Rurality and resilience in education: place-based partnerships and agency to moderate time and space constraints

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In an ongoing longitudinal intervention study (STAR)[1] we found that, although similarities existed in the way teachers promoted resilience, rural schools (in comparison to other STAR case schools) took longer to implement strategies to buoy support and found it difficult to sustain such support. Using rurality we wanted to understand how forces, agencies and resources act, move, pull and push when adversity and resilience are centred in a discussion. Similarities in promoting resilience included prioritised needs requiring support and resource use through relationships. Time, space and place were relevant as forces hampering resilience initiatives. We argue that, by means of relationships, teachers prioritised needs and were aware of available resources. As a result, place and agency (as rurality variables) were reconfigured. Consequently, resilience was positively effected as the changed place-patterns and agency were significant for teachers to negotiate ongoing challenges of time, space and resource.

Keywords: rurality, resilience, low-resource, teachers, education, schools, place-based, partnership, agency, relationships.

Background and rationale

Teaching in deep rural settings evokes countless images of barriers, hardship and despair. From literature we know that teachers in rural schools are often scripted as under- and unqualified (Human Sciences Research Council – Education Policy Consortium, 2005). We have come to expect rural schools to have derelict buildings, not enough classrooms, broken windows, limited access to water, electricity and sanitation, and restricted access to resources such as libraries and books, information technology and specialised science laboratory equipment. 'Rural' calls to mind isolation, backwardness and even 'being left behind'. Photographs 1 and 2 may, in fact, be exact replicas of these ideas and assumptions.

Photographs 1 and 2: Winter 2006 at the secondary school

What we describe in this article is another image that co-exists as reality with the realities referred to above. We present counter-illustrations of how teachers promote resilience in schools to balance numerous

ongoing adversities that are synonymous with rural life-worlds. The photographs are from a secondary school in rural Mpumalanga. Teachers in this school (n=10, 7 male and 3 female) and at two neighbouring primary schools (n=4, 1 male and 3 female) have been participating in an ongoing longitudinal intervention study[2] to investigate the role of teachers in promoting resilience in schools in low-resource environments that face an array of chronic, cumulative risk factors. As reported elsewhere (Ferreira & Ebersöhn, 2011), teachers involved in the STAR investigation initiated and sustained programmes to counter disturbances and consequently promote resilience. However, cross-case analysis and comparison indicated that implementing support strategies took longer in rural schools and sustaining implemented support structures was more challenging.

Our aim with this article is to explain resilience promotion of teachers in three rural schools as a way to contribute to emerging scholarship on rurality (Balfour, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2008). We wish to add to wellness discourses related to rural education thinking, a knowledge base that has to date hovered on the margins of local education research (Nkambule, Balfour & Moletsane, 2011). Our objectives are to describe how teachers in rural schools promote resilience, and to determine what enabled and what hindered resilience support. The question directing inquiry in this article is therefore: How can insight into teachers' promotion of resilience in rural schools be understood to inform rurality understandings?

Rurality and risk

Teachers, schools, learners and their families are confronted with very specific challenges in South Africa (Chisholm, 2004; Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2002; Harley & Wedekind, 2004), and even more so in rural settings (Loots, Ebersöhn, Ferreira & Eloff, 2010). This may especially be the case as education development is stymied by past and present policies (HSRC-EPC, 2005) that continue to isolate rural schools and perpetuate inequalities (Howley, 1997). Schools in rural settings, in particular, are challenged by severe poverty (Howley & Howley, 2010; Maltzan, 2006; Tickamyer, 2006), high levels of illiteracy and unemployment, poorly developed infrastructure, limited access to services (health, social welfare) and the looming presence of HIV and AIDS-related loss and grief, caretaking responsibilities and additional financial strain.

'Rural' remains an ephemeral concept dependent on either place-based conceptions (Chikoko, 2008; Graham & Healy, 1999) or methodological considerations (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy & Dean, 2005) that drive knowledge production in this regard. Whereas we earlier alluded to some descriptors of rural, variables such as geography (closeness to city limits) and demography (median household income, proximity to education services, community patterns) are also used to explain what 'rural' potentially entails (Coladarci, 2007). The South African 'rural' conversation obviously also includes deficiency scripts (Bundy, 1988; Moore, 1984), especially of poverty as a legacy of apartheid.

