

**AN EXPLORATION OF THE INSIGHT OF FOUNDATION PHASE  
EDUCATORS IN EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE IN  
A SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Submitted as a dissertation component in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Education

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that *AN EXPLORATION OF THE INSIGHT OF FOUNDATION PHASE EDUCATORS IN EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE IN A SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL* is my own work, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been identified and duly acknowledged by complete references.

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Supervisor- Dr Rosemary Chimbala Kalenga

## **ABSTRACT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This qualitative interpretative study used a case study approach to explore the depth of insight foundation phase educators in a public primary school in KwaZulu-Natal had about learners' educational resilience, especially those from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. The study design was underpinned by a theoretical framework that integrated concepts of Ecological and Resiliency Theory and was aimed at answering two research questions;

- Do foundation phase educators recognize and understand educational resilience?
- Do foundation phase educators enhance educational resilience in learners they consider to be 'at-risk' of academic failure?

A purposive sample of three Grade 3 educators completed qualitative open-ended questionnaires before participating in a focus group discussion on educational resilience. Reliability and validity was ensured through triangulation of data collection methods; member checking of data verified its accuracy. Classroom observations yielded information about educator instructional style; demographic details and language literacy results of six educator-identified resilient and non-resilient learners provided corroborative data.

Findings were analyzed and collated into common themes which revealed that foundation phase educators' insight about resilience was superficial. Educators were able to identify non-resilient learners but failed to be responsive in their teaching methods. Lack of parental support was considered by educators to be a significant factor in the difference in resilience between learners who experienced the same socioeconomic disadvantage. Educators acknowledged their lack of formal training in the concept of educational resilience. The study concluded that the need for foundation phase educators to deepen their insight level about educational resilience does exist and recommends that pre-and in-service resilience education is included in the professional development of foundation phase educators in South Africa. Limitations of the study were noted.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this piece of work to three very important men who instilled in me the importance of education. My late father, Mr. Preethlall, who himself had to give up schooling to work and support his siblings however he ensured that his children got an education and also furthered their education. To my late father-in-law Mr D. Laban who was an educationist and who believed that I could succeed in anything that I did. He always encouraged me to complete my secondary education and further my studies to better myself. Thank you for all your prayers you prayed for me that one day I would become a successful individual. Finally, to my late brother-in-law Mr Gona Moodley thank you for believing in me and making sure that I fulfill my dreams of becoming an educator, for making sure that I had the necessary books I needed for my studies.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **ORIENTATION**

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Resilience is a phenomenon that can be described as the ability to achieve a good life outcome, in spite of adversity or serious threat to development. It enables people who are at risk of failure due to environmental factors or inner limitations to ‘bounce back and cope effectively in the face of difficulties’ (Luther, 2003; Ratter, 2001; Masten & Reed, 2002). Educational resilience refers to the presence of this phenomenon during the learning process. Learners ‘at-risk’ of failure in the educational environment are those who face threats in excess of their peers. Educational resilience makes the difference in those who succeed despite the odds. Educators can play a role in learners’ academic achievement by enhancing educational resilience which would be relative to their level of insight about the concept (Russo & Boman, 2007).

Foundation phase education represents the first opportunity that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds have of ‘changing their stars’ so it is imperative that educators in this phase are able to identify ‘at-risk’ learners in their classrooms and build their educational resilience. This qualitative study aims to explore the depth of insight about educational resilience in a sample of foundation phase educators in a public primary school in a suburb of the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa.

Consistent with the rapid flux that has dominated the era of transformation since democracy, changes in the South African education system has significantly altered the status quo such that public primary school educators are confronted by an array of challenges, the most significant of them being teaching learners who come from socioeconomic environments dominated by adverse circumstances. Many learners’ academic development and achievements are affected by their level of adversity. However, amongst them are those who encounter adversity yet are able to achieve academic success. Garnezy (1993) commented that there must be lessons to be learned from learners who display resilience in the face of adversity. He posed the question, ‘How do children who grow up in challenging circumstances, who have experienced traumatic events make it against all odds?’ This was in reference to learners from environments with poor living conditions and a lack of material resources yet able to excel in their studies.

International studies that have focused on identifying factors that protect students against risk have suggested several approaches to fostering educational resilience (Nettles, S. M., Mucherah, W., & Jones, D. S., 2000, p. 47). Knight (2007) found factors both within the learners and their environments that were considered vital to the promotion of successful academic development. Researchers Nettles *et al*, (2000) in their study ‘understanding resilience’ argued that the academic performance of ‘at-risk’ students would positively benefit from access to caring teachers who offered a supportive relationship; educators could effectively enable learners to be less vulnerable to their circumstances and develop resilience to factors outside their control (Russo & Boman, 2007, p. 18). It stands to reason that in order for educators to promote educational resilience in learners in their care, they would have to possess sufficient insight into the concept to recognize it in their learners and potentiate it in the classroom.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Since the 1990’s, South African education has experienced much change bringing with it various challenges to its existing system. To ensure that all South African learners are afforded an equal opportunity to achieve academic success, the quality of education offered at public schools had to be adjusted to incorporate a universally accepted standard in the culture of learning. In order for this change to be sustainable, actual processes taking place daily in South African classrooms and the living conditions of learners in a diverse society had to change as well (Donald, D., Lazarus, S., & Lolwana, P., 2002; 2010). Whilst educators have limited input at community and family level, educational practices in the classroom can be altered to ensure that the specific needs of learners identified as being ‘at risk’ of academic failure are addressed (Donald *et al*, 2002; 2010).

The prospect of addressing the needs of ‘at-risk’ learners in the South African public school system may be daunting but not impossible; addressing contextual factors that influence learners’ academic success is an important component. In developing countries where severe social and economic disadvantages still exist, educational processes can be responsive to the diverse learning challenges influenced by external social factors (Donald *et al*, 2002; 2010, p. 29). The Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training and the Committee for Education Support Services in South Africa identified learning hurdles that commonly occurred in South

African society. Poverty and violence featured high on the list of barriers to learning (Department of Education 1997).

Educational resilience would be determined by the delicate balance between the stressors ‘at-risk’ children are exposed to and the protective factors that operated in and for them (Rutter 1987; 2001). Donald *et al*, (2002; 2010) was of the opinion that in addressing the realities of risk of academic failure as a result of contextual disadvantage, the concept of developmental resilience was an important variable in educational resilience. If there is understanding about why some children have the capacity to withstand severe contextual stressors and risks to their development while others do not, there is a better chance of determining how educators can intervene to take curative action.

### **1.2.1 Foundation Phase Education in South Africa**

Most public schools in South Africa are culturally diverse, with a significant proportion of learners hailing from historically socially and economically disadvantaged or underprivileged backgrounds being considered ‘at-risk’ of academic failure in mainstream education. Social studies in other countries have documented consequences to children from similar adverse circumstances that range from poor self-esteem to academic and linguistic problems; poverty has been shown to have a link with family dysfunction (Bryan, 2005). Educators in South African public school classrooms face the challenge of teaching learners who have known risk factors for academic failure like poverty, homelessness, drug problems and language difficulties (Schoon, 2006). South African educators are held accountable for their learners’ lack of academic achievement but the barriers to learning in the classroom are onerous and not always surmountable.

In 2008, the Minister of Education Naledi Pandor launched the ‘Foundation for Learning Campaign’ (2008) because South Africa had fared poorly in the international assessment of reading and numeracy. This alarming statistic confirmed that there was a ‘challenge in attaining academic success in South African public schools’ (Address by MEC, Pandor, 2008). The Minister of Education stated that “quality education is determined in the first years that a child spends at school” and that “the foundations of human development are laid during these years;

the years that a child is taught the fundamental skills and competencies that will enable the child to learn and develop a clear concept of the world” (address by MEC, Pandor, 2008).

The ‘Foundations for Learning Campaign’ focused on the need for intervention in the learning areas of literacy and numeracy of South African public school learners, specifically emphasising the need for educators to take responsibility for improving literacy amongst all learners. The aim of this initiative was to ensure that all South African learners at public schools become literate. Although it addressed academic arena deficits, the campaign failed to focus on social deficit which internationally is recognised as a major contributory factor to poor academic achievement in learners (Schoon, 2006). One of the intervention tools that could have been addressed by the campaign was educational resilience in learners or the lack thereof and the potential for its enhancement by educators.

Waxman, H. C., Padron, Y. N., and Gray, J. P. , (2004) established that learners ‘at-risk’ of academic failure encountered a complexity of problems caused by poverty, health, cultural, linguistic and other social problems which hampered their academic performance both in the area of language and numeracy. The nature of the learning process is such that schools have the opportunity to build educational resilience in these learners through educators who have a ‘resilience-building attitude’. ‘Turnaround teachers’ as described in the literature could enable a positive developmental process to improve school performance (Boon, 2008, p. 82). Greene (2002) argued that children who may be considered ‘at-risk’ because of their circumstances could become confident, competent, caring adults who have a strong capacity to form relationships, solve problems and develop a sense of identity. Knight (2007) stated that educators who were adequately equipped with the knowledge of educational resilience are better able to cater for their learners’ emotional and academic needs than educators who lacked such insight.

Researchers have felt that once educators were provided with resources to increase their knowledge base about educational resilience as part of their professional development, they would be able to make a significant difference in their learners’ classroom experience (Brown, J. H., D’Emidio-Caston, M., & Bernard, B., 2001, p. 16). Foundation phase educators specifically have the opportunity at entry level to provide a supportive relationship and nurturing environment for learners in their care. The building of educational resilience in the school environment plays a significant role in the improvement of academic outcome in vulnerable

learners in the ‘at-risk’ demographic (Waxman *et al* 2004, p. 40). Promotion of educational resilience is only possible if educators have a depth of knowledge about the concept and been equipped to enhance its presence. First world countries have established intervention programs that enhance educational resilience in learners ‘at-risk’ which can be easily accessible or modified for South African educators to use in their classrooms.

### **1.2.2 The International Perspective**

Educational intervention programs which enhance educational resiliency in ‘at-risk’ learners have been established through government initiatives in the developed world. In the US, the “No Child Left Behind” Act (NCLB) (1983) and the “The Nation at Risk: The Imperative for educational reform” have implemented widespread intervention programs to assist learners from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in danger of being academically left behind. This legislation has enabled educators to focus on what can be done to reduce the achievement gaps between white and minority students and students from high and low income families (Waxman *et al*, 2004, p. 4).

Brown *et al*, (2001) cite Rutter’s (1979; 1981; 1987) research studies as the most important contribution towards educational resilience. Rutter (1985) cited in Brown *et al* (2001) found that protective factors were essential for growth and development in ‘at-risk’ children. He initiated the idea of developing educational resilience by promoting the well-being of all children as opposed to targeting the deficits in ‘at-risk’ children. Milstein and Henry (2000) also found that by focusing on learners’ strengths, educational resilience provided an important foundation for promoting excellence for all learners. The United States Educational community adopted the concept of resilience education as a “strength-based” or “solution-based” approach. As a result, educational researchers continued to explore the subject of resilience in an attempt to improve educational and social outcomes for children and youth ‘at-risk’.

## **1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

Although an extensive body of research about the concept of resilience already exists, the exploration of the concept as it applies to learners’ academic success has mainly occurred in First

World countries. According to literature reviewed, studies with regard to foundation phase educators' insight in educational resilience have not yet been undertaken in South Africa. This study intends to address this gap by exploring the depth of insight foundation phase educators have about educational resilience and its application in the classroom in the South African public primary school context.

As a foundation phase educator, my interest was sparked by the topic of educational resilience in my post-graduate studies because it was not a focus of discussion in my undergraduate studies; I realized that as an educator I possessed core knowledge and experience about the topic even though I had not received formal training on the subject and in my practical experience in the classroom I was engaging in activities that enhanced educational resilience. I felt a responsibility as an educator in South Africa to explore educational resilience further with my colleagues as it had important benefits for learners; most of the information available was from studies that were occurring internationally. Primarily, I wanted to explore whether other foundation phase educators had a similar worldview on the topic; whether my experience and training with regard to educational resilience was similar to my peers who had different journeys in their training and experience than me but who were faced with similar challenges in the classroom and whether other educators recognised, understood and enhanced educational resilience in the classroom.

A secondary rationale for the study was that I believed that it would provide data on the subject of educational resilience in foundation phase education in South African schools which hitherto had not been explored in any depth. I felt that this study could highlight the importance of educational resilience in the foundation phase and create an interest in the topic amongst other educators. A lack of insight about educational resilience amongst South African foundation phase educators may have had negative consequences for 'at-risk' learners at their point of entry into the academic arena. When one considers the fact that early childhood education is prioritised by our national education policy which is consistent with international trends in education, the potential for us to make a difference in the classroom by strengthening learners' resilience was an exciting challenge.

The educational community, the school, and educators are at the forefront of providing learners with a positive school and classroom learning environment. Besides the family, the school as an



institution of learning can provide learners with supportive environmental conditions that foster resilience (Milstein & Henry, 2000, p. 12). A qualitative study was designed to explore foundation phase educators insight into the subject; for the purpose of this study insight was defined as a foundation phase educator's ability to recognise, understand and enhance resilience in their learners. Educational resilience for the purpose of this study was defined as the increased likelihood of academic success despite environmental difficulties (Fraser, 2004, p. 143).

The research questions were constructed to explore foundation phase educators insight in educational resilience in a South African primary school and gain a contextual understanding of educational resilience as it applied to foundation phase education. Significant findings could provide support for resilience education to be prioritized as part of the professional development of educators in KZN and may create an impetus to develop uniquely South African intervention programs that enhance educational resilience in the classroom in our learners, the majority in the 'at-risk' learner demographic due to unfavourable socioeconomic circumstances.

## **1.4 LITERATURE REVIEW**

For perspective and context, relevant information from the literature on educational resilience was reviewed to highlight some of the prominent concepts and terms relating to the subject. Educational resilience is characterised by academic success where socioeconomic and structural family factors predict failure (Boon, 2008, p. 84). Schoon (2006) defined educational resilience as academic attainment in the face of socioeconomic adversity. Socioeconomic adversity is a major risk factor known to influence children's social and emotional functioning. Every South African public school has a percentage of their learner population who are subjected to this risk because of their socioeconomic circumstances so this study is a relevant one.

Conceptual and empirical studies internationally on the theoretical construct of educational resilience and its application have gained recognition for the development of a framework with which to examine differences in academic outcome amongst learners who come from the same socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. An important area of research has been the focus on examining resilient students who succeed in school despite the presence of adverse conditions (Waxman *et al* 2004). These studies have taught educational and health professionals that some children who encounter adversity and traumatic life experiences may have the resilience to deal

with life issues and the educational resilience to overcome the odds academically to grow up to be responsible adults (Greene, 2002).

#### **1.4.1 Educational Resilience**

The concept of resilience developed as an important theoretical concept in educational psychology (Greene, 2002, p. 9). Literature reviewed indicates that resilience is a subjective concept to define; what may be considered to be resilient in one context may not be so in another. Although resilience can be viewed as the ability to embrace challenges in life (Brailsford, 2005), educational resilience is seen in the ‘strength’ of a learner left vulnerable by circumstances to achieve academic success where peers *from similar circumstances* are non-resilient and ‘at-risk’ of academic failure.

Resilience Theory emerged from research of ‘children at-risk’ to determine what factors contributed to or prevented *some* children from succeeding (Greene, 2002). The intangible internal aspects of educational resilience that seem to provide its substance include personality characteristics like inner resolve, strength, perseverance, commitment and endurance which are detectable in the difference in choices where between two learners with the same set of external variables (Greene, 2002, p. 166). Positive developmental experiences play a role (Greene, 2002) and positive peer relations, self-efficacy and creativity may indicate the presence of educational resilience in a learner (Waaktaar, T., Christie, H. J., Borge, A. I. H., & Torgersen, S., 2004). Although a psychological construct that incorporates personal factors like self-esteem, motivation and resourcefulness is seen as an important variable, learners live in a social system of interrelationships including family, friends and educators so there is a complex interplay of a series of protective factors that can minimise the impact of adverse situations (Castro, A. J., Kelly, J. R., & Shih, M., 2010, p. 623).

The educational community has adopted educational resilience in its ‘strength-based’ or ‘solution-based’ approach as opposed to a negative ‘at-risk’ focus. Researchers agree that one of the advantages to this approach in exploring educational resilience is that it shifts the focus from school failure to school success (Waxman *et al*, 2004, p. 38). Recent studies on educational resilience focused on the differences between resilient and non-resilient students, their family

environment and their perceptions of the classroom and school environment (Donald *et al*, 2010, p. 165).

According to Boon (2008) understanding how to enhance educational resilience has important implications for academic improvement. In an attempt to reduce the effect of adverse circumstances and build resilience, researchers have identified an array of ‘protective factors’ that involve both the attributes of children and the kind of environment that promotes successful development (Russo & Boman, 2007, p. 18). These protective factors are determined by children’s interactions in different contexts including family, friends, the community in which they live and social institutions like schools. Mandleco and Craig (2000) found that protective factors allow children to be less vulnerable and more resilient. Children who are exposed to chronic danger may live in anxiety and fear, feel they have little control over their lives and develop learning difficulties (Greene, 2002).

Rutter (1987; 2001) and Werner and Smith (2001) described the significant role schools and teachers had in developing protective factors in learners. As one of the prominent social contexts in which children spend a fair amount of time through the ‘growing years’, educators are presented with significant opportunities to nurture children who are emotionally disadvantaged. Schools can have significant influence early on in the development of these children; from the age of five or even younger children spend a large portion of their day at school (Russo & Boman, 2007, p. 19). Milstein and Henry (2000) thought that schools could build educational resilience in an environment of caring with ‘turnaround teachers’. A resiliency-building attitude in an educator is able to provide three protective factors that buffer risk and enable positive development; these include caring relationships, high expectations and opportunities to participate and contribute in the classroom (Bernard, 1997) in Greene (2002).

With educators being an integral part of the enhancement of educational resilience, the quality of professional development becomes one of the keys to successful school reform (Waxman *et al*, 2004; Russo & Boman, 2007).

Due to the broadness of the field of study of educational resilience and the complexity of variables, definitions applicable to educational resilience are highlighted next.

#### **1.4.2 Definitions relevant to educational resilience**

Krathwohl (2004) referred to concepts as terms used in our thinking language while referring to the things around us. For this study it was important to define relevant terms and concepts so that the context in which the words are used is understood (Creswell, 2003, p. 142).

- **RESILIENCE:** Resilience is the maintenance of a healthy and successful functioning or adaptation within a context of significant adversity or threat (Garmezy, 1993; Luthar, S. S., Cicchetti, D., & Becker, B., 2000; Masten & Obradovic, 2006).
- **EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE:** Educational resilience is the ability of learners to succeed academically despite risk factors that make it difficult for them to do so. (Waxman *et al*, 2004, p. 37).
- **RISK:** Risk refers to any influence that increases the probability of onset or digression to a more serious state, or maintenance of a problem condition (Greene, 2002, p. 32).
- **RISK FACTORS:** Risk is secondary to a number of factors associated with negative outcomes including personal, familial or neighbourhood characteristics (Greene, 2002, p. 32).
- **‘AT-RISK’ LEARNERS:** ‘At-risk’ learner refers to children who experience negative life experiences known to be associated with adjustments difficulties (Fraser 2004, p. 14).
- **ADVERSITY:** The term ‘adversity’ is also used to describe negative life experiences and is a general collective term used by researchers to refer to conditions ‘at risk’ learners are exposed to (Schoon, I., Parsons, S., & Sacker, A., 2004).
- **PROTECTIVE FACTORS:** Protective factors broadly refer to the characteristics that enhance adaptation or moderate the effects of risks, and may buffer, interrupt, or even prevent risk (Luthar *et al* 2000; Masten, 2001).
- **VULNERABILITY:** Vulnerability refers to the idea that some ‘at-risk’ people are more likely to develop an undesirable outcome or disorder; a vulnerability factor is a characteristic of an individual that makes that person more susceptible to a particular threat during development (Luthar *et al* 2000; Greene, 2002).
- **STRESS AND COPING:** Stress and coping have been used to explain an individual’s reaction to threatening events, both internally and externally (Leiderman, 1998) in Normand (2007).

- **INSIGHT:** This refers to a clear and deep perception of the complex nature of a concept based on the capacity to understand it through knowledge or skill (Webster's Revised Dictionary).

For the purpose of this study, sufficient depth of insight into educational resilience is the educator's ability to recognise and understand resilience and put in place classroom initiatives that enhance it. Lack of insight or superficial insight would refer to educators having vague, poorly formed notions about the concept largely at a theoretical level as opposed to an integrated, practical understanding of its application in the classroom.

## **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

To gain an understanding of the depth of insight foundation phase educators in a South African public primary school have about educational resilience, the following research questions were formulated after a review of national and international literature on educational resilience (Russo & Boman, 2007; Waxman *et al*, 2004).

1. Do foundation phase educators recognise and understand educational resilience?
2. Do foundation phase educators enhance educational resilience in learners they considered to be 'at-risk' of academic failure?

## **1.6 THE AIM OF THE STUDY**

The aim of this study is to explore the depth of foundation phase educators' insight about educational resilience as defined by their ability to recognise, understand and enhance its presence in learners. When educational resilience is explored, the focus is not just on the learner but also on their context and their interaction with their environment (Normand, 2007, p. 4). Thus, this study will investigate the core knowledge foundation phase educators have about educational resilience and their interaction in the classroom with non-resilient and resilient learners from the same socioeconomic background.

## **1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

To explore the phenomenon of educational resilience it was necessary to examine the theories applicable to the construct that were derived from educational psychology in the social context;

these form the backbone of this study. Theoretical research on conceptual and empirical work in resilience has provided a framework for examining the difference in academic success in learners who come from the same socioeconomic background (Waxman *et al*, 2004, p. 5). For research in the subject to be relevant and significant, theoretical constructs were relied on to determine different aspects of the study design.

This study is based on three related theoretical applications that were integrated to form a framework:

- Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory Model (1979; 2005) which was used to make sense of the multi-systemic impact of the social context on learners' resilience.
- Aspects of Resiliency Theory based on the work of Werner and Smith (1992; 2001) who identified protective factors which enabled individuals "who grew up in childhood poverty and troubled families" to overcome "psychosocial risks associated with adversity".
- Milstein and Henry's (2000) Resilience Model, an adaptation of The 'Resilience Wheel' by Henderson and Milstein (1996), which focuses on enhancing educational resilience in learners by teachers, family and community;

Although the study of educational resilience has its origins in developmental theory, it is grounded in an ecological context that builds on the 'strengths perspective'. Ecological theory has thus influenced research study designs (Greene, 2002). Over the past decade increasing efforts have been made to understand how a child's development is shaped by their social context (Donald *et al*, 2002; 2010). The concept of protective factors identified by Werner and Smith (1992) has been explored by many researchers over the last decade. Protective and risk mechanisms have been found to vary according to the type of adversity, type of resilient outcome, and life stage under analysis; risk factors in one context may be protective in another (Rutter, 1999; Ungar, 2004a). This study used aspects of the above three theories to form an integrated framework to explore the phenomenon of educational resilience in South African classrooms, specifically targeting the foundation phase; the following paragraphs provide an outline of the research design and methodology selected for use in this study.

## **1.8 RESEARCH STUDY DESIGN**

Babbie and Mouton (2001) stated that research design is the planning of a scientific enquiry and the designing of a strategy for ‘finding something out’. Their belief is that there are two aspects to research design, one to specify what needs to be found out and the other to find the best way of finding out how you can (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 72). Maree (2007) describes the process as a move from underlying philosophical assumptions to specifying concrete aspects like the selection of respondents, data gathering techniques and analysis from a wide range of available research designs appropriate for generating the data required to answer the research questions selected (Maree, 2007, p. 70). For this study, a qualitative interpretive research design was chosen to answer the main research questions.

Merriam (2002) stated that the key to qualitative research lies in the idea that meaning is socially constructed by an individual’s interaction with the world. The value in using a qualitative research design is that it is considered “a powerful tool for learning more about our lives and the socio-historical context in which we live” (Normand, 2007, p. 5). Qualitative research is concerned with understanding the process *and* the socio-cultural context. In applied fields of socially relevant practice like education, the most common type of qualitative research is the basic interpretive study (Merriam, 2009) which focuses on how people ‘construct’ their social world by sharing meanings in how they interact with or relate to each other (Maree, 2007, p. 59).

Merriam (2002) found that in basic interpretive qualitative research there are a number of processes that begin with an interest in how participants derive meaning from a phenomenon (Normand, 2007, p. 5). Interpretive thinkers believe that because human behaviour is affected by knowledge of the social world, the social world does not exist independently of human knowledge (Maree, 2007, p. 60). Merriam (2009) concurred that the interpretive paradigm’s central concern is the subjective and objective nature of the meaning of concepts; how individuals and societies comprehend and make sense of events and situations is significant to any understanding of phenomena that recur. An interpretive paradigm was therefore considered an apt choice for this study.

## **1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Research methodology is the “how” of social sciences research: simply how one plans, structures and executes a research project (Mouton, 2001, p. 56). It focuses on the research process, the kind of tools and procedures used and the specific tasks employed for data collection. For this study, the methodology was chosen to capture descriptive data from a sample of foundation phase educators and a class of learners. A case study approach was considered most appropriate for this research inquiry; the foundation phase educators formed a bounded system selected on the basis of typicality (Merriam, 2009). A case study would facilitate the interpretation of educator participant’s interactions so the significance of variables observed with regard to educational resilience in the research context could be determined (Bless, C., Higson-Smith, C., & Kagee, A., 2006, p.47).

### **1.9.1 Research Site**

De Vos (2002) suggested that the identifying of the research site should occur as soon as the research problem is identified so that it maximises the opportunity to engage with the problem. Maree (2007) felt that it was essential to select a research site that was suitable for study purposes and feasible with regard to data collection.

This study was conducted at Sapphire primary school (a pseudonym), a public primary school situated on the outskirts of Chatsworth, KwaZulu-Natal, which according to the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Department of Education, falls within the Umlazi District. The majority of the learners at this school are from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Learners of South African Indian descent that live within Sapphire Township or the adjacent suburb are from economically disadvantaged families; the majority of the Black African learners that attend this school are predominantly from the informal squatter settlement, known as Burlington, which is west of the borough of Queensburgh. These learners are economically and socially disadvantaged as many of them come from families that are either dysfunctional, single parent homes, or homes where parents are unemployed.

Sapphire Primary school has a staff population of sixteen which includes the two management staff comprising of the principal and the head of the foundation phase, the school secretary, eight departmental-based level one educators, three part-time language educators, and three non-educators, the school cleaners. Sapphire primary school is divided into three phases; the



foundation phase which includes learners from Grade R to Grade 3, the intermediate phase that includes learners from Grades 4 to 6 and Grade 7 which falls under the senior phase. Each phase has one unit per grade. This study specifically focused on foundation phase educators that taught Grade 3 foundation phase learners.

#### **1.9.1.1 Assumptions**

I made the assumptions that the selection of the school as a research site to conduct a case study would be easier as I taught at the same school. As a foundation phase educator at the school, I made the assumption that my colleagues would feel comfortable sharing their views with me and it would be easier for me to contextualise the responses in the focus group interview. I also made the assumption that being an educator at the school where the study took place would facilitate the study process as parents of the Grade 3 learners would possibly be more accepting of my conducting the study as I was a familiar face and the management of the school would have a positive attitude about the study. An assumption was made that Grade 3 learners who participated in the study would feel comfortable about my presence in the classroom as I was known as an educator in the school and not a stranger to them.

#### **1.9.2 Purposive Sampling**

According to Maree (2007) sampling refers to the process used to select a portion of the population under study; in qualitative research it is generally based on non-probability and purposive sampling rather than probability or random sampling approaches. With purposive sampling participants are selected because of some defining characteristic that makes them the holders of data needed for the study (Maree, 2007, p. 79). Patton (2002) stated that the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases so that a great deal can be learnt about issues of central importance to the purpose of the enquiry. Therefore, an essential part of the process is the choice of criteria regarding the people or sites to be studied (Merriam, 2009, p. 77).

Purposive sampling was chosen for this study because it ensured that all participants would be of value to the study, enabling the collection of data specific to the concept under study. Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003) supported the approach of selecting specific participants in the population of interest with characteristics that optimize data. The purposive sampling for this

study included three Grade 3 educators and their learners. The choice of Grade 3 learners from the foundation phase was also relevant because of contextual factors; many of the learners in this grade came from socially and economically disadvantaged homes.

### **1.9.3 Methods of Data Collection**

The main aim of data collection techniques in qualitative interpretive research is concerned with obtaining detailed descriptions of peoples' activities, behaviours and actions; this data is usually collected through interviews, observations or document analysis (Merriam, 2009). Maree (2007) encouraged the use of more than one method of data collection to enhance the validity of the findings. To enhance the validity of this study I employed the following methods of data collection techniques: questionnaires, focus group interview discussion, classroom observations and analysis of learners' profile, assessment records and drawings.

