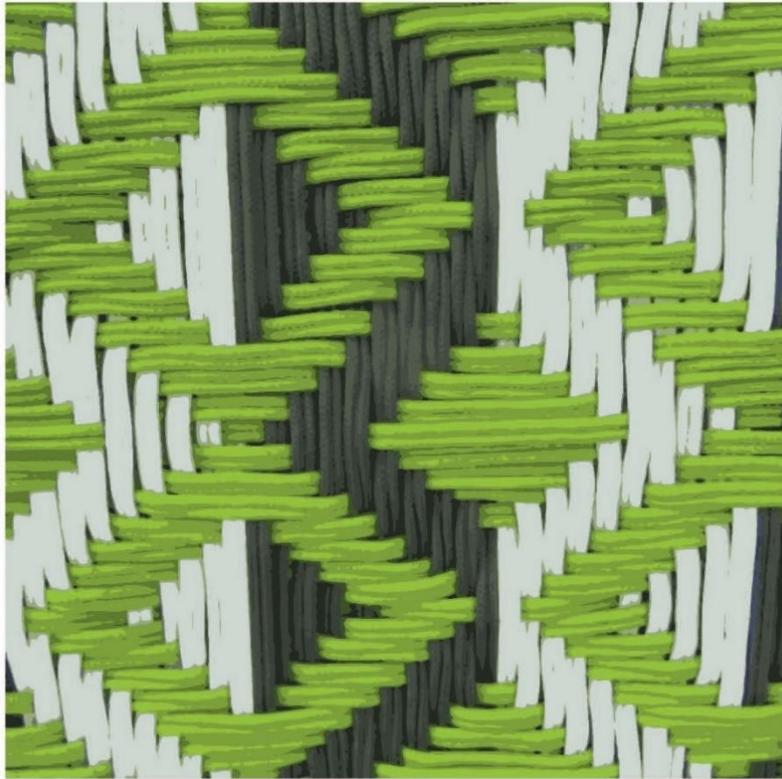


# THE ISITHEBE SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS INTERVENTION STUDY

Social connectedness as pathway to teacher resilience in school communities in  
challenged education settings



# ISITHEBE

**Funded by The Synergos Institute**

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the Isithebe Social Connectedness Intervention Study was to investigate social connectedness as a pathway to teacher resilience in challenged education spaces. Objectives included establishing the (i) teacher resilience and (ii) social connectedness of primary school teachers working in school spaces characterised by severe socio-economic deprivation, (iii) exploring the effect of an intentional social connectedness intervention with teachers on their resilience, and (iv) refining a piloted social connectedness intervention to bolster the teacher resilience of in-service teachers confronted with extreme challenges. Theoretically, the study is informed by knowledge on: social connectedness, - capital and affiliation; teacher resilience and socio-ecological resilience, resilience and poverty and socio-ecological resilience.

Six primary schools from lower socio-economic neighbourhoods in the Eastern Cape, South Africa were purposively included and teacher participants (n=36, female=34, male=2) from these schools were conveniently sampled. Transferability of findings is delimited to (i) education spaces characterised by similar structural disparity challenges, (ii) primary schools, (iii) mostly female teachers over 40 years of age with a range of years of teaching experience, and (iv) tertiary teaching qualifications.

A concurrent mixed method intervention design was used to generate teacher-data over-time and in-depth, rather than at breadth and to scale. Over a year time-frame, and following a Participatory Reflection and Action approach, a social connectedness intervention was co-constructed with teacher participants and implemented over a six-month period. Quantitative and qualitative textual and visual data were collected at baseline, during the process of the intervention and post-intervention. Whereas qualitative data, documented as verbatim transcriptions and visual data, were thematically analysed, quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 25. The piloted intervention was refined and is available as the Isithebe Social Connectedness Intervention with an accompanying Isithebe Kit.

The teacher resilience and social connectedness of in-service teachers from the six primary schools in schools challenged by severe deprivation was high – pre- and post-intervention. Following the Isithebe Social Connectedness Intervention, both quantitative and qualitative over-time teacher data showed an increase in social connectedness as well as teacher resilience scores of participating teachers. Qualitative and quantitative data were mixed during the results interpretation phase as this gives the combined strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research as researchers can use the strength of one method of research to counter the weaknesses of the other method.

*It was not unexpected* that the social connectedness of participating teachers would be high as it has been established that social connectedness (with concomitant social support) mirror culturally salient epistemologies inherent to interdependent worldviews, including Afrocentric indigenous knowledge systems.

*It was unexpected* that teacher resilience of participating teachers was high despite them working amidst severe deprivation. Following participation in the Isithebe Social Connectedness Intervention teacher professionalism significantly increased, as did teacher emotion, teacher motivation, teacher sense of coherence, self efficacy and teacher efficacy.

We theorise that, in the presence of social connectedness, teachers use a range of social connectedness competences to give and receive implicit and explicit social support across relational systems. In this regard, teachers bridge social efforts beyond proximal teacher-student and teacher-teacher relationships when they strengthen their social connectedness competence. When teachers in challenged spaces deliberately connected with others, they both assist those in their immediate and socially connected life-worlds, as well as turn to others for support when their burden as teachers become unbearable on their own.

Teacher occupational wellbeing is plausibly informed by being engaged in reciprocal social support and by being well-trained professionals. As a pathway to teacher resilience social connectedness support teachers to (i) be proud of their identities as professionals who provide quality education, (ii) participate in opportunities to develop themselves professionally, and (iii) enjoy their work (occupational wellbeing).

With regards to teacher resilience knowledge, we posit that quality education and occupational wellbeing are not only indicators of wellbeing. The quest to 'be a good teacher' may point to these indicators also functioning as pathways to teacher resilience: commitment to provide quality education and the pursuit to experience job satisfaction may drive teachers in distress to opt for resilience-enabling strategies.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

A postcolonial society in transformation, such as South Africa, is characterised by extreme inequality (Abott-Chapman, 2011). Nowhere is this more obvious than in the continued unevenness of education pathways. A challenged educational space results in fewer opportunities due to resource constraints, with few services and avenues available to develop human and social capital (Diale, Pillay & Fritz, 2014). World-wide teaching is rated as one of the most stressful 21<sup>st</sup> century professions (Kyriacou, 2001). But for teachers in a Global South space, who are faced with severe and chronic hardship, feelings of isolation from others and being disconnected to support add to the known burden on teachers and increase chances for teacher burnout, teacher attrition and lower quality education.

This report provides an overview of a Synergos Institute-funded study by the Centre for the Study of Resilience, University of Pretoria aimed at exploring social connectedness as pathway to teacher resilience in challenged educational spaces<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> **Teacher resilience** is relevant when there is severe adversity, Given such challenges negative outcomes are predicted: teacher attrition, low quality education and low levels of wellbeing. Teacher resilience shows to systemic

The study provides evidence of prolonged, in-depth engagement with a small sample of teachers from a handful of primary schools in South Africa focussing on exploring the related issues at *depth*, as well as *over time*, rather than at scale. Objectives included establishing the (i) teacher resilience and (ii) social connectedness of primary school teachers working in school spaces characterised by severe socio-economic deprivation, (iii) exploring the effect of an intentional social connectedness intervention with teachers on their resilience, and (iv) refining a piloted social connectedness intervention to bolster the teacher resilience of in-service teachers confronted with extreme challenges. The report needs to be read together with the *Isithebe Social Connectedness Intervention Manual* (Appendix A).

Teachers from participating schools decided on the name *Imbumba Yabafundiso Ntsapho*<sup>2</sup> to denote the teacher-researcher group for the study. This group established a WhatsApp group as a social media platform for virtual connection with each other across schools, individuals, teachers and researchers, and between Port Elizabeth and Pretoria. The *Isithebe*<sup>3</sup> intervention is the research outcome of the participatory engagement of the *Imbumba Yabafundiso Ntsapho*-group who co-developed and implemented the intervention.

This report provides an overview of the Isithebe study, including the intervention development and intervention processes, sampling, qualitative and quantitative measures used, data analysis and results.

### 3. SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS AS A PATHWAY TO SUPPORT TEACHER RESILIENCE IN CHALLENGED PRIMARY SCHOOL SETTINGS

This study addresses the need to build a collective body of knowledge on social connectedness as it pertains to teacher resilience as a way to bolster positive educational outcomes and counter structural disparity and inequality in a post-colonial educational space. While we have a rather good understanding of the benefits of social connectedness, the impact of social connectedness on teacher resilience in challenged contexts is far less well explored. At a time when the contemporary landscape of teaching is inhabited with persisting government policy reforms that have increased teachers' work complexity and emotional workload, exploring in greater

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pathways that enable 'better than expected' outcomes for educators – despite continued hardship. Teacher resilience is indicated by the presence of unpredicted, positive outcomes, namely educator job satisfaction and wellbeing, educator retention, and high quality education. One socio-ecological pathway which could support teacher resilience is **social connectedness**, rather than social isolation or exclusion. Social connectedness refers to meaningful relationships across work-life roles: family and personal friends, wider groups and communities we belong to, work colleagues, neighbours and the various groups.

<sup>2</sup> An isiXhosa phrase signifying 'strong teacher relationships'.

<sup>3</sup> The social connectedness intervention with teachers is named *Isithebe* – signifying the value of the *eating mat, or wooden tray* (isithebe) for both isiXhosa and isiZulu South Africans. For example, amaXhosa sometimes put the dish or meat on a large woven mat in front of the people to help themselves. They do not use a tray to serve food, a dish of food or a beaker of amahewu is just brought by hand and put in front of the people and they eat or drink from it. Isithebe is therefore a symbol of bringing family together. Of connecting people. Of preventing isolation. Isithebe shows nurturing, trust, comfort, care and support, as well as deep interest in one another.

depth the nature of resilience in teachers as a relational concept from a social-ecological perspective is important (Gu, 2014).

A resilience lens may lead to positive education outcomes given inequality (Ebersöhn, 2017). A systems approach emphasises the importance of exploring teachers' inner and external professional worlds to understand why many are still committed and passionate about making a difference and continue to do so. Drawing upon research evidence from teacher and school improvement, an emphasis on the improvement in the quality of teachers and teaching must be understood within the social, cultural and organisational environments of the school (Gu, 2018). The complexity and demand of the teaching profession, as well as the consequences thereof, are well-documented (Castro, Kelly & Shih, 2010; Gu, 2018; Mansfield, Ebersöhn, Beltman & Loots, 2018). Individuals engage collectively in bidirectional, transactional processes so that an ecology can support positive adjustment (Ebersöhn, 2019).

Global North countries have developed economies, where the education system has benefited from investment in infrastructure, teacher training, technology and resources. Research on socio-ecological risk factors and protective resources involved in teacher resilience reports similar factors across micro and meso systems. However, there were more differences in context at exo and macrosystem levels, where there was greater variation in country-specific health, welfare and education systems/policies (Mansfield et al., 2018). In Australia, professional staff outside schools have been shown to play a part in encouraging early career teachers (Le Cornu, 2013), and school psychologists can provide various forms of support (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011). In South Africa, chronic poverty is widespread and compounded by unemployment and prolonged health risks and resilience required drawing on available and unique cultural and social resources, such as community building, developing partnerships, mobilising unused resources and applying for social development grants (Ebersöhn, 2019).

Ecological contexts are made from varying degrees of proximity to the teacher, including the microsystem (the teacher's immediate environment), the mesosystem (interactions between microsystems), macrosystem (underlying mainstream societal beliefs and values), and exosystem (neighborhood and community settings in which teacher lives). These levels of the environment interact and transact with each other over time in influencing development and adaptation (Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000). In this regard, teacher resilience addresses risk by maximising assets through a dynamic interplay between personal, relational, and broader community-specific education systems (Theron, 2012; Mansfield et al., 2018).

Positive adjustment, in the face of adversity, requires a dynamic process that supports positive opportunities available in the given social system at a specific point in time (Beltman & Mansfield, 2018). Resilience processes have been universally linked to problem-solving, attachment, meaning-making and agency. Although these characteristics are common to all individuals, these processes are shaped by the

contextual realities of the individual, as well as cultural values (Theron, 2016). Even though social ecologies offer informal and formal resources, use of these resources is often diverse (Van Rensburg, Theron & Rothmann, 2018). Variations in resource mobilisation are related to perceived availability of informal and formal resources (Ungar, 2012).

The conceptual framework which guided the study incorporates the micro and macro ecologies that impact on teacher resilience in different contexts, and the nature of risks and resources to support teacher resilience in each context (Mansfield et al., 2018).

A particular strength of the social-ecological lens is that it does not assume that the social and relational context of work is a guaranteed asset or protective factor. The shift in focus on the reciprocal capacity of the individual teacher and the quality of the multiple reciprocating systems offers a more powerful and nuanced lens to inform knowledge of teacher resilience (Gu, 2018). The development and monitoring of an intentional social connectedness intervention offer a nuanced understanding of how and why social connectedness may enable teacher resilience in this specific context.

Ebersohn's generative theory (2019, 2012) of Relationship-Resourced Resilience (RRR) expands on the ecological nature of social capital by proposing that social resilience operates collectively. RRR highlights the importance of connection, support-seeking and interpersonal relationships in resilience processes. The interconnected web of social resources promises benefits of sociocultural beliefs and structures and implies resilience-enabling inclusion and access to social resources. Living on the outside of such social connectedness excludes individuals, families and communities from being benefitting from social support.

#### 4. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical clearance was obtained for the study from the Faculty of Education's Research and Ethics Committee at the University of Pretoria (reference number EP 06/11/01). The research study adhered to the guidelines set out by the American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct Manual (American Psychological Association, 2017). The researchers adhered to the ethical principles of voluntary participation, confidentiality, protection from harm and informed consent.

An informed consent form was set out in accordance with the criteria specified in the Health Professionals Council of South Africa's ethical rules of conduct for practitioners (HPCSA, 2011). At the first meeting in September 2018 researchers explained the purpose of the research to participating teachers. All participants signed a consent form before the commencement of the research. *All participants consented to the use of visual data where their faces would be recognisable.*

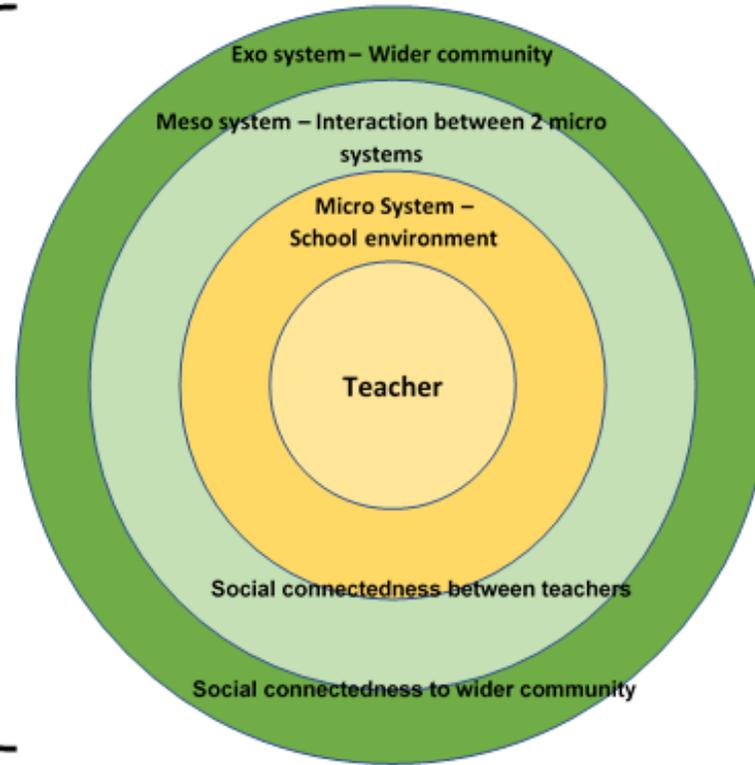
**Challenged educational space**

Teacher situated in context of chronic and cumulative risk

**Expected negative outcomes**

Teacher burnout and distress  
Teacher attrition  
Low quality education

Social connectedness as a pathway to resilience to create better than expected outcomes for teachers – despite continued hardship.



**Asset-based approach/‘better than expected’ outcomes**

Assets pre-exist in high-risk ecologies

Protective factor for teachers in high-risk ecologies is the ability to use relationships to access resources

**Unexpected positive outcomes**

Teacher job satisfaction and wellbeing  
Teacher retention  
High quality education

The study proposes that social connectedness (a person’s subjective sense of having meaningful relationships with others in the social world) is a potential pathway to teacher resilience enabling ‘better than expected outcomes (Teacher job satisfaction and wellbeing, teacher retention and high quality education).

Researcher contact details were provided on the consent form to ensure that any questions from participants, regarding the research, could be answered by the researcher directly. To protect the confidentiality of participants, there were clear operating procedures for the research team to handle and maintain all data and store it in a secure manner. As per the University of Pretoria policy, the data is digitally archived and will be securely stored for a period of 15 years.