Cloke (2006) concedes that numerous understandings of rurality exist. Coladarci (2007) explains that, because of these multiple views of rurality, a clear description of contextuality places theory and methodology in research in a space of shared understanding and facilitates transferability of findings related to rurality. As signalled in such cautions, space plays out as significant variable when contemplating rurality (Halfacree, 2006). In an analytical framework we prefer viewing 'rural' as dynamic, shaped by a variety of systems and especially by individuals who populate the rural environment (Balfour *et al.*, 2008; Graham & Healy, 1999). In this we embrace the generative theory of rurality provided by Balfour *et al.* (2008). In our interpretation of the three rural schools' resilience initiatives, we will contemplate evidence in terms of dynamic variables posited by these scholars, namely forces (time, place and space), agencies and resources (as depicted in Figure 1). Although these determinants will be discussed later, we will now provide a brief overview of our understanding of these drivers.

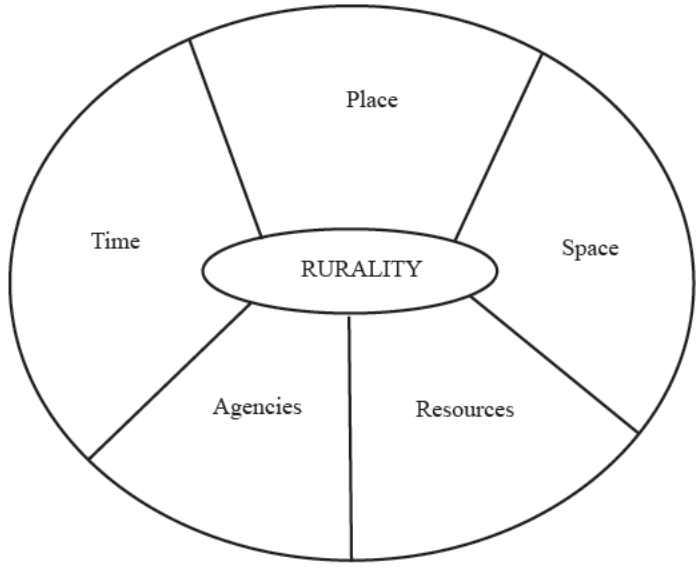

Figure 1: Dynamic variables of rurality

"*Forces* relevant to rurality include space, place and time. *Space* constitutes the 'habitus' dynamic operation … between and within rural and urban centres" (Balfour *et al.*, 2008:100). For the purpose of this article, space is exemplified in only one of the 14 participating rural teachers who identifies herself as a resident of the community in which she teaches. Howley, Theobald and Howley (2005) locate place centrally in rurality discourses. A sense of *place* is indicated by six habits, namely "connectedness, development of identity culture, interdependence with the land, spirituality, ideology and politics, and activism and engagement" (Budge in Balfour *et al.*, 2008:100). *Time* is understood as the stretch required to move from one place to another in space (Balfour *et al.*, 2008), and it is especially notable in our study as a force that necessitated all but one teacher to make use of government-provided bus transport after school to return home.

In the realm of rurality, *agency* refers to an opposing function to scripts of victimhood, passivity and dependence. Balfour *et al.* (2008:101) indicate that "agency is exercised in relation to attempts to regulate both space and time". Agency also includes systemic agencies (within individuals, community and state). Inherent in agencies is the ability to transform relationships between forces of space, place and time, implying that pattern change in determinants of space and time in a rural setting is dependent on agency.

To understand *resources* as the third rurality variable, we are encouraged by Ebersöhn's (chapter forthcoming) generative theory on relationship-resourced resilience (RRR). In the following section we link rurality and resilience conceptually by focusing on absence and abundance of resources.

Resilience and rurality

To understand resilience in education settings, we favour RRR (Ebersöhn, chapter forthcoming) as analytical framework. As generative theory, RRR was built on case studies involving schools in low-resource settings facing multiple risk factors (cumulative risk) that have persisted over time (chronic risk). Through the RRR lens we view resilience as a process that is ecologically embedded in interlinked systems. Systemic disturbances are viewed as risk factors that act as stressors in systems. Ecological disturbance (risk) signals the need for systems to adapt. Resilience indicates the extent to which such systemic adaptation is possible and sustained as response to mediate the impact of risk factors.

