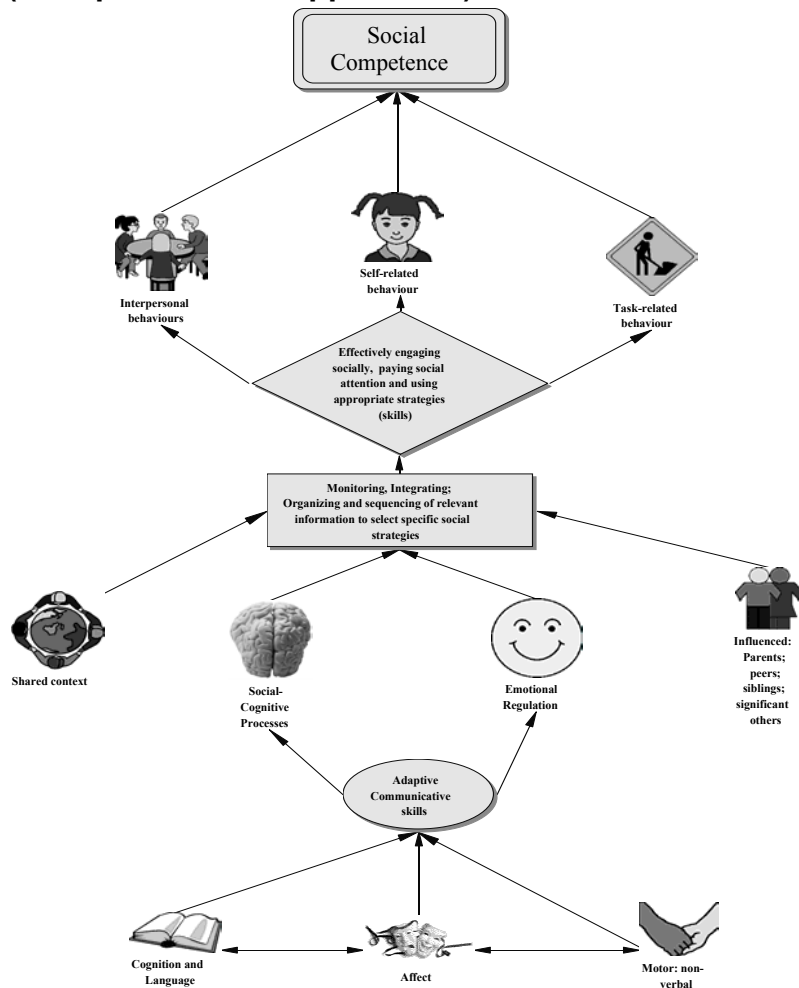
The models of Reschly and Gresham as well as Guralnick are hierarchical in that higher levels depend upon lower ones. Social competence is dependant upon the cognitive / language, emotional (affect) and motor (non-verbal) abilities or domains situated within the middle adolescent. Social interaction relies on these mentioned aspects which are interdependent in order to communicate effectively and to complete social tasks. The social situation requires the middle adolescent to utilize cognitive and emotional processes while monitoring, integrating, organizing and sequencing information necessary for social interaction, obtaining goals, and completing tasks or problem-solving. The shared cultural / situational context and influence (social scripts) from parents, siblings, peers, teachers and significant others influence the above mentioned process. The process requires the middle adolescents to effectively engage on a social level, pay social attention to the actions and reactions of others and themselves as well as choosing the correct skills that will be appropriate in the situation. Appropriate behaviour and successful negotiating of the situation related to interpersonal, self-related and task-related behaviours lead to being socially competent.

3.5. Development of social competence

Social competence needs to be transferable into all the contexts of a middle adolescent's life. Social competence is necessary for effective interaction with other people, adjustment to new situations and relationships and for the management of potential risk or stressful happenings in an effective manner. Scott (2003:1) accentuates the importance of developing social competence as follows: "*emerging theories of youth development such as resiliency, self-efficacy and protective factors have stressed social competence as an important dimension of successful adolescent development. An understanding of the development, maintenance and enhancement of social competence is useful in determining how to help protect adolescents from negative influences and assist them in reaching their optimal potential*". Social development and the formation of optimal social competency begins at birth and progresses with interaction between parents, peers, teachers, psychologists and significant others.

