

In-service teacher training to provide psychosocial support and care in high-risk and high-need schools: school-based intervention partnerships

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This article uses a South African case study to argue that postcolonial, emerging economy societies in transition often contain schools characterised as high risk and high need. Such schools require teachers to adapt to roles other than facilitating learning, such as psychosocial support and care, and which requires additional professional development. In the absence of structured teacher professional development programmes, alternatives are required to assist teachers. The paper describes a nine-year partnership between higher education researchers and teachers in high-risk and high-need schools in three South African provinces. The participatory reflection and action (PRA) study served as platform for a school-based intervention to assist in-service teachers to adapt to their additional responsibilities. Thematic analysis was used to identify the ways in which teachers' adaptation to high risk benefitted from the programme, and self-determination theory is used to argue for a dynamic and interconnected relationship between the teachers' demonstrated pathways to psychosocial support and care. The article argues that in socio-politically transforming societies where need is high for in-service teacher training and formal structures for teacher professional development may be limited, partnerships between researchers and teachers appear to be useful platforms for school-based interventions to support teacher resilience.

Keywords: school-based intervention; in-service teacher education; higher education–schools partnership; psychosocial support and care; teacher resilience; high-risk school settings; self-determination theory

Introduction

Teacher roles when risk and need is high

World-wide transformation in education requires responsive innovation from teachers as the classroom-based implementers of policy. In response to changing demands, teachers have always needed to adapt to additional roles in their classrooms as well as to practices outside the classroom (Bailey 2000; Valli and Buese 2007). In the United States, the Education Act of 2001, [No Child Left Behind](#) (NCLB 2000), resulted in changes in the expectations of teachers' roles. In this regard, Valli and Buese (2007) found that teachers' roles and responsibilities had increased, intensified and extended significantly in response to policies that focus on

increasing student achievement. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, Harden and Crosby (2000) report on the changing roles and responsibilities of teachers.

Teacher responsiveness is especially necessary in schools characterised as high risk and high need due to a variety of factors (Parret and Budge 2012). Seldom are school–communities at more risk and in more need than in emerging economy societies, where expectations for innovative teacher adaptation necessarily are also higher. Schools and teachers represent some of the few available resources to support child development in spaces where services are limited, parents may be migrant workers, death and bereavement occurs often and violence and crime are high. Schools, as microsystems nested within socio-political transformation, mirror the most admirable and appalling consequences of societies in transition. Schools display the effect of generations of under-trained in-service teachers (Begeny and Martens 2006), and they show the toxic effect of children and families living in extreme poverty combined with continued limited access to health and social development services. Schools bear the brunt of multilingual teaching and training policy decisions, especially where the language of instruction may not be the home language of either teachers or students. It follows that such transitional postcolonial contexts require specific skill sets of teachers. Rather than exclusively focusing on facilitating learning, teachers also need to respond to hunger, be equipped to assist classrooms filled with bereaved students due to HIV and AIDS and tuberculosis-related deaths, be available for afterschool assistance when the majority of parents or caregivers cannot assist with homework due to illiteracy and continue to create an enabling environment where learning and development is possible and students may aspire to access higher education and career opportunities. Besides obvious requirements to adjust curricula of pre-service teachers, it is also necessary to study ways in which in-service teachers may be assisted to acquire the necessary competence to function effectively and be retained as teachers (Hökkä and Eteläpelto 2014).

Globally, policy usually directs norms and standards for teacher professional development. In the case of South Africa, the Policy on Continuous Professional Teacher Development provides a framework for much-needed in-service teacher education (Du Plessis and Louw 2008). However, in socio-politically transforming societies the absence of adequate structures to implement an array of changing policies, leave teachers in despair when trying to access development opportunities. An important issue therefore is how in-service teacher capacity may be enhanced in the absence of governmental support.

Intervention research, and especially school-based intervention, has proven an effective mechanism to study the field of education and health's responses to need (Fergusson et al. 2011; Gruenewald 2003). When need is high and resources are constrained, characteristic of many Global South nations, school-based intervention is especially advantageous. Not only can knowledge be generated, but teacher-participation potentially holds immediate benefits. So rather than teachers being vessels for researcher outputs, school-based intervention implies mutuality for both researchers as well as teachers in high-risk and high-need schools.