From a resilience perspective it can be argued that where there is risk, there are (protective) resources. Protective resources are systemically entrenched and can be accessed and used to buoy resilience. A lack

of resources or a low level of resources (as is the case in rural environments) will, of course, narrow options to intercede for resilience purposes. Resources can be person-based (individual strengths), family-based (household income, employment), school-based (infrastructure and expertise), community-based (institutions, services, beliefs) and society-based (policies and structures). In RRR, relationships are not only resources, but they also serve as resource hosts providing hands-on access to capacity. Relationships function as a way of identifying and accessing available place-based resources. Resource mobilisation is generated by being aware of risks that have to be handled; being aware of resources that are required to mitigate risk; virtually mapping relationships that could provide required resources, and maintaining relationships to sustain the use of resources. In terms of resilience, relationships constitute disks of systemic strength (like a honeycomb) that enable agency, rather than depict rural as "ever-widening circles of deficit in terms of resources and entropy" (Balfour *et al.,* 2008:102).

Methodology

Research sites and participants

STAR (intervention research) commenced in 2003 in one primary school in an urban informal settlement community in the Eastern Cape. STAR was replicated in three additional schools between 2004 and 2006 – two urban primary schools in Gauteng and a rural secondary school in Mpumalanga. In a subsequent dissemination research phase, STAR was facilitated or partially facilitated in eight additional schools (seven primary schools – of which two were rural – and one secondary school) in three provinces of South Africa since 2007. We relied on a combination of convenience and purposive sampling to identify research sites and select teachers to participate (Patton, 2002).

Data pertaining to the three rural schools involved in STAR (one secondary and two primary schools) are pertinent to this article. They are all situated in a mountainous region in Mpumalanga close to the Swaziland border. Running water, electricity and sanitation are available intermittently at the three schools. In each school, the technological vestiges of globalisation are limited to one computer available to a school principal and teachers using cellular telephones. By and large, households in the school communities are dependent on subsistence farming (productive capital).

Research design

Meta-theoretically we adopted an interpretivist stance (Patton, 2002) and methodologically Participatory Reflection and Action (PRA) served as research design (Chambers, 2008). The first phase of the STAR intervention involves the identification of current needs and challenges faced by the community, as well as the resources available in the community. Next, teachers identify potential ways in which the identified challenges may be addressed by utilising existing and potential resources. This phase is followed by the identification of school-based projects to promote resilience, after which teachers plan and implement these initiatives. Subsequent phases of STAR include monitoring and evaluation. Several postgraduate students at the University of Pretoria have been involved in the various phases of the intervention since 2003.[3]

Data collection, documentation and analysis

This article reports on the data collected since 2005 in the three participating rural schools in Mpumalanga. We used multiple data collection and documentation strategies studying the broad STAR study. In this paper we predominantly make use of data resulting from observation-as-context-of-interaction (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2000), and visual data collection activities in the form of community and asset mapping (Chambers, 2008), as well as photographs (Patton, 2002), field notes and researcher diaries. For the broad STAR project, however, data has also been collected by means of PRA-based intervention sessions (Chambers, 2008), focus group discussions, as well as semi-structured and informal conversational individual interviews (Patton, 2002). Data thus generated were documented in the form of audio-visual

recordings and *verbatim* transcription of these recordings. By means of thematic analysis we identified initial categories, relying on colour-coded word processor methods to compare potential categories and derived suitable themes and subthemes.

We adhered to the ethical guidelines of relevant Departments of Education for obtaining permission to conduct research. We also followed the rules of voluntary participation, confidentiality, privacy and anonymity, maintaining trust and protecting participants from harm. We employed strategies such as documenting and describing the research process in detail and depth, and remained aware of potential bias due to the differences between the participants and ourselves. We clarified our preliminary findings and conclusions with participants as part of member checking, conducted regular peer-debriefing sessions, and discussed our research among ourselves and with co-researchers and peers in the research arena (Seale, 2000) to enhance trustworthiness. We focused on obtaining credible, dependable, authentic, confirmable and transferable answers, rather than generalising findings.

Results

We start this section by describing how teachers in the three rural schools promoted resilience. We then contemplate how rurality determinants actually interacted to enable and confound resilience. Although teachers promoted resilience in similar ways irrespective of site (urban/rural), we show how connectedness to place was cathartic for agency to enable resilience, and that place-embeddedness and agency were instrumental to navigate continued time, place and scarce resource barriers for resilience.