Schwartz (1999:4) states that the most significant factor in promoting middle adolescents' social development may be the soldering with positive, nurturing adults that includes teachers who offer unconditional acceptance and support, model appropriate social behaviour, live according to positive values and convey the importance of these values to wellbeing. It is therefore important that the middle adolescents learn how to form and maintain positive relationships because it allows them to feel accepted, connected and supported especially when they are faced with adversities and stressors. Effective verbal and non-verbal communication is necessary in relationships because it allows the middle adolescents to express their needs and ask for assistance and utilize friends, family, teachers and Educational psychologists as assets to help them rebound. Therefore the Resilience Enhancement Kit should focus on enhancing and developing positive relationships in middle adolescents.

An aspect that is commonly found in relationships includes sharing a sense humour. Middle adolescents are characterized by finding the comical in any situation which will result in fits of laughter or for example girls giggling about something someone said or did even if it might not seem funny to an adult. McGhee (2004:2) propose that a sense of humour is one of the most powerful ammunition for boosting resilience because the muscle relaxation brought about by laughter eases psychological tension, it creates a sense of control over the source of stress and helps keep problems in perspective. He also states that humour and laughter boosts energy levels and helps combat burnout as well as displacing negative emotions for positive emotions. In the Resilience Enhancement Kit the teacher or psychologist could use humour to acquire and sustain the middle adolescents' attention and to utilize their humour to strengthen the neural pathways by associating the learnt social competencies with a positive and pleasant experience. Laughter and humour is also a naturally occurring phenomenon and therefore activities such as game playing and role playing will foster this important aspect of positive relationships. The Resiliency Scale can

also include a question such as "I can keep my sense of humour when things get tough".

Another activity that can foster positive relationships include the use of social stories in the Resilience Enhancement Kit to introduce a new social skill and establish the underlying principle for the necessity of such a skill and illuminate how the skill can be applied. Positive and guiding feedback from teachers and psychologists regarding the middle adolescent social functioning can serve as a touchstone for improvement. Social competence requires social awareness and self-consciousness with regard to pro-social skills and self-control skills that with practice could lead to advanced social reasoning and functioning. "*Social competence includes three interrelated content categories namely performance skills (what skills to utilize), societal norms (the when and where of skill utilization) and value judgments (the why of skill utilization) that enable the middle adolescent to act independently within social settings. It has been found that the most effective social competence programs are multi-dimensional and multi-level such as the combination of skills-based approaches with environmentally-orientated approaches.*" *(Reiter & Bryen, 1991:99).* Social competence is therefore enhanced and developed if there is a proficient fit between the middle adolescent's learned skills, strategies and processes with the social environment (relationships) in which it is used.

As middle adolescents become more mature in their phase of development they are capable of advanced cognitive and emotional reasoning regarding their social world. Their developmental operations equip them to utilize formal logic to solve social problems (Piaget formal operation theory), making decisions about the right or wrong action based on abstract internalized values and norms (Kohlberg's moral reasoning theory) and building complex relationships with the same and opposite gender that require a sense of self and autonomy (Erikson's theory of life tasks). Bellafiore (2003:2) summarizes the changes that the middle adolescent experience as follows: "*the normal life cycle contains predictable*

periods of life disruption. For example, when we move from childhood to adolescence, everything we had previously known about the world goes through a jarring transformation. During this period of life disorganization, our bodies go through tremendous hormonal and developmental changes, our definitions of other people change, our motives and interests change, we learn how to define ourselves as individuals with autonomy and we expand our range of social relationships." Therefore, if the middle adolescent is able to think realistically about themselves (self-perception and self-identity) and are able to work effectively with the significant people in their lives (autonomy and self-efficacy) they are empowered to utilize their inherent strengths and assets to rebound against the onslaughts of life. Middle adolescents create their sense of self (identity and self-perception) through interacting with others. The interdependent relationship between middle adolescents and significant adults and peers allow for positive influences to enhance their social competence.