South Africa, as the most unequal society in the world (OXFAM 2013; The World Bank 2012), provides a favourable backdrop to study issues related to high-risk and high-need schools. It is therefore not surprising that the South African policy governing teacher roles and competencies also calls for change in teachers' traditional roles and responsibilities (Harley et al. 2000). These additional teacher

roles are often evaluated as burdens. In South Africa, various studies express concerns, including the practical reality of these roles in a South African classroom (Harley et al. 2000; Jansen 2001); teachers' competency in performing the roles (Bhana et al. 2006; Smit and Fritz 2008); the conflict between teachers' policy image and teachers' personal identities (Jansen 2001); and the concomitant additional sacrifices and workload (Bhana et al. 2006). Furthermore, the ways in which teachers provide psychosocial support and care, and their readiness to take up a pastoral role, remain under-researched (Schierhout et al. 2004). Jansen (2001) states that teachers' community, citizenship and pastoral role (DoE 2000) are a picture of the ideal teacher for policy makers and are not always practical in a South African classroom. Therefore, if teachers do not have the necessary competencies to fulfil their pastoral role in providing psychosocial support and care, their stress levels could be exacerbated.

Besides the policy imperatives of their role as teacher, teachers in high-risk school settings are confronted with additional stressors such as poverty and financial pressure (Smit and Fritz 2008). These stressors include less access to educational resources, a lower quality of education, lower academic performance and less communication between parents and schools, crowded surroundings, higher levels of crime, greater residential instability and lower social support (Dass-Brailsford 2005). Bhana et al. (2006) argue that there is a greater need for psychosocial support and care in schools with fewer resources and at lower socio-economic levels. This is particularly the case in South Africa where the growing number of socio-economic barriers in South Africa has devastating effects on individuals, families, schools and communities (Meintjes et al. 2009; Smit and Fritz 2008).

Partnerships: teacher resilience

Increasingly studies on teacher resilience have found that teachers are extremely adaptive, whether in affluent (Benders and Jackson 2012; Nadel and Sagawa 2002), or resource constrained, societies (Ebersöhn 2014). Despite concerns about teachers' multiple roles, evidence of teachers' positive adaptation has especially been prominent with regard to providing psychosocial support and care in at-risk school context (Flores and Day 2006; Richter 2003). Swart and Pettipher (2001) refer to teachers as potential agents for change, in that their actions could have a ripple effect on the learning context, school and community. Stewart et al. (2004) highlight how schools and teachers can act as protective resources for care and support.

One pathway of teacher development is through partnerships. In their work on teacher resilience, Mansfield, Beltman, and Price (2014) note the importance of partnerships, which they define as contextual resources, to support early career teachers to remain as teachers. Similarly, Ebersöhn (2012) found that teachers' adaptation was supported by them flocking together in partnerships with peers, as well as a range of school-community service providers. Teachers have a specific role in negotiating collaboration and partnerships between schools and communities as the starting point for support initiatives (Thompson et al. 2005). The importance of such collaborative partnerships as a key to teachers' roles as agents for change, which include collaborative problem-solving between role-players and peer coaching where teachers collaborate in acquiring new skills through sharing, observing and teaching one another, cannot be overstated (see Swart and Pettipher 2001).

Teachers therefore use collaboration and partnership between schools and communities to provide support (Thompson et al. 2005). In Australia, Flowers and Waddell (2004) found that teachers were able to act as supporters, motivators and mentors, and as resourceful coordinators and inventive strategic thinkers, who were able to build sustainable community structures. Partnering relationships among teachers, school staff members and other related professionals and resources were shown to play a key role in building resilient schools (Barley and Beesley 2007), with Theron and Theron (2010) urging that professionals should partner with communities and community representatives in an effort to promote resilience.

Against such a background, this paper argues that teachers (specifically in high-risk school settings) are in need of adjusting effectively to their changing roles. One way of developing their competencies and skills to provide psychosocial care and support is through a higher education–schools partnership.

School-based intervention

The paper focuses on the in-service teachers who were purposively selected to participate in a longitudinal higher education–schools partnership (supportive teachers assets and resilience: STAR), which is theoretically grounded in the asset-based approach and aimed at capacity building to promote resilience and support in high-risk schools. The STAR intervention partnership study started with a pilot phase with ten teachers from a primary school in an informal settlement in the Eastern Cape consisting of several interrelated studies and was replicated in two other South African provinces (two urban primary schools in Gauteng, as well as a rural secondary school in Mpumalanga) (Ferreira and Ebersöhn 2011, 2012).

