

## CHAPTER 5

### Summary, Discussion, Limitations, Recommendations and Conclusion

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#### 5.1 SUMMARY

This study aimed to explore the relationship between middle-adolescent learners' degree of resilience and the township school context, guided by the main research question, '*How does the school influence the resilience of middle-adolescent learners in a black-only township school?*' The research required first to reliably identify resilient and less-resilient middle-adolescent learners in township schools who would then participate in the main study to answer the research question. Following a mixed method design, the study was divided into Phase 1 (a quantitative research method) and Phase 2 (a qualitative research method). In each Phase of the study, I fully discussed the research process and the findings of the research.

Phase 1 aimed to inform the construct resilience by developing a resilience questionnaire, the Resilience Questionnaire for Middle-adolescents in a Township School (R-MATS). In Chapter 3 of this study, I discussed how the R-MATS was constructed, piloted, reworked and ultimately administered to 291 Grade 9 middle-adolescent learners from School 1 and School 2 in a black township, Mamelodi. To determine the item-scale correlations and to establish the reliability of the scale, item analysis was conducted on all the questionnaires (the pilot questionnaires and in the main study, the questionnaires with 28 and 24 items), resulting in the reworking, discarding and retention of items. The final questionnaire, the R-MATS, had a 'good' item-scale correlation of  $\geq 0.3$  on the 24 selected items. An exploratory factor analysis was conducted to determine and explore the underlying factors that could explain the relationships among the R-MATS items, and to assess the construct validity. Four factors were identified. The factors, which were fully explored in Chapter 3 (3.5.8), were essential in understanding the perceived relationships among the variables.

The underlying principle of Phase 1 was to ground the construct resilience as manifested by middle-adolescents in the township schools through the construction of the R-MATS, to identify resilient and less-resilient participants for Phase 2 of the study and finally to develop and validate the R-MATS for future use in township schools. As a result, the 16 resilient and less-resilient middle-adolescents from the two township schools (8 per school) who participated in Phase 2 of the study were selected based on their RMATS scores.

Phase 2 aimed to answer the main research question, '*How does the school influence the resilience of middle-adolescent learners in a black-only township school?*' by means of Interactive Qualitative Analysis focus groups. I used an issue statement to ensure that the participants understood what was required of them when generating affinities or themes during focus groups, by asking the following questions:

- (1) How does the school contribute to who you are?
- (2) How does the school fail to contribute to who you are?
- (3) What is it that the school does that makes you who you are?
- (4) What is it that the school fails to do that affects who you are?

The construct resilience was never used in the issue statement, instead 'who you are' was used. Instead of 'influence', the terms 'contribute' and 'affect' were used.

The resilient and less-resilient participants generated affinities which they perceived were essential in defining how the school contributed or failed to contribute to their resilience, i.e. 'who they are' and what the school did or failed to do to make them 'who they are'.

This chapter aims to consolidate the discussions and to interpret the findings of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the study using the research frameworks adopted for the study that were fully discussed in Chapter 2, i.e. the Resiliency Wheel (Henderson & Milstein 2004) and the Bioecological Theory of Human Development, using the Person-Process-Context-Time (PPCT) Model (Tudge 2008). To avoid repetition, the figures illustrating the research frameworks will not be repeated in this chapter. The reader is referred to Chapter 1, Figure 1.1 (The Resiliency Wheel) and Chapter 2, Figure 2.3 (The PPCT Model).

In conclusion, this chapter will draw some conclusions based on the results of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the study using the adopted theoretical frameworks, the Resiliency Wheel and the PPCT Model. In my previous discussions of the research framework, various literatures were referred to. I will refer back to most of the literature but also including new references. The limitations of the study will be discussed and finally recommendations for educational policy and practices will be made.

## **5.2 DISCUSSION OF PHASE 1 AND 2 RESULTS USING THE BIOECOLOGICAL MODEL**

### **5.2.1 ORIENTATION**

To ascertain if all questionnaire data could be pooled together in conducting item and factor analysis, a comparison between the variables was done (School 1 and School 2 and male and

female respondents), which showed no statistically significant differences. As a result, all data were pooled together.

To ground the construct resilience as it features in middle-adolescents in township schools, factor analysis was conducted on the R-MATS. Various individual and environmental protective and risk factors perceived present and influential to the resilience of the respondents were identified. The understanding and acknowledgement of the presence of risk and protective factors in life are essential, especially in resilience research because of its interactive and process nature. Blum *et al.* (2002:29) indicate that resilience is developmental in nature and interactive with adversity. This is collaborated by Schoon and Parsons (2002:261) who state that resilience is a dynamic process and not a static phase, indicating continuous interactions of the individual with the environment. The township school environment must be viewed as a particular context, therefore the Phase 1 results could be expected to contribute freshly to the knowledge base on resilience.

To determine the type and quantity of risk the respondents were exposed to, in township schools, Section A of the R-MATS proved essential, while Section B addressed the resilience characteristics. The nature of the correlation between the total scores of the two sections of the R-MATS (Section A- risk items and Section B-resilience characteristics) indicated that individuals who were exposed to more risks were less-resilient and resilient individuals experienced less risk in their development. This fact emphasises the importance of protective factors to help modify the impact of risk and adversity (Schoon & Parson 2002:261, Henderson & Milstein 2003:11-13). However, it emerged that all learners in the two township schools were exposed to some measure of risk in their environment. This finding confirms the results of my Masters research (Mampane 2004:96-98).

Resilience, according to Seccombe (2002:385), is multifaceted and produces the ability to thrive despite adversity. A resilient individual is thus not overcome by adversity, but instead aims to emerge stronger from such adversities because of their innate abilities to endure and heal from wounds and take charge of their lives (Seccombe 2002:385). The duration and intensity of exposure to adversity is important when endeavouring to understand the impact of risk on the resilience of an individual also from a township school as a particular context. The definition of 'bouncing back' alludes to individual change, growth and adaptation (Richardson 2002:313). Thus, resilience is a developmental process characterised by growth and adaptation, which is inferred from 'bouncing back' behaviour observed. Less-resilience, on the other hand, alludes to a process of poor adaptation and stunted or delayed growth.