According to Welsh and Bierman (1998:6) social competence can be developed by modelling, reinforcing, rehearsing and feedback of the desired behaviour or skills gained from social interaction with others. Modelling refers to the middle adolescent observing then imitating a particular social skill after explanation and discussion of that skill and could be incorporated in activities such as discussions and peer interviewing. Reinforcing successful attempts of strategies or skills by using the same one in different situations automates the behaviour. Rehearsal or role playing strategies give the middle-adolescent the opportunity to practice new skills in a supportive environment as it is reflected in the Resilience Enhancement Kit. The development of social competence begins in the home and is influenced by parents and siblings.
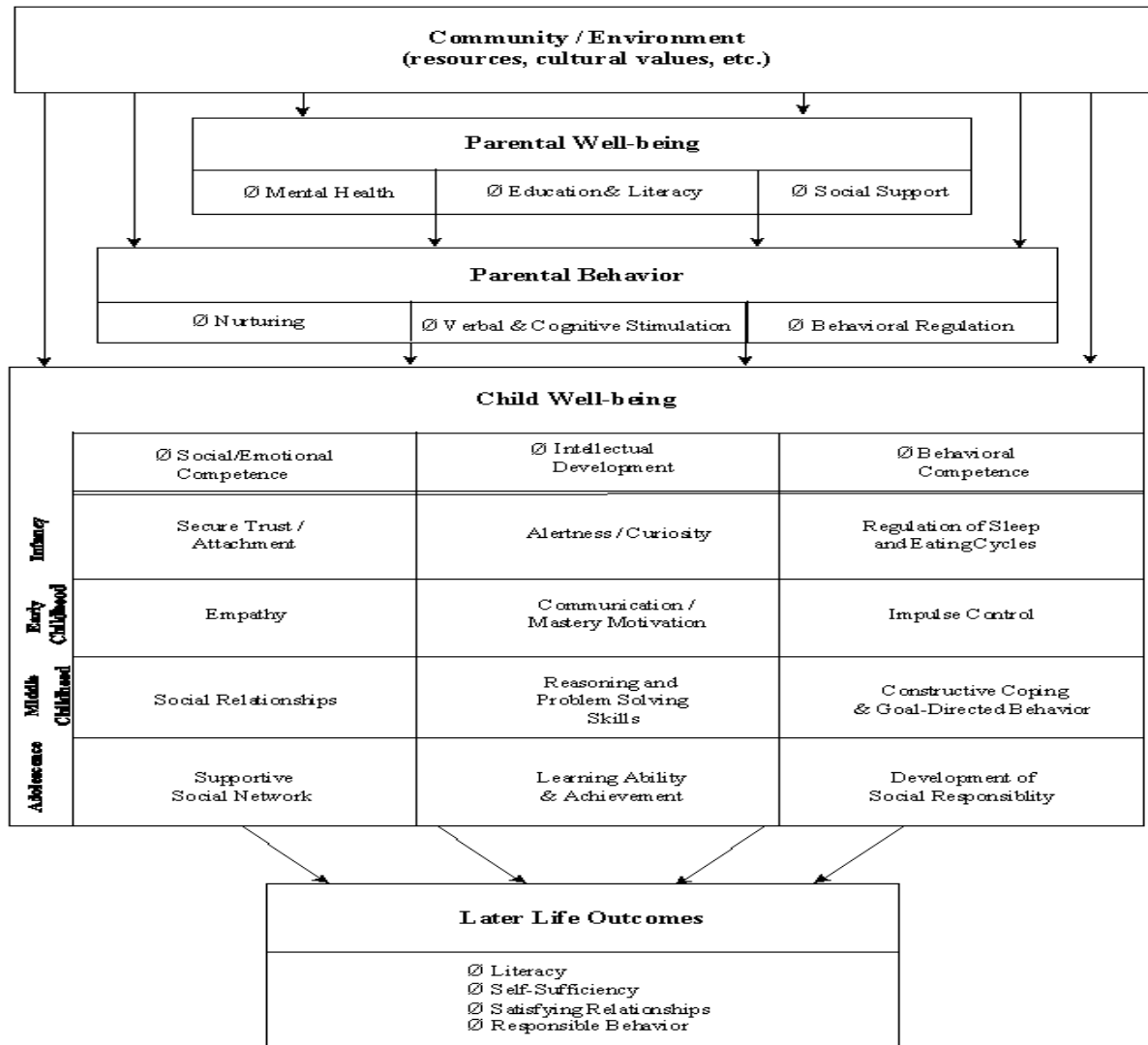
"*Research into social competence has been conducted from a social mould perspective in which various parental styles, behaviours and characteristics (e.g. modelling) are conceptualized as antecedents of social and psychological outcomes in adolescents. Socialization is viewed as a unidirectional process with*

social agents (parents) functioning to influence or shape adolescents" *(Peterson & Leigh, 1990:107).* This implies that the family has an important role to fulfil in the development of social competence in middle adolescents. However, the composition of the family structure has changed dramatically in the last century from an extended family to a nuclear family where the parents both work to subsidize their lifestyle and the occurrence of single parent families. As a result the time spent to influence the middle adolescent's development of social competence has dwindled due to the demands of a changed society. The mass media has become a more prominent force in the middle adolescent's life that could enforce different values, norms and morality to that of the family in terms of acceptable behaviour and social conduct.