The asset-based, in contrast to the needs-based, approach, focuses on assets, strengths, resources, capacities and skills (Kretzmann and McKnight 1996). Eloff (2006) argues that challenges are progressively being addressed by focusing on the available assets and resources that could enable people to deal more efficiently with challenges. Needs and barriers could therefore be addressed by mobilising individual assets and resources in systems. In line with psychosocial support and care, the fundamental principles of the asset-based approach include joint ownership and responsibility, practical solutions, a caring and supportive environment, building individuals' strengths, and ennoblement, together with collaboration and the establishment of partnerships and networks (Eloff 2006). Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006) identified the shared denominators existing between effective and sustainable care and support interventions, namely community-based participation, building and strengthening internal capacities, community resource mobilisation, networking and establishing links, advocacy, using indigenous knowledge and practices, and information sharing. They linked these trends with the asset-based approach and present the asset-based theoretical framework as one explanation for sustainability in supporting vulnerable children.

STAR aimed at providing in-service teachers with knowledge about the asset-based approach, as well as psychosocial support. The purpose was to determine if teachers, as protective resources, could use their intervention knowledge to promote resilience in high-risk school settings. In STAR, the researchers wanted to use a school-based intervention to generate knowledge on how to provide in-service teachers with competencies to adapt to chronic need in school settings and thereby act as protective resources to promote resilience (Bhana et al. 2006; Smit and Fritz 2008;

Theron et al. 2008). As Gilman, Huebner, and Furlong (2014, 5) state, ‘Schools ... constitute an important and fertile environment in which positive attributes, psychological assets, and character strengths can be developed and maintained’.

In the context of the asset-based approach, the starting point in STAR is that each of the participating teachers possesses strengths and that each school context has resources. Based on belief in the presence of assets and resources in individuals and systems, the participating teachers in the STAR intervention became familiar with the asset-based approach. STAR intervention sessions were conducted in the classrooms of the respective schools at three-month intervals over a one-year time frame. The intervention sessions included the following: insider (here the teachers) mapping of the community; identifying its assets/resources, its potential assets/resources as well as the challenges in the community; identifying needs and potential ways of addressing them; initiating school-based psychosocial support initiatives; developing plans of action to implement the identified projects and initiatives; monitoring the progress of the projects and planning the way forward; and reflecting on sustaining the STAR initiatives (Ferreira and Ebersöhn 2012). Subsequent to STAR, the teachers were able to implement the asset-based approach to provide psychosocial support by identifying, mobilising and managing assets and resources. This notion connects with similar initiatives in China (Tian et al. 2014), Britain (Proctor 2014), Italy (Di Fabio, Kenny, and Minor 2014), Australia (Green 2014) and Portugal (Marques and Lopez 2014).

Self-determination theory as theoretical framework

In line with the asset-based approach, the self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci 2002) regards human beings as dynamic and active in inherently searching for and engaging in challenges in their environments in an attempt to actualise their potential, capacities and sensibilities. The theory of self-determination, as a theoretical framework for the study reported here, posits three fundamental psychological needs, namely competence, relatedness and autonomy.

The first psychological need is *competence*, which refers to a feeling of efficiency and effectiveness in one’s interactions with the social environment and experiencing opportunities to apply one’s capabilities. The basic need for competence generally guides people to search for challenges that are optimal for their capabilities and continually to attempt to maintain and develop their skills and abilities through activity.

Relatedness refers to feeling connected to others, to supporting and caring for others and being supported and cared for by others. Relatedness implies a sense of belongingness and unity with others and with one’s community (Ryan and Deci 2002). This view is supported by McKenna and Green (2003), who classify the need to belong as one of the most basic needs at an interpersonal level. This psychological need is further confirmed by Toseland and Rivas (2005) in their work on understanding group dynamics. These authors give reasons for people’s attraction to groups, which include the need for relatedness, recognition and security.

Autonomy refers to being the perceived source of one’s own behaviour and an expression of the self. When individuals are autonomous, they experience their behaviour as an expression of the self and they feel in control of situations (Ryan and Deci 2002). Similar to the asset-based approach’s focus on well-being and

self-actualisation; the self-determination theory posits that optimal well-being results when the basic psychological needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy are fulfilled (Patrick et al. 2007).

Methodology and methods

Meta-theoretically, the reported study is framed in interpretivism (Denzin and Lincoln 2000) and a comparative case study research design was used (Creswell 2005). The research followed a participatory, reflection and action (PRA) (Chambers 2008) approach, enabling the intervention team to co-facilitate change (in partnership with teachers) by evoking agency instead of ‘solving problems’. In implementing PRA principles, the researchers regarded the participants as the experts who know their realities best, both in terms of challenges and potential solutions. As such, the researchers treated the teachers as co-researchers and therefore co-generators of knowledge.