## 5. MEASURES

### 5.1 Qualitative measures

Qualitative data generation was informed by Participatory Reflection and Action (PRA). PRA allows participants to see themselves as experts of their experience (Chambers, 1994) – matching the aim to obtain an in-depth understanding of how social connectedness may function as pathway to teacher resilience. Social development practitioners emphasise the valuable role of indigenous knowledge and involvement in the planning and implementation of social support and development (Bar-On & Prinsen, 1999; Busza, 2004; Ebersöhn, Eloff & Ferreira, 2016). The study incorporated the principles of PRA by creating a platform for participants to freely express their thoughts and ideas around social connectedness at every stage of the data collection, as well as the intervention. The study generated qualitative data at various time points: (i) pre-intervention, (ii) post-intervention, and (iii) process data.

At pre-and post-intervention time points Participatory Reflection and Action (PRA) informed group activities to address the following questions:

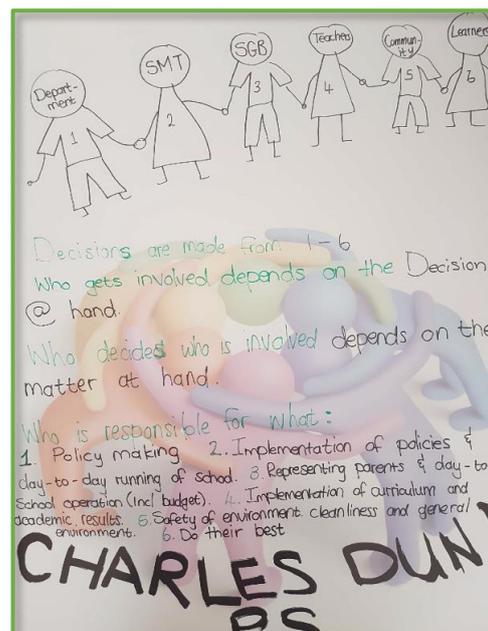
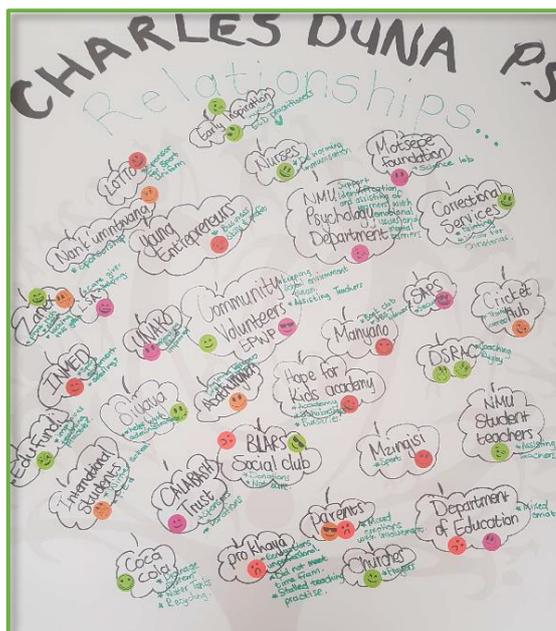
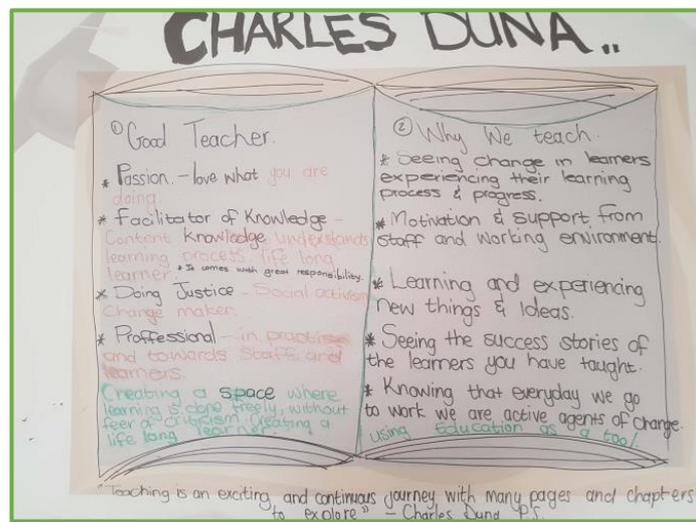
1. *What does it mean to be a good teacher? What helps you continue being a teacher?*
2. *Write down the relationships you have as a teacher in your school community? Which relationships help you to be a good teacher? Which relationships make it difficult for you to be a teacher? Paste smiley face emoticons next to which relationships help you be a good teacher and paste sad face emoticons next to which relationships make it difficult for you to be a good teacher.*
3. *Describe decision-making processes in the school-community relationships you have as a teacher.*

For these pre- and post-intervention data generation sessions teachers per school were grouped together (thus six groups of teachers in the venue). Researchers used the three questions above to prompt teacher participation in school-groups. Teachers consulted in their school-groups. Upon consensus on an answer, each teacher group would plot their school-answer on a poster. Each school-group would then verbally present their collective school answer to all other school-groups. The qualitative data consisted of (i) audio-recorded and verbatim transcribed oral school-group poster presentations, as well as (ii) observation and field notes (documented as both visual and textual data).

To generate qualitative data on the intervention process teachers were asked to verbally answer and reflect on questions below. Teachers could also opt to write these answers in a group diary. The WhatsApp group was used to prompt teachers to remember to discuss these questions. At the post-intervention session, these questions were also used in the PRA-group activity mode to generate summative responses:

1. *How do these Isithebe gatherings help you to be a teacher?*
2. *How do these Isithebe gatherings help you with school projects?*
3. *How do these Isithebe gatherings help you to be involved with other role-players in the school-community?*

Photographs 1-3 illustrates some of these qualitative data generation moments with teachers from one of the participating schools (School A) during the pre-intervention session in September 2018.



Photographs 1-3: Qualitative data generation, pre-intervention session

## 5.2 Quantitative measures

Quantitative data were generated at pre- and post-intervention time points with questionnaires completed by individual participating teachers. Quantitative measures used in the study include selected items from relevant existing scales (ENTRÉE, OPHI & REPPSI; see Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 for detailed discussions on these scales).

### 5.2.1 The Teacher Resilience / ENTRÉE scale

The Teacher Resilience Questionnaire include items from eight scales with domains of teacher professionalism (TR-Prof), teacher emotion (TR-Emot), teacher motivation (TR-Mot), teacher sense of coherence (TR-Soc) (Peixoto, Wosnitza, Pipa, Morgan & Cefai, 2018; Watt & Richardson, 2007), and contextual items (Coetzee, 2013). Responses to the statements of each of the domains are recorded on a seven-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = 'Do not agree at all' to 7 = 'Strongly agree'). Participants are asked to indicate their confidence on a Likert-type scale (ranging from 1 = 'Absolutely not confident' to 7 = 'Strongly confident') (Morgan, 2011).

Central to **teacher professionalism** (TR-Prof) is the teachers' ability to set and define professional goals, as well as aspects such as commitment, organisational and teaching skills (Peixoto et al., 2018). **Teacher emotion** (TR-Emot) includes aspects essential to resilience, including humour, enjoyment as well as emotional regulation (Peixoto et al., 2018). **Teacher motivation** (TR-Mot) measures teachers' primary motivations to teach as well as combine aspects such as optimism, intrinsic motivation and enthusiasm (Peixoto et al., 2018; Watt & Richardson, 2007). **Teacher sense of coherence** (TR-Soc) investigates coping strategies teachers employ in order to understand and manage challenging situations (Peixoto et al., 2018). Efficacy domains include self efficacy (denoted in the measure as Resilience) and teacher efficacy (TeachEff). **Self efficacy** signifies teacher ability to bounce back when encountering challenges, as well as a set of strategies employed to adapt to difficult situations (Morgan, 2011; Peixoto et al., 2018). **Teacher efficacy** assesses teacher beliefs regarding their own behaviour and ability in the teaching profession (Morgan, 2011; Peixoto et al., 2018). The process of interaction between contextual factors and teacher characteristics is central in the working framework utilised to understand teacher resilience (Peixoto et al., 2018). **Contextual factors** play an essential role in the sustaining of teacher resilience (Peixoto et al., 2018). Contextual items in the *Teacher Resilience Questionnaire* measured the contextual protective resources teachers draw from to adapt to and overcome challenging situations. These include both factors inside and outside of the school. The amount of school or governmental leadership support, as well as encouragement from family members and colleagues (using other teachers as a collective problem-solving network), has been shown to be crucial in teacher resilience (Coetzee, 2013). Accordingly, contextual items investigated these factors in the *Teacher Resilience Questionnaire*. Contextual items also measured factors which sustain teachers in their profession such as showing empathy to or instilling hope in learners, having a sense of accomplishment in their

work by employing problem-solving strategies, a positive attitude, and drawing from their spirituality (Coetzee, 2013).

### 5.2.2 The REPSSI social connectedness scale

The REPSSI social connectedness scale is drawn from OPHI's operational definition of social connectedness that assesses external and internal indicators of social connectedness and isolation (Zavaleta, Samuel & Mills, 2014; Bandeira & Mazibuko, 2017). For the purpose of the study Questions 6, 7, 8 and 9, signified internal social connectedness, were selected. **Internal indicators** of social connectedness refer to an individual's subjective perception of his/her own degree of interaction in the social environment.

OPHI's conceptualisation of social connectedness builds on multidisciplinary work that explores external and internal aspects of social connectedness and proposes a conceptual framework and a series of indicators to measure social connectedness. The scale has no empirical evidence for reliability and validity measures. However, the conceptual scales provide solid ground for the construction of basic internationally comparable indicators that measure specific aspects of social connectedness and isolation. OPHI's conceptualisation and measurement of social connectedness draw from social capital, social exclusion and social cohesion literature, as well as psychological theories of loneliness (Zavaleta et al., 2014).

## 6. SAMPLING

### 6.1 Sampling of schools

Schools were purposively sampled to represent schools in a challenged educational space where teachers face structural and environmental challenges. 'Challenged educational space' was indicated by schools meeting the requirements of the Department of Basic Education classification of Quintile 3 schools - indicating that no school fees may be charged. Six primary schools in the Nelson Mandela Metropole, Eastern Cape, were purposively sampled as characteristic of schools in challenged socio-economic spaces in South Africa. The six primary schools are characterised as public schools in an urban area (Nelson Mandela Metropole) with high st to teacher ratios as indicated by the annual Government Gazette published by the Department of Education (Department of Education, 2018). Excluded from this sample of South African schools are: secondary schools, rural and peri-urban schools, schools in middle and high income spaces.

Following intervention design principles, it was planned that *at least* one of the schools would opt out of the intervention phase and serve as control school. Following a delayed intervention model the intervention could then be implemented with teachers from this school following post-intervention testing. However, none of the schools opted for a delayed intervention model and, consequently, there were no control

schools. As a result, there were no comparative results on teacher resilience and social connectedness in the absence of the intervention with teachers.

## 6.2 Recruitment and sampling of participants

Table 1 provides an overview of the sample of participating teachers. The following process was followed for the convenience sampling of teachers as participants. A Department of Basic Education manager assisted with contact details of principals and teachers in the selected schools. The researchers sent WhatsApp messages to invite principals and teachers to participate in the study. As explained in Section 4 on Ethical Considerations, at the September 2018 pre-intervention meeting, the researchers explained the purpose and processes of the study and invited teachers to consent to participate.

**Table 1:** Sample of participating teachers

SCHOOL	WOMEN	MEN	TOTAL
A	4	0	4
B	5	0	5
C	3	2	5
D	8	0	8
E	2	0	2
F	12	0	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	34	2	36

Table 2 in Appendix B (at the back of this report) gives an overview of the demographic details of participants. From this table, it is clear that the majority of participating teachers were female over 40 years of age. Only four teachers in the sample were under the age of 40. Sixteen teachers had less than 15 years of teaching experience, eight teachers had between 15-24 years of experience, and 10 teachers had more than 24 years of experience. All of the teachers had formal teaching qualifications at tertiary level. Four teachers had postgraduate qualifications.

As is evident in Table 3, thirty-six teachers were present at the pre-intervention data collection in September 2018. Thirty teachers attended the intervention training in March 2019, twenty-one teachers attended the teacher-researcher meeting in May 2019, 30 teachers attended the teacher-researcher meeting in July 2019, and 15 teachers attended the post-intervention in September 2019. Seven additional post-intervention questionnaires were collected from teachers via email, constituting 22 completed pre- and post-intervention questionnaires.

**Table 3:** Teacher attendance: intervention implementation

	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	School F	TOTAL
<b>September '18</b>	4	5	5	8	2	12	<b>36</b>
<b>March '19</b>	5	2	5	4	2	12	<b>30</b>
<b>May '19</b>	2	4	5	3	1	6	<b>21</b>
<b>July '19</b>	3	3	5	6	0	13	<b>30</b>
<b>September '19</b>	2	3	0	8	0	7	<b>20</b>

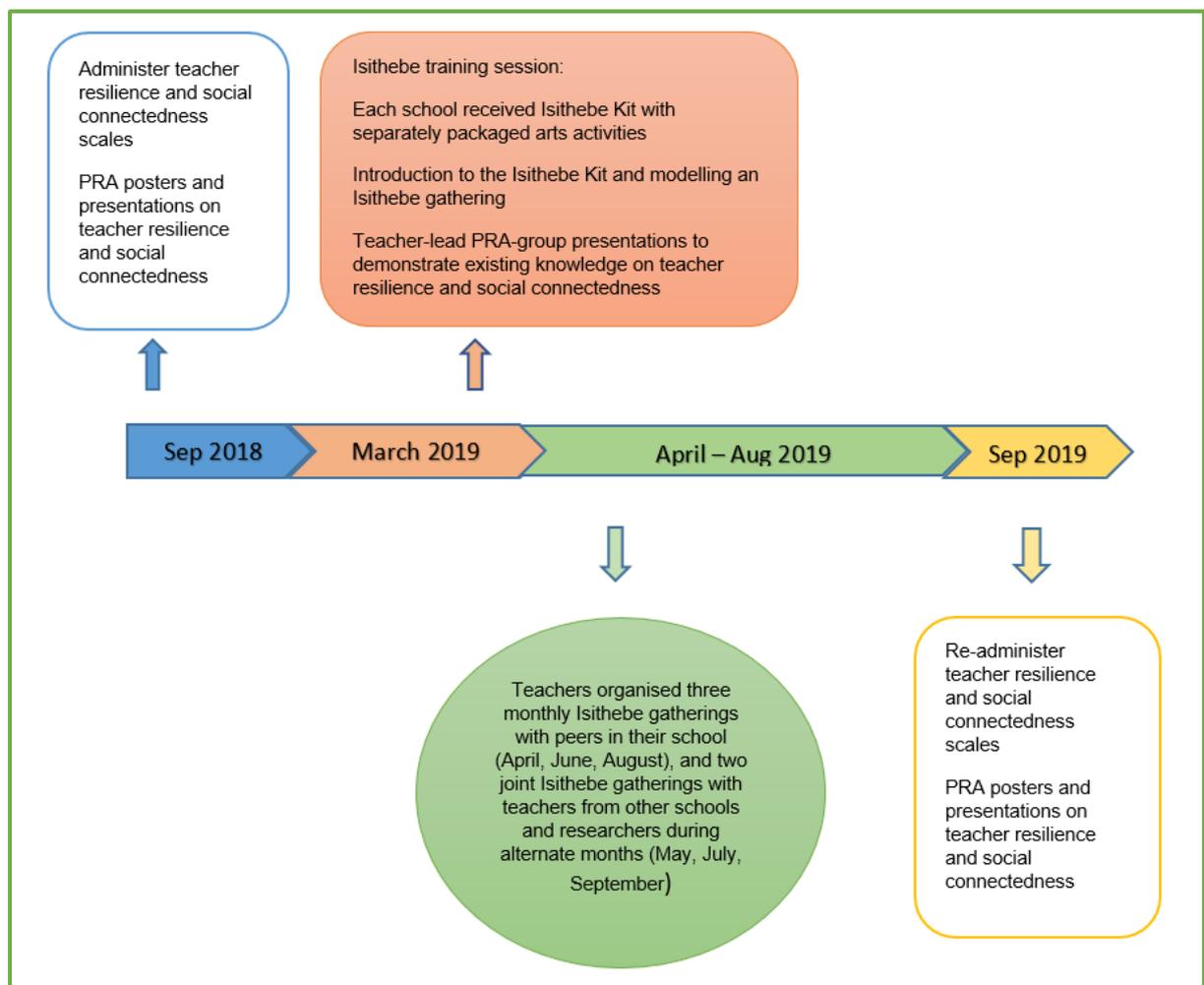
Some teachers who were present at the pre-intervention data collection did not participate in the intervention (n=2), and some of the teachers who participated in the intervention were not present at the pre-intervention (n=5) session.

## 7. THE ISITHEBE INTERVENTION

### 7.1 The Isithebe intervention process

As indicated in Figure 1 and in the accompanying *Isithebe Social Connectedness Intervention Manual*, the intervention study was conducted over a 12-month period from September 2018 to September 2019 - including pre- and post-intervention testing. The baseline assessment (with quantitative and qualitative measures) took place in September 2018. The intervention training session with participating teachers occurred in March 2019. The Isithebe intervention training consisted of a half-day (six hours) session with teachers from all six schools. Over the next six months the six intervention sessions occurred – with every second session a joint session with teachers from all schools and researchers meeting in a central venue (Usually the relevant district office of the Department of Basic Education). The post-intervention assessment took place in September 2019.

