

SECTION 3:

CONCLUSIONS,

LIMITATIONS AND

RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn”

-Benjamin Franklin

In this section the researcher will discuss the conclusions in respect of the findings of the study, follows by the limitations to the study and lastly the recommendations for nursing education, nursing practice and research. The overall aim of this study was to explore and describe the basic elements required for an effective educator-student relationship in a private nursing education institution in Potchefstroom, North-West Province. This enabled the researcher to recommend guidelines that need to be followed in order to improve the educator-student relationship. To reach this aim the following objectives have been identified:

- ✚ To explore and describe what nursing students perceive as basic elements required for an effective educator-student relationship
- ✚ To explore and describe how the resilience of nursing students can be strengthened within the educator-student relationship
- ✚ To recommend guidelines to improve the educator-student relationship

3.2 REALISATION OF DATA COLLECTION

As discussed in section 1, data were collected by means of the “World Café” method with regard to the educator-student relationship in nursing education. The “World Café” method was not originally developed as a research data collection tool but was selected for this study because it is an excellent tool to use for building relationships.

During the feedback session students also suggested the possibility of using the “World Café” method as a teaching/learning tool because it creates collaboration and interaction. The researcher, who is also an educator, agrees that the “World Café” method can be used as a teaching/learning tool to facilitate relationship building between the educator and the student. This assessment is based on the researcher’s experience of using the “World Café” method during the data collection process. The data collection was successful and yielded rich, meaningful data. Data were collected from forty enrolled nursing auxiliary students who participated in the study. Students were asked to reflect upon five discussion questions based on the relationship between the educator and the student. The discussion questions were derived from the literature review (section 1). Data collection was followed by a discussion session where students reflected on the whole process and explained, clarified and verified their findings and ideas that were written down on the posters (Annexure 10). The discussion session was audio recorded and then transcribed (Annexure 12). Field notes were taken throughout the process and are presented as evidence in Annexure 11. Data saturation was reached because no new information concerning themes was revealed which justifies the decision not to use focus groups as a second data collection method as mentioned in section 1.

3.3 CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions were drawn by establishing the interrelation between the literature review (section 1), the theoretical framework chosen for this study, namely a resilience framework (Kumpfer, 1999) and the findings of the research (section 2). The conclusions are presented as a conceptual framework of the basic elements

needed in an educator-student relationship as provided by the researcher and illustrated below in Figure 4.

