RESILIENCE IN AN EMBODIED PERSPECTIVE:
THE IMPACT OF INTEGRATED ARTS EDUCATION ON EXPERIENCES
OF SOUTH AFRICAN PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN
POST COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

PhD **Charlotte Svendler Nielsen**
Department of Nutrition, Exercise and Sports, University of Copenhagen,
Denmark

BAFA, HDE (PG sec) **Liesl Hartman**
Zeitz MOCAA Centre for Art Education, Cape Town, South Africa

ND, PGCE **Fabian Hartzenberg**
Ibhabhathane Project, Peter Clarke Arts Centre, Cape Town, South Africa

PhD **Gerard M. Samuel**
Centre for Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies, School of Dance,
University of Cape Town, South Africa

Abstract

This article seeks to deepen knowledge about how education that integrates dance and visual arts has had an impact on supporting resilience among children in a primary school in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa. The authors have for four years run a project in which the value of integrating dance and visual arts in different ways has been explored. The last workshop week took place in 2020 once schools had reopened after a long period of lockdown. The week included a focus on illuminating the children's experiences of schooling during and after the lockdown. Through a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis of data collected using methods involving multi modal means of expression, it comes forth that the impact that this work has had, is that the children have learned to

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not just accept what is, but to question and be critical based on what they feel. They learned techniques to assist them to let go of tension and to feel and be aware of embodied sensations. They also had experiences of relating to their peers in new ways and used their imagination to create and express ideas. Based on this study it is concluded that when an embodied perspective is included in a theoretical understanding of the notion of resilience, and this perspective is implemented to guide educational practice, schools may be able to better promote environments that support resilience.

Keywords: *integrated arts education, resilience, primary school, South Africa, COVID-19 lockdown.*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic starting in 2020 forced governments around the world to implement lockdown of societies in shorter or longer periods of time, and with different levels of restriction. This included closure of schools and change to approaches to education either in ways blending on-line tools with tools for distance learning, or solely distance learning, depending on the resources of the schools/teachers and families. A study from the European Commission Joint Research Centre highlights the need for more support and training on "how to maintain good mental health and boost resilience" of both pupils and teachers as a result of COVID-19 lockdowns [Carretero et al. 2021]. Recommendations from international organisations like UNESCO[1] and knowledge from projects carried out in areas hit by sudden tragedies and trauma all underline the potential of the arts to support resilience among children and communities [O'Connor 2020; Pruitt and Jeffrey 2020]. Resilience which can be defined as "an interactive concept that is concerned with the combination of serious risk experiences and a relatively positive psychological outcome despite those experiences" [Rutter 2006: 2] must be in focus in education in such challenging times as it serves as a condition for being ready to learning the subject matter in school. This article seeks to deepen knowledge about how education that integrates dance and visual arts, and with the purpose of focusing on embodied processes, could have an impact on supporting resilience among children in primary schools[2] in post-lockdown schooling of South Africa. This is a country in which the COVID-19 pandemic added to adversities normally experienced by the majority of the population as lockdown measures foster growth

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[1] https://en.unesco.org/creativity/covid-19

[2] In South African literature school-going children are referred to as "learners". We feel this term is in opposition to the view of children that inspires the work of this project and therefore have chosen to use the term "children" throughout this article except in direct quotes.

of evils related to poverty such as hunger, crime and violence [Save the Children, INEE and UNICEF 2020].