Analysis of the R-MATS suggested that participants were inclined to over-evaluate themselves and that the results were overly positive, a tendency also observed in other studies conducted in township schools (Du Plessis 2005:109). This of course impacts on the interpretation of the results of the R-MATS, calling to question the real degree of resilience these young people can demonstrate in their township environment.

Throughout this study, in my discussions of the theoretical frameworks, I consistently discussed the Resiliency Wheel first, followed by the Bioecological framework, the PPCT Model. In this chapter, I will detract from this structure. The two frameworks differ in their engagement with results and the level of approach. The Resiliency Wheel framework is a programme which functions at the applied level and the PPCT Model engages with results at the fundamental and conceptual level. It is thus more relevant to engage with the results at the fundamental level of knowledge contribution by explanation first, before mapping the results onto the Resiliency Wheel to identify and contemplate specific application implications. In the following sections, I will discuss the results using the PPCT Model (Tudge 2008), i.e. Phase 1 results, the item and factor analysis, followed by Phase 2 results, the focus group SIDs, after which I will use the Resiliency Wheel of Henderson and Milstein (2003) to discuss the results of Phase 1 and 2.

### **5.2.2 DISCUSSION OF PHASE 1 RESULTS USING THE BIOECOLOGICAL MODEL**

The Bioecological model is characterised by four defining properties, namely the developmental process, person, context and time (Bronfenbrenner 2005:7, Lerner 2005:xv, Bronfenbrenner & Ceci 1994:570, Bronfenbrenner & Evans 2000:117). The PPCT Model of Tudge (2008) discussed in Chapter 2 Figure 2.3, gives a visual representation of the Bioecological model properties. Some of the transactional processes of the person in his/her microsystem with other people, objects and symbols are (or should be) proximal processes. According to Bronfenbrenner (2005:6), the proximal process consists of regular, progressive and more complex reciprocal interactions between a living organism (sic) and the immediate environment over an extended period of time. Tudge (2008:68) defines the proximal process as everyday activities and interactions in which the individual participates as a way of understanding and interpreting their world.

The item analysis results give a reflection of the respondents' conscious evaluation and expression of themselves when presented with R-MATS items. The participants' percentage of item endorsement showed high and low frequency levels in respect of related matters which I labelled protective and risk factors based on what the items address. Because of the participants' tendency to over-evaluate themselves, the R-MATS results should not be taken as fully reliable, but they are certainly informative in indicating trends.

Section A of the R-MATS addressed the background information concerning the participants which is essential if we are to understand the environmental stressors each respondent was exposed to. Figure 5.1 provides a summary of the perceived protective and risk factors presented in descending order of frequency as deduced from Table 3.8 and discussed in section 3.5.5. Risk factors with high frequencies indicate a large percentage of the respondents responded with a *Yes* as to the presence of the risk item in their microsystem, and protective factors with high frequencies indicate a large percentage of the respondents said *No* as to the presence of the stressor in their microsystem.

<b>RISK FACTORS</b>	<b>PROTECTIVE FACTORS</b>
Fight a lot at school	Good life experiences
Abuse at home	Parents alive
Bad treatment at home	Living with parents
Many stressors	Sufficient food at home
Repeated a grade	Employment at home
No formal house structure	Formal housing (brick house)
Unemployment	Passed a Grade
Insufficient food	Few stressors
Not living with parents	Good treatment at home
Orphan	No abuse at home
Bad life experiences	Not involved in fights

**Figure 5.1: R-MATS Section A risk and protective factors**

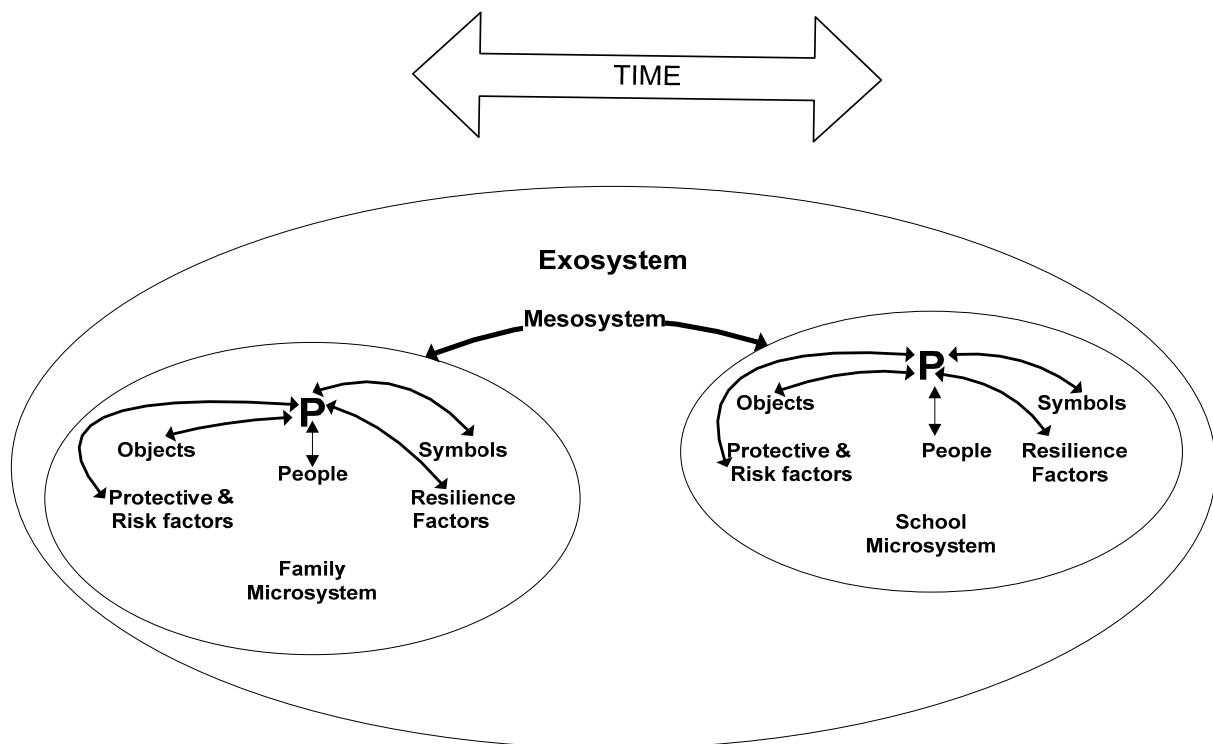
Figure 5.1 indicates that in their family microsystem the respondents were experiencing various risk and protective factors. Considerable numbers of the respondents were involved in fights at school, came from homes where they experienced abuse and bad treatment, where no member of the family was employed and there was insufficient food, some were orphans, had bad life experiences, some were just not living with their parents, were experiencing many stressors and living in informal settlements, or had failed a grade. These risk factors were mostly beyond their control and a result of their exposure to the stressors in their immediate microsystem and indirectly at the exosystem level. The inverse correlation found between risk factors and resilience (Section A, Section B) indicates the ripple effect of stressors in the township environment.