For the implementation of the intervention teachers in each school organised three school-based Isithebe gatherings with peers in their school (April, June, and August). Researchers organised three joint Isithebe gatherings at the district office of the Eastern Cape Department of Basic Education with teachers from all schools, researchers and DBE-officials during alternate months (May, July, and September). The social connectedness focus of the school-based sessions was on the bonding of teachers within a particular school place. The focus of the joint bi-monthly sessions was on bridging of social connectedness of teachers across schools, with officials in the local education sector and with researchers.



**Figure 1:** Intervention process

## 7.2 The use of art-activities in the Isithebe intervention

The Isithebe intervention was designed to leverage the benefits of art therapy techniques during gatherings of teachers. When teachers engage in art-activities social connectedness is enabled through fellowship, relaxation and creativity. The objectives of the Isithebe art-activities in the intervention are to:

- Intentionally establish and/or enhance social connectedness between teachers within and across schools, as well as in other areas of teacher’s lives;
- Establish a routine of deliberate social connection amongst teachers in their varied circles;
- Include social activities to extend to building relationships with others outside of work colleagues; and
- Encourage building relationships outside of school-group meetings.

The common ground for all art-activities includes the focus on non-verbal communication and creative processes together with the facilitation of a trusting, safe environment within which people can build trusting relationships (Backos & Pagon,

2011). The value of art as a means of personal expression is to communicate feelings, rather than aiming at aesthetically pleasing end products to be judged by external standards. This means of expression is available to everyone, not just the artistically gifted (Liebmann, 2004).

During the intervention training with teachers in March of 2019, each school received an 'Isithebe Kit' with arts and crafts materials and separately packaged art activities for each meeting. Instructions were attached to each activity package on how to use the arts and crafts. Each activity was framed around building relationships with colleagues and with others outside of work. Photograph 4 shows an Isithebe Kit with separately packaged art activities received by each school.



**Photograph 4:** Isithebe Kit with arts and crafts separately packaged for art activity per session

Photographs 5-6 below show participating teachers during Isithebe intervention sessions from September 2018 to September 2019.



**Photographs 5-6:** Participating teachers during intervention sessions from September 2018 - 2019



**Photographs 7-8:** Teachers across primary schools who participated in the intervention

### 7.3 Pre-intervention session: 21 September 2018

Besides formal processes to consult on informed consent for participation, teacher baseline data was collected in September 2018. Baseline data included quantitative and qualitative measures (as discussed in the previous section of this report), as well as demographic questionnaires. The demographic questionnaire included information on teacher gender, age, home language, grade and subject taught, as well as the duration of the teaching career.

Photographs 9-14 show teachers in the process of generating qualitative data during the pre-intervention session



**Photographs 9-12:** Qualitative data generation during the pre-intervention session



**Photographs 13-14:** Qualitative data generation during the pre-intervention session (continued)

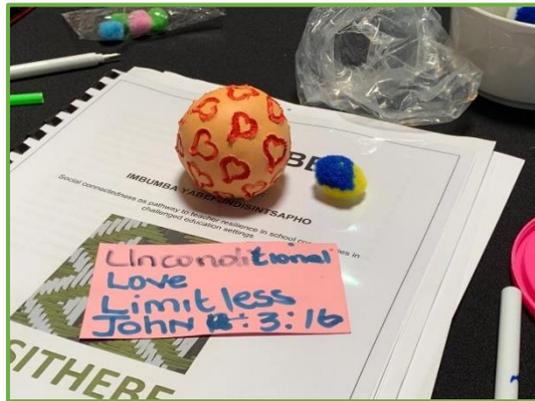
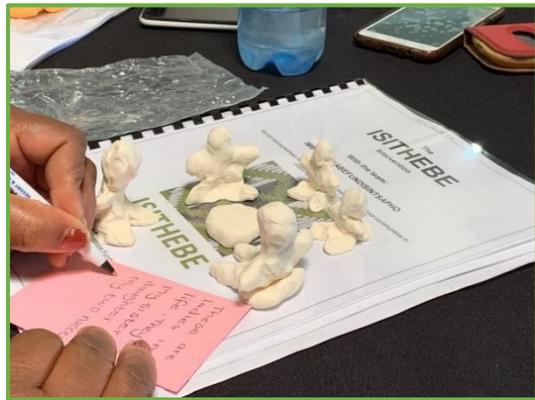
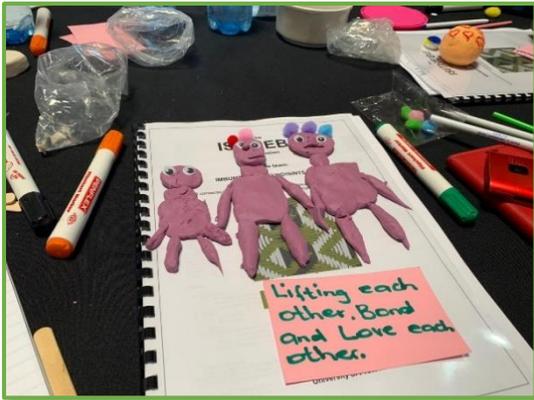
#### 7.4 Intervention training: 15 March 2019

Thirty teachers participated in the Isithebe training – see photographs 15-24. The training objectives included: (i) a theoretical introduction to a need for evidence on teacher resilience, social connectedness and social isolation; (ii) an orientation to the Isithebe Kit, (iii) modelling an Isithebe gathering, (iv) consultation and consensus on meeting dates, and (v) schools tasking individual teachers with Isithebe roles and tasks. The intervention training included teacher-lead PRA-group presentations to demonstrate existing knowledge in each domain. Each school received an Isithebe Kit, which contained:

- The *Isithebe Social Connectedness Intervention Manual* (each teacher also received their own manual – this is an additional manual for the school);
- Laminated sheet with dates for monthly Isithebe gatherings;
- Three activity packages with laminated instructions per activity; and
- 3 x Checkers R200.00 vouchers (total value of R600.00 per school). Thus R200.00 per Isithebe gathering to buy refreshments and snacks for the monthly Isithebe gatherings.



**Photographs 15-16:** Teachers engaged during the intervention training in March 2019



**Photographs 17-24:** Teachers engaged during the intervention training in March 2019 (continued)

## 7.5 Relationship Voucher Box: 15 April 2019

During this first school-based teacher meeting teachers used Isithebe Kit craft materials and glue from the designated activity package to decorate boxes. Teachers then chose relationship vouchers to place inside their individual boxes. Over the next month, teachers were encouraged to select three of the vouchers and do one relationship-building idea in a week. Photographs 25-32 show WhatsApp images teachers shared of this session.



**Photographs 25-30:** Teacher WhatsApp images of the Relations Voucher Box session



**Photographs 31-32:** Teacher WhatsApp images of the Relations Voucher Box session (continued)

### 7.6 First joint schools-researchers Isithebe gathering: 27 May 2019

Twenty-one teachers participated in this joint session. The meeting was divided into two parts: an ice-breaker activity followed by generating process PRA-data per school.

For the ice-breaker, the Friendship Survival Kit was used – depicted in Photographs 33-36. Each teacher received a small gift bag containing items/tokens, along with a label explaining each token. Per school-based group teachers then discussed what role their colleagues and friends play in their lives. After the ice-breaker, teachers were asked to work in their groups to present posters. Each school presents their answer to teachers from all schools. Each group receives three blank posters and markers to answer each of the following questions in turn:

- *How do these gatherings help you to be a teacher?*
- *How do these gatherings help you with school projects?*
- *How do these gatherings help you to be involved with other role-players in the school-community?*



**Photographs 33-34:** Friendship Survival Kit activity and process PRA-data generation



**Photographs 35-36:** Friendship Survival Kit activity and process PRA-data generation (continued)

Teachers were not deeply engaged in this discussion activity. The ice breaker did not call for hands-on creativity. The team decided that, in a revised format, this activity needs to be replaced with another art-activity. In the post-pilot revision of the manual, the Growing Together activity replaced the Friendship Survival Kit as a means to use a hands-on experience to enable experiences of engagement that signify unity and dynamic growth when connected.

For the Growing Together activity, each teacher receives an empty pot and craft materials (letters, beads, glitter, feathers, glue) to decorate the pot. Teachers are asked to use symbols of unity, togetherness, friendship in their designs. After the educators have decorated the pots, they are each given a succulent plant and potting-soil to plant in their decorated pot<sup>4</sup>. Teachers discuss in school-based groups the symbols of connectedness they used to decorate their pots and the symbolism of perseverance through unity in their own lives.

## 7.7 Teacher Circle Recipe Book: 10 June 2019

During this second school-based session teachers used Isithebe Kit craft materials and glue to decorate the outside of blank exercise books. Per school teachers then wrote down favourite recipes (which they enjoy making for friends and family) in each other's decorated recipe books. Photographs 37-42 show WhatsApp images teachers shared of this session.

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<sup>4</sup> Succulent plants are specialists at absorbing, retaining and efficiently using water. This particular characteristic has allowed them to survive in even the most desolate and water-deprived corners of the earth. These resilient plants are reminders that even the most difficult situations can be endured when planted in space of connectedness with others.

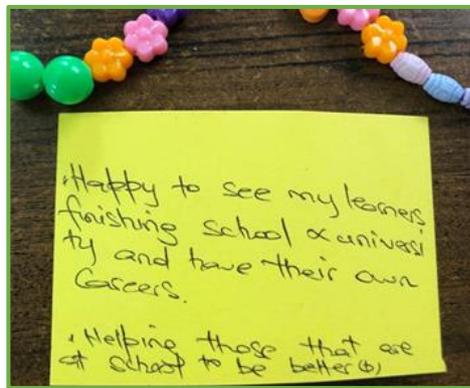
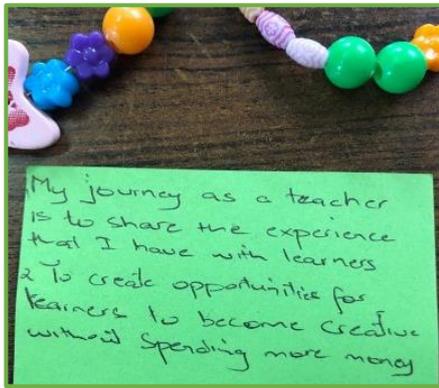


**Photographs 37-42:** Teacher WhatsApp images the Teacher Circle Recipe book session

### 7.8 Second joint teacher-researcher Isithebe gathering: 29 July 2019

Thirty teachers participated in the second joint Isithebe intervention session – depicted in Photographs 43-50. The ice-breaker art-activity involved teachers making either

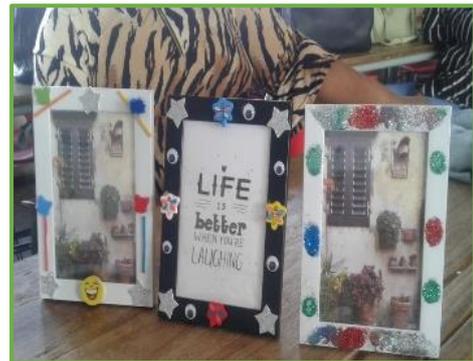
bracelets or other items of jewellery of their choosing to represent their journey as a teacher. Each teacher received a bag containing an assortment of beads, string, a pair of scissors, and a small piece of cardboard. Teachers wrote brief descriptions of this journey on a piece of cardboard.



**Photographs 43-50:** Bracelet activity during the second joint Isithebe intervention session

## 7.9 Framing important teacher relationships: 18 August 2019

During the last school-based Isithebe intervention sessions teachers again used a specific art-activity package in the Isithebe Kit. Each teacher received a blank photo frame and craft materials with instructions to decorate the frame. Teachers then placed photographs of a person signifying an important relationship in the decorated frames. Teachers explained to their peers the importance of this relationship. Photographs 51-56 show WhatsApp images teachers shared of this session



**Photographs 51-56:** Teacher WhatsApp images of the Important Relationship Frames session

## 7.10 Post-intervention data collection: 21 September 2019

The same quantitative and qualitative data was collected during the pre-intervention and post-intervention stage – refer to Photographs 57-62. As indicated in the Sampling section of this report, fifteen teachers participated in the post-intervention session on 21 September 2019 and an additional seven questionnaires were collected via email.

A Synegos Institute partner, Renald Morris, facilitated a session on Bridging Leadership and engaged teachers and researchers a bonding closing dance.



**Photographs 57-62:** Isithebe post-intervention data collection, September 2019

## 8. DATA ANALYSIS

### 8.1 Qualitative data analysis

The qualitative data analysis involved in-case and cross-case inductive thematic analysis of PRA-related data (verbatim transcriptions of school poster-presentations and visual data of PRA-posters) to compare textual and visual data sources. Thematic analysis involves identifying recurring themes or words that reflect core meanings, thus enabling the researcher to explore the phenomenon of interest (Ebersöhn, Eloff & Ferreira, 2016). During initial coding, three different coders each separately coded a sample of verbatim transcriptions. Based on consultation, the coders reached consensus on a coding schedule for inclusion and exclusion criteria for categories, subthemes and themes.

### 8.2 Quantitative data analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to gain a better understanding of the sample population and to determine the frequency of responses to the Likert-scale questions (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2014). Normality tests were run and since it was found that the data was not normally distributed, nonparametric tests were used. Specifically, the Mann-Whitney tests were used to establish differences between groups pre- and post-intervention (Terre Blanche et al., 2014). A level of significance of 5% ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) was used for all statistical tests.

## 9. PRE- AND POST-INTERVENTION RESULTS

### 9.1 Quantitative results

#### 9.1.1 Overview of quantitative results

There were 36 valid and completed social connectedness and teacher resilience questionnaires from the pre-intervention data collection in September of 2018 and 23 valid and completed questionnaires from the post-intervention data collection in September of 2019. The scores below only take into account the participants who completed both the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires.

The baseline scores for teacher resilience and social connectedness of in-service teachers from six primary schools in schools challenged by severe deprivation was high. Quantitative over-time teacher data, following an intentional social connectedness intervention, showed an increase in both the social connectedness and teacher resilience of participating teachers.

*It was not unexpected* that the social connectedness of participating teachers would be high. It is known that social connectedness (with concomitant social support) mirrors culturally salient epistemologies inherent to interdependent worldviews, including Afrocentric indigenous knowledge systems (Ebersöhn, 2019; Letseka, 2013; Owusu-Ansah & Mij, 2013). The baseline measure of high internal social

connectedness of teachers of Afrocentric heritage in this study supports this evidence. Following participation in the social connectedness intervention teacher results showed a significant difference in the increase of their existing high internal social connectedness.

*It was unexpected* that teacher resilience of participating teachers was high. There was a significant difference between pre- and post-intervention with regard to all teacher resilience scales except the contextual scale. Thus, following participation in an intentional social connectedness intervention teacher professionalism was significantly increased, as was their emotion, motivation, sense of coherence, self efficacy and teacher efficacy. Teacher contextual knowledge (teacher lived knowledge of the hardship of the space in which they work) was high before the intervention. This signifies that teachers are aware of the obstacles they face in their daily lives.

### 9.1.2 Social connectedness pre- and post-intervention results

The social connectedness scale scores measure internal items of social connectedness and refer to an individual's subjective perception of his/her own degree of interaction in the social environment. The social connectedness scale consists of four scales with a variety of items related to internal social connectedness. Scale 1 focuses on the self-reported degree of skill one has in building relationships in various areas of life. Scale 2 reveals the extent of social support an individual has in both private and communal spheres. Scale 3 provides insight on an individual's degree of social isolation, while Scale 4 focuses on the presence of trusted individuals in a person's life.

The total score on this test could range from 1 to 66. In the pre-intervention, the mean scores for the whole sample ranged from 36 to 63 with a mean score of 56.50 and a standard deviation of 5.102. *The baseline scores fell within the range of “high social connectedness” before the intervention.*

**Table 4:** Descriptive statistics of social connectedness: pre-intervention

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total Pre Scale Score	36	36	63	56.50	5.102
Scale 1: Building Relationships	34	6	8	7.82	0.459
Scale 2: Social Support	35	14	22	20.37	1.610
Scale 3: Social Isolation	36	7	13	10.56	1.340
Scale 4: Trusted Connections	36	15	22	18.75	1.628

**Table 5:** Descriptive statistics of social connectedness: post-intervention

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total Post Scale Score	23	53	64	60.17	3.243
Scale 1: Building Relationships	23	2	8	7.57	1.376
Scale 2: Social Support	23	17	23	20.91	1.443
Scale 3: Social Isolation	23	9	14	11.09	1.125
Scale 4: Trusted Connections	23	14	22	20.61	1.971

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to compare the pre- and post-intervention scores for the sample. This is the test of choice when samples are related, the sample sizes are relatively small and the assumption of normality does not hold. According to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the majority of the scales were not normally distributed ( $p < 0.05$ ). A p-value lower than 0.05 indicates that the data is not normally distributed.

The results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank tests (see Table 6) showed that *there were statistically significant differences in Social connectedness between pre- and post-intervention with regard to the total scale score*  $Z=-3.377$ ,  $p = 0.001 < 0.05$ , as well as Scale 4: Trusted connections  $Z=-3.137$ ,  $p = 0.002 < 0.05$ . Inspection of the mean scores shows that, for the total scale score, the *mean score increased from 57.30 in the pre-intervention to 60.17 in the post-intervention*. In the Scale 4: Trusted connections, the mean score increased from 18.65 in the pre-intervention to 20.61 in the post-intervention.