Supporting resilience in rural schools

In their efforts to entrench resilience-promoting practices, rural schools were similar to urban schools in the needs they prioritised and use of resources through partnerships. This finding supports the contention of Balfour *et al.* (2008) that (irrespective of locality) schools face barriers especially in low-resource, emerging-economy societies, but that the intensity of dynamics plays out as the defining characteristic in rural schools.

Identification and prioritisation of needs

Like other schools in the STAR project, teachers in rural schools focused on particular *prioritised needs* to counter the presence of vast challenges (Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2011). Teachers did not single out children for support, but viewed needs through a kinship lens as *family-oriented needs* (Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2011). As found elsewhere (Howley & Howley, 2010; Maltzan, 2006; Tickamyer, 2006), the reality of poverty and need pervades images portrayed by rural teachers. The following extracts from teachers in the three schools all bare testimony to needs synonymous with living in a non-enabling, low-resource school setting:

> *When you are talking about poverty, they (the learners and families) are very, very poor.*
>
> *Most of our learners don't have families. They are relying on the school.*
>
> *They don't do homework. After school they go to fields to work hard.*
>
> *They came to school because of food.*

Needs that were identified thus did not only relate to *poverty* (limited household income, unemployment), but also to *health* (hunger, malnutrition, family members infected or affected by HIV and AIDS), *family circumstances* (children heading households, taking care of ill parents and/or younger siblings), *emotions* (bereavement, anxiety, fear because of HIV and AIDS stigma, boredom), *learning support* (numeracy and literacy challenges, absence of homework support, tuition in English rather than in their mother tongues), as well as *lack of information and training* (high levels of illiteracy among parents, shortage of information on policies, rights and services related to welfare and health services).

Use of resources and relationships to provide support

As with other STAR teachers, rural-based teachers developed support strategies to address prioritised needs by targeting available resources and using partnerships. Networking (Murdoch, 2006), as a way to structure supportive partnerships in communities (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Butera & Humphreys Costello, 2010), has a strong tradition in rural studies. The teachers based their support plans on the principle of linking existing resources to identified needs. A female teacher from the adjacent high school shared insights of schools' collaboration by stating "around our area we are aligning the schools because there are many challenges". She continues to explain that without such relationships "we are just sitting around this corner without communicating to others". From a relationship-resourced resilience stance (Ebersöhn, forthcoming) teachers decided which resources were required to offset a need, and then determined which existing relationships hosted these resources. Teachers used relationship skills to access resources and mobilise support (buoy resilience) via acquaintances, and they linked available resources to prioritised needs by means of partnerships. Relationship-resourced resilience thus indicates that teacher *partnerships* across school community systems were instrumental to initiate, provide and sustain support services aimed at responding to needs.

To address poverty needs, teachers also targeted different ways of accessing social grants. In all STAR schools, teachers developed and implemented policies and structures to *identify vulnerable* children in classrooms and on the playground. In this regard a male teacher from the high school stated that:

> *whatever challenges learners, we refer to her (a female teacher). It is known in the school. She is the one we are piling with so much stuff. We keep records. We think of confidentiality. We allocated a room but that roof of the counselling room went off in the storms.*

Teachers also established a *referral system* to route vulnerable children and families to relevant service providers in the community (health, social welfare and grants, faith-based organisations).

All three rural schools planned to establish school-based *vegetable gardens* to provide children and their families with food. Agro-food systems for food security, as a supportive measure in rural economies, is well documented (Buttel, 2006). A female teacher from the high school explained: "Our area is poverty-stricken so we started the garden project". Likewise, a female teacher from the one primary school reported: "We wrote a letter to the principal and SGB to ask piece of land from the school to start a garden". Another female high school teacher explained how they put aside produce to be "able to give them (the learners) packs so they can eat in the holidays". As will be discussed later, observation of vegetable gardens in all the STAR schools over a period of time (2003-2011) indicated constant change. Concerning the accessing of social grants, the referral system established by teachers helped to address health-related needs, as networks facilitated access to health services. By addressing families' health needs, the need for information was also partially satisfied, because teachers provided HIV and AIDS information. One female teacher in a primary school shared that they are "involving the Department of Health (by) following their programme making learners and parents aware of HIV, mentoring learners and talking to them about teenage pregnancy". In addition, teachers implemented other resource strategies to *provide information*. They used friendly soccer and netball matches over weekends as an opportunity to provide information to parents, who attended as spectators, on health issues and social development grants, as evident in the following contribution by a female teacher from a primary school:

