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Researching resilience processes in children's everyday lives during transitioning to school: A dialogic approach

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Abstract

Drawing on our own research, in this chapter, we will illuminate how a dialogic approach amplified by a visual participatory methodology can enrich present-day understanding of the social construction of resilience processes in the everyday lives of children in transition to school. From the dialogic approach, resilience is not seen as an inner capacity of the child or located in the environment, but instead human beings *co-create and co-author resilience processes* together in their everyday practices in sociocultural contexts. We argue that the dialogic approach to researching and understanding resilience offers a robust and culturally sensitive conceptual framework for understanding and enhancing resilience processes in children's everyday lives. Our work also demonstrates the value of visual participatory research methods in capturing and making visible the social processes situated in children's everyday lives that account for their resilience processes.

Keywords: resilience, children, dialogic approach, school transitioning, visual participatory research

Introduction

Transitioning to school is an important phase in the life of a child with new demands and opportunities. When commencing primary school, children typically confront new institution's values, rules, norms, and goals as well as its physical, material, and time arrangements, which often differ from those they have experienced in their everyday lives outside the school (see e.g. Johnson de Feyter & Winsler, 2009; Ladd, Herald, & Kochel, 2006; Sairanen & Kumpulainen, 2014; Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005). In addition, starting school creates demands for children's understanding of and relationship to knowledge and their sense of selves as learners and competent actors (Rutanen & Karila, 2013; Salmi & Kumpulainen, 2017).

How children negotiate and adjust to the demands of the school are crucial for their academic learning journeys as well as for their overall healthy development (Chan, 2012; Ladd & Dinella, 2009). Worryingly, research indicates that there is an increasing number of children who experience challenges in their transitioning to school (e.g. Kumpulainen, 2012; Motala, Dieltiens, & Sayed, 2009). Children's socio-economic background, changes in family structure and functioning (e.g. divorce, parental illness or loss of employment), learning difficulties and/or developmental delays, difficulties with the language of instruction, experiences of discrimination and/or loss of community support are identified among the key threats to children adjusting well to school (see e.g. Noltemeyer & Bush, 2013; Peters, 2010). Although today we have knowledge of these well-known risks, relatively little is known about the processes of resilience that nevertheless support children's positive adjustment to school.

Drawing on our own research, in this chapter, we will illuminate how a dialogic approach amplified by a visual participatory methodology can enrich present-day understanding of the social construction of resilience processes in the everyday lives of children in transition to school. From the dialogic approach, resilience is not seen as an inner capacity of the child or located in the environment, but instead human beings *co-create and co-author resilience processes* together in their everyday practices in sociocultural contexts. We argue that the dialogic approach to researching and understanding resilience offers a robust and culturally sensitive conceptual framework for understanding and enhancing resilience processes in children's everyday lives.

Our chapter begins by introducing the dialogic approach to resilience. We will then discuss the role of visual participatory research in gaining access to the social processes of resilience in the everyday life of children and their communities. We will draw on our joint research project *Social ecologies of resilience among at-risk children starting school in South Africa and Finland: A visual participatory research* (SISU¹). Using a visual participatory approach, the children in our SISU research project provided their explanations for their positive adjustment to first grade, despite the additional challenges of living in marginalized or disadvantaged communities, and/or living with a single parent or in a blended family. The children's parents, extended family and teachers extended their accounts. Via the SISU data set we will show how the dialogic approach shifts attention beyond the individual and/or cultural context, without losing sight of children as active agents in their resilience processes. Our work also demonstrates the value of visual participatory research methods in capturing the social processes situated in children's everyday lives that account for their resilience processes.