The influence of the family on middle adolescents include adapting to life through the modelling of social rules, roles, accepted behaviour within a cultural context, ways of conflict resolution and discipline that develop morality, altruism and responsibility. Parental styles foster development in terms of interpersonal skills, effective communication, self-awareness and the formation of a personal identity. "*Since the 1940's numerous studies and reviews have identified two generic dimensions of parental behaviour-support and control as principal aspects of child rearing that predict youthful social competence. Support refers to warmth, affection, nurturance and acceptance of parents while control refers to the actions used by parents while attempting to modify the behaviour and internal states of adolescents by encouraging social responsibility, self-control, independence and self-esteem. A moderate level of cohesion (separateness and connectedness within the family) seems to provide the most conductive environment for the development of adolescent social competence*" *(Peterson et al., 1990:110).* Thorne and Rintoul (1999:47) supported this view and proposed that the behaviour of the parents shape the middle adolescents wellbeing and that nurturing, stimulation and regulation (includes discipline) leads to social competence.

The following illustration by Thorne and Rintoul (1999:47) summarizes the discussed views and depict the effect that parenting have on the developing child and adolescent in particular social competence through modelling and reinforcement.

Diagram 7: (With permission: Appendix B)

Community / Environment (resources, cultural values, etc.)		

Parental Well-being		
Ø Mental Health	Ø Education & Literacy	Ø Social Support

Parental Behavior		
Ø Nurturing	Ø Verbal & Cognitive Stimulation	Ø Behavioral Regulation

Child Well-being			
	Ø Social/Emotional Competence	Ø Intellectual Development	Ø Behavioral Competence
Infancy	Secure Trust / Attachment	Alertness / Curiosity	Regulation of Sleep and Eating Cycles
Early Childhood	Empathy	Communication / Mastery Motivation	Impulse Control
Middle Childhood	Social Relationships	Reasoning and Problem Solving Skills	Constructive Coping & Goal-Directed Behavior
Adolescence	Supportive Social Network	Learning Ability & Achievement	Development of Social Responsiblity

Later Life Outcomes
Ø Literacy Ø Self-Sufficiency Ø Satisfying Relationships Ø Responsible Behavior

Siblings also have an effect on the middle adolescents' social competence development in the home. Schneider (1993:39) reiterates the importance of siblings as peers at home and feels that older siblings may provide information and guidance to their younger brother and sister about peer culture necessary for social interaction. Middle adolescents are focused on developing a sense of

themselves and shaping their identities and behaviour in terms of the expectations and norms of significant others like siblings. Middle adolescents undertake diverse social roles as they interact with peers and siblings, while they in turn serve as a social springboard for adolescents to distance themselves from their emotional dependence upon their parents towards independent functioning with an understanding of the social rules and conventions inherent to their culture. The time spent in the school context allows the middle adolescent to practice, explore and exhibit the social roles, behaviour in an environment that could be described as a condensed global society.

The teachers and psychologists working in a school environment continue the lessons taught in a good home. For most of the middle adolescents, school is a prominent part of their life. It is where they relate to and develop relationships with their peers and significant adults while having the opportunity to develop the competencies necessary for survival in a constantly changing society. The school context might even be a source of safety and stability for middle adolescents who do not have a supportive home environment. The characteristics that can be present in a supportive home can also be present in a school that aims to foster resilience such as a sense of attachment, bonding, belonging and being cared about. Positive relationships and modelling of appropriate behaviour by teachers and psychologists can assist the middle adolescent in forming social competencies that will help them rebound.

However, the middle adolescent might not necessarily appreciate or accept the influence that the school can have on their lives. "*Unlike young children, adolescents no longer accept without question whatever their teachers tell them. Adolescents tend to condemn their seniors with just as much passion as they idealize them. They can be extremely critical and mistrustful about the actions of teachers and can undermine their authority most effectively. During this phase the teacher should rather assume the role of escort and companion*" *(Gouws et al., 1994:117).* Although the teacher and psychologist can be a support system

for middle adolescents, the way that the middle adolescent is approached and is taught the competencies necessary for resilience will ensure the success thereof. Social competencies should relate to the middle adolescents' level of interest and should actively involve them and give them the opportunity to participate and share their views. The Resilience Enhancement Kit could include these aspects and by so doing avoid being prescriptive which can create feelings of resentment and uncooperativeness.

