

**POSITIVE TRANSITIONING TO SCHOOL OF RESILIENT GRADE 1 LEARNERS  
FROM DIVORCED HOMES: A PARTICIPATORY VISUAL STUDY**

**C BEZUIDENHOUT**

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**25888137**

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Promoter: Professor Linda Theron

Assistant Promoter: Doctor Elzette Fritz

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## **DEDICATION**

This doctoral study is dedicated to my parents and brother. You have always led by example in teaching me to pursue my goals and to make a difference in the world around me. Thank you for the way in which you have shaped my life and contributed to who I am.

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## **PREFACE AND DECLARATION**

I have chosen the article format for this PhD study. I, Carla Bezuidenhout, conducted the research and I wrote the manuscripts. Professor Linda Theron acted as my promoter and Doctor Elzette Fritz as my assistant-promoter. Four manuscripts were written and will be submitted for publication.

Manuscript 1: *Educational Psychology Review*

Manuscript 2: *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*

Manuscript 3: *Child Development*

Manuscript 4: *School Psychology International*

I declare that “Positive transitioning to school of resilient grade 1 learners from divorced homes: A participatory visual study” is my own work and that all the sources that I quoted and/or used are indicated and acknowledged in the in-text citations and in the list of references.

## SUMMARY

### **Title: Positive transitioning to school of resilient Grade 1 learners from divorced homes:**

#### **A participatory visual study**

Transitioning to first grade is a milestone event in children's lives. Although transitioning to formal school is a normative event, it can pose a challenge to some first graders, causing them difficulty in adjusting well. When children transition to formal schooling such as Grade 1 (first grade), they experience changes that may complicate their positive adjustment. Some children find the adjustment stressful. This frames adjusting to formal school as a risk in itself. Additionally, some children are faced with more than just the developmental challenge of adjusting to first grade; there are also additional risks that some first graders are faced with that cause higher vulnerability, like, for example, parental divorce. Such a transitioning first grader needs to cope with adjustment challenges in the school environment along with challenges impacting on the home environment because of the parental divorce.

However, some children adjust well to the challenges of first grade and this implies resilience. Resilience is the process of positive adjustment despite the challenge of adversity. Therefore children are seen as resilient when they are able to cope well with school adjustment and additional risks that challenge them. The Social Ecology of Resilience Theory (SERT) explains that resilience is constructed by both the child and the social environment that includes families, schools, and communities. Multiple accounts of resilience in varied contexts of risk attribute resilience to resources in the child and in the social ecology. What resilience theory does not, however, prominently explain, is the resilience-enabling processes that contribute to children's positive adjustment to first grade despite the additional challenge of parental divorce.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore resilience-enabling processes by establishing why some children adjust well to first grade despite the additional challenge of parental divorce. To do so, a multiple case study (with five first graders) was conducted. Visual participatory methods were used with primary informants as well as semi-structured interviews with them and with secondary informants. This approach provided an intergenerational account that includes children's and adults' perspectives. To achieve the aim of this study and to answer the research question, sub-aims (detailed below) were developed. This PhD study includes four manuscripts that each address a sub-aim.

Manuscript 1 uses a Scoping Review to explore the existing literature that explains positive adjustment to first grade in general; no studies could be sourced to explain positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce. Masten's Shortlist of Resilience was used to analyse the literature and to identify the protective factors that are facilitated by both the individual and the social ecology and that support positive adjustment to first grade. Based on the findings, it is evident that all six of the short-listed protective factors are apparently facilitative of children's positive adjustment to first grade. In all instances, children, their families, and/or their school ecologies were co-responsible for the relational, agency, mastery, intelligence, meaning-making, regulatory, and cultural processes that support positive adjustment to first grade. As mentioned above, the Scoping Review reveals a gap in the literature explaining why and how some children adjust well to first grade despite parental divorce. This gap is addressed in Manuscripts 2, 3, and 4.

Manuscript 2 focuses on the contributions of first grade teachers in the school ecology and on how they supported children's positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce. Five first graders were the primary informants and their parents (biological and step-parents where applicable) as well as first grade teachers were the secondary informants. Semi-structured interviews (with primary and secondary informants) and visual methods such

as Draw-and-talk and Photovoice (with primary informants) were used. This manuscript addresses the gap identified in Manuscript 1, in part, by concluding that the first grade teachers' ordinary, holistic actions supported children's development in all developmental domains that contributed to their positive adjustment to first grade despite their parents' divorce.

In Manuscript 2 the focus pertains only to one social ecology – the school specifically. Because of this, the focus in Manuscript 3 is on the significant adults in all the social ecologies who contributed to children's positive adjustment despite parental divorce. Findings explain the resilience-enabling processes of significant adults to children adjusting well to first grade despite parental divorce. These findings point out how respectful parent relationships contributed to parent collaboration; how open communication channels provided clarity; and how significant adults co-supported the child's school life. This manuscript concludes with the implications of this study for members of the helping profession who work with children of divorced parents, who are adjusting to first grade.

Manuscript 4 contributes to answering the gap in the literature by exploring how the systems rooted in social ecologies enable children's resilience when their parents are divorced so as to result in their coping well with adjusting to first grade. The article is aimed at School Psychologists (SPs) working in schools to leverage supportive systems enabling positive adjustment to first grade when their parents are divorced. A single instrumental case study is used. The parents and first grade teacher of that case study informant were secondary informants. The same methodology as in the previous Manuscripts was used. Findings point to internal, school, and familial risks and resources that impact on a child's positive adjustment. I conclude by advocating that SPs working in schools with first graders of divorced parents adjusting to first grade could activate the child's sense of agency and

meaning making, work systemically to engage systems of support, and mobilize systems through task-sharing.

Together, these manuscripts address a gap in the literature – its failure to explain from a Social Ecological perspective why or how some first graders adjust well to first grade despite parental divorce. This doctoral study identifies the social-ecological stakeholders who contribute to first graders' positive adjustment to formal school, as well as children's own contributions, like their agency, in adjusting well. The implications of the manuscripts address stakeholders, including parent figures and first grade teachers, who need to take action in supportive ways according to what children experience and what they need, to enable positive adjustment to first grade, despite parental divorce.

**Keywords:** first grade; development; Draw-and-talk; Masten's Shortlist; multiple case-study; ordinary actions; parental divorce; peers; Photovoice; positive adjustment; qualitative; resilience; school ecology; School Psychologist; Scoping Review; significant adults; social ecologies; systems; transitioning.



## DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITOR

***Ann Smith PhD***

Tel: + 00 1 514 6098322 (Canada)

5 Kloof View Rd

Forest Hills Kloof 3610

18 October 2017

I have edited Carla Bezuidenhout's PhD thesis, **POSITIVE TRANSITIONING TO SCHOOL OF RESILIENT GRADE 1 LEARNERS FROM DIVORCED HOMES: A PARTICIPATORY VISUAL STUDY**, for appropriate expression, and for correct language use and grammatical structure.



Ann Smith

PhD

Managing Editor of *Girlhood Studies: an Interdisciplinary Journal*

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**CHAPTER 1**

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The discipline of positive psychology (Rutter, 2012) informs my doctoral study that explores the positive transitioning to school of resilient Grade 1 learners whose parents are divorced. This doctoral study was part of the SISU Project between South Africa and Finland that commenced in 2012 and was officially completed in 2016. The word “SISU” is a Finnish word, broadly meaning resilience. The SISU study was headed by Prof Linda Theron (South Africa) and Prof Kristiina Kumpulainen (Finland). In the greater SISU research project, the purpose was to gain knowledge about the protective processes that promote children’s resilience when transitioning to formal school (although formal school in South Africa is referred to as Grade 1, Manuscripts 1 – 4 in this thesis therefore refer to first grade). Thus the socio-cultural practices and resources within children’s homes, schools, and local communities were explored that the children, as well as their parents and teachers, regard as vital in promoting positive adjustment to school. By employing a visual participatory approach, the SISU project attempted to take a step further in developing research methodologies sensitive to children’s, teachers’, and parents’ authentic voices in explaining positive adjustment to school.

My PhD study is aligned with the aims and methods of the SISU project. The foremost objective of the research project was to explain why, and how, some at-risk South African and Finnish grade 1 children make positive transitions to formal school. This doctoral study contributed to the larger SISU Project by focusing on why South African children whose parents are divorced transitioned positively and adjusted well to grade one.

Chapter 1 consists of the background to, and rationale for, my specific contribution to the SISU Project. A purpose statement and the aims and questions that directed the research are provided. Also, a summary of the research methodology as well as an overview of how I facilitated trustworthiness and the ethical considerations of which I was mindful is included. I conclude Chapter 1 by summarising what the remaining chapters comprise of.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION OF THE RESEARCH**

In the following section, I define resilience; the Social Ecology of Resilience Theory (SERT); and I briefly describe the four principles that guide a social ecological understanding of resilience. I utilize this knowledge to draw attention to the limitations in current resilience theory that inform this doctoral study.

### **1.2.1 Defining Resilience**

Resilience can be referred to as children succeeding in life in spite of serious challenges to their development (Wright, Masten, & Narayan, 2013). Masten (2011) explains that there are two criteria for an individual child to be deemed resilient: (1) exposure to significant risk; and (2) evidence of positive adjustment in spite of facing significant risks. In this doctoral study, the serious challenge that caused the context of risk with which informants were faced is parental divorce. According to Goldstein and Brooks (2006), resilience consists of a range of biological, psychological, and social factors and processes that each has multidirectional influences that contribute to adequate functioning, despite risk, over a period of time. Thus, resilience requires interactions between children and their environments in ways that optimise developmental processes (Ungar, 2011, 2013b). In other words, the emphasis has shifted from resilience being only an individual trait to it being a constructive process of interaction between a person's social and physical ecology (Masten, 2011; Theron & Dunn, 2010; Ungar, 2011). Consequently, resilience is evident in the individual's ability to steer towards resources provided by family and the community that are health-sustaining and culturally meaningful (Ungar, 2011). The understanding is that individuals do not exist in isolation, but rather form part of different systems, also known as ecological theory (Donald, Lazarus, & Lolwana, 2006). The ecological systems theory is a well-known theory that implies an interaction among different systems (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Thus, what happens in one system affects the other systems due to the interaction among them. In other words, what happens within the family system may impact the

school system and the individual child, and vice versa. Sameroff (2010) holds the theory that the continuous dynamic interactions of children and their social and cultural settings result in the product of human development. When these interactions are positive, resilience is supported. Hence, resilience can be understood as a process that is socio-culturally supported, which implies the consideration of contextual and cultural forces that influence living and being resilient in the midst of adversities (Theron & Theron, 2010). Masten and Wright (2010) agree and explain that resilience is contextually and culturally specific. Therefore resilience may take on different forms in different cultures or contexts (Ebersöhn, 2012). Resilience can thus, be viewed as a “transactional process, which relies on eco-systemic transactions that include young people navigating towards, and negotiating for, support and communities and families reciprocating such efforts” (Theron & Theron, 2010, p. 2).

Furthermore Masten (2001) explains resilience as “a class of phenomena characterised by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development” (p. 228). However, the process of resilience is not the same as the suppression of symptoms that follow after the exposure to a traumatic event (Ungar, 2013b). In other words, even if children experience some symptoms of trauma after their parents’ divorce, those children could still be resilient when there are processes involved that sustain them to cope and function effectively (Ebersöhn & Bouwer, 2013). Resilience is, thus, “a separate but interdependent set of processes associated with mental health which is orthogonal to the presence or absence of disorder” (Ungar, 2013b, p. 255).

### **1.2.2 The Social Ecology of Resilience Theory**

The Social Ecology of Resilience Theory (SERT; Ungar, 2011) is the theoretical framework on which this doctoral study is based. SERT explains that positive outcomes in the midst of adversity are the result of facilitative environments that nurture positive outcomes in individuals who are at risk for negative outcomes (Ungar, 2013b). Theron (2016) defines SERT as a “bi-directional process in which a social-ecology and child collaborate constructively” (p. 88).

SERT is a suitable theory to base my PhD study on because it provides a lens through which positive outcomes (positive adjustment to school) during times of adversity (parental divorce) can be explained in terms of facilitative environments (family, teachers, school, peers etc.). These interacting environments have been reported in multiple previous South African studies (e.g., Ebersöhn, 2012; Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2012; Lau & van Niekerk, 2011; Mampane & Huddle, 2017) suggesting its relevance to local studies of resilience. Following Theron and Donald's (2012) SERT-focused explanation that resilience processes rely on inputs from children as well as their social ecologies, SERT supports educational psychologists (such as myself) to champion resilience in their practice with children and their families and schools. According to Ungar (2011) SERT encompasses four principles that contribute to the conceptualisation of resilience, namely: (1) decentrality; (2) complexity; (3) atypicality; and (4) cultural diversity. These four principles are explained as follow:

#### **1.2.1.1 Decentrality**

The first principle is decentrality and is indicative of the understanding that resilience is defined with the emphasis placed upon the social-ecologies of which individuals are part of, and not on the individual. Resilience is thus, ecologically conceptualised (Theron & Donald, 2012). In other words, resilience is an exchange between the individual and the environment and not a process for which individuals are solely responsible (Ungar, 2011). Ungar (2013b) has suggested that even though individual children are contributors towards resilience, the most important contribution, is the contribution of the social ecology that supports children's functional outcomes. Thus, resilience is rooted in complex and dynamic processes facilitated by social ecologies and not only in protective factors within the individual child (Theron & Donald, 2012). Lerner (2006) refers to resilience as a person $\leftrightarrow$ context transaction. Therefore, decentrality takes the emphasis off the individual child in explanations of resilience and encourages explanations to position the environment as an active partner that contributes significantly to the

resilience process of an individual child (Ungar, 2011). For this reason, when risk levels increase, the responsibility of the social ecology to provide resources supportive of the individual's positive adjustment, also increase (Ungar et al., 2015). Hence, decentrality includes the standpoint that resilience is not an individual trait only, but is reliant on ordinary adaptive systems (e.g. connections to caring adults or meaning-making) which are relevant to the culture and context of the child in question (Masten, 2014a). It is for this reason that resilience entails combining individual and social-ecological resources as the result thereof increases the possibility of positive adjustment (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011).

### **1.2.1.2 Complexity**

Complexity is the second principle and illustrates that resilience is not simplistic. It highlights that the resilience-supporting interactional patterns between an individual child and the environment are complex due to fluctuations in social and physical ecologies and developmental changes (Ungar, 2011). Resilience processes are thus, not simple or steadfast, but rather multifaceted and changeable as individuals move through time and between different contexts (Masten & Wright, 2010). Hence, an individual's functionality may differ. A child may be functional and effective in one environment such as home, but possibly not at school; or a child may have adjusted well to changes at the beginning of one year, but not at the beginning of another year. It is, therefore, unreasonable to expect a child who is resilient at a specific time, to continue functioning well in the face of significant stress at every moment or at all times (Ungar, 2011). Changes in contexts and/or developmental progress may cause changes in how individuals adjust to adversity. For example, a child might be supported by a grandmother to adjust well despite the parents' divorce, but if the grandmother should pass away, the child's positive adjustment might falter. For this reason, the supportive nature of children's social ecologies, as well as the meaningfulness of resources that they are offered, together with available alternatives, facilitates or complicates functional outcomes (Ungar, 2011).



### **1.2.1.3 Atypicality**

The third principle, atypicality or “hidden resilience” is used to explain the phenomenon when increased risk is experienced by some populations or individuals that cause them to turn to alternative ways to sustain their coping (Ungar, 2011, p. 8). In these circumstances resilience is influenced by the context that often requires individuals or marginalised and/or indigenous communities to adapt by using unorthodox patterns of coping (Ungar, 2011). Typically, these coping strategies are different from ones that are reported in Western or mainstream societies. The focus pertains to the modification of resilience processes especially because these processes, even though considered negative by some, enable coping and resilience strategies. For this reason, the child’s social and physical ecologies play influential roles and should be kept in mind in order to understand how alternative coping strategies enable an at risk child’s resilience processes (Ungar, 2011). At the same time, social ecologies have the responsibility to facilitate conditions for children that will not demand long-term atypical coping processes (Wessells, 2015).

### **1.2.1.4 Cultural relativity**

The important role that culture plays in psychosocial health is embedded in cultural relativity. This fourth principle indicates that resilience processes will be relative to the socio-cultural context of children (Masten, 2011). In other words, resilience processes may differ across cultural contexts. Ungar et al. (2015) emphasize that culture is both a system of practices, beliefs and values which has the potential to act as a protective factor. It is these everyday practices that individuals utilise to form a set of shared values, beliefs, customs, and language that influence the processes of resilience (Ungar, 2011). For instance, traditional African cultures believe that interdependence is an important value. Adherence to interdependence is associated with ‘flocking’ behaviours or the tendency of African adults in resource-poor communities to come together to mobilise and/or share and/or sustain resilience-supporting resources (Ebersöhn,

2012). In comparison, European accounts of resilience report individualised (rather than collective) pathways of resilience (Kumpulainen et al., 2016). Examples such as these are a reminder that, explanations of resilience processes which suggest identical processes, despite very different socio-cultural contexts, will have limited applicability. A “cultural lens” enables researchers to pay less attention to child contributions in resilience processes, and more on environmental ecologies and the processes fostered that lead to resilience (Ungar, 2015b, p. 40).

### **1.2.3 Inadequate Understandings of Resilient First Grade Adjustment of Children whose Parents are Divorced**

Development comprises of transitions (Robinson, 2003). One such transition is the transition to first grade that is recognized as a time of great importance in the lives of children due to this transition predicting the nature of children’s future social, emotional and educational success (O’Kane, 2016). The transition to formal schooling encompasses an “ongoing process of change” which requires children to adjust well (Blaisdell, 2014, p. 4). Khan (2016) states that adjusting well to these changes are considered crucial to successful transitioning. Transition and adjustment are therefore closely entwined (Margetts, 2013). For this reason, in this doctoral study, the word ‘adjustment’ will predominantly be used, as it focuses on the processes surrounding adjustment that inform positive transition.

The changes accompanying transition to school often result in a process during which children and their families have to adjust to new roles and identities, new expectations, and new interactions and relationships (Melbourne Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009). Hirst, Jervis, Visagie, Sojo, and Cavanagh (2011) add that the potential stress for children and families during the time of transitioning to formal school is due to the situation, which involves negotiating and adjusting to a number of changes such as the physical environment, expectations of learning, rules and routines, as well as social status and identity. Children are now faced with a more structured and routine learning environment where they

have to reach preset academic competencies such as reading, writing, and mathematics, attend a full day of school without a longer rest break, while sustaining their attention on topics and information that may seem irrelevant and uninteresting to them, sit in chairs for longer periods of the day, and discover their social roles with other children (Sink, Edwards, & Weir, 2007). Thus, during this process where the child reorganises his/her inner life and external behaviours to suit the new context in which he/she finds himself/herself, it is not unusual for children to experience some distress and adjustment difficulties during this time (Phatudi, 2007).

Thus, it seems as if adjusting to school is a complex process on its own and that it may play an important role in children's subsequent effective functioning. However, there are additional risks involved for some children adjusting to school. It is evident that the society in which children find themselves today is one where human well-being is often threatened by various adversities such as the HIV pandemic, food shortages, increasing crime and violence, failing education systems, acts of terrorism, and escalating divorce incidence (Theron & Theron, 2010). When children face additional risks, these potentially complicate their lives and challenge their well-being, making positive adjustment to school even more complex (Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2012). Complex or compound risks have the potential to be more stressful than single risks and are associated with heightened vulnerability (Masten, 2014a). For the purposes of this study, the risk of divorce has been singled out.

Miller (2010) explains that divorce is a stressful life transition that some children need to cope with. Divorce rates are rising internationally (Amato, 2014; Ruspini, 2016) and in South Africa (Preller, 2013). Thus the probability that more and more children (also children starting first grade) will be affected by divorce is a strong one. Parental divorce is typically seen as a stressful life event (Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2006). A child's reaction to parental divorce is informed by the child's developmental phase and by how meaningfully the parent-child attachments were prior to the divorce. Children between the ages of six and eight years are

often confused, with feelings of loyalty towards one parent and possible anger towards the other, sadness, and often deep feelings of loss and fear of abandonment (Wright, 2011). Divorce can be even more traumatic due to the unexpected shock value that it may have for children, especially when the child has a primary significant attachment and relationship to the parent who may be leaving the home (Gunsberg & Hymowitz, 2013; Wright, 2011). When divorce impacts negatively on children, the effects can be seen in their physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and normative development and functioning (Landsberg, Krüger, & Nel, 2005). At an emotional level, children may experience parental divorce as a loss, which may cause them to feel abandoned (Wright, 2011), and consequently, these feelings of abandonment may cause trauma (Gunsberg & Hymowitz, 2013).

When divorce potentiates negative effects or trauma for children, the effects may have an impact on a child's cognitive development. Van Der Kolk (2007) found that children who had experienced a traumatic event were likely to experience limitations in their verbal skills. Van Der Kolk's findings relate to Leys's (2000) contention that "during the provocation of traumatic memories, there is an increased activation of the visual area (according to hypothesis, the seat of iconic, traumatic memory) and decreased activation of Broca's area (the part of the central nervous system most centrally involved with speech and hence according to hypothesis, with narrative memory)" (p. 260). In other words, the functioning of speech and language decreases. We know that speech and language abilities form an integral aspect of learning and communication, especially in the foundation phase, and that these skills facilitate understanding, which is necessary for effective learning functioning in the classroom (Theron, 2013a). Consequently, the effects of divorce can potentially be seen in a first grade child's scholastic progress and functioning such as causing him/her to be distracted and presenting with attention difficulties, being unmotivated, as well as presenting with psychosomatic symptoms (Gunsberg & Hymowitz, 2013).

Yet, literature reporting on what supports positive adjustment to first grade in the face of parental divorce (excluding intervention studies) is scarce. Despite a careful search (see Manuscript 1) I could source no published research studies from a social-ecological resilience perspective, focusing specifically on first graders' positive school adjustment regardless of parental divorce. As an educational psychologist who is frequently asked to support first graders whose parents have divorced or who are embroiled in divorce proceedings I found this silence in the literature worrying.

On the other hand, in my experience as practising educational psychologist, I have also noted that not all children show negative developmental outcomes when their parents divorce. Not all parental divorce cases complicate the typical challenges of transitioning to first grade. Masten and Wright (2010) identified socio-ecological protective factors, known as Masten's Shortlist of Resilience, that enable resilience. These protective factors consist of individuals' and environment's characteristics and processes that contribute to positive adaptation despite high risk (Wright et al., 2013, p. 21).

Nevertheless, in the majority first grade cases I have dealt with, parental divorce disrupts children's life-worlds and impacts negatively on their functioning. Even so, I have witnessed that these children often manage to transition and adjust well to school. Still, little is known about why and how some children adjust well to first grade despite such risks (Brewin & Statham, 2011; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008).

Taking all of the above into consideration, the main aim of this doctoral study is to explore how children are able to cope well with the challenge of commencing first grade when this is compounded by the adversity of parental divorce. It is therefore crucial that social ecological stakeholders (including educational psychologists) better understand what enables the resilience of first graders who are challenged by parental divorce and transitioning to formal school in order to better support their positive adjustment.

Knowing that resilience is about more than individual assets (Ungar, 2011, 2012) means that social ecological accounts are needed of what enables children starting first grade, to transition well and adjust positively to formal school despite parental divorce. A more systemic account is likely to offer a better understanding of how first graders, their parents and caregivers and other significant adults, siblings, peers and teachers champion adjustment to first grade when this adjustment is further complicated by parental divorce.

### **1.3 PURPOSE STATEMENT AND QUESTIONS DIRECTING THE STUDY**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore resilience by establishing why some children adjust well to first grade despite the additional challenge of parental divorce. Thus, the main research question driving this study is: *why do some children adjust well to first grade despite the additional challenge of parental divorce?*

Based on the main research question, I developed sub-questions (that informed each of the four manuscripts):

1. What is known about the social ecological processes that support positive adjustment of first graders in general?
2. Which social ecological processes support the positive adjustment of first grader children of divorced parents?
3. How do the supportive interactions between first grade teachers and first grade children support children from divorced parents to adjust to first grade?
4. How do adults, who play significant roles in the first grader's life, contribute to positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce?
5. Which everyday (i.e. non-intervention-related) resources should <sup>1</sup>School Psychologists be aware of that enable the resilience of children challenged by adjustment to first grade *as well* as the divorce of their parents?

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<sup>1</sup>School Psychologist as used in Manuscript 4 is synonymous with educational psychologist as used in South Africa.

In exploring the answer/s to this question, I set the following aims:

- Determine if there is an adequate knowledge base that can be used to explain the social ecological processes that enable positive school adjustment of first grade children whose parents are divorced.
- Determine why and how some children adjust well to first grade despite the additional risk of parental divorce by focusing on first grade teachers' everyday, holistic developmental actions.
- Address a shortcoming in the existing literature that offers fragmented accounts of how significant adults enable first graders to adjust well to formal school (i.e. studies tend to comment on parents or teachers or extended family members, but not to these as a collective).
- Determine lessons that School Psychologists can learn to advocate resilience-enabling systems in support of children's positive adjustment to first grade, despite parental divorce.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The above aims are realised in the four manuscripts which make up my PhD thesis. These manuscripts will be submitted to the identified journals following examination of my thesis. The methodology of each of the four manuscripts is summarised next. The findings and implication sections of each manuscript is not summarised because these are included in each separate manuscript (See Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 of this thesis). One holistic section on ethics and trustworthiness is presented later in Chapter 1. Before detailing the rationale, purpose and methods of each manuscript, it is important to point out that in general the methodological paradigm of my work was qualitative. A qualitative study emphasizes the understanding of a phenomenon by closely examining individuals' actions, words and records (Lunenberg & Irby, 2008). Creswell and Poth (2017) explain that it is more useful to move from a general definition of qualitative research, to a definition that describes the process and characteristics of qualitative

research. Hence they define qualitative research as research that: commences with assumptions using interpretive or theoretical frameworks that inform the study; and answers research problems with the meaning assigned by groups or individuals about a human or social problem. They also include in their definition, the use of qualitative approaches to inquire and collect data in a natural setting; the use of inductive or deductive analysis to describe themes or patterns; and the inclusion of participants' voices when providing a rich description that calls for change or contributes to the literature.

Furthermore Galletta (2013) explains that the term reflexivity is essential in qualitative research, because it supports and strengthens the design of a research study. Creswell and Poth (2017) agree and explain that reflexivity has two parts to it: first the researcher talks about the experience with the phenomenon that will be explored, and second, how these experiences influenced the researcher's interpretation of the research phenomenon. Following Creswell and Poth (2017), I now briefly apply reflexivity to this study: first, as an Educational Psychologist based in an urban primary school setting and practicing as the school psychologist, I always look forward to the first school day of the new school year. On this day, I always attend the opening ceremony of the new first graders enrolled in the school. I observe the mixed emotions of children and their families as well as first grade teachers on this day. As our school's Principal calls out each first grader's name to join their new teacher on stage, I often think to myself, 'today's milestone is the start of great new possibilities of developing potential'. However, experience in the field has also taught me that not all children experience great possibilities and development of their potential when starting school. Life offers possibilities of developing potential, but also risks and adversity that often challenge children's effective functioning. Parental divorce is an example of a risk that I often work with, in support of children. In the past five years since starting practicing as Educational Psychologist, I've noticed the incline in divorce cases that are referred to me within the middle to high income group of white Afrikaans



speaking, urban families with whom I work. In therapy, I most often work with children who struggle through the negative effects of parental divorce. I identified the need to determine what can be done social-ecologically to enable children, especially first graders adjusting to formal school, to cope well with the concomitant adjustment to parental divorce and associated disruptions and changes.

I have always been a firm believer that children have the potential to overcome, despite the challenges of life, such as parental divorce. Children can overcome risks not only in themselves, but also because of others who cross their life's path and walk beside them to strengthen them through the process. I believe that transformational support can come from systemic work when social ecologies engage in support of resilience of a child at risk. Working in a school environment, I have witnessed the supportive effect that teachers could have on children when parents are divorced; I've witnessed how children's effective functioning is positively impacted when the critical stakeholders (e.g. parent figures and family) put in effort to act in the child's best interest, despite the divorce; and last, I experience that school psychologists have an important part to play in a school ecology by engaging all the resources needed for children's adaptive process to be executed.

Hence my experience in practice as school psychologist with parental divorce, as well as my belief of supportive systems, influenced the manner in which I engaged with the data. I was aware of my strong ideas and the lens that it formed. However, I continuously reminded myself thereof and searched for evidence according to the accounts of informants. I was aware that the informants in the study are active co-creators of the research process and are the owners of knowledge that is co-constituted between them as informants and me as researcher (Klenke, 2008; Ogden, 2008).

### 1.4.1 Manuscript 1

A summary of the rationale, paradigm, procedures as well as methodology for Manuscript 1 follows underneath. Manuscript 1 was prepared for *South African Journal of Childhood Education*. The two sub-questions directing manuscript 1 were:

1. What is known about the social ecological processes that support positive adjustment of first graders in general?
2. Which social ecological processes support the positive adjustment of first grader children of divorced parents?

The question above addresses the first sub-aim of my doctoral study, namely to determine if there is an adequate knowledge base that can be used to explain the social ecological processes that enable positive school adjustment of first grade children whose parents are divorced.

#### 1.4.1.1 Rationale for Manuscript 1

I conducted a scoping review to determine what is known about the social ecological processes that support positive adjustment of first grade children in general; and which social ecological processes support positive adjustment to school of first graders of divorced parents. If social ecologies wish to support the resilience of first graders, they need an adequate knowledge-base to inform resilience-enabling practices. From comments by Kumpulainen et al. (2016) it would appear that what is currently known about what enables positive adjustment to first grade is under-theorized. These comments gave me a reason for scoping the relevant literature. In scoping the relevant literature, I would be able to ascertain whether research studies have investigated positive adjustment to first grade from a social ecological perspective and better understand which protective processes the extant literature associates with positive adjustment to formal school. This information could offer meaningful direction for follow-up empirical work that could, in turn, provide insights to further capacitate social ecological support of first graders' resilience.

### **1.4.1.2 Paradigm**

Following Creswell (2007), a paradigm of Postpositivism informed the scoping review, seeing that I engaged in a scientific approach where I applied a “series of logically related steps” (p. 20) that included an analysis of studies which reported empirical findings in order to provide multiple perspectives regarding positive adjustment to first grade. As part of this post-positivist approach I charted the data and summarised key patterns, such as the frequency of methodologies (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005). I also adopted a deductive analysis plan (explained in detail below) to search for “valid evidence” (Nieuwenhuis, 2007, p. 65) that would limit my subjectivity without obscuring an understanding of the multiple determinants of positive adjustment to first grade.

Suffice it here to say that resilience is understood from an ecological systems perspective (Masten, 2001, 2014c; Ungar, 2011). From this perspective, resilience is seen to be a process of constructive adjustment that is socio-ecologically supported. Masten and Wright (2010) refer to 6 key socio-ecological protective factors that enable resilience and have labelled these protective factors as Masten’s Shortlist of Resilience. These short-listed factors comprise of “characteristics of individuals and their environments that contribute to good outcome when risk or adversity [is] high” (Wright et al., 2013, p. 21). The aforementioned list enabled me to provide a credible, deductive explanation of which protective factors influence positive adjustment to first grade.

### **1.4.1.3 Design**

I conducted a qualitative scoping review for the purpose of Manuscript 1 (see Chapter 2). Peterson, Pearce, Ferguson, and Langford (2017) explain that a scoping review is one of the first steps taking place in research development and that a scoping review presents an overview regarding a broad topic. Hence, this scoping review aimed at providing an overview of relevant literature (Pham et al., 2014) explaining resilience enablers applicable to positive adjustment to first grade, particularly following parental divorce. Studies were identified during two systematic

searches that matched the keyword combinations (as explained in Manuscript 1). Electronic databases, Onesearch and EbscoHost were used for the systematic searches of both research questions on both occasions.

Advantages for a researcher to conduct a scoping review relate to a number of reasons. These include the inclusiveness of studies with different study designs (thereby not narrowing the range of included studies); the usefulness of mapping study fields where visualizing the range of material might be difficult; and the identification scoping reviews provide of gaps in existing literature (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). However, Levac, Colquhoun, and O'Brien (2010) explain that limitations of scoping reviews pertain to matters such as the absence of a "common accepted definition and purpose" of exactly what a scoping review entails (p. 8); and the lack of attention to the quality assessment of the methodology of a study which is included in the review that can raise a question mark about the quality of results (Dijkers, 2015). However, despite the abovementioned limitations, conducting a scoping review proved valuable in exploring the literature regarding positive adjustment to first grade of children in general; and especially valuable in identifying the gap in international and South African literature pertaining to positive adjustment of first graders' despite parental divorce.

#### **1.4.1.4 Procedure**

Identifying relevant studies to sub-question 1, was a collaborative process between myself and a fellow PhD student whose study was also focused on positive transitioning to first grade. I facilitated the process of identifying studies relevant to the sub-question 2. The key words and key word combinations for sub-question 1 are presented in Table 1 of Manuscript 1, while for sub-question 2, the key word 'divorce', was added to the key word combinations as depicted in Table 1. For sub-question 1, I included English, peer reviewed, empirical studies reporting specifically on the adjustment to first grade of children aged 6 to 7 years. For sub-question 2, articles were included according to the same criteria as the aforementioned for sub-

question 1, except, the focus specifically pertained to adjustment to first grade children aged 6 to 7 years, whose parents are divorced. I excluded studies for sub-question 1 that narrowly conceptualized resilience as a trait or quality (seeing that resilience is a process involving interactions between individuals and social ecologies (Ungar, 2011)); studies not relating to first grade children's adjustment to formal school; intervention studies; and studies without a clear conceptualization of the term, resilience. Excluded studies for sub-question 2, encompass the same exclusion criteria as for sub-question 1, as well as excluding all studies with other risk factors, beside parental divorce. In total, 25 published studies were included in the scoping review for sub-question 1. No studies could be sourced for sub-question 2 at the time of conducting the scoping review.

Furthermore, following Creswell (2014a) I familiarized myself with the abstract and findings sections of all the included articles by reading and re-reading them. I analysed the data deductively (Creswell, 2014) using Masten's Shortlist of protective factors which include six resilience-enabling mechanisms, namely attachment relationships; agency, mastery and motivational systems; intelligence or the capacity to solve problems; self-regulation; meaning making; cultural traditions and religion (Masten & Wright, 2010).

Therefore, this was a suitable framework for analysis. In other words, the starting point was the existing literature and theory that gave way for the analysis to answer both of my research questions (Harding, 2013). The Shortlist focused on the various psychosocial competencies tying an individual's internal resources to external connections in the environment that enable positive outcomes. In this way it coheres with SERT. With no studies sourced for sub-question 2, I identified a gap which led to Manuscript 2 and Manuscript 3, detailed in the sections below.

#### **1.4.2 Manuscript 2**

In this section, I present a summary of the rationale, paradigm, procedures, and methodology for Manuscript 2. Manuscript 2 was prepared for *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*.

The question directing Manuscript 2 is:

How do the supportive interactions between first grade teachers and first grade children support children from divorced parents to adjust to first grade?

The question addresses the second sub-aim directing my PhD study, namely to determine why and how some children adjust well to first grade despite the additional risk of parental divorce by focusing on first grade teachers' everyday, holistic developmental actions.

#### **1.4.2.1 Rationale for Manuscript 2**

In Manuscript 1 I not only identified a gap pertaining to a void in research of positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce, but also to the gap of providing social ecological explanations of positive adjustment to first grade in general and when parents are divorced. Seeing that Ungar (2013a) emphasizes that facilitative environments nurture positive outcomes in children at risk, (such as children adjusting to first grade and whose parents are divorced), researchers need to explore social ecological accounts that pay closer attention to how children's environments facilitate resilience.

For this reason, Manuscript 2 focuses specifically on first grade teachers who are a cardinal part of the school ecology and key to a facilitative environment that enables resilience in children at risk for negative outcomes (Ebersöhn, 2012, 2017; Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2011; Ebersöhn & Loots, 2017; Malindi & Machenjedge, 2012). "Schools are central to many children's lives" (Theron, 2016, p. 88) and because children, also first graders, spend a significant amount of time at school, Masten (2014c) views schools to be perfect settings to facilitate resilience-enabling processes.

### **1.4.2.2 Paradigm**

Manuscript 2 is underpinned by the social constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2014). The social constructivist worldview provides a lens that views individuals as seeking meaning and understanding from the world they function in and creating this meaning through the interaction with others (Creswell, 2007). Social construction of reality occurred when the informants enabled me as the researcher to gain a better understanding of their reality (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Following social constructivism, I engaged with all primary and secondary informants to better understand the multiple realities that exist leading to multiple meanings that are constructed (Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mills, 2017). During the construction of informants' reality, I followed Creswell and Poth (2017) who recommend that the researcher rely as much as possible on the informant's insight, in this case, on the primary and secondary informants' views that explained how first grade teachers contributed to positive adjustment of first grade.

### **1.4.2.3 Design**

According to Yin (2003), a case study design is especially suitable to answer 'how' and 'why' questions as in the case with Manuscript 2, answering the research question, 'how do first grade teachers support children from divorced parents to adjust to first grade?' In answer to this question, I followed Yin (2014) with a multiple, illustrative case study design. A multiple case study occurs when the focus is on multiple individuals regarding the same phenomenon (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). In addition, an illustrative case study aims to examine factors impacting a phenomenon, more closely and uses data collection from a variety of sources (Yin, 2012).

### **1.4.2.4 Case informants and sampling**

Case study terminology refers to an informant as a special category of research participant because such a person has specific expertise and knowledge about information that is required in answering the research question (Ogden, 2008). Docket and Perry (2007) emphasize

the importance of including children's perspectives (of starting school) in research studies due to children's experiences (of school for example), differing from those of adults, placing children in the centre of being directly involved in "shaping their transition experiences" (p. 49). For this reason, the informants of this study, comprised of primary informants – the five first graders – and secondary informants – the parent figures (biological and step-parents) and first grade teachers. Hence, primary informants (first grade children) and secondary informants (parent figures and first grade teachers) offered an insider's perspective and in-depth information that answered the research question for Manuscript 2.

I selected the primary informants based on 12 criteria presented in Table 1 of Manuscript 2. To generate understanding of relevant indicators of positive adjustment to first grade following parental divorce, I consulted with an Advisory Panel (AP). The AP consisted of three white, Afrikaans speaking first grade teachers and two white, Afrikaans speaking educational psychologists. I invited these experts because of their deep knowledge of the focus of this study on children adjusting well to first grade despite parental divorce. Following a day-long meeting in which the AP and I discussed resilience and the indicators of resilient adjustment to first grade following parental divorce, the AP agreed that 12 indicators were important (see Table 1 of Manuscript 2).

Eight schools agreed to collaborate in my doctoral study. First grade teachers in these schools were asked to identify children in their classes whose parents are divorced. These first grade teachers then used the criteria in Table 1 as indicators of positive adjustment according to which they rated children whose parents were divorced, as being well-adjusted or less well-adjusted. The five most well-adjusted children were recruited. Based on the SISU specifications, each PhD student needs a multiple case study which comprised a maximum of 5 cases. All 5 cases came from middle to high income schools. Thus, following Polkinghorne (2005) using these criteria facilitated the purposeful selection of informants.



The five primary informants attended urban schools in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Table 1 provides a background summary of each primary informant.

Table 1

*Background summary of primary informants*

| Primary Informants (PI)      |                                           |                                                    |                                                   |                                           |                                                      |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Description                  | PI 1:<br>Sarah                            | PI 2:<br>Tim                                       | PI 3:<br>Lionel                                   | PI 4:<br>Andrea                           | PI 5:<br>Cassy                                       |
| Gender                       | Female                                    | Male                                               | Male                                              | Female                                    | Female                                               |
| Race                         | White                                     | White                                              | White                                             | White                                     | White                                                |
| Mother tongue                | Afrikaans                                 | Afrikaans & English                                | Afrikaans                                         | Afrikaans                                 | Afrikaans                                            |
| Age                          | 7 years 5 months                          | 6 years 9 months                                   | 7 years 4 months                                  | 6 years 9 months                          | 7 years 9 months                                     |
| Residing parent              | Mother                                    | Mother                                             | Mother                                            | Mother                                    | Mother                                               |
| Siblings (gender & age)      | Biological sister: (2 years)              | Half-sister (16 years);<br>Half-brother (12 years) | Half-sister (22 years);<br>Step-sister (10 years) | Biological brother (11 years)             | Biological sister (9 years); half-brother (2 months) |
| Attended Gr.R (kindergarten) | Yes (kindergarten at the current primary) | Yes (kindergarten at the current primary)          | Yes (kindergarten at the current primary)         | Yes (kindergarten at the current primary) | Yes (kindergarten at the current primary)            |

|                                              |                                                     |                                                |                                   |                                        |                                |
|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
|                                              | school)                                             | school)                                        | school)                           | school)                                | school)                        |
| <b>Occurrence of divorce</b>                 | During first grade                                  | During pre-school (year preceding first grade) | During pre-school                 | During pre-school                      | During pre-school              |
| <b>Step-parents</b>                          | -                                                   | Step-mother (father remarried)                 | Step-father (mother remarried)    | -                                      | Step-father (mother remarried) |
| <b>Visitation of other biological parent</b> | Anytime; and every Wednesday evening                | Every second weekend                           | Anytime; and every second weekend | Anytime; and every Wednesday afternoon | Every second weekend           |
| <b>Residing parents' income group</b>        | Middle income group                                 | Middle income group                            | High income group                 | Middle income group                    | High income group              |
| <b>Housing</b>                               | Renting: House (shared with maternal grand-parents) | Own: 2 Bedroom Apartment                       | Own: House                        | Renting: 2 Bedroom Apartment           | Own: House                     |

#### 1.4.2.5 Methods

Following Merriam (1998) I wanted to place emphasis on rich descriptions that were holistic of an informant's understanding and the manner in which they constructed their reality, to explain how first grade teachers enable positive adjustment to school in a holistic manner. The abovementioned rich descriptions were generated through qualitative methods. I used

multiple qualitative methods and did not only rely on only a single data source (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

***a) Methods with primary and secondary informants***

A first qualitative method that I used with both primary and secondary informants, was semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are useful for various reasons. For example, first, I used interviews with all informants because the preset open-ended questions provided opportunity for in-depth explanations (Jamshed, 2014). Creswell (2007) explains that from a social constructivist worldview, open-ended questions support the process where informants can construct meaning through their discussion with others, such as the researcher. Second, semi-structured interviews had the potential to open up new possibilities of understanding; and third because I was able to use interviews in combination with other methods in a multimethod qualitative study (Galletta, 2013) as explained below with primary informants.

***b) Methods with primary informants***

In this doctoral study, I used semi-structured interviewing with the Draw-and-talk and Photovoice methods. An example of the preset semi-structured interview schedule that I used with primary informants during the Draw-and-talk method is presented in Diagram 1.



*Diagram 1.* Summary of the combination of semi-structured interviews and the draw-and-talk technique

Furthermore, various visual methodologies exist, such as photographs, drawings, videos, digital storytelling, dramas, and music (Mitchell, De Lange, & Moletsane, 2017). The use of visual participatory methods is particularly valuable when conducting research with children because it provides opportunity for children to co-produce evidence and give voice to their own lives (Aldridge, 2016). In the process of co-production by the means of visual participatory methods, children get involved in knowledge construction in their local contexts by engaging in

methods such as photovoice; drawings; digital story-telling; and participatory video (Mitchell et al., 2017) that also engages them to collaborate in a process of meaning making (Mitchell, Theron, Smith, & Stuart, 2011).

Theron and Liebenberg (2015) consider visual research methods that are innovative and qualitative, to be important to use in resilience research because these methods carry the potential to produce the ordinary and unnoticed facets regarding people's experiences. For this reason the following visual methods were included: first, the Draw-and-talk method was included where the generation of the drawing is followed by a verbal explanation (Bendelow, Carpenter, Vautier, & Williams, 2002). Mitchell et al. (2011) state that drawings are a rich entry point for gaining information regarding the informant's view of the research phenomenon. The meaning of the drawings is explained by the informant. Literate participants can also be asked to write an explanation, but then the technique is known as the draw-and-write technique. For example, the draw-and-write technique is a technique used with children where they are invited to draw their answers to questions posed and then to write about their drawing (Tones & Tilford, 2001). However, the first graders in this study were not asked to provide written accounts because their verbal expression skills were better developed than their written expression skills at that time. Regardless of whether participants explain their drawing in writing or verbally, the technique generates powerful data that can be utilised in its original form and that provides rich information for analysis (leading to themes that are data-based) (UKRC, 2011).

Second, Photovoice is the method where the narratives of informants' visual data are collected by the use of purely informant-produced photographs (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). Han and Oliffe (2016) explain that Photovoice is a method that complements a few approaches, such as the constructivist approach because through the process of Photovoice, informants record photos that elicit reflection and knowledge. Hence, Photovoice facilitate dialogue (Tinkler, 2013). Thus primary informants and I engaged as they expressed the ideas in their mind that

explained how the image in the photo depicted something or someone that helped them to adjust well to first grade. Furthermore, Photovoice is a suitable method, as it is a creative way of engaging children in the research process (Thomson, 2008). This is especially valuable for a first grade child who may feel intimidated by a classical interview process (Tinkler, 2013). Therefore, the use of photos in an interview can also improve the interview experience for children, as it provides a clear and tangible prompt (Thomson, 2008). Prompts that I've used during the Photovoice, were 'describe who/what is in the photo; why the who/what was important; how who/what in the photo has helped the informant to adjust well to first grade'.

The digital storytelling (Fokides, 2016) that I used was not used as a data generation method. Instead I used digital storytelling as a method to check that I had accurately understood the informants' insights and conclude the research process with the primary informants. Here, together with the primary informant, we combined their and secondary informants' accounts (if the child wished for secondary informants' accounts to be included) into a story with visual images of drawings and photos. The digital story depicted each primary informant's story of positive adjustment to first grade and served as a manner of testing the trustworthiness of the data.

While conducting research with children, I was reminded by the book, written by a first grade teacher, that children transform their understanding of the world through drawing, talking, writing, dancing, and singing (Gallas, 1994). In my research study, the voices of children were important to provide accounts of what they experience as meaningful in enabling their positive adjustment to first grade by their social ecologies, such as the first grade teachers in Manuscript 2. For this reason, visual participatory methods elicited meaning to their realities.

**c) *Methods with secondary informants***

With all secondary informants such as parent figures and first grade teachers, I used semi-structured interviewing that was video-recorded. The semi-structured interview schedule with secondary informants included the following:

i) With parent figures

- Describe your child's first grade year thus far.
- Your child's teacher thinks your child is coping well with the adjustment to first grade. What do you believe enables your child to cope well at school?
- Who were the people who helped your child cope well with the transition and adjustment to first grade? What role did these people play?
- Were there specific activities or opportunities that helped your child to adjust well to first grade?
- What advice would you give divorced / divorcing parents wanting to support their children to transition well to first grade?

ii) With first grade teachers

- Please describe the informant as you experience him/her in your class.
- Which indicators provided pertaining to this child's positive adjustment made you consider him/her to be a child who transitioned well to first grade?
- What do you believe enabled this child to cope well with first grade, especially in the light of his/her parents' divorce?
- Who would you say contributed to the child's positive adjustment to first grade? What role did these people play?
- What other things are evident in the child's life that could have helped the child to cope with the adjustment to first grade?

- What advice would you give divorced or divorcing parents wanting to support their children to adjust well to first grade?

#### **1.4.2.6 Data collection**

Data collection proceeded after obtaining ethical clearance from the North-West University's ethics committee (see Addendum C). I obtained informed consent from the primary informants' parents (see Addendum D) and their first grade teachers (see Addendum E); as well as assent from the first grade children (see Addendum F). Other permission was obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education (see Addendum G).

I collected the data myself. I followed Creswell and Poth (2017) who state that research is situated in a specific context, site or setting and because when a researcher needs to report on a setting, it is important to have an understanding of the contextual aspects impacting the setting. For this reason, data collection occurred as follow:

- I first met with the parents of all the primary informants. The semi-structured parent interview was video recorded and conducted at the primary informants' residing home, except with informant 4, where I met with her mother at the home of the maternal grandparents because the mother works from offices at that home; and with informant 5, whose mother and step-father preferred to visit me at my office.
- Then, the teacher interviews occurred at the school of the primary informants in the teacher's classrooms or in an office at school and was also video recorded.
- Thereafter the rest of the data collection with primary informants occurred and was also video-recorded. During the first visit the assent form was read to and discussed with the primary informants where after they engaged in the Draw-and-talk and were asked to draw the answers to the interview questions and then explain their drawings verbally. An electronic disposable camera was provided to each primary informant at the end of the first visit to use at school with their parents' and teachers' permission the following week.



The instruction accompanying the camera was to capture all the people or things they perceive to be contributors to their positive adjustment to first grade. The second visit to each primary informant commenced with the loading of the primary informants' photos onto a laptop. Each photograph and the relevance of every photograph was explained by the informant to answer the question about who or what had helped him or her to cope well with starting school as well as how it had helped. Then each informant decided on five to ten photos which best described their positive adjustment to first grade. Thereafter, during the second part of the second visit, the primary informant and I spent time writing a story together that used the informant's drawings and photos to explain her or his positive adjustment to starting first grade. After the second visit, I transformed the written story with the iMovie program into a digital format. During the third visit, primary informants were asked to listen to their story because they could not yet read fluently at that stage. Snippets were used from audio-recorded teacher and parent interviews that also explained the first grader's positive adjustment to first grade and were added if the primary informant wished to have these included. The primary informant and I, and later, his or her parent, watched the story together. The primary informant then indicated whether or not this story was an accurate account of her or his positive adjustment to first grade.

Furthermore, data collection with primary informant 1, 2, and 3 occurred at their homes while a parent or family member was present somewhere in the home; while data collection with primary informant 4 occurred at her school after hours; and with primary informant 5 at my office after school hours.

#### **1.4.2.7 Data analysis**

The process between data collection and data analysis is important as the one informs the other. Manuscript 2 required all data to be included that related to first grade teachers' support

during first graders' positive adjustment to formal school. All primary and secondary informants' accounts were included that related to the question of Manuscript 2. I followed Merriam (2009) who emphasized that qualitative studies such as case studies, aim at generating inductive reasoning as well as interpretation of realities that was socially constructed and therefore I analysed and interpreted the data inductively in Manuscript 2.

I used thematic content analysis (TCA) to analyse the data. TCA relates to the identification of qualitative data themes which involves searching for relationships among the different domains of data sets and indicating how these data sets are connected (Saldaña, 2012). Table 2 below is an adaptation of the phases of thematic content analysis (TCA) as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). TCA has six phases that I followed to analyse the data:

Table 2

*Phases of thematic content analysis*

| PHASE                                               | DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCESS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Familiarising<br>the researcher<br>with the data | This involves becoming familiar with the depth and breadth of the data. This includes transcribing the video recordings of the one-on-one semi-structured interviews with the primary and secondary informants. I also read and reread the data from all the interviews, generated from the video recordings that related to the informants' explanations and interpretations of their drawings and photos and forming initial ideas and wrote them down. |
| 2. Generating<br>initial codes                      | The data was coded by myself and two other fellow students who were also doing a resilience-focused study, of which one, also related to positive adjustment to first grade. We commenced by forming initial                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

|                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                         | <p>ideas about the data and making notes of ideas as they occurred in the reading of the various data sets. Next, we opened code data segments that were relevant to my research question for Manuscript 2. We gave each of these segments a label (for example, a couple of words, a sentence, or couple of sentences) that explained what insight this segment provided about possible answers to the question of Manuscript 2. The labels were called open codes. Thereafter, we sorted the open codes into meaningful groups of similar open codes that provided an answer to Manuscript 2's question. We re-labelled each group, and assigned an axial code. For each axial code, we specified the inclusion and exclusion criteria, so that the credibility of my coding can be verified. It was verified by an independent resilience researcher. Her codes and ours had a 95% match. We followed Saldaña (2009) and reached consensus about the non-matching codes by means of a face-to-face consensus discussion.</p> |
| 3. Searching for themes | <p>During this phase, I looked for relationships among the axial codes and considered the connections among these codes. These informed the development of themes and sub-themes that were grounded in the data. These themes answered the question for Manuscript 2.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 4. Reviewing themes     | <p>Refinement of themes entailed that I check that themes work in relation to the coded extracts of the entire data set. I searched the data set for any data that contradicts the themes that have emerged and used this to refine and then finalise the themes presented in answer to my research question.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

|                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5. Defining and naming themes                | By defining and redefining the themes, I identified the essence of each theme and identified possible sub-themes. I also generated clear definitions that resulted in concise and effective names that provided information on the positive transitioning of the primary informant. |
| 6. Producing a graphic figure and a write-up | Last, I set out the naming of themes in a graphic figure that provided a bigger picture of all the themes. During the write-up, I provided sufficient evidence of the themes identified in the data.                                                                                |

### 1.4.3 Manuscript 3

In this section, I present a summary of the rationale, paradigm, informants, methodology, and procedures, for Manuscript 3. Manuscript 3 was prepared for the *Child Development* journal.

The question directing Manuscript 3 is:

How do adults who play significant roles in the first grader's life contribute to positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce?

The question addresses the third sub-aim directing my PhD study, namely to address a shortcoming in the existing literature that offers incomplete accounts of how significant adults enable first graders to adjust well to formal school.

#### 1.4.3.1 Rationale for Manuscript 3

In Manuscript 2 I focused on the school ecology, especially pertaining to first grade teachers. I reported how first grade teachers' actions facilitated cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development to support children from divorced parents to adjust well to first grade.

However, the positive adjustment to first grade is not only influenced by the school ecology. Fabian and Dunlop (2006) explain that the processes of adjustment during transition to school comprise “an interlocking set of systems” of home, family, community as well as school (p. 2). The aforementioned viewpoint relates to the Social Ecological perspective, that defines resilience as the “dual processes of navigation and negotiation” (Ungar, 2012, p. 17) between the individual child and the social environment such as the family, school, or the community. However, although the individual child demonstrates agency by navigating to resources, Ungar (2015b) emphasizes the important role of families and communities to provide resilience-enabling resources.

Children subjected to parental divorce are often at the receiving end of circumstances beyond their control and need supportive adult figures. These adult figures should support children in their development so that they can function effectively despite the risk of parental divorce. Children also often become more dependent on significant adults when they are starting formal school (Brooker, 2008). Therefore it is important to establish how adult figures can facilitate and support adaptive processes, especially for first graders transitioning to formal school who face the challenge of parental divorce. For this reason in Manuscript 3, I report on how significant adults contribute to positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce.

#### **1.4.3.2 Paradigm**

As in Manuscript 2, I again followed the social constructivist paradigm. The rationale which I offered for Manuscript 2 applies to Manuscript 3 as well. My focus here, however, was on informants’ insights about significant adults (rather than just on teachers as in Manuscript 2).

#### **1.4.3.3 Design**

As in Manuscript 2, Manuscript 3 also draws on an illustrative multiple case study design (Yin, 2014). I drew on the insights of primary and secondary informants that supported a deeper

understanding of which adults enabled positive adjustment to first grade despite the concomitant challenges of parental divorce, and how these adults were supportive.

#### **1.4.3.4 Case informants and sampling**

For the purposes of Manuscript 3 the same primary and secondary informants as in Manuscript 2 provided accounts. However, I focused on data explaining how significant adults contributed to children's positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce. Descriptions of the informants are provided in nr. 1.4.2.4.