A dialogic approach to resilience

In the research literature, the concept of resilience generally refers to “the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten system function, viability, or development” (Masten, 2014, p. 10). From an ecological systems perspective, children's capacity to adjust well to adversity is part personal and part systemic (e.g., supported by children's families or schools) (Masten, 2018; Ungar, 2011, 2018). This more systemic understanding builds on earlier understandings that resilience was primarily an individual's psychological ability to overcome, learn from and adapt positively to life's adverse events (Riley & Masten, 2005). In these earlier definitions, resilience was viewed “as an extraordinary atypical personal ability to revert or ‘bounce back’ to a point of equilibrium despite significant adversity” (Lenette, Brough, & Cox, 2012, pp. 637). These earlier accounts situated resilience in the individuals or in

¹ *SISU* is a Finnish terms and cultural construct that is typically described by Finns to express their national character. It is translated through various English terms including resilience, tenacity, grit, bravery and hardiness.

the environments in which they function, often posing a deficient view of people and/or their living environments.

A review of existing research also reveals that current literature fails to explain adequately the sociocultural processes of resilience that are embedded in the mundane practices of children's everyday life that support their positive transitioning to school (Kumpulainen, Theron, et al., 2016). Furthermore, much research has focused on adult perspectives in explaining resilience processes in the lives of children (see e.g. Ahtola, Silinskas, Poikonen, Niemi, & Nurmi, 2011; Margetts & Phatudi, 2013; Rous, Hallam, McCormick, & Cox, 2010; Skouteris, Watson, & Lum, 2012) with little, if any, focus on how children themselves explain resilience processes in their transitioning to school. In our chapter we argue that as long as resilience processes remain unexplained in their dynamic and situated complexity, teachers, school psychologists, other school-based service-providers, parents, and policy makers are inadequately equipped to understand and promote resilience processes in children's everyday lives.

Our research work on the resilience processes in the lives of young children draws on Bakhtin's dialogic approach (Bakhtin, 1981) combined with Vygotsky's developmental theory (Vygotsky, 1978, 1987) that both advocate the social-relational and cultural understanding of human functioning, learning and development. The dialogic approach strives to give meaning to the processes rather than the traits of resilience. It moves beyond more dominant dualistic conceptualizations of resilience by situating resilience within a *dialogue* between the child and the sociocultural context (see also Bottrell, 2009; Eggerman & Panter-Brick, 2010; Ungar et al., 2007). From this perspective, human beings *co-create and co-author resilience processes* in their everyday life (Stetsenko, 2015). Understanding resilience as a co-created ongoing process speaks not only to the dynamic and situated nature of resilience, but also to the ordinary environments in which resilience occurs (Lenette, Brough, & Cox, 2012). Hence, resilience in this sense is not a measurement of the individual's ability to 'bounce back' from adversity. Rather, resilience is dynamically interlinked with the child's social ecology that supports and provides access to resources in culturally relevant ways (Masten, 2014; Ungar, 2011, 2018; Ungar et al., 2007). From this definition it follows that individuals or communities do not just "have" resilience. Instead, the facilitation of resilience is always interactional (Vygotsky, 1987). In other words, the

dialogic approach situates resilience in everyday creative co-responses to constraints and life circumstances. It holds that being attuned to the ways in which people interact, create, and are influenced by their ecologies is an essential part of reframing the everyday as a wellspring of resilience. Focusing on the everyday as a natural and often overlooked site for resilience can help us question categories that may otherwise go unchallenged, and identify solutions that can address the sociocultural constraints in which people are placed.

The dialogic approach also calls attention to the importance of employing a historicized and future-oriented perspective to resilience, while remaining contextualized in people's everyday lives (Engeström, 2008). It strives toward a deep understanding of the community's ecology, the available resources and constraints of that ecology, and the influences on everyday practices on resilience processes. In this regard, the dialogic understanding of resilience resonates with a socio-ecological approach which directs its attention to the contexts in which people function. However, the dialogic approach should not be understood as suggesting that individuals are nested in and surrounded by static contexts or ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Instead, a Vygotskian perspective understands ecology as interwoven and "actively achieved" (Cole, 1996, p. 134) rather than concentric circles (Gutiérrez, 2016). For the dialogic approach, it is hence important to understand human behavior in the contexts of interdependent and ever-changing ecologies grounded in history (Cole, 1996; Gutiérrez, 2016; Gutiérrez & Jurow, 2016; Lee, 2010).