#### **1.9.3.1 Questionnaires**

Questionnaires are favoured tools to provide a cost-effective way of collecting data in a structured and manageable way. An effective questionnaire can yield useful and accurate data (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003, p. 3). The questionnaire initially used in this study was a qualitative questionnaire based on a set of open-ended questions which was meant to provide rich data for the study. Each question was purposefully designed using national and international literature on resilience research. Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003) stated that an open-ended questionnaire does not impose any of the restrictions of closed questionnaires allowing the respondent to record any response to a question as answers are not predetermined. An open-ended qualitative questionnaire was designed for this study so that participants could answer as truthfully and as openly as possible with no preconceived answers. Once the questionnaires were given to the participants, the responses yielded a paucity of data. A decision was then made to give educator participants a multiple-choice questionnaire based on the same questions used in the focus group interview. This questionnaire was given to the educator participants after the focus group interview was concluded. Participant educators were asked to indicate the statements about educational resilience that best resembled the views they held. This was done to allow educator participants the opportunity to reflect on their opinions of educational resilience away from the peer pressure of the focus group interview; the same questions presented in the focus

group interview were included in the post-group questionnaire which allowed me as the researcher to gain a more accurate determination of individual educator participants' opinions and insight level.

### **1.9.3.2 Focus Group Interview**

The focus group interview in a qualitative research study is used to gather rich, descriptive data in a small group where participants have agreed to 'focus' on a topic of mutual interest (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003, p. 90). The reason for choosing a focus group interview as a data collection technique in this study was so that each participant would be able to express their views and opinions on the topic of resilience while at the same time creating the opportunity to access the common views of all participants on the subject. Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003) commented that the main emphasis of a focus group interview discussion is to gain an understanding of participants' experiences, interests, attitudes, perspectives and assumptions which would provide vital information to determine common views held by foundation phase educators.

### **1.9.3.3 Observation**

An observation is characterised by a prolonged period of intense social interaction that incorporates a systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of participants, objects and occurrences without questioning or communicating (Maree, 2007, p. 84). It is a supportive data collecting technique that explores the complex real-world situation without asking questions of those who experience them (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003, p. 117). It does not use predetermined categories and classifications so observation occurs in a more natural way (Normand, 2007, p. 52).

Non-participant observation was used as a data collection technique in this study to acquire first-hand information on educator participant's interaction in the classroom; their instructional style and how they related to learners and the learner's experience of the classroom (Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K., 2007, p. 410). An observation schedule was used to explore the classroom situation for the purpose of corroborating data collected in this study from the questionnaire, focus group interview, learner's profiles and assessment records.

#### **1.9.3.4. Documents as Data**

A document is defined as an artifact that has a written text and can include a wide variety of documents including official records, letters, historical accounts, diaries and reports. These secondary sources of data fall into two groups; personal and official (Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003; Bloor and Wood, 2006; Merriam, 2009). This study used official documents as a data collection technique. The learner's profiles and class assessments records were used as objective sources of data; these documentary sources were used to increase the depth of data available and to corroborate data obtained from the questionnaire and the focus group interview discussion.

##### **1.9.3.4.1 Learners' Profiles**

Information from the demographic profile of learners' about their background was introduced as data; the details were used to verify the learner's socioeconomic status and level of parental involvement. The profile is an official document which all parents are requested to complete when they register their child at a school in South Africa. It contains the parents' details and employment status together with the learner's personal details, including any ailments which could impact the learning process.

##### **1.9.3.4.2 Learners' Assessment Records**

The final aspect of the collection of data involved the assessment records of the learner participants identified by the educator participants as being either resilient or non-resilient. Learner assessments are official documents used to increase the validity of data collected through the questionnaire and focus group interview. According to Merriam (2009) although using documents as a data collection technique in a qualitative study is guided by questions, educated hunches and emerging findings in a systematic search, it may allow for the accidental uncovering of valuable data (Merriam, 2009, p. 150). Assessment records used included the first and second term assessment results, part of the third term assessment results and learner drawings; this study was to have used all three terms assessment records however, the third term was disrupted due to the national public servants' strike in South Africa.

### **1.10 DATA ANALYSIS**

In a basic qualitative research study, data is inductively analysed to identify reoccurring patterns or common themes that cut across the data (Merriam, 2009, p. 171). The fact that a qualitative study was conducted meant that a large amount of contextual data was generated. Cohen *et al*, (2007) commented that qualitative data analysis involved organising, accounting for and explaining the data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situations, patterns, themes and categories. To derive a systematic format for data analysis for this study, a coding technique was used that organised and separated data. The data from the questionnaires, focus group interview, classroom observations and documentary sources were all analysed individually by code, placed into sub-categories and then finally aligned into common patterns and themes. The findings were then discussed against the background of the literature reviewed. I ensured that after the data was analysed, all data was carefully labeled and stored in a safe place until the handing over to the University of KwaZulu-Natal for safe keeping, occurred.

### **1.11 SCIENTIFIC RIGOR OF THE STUDY DESIGN**

In qualitative research, scientific rigor is an important aspect of the study design. For this study, the subject under study is empirical and lends itself to verification in any other school with foundation phase educators; the study can be replicated by other researchers. The findings of the study are relevant to the foundation phase educators at this research site which may or may not be reflective of foundation phase educators in other schools in the region or country. I made every attempt to reflect on my subjectivity and bias as a foundation phase educator in the same school and have noted the limitations of the study. As a foundation phase educator 'in the field' I was able to immerse myself in the activities and environment of the subjects under study. Working with a small group of participants is consistent with a social science study. Analysis in the study was accomplished through the writing process. The behaviour and the context of the behaviour observed was recorded and analysed during the interview process which allowed a broader perspective in the interpretation of findings. A case study approach allowed me to interpret the findings in respect to the hypotheses I generated for the study.

A number of strategies can be used to promote a study's validity (Normand, 2007, p. 9); in qualitative research studies reliability means consistency. To obtain reliability, various data collection instruments can be used (Struwig & Stead, 2001). Merriam (2009) suggested that from an interpretive perspective, the best strategy is triangulation of data collection methods. The

most common approach to multiple methods of data collection includes the use of questionnaires, observation and interviews. This research study used the following instruments to ensure reliability of the study findings: questionnaires, classroom observation, focus group interviews and document analysis.

Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be easily replicated; reliability rests with others agreeing that the results collected are both dependable and consistent and make sense (Merriam, 2009, p. 223). The following strategies could be used to ensure reliability and consistency: triangulation, peer examination, investigator's position and an audit trail (Merriam, 2009, p. 221). In this study the researcher used multiple data collection techniques (triangulation) and data analysis occurred in consultation with the supervisor (peer examination). All text from the questionnaires was coded, sub-coded and categorised to facilitate accurate analysis of themes. Information from the focus group interviews were also coded, sub-coded and categorised before common themes were identified. Member checking took place after data collection in the focus group interview so participants were given the opportunity to check their transcribed comments for accuracy before analysis. Learner information was analysed to determine the extent to which educator participant's views on the resilience or non-resilience of learners had validity.

## **1.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Research imposes a power differential between the researcher and the participants in a study so ethical considerations that govern research studies have to be adhered to for the protection of the participants in the study at a research site (Bless *et al*, 2006). Consideration of the following aspects in the planning and implementation of a study; justice, fidelity, respect and dignity are paramount to the ethical conduct of a study. This study followed the appropriate ethical procedures required; ethical clearance was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal as the first part of the ethical clearance for the study. As the school selected as the research site was a social institution, permission had to be sought and obtained from the Head of the institution; being a public school that meant permission was sought and granted by the Provincial Department of Education after an application to conduct the study at the research site was made by filling in the appropriate documentation.

The three foundation phase educator participants, the Head of the institution and the school's Governing Body Chairperson were notified in writing of the study and consent was requested in writing of the educator participants for their role in the study. Parents of Grade 3 learners and parents of the six learners who were identified as resilient and non-resilient by the Grade 3 class educator were also informed in writing; written informed consent was sought for the participation of their children in the study. The class of Grade 3 learners were informed about the classroom observation and assented in writing to the researcher being present; the six participant learners assented to their work being viewed for the study. Three learners whose parents did not return consent forms and who were not available telephonically on the date of the classroom observations were reassured by myself and their class teacher that another Grade 3 teacher would be teaching them for one lesson. This was not an unusual situation for them; being in another class for a few lessons does occur from time to time for different reasons for example, a teacher's illness or a project involving all the Grade 3's and where there is absence of some learners on a religious holiday. The academic life of these three learners was also not compromised in any way as all Grade 3 educators cover a similar curriculum and the isiZulu teacher covered her lesson with them as well.

Bless *et al*, (2006) stated that all participants have to be informed about the type of research and the reason for it. The participants for this study were given a clear explanation and reason for the study and participant confidentiality was maintained throughout the process. No information obtained from participants of a sensitive nature which the participants did not want disclosed was used in the study. All participants were given a pseudonym to protect their real identity and the identity of the school was also kept confidential. At the conclusion of the study all the data collected during the research study will be kept at the University of KwaZulu-Natal for five years in the event that the study is recalled and essential evidence is required for validation of data.

### **1.13 CHAPTER OUTLINE**

A brief outline of the chapters in this mini-dissertation is presented below.

Chapter 1: This chapter provides an outline of the background and rationale of the study, including a brief description of the literature and theoretical framework for this study, and a description of the research design and methodology used.

Chapter 2: This chapter reviews the literature and discusses the main issues in the field of resilience and educational resilience research.

Chapter 3: In this chapter the theoretical framework that underpins this study is highlighted namely.

Chapter 4: This chapter provides a description of the research design and methodology for this study.

Chapter 5: A comprehensive discussion of the data analysis process is undertaken and findings are described.

Chapter 6: This is the final chapter where recommendations for and conclusions of the study are presented.

## **1.14 CONCLUSION**

The goal of this chapter was to present an overview of the background and rationale for the study. A brief review of the literature was provided and a description of the research design and methodology. Finally, aspects of validity and reliability together with ethical considerations were explained.

Chapter Two will provide a comprehensive review of the relevant literature on educational resilience.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of a literature review within a research study is to serve as an overview of the phenomenon being studied. The literature review for this study was undertaken to facilitate my understanding of educational resilience. To contextualise the study and obtain a clearer perspective, an overview of the history of resilience and the emergence of academic resilience is discussed initially. A holistic and comprehensive review of the literature follows with a focus on educational resilience research; research studies that explored educators' recognition and understanding of educational resilience and factors that enhanced its presence are discussed. In particular, literature on educational resilience studies conducted in both developed and developing countries were reviewed due to the relative dearth of studies from the African continent so that the findings of this study could be interpreted against the international perspective.

#### **2.2 THE SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE**

As a nation in the process of transformation from the inequalities of the past, South Africa has encountered many challenges in its reconstructive attempts to address social and economic deficits within the country. This has directly impacted on the quality of the public education offering and the processes and programs educators employ that augment learners' classroom experiences (Donald *et al*, 2002; 2010). This study's focus is on educators' insight about educational resilience.

To date there are very few studies that explore educational resilience on the African continent and no research undertaken that explored foundation phase educators' insight within the public primary school context in South Africa. However, studies conducted between 1990 and 2008 have explored factors that impacted resilience in general in multiple contexts of risk including violence, youth living in high-risk environments, learning disabilities, middle adolescence and its

challenges, township living, poverty and child-headed households (Normand, 2007; Kruger & Prinsloo, 2008; Theron & Theron, 2010, p. 2).

## **2.3 HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

### **2.3.1 Educational resilience emerged from medical and developmental psychology**

At the outset, it is a useful exercise to holistically unpack the historical context of resilience research. Ungar (2003) stated that people's fascination with the concept of resilience is on the increase, not only amongst researchers but also in popular literature. He refers to Anne Frank's novel 'Diary of a Young Girl' as one such example (Normand, 2007, p. 19).

According to Waxman *et al*, (2004) resilience as a concept first emerged from medical and developmental psychopathology when invulnerability was explored on discovering that there was a difference in illness patterns in a longitudinal study of people with coronary disease. During the transition from medicine to psychosocial research, a key conceptual distinction emerged; the perspective shifted from examining invulnerability to risk, to examining strengths (Waxman *et al*, 2004, p. 20). Educational resilience research according to Rutter (1985) in Greene (2002) emerged from the study of risk; risk researchers discovered that in spite of the most unfavourable circumstances children developed into successful adults.

Werner and Smith's (2001) longitudinal study that investigated factors that protected some children from risk in high-risk children on the Hawaiian Island of Kauai focused on risk and protective factors associated with the children's long-term vulnerability and resilience. The children's role in the processes that shaped their resilience and vulnerability was explored. Researchers reflected how a child's temperament influenced interactions within a family and community; factors that determined whether they remain vulnerable or become resilient. The third phase of risk studies examined multiple influences and interactions of risk and protective factors on child and adult adjustment (Greene, 2002, p. 21) in a systematic search for protective factors which differentiated children with healthy adaptation profiles from those who were less adjusted in similar socioeconomic situations. The paradigm shift that occurred in resilience

research was the move away from studying individual resilience factors to consider social contextual factors as significant in supporting resilience in learners (Fraser, 2004, p. 143); researcher began looking at strengths rather than deficits and protective rather than risk factors. Consequently, the eco-systemic perspective of educational resilience emerged as a valid research entity (Normand, 2007, p. 22).

## **2.4 FOUNDATIONAL STUDIES IN EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE**

Waxman *et al*, (2004) authors of the book “*Educational resiliency student, teacher, and school perspectives*,” pointed out that conceptual and empirical work in educational resilience gained recognition as a framework to understand why some students were successful in school whilst other students from similar disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds were not. The educational community adopted the ‘strength-based’ approach in investigating educational resilience to improve the educational and social outcomes for children (Green, 2002; Waxman *et al* 2004, p. 4). By focusing on a child’s strengths, educators can enhance educational resilience in their learners (Greene, 2002, p. 162). Due to the demographic shift in school enrollment since 1994 and the socioeconomic circumstances of the majority of the population, South African public schools provide an optimal field for rich data collection about this topic.

Three major studies in the development of the understanding of educational resilience phenomena are cited by Waxman *et al*, (2004). The first reference is to an epidemiological study of ten years conducted by Rutter (1979) that focused on children from the Isle of Wight and inner-city London. The parents of these children were mentally ill however some of them did not show signs relative to their adverse conditions: Rutter (1979) questioned why. He found that both individual characteristics of the learner and the school environment were significant. Schools contributed protective factors by fostering a sense of achievement in children, enhancing personal growth, and increasing social skills (Waxman *et al*, 2004, p. 41).

The second study, a longitudinal one conducted by Werner and Smith (1992; 2001) in a group of high-risk children born in 1955 in Kauai explored how single factors contributed to outcomes.

Children were designated as ‘high-risk’ because of poverty and a family environment impacted by a number of factors including family instability, parental psychopathology and other negative child-rearing conditions. Werner and Smith’s study (1992), focused particularly on risk and protective factors associated with the children’s long-term vulnerability and resilience. The study separated three types of protective attributes that supported resilience: dispositional attributes of the individual, affectionate ties with family and external support systems in the environment. Cited in Waxman *et al* (2004), Werner and Smith (1992) concluded that a child’s temperament interacted within the family and community which was a determining factor in whether they became vulnerable or resilient.

The ‘Project Competence’ study’s focus was on the effects of life stressors on competency levels of elementary school children (Waxman *et al*, 2004). At the conclusion of the ten year study with 200 participants, the researchers found that participants experienced multiple stressful life conditions; disadvantaged children with a low socioeconomic status from less positive families were generally less competent and more likely to be disruptive. However, some of the disadvantaged children were competent and did not display any behavioural problems. This strengthened the question of why some children did not succumb to the adversity they faced by developing a negative adaptation (Waxman *et al*, 2004, p. 42).

Waxman *et al* (2004) cited Masten and Garmezy’s (1990) longitudinal study exploring factors attributed to successful and unsuccessful development of Minnesota children considered to be ‘at-risk’. This study compared three groups of children: competent children growing up with little adversity, resilient children growing up with high levels of adversity and maladaptive children who had not overcome their adversity. Results from this study indicated that resilient children and competent children had a history of more resources and support which helped them to cope with adversity. Maladaptive children lacked resources like family support.

## **2.5 THE RESILIENT CHILD**

The concept of a ‘competent child’ was pitted against the merits of educational resilience which researchers believed was the more complex multi-tiered phenomenon (Fraser, 2004, p. 23). Masten (2001) clarified the fact that although both involved personal attributes the significant difference was that educational resilience required the interaction between personal attributes

and unfavourable environmental factors to succeed. Many research studies are consistent in their findings that in most cases children develop coping mechanisms and achieve successful life outcomes (Knight, 2007, p. 545). However, not all children grow through childhood and adolescence without difficulty; many research reports on educational resilience indicate that non-resilient children are the ones who require educator support (Knight, 2007, p. 545).

The complex interplay between certain characteristics of learners and their broader environments requires a balance between their stressors and their ability to cope (Greene, 2002, p. 37). Resilient children achieve positive outcomes (Fraser 2004). Wolin and Desetta's (2000) use of the descriptive terms "hardiness," invulnerable," and "invincible" for the resilient child focuses on the positive qualities or outcomes rather than the negative concerns. Rutter (2001) viewed the resilient child as facing stress in a way that allowed self-confidence and social competence to increase.

## **2.6 NON-RESILIENCE: A DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS**

Children may be more or less resilient at different points in their lives (Russo and Boman, 2007, p. 17). Greene (2002) cited Masten (1999) comments that the major developmental tasks of children at different ages in all cultures are important signals to determine those children who adapt in the face of adverse circumstances versus those who are disrupted by adverse conditions. Educational resilience can thus be conceptualised as a dynamic process, a two-way construct following exposure to adversity that can result in positive outcomes with intervention (Normand, 2007, p. 31).

Greene, (2002) cited Garnezy's (1993) questions: (a) what are the characteristics of risk factors in non-resilient children that predispose them to maladjustment following exposure to adversity? (b) What are the characteristics of protective factors that shield resilient children from such adjustment problems?

Bernard (2004) author of *Resiliency: what we have learned?* , concluded that environmental protective factors are essential in enhancing resiliency in children so the non-resilient child has a lack in this area. Research on educational resiliency according to Boon, (2008) helped in identifying what resilient children do right to protect themselves when facing multiple

challenges. Lessons learned could help to develop interventions with those who remain vulnerable or non-resilient.

## **2.7 RELEVANT FACTORS IN EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE**

Resilience research show that a number of constructs exist that relate to educational resilience; these are discussed and researched regularly to prove their impact on the presence of resilience in a child. Risk and adversity, protective and vulnerability factors, stress and coping are constructs that are synonymous with resilience (Normand, 2007, p. 31).

### **2.7.1 Risk Factors**

The term risk originated in epidemiology; risks are ‘any influences that increase the probability’ of deterioration to a more serious state or ‘maintenance of a problem condition’ (Greene, 2002, p. 32). Masten (2001) explains risk factors as those characteristics thought to present children with a higher probability of an undesirable outcome like dropping out of school. Compas (1995) cited in Normand (2007) felt that risk factors do not help to explain why problems develop but simply point that they may. A common characteristic however is the chronicity which is often beyond the child’s control, tends to be interconnected and causes the child to grow up with multiple interconnected life hazards (Normand, 2007), p. 31). Ahmed *et al* (2004) cited in Moleli (2005) refers to risk factors as those elements that are not conducive to the development of a resilient learner. Research studies that explored the attributes of children these ‘at- risk’ children found non-resilient children to be withdrawn or aggressive; further, these vulnerable children behaved in ways which led them to be rejected by their peers (Greene, D., Oswald, M., & Spears, B., 2007). Boon (2008) described non-resilient children as experiencing emotional difficulties like anxiety, phobias, depression, loneliness and fearfulness. The internalizing of problems displayed by non-resilient learners may cause them to withdraw from participation in school activities which in turn may lead to absenteeism (Boon, 2008, p. 85).

For one to understand educational resilience, it is important to understand the processes and mechanisms by which vulnerable children successfully navigate risk situations. Rutter (1988) and Doll and Lyon (1998) cited in Normand (2007) suggested that both risk and resilience factors are evaluated within their context. Researchers have shown that the influence of a caring

teacher with high expectations and a positive classroom climate can play a key role in enhancing resilience in vulnerable learners (Greene *et al*, 2007, p. 135).

### **2.7.2 Adversity**

Luthar *e*, (2000) refer to adversity as being linked to risk, encompassing of negative life circumstances and associated with adjustment difficulties. Hall and Pearson (2003) stated that research on risk and adversity reveals that adversity can help or hinder a resilient reaction to life's inevitable challenge. They further stated that as families today are exposed to daily stressors many children are exposed to high levels of childhood stress. Children with adversity are likely to be identified as being 'at-risk' of having subsequent learning problems. Adversity can be decreased however, by improving learners' attributes in their school environment. In an attempt to decrease the effects of adverse circumstances and build resilience, researchers have identified a number of 'protective factors' that promote development (Russo and Boman, 2007, p.17).

### **2.7.3 Stress and Coping**

Stress and coping are two important concepts in understanding educational resilience. Leiderman (1998) cited in Normand (2007) felt that stress and coping explain a reaction to threatening events, both internally and externally. Psychological change and social adaptation are keys to the being able to cope with stress. The stress and coping paradigm refers to living in and interacting within an environment in which multiple rather than single factors are brought to bear. Coping mechanisms may include an attempt to alter threatening conditions themselves by directly changing an appraisal of conditions so that they do not feel the threat. It is also evident that some coping processes may increase the risk of maladjustment while others may improve adaptation and reduce the risk of a negative outcome (Normand, 2007, p. 34). Rutter (2002) felt that relationships play an important role in stressful event because much of the stressful quality of an event lies in its effects on families and social interactions.

### **2.7.4 Protective Factors**

Protective factors contribute to educational resilience. Masten (2001) stated that the term protective factor generally describes the circumstances that moderate the effects of risk by reducing the effects of stress and enhancing adaptation. Protective factors act as a buffer, interrupting or even preventing risk. Rutter (2001) cited in Normand (2007, p. 32) defines these factors as those attributes of the person, environments, situations and events that temper predictions of psychopathology based upon vulnerability. Ungar (2003) commented that protective factors provide resistance to risk and foster positive outcomes. He focused on the importance of social networks and close personal relationships as being protective. To fully understand educational resilience Ungar (2003) believed that external protective factors like a good school, caring educators, secure attachment to caregivers and their meaningful participation in the child's academic life should be explored as well as the internal resources of the resilient child which include self-efficacy, self-esteem, problem solving and good communication. Other internal assets which may be intrinsic, inherited or generated include biological and psychological factors like the resilient child's health, temperament, gender, intellectual capacity, social capacity and sense of purpose (Russo and Boman, 2007). Greene (2002) commented that a personal disposition, a supportive family and extra-familial social environment can modify stress and alter or even reverse potential negative outcomes. A caring relationship that conveys compassion, understanding, respect and interest grounded in good listening that establishes safety and basic trust can make a difference (Bernard, 2004). According to Russo and Boman (2007) the educator can develop these protective factors through their interaction with learners. In this study the educator's ability to enhance resilience is explored as the external mechanism of influence. International literature on resilience studies indicates that educators can foster resilience to improve outcome in vulnerable learners (Greene *et al*, 2007, p 134). Rutter (2002) emphasized that in general, protective factors allows for learners to become less vulnerable and hence more resilient. Masten and Reed (2002) found that the best documented asset for reliance is a strong bond to a competent and caring adult, which need not be a parent. In the case of non-resilient learners, it is possible that the educator is that competent and caring adult.

### **2.7.5 Vulnerability Factors**

To conceptualize educational resilience it is important to understand what a vulnerability factor means and how it relates to learners. The term vulnerability according to Masten (2001) refers to



the greater likelihood of developing an undesirable outcome. Although researchers use the term vulnerability and protective interchangeably Luthar *et al* (2000), the interplay between risk factors and a child's strengths and weaknesses does correlate with the amount of vulnerability or resilience a child experiences (Normand, 2007, p. 33). In order for educators to decrease this vulnerability in learners due to negative life experiences, they need to support non-resilient, maladaptive learners.

## **2.8 A RESILIENCE-BASED APPROACH TO EDUCATIONAL OUTCOME**

Educational resilience refers to the ability of children to succeed academically despite risk factors that makes it difficult for them to succeed (Bryan, 2005, p. 219). Greene *et al* (2001) and Fraser (2004) both explain that one of the most commonly used definitions of educational resilience is the heightened likelihood of success in school and other life accomplishments despite environmental adversity brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences (Greene *et al*, 2007, p. 133). Poverty, drug abuse, violence, emotional abuse, being disabled and coming from dysfunctional families are some of the adverse conditions described by researchers. Masten (2001) argued that when more than one of the above risk factors is present in a child then that child is considered to be 'at-risk' and the risk could be academic failure however, Waxman *et al*, (2004) cautioned that not all children who are 'at-risk' because of circumstance are likely to be 'at-risk' of academic failure as there are those children who succeed in school despite the presence of adversity.

This study's aim is to explore resilience in the South African public school context where the majority of learners are perceived as being 'at-risk' of academic failure. Fraser (2004) found that one of the most formidable challenges facing public education is improving the education of the number of learners 'at-risk' of academic failure. Due to the demographic shift in many schools, educational researchers have explored resilience in a bid to obtain answers that would improve educational and social outcomes for children. Therefore many researchers have found that as an option toward improving academic success, educational resilience has far-reaching implications (Fraser, 2004, p. 142).

A resilience-based approach to improving educational outcome does not have to place emphasis on intellectual attributes like ability; ability has not necessarily been found to be a characteristic

of resilient learners. Strategies that use educational resilience as a tool to improve academic success through effective educational interventions should take into account ‘alterable’ factors that promote resilience (Waxman *et al*, 2004, p. 38). Bernard (1991) cited in Fraser (2004) stated that several alterable factors have been found that influence resiliency in children; four personal characteristics that resilient learners display include social competence, problem solving skills, autonomy and a sense of purpose.

Four other factors related to resiliency described by McMillan and Reed (1994) cited in Waxman *et al* (2004) are known as influential factors and include personal attributes such as motivation and goal orientation, positive use of time, family life that includes family support and experiences and school and the classroom learning environment. Although there was much importance placed on resiliency and psychopathology historically, educational resilience research has considered the concept of resilience from a ‘strength-based’ perspective. Although many international studies have taken place about resilience, only a few have examined resiliency in schools; the following paragraphs will highlight the benefits of these studies (Waxman *et al*, 2004, p. 42).

## **2.9 CURRENT EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCY RESEARCH**

The term “academic invulnerability” used by Alva (1991) cited in Waxman *et al*, (2004) describes students who sustain high levels of achievement motivation and performance despite the presence of adversity that places them at risk of ultimately dropping out of school. The following studies highlight the various methods and instruments that were used to determine educational resilience and with respect to resilience versus non-resilience, what factors determined resiliency.

In a study to understand the process at play in producing successful high school students, Ryes and Jason (1993), cited in Waxman *et al* (2004) examined factors that distinguished the success and failure of Latino students from an inner-city high school. This study used the 48 learners’ previous grade attendance rates and academic achievements to identify learners at high or low risk of dropping out of school by the tenth grade. The finding in this study showed that twenty four learners were considered at high-risk of dropping out of school, whilst the other twenty four were deemed at low-risk of dropping out of school. Although there were no differences between

these two groups pertaining to parent–learner involvement, socioeconomic status, family support, or parental supervision there was still a high-risk for dropping out of school. Many of the low-risk learners reported that they were satisfied at school whilst high-risk learners were not and belonged to gangs or brought weapons to school (Waxman *et al*, 2004, p. 42).

The Centre for Research on Education of Students Placed ‘At-Risk’ has been involved in several research studies that look at the various risk factors that place these students at risk. Most of the studies concluded that students from backgrounds that showed positive family influences had high academic achievement results and were students from a higher social class (Nettles *et al*, 2000). In another study in Waxman *et al*, (2004), the researchers examined factors that contributed to *academic* resilience and achievement in Mexican American high school students. This study confirmed that resilient students were those that reported having ‘A’s whilst the non-resilient students were those that had mostly ‘D’s and below; resilient students had a higher perception of family, peer, and teacher support and a positive relationship with the school.

A study on resilient and non-resilient learners from four elementary schools in a large urban district located in a major metropolitan city situated in the South Central Region of the United States was carried out by Waxman *et al*, (1997), cited in Waxman *et al* (2004). This study used two fourth and fifth grade classrooms and educators were asked to identify their learners ‘at-risk’, that is learners from families of low socioeconomic status or learners living with a single parent, relative, or guardian. Educators were asked to identify three learners that they perceived to be resilient; learners that showed high achieving on both standardized and achievement tests and daily schoolwork who were very motivated with excellent attendance. Three non-resilient learners had to be identified; learners achieving low on both standardized and achievement tests and daily schoolwork who were not motivated with poor attendance.