#### **1.4.3.5 Methods**

All of the same methods described for Manuscript 2 under nr. 1.4.2.5 apply for Manuscript 3.

#### **1.4.3.6 Data collection**

For Manuscript 3, the same data collection procedures occurred as described in Manuscript 2's data collection, under nr. 1.4.2.6.

#### **1.4.3.7 Data analysis**

Again, the same thematic content analysis proces as described in Manuscript 2, under nr. 1.4.2.7, were used for the purposes of Manuscript 3. However, the only data included in the data analysis of Manuscript 3, was data pertaining to the research question of Manuscript 3, namely, 'how do adults who play significant roles in the first grader's life contribute to positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce?' I acknowledge that Manuscript 3 again included first grade teachers (the focus of Manuscript 2). However, Manuscript 3 does not reproduce the findings of Manuscript 2 because it focuses on the relationship between parent-figures, how parent-figures and teachers communicate, and how children are strengthened when multiple adults take responsibility for their adjustment process.

#### **1.4.4 Manuscript 4**

The next section summarises the rationale, paradigm, informants, methodology, and procedures, for Manuscript 4. Manuscript 4 was prepared for the *School Psychology International* journal.

The question directing Manuscript 4 is:

Which everyday (i.e. non-intervention-related) resources should School Psychologists be aware of that enable the resilience of children challenged by adjustment to first grade *as well as* the divorce of their parents?

The question addresses the fourth sub-aim directing my PhD study, namely to determine lessons that School Psychologists can learn to advocate resilience-enabling systems in support of children's positive adjustment to first grade, despite parental divorce.

##### **1.4.4.1 Rationale for Manuscript 4**

In Manuscript 3 I reported on significant adults whose contributions enabled first graders to adjust well to first grade, despite their parents' divorce. However, contributions of School Psychologists (SPs) were not evident in the data and thus not reported on. Yet, this does not imply that there are not important lessons that SPs can take from this study to champion first graders' resilience when adjusting to formal school, despite their parents' divorce.

SPs should be aware that resilience is facilitated through resilience-enabling processes that are brought about when children's social ecologies actively provide and sustain protective resources that are commonly understood to be meaningful to children (Ungar, 2011). An important facet of the social ecology is the school ecology of which school-based service-providers such as SPs are part of. Faulkner and Jimerson (2017) state that "school psychologists ... make important contributions to the lives of children, families, teachers, and other professionals who work with them in the school" (p.6). One such important contribution

relates to championing resilience (Noltemeyer & Bush, 2013). Championing resilience requires preventative and remedial action (Masten, 2014a). For example, SPs know about the risks associated with adjustment to first grade and the potential effect of additional risks, such as parental divorce, on the functioning of first graders. They are aware that positive adjustment to first grade is an important developmental milestone because of its association with subsequent school adjustment and academic progress/achievement (McGann & Clark, 2007). SPs have the capacity to support school staff and families to prioritise those processes which are likely to minimise the risks associated with adjustment to first grade, as well as those processes that are likely to maximise positive school experiences. They also have the responsibility to develop and support schools so that they are resilience-enabling systems (Daniels, Collair, Moolla, & Lazarus, 2007). In addition, SPs have the skill set to facilitate adaptive processes for first graders facing additional risks such as parental divorce. For this reason, I report in Manuscript 4 on the lessons that SPs can learn from this study to advocate resilience-enabling systems in support of children's positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce.

#### **1.4.4.2 Paradigm**

Manuscript 4 also followed the reasons for aligning with the social constructivist paradigm like Manuscripts 2 and 3. In addition for Manuscript 4, I align with the social constructivist model because it takes a step beyond interpretation and drives social action (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Thus the social constructivist paradigm drove the intention of the implications of Manuscript 4, aimed at SPs to use the lessons from this study in social-action when they advocate resilience-enabling systems in support of children's positive adjustment to first grade, despite parental divorce.

#### **1.4.4.3 Design**

For the purposes of Manuscript 4, a single case study design was used to answer a focused question needing in-depth inquiries to answer, as advised by Bhattacharya (2017).



Baxter and Jack (2008) explain that a case study design goes well with the social constructivist paradigm as this paradigm allows for an informant to tell stories and describe the views and experiences that form the reality of a case that provides insight to the researcher. The specific type of case study used in Manuscript 4, was a single illustrative case study design. As in other resilience studies (e.g. Fourie & Theron, 2012; Kumpulainen et al., 2016) and following methodologists such as Gustafsson (2017) I argue that a single instrumental case study offers rich insights into a given research phenomenon, in this case, the everyday, non-intervention-related resources that enable the resilience of children challenged by adjustment to first grade *as well* as by the divorce of their parents.

#### **1.4.4.4 Case informant and sampling**

The single case study of Manuscript 4 formed part of my larger PhD study which was comprised of five cases. As detailed elsewhere (Theron, Kahl, & Bezuidenhout, 2015) purposive sampling informed the selection of these five cases as explained previously (see nr. 4.2.4.). From the five identified cases, I foreground Sarah's because it offers a rich account of the multiple resources that informed her resilience. Sarah's case is exemplary because it highlights how multiple interacting, everyday resources — Sarah herself, her parents and members of her extended family, and her teachers and peers — enabled her resilience. Her case also provides lessons for SPs about facilitating resilience-enabling processes in schools.

#### **1.4.4.5 Methods**

All of the same methods described for Manuscript 2 under nr. 1.4.2.5 apply for Manuscript 4.

#### **1.4.4.6 Data collection**

For Manuscript 4, the same data collection procedures occurred as described in Manuscript 2's data collection (see nr. 1.4.2.6.).

#### 1.4.4.7 Data analysis

Again, the same thematic content analysis as described in Manuscript 2 (see nr. 1.4.2.7), was used for the purposes of Manuscript 4. However, the only data included in the data analysis of Manuscript 4, was data pertaining to Sarah's case with the aim of answering the question 'which everyday (i.e. non-intervention-related) resources should School Psychologists be aware of that enable the resilience of children challenged by adjustment to first grade *as well* as the divorce of their parents?'

### 1.5 SUMMARY OF DATA COLLECTION

All of the data collected throughout the course of my doctoral study is visually presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Summary of datasets*

| <b>Datasets</b> | <b>Research activity</b>                                                                                            |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dataset 1       | Semi-structured interview with parents (biological and/or step-parents)                                             |
| Dataset 2       | Semi-structured interview with first grade teachers                                                                 |
| Dataset 3       | Draw-and-talk with primary informants, in conjunction with semi-structured interviews                               |
| Dataset 4       | Photovoice and compilation of digital story with primary informants, in conjunction with semi-structured interviews |
| Dataset 5       | Digital story as part of member-checking with primary informants                                                    |

## 1.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS

The trustworthiness of any research study relates to the accuracy and consistency of the research methods and findings (Creswell, 2014). There are five guiding principles regarding trustworthiness namely: dependability, credibility, transferability, confirmability and authenticity. Houghton, Casey, Shaw, and Murphy (2013) describe the first four principles: dependability refers to how stable the data is; credibility relates to how believable the findings are and whether the research was conducted in a credible manner; transferability focuses on rich descriptions of the original context and whether or not the findings are transferable to similar situations or contexts; and confirmability refers to the accuracy and neutrality of the data. Seale (2003) describes that authenticity is applicable when studies demonstrate that a range of different realities have been included. I ensured that this study met all these criteria.

Following Hall and Theron (2016), credibility is ensured by triangulating the multiple data sources. I used multiple visual participatory methods and engaged primary and secondary informants. In my study, primary informants and I wrote a story that concluded the data generation process. This story included their drawings, photos, and verbal descriptions. I transformed each of these into a digital story format. Primary informants agreed that these were a true reflection of their accounts. Hence, as suggested by Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtler (2010), credibility was evident when my portrayal of the research was in agreement with the primary informant's explanation of his or her positive adjustment to first grade. Multiple coders, in line with the requirements suggested by Berends and Johnston (2005) coded the data to enhance the qualitative analysis. Face to face discussions about the coding of the data between the multiple coders, contributed to dependability (Saldaña, 2009). Confirmability was ensured by me having regular consensus meetings with my promoter in order to discuss the findings and confirm or revise emerging themes. I furthermore assured transferability by describing the

context, setting, and presenting the necessary information about the primary and secondary informants so that findings might be applicable to similar settings, contexts, and participants.

## **1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

As part of the SISU project, my study has received ethical clearance from the Optentia Ethics Committee (number: OPT-2013-009, see Appendix A) and the Ethics Committee of the North-West University. The ethical clearance number is NWU-00018-14-S8. Permission was also obtained by the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research in schools in Johannesburg (see Addendum B).

A starting point before I conducted the research, was to become aware that because this study related to the risk of parental divorce, it may be a sensitive topic to some parents and children. This awareness reminded me to act sensitively and empathetically in this regard. Discussions regarding the divorce and the effects of it occurred only between myself and secondary informants. Parents and teachers were asked about the consequences of the divorce (if any) on the child's positive first grade adjustment and how or who provided support to the primary informant and in which ways. Thus no discussion that related to the topic of their parents' divorce was held with any of the primary informants since some parents were concerned about the effect these discussions could have on their child. Except only in one case (i.e Sarah), did a primary informant voluntarily discuss the impact of her parents' divorce on her adjustment to first grade. Therefore, questions posed to primary informants were only questions that related to their positive adjustment to first grade.

Furthermore, the stages of this study – from defining the question to publishing the results – were guided by ethical principles (Mertens & Ginsberg, 2009). These ethical principles, for professional and academic purposes, included matters relating to permission and informed consent which discuss the benefit and potential risks to the informant, deception,

privacy and confidentiality, accuracy, and safekeeping of records. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The following ethical aspects were adhered to:

### **1.7.1 Informed Consent**

The process of consent is one that warrants particular care, especially with vulnerable groups such as children (Mertens & Ginsberg, 2009). I obtained the informed consent of the parents (see Appendix C), as is stated in the South African Constitution, the National Health Act, various other statutes, the common law, and the Health Professions Counsel of South Africa's guidelines (Act No. 56 of 1974). The principals of the schools in which the first graders were enrolled gave permission for their school's first grade teacher to take part in the study. Also, the first grade teacher received a letter that she had to sign for consent to be part of this research study (see Appendix D). In line with the requirement suggested by Creswell (2012), primary informants assented in writing that they understood and were willing to participate. Because the primary informants were first graders who could not yet read, their assent form (see Appendix E) was a child- friendly information pack that consisted mainly of pictures and short sentences. I worked through the information pack with the primary informant by reading the assent form that was written in the primary informant's mother tongue.

I followed Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, and Namey (2005) that informed consent, as well as informed assent, should be obtained in such a manner that those involved can easily understand the research that will be conducted. Explanations regarding the research process and the consent forms were given in an appropriate language to the respective informants involved, and an opportunity was also provided for the informants to ask questions regarding the research project. The informant assent form explained that informants will be engaging in activities that may tell me more about how they are doing well at school. Detailed information was shared with the children and their parents regarding the research goals, process, and outcomes.

Primary and secondary informants were also informed that participation was entirely voluntary and that their withdrawal from the study at any time (prior to publication) would have no consequences. This study aimed to do no harm to any of the primary or secondary informants, and I attempted to minimise any risk. If an informant would have been in need of debriefing, I would have referred to the educational or clinical psychologists who were part of the SISU team (as set out in the letter of information and in the ethics application of the SISU project) for further assistance.

### **1.7.2 Deception of Informants**

All information regarding this study was available to be shared with the informants of this study at any stage of the research process (Creswell, 2009). I explained clearly to primary informants that the aim of the study is to find out more about how they have been able to adapt to, and do well in, first grade.

### **1.7.3 Privacy and Confidentiality**

When visual methods are used in research, additional ethical principles need to be considered (see Cox, Drew, Guillemin, Howell, War & Waycott, 2014). Visual methods have implications for the safeguarding of informants' personal data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Besides the anonymity of the informants, I also needed to consider the anonymity of bystanders or others who willingly posed for a photograph with the primary informant, for example, peers. I kept anonymity of informants and bystanders by explaining to informants that if any faces appear on photographs taken at school or home of teachers, friends, siblings or parents, these faces will be blocked out in any images or photos included in the research document.

Some primary informants wanted to know who was going to see their drawings and photographs. I explained by referring to the assent form (see Appendix E) that explained that lecturers, students and other academics and the public may see it, only with the primary informant's permission. This was acceptable to them.

Furthermore, the storage of the drawings, photographs, and recorded interviews was discussed with the informants, explaining that they will be needed until the submission of the study. I assured informants of the safe keeping of this data for ten years thereafter in storage. Informants were offered copies or photographs of their drawings and copies of the recorded individual interviews if they requested so.

#### **1.7.4 Accuracy**

I saw to it that a true reflection of informants' accounts was part of this study. No unethical matters such as fabrications, omissions, or fraudulent material formed part of this research study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

#### **1.7.5 Safekeeping of Records**

Data management included the safekeeping of records. All digital and non-digital data were stored on a secure laptop with regular back-ups made. Authorised access to the data was implemented (Corti, 2008).

### **1.8 CHAPTER DIVISION**

This section provides an overview of the chapters included in this doctoral study. Table 4 below summarises Chapter 2 to 5. Chapter 6 which is the final chapter is summarised below Table 4.

Table 4

*Summary of Chapters 2 to 5*

| Chapter 2                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Chapter 3                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Chapter 4                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Chapter 5                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Manuscript 1: Positive adjustment to first grade following parental divorce: A scoping review.</li> <li>•Prepared for South African Journal of Childhood Education.</li> <li>•Referencing style: APA 6<sup>th</sup> Edition</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Manuscript 2: Ordinary, holistic teacher actions and children's positive adjustment to first grade following parental divorce.</li> <li>•Prepared for: Early Childhood Research Quarterly.</li> <li>•Referencing style: APA 6<sup>th</sup> Edition</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Manuscript 3: Children's positive adjustment to first grade when parents are divorced: The roles of significant adults.</li> <li>•Prepared for: Child Development.</li> <li>•Referencing style: APA 6<sup>th</sup> Edition</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Manuscript 4: Positive adjustment to first grade following parental divorce: Lessons for SPs in advocating resilience-enabling systems</li> <li>•Prepared for: School Psychology International.</li> <li>•Referencing style: APA 6<sup>th</sup> Edition</li> </ul> |

Chapter 6 is the final chapter of this doctoral study and includes the conclusions, reflections, limitations, and recommendations for future studies. Thereafter it is followed by a master reference list (i.e. a list of all the references cited in this doctoral study) as well as the 9 addendums relevant to the content of this doctoral study.

## 1.9 CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the rationale for my PhD study. This chapter presented how I divided this PhD study into four meaningful articles. The methodology informing each article was also summarised. The following four chapters are dedicated to these articles.



## CHAPTER 2

Manuscript 1, “Positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce: A scoping review” answers two research questions: (i) “*What is known about the social ecological processes that support positive school adjustment of first graders in general?*” and (ii) “*Which social ecological processes support the positive adjustment to school of first grade children of divorced parents?*”

Prepared for submission to *Educational Psychology Review* (see Appendix F) for author guidelines). I am aware that this manuscript exceeds the prescribed word limit.

Authors: C. Bezuidenhout, L.C. Theron<sup>1</sup>, E. Fritz<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Professor Linda Theron and <sup>2</sup>Doctor Elzette Fritz is the co-authors of all my research articles since the policy of North-West University is to give recognition to the promoters who assist in the development of doctoral studies.

### Abstract

This article reviews studies reporting on social ecologies' support of positive adjustment to school of First Graders despite parental divorce. Despite applying a comprehensive search strategy, we found only 25 articles applicable to positive adjustment to first grade and no articles that involved both positive adjustment to first grade as well as parental divorce. Masten's Shortlist of Resilience, which details 6 protective factors, was used to deductively analyse the included articles to better understand children's positive adjustment to first grade. Results showed that attachments (e.g., to parents, teachers, peers) were the predominant protective factor. In conclusion, the scoping review highlights two knowledge gaps: a dearth of studies specifically focusing on social ecologies that are supportive of first grade adjustment despite parental divorce; and studies which position first graders as the primary informants in accounts of why and how some children of divorced parents adjust well to first grade.

*Keywords:* Masten's Shortlist of Resilience; parental divorce; positive adjustment to first grade; protective factors; resilience; social ecologies

### Positive Adjustment to First Grade Despite Parental Divorce: A Scoping Review

This article reports on a scoping review on positive adjustment to school of first grade children of divorced parents. The rationale for this scoping review relates to the usefulness of such reviews in determining “knowledge gaps” (Tricco et al., 2016, p. 1). The aim of this scoping review is to determine if there is an adequate knowledge base that can be used to explain the social ecological processes that enable positive school adjustment of first grade children whose parents are divorced. From comments by Kumpulainen et al. (2016) it would appear that what is currently known about what enables positive adjustment to first grade is under-theorized. Addressing this gap is important because an adequate knowledge-base is needed to inform the resilience-enabling practices of key stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, and friends of the first grade child. Positive adjustment to school has different meanings for these different stakeholders who are involved in the process (Peters, 2010). They all play a role in building a stable educational foundation during the adjustment process. Therefore, having comprehensive knowledge about the process of positive school adjustment despite the co-occurring risk of parental divorce has the potential to support these stakeholders to champion resilience. In the course of this scoping review it will also become clear which parts of the process are currently inadequately understood. This will offer meaningful direction for follow-up empirical work that can, in turn, provide insights that could further capacitate these stakeholders.

### **Literature: Positive Adjustment to First Grade**

Adjustment to first grade is one of the many transitions that children will face in the course of their lives and often the most challenging one in the early years of development (Reynolds, Weissberg, & Kaspro, 1992). Transitioning to primary school is a complex process that plays an important role in children’s subsequent effective functioning and is “a

pivotal life transition for children and their families” (Sayers et al., 2012, p. 45). Generally, children associate transitions with a period of potential threat (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008).

Docket and Perry (2001) explain that entering formal education for the first time is seen as a turning point in children’s lives. It is a process of adjustment, during which children as well as their parents need to adjust to a number of changes. These changes include adjustment to the physical school environment, as well as adjustment to changes in social status and identity (Hirst, Jervis, Visagie, Sojo, & Cavanagh, 2011). In addition, children must adjust to the demands of a structured learning environment in which they have to reach predetermined academic outcomes and acquire skills like reading and spelling, and doing mathematics (Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005). Their daily routine also changes since they need to attend a full day of school with rest breaks that are scheduled and shorter than those to which they are accustomed. Their attention span is stretched further when they need to sustain concentration on formal academic tasks and the acquisition of information. The discovery of new social roles with peers is also part of the change that requires adjustment (Sink, Edward, & Weir, 2007). Thus, during this process during which the child reorganises his/her inner world has changed and adjusts his/her actions accordingly, it is not unusual for some children to experience some distress and adjustment difficulties (Phatudi, 2007). In summary then, adjustment to school is a multifaceted process that can challenge children’s wellbeing.

However, in the society in which children find themselves today, positive adjustment to school is not the only potential risk with which they are faced. In South Africa, as in other global South as well as global North contexts, many children face multiple co-occurring risks (Hyppolite, 2017). For example, such risks include the direct and indirect challenges associated with the HIV pandemic, increasing crime and violence, acts of terrorism, and/or parental divorce (Theron & Theron, 2010). Such additional risks may complicate children’s

lives further and challenge their well-being, making positive adjustment to first grade even more complex (Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2012).

For the purposes of this article, divorce is singled out as a risk that complicates the adjustment to first grade. Fitzgibbons (2016) states that “divorce is killing our children...” (p. 1). Worldwide the detrimental effects of parental divorce on children are well known. In South Africa, according to Fagan and Churchill (2012), divorce, in becoming more common, harms our society. Statistics South Africa (2016) indicated that the divorce rate in South Africa increased by 3.4% from 2013 to 2014. Although a decrease in percentage occurred in 2015, there was still a 2.3% rise of more divorce cases processed in 2015 than in 2014 (Statistics South Africa, 2017). In total, 55.6% of these divorces affected children under 18 years of age. What happens in children’s personal lives affects their behaviour and performance at school (Nielsen, 1993). For a first grade child, parental divorce can cause her or him to be distracted and/or unmotivated as well present with attention difficulties and/or psychosomatic symptoms, all of which have the potential to disrupt school attendance and/or school engagement (Gunsberg & Hymowitz, 2013).

Although parental divorce may compound the challenge of adjustment to first grade, some children from divorced families cope well with this adjustment (Kumpulainen, et al., 2016; Pedro-Carroll, 2011). Accordingly, this scoping review investigates the resilience of these first grade children. In this article, resilience is understood from an ecological systems perspective (Masten, 2001, 2014c; Ungar, 2011). From this perspective, resilience is seen to be a process of constructive adjustment that is socio-ecologically supported. Masten and Wright (2010) refer to key socio-ecological protective factors that enable resilience and have identified these protective factors in what is known as Masten’s Shortlist of Resilience. The Shortlist identifies “characteristics of individuals and their environments that contribute to good outcome when risk or adversity [is] high” (Wright, Masten, & Narayan, 2013, p. 21).

The protective factors include attachment relationships; agency, mastery and motivational systems; intelligence or the capacity to solve problems; self-regulation; meaning making; cultural traditions and religion (Masten & Wright, 2010).

All six these factors imply the input of social ecological factors (such as competent parents who teach and/or model self-regulation or teachers who appreciate child-initiated agency) that support children to achieve functional outcomes (such as positive adjustment to first grade) in the midst of adversities (Southwick, Bonanno, Masten, Panter-Brick, & Yehuda, 2014). The emphasis on social ecological contributions relates to the Social Ecology of Resilience Theory (SERT) (Ungar, 2011, 2012). SERT is the theoretical framework on which this scoping review is based. SERT explains that positive outcomes in the midst of adversity are the result of facilitative environments (or social ecologies) that nurture positive outcomes in individuals who are at risk for negative outcomes (Ungar, 2013b). SERT is suitable to use because it provides a lens through which positive outcomes (in this case, positive adjustment to school) despite adversity (like parental divorce) can be explained in terms of facilitative environments (home, school etc.). SERT emphasizes that resilience requires interactions between children and their environments in ways that optimize developmental processes (Ungar, 2011, 2013a). Thus, resilience is the capacity of individual children as well as the environmental factors that enable success under stress (Chen & George, 2005). It includes the child's ability to steer towards resources that are health-sustaining, along with the social ecology's capacity to provide the child with meaningful (i.e., developmentally, contextually, and culturally relevant) opportunities to experience well-being (Ungar, 2011, 2013a).

## **Method**

This scoping review is based on the five-stage framework of Arksey and O'Malley (2005) as well as the guidelines for scoping reviews from The Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) (2015). Stage 1: Identifying the research question is the starting point; this outlines the questions the review will be addressing. Stage 2: Identifying relevant studies, is comprised of a comprehensive identification of studies that answer the research questions. Stage 3: Study selection, includes applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria to determine selected studies. Stage 4: Charting the data, includes synthesising and interpreting techniques for qualitative data. Stage 5: Collating, summarising and reporting the results, concludes with prioritising certain details of the literature and reporting on the results.

### **Stage 1: Identifying the question**

Two questions informed this scoping review:

- (i) What is known about the social ecological processes that support positive school adjustment of first graders in general?
- (ii) Which social ecological processes support the positive adjustment to school of first grade children of divorced parents?

### **Stage 2: Identifying relevant studies**

Identifying and selecting relevant studies that have the potential to answer the questions formulated in Stage 1 (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The process of identifying studies relevant to the first question was a collaborative one that the first author co-conducted with a fellow PhD student whose study was also focused on positive transitioning to first grade. In the detail that follows I refer to her as Reviewer 1 and to myself (i.e., the first author) as Reviewer 2. I facilitated the process of identifying studies relevant to the second question.

Identifying relevant studies to question 1 commenced on 9 March 2016 and ended on 18 April 2016. The identification of relevant studies applicable to question 2 started on 9

March 2016 and ended on 30 April 2016. However, to ensure that the latest and relevant studies were included, the search for identifying relevant studies for both questions was conducted again from 21 to 27 January 2017. During both search phases the same search terms and search engines were used. Table 1 indicates these search terms.

Table 1

*Search terms informing literature search I*

|                   | <b>Resilience synonyms</b>    | <b>Child synonyms</b> | <b>School synonyms</b>            |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Reviewer 1</b> | Resilience ( $x_1$ )          | Child ( $Y_1$ )       | School ( $Z_1$ )                  |
|                   | Resilient ( $x_2$ )           | Boy ( $Y_2$ )         | Elementary school                 |
|                   | Resiliency ( $x_3$ )          | Girl ( $Y_3$ )        | ( $Z_2$ )                         |
| <b>Reviewer 2</b> | Protective ( $x_4$ )          | Early years ( $Y_4$ ) | Primary school ( $Z_3$ )          |
|                   | Positive adjustment ( $x_5$ ) | Student ( $Y_5$ )     | Classroom ( $Z_4$ )               |
|                   | Positive adaptation ( $x_6$ ) | Learner ( $Y_6$ )     | Teacher ( $Z_5$ )                 |
|                   |                               |                       | Education ( $Z_6$ )               |
|                   |                               |                       | First grade ( $Z_7$ )             |
|                   |                               |                       | Grade 1 ( $Z_8$ )                 |
|                   |                               |                       | Formal school ( $Z_9$ )           |
|                   |                               |                       | School transition<br>( $Z_{10}$ ) |

For the literature search to answer question 2, all the search terms indicated in Table 1 were applied, together with the risk-specific search term of divorce ( $R_1$ ).

No limitations were set for publication dates. The first author followed Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) recommendation to use a wide approach to generate breadth of coverage.



Studies were identified during systematic searches that matched the keyword combinations. Onesearch and EbscoHost were used as electronic databases for the systematic searches of both research questions. A three-way search was conducted with each of the synonyms in combination; and a four-way search included all the synonyms in combination with the keyword *divorce* added to all the searches.

For question1, this process resulted in 65 449 hits in either the title and/or abstract. This included duplicates across the search term combinations. For question 2 hits obtained in either the title and/or abstract led to 486 results. There were no duplicates between the results of Question 1 and Question 2.

### **Stage 3: Study Selection**

Following JBI (2015) we (i.e., reviewers 1 and 2) screened the identified studies in order to determine which were relevant and developed inclusion and exclusion criteria and applied them.

The following inclusion criteria had to be met:

Question 1 (i.e. Studies relating to positive adjustment to first grade):

- i) Empirical studies had to report on the adjustment to first grade of children aged 6 to 7 years.
- ii) The study had to have been published in English.
- iii) The studies had to have been peer reviewed.

Question 2 (i.e. Studies related to positive adjustment to first grade and the additional risk of parental divorce):

- i) Research studies had to report on first grade adjustment of children aged 6 to 7 years whose parents were divorced.
- ii) The study had to have been published in English.
- iii) The studies had to have been peer reviewed full text ones.

Because of the large number of hits, exclusion criteria were also of importance to guide decisions about which literature would be irrelevant to this scoping review. We excluded all studies:

- i) in which resilience was narrowly conceptualized as a personal trait or quality;
- ii) that were about 6 – 7 year olds but who were not in first grade; and
- iii) that were intervention studies including those targeting adjustment to first grade.

With regard to question 2, the above exclusion criteria were applied. The following was also applied as an exclusion criterion: All studies that focused on risks other than only parental divorce.

Application of the filter *peer reviewed* reduced the number of hits. For question 1, this process reduced 65 449 hits in either the title and/or abstract to 39 751. This included possible duplicates across the search term combinations. The hits on Question 2 were reduced from 486 to 247 after *peer reviewed* and *full text* filters were selected. However, after the rest of the inclusion/exclusion criteria were applied results for question 1 were reduced to 373 and for question 2 results were reduced to 0; there were no relevant articles applicable to question 2.

During a consensus meeting we (the reviewers) presented the results to our study leaders. During this consensus meeting the exclusion criteria were further discussed and extended to exclude all intervention studies (i.e. studies that aimed to facilitate positive adjustment to school) and/or articles without a clear conceptualization of resilience (e.g. in which resilience was the focus but not defined). Thereafter the two reviewers independently applied the extended exclusion criteria which then resulted in 97 articles. We met again after this and discussed each article and applied the extended exclusion criteria once again during our discussion. This then reduced the number of articles to 28 for Question 1. During the next meeting we presented these results to our study leaders and after further discussion, the

articles were reduced to 19 articles for Question 1. However, after the follow-up 2017 three-way search, 6 articles were added after the inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied; the final number of articles for Question 1 was 25, as presented in the following flowchart.

*Results for Question 1 (What is known about the social ecological processes that support positive school adjustment of first graders in general?) are as follow:*

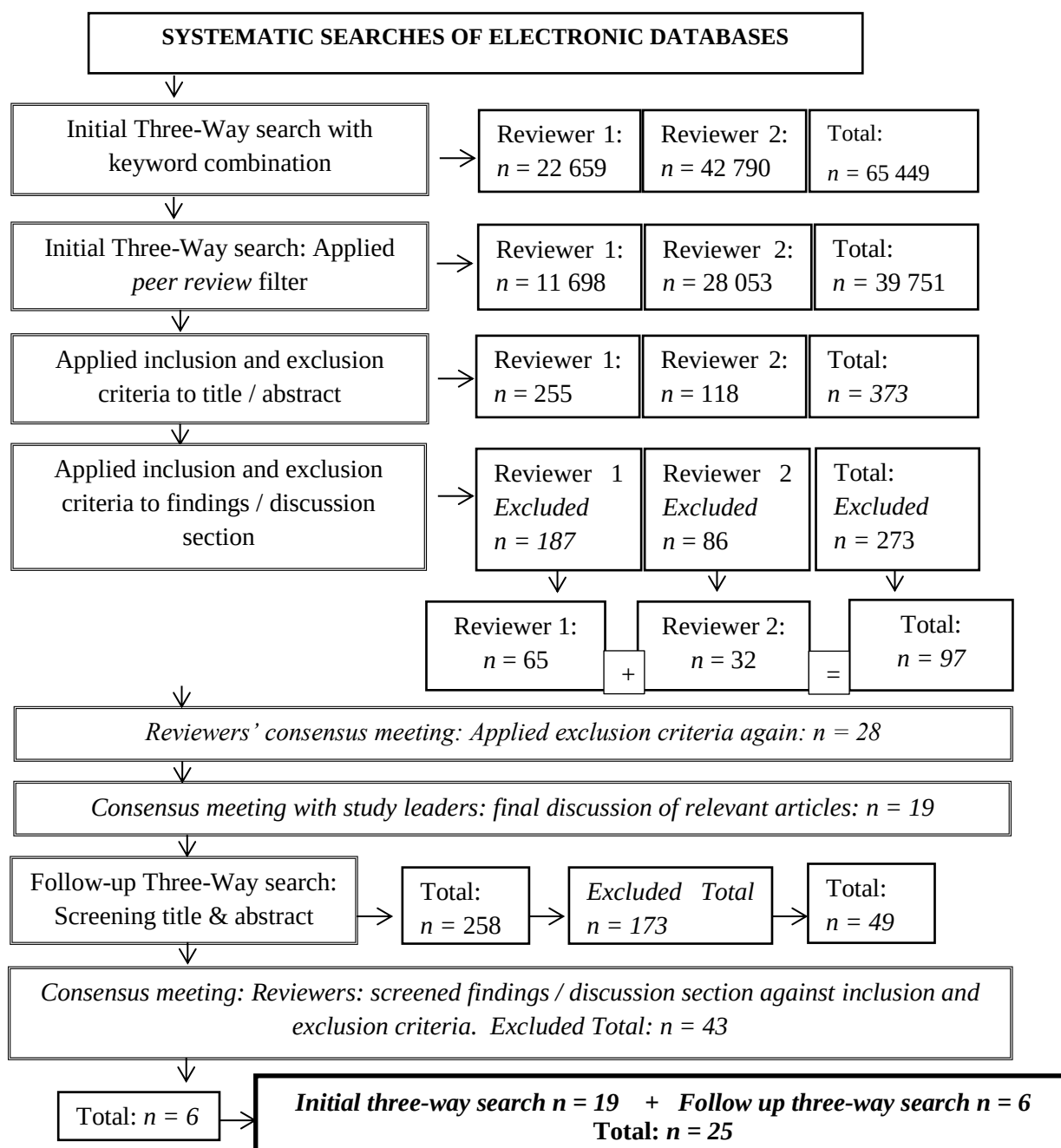


Figure 1. Flowchart of search results for Question 1 (What is known about the social ecological processes that support positive school adjustment of first graders in general?)

The search results for Question 2 were also presented to the study leaders. The presentation indicated that there were no articles that fitted with the inclusion and exclusion criteria for Question 2. Even after the 2017 follow-up four-way search, no articles provided an answer so Question 2 fell away, as seen in the following visual representation.

*Results for Question 2: (Which social ecological processes support the positive adjustment to school of First Grade children from divorced parents?)*

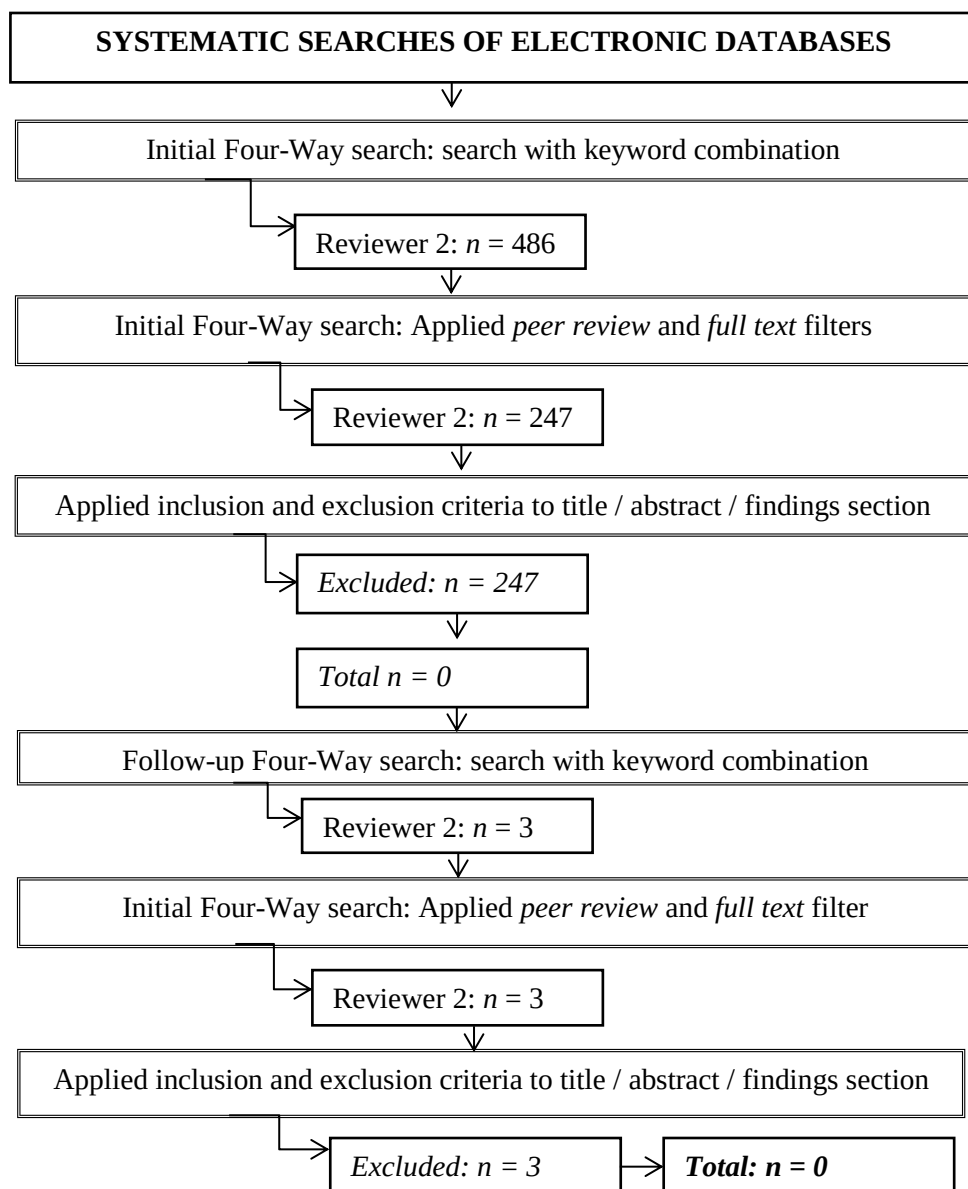


Figure 2. Flowchart of search results for Question 2 (Which social ecological processes support the positive adjustment to school of First Grade children from divorced parents?)

**Stage 4: Data charting and analysis**

First, the first author charted the data by summarising key aspects of the 25 studies included. This summary can be found under the supplemental material (Supplemental Table 1) and is organised according to six specific categories (i.e. year of publication and author of the study; study aim; participant information; research method; and findings). Following Armstrong, Hall, Doyle and Waters (2011), the Supplemental Table as part of charting the data offers a summary of the relevant literature, but without evaluating the quality of included studies.

Second, the first author analysed the included 25 articles using a set of pre-determined resilience codes, namely Masten's Shortlist of Resilience (Masten & Wright, 2010) (see Supplemental Table 2). Thus, following Creswell (2014a), the analysis was done deductively. In line with Wright et al. (2013), Masten's Shortlist was seen to be a suitable analysis framework because it focuses on the various mechanisms that tie an individual's internal resources to external connections in her/his environment that enable positive outcomes. In this way it coheres with SERT.

Wright and Masten (2010) refer to the Shortlist that includes the following protective factors: first, attachment relationships and social support refers to the forming and sustaining of meaningful relationships and attachment bonds with others. In early childhood this support could include forming close relationships with parents, or teachers, or friends. Second, agency and mastery motivation system relate to the motivation to adapt to the environment and demonstrate intrinsic motivation. During adjustment to first grade, children need to be able to adapt to the new school environment and motivate themselves to adjust to new challenges. Intelligence draws on the intellectual skills such as good problem-solving ability and the capacity for executive functions. These are important skills that first graders need to demonstrate during academic tasks. Third, intellectual skills are highly linked to good problem-solving and executive function skills that predict good adaptation under

circumstances of adversity. First graders need to demonstrate their problem-solving skills as well as their ability to apply executive function skills that demonstrate their ability to control their own behaviour and emotions. Fourth, self-regulation is the capacity to control one's behaviour and systems to regulate attention, arousal, emotion, and action. First graders are confronted with new emotions and reactions during their adjustment to first grade which they need to control and regulate. Fifth, meaning making is supported by beliefs found in faith, hope, and trust in a Higher Power or in people, and by optimism that life has meaning. During adjustment to first grade children have to interpret their new experiences and make meaning of them. Last, cultural traditions and religion include beliefs, rituals, and practices that help children deal with expected and unexpected adversities. Culture is also found within classrooms and could also enable resilience (Yan, 2016).

The aforementioned six mechanisms formed the list of literature-based or a priori codes that informed the data analysis, following Saldaña (2016). Masten's Shortlist of Resilience (Masten & Wright, 2010) offers a list of codes that are compatible with the social ecological approach to resilience that frames this work. The first author applied this list to the 25 articles and coded all the articles separately for each protective factor by reading the findings and discussion sections. Phrases or sentences that provided evidence of the protective factor in question were then labelled accordingly (see Supplementary Table 2).

### **Stage 5: Collating, summarising, and reporting the results**

A numerical analysis of the research design of the 25 studies included in the literature review was conducted. Of the 25 articles, 10 studies (presented in chronological order), (Smith & Prior, 1995; Balboni & Pedrabissi, 1998; Prevatt, 2003; Skowron, 2005; Baker, 2006; Betts, Rotenberg, & Trueman, 2014; Arbeau, Coplan, & Weeks, 2010; Obradović, 2010; Yan, 2016; Kiuru et al., 2016) adopted a quantitative design while 8 were qualitative studies (Cefai, 2007; Chawla, Keena, Pevec, & Stanley, 2014; Taket, Nolan, & Stagnitti, 2014;

Kumpulainen et al., 2016; Correia-Zanin & Marturano, 2016; McDermott, Rikoon, & Fantuzzo, 2016; Wong, 2016), and 7 made use of mixed methods (Donelan-McCall & Dunn, 1997; Ladd & Burgess, 2001; Perry, Donohue, & Weinstein, 2007; Burchinal, Roberts, Zeisel, Hennon, & Hooper, 2006; O'Brien Caughy, Nettles, & O'Campo, 2007; Ebersöhn, 2008; Choy & Karupiah, 2016). Only 1 study (Ebersöhn, 2008) had a child focus (i.e. it reported the child's perspective on what supports positive adjustment to first grade). A total of 16 studies (Balboni & Pedrabissi, 1998; Ladd & Burgess, 2001; Prevatt, 2003; Skowron, 2005; Baker, 2006; Burchinal et al., 2006; O'Brien Caughy et al., 2007; Obradović, 2010; Betts et al., 2014; Taket et al., 2014; Choy & Karupiah, 2016; Correia-Zanin & Marturano, 2016; Kiuru et al., 2016; McDermott et al., 2016; Yan, 2016, Yan, Zhou, & Ansari, 2016) reported an adult-only focus with adult scripted input via written assessments, scales and questionnaires (i.e. the parents' or teachers' perspectives and scripts about what supported children's positive adjustment to first grade) and 8 studies (Smith & Prior, 1995; Donelan-McCall & Dunn, 1997; Perry et al., 2007; Cefai, 2007; Arbeau et al., 2010; Chawla et al., 2014; Kumpulainen et al., 2016; Wong, 2016) had mixed perspectives (i.e. they reported on both child and adult explanations of the child's positive adjustment to first grade). Furthermore, 11 of the 25 studies documented research done in North America – this includes 10 studies in the USA and 1 in Canada (Prevatt, 2003; Skowron, 2005; Baker, 2006; Burchinal et al., 2006; O'Brien Caughy et al., 2007; Arbeau et al., 2010; Obradović, 2010; Chawla et al., 2014; Yan, 2016; McDermott et al., 2016; Yan et al., 2016). Five studies reported research conducted in Europe (Donelan-McCall & Dunn, 1997; Balboni & Pedrabissi, 1998; Cefai, 2007; Betts et al., 2014). Two studies were conducted in Asia (Choy & Karupiah, 2016; Wong, 2016); and another two in Australia (Smith & Prior, 1995; Taket et al., 2014). One study was conducted in South America (Correia-Zanini & Marturano, 2016); another one in Africa (Ebersöhn, 2008); and one other study involved a country in

Africa and Europe (Kumpulainen et al., 2016). Two studies did not specify the country of research (Ladd & Burgess, 2001; Perry et al., 2007). Thus, 18 studies in which the location is known focused on Northern hemisphere and developed countries. Only four studies included Southern hemisphere research of which two were developed countries. There were only two studies that included developing countries (defined as countries with a lower standard of living and industrialization, and a low Human Development Index; Pariona, 2017). Thus the gap in knowledge pertains to research that focuses on children's adjustment to first grade in developing countries in the Southern hemisphere.

### **Findings**

The findings below focus on the contribution of the social ecologies towards first graders' positive adjustment to first grade. These findings are presented in descending order; the psychosocial competency that contributed the most to children's positive adjustment to first grade, according to the 25 articles, is reported first while that which was least reported is mentioned last.

#### **Attachment Relationships with Parents, Teachers, and Peers**

In general, having meaningful relationships supported the adjustment to first grade by supporting first graders' social engagement abilities; emotional development; school liking; peer acceptance; and the ability to learn. Of the 25 articles, 19 (76%) referred to meaningful relationships with parents, teachers, or peers. Of these articles, 2 highlighted the individual first graders' responsibility to form meaningful relationships while 13 emphasized the social ecological duty to connect with the transitioning child (i.e. teachers, parents, and peers were responsible for forming resilience-enabling relationships with first graders). Only 5 articles drew attention to both the individual child and the social ecologies such as teachers, parents, peers, and the physical environment or neighbourhood to form and maintain the attachment relationship.



For example, Smith and Prior (1995) used teacher ratings to indicate the child's ability to engage with others. They did not measure how well teachers engaged with their students. Similarly, Betts et al. (2009), discussed the importance of the individual child's being aware of how she/he is perceived by others since this contributed to the formation of relationships that supported her/his positive school adjustment.

Examples of studies focusing only on social ecologies (e.g. Donelan-McCall & Dunn, 1997) found maternal involvement in the first grader's life in general to be a protective factor that enhances the ability to form attachment relationships. Prevatt (2003) indicated that family protective factors such as positive parenting enabled children's adaptive behaviour and that family social support and family functioning enabled positive adjustment to school. The study by Burchinal et al. (2006) confirmed that parents' responsive and stimulating parenting is a protective factor. Also, O'Brien Caughy et al. (2007) indicated how the expression of parents' higher affection and lower hostility levels towards their children were related to fewer behavioural difficulties that first graders experience and that this was associated with overall adjustment. Parents and caregivers, who were specifically supportive, involved, and loving toward their child also supported children's resilience (Ebersöhn, 2008). Another example of how mothers fostered resilience and attachment relationships was their support of the development of their child's social skills and problem solving skills as part of self-regulation that enabled positive peer interactions (Taket et al., 2014). Chawla et al. (2014) found that the physical ecology of natural play areas facilitated resilience when it provided opportunities for children to form supportive social relationships during play at the natural play areas. Kumpulainen et al. (2016) found that constructive relationships with many people such as parents, grandparents, siblings, teachers, and community members contributed to a child's positive adjustment to school. The study by Kiuru et al. (2016) explained that, for positive school adjustment, at least one high quality relationship is

necessary with either a teacher or a mother. Within this relationship there should then be evidence that the adult is responsible for the support of, and positive affect towards, the child. In the study by Perry et al. (2007), positive adjustment to first grade was shown to have been facilitated when teachers were in tune with their students by being aware of their skills and interests. Choy and Karuppiyah's (2016) study emphasized how collaborative relationships in which teachers and parents work together by communicating to children about, and preparing them for, first grade during the transition process, contributed to positive adjustment to first grade.

Studies indicating that both child and social ecologies are responsible for forming meaningful relationships included Ladd and Burgess (2001). This study referred to reciprocal support between first graders and others in their social ecologies (e.g. friendships with peers) that can lead to reduction in maladjustment. Another example was in the study by Skowron (2005) in which the child's ability to maintain meaningful relational connections with others is an important factor for healthy functioning and so, too, are factors such as parents' capacity to handle stress, regulate emotion, and promote autonomy and intimacy that contribute to positive family relations and serve as a protective factor for the child. Baker (2006) wrote about a first grade child's internal and external behaviour and how it impacts on forming meaningful relationships and also acknowledged that the warmth and trust that teachers bring to the forming of a positive relationship also enables adjustment. Similarly, Cefai (2007) referred to the capacity of the first grade child to connect and be affiliated with peers and teachers and how this relationship created an emotionally and physically safe classroom environment that supported positive adjustment and also noted how teachers specifically build relationships as a manner of support. Another example pointed to shy first graders who were able to form a close teacher-pupil relationship and how the teacher's

warmth and closeness enabled these first graders to cope better with starting school (Arbeau et al., 2010).

### **Agency and Mastery Motivation System Demonstrated in First Grade**

Generally, articles about school adjustment indicated that first grade children's agency and mastery contributed to their positive adjustment to first grade because it supported their being actively involved in learning and in social activities that developed their self-efficacy, ability to cope, feeling competent, and motivating themselves. Of the 25 articles 14 (56%) discussed the agency and mastery motivation system. Of these articles 7 emphasized that agency and mastery is an intrinsic characteristic of the individual child while 5 focused on the social ecology's role to establish agency during the adjustment to first grade (i.e. classroom practices, families, and the physical environment were responsible for creating opportunities during which agency and mastery could be showcased). Not a single article mentioned how both the first grader and the social ecology contributed towards first graders' agency and mastery during the period of adjustment to first grade. For instance, regarding the child's agency, Smith and Prior (1995) described agency in the first grader as a trait, having high estimations of ability to cope and to do things well in general. Donelan-McCall and Dunn (1997) reported on agency in first graders whose preschool relationship with siblings was marked by conflict and dispute and how these first graders may have compensated for these relationships by forming more positive interactions with peers and teachers. In the study by Ebersöhn (2008), agency related to children who were determined to be successful academically and who were creative in making their own decisions. Agency was also evident in children's effortful control (i.e. a range of executive functions that enables children's intended and inherent manipulation of their behaviour and attention) indicating academic competence and competency during social interactions with peers (Obradović, 2010). Wong (2016) wrote about how children who adjusted well to first grade

were able to use direct problem-solving skills which indicated agency when they practised self-help skills and academic revision exercises. Yan (2016) described mastery motivation as a prediction factor for children's resilience in academic performance. He also found that mastery motivation was evident when children demonstrated the ability to shift their attention away from stressors and engage in activities that they had learned to master.

Articles mentioning the social ecology providing opportunities for agency or mastery motivation related mostly to teachers and classroom practices. For example, Perry et al. (2007) noted that teachers who offered more social-emotional and instructional support provided opportunities for children to acquire better mathematical skills. These children had more positive perceptions regarding their academic abilities that led to mastery motivation. Classroom practices offered agency opportunities for children when they could actively engage with and help each other, receive recognition for their efforts, accomplishments, and improvements; and have positive beliefs and expectations related to their efforts (Cefai, 2007). Yan (2016) also found that positive emotional climates in classrooms of children with mothers who have depressive symptoms was a protective factor that resulted in these first graders' social competence that enabled their interactions with peers that resulted in positive adjustment to first grade. Furthermore, a study by Skowron (2005) indicated that the family as social ecology (when it had closeness and intimacy), contributed to first grade children's mastery of academic competence. Moreover, Chawla et al. (2014) described how schoolyards provide opportunities for children to experience feelings of competence while they play.

There are two studies (Correira-Zanini & Marturano, 2016; McDermott et al., 2016) that mention achievements and competence motivation that was relevant to adjusting well to first grade. However, neither study indicated the social ecologies or individual traits that enabled these factors.

**Intelligence that Supports Positive Adjustment to First Grade**

In general, articles that focused on intelligence being supportive of positive adjustment to first grade explained how intelligence enabled children to demonstrate problem-solving skills and to have understanding in academic and social circumstances. Intelligence assisted effortful control skills (i.e. executive functions involving a child's deliberate, internal manipulation behaviour and attention) that are implicated in an individual's capacity to control his/her own behaviour and emotions. Of the 25 articles, 9 (36%) included intelligence. Of these, 6 drew on intelligence as individually constructed (i.e. the individual first grader's inherent strength) and 2 reported intelligence as a capacity that is constructed as a social ecology by role players in the child's life. One article mentioned the importance of intelligence during adjustment to first grade, but did not specify if this competency was an individual strength or if it was constructed by the social ecology.

An example of a study that found intelligence in first graders to be an inherent individual factor supportive of positive adjustment to first grade, was that by Smith and Prior (1995). Here it was evident that IQ was related to self-regulation processes that, in turn, relate to social competence when children process and evaluate their social interactions, and that lead to school adaptability. Likewise, Donelan-McCall and Dunn (1997) established that children with high emotional intelligence demonstrated sophistication in their understanding of social interactions that supported their peer interactions. Children with poor social cognitive abilities struggled to sustain interactions with peers. A study by Burchinal et al. (2006) specifically focused on a child's language skills as an indicator of intelligence because it facilitates academic achievement and is thus seen as a protective factor. Obradović's (2010) study stated that IQ could predict academic competence. This study also found a relationship between a child's IQ and her/his effortful control which forms part of self-regulation. The importance here is that effortful control was related to positive school adjustment in first

grade. Furthermore, Wong (2016) included children's problem-solving skills as important during adjustment to first grade. Being able to use problem-solving skills is part of intelligence. Yan (2016) drew upon the relationship between a child's intelligence and its impact on the child's active agency to be able to engage and be motivated since this enables resilience.

An example of studies focusing on how intelligence was constructed as part of the social ecology is that of Choy and Karuppiah (2016) that demonstrated teachers' and parents' support in developing children's language and communication skills and social skills also supported their adjustment to first grade. Yan's (2016) study found that cognitive development that is related to intelligence was supported by a positive emotional classroom and showed how this classroom climate was a protective factor during adjustment.

### **Self-regulation Capacity**

The capacity for first graders to generally self-regulate during adjustment to school included their being able to control their emotions and behaviour during the time of transition. Self-regulation supported positive school adjustment because it enabled first graders to be in control of the environment despite the emotional challenge that they may have been experiencing. First graders were then able to regulate attention, emotion, arousal, and actions without a high emotional reaction during challenges. Of the 25 articles, 10 (40%) provided evidence of self-regulation. Of these 10 studies, 5 reported on children's responsibility to self-regulate; 2 spoke about the role of the social ecology in supporting children's self-regulation; 2 mentioned how both the child and social ecology played a role; and 1 identified self-regulation but without specifying who or what is responsible for it.

Smith and Prior (1995), for example, identified the child's positive temperament (high social engagement and low emotional reactivity) as an individual factor enabling self-regulation that supports adjusting well to first grade. Also, Skowron (2005) drew the

conclusion that a child's inherent ability to regulate emotion and maintain the "autonomous self" (p. 343) led to healthy functioning, necessary for adjusting positively to first grade. Similarly, Ebersöhn (2008) described the child's responsibility to regulate emotion as an "internal locus of control" (p. 14). Betts et al. (2014) commented on the importance of children's self-knowledge as being supportive of their maturity and positive orientation towards managing challenging situations and suggest that it promoted their adjustment to formal school. For Yan (2016) the ability to manage their behaviour, regulate their emotions, act in socially appropriate ways, and implement actions as planned (effortful control skills) supported first graders' adjustment to school.

Teacher practices provided one example of how the social ecology demonstrated responsibility for influencing self-regulation, as in the study by Perry et al. (2007). In this study, classrooms that were emotionally supportive were shown to provide socio-emotional and behavioural gains for children since they enabled them to regulate their behaviour and manage their social interactions with peers accordingly. Choy and Karuppiyah (2016) reported on the significance of the combined efforts of teachers and parents who communicated about the importance of developing children's self-help and emotional skills before and during their adjustment to first grade.

Taket et al. (2014) offered evidence of the individual child collaborating with the social ecology in the process of supporting self-regulation. For example, mothers implemented strategies to support children's self-regulation and the child was also able to demonstrate self-regulation in terms of managing emotions, skills, and actions in order to participate effectively in his/her environment. Likewise, Wong (2016) reported on teachers who took responsibility for facilitating children's self-help skills at the time of adjustment to first grade, but also when children applied these skills during problem-solving activities.

Correia-Zanini and Marturano's (2016) study found that the levels of children's stress symptoms were lowest at the end of first grade. However, they did not report on which social ecology or individual trait enabled the self-regulation process which resulted in low stress symptoms.

### **Cultural Traditions and Religion that Sustained Resilience**

Little evidence pointed to children's use of cultural traditions or religion that sustained resilience processes. Only 4 articles reported on the value of cultural traditions to first grade transitions. In 3 of these it was seen to be the responsibility of the social ecology, and in the other it was the task of both the first grade child and the social ecology to foster cultural traditions and/or religion. No studies made mention of only the first grader's drawing upon cultural traditions and/or religion for sustained resilience.