How then does the school support such a learner? What does the learner expect and utilise from the township school environment? It is evident that, based on their life experiences and the types of stressors they experience, learners might have different expectations and needs from the school. Interventions and/or programmes within the microsystem of the school could

perhaps, especially if these achieved the consistency, duration and frequency of proximal processes, provide sufficient support to become protective factors themselves in the resilience of such needy learners. Township schools that provide assistance with school fees (the no-fee paying schools) provide relief to learners from unemployed families. Feeding scheme programmes although they are only provided in primary schools are essential in alleviation of risk and the referral of learners to district support services helps with identification of learner needs and provision of the necessary support. Utilising community policing forums for cases that require attention of the police e.g. abuse and violence to help mitigate the impact of risk and to provide solutions to problems. Thus, I would argue that a school can protect its learners by forming collaborative relationships with other organisations, multi-sectoral interactions to access specialised services that exist in the community to benefit the learner.

At the mesosystem level of interaction between the two microsystems of family and school, I have frequently found a complete breakdown in the township environment. It is possible that, due to the nature of the risk factors in the family microsystem, little or no communication is initiated by the caregivers and collaboration is limited. The severity of the family-related risk factors of the learners also possibly contributes to reluctance or helplessness in educators and the school overall regarding supportive initiatives at the mesosystem level.

Figure 5.1 also indicates the protective factors that some learners responded to. Figure 5.2 now gives a visual representation of the perceived proximal processes (represented by arrows), of the learners at their microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem level in their developmental process. The individual learner (P) who experiences abuse, poverty or other bad experiences at home as represented by the arrows which signify interactions, depending on the nature of their resilience will respond differently to such risk factors. In the home microsystem the learner can challenge the parents to seek help, or can identify other resources that can help alleviate the stressors. The relationship between the parent or significant carers and the P is affected by the stressors and protection experienced and also the results of the interactions. Such a learner can either engage the school for support, or disengage from the interactions and thus suffer in silence. A learner who has no alternatives for dealing with problems will thus present as a less-resilient learner.



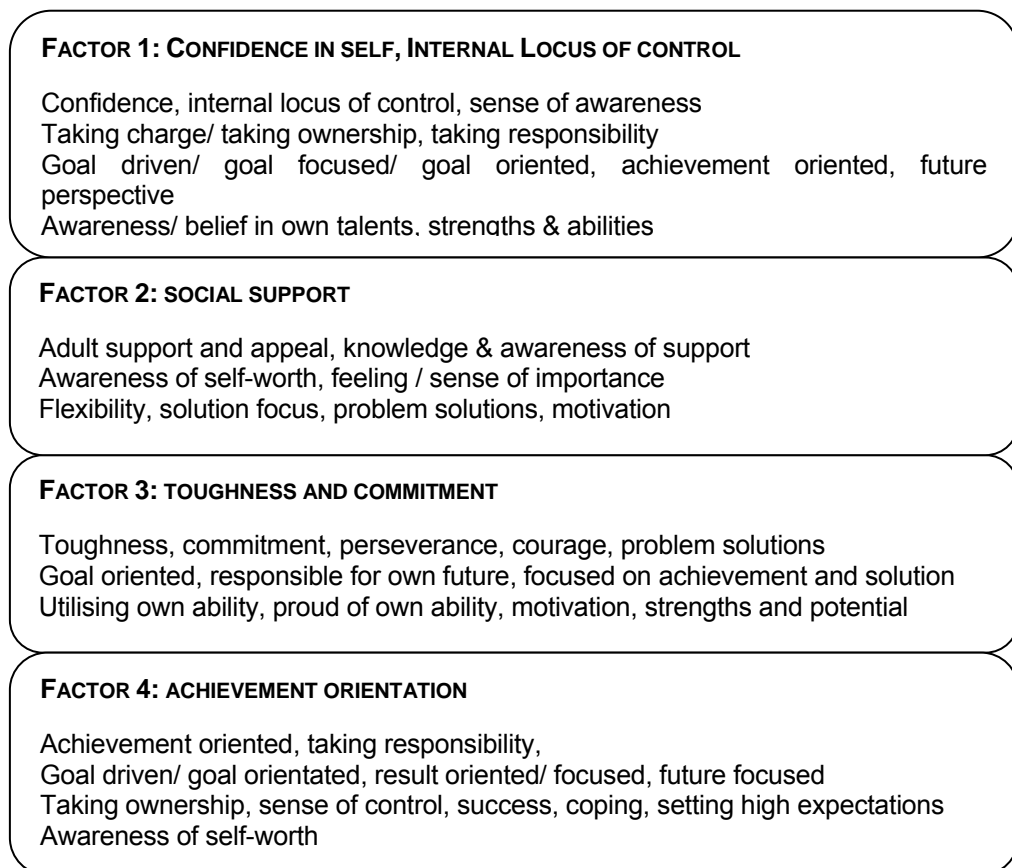
**Figure 5.2: Perceived Proximal Processes in the microsystems**