**Table 6:** The Wilcoxon signed-rank tests and the corresponding p-values for the social connectedness scale for participants who participated in both the pre- and post-intervention

	Total Scale Score	Scale 1	Scale 2	Scale 3	Scale 4
N	23	22	23	23	23
Pre-test Mean (SD)	57.30 (3.350)	7.77 (.528)	20.48 (1.275)	10.74 (1.096)	18.65 (1.748)
Post-test Mean (SD)	60.17 (3.243)	7.55 (1.405)	20.91 (1.443)	11.09 (1.125)	20.61 (1.971)
Wilcoxon signed-rank test statistic	-3.377	-.425	-1.092	-1.248	-3.137
p-value	.001	.671	.275	.212	.002

### 9.1.3 Teacher resilience pre- and post-intervention results

According to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, about half of the scales were not normally distributed ( $p < 0.05$ ). It was decided to err on the side of caution and use the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test to compare the pre- and post-intervention scores.

**Table 7:** Descriptive statistics of teacher resilience: pre-intervention

	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Pre-TR-Prof</b>	36	10.00	39.00	31.83	6.34	81.62
<b>Pre-TR EMO</b>	36	5.00	26.00	20.81	4.54	80.04
<b>Pre-TR MOT</b>	36	10.00	80.00	65.25	14.78	81.56
<b>Pre-TR SOC</b>	35	14.00	28.00	22.69	2.89	81.04
<b>Pre-Res</b>	35	16.00	59.00	45.97	8.06	77.92
<b>Pre-Cont</b>	34	29.00	76.00	56.85	9.08	74.80
<b>Pre-Teac EFF</b>	34	51.00	79.00	67.18	7.62	85.04

**Table 8:** Descriptive statistics of teacher resilience: post-intervention

	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Post-TR-Prof</b>	23	29.00	42.00	36.61	3.54	87.17
<b>Post-TR EMO</b>	23	17.00	28.00	23.52	3.54	84.00
<b>Post-TR MOT</b>	23	54.00	84.00	75.17	6.76	89.49
<b>Post-TR SOC</b>	23	23.00	28.00	25.83	1.67	92.25
<b>Post-res</b>	23	39.00	63.00	52.78	7.79	83.78
<b>Post-Cont</b>	22	38.00	68.00	59.59	6.42	87.63
<b>Post-Teach EFF</b>	23	29.00	84.00	74.57	11.98	88.77

From Table 7 it can be seen that the teacher resilience pre- and post-scores are high. The lowest pre-score is for Contextual items at 74.80% and the highest pre-score is for Teach Efficacy (EFF) at 85.04%. The lower post-score is for Teacher Resilience

(Res) at 83.78% and the highest post-score is for Teacher sense of coherence (SOC) at 92.25%.

The results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank tests showed that there were significant differences with regard to teacher professionalism (TR-Prof)  $Z=-3.140$ ;  $p = 0.001 < 0.05$ , teacher emotion (TR-Emot)  $Z=-2.136$   $p = 0.033 < 0.05$ ; teacher motivation (TR-Mot)  $Z=-3.821$ ;  $p = 0.001 < 0.05$ , teacher sense of coherence (SOC)  $Z=-3.699$ ,  $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ; Teacher resilience (Res)  $Z=-3.046$ ,  $p = 0.002 < 0.05$ , and Teacher Efficacy (EFF)  $Z=-2.777$ ,  $p = 0.005 < 0.05$ . Thus, *significant differences were found between pre- and post-intervention with regard to all scales except the contextual (PRCont) scale.*

- Teacher professionalism (TR-Prof): the score from pre-test to post-test increased statistically significantly from 33.23 to 36.64
- Teacher emotion (TR-Emot): the score from pre-test to post-test increased statistically significantly from 21.23 to 23.55
- Teacher motivation (TR-Mot): the score from pre-test to post-test increased statistically significantly from 67.50 to 75.50
- Teacher sense of coherence (SOC): the score from pre-test to post-test increased statistically significantly from 22.86 to 25.91
- Teacher resilience (Res): the score from pre-test to post-test increased statistically significantly from 45.95 to 53.14
- Teacher contextual (Cont): the score from pre-test to post-test increased from 57.48 to 59.86, although this difference is not statistically significant
- Teacher Efficacy (EFF): the score from pre-test to post-test increased statistically significantly from 67.86 to 74.68

**Table 9:** The Wilcoxon signed-rank tests and the corresponding p-values for the teacher resilience scale for participants who participated in both the pre- and post-intervention

	TR-Prof	TR-Emot	TR-Mot	SOC	Res	Cont	EFF
<b>N</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Pre-test Mean (SD)</b>	33.23 (3.518)	21.23 (2.581)	67.50 (6.906)	22.86 (2.678)	45.95 (5.924)	57.48 (10.352)	67.86 (7.530)
<b>Post-test Mean (SD)</b>	36.64 (3.619)	23.55 (3.622)	75.50 (6.731)	25.91 (1.659)	53.14 (7.778)	59.86 (6.452)	74.68 (12.245)
<b>Wilcoxon signed-rank test statistic</b>	-3.410	-2.136	-3.281	-3.699	-3.046	-1.165	-2.777
<b>p-value</b>	0.001	0.033	0.001	0.000	0.002	0.244	0.005

## 9.2 Qualitative results

### 9.2.1 Overview of qualitative results

Table 10 shows the main themes, subthemes and categories which resulted from thematic analysis of the qualitative Isithebe-data. In the discussion of themes blue excerpts signify pre-intervention data, green excerpts process-data and red excerpts denote post-intervention data.

The rich, over-time qualitative teacher data give evidence that primary school teachers in a challenged South African space indicated (i) social connectedness as a pathway to teacher resilience<sup>5</sup> and that (b) social connectedness competence can be strengthened to support teacher resilience.

Qualitative results indicate that teachers use a range of social connectedness competences to give and receive implicit and explicit social support across relational systems. Irrespective of an intervention, teachers *gave implicit social support* to students and colleagues, and *received implicit social support* from colleagues, the school community, as well as family and friends. An intervention leads to more teacher-reports on both teachers *giving explicit social support* to students and the school-community, as well as teachers *receiving explicit social support* from colleagues and the school community.

Following the social connectedness intervention it thus appears that teachers bridged social efforts beyond proximal teacher-student and teacher-teacher relationships. Thus, participating teachers felt that when they deliberately connected with others they were able to both assist those in their immediate and socially connected life-worlds, as well as turn to others for support when their burden as teachers become unbearable alone.

Teachers also voiced that being engaged in such reciprocal social support, together with being a well-trained teacher, informed their feelings of occupational wellbeing. As a pathway to teacher resilience social connectedness supported teachers to (i) be proud of their identities as professionals who provide quality education, (ii) participate in opportunities to develop themselves professionally, and (iii) enjoy their work (occupational wellbeing).

With regards to teacher resilience knowledge, the qualitative teacher data appears to show that quality education and occupational wellbeing are not only indicators of wellbeing. The quest to 'be a good teacher' may point to these indicators also functioning as pathways to teacher resilience: commitment to provide quality education and the pursuit to experience job satisfaction.

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<sup>5</sup> Teacher resilience was indicated in qualitative data by teachers who (i) *persevered* despite harsh circumstances, (ii) demonstrated continued effortfulness to provide *quality education*, and (iii) expressed occupational *wellbeing*.

**Table 10:** Themes and subthemes resulting from thematic analysis

THEME	SUBTHEME	CATEGORY
<p>1. Social connectedness enables teacher resilience.</p>	<p>1.1 Giving social support as resilience-enabling resource for teachers.</p>	<p>Giving implicit social support to students, colleagues and school-community members. Giving explicit social support to students and school-community members.</p>
	<p>1.2 Providing social support as resilience-enabling resource for teachers.</p>	<p>Receiving implicit social support from colleagues and the school-community, as well as friends and family. Receiving explicit social support from colleagues and the school-community.</p>
	<p>1.3 Strengthening social connectedness competence for teacher resilience.</p>	<p>Social connectedness competence: Awareness of social connectedness, a sense of belonging, leveraging networking capacity, mobilising social support, harnessing positive emotions in positive relationships, bonding within social networks, and bridging across social networks.</p>
<p>2. 'Being a good teacher' matters to support teacher resilience.</p>	<p>2.1 Quality education as resilience-enabling resource for teachers.</p>	<p>Teacher professional identity. Teaching and learning strategies.</p>
	<p>2.2 Occupational wellbeing as resilience-enabling resource for teachers.</p>	<p>Occupational wellbeing is supported by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ experiencing purpose in life, and</li> <li>➤ acknowledgement of occupational inputs.</li> </ul>

THEME	SUBTHEME	CATEGORY
	1.3 Teacher professional development as resilience-enabling resource.	Teacher professional development opportunities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ formal courses provided by the Department of Basic Education,</li> <li>➤ individual initiative to participate in available programmes, and</li> <li>➤ participation in research studies.</li> </ul>

### 9.2.2 Theme 1: Social connectedness enables teacher resilience

It is established that, amongst other socio-ecological protective resources on which teachers draw to resile, positive relationships (with concomitant social support) matter for teacher resilience. In this study it was principally evident that, of a host of available resilience-enabling pathways, participating teachers especially foregrounded social support as a significant pathway to resilience. Giving and receiving social support may plausibly be seen as a behavioural expression of social connectedness beliefs and practices synonymous with an Afrocentric cultural worldview (Ebersöhn, 2019).

Privileging social support as resilience-enabling pathway indicate the bridging benefits social connectedness holds for teachers. Theme 1 includes two subthemes: giving social support as resilience-enabling for teachers and receiving social support as resilience-enabling for teachers. Participating teacher experiences show that teacher connectedness (rather than isolation) to students, colleagues, family, friends, school- and education sector communities support teachers to resile.

#### 9.2.2.1 Subtheme 1.1. Giving social support is resilience-enabling for teachers

For teachers in this study, similar to evidence in other studies, teacher resilience was buoyed when they were able to give social support to students, colleagues and members of the school-community in need of their inputs. Teachers gave both implicit and explicit social support <sup>6</sup>. Teacher-reported examples of giving implicit social support include: tolerance, listening, good communication skills, being caring, loving, sharing and bearing more than the role of a colleague.

Both pre-and post-intervention data were rich with incidents of *giving implicit social support to students and colleagues* which were reportedly resilience-enabling

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<sup>6</sup> **Implicit social support** denote that people benefit from social connectedness by receiving or giving emotional comfort to others in their lives. Explicit social support signify instances where people actively draw on social networks for support to provide concrete services to others facing challenges (Ebersöhn, 2019; Taylor, 2011).

for teachers – supporting them to remain in the profession, experience wellbeing and provide quality education.

The data were silent on teachers ascribing meaning to giving implicit social support to people in distal relationships (friends, family and school-community members) as relevant for teacher resilience.

*You must be a motivator and must be caring and loving. You know the challenges that we have in our schools, without love, that you are able to forgive and forget what your learners have done to you... makes you be able to come back the following day. (School B primary school, pre-intervention).*

*It must be supportive, you have to support that is now, that is... the children as well as the teachers. (School C, pre-intervention).*

*To be understanding. When you are understanding it means you have sympathy. (School B, May meeting).*

*And umm, also you must be supportive, supporting learners and supporting your colleagues. And also being good listeners and this is applicable to both teachers and learners so that at the end of the day we are able to solve problems. (School B, pre-intervention).*

*We can feel that we have got people at our backs that are pushing us to make our schools where we wish it to be. (School A, May meeting).*

*It also promotes cooperation because we are working together as a team. We learn to communicate, as it is the key in any relationship. (School D, May meeting).*

*As teachers, they promote healthy relationships between ourselves, because now we can do all sort of network. And also they help us to share information, it develops you as a teacher and also what makes it more helpful is that we as teachers can be relaxed and more comfortable around each other and I think you are also really boosting our confidence as teachers as well (School B, May meeting).*

*You must be a motivator and must be caring and loving. You know the challenges that we have in our schools, without love, that you are able to forgive and forget what your learners have done to you... makes you be able to come back the following day. (School B, pre-intervention).*

*Some of them come to school with hungry stomachs, then you have to be there to give a shoulder to cry on, to help support the learner so that they feel comfortable to be able to work with their peers (School F, post-intervention).*

*But if you are a good teacher you listen to any story that they share with you, to any situation that they bring forth to you. And whenever you come to school in the morning, the way you greet a learner it brings about a smile and changes the whole situation. That child becomes happy and for the whole day you see that child coming to... touching you and greeting you. (School F, post-intervention).*

*Another one is being empathetic and compassionate – as I have mentioned before these kids come to school with different challenges, so now as a teacher you have to show empathy and being compassionate. (School F, post-intervention).*

*You must be willing to lend an ear whenever there is a problem. You must also try for that harmony and unity. You must also be empathic and sympathetic. What helps you to continue being a teacher is that upholding of morals and principles. (School D, post-intervention).*

*You must avail yourself at all times, whenever you are needed, you must make sure you are available (School D, post-intervention).*

Incidences of teachers giving *explicit social support* is indicated more frequently in post-intervention data. These incidences also show evidence of teachers *bridging social networks post-intervention* as they share examples of explicit social support to *students, school-community institutions*.

The data were silent on teachers giving explicit social support to colleagues, friends and family as relevant for teacher resilience.

*It helps us with our community a lot... it helps me with my church because I take some of these ideas... like this one... I am going to take it to my church so they can make something and to keep us communicating as a group and helps us make strong relationships with people in my church (School F, July meeting).*

*Some children are alone in their houses. Children who are 13-14 years are living alone, there is no one there to look after them and they do not have food at home... so now it becomes the responsibility of the school. (School A, post intervention).*

*You need to go the extra mile in everything and be a good Samaritan in every situation. Becoming a better person and getting wisdom every day. (School A, post intervention).*

*The department of education does not adequately address all the challenges... we have a lot of infrastructure problems that never get fixed. So then we have to go out and get the sources for ourselves (School F, post-intervention).*

*We are always working with the community because in our school I can say we are community-based school... so whatever we do we have to involve the community... when people see the green around our school they ask how we get it green and we say that is what a school is supposed to model. It shows that you can stay in a dirty area but your home can be clean and then kids can say... my school is clean I can make my home clean. The green garden is an example within that area... that's why we say we want a forest in the township. (School A, post-intervention).*

#### *9.2.2.2 Subtheme 1.2. Receiving social support is resilience-enabling for teachers*

It is established that teacher resilience is promoted when teachers receive social support. There was evidence of teachers receiving both implicit and explicit social support.

Both pre-and post-intervention data were rich with incidents of *receiving implicit social support from colleagues and the school-community, as well as friends and family*. 'Family and friends' in relation to social support were only mentioned with

regards to receiving implicit social support – indicating the meaningful protective resource of significant relationships outside of the workplace to reinforce teacher resilience.

The data were silent on receiving implicit social support from students as relevant for teacher resilience – although (in a next section) teachers did express that acknowledgement from students buttressed their professional identity and wellbeing.

*Support from staff and working environment. So the more your... your relationship with your staff members is good, is in a good place ... the better your teaching practice is going to be. The more enjoyable the teaching practice will be. The easier it's going to be for you to get up in the morning and go back to work. (School F, pre-intervention).*

*And then erh, also the support from your family, support from your friends. Sometimes we will feel you, you losing it and then they support you and you keep on going. (School B, pre-intervention).*

*Motivation from others (School A, pre-intervention).*

*And it also helped us to get to know each other better... and now it feels like we have a bigger community of people that are willing to help and you know are going to be there for you with anything that might be going on in your life... emotionally... or even just in the classroom (School F, July meeting).*

*Sometimes you feel like you don't want to go to school because of some certain things, but what keeps you going is that support. Sometimes you get that support from your family, from your colleagues and from your friends. (School D, post-intervention).*

*It also improved the relations amongst the teachers because we are able to understand each other in a more comfortable way and we are able to communicate more open and freely, unlike when we are in the classroom or when we are in a staff meeting. So when we are doing the Isithebe activities we are able to be ourselves so we are able to understand each other and we are able to improve relationships because now we have a better understanding of each other. (School F, post-intervention).*

Evidence of teacher-reports on receiving *explicit social support* was only present in post-intervention data. In this regard teachers mentioned receiving explicit social support from colleagues and the school-community as resilience-enabling.

The data were silent on teachers receiving explicit social support from students, friends and family as relevant for teacher resilience.

*Whenever one of us has a challenge, like our children are sick or we have a funeral, we can ask our colleagues for help (School F, post-intervention).*

*As a teacher, it is very important to have relationships with stakeholders. We have volunteers that come to school to help us clean up the school grounds. We were struggling with the water and then we got help from the community. (School B, post-intervention).*

*The community also planted trees around our school and we get sponsors to provide us with fencing for around the school. We also get donations for school uniforms for children in need. We also have social workers at our school that help us with learners who have behavioural problems and learning problems (School C -Ntyatyambo primary school, post-intervention).*

*The stakeholders and volunteers help a lot. For example, the sunshine foundation comes to help our learners get reading skills... the other one comes to help us with computer skills. We also have ABSA that brings white boards to our schools, so now we are moving away from chalk boards to only be using white boards (School D, post-intervention).*

*These stakeholders also promote unity... it is very important. What we like also is your follow up... big projects come to our school and then leave... but with you what you do is that you have follow up. That follow up which makes us not to forget about what we have done (School D, post-intervention).*

### *9.2.2.3 Subtheme 1.3 Strengthening social connectedness competence for teacher resilience*

The following theme indicates that teachers reported strengthened social connectedness competence following an intentional social connectedness intervention. Besides awareness of the advantages of social inclusion rather than isolation, teachers also mentioned other enhanced competences aligned to social connectedness: a sense of belonging, networking capacity, leveraging social support, drawing on positive emotions in positive relationships, and capacity for bonding and bridging within and across social networks.