The activities that are developed in the Resilience Enhancement Kit should encourage the middle adolescent to engage in it by structuring the activities to include their interests and such activities could include game playing. Welsh and Bierman (1998:4) support this view and state that at school middle adolescents begin to develop an interest in structured board games and group games with complex sets of rules. They suggest that being able to understand and follow game rules and being able to handle competition in appropriate ways become important skills for social competence. The non-threatening nature of games as well as the group structure thereof which can lead to incidental learning that can be beneficial in developing social competencies and should be included in the Resilience Enhancement Kit. An understanding of the origin and development of social competence provides a framework where the elements of social competence can be assessed and constructed.

3.6.   Psychological appraisal of social competence

A variety of definitions regarding social competence resulted in an assortment of measurement procedures. Odom and McConnell (1999:1) classified the approaches into three categories "*all inclusive approaches that include all competent performance (social performance, language performance, adaptive responding); behavioural approaches that include only discrete social behaviours (social initiations, social responses) and cognitive approaches that include social and cognitive skills (social initiations and responses as well as social problem-solving skills).* The external manifestation of social competence is the behaviour

the middle adolescent exhibits. As a result the behaviour can be directly observed and an event recording of the incidents for example interaction with peers can be made by teachers, psychologists, parents, peers or significant others. The information gained from the observations and recordings can prove invaluable in aiding and guiding the middle adolescent to become more self aware of his or her behaviour in different situations and in diverse contexts. The information can form the grounding for the development of social competence through modelling, reinforcement and feedback. If the observers for example teachers and psychologists know what appropriate behaviour to be attentive to and are skilled in recording the observations accurately, the information can be utilized to build a reserve of strengths and assets for reinforcement in the middle adolescents. The same holds true for the identification of areas in need of development.

Another semi-structured method of assessing social competence is interviews. Interviews create the opportunity to obtain information from the middle adolescent or peer's experiences and self knowledge regarding their social competence. The following rating scales according to Merrell (2003:323); Merrell and Gimpel (1998:63) and Nabuzoka (2000:87) are available to measure social competence:

- ❖ Walker-McConnel Scale (SSCSA) of social competence and school adjustment is a social skills rating scale for teachers and school-based professionals. It is aimed at learners from grades 7-12. This rating scale is an indication of adaptive social-behavioural competencies within the school environment.
- ❖ The behavioural assessment system for children (BASC) developed by Reynolds and Kamphaus is a multi-method behaviour rating system for use with children and adolescents. It includes rating scales for teachers, parents and a self-report scale. Although the content is oriented toward problem behaviour there are also items towards adaptive social behaviour.

- ❖ The school social behaviour scales (SSBS) was developed by Merrell and Austin for use by teachers to assess both social competence and antisocial problem behaviours of children and adolescents.
- ❖ The Matson evaluation of social skills with youngsters (MESSY). Developed by Matson, Esveldt-Dawson and Kazdin is a teacher rating scale analyzing inappropriate and adaptive behaviours. The rating form is for middle adolescents from 4-18 years.
- ❖ The Social skills rating system (SSRS) developed by Gresham and Elliott focus on behaviours that affect parent-child relationships, teacher-student relationships and peer acceptance. The instrument is divided into three developmental groups' namely preschool, elementary level and secondary level.
- ❖ Assessment of interpersonal relations (AIR) is an instrument designed by Bracken to assess the quality of interpersonal relationships from the middle adolescent's (ages 9-19 years) perspective. It assesses the perceived quality and adjustment of relationships with parents, peers and teachers respectively.
- ❖ The general competence index (GCI) developed by Greenspan, Gregory, Granfield and Musheno. The index taps into a middle adolescent's social competence that includes temperament, sensory functioning and language and cognition.
- ❖ Odom and McConnell (1999:1) proposed a performance based assessment of social competence that involved significant social agents in children's environments to make judgements about the competence of the children's social behaviour. The multi-method assessment included direct observation, observer impressions, teacher ratings and peer ratings.