The findings in this study revealed that overall, resilient learners perceived their classrooms much more favourably than non-resilient learners. Resilient students had a higher academic self-concept and learning aspirations than non-resilient ones. Resilient learners also perceived their educators as having higher expectations for them; these learners were more involved and satisfied in their classroom than non-resilient learners. There were many themes that emerged from the case study data; several important factors distinguished resilient learners from non-resilient learners. Resilient learners appeared to be more persistent, attentive, demonstrated

leadership skills, worked well with other learners and were less disruptive than non-resilient learners (Waxman *et al*, 2004, p. 48). Educators' responses in this study indicated that they had no problem identifying resilient and non-resilient learners in their class. Most of the educators in this study also reported that the use of the resilience framework was a useful approach that helped them to understand why certain learners were successful whilst others were unsuccessful. Educators indicated that the lack of parental involvement, low motivation, and low self-esteem were the major factors contributing to lack of success in non-resilient learners.

The above studies illustrate the growing body of research that tried to address the issue of why some learners succeed in school, and why some are not successful (Waxman *et al*, 2004, p. 50). A study conducted by Russo and Boman (2007) in Queensland, Australia amongst three state primary schools was undertaken to explore primary school educators' ability to recognise resilience in their students. These researchers chose nine educators and ninety two students from schools that served a socially and economically diverse population. The study concluded that many of the educator participants' theoretical knowledge of resilience was sound; educators had a perceived level of confidence in their ability to identify associated protective factors and to assist children in building resilience (Russo & Boman 2007).

## **2.10 EDUCATORS' RECOGNITION OF EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE**

Russo and Boman (2007) argued that it was imperative for educators to have a deep and applicable knowledge of the concept of educational resilience so that they are able to detect those that require assistance. Professional development is an aspect that Waxman *et al*, (2004) argued was of vital importance in helping educators implement a resilience education approach in the classroom. Many educational research projects concentrate on finding appropriate programs to help educators with resilience education. In the United States, closing the academic achievement gap has been an ongoing process in the education system. Norfleet and Kritsomis's (2006) report on closing the academic achievement gap amongst African American students stated that it has become a challenge for educators at public schools. These authors cited Irvine's (2004) study as an example of how educators can improve. The study's focus was on assisting elementary school educators develop effective classroom practices in working with African-American learners in urban settings. The educators in this study discovered that when teaching African-American

learners they had to adjust their teaching style by incorporating a caring approach, using mothering skills and demonstrating a strong belief in their learners (Norfleet *et al* 2006, p. 2).

The above study supports the premise that for educators to successfully improve the outcome for learners 'at-risk' of academic failure, teaching strategies have to also change to adapt to the learners' needs. According to Russo and Boman (2007) it is extremely important for educators to understand the phenomenon of 'resilience' in order to identify characteristics that protect children against environmental stressors. It will also help educators to understand how to create supportive academically enriched environments for their learners. Brown *et al* (2001) developed a teaching method that helps educators gain knowledge about implementing an educational resilience approach; they designed a program that involves educator participation, observation, reflection, and transformation. According to Dubois and Karcher (2005) peer-teaching methods help by nurturing contact with pro-social peers who provide learners with social support.

These few studies explored teaching strategies that educators could employ to gain knowledge on how to implement an educational resilience approach in teaching learners 'at-risk' of academic failure. Research-based instructional practices all stress a student-centered model of classroom instruction that emphasises more active student learning with teachers acting as facilitators of learning so teaching practices can create 'flow-type' instructional activities that are needed and beneficial for many students 'at risk' of failure. This type of teaching approach can prevent student complacency, passive resentment and teacher burnout as argued by Haberman (1991) cited in Waxman *et al* (2004). In helping to improve classroom instruction for non-resilient learners, educators should center on employing explicit teaching practices that have been found to be effective for students 'at-risk' of failure (Waxman *et al* 2004, p. 56). The following explicit practices have been shown to improve education of 'at-risk' learners: cognitively-guided instruction, cooperative learning, culturally responsive teaching, technology-enriched instruction and instructional conversation.

These research-based instructional practices all stress that a student-centered model of classroom instruction that emphasizes more active student learning, with educators acting as facilitators of Wolin's (1995) comment cited in Waxman *et al* (2004) as the founder of 'Project Resilience' was that little material has been written explicitly for educators on how to implement educational resilience in the classroom compared to the articles that exist on the importance of educators.

Educators are thus often frustrated by the lack of material available and accessible for their professional development. Most of the literature on resilience has been generated by research psychologists and is aimed for other research psychologists (Waxman *et al*, 2004. P. 196).

The solution to this dilemma is that educators should be offered a clear explanation of the educational resilience paradigm. Resilience can be developed in spheres of children's lives that are susceptible to the influence of educators; educators can function in those spheres to make a difference in learners' lives. According to Waxman *et al* (2004) a study on resilient and non-resilient learners found that non-resilient learners are less engaged in their work than resilient learners. Therefore, educators should be playing an active role in helping non-resilient students become engaged in classroom activities and control their attention. Educators should be exposed to literature on resilience to enable them to understand the concept and effectively administer programs that foster educational resilience in their classrooms.

## **2.11 EDUCATORS' UNDERSTANDING OF EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE**

A study by Russo and Boman (2007) investigated teachers' knowledge of, and capacity to identify resilience, in 92 primary school children in Far North Queensland. It was found that "although teachers' knowledge of resilience was apparently strong, and they reported a significant level of confidence in their ability to assist children in building resilience, their capacity to identify levels of resilience in their students was lacking." An interview survey of teachers' understanding of resilience found that teachers "located their conceptions of what builds resilience to specific aspects of the school life and context", specifically academic success and good conduct on the part of students.

A quantitative scale was administered to teachers in South Australia's Catholic education sector in 1999 to determine the extent to which they were involved in fostering resilience (Oswald M., Jonson B., & Howard S., 1999). This was followed by a qualitative questionnaire followed to determine teachers' understanding of this phenomenon. Results suggested that teachers may be able to describe readily those circumstances which place any child 'at risk' (e.g. poverty) but they failed to recognize that those children identified as resilient also experienced circumstances in which they were potentially 'at risk'. Teachers described some children as 'resilient' on "the basis

of displaying competence in coping generally but not because of experiencing 'at risk' life circumstances”.

Teachers’ misunderstanding of resilience was explored by Greene *et al* in 2007. Researchers argued that teachers were confusing the profile of a competent student: one who does not have 'at-risk' circumstances, with that of a resilient one, who also manages competently despite the 'at risk' circumstances in their lives. Recognizing these differences is considered essential for teachers to be able to identify those children requiring intervention and support both at the personal, interpersonal, social and emotional levels.

A study on understanding resilience in diverse, talented students in an urban high school revealed preliminary data about risk factors that increase negative outcomes and certain protective factors which promote positive outcomes in talented urban students (Reis S.M., Colbert R.D., & Hebert T.R., 2005). Amongst the protective factors for high ability students who achieved despite encountering obstacles were factors relevant to the discussion of educational resilience: supportive families, peers and adults, caring teachers and counselors, challenging classes, and participation in school and extracurricular activities.

## **2.12 EDUCATORS’ ENHANCING RESILIENCE**

In a study in 2008 by Waxman *et al*, results indicated that the amount and quality of teacher and student academic interaction were two of the most influential variables that promoted student outcomes. Researchers suggested teacher practices that promoted resiliency in schools included using feedback from classroom observation and learning environment measures, employing explicit teaching practices; and understanding students on a social and personal level.

In exploring educators’ enhancement of educational resilience, some researchers began with a key underlying premise that educational resilience can be “fostered through interventions that enhance children's learning, develop their talents and competencies, and protect or buffer them against environmental adversities” (Wang, M. C., Haertel, G. D., & Walberg, H. J., 1997). Based on results of meta-analyses, authoritative review articles, and a survey of educational researchers, it was established that “a teacher’s concern, high expectation and role modeling were key protective factors against the likelihood of academic failure, particularly for students in difficult life circumstances”. It was felt that teachers not only provided institutional support for

academic content and skills, but served as confidants and positive role models for children to develop the values and attitudes needed to persevere in their schoolwork by “encouraging students to master new experiences, believe in their own efficacy, and take responsibility for their own learning”.

Contextual influences in classroom management and climate or quality of instruction were seen to affect learners’ day-to-day activities (Wang *et al*, 1997). These included “maximising learning time, setting high expectations for all students, providing ample opportunities for student/teacher interaction, maintaining a high degree of classroom engagement, tailoring instruction to meet the needs of individual students, engaging students in setting goals and making learning decisions, and participating in group learning activities”. Well-organized lessons with clear learning objectives that led to student satisfaction were considered significant to outcomes.

### **2.12.1 International Studies on Models for Enhancing Resilience**

The American Psychological Association embarked on a collaborative to investigate the effect of “learning the ‘Other 3Rs’ on student academic achievement and life skills” (McDonnell J. S., 2005). Findings were that teachers attending the ‘Other 3Rs’ training in comparison to standard teachers’ training expressed greater perceived self-efficacy in their ability to influence children’s learning, had greater confidence in their ability to help children use reasoning skills to become more resilient learners and more socially responsible and had greater beliefs that resilience could be taught.

Martin (2002) recommended a model of motivation to enhance resilience because it could be used by educators and counselors, understood by learners and located in the classroom. This model was seen as desirable for students not only to be motivated to “achieve to their potential but also better prepared to deal with academic setback and pressure from a resilience perspective”. Underachievers, disruptive learners, ethnic minorities and the academically disadvantaged could all benefit from this focus. Students who had little interest in learning, anxious students, students constantly fearful of failure and even highly motivated students who needed to be sustained appeared to benefit. A greater sense of self-belief and perceived control would anchor the development of motivated behaviour in the forms of persistence, planning and study management.



### **2.12.2 Classroom intervention programs**

School-based cognitive behavioural programs have been shown to be effective in enhancing psychological health and resilience (Bin Arrifin, 2010). One such program was developed by the University of Pennsylvania for use in other countries. An exploratory study using the Penn Resiliency Program was conducted in Singapore focusing on the link between optimism and academic gains. Results indicated that children in the intervention group had fared significantly better than controls in terms of resilience scores and academic attainments. Similar outcomes were obtained from a re-run of the program on another 30 children the following year, selected from 124 children within the lowest resilience baseline band, providing preliminary evidence for replication of program effectiveness.

Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, *et al* (2007) explored classroom management in schools with a diverse student population by describing the practices used by three effective novice teachers in urban elementary classrooms. The teachers focused on “developing relationships and establishing expectations through the use of “insistence” and a culturally responsive communication style”. The authors provided clear pictures of the ways in which teachers could teach in a culturally diverse environment by insisting on respectful behaviour and establishing a caring, task-focused learner community and demonstrated how teachers could create environments resilience for students who have been historically disadvantaged.

‘Affective teaching’ was compared to ‘cognitive teaching’ by Shechtman and Leichtentritt (2004) in a study in classrooms in Israel. Data was collected based on lesson observations, equally divided into the two types of instruction. Results indicated a lower frequency of misbehaviour in the affective lessons compared with the cognitive lessons. This included not completing tasks, talking without permission, moving without permission and aggression. Positive behaviours that included expression of thoughts, expression of feelings, self-awareness and peer support were more frequent in the affective lessons compared with cognitive lessons.

Henley, Schweier, de Gara *et al* (2007) undertook a review of theories and practices pertaining to the dynamics of resilience and sport and play programs, established to help children and youth experiencing adversity in their lives. Sport and play activities, inclusive of any organized movement, exercise, game or artistic activities were seen to have a stabilizing impact on most

children through supporting and encouraging their resilience processes. Although psychosocial sports and play programs are a relatively new approach to helping children manage adversity, the authors felt that more field investigations needed to be implemented to establish best practices methodology and to discover the impact on the enhancement of children's resilience.

## **2.13 THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT**

Milstein and Henry (2000) pointed out that schools could build resiliency in learners by creating an environment of caring and personal relationships; the foundation for this relationships began with educators who have a resiliency building-attitude. Research on effective inner-city schools by Wang *et al* (1997) found effective organizational features in the educational environment to include "strong leadership by the principal, shared decision making, and esprit de corps among staff". Instructional features linked to positive educational outcomes include well-managed classrooms, challenging instruction, and student choice in selecting instructional activities. Schools that had "strong parental involvement programs, a pleasant school climate and attractive physical facilities" were mentioned positively.

A consultation strategy that assesses the availability of protective factors and risk in school classrooms and supports interventions to strengthen these so that more learners in the classroom are successful known as ClassMaps Consultation has been described by Nickolite and Doll (2008). A conceptual framework that includes a strategy for describing and measuring the ecological characteristics of classrooms and intervention strategies that target the classroom in lieu of individual students is a positive indicator that educators can enhance educational resilience for all learners with positive outcomes.

### **2.13.1 The role of educators**

Nettles *et al* (2000) argued that social resources such as a caring educator and school can have a positive benefit on a learners' academic performance. Waxman *et al* (2004) argues that educators who provide students with a sense of safety, love and belonging, respect, power, accomplishment and learning and ultimately meaning are often the important role models who foster a child's resilience. Russo and Boman (2007) explained the important role educators play in the lives of learners 'at-risk' of academic failure. The school becomes a 'home-away-from home' for these learners and educators become role models to these learners who confide in

them when their own families are threatened by dissolution. Russo and Boman (2007) also found that educators can make a significant contribution to developing resilience by providing protective factors like a caring relationship and motivation.

Educators can be the most effective environmental resource in fostering resilience in their learners through positive interactions and a caring nature. Educators are in daily contact with learners and are considered to be the first in line of assistance for children in building resilience (Russo and Boman, 2007, p. 29). Primary school educators have significant influence on their learners' development because of the time these learners spend with them. This means that learners who are non-resilient who enter the classroom are given the opportunity to develop in all these spheres if the educator is cognizant of the process of building resilience in a learner and is committed to the process. Daily school experiences affect learners in multiple ways (Russo and Boman, 2007, p. 19).

Rutter (1987) cited in Russo and Boman (2007) argued that educators can promote improved self-esteem and self-efficacy by enabling learners to develop important social and problem-solving skills. Self-efficacy is one of the protective factors that determine whether a child can overcome adversity to succeed academically. Researchers Gilligan (2002), Brailsford (2005), Theron (2006), Greene *et al*, (2007), Russo and Boman (2007) and Boon (2008) all felt that a positive rewarding school environment and positive relationships with educators promote resilience; by schools and educators developing resilience in children, and stress caused through adversity is reduced.

Brooks and Goldstein (2008) commented that the “assumptions educators possessed about themselves, their role as teachers and their students’ capabilities played a significant role in determining expectations, teaching practices and ultimately student happiness and success”. These researchers believed that “in their efforts to nurture resilience in their students, effective educators appreciate the life-long impact they have on students, acknowledge that all students want to be successful, and appreciate that the foundation for successful learning in a safe and secure classroom climate is the relationship they forge with students.”

### **2.13.2 The role of school management**

Theron (2006) found that there was a need to address the academic needs of students ‘at-risk’ of academic failure by enhancing their “school connectedness” or feeling of membership in the school. Children that are non-resilient can be helped and motivated to build resilience against adverse circumstances if they are provided with a resilience building mechanism through encouragement and the feeling of safety and security such that they are able to maintain social connections which promote positive strategies for coping (Prelow *et al*, 2006). Educators in the classroom should be supported by school management that views educational resilience as a priority for all learners at the school who assume a mutual responsibility to create a nurturing and protective school environment.

Isaacs (2003) investigated the attributes of school principals in relation to resilience. In a quantitative study that surveyed principals, assistant principals and teachers using on-line questionnaires collected data found a significant relationship with resilience attitudes that were positive about the world, focused and flexible and thoughts were organized and proactive. Leadership practices of challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act and encouraging the heart were also significant. This study contributed to the knowledge base about the leadership strengths and weaknesses in a school’s management with respect to resilience enhancement. Further research in this area is critical to managing the change necessary in the skills of those in in most schools.

### **2.13.3 The role of professional development**

Waxman *et al* (2004) discussed the fact that the key to successful school reform lay in improving the education of ‘at-risk’ students. Russo and Boman (2007) felt that professional development is necessary for educators if they are going to be able to identify resilience in learners. Briggs, Johnson, Shepherd *et al* (2002) argued that if teachers were required to provide supportive learning experiences for children to build resilience in the classroom, they needed to be educated and well-informed of the complexities. According to findings in a study carried out by Russo and Boman (2007) on primary school teachers’ ability to recognize resilience in their students, teachers were not successful in detecting students’ self-reported status of resilience. These teachers did not have any depth of knowledge about the concept of resilience however they were only able to identify resilient traits because of the statements in the questionnaire which reflected traits that were easily linked to the concept of resilience. Although teachers believed

they had a sound understanding of resilience the results suggested that in order for teachers to be able to respond appropriately to children ‘at risk’ it was imperative that they had a deeper understanding and knowledge of the concept of resilience.

According to Green *et al*, (2007) study on teachers’ understanding of resilience, knowledge about the concept was limited despite the use of textbook style definitions to indicate an understanding of the terms. Waxman *et al*, (2004) stated that once educators were aware of educational resilience, it heightened the likelihood of success in school despite environmental adversity as educators focused on students’ positive traits rather than a negative life situation.

Educators may want to understand the concept of resilience and draw upon and implement appropriate interventions to foster resiliency amongst students ‘at risk’ of academic failure but they may be restricted in their classroom practices because of a limited knowledge base. Professional development is an avenue that can promote the understanding of resilience issues for pre-service and in-service educators (Waxman *et al*, 2004, p. 153). In Russo and Bomans’ (2007) study on teachers’ knowledge of and ability to identify resilience in primary school children in Queensland, Australia, educators were asked if they had had any professional development about resilience the majority of the participants indicated that they were not directly involved in professional development. These researchers therefore argued that if educators were to provide supportive learning experiences for children ‘at risk’ to build resilience in the classroom then they needed to be educated about the applicable knowledge of resilience (Russo & Boman, 2007, p. 27).

#### **2.13.4 The role of parental support**

According to literature on resilience research, one of the characteristics of resilient children or adolescents, are that they share close relationships with caring parental figures that have high expectations (Nettles *et al*, 2000). This statement is supported by the findings of Luthar and Goldstein (2004) who found that among families living in conditions of poverty, positive parenting that involves high monitoring and support and cohesiveness can help children maintain adequate levels of adjustments. Normand (2007) concurred that resilient children tend to have parents who are concerned with their children’s education, participate in their education and direct their children’s everyday tasks and are aware of their children’s interests and goals

(Winfield, 1994) cited in Normand (2007). A good relationship with at least one parent has been shown to diminish the effects of inter-parental conflict and promote childhood resilience (Fraser, 2004, p. 45).

According to an Australian psychologist specializing in adolescent mental health, there is a current crisis in parenting that is adversely impacting the normal psychological development and growth of young people (Knight, 2007, p. 546). A supportive family environment is an important protective factor and attached relationships to reliable and responsive people enable young people to be secure (Gilligan, 2000, p. 39). According to Meichenbaum (2005), social institutions such as schools can foster resilience in youth and children by assisting and guiding parents. A longitudinal study on early child care highlighted the need to combine attentive parenting with quality child care and home visits (Meichenbaum, 2005, p. 22). Many researchers have identified the concept of effective parenting as significant in supporting 'at-risk' children (Normand, 2007, p. 97). Boon (2008) stated that resilient students are well adjusted to and able to meet the demands of society; because of the support they receive from their parents or a significant other to assist them in meeting challenging situations.

A study carried out by Boon (2008) on risk or resilience that examined predictors of low achievement and school drop-outs amongst indigenous and non-indigenous groups of learners in two North Queensland schools in Australia. The results showed that the most notable difference was found in the degree to which family structure contributed to academic risk. In the indigenous learners it was twice as strong as in the non-indigenous learners. It is clear that an intact family structure while culturally determined is a protective factor against being at academic risk (Boon, 2008, p. 96). Effective parenting is essential for very young children as this promotes self-efficacy and self-worth through the development of secure infant-caregiver attachments. This provides the basis for cognitive development and social adaptation (McGroder, 2000) cited in Fraser (2004, p. 46).

According to Fraser (2004) students from racial and ethnic minority groups and lower socioeconomic backgrounds possessed two composite group effects highly confounded by one another and related to other predictors of school failure. This included a problematic family structure with unemployed parents, low parental education level, single-headed household and a number of children residing in a household. According to studies undertaken in New Zealand,

the United States of America and the United Kingdom there is an increased rate of instability in the family structure which is placing children at risk of poor life outcomes. Also evident is the fact that current social practices are challenging traditional concepts of 'family' (Tripp, 1994; Fergusson *et al* 1994; Krudek *et al* 1995; Najman *et al* 1997) cited in Knight (2007. p. 546). Knight (2007) argued that the change in family structures have meant changes in parenting of children and young people today; the burden of setting boundaries for children and young people which was usually set up by parents are now becoming the responsibility of schools.

Fraser (2004) further stated that educational resiliency is encouraged and developed when children and youth who are 'at risk' had opportunities to participate in and contribute to their environments in a meaningful way. Literature on resilience indicates the importance of a positive parent-child attachment; a caring relationship is associated with resilient children and this remains the child's primary social support. If family dynamics are developed in a positive manner, the effect on children and adolescents would be to enhance resilient behaviour (Olsson, C. A., Bond, L., Burns, J. M., *et al* 2002, p. 7). Theron (2006) concurred citing Boyden and Manns' (2005) argument that the capacity to function in the face of adversity is linked to a triad of protective factors such as personal protective factors, which includes self-help skills, autonomy and familial protective factors that includes sound family structure and a supportive family network (Theron, 2006, p. 199).

## **2.14 CONCLUSION**

Literature reviewed for the purpose of this study showed that there is increasing evidence that many children cope with adversity and thrive with support. In summary, the resilient child overcomes their circumstances to become academically successful, self-confident and socially competent. Personal attributes at a personality level that include an inner resolve combined with external factors like a caring adult appear to be contributory to the presence of resilience. The non-resilient or vulnerable child exposed to the similar environmental challenge as the resilient one displays emotional and behavioral problems, difficulty in peer relationships and a disinterested attitude in the classroom. Besides genetic vulnerability and personal attributes that incorporate a negative self-esteem, a differentiating factor appears to be the lack of parental support and the absence of a caring adult.

The path to foundation phase educators recognising and understanding educational resilience and implementing programs that build resiliency begins with further research in the area especially in developing countries where assumptions have been made regarding the academic potential of *all* children from adverse circumstances as being negative. The success of any program to change the outcome of adverse living circumstances is an interactive and complex process that requires sensitivity to the risks the child faces, the internal and external assets the child has and the culture and context in which the child is coping.

Evidence in the literature reviewed suggests that resilience is influenced by individual and environmental factors amongst which the support of a caring teacher, a positive and supportive classroom environment and participation in class and group activities feature prominently as factors that are measurable as outcome points and within the control of every educator. The review of the literature on educational resilience encapsulates the views of various authors in their studies on this phenomenon and is indicative of a trend toward a systemic approach to interventions in schools to enhance the educational resilience of all learners for which responsibility is shared by educators, parents and the school management

Chapter Three will discuss the theoretical framework applicable for this study.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

A theoretical framework is “a very general theoretical system with assumptions, concepts, and specific theories” (Neuman, 2006). Henning, Van Rensburg and Smith (2004) pointed out that a theoretical framework allows explicit assumptions to be made about interconnectedness in the world. For the purpose of this study where the depth of insight of foundation phase educators about educational resilience is being explored, theories derived from educational psychology in the social context are relevant in forming a framework for the complexity of the factors at play.

Learners ‘at-risk’ of academic failure may benefit from intervention and support in overcoming personal, social, and cognitive deficits caused through adversity. Resilience is the ability to overcome adversity; based on studies in educational resilience, not all children who come from an ‘at risk’ background may need special intervention. Conceptual and empirical work on resilience has gained much recognition as a framework for examining why some learners are

successful in school whilst other learners from the same socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds are not (Waxman *et al*, 2004, p5).

The following theoretical models were viewed as potential vehicles for understanding the interconnectedness between the multiple factors involved at different individual and societal levels; this framework rooted the various conceptual elements involved in the process of planning the study prior to its implementation and gave direction to the design of the study.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 2005) ecological model of child development is useful in examining in detail the relevant social context of this study. The Social Ecology Model, also called Social Ecological Perspective, is a framework that examines the multiple effects and interrelatedness of social elements in an environment. In qualitative studies, this makes it possible for various contexts involving people and the environment and the influences each has on the other to be effectively analysed. This model allows for the integration of multiple levels and contexts to establish the big picture. With the study focus involving the concept of resilience, this model proved extremely useful with the complexity of the factors involved; a focus on any one level would lead to an underestimate of the effects of the other contexts and a superficial understanding of the subject. Primarily a qualitative research model, it supports observation in the field by allowing a broad focus that has the capacity to harness different sources of data.

Aspects of Werner and Smith's (1992; 2001) work in Resilience Theory which focuses on identifying the protective factors within the school, family and community and Milstein and Henry's (2000) Resilience Model, an adaptation of The Resilience Wheel by Henderson and Milstein (1996) that describes ways to enhance resilience, are the two other theoretical perspectives considered.

### **3.2 THE ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON RESILIENCE**

Ecological theory is based on the interdependence between different organisms and their physical environment, the relationship between them being viewed as a whole. To understand educational resilience and its link to ecological theory the ecological perspective and its implication will be discussed (Greene, 2002, p.64). Theorists have applied concepts of the ecological theory to explore relationships between human beings and their ecological

interactions in their social environment (Donald *et al* 2002; 2010). Theorists like Bronfenbrenner (1979; 2005) have applied this concept more particularly to understanding child development in the educational environment.

Greene (2002) stated that resilience is an ecological phenomenon and postulated that using the ecological model as a theoretical perspective allowed a broadened view of what constitutes resilient behaviour. Sun and Steward, (2007) concurred that the emphasis on an ecological approach in the study of resilience considered the influences of the social context both proximal and distal to children. The ecological perspective allows resilience to be understood as a dynamic and interactive process rather than a personal trait (Normand, 2007, p. 27).

Resilience as an individualised model placed emphasis of survival on the individual who was considered ‘at-risk’ by both social and individual circumstances and took away both the power and responsibilities from families, schools and communities for the presence or lack thereof (Normand, 2007, p. 27). Blum *et al* (2002) cited in Normand (2007) argued that the paradigm shift away from the mono-dimensional way of thinking helped to develop an understanding of what risk factors are significant in the lives of young people. This shift encouraged a movement away from “viewing vulnerabilities as discrete, intra-psychic factors to seeing them as a set of interlocking factors that is influenced by the contexts within which young people live” (Normand, 2007, p. 28). This concept is formalised in Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (1979; 2005) which specifies that wellbeing is affected by the social contexts in which children find themselves and the quality of relationships between individuals, family and institutional systems (Sun & Steward, 2007, p. 576).

Greene (2002) noted that the study of resilience has its origins in developmental theory, acknowledging its grounding in an ecological context which builds on the perspective of strengths. There appears to be a general agreement regarding the components and constructs of resilience theory; Werner’s view (1989) is cited in Sun and Steward’s article (2007). These components and constructs include individual characteristics of the child, family structures and the external environment. Werner and Smith (1992, 2001) also found that variables relating to resilience are protective factors embedded in the family, the educators and the community. Sun and Steward, (2007) agreed that factors that reside within the individual include a variety of coping skills like self-efficacy, while external factors incorporate protective factors that involve

parents, educators and the community. These may range from parental support or adult mentoring to organisations that promote positive development. It is important to note that the term external emphasises social environmental influences on a child's health and development (Waxman *et al*, 2004, p. 127).

Greene (2002) stated that because resilience relates to the context of person-environment interaction and circumstances that influence resilience are embedded in family, school, peers, neighbourhood and the larger community, resilience can be understood from an ecological perspective. Sun and Steward, (2007) commented that placing resilience in an ecological context moved it from being conceptualised as a static, individual trait (Sun & Steward, 2007, p. 576). Normand (2007) found that the ecological perspective provided a framework for understanding why the general challenges of individual development should not be separated from the more specific challenges of social issues and adversity. Donald *et al* (2002; 2010) suggested that the ecological perspective has helped to ground children's developmental contexts as central influences in the formation of their psychological capacities.

### **3.3 BRONFENBRENNER'S ECOLOGICAL MODEL**

According to Howard and Johnson (2000) Bronfenbrenner's theory illuminates why some children do and others do not display resilient behaviours in the face of adverse life circumstances. Ecological theory focuses on both the individual and on the context. Bronfenbrenner (1979; 2005) stated that a child's development is strongly influenced by the family, school, peer, neighbourhood and community contexts in which they live (Fraser, 2004, p. 5). As such his ecological theory is based on nested social structures and their powerful impact on the development of children. When changes occur at any level of the system it has an influence on the other levels; children are located in the centre of these nested systems therefore they are continuously affected in one way or another by changes that occur in the environment that surrounds them (Howard & Johnson, 2000).