> *We started a club and invited neighbouring schools on weekends. In afternoons the children do sports so that they are not able to do what they are not supposed to do.*

Other teachers presented adult basic education classes after school hours to assist parents who are unable to read. Language teachers in these schools shared capacity to address the challenges related to language of teaching and learning. Collegial isolation is synonymous with rural education (Barley, 2009). However, in the following extract from a male high school teacher it is apparent how information sharing resulted in collegial appreciation:

> *The educators meet regularly sharing experiences of that language of teaching and learning. This (sharing ideas on literacy) came as our project. It broke down a wall. Now no-one is blaming anyone (that learners come from primary schools ill-prepared for high school).*

Lastly, teachers in the rural schools also provided learning support, counselling and career guidance to learners: "Now children can do something after school. Otherwise they don't do homework."

Barriers to promoting resilience in rural schools

Teachers in rural schools needed more time to implement strategies and found it difficult over time to sustain support. From a rurality perspective (Balfour *et al.*, 2008), we argue that space and time forces were significant in time delays. Similarly, the magnitude of scarce resources frustrated attempts to build supportive networks.

Pulled and pushed by space and time

Space and time – as rurality forces (Balfour *et al.*, 2008) – played a significant role in pulling the rural-based teachers away from their intentions of support. As a male high school teacher expressed: "Our learners are coming far to school". As all but one of the teachers stayed outside of the community in which they taught, they departed directly after school in buses to travel home. In this regard, Barley (2009) notes teachers' lack of familiarity with rural schools and communities as a characteristic of rural education. One female high school teacher explained the necessity to access resources in order to address the challenge of space: "Now we are happy. The Department has given us transport." Another male teacher from a primary school stated in a matter of fact manner: "We are commuters". Thus they were not present physically after school hours to cement relationships and mobilise resources. Where implementation did occur, time and space constraints meant that rural-based teachers found it difficult to invest in monitoring and evaluation functions together with partners.

We could best observe the challenge of promoting resilience in the rural schools in terms of vegetable gardens. In urban STAR schools vegetable gardens were established within on average twelve months. Vegetable gardens went through prosperous and scarce cycles depending on climate, availability of labour and seeds, expertise and tools. Once teachers formed partnerships to initiate school-based vegetable gardens, produce was available in one form or another to share with children and their families. In the rural schools these patterns were quite different, as illustrated in Photographs 3-6.

Photograph 3: May 2006

Photograph 4: May 2007

Photograph 5: October 2007

Photograph 6: January 2009

Teachers' agency to support initiatives remained noticeable as observed in the vegetable garden at the rural secondary school. An extensive area on the school grounds was ploughed by a farmer in May 2006 (Photograph 3); mothers weeded the garden in May 2007 (Photograph 4); learners and their teacher worked in the vegetable garden during a Biology class in October 2007 (Photograph 5); a fence was erected around a smaller vegetable garden in April 2008 and more soil turned in the terrain of the smaller vegetable garden in January 2009 (Photograph 6). Teachers also obtained seeds and tools from community members in April 2009, and assembled structures around young seedlings to protect them from goats in April 2010.

Together with these signs of agency, indications of complexity abounded. From 2005 to 2011 the vegetable garden yielded a scant harvest with the only substantial crop produced in 2006 (Photograph 3). Instead of a garden green with spinach, beetroot and carrot leaves, the vegetable garden at the rural school was mostly barren, dry and rocky, with goats and chickens presiding over the landscape. Maintaining a vegetable garden required the presence of teachers – either directly or indirectly. Because teachers could not stay after school, they could not meet with mothers or learners who were willing to cultivate the garden, nor could they follow up and maintain relationships with partners who provided equipment. The teachers could also not implement their plan to start a much-needed irrigation system with the help of community members.

Time and physical presence are required in order to promote resilience. Because the teachers at rural schools travelled long distances between home and school, they had limited time and were physically unable to cultivate partnerships, give feedback and affirm visions of support. Because teachers could not be present in the 'school-community space', their managing of support initiatives suffered. They did not have time to solidify plans, observe progress and adapt flawed ideas to foster partnerships. Hence, because rural teachers could not spend after-school time to strengthen and invest in relationships, partnerships could not be initiated and maintained.