A learner who experiences much risk at home would normally not experience special treatment at school, since the school normally sets similar curricular and grade demands and expectations to all learners irrespective of stressors, especially if teachers are not aware of the stressors the learner is experiencing. The influence of home stressors can have a negative influence on the education and social relations of a learner, for instance if that learner is the hungry learner from unemployed parents or an orphan who lives in an informal settlement with unemployed carers, or an abused learner. The proximal processes of development influenced by the individual's everyday interactions highlight the relevance and importance of understanding that what happens at home affects the individual at school and vice versa, and a school that disregards the important influence of especially risk factors would essentially be failing in its role.

Admittedly, it could be difficult for teachers to comprehend the home stressors each learner is exposed to. The role of the school in ensuring that learners are able to benefit effectively from teaching and learning in spite of their daily stresses is what the learners in Phase 2 explored in answering the questions, 'How does the school contribute to who you are?' and 'What is it that the school does that makes you who you are?'. The participants of Phase 2 were learners who indicated that they experience risk and protection in their microsystem. In their proximal processes in the school environment they needed to access the available support they required to mitigate the risks in their lives, but the ability to access and utilise support is a resilience characteristic which not every learner possesses.



Factor analysis helped in identifying resilience factors that the respondents, middle-adolescents in township schools, perceived as essential and specific to the R-MATS. According to Gorsuch (1983:2), the aim of factor analysis is to ‘summarise the interrelationship among the variables in a concise but accurate manner as an aid in conceptualization’. Four factors were identified onto which the R-MATS items loaded strongly ( $\geq .30$ ), which best defined the resilient characteristics of the specific participants in the study. The resilience factors depicted in Figure 5.3 are a summary of the resilience characteristics depicted from the R-MATS items that grouped under each factor as discussed in 3.5.8, and presented in Figures 3.5-3.8.



**Figure 5.3: The four resilience factors identified in the R-MATS**

According to the respondents, those who were resilient middle-adolescent learners from a township school were confident of themselves with internal locus of control, could identify and utilise social support, were tough and committed and were achievement-oriented. The demand characteristics so demonstrated, would influence the proximal processes in all systems. A learner with internal locus of control who, for instance, experienced poverty, abuse or bad treatment from home, would then probably engage with the problem in his/her family microsystem, such a learner could even escalate or cause further conflict in the home environment, especially if the antagonist was a powerful person. He/she would probably



identify adults at school or in other microsystems successfully to mitigate the risk they were exposed to at home, would persevere and not let go of personal goals.

In contrast, the less-resilient learner would then demonstrate less-confidence of self and an external locus of control in an abusive or poor family, yet would probably fail to identify and utilise the support of other adults and would utilise ineffective strategies of mere coping instead of striving for goal attainment. The challenges and demands less-resilient learners present in their microsystems might therefore be different from those of resilient learners who demonstrate perseverance in dealing with tasks. It can be concluded that a resilient middle-adolescent from a township school, as perceived by the respondents, has the ability to strive for and achieve healthy development within the various microsystems in which he/she functions.

### 5.2.3 DISCUSSION OF PHASE 2 RESULTS USING THE BIOECOLOGICAL MODEL

The resilient and less-resilient participants of each school in the IQA phase of the study generated affinities in answer to the issue statement questions and arranged them in terms of influence and effect, which, according to the IQA research method, explains the ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ of the relationships (Northcutt & McCoy 2004:29). A summary of the generated affinities appears in Figure 5.4. In my discussion of the results I will focus on the position of the affinity as a driver, pivot or outcome to explain how the participants perceived its function in their relationships within the school as a microsystem.

SCHOOL	Affinities of resilient groups	Position*	Affinities of less-resilient groups	Position
<b>SCHOOL 1</b>	School environment	PD	Socialisation	PD
	Adolescence	PD	Being friendly	SD
	School Rules	SD	Bullying	P
	Challenges in life	SO	Challenges	P
	Positive future goals	PO	Future goals	PO
<b>SCHOOL 2</b>	School resources	PD	School resources	PD
	Reaching one’s goals	SD	School curriculum	PD
	Education	P	Self-development	SD
	School curriculum	P	Self-identity	P
	Ensuring care and safety	PO	Reaching goals	PO

\*PD (Primary Driver), SD (Secondary Driver), P (Pivot), PO (Primary Outcome), SO (Secondary Outcome)

**Figure 5.4: Focus group affinities**

Figure 5.4 gives a visual representation of the perceptions of the middle-adolescent learners from township schools 1 and 2 in answer to the questions contained in the issue statement. The SIDs (Figures 4.7, 4.10, 4.12, and 4.14) and the definition of affinities (Figure 4.2) help finally in answering the research questions. Affinities in Figure 4.2 that were positively defined can be perceived to acknowledge the schools' contribution to the resilience of learners and those that were negatively constructed should be taken to indicate critical matters that require attending to, to improve the school's contribution, and that might even be detrimental to the resilience of their learners. Thus in explaining contributions in the perceived interactions with reference to the Bioecological model, I will be directed by the SIDs and how the affinities were defined.

The resilient and less-resilient learners, as expected, had different expectations from the school and this influenced what they judged the contribution of the school to be. The resilient learners of School 1, RG1, acknowledged the role of the school in their resilience most strongly and directly of all the focus groups and their drivers and outcomes reflected the factors of commitment, toughness and confidence in achieving their goals as these were indicated in the R-MATS factor analysis. RG1 was clear in their views and their SID was not complex. LRG1 was considerably less acknowledging of the school, with a strong shift towards the family microsystem. Both focus groups of School 2 were less acknowledging of the school, expressly considering a lack of school resources to impact on their resilience.