Studies that noted the role of social ecologies in facilitating cultural traditions and religion included that of Balboni and Pedrabissi (1998) who emphasized the importance of parents exemplifying the behavioural culture, for example obeying the rules and showing respect to others, of which they want their children to be a part. Also, Prevatt (2003) indicated that resilience was more evident in first graders whose families emphasized a moral/religious perspective during the adjustment to school. Cefai (2007) identified classrooms that supported positive adjustment to first graders as being "characterized by a ... culture where all members were included and provided with opportunities to succeed, caring relationships amongst the various members, and pro-social behaviour" (p. 128).

The study by Kumpulainen et al. (2016) pointed to the combined process of child and social ecology during which a child adhered to the cultural beliefs and norms that related to school when the parents enacted "parental coaching" (p. 134) resulting in the children's obeying the rules and norms of their school. For example, parents taught their children to



keep quiet and listen to the teacher. These teachings related to the national (or cultural) valuing of education as an important commodity.

### **Meaning Making during First Grade**

For general positive adjustment to first grade, meaning making was found in “processes such as ... [enacting] positive beliefs and expectations ...” (Cefai, 2007, p. 119). There was also little evidence of first grade children’s meaning making processes. Only 3 articles included evidence of such processes in first graders. In 2 of the 3 articles, the onus was on the first grader (Ebersöhn, 2008; Wong, 2016); while the third article focused on only the social ecology in that classroom practices enabled meaning making (Cefai, 2007).

Ebersöhn (2008) wrote that first graders’ optimism was one of the most important protective factors during their adjustment to formal school. This implies that when first grade children are optimistic about their school environment and the happenings within this environment, this optimism supports the meaning that they make of their surroundings and this enables their resilience. Furthermore, parents identified that when their child experienced social stress, the problem-solving skill demonstrated was a striving to understand the situation (Wong, 2016). Thus, making meaning was based on the hope in the child’s own understanding of the situation.

Cefai’s (2007) study is an example of how a social ecology facilitated meaning making. Here, classroom practices were described as facilitating actions so that children could trust in positive expectations and beliefs about themselves and their learning. These first grade children believed in their own abilities and had positive expectations of the abilities that supported their adjustment to formal schooling because of the processes of meaning making that the classroom (social ecology) enacted. Thus, it enabled first graders’ capacity to hope for better outcomes and improvement during the challenges they

experienced in first grade. No studies reported on both the individual child and social ecologies.

### **Discussion**

When we started working on this scoping review, our interest lay in establishing what is known about the social ecological processes that support positive school adjustment of first graders in general and, more particularly, of those whose parents are divorced. We used Masten's Shortlist of Resilience to identify which protective factors support children to adjust well to first grade. These protective factors are facilitated by both the individual and the social ecology (Masten & Wright, 2010). The Shortlist of Resilience fits well with SERT in its emphasis on the importance of facilitative environments that support positive outcomes (Ungar, 2013b). In the case of this article, our review indicates that the shortlisted protective factors were facilitated either by the first grade child; social ecologies such as teachers, peers and parents; or both the first grader and social ecologies.

Of interest is that all six shortlisted protective factors are apparently facilitative of children's positive adjustment to first grade. In all instances, children, their families, and/or their school ecologies were co-responsible for the relational, agency, mastery, intelligence, meaning-making, regulatory, and cultural processes that supported positive adjustment to first grade. This fits in with the increasing tendency to move away from explanations of resilience that hold children personally accountable for their resilience (Masten, 2014c; Ungar, 2011, 2015). Social ecologies co-produced positive adjustment to first graders in the following ways: positive parenting supported attachment relationships (Prevatt, 2003; Skowron, 2005); cultural traditions enabled first graders to cope with expected and unexpected challenges and to conform to traditions and beliefs that enable adjusting positively to school (Balboni & Pedrabissi, 1998; Cefai, 2007; Kumpulainen et al., 2016; Prevatt, 2003); supportive teachers enabled agency (Perry et al., 2007); classroom practices facilitated positive meaning making

(Cefai, 2007; Yan, 2016); and natural play areas assisted feelings of competence during play (Chawla et al., 2014).

An attachment relationship was the most commonly reported enabler of positive adjustment to first grade. As we know, from a social-ecological perspective, attachment relationships are an important aspect of resilience (Masten & Wright, 2010). Ungar (2011) also explains that resilience is constructed within relationships and that these relationships are interdependent. The attachment that develops in relationships that first graders form with role players therefore becomes a protective factor that champions their resilience and hence their positive adjustment to first grade.

Meaning making was the least commonly reported enabler of positive adjustment to first grade. Theron and Theron (2014) wrote that resilience research has paid little attention to meaning making processes. Of significance is the fact that resilience enablers can vary because of the developmental stages and the level of development that has occurred in specific children. Wong and Wong (2013) link meaning-making and development. The cognitive abilities of children in early childhood that are needed to construct meaning and make refined appraisals are not yet well developed and develop only later; this probably results in limited ability to reason and create meaning abstractly at this age (Masten & Cicchetti, 2016). Thus, protective factors, such as meaning making, that assist children to cope well with challenges, depend on their cognitive levels which affects, in turn, their ability to use protective factors like meaning making (Alvord & Grados, 2005). Moreover, Wright (2012) explained that the meaning making process in children often needs to be supported with concrete processes such as arts-based activities, especially during early childhood when verbal communication skills are not yet that well developed. Future research could thus focus on exploring first graders' meaning making process through the use of arts-based activities. Most important, though, is that the underreporting of meaning making processes

reinforces the salience of developmentally appropriate processes such as attachments to parents or teachers and calls for increased attention to how relationships could be used to support vulnerable children (such as those who are challenged by parental divorce) to accommodate the challenges of first grade.

The most obvious gap that this scoping review highlights pertains to positive school adjustment of first grade children of divorced parents. No studies answered the question of what enables positive adjustment to first grade for children of divorced parents. These results are indicative of the need for research that reports on why and how first graders adjust well to school despite parental divorce. With the worldwide growing divorce rate it is of great importance for psychologists and teachers to have information regarding the processes that enable and support positive adjustment to first grade, despite the challenge of parental divorce. Given that resilience is often risk specific (Riley & Masten, 2005), a commonly occurring pathway to resilience (such as attachment) might not be a protective factor against divorce. For example, although the family and attachments to parents are seen to be an important protective factor in children's lives, this perspective changes when parents are abusive or neglectful or untrustworthy (Thompson & Goodvin, 2016). In instances of divorce, children's trust in their parent/s can be broken (King, 2002), causing the family to stop being the common pathway that acts as a protective factor. In other words, studies that provide evidence of what supports children whose parents are divorced to adjust well to first grade form part of an important next step.

An additional gap pertains to the voices that dominated the 25 included studies. Of these, 13 represented accounts of both adults and children to explain first graders' positive adjustment to school, 11 studies reported the voices of adults on their experiences of first graders who adapted positively to school, and only 1 study reported first graders' accounts of their positive adjustment to formal school. There is a glaring absence of children's voices

explaining their own positive adjustment to first grade. Exenberger and Juen (2014) refer to a child-centred approach where “the child is the unit of analysis” (p. 24). This scoping review draws the conclusion that there is a need for research where children’s voices provide answers to questions concerning their own lives, in this case, their insights regarding what supports positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce.

There are limitations to this scoping review. The first relates to the search method that included only the electronic data bases of Onesearch and EbscoHost in that only articles that were identified by these databases according to the specific keyword searches were included. Second, unpublished reports that may have provided information regarding positive adjustment to first grade were not included. Third, a language bias was evident during the selection of articles because the inclusion criteria accommodated only studies that were published in English. Therefore valuable studies published in other languages may have been excluded. Furthermore, all intervention studies pertaining to positive adjustment to first grade were excluded. These studies could have provided insights into the ways in which systems facilitate adjustment by means of interventions.

### **Conclusion**

Masten, Monn, and Supkoff (2011) pointed out that there is interdependence between all adaptive systems that are supportive of resilience. The scoping review reported in this article confirms that all six psychosocial competencies reported by Masten and Wright (2010) support children to transition well to first grade. However, this confirmation rests on studies that were largely not specific to children in the Global South, as well as not being focused on children whose adjustment to first grade was complicated by parental divorce, or informed by children themselves. Thus, to understand how best to support Global South children, whose parents have divorced, to adjust well to first grade asks for studies that position Global South

first graders, who have experienced parental divorce, as primary informants in a study that explores children's positive adjustment to first grade.

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Table 1

*Summary of overall findings (Supplemental file)*

| <i>Country</i> | <i>Author/s of study</i> | <i>Year</i> | <i>Article name</i>                                                               | <i>Aim</i>                                                                                                                                               | <i>Participant Information</i>                                                                                                                                                                                              | <i>Research Design</i>                                       | <i>Research Methods</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <i>Findings</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
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| Australia      | Smith, J., & Prior, M    | 1995        | Temperament and Stress Resilience in School-Age Children: A Within-Families Study | Compared competence and behavior disorder measures from school and home to predict resilient/ non-resilient school-aged children from families reporting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 32 families, including 81 school-age children (including first graders)</li> <li>• High levels perceived stress/ negative life events (financial, life changes, losses,</li> </ul> | Quantitative: measures, rating scales and standardized tests | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adults completed questionnaires &amp; rating scales <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Child measures:</i> Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL); Teacher's Report Form (TRF); Emotionality, Activity, Sociability temperament scale (EAS); Coddington Life Events Scale (primary school version).</li> <li>○ <i>Parent measures:</i> General Health</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children's resilience was measured by child attributes and temperament that predicted competent functioning at school and home considering variables for gender, age, IQ, mother-child warmth &amp; number of negative life events</li> <li>• Positive temperament (low emotional reactivity, high social engagement) best indicated resilient children at home and school</li> </ul> |



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|  |  |  |  | <p>severe psychological stress</p> <p>marital-, family-, illness-related)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing stressors (insufficient income, chronic illness, absent marital partners, loneliness or relationship difficulties, inadequate housing, or loss of significant other)</li> </ul> |  | <p>Questionnaire (GHQ); adapted Spanier Dyadic Adjustment scales; Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES III);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child completed questionnaires: Perceived Competence Scale for Children; Feelings of self-efficacy</li> <li>• Objective child measures: Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised edition</li> <li>• Observations of children (at home): adapted Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher-appraised outcomes best discriminated between resilient and non-resilient children.</li> <li>• Positive adjustment at school showed strong significant relationship to mothers' level of coping (child IQ &amp; level of maternal stress)</li> <li>• Predicting proportion of resilient children per family for all domains: 2 families where all children were overall resilient; 16 families not at all; 14 families 1/4–2/3 overall competent.</li> <li>• Role of positive temperament as resilience factor important for children growing up in stressful situations</li> </ul> |
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| UK | Donelan-McCall, N., & Dunn, J. | 1997 | School Work, Teachers, and Peers: The World of First Grade | <p>Children's perceptions of their experiences with their school work, and teacher and peer relationships were studied according to 3 areas of school adjustment: associations between domains of children's school experiences; correlations between children's experiences in October</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 44 Second-born first grade children with their mothers &amp; older siblings.</li> <li>• 21 Boys; 23 Girls.</li> </ul> | Mixed Methods: Interviews; observations; rating Scales | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rating Scales of Family Interaction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mother's interaction with child: Four 5 point scale for responsiveness, attention, control / intrusiveness, affection.</li> <li>○ Child's interaction with sibling and sibling with child. Five 5-point scales: Conflict, co-operation; control/ dominance; competition; affection.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Child First Grade interview: Interviewed in October &amp; May of first-grade year. Children provided information about their school experiences by responding to both open- and closed questions. Open-ended questions pertained to questions on a 3 / 4 point</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on antecedent variables regarding children's subsequent school experience, in particular relating to emotion, understanding, and earlier relationships with older siblings.</li> <li>• High number of children reported negative experiences at the end of the first-grade year.</li> <li>• Children who reported enjoying their school work at the start of first grade had mothers who had been relatively controlling when the children were 47 months old. Children who reported pleasurable experiences with their teachers also had</li> </ul> |
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|  |  |  |  | <p>Children's experiences in October and May of first grade; associations between antecedents of children's school experiences.</p> |  |  | <p>questions. Open-ended questions pertained to questions on a 3 / 4 point rating scale that children rated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Test-Retest Reliability: 10 Children not part of the longitudinal investigation took part to evaluate the test-retest reliability.</li> </ul> <p>Storytelling interview: with children at the end of their kindergarten year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maternal interview of sibling relationship: Mothers were asked 17 questions about dimensions of the sibling's relationship.</li> </ul> | <p>relatively controlling mothers when they were 47 months old.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Correlation was found between children's reports of positive peer experiences at the start of first grade and maternal reports of negative behaviour from siblings when they were 47 months old. Maternal reports of children's positive behaviour toward their siblings at 47 months were negatively correlated with the children's reports of positive work experiences at the end of first grade.</li> <li>• Children whose siblings had been relatively</li> </ul> |
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|  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observations: Family when children were 47 months; in May of their kindergarten year; in October of the first-grade year; and in May of their first-grade year.</li></ul> | <p>negative toward them at 47 months of age, according to maternal report, reported enjoying their school work at the end of first grade.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Additionally, maternal reports of siblings' negative behavior toward the children at 47 months were positively correlated with children's reports of pleasurable experiences with their teachers.</li></ul> |
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| Italy | Balboni, G., & Pedrabissi, L. | 1998 | School Adjustment and Academic Achievement : Parental Expectations and Socio-cultural Background | Socio-cultural background and parents' expectation forecasting primary school pupils adjustment and academic achievement was compared to teachers' evaluations at the end of the school year | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 216 primary school pupils first year at school</li> <li>• 50 % low SES, 50% high SES</li> <li>• 31.9 % Italian home-language;</li> <li>• 13.9% dialect spoken at home;</li> <li>54.2% both Italian &amp; dialect</li> </ul> | Quantitative: Questionnaires developed for the study | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent background indicators: language used at home, profession and level of education</li> <li>• Adult completed questionnaires for child's achievement capacity and behavior (i.e. capacity to adjust) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Parents: beginning of school year expectations &amp; predictions</li> <li>○ Teachers: pupils' achievement and adjustment feedback end of school year</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents' estimation of children's positive adjustment was more positive than teachers' reporting</li> <li>• School adjustment &amp; academic achievement: parents expected both positive school adjustment and academic performance (or negative adjustment and positive academic progress); teachers rated either both positive or both negative</li> <li>• Greater verbal skills accounted for greater adjustment &amp; academic achievement.</li> <li>• Congruence between parents' expected ratings</li> </ul> |
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|               |                            |      |                                                                  |                                                               | spoken at home                                                                                                                             |  |                                                                                                                                                                                 | and teachers' end-of-year reported ratings on positive adjustment & academic achievement performance.<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater convergence between parent/teacher ratings for higher SES; higher parent education level; low SES &amp; lower parent education level had higher, unrealistic expectations of child adjustment &amp; academic achievement</li> </ul> |
| Not specified | Ladd, G.W., & Burgess, K.B | 2001 | Do Relational Risks and Protective Factors Moderate the Linkages | Explored how relational stressors and supports interface with | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 396 children (198 males; 198 females) and their teachers (34 kindergarten; 117 grade 1</li> </ul> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aggressive with peers subscale of the Child Behaviour Scale: completed by children's kindergarten and first-grade teachers.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children's risk for aggression, as well as multiple relational risk and protective factors (i.e. stressful and supportive features of peer and teacher relationships),</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                    |

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|  |  |  | between Childhood Aggression and Early Psycho-logical and School Adjustment? | a known behavioural risk (aggression) to influence early emerging adjustment trajectories. Children's risk for aggression as well as multiple relational risk and protective factors were assessed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 385 of these children (193 males &amp; 192 females) completed the study until the end of grade 1</li> </ul> | Mixed Methods: Rating Scales; reports, forms, observations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achenbach Teacher Report form completed by teachers, measured cognitive functioning regarding attention problems and thought problems</li> <li>• Subscale of cooperative Participation of the Teacher Rating Scale of School Adjustment: used for young children, completed by teachers</li> </ul> | predicted changes in psychological functioning and school adjustment. African American children who were typically a minority among European American classmates, were more likely to experience particular stressors (e.g. chronic peer rejection); and less likely to be afforded some form of support (e.g. stable teacher-child closeness) |
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| USA | Prevatt, F. | 2003 | The contribution of parenting practices in a risk and resiliency model of children's adjustment | Examined risk and protective factors of the effect of parenting practices on children's adjustment (including school behavior) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 80 children aged 6-12 and their mothers</li> <li>• 42 girls, 38 boys</li> <li>• Mothers: 60% Caucasian, 11% African Americans, 16% Hispanic Americans, 5% Native Americans, 7% mixed ethnicity. 82% married, 9% divorced,</li> </ul> | Quantitative: Questionnaires & scales | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult completed questionnaires: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Alabama Parenting Questionnaire</li> <li>○ Parent Rating Scale (PRS) of Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC)</li> <li>○ Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI)</li> <li>○ Family Environment Scale (FES)</li> <li>○ Family Inventory of Life Events and changes (FILE)</li> <li>○ Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ)</li> <li>○ Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Social Position</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Results of study reported children ages 6-12 &amp; focused on family factors as component for school adjustment</li> <li>• Family protective factors: family cohesion, perceived social support and moral-religious emphasis.</li> <li>• Family risk factors: family stress, family conflict, parent psychopathology &amp; low SES</li> <li>• Combining family risk and protective factors &amp; parenting practices highly predicted child functioning (negative &amp; positive outcomes)</li> <li>• Parenting practices:</li> </ul> |
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|                              |                                              |      |                                                         |                                                                             | 4% never married,<br>4% widowed<br>SES (I = low;<br>V = high): I (14%), II (39%), III (31%), IV (22%), V (3%)                 |  |                                                                                                                                                                                              | negative correlation between positive parenting (positive parenting & involvement) and negative parenting (inconsistent parenting, corporal punishment & poor parenting)<br><br>• Family protective factors & positive parenting had direct positive impact on child adaptive behaviours amidst risk |
| Not specified (small school) | Perry, K.E.; Donohue, K.M.; & Weinstein, R.S | 2005 | Teaching practices and the promotion of achievement and | The effects of teacher practices in promoting social as well as cognitively | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 257 children in 14 first grade classrooms.</li> <li>• Ethnic composition:</li> </ul> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hierarchical linear modelling and regression techniques to examine whether instructionally, socially, and emotionally supportive teacher</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In classrooms where more instructionally and emotionally supportive teacher practices were observed, students ended the year with higher levels</li> </ul>                                                                                                  |

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|  |  |  | adjustment in first grade | rich instructional support on first grade student's academic achievement, behavioural and socio-emotional adjustment as well as feelings of competence were investigated. | 64% Caucasian, 23% Hispanic, 2% Asian American, 1% African American; 10% unknown.<br>• Teachers of the 14 classrooms | Mixed Methods: Observations, interviews, rating scales | practices predicted variation between classrooms in average levels of achievement, behavior, self-perceived competence.<br>• Academic Achievement Tests: administered to children at the end of their academic year.<br>Pupil Behaviour Rating Scale: completed by teachers, assessing 11 different behavioral attributes of children that were combined to create 3 scales: 1. Classroom adaptation; 2. Interpersonal behavior; 3. Intrapersonal behavior.<br>• Interviews with children | of academic skill. |
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|  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <div>using scale questionnaire.</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Early Childhood Classroom Observation Measure: trained observers spent one half-day in each classroom to observe instructional, social and motivational dimensions of preschool through to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classrooms.</li></ul> |  |
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| USA (implied – not stated) | Skowron, E.A. | 2005 | Parent Differentiation of Self and Child Competence in Low-Income Urban Families | Examined whether family system functioning was associated with resilience in children exposed to negative environmental stress | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 55 biological mother-child dyads</li> <li>• Children:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Age 6-13 36 girls, 19 boys</li> <li>○ 98% African American, 2% European American</li> <li>○ 9.4% only children, 32.1% first-born, 35.8% second-born, 9.4% third-born, 13.2% fourth-born, 9.3% foster</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | Quantitative: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult completed measures:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI)</li> <li>○ Family Inventory of Life Events and Changes (FILE)</li> <li>○ Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) items 4-18</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Documentation: Police department records documented violent crimes (murder, rape, armed robbery, assault averaged over 4 years) in neighborhoods of participating families</li> <li>• Demographic information interview with parents: Family structure and composition, living situation, age, gender,</li> </ul> | <p>Analyses determined whether mothers' DSI scores predicted child competence scores (Vocabulary, Math, SPP-SC, CBCL) in context of FILE and neighborhood violence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mother's DSI measured emotional reactivity, sense of self, emotional cutoff and fusion with others</li> <li>• Mothers' reported DSI predicted impact on children's academic success amidst risk-filled neighborhoods</li> <li>• Greater parent DSI scores predicted higher child academic achievement (vocabulary scores, math skills) over and above neighborhood violence &amp; FILE</li> </ul> |
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|  |  |  |  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mothers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Age 22-49</li> <li>○ 62.3% single,</li> <li>○ 26.4% married/committed relationship</li> <li>○ 11.3% separated/divorced</li> <li>○ 63% employed, <math>\bar{x}</math> 12.2 years education level</li> <li>○ Median family income \$14,400 per annum in</li> <li>○ income).</li> <li>○ Stability of current</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | Questionnaires, scales & standardized tests, demographic information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>relationship status family members, ethnicity, education, concerns about target child</li> <li>• Objective child measures: Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-III (WISC-III); Wide Range Achievement Test-2 (WRAT-3)</li> <li>• Child completed measure: Scholastic Competence Scale of Harter Self Perception Profile (SPP-SC)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent level of education &amp; DSI predicted child verbal skills</li> <li>• DSI had no significant impact on SPP-SC, FILE scores and neighborhood violence</li> <li>• Greater neighborhood violence, lower DSI and greater family stress exposure predicted higher levels of child aggression (CBCL externalized behavior)</li> </ul> |
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|                                           |             |      |                                                                                                     |                                                                                                             | <p>the year 2000 (low-income)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Stability of current home<br/>52% &lt;1 year in current home, 16.7% 1-2 years, 10.4% 2-3 years, 8.4% 3-4 years, 6.3% 4-5 years, 6.3% &gt;5 years; inner-city</li> </ul> |                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Small city in South-eastern United States | Baker, J.A. | 2006 | Contributions of teacher-child relationships to positive school adjustment during elementary school | Examined the extent to which teacher-child relationship contributed to school adjustment and the moderation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1310 Kindergarten to fifth grade students. 52% female and representative of racial &amp; ethnic composition</li> </ul>                                                                                    | Quantitative: Rating scales, standardized tests. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selected items from the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale.</li> <li>• Behavior Assessment System for Children-Teacher Rating Scales for children: Teachers rate the frequency of both problem and adaptive behaviours.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children with behavioral or learning problems showed poorer school outcomes and were less able to benefit from close teacher relationship (characterized by trust, warmth, and low conflict) when compared to peers</li> </ul> |

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|  |  |  |  | <p>of the associations between teacher-student relationship quality and school outcomes</p> | <p>of students in the participating schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 57% African American, 29% Caucasian, 4% Other, 10% Hispanic)</li> <li>○ 15 % Kindergartens, 20% <i>first graders</i>, 13% second graders, 16% third graders, 16% fourth graders, 21% fifth graders.</li> </ul> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The School Problems Composite measured children's learning-related problems.</li> <li>• Iowa Test of Basic Skills / Stanford Achievement Test Series, 9<sup>th</sup> Ed: measured children's academic attainment.</li> <li>• Classroom adjustment: Children's report cards in social development and positive work habits were summed to measure the degree to which they were adjusted to the norms, routines and expectations of the classroom environment.</li> </ul> | <p>without such problems.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children with developmental vulnerabilities and close teacher relationship were significantly advantaged in relation to similarly affected peers who lacked such relationships.</li> </ul> |
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|     |                  |      |                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 68 Teachers: 96% female; 84% Caucasian, 14% African-American.</li> </ul>                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| USA | Burchinal et al. | 2006 | Social Risk and Protective Child, Parenting, and Child Care Factors in Early Elementary School Years | Identified protective factors during early childhood that predict academic achievement and adjustment during early elementary school | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 75 African American children, 45% boys</li> <li>○ Recruited at age 1-11 months old, followed over time</li> <li>○ Invited infants appeared to have normative</li> </ul> | Mixed methods: Longitudinal questionnaires, scales & objective measurements; semi-structured observations/interviews; audio & video recorded sessions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual measures: social risk factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Six risk factors assessed (poverty, father absence, large household size, low maternal education, high maternal depression, high life stress)</li> <li>○ Parenting Stress Index (PSI)</li> <li>○ Annual primary caregiver interview</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Child care quality at home: Home Observation Measurement of the</li> </ul> | <p>Emphasis on correlations between risks and hypothesized protective factors (parenting, child care quality, school characteristics)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reported correlations relatively stable over time (data from Preschool - Gr.2, thus authors only present Gr.2 data).</li> <li>• Children with lower risk exposure during early childhood entered school with higher language skills; had mothers with</li> </ul> |



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|  |  |  |  |  | <p>development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Attended full time community-based child care centers prior to entry to kindergarten</li> <li>○ Assessment prior to entry to kindergarten, at entry to kindergarten, during spring/summer of <i>first four years of public school</i> (i.e.</li> </ul> |  | <p>Environment (HOME) Inventory for Preschoolers (semistructured observation/interview)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child care quality in classrooms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS)</li> <li>○ Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS)</li> <li>○ School poverty level determined from National Center for Educational Statistics (% children receiving free/reduced price meals)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Maternal measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Maternal IQ Wechsler</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <p>higher IQ scores and more responsive stimulating parenting; attended higher quality child care centers prior to school entry; on school entry were likely to attend schools with fewer low-income families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Longitudinal academic, social &amp; behavioral outcomes early elementary years (first 4 years, <i>including first grade</i>): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Higher risk exposure = lower reading &amp; math ability</li> <li>○ Parenting moderated risk exposure early childhood: better academic &amp; social outcomes</li> <li>○ Increased quality child care served as protective</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
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|  |  |  |  |  | <p>recruitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ age 18, 30 and 42 months)</li> <li>● Exclusion: children who left child care centers, moved away from area, asked not to be followed to school, disorder diagnosis</li> <li>● 72% families less than 185% federal poverty threshold</li> </ul> |  | <p>Adult Intelligence Scale-Revised (administered during first year of study)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Maternal teaching style (administered during child's first grade): Magnet task, Guessing game</li> <li>● Child characteristics at entry to school: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Teacher rated social skills: Social Skills Rating System-Preschool (SSRS-R)</li> <li>○ Language: Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (PPVT-R) &amp; Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals-Preschool (CELF-P)</li> </ul> </li> <li>● First 4 years of elementary school: Academic</li> </ul> | <p>factor over time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ More responsive stimulating parents mediate risk exposure &amp; teacher reported behavior problems</li> <li>○ Child care quality protective factor over time</li> <li>○ Schools serving fewer low-income children characterized decreasing problem behavior over time</li> <li>● Protective factors associated with scholastic success &amp; positive behavior outcomes at school</li> </ul> |
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|  |  |  |  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 65% single parent headed families</li></ul> |  | <p>outcomes using Woodcock-Johnson Test of Achievement-Revised (WJ-R); Teachers' assessment Social Skills Rating System Grades K-6 version</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• (All adult reported or measured)</li></ul> |  |
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| Malta | Cefai, C. | 2007 | Resilience for all: A study of classrooms as protective contexts | Examined how classrooms may serve as protective and competence-enhancing contexts for all students. Study aimed at capturing the common contextual processes that 'work' in classrooms formed for both at risk (low socio-economic status) and non-risk students. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Year 2-Year 4 (<i>including first grade</i>)</li> <li>• (6–9 years of age)</li> <li>• Children from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.</li> <li>• 9 classrooms in 3 different schools.</li> <li>• All classes were of mixed ability, and students came from diverse socio-</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questionnaire of 7 items about each student completed by 28 teachers in total of three different schools.</li> <li>• Observation guidelines according to literature.</li> <li>• Observation notes in fieldwork journal.</li> <li>• Semi-structured interviews with classroom teacher.</li> <li>• Focus-group interviews with children.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Year 2–Year 4 classrooms operated as protective and competence-enhancing contexts for their students, including those at risk.</li> <li>• Processes such as sense of belonging and connectedness, caring relationships, inclusion, active engagement and collaboration and recognition, were characteristics of Year 2–Year 4 classrooms.</li> <li>• These classrooms that organize themselves as caring, inclusive learning, and pro-social centered communities may operate as protective and competence-enhancing contexts for all their students.</li> </ul> |
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|                      |                                                    |      |                                                                                                   | non-risk students                                                                                                                                              | economic backgrounds <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers at 3 schools = Total: 28 teachers</li> </ul>                                                                                                        |                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Balti-more City, USA | O'Brien Caughy, M., Nettles, S.M., & O'Campo, P.J. | 2007 | Community Influences on Adjustment in First Grade: An Examination of an Integrated Process Model. | Examined the impact of neighborhood characteristics both directly and individually as mediated by parent coaching and the parent/child affective relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>405 Families with child entering first grade in the fall.</li> <li>Residents living less than 6 months in neighborhood and children with disabilities severe enough to</li> </ul> | Mixed Methods: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interview with primary caregiver.</li> <li>Developmental assessment of first grader.</li> <li>Scale: Neighborhood concentrated economic disadvantage.</li> <li>Observational tools.</li> <li>Neighborhood Environment for Children Rating Scales (NECRS)</li> <li>Psychological sense of community subscale (PSOC)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partial support for the associations proposed by the Integrated Process Model (Child adjustment during elementary years is influenced by complex interactions between child, family and community characteristics)</li> <li>Observed physical incivilities had a significant indirect association with poor school adjustment and a marginally significant</li> </ul> |

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|  |  |  |  | <p>on behavioural and school adjustment.</p> <p>keep out first grade were excluded.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban dwelling first graders.</li> <li>• African-American (54.5%; White/non-Hispanic (33.1%).</li> </ul> <p>Majority primary caregivers: mothers, then fathers, then grandparents.</p> | <p>Interviews, rating Scales, questionnaire-checklists</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-administered parent questionnaire, videotapes of parent/child interaction.</li> <li>• Centers for Epidemiological Studies – Depression (CESD II).</li> <li>• Child Behaviour Checklist.</li> <li>• Telephonic interviews with parents after their child's first report card of first grade.</li> </ul> | <p>association with positive school adjustment to first grade.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neighborhood community involvement with children was more strongly associated with positive school adjustment than poor school adjustment.</li> <li>• Lower levels of parental eliciting were associated with higher levels of child internalizing and externalizing behavior and lower levels of positive school adjustment.</li> </ul> |
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| South Africa | Ebersöhn, L. | 2008 | Children's Resilience as Assets for Safe Schools | Presented a case for using positive psychology concepts to broaden the scope of understanding children's life worlds to establish child-friendly schools in three South African provinces using children's perspective | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2391 children from 78 schools, 1200 girls, 1191 boys</li> <li>• Ages 3-21</li> <li>• 230 first grade children, 101 girls, 129 boys</li> <li>• Foundation phase: Grades 00-3: 883 children; 416 girls, 467 boys.</li> </ul> | PAR Survey-based case study: Questionnaire & lived experiences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantitative questionnaire designed for study (not part of foundation phase children Grades 00-3)</li> <li>• Qualitative lived experiences, i.e. children's perceptions of protective and risk factors in their environments: 2 open-ended items</li> <li>• Foundation phase: teacher-facilitated interviews; children had optional drawing and/or writing responses; verbal responses written down verbatim by teachers</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants felt safe at home (87%), school (86%) and classroom (85%)</li> <li>• Protective factors in schools: facilitation of learning in schools; schools characterized by high academic expectations, mentorship, mutual respect, opportunity for extramural activities &amp; life skills programmes; community &amp; family involvement.</li> <li>• Protective factors in children: individual emotional aspects including positive adaptation competencies (internal locus of control, high self</li> </ul> |
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|  |  |  |  | on risk and protective factors promoting resilience in schools |  |  |  | <p>efficacy, optimism, adaptive coping repertoire)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Protective factors in structural environment: involvement in community &amp; schools (accessibility, healthy participation of resources from families, schools and communities)</li><li>• Protective factors of resources: availability, designating assets within various systems (playgrounds, gardens, competent teachers)</li></ul> |
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| Canada | Arbeau, K.A., Coplan, R.J., & Weeks, M. | 2010 | Shyness, teacher-child relationships, and socio-emotional adjustment in grade 1 | Explored moderating role of teacher-child relationship between school shyness and socio-emotional adjustment in early elementary school | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 169 children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 84 boys, 85 girls</li> <li>○ 14 public schools, all children in <i>grade 1</i> 73% Caucasian, 12% Asian, 5% Black</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Participating teachers</li> <li>• Participating parents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 17% mothers and 21% fathers completed high school only</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | Quantitative: Multi-source assessment, maternal and teacher ratings, individual child interviews (questionnaire administration) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Parent reported child shyness: Child Social Preference Scale (CSPS) completed few weeks after starting school in September</li> <li>○ Teacher reported teacher-child relationships: Student-Teacher Relationship Scales (STRS) completed January/February; Child Behavior Scale (CBS) reported at end of school year</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Child measures at end of school year: Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Questionnaire for Young</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shyness &amp; teacher-child relationships: Shy children tended to form somewhat less close and more dependent relationships with teachers</li> <li>• Shyness, teacher-child relationships &amp; child adjustment: assessed how teacher-child relationships moderate associated shyness &amp; socio-emotional adjustment at end of school year <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Shy boys experienced greater self-reported loneliness</li> <li>○ Closer teacher-child relationship protective factor (positive</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
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|  |  |  |  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 68% mothers and 9% fathers college/university degree, some post-graduate experience</li> </ul> <p>Public school board (drawn sample) did not permit collection of parental employment status and income information</p> |  | <p>Children; self-reported School Liking and Avoidance Questionnaire (SLAQ); Interview with child</p> | <p>association between shyness &amp; adjustment difficulties only evident in children with less close teacher-child relationships)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ More dependent child-teacher relationships exacerbated positive association between shyness &amp; adjustment difficulties</li> <li>● Teacher-child relationships serve protective role for young shy children at school</li> </ul> |
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| USA | Obradović, J. | 2010 | Effortful control and adaptive functioning of homeless children: Variable-focused and person-focused analyses | Examined the role of effortful control (adaptive functioning; peer competence; internalizing and externalizing symptoms) for adaption in 58 homeless children in order to identify processes that promote | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 58 homeless children from a shelter.</li> <li>• 20 Females; 38 Males.</li> <li>• Aged 5-6 years.</li> <li>• 81% African-American, 1.7% American Indian; 3.4% Anglo-American, 13.8% mixed-ethnicity children.</li> <li>• 75% lived with single caregiver;</li> </ul> | Quantitative: Standardized tests, questionnaires, interviews | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence – 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.: subtests: Block Design; Matrix Reasoning; and Vocabulary subtests.</li> <li>• Battery of effortful control tasks assessed children's effortful control skills.</li> <li>• Structured interviews with parents.</li> <li>• Following parent interviews, research assistance completed five behavioural ratings, assessing the quality of parent-child relationship.</li> <li>• Teacher questionnaires.</li> <li>• Teacher form: The MacArthur Health Behavioural Questionnaire</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effortful control tasks are an important potential indicator of adaptation and school readiness of homeless children.</li> <li>• Performance on effortful control tasks was significantly related to school adjustment.</li> <li>• Effortful control tasks predicted peer competence, internalizing symptoms, and externalizing symptoms independent of intelligence.</li> <li>• Effortful control emerged significant predictor of resilient status controlling for the two most established protective factors in resilience: IQ and parenting quality.</li> </ul> |
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|    |                                             |      |                                                                                                            | homeless children's positive adaptation                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 90% of caregivers were mothers; 7% were fathers; 3% were grandmothers</li> <li>• Parents</li> <li>• Teachers</li> </ul>                              |                                     | (included the HBQ Academic Functioning Scale; HBQ Peer Relations Scale; HBQ Internalizing Symptoms Scale; HBQ Externalizing Symptom Scale: completed by teachers)                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| UK | Betts, L.R., Rotenberg, K.J., & Trueman, M. | 2014 | An investigation of the impact of young children's self-knowledge of trustworthiness on school adjustment: | Aimed to examine whether young children's self-knowledge of their trustworthiness conformed more closely | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 173 children (84 male; 89 female) from school years 1 and 2.</li> <li>• Children were from 9 classrooms across four schools that served a</li> </ul> | Quantitative: Scales, questionnaire | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer-reported trustworthiness procedure.</li> <li>• 5-point Likert Scale completed by children to assess peer-reported trustworthiness; promise-keeping and secret-keeping trustworthiness.</li> <li>• Teacher Scaling questionnaire about children's general</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Findings provide support for The Realistic Self-knowledge Model, rather than the positive illusion model.</li> <li>• Higher self-knowledge scores indicated that the child held inflated self-perceptions and was more positive about their own trustworthiness compared to</li> </ul> |

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|  |  |  | <p>A test of the realistic self-knowledge and positive illusion models</p> <p>to the positive illusion model or to the realistic self-knowledge model.</p> <p>Examined the relationship / between self-knowledge of trustworthiness and young children's school adjustment. The congruence between children's self-knowledge of their trustworthiness and either peers'</p> | <p>range of socio-economic areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age 5 – 7 years old</li> <li>• Peers</li> <li>• Teachers</li> </ul> |  | <p>trustworthiness on a 7 point scale.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School liking and avoidance questionnaire (SLAQ) completed by children about their school liking on a 3 point scale.</li> <li>• The Short Form TRSSA: to assess teacher-rated school adjustment – a 16-item Short-Form TRSSA comprises 3 subscales (on-task; classroom involvement; maturity; and positive orientation)</li> </ul> | <p>peers and teachers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Realistic self-perceptions are more important for adjustment than positive illusory bias</li> </ul> |
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|     |               |      |                                                                                                                           | trustworthi-<br>ness and<br>either peers'<br>or teachers'<br>knowledge of<br>children's<br>trustworthi-<br>ness was<br>examined     |                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| USA | Chawla et al. | 2014 | Green<br>schoolyards<br>as havens<br>from stress<br>and resources<br>for resilience<br>in childhood<br>and<br>adolescence | Investigated<br>how green<br>school yards<br>reduce stress<br>and promote<br>protective<br>factors for<br>resilience in<br>students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 schools</li> <li>• School 1: 11 students grades 1-6; 6 boys, 1 girl; ages 6-12; 10 European-American, 1 African-American private school:</li> </ul> | Qualitative: Interviews, observations ,<br>photo and videos | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting 1: Early Elementary data sources (<i>includes first grade children</i>)</li> <li>• Adult voices included as children aged 6-9 are learning to differentiate and verbalize feelings</li> <li>• Interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 24 Alumni surveys, followed by 8 selected interviews</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gr.1-4 children playing in woods during recess enjoyed sense of competence, cooperative play</li> <li>• Students' remarks and experiences supplemented by teachers' observations and alumni memories</li> <li>• Children aged 6-7 (early elementary) engaged in</li> </ul> |

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|           |              |      |                                                                        |                                                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• meet needs of children with dyslexia &amp; other language-based learning difficulties</li> <li>• School 2-6 excluded based on age (students <math>\geq 9</math> years old)</li> </ul> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 10 parents</li> <li>○ 5 teachers</li> <li>○ 5 school administrator and staff</li> <li>• Videos: researcher &amp; student-made</li> <li>• Photography</li> <li>• Participant observations and field notes</li> <li>• Reflective interviews with children</li> </ul> | <p>sensory-based play, created cooperative alliances, promoted autonomy and competence through play</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents considered play important for their kids: social safe space, loved play</li> <li>• Adults reported less anxiety, sense of acceptance, linked play &amp; freedom, better focus in classrooms</li> </ul> |
| Australia | Taket et al. | 2014 | Family strategies to support and develop resilience in early childhood | Followed resilient children through different transitions in educational | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 26 families (12 rural, 9 regional, 5 Metropolitan)</li> <li>• 26 children; 19 girls, 7 boys</li> <li>• Selected by</li> </ul>                                                         |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mother interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ First interview just prior to transition into primary school</li> <li>○ Second interview during first half of child's second year in primary school</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                             | <p>Mothers reported strategies they (and families) employ supporting child's resilience and development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage self-regulation &amp; independence (routine,</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                         |

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|  |  |  |  | careers from preschool to primary school<br><i>(including first graders)</i><br>amidst constrained settings | preschool teacher as demonstrating resilience<br>Families faced multiple disadvantages (financial insecurity or poverty, housing insecurity, employment insecurity, chronic health problems (child/ family | Qualitative: Naturalistic inquiry interviews | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ First interview location chosen by mother; some second interviews conducted telephonically</li> <li>○ Interview topic guide: resilience and their child, changes in child over past year, strategies promoting child's development including roles of family members, community connections, use of community resources, and the school and their child</li> <li>○ Duration 30-120 minutes</li> <li>○ Recorded and transcribed for analysis</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• organization, &amp; problem solving)</li> <li>• Support developing socio-emotional learning skills (positive peer relations, problem solving, &amp; choices)</li> <li>• Develop supportive relationships with adults</li> <li>• Using resources (community activities and facilities)</li> <li>• Dynamic contingent nature of children's resilience (new challenges need extra support from mother)</li> </ul> |
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|                        |                    |      |                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                    | member),<br>family<br>violence,<br>family<br>breakdown<br>and<br>bereavement)                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Finland & South Africa | Kumpulainen et al. | 2016 | Children's positive adjustment to first grade in risk-filled communities: A case study of the role of school ecologies in South Africa and Finland | Compared ways children's school ecologies facilitate adjusting positively to first grade in risk-filled contexts in SA and Finland | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purposeful selection of 2 from 18 cases (richly illuminated ways that children's social ecologies facilitated positive adjustment to first grade in risk-filled</li> </ul> | Qualitative: Visual participatory case study multi-level data generation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visual and/or narrative accounts</li> <li>• Semi-structured conversation-like interviews</li> <li>• Primary informants: Case children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Day-in-the-life video-recorded observations (SA only - up to 8 hours regular school/ after-school day of primary informants reduced by research team to video-segments explicated</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SA and Finnish case summary resilience supporting mechanisms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Constructive relationships</li> <li>○ Access to material resources</li> <li>Adherence to cultural norms and beliefs relating to schooling</li> <li>○ Experiences of control and efficacy</li> <li>○ A powerful identity</li> <li>○ SA &amp; Finnish case reported similar</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |

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|  |  |  |  |  | <p>contexts)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socio-economically disadvantaged communities</li> <li>• SA: first grade boy, age 7, first grade teacher, extended family (biological parents, grandmother, siblings and other kin)</li> </ul> <p>Finland: first grade girl, age 7, parents and three teachers</p> |  | <p>instances adjusting well to first grade, confirmed by informants)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Draw-and-talk</li> <li>○ Photo elicitation</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secondary informants: Case adults interviews (including teachers, parents, and extended family members)</li> </ul> | <p>mechanisms supporting resilience expressed in different culturally meaningful ways</p> |
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| USA | Yan, N. | 2016 | Children's resilience in the presence of mother's depressive symptoms: Examining regulatory processes related to active agency | Examined the proposal that children's processes related to their active and controlled engagement with the environment, their agency, are critical in promoting their | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1364 families.</li> <li>• 6 months, 15 months, 24 months, 36 months, 54 months, <i>first grade</i>.</li> <li>• Males: 705; Females: 659.</li> <li>• Ethnic minority: 12.9 % African-American, 6.1% Hispanic,</li> </ul> | Quantitative: Standardized Tests, questionnaires, coded videos, rating scales. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D): mothers' reported their depressive symptoms at child's age at 6 months, 15, 24, 36, 54 months, and first grade.</li> <li>• Assertion subscale for the Social Skill Rating System (SSRS-Parent Form): parents rated their children's social behavior on a 3 point scale.</li> <li>• Laboratory Observations.</li> <li>• Mother, fathers, caregiver report to: measure</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children become active, assertive, engaged, and skilled at self-regulation in order to reduce adverse effects of mother's depressive symptoms.</li> <li>• Children's agentic processes are mechanisms through which their resilience could be promoted: high intelligence; low difficult temperament; high quality caregiving environment and the important role of extra-familial environments for promoting children's</li> </ul> |
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|  |  |  |  | <p>resilience at first grade in the presence of mothers' cumulative depressive symptoms. Examined a framework for research on children's resilience in the presence of mother's depressive symptoms</p> | <p>1.6% Asian.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers</li> </ul> |  | <p>children's effortful control.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continuous Performance Task for young children (CPT): to measure children's sustained attention.</li> <li>Children's Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ): reported by caregivers and mothers to measure child's effortful control.</li> <li>Observations: observing children's persistence and enthusiasm during a 15 mini semi-structured procedure at 54 months.</li> <li>Infant Temperament Questionnaire: mothers completed when child was 6 months: rated on a 6 point scale.</li> </ul> | <p>resilience.</p> |
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|  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 7 Point Qualitative rating scales: to assess children's enthusiasm and persistent orientation to tasks.</li><li>• Mental development Index (MDI): assessed children's proxy for intelligence at 15 and 24 months.</li><li>• Observations: maternal sensitivity observed during laboratory interactions at 5-15, 24-36, and 54 months.</li><li>• Observational Record of the Caregiving Environment (ORCE): to assess child care quality at 24-36, and 54 months.</li><li>• Academic rating scale: completed by teachers to</li></ul> |  |
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|  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <p>evaluate cognitive functioning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic performance subscale of the Social</li> <li>• Skills Rating System (SSRS): 9 item subscale on which teachers compare children's academic competence</li> <li>• Student-teacher relationship scale: completed by teachers</li> <li>• Friends or Foe Scale: 6 point scale where teachers evaluated peer status</li> <li>• Child Behaviour Checklist &amp; Teacher Report Form: completed by parents and teachers to assess children's behaviour problems</li> </ul> |  |
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| Singapore | Choy, M.Y., & Karuppiah, N. | 2016 | Preparing Kindergarten Two children for Primary One in Singapore: Perceptions and practices of parents, kindergarten teachers and primary schoolteachers | Gathered data from preschool teachers, primary schoolteachers and parents about their perceptions and practices for preparing K2 children for Primary One ( <i>first grade</i> ) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preschool teachers</li> <li>• Primary schoolteachers</li> <li>• Parents</li> </ul> | Explanatory Mixed Methods Approach | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phase 1: A quantitative approach to gather responses via a questionnaire for parents and teachers to complete</li> <li>• Phase 2: A qualitative approach with a semi-structured interview about participants' perceptions and practices about preparing K2 children for P1 for teachers and parents</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30%-40% of children experience transition difficulties in P1.</li> <li>• Preschool teacher-training programs should consider focusing on transition practices.</li> <li>• Transition practices conducted by preschool teachers included discussions about primary school life with K2 children (90%); written records on the child's progress available to P1 teachers (88%); a flyer / brochure on primary school (88%); informing parents of the open house at the primary school (67.5%); visits to the primary school by preschool children (68%)</li> </ul> |
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|  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Parents talked to their child's primary schoolteacher before primary school (30%); others after primary school started (25%). Most parents sent children to preparatory / enrichment classes for academic preparation. Non-academically parents visited primary school with child before primary school began (39%); others talked to their child about what to expect (48%). Importance of collaborative work between parent and teacher in identifying and addressing weaknesses before child progresses to P1 (30%). More communication and interaction with primary schoolteacher were voiced (25%).</li><li>• Primary schoolteachers</li></ul> |
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|        |                                          |      |                                                             |                                                                      |                                                                                                                                              |  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <p>schoolteacher were voiced (25%).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary schoolteachers emphasized life skills as critical skills when a child starts primary school.</li> <li>• Primary school teachers expected preschool teachers to carry out transition practices before the start of P1. Believed that children should be prepared for P1 academically, socially and with self-help skills.</li> </ul> |
| Brazil | Correia-Zanini, M.R.G., & Marturano, E.M | 2016 | Getting Started in Elementary School: Cognitive Competence, | Assessed stability and change in indicators of academic achievement, | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 151 children from the 186 children recruited participated.</li> <li>• 79 boys; 72 girls.</li> </ul> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instruments and measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Social Skills Rating System Teachers version.</li> <li>○ Raven's Coloured Progressive Matrices - Special Scale, Note</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate stability of the variables and a continuous increase in academic achievement.</li> <li>• Girls showed better indicators of social skills and behavioral adjustment.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                             |

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|         |              |      | Social Skills, Behaviour, and Stress                                         | general intelligence, social skills, behavioral adjustment, and stress between 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , and 3 <sup>rd</sup> year of Elementary Education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age: 5 years 8 months to 7 years 6 months (mean 6 years 8 months)</li> <li>• 25 teachers of the 1<sup>st</sup> year</li> <li>• 30 teachers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year</li> <li>• 33 teachers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year</li> </ul> | Qualitative Research Design | <p>Book Form (access child's intellectual level).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provinha Brazil 2009 (Access child's literacy level).</li> <li>○ Childhood Stress Scale (completed by children)</li> <li>○ School Stressors Inventory – SSI (completed by children)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children showed more externalizing behaviors in the 1<sup>st</sup> year; more stress symptoms in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year; greater general intelligence, more academic social skills and fewer stress symptoms in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year</li> <li>• Transition extends up to 2<sup>nd</sup> year, and developmental achievements are consolidated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year</li> </ul> |
| Finland | Kiuru et al. | 2016 | Positive Teacher Affect and Maternal Support Facilitate Adjustment After the | Examined the proposition that a single high-quality relationship (either with teacher or parent) can                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants were identified through the First Steps longitudinal study that followed 2000</li> </ul>                                                                                                                              | Quantitative Research study | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers rated externalizing problems and prosocial behavior of target children in the spring of Grade 1 and Grade 2.</li> <li>• Maternal reports of supported were collected in the spring of Grade 1.</li> </ul>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive teacher affect was positively correlated with maternal support and prosocial behavior and negatively correlated with externalizing problems.</li> <li>• Maternal support correlated negatively with externalizing problems and</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                      |

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|  |  |  | Transition to First Grade | buffer against adjustment problems | <p>children during the transition to primary school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The sample of this study was drawn from four municipalities in different regions of Finland.</li> <li>• 1880 of the 2000 children participated.</li> <li>• A target sample of 378 children was drawn from the 1880</li> </ul> |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First and Second Grade Teachers completed the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire.</li> <li>• Grade 4 teachers also completed the Student-Teacher relationship Scale.</li> <li>• Mothers completed the revised Finnish version of the Child-Rearing Practices Report in Grade 1</li> </ul> | <p>positively with prosocial behavior.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child adjustment after the transition to primary school relied on at least one high-quality relationship with either a teacher or a parent.</li> <li>• High positive teacher affect in Grade 1 defended against adjustment difficulties for children with low maternal support, whereas cases with low teacher affect, high maternal support supported adjustment.</li> <li>• Children with low teacher and parent support showed the poorest adjustment.</li> </ul> |
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|  |  |  |  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Random selections from each classroom were taken and 183 girls and 195 boys participated.</li><li>• The children came from 94 schools and 151 classrooms.</li><li>• First and Second Grade teachers</li><li>• Grade 4 Teachers</li><li>• Mothers</li></ul> |  |  |  |
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| US | McDermott, P.A., Rikoon, S.H., & Fantuzzo, J.W. | 2016 | Transition and protective agency of early childhood learning behaviors as portents of later school attendance and adjustment | Reported on differential change trajectories for early childhood learning behaviors as they relate to future classroom adjustment and school attendance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2152 children: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Assessed at the end of Fall and Spring at the end of Head Start, Kindergarten, <i>First Grade</i></li> <li>○ 50% female predominantly (82%) African American, 8% Latino, 7% Caucasian, 3% other ethnic groups</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | Qualitative | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers completed: Preschool learning behaviours scale (PLBS); Learning behaviors scale (LBS); The Adjustment Scales for Children and Adolescents (ASCA); Absenteeism</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generalized multilevel logistic modeling and receiver operating characteristic curve analyses showed that teachers' earliest assessments were substantially predictive of eventual good classroom adjustment and school attendance, with increasing accuracy for prediction of future socio-behavioral adjustment as time progressed</li> </ul> |
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|           |          |      |                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ All children resided in households whose incomes corresponded with the federal poverty criteria</li> <li>• Teachers</li> </ul> |             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Hong Kong | Wong, M. | 2016 | A longitudinal study of children's voices in regard to stress and coping during transition to school | Explored how parental and teacher scaffolding and children's coping strategies contribute to children's adjustment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 216, 6 year old Chinese children</li> <li>• These children's parents</li> <li>• These children's teachers</li> </ul>           | Qualitative | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children participated in draw-and-tell at 3 different times; Children's Coping Strategies Checklist (included Direct problem-solving [DPS], Skills, seeking social support for action [SUPAs], and emotional-focused coping [EFC];</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main stressors predicted by children: social stress and incompetence in regard to fulfilling teachers' expectations.</li> <li>• Coping with social stress at school: (87% at Time 1; 84% at Time 2; 75% at Time 3.) Others (24%-31%) used SUPA; 5</li> <li>• children used EFC with</li> </ul> |

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|  |  |  |  | <p>during the transition from preschool to school; and how children's perception of stress and coping are constructed over time.</p> |  |  | <p>How I coped under pressure Scale.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents and teachers completed a questionnaire about their observations of children's stress and coping</li> </ul> | <p>social stress during the last month at preschool (Time 1), but no children used EFC to cope with social stress after starting school. Thus more children used DPS to deal with social stress.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coping with incompetence at school: DPS was used by most children: (88% at Time 1; 67% at Time 2; 85% at Time 3). Some children used SUPA (28% at Time 1; 41% at Time 2; 33% at Time 3). Compared to Time 1, significantly fewer children used DPS to cope with feeling incompetent at Time 2.</li> </ul> |
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|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <p>Comparing Time 2 and Time 3, significantly more children used DPS to cope with incompetence at school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Children agreed that DPS and SUPA strategies learnt at preschool were useful strategies for coping with stress at school</li><li>• Children, parents, teachers similarly reported children's use of DPS and SUPA to cope with different stressors at Time 2</li><li>• Parents and teachers' strategies in helping children cope with stress at school: 1. Listening to and talking with children (46% of parents and 39% of</li></ul> |
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|    |                                  |      |                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | teachers); 2.helping children to understand school life (33% of parents and 52% of teachers); 3. Facilitating learning (28% of parents; and 32% of teachers).                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| US | Yan, N., Zhou, N. and Ansari, A. | 2016 | Maternal Depression and Children's Cognitive and Socio-emotional development at First Grade: The Moderating Role of Classroom | Examined if a warm and positive classroom emotional climate would buffer the detrimental effects of maternal depression on children's | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1364 families were recruited in 1991 upon the birth of their child.</li> <li>• 52% of children were female, 24 % were of an ethnic minority background,</li> </ul> | Qualitative | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mothers completed the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) when child was 6, 15, 24, 36, and 54 months old.</li> <li>• Children's internalizing problems were assessed at the end of First Grade using parental report of the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL/4-18); and teachers' report of the</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children in a classroom that was characterized by a warm and positive emotional climate were less likely to be affected by their mothers' depressive symptoms than children in less supportive classrooms</li> <li>• Protective effects of positive classroom emotional climate buffer against the impact of maternal depression on</li> </ul> |

|  |  |  |                   |                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                            |
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|  |  |  | Emotional Climate | cognitive and socio-emotional adjustment at first-grade. | <p>10 % of children had mothers who had less than high school education, and 14 % of children were born to single mother households.</p> <p>Age of children: from one month old to end of <i>first grade</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents</li> <li>• Teachers</li> </ul> |  | <p>Teacher Report Form (TRF)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children's social competence: rated by parents and teachers using the Social Skills Rating Scale (SSRS) at the end of First Grade</li> <li>• Children's cognitive functioning at end of First Grade using the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-educational Battery-Revised.</li> </ul> <p>Teacher-child relationship: children's ability to establish positive relationship with teacher was assessed with Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS)</p> | various domains of child development and goes beyond academic achievement. |
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|  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Classroom emotional climate: Classroom observation system at First Grade used by trained observers.</li></ul> |  |
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**SES: Socio-Economic Status**

