Chapter 12
Teacher Championship of Resilience: Lessons from the Pathways to Resilience Study, South Africa

Linda C. Theron

Abstract Resilience, or the process of adjusting well to adversity, is a process that requires input from social ecologies. The resilience literature is unambiguous that a crucial source of such social-ecological support is teachers. However, most accounts of how teachers enable resilience are drawn from Global North studies (i.e. studies in the more developed countries of the Northern hemisphere). To address this gap, my chapter reports how high school teachers from rural, disadvantaged contexts in South Africa informed the resilience of their students. To do so, I draw on phenomenological data generated by 230 Sesotho-speaking adolescents who participated in the Pathways to Resilience Study. Using the lens of Ungar's Social Ecology of Resilience Theory, I extrapolate teacher actions that enabled students to accommodate structural adversities. I then draw attention to resilience-supporting actions that teachers did not advance. I use both these teacher actions and apathies to theorise changes to teacher education if teachers are to champion resilience in Global South contexts.

Psychological resilience is the process of maintaining, regaining, or improving one's functioning despite challenges that threaten to upset positive functioning and/or normative development (Masten 2014a). From a social-ecological perspective, the environment in which a young person is situated is likely to have a significant influence on the process of psychological resilience (Cicchetti 2013; Masten 2014b; Panter-Brick 2015; Ungar 2011). School ecologies form a key part of the environment of most young people – because adolescents spend a considerable amount of time at school, schools have the power to influence resilience processes quite extensively (Theron 2016a). Based mainly on studies in developed contexts (i.e. those parts of the world where societal challenges are less pervasive and resources more readily available), it seems that teachers, in particular, are central to how schools facilitate

L. C. Theron (✉)
University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa
e-mail: Linda.Theron@up.ac.za

resilience (Sanders and Munford 2016; Ungar et al. 2014). Accordingly, I use this chapter to document how high school teachers from rural, resource-poor contexts in South Africa facilitated resilience amongst Sesotho-speaking students. In doing so, this chapter draws attention to the relatively underreported explanations of how teachers in underdeveloped contexts champion resilience (Acevedo and Hernandez-Wolfe 2014; Theron 2016a). Given the increasing understanding that specific socio-cultural contexts shape how teachers (and other stakeholders) facilitate resilience (Masten 2014a, b), it is important to explore how teachers in developing and/or resource-poor contexts facilitate the resilience of the young people they teach.

A Social-Ecological Approach to Resilience

The Social Ecology of Resilience Theory (Ungar 2011) – which forms the theoretical framework of this chapter – emphasises the role that social ecologies (i.e. social and organisational systems) play in supporting young people to develop positively. This emphasis does not mean that young people themselves do not play a meaningful role in maintaining, regaining, or improving their functioning in the face of adversity. Instead, it means that social ecologies may not hold young people exclusively responsible for the outcomes they achieve in the face of adversity – the family, community, and other environments in which young people are nested have a duty to support vulnerable young people well enough that it is possible for them to achieve positive outcomes (Ungar et al. 2015). For example, why Sesotho-speaking young people from South Africa adjusted well to the risks of being orphaned related partly to their own agency and partly to accessible teachers who helped them access social supports and solve other problems (Theron et al. 2014). In other words, achieving and maintaining functional outcomes in the presence of significant stressors draws on the strengths of young people (e.g. intelligence, a sense of humour, tenacity) as well as on social-ecological resources (e.g. caring adults, extramural programmes, resilience-supporting cultural values).

Based on an 11-country (Canada, United States, China, India, Israel, Palestine, Russia, Gambia, Tanzania, South Africa, Colombia) 2003–2005 study of the positive adjustment of vulnerable young people, a social-ecological approach to resilience posits that family and micro/macro community environments need to facilitate seven processes of resilience (Ungar et al. 2007). These include constructive relationships, a powerful identity, access to material resources (including education), a sense of social and/or spiritual cohesion, experiences of control and efficacy, adherence to cultural norms and beliefs, and social justice (see Table 12.1 for a definition of each). Social-ecological input is key to all of these mechanisms. For example, young people's investment in education implies that their social ecologies have made it possible for them to access education resources and have staffed education systems with competent and caring professionals. Similarly, young people's sense of efficacy when they succeed at solving problems is associated with others in their environment having scaffolded problem-solving skills and modelled resource use.