In their school microsystem, RG1 viewed the school environment to be supportive and accommodating especially of their demand characteristics in their developmental phase of adolescence, thereby mapping fully onto Bioecological theory. They acknowledged the importance of school rules which engaged them effectively, even though some were not strictly enforced. However, they actually wanted the school to strictly enforce the rules and to be consistent in how these structured the demands and interactions and thereby the proximal processes in which they were involved. They were aware of their own growth from the challenges that they met in life, including those specifically posed by the school and adolescence as drivers, and perceived their goals to be positive. The resilience characteristics of confidence in self and internal locus of control, commitment and accessing of social support are evident in how they defined their affinities and structured their SID. Achievement orientation, the last of the resilience factors emerging from the R-MATS, is indeed the primary outcome of the school's contribution to the RG1.

LRG1 were not aware of what RG1 learners identified in the self-same school microsystem. They perceived the school so differently that it was virtually unrecognisable as the same context and definitely, through an apparent lack of much proximal processing, constituted a

different microsystem. In their perceptions, the less resilient learners of School 1 identified the home microsystem to be of central importance in who they were, because it was the process of socialisation that was to them the primary driver. They viewed themselves as having developed their personalities on the grounds of socialisation, in the proximal processes engaged in the home, hereby showing a somewhat external locus of control, and appeared fairly unaware of their own role and demand characteristics in becoming a friendly person or a bully. However, their understanding of how being friendly influenced how they dealt with challenges and how being a bully might directly influence their goal attainment, does imply some measure of an internal locus of control. Because of their lack of deep engagement with their school environment at the level of proximal processing, they perceived some challenges that they addressed by being friendly as actually unmanageable. The learners lacked confidence in their abilities. Their future goals, which were the outcome of their relationship with the school, depended on their ability to manage their challenges, but because of some lack of commitment and resolve, attainment of their future goals was sometimes doubtful.

In their school microsystem, RG2 viewed the school environment to be less supportive of their needs in reaching goals and experiencing success. They challenged the school policies and rules which, they perceived, unfairly denied them access to that which they regarded as the primary driver of a condition of care and safety, i.e. the school resources. Because the affinity is negatively defined in Figure 4.2, it casts doubt on the content and quality of their goal attainment and the education and curriculum the school provides are not acknowledged to be drivers. The demand imposed expressly was for the school to make good on the meagre resources it provided so that they could realise their goals, within a context of good education that could inform them to learn in the 'right' curriculum. The fact that goal attainment was to them a secondary driver instead of an outcome as to all the other focus groups, underscores their consumer or utilitarian attitude. Their proximal processes with the school environment were primarily informative and educational, for the school to enforce policy and thus provide care and safety. No mention was made of involvement with educators at a more personal level, leading me to infer that the proximal processes were of a formal and perhaps distanced nature, and were not focused on learners' growth as much as on an ordered, safe environment. RG2 learners through their R-MATS results demonstrated confidence, internal locus of control, commitment and resolution and in the focus group suggested solutions on how the school should provide a good education and a safe learning environment, i.e. through good implementation of school policies. The inaccessibility of resources in their school, e.g. library and computer laboratories, was unacceptable to them and thus they identified the school's weakness as poor engagement with their needs. Indirectly, RG2 learners were acknowledging the school's resources as adequate but criticising the management for not having an

accommodating policy and that to them was directly detrimental to their learning and goal attainment.

LRG2 learners identified school resources and school curriculum as primary drivers that influenced who they were. LRG2 was less acknowledging of the school's role as contributing positively to who they were. The two affinities were negatively constructed and ultimately thus negatively influencing their goal attainment. The nature of the two primary drivers does not permit much to occur in the line of proximal processes. The irony of their perceived self-development and self-identity in their school microsystem lies in the relationships shown by the SID, whereby self-development as a secondary driver and self-identity as a pivot (and with circular effect) appear somewhat isolated from, if not even opposed to, that which the school by and large fail to deliver. Again, the consistent and enduring interaction of a proximal process seems to be lacking, and the effect on development and identity turned out to be negative with failed or disappointing goals. However, because self-identity is a pivot, it could swing things around for them should self-development be positive, like a friendly learner who engages with the school effectively and thus develops a healthy sense of self, which could then feed into more successful goal attainment.

Like LRG1, the growth and development of LRG2 learners were presumed to be outside their control. Their perception of self-identity influencing the reaching of goals makes sense, since knowing who you are (identity) helps one to know what one wants in life. Another resemblance between the two less-resilient focus groups, the focus on self and personal attributes, suggests inadequate interaction with the school and therefore a sense of lack of support and access to resources, which cast them back onto their own personal skills and strengths instead of developing through the educational input of the school. The less-resilient learners from township schools thus regarded the skills learned from socialisation and self-development important in shaping their sense of self in a school microsystem with which they did not interact richly, ceding control without actively engaging in proximal processes with their environment, an external locus of control. The less-resilient learners in township schools were more passive about what such microsystems offered without questioning.

The resilient and less-resilient learners from School 1 and School 2 perceived the role of the school differently and similarly had different goals. This underscores the relevance of the Bioecological model with its emphasis on context and development as primary elements. The learners' perceptions of the schools might not be accurate or might not reflect the intentions of the school management teams, but in differing for the resilient and less-resilient group of each school, illustrate how personal characteristics are integral to interaction and perception. What was consistent with all the groups was their focus on future goals, although those were also

perceived differently. The resilient groups wanted structure, discipline and good implementation of policies in their school environment, because they actively interacted with their environment, by questioning and suggesting solutions, they demonstrated growth, power, and directed their proximal processes towards finding solutions. They questioned wastage of unused resources in their school context and motivated for change, thus their resilient-person characteristics directed the proximal processes to benefit them. The less-resilient learners lacked the ability to engage and question in their proximal processes, they learned to cope with what they got, which negatively affected their developmental outcomes. It appeared to feel they lacked influence and the motivational power to drive the proximal processes, and merely took what was offered with less questioning. In their interactions, they did not invite exploration, manipulation and imagination like the resilient learners, thus according to Bronfenbrenner 2005 (2005:6-7), they were actually not engaged in proximal processes because they lacked the drive, motivation and disposition characteristics that the resilient learners demonstrated.