From 2017 to 2020 the authors of this article worked together in an intercultural and integrated arts educational project called Red Apples – Green Apples[1] with a class in a primary school in Cape Town, South Africa. This project had a three-fold research focus: 1) to develop new strategies for teaching through embodied, intercultural and integrated arts educational practice, 2) to explore children's opportunities for embodied learning asking: how can they get to know and understand different concepts in a more embodied way? How can they express themselves through different modalities?, and 3) to pursue new research approaches to understand children's sense-making processes within educational practice that integrates embodied learning, interculturality, different subject matter and art forms. Overall, the project sought to cross borders between academia and artistic-educational practice, for example, by including reflective exercises using different means of expression in workshops to foster embodied learning [Anttila and Svendler Nielsen 2019] (examples of such exercises follow below). The project thus blurred the traditional lines between teaching and research, since it questioned what knowledge is, how it can be produced and who can and should be involved in knowledge production in an educational practice.[2] The workshop followed a creative educational approach with open-ended tasks and learning about concepts through different kinds of experiences and expressive formats. In the workshop which is the focus of this article the concepts of "connection" and "obstacle" were explored.

When we started the project in 2017 the class in Cape Town was in grade 4, and in 2020 they were in grade 7 soon to finish their primary schooling and ready to move on to different high schools in the city. After seven visits we had planned for a concluding year with week-long workshops in May and September 2020. But the COVID-19 pandemic started to spread around the world with countries going into lockdown and borders closing, also putting our project on hold. The school, which is the site for this research project, is situated in a working-class area and many pupils

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[1] We called the project Red Apples – Green Apples to, in an artistic way, underline the intercultural dimension of being a mix of people from the South and the North in the project which is reflected in different colours of the apples (and of ourselves as human beings) as we planned to be working with the relationship between nature and culture as underlying themes.

[2] Our collaboration was initiated through an International Network Program, "Knowledge production, archives and artistic research" funded by the Danish Agency for Science and Higher Education and led by Karen A. Vedel, Department of Art and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen 2016–2017. Meetings of this network culminated in two week-long workshops with school classes in Cape Town and Copenhagen in 2017 also involving the Western Cape Education Department's Peter Clarke Arts Centre and the Danish Cultural Institute as partners and supported by the Danish Agency for Culture and the Municipality of Copenhagen.

come from surrounding townships in which resources are scarce, both in financial terms and also with regards to infrastructure giving access to water, electricity and internet. This meant that these school children could not maintain a teaching program on-line neither with their teachers, and certainly not with a project run by external institutions. But as lockdown levels eased from a total lockdown level 5 in April–May 2020 till a level 1 which included that South Africa's borders opened in October 2020, we were successful to get permission from the school to plan a week of concluding activities for the children. This was a very special opportunity as at that time it was still not the norm that external stakeholders were allowed into schools in South Africa. This school decided that it was important for them to provide a conclusion to this long-term project and give the children the experiences we as arts-educators had been showing them that we could provide during the four years of the project. Therefore, even though the children were only in school on certain days (three days every second week and two days in the other weeks) they called all of our grade 7 in for the full week that we were planning to be working at the school. However, our initial research questions did not seem equally relevant to the new COVID reality and we therefore changed the focus of our inquiry to explore different ways of integrating dance and visual arts to help illuminate how the children had experienced the total lockdown period which they had faced during April–May 2020, and how they had experienced returning to school. Themes relating to resilience soon emerged to become important in many of the children's responses to reflection exercises. This made us decide to focus the inquiry for this paper on *what impact can a teaching space working with integrated arts educational approaches have on creating an environment that supports resilience?*

Resilience at the outset of our inquiry is referred to in a social-ecological framework [Theron, Levine and Ungar 2020; Ungar 2012] which means that resilience is not considered in terms of an individual's personal traits a capacity and own responsibility, but rather are processes that can be supported through the environment. We will discuss the potential of adding an embodied perspective to this outset in order to better understand possible processes of resilience based on our educational practice and a phenomenological concept of knowledge [Merleau-Ponty 1962] which, like the social-ecological framework, considers individual experiences as being intertwined with experiences of others and the world around us.