A Social-Ecological Approach to How Schools Facilitate Resilience

There is a solid body of literature on schools and resilience (e.g. Esquivel et al. 2011; Henderson 2012; Theron 2016a; Ungar et al. 2014). Still, to date, only two published studies (i.e. Kumpulainen et al. 2016; Theron and Theron 2014) have applied the seven social-ecological mechanisms to shed light on how school ecologies enable resilience. Although the two studies had vastly disparate participants (i.e. vulnerable first graders in Finland and South Africa; vulnerable rural and urban South African university students), they both reported that resilience was associated with schools facilitating (i) constructive relationships, (ii) a powerful identity, and (iii) access to material resources. Neither study reported a sense of social and/or spiritual cohesion as informing resilience. The studies differed in terms of social justice, experiences of control and efficacy, and adherence to cultural norms. As recounted by vulnerable rural and urban South African university students, social justice experiences (facilitated by teachers in school contexts) supported psychological resilience during their school-going years (Theron and Theron 2014). The study by Kumpulainen et al. (2016) offered no evidence that social justice mattered for resilience. Instead, experiences of control and efficacy and adherence to cultural norms were linked to the resilience of the first graders who participated in the study.

Given these similarities and differences, I became curious as to which of the above-mentioned social-ecological mechanisms account for how teachers enable the resilience of Sesotho-speaking adolescents who participated in the Pathways to Resilience Study. A prior publication (i.e. Theron 2016c) explored which of the mechanisms reported by Ungar et al. (2007) account for the resilience of the Sesotho-speaking adolescents who participated in the Pathways to Resilience Study. This article implied that teachers were important resilience role players. However, because this publication was not focused on teachers, it could not detail which social-ecological mechanisms were implicated in how teachers enabled the resilience of Sesotho-speaking adolescents who participated in the Pathways to Resilience Study.

Pathways to Resilience, South Africa: A Summary of the Methodology

The Pathways to Resilience Study, South Africa, was part of a 5-year, five-country study of the formal and informal mechanisms and resources that support vulnerable young people to avoid negative developmental outcomes (see http://www.resilienceresearch.org/ for detail of the greater project). In South Africa, 1209 young people living in the Thabo Mofutsanyana district participated. The Thabo Mofutsanyana district, like much of the Free State province that it forms part of, is characterised by multiple structural disadvantages which manifest as poverty, joblessness, violence, substandard infrastructure, widespread HIV and AIDS, and other communicable

diseases and adolescents who are orphaned (Theron 2016c). At the time of the study (2009–2014), around 60% of Free State young people – majority black – subsisted on approximately $50 per month (Hall 2012).

Participants

The project was guided by a panel of local adults who served local youth (i.e. a Community Advisory Panel or CAP including four provincial education department representatives, a young motivational speaker, three adults from child-focused non-government organisations, one clergyman, one representative from the provincial department of social development, and four adults who worked in child welfare institutions; see Theron 2013 for detail about the CAP). As explained in Theron (2016b), the CAP facilitated recruitment of young people who were made vulnerable by structural inequities. For the purposes of this chapter, suffice it to say that the CAP-facilitated recruitment resulted in participants typically being drawn from no-fee and reduced-fee schools (i.e. schools reserved for the poorest of South African children – Hall and Giese 2012). The mean age of participants was 16 (SD 1.64). The majority (97.6%) self-identified as black (predominantly Sesotho-speaking) and female (52.7%). On average, the highest grade completed was Grade 8 (SD 1.4). The 230 young people who generated the qualitative data being reported in this chapter formed a subset of the participants described above.