In conclusion, the less-resilient learners required assistance from their microsystems of home and school to empower them with a sense of autonomy and control and growth in order to engage with challenges effectively, yet ironically were not engaging sufficiently to benefit from available support services.

### **5.3 DISCUSSION OF PHASE 1 AND 2 RESULTS USING THE RESILIENCY WHEEL**

The design and function of the R-MATS falls within the phenomenological wave, which forms the first wave of resilience research, which aimed to identify the resilience of respondents, using resilience characteristics (Richardson 2002:302). Richardson (2002:313) argues that it is not enough to identify the resilience characteristics of individuals since that negates the process nature of resilience. The second wave of resilience research aimed to understand the process nature of resilience in answer to the questions ‘How does resilience manifest?’ and ‘What are the individual forces that make one resilient?’ Masten (2007:923) relates the third wave interventions to the provision of ‘cushion’ or protective factors to help children in distress through provision of supportive programmes.

Preventative programmes were designed as one way of helping to answer the ‘what’ question of resilience, because ethically it was not possible for researchers to watch and observe how resilience manifests in children exposed to adversity, without offering the required support to mitigate the risks. The Resiliency Wheel (Henderson & Milstein 2003), as a third wave programme, aims to mitigate risk and build resilience in individuals.

But could the exposure to resilience building programmes in a black-only township school help to mitigate the learner’s response to risk factors in their development? To compare and

contrast a programme (the Resiliency Wheel) which functions at the application level to prevent risk and empower individuals, with the results of an instrument to assess an individual's resilience characteristics (the R-MATS) could be implausible because they serve different purposes. However, both instruments share the foundation principles of the first wave of resilience, which aims to identify what makes individuals resilient. Since the R-MATS measures the resilience of a particular group, middle-adolescents from township schools, it serves to test the Resiliency Wheel as to its representativity. The identified resilience factors of the R-MATS, which emerged as the building blocks of resilience for the particular participants in this study, are essential to identify and contrast with what the Resiliency Wheel aims to empower students, and to deduce possibly additional components for effective use of the Resiliency Wheel in the unique context of a township.

The Resiliency Wheel of Henderson and Milstein (2003:11) consists of six segments divided into three resilience building components and three risk mitigating components (refer to Chapter 1 Figure 1.1).

Figure 5.5 represents R-MATS Section A risk factors, and the background information for the less-resilient middle-adolescent learners in township schools. Using the Resiliency Wheel (Henderson & Milstein 2003) preventative and supportive strategies could be suggested to help learners in their developmental environment. Furthermore, it is assumed that the complexity of the adversity the learners in township schools are exposed to might not be addressed by the Resiliency Wheel, it is thus important to understand whether the Resiliency Wheel is a relevant programme to use in a township environment or with further suggestions, how to implement the wheel to benefit learners from the two township schools.

<b>R-MATS Section A Risk Factors</b>	<b>Resiliency Wheel* Mitigating risk factors</b>	<b>Resiliency Wheel* Building resilience</b>
Fight a lot at school	2, 3	4, 5,6
Abuse at home	3	4,5,6
Bad treatment at home	1, 3	4,5,6
Many stressors	1,2,3	4,5,6
Repeated a grade	2,3	4,5,6
No formal house structure		4,5,6
Unemployment		4,5,6
Insufficient food		4,5,6

R-MATS Section A Risk Factors	Resiliency Wheel* Mitigating risk factors	Resiliency Wheel* Building resilience
Not living with parents	1,3	4,5,6
Orphan	1,3	4,5,6
Bad life experiences	1,3	4,5,6

\*1 Increase prosocial bonding  
 2 Set clear consistent boundaries  
 3 Teach life skills

4 Provide caring and support  
 5 Set and communicate high expectations  
 6 Provide opportunities for meaningful participation

**Figure 5.5: Mapping R-MATS Section A risk factors with Resiliency Wheel components**

The Resiliency Wheel components of mitigating risk factors aim to mitigate the impact of risk in the school environment to set the impetus for resilience to occur. For eight of the eleven risk factors included in Section A, the three components appear relevant. The components were not developed to mitigate risk factors which result directly from circumstances in the exosystem, such as no formal housing structure, unemployment of family members and insufficient food. These three risk factors require immediate and consistent material intervention like nutrition or a feeding scheme from the school with monthly contribution of food parcels from the Department of Social Services, a social grant to parents to ensure regular and reliable monthly access to funding to sustain the family and a proper housing structure from the Department of Housing.

All the resilience building components of the Resiliency Wheel map well with all the risk factors. The Resiliency Wheel holds greater potential for empowering learners by means of resilience supporting characteristics to build their resilience, because every learner requires resilience characteristics to help them succeed in their environment to lead healthy lives. Therefore, I expected the factor analysis results to map closely onto the Resiliency Wheel's resilience building components. In a township school environment, if multi-sectorial collaborations are not actively sought and implemented to support the learner experiencing severe adverse circumstances, the Resiliency Wheel cannot be applied effectively as is, to help mitigate the impact of risk on the learner.

Figure 5.6 then presents the four resilience factors that were identified in the factor analysis of Section B of the R-MATS, inverted to characteristics of less-resilience.