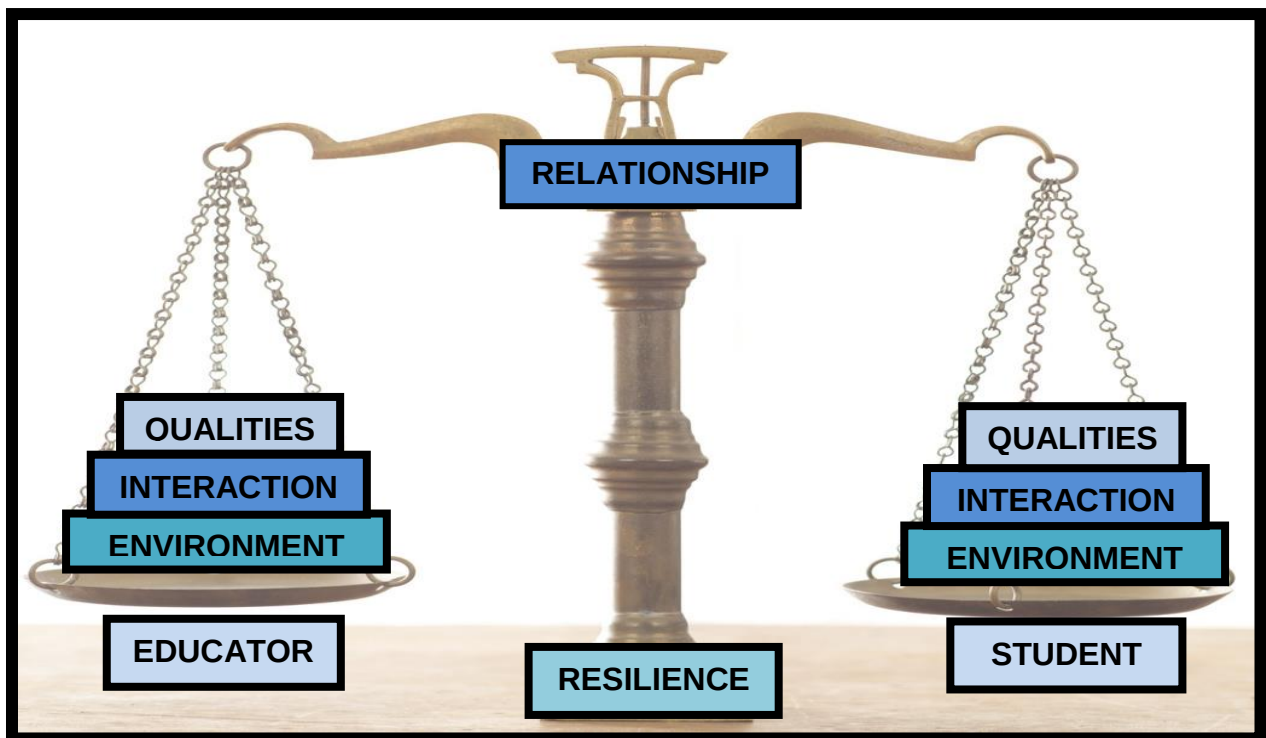


Figure 4: Conceptual framework for the basic elements needed for an effective educator-student relationship

In figure 4 (above), it is illustrated that in the educator-student relationship, certain basic elements need to be in place to ensure that this relationship remains effective. The educator-student relationship is illustrated by a double-pan balance scale in figure 4. The relationship is presented as the beam balancing the two pans representing the educator and the student respectively. In each of these pans, the basic elements needed in the educator-student relationship are represented and are balanced against each other. Each of these basic elements, i.e. environment, interaction and qualities, forms the building blocks that are needed to ensure that the relationship remains in equilibrium to ensure resilience. The central pivot point resembles the resilience in the educator-student relationship. If all building blocks are present, it will strengthen the resilience in the educator-student relationship. If

one of these building blocks is left out it will result in an imbalance in the educator-student relationship. After illustrating which basic elements are required in the educator-student relationship (figure 4), the researcher will now conclude how these elements of the educator-student relationship as identified from the findings (section 2) interrelate with the six major predictors of resilience according to Kumpfers' resilience framework, chosen for this study (section 1). Evidence from the literature concerning the protective factors that strengthen resilience with regard to the educator-student relationship will also be provided, as illustrated in figure 5 below.