This PRA-intervention study included purposively sampled cases of high-risk schools ($n = 4$, primary schools = 3; high school = 1) in three South African provinces. Criteria for ‘high-risk school setting’ included school–community and household indicators of socioeconomic level (indicated by household level) and the prevalence of HIV-infected and affected households (indicated by disclosed HIV-positive status in households). The school principals directed the purposive selection of in-service teachers ($n = 33$) who they had experienced as committed to promoting access to, and performance in, education.

For data collection, the study relied on PRA-based workshop sessions with participating teachers at the respective schools. After exploring their school environments and contexts in terms of challenges, assets and potential assets, teachers were guided to plan and initiate school-based supportive programmes for vulnerable children and their families. The nine-year longitudinal participatory, reflection and action data sources were documented in research diaries, field notes, photographs and audio-recordings. Focus group discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed. The analysis of data was informed by Charmaz’s (2000) constructivist grounded theory of thematic analysis and interpretation. Through the thematic analysis and interpretation method, the researchers acknowledged the co-creation of knowledge and meaning by both the viewer (researcher) and the viewed (participants); and endeavoured to create an understanding of the participants’ meanings. In following a comparative research design, the researchers compared the data of the four schools during data analysis, keeping in mind both the similarities and differences between the school settings.

The study endeavoured to promote a study of soundness, transparency and rigour, by paying careful attention to the following quality criteria as guiding principles: credibility, transferability, dependability, conformability and authenticity (Seale 2002). The researchers defended their claims and explanations by comparing cases with one another as well as with studies in the literature. This process included the search for negative cases and the consideration of alternative explanations for findings. As part of PRA, the study used member checking by verifying the themes and confirming the accuracy with which the participants’ views were represented (Fritz and Smit 2008; Janesick 2000). Another strategy employed to make the study more credible was the prolonged engagement in the research field. The researchers guarded against quick conclusions and continued the fieldwork until the data had

become saturated. Throughout the study, the researchers acknowledged and reflected on the possible influence of researcher bias. In this regard, they used a research journal to reflect on their own experiences, perceptions and assumptions. Through rich descriptions of each school context and the provision of an audit trail, the researchers attempted to enhance the credibility, dependability and confirmability of the study (Janesick 2000).

Although each of the four participating school contexts had unique characteristics, challenges and assets, the four participating cases shared similar typical socio-economic factors such as poverty, unemployment and high HIV/AIDS prevalence, which limited the transferability of findings to resource-scarce contexts with similar barriers. Moreover, the participants were predominantly female, implying that the study was limited to a specific career and, to a lesser extent, to gender. The researchers acknowledge that the study's findings could have differed in other contexts and for participants in different careers. The onus of transferability is therefore on the reader in determining the similarity of corresponding cases. In this regard, the aim of the reported study was to provide rich descriptions of each case to the reader (Janesick 2000).

The participating teachers in the study consisted of a specific group of teachers partnering in the broad, longitudinal STAR study. The teachers were therefore familiar with the purpose of the research. They were aware that they were under observation and might have wanted to respond favourably so as to satisfy the research team. Similarly, the presence of the research team, as well as growing relationships, could have influenced the participants' responses and behaviour. In an attempt to address such challenges and limitations, the researchers respected the ethical principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and trust, as well as protection from harm throughout the study.

Results

The results of the reported study are presented according to three themes that have emerged, relating to the competencies that participating teachers demonstrated following the asset-based intervention with higher education partners. The three sub-themes reflect pathways to psychosocial support and care that teachers used to perform their adaptive capacity (see Loots 2010 for specific examples of psychosocial support and care). To provide psychosocial support and care, teachers used *intrapersonal pathways* which reflected both positive identity formation (personal growth and reflective thinking, commitment, optimism, accomplishment and pride, competence and self-confidence), as well as management skills (goal setting, problem-solving, networking). Besides intrapersonal pathways, teachers also used *interpersonal pathways* evident as group effectiveness (group communication, roles and responsibilities, positive group dynamics) to promote resilience in high-risk school settings.

Theme 1: positive identity formation as intrapersonal pathway to psychosocial support and care

Theme 1 focuses on the participating teachers' journey towards *positive identity formation*, a dynamic process in which people obtain answers to how they think and feel about themselves and what they understand themselves to be (Ebersöhn 2006).

This theme is underpinned by the following subthemes: personal growth and reflective thinking; commitment; optimism; accomplishment and pride; and feelings of competence and enhanced self-confidence. Data excerpts are provided to give support to the points made.