R-MATS factors inverted to characteristics of less-resilience	Resiliency Wheel* Mitigating risk factors	Resiliency Wheel* Building resilience
Lack of or less confidence in self, external locus of control	3	4,5,6
Lack of or less social support	1,3	4, 6
Lack of or less perseverance and commitment	3	4,5,6
Lack of or weak achievement orientation	2,3	4,5,6

\*1 Increase prosocial bonding  
 2 Set clear consistent boundaries  
 3 Teach life skills

4 Provide caring and support  
 5 Set and communicate high expectations  
 6 Provide opportunities for meaningful participation

### Figure 5.6: Mapping less-resilience factors and the Resiliency Wheel components

Figure 5.6 indicates that, to mitigate the impact of risk on the less-resilient middle-adolescent learner in a township school, teaching life-skills is important in respect of all four resilience factors, but increasing prosocial bonding and setting clear consistent boundaries apparently less so.

The two township schools that participated in the research indeed both offer a life skill programme, Life Orientation, as a curricular subject which could be regarded as a strength in terms of the Resiliency Wheel. But the question is, has the learners' exposure to the Life Orientation subject helped to mitigate the impact of the risk factors they were exposed to in their home environment? Is the curricular content appropriate for learners specifically in a township school?

The resiliency building segment of providing care and support, which according to Henderson and Milstein (3003:13) is most critical and fundamental in overcoming adversity is, according to Figure 5.6, relevant for all factors in building resilience for middle-adolescents in a township school. The Resiliency Wheel segment of providing opportunities for meaningful participation appears equally essential for actively involving learners in the activities of the school. However, the component of setting and communicating high expectations appears difficult to map with less-resilient learners' lack or less social support because such learners perceived 'no adult' or person was there to encourage them in order to achieve their goals and full potential.

While the Resiliency Wheel programme purposes to build resilience in the environment, the affinities were generated in Phase 2 in answer to the questions '*How does the school contribute to who you are?*' and '*What is it that the school fails to do that affects who you are?*' thus they answered the questions about the township school's contribution to their resilience.

In mapping the Resiliency Wheel to the affinities I will then ask the following question, ‘What is there in the school that is operating more or less as the Resiliency Wheel would want?’ Of the two resilient focus groups, RG1 had higher resilience scores than RG2 (Table 4.1), and according to their affinities were more receptive of their school environment. As a result I will use their affinities to map on the Resiliency Wheel and if their affinities map well, one could agree that the components of the Resiliency Wheel should be made explicit for application in the township school environment. It is my assumption that by mapping RG1 affinities to the Resiliency Wheel it could give some direction on the following question, ‘What should happen to make less-resilient learners aware of and utilise available school resources?’ Figure 5.7 presents the affinities generated by the RG1 mapped with Resiliency Wheel segments.

School	Focus groups affinities	Resiliency Wheel Risk mitigating	Resiliency Wheel Building resilience
RG1	School environment	1, 2, 3	4, 5, 6
	Adolescence	1,3	4, 6
	School rules	2	5,
	Challenges in life	1, 3	5
	Positive future goals	1, 2, 3	4, 5, 6

\*1 Increase prosocial bonding  
 2 Set clear consistent boundaries  
 3 Teach life skills

4 Provide caring and support  
 5 Set and communicate high expectations  
 6 Provide opportunities for meaningful participation

**Figure 5.7: Mapping RG1 affinities with Resiliency Wheel segments**

The segment of mitigating risk in the environment, increasing prosocial bonding, which encompasses positive bonding, features in all the affinities of RG1 excepting school rules, which indicates the emphasis on positive relationships laid by this focus group. Teaching of life skills also features in all the affinities and relates to the perceived importance of life skills to RG1. The segment of setting clear and consistent boundaries which relates to consistency of policy implementation, does not feature as much. This is further emphasising the group’s need for clear and consistent rules in their township school environment. Thus, in mitigating risk in the township school environment it is important for the school to set and communicate clear and consistent boundaries.

The segment on building resilience in the environment that features most in the affinities of RG1 is, setting and communicating high expectations, which includes motivation, encouragement and setting high but realistic goals for learners. Providing care and support does not feature with school rules and challenges in life, considering that some of the RG1 learners according to affinities in Figure 4.2 considered rules to be inconsistently enforced and

their challenges in life allude to conflicts in life and sometimes with significant others. At least three out of five affinities of RG1 mapped with the Resiliency Wheel segments. Another focus group of learners with the optimal resilience score on the R-MATS could generate different affinities, but RG1 indicated that the Resiliency Wheel programme can be applied in township schools.

#### **5.4 FINALLY ANSWERING MY RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The main question that directed the focus of this study is:

*How does the school influence the resilience of middle-adolescent learners in a black-only township school?*

The research question was clarified by the two sub-questions:

- a. What are middle-adolescent resilient learners' experiences of their black-only township school system?
- b. What are middle-adolescent less-resilient learners' experiences of their black-only township school system?

The resilient middle-adolescent learners from the two black-only township schools participating in the study, differed in their acknowledgement of the contribution of their school on their resilience and development. The learners of School 1 were aware of the school policies e.g. discipline policy and engaged with them to benefit from their environment and grow despite their adversities. RG1 perceived the school environment to be accommodating and sensitive of their adolescent stage. As a result, they accepted and embraced the challenges of their developmental phase because the school was supportive. The clearly defined and articulated school rules helped in providing them with clear and consistent boundaries. They were confident that because of their supportive school environment they would achieve their perceived positive goals. RG2 experienced their school environment as less-supportive and although they acknowledged it had educational resources, access was in their view not provided. They were critical of the school. The inaccessibility of the resources from the school was perceived to negatively influence their ability to reach their goals, and so they were not benefiting from the 'good' education and the 'good' school curriculum they felt they deserved. Thus, the outcome for these learners was only care and safety from their school instead of future success. School 2 seems to strive for implementation of policy and clearly defined rules, structure and consistency, but was not yet purposefully supporting the personal growth and learning of their learners.