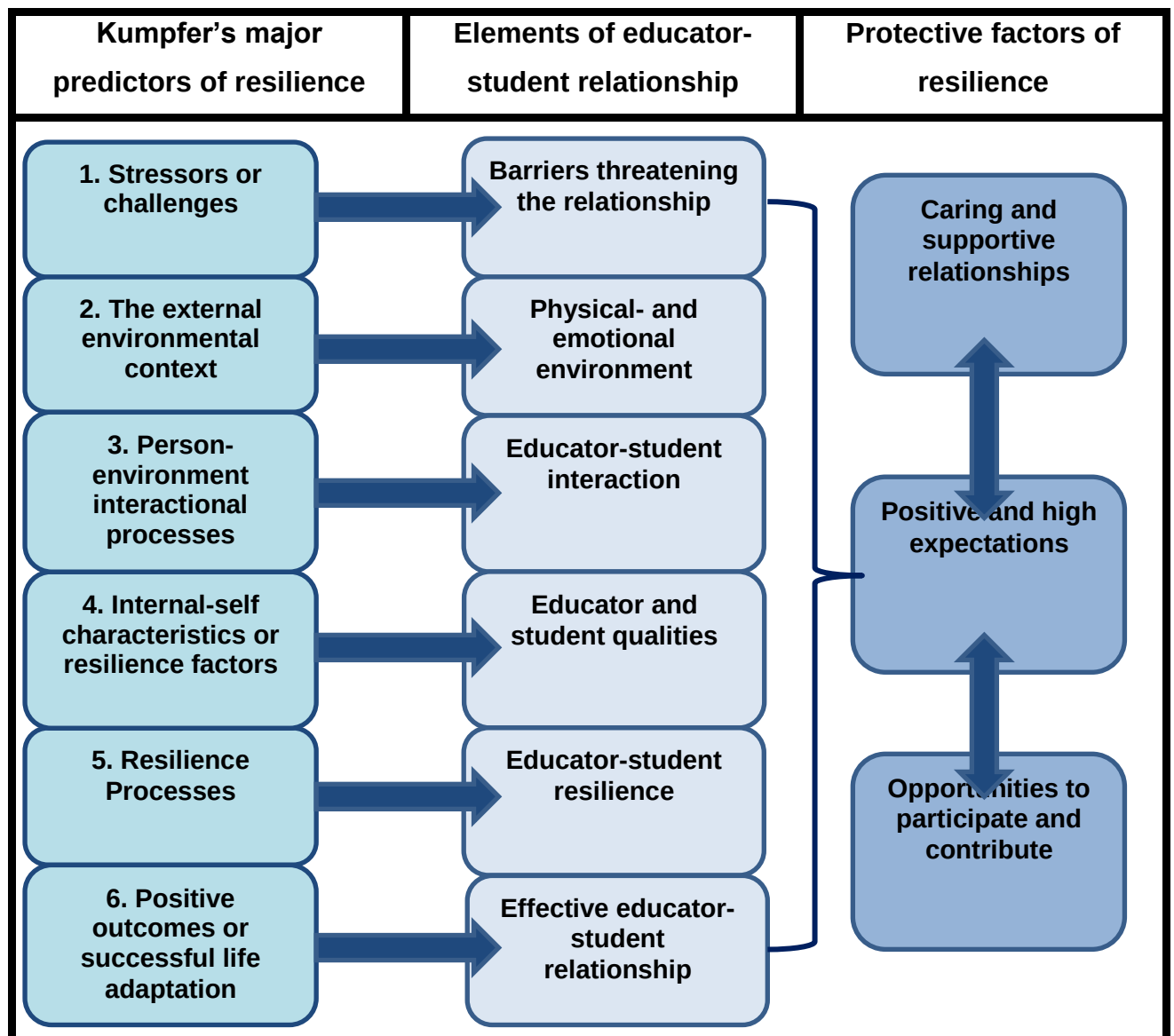


Figure 5: The relationship between major predictors of resilience, elements of educator-student relationship and protective factors of resilience

3.3.1 Barriers threatening the relationship

The educator-student relationship needs to display characteristics to remain effective, especially, if some stressor or challenge comes along and it threatens the effectiveness of this relationship. Stressors or challenges can be any event, situation or experience whether emotional, physical or social that threatens to damage the relationship between the educator and the student. From the findings of this study (section 2) it is evident that various stressors or challenges within the educator-student relationship exist and include: lack of caring and supportive classroom environments, lack of mutual interaction and an unfriendly or unsupportive educator.

According to Kumpfer's resilience framework stressors or challenges, which are the first predictor, need to be present for an individual to demonstrate resilience (Kumpfer, 1999:189). Whether it is a stressor or challenge depends on the student's ability to perceive and interpret the event as stressful or threatening. This cognitive appraisal of the event as stressful may cause the student to become resilient or non-resilient, depending on the outcome or the response of the student. Kumpfer (1999:183) stresses that these incoming stimuli activate the resilience process and create disequilibrium in the homeostasis of the individual. The degree of stress perceived by the educator and student depends on their perception, cognitive appraisal and interpretation of the stressor as threatening or aversive (Kumpfer, 1999:183). Therefore the respective ability of the educator and student to cope with or adapt to these stressors or challenges will determine the effectiveness of their relationship.

Literature reports that the fourth greatest source of stress for students is the relationship with their educators (Del Prato *et al.*, 2011:111). When students

experience interpersonal relationships with their educators as negative it will cause a great amount of stress for them (Timmins & Kaliszer, 2002:207). If students perceive their relationship with their educator as uncaring or unsupportive it causes a stressful situation for students which impacts negatively on the effectiveness of the educator-student relationship. Mkhwanazi (2007:54) names other stressors affecting students and they include: incorrect study techniques, inadequate preparation due to poor time management, incorrect choice of courses, poor self-discipline and other commitments.

The evidence presented above clearly shows that various stressors (barriers) have an impact on the educator-student relationship. The environment, interaction and personal qualities form the basic elements in the educator-student relationship (figure 4). If these elements are not present in the educator-student relationship it leads to the relationship being ineffective. Through implementing preventative strategies to overcome or adapt to these barriers (figure 5) the educator-student relationship can restore its equilibrium (figure 4) which will strengthen the resilience of both the educator and the students.