Visual participatory research methodology

Learning how to see the complexity of resilience processes in children's everyday lives requires robust and contextually sensitive research methodologies that care for multiplicity and variance in children's everyday lives (Theron, 2016a). Traditionally, education researchers have studied resilience with pre-defined assumptions and categories that narrowly shape how children and their communities are seen. Moreover, often times this more traditional research maintains unequal relationships between research participants and investigators while diminishing the value and agency of the actual people in the research process. To overcome some of the aforementioned limitations and to follow a dialogically informed research approach, in our work

we have harnessed visual participatory research methodologies that we believe can offer new research sensibilities to the study of resilience processes in children's everyday lives.

Visual participatory research methodologies respond to our efforts to capture the complexity of resilience processes as situated in children's everyday lives that takes account of the multiple sites in which children live, learn and develop. We hold that for a dialogically informed research, it is necessary to understand children's everyday lives as movement within and across contexts, and how children's interactions in these contexts create and/or close opportunities for their resilience processes (see e.g. Kumpulainen & Erstad, 2017). It has hence been important to us to collect research data that takes account of children's interactions and experiences within and across multiple contexts as explained by the children and the key people in their lives.

Visual participatory methods have also supported us in our efforts to account for children's perspective and authentic participation in the research process (Bezuidenhout et al., 2018; Flewitt et al. 2017; Kumpulainen, Mikkola, & Salmi, 2015). In our work, we have attempted to move away from researching *on* children and significant others to researching resilience processes *with* children and others (Christensen & James, 2008). In general, visual methods, such as the creation of drawings, photographs and videos have gained popularity among education researchers as potential means to gain access to children's perspectives and sense making in their life worlds. Visual methods are regarded as natural, child-sensitive means that can support children to communicate their perspectives in multimodal and authentic ways and that can pass on knowledge about the world as experienced by children: knowledge that would be difficult, if even impossible, to gain in other ways (Clark, 2005).

Visual methods are also linked to other creative and aesthetic forms of self-expression, holding emancipatory power that helps the narrator find her voice and identity (Bragg, 2011; Brushwood Rose & Low, 2014). Lorenz (2010) defines visual artifacts as metaphors that bring alive emotions and personal experiences and help children share and reflect upon their sense-making. At the same time, Kumpulainen, Mikkola and Salmi (2015) warn about naïve realism as if participatory research was free of issues around power and equity, and that visual methods would pass on the "pure knowledge" of the child and adults. They point out how visual participatory

research needs to be understood as mediated and shaped by the tools and social contexts in which it is conducted in a particular moment in space and time.

Insights from research on children's resilience processes

Next, we turn to illuminating the dialogic approach to understanding resilience processes in children's everyday lives amplified by a visual participatory methodology. We draw upon our bilateral project '*Social ecologies of resilience among at-risk children starting school in South Africa and Finland: A visual participatory study (SISU)*' that laid out the overall objectives, theoretical orientation, research design and research methodology of its individual studies. The empirical case study data we draw upon in this chapter has been more fully discussed in Kumpulainen, Theron, et al., (2016).

Data generation

Our SISU research involved children from socio-economically disadvantaged communities in South Africa, as well as in Finland, and their teachers, parents, and other significant people, such as grandparents and extended family members. We were particularly interested in those children in these communities who were identified by their teachers as adjusting well to school. The nomination of case-children in both countries was informed by consensus discussions between teachers and researchers informed by prior studies on resilience (Theron, Theron, & Malindi, 2013).