*These also give us a platform for a support system because no one can operate like an island... we need each other. As teachers we cannot work as an island, you can't lock yourself in one room, you need to meet with other teachers, so this is another thing that has helped us to do that by supporting each other (School B, post-intervention).*

*Isithebe keeps us together... we are not scattered... we are together. Even the 5 of us we sit together and we feel that when others see us they also become interested in what isithebe is doing. It keeps us together and we give each other support. So it keeps us helping each other and I know that I have my isithebe group of mine... (School A, post-intervention).*

*You must have those people that you are sure of... even if you are late... it's okay, I can call so and so... and even with others, we can just throw a question and people can give you ideas... and if you want hands at school that group of yours is here... and they will give you hands. So you feel secure, security is very important in these times (School A, post-intervention).*

*I think it helps because sometimes when you are a teacher you think you are experiencing everything in isolation. And then by having these meetings you have an opportunity to discuss everyday life and what is going on in the classroom and then you realise that you actually have a whole community of people who are going through the same experiences and you can get a lot of support them... and you are not actually in isolation. (School F, post-intervention).*

*It also promotes unity.... when you are at school you just go to your class... but by being by Isithebe what we normally do is... we have that follow up thing when we have to organise meetings.. so we meet... we gather at 10h00 or 12h00... so there is that unity. Because at school you are normally busy, you go to call and at 14h00 you are normally out... but by attending these you have days whereby you know that Isithebe is meeting on the 16 August... you meet, you laugh, you take photos, you eat... it becomes a way of exhaling out. Because you are out of the class and you are meeting with the other colleagues. (School D, post-intervention).*

*You meet, you laugh, you take photos, you eat... it becomes a way of exhaling out. Because you are out of the class and you are meeting with the other colleagues. (School DI, post-intervention).*

*Isithebe has brought about the realisation of some skills that were there but we were not actually focusing on them. It helped us to have a good teamwork, because when we are in the gatherings we are able to share ideas and it actually strengthened the team amongst the school and we are able to work hand in hand (School F, post-intervention).*

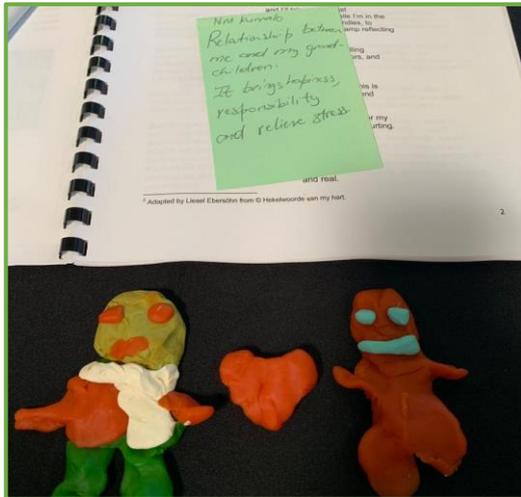
*We have learnt to build relationships with other stakeholders as we believe you cannot operate as an island, we need each other. In our endeavour to equip our learners and to develop us as educators, we extend our invitation to other stakeholders to come address any issues that are pertaining to education (School D, May meeting).*

*You don't have the necessary skills, that is why you need to consult with other professionals. These gatherings help us to problem solve and how to connect with other stakeholders (School C, May meeting).*

*We cannot operate as an island. At times we need to work together with the stakeholders from outside, hence this platform teaches us to share information and also to work closely with the stakeholders outside (School D, July meeting).*

*You don't have the necessary skills, that is why you need to consult with other professionals. These gatherings help us to problem solve and how to connect with other stakeholders (School C, May meeting).*





**Photographs 63-64:** Clay sculpting activity done at pre-intervention training

*It also helps us have a bond with family relationships, it gives us that bond. (School D-, July meeting).*

*Isithebe also showed how important my family relationships are... I like to share what happened in Isithebe with my family because it brings us closer (School B, May meeting).*

*The one activity we had to make a beautiful box and we had to put messages inside. The one activity was to call your friend you have not talked to in a while and then I got an invite. My friend invited me to come see her get ordained as a pastor and we met up to go for coffee at mugg and bean. (School A, post-intervention).*



**Photographs 65-66:** Image of a mother with her children sent by a teacher on the WhatsApp group

### 9.2.3 Theme 2: 'Being a good teacher' matters to support teacher resilience

Adjunct to the significance of social support as action extending from social connectedness, teachers also indicated the significance of quality education as resilience-enabling for teachers. Synonymous with existing teacher resilience knowledge, teachers in this study view their role in providing quality education as an essential resilience-enabling resource. Besides remaining in the profession, teacher

resilience is indicated by being able to provide quality education and experiencing wellbeing – two of the three subthemes in Theme 2. These subthemes are: quality education as resilience-enabling resource for teachers, occupational wellbeing as resilience-enabling resource for teachers, and teacher professional development as resilience-enabling resource. The latter is seen as a pathway to be able to provide quality education and consequently being able to experience confidence and pride (job satisfaction).

### 9.2.3.1 Subtheme 2.1: Quality education as resilience-enabling resource for teachers

Being able to provide quality education is an indicator of teacher resilience. This subtheme, which coincides with existing teacher resilience knowledge elsewhere in the world, describes that participating teachers in a South African challenged education space also view quality education as resilience-enabling. The theme includes quality education categories that are resilience-enabling for teachers, namely teacher professional identity and teaching and learning strategies.

From their comments, it is evident that teachers take pride in their professional identity. Their professional identity is characterised by being equipped with professional knowledge, being punctual and responsible and setting good examples to students. Teachers similarly indicated that a professional identity characterised by positive affect (motivation and commitment to teach) made a difference in the lives of the children they taught.

*To work very hard in our school and love our job more... (School B, post-intervention).*

*To lead by example. To be punctual at school. If you are early at school, children will see that and they will also be early. (School B, post-intervention)*

*You must have good command of your class room and you must know your subject matter. You must be punctual, they say time wasted never returns. (School B, post-intervention).*

*What helps you to continue being a teacher is that upholding of morals and principles. (School D, post-intervention).*

*You must be willing to adapt. As we know we are living in a time of change. Circumstances are changing all the time. For example we are talking now about the fourth industrial revolution. So as a teacher you must be open to any change. (School D, post intervention).*

*To be a good teacher you must be passionate about your work (School A- , post-intervention).*

*Another one is being passionate and love teaching (School F, post-intervention).*

*And be inspirational so we can inspire others as well and being exemplary at all times and we are also an agent of change. (School D, pre-intervention)*

*To work very hard in our school and love our job more... (School B, post-intervention).*

*To lead by example. To be punctual at school. If you are early at school, children will see that and they will also be early. (School B, post-intervention)*

*You must have good command of your class room and you must know your subject matter. You must be punctual, they say time wasted never returns. (School B, post-intervention).*

*What helps you to continue being a teacher is that upholding of morals and principles. (School D, post-intervention).*

*You must be willing to adapt. As we know we are living in a time of change. Circumstances are changing all the time. For example we are talking now about the fourth industrial revolution. So as a teacher you must be open to any change. (School D, post intervention).*

*To be a good teacher you must be passionate about your work (School A- , post-intervention).*

*Another one is being passionate and love teaching (School F, post-intervention).*

*And be inspirational so we can inspire others as well and being exemplary at all times and we are also an agent of change. (School D, pre-intervention)*

*These meetings help me to motivate my children to be independent and to be better citizens and to reach their goals... I will be so proud of them when they reach their goals and finish university and have careers one day. I started teaching in 1994 and some of my kids come back to tell me about their careers (School B, July meeting)*

*I am so proud to be a teacher and I want to help learners. (School B, July meeting)*

*What keeps us being a teacher is knowing that we have built a good foundation to our learners – (School D, July meeting)*

*Another one that is important is to see the learners trying. There is a saying that goes “success breeds success” so at the end of each term you analyse your results and then you see that okay, they have done well and then that motivates me to do more or to better yourself more (School F, post-intervention).*

*What helps you to continue being a good teacher... to give back what you have learned from the university or college. When you see those learners progress to university and get jobs, I feel proud about that. That is what makes me to continue with my teaching, to change the lives of children and serve the community as a whole (School B, July meeting).*

*Hope for a better future. As a teacher, you must have a hope that you can do better (School A-, post-intervention).*

*Coz when the parents see clean and green they can see that even if it is township school, things are happening here for the children to have a better future (School A- , post-intervention).*

Teachers spoke about the importance of being equipped for teaching and learning in order to be responsive to student needs. Teacher referred to how the learning process requires teaching and learning competence in order to help children understand and learn. In order to do this, teachers acknowledged that they need to have mastered content knowledge of the curriculum, as well as teaching and learning skills to provide quality education.

*And then for a teacher to be a facilitator of knowledge, you're not a banker of knowledge, you're a facilitator, knowledge already exists within the children and the schooling environment. (School F, pre-intervention).*

*And you also understand the learning process. A child doesn't understand something just by learning it once (participants murmur in agreement) it's continuous. (School F, pre-intervention).*

*Our concepts that we have to teach are difficult, so now, you have to be able to interpret each and everything little thing you say to them so they are able to understand what you want them to do and by giving clear instructions by being exemplary yourself (School F, post-intervention).*

#### *9.2.3.2 Subtheme 2.2: Occupational wellbeing as resilience-enabling resource for teachers*

Job satisfaction is aligned with occupation well-being (Ebersöhn, 2019) and constitutes an indicator of teacher resilience. Like their counterparts in other parts of the world, teachers in this study also pointed that their positive occupational wellbeing was resilience-enabling. According to teachers their teacher resilience is promoted when they feel happy to go to work and are proud of the work they produce in their careers. Teacher accounts showed various pathways that promoted their occupational wellbeing. Teacher occupational wellbeing was positively affected when students acknowledged their inputs with positive feedback and when they experienced purpose in life - contributing to the lives of children.

*That's the fun part about teaching. You come home every day with a new experience, new idea, new conversation, new story even. Uhhh, seeing the success stories of the learners you have taught. I mean I'm waiting for the day when one of my learners comes up to me as a scientist at NASAR and they are like, MISS ITS MEE!! (Laughter) and I am going to be like what, I actually had an impact in that child's life. (School F, pre-intervention).*

*And what gives us drive also to wake up every day is being passionate about our learners, knowing that our core business is to teach and also when you receive that feedback from your learners... it makes you proud knowing very well that you have unlocked the potential of that kid. (School D, pre-intervention).*

### 9.2.3.3 Subtheme 2.3. Teacher professional development as resilience-enabling resource

Teachers in this study, as is the case in teacher resilience world-wide, noted the relevance of teacher professional development to acquire new competences in order to provide quality education. Teachers described various opportunities for such lifelong learning that help them develop professionally. These include formal courses provided by the Department of Basic Education, taking individual initiative to participate in available programmes, and teacher development opportunities provided because of research studies.

*Even the creativity that we are doing now is helping... there are kids in our class you see they can't cope... they can't do nothing, but you can give them these things to do so that they can make something that will make them to boost their self-esteem... It also helps us when you are busy with other groups, you can give others something to do. So by doing this, they can be doing patterns and also they can show their creativity (School D, July meeting).*

*We have a project here at our school where we do these activities with the children... we have given these boxes to our learners because they are doing bead work, they are doing other sorts of crafts work. So we have given them other ideas to make their products more attractive so they can sell it to other people to make money for themselves (School F, May meeting).*

*We also take what we do here and do the ideas with our children and it helps them a lot... If I can come up with my own necklace so they can see how it is done so they can make their own necklaces (School B, May meeting).*

*It also gives us ideas because you can do this with the learners and teach them to make things and also helps little one develop fine motor skills. You can also use these activities to help children with maths and patterns (School A, July meeting)*

*These gathering help us to be creative and also to learn from other and share the ideas from others. The projects that we have done here at Isithebe help us to give back to our learners and it also helps our learners to be creative (School A, post-intervention).*

## 10. FINDINGS

### 10.1 Intentionally strengthening social connectedness as pathway to teacher resilience

In past South African studies, it has been found that a default response to adversity for teachers appeared to be 'flocking': leveraging a socio-cultural proclivity for social connectedness for resource management by linking existing resources to identified needs (Ebersöhn, 2012). Resilience research in South Africa highlights that an Afrocentric way of being shapes processes of positive adjustment (Phasha, 2010; Theron, 2012; Theron & Theron, 2014). This proclivity for social connectedness as resource management was present at pre-intervention. This was reflected by high

scores for quantitative measures with 87% of teachers showing high social connectedness.

This was also reflected in qualitative themes at pre-intervention in terms of giving and receiving social support. Current research suggests that resilience can be promoted by relational resources that support teachers to behave in ways that prioritise relationship-building and social connectedness (Theron, 2016). The introduction of an intentional social connectedness intervention not only strengthened relationships between the teachers. It also promoted and prioritised social connectedness in the lives of students as it deepened teachers' capacity to give social support to the students they teach.

The micro and mesosystems of teachers are comprised of proximal personal systems that include students, colleagues, and support systems. From a socio-ecological perspective, risk factors and protective resources exist across all these systems. Examples of protective resources evident in this category include supportive teachers and social capital (Ebersöhn, 2016). Teachers in developed and developing countries both described interpersonal resources, particularly collaborative networking with colleagues to be beneficial and resilience enabling (Mansfield et al., 2018).

Teachers receiving implicit social support from colleagues was resilience-enabling. Although importance was placed on social support before the intervention, the intentional intervention created additional space for bridge social connections to a larger school-community (rather than containing social support to proximal relationships with student and colleagues). Social connectedness within the place of a schools does not occur within a vacuum but rather reflects and is strongly influenced by the policies and priorities of the school system they belong to (Noble & McGrath, 2015; Noble & McGrath, 2018).

## **10.2 Promoting teacher resilience by strengthening social connectedness**

As indicated in the conceptual framework a working assumption of this study was that social connectedness (a person's subjective sense of having meaningful relationships with others in the social world) is a potential pathway to teacher resilience (teachers who are able to cope in a challenged education space by drawing on individual, life and environmental factors) to enable 'better than expected' outcomes despite extreme challenges.

Quantitative results across pre- and post-intervention confirmed that there were significant differences with regard to teacher professionalism (TR-Prof)  $Z=-3.140$ ;  $p = 0.001 < 0.05$ , teacher emotion (TR-Emot)  $Z=-2.136$   $p = 0.033 < 0.05$ ; teacher motivation (TR-Mot)  $Z=-3.821$ ;  $p = 0.001 < 0.05$ , teacher sense of coherence (SOC)  $Z=-3.699$ ,  $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ; Teacher resilience (Res)  $Z=-3.046$ ,  $p = 0.002 < 0.05$ , and Teacher Efficacy (EFF)  $Z=-2.777$ ,  $p = 0.244 < 0.05$ . Statistically significant differences were found between pre- and post-intervention results with regard to all scales except

the teacher contextual scale. Qualitative themes reflected quantitative results. It was evident that deliberately strengthening social connectedness manifested in increased instances of (i) teachers giving and receiving social support to wider social systems, and (ii) teacher occupational wellbeing (teacher emotion and teacher motivation).

Teacher professionalism, self efficacy and teacher efficacy are mirrored in qualitative data with teachers determined to be good teachers who engage in professional development opportunities in order to provide quality education. Teacher efficacy is the belief a teacher demonstrates in his or her skills and capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context (Raath & Hay, 2016).

Research has shown that a lack of support from school leadership and poor relationships with colleagues, students or parents challenge teachers' capacity of resilience (Gu & Li, 2013). On the other hand, protective resources include the support a teacher gets at school, like support from colleagues, effective leadership, working in a good school atmosphere and caring and supportive relationships with colleagues (Cefai & Cavioni, 2014; Ebersöhn, 2012; Le Cornu, 2013). These contextual factors show the importance of personal and professional relationships for positively overcoming challenging situations and sustaining their passion and commitment to teaching (Ebersöhn, 2012; Mansfield et al., 2018).

Social support has a beneficial impact only if it is affectionate and perceived as such and is therefore highly subjective (Gierveld & Van Tilburg, 2010). Supportive groups can create an atmosphere of belonging and acceptance, guide individuals towards greater self-awareness and confirm beliefs, values, reality and opinions via feedback received from other members (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Resilience literature also highlights the importance of seeking help or assistance as a coping strategy, when teachers face difficulties in handling the variety of stressors within the school context (Castro et al., 2010; Sharplin, O'Neill & Chapman, 2011; Tait, 2008). Health-care professionals who experience a sense of isolation and lack the opportunity to express their emotionally charged feelings are more likely to develop burnout, whereas sharing experiences and problems may help with dealing with personal problems and emotions (Van Dyk, 2007).