Personal growth and reflective thinking

The participating teachers demonstrated the ability to reflect on their personal growth; ... *it shows that you're thinking differently* (School 4, Participant 19, Line 256–257); and *It came to a point where now our eyes became bigger, we started to see things clearer* (School 2, Participant 24, Line 561). They also reflected on their growth related to realising alternative ways of being a teacher and providing psychosocial support and care in their school contexts: *One other thing I've learnt is that as educators is that it is possible that we can go an extra mile helping other people out there as long as we have ideas and as long as we communicate and as long as we form groups* (School 2, Participant 11, Line 123–127). In the context of the participating teachers' renewed awareness of alternative ways of being teachers, they reflected on their acquired capacities, knowledge and skills in being able to support vulnerable and needy individuals in their school contexts: *we became skilled on how to help our communities* (School 3, Participant 13, Line 393–394).

Commitment

The participating teachers demonstrated dedication, motivation, drive and perseverance, as evident in the following verbatim quotation *it's just perseverance* (School 2, Participant 9, Line 255). Two other participants confirmed their level of commitment to psychosocial support and care as follows: *Yes, we stay motivated* (School 4, Participant 17, Line 391); and *to persevere in whatever we are doing, it also made us have the passion of helping especially the poverty stricken families that we are working with here in this community* (School 3, Participant 12, Line 343–344).

Optimism

The teachers remained optimistic about achieving their goals, despite the challenges they encountered in their school contexts. The following verbatim quotations illustrate not only the participating teachers' observed optimism about achieving results even when confronted with adversity, but also their apparent ability to reframe challenges positively: *I can do it irrespective of financial constraints or not but with the little knowledge I am able to try things that can assist other people – I can do it* (School 3, Participant 13, Line 569–572); *After having shared all the problems that we are encountering in this area here – nothing will be impossible for us to achieve* (School 3, Participant 12, Line 610–612).

Accomplishment and pride

Teachers experienced success and demonstrated feelings of pride about making a difference in their schools and communities, as indicated by the following excerpt: *We know as teachers that what we are doing, we are achieving, we know our achievements* (School 1, Participant 1, Line 766–768). More specifically, teachers

were proud about the way they managed to support children in their schools: *About the projects that we've been doing I feel very proud of realising that the potential that was unleashed within the kids themselves even though they may be suffering from HIV/AIDS, but there is something else that is within them, that they can do better than others* (School 3, Participant 13, Line 428–433).

Feelings of competence and enhanced self-confidence

The teachers reported feelings of competence and enhanced self-confidence in their own skills, knowledge and capacities: *We are empowered with the skill of assisting the kids, or assisting the community* (School 3, Participant 14, Line 359–361); and *I have a capability ... but with the little knowledge I am able to try things that can assist other people – I can do it* (School 3, Participant 13, Line 572–575). The following verbatim quotation refers specifically to the participating teachers' enhanced belief in their newly acquired knowledge: *And it's so nice, even if they ask questions from you, you are able to answer; you don't say I don't know because you have the knowledge* (School 1, Participant 4, Line 597–598).

Theme 2: management skills formation as intrapersonal pathway to psychosocial support and care

The previous subtheme focuses on the participating teachers' demonstrated management skills related to their asset-based initiatives and is underpinned by the following subthemes: goal-setting skills; problem-solving skills; and networking skills.

Goal-setting skills

The teachers seemed able to set and plan goals and act accordingly. They explained that: *we are working towards reaching a goal as per our mission and vision* (School 1, Participant 20, Line 40–41).

Problem-solving skills

The participating teachers demonstrated the ability to solve the problems they encountered in their schools. They sat together and brainstormed ways to address the challenges they faced: *And we (teachers) give ideas to remedy the problem* (School 4, Participant 16, Line 78). Teachers referred to the skills they had acquired for solving problems more efficiently: *I'm so glad for that information that you brought to us, where to go when we've got problems, like to X, all the contacts – it makes it to be easier for us, someone to talk to when we've got a problem* (School 1, Participant 7, Line 531–534).

Networking skills

Teachers displayed networking skills by establishing collaborative partnerships with individuals and organisational role-players to provide psychosocial support in their school contexts: *We are working with different people, all those workshops were catered for by different NGOs* (School 1, Participant 20, Line 206–208). Another participant related the asset-based approach to their networking initiatives: *Circle of*

Life is an NGO so we make use of the community, you see the asset-based thing that we making use of, that is an NGO, local institution that we're making use of (School 4, Participant 16, Line 66–68).