**PAR: Participatory Action Research**

Supplementary Table 2

*Summary of overall findings: Masten's Shortlist*

| <i>Process</i>                                | <i>Author</i>                              | <i>Article title</i>                                                                            | <i>Synopsis and evidence of findings</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Agency &amp; Mastery Motivation System</i> | 1995,<br>Smith, J., &<br>Prior, M.         | Temperament and Stress Resilience in School-Age Children                                        | "...The child's own sense of coping and self-efficacy was reflected by...Self-Coping, where ...the child had made high estimates of his or her ability to cope and generally do things well ... Children ... valued themselves highly as people and rated themselves as very competent". p. 173                                                                       |
|                                               | 1997,<br>Donelan-McCall, N., &<br>Dunn, J. | School Work, Teachers, and Peers: The World of First Grade                                      | "Those children whose preschool sibling relationship were characterised by conflict and dispute may have developed the skills needed to forge more positive peer and teacher interactions at the beginning of the year". p. 174                                                                                                                                       |
|                                               | 1998, Balboni, G. &<br>Pedrabissi, L.      | School Adjustment and Academic Achievement: Parental Expectations and Socio cultural Background | "The correlation resulted as being significant ... both between the adjustment and achievement evaluations expressed by the teaching staff". p. 84<br><br>"It is, therefore [clear]... that positive adjustment facilitates the pupil's achievement capacity, but also vice-versa, that academic success favours the pupil's acceptance of the school's rules". p. 88 |
|                                               | 2005,                                      | Teaching practices and                                                                          | "... [in] classrooms where teachers were observed to offer more instructional and                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

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|  | Perry, K.E.,<br>Donohue,<br>K.M., &<br>Weinstein, R.S | the promotion of<br>achievement and<br>adjustment in first<br>grade                        | <p>social-emotional support (i.e. attending to students' interest and initiative, providing appropriately challenging learning opportunities, and creating positive social relationships), children on average acquired more math skills, made greater behavioural gains, and had more positive perceptions of their academic abilities". p. 269.</p> <p>"... feelings of competence were investigated ..." p. 269.</p> <p>"Children's reports of their academic competence were ... quite positive ..." p. 283.</p> <p>"...examining links between teacher practices and children's interpersonal skills ... finding that in more instructionally and emotionally supportive classrooms, children, on average ... were more likely to engage in productive work". p. 288</p> <p>"Teachers also play a significant role in creating the context for developing competencies ..." p. 289</p> |
|  | 2005,<br>Skowron, E.A.                                | Parent Differentiation<br>of Self and Child<br>Competence in Low-<br>Income Urban Families | "... family closeness or intimacy that is protective but neither coercive ... has been linked ... with greater academic success". p. 342                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

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|  | 2007,<br>Cefai, C.   | Resilience for all: A study of classrooms as protective contexts | <p>“The classrooms in this study served as ... engaging ... learning environments, with instructional arrangements facilitating active participation...” p. 126</p> <p>“They... [expressed] a sense of ownership in their class”. p. 124</p> <p>“The celebration of students’ effort and success, at both individual and group levels, was a common practice in the classrooms. Praise, exhibition of work, reading work to others, notes to administration and parents, and tangible rewards, were frequently observed in the classrooms”. p. 128.</p> <p>“In most of the classes, there were no losers, competition was discouraged, recognition was also awarded for effort, and students were encouraged to help each other succeed. In contrast to highly competitive and individualistic structures, the caring, inclusive, collaborative and learning-centred contexts made it possible for all students to receive recognition for their efforts, accomplishments and improvement”. p.128</p> |
|  | 2008,<br>Ebersöhn, L | Children’s Resilience as Assets for Safe Schools                 | <p>“Individual emotional aspects as protective factors relate to positive adaptation competencies ... high self-efficacy, optimism and an adaptive coping repertoire”. p. 14</p> <p>“Children ... are confident ... happy about their future, independent, determined to succeed academically, and creative in making decisions”. p. 15</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

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|  | 2010,<br>Obradovic, J.                          | Effortful control and adaptive functioning of homeless children: Variable-focused and person-focused analyses | <p>“The effortful control composite (EC) was significantly related to... domains of adaptation: academic competence, peer competence ...” p. 113</p> <p>“Children’s effortful control emerged as a unique predictor of early academic success”. p. 114</p> <p>“... effortful control emerged as the most significant predictor of all four salient developmental domains of adaptation”. p.109</p> |
|  | 2014,<br>Chawla et al.                          | Green schoolyards as havens from stress and resources for resilience in childhood and adolescence             | <p>“... the natural areas ... facilitated ... resilience in the form of feelings of competence”. p.10</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|  | 2016, Correia-Zanini, M.R.G., & Marturano, E.A. | Getting started in Elementary School: Cognitive Competence, Social Skills, Behavior, and Stress               | <p>“...the 3<sup>rd</sup> year appears to be the one in which achievements are consolidated and the transition overcome”. p. 314</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

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|  | 2016,<br>Mc Dermott,<br>P.A.,<br>Rikoon, S.H.,<br>& Fantuzzo,<br>J.W. | Transition and<br>protective agency of<br>early childhood<br>learning behaviors as<br>portents of later school<br>attendance and<br>adjustment | “There was a 9% difference separating those with better versus poorer Competence Motivation at the beginning of Head Start which rose nominally to 10% by the finish of 1 <sup>st</sup> grade...p. 70”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|  | 2016,<br>Wong, M.                                                     | A longitudinal study of<br>children’s voices in<br>regard to stress and<br>coping during the<br>transition to school                           | <p>“... children’s use of DPS (Direct Problem Solving), such as spending more time practising both self-help skills (e.g. doing online exercises or revising lessons at home), in order to cope with being incompetent at school”. p. 940</p> <p>“...using SUPA (Social Support for Action)...one parent reported that her daughter would ask teachers and peers to teach her how to take notes”. p. 940</p>                                                                   |
|  | 2016,<br>Yan, N., Zhou,<br>N., & Ansari,<br>A.                        | Children's resilience in<br>the presence of mothers'<br>depressive symptoms:<br>Examining regulatory<br>processes related to<br>active agency  | <p>“... children's ... active agency [is] critical in promoting their resilience at first grade ...”. p. 90</p> <p>“... mastery motivation predicted their resilience only in academic performance”. p. 96. “Children high in mastery motivation can shift their attention from the daily stress of difficult environments to engage in mastery-related activities...”. p. 97</p> <p>“... children’s active agency accounted in part for why those with high intelligence,</p> |



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|                                     |                                                |                                                                                                                                                                       | <p>low-irritable temperament, and high quality caregiving were resilient...”. p. 96.</p> <p>“... children’s agentic processes facilitated their resilience”. p. 96</p> <p>“Those children who assert their needs to seek support, exhibit control over their stress-coping processes, and engage themselves in pleasurable mastery-related tasks, are shown to exhibit better-than-expected adjustment...”. p. 96</p> |
|                                     | 2016,<br>Yan, N., Zhou,<br>N., & Ansari,<br>A. | Maternal Depression<br>and Children’s<br>Cognitive and Socio-<br>Emotional<br>Development at First<br>Grade: The Moderating<br>Role of Classroom<br>Emotional Climate | <p>“... positive emotional classroom climate served as a salient protective factor that buffered the negative impacts of mothers’ depressive symptoms ... on children’s development across multiple domains, namely...social competence”. p.1253</p>                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <i>Attachment<br/>Relationships</i> | 1995,<br>Smith, J., &<br>Prior, M.             | Temperament and<br>Stress Resilience in<br>School-Age Children                                                                                                        | <p>“Teacher ratings of ... [children’s] ability to engage others ... Children ... related positively to peers and teachers...”. p. 173</p> <p>“... the importance of a warm and positive relationship with the primary caregiver...”. p.177</p>                                                                                                                                                                       |

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|  | 1997,<br>Donelan-<br>McCall, N., &<br>Dunn, J. | School Work, Teachers,<br>and Peers: The World<br>of<br>First Grade                                                             | <p>“It was reported that children who were involved in warm, supportive relationships with their mothers and siblings when they were 47 months old would report more positive school experiences ... Children whose mothers were relatively controlling when the children were 47 months old were more likely to report positive experiences when they started school. It should be noted that maternal control was an index of directiveness with the child, rather than a dimension of critical, authoritarian behaviour.” p. 173</p> <p>“... maternal involvement [was found] to be related to various positive aspects of children’s social and emotional development, which may facilitate children’s school adjustment”. p.173</p> |
|  | 2001,<br>Ladd, G.W., &<br>and Burgess,<br>K.B. | Do relational risks and<br>protective factors<br>moderate linkages<br>between childhood<br>aggression and school<br>adjustment? | <p>“... other aspects of children’s relationships, including peer acceptance, number of mutual friendships, and teacher-child closeness, were ... protective factors”. p. 1587</p> <p>“... sustained peer acceptance was significant, suggesting that attention problems tended to abate among children who were consistently accepted by classmates”. p. 1591</p> <p>“For school adjustment, results showed that stable relational supports predicted gains in cooperative participation and school liking. Children who maintained higher levels of peer acceptance and closeness with teachers exhibited higher levels</p>                                                                                                            |

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|  |  |  | <p>of classroom participation, and those who maintained closer teacher–child relationships evidenced higher levels of school liking over time, relative to their peers”. p. 1593</p> <p>“... teacher-child closeness at the outset of kindergarten forecasted increased obedience during classroom activities and liking of school ...” p.1597</p> <p>“... the tendency for children to maintain higher levels of peer acceptance from kindergarten to first grade was associated with relative gains in cooperative participation...” p. 1597</p> <p>“... relational supports buffer children from maladjustment, especially during periods of challenge or transition...” p. 1597</p> <p>“...closer teacher-child relationships may provide young children with resources...” p. 1597</p> <p>“... integration into the peer group soon after school entrance may be an important facilitator of ... early school adjustment”. p. 1598</p> <p>“...children may benefit from early as well as lasting relationships with supportive teachers”. p. 1598</p> |
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| 2003,<br>Prevatt, F.F.                                         | The contribution of parenting practices in a risk and resiliency model of children's adjustment | <p>"... family protective factors and positive parenting primarily accounted for the variance in child adaptive behaviours". p. 469</p> <p>"Protective factors included family cohesion, [and] family social support..." p. 469</p> <p>"... family functioning is an important component in children's adjustment". p. 478</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 2005,<br>Perry, K.E.,<br>Donohue,<br>K.M., &<br>Weinstein, R.S | Teaching practices and the promotion of achievement and adjustment in first grade               | <p>"... in classrooms where more ... emotionally supportive teacher practices were observed, students ended the year with higher levels of academic skill". p. 287</p> <p>"... [in] emotionally supportive classrooms, children, on average, got along better with their peers and were more likely to engage in productive work and play with other children". p. 288</p> <p>"... when teachers are more in tune with students as individuals (i.e. aware of what skills they have, what they are interested in etc.), and when they then use this information to deliver instruction that is in some ways suited to individual needs, more growth is possible for more children". p. 290</p> |
| 2005,<br>Skowron, E.A.                                         | Parent Differentiation of Self and Child Competence in Low-Income Urban Families                | <p>"... family systems factors, such as a parent's capacity to regulate emotion, think clearly under stress, and promote both intimacy and autonomy in family relationships, ... would theoretically be associated with positive development in lower risk children". p. 343</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

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|  |                              |                                                                                                             | <p>“... the ability to maintain connections with others ... is important for healthy functioning”. p. 343</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|  | <p>2006,<br/>Baker, J.A.</p> | <p>Contributions of teacher–child relationships to positive school adjustment during elementary school.</p> | <p>“...a protective effect was noted, such that children with developmental vulnerabilities and a close teacher relationship were significantly advantaged relative to similarly affected peers who lacked such relationships”. (p. 211)</p> <p>“...characterized by warmth, trust, and low levels of conflict....” (p.219)</p> <p>“... teacher-child relationships matter ... a great deal for young children, for whom warm, close relationships with teachers are consistently associated with positive school adjustment”. p. 211</p> <p>“Closeness in the teacher-student relationship shows ... a more pronounced association with children’s social skills”. p. 218</p> <p>“Teacher-child relationship quality predicted behavioural and academic indicators of school success during the formative elementary school-aged period...”. p. 223</p> <p>“The findings ... echo the importance of the teacher-child relationship in promoting children’s school success...”. p. 223</p> <p>“... children with developmental vulnerabilities and a close teacher relationship</p> |

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|  |                                                                                             |                                                                                                                     | <p>were significantly advantaged relative so similarly affected peers who lacked such relationships”. p. 223</p> <p>“An effective teacher relationship may differentially benefit children with learning problems in terms of non-academic outcomes, such as social or behavioural indicators of school adjustment”. p. 224</p> <p>“The teacher-child relationship holds promise as a developmental context that can provide nurturance and coherence for children as they navigate the social world of school”. p. 227</p> |
|  | 2006,<br>Burchinal, M.,<br>Roberts, J.E.,<br>Zeisel, S.A.,<br>Hennon, E.A.,<br>& Hooper, S. | Social Risk and<br>Protective Child,<br>Parenting, and Child<br>Care Factors<br>in Early Elementary<br>School Years | <p>“... although parenting appears to mediate the negative impact of risk on both academic and social-emotional outcomes during the first years of primary school, responsive and stimulating parenting may protect children from the negative impact of risk on mathematics skills”. p. 105</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|  | 2007,<br>Cefai, C.                                                                          | Resilience for all: a<br>study of classrooms as<br>protective contexts                                              | <p>“...caring relationships ... were identified ... as optimal learning environments.” p. 119</p> <p>“The students in the study appeared connected and affiliated to each other and to their teachers. They felt physically and emotionally safe in an environment where they trusted rather than feared each other, and where interpersonal relationships</p>                                                                                                                                                              |

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|                                                                       |                                                         | <p>were salient features of their contexts”. p. 124</p> <p>“During classroom activities as well as during play, frequent episodes were observed of caring and supportive behaviour amongst the students, such as taking an active interest in each other’s work and helping each other. Teachers and students themselves referred to a ‘classroom norm’ of students helping each other with work”. p. 124</p> <p>“It was a norm in most of the classes that during written work, students shared and helped each other in their work, particularly those sitting next to them”. p. 124</p> <p>One teacher remarked that she sought to include students with challenging behavior by ... building a caring relationship with them”. p. 125</p> |
| 2007,<br>O'Brien<br>Caughy, M.,<br>Nettles, S.M.,<br>& O'Campo<br>P.J | Community Influences<br>on adjustment in first<br>grade | <p>“The impact of neighbourhood characteristics both directly and indirectly as mediated by parent coaching and the parent/child affective relationship on behavioural and school adjustment”. p. 819</p> <p>“... the parental affective relationship such as higher expressions of affection and lower hostility were associated with fewer behaviour problems but only weakly associated with overall adjustment”. p. 826</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

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| 2008,<br>Ebersöhn, L.                                           | Children's resilience as<br>assets for safe schools                                      | "Parents and caregivers particularly are supportive, loving and involved". p. 15                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 2010,<br>Arbeau, K.A.,<br>Coplan, R.J.,<br>& Weeks, M.          | Shyness, teacher-child<br>relationships, and<br>socio-emotional<br>adjustment in grade 1 | <p>"Children who have closer relationships with their teachers may be able to use their teachers as a secure base to help them explore...". p. 263</p> <p>"A closer teacher-child relationship appeared to act as a protective factor, with the positive association between shyness and adjustment difficulties only evident among children with less close teacher-child relationships". p. 263</p> <p>"a close teacher-child relationship may help children successfully adjust to school". p. 266</p> |
| 2014,<br>Betts, L.R.,<br>Rotenberg,<br>K.J., &<br>Trueman, M.T. | Young children's self-<br>knowledge on school<br>adjustment                              | <p>"... for children, being aware of how you are perceived by others in terms of trustworthiness helps the formation of relationships with peers and teachers and that developing supportive relationships with these individuals may foster school adjustment". p. 419.</p> <p>"... the role of peer relationships and teacher relationships for an individual's school adjustment has been widely recognized". p. 419</p>                                                                               |



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|  | 2014,<br>Chawla et al.                                 | Green schoolyards as havens from stress and resources for resilience in childhood and adolescence                                                        | “... the natural areas ... facilitated ... resilience in the form of ... supportive social relationships”. p. 10                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|  | 2014,<br>Taket, A.R.,<br>Nolan, A., &<br>Stagnetti, K. | Family strategies to support and develop resilience in early childhood                                                                                   | <p>“... mothers were concerned to support their child in developing skills related to forming and maintaining positive peer relationships...” p. 293</p> <p>“... families sought to support their child in building their problem-solving skills particularly in relation to developing positive peer relationships”. p. 293</p> <p>“Mothers talked ... about the benefits of the relationships children had developed with other adults, especially preschool teachers, and members of their extended family...”. p. 295</p> |
|  | 2016,<br>Choy, M.Y., &<br>Karuppiah, N.                | Preparing Kindergarten Two children for Primary One in Singapore: Perceptions and practices of parents, kindergarten teachers and primary schoolteachers | “Parents also hoped to have more communication and interaction with the primary schoolteachers when their child starts P1 (25%). This was also in line with studies advocating for the establishment of positive relationships between the children, parents and educators” p. 457                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

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| 2016,<br>Kumpulainen<br>et al. | Children's positive adjustment to first grade in risk-filled communities: A case study of the role of school ecologies in South Africa and Finland | "... adjusting well was robustly supported by a warm supportive collective that went beyond his nuclear family, or his teacher. Salient to his case, was the schooling- related engagement of multiple family (father, mother, grandmother, siblings) and community members (teachers; local women who cook food provided by the government-funded, school-based feeding scheme; the 'mothers' or caring women at the library)". p. 127                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 2016,<br>Kiuru et al.          | Positive Teacher Affect and Maternal Support to Facilitate Adjustment After the Transition to First Grade                                          | <p>"Positive teacher affect was positively correlated with maternal support and prosocial behaviour ...". p. 166</p> <p>"... results showed that high positive teacher affect buffered against the development of adjustment problems...". p. 170</p> <p>"... a single high-quality relationship can buffer against adjustment problems associated with another, low-quality, relationship". p. 170</p> <p>"... maternal support may also compensate for relationship problems with the teacher". p. 171</p> <p>"... maternal support remains important during the transition to primary school..." p. 171</p> <p>"If a child had a close, supportive relationship with his or her mother, lack of emotional support and positive affect from the teacher at the beginning of formal</p> |

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|                     |                                                |                                                                                                                                                                       | <p>schooling did not lead to problems in subsequent school adjustment”. p. 171</p> <p>“Building a secure classroom environment during the first years of school may well provide years of dividends in terms of children’s adjustment...”. p. 172</p> <p>“... parental social support remains important ... parents should continue giving their children positive support in their schoolwork”. p. 172</p> |
|                     | 2016,<br>Yan, N., Zhou,<br>N., & Ansari,<br>A. | Maternal Depression<br>and Children’s<br>Cognitive and Socio-<br>Emotional<br>Development at First<br>Grade: The Moderating<br>Role of Classroom<br>Emotional Climate | <p>“... a positive emotional classroom climate served as a salient protective factor that buffered the negative impacts of mothers’ depressive symptoms ... on children’s ... relationships with teachers at first grade”. p. 1253</p>                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <i>Intelligence</i> | 1995,<br>Smith, J., &<br>Prior, M.             | Temperament and<br>Stress Resilience in<br>School-Age Children                                                                                                        | <p>“... the analyses of maternally rated social competence and school adaptability, where IQ showed a strong correlation with the function ... ”. p. 176</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

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|  | 1997,<br>Donelan-McCall, N., & Dunn, J.                                         | School Work, Teachers, and Peers: The World of First Grade                                           | <p>“... children who had as kindergartners shown more sophistication in understanding other’s feelings reported more positive peer experiences in ... their first-grade year”. p. 174</p> <p>“... problems in children’s social cognitive abilities are associated with poor peer relations in school-aged children”. p. 175</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|  | 2006,<br>Burchinal, M., Roberts, J.E., Zeisel, S.A., Hennon, E.A., & Hooper, S. | Social Risk and Protective Child, Parenting, and Child Care Factors in Early Elementary School Years | <p>“The child’s language skills at entry to kindergarten mediated association between risk and the two achievements outcomes and moderated the association between risk and mathematics”. p. 104</p> <p>“Rather than study intelligence globally we examine language skills specifically because language facility is one of the more important skills underlying academic achievement and accounts for much of the association between intelligence and academic achievement”. p. 106</p> <p>“... language skills specifically could serve as a protective factor...”. p. 106.</p> |
|  | 2010,<br>Obradović, J.                                                          | School transition homeless highly mobile children 5-6years old resilience                            | <p>“IQ also significantly predicted academic competence and internalizing symptoms ...”. p. 113.</p> <p>“Children with higher levels of EC [effortful control composite] showed higher levels of competence and lower levels of symptoms. In addition, EC was positively</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

|  |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|--|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                               | related to IQ". p. 113<br><br>"Performance on effortful control tasks was significantly related to school adjustment" p.114                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|  | 2016,<br>Choy, M.Y., &<br>Karuppiah, N.                      | Preparing Kindergarten<br>Two children for<br>Primary One in<br>Singapore: Perceptions<br>and practices of parents,<br>kindergarten teachers<br>and primary<br>schoolteachers | "... parents and preschool teachers should prepare the child for P1 in ... basic academic ... skills". p. 458<br><br>"... social skills ... language and communication skills ... were important skills for children starting P1". p. 459                                                                                                                                                                      |
|  | 2016, Correia-<br>Zanini,<br>M.R.G., &<br>Marturano,<br>E.A. | Getting started in<br>Elementary School:<br>Cognitive Competence,<br>Social Skills, Behavior,<br>and Stress                                                                   | "For general intelligence, a high correlation was found between the measures taken in the 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> years, and a moderate correlation between the 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> years. As expected, there was an increasing trajectory. However, it was discernible only in the 3 <sup>rd</sup> year ... a sufficiently long exposure could result in cognitive modification". |

|  |                                          |                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|--|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | 2016,<br>Wong, M.                        | A longitudinal study of children's voices in regard to stress and coping during the transition to school                                        | "Among the children who suggested coping strategies, most of them suggested using DPS (Direct Problem Solving) to cope with social stress". p. 932                                                                                                                                                            |
|  | 2016,<br>Yan, N.                         | Children's resilience in the presence of mothers' depressive symptoms: Examining regulatory processes related to active agency                  | "Children's effortful control was predicted by their ... early intelligence ...". p. 96<br>"Child intelligence has been shown repeatedly to be associated with better functioning". p98.<br>"... children's active agency accounted in part for why those with high intelligence ...were resilient...". p. 96 |
|  | 2016,<br>Yan, N., Zhou, N., & Ansari, A. | Maternal Depression and Children's Cognitive and Socio-Emotional Development at First Grade: The Moderating Role of Classroom Emotional Climate | "... positive emotional classroom climate served as a salient protective factor that buffered the negative impacts of mothers' depressive symptoms ... on children's development across multiple domains, namely ... cognitive development". p.1253                                                           |

|                        |                                                                |                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Self-regulation</i> | 1995,<br>Smith, J., &<br>Prior, M.                             | Temperament and<br>Stress Resilience in<br>School-Age Children                                | <p>“Positive temperament (low emotional reactivity, high social engagement) best discriminated children showing resilience on all indicators, i.e. behavioural and social competence both at home and at school”. p. 168.</p> <p>“... emotional reactivity ... is related to self-regulation aspects of temperament ... [and] associated with positive temperament and behavioural adjustment”. p.176</p> <p>“Positive temperament attributes have a particular significant role in individual children’s capacities to maintain adaptive behaviours in ... learning settings ... despite severe stress exposure”. p. 178.</p> |
|                        | 2005,<br>Perry, K.E.,<br>Donohue,<br>K.M., &<br>Weinstein, R.S | Teaching practices and<br>the promotion of<br>achievement and<br>adjustment in first<br>grade | <p>“... the relative behavioral and socio-emotional gains made by students in more rather than less supportive classrooms”. p. 288</p> <p>“... examining links between teacher practices and children's interpersonal skills ... finding that in more instructionally and emotionally supportive classrooms, children, on average, got along better with their peers and ... play[ed] with other children”. p. 288</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|                        | 2005,<br>Skowron, E.A.                                         | Parent Differentiation<br>of Self and Child<br>Competence in Low-<br>Income Urban Families    | <p>“... emotion regulation is an important intrapersonal predictor of cognitive and socioemotional competence in school-age children”. p. 342</p> <p>“... the ability to maintain ... an autonomous self (i.e. differentiation of self) is important for healthy functioning”. p. 343</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

|  |                                                                 |                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | 2008,<br>Ebersöhn, L.                                           | Children's Resilience as<br>Assets for Safe Schools                                                                 | "Individual emotional aspects as protective factors relate to ... an internal locus of control ...". p. 14                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|  | 2014,<br>Betts, L.R.,<br>Rotenberg,<br>K.J., &<br>Trueman, M.T. | Young children's self-<br>knowledge on school<br>adjustment                                                         | "Children with more accurate self-perceptions had higher on-task classroom involvement, maturity, and positive orientation ... Those children with inflated self-perceptions [had] lower school adjustment...". p. 417                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|  | 2014,<br>Taket, A.R.,<br>Nolan, A., &<br>Stagnetti, K.          | Family strategies to<br>support and develop<br>resilience in early<br>childhood                                     | "Self-regulation refers to the child's ability to manage skills, emotions and behaviours to participate actively in their environment. Mothers often talked about this in terms of independence". p. 292<br><br>"... strategies that mothers talked about as supporting self-regulation and independence were working with children to analyse what had happened in a situation and offering different interpretations of events...". p. 293 |
|  | 2016,<br>Choy, M.Y., &<br>Karuppiah, N.                         | Preparing Kindergarten<br>Two children for<br>Primary One in<br>Singapore: Perceptions<br>and practices of parents, | "... children's independence and self-help skills needed to be reinforced by the preschool teachers to facilitate adjustment...". p. 458<br><br>"... parents and preschool teachers should prepare the child for P1 in ... self-help skills". p. 458                                                                                                                                                                                         |



|  |                                                              |                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |                                                              | kindergarten teachers and primary schoolteachers                                                         | “... primary schoolteachers encouraged parents not to place emphasis only on academic skills in preparation... for P1. They suggested that parents should also help their children develop social, emotional and self-help skills which are important for P1”. p. 458 |
|  | 2016,<br>Correira-Zanini,<br>M.R.G., &<br>Marturano,<br>E.A. | Getting started in Elementary School: Cognitive Competence, Social Skills, Behavior, and Stress          | “In the 3 <sup>rd</sup> year the children had the lowest levels of stress symptoms”. p.314                                                                                                                                                                            |
|  | 2016,<br>Wong, M.                                            | A longitudinal study of children’s voices in regard to stress and coping during the transition to school | “...Among the children who suggested coping strategies most suggested using Direct Problem Solving skills to cope with being incompetent...”. p. 933<br><br>“... more teachers facilitated children’s self-help skills during the transition period”. p. 942          |

|                       |                       |                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                       | 2016,<br>Yan, N.      | Children's resilience in the presence of mothers' depressive symptoms: Examining regulatory processes related to active agency | “... children may function to reduce the adverse effects ... they become active, assertive, engaged and skilled at self-regulation”. p. 96<br>“... effortful control was the most consistent independent predictor of resilience ... Children high in effortful control are able to control their attention and behaviours, regulate their emotions, implement behaviours as planned, employ skills to engage in socially appropriate behaviour, and develop as socially competent individuals”. p. 96 |
|                       |                       |                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <i>Meaning-making</i> | 2007,<br>Cefai, C.    | Resilience for all: A study of classrooms as protective contexts                                                               | “Various processes, such as ... positive beliefs and expectations ... were identified ... as optimal learning environments”. p. 119<br>“They [classrooms] were also marked by positive academic behaviours and beliefs...”. p. 128.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|                       | 2008,<br>Ebersöhn, L. | Children's Resilience as Assets for Safe Schools                                                                               | “Children identified individual emotional aspects as the next highest protective factor. Individual emotional aspects as protective factors relate to ... optimism ...”. p. 14                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|                       | 2016,<br>Wong, M.     | A longitudinal study of children's voices in regard to stress and coping during the transition to school                       | “... one parent reported their child's use of seeking understanding (SU) when they encountered social stress”. p. 940                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

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|                                         |                                             |                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <i>Cultural traditions and Religion</i> | 1998,<br>Balboni, G.<br>&<br>Pedrabissi, L. | School Adjustment and Academic Achievement: Parental Expectations and Socio cultural Background | “It is probable that parents follow up their high expectations by behaving in a way which encourages their children’s own good behaviour, valorising, for example, obedience to the rules, or punishing unjustified acts of rebellion and rewarding behaviour showing respect towards their teachers and peers”. p. 90 |
|                                         | 2003,<br>Prevatt, F.F.                      | The contribution of parenting practices in a risk and resiliency model of children’s adjustment | “Protective factors included ... family moral-religious orientation”. p. 469                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                         | 2007,<br>Cefai, C.                          | Resilience for all: A study of classrooms as protective contexts                                | “[Classrooms] were characterized by a ... culture where all members were included and provided with opportunities to succeed, caring relationships amongst the various members, and pro-social student behavior”. p. 128                                                                                               |

|  |                                |                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                               |
|--|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | 2016,<br>Kumpulainen<br>et al. | Children's positive adjustment to first grade in risk-filled communities: A case study of the role of school ecologies in South Africa and Finland | "... children's adherence to cultural norms and beliefs relating to schooling ... meant enacting parental coaching in obeying school rules and norms". p. 134 |
|--|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

**CHAPTER 3**

Manuscript 2, “Positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce: First grade teachers as champions of resilience” answers the research question: “*How do first grade teachers support children from divorced parents to adjust to first grade?*”

Prepared for *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* (see Appendix G for author guidelines).

Authors: C. Bezuidenhout, L.C. Theron and E. Fritz

### Abstract

Some children need to cope with adjusting to first grade along with the additional risk of parental divorce. Given a dearth of studies that focus on this issue, we were interested in how such first graders coped well. In particular, this article reports on how first grade teachers facilitate the positive adjustment of first graders challenged by parental divorce. To do so, it draws on visual and narrative data generated by five South African first graders, their divorced parents and/or step-parents, and their first grade teachers. Findings indicate that teachers used ordinary activities to enable resilience by supporting cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. These activities offered children the opportunity to exercise agency and engage with their school ecology. The findings prompt three best classroom practices that should support teachers to support positive adjustment to first grade especially for first graders from divorced parents.

*Keywords:* positive adjustment to first grade, parental divorce, resilience, developmental domains, ordinary teacher practices

Positive Adjustment To First Grade Despite Parental Divorce: First Grade Teachers As  
Champions Of Resilience

For some children, the transition to first grade is a difficult process, thus framing first grade as an actual risk in itself (Perrin, 2014). For example, some first graders are challenged by demands that include adjusting to new roles and identities, new interactions, and new relationships (Melbourne Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009). Yet, some children adjust well to the challenges of first grade; this implies resilience. According to Masten (2013), resilience is evident when conditions that pose a risk to children's normative functioning and development, like transitioning to first grade, show no negative impacts. From a Social Ecological perspective, resilience is co-constructed by the child and the social environment, including families, schools, and communities (Ungar, 2012).

The current literature on school adjustment considers various additional risks which may threaten children's positive adjustment to first grade (i.e., risks in addition to those of adjusting to formal school. These include psychological stress (Smith & Prior, 1995; Wong, 2016); childhood aggression (Ladd & Burgess, 2001); social withdrawal (Hall, Welsh, Bierman, & Nix, 2016); family risk factors such as poverty (Burchinal, Roberts, Zeisel, Hennon, & Hooper, 2006); conflict, stress, and parent psychopathology (Prevatt, 2003; Yan, 2016) as well as children's learning problems (Baker, 2006). We take note of these risks. But we agree with Cohen, Mannarino, and Deblinger (2006) that a topical risk for children is parental divorce. Although divorce is commonplace in most societies, Levine and Kline (2008) refer nonetheless to "children's traumatic reaction to divorce" (p. 162). Typically, for children aged between 6 and 8 years, Wright (2011) explains that the experience of parental divorce causes internal conflict and strong emotions such as loss and fear of abandonment. In addition to being potentially trauma-inducing, such emotional conflict can hinder children's learning process of scholastic skills during class time (Valiente, Swanson, & Eisenberg, 2012). Despite this risk,

how children whose parents are divorced adjust well to first grade has not yet received much scholarly attention.

Specifically, in this article we are concerned with understanding how the supportive interactions between first grade teachers and first grade children support children from divorced parents to adjust to first grade.

Within the school ecology, teachers are a protective factor for children during times of adversity (Ladd & Burgess, 2001). The resilience-enabling value of teachers is especially pertinent when children enter formal school settings such as first grade for the first time (Hamre & Pianta, 2006). However, despite the rising incidence of divorce globally (Ruspini, 2016) and in South Africa (Preller, 2013), we found no literature (neither Western nor African) explaining how teachers champion resilience during children's positive adjustment to first grade when this transition is complicated by parental divorce. Thus, the question which directed this article is: How do the supportive interactions between first grade teachers and first grade children support children from divorced parents to adjust to first grade?

### **Brief Review of the Relevant Literature**

From a Social Ecological approach, Ungar (2012) explains that resilience necessitates that the child alone is not individually responsible for positive adjustment to adversity. This means that the child is not individually responsible for adjusting to the challenges of first grade. Fokides (2016) explains that because transitions, such as this adjustment to first grade, are social constructs rather than individual endeavours such positive adjustment to school involves the constructive participation of social ecologies. In other words, social ecologies (family, school, community) are co-constructors of resilience processes (Ungar, 2012). As mentioned, our focus in this article is on the school ecology and so we report literature which explains the challenges associated with transitioning to school, how divorce compounds school adjustment, and what is known about how teachers facilitate positive school adjustment.



**Challenges to positive first grade adjustment and how divorce complicates these challenges**

Most first graders are likely to recognize changes in their life-worlds that could challenge the adjustment process (Sink, Edwards, & Weir, 2007). Generally, the adjustment to first grade consists of challenges in all four developmental domains that must be mastered (Shoshani & Aviv, 2012). These challenges could relate to difficulties that children may experience in the social and emotional, and in the physical and cognitive domains (Fox, Dunlap, & Cushing, 2002). For instance, Bowman (2010) explains that cognitive development has a strong influence on all the other developmental domains. Generally, on a cognitive level first graders should adjust to ignoring distractions and sustaining concentration for longer; they should use executive function skills and recall maths problem-solving steps (Obradović, Portilla, & Boyce, 2012). We know now that parental divorce is an additional risk to coping well with starting formal school. Steele and Kuban (2013) found parental divorce to be a traumatic event for some children that may impact their cognitive development. For example such trauma may lead to limitations in their verbal skills that could impact negatively on their academic progress (Van Der Kolk, 2007). Van Der Kolk's findings relate to Leys' (2000) contention that:

During the provocation of traumatic memories, there is an increased activation of the visual area (according to hypothesis, the seat of iconic, traumatic memory) and decreased activation of Broca's area (the part of the central nervous system most centrally involved with speech) and hence according to the hypothesis, with narrative memory. (p. 260)

In other words, the functioning of speech and language decreases. Speech and language abilities form an integral aspect of learning and communication, especially in the foundation phase and these skills facilitate understanding, which is necessary for effective learning functioning in the classroom (Theron, 2013a).

In the emotional domain, first graders need to adjust to various changes (e.g. coping with emotions such as anxiety and managing self-regulation) that could impact their emotional

wellness. To cope with these changes first graders need to self-regulate and manage their emotions; they should demonstrate motivation and form close relationships with their teachers (Trentacosta & Izard, 2007). Yet for first graders of divorced parents, divorce often causes distressing emotions, including being fearful and/or distrustful. These stressful events cause negative emotions resulting to an emotional barrier and/or distraction that make it difficult for such a child to concentrate in school (Cole et al., 2005). Thus, difficulty regulating emotions could complicate adjustment to first grade and, in addition, exacerbate cognitive challenges.

In general, first graders are faced with the adjustment to new social roles, getting to know new teachers and friends, and becoming familiar with more formal work and less play (Einarsdóttir, 2007a). But, after divorce specifically, children often experience difficulty with social relationships such as those with peers, and their social competence is often disrupted (McGurk & Soriano, 1998). According to Fagan and Churchill (2012) they are also more likely to experience difficulty with conflict resolution in their social relationships. These challenges could have, in turn, a negative impact on their social functioning, hindering how they connect to teachers and peers and engage during first grade group work, team sports, and break times.

Physically, first graders generally need to adapt to restrictions that limit their physical space in the class setting, such as being bound to a specific space like a desk. They cannot move around and play freely as may have been previously acceptable at nursery school. They also need to keep seated for longer periods of time than what they are used to (Sink et al., 2007). In relation to this, Nichols (2014) refers to the physical living adjustments that children often need to make after divorce so the physical classroom restrictions might reflect the adjustments they have had to make at home with regard to physical living. In most cases either one parent, or the child and the other parent, need to relocate after the divorce. Getting used to different home environments may also impact on children's functioning in class when they need to adapt to reduced mobility.

**How teachers mitigate challenges to adjustment to first grade**

Because this article focuses on adjustment to first grade, the school ecology is emphasized. We acknowledge that the whole network surrounding the school (i.e. teachers, peers, and family) is important if we are to gain a full understanding of school transitions (Ahtola et al., 2011). Still, literature on positive adjustment to first grade accentuates teachers within the school ecology as important contributors to pathways that enable resilience (Gutman, 2009). In particular, studies show that teachers supported first grade transitions when they focused on being competent instructors in their classrooms (Perry, Donohue, & Weinstein, 2007). Teachers also facilitated active cognitive engagement in having children actively take part in class activities and receive recognition for their contributions (Cefai, 2007). For Perry et al. (2007), cognitive development was associated with teacher actions such as being more instructional during the teaching of new concepts by checking children's conceptual understanding and engaging them in problem solving activities. With regard to the social-emotional domain, the relational interactions between teacher and child were also found to be fundamental by Pianta, Hamre, and Allen (2012), especially during times of transition (Cadima, Doumen, Verschueren, & Buyse, 2015). This means that teachers who supported positive adjustment to first grade established positive relationships with their students (Baker, 2006) and they provided a positive emotional environment in their classrooms (Yan, 2016). Truebridge (2014) found that relationships between teacher and child defined by care fostered a sense of belonging and connectedness that exudes trust. Similarly, the study by Rey, Smith, Yoon, Somers, and Barnett (2007) established that children who have an emotionally supportive, caring, and meaningful relationship with a teacher experience connectedness to school and are more involved in school activities such as extra-mural ones. Emotional support was also found in a study about close teacher-student relationships that provided warmth and support (Kiuru et al., 2016). On

occasion, studies focused on physical development (see, for example, Wilson, 2011) during the adjustment to first grade but without stating specifics about what teacher actions entailed.

Developmental theorists explain that development occurs throughout the human lifespan and follows specific developmental stages that draw on four domains of development, namely cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development (Louw & Louw, 2014; Steinberg, Bornstein, Lowe Vandell, & Rook, 2010). The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) states that “early childhood, which spans the period up to 8 years of age is critical for cognitive, social, emotional and physical development” (2016, para. 1). Holistic early childhood development serves as a foundation for later learning and development (Allen & Kelly, 2015). Accordingly, optimal child development combines all the above-mentioned domains in support of holistic development (National Council of Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2004); development of the whole child informs adjustment processes (Bowman, 2010). Even so, as illustrated above, the current literature provides silo-like accounts of how teachers facilitate the processes of positive adjustment to first grade in that studies explore how teachers facilitated adjustment in specific developmental domains. If early childhood development (including transitioning to first grade) is optimal when it is holistic (NCCA, 2004), then there is a need for accounts that address how teachers facilitate all four developmental domains.

Although the above studies provide some (albeit silo-like) explanation of what teachers did to support children to adjust to the challenges of first grade, of significance is the fact that none of these studies were specifically about children whose parents were divorced. In relation to grade 6 children, Anderson (2006) concluded that teachers play a profound role in supporting those of divorced parents and provided valuable insight into how teachers can support them. However, given the vastly different developmental domains of first and sixth graders, the relevance of Anderson’s study to this article is limited.

### **Method**

In order to address the gap related to the poor understanding of how first grade teachers support children whose parents are divorce to develop holistically and transition well to first grade, we carried out a study in which first graders were the primary informants. The methodological orientation for this study adapted the work of Christensen and James (2017) who wrote about the importance of children being viewed as central informants regarding their own lives. They emphasise the need for research with children, instead of on children since this, as Norozi and Moen (2016) make clear, provides an exact and crucial understanding of children's life worlds.

### **Design**

Following Yin (2014) the approach used in this study was a multiple, illustrative case-study. An illustrative case study is descriptive and serves to make unfamiliar aspects about a topic more familiar (Mann, 2006). Accordingly, we report on five cases of resilient first graders of divorced parents who adjusted well to first grade. Primary and secondary informants took part to contribute to the understanding of what enables these particular first graders to adjust well to first grade. For the purposes of this article the only data used was that that explained how first grade teachers facilitated positive adjustment to first grade for children of divorced parents.

### **Case Informants**

In case study terminology, an informant is viewed as a specialized category of research participant who has specific knowledge and expertise regarding the information that is needed to answer the research question (Ogden, 2008). The primary and secondary informants in this research project therefore provide an insider's perspective as well as in-depth information about how first grade teachers facilitated positive adjustment to first grade for children of divorced parents.

The primary informants were selected based on 12 criteria presented in Table 1, during the fourth month of their first grade year. The interviews with primary informants commenced four months after being selected by their first grade teachers. Thus, the primary informants have been exposed to their teacher's supportive actions for eight months before starting with interviews. To generate understanding of relevant indicators of positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce, the first author consulted with an Advisory Panel (AP). Using an AP has become popular in international and South African resilience studies (Theron, Theron, & Malindi, 2013). The AP consisted of three first grade teachers and two educational psychologists. The first author invited these experts because of their deep knowledge of the focus of this study (i.e. children adjusting well to first grade despite parental divorce). Following a day-long meeting in which the AP and the first author discussed resilience and the indicators of resilient adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce, the AP agreed that 12 indicators were important (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Indicators of positive adjustment*

| <b>Cognitive indicators</b>                                 | <b>Behavioural indicators</b>                                                                                           | <b>Social indicators</b>                           | <b>Emotional indicators</b>                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Academic progress                                           | Normative behaviour (e.g. constructive anger management)                                                                | Participation in class and after-school activities | Positive self-esteem and self-worth ('I can') |
| Able to listen to teacher                                   | Co-operative classroom behaviour (e.g. can cope well with discipline; is diligent; stays seated when doing school work) | Able to form and maintain friendship               | Copes well with conflict                      |
| Able to understand and follow instructions from the teacher |                                                                                                                         | Positive peer and teacher relationships            | Healthy risk-taking                           |
| Problem solving                                             |                                                                                                                         |                                                    |                                               |

First grade teachers from 8 schools who agreed to collaborate in the study used the indicators to identify children in their classes whose parents are divorced but who nonetheless adjusted well to first grade. The five cases that showed the highest levels of positive adjustment (i.e. rated as excellent for every / most indicators) were recruited by the first author. They came from 3 middle-to-high income schools. Thus, following Polkinghorne (2005) using these criteria facilitated the purposeful selection of informants.

Primary informants of this study, referred to as case children, included three first grade girls, namely Sarah (case child 1), Andrea (case child 4) and Cassy (case child 5), as well as two first grade boys, named Tim (case child 2) and Lionel (case child 3). Pseudonyms are used for each case child. Parent figures and teachers are associated with the number of each case child, e.g. teacher 1 as Sarah (case child 1's) teacher. Four of the five informants attended South African Government schools in urban areas around Johannesburg, and one child attended a private school in Johannesburg. All five children came from middle-to-high income families. The biological parents of all primary informants were divorced. In two of the cases the divorce occurred in the 12 months preceding the start of first grade, and in the three other cases the divorce was less recent (i.e. prior to the reception year that directly precedes first grade or while the child was in nursery school). In all five cases, parents and/or teachers observed that primary informants did experience their parents' divorce as challenging. The first informant presented with higher anxiety after her parents' divorce; the second informant reacted more emotionally after a weekend when he visited his father; the third came across as unsettled in class every time he spent a weekend with his father and arrived late for school; the fourth presented with clingy and dependent behaviour towards her mother at times; and the fifth struggled to socialize when commencing first grade.

There were 14 secondary informants of which 7 were the biological parents of the primary informants (5 mothers and 2 fathers). Also, 2 secondary informants were step-fathers.

The remaining 5 secondary informants were the first grade teachers of the primary informants. The teachers were all female. Their range of first grade teaching experience varied between 6 and 35 years.

### **Data Generation**

Collecting data with primary and secondary informants occurred at different times. In line with Kumpulainen et al. (2016), a participatory research approach was deemed useful for the capturing of authenticity in the voices of informants when explaining why and how children adjusted and coped well with first grade.

**Data generation with primary informants.** The first author visited three primary informants at their homes. One other informant was visited at her school after school hours and the other informant, came to the first author's office after school hours. There were three home visits scheduled with the residing biological parent's permission. During each visit, the primary informant was approached separately. Each visit lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

Data generation commenced with semi-structured video-recorded interviews with primary informants to provide narrative and/or visual accounts regarding their confirmation that they believed they had adjusted well to first grade and their understanding of what had supported their positive adjustment to first grade. A semi-structured interview is a flexible data collection method that allows for dialogue between researcher and informant (Veldsman, 2009). The semi-structured interview with primary informants consisted of questions relating to what new things they had to get used to in first grade; what they could do well in class or at school; what or who helped them to do well in first grade; and what they would recommend to other first graders starting formal school to aid positive adjustment. During the first home visit, the semi-structured interview was supported by the Draw-and-talk method outlined by Bendelow, Carpenter, Vautier, and Williams (2002). The children were invited to draw their answers to questions



posed and then, following Tones and Tilford (2001), provide a verbal account about their drawing. As Harrison, Clarke, and Ungerer (2007) point out, children's drawings can provide rich insights that aid a research enquiry. To create the drawings, each primary informant was provided with paper, a grey pencil, and coloured crayons. Some primary informants immediately drew a picture in answer to the question and then provided a verbal explanation, whereas others first verbalized their answer and then provided a visual account. At the end of the first visit, each primary informant received an electronic disposable camera that she or he could use at school, with the class teacher's permission, the following week to capture the things or people they viewed as contributors in helping them adjust to first grade.

During the second visit the primary informants' photos were loaded onto a laptop. Following Sitter (2017) the photographs used during the Photovoice facilitated dialogue. In relation to the first author's questions about who or what had helped the primary informant to adjust well to school, he or she explained each photograph and its relevance to how it helped him or her to adjust to first grade or to do well in first grade. Thereafter, each informant identified between 5 and 10 photos that best described their positive adjustment. The first author used probes to elicit rich answers that explained how the photos document what or who had helped the first grader to cope well with first grade.

The second part of the second visit was spent on writing a story with the primary informant using her or his drawings and photos to tell about her or his positive adjustment to first grade. Thereafter the first author transformed the written story into a digital format by using the program iMovie because digital storytelling had helped children's adjustment to first grade in a previous study by Fokides (2016). The story that the primary informant told explained her or his positive adjustment to first grade, and was written down by the first author. Later, the first author did a voice recording of the written story that was used in the digital story that consisted of drawings or photos. Primary informants listened to the story since they could not fluently

read at that time, while looking at their drawings and photos. Snippets from audio-recorded teacher and parent interviews explaining the first grader's positive adjustment to first grade were also added if the primary informant gave permission for these to be added to his or her story.

During the third visit the first author, together with the primary informant and, later, his or her parent watched the story together. During this visit the primary informant indicated if and how this story was a true reflection that explained his or her positive adjustment to first grade. All five primary informants agreed that this story explained their positive adjustment to first grade well.

**Data generation with secondary informants.** A semi-structured video recorded interview was conducted with all secondary informants. Interviews with parents lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Parents were asked questions, the replies to which necessitated their needing to describe their child's first grade year thus far. They were asked what they believed enabled their child to cope well at school; who were the people, and what were the activities, or opportunities that helped their child to adjust well to first grade; and what advice they would give to other parents who were recently divorced and whose child was adjusting to first grade. The first author first visited 3 of the residing parents at their home, the other residing parent was visited at her parents' home; and the other case, the parents visited the first author in her office. In two cases both biological parents were present and in one of the two a stepfather was also present; in two cases only the biological mother was present, and in the other case the biological mother and stepfather were present.

Thereafter the teacher interview took place at the teacher's school. Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. Questions were posed to gather information explaining the primary informants' positive adjustment to school. For example, first grade teachers were asked to describe the informant as they experienced him or her in class; to say which indicators pertaining to this child's positive adjustment made them consider him or her as having adjusted well to

school; to describe what they believed enabled the child to adjust well to formal school; and to say what advice they would give to other parents who are recently divorced or divorcing while the child is adjusting to first grade. Prompts were also used to focus on who or what supported the primary informant to cope well with starting first grade, as well as how this was done. For example, who contributed to the child's positive adjustment and what other things evident in the child's life could have supported this positive adjustment. Furthermore, the divorce and its possible impacts were discussed only with secondary informants, both parents and teachers. They were asked about the consequences of divorce (if any) on positive first grade adjustment and how these manifested, as well as who had supported the primary informant despite the divorce. The topic of the divorce itself was not discussed with children since some parents were concerned about the impact of these questions on their child. For this reason, primary informants were asked only questions relating to their positive adjustment to school.

### **Data Analyses**

Thematic content analysis (TCA) was applied by the first author. TCA took place in phases following Braun and Clarke (2006). For the purposes of this article, only data that related to first grade teachers' support during children's positive adjustment to first grade was included. This data included the explanations of the children, teachers, and/or parents. The first phase commenced when the first author familiarized herself and engaged with the data by reading through all the transcripts repeatedly while also studying drawings and photos to extract evidence relating to first grade teachers. Phase 2 included a list with initial ideas regarding relevant matters in the data pertaining to the research focus of first grade teachers' contributions to children's positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce. In conjunction the data was coded by the first author and two other fellow students who were also doing a resilience-focused study, of which one, also relating to positive adjustment to first grade. Coders used open codes that answered the research question (How do teachers facilitate positive adjustment to first

grade despite parental divorce?). For example, one code referred to first grade teachers who were aware and responsive to the needs of first graders. The third phase consisted of searching for themes among codes that pointed to how teachers facilitated positive adjustment to first grade. For example, having a purposeful emotionally supportive teacher was one of the themes that emerged. According to Saldaña (2009), the first author and the fellow students thereafter, during Phase 4, coded the data independently, and held consensus discussions between them about the themes and how these themes answer to the question of how teachers support children to adjust well to first grade. Phase 5 consisted of renaming themes by discussing the sub-themes and what each theme entailed. For example, a purposefully emotionally supportive teacher was an approachable teacher. Lastly in Phase 6 the analysed data relating to first grade teachers who answered this research question was used to write this article.

### **Ethics**

The authors received clearance from the Institutional Review Board of [blinded for review] to conduct this research study. In addition, the authors gained informed consent from the Gauteng Education Department as well as the principals of the schools involved. Teachers and parents also needed to give their informed consent. In line with the requirement suggested by Creswell (2012), primary informants assented in writing that they understood and were willing to participate. Because the primary informants were first graders who could not yet read, their assent form was a child- friendly information pack that consisted mainly of pictures and short sentences. The first author worked through the information pack with the primary informant by reading the assent form that was written in the primary informant's mother tongue.

### **Trustworthiness**

Following Hall and Theron (2016), credibility was ensured by triangulating the multiple data sources. Multiple coders, in line with the requirements suggested by Berends and Johnston (2005) also coded the data to enhance the qualitative analysis and consensus discussions

informed final codes. Primary informants together with the first author each wrote a story that concluded the data generation process. This story included their drawings, photos, and verbal descriptions. The first author transformed each of these into a digital story format. Primary informants agreed that these were a true reflection of their accounts. Hence, as suggested by Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2006), credibility was evident when the first author's portrayal of the research was in agreement with the primary informant's explanation of his or her positive adjustment to first grade.

### **Findings**

In answer to the question of how first grade teachers facilitate positive adjustment to first grade, four themes emerged: first grade teachers enabled academic mastery; first grade teachers intentionally created emotionally connected relationships with case children; first grade teachers created pathways to social engagement; and first grade teachers encouraged physical extra-mural activities. These themes implied ordinary actions by first grade teachers who were regularly responsive. Their responses were holistic; they development in all four developmental domains. Such responsiveness was not a once-off phenomenon, but was, rather, repeatedly evident in the teachers' everyday actions.

#### **Teachers Enabled Academic Mastery**

Cognitive development involves mental activities that include attention, problem-solving, creativity, language, and decision-making (Pound, 2013). Supporting children academically resulted in children's experiencing being taught by their teacher to "become clever" (Sarah, Andrea). Cassy explained the process of how the teacher taught scholastic content that became more difficult as time progressed: "There were many things [scholastic skills] that I didn't know at first how to do it. My teacher first taught us the easy things, but then she taught us difficult things". However, Tim indicated that he "actually...like[s] learning and all that stuff

[schoolwork] [him]self” and made it clear that adjusting well to first grade was possible because of his own intellect and ability to learn.

Various specific actions conveyed purposeful academic support: it was demonstrated when teachers individualized instructions and learning interventions. Teacher 3 explained that she enlarged fonts for Lionel who had a visual learning barrier, not only to support him academically, but also to ensure that this barrier to learning was not “something else that he needs to worry about” besides coping with two households. Teachers also accommodated learners’ individual learning needs. For instance, Sarah who presented with higher anxiety after her parents’ divorce explained that “she [teacher] helps the kids not to be afraid, by waiting for them when they are falling behind in work”. Furthermore case children also identified that their teacher took action to support them when they struggled with scholastic tasks. “She [teacher] helps me if I need help with stuff [schoolwork] – I just go and stand at her desk then she helps me with the answer” (Lionel). Sarah acknowledged, “In the beginning of the year I was scared to read. The teacher said we don’t have to be scared, as it’s our first time. And then we did it easily”.

Another resilience enabling process that contributed to academic learning occurred when teachers established a predictable classroom space. To facilitate predictability, teachers maintained a structured learning environment: “Limits are important...Try to keep to the routine and you know that they won’t be disrupted. Give routine, it gives security” (Teacher 5). Teacher 3 identified specifics about how she provides routine in a learning environment: “I show them on the board what we are going to do for the day... I write it down so that everyone can understand it ... For him as well, I will get him calmer by setting it [activities] out nicely”. Tim confirmed the teacher’s role as structure-giver, “She is the boss of the class”.