3.3.2 Physical- and emotional environment

The environment refers to the classroom and includes both the physical- and emotional environment in which teaching/learning takes place (section 1). From the findings of this study (section 2) it is eminent that the physical environment consists of suitable desk and space arrangement, effective student placement, attractive appeal of bulletin boards, adequate space for storage of materials and supplies, creative and esthetical classroom decorations (colourful posters), as well as environmental preferences such as correct temperature (proper ventilation),

adequate lighting and low noise levels. The emotional environment of the classroom is characterized by warmth, caring, support, and understanding and involves many opportunities for students' participation and involvement.

Kumpfer's resilience framework points out that the external environmental context (predictor 2) is one of the major constructs influencing resilience. The relationship between the external and internal factors will determine the outcome of the resilience process. If an acute stressor occurs, the environmental context can exacerbate a negative impact on the individual. An environmental characteristic that serves as protection for students at risk is creating a caring and supportive environment with high expectations for students' success. Therefore if the external environment is not as supportive and positive as it should be, it influences the students' academic outcomes and also impacts negatively on the educator-student relationship (Kumpfer, 1999:189).

In addition to the above-mentioned, Slavin (1995:172) states that the physical and emotional environment in the classroom significantly affects students' learning responses. Combining the physical and emotional environment, the available literature emphasizes that both educators and students state a desire for an open, caring, supportive, comfortable, respectful, safe or non-threatening and enjoyable classroom environment which contributes to a positive educator-student relationship (Carta-Falsa, 2002:136; Petrus *et al.*, 2012:2; Redmond & Sorrell, 1996:25; Schofield, 2001:3; Hanson *et al.*, 2004:12). Cooper and Cefai (2013:18) add that educators need to establish an orderly and well-organised classroom that is safe, clean and free of distracting physical features, the furnishings must be flexible to suit the people using them, media equipment are available and operable, lighting,

windows and blinds are operable, and there is adequate control over ventilation and temperature. According to Bernard (1997:3) classroom environments foster protective characteristics amongst students and this contributes to their resilience. Resilience combined with positive and constructive learning environments contribute to improving students' academic performance.

Therefore in the educator-student relationship it is important to establish a sound physical and emotional environment (figure 5) to ensure that the educator-student relationship remains in equilibrium as this will strengthen the resilience in their relationship (figure 4). Ultimately it will improve students' academic and behavioural outcomes. The physical and emotional environment serve as a powerful setting for providing students with effective instruction and it facilitates positive teaching/learning interactions. This leads us to the next point of discussion.

3.3.3 Educator-student interaction

Educator-student interaction denotes the ability of the educator and the student to come into contact, communicating and acknowledging one another in the classroom setting. The more the educator and student are willing to interact the better they will get to know each other. As evident in the findings of this study (section 2) students reported that they need interaction that is constructive, interaction that acknowledges human rights and interaction that makes use of appropriate non-verbal communication.

The third predictor in the resilience framework is the person-environment interactional process and includes person-to-person interaction (Kumpfer, 1999:192). This interactional process involves the person either passively or actively attempting

to perceive, interpret and surmount threats, challenges or difficult environments in order to construct more protective environments (Kumpfer, 1999:184). According to Kumpfer (1999:185) students continuously interact with their environment to transform high-risk environments into more protective environments through selective perception, cognitive reframing, planning and dreaming. Interactional processes mentioned by Kumpfer (1999:192) encompass role modeling, teaching, advice giving, empathetic and emotionally responsive caregiving, creating opportunities for meaningful involvement, effective supervision and disciplining, reasonable developmental expectations and support.

Literature reports that if the educator provides students with opportunities for: creative expression, helping others, using participatory evaluation strategies, involving students in creating classroom rules, involving students to express their opinions and imagination, making choices, solving problems, working with and helping others, it strengthens the student's resilience skills which will, in turn, improve the educator-student relationship (Bernard, 1997:2). According to Wentzel (2012:24) educators need to create opportunities for learning, for emotional support and interpersonal connectedness as well as provide instrumental help. Beutel (2002:6) states that educators who provide students with opportunities to instigate learning experiences rather than simply providing information, causes a shift from educator-centred work to student-directed activities. Whereas McCarthy (2009:8) mentions that students who are able to achieve autonomy and self-efficacy are more likely to feel a sense of control in their environment and that their consequent self-confidence contributes to a more positive outlook on life.