Although the above-mentioned rating scales include a wide variety of aspects that can be measured, a critical view should also include the limitations of their use. Odom and McConnell (1999:2) warned against the limitations of using one or the other of the above mentioned assessment measures: "*the existing*

approaches are generally unidimensional in nature and may under represent the actual interpersonal social functioning of children, in particular these approaches all focus on the actions, characteristics or skills of a particular child with little attention to the social validity and or impact of these features." Most of the assessment instruments were developed and standardized in America. One of the limitations would be that the assessment instruments might not always be applicable to the South-African context with its diverse cultures, languages and varying socio-economic citizenry. A further concern is that many of the rating scales are only based on a medical model of deficits rather than also including the assets or strengths the middle adolescent might encompass or exert.

Although the areas of development can never be disregarded, there must be a paradigm shift towards a more positive psychology that views the middle adolescent holistically and utilizes strengths, abilities and assets to enhance social competence. Odom and McConnell (1999:2) quotes Hops and McFall who proposes that*: "social competence is not reflected solely by the social behaviours of middle adolescents nor by the social-cognitive processes that underlie these behaviours; the behaviours and processes are necessary but not sufficient for a complete description of social competence. It could rather be best measured by considering the social impact of an individual's behaviour in particular settings; this social impact is perhaps most directly assessed by considering the judgements of significant social agents about individual children's behaviour in social interchanges in these settings for example in the school setting*". Therefore, the Resiliency Scale that will be developed should take into account and amalgamate the competencies necessary for resilience and focus on the positive aspects of the middle adolescent's social functioning. The information gained from this self-report questionnaire (Resiliency Scale) could be used to guide teachers and psychologists to enhance and develop social resilience in the school context.

3.7. Social resilience and school context

Schools are complex environments comprising of heterogeneous populations from various cultural contexts. It has become increasingly important for teachers not only to facilitate the academic content of subjects but also to equip the middle adolescent with the necessary skills to excel in life and rebound from experienced barriers to development and learning. The South African education philosophy (Outcomes Based Education) is focused on developing children and adolescents holistically and equipping them with skills to be well-integrated contributing citizens of the country. Vincent, Horner and Sugai (2002:1) supports this view and state that "*over the last two decades, schools face the challenge of creating environments that are sensitive to a myriad of individual's backgrounds and support all learners' social and academic success. They are responsible for establishing and maintaining socio-cultural microcosms that teach children to negotiate the diverse values and social norms of a pluralistic society.*" Social competence assists middle adolescents to develop into independent, capable and competent individuals.

The development and enhancement of social competencies as a resilience modality will equip middle adolescents to deal with the choices and challenges they face; in forming and maintaining healthy relationships; reducing and coping with stress and contributing effectively to their own learning by being responsible for their behaviour as well as creating a sense of self. The school has an important challenge in fostering the development of middle adolescents to be socially capable in dealing with the stresses of a rapidly changing competitive world. Merrell and Gimpel (1998:12) refer to Stephen's social skills framework that adolescents need to develop for effective social functioning and social competence in the school context :

(With permission: Appendix B):

Self-management	Environmental behaviour
✠ Self-control	✠ Care for the environment
✠ Social conventions	✠ Dealing with emergencies (bullying or physical violence)
✠ Accurate perception of a situation leads to the correct interpretation of social cues and appropriate responses.	
✠ Independence	
✠ Accepting consequences	
✠ Ethical behaviour (e.g. tolerance)	
✠ Expressing feelings	
✠ Positive attitude towards self	
✠ Responsible behaviour	
✠ Self-care	
Task-related behaviour/ Academic	**Interpersonal behaviour / Peer relations**
✠ Asking and answering questions	✠ Accepting authority
✠ Attending behaviour	✠ Coping with conflict
✠ School adjustment	✠ Gaining attention appropriately
✠ Respect for social rules at school	✠ Helping others
✠ Classroom compliance	✠ Making conversation
✠ Completing tasks	✠ Positive attitude towards others
✠ Following directions	✠ Respecting property of others
✠ Active participation in group activities	✠ Assertiveness
✠ Independent work	✠ Selection of positive role models and supportive mentors
✠ Good quality of work	✠ Social problem-solving, cooperative behaviour, understand group process
✠ On-task behaviour	
✠ Performing before others	

The framework presented includes aspects of both emotional- and social competence. The aspects related to emotional competence includes self-control and accepting consequences of behaviour (ego-resiliency), expressing feelings and helping others, ethical behaviour as well as having a positive attitude towards others (empathy). The social skills encompassed within social competence include perceiving a situation accurately that will enable the middle adolescent to interpret social cues and responses correctly (verbal and non-verbal communication). Aspects such as active participation in group activities, on-task behaviour, performing before others, coping with conflict, assertiveness and cooperative behaviour are all related to working effectively in groups which is associated with positive relationships. The middle adolescent's sense of self is reflected in social skills such as self-care, positive attitude towards the self and independence. The mastery of social competence will lead to the appropriate school-related behaviour such as attending behaviour, classroom compliance, completing of task and following of directions.