### **Teachers Intentionally Created Emotionally Connected Relationships**

All five informants reported positive emotionally connected relationships with their teachers. Some took photographs and other drew their teacher indicating that she was one of the most important people who enabled them to adjust well to school. “My teacher... always makes me happy... I like her” was Andrea’s verbal description of the photograph of her teacher. Tim conveyed the message that he trusts his teacher when he said, “If there is something wrong then ... tell the teacher. She will sort it out”. Also, parents confirmed teachers’ efforts in establishing an emotional connection with their children: “Her teacher is a very sweet and patient lady who truly loves her learners and helps them if they are stuck” (Parent 4). Also, parents could observe the positive impact of the connected relationship from their child’s behaviour: “Cassy is always crazy about her teacher. You can just see from how she acts that it’s nice for her” (Parent 5). All five teachers strived to establish a positive emotionally connected relationship. Also, most teachers confirmed that they experienced the positive emotional connection as reciprocal between themselves and the informant. Teacher 1 referred to Sarah who gives her hugs, while Teacher 3 referred to the conversations that Lionel has with her about his life and challenges. Parent 5 explained that Cassy’s school valued a positive emotional connection between first grade teacher and child. During the class placement of kindergarten children for the following year, first grade teachers, like Teacher 4 and 5 who taught at this school, discuss children’s temperaments and which first grade teacher would be the best fit to connect emotionally with each child. During a follow-up conversation with Teachers 1, 2, and 3 they confirmed that they follow similar processes. This is evidence of some schools’ progressive thinking about enabling positive school adjustment by ensuring that first graders are placed with teachers who will understand their temperament and challenges (e.g. parental divorce) and with whom they may be able to form an emotional relationship.

Teachers also took action to position themselves as approachable figures. Cassy related her emotional connection to her teacher with reference to her teacher’s ability to be

approachable. Cassy's description links an approachable with cognitive development: "It [schoolwork] was a first for me ... But then I knew my teacher, and if I don't know something ... she helps me if I ask her". For teachers to come across as approachable, they needed to present as stable, constant, and available figures. "It is important for the child to experience stability – when everything else changes, the child still has to feel safe, sheltered, and protected at school" (Teacher 5). About consistency, Teacher 3 commented, "The teacher must remain constant and give that security at school ... even though mommy didn't give love yesterday teacher is there at school ... You are just like their other mommy at school". Parent 1 emphasized the critical role of her daughter's class teacher when the teacher set a safe emotional space by showing herself to be trustworthy and available when the child was in need of reassurance or confirmation about herself or her work. Parent 1 included the teacher as part of her daughter's support network and said, "Her [daughter] support structure is very important to her... it's very important to her that she must feel safe where she is". This enhanced her daughter's self-confidence.

A safe emotional relationship was also constructed when teachers demonstrated empathy for the first grader whose life was negatively impacted by the divorce without his or her asking to be affected by the circumstances. When teachers were mindful about these circumstances being out of the child's control, it informed their classroom practice. Teacher 2 summed it up when she explained that home circumstances resulting from the divorce often impact the child negatively. She said, "Have understanding for the child". Teacher 3, for example, explained that she does not get upset with Lionel when "[his] Daddy [doesn't] have him at school on time on a Monday" after visiting for the weekend. "I see it affects him [child], I notice there is a change in him".

Furthermore, teachers created contact time during which children could share experiences with the class or with the teachers. Providing time in the class routine to talk was important



since it opened channels for communication that strengthened the relationship. Like Teacher 1, the other teachers started off on a Monday with chat time during which children shared what their weekends had entailed. It was then that a teacher could report. “Lionel will share anything with me. He will also tell me if it isn’t going well at home” (Teacher 3). Teacher 2 felt that the safe space of communication is indicative of the child’s acceptance of his or her teacher because if “a child cannot come and tell the teacher something, then ... he [child] hasn’t accepted her... as ... his mommy at school”.

### **Teachers Created Pathways to Social Engagement**

Some children of divorced parents struggle with social engagement at times and tend to withdraw (Fagan & Churchill, 2012). Yet, first grade teachers’ responsiveness was demonstrated when they provided pathways for social engagement that protected children from social withdrawal. For example, Cassy who struggled with making new friends explained how her teacher listened to her when she asked to be placed next to a specific girl with whom she wanted to be friends. Later on, this friend also became an academic support structure to Participant 5 during paired learning activities when she struggled with sums (see figure 1).

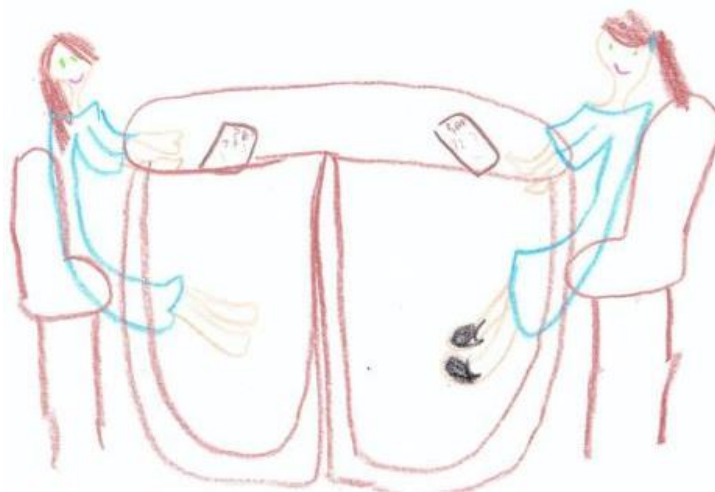


*Figure 1. Cassy’s friend helping her with sums*

Such support was invaluable because it facilitated a sense of competence that was important given the multiple challenges of adjusting to first grade in tandem with how divorce

can jeopardize children's self-esteem. From social engagement pathways that teachers facilitated, peers also supported case children emotionally when they encouraged case children during academic work to "keep on trying" (Andrea). It was clear that these first grade teachers were aware of case children's internal assets in their social skills. For example, Teacher 4 noticed, when she observed Andrea taking part in conversation and making suggestions during play time, that although she presents as an introverted girl, she does well socially within her group of close friends. Teacher 2 was aware that Tim is "a real little leader" amongst his friends – an observation based on her scrutiny of his social interactions with other peers. Teachers were not only silent observers of informants' social skills, but were also responsive when a child steered towards actions that developed her or his own social skills.

For Lionel who struggled with social engagement, his first grade teacher started the construction of a social world with peers through the language she used. Lionel reported on how this teacher positively grouped the children in her class as "the family who are with us in the class".

Teachers also focused on social engagement between peers and facilitated these processes by being responsive when they were aware of some children's not having any friends. The habitual monitoring was echoed in how Cassy explained her teacher's responsiveness: "Every single time, every single break ... when someone doesn't have a friend, she [teacher] will say: 'Who will play with that friend?'" First grade teachers asked questions about who plays with whom. "We make sure they have friends" (Teacher 3).

The social engagement that teachers facilitated assisted the inclusion of primary informants into their peer group. Tim emphasized the value of inclusion by friends: "All these friends played with me ... it's important that kids can play with each other ... you can't just sit and be bored". It was also a reciprocal process when informants joined peer groups and engaged with them. Andrea reported: "I like to play with my friends – they keep me happy".

**Teachers Purposefully Encouraged Physical Extra-Mural Activities**

In the South African Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) physical education forms part of Life Orientation and should receive at least two hours per week (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Physical development lessons should focus on skills such as coordination, balance, rhythm, and perceptual-motor skills (Department of Basic Education, 2011). The only evidence from the data that hinted at physical development during school hours was Sarah's drawing of herself during a physical education activity where she was able to master the skill of balancing a bean-bag on her head and Andrea's drawing of herself and the friend she made while skipping rope during a physical educational period.

However the urban schools involved in this study were fortunate enough to have various resources at their disposal to use for physical development. These resources also included extra-mural activities that were of a physical nature and could support physical development. Teachers showed themselves to be purposefully involved in identifying extra-mural activities in which informants could participate. These first grade teachers played an important role in informing children and parents about the various activities available at school. For divorced parents with financial constraints, this is important since most of the extra-mural physical activities are free of charge at schools. Parent 4 talked about how other fee-based extra-mural activities for her daughter had to be discontinued because of her ex-husband's failure to contribute financially. Yet, she was grateful to Teacher 4 who purposefully identified netball (a non-fee-based extra-mural) at school in which her daughter could participate. When teachers purposefully identified extra-mural activities, they ensured that children were "involved" (Teacher 3). Parent 2 shared how her son struggles with sport-based activities because of the hand-eye coordination that needs to develop. But, she believed that when her son practised cricket this supported his physical development and she was also thankful that the opportunity

was brought to their attention. Parent 2 also mentioned that although her son is not a “sport star” he enjoys taking part in all the different available school activities.

By offering purposeful support in this manner, teachers make sure to “always draw the child in” (Teacher 1). In the course of this, not only did children benefit from physical development, but it also impacted on their social engagement when they belonged to a team, or a club, or a group. Parents recognised this value: “I think they [teachers] are helping her; they keep the children involved ...” (Parent 1).

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this article is to answer the question of how first grade teachers facilitate children’s positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce. In answer, we reported four themes which, taken together, suggest three components that supported positive adjustment to first grade. First, first grade teachers facilitated development across all four developmental domains; second, teacher actions which facilitated holistic development formed part of teachers’ ordinary day-to-day classroom practices; and third, while teachers were facilitating adjustment-enabling processes, they also allowed children to take responsibility and reach out to the social ecological resources supporting their resilience.

First of all, teacher actions included all four developmental domains in how they supported first graders whose parents had divorce and so supported development of the child as a whole. For example, during group work teachers combined peer interaction, a sense of safety and academic support and in doing so supported cognitive, social and emotional development. The benefits of such multi-domain activities have been confirmed in other studies such as that of Perry et al. (2007). As in the study of Kohl and Cook (2013), teacher facilitation of children’s physical development within the boundaries of extra-mural activities supported social (and probably emotional) development whilst children were part of a focused group or team.

What stood out about how teacher support was holistic, was the teacher's attention to the child and the teacher's capacity to relate to the child as a cognitive, social, physical and emotional being. In this regard, our results speak of how constructive connections between the first grader and school ecologies developed when teachers took notice of the individual first grader and her or his specific needs, including divorce-related needs. In this study, teachers demonstrated awareness in how they took notice of how case children's home circumstances were impacted by divorce; in how they thought about the role of the classroom as a safe space with open communication channels; and in how they engaged in their role of "mommy at school". Teachers were not only aware of the aforementioned, but also took action by being responsive to children's needs and in doing so conveyed the message that they see these children, understand their circumstances, and recognise that they are important enough for them, as teachers, to take action that can support them. Thus, our results confirm Wien's (2010) contention that relationships are at the heart of enabling primary school classrooms. They align with Ungar's (2012) social ecological approach that views resilience as relationally constructed and confirm the hypothesis that resilience "is about connections and relationships" (Truebridge, 2014, p. 71).

Adding to the above, Curby, Grimm, and Pianta (2010) found that a teacher's emotional support is linked to children's academic learning and cognitive development. Similarly, the case children's established, trusted relationship with their teachers facilitated their approaching the teacher with more ease to ask for assistance across all domains of development. Thus, this first component provides evidence for us to argue that in facilitating cognitive, emotional, social and physical development, teachers support children whose parents are divorced to adjust well to first grade.

The second component is the observation that first grade teachers' facilitation of holistic development was anchored in what Masten (2011) refers to as ordinary daily actions that took on

special meaning for case children and their parents. These ordinary actions (such as providing a predictable classroom routine, supporting learning, or facilitating positive peer relationships) probably provided case children with stability and predictability. We hypothesise that this was especially important, given that Cavanagh and Huston (2008) note that some children of divorced parents are exposed to instability and unpredictability. Sandstorm and Huerta (2013) state that “children thrive in stable and nurturing environments where they have a routine and know what to expect” (p. 5). Importantly, facilitating positive adjustment to first grade did not come from first grade teachers’ occasional support, or from supportive actions that might be considered exceptional for teachers (e.g., therapeutic interventions which characterise the practice of mental health practitioners). Instead, teacher support took the form of consistent ordinary teacher actions that facilitated holistic development. Our study confirms the positive effect on case children when first grade teachers did so and echoes Marden (1894) who said, “Don’t wait for extraordinary opportunities. Seize the common occasions and make them great” (p. 5). Treptow (2017) explains that ordinary actions, such as having a vulnerable child experience relationships that foster care and that are supportive of inherent developmental capacities, enable resilience. Similarly, in a longitudinal study Johnson (2008,) referred to the “ordinary... little things” (p. 385) that teachers did that enabled the resilience of 9- to 12-year-old children. Hall and Theron (2016) also found that the commonplace actions of teachers mattered for the resilience of adolescents with intellectual disability. However, none of the above prior studies focused on first graders. Thus our study extends what was known about helpful teacher actions in general to encompass the understanding that ordinary first grade teacher practices enabled first grade children whose parents are divorced to adjust well to first grade.

The last component rests on the fact that during adjustment-enabling processes that first grade teachers facilitated, first graders were able to engage with their social ecologies and

demonstrate agency. Although divorce often leaves children feeling powerless and helpless (Hannibal, 2007) it is evident that teacher-facilitated adjustment-enabling processes allowed children to engage actively in their own adjustment processes. These first grade teachers created opportunities for informants to reciprocate, such as when structured activities or teacher suggestions created opportunities for children to draw on own interpersonal or emotional or cognitive skills. Thus our findings confirm that the Social Ecological standpoint of reciprocal engagement between individual and social ecology (Ungar, 2012) underpins children's positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce.

### **Implications**

Children spend more time at school than they do at any other place aside from their homes, making schools important contributors to human development (Eccles & Roeser, 2012) so school ecologies need to be effective. The functioning of middle to high class urban schools today requires teachers to be exceptionally effective in various school systems. Teachers' tasks consist of various time-consuming practices such as marking various assessments, paperwork, teachers' meetings, lesson plans, lesson presentations relevant to the iGeneration of which 6- to 8-year-olds are part, extra-mural coaching sessions, school fundraisers, and after-hours school events. Teachers aim high so as to excel in these schools because that is what is expected. We thus acknowledge that all these facets construct an effectively functioning school. But for children of divorced parents who are adjusting to first grade, our study showed that the impact lies within the ordinary everyday practices of teachers that focus on the child's holistic development. We now focus on three aspects regarding best classroom practices that teachers can take away from this study.

### **Best Classroom Practices Should Include Holistic Development**

Best classroom practices should start with teacher training during which student first grade teachers are taught how to apply holistically developmental facilitative processes that

support positive adjustment to first grade. Teacher training should focus student first grade teachers' attention on thinking about the child holistically and not only in fragmented areas of development such as only cognitively, only emotionally or socially, or only physically. Mindful discussions about detailed and doable teacher actions in all developmental domains will inform best classroom practices.

### **Best Classroom Practices are Based on Ordinary Teacher Actions**

Within all four developmental domains, first grade teachers' supportive actions need not be out of the ordinary or extreme. For first graders of divorced parents, the ordinary everyday facilitative processes across all four developmental domains have the potential to make a difference. Teachers should still be mindful about their supportive actions, but should strive towards the stability that lies within ordinary supportive actions.

### **Best Classroom Practices Commence with Relationship Building and Respect for Child Agency**

"If education is to be the most powerful experience it can be, we have to focus on that relationship between teacher and student and we have, overtime, confused, clouded, complicated and obscured that relationship with every type of distraction" (Loe, 2014, para. 7). During those first few school days, teachers could invest their time in getting to know their students and their home circumstances. This will inform first grade teachers' actions and enable them to think holistically about the child. Relationship building needs to be expedited. Teachers can invent and apply ways to get the relationship building process started from day one when the first grader enters. They could, for example, play non-competitive games with the children that investigate interests, family setup, pets, personal characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses. These could include having the teacher share appropriate things about herself. A game could be devised in which the teacher can check in with each child personally at the end of each day for the first few weeks to give them a chance to verbalize the highs and lows of each day.



Furthermore, teachers could raise their awareness of children's ability to navigate towards resources. In this way the child's agency would be encouraged, respected, and valued. Teachers should be attentive when children make suggestions that demonstrate their agency and they should support children during these moments in order to strengthen their agency.

### **Limitations**

A limitation of this study relates to the range in time difference of biological parents' divorce. The primary informants experienced the divorce and its effects at different times, mostly before commencing with first grade which might suggest that some primary informants may have processed the divorce and its consequences differently. Although the reason for interviews with the first grade teachers of this study was clearly stated to be related to gathering information about children of divorced parents who adjusted well, these teachers were not explicitly asked if their supportive actions with these children were different from their actions directed at other children in their class whose parents were not divorced. Also, this study reports a snap-shot in time. It is unclear how long the effects of the above-mentioned teacher actions lasted. As recommended in many other resilience studies (e.g. Van Rensburg, Theron, & Rothmann, 2017) the lack of longitudinal insights are a limitation.

### **Conclusion**

Our study posed the question: How do the supportive interactions between first grade teachers and first grade children support children from divorced parents to adjust to first grade?

The answer aligns with previous studies which have reported that teachers' actions matter for children's resilience (Theron & Theron, 2014). In particular, this current study urges renewed appreciation for first grade teachers' everyday actions which facilitate first grade children's holistic development and opportunities for child agency. It is this "ordinary magic" (Masten, 2001) which explains positive first grade adjustment despite parental divorce.

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**CHAPTER 4**

Manuscript 3, “How do significant adults facilitate first grade adjustment despite divorce? Learning from a multiple case study” aims to answer the research question: “*How do adults who play significant roles in the first grader’s life contribute to positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce?*”

Prepared for *Child Development* (see Appendix H for author guidelines).

Authors: C. Bezuidenhout, L.C. Theron and E. Fritz

### Abstract

First grade adjustment and parental divorce are co-occurring risks in the lives of some children. This article draws on a multiple case-study to explain how significant adults (parent figures, extended family members, and teachers) supported five first graders' to adjust well to school, despite parental divorce. Adult support related to three aspects: respectful relationships encouraged parent collaboration; open communication smoothed school-related issues; and significant adults co-support school adjustment. These findings prompt practice-related guidelines for professionals who work with children and families.

## How Do Significant Adults Facilitate First Grade Adjustment Despite Divorce? Learning From A Multiple Case Study

Development is comprised of transitions (Robinson, 2003). The transition to formal school is important for child development because it often determines the pathways that children's educational development will take (Cowan, Cowan, Schulz, & Heming, 1994). However, although transitioning to school is a normative adjustment, it can pose a challenge to some first graders. Hirst, Jervis, Visagie, Sojo, and Cavanagh (2011) explained that transition to formal schooling (i.e. first grade) is marked by changes in children's daily physical environment, includes new learning, involves school rules and routines, as well as changes to their social status and identity. Sink, Edward, and Weir (2007) found that for some children these adjustments cause distress. In instances where parents have divorced, first graders need to adjust to the changes that accompany starting formal school, as well as coping with family changes caused by divorce. Maione (2005) reminds us, divorce is "part of our culture" (p. 4). Similarly, for Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2004) divorce is the rule rather than the exception. Kelly and Emery (2003) explain, divorce introduces changes that sometimes complicate children's positive development and normative adjustment to new life phases and transitions. Such multi-layered risks lead to the need for additional support for children faced with these challenges.

When first graders receive effective support and are able to cope well with the double risk of adjusting to first grade and parental divorce or separation, resilience is implied. Frydenberg (2017), like Masten (2014c) defines resilience as a process that supports a child who is exposed to adversity to nonetheless demonstrate successful functioning. Thus when a child (such as a first grader) is able to function well (like adapting well to first grade) in the face of additional risk (such as parental divorce), resilience is evident (Cummings & Valentino, 2015).

From a Social Ecological perspective, resilience is defined as the "dual processes of navigation and negotiation" (Ungar, 2012, p. 17) between the individual child and the social

environment such as the family, school, and community. Resilience can thus be seen in the ways in which children withstand risks through individual and collective resources, strengths, and capabilities (Panter-Brick et al., 2017). However, although the individual child demonstrates agency by navigating to resources, Ungar (2015) emphasizes the important role of families and communities to provide resilience-enabling resources. Accordingly, we theorised that some children whose parents have divorced adjust well to first grade because of supportive relationships with others, especially with significant adults. In addition, children often become more dependent on significant adults when they are starting formal school (Brooker, 2008). Clinton (2013) confirms that what matters most are the relationships which children have with others. For this reason, the purpose of this article is to explore how adults who play significant roles in the first grader's life contribute to their positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce.

### **Brief Review of the Relevant Literature**

We could source no studies explaining positive first grade adjustment despite parental divorce. The following literature review will therefore report on accounts of positive contributions of significant adults towards children's general adjustment despite parental divorce as well as on the limitations of this body of literature.

### **How Adults Contribute to Children's Resilience Post-Divorce**

When children have a constructive relationship with a competent adult they fare better and both recover and adjust more successfully (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990). Thus the significant adults in children's lives can contribute through their supportive relationship to the resilience of children at risk. These relationships include those with parents, grandparents, extended family members such as uncles and aunts, as well as other significant adults like teachers, nannies, therapists, and sports coaches.

Preller (2013) states that the “most significant relationships are those between ... parents and their children” (p. 1). Nielsen’s (2017) research explains that the focus nowadays regarding parental conflict and co-parenting after divorce should not even be the main issue at hand, especially during custody hearings, but should rather be on strengthening the parent-child relationship. For example, parents should prioritise quality interaction with their child (Danioni, Barni, & Rosnati, 2017). Chirban (2017) emphasized the importance of parents being attuned to their children’s needs despite other distractions caused by the divorce. Parent responsiveness should include low inter-parental conflict and effective ways in which parents resolve conflict along with co-operative parenting where parents communicate in a positive manner. Furthermore, authoritative parenting after divorce (during which parents present show warmth and supportiveness towards their children and are able to respond to their children’s needs, but are still firm and consistent and clearly in control of their children’s activities) was found to contribute to children’s resilience (Amato, 2000). Parents were also supportive of children when they managed to sustain stability and structure in children’s daily functioning during and following the divorce (Clark, 2013). Children’s resilience was further facilitated when parents communicated with their children’s teachers, ascertaining how they can assist the child academically, and when they kept teachers informed of divorce-related changes in their family, (Reynolds, 2011).

Step-parents are also potential sources of resilience-enabling support. Daughtry (2011) describes how the collaboration between step-parents and biological parents benefit children’s adjustment to divorce and how step-parents should strive to establish a stable relationship with step-children. Lamanna, Riedman, and Stewart (2016) explain that although step-parents take on a less active role in step-children’s lives, it benefits children’s adjustment when step-parents can find the balance to be both a confidante and a supporter.



Supportive extended family relationships were often found to be important protective factors following divorce (Leon, 2003), especially when extended family members were included during family therapy sessions (Gürmen, 2015). Grandparents, in particular, fulfilled various roles in support of children. Timonen, Doyle, and O'Dwyer (2009) explain that grandparents' support often deepens and they contribute by fulfilling more roles after a divorce such as providing stabilization in a family or, more often, informal childcare, or even becoming custodial parents in some cases. It is to the benefit of children when parents keep the contact between children and their grandparents intact, especially when there was a meaningful relationship with grandparents before the divorce (Timonen et al., 2009).

Other significant adults who support children after parental divorce include teachers. The positive relationship that children at risk have with teachers is a protective factor (Bayat, 2016). It is from these positive teacher-child relationships that children receive emotional support during times of transition or crisis (Werner, 2000). Furthermore, when teachers and parents collaborated in support of a child after parental divorce, the child benefitted significantly (Leon & Spengler, 2005). Further studies indicated how teachers supported children of divorced parents by providing time for them to express their feelings, showed additional love and care, were aware of the changes happening in the child's life, and/or referred them to the school psychologist or counsellor for further psychological support (Galluzzo, 2012).

Therapeutic interventions of healthcare professionals such as psychologists or counsellors are often one of the first resources parents turn to in support of their children following a divorce. Healthcare professionals are typically expected to intervene via therapy or counselling to support children through the divorce or post-divorce. In addition, they provide "parents with supportive tools to repair or sustain the parent-child relationship" (Baker & Andre, 2008, para. 3).

**Limitations to Current Understandings of how Significant Adults Enable Resilience of Children Post-Divorce**

Southwick, Bonanno, Masten, Panter-Brick, and Yehuda (2014) explain that “much of resilience, especially in children ... is embedded in close relationships ... Those relationships give ... a profound sense of emotional security and the feeling that someone has your back, because they do” (p. 5). Thus, children’s resilience is championed through relationships. Ungar (2015) believes that the resilience processes of children need “lots and lots of relationships” (p. 102). Relationships with various significant adults thus contribute to children’s resilience. However, the current literature offers incomplete accounts of how the relationships between children and significant adults facilitate children’s resilience, post-divorce.

First, the literature reporting on first grade adjustment mostly includes adults’ accounts of what enables positive adjustment to formal school (e.g. Kiuru et al., 2016; Perry, Donohue, & Weinstein, 2007; Wong, 2016). Studies reporting an inter-generational account that included both adult accounts and children’s perspectives on their positive adjustment to first grade were fewer (Choy & Karuppiyah, 2016; Skowron, 2005). The triangulation of adult and children’s perspectives will offer a more complete account of how first graders adjust well to formal school, post-divorce.

Second, the literature reporting on divorce and children is vast. There are accounts of the risk and protective factors impacting children post-divorce, including parenting factors (e.g., Kelly & Emery, 2003; Lamela, Figueiredo, Bastos, & Feinberg 2016; Viry, 2014), the effects of divorce on children (e.g., Fagan & Churchill, 2012; Maddox, 2010), as well as post-divorce interventions (e.g., Botha & Wild, 2013; Gilman, Schneider, & Shulak, 2005) and parent education programmes following divorce (e.g., Bacon, 2004). Despite this vastness, and as noted earlier, we found no studies that investigated how significant adults supported children to adjust well to first grade, despite parental divorce. There were studies on the role of both the

school and parents in supporting children after their parents' divorce (e.g., Brody, Dorsey, Forhand, & Armistead, 2002) and on the long term consequences that divorce had on children's education (e.g., Bernardi & Radl, 2014), but none of these were specific to first grade children. Studies on adjustment to first grade focused on how significant adults (e.g. teachers, extended family, parents) provided emotional support (Baker, 2006), pragmatic support (Kumpulainen et al., 2016), and social support (Perry et al., 2007) that ultimately benefitted the adjusting first grade child, but not in relation to parental divorce. In addition, these extant studies do not consider how relationships between significant adults champion first grade children's resilience, post-divorce.

Given these limitations, the following question informs the method and findings reported in this article: How do adults who play significant roles in the first grader's life contribute to positive first grade adjustment despite parental divorce?

### **Method**

The methodological orientation for our study is in agreement with Einarsdóttir (2007b) who concurred with other researchers that "children are seen as strong, capable, and knowledgeable experts on their own lives, possessing knowledge, perspective and interest that is best gained from the children themselves" (p. 199). Thus research with children contributes to insight and understanding from a child's perspective. In particular, given the previously mentioned methodological shortcoming in extant relevant studies (i.e. the over-reporting of adults' perspectives and under-reporting of children's and adults' perspectives), we prioritise children as the primary informants but also include significant adults as secondary informants.

### **Design**

In addressing the identified gap (i.e. the need to understand how significant adults support first grade children to adjust well to first grade, despite parental divorce), we used an illustrative multiple case study design. Mann (2006) describes an illustrative case study as descriptive in

that it serves to make the unfamiliar aspects about a topic more familiar. Each case illustrated children's positive adjustment to first grade, despite parental divorce.

### **Case Informants**

In case study terminology, an informant provides insights into the research phenomenon and is critical for the success of a case study (Yin, 2009). Ogden (2008) describes informants as valuable research participants because they provide specific knowledge that answers the research question. For the purposes of this article, primary and secondary informants shared in-depth information about how adults who play significant roles in the first grader's life facilitate positive adjustment to first grade parental divorce.

The criteria presented in Table 1 were used to select the primary informants (five first graders). Following Theron (2013b) who found that collaboration with Advisory Panels shaped research processes in a contextually meaningful way, the first author consulted with an Advisory Panel (AP) to generate information for the understanding of relevant indicators relating to positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce. This study's AP consisted of white Afrikaans speaking members – three first grade teachers and two educational psychologists. The first author viewed these community members as experts with insight and deep knowledge relating to the focus of her PhD study – how first graders adjust well to formal school despite parental divorce. The AP members and the first author discussed resilience during a day-long meeting with particular reference to the indicators of resilient first grade adjustment despite parental divorce. The AP agreed that 12 indicators were important for positive adjustment to formal school (see Table 1). [Insert Table 1 about here]

Thereafter, collaborating teachers teaching first grade in 8 urban schools in Johannesburg were asked to identify children in their class whose parents are divorced. The criteria in Table 1 were then used as indicators of positive adjustment by these first grade teachers. These first grade teachers marked each indicator as excellent, good, average, poor, or concerned as it

applied to the specific child. In other words, following Polkinghorne (2005), Table 1 functioned as a checklist for purposeful inclusion in the study. The results of these checklists indicated only five informants who showed positive adjustment to first grade.

In this study, pseudonyms are used for each primary informant. The primary informants were all white and Afrikaans-speaking and included three first grade girls, namely Sarah, Andrea, and Cassy, and two first grade boys, namely Tim and Lionel. Parent figures and teachers are associated with each case child's pseudonym. Of the five primary informants, four attended South African Government schools in urban areas surrounding Johannesburg, while one child attended a private school in Johannesburg. The families of all five children fall within the middle-to-high income group. The primary informants' biological parents were all divorced. The parental divorce in one of the cases occurred at the beginning of the child's first grade year, while in another case, the divorce occurred during the 12 months preceding the start of first grade in pre-school. For the other three children the divorce was less recent (i.e. during their pre-school years).

The five primary informants experienced their parents' divorce as a challenge according to their parents and teachers: Sarah showed a higher level of anxiety after her parents' divorce; Tim was emotional after he visited his father on a weekend; in class Lionel presented as unsettled when he arrived late at school on a Monday morning after spending the weekend at his father's home; Andrea was more clingy towards her mother after the divorce, and difficulty with social interaction with peers at school was observed by Cassy's teachers and parents. Table 2 summarises the living arrangements of each primary informant at the time of the study.

[Insert table 2 about here]

Fourteen white, Afrikaans speaking secondary informants participated, of which seven were the informants' biological parents (two biological fathers and five biological mothers). Two step-fathers also participated. The other five secondary informants were the first grade

teachers (all women) of each primary informant. The first grade teachers' teaching experience varied between six years and 35 years.

### **Data Generation**

**Data generation with primary informants.** The first author visited three of the primary informants at home. One other primary informant was visited at her school after hours, and the other primary informant visited the first author at her office after school hours. In total, three home visits occurred at the residing biological parent's home with that parent's permission. The primary informants met with the first author individually during each visit that lasted between 60 and 90 minutes at a time.

Data generation involved the use of semi-structured video-recorded interviews during which primary informants provided visual and narrative accounts of their positive adjustment to first grade and what they believed supported them to cope well during that time. Jamshed (2014) described a semi-structured interview as an in-depth interview method that enables the respondents to answer pre-set open-ended questions. The semi-structured interview that was used with primary informants included questions that asked them to describe the new things that they needed to get used to in first grade; to explain what they have noticed they can do well in class or at their school; to say who or what helped them to cope well in first grade; and to say what their recommendations are to other first graders about obtaining help to adjust well to first grade.

Following Tones and Tilford (2001), primary informants were asked to draw the answers to the interview questions and then explain their drawings verbally. In this way, and as Eldén (2012) explains, the Draw-and-talk-method is an effective method to support semi-structured interviews since this method allows for children's voices to become apparent through their drawings and narratives. Each of the primary informants was presented with a piece of paper, a grey pencil, and colouring crayons when they were requested to make the drawings. Primary

informants' approach to the request differed: some started to draw the picture to provide an answer to the question and thereafter provided a verbal explanation, while other informants first provided a verbal account as an answer and thereafter drew a picture.

An electronic disposable camera was provided to each primary informant at the end of the first visit to use at school with their parents' and teachers' permission the following week. The instruction accompanying the camera was to capture all the people or things they perceive to be contributors to their positive adjustment to first grade.

The second visit to each primary informant commenced with the loading of the primary informants' photos onto a laptop. Richard and Lahman (2015) explain how photographs provide access to the world and perceptions of the informants. Each photograph and the relevance of every photograph to first grade adjustment was explained by the informant. Then each informant decided on five to ten photos which best described their positive adjustment to first grade. It was necessary for the first author to use probes at times in order to elicit answers that provided a richer explanation regarding the photos and how each was indicative of who or what had helped the first grader to adjust well to starting formal schooling.

Thereafter, during the second part of the second visit, the first author and primary informant spent time writing a story together that used the informant's drawings and photos to explain her or his positive adjustment to starting first grade. After the second visit, the first author transformed the written story with the iMovie program into a digital format. During the third visit, primary informants were asked to listen to their story because they could not yet read fluently at that stage. Snippets were used from audio-recorded teacher and parent interviews that also explained the first grader's positive adjustment to first grade and were added if the primary informant wished to have these included. The first author and primary informant, and, later, his or her parent, watched the story together. The primary informant then indicated whether or not this story was an accurate account of her or his positive adjustment to first grade. All the

primary informants agreed that the story captured their understanding of why they had adjusted well to first grade. However, the first author was aware that children can be compliant and that their compliance may have influenced their positive reaction.

**Data generation with secondary informants.** All the secondary informants engaged in a semi-structured video-recorded interview that lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Questions to parents consisted of asking for descriptions of their child's first grade year thus far and what they believed enabled the positive coping of their child. They were asked to say whom they saw as important people, as well as list opportunities, or activities that contributed to their child's positive adjustment to school and what their advice would be to other parents who are divorced and whose child is adjusting to first grade.

All the residing parents were first visited at their homes, except for one case where the interview occurred at the first author's office. In one case both biological parents were present; in two cases, only the biological mother attended; in another case both the biological parents and the step-father were present, and in the last case, the biological mother and step-father were present.

The teacher interviews that took place at the teachers' schools lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and were held following the interviews with parents. Teachers answered questions to explain the positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce of the primary informants. They were asked to provide a description of the informant according to how they (the teachers) perceived him or her in class and for indicators that pertained to the first grader's positive adjustment. They were asked to say what, according to them, enabled or contributed to the child's positive adjustment to first grade, and for the advice they would direct at parents who are divorced or in the process of divorcing while the child is adjusting to first grade. In order to maintain the focus on who or what, and in what way people, things, or opportunities supported



the primary informant to cope well with starting school, prompts were used (e.g. Can you give me an example of what you mean?)

In addition, discussion regarding the divorce and the effects of it occurred only between the first author and secondary informants. Parents and teachers were asked about the consequences of the divorce (if any) on the child's positive first grade adjustment and what or who provided support to the primary informant and in which ways. Thus no discussion that related to the topic of their parents' divorce was held with any of the primary informants since some parents were concerned about the effect these discussions could have on their child. There was one exception, where a primary informant voluntarily discussed the impact of her parents' divorce on her adjustment to first grade.

### **Data Analyses**

For this article, we considered only data that included reference to how significant adults supported children's adjustment to first grade. The data consisted of the children's explanations along with those of their parents and teachers. The authors extracted meaning from this data by means of thematic content analysis (TCA), according to phases described by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Phase 1 commenced with the first author's familiarizing herself with the data and engaging with it by repeatedly reading all the transcripts while also including photos and drawings that provided evidence relating to significant adults and their contributions. During Phase 2 the first author drew up a list of initial ideas that related to relevant aspects in the data that pertained to the research focus, namely adults who play significant roles in the first grader's life and how they contribute to the child's positive adjustment despite the divorce. The first author labelled (or open-coded) these initial ideas by writing a short phrase that paraphrased the idea in each segment of data. For example, 'parent communication and interaction' was used to label data that related to divorced parents or step-parents and parent-figures in reconstituted

families communicating positively with one another. Simultaneously, two fellow post-graduate students who were also doing a resilience focused study, coded the data. Similar codes were then grouped to form candidate or potential themes. During Phase 3, we considered which candidate themes had sufficient evidence to be considered as themes and sub-themes.

Then in Phase 4, the coders refined the emerging themes. This process consisted of two levels. During level 1, for example, following Saldaña (2009), after we coded the data independently, consensus discussions commenced between us (i.e. myself and the fellow coders) to discuss and review coded extracts in order to decide which candidate themes did or did not have enough data, or which candidate themes could be grouped together. A thematic map portrayed the main themes and sub-themes. For example, a main theme was ‘parent communication or interaction’ and the sub-themes were ‘agreement on logistics for after-school routine’; ‘congruent messages about school’; ‘respectful parent relationships’. Thereafter we reached consensus that the candidate themes adequately captured the outlines of the coded data.

During level 2 of Phase 4, the first author re-read the data set to ensure that a true reflection of “the validity of individual themes in relation to the data set” was accurate and also to re-check whether the candidate thematic maps “accurately reflect[ed] the meanings evident in the data set as a whole” as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 91). In our study this refinement process during level 2 led to us adding another sub-theme – ‘attending school events together’ to the main theme of ‘parent communication / interaction’.

Phase 5 was focused on re-naming and defining the themes. Sub-themes were discussed as well as what each entailed. During this phase we ensured that we were able to define clearly what the themes were. Phase 6 consisted of writing up the data that related to how adults, who play significant roles in the first grader’s life, contribute to their positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce. This provided an answer to the research question.

**Ethics**

The Institutional Review board of [blinded for review] provided clearance to the authors to conduct this research study. In addition, informed consent was obtained from the Gauteng Education Department as well as the principals of the various schools. Parents and teachers gave their informed consent. Creswell (2012) refers to minor primary informants giving assent in writing. To accommodate the primary first-grade informants who at that stage could not yet read fluently, the assent form was presented in a child-friendly information pack that described the activities mainly in pictures and short sentences that were shown read to them. The information pack and assent form was read to the primary informants by the first author in the primary informant's home language. The first author checked what the children had understood. They clarified that they knew what the study was about and were willing to participate in the research study and assented by writing their names.

**Trustworthiness**

The first author followed guidelines (see Creswell, 2014b) to advance the trustworthiness of the study by involving multiple coders and asking the second author (an experienced resilience researcher) to audit and confirm the coding. Credibility was assured by following Hall and Theron (2016) in triangulating multiple data sources. Trustworthiness was also assured when all five primary informants agreed that the digital story that they co-compiled was a true reflection of their accounts.

**Results**

In answer to the question of how adults who play significant roles in the first grader's life contribute to their positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce, three themes emerged. Respectful parent relationships contributed to parent collaboration; open communication channels provided clarity; and all significant adults in the child's life supported her or his school life in ways that contributed to their positive adjustment. The themes indicated

how adults who play significant roles in the first grader's life matter in the process of children's positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce. These adults formed a team. Their actions indicated that their communal goal was to champion these first grade children's resilience.

### **Respectful Relationships Encouraged Parent Collaboration**

Respectful parent relationships seemed to reflect a conscious decision between biological parent figures to be respectful towards each other. This decision was not shaped by how easy or difficult the divorce was. For example, biological divorced mothers experienced the divorce as "incredibly ugly..." (Andrea's mother) and explained that it "was difficult and accompanied by a lot of emotions" (Cassy's mother). Not only were biological mothers impacted by the divorce, but the "kids [were] going to be influenced by divorce" (Cassy's step-father). However to benefit their child's adjustment to first grade divorced biological parents "made a mature choice not to be enemies ..." (Lionel's mother). "At one stage ... we decided that it would be better if we [the biological divorced parents] would get along because it affects our child" (Tim's mother). Mothers then reported that the relationship with the child's father was "like a scab healing and it's so much better ... we feel like two old friends who can speak again ... the mutual hatred has disappeared" (Andrea's mother ). Cassy's mother also emphasized the importance of the "respect thing" being based on biological divorced parents who don't "bad-mouth" each other (as Lionel's mother put it.). Both Lionel's step-father and Cassy's agreed that the mutual respect between the child's biological parents contributed to a better working relationship during which they can interact for the benefit of the respective children, which ultimately benefits their adjustment to first grade. Sarah's mother was mindful of the positive effect on her daughter when she and the child's biological father showed mutual respect towards each other since it conveyed a "sense of security" to her daughter despite the divorce. Most mothers also acknowledged that their children are "very close" to their fathers. Tim's mother

said that her children's father was "not a bad father, he is a good father...". Sarah's biological father also expressed the importance to his daughter of having quality time not only with him, but also with her mother.

When the first author explored what had supported children to adjust well to first grade, the parent figures also included reference to the quality of the relationship between divorced biological parents and step-parents. A respectful relationship was evident between step-parents and the biological parents. Cassy's step-father explained how "having a beer with him" [Cassy's biological father] was one of "the best moments yet because [we] stood together and it's important that the two father figures ... can show in front of the children that there is some form of negotiation taking place". During the parent interview, Lionel's biological father and step-father could sit together and acknowledge, as the stepfather put it, "That's life, you must make choices" and they, as father figures, are part of each other's lives so as to benefit the child. Lionel's mother confirmed this by stating, "I think it is very nice for him [child] to know [that] 'my daddy and my dad can talk to each other'." A mutually respectful relationship was formed when father figures agreed on the up-bringing of children. For Cassy's step-father, he and her biological father "had to have a chat" about "certain things which he [biological father] wants to see done, like discipline". He added that there needs to be "an understanding between ourselves that I [as step-father] don't teach [the children] things which he [as their biological father] doesn't ... There has to be a certain line through everything for them so they don't get confused".

Teachers seemed to place value on parental relationships despite the divorce and explained that these relationships supported the child's positive adjustment to first grade. The success of civil parent relationships despite divorce was noticed by teachers. Sarah's teacher said, "The parents handled the divorce very well ... She has a very good and solid foundation from mom and dad". Teachers also noticed the importance of a respectful relationship between

divorced biological parents and how it contributed to the primary informants' "security" when they "know mommy or daddy...will be there for me" (Lionel's teacher). Cassy's teacher noticed how "her biological parents still maintain a good relationship". The impact of the respectful parent relationships was effective when parent figures could collaborate in support of the child at school. Lionel's teacher noticed how "...all three parties, his new daddy, his biological daddy and she [mother] have a very good relationship, and every parents' evening they are here ... they come to interviews together and will also be at school functions". All Cassy's parent figures will "arrive at everything [at school] such as parents' evening, concerts, hockey games...which is a big deal to her" according to her mother. When Andrea was asked who helped her to adjust well to first grade, she included both "my mom and dad". Her mother explained that both she and Andrea's biological father "struggle financially... so now [we] share..." They collaborated when she "just basically told him [biological father], here is a list and I need help, and ... he understood". The collaboration between Cassy's mother and her biological father was very important in order to provide school supplies such as "first grade stationery and school uniform" that enabled positive adjustment to first grade. Cassy's step-father explained the benefit of civil parent relationships to the child when he said: "In first grade your situation outside of school actually has to be as comfortable as possible so that it doesn't affect anything at school, so that you can just go through school with ease with all the support you have".

### **Open Communication Channels Smoothed School-Related Issues**

When significant adults such as parent figures and teachers were able to inform each other and discuss relevant matters impacting the primary informants' adjustment to first grade with each other or with these children themselves, open communication was evident. The result of open communication was a clear understanding of circumstances that facilitated the primary informants' positive adjustment to first grade.

Evidence of open communication pertained to verbal or written information shared between biological mothers and teachers. All five biological mothers informed the first grade teacher about the divorce, either verbally or in writing. Lionel's teacher explained that when parents inform teachers about such matters, "it makes a difference [because] you [the teacher] know where the child is coming from ... It's important that you know [about the divorce] because you are going to approach that child differently". Being kept informed about the impact of the divorce will also enable the teacher to "know how to help the child and understand why the child may be unhappy, or [is] not wearing a clean school uniform," said Sarah's teacher. This was the case with Tim's teacher when she understood Tim's excitement at bringing "his weekend suitcase to school" every second Friday because his father fetched him from school for weekend visits. Moreover, teachers also viewed their communication with parents regarding school adjustment matters as very important: "I talk to the mommy... we communicate regularly over WhatsApp. I think it helps a lot. If we pick up something, we tell the parents about it. We also ask parents that they must provide feedback to us about how it is going at home" explained Andrea's teacher. When teachers communicated openly with parents in providing feedback about the child, it contributed to what Sarah's teacher, described as an "open relationship" between parent and teacher where information regarding the child's need and adjustment could be discussed in an honest and open manner. Through this communication parents and teachers were aware of the child's needs and could act accordingly to support him or her. Biological mothers appreciated the mutual open communication between them and the first grade teachers. Tim's mother said that the teacher "talks ... if there is a problem". Cassy's mother found "open communication in the school" when teachers could easily be contacted and remarked on how this conveyed a "caring environment".

Furthermore, it was evident that open communication also occurred between parent figures who found various ways to keep each other informed about matters concerning school.

“[Her father] has started a WhatsApp group for him and [me] ... there is open communication between us” said Sarah’s mother. Tim’s mother deemed it important that “if there is something he [biological father] should know, I let him know immediately”. Besides this kind of communication, parents agreed that they should, as Andrea’s mother put it, “Communicate in a way which is beneficial for the child”. Lionel’s mother explained how juggling two households can impact a child’s functioning and adjustment to school and that she “must just have open communication with his father to remember to fill in a letter ... or ... send a set of school clothes along...”

Open communication also related to the communication between parent and child during which the child could ask questions and express emotions about the divorce. Sarah’s teacher believed that one of the reasons for Sarah’s positive adjustment to first grade despite her parents’ divorce was that her parents “prepared her ... and talked to her about it [the divorce]”. Cassy’s teacher agreed that it is important for parents to “communicate with the child personally... and not to just leave the child in the dark, even if there isn’t always an explanation when something like divorce happens”. When teachers were asked if parents’ communication with their children played a role in the child’s positive adjustment to first grade, Tim’s teacher expressed the belief that “the way in which the mother explained the divorce to him and explained why they are getting a divorce, helped”. Sarah’s teacher explained she could see the effect of this communication between parent and child and school. It enforced a sense of “security” when parents discussed matters relating to the divorce with their children and prevented emotional reactions in class such as “crying, because they know ‘my mom or dad will be there to fetch me from school’.” Cassy’s mother confirmed that the open communication with her child is important, especially in first grade with school related matters. She must “tell me if she is struggling with something. You [as the parent] have to be their first port of call”.



When the first author asked teachers about their relationship with the primary informants and how it contributed to the child's positive adjustment, teachers often included the openness in communication between themselves and the child. It was then that Lionel's teacher could report, "It is really amazing that he is so honest with me, and he will really share anything with me". Open communication with first grade teachers was evident when case children spoke "a lot about daddy and mommy," said Sarah's teacher. Teachers explained that it is important for them to have knowledge of how the child perceives his or her life at home because it impacts on their functioning in class and, ultimately, on their adjustment to first grade. These case children openly shared a part of their home lives with their teachers when they told them about weekend visits to their fathers. Tim's teacher said, "He tells me he is very excited to go to his father ... After the weekend he tells us about all the nice things that they did together". Teachers deemed it important that the case children could share these experiences with them. "It's good for Tim to talk about it [visits to the biological father]" added his teacher. Open communication provided clarity to first grade teachers about the case child's frame of mind regarding home circumstances. Lionel's teacher explained, "It's good for me to know [that] in Lionel's mind it is going well". For her, this knowledge served as an indicator to teachers in general that "it's [home circumstances] not something else that he [or she] has to worry about".

### **Significant Adults Co-Support School Adjustment**

Significant adults included biological parents, step-parents, grandfathers and grandmothers, adult siblings, aunts and uncles, teachers, and nannies. Evidence portrayed how these significant adults acted in supportive ways that benefitted the case children's school life and ultimately enabled their positive adjustment to first grade. In their joint contribution to the children's adjustment, they can be said to have co-supported the child. Parents supported their child's school life when they welcomed the contribution of other significant adults in school-related matters. For Cassy's mother, "I think it's important to have such people in your life ...

because it's support for us. It's nice to have other people ... who look at things differently and give advice ... The people in our lives contribute in a positive manner".

Significant adults provided school-related support to case children. Sarah's biological parents supported her by applying their own personal strengths to help her with different academic subjects. "Daddy helped me with math sums. Mommy isn't the cleverest with sums. Daddy is the clever one with maths," Sarah explained. Other significant adults also supported the mastery of academic and scholastic skills that is part of a child's life at school. "It is our nanny. She helps us with homework. And she just likes to be with us and she always waits for us after school," Cassy explained. Grandparents were also involved in providing care when parent figures had to work. During this time grandparents assisted in scholastic tasks. Sarah said, "Granny helped me when Mommy was away and Daddy was at work and I had to do sums". Andrea said, "My Grandpa helps me to read". Andrea's teacher explained that Andrea's grandparents and her mother always ensured that "her [school] things are always here [at school] ... So I think that has helped her a lot. She was never anxious about stuff that isn't here ... It's that support". Furthermore, parent figures supported their child's school life when all parent figures were involved in co-supporting school extra-mural activities. Cassy's mother said "All three of us [herself, the biological father, and the step-father] support ... When it's ... hockey ... we sit together. [At] concerts we all sit together". The collective of adults also supported a positive perspective in Sarah regarding school. She said, "My whole family helped me not to be afraid [of school]... uncles, aunt, mom, my teacher, granny, grandpa ... they all helped me to be brave". Tim's mother explained how Tim's uncle, her brother, "was also a big help ... because he conveys an academic focus" with Tim when he tells him that school is important and motivates him to do well at school. It was also evident that first grade teachers acted in the best interest of the case children on numerous levels. Their actions benefitted these children and led Lionel to report, "My teacher says she is our half-mommy at school ... she is just very good to

me”. It is evident that the case children trusted their teachers and were comfortable with them. Having a trusted and secure figure at school benefits their functioning at school.

The second point here is that significant adults acted in the best interest of the case child when they provided her or him with connections to resources that promote mastery of scholastic skills in first grade. Cassy’s step-father explained the reason behind resources that support scholastic skills: “In first grade, the race already starts ... So if a child goes through a divorce ... especially in first grade, she must not fall behind ... I say take extra classes and stay on par so that the child can join in running the race at school”. For this reason Cassy’s mother was diligent about Cassy’s attendance at the mathematics and reading centres. Lionel’s parent figures agreed that the expenses for occupational therapy that Lionel received was worth it since this intervention “has given his self-confidence ... a big boost”. Significant adults contributed financially to provide children with additional scholastic interventions, like Tim’s whose “grandmother paid for extra maths classes ... that helped him a lot”, his mother said. Tim acknowledged that the school uniform and school stationery that his mother supplied enabled him to adjust well to first grade.

### **Discussion**

The aim of this article is to provide answers to the question of how adults, who play significant roles in the first grader’s life, contribute to positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce. The answer, which draws on the insights of children and adults, has two central facets; how adults related to one another and how they related to the first grader made a difference to first grade adjustment. The manner in which adults related to each other spanned two dimensions – their respectful relationships and open communication channels.

Amato, Kane, and James define a “good divorce” (2011, p. 511) as one where cooperative relationships between parents are evident. Our results suggest that mutual respect, despite parental divorce, contributed to parent figures being cooperative about matters

concerning their children, especially school-related matters. Multiple extant studies have noted the importance of cooperative post-divorce parent relationships for children's post-divorce wellbeing (Carr, 2016; Gold, 2013; Paris, 2017; Sokol, Stevenson, & Braver, 2017). Our study extends this understanding to children's positive adjustment to first grade, despite parental divorce.

The cooperative nature of these parent relationships included candid communication between themselves, but also with other significant adults (such as step-parents, extended family or teachers). As Preller (2013) explains, by doing so, parents demonstrated that they are able to "openly communicate" (p. 186). Their open communication enabled significant adults to address their children's school-related needs and obligations. Therefore our findings fit with those of Lee and Bax (2000) who found value when divorced parents regularly communicated with each other to exchange information about their child. Moreover, our findings are in accordance with the point made by Loughran (2011) who states that communication between parent and teacher is a "partnership providing two-way information flow" (p. 35). Once again, our finding extends the aforementioned to the specific context of first grade and the process of positive adjustment to formal school, despite parental divorce.

In addition, how significant adults communicated with the first graders appeared to support their positive adjustment to first grade. Useful parent-child communication included non-alienating messages about the divorce, or the other parent, and/or new step-parent. Parents also reported the importance of regularly being available for discussions with their children since it provided opportunity for their children to express themselves and gain clarity about the divorce. Teachers reported a similar openness and willingness to be available to support the case children. Thus our study echoes Levine and Kline's (2008) understanding that open communication between parent and child, following a divorce, is critical. It also echoes Anderson's (2006) study that teachers play a profound supportive role when they create a safe

classroom environment that allows for open communication during which children can express their feelings or their experiences relating to the divorce.

Ungar (2015) stated that “a child’s resilience is always a reflection of the world in which the child grows up ...” (p. 208). Essentially, our findings illustrate that the world in which these case children of divorced parents are growing up is one in which significant adults respond well to one another and to the children they care for. What stood out for us was that the accounts of why children adjusted well were not limited to mothers (even though three of the case children had single mothers) or immediate family (as is often the case in the resilience literature – Masten, 2014b; Theron, 2017). Instead, they reflected that significant adults in the child’s immediate social ecology (i.e. home and school) supported first graders to become accustomed to their life as a post-divorce first-grader. During this difficult period of transitioning to first grade despite parental divorce, supporting the child to adjust was the work of parents, teachers, extended family, and nannies. McCann et al. (2015) refer to the value of “co-parenting couples” (p. 3) that may include any two adults (including extended family member) who share the responsibility of care-giving following divorce. Similarly, Gonzalez, Jones, and Parent (2014) found that supportive extended family members, who fulfil the role of “non-marital co-parents” (p. 35), improved the quality of single mothers’ parenting. We argue that the children in our study adjusted well to first grade, despite parental divorce, because adults who shared biological ties with these children, and adults who did not, were willing to share the responsibility for these children’s adjustment process.

Finally, and as an aside, we found it interesting that children did not volunteer information about their parents’ respectful relationship or open communication (except for Sarah who voluntarily discussed the effect of her parents’ divorce on her school adjustment). This could reflect our not having asked children divorce-specific questions. But, it could also reflect that from these children’s perspective their parents’ respect for one another was not out of the

ordinary. Despite being divorced their parents had apparently managed to achieve what the parenting literature encourages divorced parents to achieve, namely “two 100% parents” (Bonnell & Little, 2015, p. 33). Even so, children’s silence on this matter points to the need for cautious follow-up studies that explore children’s understandings of the value/not of cooperative parent relationships post-divorce to first grade adjustment.

### **Implications**

Families have been changing over the past century (Sokol et al., 2017). Part of this change is the result of the breakdown of relationships between parents which has caused childhood to also change (Hawthorne, Jessop, Pryor, & Richards, 2003). Levine and Kline (2008) wrote that divorce is most often not pretty for children. Divorce not only complicates the lives of children in general, but it also specifically complicates children’s adjustment to first grade.

Werner (2000) explains that when children are faced with adversity such as divorce, sources of support contribute to their resilience. These sources of support not only include the significant adults directly involved in the child’s life, but also pertain to workers in the helping profession such as psychologists, counsellors, and educators who support these adults during times of adversity such as divorce. Therefore we now pay attention to two points that workers in the helping profession can take away from our study.