Therefore communication needs to flow between the educator and the student and not only from the educator to the student (figure 5). Educator-student interaction, combined with emotional support, motivate students to engage in the social and academic life of the classroom. Effective interaction ensures that the educator-student relationship remains effective (figure 4). Interaction requires certain qualities that need to be displayed by both the educator and the student so as to contribute to the effectiveness of their relationship.

3.3.4 Educator-student qualities

Qualities refer to traits that both the educator and student need to have. Qualities are vital to effective teaching and the promotion of positive relationships which in turn fosters emotional well-being and educational engagement. Findings from this study (section 2) indicate that the educator must display qualities of love and care, respect, responsibility, morality, patience, openness to new ideas, motivation, willingness to “go the extra mile” and punctuality. Educators who are perceived as warm, caring and supportive towards students create a climate with open communication that is one of acceptance and is non-judgmental. In addition, students need to display qualities of versatility, being prepared for class, paying adequate attention in class, showing gratitude to their educators and taking initiative for learning.

According to the fourth construct in the resilience framework both educator and student need to possess internal self-characteristics to strengthen their resilience (Kumpfer, 1999:184). Resilience internal characteristics are shaped by a persons’ genetic factors, along with their own character and how they perceive and respond to situations (Kumpfer, 1999:192-197). Resilience skills include components such as academic confidence, a sense of well-being, motivation to succeed, an ability to set

goals, strong relationships and connections and the ability to handle stress (Kumpfer, 1999:197-210).

The available literature points out that the nurse educator who is the most effective in creating a warm relationship with students is the one who displays the following qualities: an educator that is respectful towards students' uniqueness and abilities, one who is usually wise, non-judgmental, generous, confident, honest, willing to take risks, and motivated to educate (Meyer & van Niekerk, 2008:107). Bernard (1993:47) states that resilient students display qualities of social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy and a sense of purpose. Adding to the previous statements, McMillan and Reed (1994:138) state that resilience skills include qualities of personal attributes (motivation and goal orientation), positive use of time (homework completion and on-task behaviour), family life (family support and expectations) and classroom learning environment (overall climate).

Protective factors at the disposal of students include cognitive competence, social competence, faith and optimism, a sense of responsibility towards others and the ability to plan. Therefore educators need to be available to students and help them to identify and manage the challenges of the situation they are in. Educators also need to show emotional support and that entails talking to a student and helping that student understand and adapt to a situation or challenge. Through strengthening the educators' and students' internal self-characteristics of resilience (figure 5), the educator-student relationship will improve (figure 4) and this will promote positive and successful academic outcomes.

3.3.5 Educator-student resilience

Educator and student resilience refers to both educators' and students' ability to handle adverse situations with persistence, hope, wisdom, character and strength. Resilient students are students who succeed despite the presence of adverse conditions and they respond to stress in ways that help them not only to recover, but also to grow and thrive. Findings reported various ways in which students manage to stay resilient, namely: being positive, having a support system, changing study methods, self-motivation, setting personal goals, taking pride, perseverance and determination (section 2). Educators who can contribute to building resilience skills in students will improve the effectiveness of the educator-student relationship and thus contribute to educator-student resilience.

According to the resilience framework the fifth construct, resilience processes, includes establishing short and long term resilience through developing appropriate coping processes to help individuals to bounce back from any challenge or stressors that they are faced with (Kumpfer, 1999:184). This coping process occurs to predict a positive outcome and is associated with students' interaction between the internal characteristics and the final outcome (Kumpfer, 1999:210). Kumpfer (1999:210) emphasizes that it is important to create resilience factors through designing and encouraging resilience building processes. Through resilience building processes students will be equipped with resilience factors namely self-esteem, confidence, self-efficacy and psychological hardiness to help them cope with any stressor or challenges that may come their way.

The literature emphasizes those educators who engage students in goal-oriented behaviors such as identifying goals, making plans and providing feedback offer

models of these processes for students (Hupfeld, 2010:4). Williams and Williams (2011:5) state that having a good set of notes, using an appropriate amount of time to study and developing good study methods all contribute to students' academic success. Davis (2003:207) document that over the last 30 years the literature has emphasized the importance of supportive educator-student relationships to improve student motivation, learning and achievement. Therefore student motivation is an essential element needed for quality education (Williams & Williams, 2011:2). According to Hupfeld (2010:3) researchers found that many personal resilience traits can be linked to a sense of self-efficacy and self-determination, in other words, students who believe that they have the ability to shape what happens in the future and are thus responsible for their own success. Janas (2002:117) mentions that positive character skills includes patience, tolerance, responsibility, compassion, determination, commitment, self-reliance and hope and they cultivate successful adaptive and coping behaviours. Furthermore Hupfeld (2010:4) states that educators play a very important role in students' lives by demonstrating resilience skills.