Qualitative Methods

The qualitative methods are described at length in Jefferis and Theron (2015) and Theron (2016b). For the purposes of this chapter, these methods can be summarised as young people participating in semi-structured interviews and visual participatory methods (draw-and-write, participatory video, and/or clay modelling). All of these were vetted by the CAP as culturally acceptable and safe and guided by a central question: 'What has helped you to do well in your life so far, even though you face difficulties?' The visual participatory methods prompted informal group discussions during which researchers could further explore young people's accounts of what had enabled their resilience.

Data Analysis

For the purpose of this chapter, data analysis was done in three steps. First, a research psychology intern and I perused the Pathways qualitative data set to locate data segments (if any) that included accounts of school staff facilitating resilience processes.

In the current data set, there was no mention of janitors or other supportive school staff; teachers predominated. Second, using a deductive approach (Creswell 2012), we independently analysed the identified segments to understand how teachers enabled resilience processes. The deductive analysis was based on Ungar et al.'s (2007) seven resilience mechanisms. As in Theron and Theron (2014), we coded for teachers facilitating/obstructing any of these seven mechanisms. There were no instances of teachers obstructing resilience processes. Following Saldana (2009), we used a consensus discussion to finalise our analyses. Our codes seldom differed, but when they did we debated until we agreed on a code. Third, I critically interpreted what the coded mechanisms suggested about teachers' facilitation of resilience and used these to group the mechanisms into two overarching themes (as presented below). I presented the findings to education researchers and psychologists at two conferences and used their feedback to fine-tune the findings and increase trustworthiness (Creswell 2012). For example, a conference attendee asked whether the championship of resilience was a whole school endeavour and this alerted me to the importance of clarifying that teacher championship of resilience typically related to the actions of individual teachers (see below).

Teacher Championship of Resilience

As summarised in Table 12.1, analysis revealed that teachers facilitated resilience amongst their students by leveraging most of the mechanisms described by Ungar et al. (2007). However, in this process, resilience was typically championed by individual teachers and in ways that enabled individual students (rather than the student corps or the community in which students were rooted). Furthermore, the championship of resilience neglected social justice pathways.

Individual Teachers Enable Individuals

Teacher championship of resilience included six of the seven mechanisms of resilience: access to material resources, constructive relationships, a powerful identity, experiences of control and efficacy, a sense of social and/or spiritual cohesion, and adherence to cultural norms and beliefs (see Table 1). As noted previously in relation to different South African studies of how school ecologies facilitate resilience (Theron and Engelbrecht 2012; Theron and Theron 2014), these teacher actions were both ordinary (e.g. enabling adolescents by supporting them to master literacy skills) and extraordinary (e.g. using personal finances to support the wellbeing of students). Put differently, teachers' support of resilience related to what they did as part of the everyday task of being a teacher and to what they did above and beyond these expected tasks.

Table 12.1 Teacher-mediated resilience-supporting mechanisms

Resilience mechanism (Ungar 2015; Ungar et al. 2007)	Teacher-related definition (adapted from Ungar 2015)	Evidence (three examples for each; for additional teacher-related examples from the Pathways to Resilience study, see Theron 2016c and Theron et al. 2013)
Access to material resources (i.e. getting what is necessary to satisfy basic physical [e.g. food, shelter] and psychological [e.g. self-actualisation via education or employment] needs)	Teacher-facilitated support to obtain sufficient food, clothing, education, employment, etc.	They [teachers] give us food, even if I don't have money for lunch I know there will be food
		I didn't have an ID [identity document]. My teachers told me about this service [Department of Home Affairs that provided him with an ID]
		Participant: I live with my teacher
		Researcher: Can I ask, why do you live with your teacher?
		Participant: Teacher loves me [and then she explained in Sesotho that her teacher took her in when her grandparents died and she was homeless]
Constructive relationships (i.e. having relationships with significant others that support positive development)	Positive connections between teachers and students	My teachers tell me to work hard this year, encourage me, and I promise you I will do that
		They [teachers] ask us what's wrong ... do we have problems – if we have a problem, we must go to them and talk about the problem
		My register teacher – she is a comforting person ... when someone listens to me when I need something or when I cry about something... then I take you as a person that really cares ... she listens to me
A powerful identity (i.e. having a sense of personal competence and enjoying acknowledgement of this competence along with opportunities to develop personal capacity)	Teacher-enabled sense of competence; teacher facilitation of learning opportunities that support the development of competencies	Teachers did well for me – they boosted my future. I will become something in this world because of teachers
		Teachers, education, and sport teach me a lot. Even now I am brilliant at what I do in life and I know I am going to achieve
		When you want education, teachers help you so that when you grow up you can be something better in life