### **It Takes a Village to Raise a Child**

The African proverb, ‘It takes a village to raise a child’ draws on the idea that it takes a community to do this. In our case, it took significant adults such as parent figures, extended family, nannies, and teachers to raise a resilient child. The relationships children have with significant adults are a supportive base from which they can face the world and cope with adversity along the way. Not only do significant adults who are willing to take responsibility for children’s well-being, render support to children, but in keeping with the findings of earlier

studies (Gonzalez et al., 2014) they also extend support to parent figures following divorce that impacts parenting in positive ways. For this reason, especially when working with divorced parents, it is critical to convey the importance of allowing children to continue to have relationships with other significant adults, even though these adults may be part of the divorced parent's family or group of friends, or even when these adults do not approve of the divorce. Similarly, parents (particularly single parents) need to be encouraged to form connections with supportive others and to understand that doing so is likely to enable better quality parenting as Gadsden, Ford, and Breiner (2016) have explained. Not only do parents then allow themselves a support network, but they also enable the strengthening of their child's resilience and the quality of their parenting.

### **Valuing and Enacting the Processes Enabling the Village to Raise a Child**

Evident in our study was how the processes of mutual respect between teachers and parents led to collaboration between them. Communication between various biological and other role-players provided clarity and enabled support for first graders. These processes indirectly and directly enabled significant adults to facilitate the positive adjustment of first graders. Accordingly, divorced parents need to make a conscious decision to behave respectfully, based on the evidence of how mutual respect enables supportive actions that can lead to collaboration that will benefit their children. Therapy or mediation could include developing communication skills between divorced parents themselves and help them to communicate constructively with other role-players such as teachers and extended family members. In addition, such professional help could assist parents in communicating with their children so as to offer age-appropriate information that will support and not devastate their child. Second, communication between different systems, such as family systems and school systems should be constructive and supportive of children following the divorce of their parents. Parents should be encouraged to include teachers by informing them about events or situations, such as divorce, visitation

schedules, which could impact how children act in class. This would then give teachers a better understanding of the child and would enable them to make sense of the child in his or her own context. Teachers will also be in a better position to provide relevant feedback that may enable parents and other adults to support the child.

### **Limitations**

A first limitation relates to the specific ethnicity of the informants of this study that prohibits broad generalization of the study's results. Second, the interviews with secondary informants included only two of the five primary informants' biological fathers. The other three biological fathers were not available for the interviews. Neither were extended family members interviewed to gain their insight into what they do and how they enabled the children to cope well with adjusting to first grade. It could have been beneficial to the study to gain a deeper, first-hand explanation of how these significant adults perceived their role. Another limitation is that other significant adults such as nannies, sport coaches and therapists were not included in this study. Neither were the parenting styles of parent figures explored to establish the manner in which parenting styles contribute to positive adjustment to first grade. Finally, Van Rensburg, Theron, and Rothmann (2017) explain that the lack of longitudinal insights into resilience processes is a limitation. In this study, we interacted with primary informants for a limited period and thus we do not know which significant adults continued to support first graders adjusting to school, for how long they did so, and in which ways they continued to be supportive.

### **Conclusion**

With the high divorce rates, an important question arises: "to whom do children turn for support?" (Hawthorne et al., 2003, p. 11). Our study showed that parents, step-parents, extended family members, and teachers supported children from divorced families to adjust well to first grade. Although none of the adults in this study did anything out of the ordinary, their respectful relationships resulted in constructive communication and co-parenting that



championed children's resilience. If more adults who are significant in the lives of children from divorced homes could be supported to emulate these adults, there is a good chance that more children from divorced homes will adjust well to first grade.

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### Tables and figures

Table 1

*Indicators of positive adjustment*

| <b>Cognitive indicators</b>                                 | <b>Behavioural indicators</b>                                               | <b>Social indicators</b>                           | <b>Emotional indicators</b>                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Academic progress                                           | Normative behaviour (e.g. constructive anger management)                    | Participation in class and after-school activities | Positive self-esteem and self-worth ('I can') |
| Able to listen to teacher                                   | Co-operative classroom behaviour (e.g. can                                  | Able to form and maintaining friendships           | Copes well with conflict                      |
| Able to understand and follow instructions from the teacher | Cope well with discipline; is diligent; stays seated when doing school work | Positive peer and teacher relationships            | Healthy risk-taking                           |
| Problem solving                                             |                                                                             |                                                    |                                               |

Table 2

*Living arrangements of primary informants*

| <b>Case Child</b>    | <b>Residing Parent</b> | <b>Residing Parent Remarried</b> | <b>Other extended family living together with residing parent</b> | <b>Visitation Agreement with Biological Father</b>                                                                                  |
|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Case Child 1, Sarah  | Mother                 | No                               | Yes: Maternal Grandparents                                        | Wednesdays for dinner; sleepover Friday evenings; Saturdays according to availability, and biological father can see child any time |
| Case Child 2, Tim    | Mother                 | No                               | No                                                                | Every second weekend                                                                                                                |
| Case Child 3, Lionel | Mother                 | Yes – Step-father present        | No                                                                | Every second weekend                                                                                                                |
| Case Child 4, Andrea | Mother                 | No                               | No                                                                | No set agreement – biological father can see child any time                                                                         |
| Case Child 5, Cassy  | Mother                 | Yes – Step-father present        | No                                                                | Every second weekend and biological father can see child any time                                                                   |

**CHAPTER 5**

Manuscript 4, “Positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce: Lessons for School Psychologists” aims to answer the research question: “*Which everyday (i.e. non-intervention-related) resources should School Psychologists be aware of that enable the resilience of children challenged by adjustment to first grade as well as the divorce of their parents?*”

Prepared for *School Psychology International* (see Appendix I for author guidelines). I am aware that this manuscript exceeds the prescribed word limit. I will request lenience from the editor given that I am reporting on qualitative work that draws on multiple sources.

Authors: C. Bezuidenhout, L.C. Theron and E. Fritz

### Abstract

Positive adjustment to first grade is an important milestone in children's lives. Yet, it is sometimes further complicated by additional challenges such as parental divorce. Drawing on a Social Ecological perspective we explored how the systems rooted in social ecologies enable children's resilience when their parents are divorced so as to result in their coping well with adjusting to first grade. We used a single instrumental case study that involved visual methodologies to uncover lessons from the story of a first grader whose parents divorced but who continued to adjust well to first grade. Our findings suggest leverage points for School Psychologists (SPs) who wish to champion the resilience of first graders who are adjusting to formal school as well as their parents' divorce. SPs can intervene by supporting the first grader's processes of agency and meaning making; by working systemically to engage systems of support; and by mobilizing systems with task-sharing.

*Keywords:* first grade adjustment, parental divorce, resilience, social ecologies, ecological systems, school psychologist

### Positive Adjustment to First Grade Despite Divorce: Lessons for School Psychologists

Life includes various transitions that children, adults, and families have to make. For example, transitioning to first grade for children (Kumpulainen et al. 2016); transitioning to a new teaching position for teachers (Meanwell & Kleiner, 2014); and transitioning to a new family life after divorce for parents and children (Fetsch, 2011). Transitions are often associated with risk, anxiety, and, sometimes even with mixed emotions that could even involve excitement (Dockett, Griebel, & Perry, 2017).

For children, transitioning to first grade is an ordinary developmental milestone (Yeo, 2013). Transitions often involve change. Dockett and Perry (2015) state that transition to formal schooling, for example, especially involves changes in identity and status as well as agency, not only for children, but for everyone who is involved. Children often experience stress and anxiety associated with these changes (Skouteris, Watson, & Lum, 2012; Symonds, 2015). This relates to first graders being challenged by a new educational environment (e.g. a new classroom and new playground), academic standards and scholastic skills that they need to learn, teacher expectations, and the acceptance (or not) into a new peer group (Margetts, 2005; Yeo, 2013).

Unfortunately, some children are faced with more than just the developmental challenge of adjusting to first grade. Hyppolite (2017) found that the risks that some children face co-occur, and this results in heightened vulnerability. For example, the disintegration of family life resulting from parental divorce poses an additional risk to some children (Wright & Masten, 2015). Such a transitioning first grader then needs to cope with adjustment challenges in the school environment along with challenges impacting on the home environment because of the parental divorce. Landsford (2009) explains how parental divorce may challenge children's development including their academic achievement, emotional stability (internalizing and/or externalising problems),



and social relationships. This could result in compound challenges that hinder children's functioning (Noltemeyer & Bush, 2013).

However, when children develop normatively, despite the aforementioned risks, resilience is implied (Yates, Tyrell, & Masten, 2015). Resilience is generally accepted to indicate the capacity to withstand risks which threaten normative development or functioning (Masten, 2014c). Resilience is facilitated through resilience-enabling processes that are brought about when children's social ecologies actively provide and sustain protective resources that are commonly understood to be meaningful to children (Ungar, 2011).

An important facet of the social ecology is the school ecology of which school-based service-providers such as SPs are part. Faulkner and Jimerson (2017) state that "school psychologists ... make important contributions to the lives of children, families, teachers, and other professionals who work with them in the school" (p. 6). One such important contribution relates to championing resilience (Noltemeyer & Bush, 2013). Championing resilience requires preventative and remedial action (Masten, 2014c). For example, SPs have known about the risks associated with adjustment to first grade and the potential effect of additional risks, such as parental divorce, on the functioning of first graders. They are aware that positive adjustment to first grade is an important developmental milestone because of its association with subsequent school adjustment and academic progress/achievement (McGann & Clark, 2007). Thus SPs have the capacity to support school staff and families to prioritise those processes which are likely to minimise the risks associated with adjustment to first grade, as well as those processes that are likely to maximise positive school experiences. They also have the responsibility to develop and support schools so that they are resilience-enabling systems (Daniels, Collair, Moolla, & Lazarus, 2007). In addition, SPs have the skill set to

facilitate adaptive processes for first graders facing additional risks such as parental divorce.

SPs' championship of resilience cannot, however, be fulfilled in isolation. Theron (2013c) explains how important it is for SPs to understand that "resilience is a reciprocal, systemic transaction" (p. 528). The emphasis on resilience being facilitated by an interplay between and among the different systems in the child's social ecology relates to social ecological understandings of resilience (Masten, 2014c). The Social Ecological Resilience Theory (SERT) highlights how positive adaptation to compound risks (such as adjusting to first grade and to one's parents divorcing) is supported by social ecological stakeholders (e.g. SPs) who enable and sustain facilitative resources (like supportive teachers, parents and peers) that nurture positive outcomes (Ungar, 2013b).

Although SPs are central to processes that enable reciprocal interaction between systems impacting on children's healthy functioning, such as teachers, family and peers, Theron (2016) found that extant resilience literature only occasionally included the contributions of SPs in accounts of what supported the resilience of vulnerable children. Following Atkinson, Squires, Bragg, Muscutt, and Wasilewski (2014) and Jimerson, Stewart, Skokut, Cardenas, and Malone (2009), Theron (2016) speculated that there are two reasons for the under-reporting of SPs' contributions to resilience. First, psycho-educational assessments and tasks consume SPs' time. Second, SPs are typically inaccessible or absent in low-resource contexts. In South Africa, for example, there are too few SPs to serve the population of children in schools (Moolla, 2011) and this is more pronounced in rural, resource-poor communities (Pillay, 2017).

Instead of focusing on interventions and other contributions by mental health practitioners, accounts of what enables South African children to adjust well to multiple

challenges favour caring adults, such as warm parents/caregivers, loving relatives from the extended family, and/or supportive teachers (see Kumpulainen et al., 2016; Theron, 2017; van Breda, 2017). However, none of these accounts is specific to first graders whose parents have divorced. Essentially then, it is important to explore what first graders with divorced parents, and adults (e.g. parents, relatives, or teachers) in their everyday social ecology consider to be foundational to the positive adjustment of these first graders. In contexts where SPs are accessible, they can draw on these insights and leverage-related resilience-enabling processes. In contexts where SPs are scarce or mostly inaccessible, a better understanding of what enables the resilience of first graders whose parents have divorced could support lay persons and/or school staff to partner with SPs to champion resilience.

Thus, the question that directed the study on which this article is based was: Which everyday (i.e. non-intervention-related) resources should SPs be aware of that enable the resilience of children challenged by adjustment to first grade *as well* as the divorce of their parents? To answer this question, we narrate the story of a seven-year-old girl, Sarah (pseudonym used), who had adjusted well to first grade despite her parents' divorce that occurred shortly after she commenced first grade. Sarah's story illustrates the different resources that enabled her to cope well with the adjustment to formal school as well as with her parents' divorce. Even though this specific school context is one without an SP, I use this case study to highlight the centrality of schools and the possibilities of SPs' facilitation of resilience-enabling processes in school contexts.

### Method

The methodological orientation for this study is the belief that children are central informants about their own lives (Christensen & James, 2017). Thus, when research

with children (rather than on them) is conducted, a more precise understanding of the children's life worlds is formed (Norozi & Moen, 2016).

### **Design**

With the aforementioned in mind, we report on a single, instrumental case study. As in other resilience studies (e.g. Fourie & Theron, 2012; Kumpulainen et al., 2016) and following methodologists such as Gustafsson (2017) we argue that a single instrumental case study can offer rich insights into a given research phenomenon, in this case, the everyday/non-intervention-related resources that enable the resilience of children challenged by transition to first grade *as well as* by the divorce of their parents.

### **Sampling and Informant**

The single case study formed part of a larger study which was comprised of five cases. As detailed elsewhere (Theron, Kahl, & Bezuidenhout, 2015) purposive sampling informed the selection of these five cases. Following Theron, Theron, and Malindi (2013) who found that the guidance of Advisory Panels (AP) regarding research participants has become common in international and South African resilience studies, the inclusion criteria for the aforementioned five participants were informed by indicators of positive adjustment to first grade as constructed by an AP that consisted of two SPs and three first grade teachers. The AP concluded that positive first grade adjustment, despite parental divorce, was marked by positive cognitive, behavioural, social, and emotional functioning that included, for example, problem solving skills, co-operative classroom behaviour, being able to cope well with discipline, staying seated when doing school work, demonstrating the ability to form and maintain friendships, and exhibiting positive self-esteem and self-worth. First grade teachers from 8 schools in Johannesburg were asked to use the indicators to identify children in their class whose parents are divorced but who have nonetheless adjusted well to first grade. From the

five identified cases, all of which attended middle-to-high income schools, we foreground Sarah's because it offers a rich account of the multiple everyday resources that informed her resilience. Sarah's case is exemplary because it highlights how multiple interacting resources – Sarah herself, her parents and members of her extended family, and her teachers and peers – enabled her resilience. Her case also provides lessons for SPs about facilitating resilience-enabling processes in schools.

### **Procedures**

With the permission of Sarah's parents and with Sarah's assent, the first author visited Sarah three times at her maternal grandparents' home where she resided with her mother and sister. Each visit lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was audio-recorded. It focused on providing Sarah with the opportunity to explain her understanding of what had supported her and why she was able to adjust well to first grade. To this end the first author engaged Sarah in different qualitative activities including semi-structured interviews as described by Fylan (2005), along with visual participatory research activities that support participants in creating a visual artefact relating to the research phenomenon and then explaining its meaning. Such activities include Draw-and-Talk (see Bendelow, Carpenter, Vautier, & Williams, 2002), Photovoice (see Sitter, 2017), and the creation of a digital story (see Fokides, 2016). During the creation of the digital story Sarah verbalized how she adjusted well to first grade while the first author wrote down her account. Later, the first author transformed it into a digital format. The first author probed Sarah by using questions such as:

*What new things did you have to get used to in first grade?*

*What do you think you do well as a first grader?*

*Who or what helped you to do well in first grade?*

*What would you recommend to other children starting first grade to help them adjust well to first grade?*

*What advice would you give to another first grade child whose parents have divorced, to do okay in first grade?*

Sarah was the only informant who voluntarily reported on her experience of her parents' divorce during the last interview session together. She volunteered this information in response to the first author's question about whether she wanted her parents to view the digital story. The only prompts that the first author used during Sarah's spontaneous account of this experience was to ask:

*How did your parents' divorce affect you at school?*

*What advice would you give to another first grade child whose parents have divorced, to be okay?*

The first author also conducted semi-structured video recorded interviews with Sarah's secondary informants – her biological parents and her teacher – that lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The interview with her parents occurred at Sarah's maternal grandparents' home while that with her teacher took place at the school. Her parents and teacher were asked questions to elicit rich descriptions of what they believed enabled Sarah to adjust well to first grade given the divorce of her parents. They were questioned about who assisted her to adjust well and about the activities that may have helped her do so. They were asked what advice they would give to recently divorced parents whose first grader was in the process of adjusting to formal school.

## **Analyses**

To gain an understanding of the resilience processes that enabled Sarah to adjust well to first grade following her parents' divorce, the first author engaged in thematic content analyses of all the data according to the model proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). For the purposes of this article, the only data that was included was that explaining how Sarah's social ecology supported her positive adjustment to first grade following her parents' divorce. Phase 1 consisted of the first author's familiarizing of herself with the data. Phase 2 consisted of the creation of a list with initial ideas pertaining to matters in the data relevant to the research focus on what it is that supports children's positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce. Thereafter, two of the first author's fellow post-graduate students who were also engaged in their own resilience-focused studies also coded the data thematically. The codes were compared and consensus was reached. Phase 3 consisted of searching for themes among codes that pointed to what facilitated Sarah's positive adjustment to first grade. During Phase 4, consensus discussions (see Saldaña, 2009) confirmed the themes and established how these themes demonstrate how systems support children to continue to adjust well to first grade. The verification and/or renaming of themes occurred during Phase 5 when the first and second authors discussed the sub-themes and what each theme entailed. The results presented below constituted Phase 6.

## **Results**

The first author first met Sarah during the third term (quarter) of her first-grade year, three months after her parent's divorce that occurred in the fourth month of first grade. Her teacher and both her biological parents reported that she had been coping well with first grade throughout the year thus far despite the pre-divorce uncertainties and post-divorce changes to her family structure. Sarah agreed that she had coped well

with the adjustments associated with first grade and with adjustments at home following her parents' divorce.

### **Risks Threatening Sarah's Positive Adjustment to First Grade**

**Internal challenges.** Sarah's account of her reaction to new experiences related to formal school was indicative of an anxious approach to unfamiliar and new situations. Although she attended her primary school's kindergarten the previous year and reported that it helped her in relation to being familiar with the school surroundings, she still felt anxious and reported, "The first day of school...I was scared." Academically, she especially felt anxious about reading and said, "I was scared to read." When her friends went to play on the playground where the older children usually played, Sarah hesitated and "was scared" to go and play there with them.

**School related challenges.** When she was thinking back, Sarah could identify that getting used to "new friends and a new teacher" was difficult for her. She said that on the first day of school, "I cried and the teacher told me... to choose a friend." However, this was difficult because although there were children she knew from her kindergarten class, she explained, "There were other kids I didn't know yet." She also sat next to a classmate whom she described as "teasing me the whole time" but added, "Then I just ignore[d] her." Scholastically, Sarah realized that the academic level of first grade was higher than that of kindergarten and said, "We didn't have such difficult work in kindergarten." At the beginning of first grade she struggled to keep up with the class's working tempo and sometimes fell behind. She also struggled with sums: "I got many [sums] wrong," she told the first author. Furthermore, although there was an after-school facility at school, Sarah was afraid of the lady in charge because she often screamed at the children so Sarah preferred to attend another aftercare facility in the community outside of school.



**Family related challenges.** Another risk that challenged Sarah's positive coping was her parents' divorce. Sarah voluntarily talked about her parents' divorce. She explained that prior to the divorce she "couldn't actually learn [her] schoolwork [at home] because mommy and daddy fought the whole time... and shouted at each other really loud." Her reaction after they told her about their decision to divorce was that "it was sad." Initially Sarah didn't want to tell anyone about her parents' divorce and she "cried the whole day long" when her parents told her. She explained how the news of the divorce impacted on her in class and that she sometimes "cried during class time" and "felt sad" for quite a while thereafter.

### **Resources Enabling Sarah's Positive Adjustment to First Grade**

**Internal strengths as resource.** Sarah's mother described Sarah as "a driven child" who aimed to achieve and accomplish outcomes. Sarah was thrilled when she told the first author that she achieved "sevens" on her report card, which, in being the highest symbol of achievement for scholastic skills, indicate excellent performance. Her teacher observed Sarah's internal strengths by describing her as a "very positive child, cheerful... academically strong, [and] a little leader." Another internal resource was Sarah's ability to form positive meaning from her parents' divorce. She explained, "I think it's better that mommy and daddy don't live together anymore... because when mommy and daddy didn't live together anymore, then my schoolwork improved... My work just got better and better." She also believed that "they [her parents] still love me and they will always love me." Although Sarah missed having her father live with them, she explained how she coped with this challenge by telling herself, "It's just like daddy is working late in the evenings and comes home to sleep and then goes to work again very early in the morning... I still see daddy often, he just sleeps at another place". Finally, Sarah's faith reflects an internal strength and was evident during the Photovoice

research activity when Sarah asked her teacher to take a photograph of her browsing through the children's Bible in her classroom. Her explanation was that "Jesus makes you brave... The Bible helped me to read about Jesus and to not be afraid, because Jesus is with us [even] if we don't finish our homework or school work."

**School related resources.** In support of her school work, Sarah made friends in class who helped her by distracting the teasing classmate who bothered her when she doing academic work. Her peers also comforted Sarah when she felt anxious at school, telling her that they would play with her. Another supportive system was her teacher, with whom Sarah had a positive emotionally connected relationship. Her teacher noticed Sarah's anxiousness when she was commencing first grade as well as her being emotional after her parents' divorce. Her teacher responded to her needs by assuring her often that she would wait for her if she fell behind in work. When Sarah told her teacher about her parents' divorce, she said that her teacher "gave me a hug." Sarah experienced her teacher's hug as supportive and caring. Her teacher also introduced Sarah to extra-mural activities, such as public speaking and participating in the eisteddfod at school. Her mother reported that the teachers at school were successful in keeping the children busy with school activities. Later in the year, when her teacher sent her to the principal's office with her books to showcase her good work Sarah said that the principal "rewarded me with a chocolate for work well done." Her mother reported that when Sarah "received certificates during assembly for achievements in extra-mural activities" the recognition "made a huge difference" to Sarah's life. Her mother expressed appreciation for the school principal who acknowledged Sarah's work and greeted her when he saw her on Sundays at church.

**Family related resources.** Sarah's family was a solid support system during her first-grade year. Pragmatically, her grandparents often took care of her when her

divorced parents were at work. Academically, homework formed part of practising scholastic skills such as reading and doing sums and when Sarah struggled with scholastic skills during homework time, her mother would encourage her by telling her to “keep on trying.” If her mother was unavailable to assist her because she was working away from home, Sarah’s grandparents, uncle or older cousins helped with homework. Her father also helped during his regular contact sessions with Sarah. Sarah had positive relationships with her extended family, especially her grandmother who often “spoiled and treated” her. Sarah’s three-year-old sister also helped her by “not making a noise while I was doing homework.” Sarah’s teacher reported that Sarah’s mother saw to it that Sarah’s “things are always there [at school] and ready.” Emotionally, Sarah’s mother also comforted her when she was sad because of the divorce and her father made an effort to keep regular contact with Sarah and saw her often after the divorce.

Together with her mother and sister, Sarah resided with her maternal grandparents when her biological father moved out after the divorce. Sarah’s mother reported that Sarah has close relationships with both her and her biological father and that her biological father was welcome anytime to see her and he made an effort to do so. A Sarah-related WhatsApp group was used as a communication tool between both biological parents to keep each other informed and to remind one another of matters that concerned Sarah. Her parents also made a conscious effort to be “respectful” of each other and mindful of their interactions and the effect these had on Sarah. Sarah’s mother mentioned that she and her ex-husband therefore attended school events like Parents’ Evening together during which they were informed about Sarah’s functioning by her teacher with whom they discussed their child. As mentioned above, Sarah had told her teacher about her parents’ divorce. Although during the first author’s interview with her, this teacher said that she would prefer parents to inform her about a divorce

since it frames her understanding of the child accordingly, she nonetheless found that Sarah's parents "handled the situation very well" and she could see that Sarah remained "their priority."

It was evident that all the aforementioned supportive actions had a positive result because when the first author asked Sarah to draw a picture that indicated what she was good at in first grade, the drawing depicted her reading a book along with a worksheet with sums on it on her desk, and a picture of her doing physical education activities at school (see figure 1).

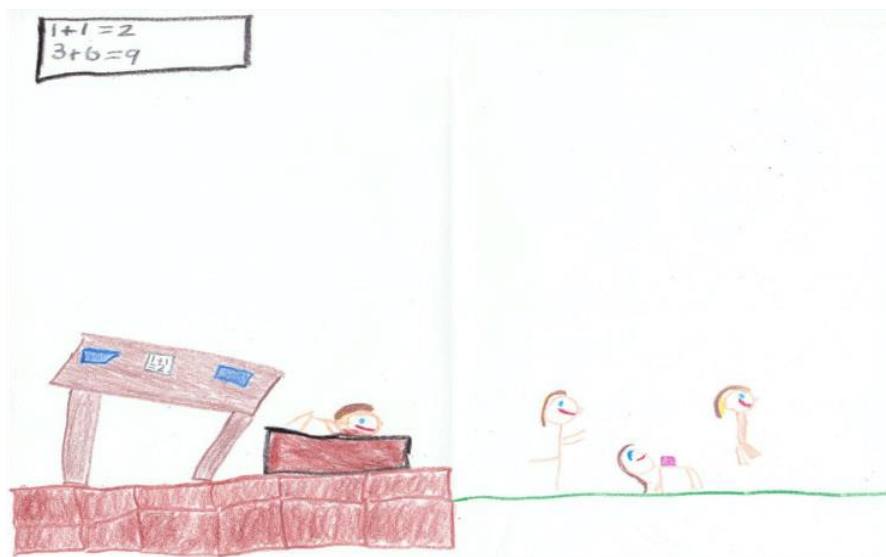


*Figure 1.* Sarah's picture indicating what she is good at in first grade

Despite the initial challenges associated with her adjustment to first grade and later the adjustment following her parents' divorce, Sarah's teacher could still describe her as "a strong little girl." Sarah's mother explained that Sarah's positive adjustment to first grade was related to the "importance of her support structure" because it provided her with "safety [that] helped her to do well."

### Discussion

Sarah was competent at adjusting well to first grade despite her parents' divorce. Masten, Burt, and Coatsworth (2006) define competence as the demonstration of

patterns of capacity relating to effective adaptation that meet developmental, contextual, and cultural expectations for an individual or specific group or social structure. From this viewpoint, Sarah's resilience relates to "manifested competence in the context of significant challenges to adaptation or development" (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998, p. 206). The case study of Sarah confirms that her competence was the result of "both the individual and the social ecology play[ing] active roles" (Jefferis & Theron, 2017, p. 1). Hence we can see that Sarah's positive adjustment was rooted not only in her individual capacity, but especially in the "goodness of fit between elements of the mesosystem (interactions between family, school and community systems)" as Ungar (2012, p. 14) puts it.

Essentially, Sarah's resilience drew on her own strengths and the strengths within her supportive systems. Supportive systems apparent in Sarah's social ecologies consisted of family (parents, sibling, and extended family); school (first grade teacher, peers, extra-mural activities, and acts of recognition); and community (after-care facilities) that acted in Sarah's best interest. This aligns with the contention by Ungar et al. (2007) who explain that resilience is fostered by a child's physical and social environments which include school, family, and community. Importantly, Sarah's case study illustrates that these systems provided everyday supports that are likely to be ordinary. This extends extant resilience studies which have not thus far offered accounts of resilience in contexts where children whose parents have divorced also adjust well to the challenges of first grade. Thus, essentially, our findings are in agreement with those of Masten (2014c) who found that resilience "arises from [the] operation of basic protections" (p. 7) and that the value of these systems as basic "ordinary resources and processes" (p. 3) facilitated resilience. Even though, broadly speaking, this case study does not offer new insights into what enables resilience, it

does offer an opportunity to distil resilience-enabling leverage points for SPs working in schools with first grade children whose parents are divorced.

### **Lessons for SPs Working in Schools**

**Activate the child's sense of agency and meaning making.** Sarah's personal sense of agency played an important role in enabling her to adjust to first grade. Resilience is typically enabled in a child's agency and mastery motivation that enables the child to adapt to the environment and demonstrate intrinsic motivation (Masten & Wright, 2010). In accordance with the literature, Sarah demonstrated individual agency when she was able to navigate to resources that supported her adaptation (Ungar, 2012). She was particularly adept at making constructive meaning. Meaning making relates to the human ability to construct meaning and "find beauty" (Masten & Cicchetti, 2016, p. 293) in the midst of challenges or adversity. Theron and Theron (2014) found that meaning-making processes were resilience-promoting. According to Masten and Cicchetti (2016), little data is available on young people's meaning-making processes. Thus, while this study affirms the value of a first grader's meaning making regarding parental divorce and adjustment to first grade, follow-up studies are needed to better understand who/what supports young children to make such constructive meaning.

For SPs, it is important to consider which therapeutic interventions might meaningfully support an anxious first grader, such as Sarah. Learning from Sarah, SPs could support agency and meaning making during individual or group therapy sessions when they are working with first graders whose parents are divorced. It is plausible that supporting agency starts with the development of self-efficacy, because, as Prince-Embury, Saklofske, and Keefer (2017) explain, self-efficacy is the basis of human agency because it relates to people's belief system about themselves and their ability to manage challenging circumstances. Enhancing ego strengths in therapeutic

interventions will thus probably benefit the first grader's agency. Therapeutic interventions also involve making the first grader aware of the resources towards which she or he could navigate for support. Following Masten (2014c), meaning making is an important protective factor and therefore SPs need to engage with the child in a process of shifting negative perceptions by offering an alternative lens through which the child can search for some form of meaning from the situation because this could bring about resilience to cope well with parental divorce.

**Work systemically and engage systems of support.** "Support refers to psychological and tangible resource available to individuals through their relationships with family, friends, neighbours..." (Masten & Cicchetti, 2016, p. 216). Ungar, Russell, and Connelly (2014) emphasizes that when individuals navigate towards resources, these resources should be responsive in providing the support necessary to fulfil the need. We see that Sarah's case study is in agreement with international and South African literature regarding how meaningful and effective the support from various systems is in enabling resilience (Southwick, Bonanno, Masten, Panter-Brick, & Yehuda, 2014; Theron & Donald, 2012). When SPs work systemically, they are more likely to involve the whole gamut of possible supports which underpin positive adjustment to first grade, regardless of additional risks such as the divorce of parents. For example, working with the nuclear family parents will consist of offering guidance towards positive supportive parenting, despite the divorce, such as attending school events together and maintaining regular communication about matters concerning the child (Chinn, 2007). Useful, too, is making the nuclear family members aware of the support structure available in the extended family (where this is the case) and how the nuclear family and extended family could collaborate in working together in areas such as assisting with homework (Grant & Ray, 2016). Working with teachers will entail equipping them with skills to apply to the

classroom such as finding ways for children to talk about their feelings (Gordon & Browne, 2017). Following Masten (2014c) who refers to various ways in which schools could support children, SPs, when they are working with principals and school management teams, could make them aware of the value that practices such as recognition for small achievements hold for the first grader. SPs could point to the importance of involving first graders in extra-mural activities, and explain why the after-care facilities need to be child-centred.

According to D'Amato, Zafiris, McConnell, and Dean (2011) there should be good collaboration between the school and the family system. Importantly, SPs should aim to support school and family systems to engage with each other. This was evident in Sarah's story in our finding that an informative relationship between her parents and her first grade teacher existed. Fiese (2013) states that "a child's early success in school will rely in part on how well connected the family is to the school" (p. 380). Thus, the potential to support children through the provision of psychological or tangible resources is greater when school and family systems interact. The SP's role here could have been to encourage continued engagement from both the teacher and Sarah's parents to discuss how matters at home were impacting on Sarah at school. Generally, SPs (specifically those based in schools) stand central to school-ecological systems. SPs are involved with the individual child; they have knowledge of the family and relationships between the child and other role players such as peers and teachers; they have contact with the teachers and school management teams; and they have knowledge of operating systems in the school that impact on the child's functioning. For example, systems of recognition and extra-mural school activities SPs also know which after-school facilities operate. For this reason, SPs need to act as the connection between and among all these systems.



**Mobilize systems through task-sharing.** When systems engage with each other, they are “co-transacting towards resilience in an effort to augment accessible, protective... resources” (Theron & Donald, 2012, p. 9). However, this process of co-transaction requires multiple role players in multiple systems to actively champion resilience. Seeing that SPs are scarce in South African schools, less complex SP tasks could be facilitated by involving important role players (such as school principals, first grade teachers, parents and siblings, extended family members like grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, and peers and other community members) in service provision which does not demand sophisticated psychological knowledge/skills. This is known as “task sharing” (Padmanathan & De Silva, 2013, p. 82). Task sharing involves a “knowledge transfer” (Riss, Cress, Kimmerle, & Martin, 2007, p. 287) which supports layman in supporting children and/or others in their community to cope with commonly occurring stressors (and to refer such persons if they require more sophisticated support). Thus, task sharing should not be confused with task shifting (Lund et al., 2014). When SPs include the role players (such as those identified in Sarah’s story, for example) to share the task of supporting positive adjustment to first grade (in the presence of additional stressors such as parental divorce), SPs contribute to mobilizing resilience-enabling systems and potentially support positive adjustment to school. For example, SPs mostly work in close collaboration with teachers and families (Theron & Donald, 2012). Task sharing with teachers and families will require SPs to share knowledge regarding effective ways of managing the effects of divorce so that it is least disruptive of the first grader’s adjustment to formal school. SPs can share knowledge (such as the lessons learned from Sarah’s story) about how family members can provide academic support during homework activities, how peers can comfort a sad friend and reach out by offering to play together, and how teachers can be aware of a

child's academic needs and can reassure the child and be responsive to these needs by waiting for the child if she or he falls behind in work. SPs can share knowledge about the implications of being aware of a child's emotional needs shortly after parental divorce, about how the school can support spiritual beliefs by providing spiritual resources in class, and about how a child's sense of belonging can be confirmed through the extra-mural activities that the school offers.

### **Conclusion**

Masten (2014c) found that families and schools are ideal settings in which to facilitate resilience-enabling processes. Sarah's case study echoes Masten's insights and, in doing so, reminds SPs that they are well positioned to champion resilience provided they heed what her case study teaches. Sarah's case illuminates the fact that ordinary resources (such as warm parents/caregivers, loving relatives from the extended family, and/or supportive teachers) enable resilience. Thus, in support of the positive adjustment of first graders whose parents have divorced, SPs would do well to activate and/or sustain children's agency and meaning making and work systemically to facilitate/engage/sustain the resilience-enabling contributions of warm parents/caregivers, loving relatives, and/or supportive teachers. Additionally, and more particularly in contexts where SPs are inaccessible, those SPs who are accessible at times, need to mobilize the capacity of the aforementioned adults to engage in task-sharing. In doing so, SPs are likely to make a meaningful difference to children whose wellbeing is threatened by compound stressors (such as adjusting to formal schooling and a changed family structure following parental divorce).

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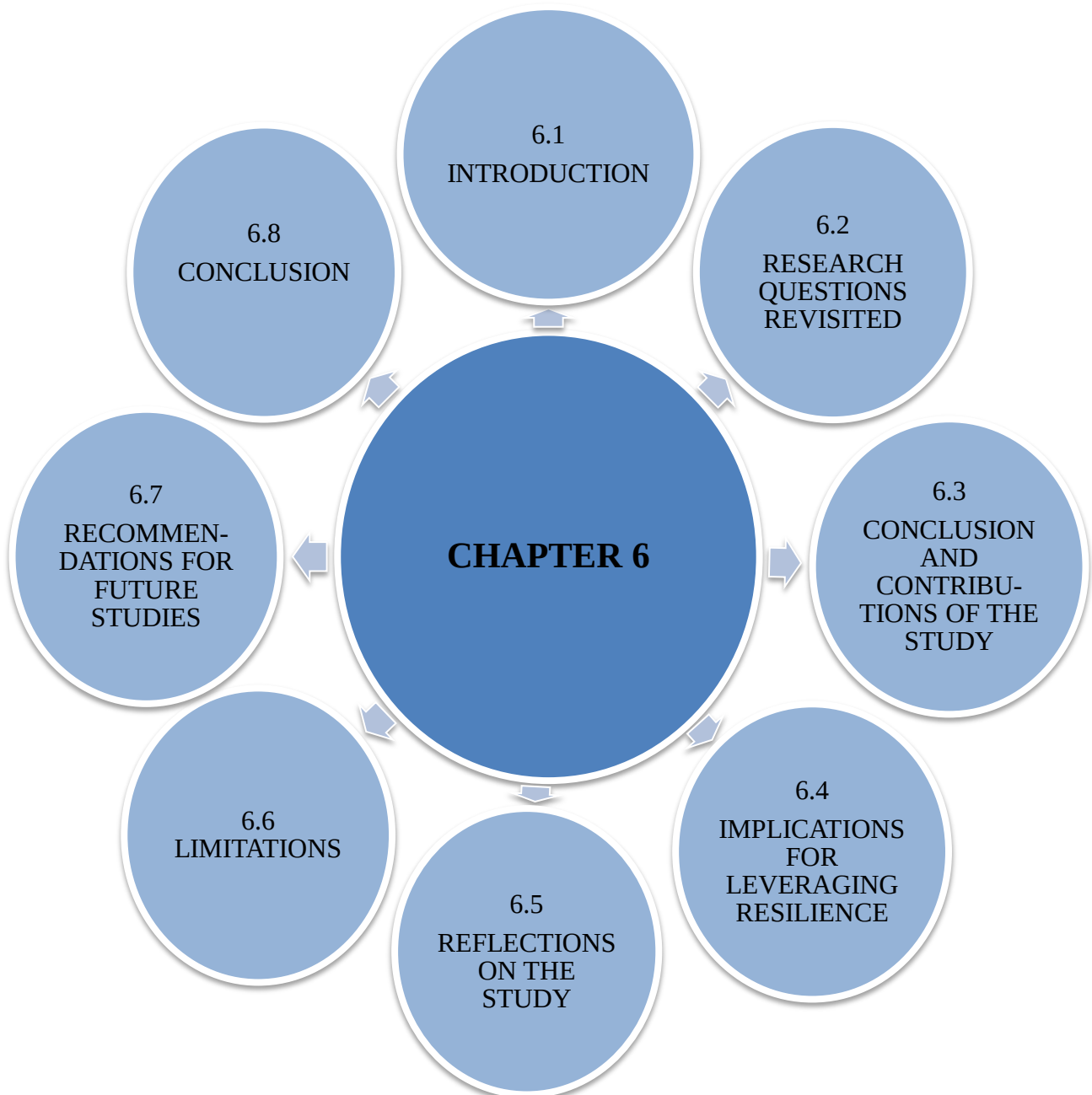
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**CHAPTER 6**

## CHAPTER 6

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

With Chapter 6, I conclude this doctoral study. This chapter consists of a summary of the study (as addressed in Manuscripts 1 to 4) in which I revisit the research questions, discuss the contributions of the study, outline the implications for leveraging resilience, reflect on the study, describe its limitations, make recommendations for future studies, and offer the conclusions.

### 6.2 RESEARCH QUESTION REVISITED

My doctoral study aimed to answer the main research question: “*Why do some children adjust well to first grade despite the additional challenge of parental divorce?*” Subsequently, from the main research question, I developed sub-questions that informed each of the four manuscripts. In Figure 1, I present visually the sub-questions applicable to each manuscript.

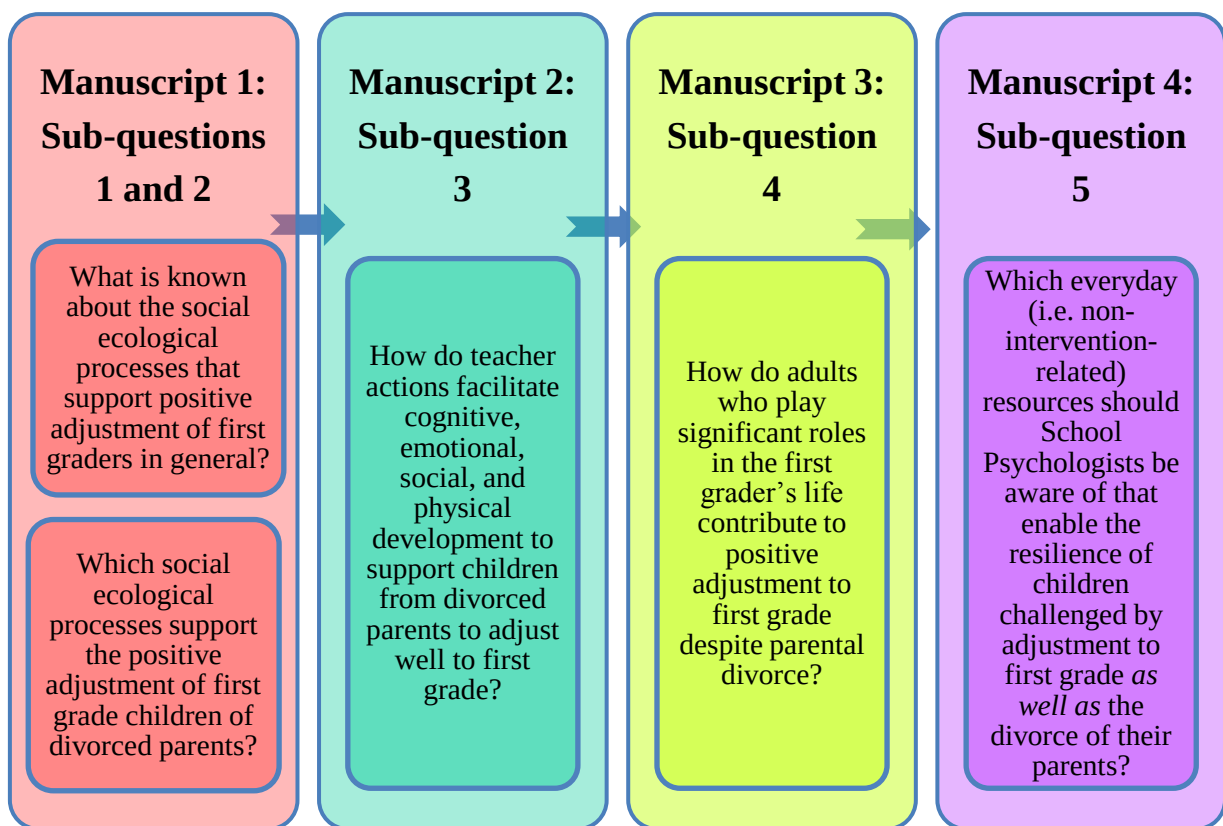


Figure 1. Visual summary of the research questions of each manuscript

Figure 2 presents a visual summary of the methodology employed to answer these sub-questions.

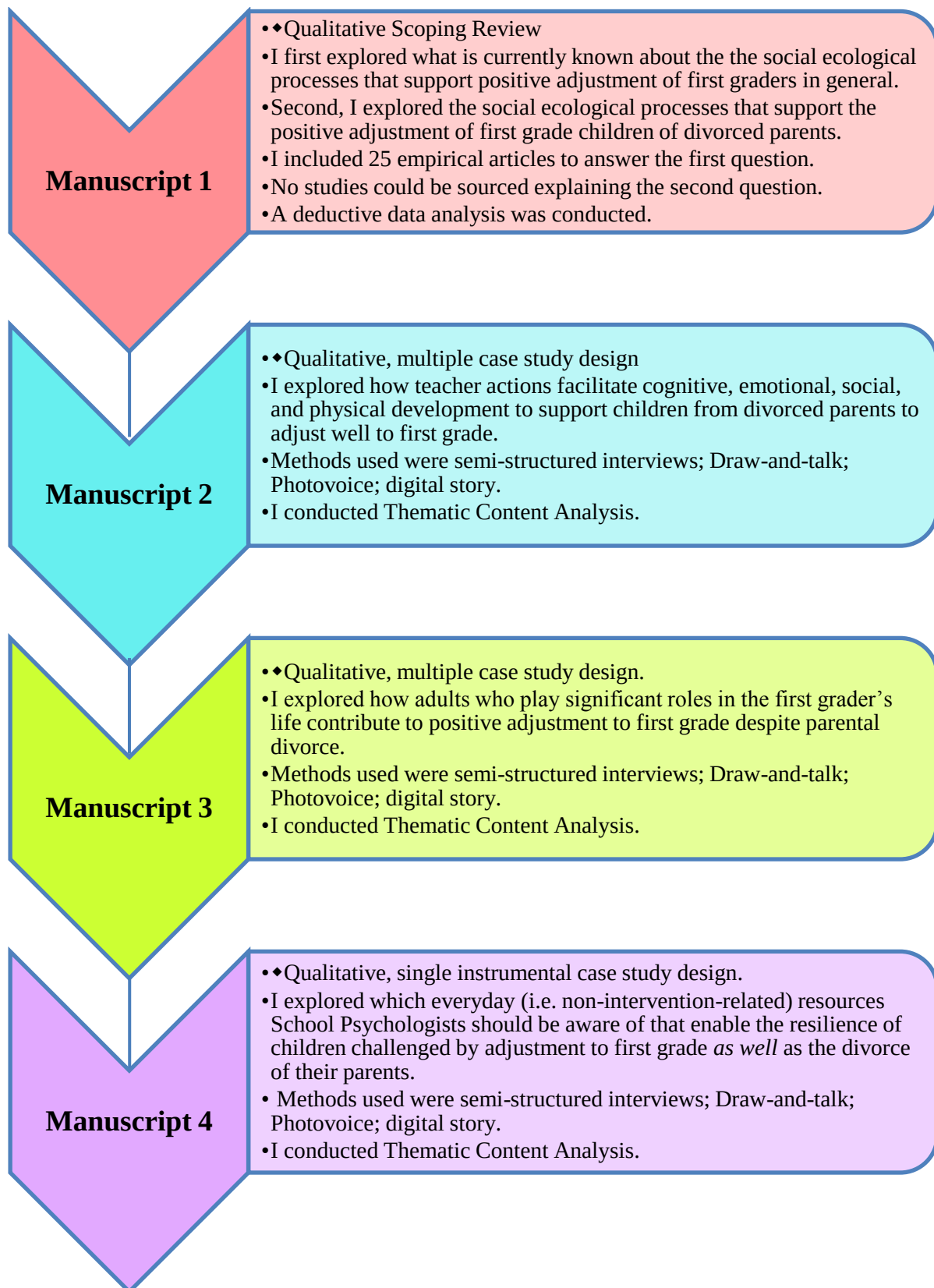


Figure 2. Visual summary of the methodology informing each manuscript

### 6.2.1 Manuscript 1

Manuscript 1 consisted of a qualitative scoping review. I wanted to explore aspects of the current literature concerning positive adjustment to first grade.

- First, I wanted to know what is known about the social ecological processes that support positive adjustment of first graders in general.
- Second, I wanted to know which social ecological processes support the positive adjustment of first grader children of divorced parents.

In my exploration of the first aspect, I used Masten's Shortlist of Resilience (Masten & Wright, 2010) for deductive data analysis. The Shortlist of Resilience consists of protective factors that are characteristics of individuals and their social ecologies that facilitate resilience processes. Of interest was that the scoping review showed that all six protective factors are apparently facilitative of children's positive adjustment to first grade. However, the analysis indicated that some suggested to be more important factors supportive of adjusting well to first grade than others (i.e. connection to others was most prevalent; meaning-making was least prevalent).

The exploration of the second aspect indicated that the most obvious gap that the scoping review highlighted pertained to positive school adjustment of first grade children of divorced parents. No studies answered the question of what enables positive adjustment to first grade for children of divorced parents. These results were indicative of the need for research that reports on why and how first graders adjust well to school despite parental divorce, from a socio-ecological perspective. Consequently, my doctoral work was well-motivated.

### 6.2.2 Manuscript 2

This gap identified in Manuscript 1 led to Manuscripts 2, 3, and 4 that explored the social ecologies that contribute to children's positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce. For Manuscript 2, the focus was on the school ecology, especially first grade teachers and how they contributed to resilience-enabling processes supporting first graders adjusting to first grade.

This focus was prompted by the extant literature which provided a silo-like account of how teachers facilitate the processes of positive adjustment to first grade in that studies explored how teachers facilitated adjustment in either one or two of the developmental domains, but not in all four developmental domains. For example, studies either focused on how teachers supported cognitive development (Seifert, 2013); or emotional (Kiuru et al., 2016), or social development (Murray, Kosty, & Hauser-McLean, 2016). Sometimes social and emotional development was combined (Cefai, 2007). However no studies relating to physical development as support in adjusting well to first grade were sourced. Of significance was the fact that none of these studies were specifically about children whose parents were divorced.

I drew on qualitative data generated by first-graders, their parents/caregivers, and teachers. The findings showed three components that supported positive adjustment to first grade. First, first grade teachers facilitated holistic development (i.e. development across all four developmental domains); second, teacher actions that facilitated holistic development formed part of teachers' ordinary day-to-day classroom practices; and third, while teachers were facilitating adjustment-enabling processes, they also allowed children to take responsibility and reach out to the social ecological resources supporting their resilience. From the findings I identified implications for best resilience-enabling classroom practice than can be used for future teacher education. These implications indicated that best classroom practices should include holistic development of the first grader; that best classroom practices are based on ordinary teacher actions; and that best classroom practices commence with relationship building and respect for child agency.

### **6.2.3 Manuscript 3**

Thereafter, I engaged with the data again. Manuscript 3 emerged as I realized that although teachers as part of the school ecology are crucial social ecological stakeholders who facilitate positive adjustment to first grade, they are not the only stakeholders who contribute to

first graders' positive adjustment to formal school in the face of parental divorce. For this reason, in Manuscript 3 I wanted to explore how adults who play significant roles in the first grader's life contribute to positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce. Additionally, Connidis (2010) explains that parents have an obligation to support their children during and after a divorce. However, it is also known that not all parents are capable during times of divorce to be the source of support that their children need and it is then that other significant adults should be acknowledged, too. Accordingly, I theorised that some children whose parents have divorced adjust well to first grade because of supportive relationships with others, especially with significant adults. Clinton (2013) confirms that what matters most are the relationships that children have with others. For this reason, the purpose of Manuscript 3 was to explore how adults who play significant roles in the first grader's life contribute to his/her positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce. In answer to the research question of Manuscript 3, 'How do adults who play significant roles in the first grader's life contribute to positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce?', the findings portrayed two central facets: how adults related to one another and how they related to the first grader made a difference to first grade adjustment. The manner in which adults related to each other spanned two dimensions — their respectful relationships and their open communication channels. In Manuscript 3 I discussed the results and implications for practitioners supporting children because of parental divorce by highlighting the following two aspects. First, the relationships children have with significant adults are a supportive base from which they can face the world and cope with adversity along the way. Thus, it takes a village (of significant adults) to 'raise' a child. In other words, it involves all significant adults to contribute to children's positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce. Second, valuing and enacting the processes enabling the so called village to raise and support a child was underscored in this study. Practitioners should guide divorced parents to make a conscious decision to behave respectfully



based on the evidence of how mutual respect enables supportive actions that can lead to collaboration that will benefit their children. Also, healthcare workers should encourage communication between different systems, such as family systems and school systems, so that the communication can be constructive and supportive of children following the divorce of their parents.

#### **6.2.4 Manuscript 4**

Manuscript 4 emerged from the idea that social ecologies are indeed critical in enabling positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce, but often a central person who connects with the school as well as parents and children is needed as a link between the various systems that make up the school ecology. One such connector is a School Psychologist (SP). SPs have the capacity to support school staff and families to prioritise those processes which are likely to minimise the risks associated with adjustment to first grade, as well as those processes that are likely to maximise positive school experiences. In addition, SPs have the skill set to facilitate adaptive processes for first graders facing additional risks such as parental divorce. However, even though SPs are central to processes that enable reciprocal interaction between systems impacting on children's healthy functioning, such as teachers, family and peers, the extant resilience literature only occasionally includes the contributions of SPs in accounts of what supported the resilience of vulnerable children (Theron, 2016). Instead of focusing on interventions and other contributions by mental health practitioners, accounts of what enables South African children to adjust well to multiple challenges favour caring adults, such as warm parents/caregivers, loving relatives from the extended family, and/or supportive teachers (see Kumpulainen et al., 2016; Theron, 2017; van Breda, 2017). However, none of these accounts is specific to first graders whose parents have divorced. Essentially then, it was important to explore what first graders with divorced parents, and adults (e.g. parents, relatives, or teachers) in their everyday social ecology considered to be foundational to the positive adjustment of these

first graders. SPs could then take lessons from these accounts to apply in practice. Thus, Manuscript 4 was directed by the following question: Which everyday (i.e. non-intervention-related) resources should SPs be aware of that enable the resilience of children challenged by adjustment to first grade *as well as* the divorce of their parents? The answers to this question illustrated that the supportive systems at home, in school, and in the community provided everyday supports, such as a teacher who provided emotional and scholastic support in class; pragmatic care from grandparents; emotional support from the mother; scholastic support during homework from the parents; and an after-school centre in the community. Even though, broadly speaking, the results from Manuscript 4 did not offer new insights into what enables resilience, they did offer an opportunity to distil resilience-enabling leverage points for SPs working in schools with first grade children whose parents are divorced. Lessons that SPs working in schools could take from Manuscript 4 are to activate the child's sense of agency and meaning making; to work systemically and engage systems of support; and to mobilize systems through task-sharing.

In summary, with the support of the informants in my study, the above-mentioned manuscripts reported the answers to the sub-questions that informed my PhD work. In the following section, I combine these answers in an attempt to answer the main research question. In doing this, I introduce the conclusions that these answers provide.

### **6.3 CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY**

This PhD study explored why some first grade children adjust well to first grade despite parental divorce. The first contribution relates to the gap that was identified in the literature pertaining to the need for research from a social-ecological perspective about children's positive adjustment to first grade despite their positive adjustment being challenged by their parents' divorce. After the time that I spent with the informants (five first graders, their parents, and first grade teachers) and the time spent with the data consisting of their accounts, I offer the following

answer to address the abovementioned gap which informed my study's main research question. First graders in this specific study adjusted well to formal school despite parental divorce because of the contributions of stakeholders in their social ecology. This included first grade teachers who engaged in ordinary actions that facilitated the participants' development across multiple domains (i.e. cognitive, emotional, social, and physical). It also included the contributions of significant adults (i.e. first grade teachers, parent figures, extended family members like grandparents, uncles, and aunts). Like those of the first grade teachers, these contributions were nothing out of the ordinary and included, for example, mutual respect and open communication that led to supportive actions. Essentially, my study suggests that first graders whose parents have divorced adjust well to formal school because they are supported by school- and family-linked adults who are committed to supporting children and who operationalise this commitment in ordinary, everyday actions that communicate that children matter, limit unnecessary divorce-related stressors, and champion children's wellbeing.

The above answer fits with Masten's (2014c) viewpoint that resilience is not based on extraordinary events or resources, but rather on "ordinary human resources and protective factors" (p. 8) that are part of children's lives. Aligned with Masten's insight, the answers in this PhD study indicate that parent figures, extended family, siblings, teachers, and peers should go back to the basics — the ordinary actions that matter for resilience. It was the basic actions of school and family ecologies that facilitated resilience-enabling processes supportive of positive adjustment to first grade for children whose parents had divorced.