Resilience in the educator-student relationship needs to be strengthened through implementing resilience building strategies so both the educator and the student can learn to overcome adversities. The external factor which determines a positive outcome and contributes to students' abilities to become resilient is a supportive relationship.

3.3.6 Effective educator-student relationship

Good relationships are fundamental to our well-being because it makes us happier and helps us to function better. The educator-student relationship relies on a relationship that is characterized by effective interaction in a positive and beneficial

way within a positive and supportive learning environment. Strong educator-student relationships promote students' social and academic performance in a positive way. Establishing such a strong relationship acts as a safeguard for students who are socially and intellectually at risk. From the findings it is evident that students express the need for a quality relationship (section 2). Quality in the relationship ensures that both the educator and student care about each other, have mutual understanding and validate how valuable each one is to the other.

Kumpfer's (1999:184) resilience framework points out that predictor six, positive outcomes or successful life adaptation, refers to the person demonstrating resilience after disruption or stress. Resilient outcomes are indicated by academic, social and emotional competence displayed by students despite negative life events (Kumpfer, 1999:212). Resilient traits can be developed by modifying the external environment to increase protective processes, employing small challenges, creating opportunities for involvement and bonding (Kumpfer, 1999:214). Therefore to ensure that the educator-student relationship provides a positive outcome, educators need to increase resilience characteristics and reduce environmental inequities and stressors for students (Kumpfer, 1999:214).

Wentzel (2012:20) mentions that an effective educator-student relationship is characterized by degrees of continuity, shared history and interdependent interactions. The benefits of an effective educator-student relationship are that it provides emotional well-being, a sense of cohesion and connectedness, instrumental help, a secure base and a sense of identity for promoting positive developmental outcomes (Wentzel, 2012:20). Hamre and Pianta (2006:54-55) describe strategies

that the educator can use to improve the educator-student relationship. These strategies include:

- ✚ Engaging in frequent social conversation with students
- ✚ Being available to students who are having a hard time
- ✚ Displaying regard for students' perspectives and ideas
- ✚ Using behavior management strategies that clearly communicate expectations and caring

An educator-student relationship characterized by care, support and respect will have a positive impact on students' personal and academic outcomes. To ensure that the educator-student relationship remains effective the educator needs to instill the protective factors of resilience which will prepare students for healthy and productive lives, regardless of the inherent risks.

3.3.7 Protective factors in resilience

The foundation for the educator-student relationship begins with educators who demonstrate a resilience-building attitude. According to Bernard (1994:45) educators who have a resilience-building attitude, increase resilience in students through creating an environment conducive for caring and personal relationships to develop. Caring educators that provide and model protective factors through instruction and engaging students in active participation and learning, while maintaining high expectations develop students who demonstrate resilient characteristics. Protective factors temper a risk factor. In other words, when students experience high levels of stress, the protective factors are of high influence and when the levels of stress are lower, protective factors are of less influence. The more protective factors are

present in students' lives, the more likely they are to display resilience (Bernard, 1995:2; Hanson *et al.*, 2004:4; Hurlington, 2010:2-3; Vitto, 2003:10-14).

The three protective factors are: caring relationships, high expectations and meaningful ways to work together in order to promote resilience in students (Bernard, 1995:2; Hanson *et al.*, 2004:4; Hurlington, 2010:2-3; Vitto, 2003:10-14). If these protective factors reside in the educators as well as the students, it provides for developmental needs of safety, love and belonging, respect, power, challenge, mastery and meaning. According to these authors, when resilience is fostered and engaged the internal assets of social competence, problem-solving, autonomy and a sense of purpose emerge. The provision of external protective factors such as fostering a sense of achievement, academic pressure and high expectations, attentive and caring educators and a sound educator-student relationship all contribute to students demonstrating resilience characteristics (Bernard, 1995:2; Hanson *et al.*, 2004:4; Hurlington, 2010:2-3; Vitto, 2003:10-14).