Theme 3: group effectiveness skills formation as interpersonal pathway to psychosocial support and care

The next theme focuses on the teachers' demonstrated abilities and skills to function effectively in an asset-based group providing psychosocial support and care and is underpinned by the following subthemes: group communication; roles and responsibilities; and positive group dynamics.

Group communication

The following verbatim quotation provides supportive evidence of the teachers' ability to communicate effectively through regular group consultations, meetings and discussions: *We have regular meetings ... we have minutes for the meeting, so it's not a loose thing, it's a structured thing (School 4, Participant 19, Line 333–338).* The teachers demonstrated a willingness to share their ideas, insights and knowledge in their groups: *If I have something that I don't know, I know who to go to, I know where to get assistance ... it has made us to be outspoken to one another; we no longer keep things to ourselves ... (School 3, Participant 14, Line 453–455).* Through sharing their knowledge, ideas and insights, the teachers reportedly learnt from the group members' input, as is evident in the following contribution: *We gained a lot and then one thing again, teamwork ... it does play a role because even when we were just brainstorming, if I was alone maybe the points that we shared as a group I would not have been in a position to think about them. But because we were a group and then some other things just came up and then you become aware of it (School 3, Participant 15, Line 387–394).*

Roles and responsibilities

The participating teachers demonstrated the ability to adapt effectively to shared roles and responsibilities in reaching goals. They seemed able to cooperate in a group and share responsibility and ownership for reaching their group's goals. They reflected an enhanced team-oriented approach during and after taking the asset-based approach. Teachers referred to their group name, implying a sense of partnership, enhanced teamwork and shared responsibility: *Well we now decided that we must give our project a name, we can't just drop it, let's call it Masizakheni ['let us build together'], that name also came from the staff, from all of us because I said we are working as a team (School 1, Participant 20, Line 111–115).* The following verbatim quotation confirms the teachers' team-oriented approach to working together towards group goals: *Working as a team makes the outcomes achievable (School 3, Participant 14, Line 328–335).*

Positive group dynamics

Teachers seemed able to build and engage effectively in positive group relations. The following verbatim quotation illustrates the teachers' team spirit and sense of

belonging in their groups: *I think we are working as a team and that is the one thing that helps us a lot* (School 3, Participant 12, Line 284–285). Teachers created a caring, encouraging and supporting environment, where the group members felt valued: *Sometimes you don't really feel up to it but once you're with the team they encourage you and you understand, it is better to work as a team than as an individual* (School 4, Participant 16, Line 314–316). The teachers developed close interpersonal relationships in their groups: *Yes, bringing the group closer and closer* (School 3, Participant 15, Line 407).

Discussion

In the context of the participating teachers' openness to new learning experiences, reflective thinking and subsequent personal growth, Keyes and Lopez (2005) refer to personal growth as a fundamental pathway to psychological well-being, as it is a continuous process of being open to new learning experiences, development and change. Just as the teachers in this study reported on personal growth and subsequent psychosocial support and care in their schools, the existing literature agrees that the process of capacity building can lead to individual development and growth, which in turn may enhance social change at a broader level (Ferreira 2008).

The participating teachers' demonstrated commitment to, and perseverance in pursuing, their goals are reflected in the existing literature on collaborative research partnerships that emphasise the importance of group members' commitment to shared goals and visions as an important element for successful partnerships (Harper et al. 2004). This correlates with a finding of Michan and Rodger (2000) that commitment to a shared goal could enhance direction and motivation for group members.

The teachers' apparent ability to cope in a solution-focused way, by positively reframing problems as alternative and workable solutions, can be related to the findings of Fritz and Smit (2008), indicating that the teachers were optimistic about the future and able to cope, despite the additional burdens of pastoral care responsibilities and the educational adversities they encountered.

The participating teachers' sense of accomplishment about providing psychosocial support and care correlates with Bennell's (2004) study on teacher motivation in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. Bennell (2004) reports that the rewards of being a teacher are the fundamental determinant of a teacher's job satisfaction. Howard and Johnson (2004) also found that teachers' sense of pride and achievement can be regarded as a factor protecting teachers' resilience to dealing with adversity and stressors. As with the results of this study, Howard and Johnson (2000) identify a sense of achievement as a fundamental protective factor in the ability to cope with adversities and challenges.

In the context of an intervention-based study that focused on higher education–school partnerships, the findings suggest enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem among participating individuals (Kilpatrick et al. 2002). Similarly, other studies confirm that self-esteem and a sense of one's own competence are two of the fundamental protective factors when dealing with stressors and challenges (Howard and Johnson 2004).