## 11. CONCLUSION

Social connectedness appears to be an available protective resource on which teachers can draw to buffer against chronic and severe challenges to their wellbeing and job performance in a space of deprivation and challenge. Despite structural disparity high teacher resilience is evident in respect to teacher professionalism, emotion, motivation, self efficacy and teacher efficacy. Social connectedness is a plausible pathway to teacher resilience in a challenged education space in primary schools in South Africa. The Isithebe Social Connectedness Intervention is an evidence-based intervention to use with teachers in similar education spaces to

strengthen competences aligned with social connectedness as a mechanism to support teacher resilience.

Isithebe functioned to deliberately strengthen a web of social connectedness between teachers, their family members and friends, as well as broader school-communities. This web of social connectedness enabled teacher-resilience although the context of challenge continues.

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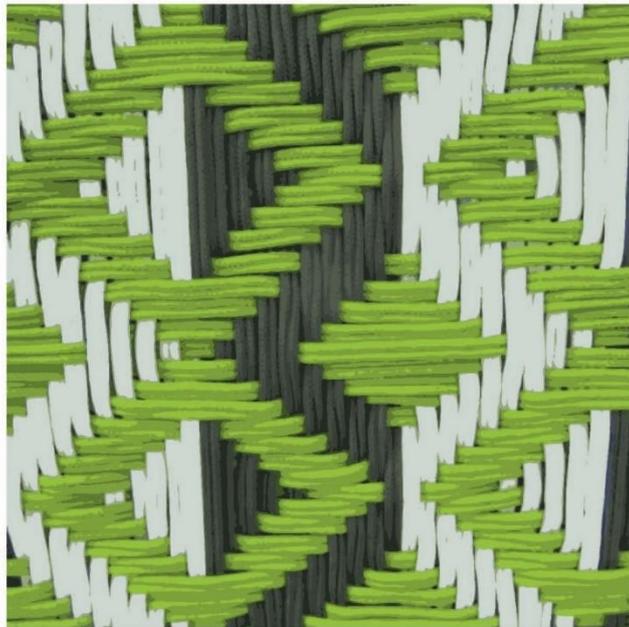
**APPENDIX A**  
**ISITHEBE SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS INTERVENTION**  
**MANUAL**

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**Isithebe Social Connectedness Intervention**  
**MANUAL**

**Developed in collaboration with the:**  
**IMBUMBA YABEFUNDISINTSAPHO-team**

Social connectedness as pathway to teacher resilience in school communities in  
challenged education settings



**ISITHEBE**

**Funded by The Synergos Institute**

February 2020

Centre for the Study of Resilience  
Faculty of Education  
University of Pretoria

**Liesel Ebersöhn, Jessica Versfeld, & Ronél Ferreira**

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# ISITHEBE

Nokele (2006) note the value of the *eating mat, or wooden tray* (isithebe) for both IsiXhosa and isiZulu South Africans. For example, amaXhosa sometimes put the dish or meat on a large woven mat in front of the people to help themselves. They do not use a tray to serve food, a dish of food or a beaker of amarhewu is just brought by hand and put in front of the people and they eat or drink from it.

Isithebe is therefore a symbol of bringing family together. Of connecting people. Of preventing isolation. Isithebe shows nurturing, trust, comfort, care and support, as well as deep interest in one another.

The Isithebe intervention is co-developed within the Imbumba Yabefundisintsapho-team<sup>7</sup>. The importance of social connectedness and having positive relationships with those around us is established. Yet, often social connectedness is not intentionally practiced as a supportive pathway. Therefore, the aim of this intervention is to explore how strengthening social connectedness between educators may help educators to experience job fulfillment, remain on in the profession and provide quality education (teacher resilience).

Over six months Isithebe deliberately provides spaces that bring educators together to share and connect with each other. We know that educators are extremely busy. Through Isithebe we want to make it easy for you to connect with other educators over enjoyable arts-activities. We know that such social connection (rather than isolation) is extremely important to be able to be a good teacher, enjoy being a teacher, and continue in the profession.

The purpose of this intervention is to explore *social connectedness as pathway to teacher resilience using the Isithebe-intervention*

## ISITHEBE



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<sup>7</sup> Participating school: Garrett Primary School, Ntyatyambo Primary School, John Masiza Primary School, Walmer Primary School, Charles Duna Primary School and Seyisi Primary School.

## **Come sit here with me<sup>8</sup>**

come sit here with me and tell  
me about your day. of your  
joy your sadness your crying your  
plans your laughing.

then I'll tell you about that  
curry I ate today, and  
you tell me about the book you read, and  
I tell you about the angel in my home, and you  
tell me about the visit with family you're planning.

and as the sun sets I'll  
light a candle for us,  
with my feet up while you sit  
with outstretched legs. And  
while we brew that tea - with the bags  
we bought last week - I'll  
add milk, and you'll say people don't drink tea  
with milk. And we'll go quiet  
and be happy in the  
shade. While the sun sets.

and you'll say we're going to make  
a fire now, just because we can,  
and I'll take out the last  
chicken from December. And while I'm in the  
kitchen I'll bring out more candles, to  
add to the dim, flicker of the streetlamp reflecting  
in the yard

we'll each empty all our telling  
and start our laughter generators, and  
fill our hearts.

and I'll sit there and feel  
like a rich woman, and think this is  
exactly how each day must end  
for me. More real than  
my work, or my budget, or  
transport problems, or clothes, or my  
sore feet that don't want to stop hurting.

because it's natural.  
and easy.  
and together.  
and good.  
and real.

---

<sup>8</sup> Adapted by Liesel Ebersöhn from © Hekelwoorde van my hart.

## TEACHER RESILIENCE: BEING A QUALITY EDUCATOR DURING CHALLENGING TIMES

Educators in South Africa face many challenges. It is natural to expect that educators may experience burnout, want to drop out of the profession and could struggle to provide quality education. Educators may be too tired to work, feel too hopeless to think that things will change and that they can receive more resources and support, and feel such fatigue that they do not know how they can teach good lessons to learners.

These are the **expected (negative) outcomes (results)** that one can **predict for educators** because of the **extreme challenges** we face because of inequality:

- educator burnout and distress,
- educator attrition, and
- low quality education.

**Resilience** is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity. **Teacher resilience**, however, means that there can be **‘better than expected’ outcomes for educators – despite continued hardship**. Teacher resilience mean that there is support for educators so that the following **unpredicted, positive outcomes** are possible for educators:

- educator job satisfaction and wellbeing,
- educator retention, and
- high quality education.

### **The importance of a social connectedness for teacher resilience.**

One pathway in which to support teacher resilience is social connectedness (a web of relationships and connections with other people). **Social connectedness reflect the indigenous knowledge inherent to Ubuntu.**

What makes us happiest and content in life? Some people may point to fame and fortune. Yet, when people reach the end of their lives, they report that good relationships and connections with friends and family are the real prize that makes life worth living. Most people rate moments of connection and shared enjoyment with others as their most important life experiences.

One can expect that when the lives are people are characterised with social connectedness they can expect to give and receive **social support** to each other. Social support from relationships to which people belong enable resilience.

**Social connectedness refers to our sense of belonging.** Having a sense of community all contribute to our happiness. This sense of community include meaningful relationships that make up our identity (such as work, family, leisure, religion and community groups): family and personal friends, wider groups and

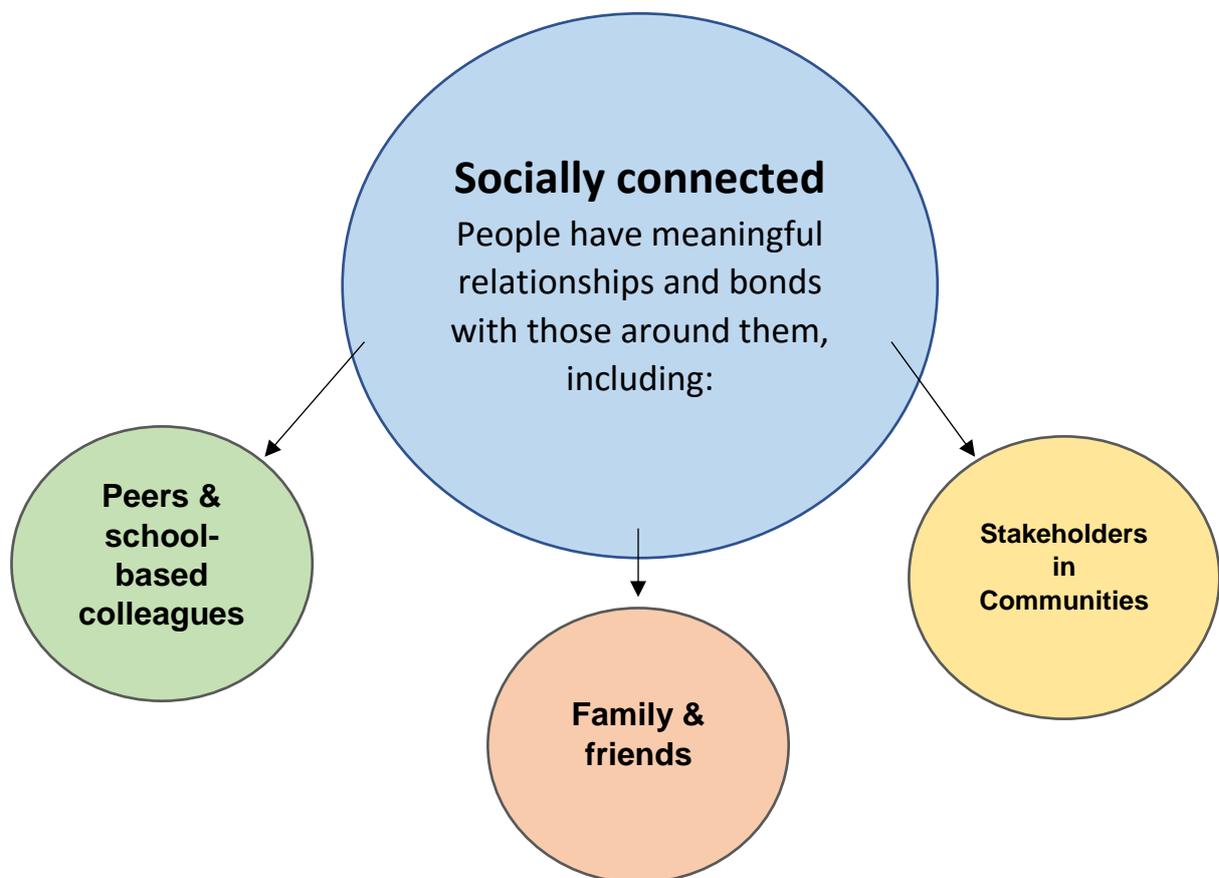
communities we belong to, work colleagues, neighbours and the various groups. In the work-life of an educator, significant relationships include those with peers, learners and their families, school leadership, district officials, as well as community stakeholders.

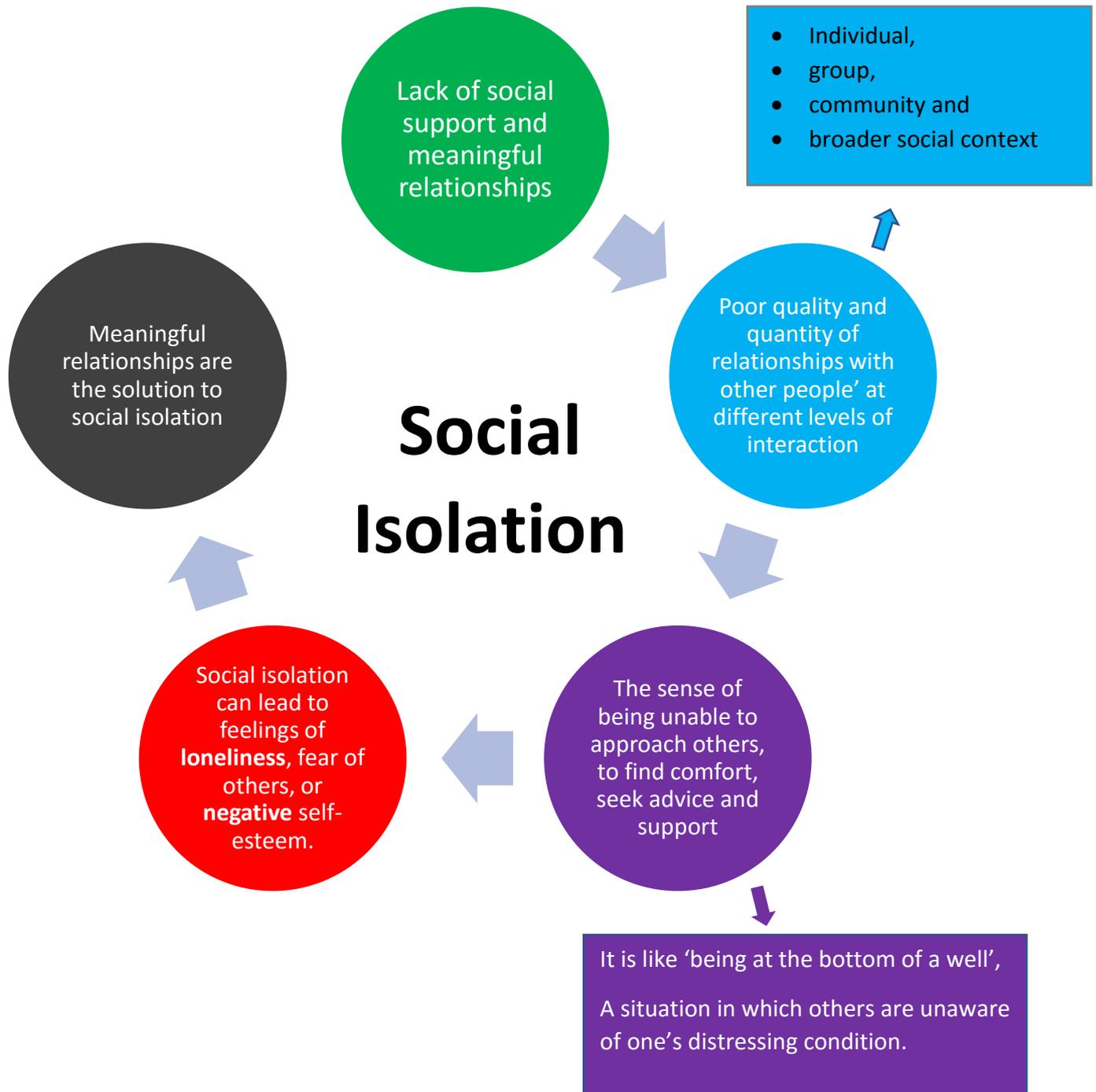
**The opposite of social connection is social isolation and loneliness.** This is when we feel alone and disconnected from other people. Being lonely is when we feel that we do not have genuine relationships with others where we feel understood and accepted. Some people who are surrounded by others throughout the day, or even in a lifelong marriage, can still experience a deep sense of loneliness. Feelings of isolation and loneliness can have serious negative effects on one's mental and physical health (Loneliness can be a contributing factor to heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, Alzheimer's and other critical diseases).

### **Why is it important to build social connectedness?**

- Relationships are an important part of life
- Relationships help us stay healthy and happy
- Good relationships provide people with a sense of belonging and meaning in life
- Relationships provide us with networks that create access to resources
- People who have good relationships with those around them tend to contribute more towards their communities
- When we feel that we are appreciated and cared for in the spaces we live and work it reduces the chance for burn-out (Feelings of physical and emotional exhaustion due to stress from working with people under demanding conditions)
- To counter burnout, having a sense of purpose is highly important and this is often achieved through relationships with others
- Relationships help us cope with stressful experiences by reminding us of what is positive in our lives despite difficulties

## SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION





## ISITHEBE-INTERVENTION TRAINING

Educators from six schools in the Eastern Cape participate in the development of Isithebe. The co-generators of Isithebe (Imbumba Yabefundisintsapho) are on a What's app group that is used as a communication platform throughout the intervention to send photos and reminders. At **baseline** all the educators completed measures on teacher resilience and social connectedness in September 2018.<sup>9</sup> These same measures will be completed **post-intervention** in September 2019.

**Isithebe intervention training** consists of a half-day (6 hour) Isithebe-training session (March 2019) with educators from all six schools (refer to Appendix A for the training schedule). Following the Isithebe training, educators then organise three monthly Isithebe gatherings with peers in their school (Apr, June, August), and also have joint Isithebe gatherings with educators from other schools and researchers during alternate months (May, July, September) (**refer to Appendix A**).

The training session covers the foci that the Isithebe intervention addresses. To frame each of intervention foci the training includes arts-based activities, brief power point presentations (**refer to Appendix D**), as well as educator-lead PRA-group presentations to demonstrate existing knowledge in each domain.

The Isithebe training foci include:

- the need for teacher resilience;
- social connectedness and social isolation;
- introduction to the Isithebe Kit; and
- modelling an Isithebe gathering.

## ISITHEBE KIT

During the Isithebe intervention training every school receives an '**Isithebe Kit**' for Isithebe meetings. The Isithebe Kits are premised on the therapeutic value of arts-based activities to mindfully bring people together to relax, connect and experience well-being.