Experiences of control and efficacy (i.e. being listened to and being supported to overcome challenges in ways that facilitate a sense of having control over difficulties)	Teacher-mediated sense of being able to control current challenges	*My teacher at school helped me to do well in life because she taught me how to write and read and about many things in the world and how to take care of myself. I know how to handle my problems in life because of school and teachers* *For me to be strong, Ms X [teacher] gives me advice and I take her advice, and when something makes me sad I go to [teachers X & Y], and talk to them, and then they give me advice and that makes me strong* *At school we get messages from teachers that if you want to change your life, it's possible. This one teacher used to observe the naughty things we used to do. And she asked me why I used to take money from younger children. She told me never to hit younger children and take their money, but rather to come to her if I need any money. I listened to her and I changed...I used to go to her as she said, and she bought me boots, soccer boots... I was glad because then I could move away from my bad friends and play football*
Sense of cohesion (i.e. a sense of belonging to a specific community as well as the sense that life has meaning and purpose, despite adversity)	Teacher-facilitated sense of belonging (at school and to the community) and/or teacher encouragement to believe that life has or will have meaning despite daily challenges	*I will go to school feeling sad, but I will forget about things that are happening at home...Teachers used to encourage us to forget experiences and focus on the future...* *They [teachers] taught me to work with people and to communicate with other people* *Teachers teach me about life...So that I don't have to think about crying, but come to school...Learning is important and learning to have a career..Because if you haven't finished your grade twelve, there's nothing in life for you*

(continued)

Table 12.1 (continued)

Resilience mechanism (Ungar 2015; Ungar et al. 2007)	Teacher-related definition (adapted from Ungar 2015)	Evidence (three examples for each; for additional teacher-related examples from the Pathways to Resilience study, see Theron 2016c and Theron et al. 2013)
Cultural adherence (i.e. identifying with/endorsing and enacting group beliefs or values)	Teacher-aided enactment of convention of traditionally African values (e.g. interpersonal respect and interdependence	*School teaches me how to respect others…When the teacher talks in the class you must listen, and he tells you '[Do] not talk when I talk, that thing is not right, so you shall listen, you have to know more'. It helps me because I don't want to be a naughty girl – then people [would] talk about me, 'Oh that girl she's so naughty she doesn't respect'. That would be bad for me*
		From my teacher I have learnt that we should work together so that we don't have difficulties
		At school I get more help because some of the lessons that you are taught is about reality, so they [teachers] help you to see what life is, and how you must treat people well so that they can treat you the same way

Significantly, whether ordinary or extraordinary, teacher actions were directed at young people as individuals. What participants reported was devoid of any suggestion that teacher actions were aimed at altering the systemic factors which put young people at risk. This person-directed focus could be an artefact of the individual-focused method of data generation (i.e. asking young people to recount what had supported them as individuals to do well in life). I am, however, more inclined to suggest that this focus relates to how foundational ecological theories of human development position the individual as central to all interactions (e.g. Bronfenbrenner 2005). Consequently, services and interventions are typically aimed at an individual, rather than at changing systems (Hart et al. 2016). Resilience guidelines for teachers generally follow suit and offer a range of individual-directed actions (e.g. Oades-Sese et al. 2013). In addition, it is also possible that teachers – who, in South Africa, constitute an undervalued and underpaid group of professionals with relatively little power to effect systemic change – directed their attention at individual adolescents because this was an achievable target. Moreover, when individuals welcome and make good use of offered supports, support is more likely to be sustained (Zautra 2014) and so the evidence that their actions were making a meaningful difference probably spurred teachers to sustain individual-directed supports.