#### **3.3.1 The Ecological Systems Theory**

According to Donald *et al* (2002; 2010), the ecological theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979) considers child development as an interaction that evolves within the different levels of systems in the social context. Maher (2007) notes that levels within the ecological model potentially

influence the self-efficacy and educational outcomes of ‘at-risk’ learners; transactions occur when there is interplay between the child at the centre and the setting within which the child operates. The school and the educator are recognised as a major influence in the academic achievement and development of a child (Donald *et al* 2010, p 42). The child develops within a complex system of relations that are affected by multiple levels within the environment, which simply means that as the child interacts within these systems, dynamic interactions occur as members of the systems interact with one another and the child (Donald *et al* 2002; 2010).

In Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (1979; 2005), the child is the central being of a nested system, and is consequently affected by the environment and its actions. Maher (2007) described Bronfenbrenner’s systems theory as having microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems that are linked together in this nested system. These systems are interdependent, dynamic structures ranging from proximal, immediate face-to-face settings, to the most distal, broader social contexts like classes and cultures (Maher, 2007).

Transaction between the child at the centre and any one other is seen as being a microsystem transaction. The microsystem encapsulates the child and their immediate environment: the family, school and peer group in which the child closely interacts face to face with familiar members (Donald *et al* 2010, p.40). It is at this level where daily patterns of activities, roles, relationships and interactions occur. When two or more interact, it is seen as being a mesosystem transaction; this level involves the peer-group, school, and family (Maher, 2007, p8). If there is an imbalance in the microsystem it could influence how the child responds to school; if a child is experiencing adversity at home and the school provides support and protection then the child’s sense of belonging and security increases, effectively modifying the child’s behaviour (Donald *et al*, 2010, p.41).

At the exosystems level, the child is not directly involved but could be influenced by those who have a close proximal relationship with the child; the child could emulate a teacher who encourages and motivates them which in turn could influence the child’s academic achievement. The macrosystem consists of the dominant social structures, values, laws, and customs that influence a society and are influenced by the other levels or cultural values, beliefs or respect for adults that occur in the community (Donald *et al* 2010, p. 42). These values or beliefs could influence the proximal interactions in the child’s microsystem and run through the whole system.

This system is equivalent to the social system as a whole (Donald *et al* 2010, p. 43). In the chronosystem, the interactions between these systems and their influences on individual development are all crossed by time frames; a family in which a developing child is involved may be seen as a process of development which in turn interacts with the child's progressive development itself. Maher (2007) therefore points out that these interactions are not just one or two-way interactions; as one element influences another in any interaction, the influenced one changes and at the same time the one who initiated the interplay is also affected and transformed and nothing remains the same.

### **3.4 ASPECTS OF WERNER AND SMITH'S WORK IN RESILIENCY THEORY**

Many longitudinal studies in resilience found that not every child who comes from an 'at-risk' background will need special intervention; there are those who become healthy, competent adults without any intervention. By incorporating into the theoretical framework aspects of Werner and Smith's (1992) work in resilience theory which focuses on identifying protective factors within the family, school, educators, and community in resilient learners, depth is added to the understanding of the mesosystem within Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (Fraser, 2004, p. 6).

Werner and Smith's (1992; 2001) view was that there exists the "inborn capacity for self-righting" and like other researchers also exploring resiliency theory through longitudinal studies held the view that resilience is not a 'genetic trait' that only a few possess. All children are born with an innate capacity for resilience and its presence can be recognised and enhanced externally. This capacity for resilience allows children to "develop social competence, problem-solving skills, a critical consciousness, autonomy, and a sense of purpose". (Benard, 1995).

It is useful to consider each of these characteristics of a resilient child separately so that non-resilience can be identified. Social competence includes a responsiveness and "ability to elicit positive responses from others", flexibility even inter-culturally, "empathy, communication skills and a sense of humour". Problem-solving skills incorporate the ability to plan, be resourceful help-seeking behaviour and the capacity for critical, creative and reflective thinking. A critical consciousness is seen in the awareness of oppression in the home, school and society and the creation of strategies to overcome these hurdles whether it an alcoholic parent or an unfair educator. Autonomy is "having a sense of one's own identity and an ability to act independently"

in exerting control over the environment that allows a child to have an internal locus of control, master tasks and exhibit self-efficacy. In refusing to accept negative messages resilient children develop resistance to adversity and are able to distance themselves from dysfunction which protects independence. Finally, the resilient child has a sense of purpose and a belief in their future which makes them goal-directed, motivated to achieve and have educational aspirations, be persistent, hopeful, optimistic, and spiritually connected (Waxman *et al* 2004).

Ungar (2004) confirmed Werner and Smith's views (1992; 2001) that teachers who recognize resiliency in their learners and understand its critical importance should foster these attributes in *all* their learners who may possess varying degrees of some of all of these attributes; whether or not these attributes are strong enough to help learners overcome the adversity they face would be dependent on different variables including the existence of key protective factors in their daily environment described by Werner and Smith (1992). When these protective factors are in place then caring educators, who communicate their high expectations, offer purposeful support and ongoing opportunities for meaningful participation and effective instruction will foster the innate resilience of every child in their classroom (Waxman *et al*, 2004, p. 207).

### **3.5 HENDERSON AND MILSTEIN'S RESILIENCY WHEEL**

Henderson and Milstein (1996) developed the Resiliency Wheel to serve as an outline for the process of building resiliency which had proven to be durable and useful to individuals, schools and communities wanting to promote resiliency and included the following six factors;

- Supportive bonding among members,
- The provision of clear and consistent boundaries,
- Encouragement toward the learning of life skills (those skills necessary for survival in the environment),
- Caring and support,
- Exhibition of high and reasonable expectations.
- The provision of opportunities for meaningful participation

However, the language of the above six factors in Henderson and Milstein (1996) Resiliency Wheel, according to Milstein and Henry (2000), was difficult for some to assimilate so they

simplified the terms used to depict the elements by tightening and clarifying definitions of these six elements (Waxman *et al* 2004, p. 252). Milstein and Henry (2000) adapted the six elements from the resiliency Wheel and developed the resiliency Model which is discussed below.

### **3.5.1 The Resiliency Model**

The resiliency model depicts the key elements described in educational resilience literature; the model is applicable for use with youth, students, educators, parents and the community. The more learners who increase the elements found in the resiliency model are supported by their environments, the more likely it is for them to live positive, healthy, and meaningful lives. The elements within the resiliency model consist of:

- *Positive connections* with parents, teachers and friends in activities and programs in schools and the community and the core values that link them.
- *Clear, consistent, and appropriate boundaries*: expectations are communicated in school rules as well as educator and parental expectations and community norms and cultural preference.
- *Life-guiding skills competencies* are necessary to deal with change as they develop so goal setting, planning, problem solving, decision making, communicating, conflict resolution, management and the ability to be reflective becomes important with maturity.
- *Expectations* are when there are clear goals and priorities and the motivation to achieve them. There is then a greater likelihood of engaging in life's challenges. A sense of purpose and expectations helps foster both motivation and development (Waxman *et al*, 2004, p.127).

According to Milstein and Henry (2000)'s Resiliency Model, the enhancing of resiliency in learners is possible but it would require all the components of the school environment to function holistically to implement policies and programs that set and communicate high expectations, provide opportunities for meaningful participation, increase social bonding, provide caring and support, teach life skills and set clear, consistent boundaries.

## **3.6 ECOLOGICAL THEORY INTERWOVEN WITH RESILIENCE THEORY**



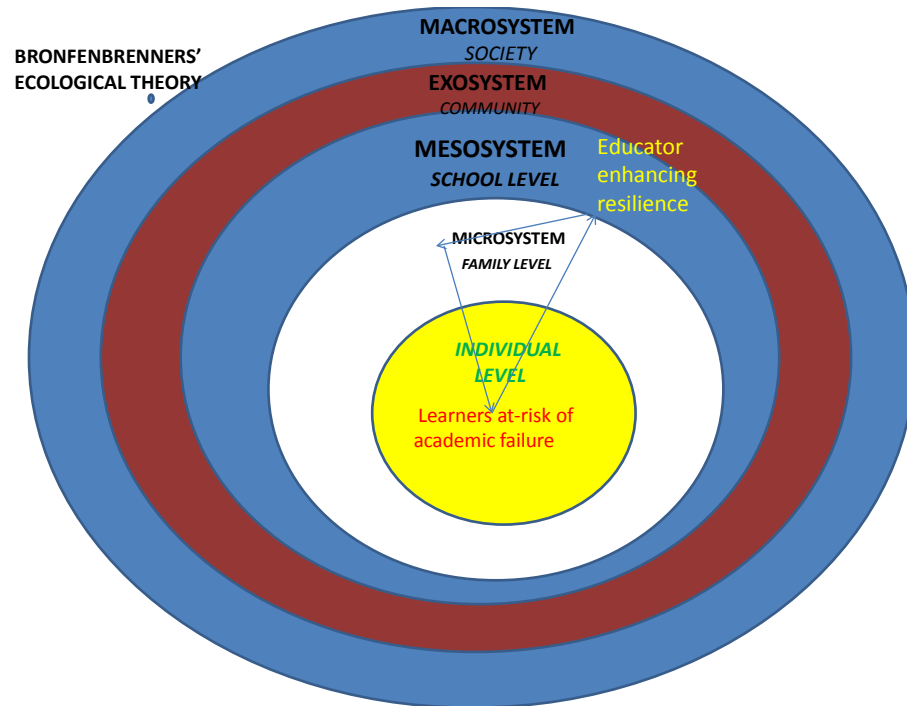
The ecological system incorporates the sociological and psychological development of the child; the mesosystem level of the ecological model of systems is an appropriate level to explore the multiple factors which interplay in the concept of educational resilience. Contextual elements in the mesosystem, as described by Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) in Donald *et al* (2010), are of relevance to this study as it explores the educational resilience and outcomes of learners 'at-risk' of academic failure. Learners are in the centre of the system; the psychological factors are within this circle whilst the sociological influences are in the outer levels. Maher (2007) stated that the mesosystem is a web of involvement that comprises of a link process that takes place between two or more settings containing the developing person.

Positive support from the educator can modify the child's behaviour and thus build resilience which will act as a protective buffer against adversity (Fraser, 2004). The ecological system is interrelated within itself and allows for a better understanding of how foundation phase educators can improve the educational achievements of their learners through a change in perspective. The mesosystem is described as a set of microsystems associated with one and another; negative experiences at home or in the peer group can influence how children respond at school. Children that are unsupported at home may become anxious and insecure; by experiencing care and support from a neighbor, peer, or educator at school over a period of time it may be possible to modify the child's sense of insecurity (Donald *et al*, 2002; 2010).

Using a multisystem approach, it is possible to incorporate the characteristics of resilience contained in The Resiliency Theory in the mesosystem within Bronfenbrenner's Model to clarify the specific skills the educator can develop in learners in the classroom to enhance resilience. The Resiliency Wheel will allow the elements of the nurturing school environment described in The Resiliency Model to be conceptualised in a similar manner so that the educator's role in the enhancement of resilience in the 'at-risk' learner is simpler to understand at an abstract conceptual level and concrete, practical level.

The following diagram depicts the mesosystem level in Bronfenbrenners' ecological model (1979; 2005) interwoven with Werner and Smith's Resiliency Theory (1992; 2005) and Henry and Milstein's Resiliency Model (2000) an adaptation of Henderson and Milstein's Resiliency Wheel (1996).

DIAGRAM 1: The Ecological Theory interwoven with The Resiliency Theory and The Resiliency model adapted from The Resiliency Wheel



It is evident that to improve educational achievement learners and educators have to seize the opportunity to form a positive relationship with each other because they are interconnected; in considering Resiliency Theory, the common attributes that identify a resilience in a child will enable the educator to recognise those learners who are resilient and those who are not from the same ‘at-risk’ demographic and structure classroom intervention programs or create opportunities to enhance resilience in each child, especially the most vulnerable. The various elements in The Resiliency Model (2000) when taken into consideration will allow the school environment to be structured in a way that fosters educational resilience in its learners (Waxman *et al*, 2004, p.125). By interweaving these three theories into a conceptual framework, I feel that educators can have a model of educational resilience that can be translated into practical application in the classroom.

### 3.5. CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the theoretical framework that was significant in the conceptualizing process of the study. Chapter Four will describe the research design and methodology used in this qualitative interpretative study.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, the methodological choice of a qualitative interpretive study design using a case study approach to explore the research questions is discussed. The case study process, data

collection and data processing methods during the research process are elaborated on; this includes amongst others data collection strategies, the choice of research site and the selection of participants. Finally, data analysis and the issues of validity and reliability and ethical considerations will be discussed.

To place this chapter in perspective, while Chapter One introduced the rationale for the study and Chapter Two provided an in-depth review of the literature applicable to the study of resilience, Chapter Three discussed the theoretical framework that underpins this study.

## **4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

De Beer (2006) cited Dzivhane's (2002) description of research design as the structure of an investigation a researcher uses to obtain evidence to answer research questions. Flick (2007) stated that a research design is a plan for collecting and analysing evidence that makes it possible for the researcher to answer questions posed. A good research design according to Babbie and Mouton (2001) cited in Normand (2007) is a plan or strategy with two aspects; one, to specify what needs to be found out and the other to find the best way of finding out how (Normand, 2007, p. 5).

Normand (2007) cited Cresswell's (1994) suggestion that the design of a study begins with a selection of a topic and a paradigm. Once the topic was decided as being an exploration of educators' insight about educational resilience in the context of foundation phase education, a qualitative, interpretive research design was selected as the most appropriate study design. One of the benefits of qualitative research designs is that it lends itself to an understanding of the nature of a setting and its meaning for participants in that specific setting (Normand, 2007, p. 44). In view of the fact that research is about exploring relationships between events, seeking explanations about why things happen and comparing approaches to practice as described by (MacNaughton 2000) cited in Folkard (2005), as a foundation phase educator, it was the logical approach to select a study design that would provide me with optimal answers to the research questions.

### **4.2.1 Qualitative research**

Qualitative researchers argue that there are a variety of ways of making sense of the world. Qualitative research is concerned with understanding the processes and social and cultural contexts of the topic under study. In applied fields of socially relevant practice like education the most common type of qualitative research is a basic interpretive study (Merriam, 2009). At the core is the acceptance that individuals construct reality in interaction with their social world (Merriam, 2009, p. 22); by studying people or systems in their natural environment, by interacting with and observing the participants and focusing on their stated meanings and interpretations of events as they experience them, it is possible to obtain a clearer perspective (Maree, 2007, p. 51). In short, a qualitative research study will provide me with the process to obtain answers to questions about my selected subjects, foundation phase educators, what their lives are like and what the world looks like for them (Merriam, 1998) cited in Normand (2007) with respect to educational resilience, a description rather than an explanation (Babbie & Mouton 2001).

McMillan and Schumacher, (2006) suggested that two methods should be employed; an inquiry in which data is collected in a face-to-face situation by interacting with the selected subjects in their settings and non-interactive methods like obtaining information from documents. According to Dawson (2006) cited in Alberda (2008) attitudes, behaviour and experiences captured through methods like interviews or focus groups represent valid attempts to obtain in-depth opinions from participants. Attitudes, behaviour and experiences are considered important to the qualitative research process.

In this study, a focus group interview, questionnaires, observation and document analysis were methods selected as qualitative research techniques to gain an in-depth understanding of the educator participants' attitudes, behavior and experiences.

#### **4.2.2 The Interpretive Paradigm**

In keeping with Creswell's (1994) suggestion, the discussion about the research design will begin with an explanation of the paradigm perceived most suitable for this study. A paradigm according to Patton (2002) simply means a worldview, a way of thinking about and making sense of the complexities of the research world. Ungar (1996) cited in Normand (2007), commented that all research is based on epistemology, the study of how knowledge is

constructed about the world, who constructs it and what criteria is used to create meaning (Normand, 2007, p. 42). Paradigms in effect serve as the lens or organizing principles by which reality is interpreted (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) cited in Maree (2007).

Merriam (2009) stated that the primary goal of an interpretative paradigm is for the researcher to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, and how people interpret what they experience. With relevance to this study, this approach helped me as the researcher to interpret educator participants' perspectives on educational resilience with a contextual understanding by offering the opportunity for educator participants to depict the worldview that was both meaningful and functional to them whilst being subjective to them as a group of educators teaching at a specific school (Maree, 2007, p. 48). This approach also allowed me to focus on how these foundation phase educators interpreted their classroom experiences, how they constructed their world and what meaning they attributed to their experiences with learners (Normand, 2007, p. 45) all of which is relevant to an exploration of insight.

The qualitative interpretive approach is underpinned by the constructionist paradigm. Normand (2007) cited Merriam's (2002) statement that "constructionism underlines an interpretive qualitative study". This is important as factors like the socio-cultural environment of the learners and the training of educators also needed to be explored while there was a core focus on investigating educators' depth of insight.

#### **4.2.3 Relevance of the study design**

Miles and Hubberman (1994) cited in Folkard (2005) commented that qualitative research studies understand human behaviour by observing and communicating with people, questioning people's opinions and attitudes, and analysing documents like textbooks, reports and diaries. Using a qualitative research design for this study was consistent with research methods used internationally in the field of educational resilience. Ungar (2003) stated that qualitative research methods make a substantial contribution to understanding the construct of educational resilience. The complexity of subject's experiences and relationships with one another embedded in a specific context have can be captured as they have relevance in the field of education research (Normand, 2007, p. 46). The descriptive nature of a qualitative research study characterises the

end product (Merriam, 2009, p.p.16-17) once data is analysed inductively to address the research questions posed (Merriam, 2009, p.16).

#### **4.2.4 Rigor of the study design**

Qualitative research involves the analysis of data that is difficult to quantify because it focuses on observing the behaviour of subjects within their natural context. Given the potentially abstract nature of this research topic, it was important to ensure that the study could be performed with rigor. Rigor is usually achieved through a set of approaches that ensures its progress and accuracy. For this study, the subject under study is empirical and occurs in the observable world. Secondly, the study design lends itself to verification in any other school with foundation phase educators and the study can be replicated by other researchers. The findings of the study are relevant to the foundation phase educators at this research site which may be reflective of foundation phase educators in other schools in the region or country but not necessarily so. Every attempt has been made to reflect on my subjectivity and bias as a foundation phase educator in the same school and the limitations of the study. The study does however create the opportunity for other researchers to explore the subject in South Africa.

The data collection occurred in the actual cultural setting of the topic under study: the “field” was the school where foundation phase educators interacted with learners. Data was collected in the form of questionnaires, interviews and participant observation. As a foundation phase educator ‘in the field’ I was able to immerse myself in the activities and environment of the subjects under study. Working with a small group of participants was consistent with a social science study. Analysis in the study was accomplished through the writing process. The behaviour and the context of the behaviour observed was recorded and analysed during the interview process to allow for broader perspective in the interpretation of findings. A case study approach allowed me to interpret the findings in respect to the hypotheses generated for the study.

#### **4.2.5 Reliability and validity**

Engaging in multiple methods of data collection like observation, interviews and document analysis is important in qualitative research (Maree, 2007, p. 80). In this study the multiple

methods of data collection included qualitative questionnaires, a focus group interview, classroom observations and documents including learners' profiles and assessment records.

Creswell (2003) stated that a case study like any other qualitative work must be useful in illuminating another context if it is to be deemed transferable. It should be applicable to another setting and in case study research the case being explored should be useful to others in similar situations. Krefting (1991) cited in Alberda (2008) stated that in order for a research study to meet the criteria of transferability, findings have to fit into contexts outside the study situation. This study in its design and findings are applicable in the setting of other schools with foundation phase educators.

Dependability, according to Creswell (2003), involves the researcher purposefully avoiding a control of the research conditions and concentrates on recording the complexity of situational contexts and interrelations as they occur naturally. In this study every attempt was made to record findings as they occurred and to document in detailed descriptions my observations and interactions with subjects. One relevant example of recording findings as they occurred in this study is the questionnaire. In the original proposal for the study, an open-ended questionnaire was part of the study design. Once in the field, I realised that there was a paucity of responses which may have occurred for different reasons which I describe later in the text. After the focus group interview, participant educators were given a second opportunity to revisit the questions by indicating which statements regarding the subject under study best communicated their views.

According to Creswell (2003) for results to be confirmable, the degree to which the findings are a function solely of the informants and conditions of the research and not of other biases, motivations and perspectives have to be established; as a researcher using this approach I was always cognisant of this when collecting the data and ensured that the data captured represented the opinions of the foundation phase educators in the study sample.

Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of data were all factors considered in determining the research design of the study and the principles were adhered to during the conduct of the study. Participants were comfortable and not under pressure when data was collected during the various data collection techniques. During the focus group interview the participant educators were given ample time to answer the questions; the process was also not



rushed. To increase the credibility of the answers given, recordings were replayed so that participants were given a chance to clarify their views. Through the comparing of the different data collection methods and sources credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability was increased. By giving educators a qualitative questionnaire and collating data from learners' profiles and assessments records, the researcher was able to confirm and ascertain the degree to which the data could be considered a true reflection of the status quo.

The rich description of data that was collected was analysed using a theme system so that accuracy could be maintained. An in-depth description of the data analysing process will be discussed later in the text when issues relevant to the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of findings will also be highlighted. A detailed account of the research problem and working hypothesis is in the following paragraph which leads to the description of the primary aim of the research study and the main research questions.

#### **4.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM AND WORKING HYPOTHESIS**

Most public primary schools in South Africa are now culturally diverse and a large proportion of schools have learners who are from socially and economically historically disadvantaged or underprivileged backgrounds which may place them 'at-risk' of academic failure more than their peers. Social studies have documented the link between poverty and dysfunctional families; consequences ranging from poor self-esteem to academic and linguistic problems in children are noted (Greene *et al*, 2007, p. 134). Learners in these situations are often incorrectly viewed as being academically incompetent. International studies have shown that resilient children in adverse socioeconomic circumstances are able to succeed despite the odds against them. However, non-resilient or vulnerable children from the same demographic may be 'at-risk' for academic failure; the learners would benefit from the intervention of a caring educator.

The hypothesis for this study is that foundation phase educators in South African public schools lack insight in educational resilience. According to literature reviewed, no studies to date have explored the depth of the insight foundation phase educators have about educational resilience in the South African public primary school context. Therefore, the lack of insight in educational resilience was chosen as the research problem.

#### **4.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study used a case study design to extract answers to the primary research questions formulated to address the research problem.

1. Do foundation phase educators recognise and understand educational resilience?
2. Do foundation phase educators enhance educational resilience in learners they considered to be ‘at-risk’ of academic failure?

#### **4.5 AIM OF THE STUDY**

The primary aim of this study is to explore the depth of foundation phase educators’ insight about educational resilience as demonstrated by their ability to recognise, understand and enhance its presence in learners they identified as being ‘at-risk’ of academic failure.

#### **4.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Research methodology is what researchers call the “how” of social sciences research, simply meaning how one, plans, structures and executes a research project (Mouton, 2001, p. 56). It focuses on the research process, the kind of tools and procedures used and the specific tasks employed for data collection. In this study the aim was to explore foundation phase educators’ insight about resilience. A case study approach was deemed as the most relevant to the study problem as the study of educators in a specific school was possible. The following aspects were relevant to the methodology and data collection techniques used in this study.

##### **4.6.1 A case study approach**

Merriam (2009) stated that for a case study approach, a particular group of subjects that is a bounded system can be selected on the basis of typicality, According to Bless *et al* (2006) a case study allows a focus on the interpretation of the participants interactions so that significant characteristics can be uncovered providing a rich and thick description of a particular phenomenon (Bless *et al*, 2006, p.p. 46-47). The strength of a case study lies in its ability to use multiple sources and techniques in the data gathering process, allowing the researcher to determine in advance what evidence to gather and what analysis techniques to use with the data to answer the research questions (Maree, 2007, p. 76). Case studies allow for data to be predominantly qualitative in nature, although quantitative data can be included. Data collecting tools for case studies can include surveys, interviews, documentation reviews, direct observation, participant observation and the collection of physical artifacts; no single data collecting tool has

complete advantage over the others (Maree, 2007, p, 76). One of the criticisms against a case study methodology is that it is dependent on a single case and is not capable of providing a generalising conclusion however that is not a relevant point with respect to the aims of this case study.

In this study, the bounded system that formed the case was the Grade Three foundation phase educators at the research site, which is the school where they teach. By using a case study approach for this study, multiple data gathering techniques were used to explore the research topic. As a researcher, the case study approach enabled me to get a rich description of the educators' and learners' experiences in the classroom.

#### **4.7 RESEARCH SITE**

The selection of the research site was done early in the study design in line with an objective of maximizing the opportunity to engage with the problem (De Vos, 2002). Sapphire primary school (a pseudonym) is a public primary school situated on the outskirts of Chatsworth, KwaZulu-Natal, which according to the Department of Education in the province of KwaZulu-Natal that falls within the Umlazi District. Sapphire primary school prior to 1994 was a school built specifically for the residents of Sapphire Township, a middle class South African Indian township. Since 1994 and the establishing of a democratic society, Sapphire primary school has become a multicultural school and the population of two hundred and fifty learners for 2010 was made up of a ratio of 50% South African Indian learners, 48% Black learners, and 2% Coloured learners. There were no White learners. Since the year 2000, the school population has dropped, as many of the children living in the middle class families attend ex-model C schools or have completed their schooling. The majority of South African Indian learners that live within Sapphire Township or the adjacent suburb are tenants who come from economically disadvantaged dysfunctional families that include single parent families where unemployment is high and one of the parents is either an alcoholic or drug addict.

The majority of Black learners are from an informal squatter settlement, known as Burlington, west of Queensburgh. These learners are economically and socially disadvantaged as many of them come from families that are dysfunctional, single parent homes, or homes where parents are unemployed. There is also poor housing; they live in shacks that do not have the basic utilities.

Many learners live with their grandparents who are pensioners. Learners come to school most often without any meals and as a result are unable to concentrate at times in class. They travel a distance to get to school either by train or on foot. Sapphire primary school fund fee for the last two years was set at six hundred and fifty rand per year; however, due to the context of learners that attend this school, only ten percent of the school fund has been received during the present year thus far.

Sapphire Primary school has a staff population of sixteen staff members which includes the two management staff which comprises of the principal and the head of foundation phase, the school secretary, eight departmental-based level one educators, three part time language educators, and three non-educators, the school cleaners. Sapphire primary school is divided into three phases: the foundation phase which includes learners from Grade R to Grade three, the intermediate phase including learners from Grade four to Grade six while Grade seven falls under the senior phase. Each phase has one unit per grade. This study specifically focused on foundation phase educators that teach Grade 3 foundation phase learners.

#### **4.8 POPULATION AND SAMPLING**

A population is defined as a specific unit being sampled usually by its geographical location and the temporal boundaries of the population (Neuman, 2006). In this study three foundation phase educators with a teaching experience of eight to thirty six years between them, who have been teaching at the research site between three to twenty eight years were sampled. Sampling, according to Maree (2007) refers to the process used to select a portion of the population for the study. In qualitative research two types of sampling are generally used, probability and non-probability method. Probability sampling implies that the selection of elements is completely random and this means no subjective mechanism is used in the selection procedure. Non-probability sampling does not make use of random selection of population elements (Maree, 2007, p. 176) although there are different methods in non-probability sampling that can be used to collect data.

##### **4.8.1 Purposive Sampling**

Purposive sampling means that participants are selected because of some defining characteristic that makes them the holders of the data needed for the study (Maree, 2007, p. 79). The

researcher chose to use purposive sampling for this study because it ensured that all participants would be of value to the study, enabling the researcher to obtain the specific data the researcher was looking for. All educator participants were female educators; this was because the research site had only one male member on staff, that being the principal. Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003) stated that in using purposive sampling the researcher specifies the participants of the population of interest, locating individuals with those characteristics that will optimize the data.

## **4.9 THE PARTICIPANTS**

The primary participants in this study were the three educator participants who were the focus of the case study; the secondary participants were the six learners who were identified by the educator participants as being resilient or non-resilient. A detailed description of the primary participants, the educators, follows; the secondary participants, the learners, will be discussed later in the chapter.

### **4.9.1 Educator Participants**

Grade 3 educators were selected via purposive sampling. From the inception of the study the decision to use Grade 3 of the foundation phase was made because of contextual factors; many of the learners in this grade come from socially and economically disadvantaged homes. Each participant was given a letter of participation for the study which included an outline of the study. Participants were also informed that participation was voluntary and that those who were willing were required to have an informed consent form signed and returned to the researcher. All educator participants agreed to participate in the study and returned signed forms to the researcher. All of the learners from Grade 3 were given letters of participation so that the researcher could observe the educator during a class lesson. The majority of parents of learners signed and returned forms to the researcher.