The visual participatory research approach of our SISU research project was realised by inviting children, their parents, and their teachers to make visual and/or descriptive accounts of children adjusting well to school via semi-structured, conversation-like interviews (Creswell, 2012). We also conducted Day-in-the-Life video-recorded observations (Gillen & Cameron, 2010) that entailed recording up to eight hours of a regular school/after-school day of the case study children. Our research partners – both children and adults -- joined us as co-researchers in confirming which video-segments explicated instances of adjusting well to school. In addition, we utilized Draw-and-talk methodology (Mitchell, Theron, Stuart, Smith, & Campbell, 2011) in

which the children made drawings that demonstrated their understanding of adjusting well to first grade and then explained what drawings conveyed. Finally, we employed photo elicitation (Cook & Hess, 2007) during which children took photographs (using disposable/digital cameras) of what supported their adjusting well to first grade and then explained their photographs. We tried to do our very best to harness these different research methods in ways that were convenient to and respective of participants.

To ensure the ethics of our research endeavour, we obtained institutional approvals, ethical clearance from relevant school authorities, and voluntary, informed consents from the children, parents, and teachers. We accentuated constraints on anonymity in visual methods as well as participants' ethical rights (Hill, 2005). All our research team members were also trained in the use of chosen research methods to facilitate ethically responsible employment of these.

Data analysis

Given the importance of a nuanced understanding of resilience processes in the everyday lives of children in transition to school (Liebenberg & Theron, 2015), the country-specific data were first analysed by researchers from the same country. In this process, each country team of researchers sought instances from the country-specific data that confirmed and disconfirmed the theoretical frame proposed by Ungar (2015) of seven commonly recurring mechanisms of resilience processes. These mechanisms were based on a comparative 11-country study of youths' resilience processes (see also Ungar et al., 2007). They include constructive relationships, access to material resources, a sense of social and/or spiritual cohesion, experiences of control and efficacy, adherence to cultural norms and beliefs, a powerful identity, and social justice. To manage the potential problem that deductive inquiry frequently poses (i.e., imposing prefixed categories onto empirical data), each country-specific team held regular consensus discussions as data analyses progressed. Thereafter, following Saldana (2009), the teams exchanged their analyses and negotiated cross-country consensus before finalizing the analysis.

We tried to increase the credibility of our analyses by including voices of numerous informants and triangulating them (Shenton, 2004). To facilitate rich accounts of children's resilience

processes in transition to school, we were careful to include visual, narrative, and observational data that were collected at several points in time. We also believe that the detailed and contextualized description of each case of our SISU research data supports their trustworthiness (Creswell, 2007, 2012).

Contextual insights to resilience processes of children in transition to school

Next, we will illuminate the dialogic approach amplified by a visual participatory methodology to children's resilience processes via the analysis of two children in transitioning to school in South-Africa and in Finland. As also explained in Kumpulainen, Theron, et al. (2016), these children were identified as having adjusted well to school despite hardship in their lives. The South African case (CASE Study 1) draws on the experiences and insights of a boy-child Thabo, his first grade teacher, and members of his extended family (his biological parents, grandmother, siblings, and other kin). The Finnish case draws on the experiences and insights of a girl-child Maria (CASE Study 2), her parents, and three teachers (i.e. two class teachers and a special education needs teacher).

CASE Study 1: Thabo

Thabo (pseudonym) is a Setswana-speaking, seven-year-old boy. He lives with his father (the primary caregiver), siblings (older brother and younger sister), and paternal grandmother. His mother was present at the outset of the study, but a calling to train as a traditional healer meant she had to absent herself from her family for the undisclosed period of her training. This suggests that at the time that Thabo was adjusting to formal schooling he was also adjusting to a major change in his home life.

Thabo's family lives in a socio-economically disadvantaged, rural area where 49% of the population depend on government grants (20% live on 80–100\$ per month). Most inhabitants are black Africans (71%) of which 67% speak Setswana; 20% of adult inhabitants have no education; 28% only have primary schooling (The Gaffney Group, 2011). Essentially, Thabo's school ecology is situated in a vulnerable context that threatens children's wellbeing.