Although there were no accounts of teachers obstructing resilience, participants made statements that suggested that teacher championship of resilience was not true of all teachers. For example, participants referred to a single teacher (e.g. 'There is a teacher at school that I approach when I have problems at home'). Other participants clarified that some teachers were uncaring (e.g. 'Teachers are helpful, but not all of them ... [some] don't really connect with children, they just don't care') or unapproachable (e.g. 'I was scared to go to the teacher to tell him what happened'). These occasional statements underscore that individual teachers – and not the teaching staff as a whole – were enabling vulnerable young people. This implies that resilience-enabling teacher actions were not part of a formal, school-wide approach to support the resilience of young people (as in, e.g. health promoting schools – see Stewart and Wang 2012).

Teachers Neglect Social Justice Pathways to Resilience

Allied to teachers' focus on supporting young people to beat the structural odds that were stacked against them (e.g. by providing food or encouraging educational aspirations), there was an absence of teacher actions aimed at changing these odds. As Seccombe (2002) noted, 'changing the odds' (p. 384), or addressing the social determinants of risk, is crucial to resilience. It requires a social justice agenda (Hart et al. 2016; Masten 2014b). Nothing in Pathways participants' accounts suggested that teachers challenged the social injustices that were at the root of what was putting them at risk. Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky (2005) equate actions aimed at undoing social injustices with 'distal caring' (p. 89). In comparison, 'proximal caring' (p. 89) is expressed in the interaction between a professional (e.g. teacher) and

young person – although resilience-enabling, proximal acts of care are insufficient to sustain positive outcomes in contexts of chronic adversity. In the interests of resilience, teachers (see Theron 2016a) and other professionals and service providers (see Wessells 2015) need to enact both types of caring. This was illustrated, for example, in a study by Acevedo and Hernandez-Wolfe (2014) with 21 Colombian teachers who enabled the resilience of young people challenged by structural disadvantage: these teachers connected constructively with the vulnerable young people they were teaching. Simultaneously, they also advocated for systemic change that would alleviate the structural inequities that underpinned what was placing these young people at risk (Acevedo and Hernandez-Wolfe 2014).

Moving Forward: Augmenting Teacher Championship of Resilience

As mentioned in the introduction, this chapter was prompted by the relative under-reporting of how teachers in underdeveloped contexts champion resilience. Interestingly, compared to reviews of how teachers globally enable resilience (e.g. Theron 2016a; Ungar et al. 2014), the above account of how some South African teachers championed resilience does not provide evidence of unique teacher-facilitated pathways of resilience. Globally teachers enable resilience by caring for, connecting with, and capacitating their students. The commonalities between the findings of this chapter and other accounts of how teachers enable resilience direct attention to how more teachers can be supported to champion resilience. As detailed below, four potential leverage points for augmenting teacher championship of resilience are implicated in the preceding account of how some South African teachers in rural, resource-poor schools supported young people to beat the myriad odds of being structurally disadvantaged.

Acclaim and Maintain Teacher Championship of Resilience

Clearly, with regard to resilience, teacher actions matter. As previously noted (Theron and Engelbrecht 2012), these actions need to be celebrated and publicised (even though they are limited to 'proximal caring'). Public acknowledgment of teacher contributions to the resilience of vulnerable young people is likely to buffer the compassion fatigue that has recently become associated with teacher championship of resilience (e.g. Acevedo and Hernandez-Wolfe 2014). Furthermore, social ecologies will need to invest in formal ways to sustain teachers' resilience-enabling actions, both at pre- and in-service stages (e.g. via programmes that capacitate the personal resilience of teachers or via school-based supports – see Beltman et al.