The Grade 3 educators were the primary participants in this study and six Grade 3 learners were also selected as secondary participants. Educator participants consisted of three foundation phase educators of which two taught the Grade 3 class while the third was the head of the foundation phase department (HOD) who has been teaching for the past thirty six years. She was purposefully chosen because of her expertise as the Head of the foundation phase. The Grade 3 class educator was asked to identify three resilient and three non-resilient learners from the class.

The researcher used these six learners as a purposeful sampling as these six learners' profiles and assessment records were used as corroborative data for the study.

#### **4.9.1.1 Biographical profiles of educator participants**

Patton (2002) felt that in a qualitative study the researcher should open a world of rich, detailed, and concrete descriptions of people and places so that a phenomenon can be understood. The characteristics and discussion of the sample are vital in the understanding of the nature of the findings (Mouton, 2001, p. 98). Table 1 represents the educator participants' biographical profile.

**TABLE 1 BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE OF THE EDUCATOR PARTICIPANTS**

<b>EDUCATOR PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>GENDER</b>	<b>LEARNING AREA</b>	<b>TEACHING EXPERIENCE (YEARS)</b>	<b>QUALIFICATIONS</b>
<b>EP A</b>	Female	Class teacher	24	M + 5
<b>EP B</b>	Female	IsiZulu	8	M + 4
<b>EP C</b>	Female	Head of Department	36	M + 5

The biographical information above clearly indicates that this study comprised of three female educator participants. All three participants were given a qualitative questionnaire to answer. These participants also participated in a focus group interview. Only two participants were observed during their class lessons; educator participant C was not observed as this participant was purposely chosen because of her expertise as the Head of Department. All three educator participants' qualifications varied; they did have a large amount of teaching experience amongst them ranging from eight to thirty six years. Educator participant A is the Grade 3 teacher and

educator participant B is the IsiZulu educator for the Grade 3 learners. Educator participant C is the Head of Department is responsible for all foundation phase educators and learners.

#### **4.10 THE DATA COLLECTION PROCESS**

A questionnaire was completed by the educator participants who also participated in the focus group discussion. Educators were observed in the classroom and the demographic profiles and academic records of six learners identified by the educators were also reviewed,

##### **4.10.1 Questionnaires**

An open-ended questionnaire according to Struwig and Stead (2001) allows the participants to answer questions in their own words and to express any ideas they think apply as no choices or alternatives are offered. An open-ended questionnaire was produced so that participants could respond independently to questions relating to resilience as they understood resilience to mean to them. Each question was purposefully designed using national and international literature on resilience and resilience study and contained secondary questions stemming from the main research questions and the primary aim of this study (Waxman *et al* 2004; Russo and Boman, 2007).

All three of the educator participants were given an open-ended qualitative questionnaire to complete in their own time and return to the researcher. The responses from the open-ended questionnaire from all three educator participants were transcribed into a Word document and coded. The paucity of responses in the open-ended questionnaire was a concern. Possible reasons for the paucity of responses may have been that educator participants were reluctant to describe in their own words their thoughts about a topic they had not received formal training in. As I was a colleague at the school, educator participants may have been inhibited in being forthcoming about some of their opinions. Although this response was related to my being an educator at the research site, I believe that any researcher bias in the study was minimal.

Following the open-ended questionnaire I facilitated the focus group discussion using the same questions educator participants had in the questionnaire to allow all participants to communicate their views freely. In order for me to give the educator participants the opportunity to clarify their responses further, a multiple-choice questionnaire was drawn up with the questions

discussed in the focus group and educator participants were asked to indicate the statements that best reflected their views away from any peer pressure that may have existed. This was done to remove any bias to the findings that may have come from educator participants being inhibited by my dual role as a colleague and the researcher.

#### **4.10.2 Focus Group Interview**

Patton, (2002) stated that a focus group interview is an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic; the group could typically be made up of people with similar characteristics using a predetermined, structured sequence of questions in a focused discussion (Motalingoane-Khau, 2007, p. 35). When participants were approached to be part of the research study and told that they would be interviewed they were apprehensive about the interviewing. They enquired if they would be doing a one-on-one interview. I gathered from this that the participants were uncomfortable doing a one-on-one interview. I assured them that it would be a focus group interview and a specific topic will be focused on. According to Cohen *et al* (2007) interviews do have their weaknesses and in the one-on-one interview the interviewer is in control and the interview seems like as a questionnaire that is completed face to face. Therefore, using a focus group interview allowed me to act as a facilitator rather than just an interviewer and participants were able to answer the prescribed questions in a relaxed and comfortable environment.

The focus group interview was held with three participants that teach Grade 3 learners in the foundation phase. The researcher believed that the three participants and the researcher were sufficient for the purposes of this study and to participate in the focus group discussion. The reason for choosing to use a focus group interview as a data collection technique in this study was that it enabled each participant to express their views and opinions on the topic of resilience and at the same time get the common views of all participants on the subject.

Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003) commented that the main emphasis of a focus group interview discussion was to gain an understanding of the participants' experiences, interest, attitudes, perspectives and assumptions. Anderson (1996) cited in Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003) found a focus group to be a moderated informal discussion where one person's ideas bounce off another's, creating a chain reaction. Participants were all familiar with one another as they belonged to the same site. This eliminated the fear of participating in a group discussion



with strangers. Although Patton (2002) argues that focus groups work best when people in the group are strangers to each other, the dynamics are quite different and more complex.

In this study it was not possible to include participants that were strangers to each other because of the study design and purpose; the participants were a purposive sampling of Grade 3 educators from the same site because I believed that using the educators that teach the same Grade 3 learners enabled me to contextualise my perspective of the experiences of the educator participants and what they understood it to mean which could then be corroborated with each other and with information gleaned from learner participant data.

#### **4.10.2.1 The Focus Group Process**

The focus group interview was chosen as a data collection technique so that it could generate discussion amongst the three educator participants by giving them an opportunity to express their views on educational resilience while at the same time allowing me to determine the common views and insight of all participants on the subject. This data collection method added strength to the other data collection techniques.

According to Merriam (2009) findings must be directly responsive to the problem area of the study. The seven questions from the qualitative open-ended questionnaire and focus group interview questions were linked to the two main research questions. The seven sub-questions were common to both the instruments and to the multiple choice post-focus group questionnaire; these questions were developed from a review of the studies on educational resilience in resilience literature (Waxman *et al*, 2004, and Greene *et al*, 2007). The questions were structured to elicit information from participant educators with regard to the research questions. The use of the same questions in the two collection methods was done to assist educator participants to communicate their views on the subject.

As a foundation phase educator who had not received formal training in educational resilience, my interest was sparked when I received information about the topic and I realised that I had a core knowledge about educational resilience and was enhancing its presence in the classroom even though at the time I was not able to define it. I felt that giving this opportunity to my colleagues who varied in training and experience would allow them a similar process; the questions were expected to prompt their thought about the topic and there was opportunity for

them to reflect on the definition and content of their thoughts and classroom experience to communicate their views on educational resilience.

The focus group interview took place in a Grade 3 classroom at the research site in a very informal way. The children's carpet corner in the classroom was used. I set up four chairs and the tape recorder was placed in an appropriate place so the discussion could be recorded. The setting was informal so that the participants could be comfortable during the discussion session. According to Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003) focus group interviews encourage people to sit together to talk about the challenges that they face either individually or collectively. All participants were welcomed to the focus group interview and the participants were assured about confidentiality and anonymity. They were informed that their names would not be used in the research and the transcripts of the focus group show that I avoided the use of participants' names while the discussion was taking place.

The participants were asked if they could be recorded during the focus group session and all participants agreed and also requested that they hear themselves in the recording after the interview. I acted as facilitator and used the focus group interview schedule that had the seven questions to generate the discussion on educational resilience, which was directly linked to the two main research questions. The seventh question on the schedule was asked so an understanding of the educators' professional development regarding educational resilience could be obtained.

The focus group interview discussion was not a prolonged discussion, neither was it rushed by me however since participants had already answered the open-ended questionnaire, they were familiar with the questions. I also sensed the participants' impatience to complete the discussion as this was their first experience being interviewed for a research study. Participant A and B contributed more to the discussion than participant C. The participants answered all questions as well as they could. The transcribing of the focus group interview process was done as soon as possible to ensure that sufficient and relevant data was recorded. When I was transcribing the focus group interview I felt that the duration of the focus group interview could have been longer. Also, one of the three participants had not contributed as much as she could have. With hindsight perhaps, I could have used a narrative approach during the focus group and asked the educators to relate stories about learners in their classrooms which may have triggered a more

interactive discussion about educational resilience. I do not believe that this would have altered the findings of the study in any significant way as there were many other variables that were considered. Participants *were* given the opportunity to check their responses for accuracy and clarify their thoughts about the subject.

According to Patton (2002) by the researcher transcribing field notes, an opportunity is afforded for the researcher to get immersed in the data, an experience that usually generates emergent insights. I found this process to be fairly insightful as I read through the responses after transcription and coded the data to consolidate the common views into themes. My own impression of the process was that it afforded me a unique view of how challenged educators felt in the classroom and how little support educators perceive they have.

Mouton (2001) stated that the use of multiple data in a research study increases its reliability; multiple data collection methods complement each other and any respective shortcomings can be balanced out (Normand, 2007, p. 50). Questionnaires, classroom observation and learners' profiles, assessment records and drawings were included as data collecting techniques for this reason.

#### **4.10.3 Observation**

An observation is characterised by a prolonged period of intense social interaction between the researcher and subjects. It is also a systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of participants, objects and occurrences without questioning or communicating (Maree, 2007, p. 84). Observation is a supportive data collecting technique that allows the researcher to understand much more about what goes on in a complex real-world situation than they could discover simply by asking questions of those that experience them (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003, p. 117). Observation in a qualitative study is generally unstructured and the researcher does not use predetermined categories and classifications but makes observations in a more natural-ended way (Normand, 2007, p. 52).

I incorporated the use of a non-participant observation as a data collection technique to acquire first hand information of the phenomenon under study (Cohen *et al*, 2007, p, 410). Observation took place after I had collected and coded data from the questionnaires and the focus group interview. An observation schedule was used to explore the classroom situation to observe how foundation phase educators enhanced resilience in the learners. Although the protocol only described one educator participant in the classroom observation, after commencing the study, while collecting data using the questionnaires and the focus group interview, I decided to increase the observation data by observing both the Grade 3 educators in the classroom. This was primarily because during the focus group interview it was mentioned that the English language was one of the barriers preventing non-English learners from becoming academically competent. The researcher felt that observing an English medium Grade 3 educator and the Grade 3 IsiZulu educator would yield a deeper understanding of whether this was a variable. Literature does state that learners ‘at-risk’ of academic failure encounter a complexity of problems caused by poverty, health and linguistic problems (Waxman *et al*, 2004, p.4).

To prevent being intrusive while observing the educators, I sat at the back of the class. Informal notes were recorded about the learners’ reactions towards the lesson, the educators’ interactions with the learners and the learners’ response to the educator; all of these helped to enrich and increase the depth of the data collected.

#### **4.10.3.1 Classroom Observation**

During the observation process my aim was to only observe the class educator’s interaction with the learners, to obtain data on what strategies educator participants used to enhance resilience in learners as well as the learners responses to the educator. During the focus group interview, educator participants indicated that the language barrier was one of the reasons for non-resilience amongst learners identified as being ‘at-risk’ of academic failure. This prompted the researcher to observe the IsiZulu educator with the Grade 3 learners. IsiZulu was documented as being the mother tongue of most of the learners in Grade 3.

To verify what educator participants said about language being a barrier, I observed the IsiZulu educator's lesson to see the response of the IsiZulu learners during the lesson. I wanted to observe the behaviour of the learners identified by the class educator as either resilient or non-resilient and observe if instruction in their mother tongue made any difference. The data from the observation of educator participants A and B's lessons together with the learners' profiles, assessment records and drawings was compared with the data coded from the questionnaires and focus group interview.

#### **4.10.3.2 Classroom Setting**

Learners sit in groups of two, fours and six. In most foundation phase classes, educators arrange the desk in this way because of group teaching. The new curriculum places emphasis on learners being taught in groups and the desks were arranged in groups so learners' social skills can be developed. The other reason the desks could have been arranged in groups was to use the classroom space effectively because of the large number of learners in the class. Although the desks were arranged for group work, no group work occurred during the time of observation. Learners worked independently. It was evident that learners were not grouped according to academic ability but rather in mixed ability groups. The classroom wall had brightly colored animal and plant charts, number and alphabet charts, the world map and a country map. Learners' drawings and projects were displayed on the wall and on the shelf. The learners' readers that were used daily were set neatly on the shelves so that learners had easy access to it.

#### **4.10.3.3 Lessons Observed**

Educator participant A's theme for the week was spring and Arbor week so the educators' discussion for that particular literacy lesson was plants. The class attendance for this lesson was 27 out of the class attendance of 30 for the day. Three of the learners present on that day did not have parental consent to participate in this study so they were sent to another class; prior arrangements were made with regard to this and the learners were not compromised in any way by this as described elsewhere in the text. Although English was a second language for many of the learners, the medium of instruction was in English. Educator participant A does not have the IsiZulu language skills to teach or instruct the second language learners in their vernacular. The educator used a plant as a concrete apparatus to teach the lesson.

Once the learners were quiet, the educator commenced with her lesson and stood at the front of the classroom and held the plant in her hands while she discussed it. The educator also used the chalkboard to write the names of the different parts of the plants as the learners were giving her the answers. The educator discussed the different parts of the plant and at times pointed at certain parts of the plant to get the learners to respond to naming the parts of the plants and their purpose. The educator stood at the front of the class for the entire duration of the discussion. After the educator had finished with the discussion, she put up a worksheet on the board with a diagram of a plant and the learners were asked to name the different parts as she pointed to them. Most of the answers came from the front of the class; very few of the second language learners answered the educator. I observed that the learners that were identified as non-resilient were the ones not listening or participating in the lesson.

When the educator completed her discussion with the worksheet the learners were asked to fill in the blank spaces in the worksheet with the correct answers. The answers were given on the worksheet in a scrambled form and the learners had to look for the names of the parts of the plants and write them in the space provided on the plant diagram. However before the learners could begin the worksheet the educator read out each question loudly, clearly asking the learners to follow in their worksheets while she was reading. Only those learners that were paying attention followed the educator's reading and were able to start answering the questions on the worksheet. Those that were not paying attention found it difficult to answer the worksheet. Also, most of the learners could not read the instructions or questions on the worksheet. To help those that were finding it difficult to comprehend the worksheet, the educator assisted them by reading the questions again to them.

The IsiZulu speaking learners who could not understand nor read in English found it difficult to answer the worksheet so the educator nominated their peers, who were other Black IsiZulu speaking learners that were fluent in reading and speaking in English to assist them. The educator could not assist these learners because she was not competent in instructing them in their mother tongue.

The class attendance for the day was 29 learners out of a roll of 33 learners. The three learners that had not been granted parental consent were given a set of work to do and sent with the class educator. A verbal arrangement was made with the two educator participants concerning learners

that had not been granted parental consent for these learners to be taken care of by the class educator during the IsiZulu lesson observation. This observation took place in the morning before the learners' first interval. Learners were aware that it was their IsiZulu period and had been waiting for the educator to come in. The learners greeted participant 'B' in IsiZulu and the researcher in English. Participant 'B' responded in IsiZulu and the researcher responded in IsiZulu. This amazed the learners and they got excited, especially the IsiZulu speaking learners. The learners by now were aware as to why I was visiting their class as this was explained during participant 'A's class observation. I sat at the back of the class as participant B began her lesson.

Participant B started her lesson on numbers by introducing the numbers in IsiZulu and then in English. The educator walked around the class as she taught her lesson and questioned the learners as she went along. She randomly called out learners to give her the answers in IsiZulu. Many of the learners responded to her. If learners answered correctly they were praised by the rest of the learners and this was done by them giving five loud claps. Learners were eager to answer questions however there were still those that did not pay attention to the lesson. One particular learner kept looking around and tried to talk to the learner next to him. This was one of the learners identified as non-resilient. Participant 'B' also used the chalkboard to write the answers that the learners were giving her and she also got learners to write their answers on the chalkboard. At times the educator walked to those learners that she noticed were not listening and asked them to answer a question and they were unable to give her the answer. I noticed that it was the same learners as in Participant 'A's observation that were not interested in paying attention during the IsiZulu lesson.

Although this was an IsiZulu lesson, the educator used both IsiZulu and English to teach her lesson. This was done so that the English words and the IsiZulu words could be learnt simultaneously, also for the benefit of the non-IsiZulu speaking learners. I observed that the IsiZulu educator was code switching between IsiZulu and English while teaching the lesson. It was interesting to note that the majority of non-isiZulu learners were quiet fluent in their responses to the questions. They were able to answer correctly in IsiZulu using the correct pronunciation and also spelling the words correctly. The educator kept asking questions after a short discussion and she often questioned those learners who did not put up their hands. She coaxed them to respond to her questions. She spoke in IsiZulu to the IsiZulu learners to get

answers and in English to get the non-IsiZulu learners to answer. Although the learners in the front tended to dominate the lesson by shouting out the answers at times the educator kept asking them to give other learners a chance to answer.

After the oral discussion and getting the learners to answer the questions verbally or by writing on the board the educator asked learners to open their workbooks so that they could write in their books. The educator instructed them in IsiZulu and English so that all learners got a clear understanding of what to do. Whilst the educator was giving the instructions she walked around the class to see if learners were writing the correct information in their workbooks. Where learners needed help the educator gave individual instructions to the learners making sure that her instructions were understood. However some of the IsiZulu and English speaking learners were finding difficulty in understanding the instructions. I also observed that although this was an IsiZulu lesson and the educator spoke to the Black learners in their mother tongue; they still found it difficult to understand the instructions concerning their written work. These learners were the same learners who were not listening when the educator was teaching. At the close of the lesson the educator greeted the learners in IsiZulu to say goodbye and learners responded in IsiZulu. The researcher left with educator participant 'B' at the end of the lesson.

#### **4.10.4 Documents**

Documents are secondary data which fall into two groups: personal and official documents, (Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003; Bloor and Wood, 2005; Merriam, 2009). The learners' profiles, class assessment records and drawings were used as official document sources of data. This was used to increase the depth of the data collected and to corroborate information gathered from the educator participants.

##### **4.10.4.1 Learner Profiles**

Learner participants were selected by the Grade 3 class teacher, an educator participant who identified learner participants A, B, and C as non-resilient and learner participants D, E, and F as resilient. The educator differentiated between resilience and non-resilience from these learners from the same socioeconomic environment based on several variables: academic performance, parental involvement, class attendance and behavior. The learners' profiles were included as a data collection method. The profiles had the learners' background details which indicated their



socioeconomic status and confirmed that the learners were from a similar disadvantaged socioeconomic situation. The profile is an official document which all parents are requested to complete when they register their child at school. The profile had the parents' details and their employment details together with the learners' personal details including any ailments that the learner had which could hamper their learning.

Once the six learners were identified I obtained their profiles from the school secretary to verify the demographic information of these learners. All of the six participants profile records were available however, not all information on the profile form was filled in; this could have been because the profile form was in English and not in the mother tongue IsiZulu or because not all of the parents were fully literate in English. The learner participants' demographic profiles included information about the learners' age, sex, home language and family profile. The family profile indicated whether both parents lived with the learner or if it was a single parent household; the employment status of the parents was also recorded. Indication of whether the learner was living with both or a single parent was taken as indicated in the profile form as was the employment information. Most of the forms just indicated the learner's name and surname, address and telephone contact numbers of parents and details like parents names and employer details. The addresses on the form showed that all six learners were from the Burlington squatter settlement. The information from the learners' profiles showed that all six participants' mother tongue was IsiZulu and their families resided in the squatter settlement at Burlington. Table 2 below provides the learner participants' demographic profiles.

**TABLE 2 THE DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF LEARNER PARTICIPANTS**

<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>SEX</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>HOME LANGUAGE</b>	<b>FAMILY PROFILE</b>
Learner Participant:  <b>A</b>	Female	11	IsiZulu	She lives with her mother. It is a single parent home and the mother is employed as a domestic worker
Learner Participant:  <b>B</b>	Male	8	IsiZulu	His mother is deceased and he is taken care of by his granny who is a pensioner.

Learner Participant: <b>C</b>	Male	9	IsiZulu	He lives with both his parents. His father is unemployed and his mother is employed as a domestic worker.
Learner Participant: <b>D</b>	Female	8	IsiZulu	She lives with both her parents. Both her parents are Employed
Learner Participant: <b>E</b>	Female	9	IsiZulu	She lives with both her parents. Both her parents are employed.
Learner Participant: <b>F</b>	Female	9	IsiZulu	She lives with both her parents. Her father is employed as a labourer and mother is a domestic worker.

#### **4.10.4.2 Learner's Assessment Records and Drawings**

The final data collected was the assessment records and drawings of the learner participants that were identified in the purposive sampling. The assessment record is an official document (Annexure J) and included the first and second term assessment results and part of the third term assessment results. Drawings of the learners were also reviewed by me to assess whether learner participants had emotional problems and whether there was a discrepancy between a learner's biological age and the maturity of their drawings. This study was to have used all three terms assessment records but the third term was a disrupted term due to the educators strike and many educators and learners were not at school for a long period of time. All assessment records were collected from the Grade 3 educators at the end of the third term and photocopied and signed by the principal and class educator as authentic documents. All data collected during the research methodology process was analyzed. Data analysis involved "breaking up" the data into manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships.

Learners' assessment records were used to compare the academic performance of resilient and non-resilient learners as identified by the class educator. The class educator was asked to identify three resilient learners and three non-resilient learners from her class whom she felt were resilient and non-resilient, coming from the same socioeconomic background. The learners'

assessment record serves as the learners' academic record. This is recorded every term and consists of the learners' oral and written tasks or project results. In the foundation phase learners do not write tests as such however they follow the National Foundations for Learning. Each learning area (literacy, numeracy and life-skills) had tasks with specific activities that the learner has to complete per term. The various tasks or exercises that the educator gives the learners are rated according to the National Foundations for Learning.

In the foundation phase, the recording and reporting of learner performance takes place after assessment tasks across the three learning areas of literacy, numeracy and life skills (National Curriculum Statement Assessment Guidelines, Department of Education, Republic of South Africa, 2008). For this study, the focus was on the learners' literacy assessment records of both the languages within the literacy learning area. The National Policy on Assessment and Qualification for schools in the GET Band requires the use of national codes and descriptors to record and report on learners' progress (National Curriculum Statement Assessment Guidelines, Department of Educational, Republic of South Africa, 2008, p. 31). The rating code descriptor and the learners' ratings are presented in tables which are included in (Annexure J). The scales used for the foundation phase learner is shown.

The assessment records for the learning area literacy which includes both English and IsiZulu is presented in tables included in (Annexure J) which allowed comparison of the academic achievement of the educator identified resilient and non-resilient learners. The National Assessment Policy on Assessments and Qualifications for schools in the General Education and Training Band uses national codes and descriptors to record and report on learner's progress (National Curriculum Statement Assessment Guidelines, Department of Education, 2008).

In the foundation phase four formal literacy assessment tasks are recorded per term. These four tasks are rated according to national ratings as per Foundations for Learning and included with these literacy language tasks are the learners spelling assessments and phonic assessment ratings for each term. However in the third term only three assessment tasks were recorded due to the public servants strike which caused a disruption during the third term. The IsiZulu teacher recorded one assessment per term.

I observed that the three learners which the educator identified as non-resilient barely paid attention during the lesson and had to be helped by the educator and peers to complete their worksheets. The educator did assist one of the non-resilient learners who had a limited understanding of the English language. She explained the worksheet again to him and repeated the instructions to him. Most of the learners had completed and given their worksheet to the educator before the end of the lesson. The drawings of the learner participants were reviewed by me and it was interesting that the drawings of the learners identified as non-resilient by the educator did reflect immaturity when compared to the resilient group and one non-resilient learner participant appeared to have emotional problems that were reflected in their drawings.

By using the information from the learner profiles, I obtained data that was used to corroborate data collected from the educator about learners' resilience and non-resilience. Learners' profiles indicate a lack of parental involvement in those learners identified by the educator as non-resilient. There was no evidence from the profiles of any significant illness in non-resilient learners.

Learner assessment records revealed differences in academic performance between the resilient and non-resilient learners but the assessment records were not available for the entire year due to the strike so not much significance was placed on this aspect of the data. Learner drawings did show differences between the resilient and non-resilient learners in terms of their maturity level and the presence of emotional factors. I believed that the information from the secondary participants increased the reliability of the data collected from the educator participants.

#### **4.11 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY**

The main aim of data collection techniques in a qualitative research study are concerned with scientific rigor of the findings and their reliability and validity (Normand, 2007, p. 50). Merriam (2009) commented that researchers are encouraged to use more than one method of data collection technique to enhance the validity of the findings. This study employed multiple methods of data collection techniques to ensure reliability and validity and these included qualitative questionnaires, a focus group interview, classroom observations and documentary sources. During the collection of data every attempt was made to abandon personal biases to ensure that the systematic and accurate recording of observation occurs. During the focus group

interview I established trust and a good rapport with the interviewees and conducted the group in a comfortable setting so that optimal data collection could be possible. In qualitative research studies reliability means consistency.

To obtain this reliability, multiple data collecting instruments were used (Struwig and Stead, 2001). Every attempt was made by me not to introduce personal bias or my judgement into the findings. All observation notes and transcripts from the focus group interview were made available to the educator participants to member check for validity. All text in the questionnaires was coded and categorized for correct analysis to ensure accuracy of the deductions made in the findings. The coding of the questionnaire responses was done before the focus group interview. The information from the interview was recorded and transcribed and coded and categorized subsequently. An audit trail that tracks the coding of information is available in the Addenda.

Validity in a qualitative research study is defined as the degree to which we can rely on the concepts, methods, and inferences of the study, or tradition of inquiry (Struwig & Stead, 2001). Reliability is the extent to which findings are replicated or reproduced by another enquirer and objectivity is the extent to which findings are free from bias (Normand, 2007, p, 55). Threats to objectivity and validity include vague research statements, biased instruments, biased sampling, and conclusions that are not supported by evidence (Normand, 2007, p. 55). The aim of my data collection was to produce reliable data which was consistent. Every attempt was made to prevent researcher bias from occurring in the analysis of the data.

#### **4.12 DATA ANALYSIS**

Qualitative data analysis is an approach that is aimed at understanding how participants make meaning of the phenomenon under study and for this study the responses to the open-ended questionnaires, the transcript of the focus group discussion and field notes from the classroom observation were available for analysis and systematically processed.

Analysis begins with an organisational process that compiles an inventory of what you have; therefore all data collected during the research study was labeled and safely stored for easy retrieval (Patton, 2002, p. 440). Struwig and Stead (2001) commented that data analysis within a qualitative research study enables the researcher to organize a significant volume of contextual data to bring meaning. Data analysis was a complex process; my aim was to interpret and make

sense of what was in the data which made me use a systematic approach to analyzing the data that involved independent coding of the data from each collection method, sub-categorising and categorizing data before organizing the data into themes (Maree, 2007, p. 100).

Maree (2007) stated that the aim of qualitative data analysis is to allow a researcher to summarise what was seen or heard in terms of common words, phrases, themes or patterns that assist in gaining an understanding and interpretation of what is emerging. Merriam (2009) is of the opinion that all qualitative data analysis is primarily inductive and comparative. Data analysis in this study was a complex process that involved collection of all the bits of data, inductive and deductive reasoning and description and interpretation (Merriam, 2009, p176). The systematic and step-by-step logical approach that was used is described.

#### **4.12.1. Coding and Categorizing Data**

The process of coding involves careful reading of transcribed data before dividing it into meaningful analytical units (Maree, 2007, p.105). The coding process enables a researcher to retrieve and collect together all the text and other data that are associated with some thematic idea so that the sorted bits can be examined together and compared in that respect (Maree, 2007, p. 105). Classifying and coding qualitative data produces a framework for organizing and describing what has been collected during the study; this descriptive phase builds a foundation for the interpretative phase when meanings are extracted from the data and comparisons are made (Patton, 2002, p. 465). Coding is a process of dividing data into different levels which enables the researcher to classify the data into descriptive, interpretive and selective levels so that themes could be developed from the data (Neuman 2006). For this study, the data was coded first from each data collection method before there was sub-categorizing and categorizing and eventually classification into common themes.

##### **4.12.1.1 Levels of Coding**

Coding can be divided into three levels; these levels are the open coding that occurs at the beginning of the coding process where the researcher locates the initial themes or segments and assigns labels in order to condense the mass of data (Neuman, 2006, p. 459). The data from the questionnaire was coded first. Reading the transcripts of the data allowed me to gain an overall

picture of the data collected and to become orientated with the data. The data from the focus group interview discussion was then coded and readied for the next level.