Thabo attends a Quintile 1 school (i.e. one that is more heavily subsidized by government so that students can receive one meal daily and pay no school fees— Department of Basic Education, 2013). The school has basic resources, including a small library. Thabo completed his preschool year at this same school and started first grade in 2014 (i.e. the year he turned seven). His teacher has 32 years of teaching experience and provides mother-tongue instruction. Thabo's first grade class comprised 38 learners.

Findings

Constructive relationships, access to basic resources, adherence to cultural norms, a powerful identity, and opportunities to exercise control supported Thabo's adjusting well to first grade (Ungar, 2015). In particular, Thabo's 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). They offered concrete and emotional schooling-directed support regardless of their level of literacy or limited resources. This included taking care of basic needs (such as hunger and hygiene), facilitating homework, and encouraging Thabo.

For example, Thabo acknowledged the contribution of his illiterate grandmother to his adjusting well to first grade.

Grandmother confirmed this: 'When I am sitting with Thabo I encourage him saying "Thabo, do you have homework from school? Come let's read"'. I didn't go to school ... I am able to encourage'. Thabo's father echoed this: 'My mom is not educated; she has never been in school at all ... She only knows to write her name ... so how does she help Thabo? She encourages him!'. His father explained further: 'We encourage him with education ... Even when there is no homework we sit with him. We (all of us and him, his brother) write stories, make up stories ... I make them enjoy ...'.

His teacher (respectfully called 'mistress' by children and parents in traditional African communities) also accentuated encouragement: 'I'm always motivating my kids ... If he's struggling, you must just give him that hug, give him the appreciation that, even if he can't do this, maybe tomorrow he will be OK'. She was empathically aware of the challenges Thabo faced at home: 'I do ask myself—if I give Thabo homework, is the responsibility for the younger brother or the granny or him, if the father is not there?'.

Thabo's own drawing of why he was adjusting well to first grade confirmed that support for his schooling was the business of the collective of his relationships. Part of what this collective facilitated was supporting Thabo to understand that education was valued in his family and community. In disadvantaged South African communities being invested in education is widely promoted, partly because of its potential to emancipate (Theron & Phasha, 2015). For example, his mother (who was present at the beginning of the study) noted: 'I always tell him, Thabo attend school, you should love school!'. His teacher understood that this contributed to the significance of her task: 'Their parents have sent them here so that they can be better people tomorrow'.

His parents supported adherence to investment in education by coaching Thabo how to behave at school. His father noted: 'I always say to him, you must listen well at school and do the work of mistress [teacher]'. This collective emphasis on the meaningfulness of education supported Thabo's internalization, and enactment thereof. When Thabo considered why he was adjusting well, he included his own contributions: 'By writing and listening to mistress ... I keep quiet in class'.

However, the emphasis on being diligent was balanced with an understanding of the importance of play (albeit with basic toys like a ball), and how opportunity to play strengthened capacity to be invested in education. His father noted: 'A child needs time to play, also a certain time to meet his friends, yes to refresh his mind'. Thabo echoed this—for him school breaks were times to: 'Play ball'. In addition, Thabo had some control over play and work times after school. His father confirmed: 'Before he goes to play the first thing is that work—he will look for me, or look for his mom, to say "I have school work, here it is"'.

Thabo, and those around him, considered him a competent student. This nurtured a powerful identity as a first grader. His teacher called him her 'clever boy'. She asked him to help peers who had not yet mastered tasks he had (such as reading). Significantly, this sense of identity, and investment in schooling, were not obstructed by the material insufficiencies that characterized his daily life. In his father's words: 'Even when he doesn't have shoes or ... something that is nice that other children get ... he will continue doing good ... in everything he does it's like he puts in 100%'.