**Objectives of the Isithebe arts-activities** gatherings are to:

- Intentionally establish and/or enhance social connectedness between educators within and across schools, as well as in other areas of teacher's lives
- Establish a routine of deliberate social connection amongst educators in their varied circles;
- Include social activities to extend to building relationships with others outside of work colleagues; and
- Encourage building relationships outside of school-group meetings.

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<sup>9</sup> Demographic questionnaire, Social Connectedness and Teacher Resilience scale, ENTRÉE scale, PRA discussions and posters

The **aim of the joint bi-monthly Isithebe gatherings** are to intentionally create a space for joint reflections between educators from different schools and researchers on previous monthly Isithebe gatherings per school. Following an introductory icebreaker educators participate in school-based Participatory and Reflection Action sessions to address the three questions they answered after their previous monthly Isithebe gathering.

**Each Isithebe Kit contains:**

*ISITHEBE ORGANISATIONAL ISITHEBE ELEMENTS:*

- The **Isithebe Manual** (each educator will also receive their own manual – this is an additional manual for the school);
- **Laminated sheet with dates** for monthly Isithebe gatherings (second last Monday of the month. April, June and August educators meet per school. May, July and September all six schools and researchers have a joint Isithebe gathering at the DBE District Offices) – **refer to Appendix A;**
- 3 x **Checkers R200.00 vouchers** (total value of R600.00 per school). Thus R200.00 per Isithebe gathering to buy refreshments and snacks for the monthly Isithebe gatherings;
- Instructions attached to each activity package (**please refer to Appendix B**)
- A **laminated sheet with three questions** to be discussed during each Isithebe gathering:
  - How do these gatherings help you to be a teacher?
  - How do these gatherings help you with school projects?
  - How do these gatherings help you to be involved with other role-players in the school-community?
- A **school-journal** to write down each teacher's answers to the three respective questions (this is used during very Isithebe gathering)

*ISITHEBE ACTIVITY ELEMENTS*

- **Four arts-activity packages** for every second upcoming month meeting where educators meet as teachers within their particular school (March-model, April, June, August)



- Instructions that will be attached to the activity packages **(please refer to Appendix B)**
- **Reusable craft materials** for the duration of the Isithebe gatherings (to be used and re-used for activities throughout the intervention)



Stickers



Glitter



Feathers and stones



Kokies and pencils



Paint and brushes



Craft variety pack



All together in "Chest of Care"

## STANDARD ISITHEBE INTERVENTION PROCEDURES

### Procedure for bi-monthly Isithebe gatherings per school<sup>10</sup>:

#### *Before the session:*

- decide on a time and place to gather bi-monthly;
- use the Checkers voucher to buy refreshments and snacks for the school-based Isithebe gathering.

#### *During the session:*

- take the particular art-activity<sup>11</sup> for that month from the isithebe Kit,
- read the instructions, and
- do the activity;
- take turns to ask and answer the three questions on the laminated document<sup>12</sup>;
- write the answers in your school journal; and
- take a photograph of your school's Isithebe gathering to share with educators from other schools on the Imbumba Yabefundisintsaipo whatsapp group.

#### *After the session:*

- educators take photographs of their school's Isithebe gathering and post on whatsapp; and
- educators bring the completed arts-activity products and school journals with answers from each educator to the three questions to the next month's joint Isithebe gathering.

### Procedure for joint bi-monthly Isithebe gatherings of teachers from all schools with researchers:

#### *Before the session:*

- educators and researchers decide on a time and place to gather bi-monthly (probably DBE District offices);
- researchers buy refreshments and snacks for the joint Isithebe gathering; and
- educators bring their completed arts-activity products, as well as school journal with answers from each educator to the three questions to the next month's joint Isithebe gathering.

---

<sup>10</sup> Modelled with educators in a session during the Isithebe training.

<sup>11</sup> Art-activities include: clay modelling, relationship box, sharing of recipes, making bracelets and decorating photo frames

<sup>12</sup> Three questions to ask and answer during every Isithebe gathering:

How do these gatherings help you to be a teacher?

How do these gatherings help you with school projects?

How do these gatherings help you to be involved with other role-players in the school-community?

*During the session:*

- researchers provide materials and give instructions for an arts-activity<sup>13</sup> as ice breaker to the joint session,
- following the completion of the ice breaker teachers from each school answer and present the three questions in Participatory Reflection and Action sessions (educators can refer back to and expand on what they wrote in their school journals).

## RELATIONSHIP VOUCHER BOX

### FIRST Isithebe gathering of educators *per school* (April)

- Educators meet per school at an agreed time in an agreed venue. Suggested date: 15 April 2019.<sup>14</sup>
- Nominated educator(-s) from school-group use supplied vouchers to buy drinks and snacks for the Isithebe gathering.
- This session is planned for 1 hour 30 min to 2 hours.
- **APRIL** packaged arts-activities included in the large “Isithebe Kit” - distributed at the intervention training.

### Instructions: Relationship Voucher Box activity (approximately 45 min)

- As part of the Isithebe Kit per school each educator receives a small box and craft materials to decorate the outside of the box (letters, beads, glitter, feathers, etc) and glue.



- Educators use craft materials and glue to decorate the box in any way they chose.
- Along with the box to be decorated, the April bag also contains an envelope with ideas on how to build and maintain relationships: e.g: message a friend you haven't spoken to in a long time, do something nice and unexpected for a family member, go for coffee with a friend, etc.
- There will also be blank pieces of paper in the envelope for educators to write down any of their own ideas on strengthening relationships.

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<sup>13</sup> Art-activities include: clay modelling, relationship box, sharing of recipes, making bracelets and decorating photo frames

<sup>14</sup> Laminated sheet with suggested dates for Isithebe gatherings are included in the Isithebe Kit.

- After educators finish decorating their boxes, educators each select six vouchers to put in their relationship box.
- Over the next month educators are encouraged to select three of the vouchers and do one relationship-building idea in a week.

### **Discussion after the Relationship Voucher Box activity (approx. 45 min)**

- Take turns to ask and answer the three questions on the laminated document<sup>15</sup>;
- Write the answers in your school journal;
- Take a photograph of your school's Isithebe gathering and post on whatsapp; and
- Bring the school-journal, as well as Relationship Voucher Boxes to the joint meeting next month.

## **GROWING TOGETHER**

### **FIRST JOINT Isithebe gathering: teachers of six schools and researchers (May)**

- Educators and researchers meet jointly at an agreed upon venue – probably DBE District Offices.
- This session is planned for 1 hour 30 min to 2 hours.
- **Educators each bring their Relationship Voucher Box (created during the previous Isithebe gathering) to present and discuss at joint meeting.**
- **Each school brings Isithebe kits to use art materials for activity**
- Researchers bring May materials for icebreaker (pot plants, soil and succulents to plant), three posters per school, markers, and also organise drinks and snacks.

### **Growing together (approximately 45 min)**

- Each educator is given an empty pot and craft materials (letters, beads, glitter, feathers, glue) to decorate the pot. Teachers are asked to use symbols of unity, togetherness, friendship in their designs.



<sup>15</sup> Three questions to ask and answer during every Isithebe gathering:

How do these gatherings help you to be a teacher?

How do these gatherings help you with school projects?

How do these gatherings help you to be involved with other role-players in the school-community?

- After the educators have decorated the pots, they are each given a succulent plant and potting-soil to plant in their decorated pot.

#### *Succulent plant symbolism*

- Succulent plants are specialists at absorbing, retaining and efficiently using water. This particular characteristic has allowed them to survive in even the most desolate and water-deprived corners of the earth.
- These resilient plants are reminders that even the most difficult situations can be endured when planted in space of connectedness with others.

#### *Group discussion*

- Teachers to discuss in groups the symbols of connectedness they used to decorate their pots and the symbolism of perseverance through unity in their own lives
- Acts as a reaffirming experience for teachers to acknowledge the organic and dynamic nature of social connectedness to support resilience
- Optional: educators can keep the pot plant, or give it to one of their close friends or colleagues.

#### **PRA discussions per group after the Growing together icebreaker (approx. 45 min)**

- Teachers divide into school-specific groups.
- Each group receives three blank posters and markers to answer each of the following questions in turn:
  - How do these gatherings help you to be a teacher?
  - How do these gatherings help you with school projects?
  - How do these gatherings help you to be involved with other role-players in the school-community?
- Each school presents their answer to educators from all schools.

### **EDUCATOR CIRCLE RECIPE BOOK**

#### **SECOND Isithebe gathering of educators *per school* (June)**

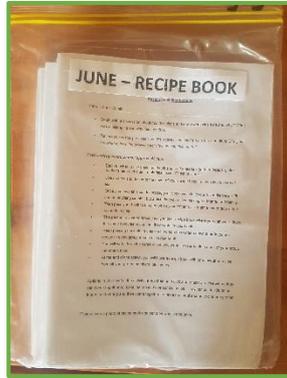
- Educators meet per school at an agreed time in an agreed venue. Suggested date: 10 June 2019.<sup>16</sup>
- Nominated educator(-s) from school-group use supplied vouchers to buy drinks and snacks for the Isithebe gathering.
- This session is planned for 1 hour 30 min to 2 hours.
- **JUNE** packaged arts-activities included in the large “Isithebe Kit” - distributed at the intervention training
- This session is planned for 1 hour 30 min to 2 hours

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<sup>16</sup> Laminated sheet with suggested dates for Isithebe gatherings are included in the Isithebe Kit.

### Instructions: Educator Circle Recipe Book activity (approximately 45 min)

- As part of the Isithebe Kit per school each educator receives a blank notebook and craft materials to decorate the outside of the book (letters, beads, glitter, feathers, etc).



- Follow the page of instructions attached to June package:
  - Use the letters provided to title your book "RECIPE BOOK"
  - Use other materials to decorate the cover of your book in any way you would like
  - Once you have finished decorating your book, write in it your favourite recipe (it can be anything simple), but a dish that you enjoy making for friends and family.
  - Then pass your book to the person on your left and ask them to write down their favourite recipe
  - The person to your right will pass you their recipe book where you can write down the same favourite recipe that they wrote in your book
  - Keep passing book along until each person has written down their favourite recipe in every group member's recipe book
  - You will write down the same recipe you wrote in your book in each of your group member's book
  - At the end of the activity you will have a recipe book with one favourite recipe from all your group members, plus yours.
- Optional: at the end of the activity group members pick a date and a recipe where they can come together to make the meal at someone's house. They can all decide on an ingredient to bring and then come together to make the meal and have dinner together

### Discussion after the Educator Circle Recipe Book activity (approx. 45 min)

- Take turns to ask and answer the three questions on the laminated document<sup>17</sup>;
- Write the answers in the school journal;
- Take a photograph of the school's Isithebe gathering and post on whatsapp; and
- Bring the school-journal, as well as Educator Circle Recipe Book to the joint meeting next month;

<sup>17</sup> Three questions to ask and answer during every Isithebe gathering:

How do these gatherings help you to be a teacher?

How do these gatherings help you with school projects?

How do these gatherings help you to be involved with other role-players in the school-community?

- Throughout the upcoming month each teacher can share which recipes they enjoyed making on whatsapp; and
- Each educator whatsapp a researcher (or to the whatsapp group) photographs that symbolise their important relationships – researchers need to have enough time to print these photographs and hand back to educators during the July gathering so that educators can use the photographs in the Framing Important Educator Relationships (August) arts-activity.

## EDUCATOR JOURNEY BRACELETS

### SECOND JOINT Isithebe gathering: teachers of six schools and researchers (July)

- Educators and researchers meet jointly at an agreed upon venue – probably DBE District Offices. Suggested date: 29 July 2019.<sup>18</sup>
- This session is planned for 1 hour 30 min to 2 hours.
- **Educators each bring their Educator Circle Recipe Book (created during the previous Isithebe gathering) to present and discuss at joint meeting.**
- Researchers bring July materials for icebreaker, three posters per school, markers, and also organise drinks and snacks.
- Researchers bring and handout to educators the printed photographs symbolising important relationships.

### Instructions: Educator Journey Bracelets icebreaker (approximately 45 min)

- Each educator receives a bag that contains an assortment of beads, string, pair of scissors, and a small piece of cardboard.



- The facilitator gives the following instructions:
  - Use the materials to make a bracelet that represents your journey of becoming a teacher (include highs and lows – success and disappointments);
  - Please write a brief description of your teacher journey on the piece of cardboard provided.
- Optional: educators can swop bracelets with a group member who they feel they had a similar journey to, or a journey that inspired them.

<sup>18</sup> Laminated sheet with suggested dates for Isithebe gatherings are included in the Isithebe Kit.

### **PRA discussions per group after the Friendship Survival Kit icebreaker (approx. 45 min)**

- Teachers divide into school-specific groups.
- Each group receives three blank posters and markers to answer each of the following questions in turn:
  - How do these gatherings help you to be a teacher?
  - How do these gatherings help you with school projects?
  - How do these gatherings help you to be involved with other role-players in the school-community?
- Each school presents their answer to educators from all schools.
- Each educator receives the printed photographs symbolising important relationships for the Framing Important Educator Relationships (August) arts-activity.

## **FRAMING IMPORTANT EDUCATOR RELATIONSHIPS**

### **THIRD Isithebe gathering of educators *per school* (August)**

- Educators meet per school at an agreed time in an agreed venue. Suggested date: 19 August 2019<sup>19</sup>
- Nominated educator(-s) from school-group use supplied vouchers to buy drinks and snacks for the Isithebe gathering.
- This session is planned for 1 hour 30 min to 2 hours.
- **AUGUST** packaged arts-activities included in the large “Isithebe Kit” - distributed at the intervention training
- This session is planned for 1 hour 30 min to 2 hours

### **Instructions: Framing Important Educator Relationships activity (approximately 45 min)**

- As part of the Isithebe Kit each educator receives a blank photo frame and craft materials to decorate the outside of the box (letters, beads, glitter, feathers, etc) and glue – materials inside “Isithebe Kit”.



<sup>19</sup> Laminated sheet with suggested dates for Isithebe gatherings are included in the Isithebe Kit.

Follow the page of instructions attached to June package

- Each teacher to use blank photo frame and craft materials (letters, beads, glitter, feathers, etc) and glue – materials inside “Isithebe Kit”.
- Use materials and glue to decorate your photo frame in any way you would like
- After frame is decorated, place the photo of your important relationship in the frame (printed photos to be handed out at July meeting)

After activity, teachers to share in group:

- How this relationship developed?
- What are the highs and lows of this relationship?
- What are the challenges they have overcome?
- Why does this person help them be a good teacher?

\*Teachers reminded to take a photo of photo frame and send on what’s app group

\*Optional – place the photo frame on your desk at work or somewhere at home

### **Discussion after the Framing Important Educator Relationships activity (approx. 45 min)**

- Take turns to ask and answer the three questions on the laminated document<sup>20</sup>;
- Write the answers in the school journal;
- Take a photograph of the school’s Isithebe gathering and post on whatsapp; and
- Bring the school-journal, as well as ALL the Isithebe products to the joint meeting next month.

## **FULL CIRCLE SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS**

### **THIRD JOINT Isithebe gathering: teachers of six schools and researchers (September)**

- Educators and researchers meet jointly at an agreed upon venue – probably DBE District Offices. Suggested date: 20 September 2019<sup>21</sup>
- This session is planned for 1 hour 30 min to 2 hours.
- **Educators each bring ALL the products from previous Isithebe gatherings to present and discuss at joint meeting.**
- Researchers bring September materials for icebreaker, three posters per school, markers, teacher resilience and social connectedness measures, and organise drinks and snacks.

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<sup>20</sup> Three questions to ask and answer during every Isithebe gathering:

How do these gatherings help you to be a teacher?

How do these gatherings help you with school projects?

How do these gatherings help you to be involved with other role-players in the school-community?

<sup>21</sup> Laminated sheet with suggested dates for Isithebe gatherings are included in the Isithebe Kit.

**Instructions: Full circle social connectedness icebreaker (approximately 45 min)**

- Teachers divide into school-specific groups.
- Each educator picks one Isithebe product as a symbol to explain to their school-group how social connectedness supports them to be happy as teachers, remain in the profession, and provide quality education.

**PRA discussions per group after the Full Circle Social Connectedness icebreaker (approx. 45 min)**

- Teachers divide into school-specific groups.
- Each group receives three blank posters and markers to answer each of the following questions in turn:
  - How do these gatherings help you to be a teacher?
  - How do these gatherings help you with school projects?
  - How do these gatherings help you to be involved with other role-players in the school-community?
- Each school presents their answer to educators from all schools.
- Post-test of social connectedness and teacher resilience measures.