The next level of coding known as axial coding or analytical coding is the level where the coding process goes beyond the descriptive; in this level the coding that comes from interpretation and reflection brings meaning (Merriam, 2009, p. 180). According to Neuman (2006) during the axial level of coding the researcher looks for categories and groups together the main categories that emerge from the open coding of data as these are often interconnected with each other (Punch, 2005) in Normand, 2007, p. 61. Using the codes from the open coding level, I looked for codes that were related and connected so that categories could be developed into themes from the data.

The final level of the coding process involves the final pass through the data; this is known as selective coding of data (Neuman, 2006, p. 460). At this stage, I looked selectively for data that illustrated themes by capturing reoccurring patterns that cut across the data.

To bring about a systematic format in analyzing the data, I used a coding technique which made use of themes to organize and separate data. The data from the questionnaires, focus group interview, observation and documents were all analysed by comparing and looking for common patterns and themes. All data collected in the focus group was transcribed and this transcript was read and reread to gain a better insight about the participants' experiences. I ensured that after the data was analysed all data was carefully labeled and stored in a safe place until the handing over to the university, for safe keeping. The following paragraphs explain the importance of ethical considerations when undertaking a research study. There is a descriptive discussion of the data analysis process in chapter five.

#### **4.13 TRANSCRIPTION**

I transcribed the focus group data verbatim; participants were given initials for identification so that participant identity could be protected and anonymity preserved. All data transcribed from the focus group was member checked for verification by the participants that allowed them the opportunity to clarify and deepen responses if they wanted to. I also transcribed the classroom observation notes of the researcher. The questionnaire and observation notes were transcribed using Microsoft Word, labeled and kept together with the original field notes. I made copies of

the transcribed data so that the copies could be used for the coding process. The tape recording from the focus group interview together with the transcripts and all other data collected were labeled and safely stored.

#### **4.14 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Doing research imposes a power differential that exists between researchers and participants. The word ‘ethics’ derived from the Greek word ‘ethos’ meaning one’s character or morality form the basis of the ethical considerations for the participants, the research study and the site (Bless *et al*, 2006). Ethical concerns in a research study require the researcher to heed the following aspects: justice, fidelity, respect for participants, dignity, confidentiality, anonymity, appropriate referral, discontinuance, reporting back to participants, ethics in analysing and reporting, and obtaining access to research participants by means of gatekeepers, and relationship with organizations (Bless *et al*, 2006). In keeping with what these authors state about ethical issues I ensured that the study followed the appropriate ethical procedures required when one enters the field or research site.

##### **4.14.1 Access to Research Site**

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University as the first part of the ethical clearance for this study (Annexure A). Using the school, a social institution for this study required that the researcher seek permission from the Head of the institution a letter of permission to conduct the research study was submitted to the principal in which the researcher indicated the purpose and goals of the study (Annexure B). As this was a public school it, meant that permission had to be sought from the Provincial Department of Education an application for permission to conduct research was submitted to the Department of education (Annexure C). Data collection was only conducted after I received the letter of permission to conduct research from the Department of Education (Annexure D).

##### **4.14.2 Informed Consent**

Mouton (2001) commented that in research ethics are concerned with the protection of the rights and interests of research participants. He further stated that the rights included privacy, informed consent and confidentiality (Mouton, 2001, p, 99). In this study the three educator participants,



and learners, were notified in writing seeking written consent for their participation in this study (Annexure E). The parents of the Grade 3 learners were also informed and permission sought in writing for their participation (Annexure F). The learners were informed about the study and assented verbally and in writing to their work being reviewed and my being present in the class as an observer. The three learners whose parental consent in writing was not available at the time of the classroom observation were not compromised in any way as explained elsewhere in the text.

#### **4.14.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Cohen *et al*, (2007) stated that researchers can protect their participant's right to privacy through the promise of confidentiality. Anonymity according to Mouton (2001) is when the identity of an individual is kept a secret (Mouton, 2001, p. 244). The participants for this study were given a clear explanation and reason for the study and researcher and participant confidentiality was adhered to. Participants were assured that no information obtained from them that was sensitive and which the participants did not want made available would be used. In keeping with participant confidentiality, all participants and the site was given pseudonyms so that their identity could be protected. This was to protect the participants from any harm (Maree, 2007, p. 87). Confidentiality refers to the control of access to information and ensuring confidentiality of data is good practice (Normand, 2007, p, 57). At the conclusion of the study all data that was collected during the research study from the participants was collected and handed at the university, for safe keeping for the next five years in the event the study is recalled for validation. Ethical considerations also included the reliability and validity and trustworthiness of the research instruments used to obtain data.

#### **4.15 CONCLUSION**

This chapter provided a descriptive process of the research design and methodology. The aims of the study and research problem and question were also highlighted before the method of data collection was described. Finally, ethical considerations, reliability and validity that were taken into account throughout the methodological process were discussed.

Chapter five will discuss the data analyses including the themes and the findings of the study.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, the process of data analysis, the findings of the study represented by main themes and sub-themes drawn from the data collected are presented, followed by a discussion of the findings. The data analyzed included the written and verbal responses of the educator participants from the questionnaires and focus group interview discussion and data collected from the researcher's classroom observations and learner assessment records. The findings of this study were compared with those of relevant studies in the literature reviewed so that the results of the study could be contextualized and given perspective.

#### **5.2 THE DATA ANALYSIS**

During the reporting of a research study, findings are usually positioned in terms of existing literature and previous research on the specific phenomenon being studied (*cf.* 4.12.1.1.1). For this study, findings were analyzed against the background of studies conducted mainly

internationally. The purpose was to gain understanding of the depth of insight of foundation phase educators at a South African public primary school about educational resilience in the context of the ‘at-risk’ learner. Depth of insight was identified by the extent to which educators were able to recognize, understand and enhance resilience in the classroom in learners from poor socioeconomic circumstances who fell in the ‘at-risk’ demographic. It is recognized that not all learners in the ‘at-risk’ group by virtue of their living conditions were ‘at-risk’ of academic failure, so for this study, educator participants identified resilient and non-resilient learners amongst those they considered to be ‘at-risk’ in the classroom.

Educator responses were analysed through a process of coding and categorizing of data which was interpreted using descriptive terms to summarize content into themes and sub-themes. The main themes and sub-themes which emerged from this process are presented in Table 3.

### 5.3 MAIN THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

**Table 3: Main Themes and Sub-Themes Identified from All Data Collected in Study**

MAIN THEMES	SUB-THEMES
<b>5.3.1 THEME:1</b> <b>EDUCATORS’ SUPERFICIAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE TERMS EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE AND ‘AT RISK’ LEARNERS : A LACK OF DEPTH IN CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>5.3.1.1</b> Superficial understanding of resilience: linked to recovery from adversity</li> <li>• <b>5.3.1.2</b> Understanding of ‘at-risk’ learner: linked to negative environment and learner attributes</li> <li>• <b>5.3.1.2</b> Association made between resilience and family support</li> </ul>
<b>5.3.2 THEME: 2</b> <b>EDUCATORS’ FAILURE TO ENHANCE EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE OR RESPOND TO A LACK OF EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>5.3.2.1</b> Lack of resilience: identified by negative emotional behaviour in ‘at-risk’ learners</li> <li>• <b>5.3.2.2</b> Enhancing resilience requires educator awareness</li> <li>• <b>5.3.2.3</b> Importance of varying instructional style noted</li> </ul>

<b>IN IDENTIFIED ‘AT-RISK’ LEARNERS</b>	
<b>5.3.3 THEME: 3 LACK OF PARENTAL SUPPORT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>5.3.3.1</b> Absence of parental involvement : negative impact on educator</li> <li>• <b>5.3.3.2</b> Difference in resilience attributed to level of parental involvement</li> <li>• <b>5.3.3.3</b> Parental support viewed as a ‘protective factor’; lack of awareness of educator role</li> </ul>
<b>5.3.4 THEME: 4 LACK OF TRAINING IN EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE DURING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>5.3.4.1</b> Absence of formal training in educational resilience</li> <li>• <b>5.3.4.2</b> Classroom inexperience</li> </ul>

The following paragraphs discuss the themes and sub-themes in greater detail, with reference to relevant studies in the literature reviewed.

### **5.3.1 Theme 1: Educators’ superficial understanding of the terms educational resilience and ‘at risk’ learners: a lack of depth in conceptual understanding**

Data collected from the educator participants about the terms educational resilience and ‘at-risk’ revealed that although educator participants had some understanding of what the terms meant, their responses showed that they had a limited or colloquial knowledge about educational resilience, were not well versed on theoretical aspects of the topic and had not considered its relevance nor its application in the classroom. Even though educators did not have formal training in educational resilience, the educator participants did have classroom experience and through the process of data collection, I had anticipated that the educators would reflect on their

experience as they considered the questions which were very specific triggers for a discussion on educational resilience. The theoretical framework of the study which incorporated Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory with resilience theory highlighted the systemic nature of educational resilience. It was significant that educator participants were able to see the role of parents and external factors in educational resilience more clearly than they were able to see their own role.

#### **5.3.1.1 Sub-theme: Superficial understanding of educational resilience**

One educator's response to being asked to describe the term educational resilience was;

*"The term resilient had something to do with recovery from an illness or a setback".*

Another participant understood resilience to mean;

*"Capable of having skills to do things"*

Resilience in the literature *is* broadly referred to as having the tendency to rebound from adverse situations and involves the capacity to maintain a healthy life in spite of life stressors (*cf.* 1.4.3), reflected by an ability to have balance between the stress and the ability to cope (*cf.* 2.6). Although the questionnaire in error did not use the words educational resilience, the topic of discussion was resilience of learners in the school environment as it applied to academic performance, in short, educational resilience. The educator participant responses were confined to a superficial, colloquial knowledge about stress and adversity. Educational resilience is resilience as it applies to the classroom or the lecture room in the academic setting where factors in the learner's environment and a learner's inner attributes can act as protective factors that assist in academic progress despite the adverse nature of their circumstances.

From the data analysis, it emerged that educator participants linked the term resilient to recovery from illness or adversity in a more general sense; the literature from resilience studies does describe resilience as meaning to recover psychologically, physically and intellectually (*cf.* 2.3.1).

One of the participant responses indicated that the term resilience meant to;

*“Recover quickly after an illness or set back”.*

According to literature reviewed, although the concept of resilience emerged from medical and developmental psychology and is relevant to learners in terms of their development, the interest in educational resilience was sparked when it was recognized that some students were successful in school whilst others from similar disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds were not. This ‘academic invulnerability’ of learners who could have been ‘at-risk’ of academic failure because of socioeconomic factors is viewed as an opportunity for positive intervention by the educator and worthy of further study (*cf.* 2.4).

Educator participants in this study did not reflect on resilience as it applied to the learning environment but made reference to a more colloquial understanding of resilience as it refers to life in general in their discussion. There was paucity of ideation in their responses and their broader view of the concept which was lacking in theoretical knowledge, did not lend itself to an in-depth discussion of the complex interplay of factors that impact the resilience of learners in a classroom. Their responses on an individual basis in the open-ended questionnaire lacked depth, as did the content of their views expressed during the focus group discussion which was shorter in duration than expected even when participant anxiety was taken into account. This was interpreted as evidence of the relative superficial insight educator participants had about the concept of educational resilience. Although as an educator I realised there was no formal training in educational resilience, there was no preconceived opinion that this would definitely be a finding in the study. After I was exposed to educational resilience in my postgraduate studies I realised that although I could not define the topic as per the literature I did have knowledge about educational resilience and was enhancing it in my classroom with my learners and I made the assumption that other foundation phase educators, especially the experienced ones would have had a similar experience.

#### **5.3.1.2 Sub-theme: Understanding of what constitutes an ‘at-risk’ learner**

Educator participants saw resilient learners as motivated and supported by their parents and described ‘at-risk’ learners as exposed to external danger from a negative home environment characterized by poverty, disruptive behaviour, absenteeism and lack of parental involvement. It

was unclear whether educator participants assumed that ‘at-risk’ and non-resilient were interchangeable.

One of the participants understood the term ‘at risk’ with reference to learners to mean:

*“I would just think it is to be in danger of a certain experience or situation”*

Another participant understood the term to mean:

*“Like from getting good marks or performing well. Like the background of the learner, the situation that the learner is living under, poverty even all those things or situations”*

This was how one participant described ‘at risk’ learners:

*“Those learners who do not show any initiative towards their education”*

The term ‘at-risk’ is used in the literature to describe children who have experienced adverse circumstances in their lives (*cf.* 2.8.1). Given that not all learners in ‘at-risk’ circumstances were ‘at-risk’ of academic failure, it was important that the understanding of educator participants of the term ‘at-risk’ was probed. There was evidence that the characteristics of non-resilience like disinterest in the classroom were easily identified by educators.

Educator participants viewed learners’ emotional and physical health factors as relevant. Lack of confidence, poor communicating skills, nervousness and depression were the negative factors related to learners being ‘at-risk’. Literature on characteristics of resilient and non-resilient learners does highlight some of the negative emotional, physical and intellectual problems non-resilient learners can display (2.8.1). Positive factors or attributes of learners that contribute to skills and competencies which are known to be protective in resilient learners were not referred to in any great depth. In this study, it emerged that educator participants used learners’ negative emotional characteristics to describe non-resilient learners as nervous, disruptive, sad, not confident, frequently absent from school and sometimes angry. There was little comment made about positive learner attributes by the respondents.

This is one such description of a non-resilient learner by an educator participant;

*‘But I would say there is unruly behavior sometimes, they don’t want to work. They become disruptive’.*

Literature on risk and educational resilience does describe non-resilient learners as experiencing emotional difficulties like anxiety, phobias, depression, loneliness and fearfulness. Researchers point out that the tendency for non-resilient students to internalize their problems is high which may contribute to learners experiencing difficulties in the classroom (cf. 2.8.1). There was little focus by educator participants on positive emotional factors like a sense of security, good self-esteem and a positive response to high expectations, in the learners they identified as being resilient in the ‘at-risk’ demographic. This was attributed to a lack of theoretical knowledge of the factors that protect learners in the classroom and provided support to the finding that the insight level of the foundation phase educator participants about educational resilience was superficial. The theoretical framework of this study incorporates specific characteristics of the resilient child including autonomy and self-efficacy; in the ‘at-risk’ demographic that most learners from our school come from, these resilient characteristics are present in learners who walk long distances to school, study in difficult home circumstances and achieve academic success. As an educator an awareness of these strengths and caring support combined with high expectations would build on the strengths of these learners which may allow them to achieve long-term success in their studies.

### **5.3.1.3 Sub-theme: Association between educational resilience and family support**

Educator participants expressed views that described an association between resilient behavior and certain positive environmental factors, especially a supportive family. Educator participants perceived this as an indication that a learner came from a ‘good home’ which made them resilient, despite their poverty. This is what one of the educators had to say;

*“Yes because there’s a big difference with children who come from good backgrounds and the children that come from the poor backgrounds, because I have children who come from Burlington, and I have children who live around here. And you’ll see that very big difference in their work”.*



This educator further identified a resilient learner as one coming from a poor home but still performing well in class because of the support the learner gets from her family. This is the educator's description of a resilient learner:

*“She comes from a good home. Although there's poverty in the home, she comes from a good home and I tell you, she didn't know a word of English, but the way she has improved in her work, and she reads so well and she's doing so well”.*

Researchers have defined educational resilience as “the heightened likelihood of success in school and other life accomplishments, despite environmental adversities brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences” (*cf.* 2.8.). The capacity to function in the face of adversity has been linked to protective factors in the literature. Personal protective factors mentioned in resilience studies include self-help skills, autonomy and problem-solving abilities. Familial protective factors mentioned were a sound family structure and a supportive network (*cf.* 2.13). Respondents in this study did not discuss personal protective factors in their discussion of risk and resilience and were not detailed in their discussion of the specific factors that impacted learners in their families. Considering the interconnectedness of the multi-systems in the theoretical framework of this study, it is important for educators to facilitate contact with parents of learners, especially non-resilient ones to determine if intervention is needed.

### **5.3.2 THEME 2: Educators failure to enhance educational resilience or respond to a lack of educational resilience in identified ‘at -risk’ learners by their classroom approach**

Although educator participants had some understanding of educational resilience, albeit a superficial one and were able to describe what constituted an ‘at-risk’ learner in their classroom and identify them, there was no corresponding change in their classroom approach for those learners who displayed characteristics of non-resilience. The lack of variation in their instructional style to cater for all learners’ needs during a lesson and the non-response of some educator participants to the comprehension difficulties and disinterest displayed by some learners during a lesson was interpreted as a failure to respond to an awareness of the difference in resilience between learners. It should be pointed out that consideration must be given to the fact

that only two lessons were observed during the study and this may not be truly reflective of what occurs.

#### **5.3.2.1 Sub-theme: Lack of educational resilience identified by negative emotional behavior in learners**

Data analysis from the classroom observation indicates that participant educators did not acknowledge lack of resilience in the learners they identified as being ‘at-risk’ of academic failure, although data from the focus group interview indicated that educators believed they were able to identify learners that were resilient and non-resilient.

This is what one participant had to say about how she was able to identify a resilient or non-resilient learner in her class;

*“Yes, as a teacher I will be able to identify because you’ll find the difference between a resilient and non-resilient child, a child who is interested and the one that is not interested in their work”.*

According to the data collected through the questionnaire and focus-group, educator participants’ responses indicated that learners ‘at risk’ displayed negative emotional behavior and were unable to concentrate during the lessons. As a result they disrupted other learners around them. One participant stated;

*“And sometimes you get them being frequently absent they don’t want to be at school, but I would say they are unruly and disruptive. They don’t have a motive in them to work”.*

The literature does describe non-resilient learners as experiencing emotional difficulties who often display withdrawn or aggressive behavior. This occurred because of vulnerability to risk factors like poor living conditions. Some vulnerable learners are described as unhappy, sensitive, anxious and also disruptive (*cf.* 2.8.1). It is thought that non-resilient learners become unruly or disruptive because of their circumstances; adversity in a child’s life can either hinder them or precipitate a resilient reaction to life’s inevitable stressors, changes or challenges (*cf.* 2.8.2). Although respondents in this study were aware of learners’ negative emotional behavior, they did not have sensitivity to the underlying needs of learners who displayed this behavior, reflecting

mainly on the impact of the disruption on other learners and their classroom environment. Educators can be trained to become sensitive to the needs of non-resilient learners once there are aware that learners may display negative emotional behavior when their home environment is difficult which may require educators to vary their approach or use alternative teaching methods to assist learners to focus in the classroom. The theoretical framework of this study highlighted the underlying factors that cause non-resilient children to behave in certain ways in the classroom and the supportive responses educators should have to assist them. Werner and Smith (1992) were of the view that every child is born with innate resilience that can be built on.

#### **5.3.2.2 Sub-theme: Enhancement of educational resilience requires educator awareness**

When educator participants were asked whether they enhanced educational resilience and how they accomplished this, there were positive responses. All educator participants stated that it would be possible to enhance resilience in learners they identified as being non-resilient. The findings from the data analysed indicate that participants believed that in order for this to happen, there had to be an internal change within the educator, meaning that the educator's attitude towards their learners would have to be positive. These are the responses from the educator participants with regard to their ability to enhance resilience in non-resilient learners. One of the educator participants stated;

*“It is possible to enhance resilience. As educators you need to be active and set a role where they can follow you as a model”.*

Another participant stated;

*Yes, it is possible you will talk to your learners trying to give them skills’.*

Educator participants in this study commented that by using a variety of teaching techniques and methods educators could enhance resilience in non-resilient learners. In the classroom observations however, the researcher noted that educators used the whole-class instructional approach to teach, individual attention was not given and alternate methods of teaching were not employed for non-resilient learners during the lesson. This may support the hypothesis that the educators' insight about educational resilience was superficial; although they believed they had

the capacity to enhance educational resilience when presented with the question in theory, they did not act on that knowledge by changing their teaching style in the classroom to accommodate all learners' needs. Consideration must be given to the fact that only two lessons were observed and this may not be a true reflection.

A study on resilient and non-resilient learners in the literature found that non-resilient learners were less engaged in their work than resilient learners. Educator participants, observed during a lesson, did not respond to the non-engagement and disinterest of some of the learners in their classroom. The literature refers to the role educators can play in helping non-resilient students become engaged in classroom activities by controlling their attention (*cf.* 2.11). It was also noted that educators who provide students with a sense of safety, love and belonging, respect, power, accomplishment, learning and ultimately meaning are often the important role models who foster a child's resilience (*cf.* 2. 10).

#### **5.3.2.3 Sub-theme: Importance of varying instructional style**

Educator participants' response to helping enhance resilience in learners' 'at risk' of academic failure indicated an awareness that a change of teaching technique was required. This is one educator participants' response;

*“Yes, by giving the learners more attention in regards to their work and by using a variety of methods to bring them back to form”.*

Classroom observations revealed that there was no real variance in classroom approach or instructional style to engage non-resilient children who displayed negative emotional behaviors like disinterest in the lesson. There was also a lack of effort noted in determining whether all children had comprehended the information taught during a lesson although one educator participant with more varied classroom experience, who was also more active than the others in the focus group discussion, did try to assist learners and roped other learners to assist those who appeared not to have understood the lesson. The language barrier was not considered a significant factor in teaching technique because even in the Zulu educator's classroom, there were children who did not engage with the lesson.

From the non-resilient learners' assessment records, there was support for the possibility that poor engagement in lessons or a lack of comprehension in response to teaching style was a problem. The records indicate very little improvement in learners' results over time (Annexure K). This may be considered support for the educators' failure to identify or enhance non-resilience in these learners who they already perceived to be 'at-risk' of failure. Although multiple variables may contribute to academic improvement or success, from the educator participants' perspective there may have been the view that the disinterest of the learners who fared badly in the classroom contributed to their failure which was either their own responsibility or that of their home environment and there was little educators could do to change that. This was further support for a superficial way of viewing learners' classroom behavior and academic performance.

The role of educators in helping non-resilient children become more engaged is regarded as significant in the literature; it is thought that educators may be able to assist learners to focus on a goal by providing immediate feedback on activities and providing challenging material that will help learners develop new skills (*cf.* 2.9). Research-based instructional practices all stress that a student-centered model of classroom instruction which emphasises more active student learning may work better in this situation. Teachers could act as facilitators in a process that has been described as a 'flow-type' instructional activity which is seen as benefiting disengaged learners in the classroom.

The theoretical framework that underpins this study, a blend of socioeconomic and resilience theory, makes reference to attributes that identify a resilient child within a specific socioeconomic context. These include learner characteristics that incorporate social competence, autonomy, problem-solving skills and a sense of purpose and future. Educator participants in this study failed to acknowledge those learners who lacked resilience amongst those they identified as being 'at-risk' for academic failure because of their socioeconomic status and did not comment on positive learner attributes (*cf.* 1.7). Had educators been trained in the theoretical understanding of resilience and in being able to identify positive learner attributes, they would have been able to properly assess and respond to learners' needs. More importantly, educator participants would have been able to create opportunities for non-resilient learners to develop

their social skills and autonomy in the classroom by encouraging them to develop a sense of purpose and a plan for the future by taking an interest in their lives.

### **5.3.3 THEME3: Lack of Parental Support**

Educator participants placed emphasis on the importance of parental involvement or the lack thereof in their responses in both the open-ended questionnaire and the focus group interview. The challenge of teaching in an environment in which parents do not engage with the educator about their child, their academic performance or school activities and the impact on the learner's response in the classroom where there was parental disinterest were considered significant factors by educator participants. As the theoretical framework for this study depicted, parental and family support formed the system closest to the child; as such the role of parents in resilience cannot be understated. The educator and school form the next system of support and where educators identify a lack of parental support, they should assume responsibility as a caring adult to assist the learner.

#### **5.3.3.1 Sub-theme: Absence of parental involvement: negative impact on the educator**

Educators made a clear distinction between resilient learners' parents who were supportive of their children and 'non-resilient learners' parents who were unsupportive in the 'at-risk' learner demographic. The attitude of the educator participants towards disinterested parents indicated that there was a degree of frustration about their non-involvement in their children's lives.

This was a response from one participant when asked about identifying resilient and non-resilient learners:

*"I think you can see their parents are not interested in the learner as well. Parents need to show interest in the learner so the learner can feel motivated and want to learn."*

One educator stated that there should be a positive relationship between the educators and parents and this is what she had to say;

*“I was even going to say that in a school we’ve got a triangle. It’s the learner, the parent and an educator, so all those three people are working together in promoting a learner. So I can’t work with the learner only. I also have to engage with the parent, and the parent must also engage with me as an educator”.*

Educator participants reflected a willingness in their responses to relate to parents of learners who were experiencing difficulties in the classroom and appeared to view parents who showed a lack of interest in a negative light. Even though there was recognition of those learners whose parents were uninvolved and an awareness of the impact on learners’ learning attitude, little attention was paid in the discussion to possible reasons for parental non-involvement in the educator participants’ responses. Factors like language barriers, socioeconomic challenges or time constraints were not cited as possible reasons behind the parental lack of interest. Educator participants appeared to focus more on the added burden placed on them by parental non-involvement and did not reflect on the opportunity this presented for their role to be positive in enhancing resilience in their learners.

#### **5.3.3.2 Sub-theme: Difference in educational resilience attributed to level of parental involvement**

Although both the resilient and non-resilient learners came from the same neighborhood, educator participants noted that there was a difference in parental support for their children. The educators’ observation, conveyed in the comments in the focus group discussion, was that those learners in the ‘at-risk’ demographic who had uninvolved parents did not fare as well in their academic activities as their peers whose parents showed interest. This was perceived to be related to learners’ resilience; the conclusion drawn by educator participants was that the absence or reduced level of parental involvement corresponded to a lack of resilience or non-resilience in the learners.

Findings from the data analysed indicated that educator participants placed importance on parents being involved in their child’s education. Educators perceived that resilient learners were from well adjusted families and ‘at risk’ learners, from dysfunctional ones. They also emphasised that some parents of ‘at risk’ learners did not come to school to enquire about their

children's academic progress. An educator participant saw the relationship between the educator, parent and child as significant in helping and motivating the learner.

*“My point is that parents should have a part in their child's learning and the parents must work with the teacher and the child to help the child”.*

Research studies on resilience have found that one of the characteristics found in resilient children is a close relationship with caring parental figures that have high expectations. It is important to consider that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in South Africa, family structures which historically for the majority of the population consisted of extended families living together with elders, has changed especially in the urban population. This shift has meant that parenting of children is challenging for most parents and is increasingly becoming a shared responsibility with schools with an expectation that educators would address gaps in parenting. Parents struggling with the issues of living appear not to have the skills or the time to explore their children's goals and plans for the future with them; learners are left with little hope for the future or expectation of success (*cf.* 2.13). High parental or educator expectation has been noted as a protective factor in educational resilience as it acts as a motivating factor for learners to persevere in their studies.

#### **5.3.3.3 Sub-theme: Parental support seen as protective factor; lack of awareness of educator role**

Educator participants viewed parental involvement and support for the learner and the school as being a positive protective factor for the learner ‘at risk’ from adverse socioeconomic circumstances. According to literature on resilience, protective factors can contribute to resilience, moderate the effects of risk and stress and enhance adaptation (*cf.* 2.8.4). A supportive family environment is well documented in literature as being an important protective factor; attached relationships to reliable and responsive people enable young people to be secure. Many researchers have identified the concept of effective parenting as significant in supporting ‘at-risk’ children. The finding in this study that educator participants saw parental support as significant to learners’ educational outcome is consistent with this (*cf.* 2. 13).

Educators who foster resilience in learners ‘at risk’ of academic failure and reverse potential negative outcomes where there is parental lack, are also seen as a protective factor (*cf.* 2.8.4.). It



was found that learners in racial and ethnic minority groups from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, as a group, had other predictors of school failure. Problematic family structures, parental unemployment, low parental education level, single-headed households and a number of children residing in a household were seen as negative factors for learner development. Current social practices which differ from traditional concepts of ‘family’ were also not protective in terms of resilience (*cf.* 2. 23).

In this study, educator participants were aware of the lack of parental involvement in the lives of learners who were non-resilient but were unaware of the potential protective nature of their role. A positive attitude in an educator who assumed a level of responsibility where there is an absence of a significant adult or parent figure could be a protective factor that enhances resilience. This lack of awareness of the protective role of the educator where there is a lack of resilience supports the finding that the insight of foundation educator participants was superficial. Educator participants in their responses to the questionnaire and in the focus group did not make reference to the vital role they could play in the lives of learners by being a caring adult that shows an interest.