Kumpulainen, Theron, et al., 2016, pp. 126-129

CASE Study 2: *Maria*

Maria (pseudonym) is a seven-year-old, white, native Finnish girl who lives with her parents and a younger sister. The mother tongue of Maria's family is Finnish. Maria's home and school are situated in a suburb of Helsinki with a large concentration of non-Finnish-speaking people. More than 27% speak mother tongues other than Finnish, of which Russian, Estonian, and Somali are most common (City of Helsinki, 2014). Characteristic of the area is its inhabitants' low educational level and income, high unemployment, and prevalence of city-owned rental apartments (Tikkanen & Selander, 2014). Maria started her first grade in the local primary school when she turned seven. She transitioned there from a nearby, city-run preschool. She receives one meal daily and pays no school fees, the subjective right of all children attending primary school in Finland. Maria's primary school benefits from the Finnish positive discrimination policy. This means that the city allocates extra funding to schools where poorer functioning is predicted based on high percentages of immigrant children, and low parental levels of education and income (Lankinen, 2001).

Maria's first grade class consisted of 23 students, a class teacher, and a teacher's assistant. Maria's teacher is a trained, experienced class teacher with several years of experience in teaching young children. She is also a qualified kindergarten teacher. Instruction is given in Maria's mother tongue, Finnish. Maria was also able to receive support from the school's special educational needs teacher who regularly visited the class to follow the learning and development of each student, and to provide the earliest possible support in order to prevent the emergence of any problems.

Findings

The four main mechanisms of resilience that emerged in Maria's account were constructive relationships, powerful identity, adherence to cultural norms and beliefs, and experiences of control and efficacy (Ungar, 2015). In addition, Maria's class teacher included access to material resources. Also, the availability of other professional experts—such as a special educational needs teacher and teacher's assistant—were regarded as valuable resources supporting Maria's positive transitioning to school.

Comfortable and emotionally supportive relationships were invaluable to Maria adjusting well to first grade. In Maria's school ecology these included the teachers, family members, and peers. Maria drew a picture of herself and her friends to illustrate the importance of peer friendships in adjusting well to first grade. She said: 'I didn't have many friends in day-care. At school I have three new friends. We play together with Angry Birds [a digital game]'. Maria's teacher emphasized that it is the teacher's job to make sure that the classroom is a safe environment with well-functioning peer-relationships.

Maria described her class teacher as a strict but humorous person with a caring attitude by saying: 'She [teacher] is strict and kind of child-like. She doesn't take everything so seriously'. Maria's class teacher accentuated the relationship between the child and the teacher as important to a child's adjusting well to first grade. In her opinion, getting to know one another enables the teacher to support the child's adjustment in the best possible way. Also, when the child is familiar with his/her teacher, the child knows what is expected from him/her in school: 'So we have that kind of mutual understanding of what it is that we are doing here together [in school] and from there comes that trust between me and the child'. She added that a shared understanding of the child's perspective, and effective models of cooperation between the teacher and the parents, greatly facilitate the child's adjustment: 'It is important for the adult to try to understand the child's point of view [and] what would be the best for the child and the family in order to make sure the school start would be positive'.

For Maria, cultural adherence meant conforming to the cultural norms and valued practices of the school. By way of illustration, Maria commented: 'One should listen to the teacher and follow the school rules'. When the cultural practices of schooling align with those of the child's home and larger community, the child identifies more easily with and upholds the values of the school. Maria's parents supported Maria's adherence by checking her homework on a daily basis. Her class teacher confirmed the value of Maria's collective network supporting adherence: "Any challenge the child faces, whether it is developmental or social, is more easily overcome when there is a shared vision regarding the role of the school in the child's life and that families are willing to take their child's education seriously."

Maria's experiences of control and self-efficacy entailed her being in control of her schoolwork at home. She described the division of labour between her and her parents with regards to her schooling as follows: 'I do my homework independently and then my mum and dad check it. If I make mistakes, my dad tells me'. Maria's class teacher believed the teacher can also create opportunities for the child to experience feelings of control and efficacy. In order for this to be possible, the teacher has to know the children and take things that are said and done by children seriously: "One [teacher] cannot think that I'll just follow the curriculum with this class when there are clearly more important things going on among children. One can say that our heads as adults are this high and things are happening at the child's level which we have no idea of unless we listen to the children."