Limited resources aggravate time and space restrictions

Although teachers in the rural schools managed to establish referral systems with clinics for health services and with government offices for grant applications, teachers and community members found it difficult to access these services despite the established partnerships because of scarce resource/service availability and vast distances to resources/services. In all the STAR schools, limited resources posed as barriers to resilience (Loots *et al.*, 2010). Balfour *et al.* (2008) argue that the level of intensity of scarce resources in rural settings served as an added burden to teachers' attempts to enhance resilience. Similarly, resources were not only scant in rural settings, but available resources were also far away from school communities, and therefore even more difficult to access. One female primary school teacher lamented: "There's no work. There's nothing. There's no life in fact. They come to school because of food". A female high school teacher explained the isolation of the schools, learners and their families: "it's very deep rural. It's

a remote area". A male primary school teacher expressed the scarcity of resources: "There is no water. Water is a scarcity." A male high school teacher shared that the roof which was blown off during seasonal storms early in a year "will be replaced at the end of this (the same) year. The Department says this is what they can do".

Resources to promote resilience in rural schools

It is obvious that the above barriers to enabling resilience also had implications for place as a rurality force. As teachers spent many hours travelling, they were literally 'disconnected' with the place in which they worked. Although place habits (Budge in Balfour *et al.*, 2008) related to the schools in which teachers worked, the same was not the case for the school communities in which teachers worked. Teachers did not feel connected to school communities and activism and engagement lacked. In the following section we demonstrate that teachers' prioritising of needs and awareness of available resources via relationships rearranged place and agency as rurality variables, thus culminating in a positive effect on resilience.

Place-based connection and engagement

We conjecture that place-based changes occurred when teachers' prioritisation of needs coincided with audits on available resources in school communities. Teachers were *drawn into their place* of work-life by the knowledge of existing resources to systematically address needs. Although teachers inhabited their home-life places, their place habits regarding work-life places changed as they became engaged in efforts to promote resilience. One female high school teacher explained how she and other teachers benefited from insider, community knowledge of a fellow teacher in a primary school who came from, and was a resident of, the particular rural setting:

> *Some of those, that one, reside in the community. It made our work easier. There were things, the information she brought us that was useful. Otherwise there wouldn't be a relationship between the educators and the community.*

Another female primary school teacher explained that:

> *We learned that our community was poor. We learned that our community needs us. We can communicate with parents, with the community. We started a club in the community for meeting, playing (sports), sharing, discussing things.*

We argue that specifically habits of place, as a force of rurality (Budge in Balfour *et al.*, 2008), changed in terms of teachers' connectedness, their ideology and politics, and their activism and engagement. This notion is inherent in the following description by a male high school teacher:

> *Now actually we are not teachers. We are a community. It's only that the springboard is the school. From the school we do in the community.*

They began sharing the ideologies of their school communities and became activists to mediate the effects of adversity. Teachers were outspoken about their belief that school communities were able to counter needs; they asked community members whom they knew to access resources, and they actively got to know more community members in order to establish partnerships aimed at providing services. Because teachers started 'owning' their place in the school communities, they began referring to "our problems" (male teacher in secondary school) and "our plans" (female teacher in primary school), and made remarks such as "We will not give up" (male teacher in primary school).

Agency and resources via place-based relationships

We propose that agency as a rurality variable (Balfour *et al.*, 2008), in conjunction with reconfigured place connectivity, enabled teachers to make full use of the small number of available resources. Svendsen (2009) explains how social and human capital serve as conduits to enable multifunctional centres in rural areas. Thus, we posit that teachers' agency occurred in tandem with place-based connectedness, activism and engagement (see Figure 2). Agency was signified in the vegetable garden example. In this

instance, it was apparent that teachers' "exercise of will" (Balfour *et al.*, 2008) was not to surrender but to be compliant to hurdles of time, space and limited resources. Teachers' agency was indicated by their opposition of entropy and their activist engagement to promote resilience, even though barriers tripped up their attempts.