Children who are said to be ‘at-risk’ are more likely to be resilient if they attended a school with attentive, caring teachers. The educator’s role in building resilience by creating a classroom experience that fosters social competence, builds self-confidence and alters perception of the future enables the non-resilient learner to begin a journey away from an environment of risk that predicts failure toward academic achievement. This in turn may influence their social context positively as parents may take a deeper interest in a child who becomes successful at school (*cf.* 2.10).

Research studies have confirmed that educators’ actions and expectations and a healthy classroom and school climate play a key role in motivating positive attitudes towards school and enhancing resilience in learners (*cf.* 2.8.1). Educators by virtue of their frequent contact with learners are considered to be the first line of assistance for children in building resilience; they may be most effective in promoting a learner’s well-being by providing a protective factor against adversity that comes from other areas of the child’s life. Educators who have a resiliency

building-attitude can enhance resiliency by creating a caring environment and a sense of safety (cf. 2.10).

#### **5.3.4 THEME 4: Lack of training in educational resilience during professional development**

In response to questions about professional development it emerged that all of the educator participants in this study have not been exposed to formal training in resilience during their professional development and acknowledged a relative lack of inexperience in addressing resilience in learners in their classroom.

##### **5.3.4.1 Sub-theme: Absence of formal training in educational resilience**

This was what one educator participant indicated about professional development in regards to resilience;

*“Because it’s new to us, we have been educated during the apartheid times where we were only exposed to our kind now, our Indian, or our culture. Now suddenly we are just put into the deep end and it is difficult. It is very, very difficult”.*

Besides having no formal training in the theory and practical application of resilience, educator participants interviewed for the study were not trained to teach in schools where there was a cultural diversity amongst learners and were ill-prepared for the language difficulties, learning deficits and socioeconomic challenges that learners in their classrooms presented with. Educators had to adjust to the changes in learning climate on their own with minimal guidance and academic input. There was no forum in which their classroom challenges were adequately discussed or addressed. Some of the educator participants acknowledged that they were unable to fully verbalise their understanding of the theoretical concepts around resilience because of a lack of training and most of their understanding was gleaned from interaction with learners.

Researchers have commented that training in educational resilience is a vital aspect of professional development that assists educators to implement a resilience education approach in the classroom (cf. 2.11). At South African institutions where teacher training is done, no

undergraduate education studies presently focus on resilience education. Students that study psychology as one of their modules may be exposed to resilience studies but it does not constitute comprehensive training in the concept.

#### **5.3.4.2 Sub-theme: Classroom inexperience**

Educators did acknowledge the need to be professionally developed in the field of resilience education and positively agreed that if they were professionally developed with regard to the concept, they would be better equipped to help their learners ‘at risk’ of academic failure. One of the positive responses from an educator participant concerning professional development was:

*“It’s important for educators to equip themselves with some knowledge”.*

Classroom observation of educators revealed a lack of awareness of differences in resilience in learners and no variation in instructional style to cater for non-resilient learners. Classroom inexperience in dealing with learners who displayed negative emotional behaviors reflected the challenges that educators experience daily. Even when educators were able to identify the non-resilient learners in those they perceived to be ‘at-risk’, there was no awareness of the factors that could have been contributing to the learner’s disinterest in a lesson. Educator participants were not negative in their attitude to learners but there was no positive interaction either. Educators did not display proactive planning to cater for learners who were struggling to grasp concepts being conveyed in the lessons.

From the literature it is considered extremely important for educators to understand the phenomenon of resilience in order for them to be able to identify characteristics that protect children against environmental stressors. This is seen as the first step toward educators understanding how to create supportive academically-enriched environments for their learners. The likelihood of success at school despite environmental adversities is linked to an educator’s ability to focus on a learner’s positive traits and their choice to implement appropriate interventions in the classroom to build on their academic invulnerability. Training in the concept of resilience as part of an educator’s professional development would provide them with skills they lack to achieve this (*cf.* 2. 12).

South Africa is not uniquely placed in its need to review the curriculum for the professional development of its educators to incorporate resilience studies. A study on teachers' knowledge of and ability to identify resilience in primary school children in Queensland, Australia, reported that when educators were asked if they had had any professional development about resilience, the majority of the participants indicated that the concept was not directly targeted in their professional development. Some of them attended other professional development programs for problems like bullying that had resilience education embedded in the course. Educators felt that being required to provide supportive learning experiences in the classroom for learners to build resilience requires support for educators to be trained and well-informed of its complexities (*cf.* 2. 12).

In this study, the educator participants felt that professional development is essential for them to deepen their insight about educational resilience. They commented that in order for them to respond appropriately to children they identified as being 'at-risk', they required a deeper knowledge of resilience, core resilience characteristics of learners and the skills necessary to build on resilience in learners (*cf.* 2.12).

## **5.4 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The following findings emerged from the themes identified after the data analysis. The study sought an answer to the research questions: did foundation phase educators recognize and understand resilience and did they enhance its presence in learners they considered to be 'at-risk'. The hypothesis at the onset of the study was that foundation phase educators lacked depth of insight about educational resilience.

### **5.3.1 FINDING 1: Educators Lacked Depth of Insight about Educational Resilience**

For the purpose of this study sufficient depth of insight into educational resilience and its application in the classroom was defined at the onset of the study by the educator's ability to recognise and understand educational resilience and put in place classroom initiatives that enhance it. Lack of insight or superficial insight, it was determined, would be reflected by finding that educators had vague, poorly formed notions about educational resilience.

The findings in this study relevant to educator participants' depth of understanding about the terms educational resilience and 'at-risk' learners revealed that although these educators had some understanding of what these terms meant, their responses showed that they had limited knowledge on what exactly educational resilience and 'at-risk' referred to. They had in fact a broader, colloquial understanding of these terms. One of the educators' responses indicated that the term resilient had

*“Something to do with recovery from an illness or a setback”.*

The concept of resilience according to literature refers to a phenomenon that is characterized by good outcomes and the ability to “bounce back” or cope effectively in the face of adversity (*cf.* 2.5) One of the findings that emerged from consideration of the term 'resilient' in this study was that educator participants associated resilient behaviour with environmental and supportive family factors. A definition of educational resilience as defined by researchers is “the heightened likelihood of success in school and other life accomplishments, despite environmental adversities brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences (*cf.* 2.8.6)”. The term resilient was used to describe children who achieved positive outcomes in the face of risk (*cf.* 2.6)

Participant educators in this study saw resilient learners as motivated and supported by their parents and a non-resilient learner as being one exposed to external danger. The risk or negative factors identified included the learners' environment, poverty, disruptive behavior, absenteeism and lack of parental involvement. A lack of confidence, poor communicating skills, nervousness and depression were the learner attributes associated with learners being 'at- risk' (*cf.* 2.8.1).

According to studies done internationally on teachers' understanding of resilience, knowledge about the concept was limited despite the use of textbook style definitions to indicate an understanding of the terms. Researchers suggested that teachers were able to identify resilient traits because of statements in questionnaires that identified traits linked to the concept of resilience; there was little depth of knowledge about the concept for teachers to correctly identify or enhance its presence (*cf.* 2.12). Although educator participants in this study did not have core knowledge of the textbook definitions of resilience, their discussion of the topic indicated a basic understanding of the relevant terms gleaned from personal experience. The concepts themselves

were ill-defined and poorly formed and there was little depth for the researcher to probe deeper into links to positive learner attributes or strengths. There was also a lack of awareness of the positive nature of their role and no change in their response to learners in the classroom based on difference in resilience. It is fair to conclude therefore that educator participants in this study had a superficial understanding of the theory and practical application of educational resilience.

The hypothesis for the study is true: foundation phase educators' insight into educational resilience was superficial. Consideration must be given to the fact that the educators did not have formal training in educational resilience.

### **5.3.2 FINDING 2: Educators were able to identify 'at-risk' learners but failed to be responsive in their teaching methods.**

All three participants' responses to questions relating to their perception of learners 'at-risk' indicated that they perceived 'at-risk' to mean that the learner was endangered because of exposure to something negative or a stressful experience. The educators also perceived 'at-risk' to be associated with negative contextual factors like poverty, poor living situations and the background where they come from. Participant B's response was;

*"It is to be in danger of certain experiences or situations".*

Participant A's response was;

*"Consider the learners' background like from where they come. What problems they come with to school."*

There was no discussion of positive factors linked to educational resilience or any depth in perception of educator role. Research studies have confirmed that teachers' actions and expectations, classroom environment and school climate play key roles in enhancing resilience and motivating positive attitudes towards school (cf. 2.8.1). This study found that educator participants felt that exposure to adversity and external contextual factors were the most important when considering which learners were non-resilient. Further, educator participants used negative emotional behavior to describe the characteristics that non-resilient learners

display while positive descriptive words like well-motivated, cheerfulness and signs of improvement were used to show the characteristics of a resilient learner. The study found that educator participants felt that positive emotional characteristics including self-motivation and a positive attitude were resilient characteristics.

Findings from the learner assessments revealed that non-resilient learners obtained ratings between 1 (not achieved) and 2 (partial achievement). These ratings implied that these learners were finding difficulty in learning and were possibly correctly perceived as being ‘at- risk’ of academic failure by educator participants. However, one of the learners identified as a resilient learner obtained a rating of 1 (not achieved) for all three terms in her performance in the IsiZulu assessment and not all of the learners identified as resilient performed well in their English spelling and phonic assessment tasks for all three terms. Classroom observations of educators interacting with Grade 3 learners, including those identified as being resilient and non-resilient from the same socioeconomic environment revealed that educators did not vary their teaching techniques to enhance resilience in learners.

All three educator participants responded ‘yes’ with regard to their ability to enhance resilience, stating that it is possible to enhance resilience. Strategies advanced as to how resilience could be enhanced included educators having a positive relationship with learners, a positive attitude in the classroom and the use of different teaching techniques. However, no examples of what types of teaching strategies could be used to enhance resilience was given. Further, classroom observations indicated that the educators’ response in the classroom to the identification of ‘at-risk’ learners or lack of resilience did not translate to an adaptation of teaching methods or instructional style. Although there was some understanding of teaching strategies that could be employed in the classroom, educators failed to use any of them in the classroom to enhance resilience in their learners. Consideration must be given to the fact that only two classroom observations occurred during the study.

Literature reviewed indicates that in helping to improve classroom instruction for non-resilient learners, educators should employ teaching practices found to be effective for students ‘at-risk’ of failure. These research-based practices include cognitively-guided instruction, cooperative learning, culturally responsive teaching, technology-enriched instruction and instructional

conversation. A student-centered model of classroom instruction was preferred as it allowed for more active student learning where educators acted as facilitators of learning (cf. 2. 11). In this study, educator participants underestimated their role in learners' lives. They perceived the challenge brought to the classroom by learners whose parents were uninvolved as a weight or burden and not as a life opportunity afforded them to grow in excellence as an educator. This may have been a result of a lack of training. Educator participants were able to identify differences in resilience but failed to act where there was a lack to enhance the resilience of 'at-risk' learners.

### **5.3.3 FINDING 3: Lack of parental support is a factor in the difference in educational resilience in learners with similar socioeconomic risk factors**

Lack of parental support was considered by educators to be a significant factor in the difference in resilience between learners who experienced socioeconomic disadvantage. This was a major finding in this study as all educator participants placed emphasis on the importance of parental involvement or the lack thereof in their child's learning. Educator participants made a clear distinction between resilient learners' parents who were supportive of their children and non-resilient learners' parents who were unsupportive. Although both the resilient and non-resilient learners came from the same neighborhood the difference in parental support for their children was observed by the educators. Research studies on resilience have found that one of the characteristics found in resilient children who are well adjusted and able to meet the demands of society is the support they receive from their parents or a significant other (cf. 2. 13). Researchers have commented that resilient children tend to have parents who are interested in their children's education (cf. 2.13).

According to studies undertaken in New Zealand, the United States of America and the United Kingdom there is an increased rate of instability in the family structure which places children at risk of poor life outcomes. Researchers have argued that the change in family structures have meant changes in parenting of children and there is greater reliance on schools to assist in this regard; where parental involvement was minimal, educators were viewed as the responsible, caring adult who could guide a child's development. (cf. 2.13).



According to Carr-Gregg an Australian psychologist specializing in adolescent mental health, the current crisis in parenting is adversely impacting the normal psychological development and growth of young people (*cf.* 2.13). A supportive family environment is recognized as an important protective factor; attached relationships to reliable and responsive people enable young people to be secure (*cf.* 2.13). In this study, although educator participants were aware of the lack of parental involvement in the lives of learners who were non-resilient, their awareness did not extend to their own role. Educators' attitudes were not positive toward assuming responsibility to make a difference as significant adults who had consistent contact with the learner; rather educator participants apportioned blame and were slightly egocentric in their perspective as to how this impacted their classroom environment. This supports the finding of superficiality of insight; educator participants failed to perceive the vital role they could play in the lives of learners by being a caring adult who takes an interest (*cf.* 3. 5.1). For educator participants, parental support was viewed as the significant factor in differentiating between levels of resilience between learners with the same socioeconomic disadvantage.

#### **5.3.4 FINDING 4: Educators acknowledged a lack of training in educational resilience.**

When it came to resilience education and the professional development of educators, one of the main findings in response to questions about professional development in this study was that all of the educator participants in this study had not been involved in any professional training or development about resilience. All three educator participants acknowledged the importance of educators having an understanding of what the term resilience was; they also felt that it was important to enhance resilience in learners identified as being 'at-risk' of academic failure. Responses further showed that these educator participants believed that the fact that the school they were based in catered for culturally diverse learners, meant that educators should have been adequately equipped to help learners which was not the case. One of the important responses emerging from the data indicated that none of the participants had any professional development with regard to resilience education. One of the educator participants' responses reflected the frustration;

*“When I say it is difficult I mean that we did not learn about resilience and now we are faced with challenges in the classroom.”*

At present at South African institutions where teacher training is done, no undergraduate education studies focus on resilience education. This researcher heard about resilience and resilience education only at post-graduate level. Educators did acknowledge the need to be professionally developed in the field of resilience education and positively agreed that if they were professionally developed with regard to educational resilience, they would be better equipped to help their learners 'at risk' of academic failure.

Resilience studies show that once educators are aware of educational resilience there is heightened likelihood of success in school despite environmental adversities; educators begin focusing on students' positive traits. Professional development represents an important avenue to promote the understanding of resilience issues for pre-service and in-service educators (*cf.* 2.12).

In this study, the educators stated that professional development was essential for them to deepen their insight about educational resilience. This is consistent with the views of educational resilience researchers who believe that for educators to respond appropriately to children they identify as being 'at-risk', they have to have an applicable knowledge of resilience (*cf.* 2. 14).

The ecological theoretical model that formed the basis of the theoretical framework of this study reflects the interconnectedness of the multiple levels or systems that impact upon child development. The educator fits into the system close to the core, being the child. The educator has daily contact with the child for at least five hours on a face-to-face basis for most days of the week for most of the school year. This offers the educator the opportunity to directly influence the child's social context which includes the child's attitudes, perceptions and behavior as the child develops. In the foundation phase of education, the child is still developing at all levels: physically, developing fine motor coordination, emotionally, developing independence, cognitively, developing executive levels of reasoning, socially, developing relationships and psychologically, developing a sense of identity. This implies that learners who are non-resilient who enter the classroom are given the opportunity to develop in all these spheres if the educator is cognisant of committed to the process of building resilience.

Self-efficacy has been suggested as one of the protective factors that determine whether a child can overcome adversity to succeed academically. The educator's role in building resilience by

creating a classroom experience that fosters independence, social competence, builds self-confidence and alters the perception of the future to the positive will enable the non-resilient learner to begin to succeed.

Educator participants in this study believed that they had not been adequately trained in this area; it is a lack that needs to be addressed. Educator professional development is a foundational component which is a shared responsibility between the educator, the management team of the school and the training institutions of the Department of Education. All educators at pre- or in-service level should be equipped with the theoretical framework and practical understanding of the concept of educational resilience.

## **5.5 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter the process of analysing the data was briefly discussed before the themes and sub-themes identified from the data were presented. Findings were discussed by making reference to resilience studies in the literature reviewed. The hypothesis for this study was confirmed in that foundation educator participants had a superficial understanding of the concept of resilience. In addition, other findings were that there was a failure to vary the classroom approach in response to an awareness of learners' lack of resilience and lack of parental support was identified as the significant difference between learners from the same 'at-risk' demographic. All educator participants confirmed a lack of training in resilience education in their professional development. Consideration must be given to the fact that educator participants did not have formal training in educational resilience and that only two classroom observations occurred in the study.

Chapter Six will discuss the limitations of the study and outline the recommendations made by the researcher.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

This study aimed to explore the depth of insight of foundation phase educators in educational resilience in learners they identified as being ‘at risk’ of academic failure due to socioeconomic

circumstances in a public primary school in South Africa by answering two research questions: whether foundation phase educators recognized and understood educational resilience and what they did to enhance its presence in learners. The purpose of this study was to explore the depth of educators' insight as demonstrated by their ability to recognize, understand and enhance resilience in learners in their care. This chapter begins with a systematic summary followed by the listing of the recommendations that stem from the significant findings of the study. The limitations of the study are noted before the study finally concludes with a summary.

## **6.2 SYSTEMATIC SUMMARY OF THE STUDY**

This study began when my interest was sparked about educational resilience in my post-studies. As a foundation phase educator, I wanted to explore the worldview of other educators about the topic. The hypothesis generated was that foundation phase educators lacked depth in their insight about educational resilience. As this was a qualitative case study approach to the study, the aim was to describe the data obtained not explain it. After ethical considerations were met, primary data was obtained from the case study, a small sample of Grade 3 educator participants at the research site, through questionnaires, focus group interviews and non-participant observation. Secondary corroborative data was collected from learner profiles, assessment records and drawings. Data was analysed, coded and common themes were identified from which the findings were reported. Methodological limitations of the study design included the fact that questionnaires did not specify educational resilience even though the questions were facilitated in the focus group interview and the discussion was about educational resilience; questions in the questionnaire were focused on the individual characteristics of learners whereas the theoretical framework of the study was a systemic approach to educational resilience; identical questions were used in the different instruments and the questions were closed due to the initial paucity of responses to the open-ended questionnaire which may have limited the discussion and influenced the findings where a narrative approach that asked educators to relate stories about their learners may have yielded more descriptive data; educator participants did not have access to formal training about educational resilience and as such should not have been expected to have a depth of insight about educational resilience so the study findings may have been predicted although some educator participants were extremely experienced educators who should have had a core knowledge about the subject and should have been able to enhance its presence even though they

may have been unable to define its theoretical constructs; only two classroom approaches occurred which may have been insufficient to assess educators' teaching styles and classroom approaches and draw any lasting conclusions.

The research problem identified was in the form of research questions; with the limitations of the study identified and a review of the findings, the following answers are relevant to the research questions formulated at the beginning of the study:

#### **6.2.1 Do foundation phase educators recognize and understand the concept of educational resilience?**

This study confirmed the hypothesis that foundation phase educators lacked depth in their level of insight about educational resilience. Educator participants were able to recognize resilient and non-resilient learners in their 'at-risk' learner demographic and did have a colloquial understanding of the risk factors associated with non-resilience. They were able to describe the negative attributes of the non-resilient child but were unable to identify protective factors or strengths. Educators' understanding of the complex multi-systemic factors that impact educational resilience was limited; participants were able to identify the parental role and the role of adversity in resilience but were unaware of their role as educators. Even though there were limitations to the study that included a small sample, lack of formal training in educational resilience and only two classroom observations, the findings do indicate that educator participants' insight about educational resilience is superficial.

#### **6.2.1 Do foundation phase educators enhance resilience in learners they considered 'at risk' of academic failure due to socioeconomic circumstances?**

The finding in this study was that educator participants were unable to enhance resilience in learners they considered 'at risk' of academic failure in learners from the same disadvantaged background. Although there were limitations to this study, - there were only two opportunities to observe classroom approach-, educator participants conceded they were unaware of a role in the enhancement of educational resilience. Lack of parental support was identified as the differentiating factor between resilience and non-resilience in learners from the same socioeconomic background. Non-resilient learners were identified by their lack of interest but

there was no variation in teaching technique to assist learners. Educators saw non-resilient learners as a burden, not an opportunity.

## **6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

After a review of the findings from the study, here are my recommendations:

### **6.3.1 Resilience education should be included in the professional development of educators**

A significant volume of literature that points to the fact that the recognition and enhancement of educational resilience is an important contributor to the academic progress of learners otherwise ‘at-risk’ for academic failure due to adverse socioeconomic circumstances that are beyond their control. In certain districts like the one selected for this study, learners attending South African public schools who come from poor living conditions represent the norm rather than the exception. In order for educators to maximise the opportunity the school affords learners to change their life outcome, it is imperative that their depth of insight about the concept is deepened together with an understanding of its implications for classroom instruction. It is recommended that training in the subject, its identification and enhancement be included as part of professional development at a pre-and in-service level. Although the responsibility for the training of its educators in the concept of educational resilience rests with the Department of Education, educators should be encouraged by their peers and the school management to expand their knowledge base for the benefit of the school, its learners and the community. Educator training institutions should review their training curriculum to include this important topic in their undergraduate training programs (*cf.* 2.11 & *cf.* 2.12).

### **6.3.2 Educators should have a positive attitude toward learners in the classroom**

Educators have the opportunity to positively influence the lives of learners who are in the ‘at risk’ demographic, especially those learners who do not have parental support. As a caring, supportive adult, an educator can be a consistent parent figure through the foundation phase of a learner’s education which would cause them to build on their inner strength. By simply expressing interest in a learner and taking the time to assist them with their learning challenges, an educator can contribute to a learner’s sense of security and their self-esteem. Literature reviewed for this study suggested that a positive attitude in the classroom towards learners

enables learners to benefit from the classroom environment and encourages them to focus on their studies. Studies indicate that there is a degree of ‘academic invulnerability’ in children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds that an interested educator can access and build on through constructive changes in the classroom. Research studies indicate that changes in instructional style, inclusion of various methods to engage non-resilient learners in lessons and a consistent and caring approach that fosters a culture of learning can make an immediate difference. Learners from disadvantaged backgrounds may display negative social behaviors in the classroom and instead of negative responses to their lack of interest or learning deficits educators should incorporate classroom methods that engage learners by creatively including them in lessons. This would alter the educational outcome of learners in their care (*cf.* 2.12).

### **6.3.3 School management should play a role in developing educational resilience**

Other suggestions for the enhancement of educational resilience at schools can be the incorporation of specific skills into the curriculum like communication and problem solving skills which could be incorporated into the different learning areas that educators teach in the foundation phase. This will benefit all educators as they will be encouraged to gain an understanding of how to build resilience and inculcate a sense of wellbeing in all learners. It is also suggested that the school management team’s role could be to create a nurturing environment that supports educators by providing them with the opportunity to air their views on educational resilience and express their ideas about its enhancement in a staff exchange-experience. Workshops should be arranged for educators who display an interest in the topic and take an initiative to engage learners because they wish to make a difference in the classroom. Teaching programs that are successfully used in other countries where there are established classroom practices geared to enhance resilience in learners ‘at-risk’ for academic failure can be modified for the South African classroom (*cf.* 2.11). The international trend towards a systemic approach in understanding educational resilience establishes the role of all components in the school environment, not just the educator as having the responsibility to enhance resilience in *all* learners.

### **6.3.4 Parental support should be encouraged and supported; parental non-involvement should be investigated**



Parental involvement in school activities should be encouraged by teaching and management staff of public schools. This will allow for better communication between parents, educators and learners. Parents can thus be encouraged to become sensitive to their children's educational needs. Where a learner's academic progress is being adversely impacted by lack of parental involvement, the school management team together with the class educator should enlist the help of community agencies or Social Welfare services to work together to facilitate good parenting practices and skills. Home visitation programs may provide support to parents overwhelmed by their socioeconomic environment or identify more specific problems that need to be addressed. The school can also forge links within the community with relevant cultural and spiritual leaders who may be able to assist by liaising with parents on behalf of the educators (*cf.* 2.13)

In some cases parents' non-involvement in school activities may be a reflection of ethnicity concerns or language barriers and community leaders may be able to assist by communicating with these parents. One practical suggestion is all school notices and circulars should be communicated in the home language of learners which would help those parents who are not literate in English. Learner profiles should be updated to include all information relevant to their home circumstances and interpreters should be available to assist parents at registration to complete all the necessary forms. Since English is the second language of a significant proportion of learners at public schools, the assumption can be made that their parents are more comfortable with discussions in their mother tongue. Educators fluent in IsiZulu should be used routinely at parent-teacher meetings to communicate with parents to ensure that there is understanding of the issues being discussed.

### **6.3.5 Educators teaching techniques should be varied to enhance learner resilience**

The time that learners spend in the classroom with their educators represents a unique opportunity for educators to build resilience in learners identified by them to be 'at risk' of academic failure simply by creating a caring environment and encouraging them to engage in lessons in a consistent manner. The educator's relationship with these learners is the cornerstone to shifting the odds; educators can provide learners who are 'at risk' with opportunities to participate in the classroom activities by being sensitive to the challenges experienced by them due to language and other barriers. Educators should also consider varying their teaching techniques in sustainable ways to incorporate the needs of learners they identify as displaying a

lack of resilience. Simple changes to the type of classroom approach used when teaching may create the opportunity to enhance resilience; educators can provide learners with specific skills identified as being lacking when compared to their peers like problem solving skills. Educators could ensure that their teaching approach is more conducive to facilitating learning in all learners in their classroom. A more active learner-based learning approach is preferred to a whole-classroom instructional style. Research in resilience education also has identified teaching practices that are considered more effective for learners ‘at risk’. Literature makes reference to cognitively-guided or technology-enriched instructional style, culturally-responsive teaching, cooperative learning and instructional conversation (*cf.* 2. 12). The following paragraph discusses the limitations to this study.

#### **6.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

When evaluating the results from this study, certain limitations should be taken into consideration. The methodological limitations of the study have been addressed at the beginning of this chapter. Further, this study explores the depth of insight about educational resilience of foundation phase educators from one public primary school in the Umlazi district in South Africa; it is therefore limited in the broader applicability of its findings to other educators and schools. The educator participant sample was small so the results cannot be generalised to be an accurate reflection of all educators and should be contextualised to the particular setting of the study. Due to the public servants strike that occurred during the data collection phase of the study, learner assessment records did not reflect three full terms though this did not impact on the conclusions drawn. Although it appears as if there was gender bias in selection of educator participants, this was unavoidable given the fact that only the Head of the institution at the selected research site was male. The questionnaire and the focus group interview were used to explore the educators’ insight into educational resilience. The questions began with the concept of educational resilience but there was little opportunity for the researcher to explore the topic in greater detail due to paucity of responses and the relative inexperience of educator participants in its practical application in the classroom. Perhaps a narrative approach to data collection that asked the educator participants to relate stories about their learners may have yielded different results.

Discussion of relevant positive factors like learner attributes would have made the study more consistent with the international shift in educational resilience studies away from determining risk factors to exploring learner strengths which would have allowed the findings of the study to be comparable with other studies. Further, an assessment of learners strengths would have required psychometric and personality assessments which were outside the scope of this study. The study also was a ‘snapshot’ that observed educator participants for a short period in a classroom therefore it may not have been reflective of how educator participants related to learners over the entire school year. It did appear, however, as if the classroom instructional style was a familiar approach for both educators and learners. Further, the classroom observation was only of two lessons and the conclusions drawn from the observation data may not be a true reflection of how educator participants interact with their learners. Another limitation of the study may be that the findings were affected by my being a foundation phase educator at the research site which may have inhibited the educator participants in their responses.

## **6.5 FURTHER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES**

This qualitative interpretive study was conducted in a public primary school with a small educator participant sample but the findings highlighted the significant omission of formal training in educational resilience in the professional development of educators in this country. There is also sufficient evidence to believe that the absence of depth in educators’ insight into the topic represents a general trend so an immediate research opportunity is for this study to be replicated in a larger sample as a multi-centre study across different phases within the education system to verify findings. It would be an interesting exercise to further explore foundation phase educators’ insight in educational resilience by employing a mixed method approach using a larger sample of educator participants and survey type questionnaires so more than one school can be included in the study.

Pre-and post educator training studies of the depth of educators’ insight about educational resilience and its enhancement in the classroom would be useful in assessing the effectiveness of the training of educators in this area. Further exploration of the role of parental support in the resilience of learners exposed to the same set of socioeconomic variables would also be an important study in South Africa where assumptions are still made that learners are considered

‘at-risk’ of academic failure solely because of their circumstances and little effort is made at educational policy level to address learners’ needs.