Open and continuing communication as a fundamental element for effective group work and successful partnerships is widely documented (Israel et al. 2006; Wood 2007), and this study correlates with that research. The existing literature

confirms the results of the reported study by referring to the importance of sharing knowledge and expertise as a fundamental building block of successful and dynamic partnerships (Wood 2007). Eisinger and Senturia (2001) found that the participants in their research on partnerships became progressively more open about sharing knowledge and ideas and contributing to shared decision-making, which was also the case with this study. The participating teachers in the study reportedly shared personal experiences in their groups, which apparently resulted in supportive asset-based groups. Similarly, the work of Boyd and Eckert (2002) on building resilient teachers shows that sharing personal stories could help teachers to get in touch with their inner wisdom and connect to one another, which may result in greater resilience when dealing with additional burdens and responsibilities.

The results obtained for the teachers' shared roles and responsibilities in a group agree with the findings of the existing literature that group collaboration and shared responsibility are fundamental building blocks of effective partnerships (Ferreira 2008; Israel et al. 2006; Wood 2007). Richter, Manegold, and Pather (2004) highlight that when individuals build the capacity for working together and addressing challenges, they generally take ownership by becoming agents of their own change. Mathie and Cunningham (2003) also emphasise the importance of taking ownership and state that the process of driving development has a direct link with taking credit for the outcomes achieved.

The results obtained for the participating teachers' reported ability to build positive interpersonal relationships correlate with the view in the existing literature that relationship building and the quality of interpersonal relations are central to any partnership and fundamental to optimal living (Green, Daniel, and Novick 2001; Harper et al. 2004; Lasker and Weiss 2003). In this way, the relationships that the teachers built in the reported study potentially added to positive group dynamics. The teachers' reportedly enhanced sense of group cohesion is supported by the findings of the Eisinger and Senturia (2001) study on community partnerships, indicating that greater group cohesion was evident over time, which improved trust among individual members. In the same way, Fritz and Smit (2008) explored the ethnographic narratives of teachers' drives and perseverance. These authors found that teachers experienced their school–community as a family, where they felt acknowledged and could rely on people, and people could rely on them. Their findings relate to the reported sense of group cohesion among the teachers in the current study, in the form of a sense of belongingness, unity and security in their groups.

The results relating to the participating teachers' demonstrated goal-setting skills are in line with findings in the existing literature on fundamental components of goals, namely setting goals, continuously planning goals and directing behaviour towards reaching goals (Israel et al. 2006; Snyder, Rand, and Sigmon 2005). Similarly, Green, Daniel, and Novick (2001) refer to the formulation and achievement of shared goals as an indicator of effective partnerships.

With regard to the plans of action, the participating teachers formulated as part of their goal-setting process, Bender (2004) confirms the importance of developing such plans during community development and support. She stresses that concrete steps in plans of action can help people focus on what is important for reaching their goals. The results of this study are in line with the Israel et al. (2006) study on community-based participatory research partnership. These authors report that the participants' engagement in continuous planning and re-assessment assisted them with re-establishing their commitment, objectives and actions.

The teachers' demonstrated problem-solving skills are in line with the definition of problem-solving skills by Snyder, Rand, and Sigmon (2005), namely the ability to generate alternative ways of reaching the formulated goals when encountering obstacles. The results of the participating teachers' ability to identify and address problems in their unique school contexts correlate with the Lasker and Weiss (2003) study, namely that 'community competence' is fundamental to effective problem-solving, which refers to community members' ability to collaborate effectively to identify problems and needs and to find ways of solving these problems. Furthermore, the participating teachers' ability to take ownership when dealing with setbacks and challenges in their school-community contexts concurs with Karnpisit's (2000) views that empowering people entails encouraging them to deal with their challenges by finding their own solutions. It implies that they should accept agency and ownership of their own lives, in mobilising assets and resources.

The teachers' demonstrated ability to establish networks and partnerships with various individuals and organisations to provide psychosocial support and care in high-risk school settings, confirms the existing literature about the importance of actively establishing and maintaining relationships with community resources (Bender 2004; Ebersöhn and Ferreira 2011).

The teachers' demonstrated strengths show similarities with the three categories (personal characteristics, social competence and cognitive competencies) of internal protective resources for resilience (Dass-Brailsford 2005; Howard, Dryden, and Johnson 1999). First, the teachers' asset-based characteristics which assisted them with forming a positive identity relate to personal characteristics such as internal protective resources for resilience, including self-efficacy, the sense of their competence and a sense of achievement, together with an internal locus of control, optimism, hopefulness and flexibility (Dass-Brailsford 2005; Howard, Dryden, and Johnson 1999; Howard and Johnson 2004; Oliver et al. 2006). Second, the teachers' demonstrated skills in group effectiveness relate to internal protective resources involving social competence such as effective communication skills, effective social behaviour, social responsiveness and social connectedness (Howard, Dryden, and Johnson 1999). Third, the teachers' demonstrated management skills relate to cognitive competencies such as planning, decision-making, problem-solving and goal-setting skills (Dass-Brailsford 2005; Oliver et al. 2006).