The answer of this study also aligns with the Social Ecology of Resilience Theory (SERT) that positive outcomes in the midst of adversity are the result of facilitative environments (or social ecologies) that nurture positive outcomes in individuals who are at risk for negative outcomes (Ungar, 2013b). In other words, resilience rests upon the profound duty of social ecologies to provide the resources necessary for children's positive adjustment. In my

study, the aforementioned was evident when first grade teachers provided resources in developmentally beneficial ways that supported children's development holistically and that contributed to children's adjustment to and managing of the demands of first grade. Other significant adults (particularly parents and parent-figures) also provided resources that contributed to children's positive adjustment by choosing a respectful approach towards each other that enabled them to be child-focused and thus responsive to the needs of the children despite the parental divorce. Furthermore, SERT emphasizes that resilience requires interactions between children and their environments in ways that optimize developmental processes (Ungar, 2011). Put differently, children also have a responsibility (albeit less important than that of the social ecology) to navigate towards the provided resources; this indicates agency. It was evident from the answers in this PhD study that first grade children were provided with resources by their social ecologies but, at the same time, these children could navigate towards these resources and use them in combination with their own personal strengths. In this regard it was evident that children described in this study were motivated and that they used the intellectual and other capacities that enabled them, for example, to work hard at homework completion tasks so as to master scholastic skills, and to accept support by forming close emotional relationships with their teachers and peers, by engaging in peer connections that their teachers initiated, and by taking part in extra-mural activities at school.

In summary, then, the answer of this PhD study aligned with prior understandings that resilience was found in the ways in which children withstood risks through their individual and collective resources, strengths, and capabilities (Masten, 2001, 2016; Panter-Brick et al., 2017). The answer extends these prior understandings to how first graders, whose adjustment to formal school is complicated by the additional risk of parental divorce, transition well. However, the question comes to mind regarding whether one can reasonably expect a social ecology to facilitate relevant resilience-enabling resources without their receiving support or guidance to do

so (Jefferis, 2016; Jefferis & Theron, 2015). It is here that the contribution of Manuscript 4 comes in. The lessons that were apparent in this study need to be honoured by SPs and shared with social ecologies to equip them to facilitate resilience processes that will enable first graders to adjust well to first grade despite the risk of parental divorce.

Another contribution of this study are the intergenerational accounts that explained why and how first graders adjusted well to first grade despite parental divorce. A significant contribution was that first grade children, who were the main focus of this study, could provide accounts about what they experienced as important and supportive during their adjustment to first grade. Stakeholders like first grade teachers and parent figures need to be doing more of what is meaningful to children. This PhD study therefore contributes by making stakeholders aware of resilience-enabling processes according to first graders whose parents are divorced. Howard, Dryden, and Johnson (1999) emphasized the importance of including children's understanding of key concepts in resilience studies, especially because children's perspectives differ from those of adults. As mentioned at the outset of this PhD study, Docket and Perry (2007) similarly emphasized the importance of including children's perspectives on starting school in research studies because the perspectives of children on their experiences at school are different from those of adults. This recognition places children at the centre of being directly involved in "shaping their transition experiences" (p. 49). Although the matter of their parents' divorce was not explicitly discussed with the informants, I remained aware of the importance to hear from children's accounts and perspectives about parental divorce (Butler, Scanlan, Robinson, Douglas, & Murch's, 2003). Wright, Masten, and Narayan (2013) and Liebenberg and Theron (2015) echo the importance of prioritising children's insights in how resilience is accounted for. Essentially, then, my study honoured the calls to give voice to children's insights, in this case on what enables positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce, but also added adult perspectives. I added insights of significant adults to the insights of children to

address the tendency in the extant literature to underplay not only children's insights, but also followed Michaelson, King, and Pickett (2017) with a combination of child and adult insights to balance the information gained from adults with children's perceptions. In doing so, my study draws on intergenerational insights (as argued by Theron, 2017). This intergenerational approach is necessary given how complex and dynamic resilience processes are (Ungar, 2011).

#### **6.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR LEVERAGING RESILIENCE**

My intention with the PhD research that I conducted was for it to have positive impact on the social ecologies that influence first graders' positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce. Aranda and Hart (2014) describe this as the translation of findings into meaningful interventions in support of vulnerable children. Although I have not reworked my findings into intervention programs, the findings do have implications for leveraging resilience in the different social ecologies. From the viewpoint that children's resilience is supported by the resources that their social ecologies offer (Ungar, 2013b), I direct suggestions towards the social ecologies that have an impact on first graders' adjustment to first grade. I therefore offer suggestions that can be enacted and implemented by the stakeholders of these social ecologies, such as first grade teachers, parent figures, extended family members, and school psychologists. Theron (2016, 2017) argues that the translation of resilience research should include everyday, sustainable actions. Following this, I made the following suggestions in Manuscripts 2, 3, and 4.

- Seeing that children spend more time at school than they do at any other place aside from their homes, schools are implicated in being important contributors to human development (Eccles & Roeser, 2012) so school ecologies need to be effective at championing resilience. Thus, first grade teachers, who are a crucial part of the school ecology and of first graders' realities need to prioritise classroom practices that are most likely to support positive adjustment to formal school despite the additional challenges of parental divorce. First, these best classroom practices should start with teacher training during which student first

grade teachers are taught how to facilitate developmental processes that support positive adjustment to first grade holistically. Teacher training should focus student first grade teachers' attention on thinking about the child holistically rather than focusing on specific outcomes (e.g., only cognitively, only emotionally or socially, or only physically). Second, best classroom practices are based on ordinary teacher actions. Within and across all four developmental domains, first grade teachers' supportive actions need not be out of the ordinary or extreme. Teachers should still be mindful about their supportive actions but should strive towards the stability that lies within the ordinary supportive actions (e.g., a predictable classroom routine). Third, classroom practices commencing with relationship building and respect for child agency is a good start to best classroom practices. Loe (2014) states, "If education is to be the most powerful experience it can be, we have to focus on that relationship between teacher and student..." (para. 7). During those first few school days, teachers could invest their time in getting to know their students and their home circumstances. This will inform first grade teachers' actions and enable them to think holistically about the child. Relationship building needs to be expedited. Teachers can invent and apply ways to get the relationship building process started from day one when the first grader enters. They could, for example, play non-competitive games with the children that investigate interests, family setup, pets, personal characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses. These could include having the teacher share appropriate things about herself. A game could be devised in which the teacher can check in with each child personally at the end of each day for the first few weeks to give them a chance to verbalize the highs and lows of each day. Last, teachers could raise their awareness of children's ability to navigate towards resources. In this way the child's agency would be encouraged, respected, and valued. Teachers should be attentive when children make suggestions that demonstrate their agency and they should support children during these moments in order to strengthen their agency.

- Werner (2000) explains that when children are faced with adversity such as divorce, sources of support contribute to their resilience. These sources of support not only include the significant adults directly involved in the child's life, but also pertain to practitioners in the helping profession such as school/educational psychologists, counsellors, and educators who support these children during times of adversity such as divorce. Therefore I now pay attention to suggestions that can be implemented by parent figures and extended family, but also suggestions aimed at workers in the helping profession. First, the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child" is used to convey the idea that it takes a community to support a child. For this reason, especially when practitioners are working with divorced parents, it is critical to convey the importance of allowing their children to continue to have relationships with other significant adults, even though these adults may be part of the divorced parent's family or group of friends, or even when these adults do not approve of the divorce (Timonen, Doyle, & O'Dwyer, 2009). Similarly, parents (particularly single parents) need to be encouraged to form connections with supportive others and to understand that doing so is likely to enable better quality parenting as Gadsden, Ford, and Breiner (2016) have explained. Not only do parents then allow themselves a support network but they also enable the strengthening of their child's resilience and the quality of their parenting. Second, it was evident in this study how the processes of mutual respect between teachers and parents led to collaboration between and among them. Communication between various biological and other role-players provided clarity that enabled support. These processes indirectly enabled significant adults to be supportive towards the adjusting first graders. To start with, divorced parents need to make a conscious decision to behave respectfully based on the evidence of how mutual respect enables supportive actions that can lead to collaboration that will benefit their children. Therapy or mediation could include developing communication skills between divorced parents themselves and helping them to



communicate with other role-players such as teachers and extended family members to express their needs. In addition, such help could assist parents in communicating with their children so as to offer age-appropriate information that will support and not devastate their child. Also, communication between different systems, such as family systems and school systems should be constructive and supportive of children following the divorce of their parents. When teachers and parents collaborate in support of a child after parental divorce, the child benefits significantly (Leon & Spengler, 2005). Thus parents should be encouraged to include teachers by informing them about the current situation of their students following divorce. This would then give teachers a better understanding of the child and would enable them to make sense of the child in his/her own context. Teachers will also be in a better position to provide relevant feedback that may enable parents and other adults to support the child.

- The last set of implications is suggested specifically to practitioners such as SPs working in schools. SPs working in schools are well positioned to champion children's resilience (Noltemeyer & Bush, 2013). These SPs stand central to various systems that operate in social ecologies influencing resilience-enabling processes that have an impact on children's positive adjustment to first grade, despite the challenge they face of their parents' divorce. To start with, SPs can activate the child's sense of agency and meaning making. For SPs, it is important to incorporate the activation of agency and meaning making during individual or group therapy sessions when they are working with first graders whose parents are divorced. It is plausible that activating agency starts with the development of self-efficacy, because, as Prince-Embury, Saklofske, and Keefer (2017) explain, self-efficacy is the basis of human agency since it relates to people's belief system about themselves and their ability to manage challenging circumstances. Therapeutic interventions also involve making the first grader aware of the resources towards which she/he could navigate for support.

Following Masten (2014c), meaning making is an important protective factor and therefore SPs need to engage with the child in a process of shifting negative perceptions by offering an alternative lens through which the child can search for some form of meaning from the situation because this could bring about resilience to cope well with parental divorce.

Second, SPs based in schools need to work systemically and engage systems of support. “Support refers to psychological and tangible resource available to individuals through their relationships with family, friends, neighbours...” (Masten & Cicchetti, 2016, p. 216). When SPs work systemically, they are more likely to involve the whole gamut of possible supports which underpin positive adjustment to first grade, regardless of additional risks such as the divorce of parents. For example, working with the nuclear family parents and caregivers in the extended family will consist of offering guidance towards positive supportive parenting, despite the divorce, such as attending school events together and maintaining regular communication about matters concerning the child (Chinn, 2007). Useful, too, is making the nuclear family members aware of the support structure available in the extended family (where this is the case) and how the nuclear family and extended family could collaborate in working together in areas such as assisting with homework (Grant & Ray, 2016). Working with teachers will entail equipping them with skills to apply to the classroom such as finding ways for children to talk about their feelings (Gordon & Browne, 2017). Following Masten (2014c) who refers to various ways in which schools could support children, SPs, when they are working with school management teams, could make them aware of the value that practices such as recognition of small achievements hold for the first grader. SPs could point to the importance of involving first graders in extra-mural activities, and explain why the after-care facilities need to be child-centred. Furthermore, SPs should aim to support school and family systems to engage with each other. Fiese (2013) states that “a child’s early success in school will rely in part on how well

connected the family is to the school” (p. 380). Another suggestion is that SPs should mobilize systems through task-sharing. When systems engage with each other, they are “co-transacting towards resilience in an effort to augment accessible, protective... resources” (Theron & Donald, 2012, p. 9). However, this process of co-transaction requires multiple role players in multiple systems to actively champion resilience. Seeing that SPs are scarce in South African schools (Moolla, 2011), less complex SP tasks could be facilitated by involving important role players (such as school principals, first grade teachers, parents and siblings, extended family members like grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, and peers, and other community members) in service provision which does not demand sophisticated psychological knowledge/skills. This is known as “task sharing” (Padmanathan & De Silva, 2013, p. 82) that involves a “knowledge transfer” (Riss, Cress, Kimmerle, & Martin, 2007, p. 287) which supports lay persons in supporting children and/or others in their community to cope with commonly occurring stressors (and to refer such persons if they require more sophisticated support). For example, SPs mostly work in close collaboration with teachers and families (Theron & Donald, 2012). Task sharing with teachers and families will require SPs to share knowledge regarding effective ways of managing the effects of divorce so that it is least disruptive of the first grader’s adjustment to formal school. Knowledge shared will impact on the academic, social, emotional, spiritual, and pragmatic levels of support that all stakeholders provide. SPs can share knowledge about how family members can provide academic support during homework activities, how peers can comfort a sad friend and reach out by offering to play together, and how teachers can be aware of a child’s academic needs and can reassure the child and be responsive to these needs by waiting for the child if she/he falls behind in work. SPs can share knowledge about the implications of being aware of a child’s emotional needs shortly after parental divorce, about how the school can support spiritual beliefs by providing spiritual resources in class, and about how a

child's sense of belonging can be confirmed through the extra-mural activities that the school offers.

## **6.5 REFLECTIONS ON THE STUDY**

The following section consists of my theoretical, methodological, and ethical reflections on this doctoral study. This section also includes a discussion of implications for researchers that flow from these reflections.

### **6.5.1 Theoretical Reflections**

Reflecting on my knowledge about resilience since commencing with this study, I realise that my knowledge has transformed. My understanding about resilience gained a new perspective as I discovered the in-depth nature of resilience. Even though I have always used the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) as the base of my work as an Educational Psychologist, I somehow perceived resilience mostly as an internal resource that is associated with a child's inner strength. Now, after this PhD study, I have gained knowledge in the field of resilience and I have learned a great deal.

First, SERT introduces the notion that individual children navigate towards resources in their social ecologies, but these social ecologies reciprocate when they reactively provide resilience-enabling resources and anticipate when they provide resilience-enabling resources proactively (Ungar, 2013b). Ungar (2012) explains that resilience necessitates that the child alone is not individually responsible for positive adjustment to adversity. Positive outcomes in the midst of adversity are thus the result of facilitative environments (or social ecologies) that nurture positive outcomes (proactively or reactively) in individuals who are at risk for negative outcomes (Ungar, 2013b).

However, resilience-enabling processes do not lie only in the hands of social ecologies. The reciprocal process between the individual child and the social ecologies are of great importance. Hence, second, I have learned that the resilience process is not the sole

responsibility of the social ecologies. Instead, the child shares in it (i.e. by navigating towards and making good use of available resources and by negotiating for necessary resources that are either unavailable or inaccessible). Even when children are young (e.g. first graders) they have a role to play in the resilience process. In other words, I learned that resilience draws more on the contributions of the social ecologies but that which the child contributes is also important.

Third, I have learned that the individual and social ecological resources that underpin the resilience process cannot be reduced to one or two popular resources (e.g., agency). Given the prevalence of popular resilience-enabling resources in the literature (e.g., mindfulness, see Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz, & Walach, 2014; or hardiness, see Almedom, 2005) it would be easy to adopt a simplistic approach to resilience which reduces it to a couple of popular resources. Rather, resilience is informed by multiple protective factors as summarised in Masten's Shortlist of Resilience (Masten & Wright, 2010). The Shortlist identified "characteristics of individuals and their environments that contribute to good outcome when risk or adversity [is] high" (Wright et al., 2013, p. 21). The protective factors include attachment relationships; agency, mastery and motivational systems; intelligence or the capacity to solve problems; self-regulation; meaning making; and cultural traditions and religion (Masten & Wright, 2010). Importantly, I learned that in addition to acknowledging that multiple, complex mechanisms inform resilience, they operationalise in ways that are contextually relevant (Panter-Brick et al., 2015) and interact dynamically. For this reason, when Educational Psychologists accept and enact the responsibility to champion resilience, we must be responsive to the complex underpinnings of resilience.

As I engaged with resilience literature and engaged with informants of this study, I became aware of how the Social Ecology of Resilience Theory and the practical implications thereof complemented each other. In the data that I collected, informants of the study confirmed the tenets of SERT (Ungar, 2011, 2012). Mostly, all informants identified the social ecologies that contributed with resources that enabled positive adjustment to first grade and championed

children's resilience despite parental divorce. However, Tim, one of the primary informants, believed mostly in his own agency as the reason for his positive adjustment to first grade. I remember experiencing a bit of frustration initially when his explanations included only himself. "Me-myself-and-I", I thought to myself after engaging with him during the first session. Although he included evidence of the contribution of social ecologies to his adaptive functioning in his accounts, he did not acknowledge that the social ecologies played an influential part in his positive adjustment to first grade. He was set on his own contributions throughout the data collection process. When I asked Tim to draw me one last drawing about the most important thing or person who helped him to do well in first grade, he drew himself.

Fisher (2010) refers to Piaget's preoperational stage of development that describes children between 2 to 7 years of age as still portraying egocentric thoughts. However, Fisher (2010) also explains that differences between children in that stage do exist so children in the same stage may develop differently. For this reason, developmental differences between informants also existed, with Tim still perceiving his positive adjustment from a more egocentric stance because that may have been where he was situated developmentally. Theron, Mitchell, and Smith (2012) stated that "doing well is often linked to socially and developmentally appropriate indicators" (p. 107). Therefore, resilience should be seen in a developmentally appropriate context. In Tim's case, his egocentric view regarding his contributions was therefore meaningful to his positive adaptation in adjusting well to first grade. In addition, Tim's family culture may also have influenced his strong regard for his own agency. His mother explained that because she works long hours, she places emphasis on Tim's being as independent as possible and she teaches him to take responsibility for himself. Therefore, the theory that holds that the contributions of the social ecologies are greater than those of the individual child (Ungar, 2015) is not necessarily applicable to children in the pre-operational stage. This does not mean that social ecologies do not matter (Tim did make mention of social ecological resources such as

friends), but rather that younger children may explain resilience processes in ways that do not fit absolutely with theory.

From a theoretical point of view, it is therefore important to have knowledge about what young children in their developmental stages, and in specific contexts, view as meaningful contributions to their resilience processes and for researchers to be sensitive towards this. Masten and Cicchetti (2016) stated that little data is available on young people's meaning-making processes. Part of these processes include children's explanations of the value and meaning they find in resilience-enabling contributions. For this reason, SERT should also include more evidence about children's accounts regarding what they experience as meaningful enablers that are supportive of their positive adjustment to first grade when their parents are divorced.

### **6.5.2 Methodological Reflections**

As an Educational Psychologist, I found it easy to conduct this research study from a social constructivist paradigm (as explained by Creswell, 2014). This is a paradigmatic basis from which I often practice with clients. During the engagement with informants, I explored the realities of the informants as they experienced their world. Thus, I drew on their personal experiences to provide accounts about why these children adjusted well to first grade despite parental divorce.

Furthermore, I was comfortable with the research methods that I used in this study. They fit with arts-based therapies and Gestalt work which were part of my training as an Educational Psychologist. During the semi-structured interviews with the primary informants I was aware of the importance of using developmentally appropriate language in a child-friendly manner during the data collection. From my experience as an Educational Psychologist, I was also aware that children often communicate through their drawings and the photographs they choose to take and that these drawings and photographs were valuable conversation enablers. However, during the

Draw-and-talk data collection, it became apparent that some children preferred to first talk about their answer to the question and then, after verbalizing it, provide a visual account by drawing their answer. I understood that for some primary informants, the verbal description constructed their experiences first and this provided them with ideas about how to present it visually. Also, similar to my practice with clients, I came across children making excuses for their drawing style or inability to draw well. Therefore, I was used to primary informants making excuses for their drawings before commencing with them. I then followed Pitt's (2017) recommendations and reassured primary informants, telling them that their best is good enough and that the drawing is only used to explain their answer and not to see if they can draw well. Brownell, Lemerise, Pelphry, and Roisman (2015) caution that during research with children, the researcher needs to be aware of children's attention span because the longer the interview, the greater the possibility that children may become fatigued or even bored as their attention starts to wander. For this reason, I frequently checked with primary informants to see if they needed a short break or if we should rather continue another time. Primary informants were comfortable in confirming when they needed a break.

### **6.5.3 Ethical Reflections**

The most important ethical reflection for me personally relates to the risk factor of parental divorce. I understood that parental divorce is a sensitive topic, especially with children. First, even though I was very well aware of the sensitivity around the topic of parental divorce and of discussing it with children, I did find that excluding specific reference to their parents' divorce (this was disallowed by the ethics committee) in relation to the children's positive adjustment somewhat limiting. It was interesting to me that three out of the five mothers of the study said that they had no concerns should the topic of their divorce come up during interviews with their child and that they would actually like to know how their child perceived the impact of the divorce on her/his schooling. The fourth mother was relieved to hear that the topic would not



be discussed, although she would have consented to it, and the fifth mother strongly disapproved of discussing with her child the impact of the divorce on her child's schooling. Hence, I explained to all the parents that because of the sensitivity and ethical concerns regarding research with children, I would not be asking the children questions related to the divorce.

I believe that the main principle of doing no harm to children and acting in the child's best interest according to the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (see South Africa, 2005) should take priority in any research conducted with children. Educational psychologists conducting research with children experience an ethical dilemma in finding the balance between protecting the child during research while needing to gain access to his/her perceptions and experiences related to sensitive topics (Human Research Ethics Committee, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town, 2013). However, we need research that also includes children's voices on sensitive topics so that the implications thereof can serve the needs of children and affect policy-making and programs aimed at support that is relevant to children. Keeping the ethical aspects according to the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (see South Africa, 2005) in mind, Educational Psychologists as researchers could possibly frame the research questions on sensitive topics in such a way that they provide children with the opportunity of meaning-making without exploiting them or placing them at risk in doing so, and in accordance with the permission of the ethical board. In such cases, children should give their assent and parents their consent, knowing beforehand that questions might relate to sensitive matters, but that the principle of minimal risk takes priority. Furthermore, children should also be given the opportunity to refuse to answer questions if they do not want to, so as to ensure the ethical consideration, as explained by Strode, Slack, and Essack (2010), that children have the right to participate (or not) in appropriate ways concerning matters by which they are affected.

I had to distinguish between my role as an Educational Psychologist and as a researcher. Thus I needed to keep in mind that my research process was focused on gaining information

from informants whose perspectives could explain their positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce, and not on engaging with informants, especially primary informants, in a therapeutic manner. When Sarah voluntarily discussed the impact of her parents' divorce on her schooling, I was immediately aware that my response to it should stay researched-focused by gaining insight into her experience that provided, in turn, insight into the research focus, instead of following a therapeutic approach to her discussion.

Additionally, during the selection of possible schools in Johannesburg, I specifically did not include the school where I am practicing as an Educational Psychologist in order to prevent ethical challenges associated with conflict of interest or multiple relationships as stipulated by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) (Health Professions Act 1974, Act No.56 of 1974) (see Department of Health, 2006). I would recommend that other practitioners working in schools and conducting research consider the same approach. A psychologist, regardless of the category of registration, who works in a school has the first priority of providing mental healthcare services to the public and more specifically to children, parents, and teachers of that school. When psychologists working in a school also act in the role of researcher, they might confuse the public about their role and this can prevent people from seeking support from them which, in a school setting, could minimize the impact of their services.

## **6.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY**

Alston and Bowles (2003) recommend that researchers need to acknowledge the limitations in their studies and that being critical in a constructive manner about their own work may assist future researchers who wish to replicate the work. Hence I share the following limitations of this study.

A first limitation relates to the specific race and ethnicity of the informants of this study. All informants were white and Afrikaans speaking. This related to the inclusion criteria, which

did not specify that participants represent varied race groups or ethnicities. In hindsight I realise that this was an oversight. It also probably related to the Advisory Panel and collaborating teachers representing schools which are attended largely by white, Afrikaans speaking children. Again, with hindsight I realise it would have been valuable to diversify my advisory panel. This limitation prohibits the transferability of the study's results to other racial groups.

Second, this study included informants who were part of the middle to high income group that shaped a context that may differ from that of informants from a lower income group. Ungar et al. (2015) explain that resilience is context specific. Hence I reported on resilience processes that were relevant to this specific context of informants who are part of the middle to high income groups. Therefore, I do realise that the study lacks insights that report on resilience processes from a context that differs from the context of the informants of this study.

Also, another limitation relates to how recently the parental divorce occurred. The divorce occurred in three cases during the primary informant's pre-school years. In another case, the divorce occurred during the year preceding first grade and in the other case, the divorce occurred early in first grade. Although the literature suggests that the impact of divorce on children depends on multiple variables, including how parents relate to one another and the child post-divorce (see Government of Canada, Department of Justice, 2015) this variation in how recently the divorce occurred could have affected the children's adjustment to first grade. How recent it was could also have influenced how children accounted for their positive adjustment and also who children included in their accounts of how they adjusted to first grade.

Another limitation related to the restrictions imposed by the ethical board that granted clearance in preventing me from specifically questioning the primary informants about their parents' divorce, or the effects of it on their positive adjustment to first grade. Some parents also preferred not to ask the child questions about the divorce. As mentioned earlier, asking children about their experience of the divorce could have provided an interesting perspective.

Even though doing no harm is most important, by asking only secondary informants about how they believed divorce had affected the primary informants' adjustment to first grade, I may have been complicit in diminishing children's roles as social actors and agents (Kellet, 2005).

Furthermore this study included only the accounts of first grade teachers who formed part of the school ecology and not of other influential stakeholders within the school ecology, such as management teams. Mulford (2003) states that school leadership is very important in its impact on the functioning of a school.

Although a strength of my study was that it included children and significant adults from their primary household (e.g. parents) and school (i.e. first grade teacher), the interviews with adults (i.e. secondary informants) included only two of the five primary informants' biological fathers. The other three biological fathers were not available for the interviews. Neither were extended family members interviewed to gain their insight into what they do and how they enabled the children to cope well with adjusting to first grade. This limited the study in its excluding of stakeholders' explanations of children's positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce. Although Mare's (2015) study did not focus on first graders' positive adjustment, it was emphasized that the inclusion of a wider intergenerational account could contribute that richer data sets to studies.

## **6.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES**

In this section I recommend studies that respond to the above limitations. I follow this with studies that respond to the limitations noted in Manuscripts 1 to 4.

A first general recommendation for future studies would be to duplicate my PhD study with first graders from diverse racial or ethnic groups. It would be meaningful to establish across cultures what the results are regarding why and how some children adjust well to first grade despite parental divorce. Since most South African Schools now include learners from many races and cultures, such results could benefit a wider range of social ecologies supporting

children at risk.

A second general recommendation would be for future research studies to replicate this study with informants from diverse income groups. This may contribute to more contextualised knowledge regarding why and how some children across socio-economic contexts adjust well to first grade despite parental divorce.

Third, a future study could also consider conducting research with primary informants who were the same age when their parents divorced. Given the complexity of resilience processes (Masten, 2014c), I am not convinced that how recent the divorce was, will be a decisive influence, but it is worth investigating.

Furthermore, another recommendation for future studies would be to carefully and sensitively choose wording in the planning of those future studies in which the interview questions are framed to enquire specifically from primary informants about the effect of parental divorce on their positive adjustment, with the parents' consent as well as that of the Ethics board. This will contribute insights to the literature about what children themselves experience as meaningful contributions to their positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce.

More specifically, in Manuscript 1, one of the questions was: What is known about the social ecological processes that support positive school adjustment of first graders in general? To answer this question one of the inclusion criteria was that only articles published in English were included. For future studies, articles in other languages could also be included. These could contribute to the theoretical understanding of positive adjustment to first grade.

With regard to Manuscript 2, the question was: How do first grade teachers support children from divorced parents to adjust to first grade? Future studies focusing on teacher actions that support positive adjustment to first grade could include data not only from teachers but also from school management teams to explain how they contribute on a systemic level in

managing the schools in ways that support first graders to adjust well to first grade despite parental divorce.

Manuscript 3 asked the question: How do adults who play significant roles in the first grader's life contribute to positive adjustment to first grade despite parental divorce? Future research could also include the accounts of other significant adults, other than teachers and parents, such as grandparents, extended family members, sports coaches, therapists, au-pairs etc.

In Manuscript 4, I asked which everyday (i.e. non-intervention-related) resources should School Psychologists be aware of that enable the resilience of children challenged by adjustment to first grade *as well as* the divorce of their parents. Future studies could focus on informants from schools with a lower socio-economic community to determine the resources that School Psychologists should be aware of in a different school setting beside the middle to high income group.

## **6.8 CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this doctoral study was to determine why some first graders adjust well to first grade despite parental divorce. With the help of the informants of my study, I was able to provide answers to this question that were evident from their drawings and verbal accounts. Essentially, the results of this study come down to the spirit of Ubuntu. Although Ubuntu is a African isiZulu word, as South Africans we all share in this meaning that 'I am what I am because of who we all are' ([www.ubuntu.com](http://www.ubuntu.com)). The collage (see figure 3) of the primary informants' drawings, captures who or what they experienced important to how they adjusted to first grade despite parental divorce.

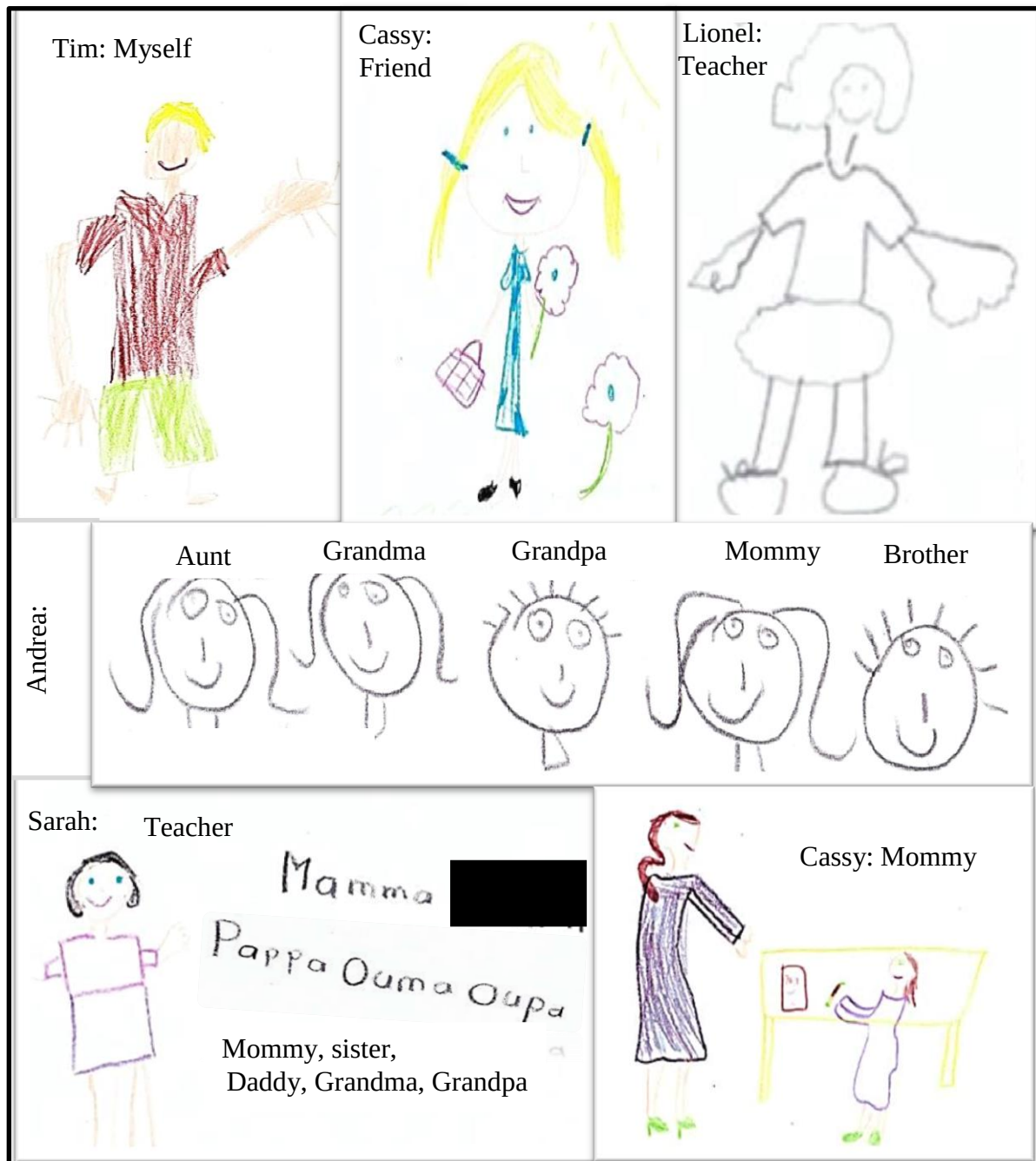


Figure 3. Primary informants' drawings

The more first grade teachers and parent figures who are aware of the resilience-enabling nature of their supportive actions and facilitative environments, the more the spirit of Ubuntu will grow when vulnerable children adjust well despite risks. A call to researchers, fellow students, first grade teachers, school management teams, parent figures, and extended family

members of first graders adjusting to first grade despite parental divorce, is to leverage the insights that this study provided. Taking action to implement the implications of this study will nurture resilience-enabling processes that make us all change agents who are a part of the village responsible for supporting first grade warriors facing challenges like parental divorce while adjusting well to first grade.



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Appendix A  
Ethical Clearance Letter



PO Box 1174, Vanderbijlpark  
South Africa, 1900

**Optentia Research Committee**  
Tel: +27(16) 910-3140  
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>  
Email: [linda.theron@nwu.ac.za](mailto:linda.theron@nwu.ac.za)

Date 10 February 2014

Dear Prof Linda Theron and Prof Tumi Khumalo

**ETHICS APPLICATION: SISU [OPT-2013-009]**

**“SOCIAL ECOLOGIES OF RESILIENCE AMONG AT-RISK CHILDREN STARTING SCHOOL IN SOUTH AFRICA AND FINLAND: A VISUAL PARTICIPATORY STUDY (SISU)”**

Ethical approval is recommended.

Sincerely

*Prof Ian Rothmann*

Chair: Optentia Ethics Committee

## Appendix B

## Gauteng Department of Education Research Approval Letter

**GAUTENG PROVINCE**

Department: Education  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

For administrative use:  
Reference no: D2015 / 049

**GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER**

|                                |                                                                                                           |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Date:                          | 8 May 2014                                                                                                |
| Validity of Research Approval: | 8 May 2014 to 3 October 2014                                                                              |
| Name of Researcher:            | Bezuidenhout C.                                                                                           |
| Address of Researcher:         | 26 Mc Bride Street                                                                                        |
|                                | Brackenhurst                                                                                              |
|                                | Alberton                                                                                                  |
|                                | 1449                                                                                                      |
| Telephone Number:              | 082 563 0351                                                                                              |
| Email address:                 | churuna.kistasamy@gmail.com                                                                               |
| Research Topic:                | Positive transitioning to school of resilient Grade 1 learners from divorced homes: A participatory study |
| Number and type of schools:    | NINE Primary schools                                                                                      |
| District/s/HO                  | Ekurhuleni South and Johannesburg North                                                                   |

**Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research**

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

*2014/05/09*  
The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

1

*Making education a societal priority*

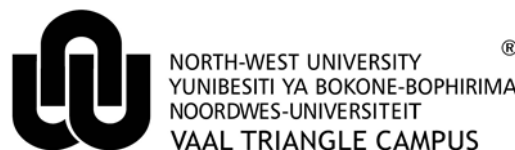
**Office of the Director: Knowledge Management and Research**

9<sup>th</sup> Floor, 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 2001  
P.O. Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000 Tel: (011) 355 0506  
Email: David.Makhado@gauteng.gov.za  
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za



## Appendix C

### Letter of Information and Parent Consent Form



#### LETTER OF INFORMATION: PARENTS

Dear (Parents' name)

I am a doctoral student who is part of a research team of the Optentia Research Focus Area North-West University, Vaal Triangle Campus, working in collaboration with the University of Helsinki in Finland. This joint project (called the SISU project) will be exploring how and why at-risk South African and Finish children, aged six to seven, transition well to school. In other words, why do some children, who are challenged by additional stressors, cope well with the stress of going to Grade 1? To date, there are almost no studies that explain this, and certainly no South African studies. We are hopeful that a deeper understanding of resilient transitioning to Grade 1 will support teachers, psychologists, parents and other stakeholders to nurture resilient transitioning in many more children.

My part of the study and the aim of the study will explore how five South African children transition positively to Grade 1, despite challenges associated with their parents having divorced in the 3 – 24 months preceding the child commencing Grade 1. Furthermore, this study will include three aspects: how these children explain their resilience, having been identified as having adjusted well to starting school; how their parents explain their children's positive transitioning to school; and, how their Grade 1 teachers explain their positive transitioning to school.

#### **Which children are eligible for participation?**

Children who are invited to participate will:

- Have parents who divorced during the previous 3 to 24 months. (i.e. in the year or two years before they started Grade 1)

- Be identified by their Grade 1 teacher as coping well with the transition to Grade 1. This identification will only have been done towards the end of Term 1.
- The parents of all invited children will be invited to participate too. In addition, the Grade 1 teachers of invited children will participate.

Your child's teacher has identified (*child's name*) as doing well in school. You are invited to participate as a parent in the study. If you accept the invitation for you and your child to participate (and if your child agrees to this too), **you and your child's participation will involve the following:**

#### **PARENT INTERVIEW: Introduction, Informed Consent Permission, In-depth interview**

- **Activities with you as parent(s)**
  - I will visit both parents (if available) to introduce myself and explain the research. I will answer any questions you may have.
  - This visit will also be to conduct an **in-depth interview with you** regarding your perceptions on how and why your child transitioned well to school. The interview will take about an hour and will be video-recorded and transcribed for analysis at a later stage.

#### **VISIT 1 WITH YOUR CHILD**

- **Introduction**
  - I will introduce myself to (CHILD'S NAME) and explain the research study to him/her.
  - I will ask (CHILD'S NAME) if he/she would like to take part in this research study after reading the child assent form to the child.
  - If he/she agrees to take part, we will arrange for the next visit.
- **Drawings and in-depth interview**
  - (CHILD'S NAME) and I will engage in an interview where (CHILD'S NAME) draws some pictures as requested. Using an individual video-recorded interview I will ask your child what at school, at home or elsewhere contributed to his/her coping well with Gr. 1. To make it easier for your child to talk about this, I will ask him/her to make drawings that show what at school, at home or elsewhere contributed to his/her coping well with Gr. 1.

- Thereafter I will explain that I will leave a disposable photo camera with your child or if you own a digital camera and are comfortable with your child using it, and ask him/her to take photos of all the things that show how and why he/she is doing well at school. Thereafter I will arrange for a day, in more or less a week's time to collect the camera to have the photos developed.

### **Visit 2: Photo Discussion and Grade 1 story**

- I will return after a week to load the digital photos on to my computer.
- I will ask (CHILD'S NAME) to talk to me about each photo. I will want to know how the photographed items or people helped him/her to do well in Grade 1. I would like to video-record what (CHILD'S NAME) says.
- (CHILD'S NAME) and I will also complete a digital life story consisting of the photos that was taken as well as other relevant photos that contributes to (CHILD'S NAME) Grade 1 life story.

### **Visit 3: Compilation of the findings**

- ***Activities with your child***

- I will put together a compilation of drawings, photos, and quotes that illustrate why/how your child transitioned well to Grade 1 and the resilience processes supporting this. I will show your child this compilation in the form of a digital story. We'll watch it with (CHILD'S NAME) and talk to him/her about it while video-recording our discussion.
- We will ask your child if we can show this video compilation to you and also if we can show the video to his/her teachers.
- The showing of the video and discussions will take about 1 hour.

- ***Activities with you as parent(s)***

- With your child's explicit permission you will be invited to reflect on this slide show compilation. You will be asked to reflect on the slide show to help researchers to better understand your child's positive transitioning to school.

- ***Concluding the process***

- I will give your child a certificate of participation for his/her contribution to the study. We will also at this visit conclude the study.

## Possible Risks and Discomforts

No intentional risks or harm are expected as a result of you or your child's participation. The interference of the research on your child's school life (e.g., classroom disruption) will be kept at a bare minimum and the appropriate ethical permission (i.e., from the Department of Education and your child's school) gained prior to the research being conducted. Possible risks associated with your and your child's participation are:

- Local and international students and researchers will view your child's drawings, photos, and slide show and be informed of your and your child's understanding of his/her resilience processes (without disclosing your names). You and your child will be seen on video recordings, but your faces will be blocked out and we will make sure that you or your child's name or other identifying markers will not be displayed. Although we shall not disclose any identifying particulars, it is possible that someone could recognise you/your child. If you agree to be part of this study, you accept this risk.
- Your child's school principal and class teacher will be informed of the research focus of this study and that you and your child are participating in the study. Community members may also be aware of your and your child's participation in the study. In other words, your and your child's participation will not be confidential, but will be kept anonymous to people who do not know you.
- Children and teachers at your child's school may become aware of your child's participation when the child takes photos at school. Your child may experience pressure from friends/peers who single your child out due to his/her participation. I would like to assure you that I am there to support your child in overcoming challenges like this and that the school, your child's teacher and I will help to make the research as positive an experience for your child as possible.
- Your child might become very excited about his/her participation. Even though children generally feel special when they participate in research studies with a positive focus like this one, the excitement could affect his/her ability to concentrate and behave as he/she usually does.
- I will be coming into your home to meet and interview your child. I will be as unobtrusive as possible and will respect your family routine, home, and space.
- Not all the children attending the same school as your child will be selected to participate. Your child will be the only child in his/her class that we will follow.
- In the course of interacting with you and your child, it is possible that you or your child may share personal information with us, even though our focus will be on why and how

your child is coping well with Gr. 1. As long as such information does not suggest that your child is in danger of being harmed / harming others, it will be handled confidentially and will not be included in the findings of the study. If your child reports that he/she is being hurt/violated (emotionally, physically) by anyone I am required by law to report this to a police officer, social worker or other professionals. Should participation in this study cause you or your child discomfort, I will refer you to a psychologist who has agreed to debrief participants in this project, should the need arise. The greater SISU team comprises two educational and one clinical psychologist who can also provide debriefing, should the need arise.

### **Potential Benefits**

This study will potentially hold many benefits, not only to the children participating, but also to the parents and teachers involved. Children generally feel valued and special when they participate in a study that focuses on positive aspects of their lives. They can also expect their opinions to be heard and respected, while parents and teachers can potentially learn how to better support at-risk children to transition well to school. Not only do this potentially impact participants in the study, but the community in general. Educators and relevant stakeholders will probably gain valuable insights into at-risk children's resilience processes and their positive adjustment to school and use these to support more children to be resilient.

### **Confidentiality and anonymity**

Although no identifying particulars of you or your child will be disclosed by me or the other researchers, other local and international researchers, students, and academics will see the slide show, photos, and drawings. However, if any faces appear on photographs taken at school or at home, the faces will be blocked out in any images or photos included in the document. Due to the possibility that people in your community may know that you and your child and your child's teacher are participating in the research, I cannot promise that your participation in this study will be kept confidential. But, you should know that I will protect your privacy. If people recognise you and/or your child or ask about your participation, I will not confirm their identification of you or confirm your participation to them. All the identifying information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. All the information I collect will be used anonymously. This means that it will have no personal information on it like your name or your child's name, and I will not publish your names in anything I write about this study, or link your names to the research artefacts (e.g., video, drawings, photos) or what you said. Only the forms you sign will identify you personally and that information will be stored in a safe place at NWU.

Once information has been collected, I will publish a research summary and other academic products. It is possible that your child's drawings / photos or slide show will be included when I publish the study's findings in books, magazines, journals, or on websites and when I talk about the results to people who are interested in supporting children's resilience. As noted above, this will be done with respect for your privacy: should I use your child's drawings / photos or video excerpts, or a quote from your/your child's explanations, I will not include identifying particulars, like your names and any person's face appearing on video or photo will be blocked out.

The SISU team will place all the data from the project (i.e., all drawings, photos and videos) in a public research archive. Current and future university students, researchers and academics will have access to this archive for 10 years. Again, nothing in the archive will include identifying particulars, like your names. If any faces appear on any photograph taken at school or at home, the faces will be blocked out so that no faces appear in any images or photos included in the document.

### **Withdrawal without Prejudice**

Participation is voluntary and refusal to participate in this study will be absolutely respected. Each participant is free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation at any given moment in time, or to withdraw parts or all of the data generated.

### **Costs or Payments**

There will be no costs involved for taking part in this research study. No participant will receive any payment to participate in this research project.

### **What will we do with our findings?**

Researchers (locally and in Finland) will use the interview tapes, transcripts, photographs, drawings, and video recordings to understand how young children cope well with the transition to school, despite facing the challenges of divorce. We intend to publish what this study teaches us about children's resilience in books and journals, as well as share parts of the videotape we make with researchers at scientific conferences around the world so they can learn about children like them and what helps young children thrive. We will send you and your child a copy of our reports if you are interested when the study is complete. With your and your child's

permission we would like to upload all the video footage, photographs, and drawings into an on-line library (a digital archive) that education and other students, and academics can access and use to better prepare professionals and parents to support children to be resilient.

**Any Questions/ Problems?**

If you have any questions, problems or concerns you are welcome to contact me:

Carla Bezuidenhout: e-mail: [bcarla@vodamail.co.za](mailto:bcarla@vodamail.co.za); cell phone: 082 563 0351.

You are also welcome to contact my supervisor:

Professor Linda Theron: e-mail: [linda.theron@nwu.ac.za](mailto:linda.theron@nwu.ac.za); work phone: (016) 910 3078 / 082 783 1728

Or, you can contact the Research Director of Optentia:

Professor Ian Rothmann e-mail: [ian@ianrothmann.com](mailto:ian@ianrothmann.com); work phone: (016) 910 3410.

Thank you very much for considering this request.

Kind Regards

Carla Bezuidenhout

Educational Psychologist



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY  
YUNIBESITHI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA  
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT  
VAAL TRIANGLE CAMPUS

## PARENTS CONSENT FORM

My full name(s) (please print):

My child's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's birth date: \_\_\_\_\_

(Day/Month/Year)

Marital status: Single ☐ Living together ☐ Married ☐

Divorced ☐ Widowed ☐ Never married ☐

Child's sex: Male ☐ Female ☐

Please mark where applicable:

| <b>Informed Consent Agreement:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>Yes, I understand and agree</b> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>I understand the information about the study provided in the Information Letter. Any questions I had were answered.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                    |
| <i>I understand that participation is voluntary, but that I am committing to forming part of the study.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                    |
| <i>I understand that information will be collected directly from me by means of an interview and reflections on my child's video/photos/drawings.</i>                                                                                                                                                          |                                    |
| <i>I understand that information will be collected directly from my child by means of drawings and video-recorded verbal explanations of these drawings; photos and video-recorded verbal explanations of these photos.</i>                                                                                    |                                    |
| <i>I understand that this research may lead to the public being aware of my and my child's participation in the project. The drawings, written and verbal discussions, as well as video clips will be shared with the local and international researchers from the greater SISU research project, but that</i> |                                    |



|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| <i>all faces on video footage or photographs will be blocked out.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |  |
| <i>I understand that my child will be asked to give the researcher his/her drawing or give her permission to photograph it. I also understand that a copy of my child's, drawings (or photos thereof) and copies of the photos he/she takes will become the property of the SISU research team to use as explained in the letter of information.</i>                                                                                                                                                         |  |
| <i>I understand that my child's drawing and explanations thereof; photos and explanations thereof, video and explanations thereof, as well as verbal or written information and explanations shared by myself as parent, can be published and/or used publically for academic and training purposes. I understand that our names and faces will not be disclosed in this process. I understand that researchers will not make identifying particulars (like our names) public.</i>                           |  |
| <i>My child and I may be contacted again to talk about what we contributed to the SISU project.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |  |
| <i>I understand that what my child says/draws /photographs may be quoted / reproduced anonymously in publications, presentations and the final report. The same applies to what I say/report. I understand that the video or sections thereof may be shown publically or linked to academic publications, presentations and the final report. If I become concerned with anything I or my child said/generated, I can ask for parts, or all, of my responses to be withdrawn and this will be respected.</i> |  |
| <i>A copy of all data (drawings, photos, written and verbal discussions, video clips) may be uploaded onto a public research archive for use by other researchers and students.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |  |

**My signature below indicates that I have received a copy of this consent form, and that I consent to my child's participation in this study.**

My signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I am satisfied that \_\_\_\_\_ (parents' names and surname)  
have provided fully **informed** consent.

Researcher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Letter of Information and Teacher Consent Form



### **LETTER OF INFORMATION: FIRST GRADE TEACHER**

Dear (Teacher's name)

I am a doctoral student who is part of a research team of the Optentia Research Focus Area North-West University, Vaal Triangle Campus, working in collaboration with the University of Helsinki in Finland. This joint project (called the SISU project) will be exploring how and why at-risk South African and Finish children, aged six to seven, transition well to school. In other words, why do some children, who are challenged by additional stressors, cope well with the stress of going to Grade 1? To date, there are almost no studies that explain this, and certainly no South African studies. We are hopeful that a deeper understanding of resilient transitioning to Grade 1 will support teachers, psychologists, parents and other stakeholders to nurture resilient transitioning in many more children.

My part of the study will explore how South African children transition positively to Grade 1, despite challenges associated with their parents having divorced in the 3 – 24 months preceding the child commencing Grade 1. The study will focus on three aspects: how these children explain their resilience, having been identified as having adjusted well to starting school; how their parents explain their children's positive transitioning to school; and, how their Grade 1 teachers (i.e. you) explain their positive transitioning to school.

#### **Which children are eligible for participation?**

Children who are invited to participate will:

- Have parents who divorced during the previous 3 to 24 months. (i.e., in the year or two years before they started Grade 1)
- Have been identified as coping well with the transition to Grade 1. This identification will only have been done toward the end of Term 1.

The parents of all invited children will be invited to participate too. In addition, the Grade 1 teachers of invited children are invited to participate.

[CHILD'S NAME] has been nominated to participate and he/she and his/her parents have agreed to participate. You are the Grade 1 teacher of [CHILD'S NAME] – for this reason, I am inviting you to participate.

**Your participation in the study, consists of four parts:**

- Part 1: I will visit your principal to discuss the entire study. After consent was obtained from the school principal and the relevant Department of Education, I will meet with you. The details of the study will be explained. If you agree to take part in the study, a second meeting will be arranged.
- Part 2: I will meet with you again to interview you. In this private video recorded interview I will ask you to talk about your experiences and professional perceptions of what supports children at-risk to transitioning well to school; what in your opinion supports children from divorced homes to transition well; and about the positive transition to school of the particular child we are studying. I will also ask your opinion of why [CHILD'S NAME] has transitioned and adjusted well to Grade 1.
- Part 3: Part of the study is for the child to take photos of things or people that have helped him/her to do well. You would need to give consent for the learner to take photographs at school and in your class for a week. If any of child's or teacher's face appear in photographs taken at school, the faces will be blocked out in any images or photos included in the document.
- Part 4: I will invite all teachers who participated in the study to a meeting at which I will explain what we have learnt about how some at-risk children transition well to Grade 1. I will highlight how this knowledge can support you as teachers to support other at-risk children to cope well with Grade 1.

## Possible Risks and Discomforts

No intentional risks or harm are expected as a result of your or [CHILD'S NAME] participation. The interference of the research on [CHILD'S NAME] school life (e.g., classroom disruption) will be kept at a bare minimum and the appropriate ethical permission (i.e., from the Department of Education and your child's school) gained prior to the research being conducted. Possible risks associated with your and [CHILD'S NAME] participation are:

- Local and international students and researchers will view [CHILD'S NAME] drawings, photos, and interviews and your understanding of his/her resilience processes (without disclosing your names or faces).
- Your school principal is aware of the research focus of this study and that you and [CHILD'S NAME] is participating in the study. Other school stakeholders and community members may also be aware of your and [CHILD'S NAME] participation in the study. In other words, your and your learner's participation will not be confidential.
- I will be coming into your class to meet and interview you. [CHILD'S NAME] will also take photos at school. This may be intrusive / uncomfortable for you, but we can assure you that we will focus on the positive processes that help [CHILD'S NAME] to adjust well despite challenges that he/she needs to overcome.
- [CHILD'S NAME] will be the only child in his/her class that we will follow. This may make him/her excited about being part of the research which may impact his/her ability to concentrate in class. I would however need your assistance in monitoring this behaviour if it occurs.
- Just to repeat: should any learners other than [CHILD'S NAME] be photographed in the course of [CHILD'S NAME] photos at school, their faces will be blurred so that they cannot be recognised.
- Because [CHILD'S NAME] is the only one in class that is part of this study, other children may be curious and ask him/her questions about it. [CHILD'S NAME] may experience pressure from friends who single him/her out due to his/her participation. I would like to assure you that I will support your learner in

overcoming challenges like this and that the school, your learner's parents, and we as a research team will help to make the research as positive an experience for the involved learner as possible.

- In the course of interacting with you and [CHILD'S NAME], it is possible that you may share personal information, even though our focus will be on why and how [CHILD'S NAME] is coping well with Gr. 1. As long as such information does not suggest that [CHILD'S NAME] is in danger of being harmed / harming others, it will be handled confidentially and not included in the findings of the study. If [CHILD'S NAME] reports that he/she is being violated by anyone I am required by law to report this to a police officer.
- Should participation in this study cause you discomfort, I will provide you with the contact details of a service provider (e.g., psychologist) whom you can consult. The greater SISU team comprises two educational and one clinical psychologist who can also provide debriefing, should the need arise.

### **Potential Benefits**

This study will potentially hold many benefits, not only to the children participating, but also to the parents and teachers involved. Children generally feel valued and special when they participate in a study that focuses on positive aspects of their lives. They can also expect their opinions to be heard and respected, while parents and teachers can potentially learn how to better support at-risk children to transition well to school. Not only does this potentially impact participants in the study, but the community in general. Educators and relevant stakeholders will probably gain valuable insights into at-risk children's resilience processes and their positive adjustment to school and use these to support more children to be resilient.

### **Confidentiality and anonymity**

Although no identifying particulars associated with you or [CHILD'S NAME] or your school will be disclosed by, other local and international researchers, learners, and academics will see the slide show dvd but your faces will be blocked out. However, I cannot promise that your participation in this study will be anonymous.

But, you should know that I will protect your privacy. If people recognise you and/or [CHILD'S NAME], I will not confirm their identification of you. All the identifying information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. All the information I collect will be used anonymously. This means that it will have no personal information on it like your name or [CHILD'S NAME] or the name of the school. I will not publish your names in anything I write about this study, or link your names to the research artefacts (e.g., video, drawings, photos) or what you said. Only the forms you sign will identify you personally and that information will be stored in a safe place at NWU.

Once information has been collected, I will publish a research summary and other academic products. It is possible that video excerpts will be included when I publish the study's findings in books, magazines, journals, or on websites and when I talk about the results to people who are interested in supporting children's resilience. As noted above, this will be done with respect for your privacy: should I use video excerpts, or a quote from your interview/explanations, I will not include identifying particulars, like your name.

The SISU team will place all the data from the project (including the video) in a public research archive. Current and future university learners, researchers and academics will have access to this archive. Again, nothing in the archive will include identifying particulars, like your names or faces.

### **Withdrawal without Prejudice**

Participation is voluntary and refusal to participate in this study will be absolutely respected. Each participant is free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation at any given moment in time, or to withdraw parts or all of the data generated.

### **Costs or Payments**

There will be no costs involved for taking part in this research study. No participant will receive any payment to participate in this research project.

### **What will we do with our findings?**

Researchers (locally and in Finland) will use the interview tapes, transcripts, photographs, drawings, and video recordings to understand how young children cope well with the transition to school, despite facing additional challenges, like divorce.

We intend to publish what this study teaches us about children's resilience in books and journals, as well as share with researchers at scientific conferences around the world so they can learn about children like them and what helps young children to adjust well.

We will send you a copy of our reports if you are interested when the study is complete.

### **Any Questions/ Problems?**

If you have any questions, problems or concerns you are welcome to contact me:

Carla Bezuidenhout: e-mail: [bcarla@vodamail.co.za](mailto:bcarla@vodamail.co.za); cell phone: 082 563 0351.