## **6.6 CONCLUSION**

This qualitative, interpretive case study of the depth of foundation phase educators’ insight into the resilience of their socioeconomically disadvantaged learners at a public primary school yielded interesting and significant results that may have implications for the professional development of educators in South Africa and the academic progress of learners. The research questions formulated considered whether foundation phase educators recognised and understood educational resilience and whether they had the capacity to enhance its presence in the classroom. This study found that educator participants had a superficial knowledge of educational resilience and there was a gap between their knowledge base and the practical application in the classroom. Educator participants were able to identify learners they considered to be ‘at-risk’ for academic failure and were able to differentiate between resilient and non-resilient learners but failed to translate this awareness into a practical application in terms of their instructional style or teaching technique. Parental non-involvement was perceived by educator participants as being significant to the non- resilience of learners from the same ‘at-risk’ socio-economic environment as compared to their peers. Educator participants acknowledged the lack of formal training in educational resilience during their professional development and were unaware of the contributory role they could play in building resilience by being a consistent, caring parent figure to learners.

Although the study was conducted in a small sample of educator participants, the findings are relevant to the broader society especially in the area of training of educators at a pre-and in-service level in the theory, identification and enhancement of educational resilience in learners in their care. This study also opened up the opportunity for discussion about the educators’ role and responsibility to provide a caring environment at school for learners whose academic achievement is compromised by lack of parental involvement when compared to their peers. Simple changes in teaching methods and instructional style may engage non-resilient learners in a process that would build their resilience such that they could participate actively in their school experience and achieve academically.

Limitations of the study were noted with regard to generalisation of the findings, given the smallness of the educator participant sample. However, the study does raise important questions about the training of educators which may be easily addressed. The choice of foundation phase educators for this study was an important one as this phase is literally the foundation of a learner's academic journey. Enhancement of educational resilience through interaction with caring educators in a supportive environment may allow learners to overcome the challenge they face due to circumstances beyond their control. In the absence of parental involvement, the foundation phase educator's role as a parental figure providing nurturing assistance and mentoring to learners who begin their schooling career at a disadvantage implies that these learners may be given the opportunity to advance at a similar pace as their peers who were born to privilege. In view of the trend internationally to regard educational resilience as a systemic process, it is critical that all components of the school environment have an awareness of the role that can be played to enhance the resilience of *all* learners.

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**ANNEXURE A**

**CONSIDERATION OF ETHICAL CLEARANCE FROM THE UNIVERSITY**

**OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

**ANNEXURE B**

**LETTER OF PERMISSION TO THE PRINCIPAL AND SCHOOL GOVERNING**

**BODY TO CONDUCT RESERCH STUDY**

LETTER FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH:

PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

31 Greendale Road

Silverglen

Chatsworth

4092

27 May 2010

The Principal

Mr A. Singh

[REDACTED]

Chatsworth

Durban

4092

12 May 2010

Dear Sir

**PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

I Mrs N Laban is currently completing my Masters of Education degree at the University of Kwa-zulu Natal (Edgewood campus). The research topic: *An exploration of the Insight of Foundation Phase Educators in Educational Resilience in a South African Public Primary School*. The purpose of the study is to explore South

African public school foundation phase educators' ability to recognise, understand and enhance resilience in learners at risk of academic failure. Educational resilience is the increased likelihood of academic success in spite of environmental difficulties.

This study will involve questionnaires, observation and interviews. The questionnaire will only be administered to three grade three educators, and completed in their free time and returned within two days. Interviews will be conducted with the purposeful samples the three grade three educators. Consent forms will be issued to learners to be signed by their parents granting them permission to participate in the research study. Learners who return their consent forms granting them permission will only participate in this study. The educators will be interviewed after school hours at the convenience of the interviewee. Observation will take place during a class lesson at a prearranged time.

I wish to reassure you of the following:-

- No learner or educator will be identifiable in any way from the research results;
- Participation will be voluntary;
- The confidentiality and anonymity of all participants will be respected and ensured;
- The institution will not be identifiable by name in the research results;
- A synopsis of the most important findings and recommendations will be forwarded to your school.

I trust that my request will be favourably considered.

Thanking you

.....

**N.LABAN**

**ANNEXURE C**

**APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

**LETTER FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

**N. Laban**

**31 Greendale Road**

**Silverglen**

**Chatsworth**

**4092**

**Research Strategy, policy Development and Education Management Introduction Systems**

**Mr Sibusiso Alwar**

**228 Pietermaritz Street**

**Pietermaritzburg**

**3200**

**12 May 2010**

**Sir**

**PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

**I Mrs N Laban wish to request permission to conduct research towards the completion of my Masters in Education degree at the University of Kwa-zulu Natal (Edgewood campus).**

**The research topic: *An exploration of the Insight of Foundation Phase Educators in Educational Resilience in a Public Primary School.* The purpose of the study is to explore South African public school foundation phase educators' ability to recognise, understand and enhance resilience in learners at risk of academic failure. Educational resilience is the increased likelihood of academic success in spite of environmental difficulties.**

**This study will involve questionnaires, observation and interviews. The questionnaire will only be administered to three grade three educators, and completed in their free time and returned within two days. Interviews will be conducted with the purposeful sample three grade three educators. Consent forms will be issued to learners to be signed by their parents granting them permission to participate in the research study. Learners who return their consent forms granting them permission will only participate in this study. The educators will be interviewed after school hours at the convenience of the interviewee. Observation will take place during a class lesson at a prearranged time.**

**I wish to reassure you that no learner or educator will be identifiable in any way from the research results.**

**Enclosed with this letter are the following:**

- **A copy of my proposal.**
- **A copy of the parent consent form.**
- **A copy of the questionnaire.**
- **A copy of the focus-group interview schedule.**

**Awaiting your approval in anticipation**

**Thanking you**

.....

**N.Laban**

**ANNEXURE D**

**LETTER OF APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN KWAZULU- NATAL**

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**



## ANNEXURE E

### LETTER OF REQUEST TO EDUCATOR PARTICIPANTS: CONSENT FORM

#### PARTICIPANTS LETTER OF CONSENT

31 Greendale Road

Silverglen

Chatsworth

4092

14 July 2010

The Grade Three Educators

[REDACTED]

Chatsworth

Durban

4092

Dear Sir /Madam

#### Request for permission to participate in research study

I Mrs N Laban is currently completing my Masters of Education degree at the University of Kwa-zulu Natal (Edgewood campus). ). The research topic: *An exploration of the Insight of Foundation Phase Educators in Educational Resilience in a Public Primary School*. The purpose of the study is to explore South African public school foundation phase educators' ability to recognise, understand and enhance resilience in learners at risk of academic failure. Educational resilience is the increased likelihood of academic success in spite of environmental difficulties.

I would like to request your permission to be a participant in my research study. This study will involve questionnaires, observation, and document analysis (learners profile records and assessment reports and interviews. The questionnaire will only be administered to you the grade three educator, and can be completed in your free time and returned to me. Interviews will be conducted with you and the two other grade three educators in a focus group interview discussion and observation of class lesson will take place during one of your lessons. I will make prior arrangements with you to confirm the time. I wish to reassure you of the following:-

No learner or educator will be identifiable in any way from the research results;

Participation will be voluntary;

The confidentiality and anonymity of all participants will be respected and ensured;

The institution will not be identifiable by name in the research results;

Thanking you and trust that my request will be favourably considered.

.....

N.Laban

## **ANNEXURE F**

### **LETTER OF REQUEST TO PARENTS: CONSENT FORM**

#### **LETTER OF CONSENT TO PARENTS**

Date: -----

Dear Parents,

We would like to include your child in a research project that explores whether foundation phase educators understand and recognise which learners in their class display resilience so that learners can be helped where necessary. Resilience refers to whether a learner can learn well in the classroom because they have adjusted to life. This study will be conducted by myself as the researcher, for a Master in Education project at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal.

To help us in our research, we would like your permission to ask your child's principal for information from your child's school records. This information will consist of information you have filled in when you enrolled your child at school and information from assessments done in the classroom that your child has completed as part of their normal school work. This information may include possible problems your child has with hearing, vision, and physical mobility, and information about your child's learning difficulties.

Only the researcher will have access to the information collected in this project, which will be kept in locked storage at the university for a period of five years following the completion of the research. Neither your name nor your child's name will appear in any reports of this research. You have a right to review a copy of any information being used regarding your child.

Participation in this project is voluntary and involves no unusual risks to you or your child. You may rescind your permission at any time with no negative consequences. You or your child can refuse to participate or withdraw from the project at any time with no negative consequences (e.g. to their grades or their right to receive services).

Your child's participation in the project will help us develop better methods for educators to identify and enhance resilience in children which may assist in resolving factors that hinder a child's academic progress.

If you agree to let your child participate, please indicate this decision on the following page. If you have any questions about this research or would like to review the information prior to providing consent, please feel free to contact me at 031401101 or my supervisor Mrs Rosemary

Kalenga at -031 2607583 and if you have questions about your child's rights as a research subject, you may contact the principal Mr A. Singh at 0314034696

**Sincerely**

**N.Laban**

**Reply slip**

**I-----parent /guardian of-----in grade three**

**Hereby grant /do not grant permission for my child/ward to participate in the research study. Please tick the appropriate box.**

<b>YES</b>			
------------	--	--	--

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**Sign (parent/guardian)**

---

**LETTER TO PARENTS - LEARNER CONSENT FORM**

**31 Greendqle Road**

**Silverglen**

**Durban**

**4092**

**14 July 2010**

**Mzali**

Ngibhala lencwadi ukukucela ukuba ube yingxenye yocwaningo (research) mayelana nokuzibandakanya ekufundeni kwengane yakho. Mina nginguthisha osebenza [REDACTED] Primary School. Lolucwaningo (research) luyingxenye yezifundo engizenza eNyuvesi ya-KwaZulu–Natal. Imvume yokuqhuba lolucwaningo ngiyitholile eMnyangweni wezemfundo namasiko. Ngingathokoza uma ungaphumelela. Uma unesifiso sokuba yingxenye ngicela ugcwalise lemininingwane engenzansi, ngizobese sengikuthinta ukuze sihlele usuku nesikhathi esingahlangana ngaso.

---

Igama: -----

Ucingo:-----

Ngiyavuma

☐

Angivumi

☐

---

Ngingabonga uma ungaphumelela

Yimina ozithobayo

N. Laban (mrs)

Ucingo: Cell – 0827814358 (Home) 0314011010

N.Laban

---

### **VERBAL ASSENT FORM FOR CHILD**

The assent form for this research will be read out to the learners by their parents as the information of learners from foundation phase will be used for the purpose of the study.

**I agree to my teacher using information about me and my work for her project. The teacher explained to my mother/father/guardian and he/she /they said that I could be in it. The only people who will know about me and my work will be my teacher. No-one else will know my name.**

**Writing my name on this page means that the page was read to me and that I agree. If I don't want to do this, all I have to do is tell my teacher I don't want her to use my work.**

---

**Child's Name written by the child or thumbprint**

---

**Date (written by parents)**

---

**Signature of Parent/Guardian**

---

**Date**

---

**Signature of Researcher**

---

**Date**

**ANNEXURE G**

**QUESTIONNAIRE SCHEDULE**

**ANNEXURE H**

**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**



**ANNEXURE I**

**OBSERVATION SCHEDULE**

## ANNEXURE J

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TABLE 5: Learners' English literacy assessment records of non-resilient learners

TABLE 6: Learners' English literacy assessment records of resilient learners

TABLE 7: Learners' IsiZulu assessment records of non-resilient learners

TABLE 8: Learners' IsiZulu assessment records of resilient learners

### TABLE 4: RATING CODE DESCRIPTION OF COMPETENCE

<b>CODES</b>	<b>DESCRIPTORS</b>
4	OUTSTANDING / EXCELLENT ACHIEVEMENT
3	SATISFACTORY ACHIEVEMENT
2	PARTIAL ACHIEVEMENT
1	NOT ACHIEVED

### TABLE 5: ENGLISH LITERACY ASSESSMENT RECORDS OF NON-RESILIENT LEARNERS

TASKS	SPELLING TEST			LITERACY ASSESSMENT			PHONIC TEST		
TERMS		2		1	2	3	1	2	3
PARTICIPANTS									
A				1	2	2	1	1	ABSENT
B				1	2	2	1	1	1
C				1	2	2	1	1	1

**TABLE: 6 ENGLISH LITERACY ASSESSMENT RECORDS OF RESILIENT LEARNERS**

TASKS	SPELLING TEST			LITERACY ASSESSMENT			PHONIC TEST		
TERMS		2		1	2	3	1	2	3
PARTICIPANTS									
D				3	3	3	2	2	3
E				3	3	2	1	1	1
F				3	3	3	1	1	1

**TABLE 7: ISIZULU ASSESSMENT RECORDS FOR NON-RESILIENT LEARNERS**

TASKS	TESTS		
TERMS	1	2	3
PARTICIPANTS			
A	2	2	2
B	1	1	2
C	1	1	1

**TABLE 8: ISIZULU ASSESSMENT RECORDS FOR RESILIENT LEARNERS**

TASKS	TESTS		
TERMS	1	2	3
PARTICIPANTS			
D	2	2	3
E	1	1	1
F	2	2	2

## ANNEXURE K

### **ADDENDUM: PRESENTATION OF DAT AND THEMES FROM THE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE, FOCUS-GROUP INTERVIEW AND POST-MULTIPLE QUESTIONNAIRE AND A SAMPLE OF THE SIX LEARNERS DRAWINGS**

### **ADDENDUM: PRESENTATON OF DATA AND THEMES FROM THE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE, FOCUS-GROUP INTRVIEW AND POST-MULTIPLE QUESTIONNAIRE**

**TABLE 1: OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE DATA AND THEMES**

**QUESTION I: What do you as an educator understand the term resilient to mean?**

<b>QUESTION I</b>	<b>EDUCATOR PARTICIPANT: A</b>	<b>EDUCATOR PARTICIPANT: B</b>	<b>EDUCATOR PARTICIPANT: C</b>
<b>What do you understand the term ‘resilient’ to mean?</b>	Resilient is to recover quickly after an illness or setback. It means to spring back into action.	To be capable, to have skills and being flexible.	Bringing something or someone that is out of form.
<b>COMMON THEMES</b>	<b>Recovery, skills and flexibility</b>		

**QUESTION 2: What do you understand learners’ ‘at risk’ to mean?**

<b>QUESTION: 2</b>	<b>EDUCATOR PARTICIPANT: A</b>	<b>EDUCATOR PARTICIPANT: B</b>	<b>EDUCATOR PARTICIPANT: C</b>
<b>What do you understand learners’ ‘at risk’ to mean?</b>	<b>Learners’ are at risk when they are exposed to something. It is something that can endanger a learners’ life.</b>	<b>To be in danger or stressful experience.</b>	<b>Learners are exposed to conditions that prevent them from giving their optimal towards education. Those learners who</b>

			<b>do not show any initiative towards their education.</b>
<b>COMMON THEMES</b>	<b>Adversity</b>		

**QUESTION 3: What characteristics do learners’ ‘at risk’ display?**

<b>QUESTION: 3</b>	<b>EDUCATOR PARTICIPANT: A</b>	<b>EDUCATOR PARTICIPANT: B</b>	<b>EDUCATOR PARTICIPANT: C</b>
<b>What characteristics do learners’ ‘at risk’ display?</b>	<b>Fear, anxiety, nervousness, sadness, worry, depression, unpleasantness.</b>	<b>Inferiority, not confident, not happy, scared.</b>	<b>Unruly behaviour by disrupting classes. Frequently absent from school.</b>
<b>COMMON THEMES</b>	<b>Emotional behaviour and relationship</b>		

**QUESTION 4: What characteristics do learners’ that are resilient display?**

<b>QUESTION: 4</b>	<b>EDUCAROE PARTICIPANT: A</b>	<b>EDCUATOR PARTICIPANT: B</b>	<b>EDUCATOR PARTICIPANT: C</b>
<b>What characteristics do learners’ that are resilient display?</b>	<b>Positiveness, well motivated, ready for change, signs of improvement, cheerfulness.</b>	<b>Try hard, engage themselves in different situations. Show enthusiasm in different aspects of life.</b>	
<b>Common themes</b>	<b>Motivation, adaptation</b>		

**QUESTION 5: Are you able to differentiate between resilient and non-resilient learners’ in your class?**

<b>QUESTION: 5</b>	<b>EDUCATOR PARTICIPANT: A</b>	<b>EDUCATOR PARTICIPANT: B</b>	<b>EDUCATOR PARTICIPANT: C</b>
<b>Are you able to differentiate between resilient and non-resilient learners' in your class?</b>	<b>Resilient learners' are happy, active and self motivated. Non-resilient learners' are quiet, introverted, lack motivation and there is no desire to work.</b>	<b>Yes, because of the way they carry themselves, although sometimes it's not easy as other learners are introvert by nature.</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>COMMON THEMES</b>	<b>Resilient- self motivated. Non-resilient – introvert</b>		

**QUESTION 6: As a foundation phase educator, is it possible to enhance resilience in learners', and do you enhance resilience in your learners', and if so how?**

<b>QUESTION: 6</b>	<b>EDUCATOR PARTICIPANT: A</b>	<b>EDUCATOR PARTICIPANT: B</b>	<b>EDUCATORE PARTICIPANT: C</b>
<b>As a foundation phase educator, is it possible to enhance resilience in learners', and do you enhance resilience in your learners', and if so how?</b>	<b>It is possible to enhance resilience. As an educator you need to be active and self motivated. You need to keep up with time. You also need to understand that learners come from a variety of home backgrounds. You have to be sensitive to their</b>	<b>Yes it is possible as you will talk with your learners trying to give them skills that will be useful to them in the future. I enhance resilience by giving them hope, and telling them that everything is possible.</b>	<b>Yes, by giving the resilient learners more attention regarding their work. Using a variety of methods to bring them back to form.</b>

	problems but you need to always show costiveness and a will to use a variety of teaching techniques.		
<b>COMMON THEMES</b>	Motivation, positive attitude, Skills development, teaching methods and techniques.		

**TABLE: 2 : FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW DATA AND THEMES**

<b>QUESSTIONS</b>	<b>THEMES</b>	<b>EDUCATOR</b>	<b>EDUCATOR</b>	<b>EDUCATOR</b>
-------------------	---------------	-----------------	-----------------	-----------------

		<b>PARTICIPANT:A</b>	<b>PARTICIPANT:B</b>	<b>PARTICIPANT:C</b>
<b>1. What do you understand the term resilience to mean?</b>	<b>Intellectual ability</b>		<b>Capable of having skills to do things.</b>	
	<b>Recovery</b>	<b>It means to recover quickly after a setback.</b>		
	<b>Motivation</b>			<b>The educators need to motivate the child to come back to reality.</b>
<b>2. What do you understand the term “at-risk” to mean?</b>	<b>Adversity</b>	<b>To be exposed to something to endanger the learner.</b>	<b>It’s to be in danger of certain experience or situation</b>	<b>Exposed to things that prevent them from giving of their optimal, their best.</b>
	<b>Contextual factor-Poverty</b>			<b>Poverty even like all those things or situations.</b>
	<b>External factor –or contextual factor</b>	<b>Consider the learners background like from where they come, what problems they come with to school.</b>	<b>Consider the learners problem they have at home.</b>	<b>Like the background of the learner, the situation that the learner is living under.</b>
<b>3. What characteristics do learners</b>	<b>Negative emotional characteristics</b>	<b>Nervousness and Depression disruptive</b>	<b>Drawback, sadness, moody, anger sometimes.</b>	<b>Learners get scared</b>





			<p>parent must also engage with me as an educator. Even sometimes the learner must be able to speak up, when she's not feeling well, when she's got a problem then I as an educator can engage with her trying to come up with what stresses the learners is coming up with. The parents must work with the teacher and the child to help the child.</p>	
<p><b>4. What characteristics do learners' that are resilient display?</b></p>	<p><b>Self-motivation</b></p>	<p><b>Yes, yes. When the child now says that I can be able to do this. Where the child now says I can do this. In other words they must try for help.</b></p> <p><b>Give them help</b></p>	<p><b>He would be motivated to come to school, speak up try and do work even though they can't do it can even ask a peer or a friend just to help.</b></p> <p><b>Maybe she will ask</b></p>	<p><b>Yes show them</b></p>

	<b>Encouragement</b>	even if we are lacking positiviness we must try and give them help.	“how can I do this”	that you care.
<b>5. Are you able to differentiate between resilient and non-resilient learners in your class?</b>	<b>Behaviour</b>		<b>Not hyperactive</b>	
	<b>Attitudes</b>			<b>Yes I think the teacher will identify because you’ll find the difference between a resilient and non-resilient. A person who is interested and not interested</b>
	<b>External factors</b>	<b>See the difference in my class, the children coming from good backgrounds and the children coming from poor</b>	<b>The educator has to research the learner if she is in danger. When they go back to when they meet at home is different from here.</b>	<b>In our school we must take into consideration from where these children are coming from. We must</b>

		backgrounds.		look at the home situation and the problems these children face
	Parental support	She's got backing from home and that is very important.	It is very important to get backing from home.	
	Language barrier	The background is different people that they are meeting, speaking another language. More comfortable in their home language.	At home they speak another different language. Different language beside English or IsiZulu.	
	Peer assistance	Or they will walk to another child and explain it in IsiZulu and the child will tell me.	They will get peer assistance.	
6. How do you enhance resilience in your learners' and does enhancing resilience improve the non-resilient learners'	Motivation		I think it's where we give like motivation give them hope. You do this, just try more harder. If you see someone struggling give assistance I think that is important.	

<b>academic performance?</b>				
	<b>Role model</b>	<b>You need to be active. You need to set a role, where they can follow you as a model. You can't be a dead educator and expect them to be self-motivated.</b>	<b>Exactly! Because now, if you don't set a role, how are they going to be able to stand up and do the same.</b>	
	<b>Teaching strategies</b>			<b>We must also consider the child whether he is interested in school. We got to find different methods of bringing him back to learn. Like even in a play-way method, or any form of teaching that you have to use to bring</b>

				them back to form.
	<b>External factor-</b>	<b>It's not being done at home and that our problem at our school a major problem.</b>	<b>That's why I say I's they background and ****my mother is at work coming home late, so all those things are the problems to them.</b>	<b>Any language is very important. They have to tell you whatever they learn at home, at school and at home,</b>
	<b>Social issues</b>			<b>Social conditions, very important. You have to consider that problem.</b>
<b>7. Do you as an educator think it is important for all educators to know what the term resilience is and how to enhance resilience, especially in those 'at risk' of academic failure?</b>	<b>Resilience knowledge</b>		<b>Exactly. Yes, I think so all educators should know about what resilience is because we got different teachers that come in the classes, so they should know what to expect.</b>	<b>I think it is important, because we have different types of children that we are working with. What I want to say is that children are important to us educators therefore all educators should know something about resilience.</b>
	<b>Learner diversity</b>	<b>We have been educated in the</b>		

		<p>apartheid times where we only taught our Indian, our culture. Now suddenly we are just put into the deep end and it's difficult.</p>		
	Professional development	<p>When I say difficult I mean that we did not learn about resilience and we are faced with challenges in the classroom and if we had being taught about resilience then it would be easier for us.</p>	<p>I am saying if I don't know about resilience how am I going to help my learners in the class. At the same time, what I'm trying to say is, we need some people that are going to work with us. Maybe we can like ask our social workers.</p>	<p>It's like we are finding our way through, because we had to adapt to so many different ways. There are no support systems. I think we should get departmental help in helping us to know about these things. We should be workshopped about it so we can be good educators in the class.</p>
	Multiple role player		<p>You have to be a social worker, you have to be a</p>	

			<p>teacher. You have to be a mother everything. You have to separate yourself into these different roles.</p>	
	<p><b>Knowledge of learners contextual factors</b></p>		<p>It is difficult for us educators because we need to like engage now with people that are from different backgrounds . It is a problem. Ya.</p>	<p>But it's important to know their background. Very important. What I mean to say is that if we don't their background we won't know their problems so we can't help them.</p>

**TABLE:3 : POST- MULTIPLE QUESTIONNAIRE DATA AND THEMES**



<b>QUESTION: 1 What do you as educators' understand the term resilient to mean?</b>		<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>		
		<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>
1	Resilience means to bounce back and cope well in the face of profound problems	✓		
2	To cope despite adversity	✓		
3	Children who experience difficulties but still have a positive outlook to life		✓	
4	Someone who can cope under stressful conditions			✓
5	One's capacity to adapt successfully in the presence of risk and adversity		✓	
6	The ability to maintain competence despite stressful and difficult life circumstances		✓	
<b>THEMES: COPING, POTIVENESS, ADAPTATION AND COMPETENCE</b>				

<b>QUESTION: 2 What do you understand learners' 'at risk' to mean to you?</b>		<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>		
		<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>
1	Disruptive or aggressive behaviour		✓	
2	Withdrawn and emotional			
3	Unhappy, sensitive or anxious	✓		
4	Unsociable, unable to make friends easily, unwilling to participate or share		✓	✓
5	Attention seeker, over-reliance on parents, irresponsible			
6	Frequently absent from school		✓	
<b>THEMES: EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOUR AND RELATIONSHIP</b>				

<b>QUESTION: 3 What characteristics do learners that are resilient display?</b>	<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>

		A	B	C
1	Are independent, confident and have high self-esteem	✓	✓	
2	Are responsible for their actions and make sensible choices	✓	✓	
3	Have a positive attitude and are strong willed			✓
4	Have good socializing skills			
5	Can communicate openly with good communicating skills		✓	
6	Happy to be at school with regular attendance			
<b>THEMES: SELF-ESTEEM, RESPOSSIBILITY AND GOOD COMMUNICATING SKILLS</b>				

<b>QUESSTION: 4 What characteristics do non-resilient learners display?</b>		<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>		
		A	B	C
1	Lacks interpersonal skills			✓
2	Problems making friends easily	✓		
3	Very emotional, sudden outburst			
4	Disruptive behaviour		✓	
5	Low self –esteem	✓	✓	
6	Lacks effort in doing tasks at school			
7	No parental or family support		✓	
8	Lacks responsibility			
<b>THEMES: INTERPERSONAL SKILLS, ATTITUDES AND PARENTAL SUPPORT</b>				

<b>Question: 5 How do you as foundation phase educators enhance resilience in learners’ “at-risk” of academic failure?</b>		<b>PARTICIAPANTS</b>		
		A	B	C
1	I encourage learners to share their problems and give them appropriate support.	✓	✓	

<b>2</b>	I assist them in developing problem-solving strategies.	✓		✓
<b>3</b>	I encourage my learners to work hard and achieve.		✓	✓
<b>4</b>	I discourage my learners from blocking out their problems and blaming themselves			
<b>5</b>	I encourage my learners to make friends so that they do not keep to themselves.		✓	✓
<b>6</b>	I encourage my learners of the importance of playing sports and keeping fit.			
<b>7</b>	I point out to my learners about the importance of having good, close friends			
<b>THEMES: ENCOURAGEMENT, RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIALISING</b>				

## **ANNEXURE L**

### **ADDENDUM: AUDIT TRAIL PROCESS FOR THE INDUCTIVE PROCESS FOLLOWED IN THE CODING OF THE DATA**

**An audit trail of the process used for the coding of the data collected from the open-ended questionnaire, focus group interview, post-group multiple choice questionnaire and classroom observation using an example of data collected from one of the participants is provided below.**

#### **Participant A**

##### **Open-ended Questionnaire**

**Question: As foundation phase educators is it possible to enhance resilience in your learners, and how do you as foundation phase educators enhance resilience in learners' 'at risk' of academic failure?**

**Response: It is possible to enhance resilience. As an educator you need to be active and self motivated. You also need to understand that learners come from a variety of home backgrounds. You have to be sensitive to their problems but problems and you have to show positiveness and a will to use a variety of teaching techniques.**

**Coding: Themes: Self-Motivation and a variety of teaching techniques.**

##### **Focus-group interviews**

**Question: As foundation phase educators is it possible to enhance resilience in your learners, and how do you as foundation phase educators enhance resilience in learners' 'at risk' of academic failure?**

**Response: Yes, You need to be active you need to set a role model, where they can follow you as a model. You can't be a dead educator and expect them to be self-motivated.**

**Coding: Themes: Motivation and role model.**

**Post-group multiple choice questionnaire**

**Question: As foundation phase educators is it possible to enhance resilience in your learners, and how do you as foundation phase educators enhance resilience in learners' 'at risk' of academic failure?**

**Response: I encourage learners' to share their problems and give them appropriate support.**

**I assist them in developing problem-solving strategies.**

**I encourage my learners to work hard and achieve.**

**Coding: Themes: Motivation and encouragement**

**Observation classroom visit:**

**Question: Are educators enhancing resilience in learners' at risk of academic failure and how are they going about doing this.**

**Response: The educator used concrete apparatus and whole class teaching method to teach the lesson. Educator walked around the class whilst learners were completing their worksheets and the educator encouraged and helped learners' that were finding it difficult to understand and complete the worksheet. The learners that the educator assisted included the learners that were identified as non-resilient learners and at risk of academic failure.**

**Coding: Themes: Encouragement.**