In Maria's account of her sense of a powerful identity, being independent did not mean handling things by herself. Instead, it meant knowing when to ask for help if she needed it. The recognition from the teacher seemed to be important for Maria's positive self-image as a student. Maria reckoned that what makes her teacher glad is that she can sometimes do things independently, and she took pride in her teacher's encouraging appraisal.

Kumpulainen, Theron, et al., 2016, pp. 129-132

What can be learned from a dialogic approach amplified by a visual participatory methodology to children's resilience processes?

Altogether, and as previously explained (Kumpulainen, Theron, et al., 2016), the findings from our SISU research show how children's positive school transitioning is enhanced by resilience processes evidencing constructive relationships, access to material resources, adherence to cultural norms and beliefs, a powerful identity and opportunities of control and efficacy, resonating with Ungar's (2015) seven commonly recurring mechanisms of resilience processes. Our research findings also demonstrate that, although similar, our case children's adjustment to school, was distinctively nuanced in the interaction between the child and their socio-cultural contexts, hence evidencing the social and contextual nature of resilience processes. This finding underlines the importance of understanding resilience processes as co-constructed and gaining their meaning within the given social ecology of a child (Theron, 2013, 2016b).

To illustrate: For Thabo, constructive relationships entailed a network of supportive others that included parents, grandparents, siblings, and community members. This collective supported his positive school transitioning. This collective also expressed the belief that education would enable a better future both for Thabo and his community, and co-enacted this belief by all contributing to Thabo's positive school transitioning. For Maria, constructive relationships included several individuals, such as mother, father, class teacher, sister, special educational needs teacher, and peers. Yet, her case brings less evidence of intergenerational interaction and foregrounds peer relations. Home-school collaboration and a value base that is shared by the teacher/school and family contributed to how both children adjusted. In Maria's case, however, it was the class teacher who wanted to learn more about Maria. In contrast, Thabo's teacher – who was a member of the same community – appeared to understand his challenges. Their shared geography provided her with an easy understanding of Thabo's circumstances. In short, Thabo's case illustrated the African way-of-being (i.e., the individual is valued, but the community, and what is communally valued matters equally, if not more) (Bujo, 2009; Theron & Phasha, 2015). In Maria's case the values and practices typical to the global North - embracing independence, agency and autonomy - were more prominent (Bottrell, 2009).

Cultural norms and beliefs relating to schooling were also reflected in how Thabo and Maria behaved as learners. For instance, both children were coached by their parents/caregivers to obey school rules and to listen to the teacher. The data showed both children enacting their parents' advice. Also, both children were familiar with the idea that education is valuable because of its potential to transform futures (i.e., this was a popular discourse in both of their communities). Yet, explanations about the power of education to create a better future for Maria were not as specifically articulated as in Thabo's case giving evidence of cultural differences. In Finland, education is the subjective right of every child regardless of socio-economic or cultural background, and hence its importance may be taken more for granted. In South Africa, disadvantaged families and communities place special emphasis on the potential of education to facilitate improved futures (Theron & Phasha, 2015; Theron & van Rensburg, 2018).

Material resources were also found to play an important role in supporting both children's positive school transitioning. For Thabo, government support enabled access to important, but basic, material resources at school, such as food and school books. For Maria, material resources included access to special education services, offered to all children in need by the Finnish law. These findings speak to the importance of understanding resilience processes at the nexus of multiple levels, including educational policy (Ungar, 2015).