The less-resilient learners from the black-only township schools experienced their school environment as less supportive of them. They struggled in different ways to access school

resources actually available to them. LRG1 experienced School 1 as merely an environment where they could use their personalities to grow and develop, or could just exist. They perceived the socialisation from the home environment to be the primary driver of their resilience and failed to notice any directly constructive value in the school. The less-resilient friendly learners experienced some challenges as a result of their socialised selves which, when not well resolved, might affect their future goals negatively, but which the setting of the school could sometimes support them in resolving. The bully learners on the other hand interacted minimally with their school environment. The learners of LRG2 were dissatisfied with meagre school resources and a 'poor' school curriculum. They felt the denied access to available school resources actually affected their development negatively and thus their sense of self (self-identity). The less-resilient learners actually accused their school for their less-resilience because in their view it stunted their growth and their prospects of reaching goals.

The answer to the main research question, '*How does the school influence the resilience of middle-adolescent learners in a black-only township school?*' then cannot but depend on both the school and the learner. The influence of the school varies depending on the degree of resilience of the learner and the school environment.

The two township schools differed. School 1 appeared to be a warm and supportive environment because the resilient learners acknowledged the school's role as positively influencing their resilience and the less-resilient learners did not blame the school for their less-resilience, but merely failed to recognise much support coming from there. School 1 influenced the resilience of the resilient learners positively by providing a supportive teaching and learning environment that particularly accommodated the adolescent stage of development and thus made the challenges encountered by them manageable and created an impetus for realising positive future goals. Again, the school environment influenced the future goals of learners by exposing them to various experiences as presented by their peers, e.g. poverty. By virtue of accommodating learners with different personalities from different family backgrounds and exposing them to various challenges and opportunity to coexist and interact, the less-resilient learners realised their need for growth and development in order to experience perceived future goals.

School 2 influenced the resilience of all the learners negatively by perceivably denying them access to school resources and thus even providing a 'poor' school curriculum. The school was consequently accused of impacting negatively on the prospect of learners reaching their goals. Resilient learners perceived the degree of care and safety experienced, both positive and negative, as the primary outcome of their relationship with the school.

The needs of learners within the same school environment also differed. The learners placed much emphasis on reaching goals and the school as a context of development was perceived to influence reaching goals positively or negatively. School curriculum and education were important in all the focus groups. Learners required a supportive school environment with clearly defined and implemented rules and policies. Because future goals were important to them, 'good' education and a 'good' curriculum were essential to the middle-adolescent learners in township schools.

## **5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

In the limitations of the study I will look at myself as the researcher, the research process and the learners as the participants.

### **5.5.1 PHASE 1**

In Phase 1, time allocated for the administration of the R-MATS was not sufficient and might have created pressure for learners to work quickly in preparation for the next class. It is understandable that schools cannot afford to make any concessions for research activities during curricular hours.

The R-MATS is an English instrument and language could furthermore have limited the ability of learners to engage effectively with items in addition to requiring more time to read and comprehend each item.

The Likert-scale nature of the questionnaire was finally a challenge in terms of their ability or readiness to choose the degree that best described their perceptions, which possibly contributed to an inflation of their scores and thus impacted negatively on assessment reliability in spite of the favourable statistics.

### **5.5.2 PHASE 2**

In Phase 2, the time allocated for focus groups was after school hours and required extra commitment of the learners. As a result, focus groups lasted a maximum of only 2 hours, to ensure their safety, especially those who walked home in groups.

The sample size is a further limitation of the study. Four learners in each focus group is a small number, especially if group dynamics are not well managed, which could have led to the ideas of dominant learners overriding other members' participation. This limitation was overcome

through silent nominal coding, which provided the opportunity for each participant to generate affinities silently and thus participate effectively.

My role as a researcher especially in defining, grouping and naming the affinities to not influence the direction, thoughts and ideas of the groups, was guided by consistently confirming the descriptions and definition of concepts with the group, to ensure that I captured their ideas and thoughts in explaining the affinities. In School 2, the affinities of RG2 and LRG2 which were similar (school resources, school curriculum and reaching goals) could perhaps be partly due to my role or to discussions that might have occurred among the participants outside of the focus groups.

A further limitation is the use of a relatively new research method, IQA, because of the limited literature available, making the authors Northcutt and McCoy (2004) the only authority in the method. IQA is highly structured and requires the researcher to closely follow suggested steps to implement the process effectively to ensure the results will be reliable. The limitation of the IQA method is that, it limits the involvement of the researcher, leaving little room to improvise and requiring her to follow the suggested procedures precisely. If the researcher is not highly knowledgeable in the method it becomes a problem because she is strictly guided by the process and steps to follow. The process I followed when conducting interviews is not how Northcutt and McCoy (2004) is not IQA suggests.

## **5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY**

I would like to make recommendations for further research only. I am convinced that as a researcher I am not able to make recommendations for practice nor assume control over how the findings of this study could be implemented or interpreted.

Regarding further research, I recommend that this study be replicated using multiple black-only township schools in other parts of the country, to further explore and understand the perceived relationship between middle-adolescent learners and their township school environment. This study was conducted in one township, Mamelodi.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to understand the perceptions of resilient and less-resilient learners in higher grades from the same township school context, e.g. Grade 10, 11 and 12 learners.

A further recommendation includes conducting applied research using the Resiliency Wheel to determine the relevance of all the segments for less-resilient township school learners and its value in mitigating risk and building resilience in learners.

I further recommend that the validity of the R-MATS be further tested especially since township learners have the inclination to over-evaluate themselves. This is a problem that can be further explored and must if possible be prevented in further research.

## **5.7 A FINAL REMARK**

It is evident that township learners are exposed to numerous adversities and support is needed to help them make it in their environment. The school is one of the contexts that can help them reach their future goals. The school managers have the responsibility to ensure that the township school context will cater effectively for the needs of learners in township schools. Inclusive education makes it possible for every school to have support structures for identification and referral of learners with stressors and problems in their environment. Such structures are important for learners in township schools. Thus, the school needs to act to support learners.

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