## APPENDIX A: INTERVENTION OUTLINE APRIL – AUGUST 2019

ISITHEBE GATHERINGS: TIMEFRAME APRIL – AUGUST 2019		
15 April 2019	Meet per school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ April-labelled package with instructions in Isithebe Kit – <b>Relationship Voucher Box</b></li> <li>➤ Round robin discussion on questions and write answers in journal:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do these gatherings help you to be a teacher?</li> <li>- How do these gatherings help you with school projects?</li> <li>- How do these gatherings help you to be involved with other role-players in the school-community?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
27 May 2019	Joint meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Start with <b>Friendship Survival Kit ice-breaker</b></li> <li>➤ PRA groups/school on questions and written answers in journal:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do these gatherings help you to be a teacher?</li> <li>- How do these gatherings help you with school projects?</li> <li>- How do these gatherings help you to be involved with other role-players in the school-community?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
10 June 2019	Meet per school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ June-labelled package with instructions in Isithebe Kit – <b>Educator Circle Recipe book</b></li> <li>➤ Round robin discussion on questions and write answers in journal:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do these gatherings help you to be a teacher?</li> <li>- How do these gatherings help you with school projects?</li> <li>- How do these gatherings help you to be involved with other role-players in the school-community?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
29 July 2019	Joint meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Start with <b>Educator Journey Bracelets craft activity and ice-breaker</b></li> <li>➤ PRA groups/school on questions and written answers in journal:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do these gatherings help you to be a teacher?</li> <li>- How do these gatherings help you with school projects?</li> <li>- How do these gatherings help you to be involved with other role-players in the school-community?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
19 August 2019	Meet per school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ August-labelled package with instructions in Isithebe Kit – <b>Framing Important Educator Relationships</b></li> <li>➤ Educators reminded to bring photos given to them at July meeting</li> <li>➤ Round robin discussion on questions and write answers in journal:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do these gatherings help you to be a teacher?</li> <li>- How do these gatherings help you with school projects?</li> <li>- How do these gatherings help you to be involved with other role-players in the school-community?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
September	Joint meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Bring all Isithebe products for sharing</li> <li>➤ PRA groups/school on questions and written answers in journal:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do these gatherings help you to be a teacher?</li> <li>- How do these gatherings help you with school projects?</li> <li>- How do these gatherings help you to be involved with other role-players in the school-community?</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ Post-test: teacher resilience &amp; social connectedness</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX B: ARTS-ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS IN ISITHEBE KIT

### Relationship Voucher Box Instructions

Time: 1 hour 30 min

- Begin with a discussion about month's highs and lows (what was nice and why? What was challenging and why this month?).
- Reflection on the previous month's activity and begin with the question: *Did your knowledge from the previous activity help you this month?*

### Craft activity instructions

- Each teacher to use small box and craft materials (letters, beads, glitter, feathers, etc) and glue – materials inside "Isithebe Kit".
- Use materials and glue to decorate your box in any way you would like
- Open envelope with relationship vouchers inside
- There are blank pieces of cardboard for you to write your own ideas on how to build relationships
- After you have finished decorating your boxes, please select 6 vouchers to put in their relationship box
- Take part in 4 week challenge – every week select a voucher from the box to do

\*Teachers reminded to take a photo of relationship box and send on what's app group

### Recipe Book Instructions

Time: 1 hour 30 min

- Begin with a discussion about month's highs and lows (what was nice and why? What was challenging and why this month?).
- Reflection on the previous month's activity and begin with the question: *Did your knowledge from the previous activity help you this month?*

### Craft activity instructions: (approx. 45 min)

- Each teacher to use blank notebook and craft materials (letters, beads, glitter, feathers, etc) and glue – materials inside "Isithebe Kit".
- Use materials to decorate the cover of your recipe book in any way you would like
- Once you have finished decorating your book, write in it your favourite recipe (it can be anything simple), but a dish that you enjoy making for friends and family.
- Then pass your book to the person on your left and ask them to write down their favourite recipe
- The person to your right will pass you their recipe book where you can write down the same favourite recipe that they wrote in your book

- Keep passing book along until each person has written down their favourite recipe in every group member's recipe book
- You will write down the same recipe you wrote in your book in each of your group member's book
- At the end of the activity you will have a recipe book with one favourite recipe from all your group members, plus yours.

Optional: at the end of the activity group members pick a date and a recipe where they can come together to make the meal at someone's house. They can all decide on an ingredient to bring and then come together to make the meal and have dinner together

\*Please take a photo of recipe book and send on what's app group

### **Photo Frame Instructions**

Time: 1 hour 30 min

- Begin with a discussion about month's highs and lows (what was nice and why? What was challenging and why this month?).
- Reflection on the previous month's activity and begin with the question: *Did your knowledge from the previous activity help you this month?*

### **Craft activity instructions**

- Each teacher to use blank photoframe and craft materials (letters, beads, glitter, feathers, etc) and glue – materials inside "Isithebe Kit".
- Use materials and glue to decorate your photo frame in any way you would like
- After frame is decorated, teachers can place the photo of their important relationship in the frame (printed photos to be given to teachers at July meeting)
- After activity, teachers to share in group:
  - How this relationship developed?
  - What are the highs and lows of this relationship?
  - What are the challenges they have overcome?
  - Why does this person help them be a good teacher?

\*Teachers reminded to take a photo of photo frame and send on what's app group

## APPENDIX C: INTERVENTION TRAINING 15 MARCH 2019

### Intervention training session

- Educators sit in groups with colleagues from their school.
- Provide each group with stationary necessary per activity (e.g. a piece of cardboard and coloured pens for the 'Picture the value of a relationships' session).
- Following every group-based arts-activity additional knowledge is presented during a brief power point information session (**refer to appendix D**).
- **The following materials are required:**
  - Card board and posters
  - Kokies and pencils for drawing in first session
  - PPT
  - Isithebe kits per school
  - Attendance register
  - Name labels
  - Isithebe Intervention manuals per attendee
  - Thank you gifts
  - Participation certificates

ISITHEBE INTERVENTION TRAINING: 15 MARCH 2019			
8:00-8:30	Registration, arrival coffee & tea		
8:30-9:00	Welcoming Introductions Overview of purpose (Isithebe manual: pp2 & 3)	Ms Joy Sishi Liesel Ebersöhn & Ronél Ferreira	5 min 15 min 10 min
9:00-10:00	<b>SESSION 1: Your best self as a teacher</b> Body-sculpting to frame teacher resilience experiences: (a) <b><i>use your BODY to create a statue of your best self as a teacher – show the legacy you want to leave when you pass;</i></b> (b) discuss in your group why this body-sculpture represents your best self as a teacher; and (c) each group selects and presents two body-sculpture representations with the larger group.	Jessica Versfeld Liesel Ebersöhn Ronél Ferreira Zahné Bosch	10 min 20 min 30 min
10:00-10:15	PPT-information session & Isithebe manual, p4.		15 min
10:15-10:45	Tea and coffee, comfort break		
10:45-11:45	<b>SESSION 2: Picture the value of a relationship</b> Drawing to frame social connectedness: (a) educators draw a picture / image to show what they appreciate about the person to their left; (b) discuss in your group how your drawing shows what you appreciate about the person to your left; and (c) each group selects and presents two drawings with the larger group.	Jessica Versfeld Liesel Ebersöhn Ronél Ferreira Zahné Bosch	10 min 20 min 30 min
11:45-12:00	PPT-information session & Isithebe manual, p4-6.		15 min

<b>ISITHEBE INTERVENTION TRAINING: 15 MARCH 2019</b>			
12:00-13:00	<b>SESSION 3: Introduction to Isithebe gatherings</b> (a) Distribute the Isithebe Kits per school; (b) Explain the Isithebe Kit & timeframe (pp7-10); (c) Model the use of the Isithebe Kit (Appendix E): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use the March-labelled package in the Isithebe Kit (clay modelling);</li> <li>• demonstrate the procedure with three questions;</li> </ul> (d) revisit the before, during and after procedure.	Jessica Versfeld Liesel Ebersöhn Ronél Ferreira Zahné Bosch	10 min 10 min 30 min 10 min
13:00-13:15	Closing and way forward	Liesel Ebersöhn Ronél Ferreira	15 min
13:15	Lunch	---	---

# APPENDIX D: POWERPOINT PRESENTATION FOR INTERVENTION TRAINING

**CSR**  
The Institute for the Study of Business  
Wa seenters ya boesetso  
Global leader in multidisciplinary knowledge generation in high risk, high need, adaptation and high performance

**ISITHEBE**  
**IMBUMBA YABEFUNDISINTSAPHO**

**UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA**  
**UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**  
**YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA**

**Synergos**

## Teacher resilience: being a quality educator during challenging times

- ▶ Educators in South Africa face many challenges
- ▶ Educators may feel hopeless, feel as if they need more support and resources

Expected (negative) outcomes (results) that one can predict for educators because of the extreme challenges we face because of inequality:

- ▶ educator burnout and distress,
- ▶ educator attrition, and
- ▶ low quality education

## Teacher resilience: being a quality educator during challenging times

- ▶ **Resilience** - adapting well in the face of adversity
- ▶ Teacher resilience - 'better than expected' outcomes for educators - despite continued hardship

Teacher resilience means the following **unpredicted, positive outcomes** are possible for educators:

- ▶ educator job satisfaction and wellbeing,
- ▶ educator retention, and
- ▶ high quality education

## SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

- ▶ What makes us happiest in life? *Discussion*
- ▶ Social connection refers to our sense of belonging
- ▶ Includes not only family and friends, but also the wider groups and communities we belong to
- ▶ The relationships and various groups we belong to make up our identity
- ▶ We draw strength from relationships and connections in times of difficulties



## WHY RELATIONSHIPS ARE IMPORTANT

- ▶ Relationships help us stay healthy and happy
- ▶ Provide people with a sense meaning in life
- ▶ Relationships provide us with networks that create access to resources
- ▶ When we feel appreciated and cared for - reduces burn-out rates



## LONELINESS

- ▶ The opposite of social connection is social isolation and loneliness
- ▶ Lack of genuine relationships
- ▶ Feel misunderstood and excluded
- ▶ Subjective - can be surrounded by others and still feel lonely
- ▶ Loneliness can be a contributing factor to heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, Alzheimer's and other critical diseases



## FOSTERING SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

- ▶ Isithebe intervention aims to bring you together as teachers to spend time with each other bonding over arts, crafts and discussions
- ▶ Isithebe intervention aims to facilitate closeness with each other, as well as with other people in your life
- ▶ Teachers are busy - therefore create intentional space to connect



## RELATIONSHIPS MATTER IN ALL SPACES

- ▶ People who have good relationships tend to contribute more towards their communities
- ▶ Social connectedness is associated with the economic performance of a community
- ▶ Relationships create networks and access to resources
- ▶ Enabling environments create "safe spaces" to foster good relationships



## RELATIONSHIPS MATTER IN ALL SPACES

- ▶ Schools and teachers are associated with positive ways in building relationships
- ▶ For children, relationships with caring teachers is an important pathway to social connectedness
- ▶ Meaningful interactions are a way out of isolation
- ▶ Relationships give teachers and the children they work with the courage to overcome painful situations



## APPENDIX E: TRAINING ARTS-ACTIVITY (CLAY MODELLING)

- Educators meet jointly during the training.
- Group members use MARCH labelled packet which includes:



Craft materials and clay

### Instructions: Clay Modelling activity (approximately 45 min)

- The instruction is given as follows:
- Use the clay and materials to make a visual display of **what relationships mean to you as a teacher**
- Please write the description of what relationships mean to you as a teacher on the piece of cardboard
- Please take a picture of your clay model and cardboard description and post it on the Imbumba Yabefundisintsapho what's app group
- Put materials from craft variety pack back into 'Isithebe Kit' to be used for subsequent craft activities

### Discussion after the Clay Modelling activity (approx. 45 min)

- After completion of clay models, groups display their visual representation of what relationships mean to them as a teacher and answer the following questions:
- Take turns to ask and answer the three questions on the laminated document<sup>22</sup>;
- Write the answers in your school journal.

## ISITHEBE



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<sup>22</sup> Three questions to ask and answer during every Isithebe gathering:

How do these gatherings help you to be a teacher?

How do these gatherings help you with school projects?

How do these gatherings help you to be involved with other role-players in the school-community?

## APPENDIX B

### DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF PARTICIPANTS

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**Table 2:** Demographic details of participants

Primary School	Teacher	Gender	Age	Home Language	Teacher Qualification	Grade Teaching	Subjects Teaching	Teaching Duration	Total Teachers Per School
A	1	F	58	IsiXhosa and English	Senior Phase Teaching Diploma; Remedial Education; Educational psychology	Grade 7	English, Social Science and Technology	More than 24 years	4
	2	F	50	IsiXhosa	Junior Phase Teaching Diploma (J.P.T.D); Remedial Education; Bachelor of Education (BEd)	Grade 4	IsiXhosa	Between 15 and 24 years	
	3	F	57	IsiXhosa	BEd Honours	Grade 3	IsiXhosa, Maths, English, Life Skills	More than 27 years	
	4	F	50	IsiXhosa	BEd Intermediate Phase	Grade 3	IsiXhosa, Maths, English, Life Skills	Between 15 and 24 years	

Primary School	Teacher	Gender	Age	Home Language	Teacher Qualification	Grade Teaching	Subjects Teaching	Teaching Duration	Total Teachers Per School
B	7	F	53	IsiXhosa	J.P.T.D; BEd Honours	Grade 3	IsiXhosa, Maths, English, Life Skills	Between 15 and 24 years	5
	8	F	43	IsiXhosa	Early childhood	Grade R	(No information available)	(No information available)	
	9	F	53	IsiXhosa	J.P.T.D; BEd	Grade 4-7	English, Social Science	More than 24 years	
	10	F	48	(No information available)	J.P.T.D	Grade 1	Foundation phase subjects	Less than 15 years	
	11	F	50	IsiXhosa	J.P.T.D; BEd Honours	Grade 3	IsiXhosa, Maths, English, Life Skills	Between 15 and 24 years	
C	12	F	38	IsiXhosa	NQF level 4	Grade R	IsiXhosa, Maths, Life Skills	Less than 15 years	5
	13	F	54	IsiXhosa	J.P.T.D	Grade 2	All Junior Phase subjects	Between 15 and 24 years	
	14	M	50	IsiXhosa	Senior Teacher Diploma; Advanced Certificate of Education (ACE); BEd Honours	Grade 7	Maths and Natural Science	More than 28 years	
	15	F	49	IsiXhosa	Foundation Phase Diploma; BEd	Grade 1	IsiXhosa, English, Maths, Life Skills	Between 15 and 24 years	
	16	M	31	IsiXhosa	BEd of Arts and Culture	Grade 4-7	IsiXhosa, EMS and creative arts	Less than 15 years	

Primary School	Teacher	Gender	Age	Home Language	Teacher Qualification	Grade Teaching	Subjects Teaching	Teaching Duration	Total Teachers Per School
D	17	F	45	IsiXhosa	Senior Primary Education Diploma	Grade 4	Natural Science and IsiXhosa	Less than 15 years	8
	18	F	47	IsiXhosa	J.P.T.D; ACE. Life Orientation (LO)	Grade 3	IsiXhosa, English, Maths, Life Skills	Less than 15 years	
	19	F	53	IsiXhosa	Diploma	Grade 2	IsiXhosa, English, Maths, Life Skills	More than 24 years	
	20	F	(No information available)	IsiXhosa	J.P.T.D	Grade 3	All Foundation Phase subjects	More than 24 years	
	21	F	54	IsiXhosa	J.P.T.D; Bachelor of Arts (BA); BA Honours	Grade 6	Life Skills and Social Sciences	More than 24 years	
	22	F	53	IsiXhosa	J.P.T.D	Grade 1	IsiXhosa, English, Maths, Life Skills	Less than 15 years	
	23	F	60	IsiXhosa	J.P.T.D; Remedial Education	Grade 2	All JP subjects	More than 24 years	
	24	F	60	IsiXhosa	J.P.T.D; Remedial Education	Grade 4	Social Science and Life Skills	More than 24 years	

Primary School	Teacher	Gender	Age	Home Language	Teacher Qualification	Grade Teaching	Subjects Teaching	Teaching Duration	Total Teachers Per School
E	25	F	49	IsiXhosa	Junior primary	Grade 1	All Foundation Phase subjects	Less than 15 years	2
	26	F	47	IsiXhosa	Honours in Education	Grade 2	All	between 15 and 24 years	
F	27	F	55	IsiXhosa	Diploma in Education	Grade 4 and 5	English	Less than 15 years	12
	28	F	52	IsiXhosa	SED; ACE	Grade 4-6	Life Skills	Less than 15 years	
	29	F	63	IsiXhosa	BEd	Grade 7	English and Economic and Management Sciences	More than 24 years	
	30	F	46	IsiXhosa	NQF level 2; NQF level 4	Grade 12	All subjects	Less than 15 years	
	31	F	46	IsiXhosa	J.P.T.D; Remedial	Grade 1	IsiXhosa, Maths and Life Skills	Between 15 and 24 years	
	32	F	53	IsiXhosa	J.P.T.D	Grade 3	All Foundation Phase subjects	Less than 15 years	
	33	F	54	IsiXhosa	J.P.T.D	Grade 2	All Foundation Phase subjects	Less than 15 years	
	34	F	52	IsiXhosa	Teacher's diploma - junior phase; foundation phase	Grade 3	All Foundation Phase subjects	Less than 15 years	
	35	F	55	IsiXhosa	Diploma ACE (Life Orientation)	Grade 4 and 5	Natural Science and Technology	Less than 15 years	

	36	F	23	IsiXhosa and English	BEd Foundation Phase	Grade 3	All Foundation Phase subjects	Less than 15 years	
	37	F	47	IsiXhosa	Early Childhood Development	Grade R	Maths, life skills and English	Less than 15 years	
	38	F	33	IsiXhosa	Early Childhood Development	Grade R	Language, Life Skills, Numeracy	Less than 15 years	
<b>TOTAL TEACHERS IN DATASET</b>									<b>36</b>