The Resilience Enhancement Kit should enhance and develop social competencies that include the ability to form, maintain and develop positive relationships, demonstrating self-efficacy inherent to a positive self-identity and self-perception. The ability to communicate effectively on a verbal and non-verbal level, displaying a sense of humour in the face of adversity and exhibiting an independent, proactive work ethic while working with members of a group are also important social competencies. As discussed earlier in the chapter, all these competencies are manifested in the behaviour of the middle adolescent and these competencies can be developed and enhanced through the Resilience Enhancement Kit.

The Resilience Enhancement Kit should empower the middle adolescent to identify, manage and utilize existing internal and external social assets to rebound in the face of adversity and the stressors they are exposed to even at school. "*From middle school on, students are expected to assume increased*

responsibility for regulating their behavioral and academic performances. They are expected to manage the instructional styles and work demands of multiple teachers, spend increased time beyond the instructional day completing long-term assignments and use a range of interpersonal skills to negotiate social demands and respond to peer pressure" *(Lane, Pierson & Givner, 2004:174).* These challenges are compounded by the fact that middle adolescents in South Africa are also challenged with making a transition from primary school into high school which can place pressure on a learner who does not have the necessary repertoire of social competencies which can help them to rebound.

The teachers and psychologists can play an essential role in facilitating social competence by introducing activities as part of the curriculum that could encourage the development and enhancement of social skills and positive attitudes. These activities that rely on working in a group where social learning can be most effective might include classroom discussions, role-playing, game playing, social stories and pair work. Interactive group activities define roles, sets limits and expectations for behaviour. Reid (2001:6) quotes Serok and Blum who are of opinion that game playing is inherently social and involves learning and following rules, problem solving, self-discipline, emotional control and adoption of leader and follower roles, all of which are essential components of socialization. Reid (2001:9) adds that interaction and game playing facilitates identification with peers of the same gender and aids in the formation of autonomous personality functioning within the boundaries of prescribed social roles. The choice of activities that foster social learning in a non-threatening and enjoyable manner in the school context will encourage middle adolescents to integrate the social competencies and utilize it more readily. Bellafiore (2003:1) quotes Ralph Emerson as saying "*and thus, like the wounded oyster, he mends his shell with pearl*" which is an eloquent image to describe the role of the school in fostering social competencies necessary for resilient functioning in this turbulent stage of development. The enhancement and development of social competencies are coalesced in the Resilience Enhancement Kit which is discussed in chapter five.

3.8. Conclusion

In this chapter the influence and importance of social competence was weaved into the tapestry of the resilience framework that can be applied to the middle adolescent. The nature and origin of social competence were discussed. The various theories that underpin social competence were highlighted as well as the assessment methods that allow teachers and psychologists to obtain insight into middle adolescents' social competence. It was found that social competence develops from an early age and is shaped by family, peers and especially the school. The school provides a secure environment with a heterogeneous population and mentors in the form of teachers and psychologists who can assist the middle adolescent in developing social competence. The social competencies that foster resilient functioning was found to be the forming and maintenance of positive relationships, that include communicating and participating effectively in a group. Creating a positive sense of self encompasses a middle adolescent's self-identify, perception and self-efficacy that are also part of social competence.

Through activities such as modelling, reinforcement, positive feedback, group work, games and role playing the middle adolescent can master his or her ability to manage and enhance social competence. Middle adolescents have to navigate their lives through the labyrinth of social experiences and relationships that can leave emotional scars and have a negative effect on school functioning if they are not provided the opportunity in schools to develop and enhance this critical social modality of resilience. The school can act as a catalyst for social resilience in middle adolescents. It became apparent in this chapter that emotional competence, social competence and cognitive competence are intertwined and function interdependently as resilience modalities. The next chapter will focus on the development of cognitive competencies in the middle adolescent.