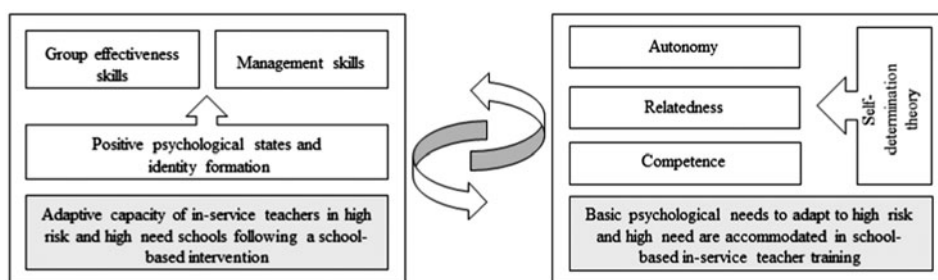


Figure 1. A self-determination lens on school-based in-service teacher training in the contexts of high risk and high need.

Conclusion

This paper has set out to add to the knowledge of the in-service education of teachers in high-risk and high-need school settings. In a transitional society, where policy and structure did not allow for formal teacher professional development, a school-based intervention proved beneficial to equip teachers to adapt in their high adversity schools. The paper has shown how the immediacy of multiple needs that teachers face, but may be unprepared to adapt to, could be addressed from a partnership platform between teachers and higher education researchers.

It was found that in-service teachers developed (or refined existing) strengths following a school-based intervention with higher education partners. Using the lens of self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci 2002), the paper has argued that there is a dynamic and interconnected relationship between these strengths. In their adaptation to continued risks the teacher responses mirrored competence, relatedness and autonomy. The need for competence relates to positive psychological states which could lead to positive identity formation. The psychological need for relatedness correlates with effective functioning in a group. Autonomy relates to the ability to take ownership of one's life and managing one's circumstances through skills such as goal setting, monitoring, problem-solving and networking. Figure 1 illustrates the demonstrated strengths of the participating teachers within the framework of self-determination theory.

Following the school-based intervention, the in-service teachers demonstrated an enhanced sense of well-being and reported a positive evaluation of and satisfaction with life. Based on the strengths these teachers demonstrated, it is conjectured that a school-based intervention with research partners potentially also fulfilled psychological needs. The positive identity formation which the teachers demonstrated in the partnership may be regarded as an important building block for group management and management skills. Bebbington (1999) argues that assets and positive states may give people the capacity to engage in meaningful relationships with the world. Similarly, Bailey (2000) argues that change can only occur when it starts with the individual. So, from this view, a teacher who does not feel competent and optimistic about their capacities and strengths would find it difficult to make a valuable contribution to their role and responsibility in a group. Similarly, it would be important for a teacher to be open to individual learning experiences so that they could benefit from group members' input, insights and knowledge. In the same way, a teacher has to value their own contributions in a group.

This study indicates that in-service teachers could commit to group goals to promote resilience in schools once they were able to fill committed to teaching and schools as individuals. The individual in-service teachers, as group members, expressed positive identities which were used to develop positive group dynamics. Positive identity formation and group effectiveness skills both appeared crucial for in-service teachers in high-risk schools to be able to have effective management skills. It appeared that the school-based intervention assisted in-service teachers to adapt to high risk and high need by enabling them to (i) feel competent and optimistic about their capacities, (ii) demonstrate management skills (skills such as goal setting and monitoring, problem-solving, networking and leadership) and (iii) making a valuable contribution in a group.

This study demonstrates that a school-based intervention proved beneficial to in-service teachers to developed adaptive capacity to promote resilience in high-risk

school settings. In particular, the teachers demonstrated positive identity formation (personal growth and reflective thinking, commitment, optimism, accomplishment and pride, and feelings of competence and enhanced self-confidence); management skills (underpinned by the skills of goal setting and monitoring, problem-solving and networking) and group effectiveness skills (group communication, roles and responsibilities, and positive group dynamics). Accordingly, it is proposed that partnerships between researchers and teachers may be used as platforms for school-based interventions with in-service teachers where formal structures for teacher professional development may be limited.

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