2016; Mansfield et al. 2012, 2014). Sustaining teacher championship of resilience is crucial, given the growing understanding that it is 'enduring commitment to the young person' rather than haphazard support that really matters (Sanders and Munford 2016).

Champion Resilience Systemically

The resilience of vulnerable young people needs more than the inputs of individual teachers. It needs whole school and education system responses. A carefully planned systemic response – one that includes inputs at the level of the individual, the classroom, and the system (Fazel et al. 2014) – will amplify what individual teachers are already managing to achieve, as well as legitimise resilience agendas. It will probably also sensitise teachers towards understanding that enabling resilience should be every teacher's business. The Health Promoting Schools (HPS) initiative provides an example of a whole school approach aimed at capacitating the health and wellbeing of all students. Similar to other whole school approaches (see Mallin et al. 2013), it draws on teacher, student, and parent inputs and mobilises links between parents, young people, and community resources. A systematic review of the literature showed that HPS is an effective way of enabling resilience (particularly amongst teachers and students) (Stewart and Wang 2012).

As part of a systemic response, young people need to understand that they form part of the school system and need to be involved in resilience-enabling initiatives. In addition, they need to be sensitised to the importance of personal agency and reciprocity (Sanders and Munford 2016). For instance, because teachers' capacity to act is curtailed when they are unaware that young people need support, young people need to communicate support needs to teachers (Theron and Engelbrecht 2012). They also need to reciprocate, including making good use of offered supports as well as contributing to the efficiency of the school system (by, e.g. contributing to fund-raising schemes initiated by teachers) (Theron and Theron 2014).

Equip Teachers to Mobilise Social Justice

In addition, teacher actions (both individual and school-wide) need to be augmented in ways that will challenge the social injustices (such as structural inequities) which perpetuate the risks which make young people vulnerable. The resilience literature includes robust calls for greater attention to social change agendas that, ultimately, will reduce threats to young people's wellbeing (e.g. Hart et al. 2016; Masten 2014b; Seccombe 2002; Theron 2016c), but this call is faint in the literature on teachers and resilience (Theron 2016a). One way of addressing this is to emphasise a social

justice mandate in pre- and in-service teacher training. Along with this, teachers need to be taught participatory action research skills that will capacitate them to confront higher-level structural influences that place young people at risk. A South African study with 33 teachers in 4 geographically disparate, resource-poor schools produced evidence that teaching in-service teachers participatory action research skills prompted benefits not only for the teachers themselves but also for their schools (Ebersöhn et al. 2015). In particular, vulnerable students benefitted because action research skills aided teachers' use of group-facilitated problem-solving (e.g. accessing government grants for vulnerable families and youth) and enhanced teachers' networking capacity (e.g. collaborating with individuals and organisations to provide psychosocial support to students).

Form University-School Partnerships

The successes of the above-mentioned study by Ebersöhn et al. (2015) reflect university-school partnerships. So too does the success of Boingboing, a not-for-profit, a social enterprise that works with communities (including school communities) and the statutory sector to advance resilience (http://www.boingboing.org.uk/; see Hart et al. 2016). This implies that augmenting in-service teacher championship of resilience will require a commitment from higher education institutions to develop research agendas that leverage teacher and school capacity to co-facilitate positive outcomes for young people. Importantly, these partnerships should not blindly reproduce documented pathways to resilience but co-produce contextually and culturally relevant ways of advancing the wellbeing of vulnerable young people (Hart et al. 2016; Theron 2016c).

Conclusion

The four leverage points suggested above are not extraordinary. Their commonplaceness is reminiscent of Masten's seminal statement: 'Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities, but from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, bodies and brains of children, in their families and relationships and in their communities' (2001, p. 235). Accordingly, using these leverage points to capacitate teachers in South Africa (and elsewhere) to champion the resilience of vulnerable adolescents should be achievable. Empirical follow-up to test this concluding assumption and to refine how best to support teachers to champion resilience should, therefore, be expedited.

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