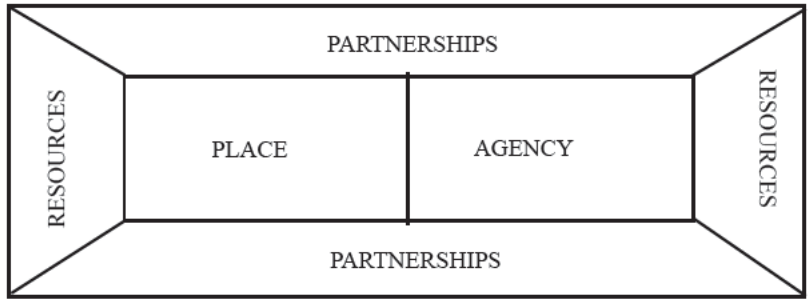

Figure 2: Resilience: A result of place-based partnerships and agency

Place-based connection and agency resulted in teachers being able to connect with individuals in the school community in a goal-directed manner. Because teachers advocated for change, community members came to trust them, partnering to respond to problems. Place-based partnerships were therefore forged. Teachers' reconfigured place habits and connectedness provided an arena to identify relationships rich with required resources; they manifested as agency to access, mobilise and monitor the use of resources to provide support. Resources are, of course, "critical to an understanding of the limits and effectiveness of community or individual agency" (Balfour *et al.*, 2008:97), and they were accessed via place-based relationships in partnership with community members. For instance, a farmer's help was called in and his tractor used to turn the soil; mothers prepared affordable meals outside the school gates to sell during breaks and after school, and seeds were obtained from a local supplier for the vegetable garden.

Partnerships with community members also meant that support could continue even when teachers were absent after school hours. Partnerships carried and sustained resilience efforts in the form of a systemic resource-net to oppose continued adversity. Place-based habits and agency were continually compromised by time limitations and physical absence. Teachers' embeddedness in the place of school communities required demonstrations of connectedness, of shared ideology and of visible engagement in partnerships. In the absence of these habits, the returns on place-based investments faltered. Resilience promotion was dependent on teachers' ability to oppose time and space forces in favour of place forces.

Conclusion

By using rurality as generative theory, we wanted to understand how forces, agencies and resources, as centrifugal variables, act, move, pull and push when adversity and resilience are centred in a discussion. We presented evidence of how three schools in the same rural setting defied entropy to indicate "activism in communities" (Balfour *et al.*, 2008:95). We concur that, in comparison with other case schools in the STAR investigation, the intensity (Balfour *et al.*, 2008:98) of adversities and of resource scarcity significantly contributed to time- and space-related barriers that are synonymous with rurally placed schools. We conclude that teachers' prioritisation of needs, awareness of available resources, and embracing of place habits are factors that enabled gradual "transformation or even change in rural environs" (Balfour *et al.*, 2008:101). Through identifying with their school place, teachers started to become connected and to engage with school place politics and ideologies. Agency in this context meant that teachers actively pursued place-based relationships that had the potential to provide resources in order to counteract risk.

Time and space remained as forces pulling teachers away from resilience support. This meant that resilience agency to provide support via partnerships was protracted, as teachers were required to navigate against these forces by using place and agency centrifugally for support implementation and maintenance.

Habits based on agency and place (*i.e.* connectedness in partnerships for resource sharing; fervent persistence in engagement; joint ideology and politics of prioritised need, and resource mobilisation) constituted the core of such force navigation. The relationship between space and time was transformed by commitment and connection to place together with agency, thus extending the use of available resources.

When we view Photographs 1 and 2 we see the absence of teachers who do not stay where they work, and we notice neglect that accompanies poverty. We also see the presence of engaged teachers and school community members. The images carry with them a unified ideology to confront risks, to use resources, to connect and to partner. We see teachers' resolve and desire, and of successes involving referral systems, counselling sessions, literacy interventions, networking, social grant applications and access to health services. We observed not only harsh adversity, but also tough resilience in rural education.

Endnotes

1. STAR (Supportive Teachers, Assets and Resilience). Twelve schools and 74 teachers (11 male, 63 female) in three South African provinces participated.
2. STAR sites and participants: Twelve schools and 74 teachers (11 male, 63 female) in three South African provinces.
3. Bagherpour (2010); Beukes (2010); De Jager (2010); Dempster (2010); Joubert (2010); Loots (2011); McCallaghan (2007); Mnguni (2006); Odendaal, (2006); Olivier (2009).

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