You are also welcome to contact my supervisor:

Professor Linda Theron: e-mail: [linda.theron@nwu.ac.za](mailto:linda.theron@nwu.ac.za); work phone: (016) 910 3078.

Or, you can contact the Research Director of Optentia:

Professor Ian Rothmann: e-mail: [ian@ianrothmann.com](mailto:ian@ianrothmann.com); work phone: (016) 910 3410.

Thank you very much for considering this request.

Kind Regards

Carla Bezuidenhout

Educational Psychologist (PS 0119911)



## TEACHER CONSENT FORM

*Please keep this portion of the consent form for your future reference.*

My name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

My learner' name: \_\_\_\_\_

Learner's birth date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please mark where applicable:

| <b>Informed Consent Agreement:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>Yes, I understand and agree</b> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>I understand the information about the study provided in the Information Letter. Any questions I had were answered.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                    |
| <i>I understand that information will be collected by interviews with me, the learner and the learner's parent/s.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                    |
| <i>I understand that this research may result in other people being aware of my participation in the project. The photographs taken in my classroom will be shared with [CHILD'S NAME] parents, and students and researchers associated with the SISU research project, as well as academics in general. Any photographs portraying my, other learners or teachers' face will be blocked out.</i> |                                    |



|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| <i>I also understand that the photographs taken in my class will become the property of the SISU research team to use as explained in the letter of information.</i>                                                                                                           |  |
| <i>The explanations in interviews shared by myself as teacher can be published and used publically. I understand that my name will not be used in such instances.</i>                                                                                                          |  |
| <i>I may be contacted again to talk about what I contributed to the study.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                 |  |
| <i>I understand that what I say may be quoted / reproduced anonymously in publications, presentations and the final report. If I become concerned with anything I said/generated, I can ask for parts, or all, of my responses to be withdrawn and this will be respected.</i> |  |

**My signature below indicates that I have received a copy of this consent form, and that I consent to participation in this study.**

My signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I am satisfied that \_\_\_\_\_ (parents' names and surname) have provided fully **informed** consent.

Researcher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

### Letter of Information and Child Assent Form



#### INFORMATION LETTER: CHILD

Dear (Name of Child)

My name is Carla. I am a psychologist and I am studying further at the University of North-West, Vaal Triangle campus. There, I do research studies about children. A research study is when somebody tries to find out new things about something. With this research study, I try to find out new things about children of six or seven years old and whose mummies and daddies got divorced. I want to find out more about how these children manage to do well in school and in class. For me to see and remember how you managed to be do well and be happy, I spend some time with you while doing activities that explain to me why or how you are doing well at first grade despite mommy and daddy's divorce.

#### How does this study work?

##### Meeting with your parents

I meet your parents together or separately and tell them more about this study that I am busy with. Then I ask them if both you and them want to be part of my study. If your parents say yes, you may be part of my study, then I also come and talk to you. Remember, even if they said yes, you are allowed to decide that you do not want to part of it. Nobody will be upset with you.



### First visit

Here, the two of us are going to talk and draw pictures. I am going to use a video camera to record what we talk about. Then I will also give you a camera when I leave, so that you can take pictures of everything and everyone in your life, who helps you to do well in Grade 1. Your teacher and principal will know about this. In one week I will come back to fetch the camera and to make the pictures.



---

### Second visit

The two of us talk about the pictures you took, so that you can explain to me what each picture means. Again I record it on a video camera. Then we use your pictures, photos and other information you want to give, to make a story about your life in Grade 1 on my laptop computer.

---

### Third visit

With this visit I bring with a dvd which we are going to watch together about your pictures, photos, the story of your life, things which mommy, daddy or your teacher said about you and why you do so well in Grade 1. I will be asking you to tell me if this story with your drawings and pictures and what your parents / teacher said, is correct in explaining to us why you are doing well in Grade 1. If you say yes, we can watch it together with mommy / daddy.

---

You may wonder: **Who sees this video?**

There is a team of men and women who work with me at the University who also do research studies and who very much want to see how you and I worked together.



I will also bring you a certificate to say thank you for taking part in my research study. I will also say good-bye then, because my study will be finished and I will not come to visit again.




---

### **Who sees my pictures, photos and the video of me?**

All the activities you did, I would like to share with the men and women in the group I work with at the university. I also want to share it with your mommy, daddy and teacher. The activities you did (like the photos and pictures), I would also like to share with other men and women, mommies and daddies and teachers. But, I can only do that if you say it is okay with you that I share your pictures, our discussions and the photos, with other people. I want to use the information so that many people can learn. Remember, even if I share this information with them, your name and surname is not mentioned, and also not the name and surname of your mommy, daddy, teacher or the name of the school.

### **Who will know that I am taking part in this study?**

Myself and the men and women who I work with at the university cannot promise that nobody will know that you were part of this study. These pictures you will draw and the photos you will take, I will also show to other people who do research studies about children (if you say I can do that). I can promise however, that I will not mention your name and surname when I show the photos / pictures. You are just going to write your name on this form and it will be safely put away in a store room at the university. I will also not say where you live, or what the name of the school is.

You can also tell me if you think you are in danger or if there are people who you are afraid of. We can talk about it if you feel you want to hurt yourself or anyone else. Then I will tell someone who can help you to be safe.

### **What if I do not want to be part of the study anymore?**

You can tell me any time if there is an activity which you do not want to do, or if you are too tired to do any activity. It is also okay if you do not want to continue to be part of the research study and to tell me so.

### **How can this help me or hurt me?**

The activities we are going to do together, will not hurt you because you will talk about the pictures you drew and the photos you took and about all the good things in your life.

The kids at your school will also see that you take pictures. Maybe they will ask you questions or mock you about it. If they do that, you can tell us and we will try to help you to feel better. If we cannot help you to feel better, we will give you the number of another lady who mommy or daddy can call to help you.

To help me with my research study, will not help you, but it will help other men and women, teachers, mommies and daddies to learn more about how children manage to do well in Grade 1. Then these people can help other children who are maybe not doing so well in Grade 1.

Thank you for letting me talk to you. If you have any questions about my research study, you can ask me or you can call Mrs Linda (she is helping me with my study). Her number is 082 783 1728. Or you can call Mr Ian (he is Mrs Linda's boss). His number is 016 9103410.

Best regards

Carla Bezuidenhout

### CHILD'S CONSENT FORM

I \_\_\_\_\_ (NAME OF CHILD) \_\_\_\_\_ understand that:

- ☺ Carla explained the research study to me and I understand what I have to do and I want to do it.
- ☺ I will draw pictures, take photos and will be recorded on a video camera.
- ☺ I can tell Carla any time when I am tired and if there are some of the activities which I do not want to do (like drawing or taking photos) and that it is ok if I say that.
- ☺ My parents gave permission that I can be part of this study and I also said I want to be part of it.
- ☺ My teacher said it is ok for me to take photos at school.
- ☺ Other people will see my face on the video and will know I helped Carla with her research study.
- ☺ Other children in my class and school will see that I am taking pictures.
- ☺ My name, my mommy and daddy and teacher's names and the name of my school will not be given to other people.
- ☺ Carla would like to share my pictures, photos and videos with other mommies, daddies, teachers and children if it is ok with me that she does that.
- ☺ Carla can keep a copy of my photos, pictures and video.
- ☺ Everything I share with Carla will be kept safe and she will not share any information or activities with people if I do not want her to do that.
- ☺ I do understand that she will have to tell someone if I do not feel safe, so that we can be helped to be more safe.
- ☺ If I have any questions, I can ask Carla and she will explain to me.
- ☺ I am one of five children who are doing these activities for Carla's research study.

By writing my name it shows that I understand what this letter says and that Carla explained it to me.

My name: \_\_\_\_\_

My Mom's name and signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

My Dad's name and signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

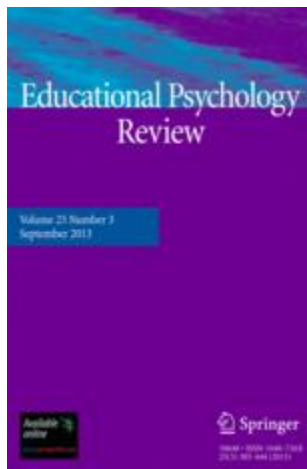
Carla promises she explained everything to me well.

Carla's name and signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Datum: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F

### Manuscript Guidelines: Educational Psychology Review



### Instructions for Authors

#### 5.1.1 APA STYLE

Please follow the 6th Edition of the APA Style Guide.

Text must be double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman with standard 1-inch margins on all sides.

Manuscripts should not exceed 40 pages (or 12,000 words), including title page, Abstract, tables, appendices, and notes, but excluding all necessary references and figures (for an approximate total length of no more than 50 pages). Manuscripts that exceed 50 pages may be returned without review.

#### 5.1.2 TYPES OF PAPERS

Review Article, Editorial, Commentary, Interview, Replication, Intervention Article

#### 5.1.3 GENERAL INFORMATION

If problem encountered during submission through EM please contact Fred Paas (EiC).

#### 5.1.4 EDITORIAL PROCEDURE

##### 5.1.4.1 Double-blind peer review

This journal follows a double-blind reviewing procedure. Authors are therefore requested to submit:

- A blinded manuscript without any author names and affiliations in the text or on the title page. Self-identifying citations and references in the article text should be avoided.
- A separate title page, containing title, all author names, affiliations, and the contact information of the corresponding author. Any acknowledgements, disclosures, or funding information should also be included on this page.



## **5.1.5 MANUSCRIPT SUBMISSION**

### **5.1.5.1 Manuscript Submission**

Submission of a manuscript implies: that the work described has not been published before; that it is not under consideration for publication anywhere else; that its publication has been approved by all co-authors, if any, as well as by the responsible authorities – tacitly or explicitly – at the institute where the work has been carried out. The publisher will not be held legally responsible should there be any claims for compensation.

### **5.1.5.2 Permissions**

Authors wishing to include figures, tables, or text passages that have already been published elsewhere are required to obtain permission from the copyright owner(s) for both the print and online format and to include evidence that such permission has been granted when submitting their papers. Any material received without such evidence will be assumed to originate from the authors.

### **5.1.5.3 Online Submission**

Please follow the hyperlink “Submit online” on the right and upload all of your manuscript files following the instructions given on the screen.

## **5.1.6 TITLE PAGE**

### **5.1.6.1 Title Page**

The title page should include:

- The name(s) of the author(s)
- A concise and informative title
- The affiliation(s) and address(es) of the author(s)
- The e-mail address, and telephone number(s) of the corresponding author
- If available, the 16-digit ORCID of the author(s)

### **5.1.6.2 Abstract**

Please provide an abstract of 150 to 250 words. The abstract should not contain any undefined abbreviations or unspecified references.

### **5.1.6.3 Keywords**

Please provide 4 to 6 keywords which can be used for indexing purposes.

## **5.1.7 TEXT**

### **5.1.7.1 Text Formatting**

Manuscripts should be submitted in Word.

- Use a normal, plain font (e.g., 10-point Times Roman) for text.
- Use italics for emphasis.
- Use the automatic page numbering function to number the pages.
- Do not use field functions.
- Use tab stops or other commands for indents, not the space bar.
- Use the table function, not spreadsheets, to make tables.
- Use the equation editor or MathType for equations.
- Save your file in docx format (Word 2007 or higher) or doc format (older Word versions).

Manuscripts with mathematical content can also be submitted in LaTeX.

- [LaTeX macro package \(zip, 182 kB\)](#)

### 5.1.7.2 Headings

Please use no more than three levels of displayed headings.

### 5.1.7.3 Abbreviations

Abbreviations should be defined at first mention and used consistently thereafter.

### 5.1.7.4 Footnotes

Footnotes can be used to give additional information, which may include the citation of a reference included in the reference list. They should not consist solely of a reference citation, and they should never include the bibliographic details of a reference. They should also not contain any figures or tables.

Footnotes to the text are numbered consecutively; those to tables should be indicated by superscript lower-case letters (or asterisks for significance values and other statistical data). Footnotes to the title or the authors of the article are not given reference symbols.

Always use footnotes instead of endnotes.

### 5.1.7.5 Acknowledgments

Acknowledgments of people, grants, funds, etc. should be placed in a separate section on the title page. The names of funding organizations should be written in full.

## 5.1.8 TERMINOLOGY

- Please use the standard mathematical notation for formulae, symbols etc.:  
Italic for single letters that denote mathematical constants, variables, and unknown quantities

Roman/upright for numerals, operators, and punctuation, and commonly defined functions or abbreviations, e.g., cos, det, e or exp, lim, log, max, min, sin, tan, d (for derivative)

Bold for vectors, tensors, and matrices.

## 5.1.9 SCIENTIFIC STYLE

- Please always use internationally accepted signs and symbols for units (SI units).

- Generic names of drugs and pesticides are preferred; if trade names are used, the generic name should be given at first mention.

## 5.1.10 REFERENCES

### 5.1.10.1 Citation

Cite references in the text by name and year in parentheses. Some examples:

- Negotiation research spans many disciplines (Thompson 1990).
- This result was later contradicted by Becker and Seligman (1996).
- This effect has been widely studied (Abbott 1991; Barakat et al. 1995; Kelso and Smith 1998; Medvec et al. 1999).

### 5.1.10.2 Reference list

The list of references should only include works that are cited in the text and that have been published or accepted for publication. Personal communications and unpublished works should only be mentioned in the text. Do not use footnotes or endnotes as a substitute for a reference list.

Reference list entries should be alphabetized by the last names of the first author of each work.

- Journal article  
Harris, M., Karper, E., Stacks, G., Hoffman, D., DeNiro, R., Cruz, P., et al. (2001). Writing labs and the Hollywood connection. *Journal of Film Writing*, 44(3), 213–245.
- Article by DOI  
Slifka, M. K., & Whitton, J. L. (2000) Clinical implications of dysregulated cytokine production. *Journal of Molecular Medicine*, doi:10.1007/s001090000086
- Book  
Calfee, R. C., & Valencia, R. R. (1991). *APA guide to preparing manuscripts for journal publication*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Book chapter  
O'Neil, J. M., & Egan, J. (1992). Men's and women's gender role journeys: Metaphor for healing, transition, and transformation. In B. R. Wainrib (Ed.), *Gender issues across the life cycle* (pp. 107–123). New York: Springer.
- Online document  
Abou-Allaban, Y., Dell, M. L., Greenberg, W., Lomax, J., Peteet, J., Torres, M., & Cowell, V. (2006). Religious/spiritual commitments and psychiatric practice. Resource document. American Psychiatric Association. [http://www.psych.org/edu/other\\_res/lib\\_archives/archives/200604.pdf](http://www.psych.org/edu/other_res/lib_archives/archives/200604.pdf). Accessed 25 June 2007.

Journal names and book titles should be italicized.

For authors using EndNote, Springer provides an output style that supports the formatting of in-text citations and reference list.

- [EndNote style \(zip, 3 kB\)](#)

## 5.1.11 TABLES

- All tables are to be numbered using Arabic numerals.
- Tables should always be cited in text in consecutive numerical order.
- For each table, please supply a table caption (title) explaining the components of the table.
- Identify any previously published material by giving the original source in the form of a reference at the end of the table caption.

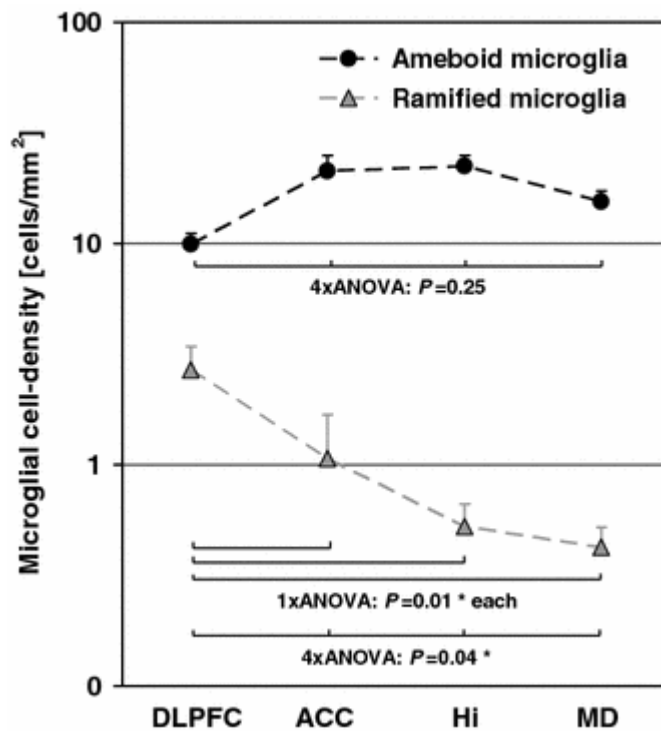
- Footnotes to tables should be indicated by superscript lower-case letters (or asterisks for significance values and other statistical data) and included beneath the table body.

## 5.1.12 ARTWORK AND ILLUSTRATIONS GUIDELINES

### 5.1.12.1 Electronic Figure Submission

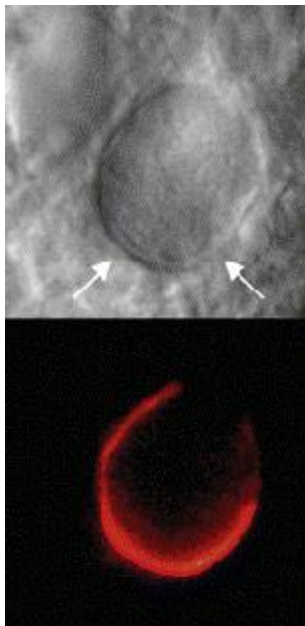
- Supply all figures electronically.
- Indicate what graphics program was used to create the artwork.
- For vector graphics, the preferred format is EPS; for halftones, please use TIFF format. MSOffice files are also acceptable.
- Vector graphics containing fonts must have the fonts embedded in the files.
- Name your figure files with "Fig" and the figure number, e.g., Fig1.eps.

### 5.1.12.2 Line Art



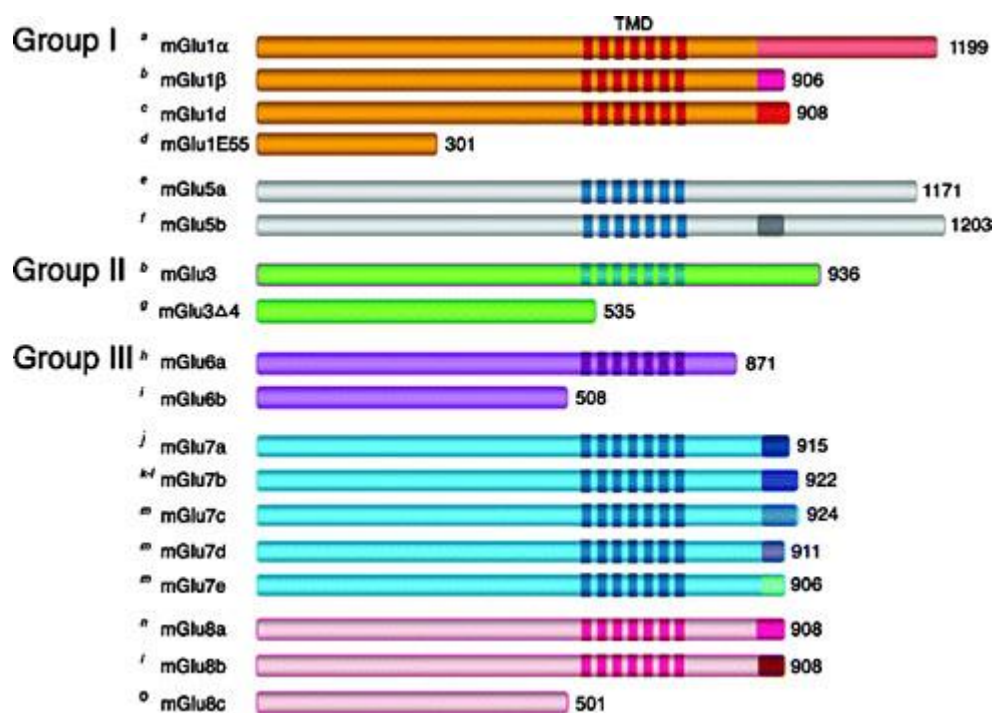
- Definition: Black and white graphic with no shading.
- Do not use faint lines and/or lettering and check that all lines and lettering within the figures are legible at final size.
- All lines should be at least 0.1 mm (0.3 pt) wide.
- Scanned line drawings and line drawings in bitmap format should have a minimum resolution of 1200 dpi.
- Vector graphics containing fonts must have the fonts embedded in the files.

### 5.1.12.3 Halftone Art



- Definition: Photographs, drawings, or paintings with fine shading, etc.
- If any magnification is used in the photographs, indicate this by using scale bars within the figures themselves.
- Halftones should have a minimum resolution of 300 dpi.

### 5.1.12.4 Combination Art



- Definition: a combination of halftone and line art, e.g., halftones containing line drawing, extensive lettering, color diagrams, etc.
- Combination artwork should have a minimum resolution of 600 dpi.

### 5.1.12.5 Color Art

- Color art is free of charge for online publication.
- If black and white will be shown in the print version, make sure that the main information will still be visible. Many colors are not distinguishable from one another when converted to black and white. A simple way to check this is to make a xerographic copy to see if the necessary distinctions between the different colors are still apparent.
- If the figures will be printed in black and white, do not refer to color in the captions.
- Color illustrations should be submitted as RGB (8 bits per channel).

### 5.1.12.6 Figure Lettering

- To add lettering, it is best to use Helvetica or Arial (sans serif fonts).
- Keep lettering consistently sized throughout your final-sized artwork, usually about 2–3 mm (8–12 pt).
- Variance of type size within an illustration should be minimal, e.g., do not use 8-pt type on an axis and 20-pt type for the axis label.
- Avoid effects such as shading, outline letters, etc.
- Do not include titles or captions within your illustrations.

### 5.1.12.7 Figure Numbering

- All figures are to be numbered using Arabic numerals.
- Figures should always be cited in text in consecutive numerical order.
- Figure parts should be denoted by lowercase letters (a, b, c, etc.).
- If an appendix appears in your article and it contains one or more figures, continue the consecutive numbering of the main text. Do not number the appendix figures, "A1, A2, A3, etc." Figures in online appendices (Electronic Supplementary Material) should, however, be numbered separately.

### 5.1.12.8 Figure Captions

- Each figure should have a concise caption describing accurately what the figure depicts. Include the captions in the text file of the manuscript, not in the figure file.
- Figure captions begin with the term Fig. in bold type, followed by the figure number, also in bold type.
- No punctuation is to be included after the number, nor is any punctuation to be placed at the end of the caption.
- Identify all elements found in the figure in the figure caption; and use boxes, circles, etc., as coordinate points in graphs.
- Identify previously published material by giving the original source in the form of a reference citation at the end of the figure caption.

### 5.1.12.9 Figure Placement and Size

- Figures should be submitted separately from the text, if possible.
- When preparing your figures, size figures to fit in the column width.
- For most journals the figures should be 39 mm, 84 mm, 129 mm, or 174 mm wide and not higher than 234 mm.
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### **5.1.12.11 Accessibility**

In order to give people of all abilities and disabilities access to the content of your figures, please make sure that

- All figures have descriptive captions (blind users could then use a text-to-speech software or a text-to-Braille hardware)
- Patterns are used instead of or in addition to colors for conveying information (colorblind users would then be able to distinguish the visual elements)
- Any figure lettering has a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1

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Springer accepts electronic multimedia files (animations, movies, audio, etc.) and other supplementary files to be published online along with an article or a book chapter. This feature can add dimension to the author's article, as certain information cannot be printed or is more convenient in electronic form.

Before submitting research datasets as electronic supplementary material, authors should read the journal's Research data policy. We encourage research data to be archived in data repositories wherever possible.

### **5.1.13.1 Submission**

- Supply all supplementary material in standard file formats.
- Please include in each file the following information: article title, journal name, author names; affiliation and e-mail address of the corresponding author.
- To accommodate user downloads, please keep in mind that larger-sized files may require very long download times and that some users may experience other problems during downloading.

### **5.1.13.2 Audio, Video, and Animations**

- Aspect ratio: 16:9 or 4:3
- Maximum file size: 25 GB
- Minimum video duration: 1 sec
- Supported file formats: avi, wmv, mp4, mov, m2p, mp2, mpg, mpeg, flv, mxf, mts, m4v, 3gp

### **5.1.13.3 Text and Presentations**

- Submit your material in PDF format; .doc or .ppt files are not suitable for long-term viability.
- A collection of figures may also be combined in a PDF file.

### **5.1.13.4 Spreadsheets**

- Spreadsheets should be submitted as .csv or .xlsx files (MS Excel).

### 5.1.13.5 Specialized Formats

- Specialized format such as .pdb (chemical), .wrl (VRML), .nb (Mathematica notebook), and .tex can also be supplied.

### 5.1.13.6 Collecting Multiple Files

- It is possible to collect multiple files in a .zip or .gz file.

### 5.1.13.7 Numbering

- If supplying any supplementary material, the text must make specific mention of the material as a citation, similar to that of figures and tables.
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- Name the files consecutively, e.g. “ESM\_3.mpg”, “ESM\_4.pdf”.

### 5.1.13.8 Captions

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### 5.1.13.9 Processing of supplementary files

- Electronic supplementary material will be published as received from the author without any conversion, editing, or reformatting.

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- The manuscript contains a descriptive caption for each supplementary material
- Video files do not contain anything that flashes more than three times per second (so that users prone to seizures caused by such effects are not put at risk)



## Appendix G

## Manuscript Guidelines: Early Childhood Research Quarterly



# EARLY CHILDHOOD RESEARCH QUARTERLY

## AUTHOR INFORMATION PACK

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- **Abstracting and Indexing p.1**
- **Editorial Board p.2**
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ISSN: 0885-2006

### DESCRIPTION

*Early Childhood Research Quarterly* (ECRQ) publishes research on **early childhood education** and **development** from birth through 8 years of age. ECRQ publishes predominantly empirical research (quantitative or qualitative methods) on issues of interest to early childhood development, theory, and educational practice.

The journal also occasionally publishes practitioner and/or policy perspectives and significant reviews of research. As an applied journal, we are interested in work that has social, policy, and educational relevance and implications and work that strengthens links between research and practice.

Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- Children's social, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, language, and motor development applied to early childhood settings.
- Childcare, program quality, and children's transition to school
- The efficacy of early intervention and prevention programs
- Public policy, early childhood education, and child development
- Best classroom practices and effective early childhood curricula
- Professional development and training for early childhood practitioners

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2016: 2.436 © Thomson Reuters Journal Citation Reports 2017

### **ABSTRACTING AND INDEXING**

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### **GUIDE FOR AUTHORS**

#### *Submission checklist*

You can use this list to carry out a final check of your submission before you send it to the journal for review. Please check the relevant section in this Guide for Authors for more details.

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State the objectives of the work and provide an adequate background, including a brief literature review.

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Mettam, G.R., & Adams. L. B. (1994). How to prepare an electronic version of your article. In B. S. Jones & R. Z. Smith (Eds.), *Introduction to the electronic age* (pp.281-304). New York: E-Publishing.

## **Video**

Elsevier accepts video material and animation sequences to support and enhance your scientific research. Authors who have video or animation files that they wish to submit with their article are strongly encouraged to include links to these within the body of the article. This can be done in the same way as a figure or table by referring to the video or animation content and noting in the body text where it should be placed. All submitted files should be properly labeled so that they directly relate to the video file's content. In order to ensure that your video or animation material is directly usable, please provide the files in one of our recommended file formats with a preferred maximum size of 150 MB in total. Any single file should not exceed 50 MB. Video and animation files supplied will be published online in the electronic version of your article in Elsevier Web products, including [ScienceDirect](#). Please supply 'stills' with your files: you can choose any frame from the video or animation or make a separate image. These will be used instead of standard icons and will personalize the link to your video data. For more detailed instructions please visit our [video instruction pages](#). Note: since video and animation cannot be embedded in the print version of the journal, please provide text for both the electronic and the print version for the portions of the article that refer to this content.

## **Supplementary material**

Supplementary material such as applications, images and sound clips, can be published with your article to enhance it. Submitted supplementary items are published exactly as they are received (Excel or PowerPoint files will appear as such online). Please submit your material together with the article and supply a concise, descriptive caption for each supplementary file. If you wish to make changes to supplementary material during any stage of the process, please make sure to provide an updated file. Do not annotate any corrections on a previous version. Please switch off the 'Track Changes' option in Microsoft Office files as these will appear in the published version.

## **RESEARCH DATA**

This journal encourages and enables you to share data that supports your research publication where appropriate, and enables you to interlink the data with your published

articles. Research data refers to the results of observations or experimentation that validate research findings. To facilitate reproducibility and data reuse, this journal also encourages you to share your software, code, models, algorithms, protocols, methods and other useful materials related to the project.

Below are a number of ways in which you can associate data with your article or make a statement about the availability of your data when submitting your manuscript. If you are sharing data in one of these ways, you are encouraged to cite the data in your manuscript and reference list. Please refer to the "References" section for more information about data citation. For more information on depositing, sharing and using research data and other relevant research materials, visit the [research data](#) page.

### *Data linking*

If you have made your research data available in a data repository, you can link your article directly to the dataset. Elsevier collaborates with a number of repositories to link articles on ScienceDirect with relevant repositories, giving readers access to underlying data that gives them a better understanding of the research described.

There are different ways to link your datasets to your article. When available, you can directly link your dataset to your article by providing the relevant information in the submission system. For more information, visit the [database linking page](#).

For [supported data repositories](#) a repository banner will automatically appear next to your published article on ScienceDirect.

In addition, you can link to relevant data or entities through identifiers within the text of your manuscript, using the following format: Database: xxxx (e.g., TAIR: AT1G01020; CCDC: 734053; PDB: 1XFN).

### *Mendeley Data*

This journal supports Mendeley Data, enabling you to deposit any research data (including raw and processed data, video, code, software, algorithms, protocols, and methods) associated with your manuscript in a free-to-use, open access repository. Before submitting your article, you can deposit the relevant datasets to *Mendeley Data*. Please include the DOI of the deposited dataset(s) in your main manuscript file. The datasets will be listed and directly accessible to readers next to your published article online.

For more information, visit the [Mendeley Data for journals page](#).

### *Data in Brief*

You have the option of converting any or all parts of your supplementary or additional raw data into one or multiple data articles, a new kind of article that houses and describes your data. Data articles ensure that your data is actively reviewed, curated, formatted, indexed, given a DOI and publicly available to all upon publication. You are encouraged to submit your article for *Data in Brief* as an additional item directly alongside the revised version of your manuscript. If your research article is accepted, your data article will automatically be transferred over to *Data in Brief* where it will be editorially reviewed and published in the open access data journal, *Data in Brief*. Please note an open access fee of 250 USD is payable for publication in *Data in Brief*. This fee applies to articles submitted before 31 December 2017. Full details can be found on the [Data in Brief website](#). Please use [this template](#) to write your Data in Brief.

### *Data statement*

To foster transparency, we encourage you to state the availability of your data in your submission. This may be a requirement of your funding body or institution. If your data is unavailable to access or unsuitable to post, you will have the opportunity to indicate why during the submission process, for example by stating that the research data is confidential. The statement will appear with your published article on ScienceDirect. For more information, visit the [Data Statement page](#).

### **AudioSlides**

The journal encourages authors to create an AudioSlides presentation with their published article. AudioSlides are brief, webinar-style presentations that are shown next to the online article on ScienceDirect. This gives authors the opportunity to summarize their research in their own words and to help readers understand what the paper is about. [More information and examples are available](#). Authors of this journal will automatically receive an invitation e-mail to create an AudioSlides presentation after acceptance of their paper.

### **Interactive plots**

This journal enables you to show an Interactive Plot with your article by simply submitting a data file. [Full instructions](#).

## AFTER ACCEPTANCE

### *Online proof correction*

Corresponding authors will receive an e-mail with a link to our online proofing system, allowing annotation and correction of proofs online. The environment is similar to MS Word: in addition to editing text, you can also comment on figures/tables and answer questions from the Copy Editor. Web-based proofing provides a faster and less error-prone process by allowing you to directly type your corrections, eliminating the potential introduction of errors. If preferred, you can still choose to annotate and upload your edits on the PDF version. All instructions for proofing will be given in the e-mail we send to authors, including alternative methods to the online version and PDF. We will do everything possible to get your article published quickly and accurately. Please use this proof only for checking the typesetting, editing, completeness and correctness of the text, tables and figures. Significant changes to the article as accepted for publication will only be considered at this stage with permission from the Editor. It is important to ensure that all corrections are sent back to us in one communication. Please check carefully before replying, as inclusion of any subsequent corrections cannot be guaranteed. Proofreading is solely your responsibility.

### *Offprints*

The corresponding author will, at no cost, receive a customized [Share Link](#) providing 50 days free access to the final published version of the article on [ScienceDirect](#). The Share Link can be used for sharing the article via any communication channel, including email and social media. For an extra charge, paper offprints can be ordered via the offprint order form which is sent once the article is accepted for publication. Both corresponding and co-authors may order offprints at any time via Elsevier's [Webshop](#). Corresponding authors who have published their article open access do not receive a Share Link as their final published version of the article is available open access on ScienceDirect and can be shared through the article DOI link.

## AUTHOR INQUIRIES

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You can also [check the status of your submitted article](#) or find out [when your accepted article will be published](#).

## Appendix H

### Manuscript Guidelines: Child Development



#### Types of Manuscripts ([back to top](#))

*Child Development* considers manuscripts in the formats described below. Inquiries concerning alternative formats should be addressed to the Editor prior to submission. All submissions are expected to be no more than 40 manuscript pages, including tables, references, and figures (but excluding appendices). If the submission is more than 40 pages, it will be returned to the author for shortening prior to editorial review.

**Empirical Articles** comprise the major portion of the journal. To be accepted, empirical articles must be judged as being high in scientific quality, contributing to the empirical base of child development, and having important theoretical, practical, or interdisciplinary implications. Reports of multiple studies, methods, or settings are encouraged, but single-study reports are also considered. Empirical Articles will thus vary considerably in length, but should be no longer than 40 manuscript pages; text and graphics should be as concise as material permits. All modes of empirical research are welcome.

**Empirical Reports** are reserved for short, cutting-edge empirical papers that are no longer than 4,000 words in length (including body text, tables, appendices, etc. but excluding references), which advance research and knowledge in an area through noteworthy findings and/or new methods.

**Reviews** focus on past empirical and/or conceptual and theoretical work. They are expected to synthesize, analyze, and/or critically evaluate a topic or issue relevant to child development, should appeal to a broad audience, and may be followed by a small number of solicited commentaries.

**Special Section** is a format in which papers on a focal topic, written by different authors, are published simultaneously. In some cases, calls for submissions on particular topics will be disseminated through the SRCD (via e-mail or SRCD publications), and submissions will undergo normal editorial review. In some cases, a submitted manuscript (e.g., an Empirical Article) may be selected as a lead article for

this format, with invited commentaries providing additional perspectives. The editors also welcome suggestions from readers for topics for this format.

## Formatting Requirements ([back to top](#))

The following points are requested of all papers submitted to *Child Development* and are required for any paper ultimately accepted for publication. Failure to comply with these requirements may lead to delays in processing, review, or publication. Failure to comply may also lead to the manuscript being returned to you for revision.

### Format and Style

*Child Development* requires that all documents be submitted as Word files (.doc or .docx; exceptions may be made by contacting the Editorial Office).

In addition, all manuscripts **must** align with APA Style rules including:

- Double-spacing throughout (abstract, body text, references)
- Using 12-point, Times New Roman font
- Having 1-inch margins

### Page Limits

40 pages for Empirical Articles and Reviews, inclusive of everything, including a reference list that is no longer than 8 pages

4,000 words for Empirical Reports, excluding title page, abstract, and references, but inclusive of body text, tables, figures, and appendices

### Manuscript Structure

Empirical Articles and Reports must have the following major sections (other article types may vary):

- Introduction (but not labeled as such)
- Method
- Results
- Discussion
- References
- Tables and Figures

The **Method** section **must** include participant demographic information, such as sex, SES, race or ethnicity, recruitment method, etc.

## Abstracts

- Must be 120 words or fewer
- Include participants' numerical age
- Include total number of participants (Ns)
- Must be written in the third person, **not** first person

## References

- Do not exceed 8 pages
- Are cited both in the body text and on the reference list
- Are listed in alphabetical order by authors' surname
- Include the DOI # when available

## Figures

Color figures publish online for free, but there is a \$325 cost to **print** in color. More technical information on images (accepted file types, image quality, etc.) is available at [Wiley-Blackwell Author Services](#).

## Footnotes and Endnotes

*Child Development* does **NOT** publish footnotes or endnotes of any kind. All such notes must be incorporated into the body text.

## Blinding

*Child Development* uses a double-blind reviewing procedure. Please ensure any information that might identify authors is either removed or sufficiently masked.

Information such as the author list, affiliations, acknowledgements, etc. should be removed from the main manuscript file and uploaded as a separate Title Page file during submission.

In-text references to any work by the authors should be referred to in the third person to mask the authors' identities (for example: "We have shown in previous work that children...(Martin 2011)" should instead be written as "It has been shown in previous work that children...(Martin 2011)").

## APA Style Reminders

*Child Development* follows the Sixth Edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA).

The following are reminders of oft-forgotten points of APA style. However, ultimately it is the author's responsibility to comply with APA regulations. Failure to follow APA rules may lead to delays in the production process and the publication of your manuscript.

### **Sexism**

Avoid sexist language; use plural phrases such as "children and their toys" rather than "a child and his toy." Refrain from referring to children with "it."

### **Figures**

Please keep figures as clear and simple as possible. For example, do not use a three-dimensional bar graph unless you are presenting data along three dimensions. Be sure that labels are large enough to be visible when the figure is reduced in size. Remember to provide figure numbers and captions separately, not on the figure itself.

### **"Relationship" vs. "Relation"**

These are not interchangeable. "Relationship" is used to describe a social bond, such as between a mother and a child, a teacher and a child, etc. "Relation" is used to describe non-animate associations, including those between variables.

### **Uses of Slash (/)**

Uses of slash in the abstract and body text must be avoided. Examples include "and/or," "his/her," etc. "His/her" can (and should) be written as "his or her." Slashes may be used in references, tables, and figures. Slashes may also be used when citing previously written material, such as including in the paper a test question that was used with participants.

## **Note: Online Supplementary Materials**

*Child Development* is able to host supplementary materials to articles published in the journal on its Wiley Online Library website. The current editorial team has been encouraging authors to take advantage of this resource as a way to cut the amount of material included in print articles and to provide additional information to interested readers. As such, we are urging authors to look critically at their manuscripts to find information that could potentially be moved online. Examples of such materials include extra tables, figures, or appendices; test questions or other test materials; videos of experiments taking place; or additional data sets from meta-analyses. For Wiley's guidelines for online supporting materials please see <http://olabout.wiley.com/WileyCDA/Section/id-828014.html>.



## Additional Requirements ([back to top](#))

### Sociocultural Policy

In keeping with SRCD's stated goal of increasing global participation and awareness, Child Development announces a new sociocultural policy intended to increase the scope and breadth of sample information included in published articles. While CD previously required the reporting of participant ages, gender and race/ethnicity, further relevant information such as participants' socioeconomic status, language, family characteristics, specific location information, etc. will now be required. The inclusion of this information is aimed at providing greater clarity regarding sample characteristics, specifically in the context of the research questions posed in the article. [Click here for the full policy requirements and examples.](#)

### Methodological Recommendations

In an effort to further Child Development's tradition of publishing rigorous research, we announce new methodological recommendations for authors designed to support the production of accessible and reproducible, high-quality research without excluding innovative hypothesis-generating inquiry. To satisfy these recommendations, we ask that authors address sample recruitment and selection, data collection and coding, descriptive statistical information, and model misspecification in the body of their manuscripts or as online supplements. [Click here to view the full descriptions of the recommendations and further information.](#)

## Manuscript Submission and Review Process ([back to top](#))

**Manuscripts should be submitted online at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/childdev>.**

Full instructions and support are available on the site and a user ID and password can be obtained on the first visit. If for some reason you cannot submit online, please contact the Editorial Office by telephone (202-805-2368) or by e-mail ([cdev@srcd.org](mailto:cdev@srcd.org)).

### Cover letter

Please include a cover letter that contains the name(s) and affiliation(s) of the author(s), and the street address, telephone, fax, and electronic mail address of the corresponding author. Please also provide details about other published or submitted papers having substantial overlap (including data sets) with the new *Child Development* submission to enable editors to judge whether the new submission is sufficiently distinct from other work.

## Corresponding Author Responsibilities

A corresponding author's submission to *Child Development* implies that all co-authors have agreed to the content and form of the manuscript and that the ethical standards of the SRCD have been followed (see the SRCD website or pp. 283-284 of the 2000 SRCD Directory). Any financial interest or conflict of interest must be explained to the Editor in the cover letter. The corresponding author is responsible for informing all coauthors, in a timely manner, of manuscript submission, editorial decisions, reviews, and revisions.

## Manuscript Review

*Child Development* conducts a double-blind review process. Each manuscript is handled by the Editor or an Associate Editor who consults with one or more Consulting Editors and/or ad hoc reviewers who have relevant expertise. To ensure blind review, cover sheets are removed before review; authors should avoid including any other information about identity or affiliation in submissions. Copies of the submission and associated correspondence are retained in the SRCD archives.

Associate Editors review each assigned submission and invite 2-4 reviewers who have pertinent areas of expertise. Authors are encouraged to recommend possible reviewers during the submission process, but this is neither required nor are the editors required to abide by the recommendations.

Once the Associate Editor receives the requested number of reviews they will make an editorial decision based on the reviews and reviewer recommendations. The Associate Editor's decision letter, and accompanying reviews, are blinded and processed by the Editorial Office staff. These materials are then sent to the authors and all reviewers who contributed to the review process.

*Child Development* strives to deliver decisions within 60 days of submission. However, given the nature of the review process turnaround times may vary. If you have any questions about your submission, please inquire at [cdev@srcd.org](mailto:cdev@srcd.org) or call (202) 805-2368.

## Conflicts of Interest and the Review Process

*Child Development* takes conflicts of interest (COIs) very seriously. COIs arise when scholars are asked to review papers of which their opinions could be biased. In order to avoid any COIs in the manuscript review process, we ask that authors **NOT** recommend as a reviewer any person who:

- Is a close personal friend of any of the authors
- Works in the same department or school as any of the authors
- Has recently collaborated with any of the authors on projects or publications (this includes members of the authors' dissertation committees)
- Was a recent Ph.D. student advised by any of the authors
- Has any other relationship with the authors that could bias their opinion of the submitted manuscript

We also ask that anyone invited to review a manuscript inform the Editorial Office if they believe they have a conflict of interest. If you have any questions about potential COIs, please contact the Editorial Office ([cdev@srcd.org](mailto:cdev@srcd.org)).

## Accepted Manuscript and Publication Information ([back to top](#))

### Publication Process ([click here for full Accepted Manuscript Requirements](#))

When a manuscript is accepted, authors will be asked to send a final version and accompanying materials via email to the Editorial Office ([cdev@srcd.org](mailto:cdev@srcd.org)). These materials include:

- A final version of the manuscript that follows all requirements listed in the [Publication Checklist](#).
- A 300-500 word layperson summary for public dissemination purposes.
- Signed Full Disclosure of Interest forms from all authors.
- A completed Color Charge Form for figures to be printed in color, if applicable (color figures publish online for free).

All forms are provided to authors upon acceptance.

Once the above materials have been received the paper will be scheduled to be sent to our publisher Wiley-Blackwell for typesetting and proofing. It will then publish online to W-B's Early View system, with print publication to follow (articles for special sections and issues typically do **not** publish to Early View).

### Note to NIH Grantees

Pursuant to NIH mandate, the SRCD through Wiley-Blackwell will post the accepted version of contributions authored by NIH grant holders to PubMed Central upon acceptance. This accepted version will be made publicly available 12 months after publication. For further information, see [www.wiley.com/go/nihmandate](http://www.wiley.com/go/nihmandate).

## Appendix I

### Manuscript Guidelines: School Psychology International

# School Psychology International

**2016 Impact Factor:** 1.012

**2016 Ranking:** 46/58 in Psychology, Educational

Source: 2016 Journal Citation Reports®

(Clarivate Analytics, 2017)



### Manuscript Submission Guidelines: *School Psychology International*

This Journal is a member of the [Committee on Publication Ethics](#)

**Please read the guidelines below then visit the Journal's submission site <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/spi> to upload your manuscript. Please note that manuscripts not conforming to these guidelines may be returned.**

Only manuscripts of sufficient quality that meet the aims and scope of *School Psychology International* will be reviewed.

There are no fees payable to submit or publish in this journal.

As part of the submission process you will be required to warrant that you are submitting your original work, that you have the rights in the work, that you are submitting the work for first publication in the Journal and that it is not being considered for publication elsewhere and has not already been published elsewhere, and that you have obtained and can supply all necessary permissions for the reproduction of any copyright works not owned by you.

## 1. What do we publish?

### 1.1 Aims & Scope

Before submitting your manuscript to *School Psychology International*, please ensure you have read the [Aims & Scope](#)

### 1.2 Article Types

*SPI* publishes original research and review articles of international interest in all practical and academic areas of school and educational psychology. Manuscripts should be between 3,000 and 6,000 words in length, *including* Tables, Figures, References, and any Appendices. Manuscripts should be as concise as possible, while retaining a clear presentation of the subject matter. *SPI* will at times publish articles longer than 6,000 words *if warranted by the contribution of the study* (e.g., high quality multi-study manuscripts); however, a *compelling* justification and rationale for a longer format should be included in the submission letter. Articles over 7,000 words may be published but will require authorization from the Editor. Authors interested in including additional information beyond the 6,000 word limit are encouraged to utilize Supplementary Materials to accompany the article online (see [Section 4.3](#) below for more details).

Supplementary Materials provide an opportunity for archiving information that enhances the full context of the article yet is not required to understand the article itself. Supplementary Materials may include Appendices, data sets, curriculum or intervention materials, tables/figures, or extended statistical analyses that would augment the article content.

A variety of research methodologies are actively encouraged (including quantitative and qualitative research, single-subject designs, and longitudinal studies, etc.) and the editorial team seeks manuscripts with *methodological and statistical sophistication and rigor*. Research designs appropriate for uncovering causal relationships rather than resulting in simple descriptions are particularly welcomed. In all cases, the research design and statistical analyses must be appropriate for the given research questions and powerful enough to uncover meaningful conclusions and implications. Related to the submission of review articles, the editorial team particularly encourages those that use a systematic and rigorous process for identifying, synthesizing, and reporting the extant research on the topic.

Several types of research will *not* be considered for publication within the journal: (1) book reviews, (2) test reviews, (3) obituaries, (4) announcements, and (5) studies where undergraduate students serve as the participants. Furthermore, the journal discourages (and rarely accepts) the following types of research: (1) survey-research using an ill-justified sample and/or psychometrically questionable instrument, (2) submissions that primarily serve as analyses of tests and protocols used in investigations (e.g., analysis of the validity of instrumentation used in cross-cultural

research), and (3) studies primarily focusing on children's parents and teachers (unless multi-setting analyses have been performed that disclose cultural differences and similarities in the provision of psychological/educational services to children).

*SPI* also seeks to publish work that has broad relevance *internationally*. Thus, it is anticipated that a literature review will be internationally comprehensive and not, for example, limited to one national setting's academic journals or practices. Research that focuses on a sample of children from a single national setting may, for example, include an author-derived discussion of the applicability of the research foci and the implications of the results across national boundaries (i.e., generalizable 'lessons-learned' for transfer across national boundaries). Studies absent of a discussion of the practical implications of the results to the provision of psychoeducational services to children in multiple locales are rarely accepted for *SPI* publication. It is anticipated that where interventions are proposed then school/educational psychologists are contemplated as integral intervention agents.

Procedures for the translation of tests used in settings for which they were not designed must be fully described and justified, and be reflective of contemporary best-practice.

Finally, *SPI* also welcomes proposals for themed issues developed around a topic consistent with the scope and mission of the journal. Such themed issues are designed to integrate a set of complementary manuscripts on a topic to substantively further knowledge and practice in that area. Authors interested in proposing a themed issue are encouraged to correspond with the Editor-in-Chief.

### **1.3 Writing your paper**

The SAGE Author Gateway has some general advice and on [how to get published](#), plus links to further resources.

#### **1.3.1 Make your article discoverable**

When writing up your paper, think about how you can make it discoverable. The title, keywords and abstract are key to ensuring readers find your article through search engines such as Google. For information and guidance on how best to title your article, write your abstract and select your keywords, have a look at this page on the Gateway: [How to Help Readers Find Your Article Online](#)

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## **2. Editorial policies**

### **2.1 Peer review policy**

All submitted manuscripts are first screened to determine their appropriateness to proceed to a full peer review. Manuscripts that do not align with the journal's mission/scope, evidence possible

duplication of content (from the authors' own work or other work), or do not meet other requirements of the journal will be declined without a peer review.

For those manuscripts entered into full-review, SPI typically uses a blind peer review process in which neither the authors' or reviewers' identities are revealed. Although a reviewer may opt to share his or her name with the author in a review, our standard policy practice is for both identities to remain concealed. Typically, a manuscript subjected to full-review is reviewed by a *content specialist* and a *methodologist*; we strive for at least one of these reviewers to be from a nation/region/setting different from any of the co-authors. For research where data are collected from a single-setting, reviewers are specifically asked to evaluate the relevance of the paper for influencing practice in other nations. At the conclusion of the peer review process, the Editor provides the author with a final decision and a summary of reviewers' comments to the author. All manuscripts are reviewed as rapidly as possible. Comments by reviewers are considered to be critically important in reaching a publication decision, nevertheless the determination made by the Editor (or Associate Editor serving as the Action Editor) is final (see 3.4 below for information on the appeals process).

## **2.2 Authorship**

All parties who have made a substantive contribution to the article should be listed as authors. Principal authorship, authorship order, and other publication credits should be based on the relative scientific or professional contributions of the individuals involved, regardless of their status. A student is usually listed as principal author on any multiple-authored publication that substantially derives from the student's dissertation or thesis.

## **2.3 Acknowledgements**

All contributors who do not meet the criteria for authorship should be listed in an Acknowledgements section. Examples of those who might be acknowledged include a person who provided purely technical help, or a department chair who provided only general support.

Any acknowledgements should appear first at the end of your article prior to your Declaration of Conflicting Interests (if applicable), any notes and your References.

## **2.4 Funding**

*School Psychology International* requires all authors to acknowledge their funding in a consistent fashion under a separate heading. Please visit the [Funding Acknowledgements](#) page on the SAGE Journal Author Gateway to confirm the format of the acknowledgment text in the event of funding, or state that: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

## 2.5 Declaration of conflicting interests

*School Psychology International* encourages authors to include a declaration of any conflicting interests and recommends you review the good practice guidelines on the [SAGE Journal Author Gateway](#)

## 2.6 Research ethics and participant consent

For all research using human subjects, authors are required to include a statement on the title page indicating that the relevant Ethics Committee or Institutional Review Board provided (or waived) approval. When doing so, authors should ensure that they have provided the full name and institution of the review committee, in addition to the approval number. Furthermore, authors are also required to state in the methods section whether participants (or their parents/guardians) provided informed consent and whether the consent was written or verbal.

Participants have a right to privacy. Unless participants give their consent, identifying information, including names and initials, should be omitted from the article.

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## 3. Publishing Policies

### 3.1 Publication ethics

SAGE is committed to upholding the integrity of the academic record. We encourage authors to refer to the Committee on Publication Ethics' [International Standards for Authors](#) and view the Publication Ethics page on the [SAGE Author Gateway](#)

#### 3.1.1 Plagiarism

*School Psychology International* and SAGE take issues of copyright infringement, plagiarism or other breaches of best practice in publication very seriously. We seek to protect the rights of our authors and we always investigate claims of plagiarism or misuse of published articles. Equally, we seek to protect the reputation of the journal against malpractice. Submitted articles may be checked with duplication-checking software. Where an article, for example, is found to have plagiarised other work or included third-party copyright material without permission or with insufficient acknowledgement, or where the authorship of the article is contested, we reserve the right to take action including, but not limited to: publishing an erratum or corrigendum (correction); retracting the article; taking up the matter with the head of department or dean of the author's institution and/or relevant academic bodies or societies; or taking appropriate legal action.



### 3.1.2 Prior publication

If material has been previously published it is not generally acceptable for publication in a SAGE journal. However, there are certain circumstances where previously published material can be considered for publication. Please refer to the guidance on the [SAGE Author Gateway](#) or if in doubt, contact the Editor at the address given below.

### 3.2 Contributor's publishing agreement

Before publication, SAGE requires the author as the rights holder to sign a Journal Contributor's Publishing Agreement. SAGE's Journal Contributor's Publishing Agreement is an exclusive licence agreement which means that the author retains copyright in the work but grants SAGE the sole and exclusive right and licence to publish for the full legal term of copyright. Exceptions may exist where an assignment of copyright is required or preferred by a proprietor other than SAGE. In this case copyright in the work will be assigned from the author to the society. For more information please visit the [SAGE Author Gateway](#)

### 3.3 Open access and author archiving

*School Psychology International* offers optional open access publishing via the SAGE Choice programme. For more information please visit the [SAGE Choice website](#). For information on funding body compliance, and depositing your article in repositories, please visit [SAGE Publishing Policies](#) on our Journal Author Gateway.

### 3.4 Appeals and complaints

If an author wishes to appeal against an Editor's decision, the author should petition to the Editor-in-Chief. If the decision was made by the Editor-in-Chief, he or she will appoint an independent advisor or panel to consider the appeal. If an author wishes to make a complaint about other journal processes (i.e., outside of editorial decisions), he or she should first consult the Editor-in-Chief. If the complaint is not satisfactorily resolved, the author will be referred to an independent advisor and the [Committee on Publication Ethics](#), in that order until the concern is resolved.

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## 4. Preparing your manuscript for submission

### 4.1 Formatting

The preferred format for your manuscript is Word. LaTeX files are also accepted. Word and (La)Tex templates are available on the [Manuscript Submission Guidelines](#) page of our Author Gateway.

## 4.2 Artwork, figures and other graphics

For guidance on the preparation of illustrations, pictures and graphs in electronic format, please visit SAGE's [Manuscript Submission Guidelines](#)

Figures supplied in colour will appear in colour online regardless of whether or not these illustrations are reproduced in colour in the printed version. For specifically requested colour reproduction in print, you will receive information regarding the costs from SAGE after receipt of your accepted article.

## 4.3 Supplementary material

This journal is able to host additional materials online (e.g. datasets, podcasts, videos, images etc) alongside the full-text of the article. For more information please refer to our [guidelines on submitting supplementary files](#)

## 4.4 Reference style

*School Psychology International* adheres to the APA reference style. View the [APA](#) guidelines to ensure your manuscript conforms to this reference style.

## 4.5 English language editing services

Authors seeking assistance with English language editing, translation, or figure and manuscript formatting to fit the journal's specifications should consider using SAGE Language Services. Visit [SAGE Language Services](#) on our Journal Author Gateway for further information.

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## 5. Submitting your manuscript

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## **7. Further information**

Any correspondence, queries or additional requests for information on the manuscript submission process should be sent to the *School Psychology International* editorial office as follows:

Amity Noltemeyer, Ph.D. [anoltemeyer@miamioh.edu](mailto:anoltemeyer@miamioh.edu)

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