Discussion

Despite vast research on school transitions, less attention has been paid to understanding the social processes of resilience in the everyday lives of children that account for their positive transitioning to school. In this chapter we have argued for the importance of moving beyond categorical and universalistic definitions of resilience towards a dialogic account that underscores resilience as a social and situated process between the child and her sociocultural context. Moreover, we have stressed the importance of education and resilience researchers taking account of the historicity and multiple, interactive contexts of children's ecologies that create and disclose opportunities for children's resilience processes. This calls for research data that recognise children's interactions and experiences within and across multiple contexts and timescales. Paying careful attention to historicity and multiple contexts in which children and

their communities engage and interact is fundamental for developing a nuanced understanding of the resources and structural conditions that mediate the challenges of children's everyday lives, as well as how they come to see who they are and who they can become (Engeström, 1999; Gutiérrez, 2016).

In our chapter we have also pointed out how early research on resilience focused on an individual's ability to transcend difficult circumstances (e.g., Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 1987, 1990; Werner, 1990, 1993). However, in discussing resilience, in our work we are less concerned with individuals and more concerned with the interaction that takes place between the child and the larger sociocultural and activity systems in which they function. We find this especially important for enhancing and designing social ecologies that can support diverse children's resilience processes in transition to school and in their life worlds in general. A dialogic approach to positive human functioning, learning and development requires critical attention to more than just the individual learner; it also involves attention to the social context of development in which the learner is developing, be it informal or formal (Vygotsky, 1987). Approaching resilience processes as an everyday, interactional phenomenon, it is not difficult to see how also resourceful, clever, and inventive the participating community members, including the children themselves are, as they reconfigure and reimagine their available resources to address and overcome constraints in their surroundings that contribute to the child's resilience processes in positive transitioning to school (Salmi & Kumpulainen, 2017).

An appreciation of dialogic processes mediating children's opportunities for resilience calls for active, continued enquiry into how specific cultural systems shape resilience processes and a refusal to assume understanding based on generic explanations of positive adjustment (Masten, 2014). In our work we harnessed visual participatory research methodologies that we believe can offer new research sensibilities to the study of resilience processes in children's everyday lives. One way of gaining access to resilience supporting mechanisms in the children's overall ecologies is hence to invite children and their community members to share their stories and explanations that can be woven into collective knowledge and a value base to guide co-constructed pathways towards every child's positive school transitioning.

Conclusions

Our participatory research framed by a dialogic framework yields several lessons for teachers to understand and support the resilience processes of young children starting school. First, our SISU research points out that it is important that efforts to support children's positive school transitioning are responsive to the unique strengths, vulnerabilities, and values of specific children and their social ecologies. Second, our SISU research suggests that participatory visual research methods can have a lot of potential to create flexible, multimodal and responsive opportunities for children and their community members to express and share contextual definitions of those resources and mechanisms that, according to their perspective, account for positive school transitioning. As pointed out by Flewitt et al. (2017), the complexity of children's everyday lives, particularly among those children living in disadvantage, can easily result in not understanding or including these in their education process with unwanted consequences. Participatory methods however carry with them a lot of potential for making these complex lives visible, giving children and their community members a medium to communicate their views, interests and experiences. Most importantly, here, children and their community members are positioned as agentic and accountable participants' in co-constructing resilience processes that can genuinely support contextualized pathways to positive school transitioning. Participatory methods can also cultivate trust and build a shared vision and value base between education professionals, children and their communities, as there is recognition of multiple voices and perspectives in defining and enhancing resilience processes in children's everyday lives. These efforts can create a fertile context for reciprocal interaction and collaboration for supporting children's school transitioning that stretch from home to school and to communities.

Third, in addition to learning from and with children and their communities about resilience supporting resources and mechanisms in children's everyday lives, our SISU research points out that it is also important that teachers are familiar with the school ecologies that they serve and contribute to. This means that teachers need to be knowledgeable and reflexive about the cultural beliefs and contextual realities of the school and how these realities enable and/or constrain unique children's positive school transitioning. With such culture- and context-sensitive knowledge and a reflexive orientation, teachers can better act as a pivotal link in the social

ecology of the child orchestrating the co-construction of resilience processes for children's positive school transitioning. Moreover, they can use this knowledge to constantly develop formal educational practices in the school that make it ready for all children.

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