Caring relationships entail supportive connections between educators and students. In students' lives, educators model and support healthy development and well-being. Caring relationships promote healthy and successful development for educators and students, even in the face of environmental stress, challenges and risks. These relationships demonstrate that the educators have an interest in the students by actively listening to and interacting with them (Bernard, 1995:2; Hanson *et al.*, 2004:4; Hurlington, 2010:2-3; Vitto, 2003:10-14).

The consistent communication of direct and indirect messages conveying that the student can succeed is what high expectations are all about. High expectations are

at the core of caring relationships and communicate a belief in students' innate resilience and ability to learn. Educators who follow this approach convey firm guidance, clear boundaries and structure needed for creating a sense of safety and predictability. For that reason conveying high expectations enhances the development of autonomy, identity and self-control within students. This approach identifies each student's unique strengths and gifts, nurtures them and allows students to work on needs and concerns. Educators, who communicate values and expectations for behaviour and achievement in the classroom, also convey expectations about ability and performance to each student (Bernard, 1995:2; Hanson *et al.*, 2004:4; Hurlington, 2010:2-3; Vitto, 2003:10-14).

Meaningful participation refers to educators involving students in relevant, engaging and interesting activities which create opportunities for students to accept responsibility and offer their contributions. Educators who provide students with opportunities for meaningful participation create environments that convey high expectations. Positive developmental outcomes are associated with students being given responsibilities, planning and decision-making opportunities and chances to contribute and help others (Bernard, 1995:2; Hanson *et al.*, 2004:4; Hurlington, 2010:2-3; Vitto, 2003:10-14).

In this way a caring relationship with an educator is a very powerful motivator for academic success. Relationships that convey a deep belief that students have the ability to succeed may help students learn to believe in themselves and their futures. Students then develop internal resilience strengths of self-efficacy, self-awareness, goals and aspirations. Giving students opportunities to participate in meaningful activities and assigning them roles in the classroom helps engage their intrinsic

motivation and innate ability to learn. All of which contribute to the effectiveness of the educator-student relationship.

3.3 LIMITATIONS

The researcher identified the following limitations with regard to the study:

- ✚ Data collected was limited to only one private NEI
- ✚ Sample was limited to only one group of forty enrolled nursing auxiliaries

The researcher strived to overcome these limitations through writing a detailed report which will enable further research to duplicate this study in other settings if required.

3.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout this study it was argued that the students' relationship with their educator is fundamental to their academic success. Educator-student relationships develop over the educational period through students' and educators' beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and interactions with one another.

3.5.1 Recommendations for nursing education

From the research it is evident that the educator-student relationship needs to be effective to strengthen the resilience of nursing students. Based on these findings the following recommendations can be made for nursing education:

- ✚ Educators can be informed through seminars, workshops, portfolios and videos about how to establish a positive and effective educator-student relationship and what positive effects it may have on students

- ✚ Educators need to implement specific strategies such as case studies, role play and group discussions to strengthen the resilience of nursing students
- ✚ Nursing students need to be made aware of how to stay resilient and what specific strategies to follow to strengthen their resilience

3.5.2 Recommendations for nursing practice

Nurse educators have a responsibility towards nursing students to equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary for their nursing career and to foster caring relationships with students. Based on the findings of this study the following recommendation can be made for nursing practice:

- ✚ Practices to strengthen the resilience of nursing students need to be implemented by being a role model for them so they can, in turn, make use of caring nursing practices towards their patients
- ✚ Educators can add lectures regarding resilience to help students identify personal protective factors as well as personal strengths and empower them to use these in the clinical practice

3.5.3 Recommendations for research

Good practice should be based on research. Research within the educational setting is important because it provides educators with a justification and rationale for decisions and actions and help build catalogue to deal with unexpected problems. Educational research helps to improve education standards and the quality of teaching. Previous research focused on disciplines other than nursing. Based on these findings the following recommendations can be made for research in the nursing discipline:

- ✚ Further research needs to be done on how to measure the existing educator-student relationship in the classroom
- ✚ This study used a small sample of forty nursing students, which was selected from a rather small population of sixty. According to Hart (2005) a small population does not form a basis for generalisation. Therefore research can be done on a larger population of nursing students

Finally it can be concluded that the overall aim and objectives for this study have been reached. The basic elements required for an effective educator-student relationship have been explored and described. How students' resilience can be strengthened was explored and described and lastly guidelines on how to improve the educator-student relationship were presented.

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