Ethical considerations when doing research in education with vulnerable children

The specific school in Cape Town was invited to become part of this project as it is a school that is working with the Peter Clarke Arts Centre, one of the partners in the project. This means that the decision to participate in this study was made by

the school leadership and specific teachers. Later they informed the children about their involvement and the purpose of the project. This means that the children did not have the choice to not participate, but every time we were planning interview sessions, we gave the children themselves a choice to take part or not as we felt that, for ethical reasons, they should have the possibility of deciding themselves in what way they wanted to engage in the project. As photography and videography were central method of the project [see Svendler Nielsen et al. 2020], we made it clear to the children that they could tell us if they did not want to be photographed or filmed. A number of times in the project period informed consent was obtained from parents/guardians through a letter informing them about the purpose of the project, how it would be carried out, how data would be safely stored, their right to get insight to material involving their own child, and their right to withdraw their consent at any moment until publication of articles about the project. It was necessary to obtain such content more than once, since due to funding issues we were unclear of the duration of the project when we started it. For this article, the data includes material about vulnerable issues related to poverty and difficulties doing school work. Therefore, we have given the children pseudonyms reflecting their gender and ethnicity, and have made sure the photos we include are not linked to any interview quote so that no one can know who has said what. We also checked that the names we chose were not names of children in the other grade 7 class of the school.

A research methodology and conceptual framework to capture and understand "first-person" experiences

The methodology of this project is inspired by a (post)qualitative research approach [LeGrange 2018] sparking a decolonial conversation that can be framed as "phenomenological and arts-based educational action research". The project is grounded in a phenomenological theory of knowledge focusing on first-person experiences and on connections of "body-mind-world" [Merleau-Ponty 1962; van Manen 1990] both as the base of the educational approach of workshops we taught, and of the analysis and interpretation of the empirical material which we gathered. The phenomenological base leans on hermeneutic phenomenology [van Manen 1990] and is combined with arts-based educational research [Barone and Eisner 2006], educational action research [Altrichter et al. 2008], multi-modal theory [Danesi 2007; Wright 2010] and different practical creative expression formats. The phenomenological philosophy guiding both the research and educational dimensions we find to align well with our project's overall focus on igniting experiences and expressions that will foster intercultural learning [Wilson et al. 2021] and promoting de-colonial perspectives [Bhabha 2004], because in its roots

it is inspired by non-Western philosophies that also consider body, mind and sur-roundings as interconnected [Merleau-Ponty 1962].

The project included one class of approximately 40 learners throughout the four-year project period including a couple of newcomers to the class as well as losing some that did not pass from grade to grade, or moved school. For the study for this article two teachers were involved in reflections through interviews and more informal conversations that were either recorded or documented in writing. All four of us were involved in creating empirical material. Charlotte led interview sessions and all of us were involved in informal conversations which we shared in our group and then made notes about. We all also took the role of observer, sometimes photographing or video recording during the teaching processes and all also led various reflective exercises. When we were not the one leading or documenting an activity, we took the role of participant alongside the children. The essence of our methods of research and of the pedagogy of the project is that we combined doing/expressing/dancing with talking, drawing, painting and writing. These activities served as multi-modal entries to learning and engagement. The integrated arts educational approach as well as the different roles we as adults took also fostered ways of addressing inherent power issues that can be experienced in all research projects as researchers and participants are involved for different reasons, but seemed even more prevalent in a context in which there was a great diversity in the group as a whole both in terms of race/ethnicity and social status. Furthermore, some of the children could be categorised as part of less privileged groups in society, which is important to understand when interpreting their responses. It seems that part of an educational reality almost 30 years after apartheid has officially ended, is that there is still an experience of apartheid. There may be no laws indicating the difference between privileges of different racial groups, but it is clear that certain cultural groups still experience a diminished sense of self-worth, a remnant of Apartheid [Erasmus 2001, 2018]. This underlying complex power issue made interviewing the children a challenge. We therefore worked with open-ended questions facilitating the children's creative responses and experimented with different ways of "interviewing" and reflecting, both in interview and workshop sessions.

Reflective exercises

During the days of the workshop week in November 2020 we did a number of different reflective exercises involving different modalities. Some of the exercises served as a way to start group dialogue sessions (see next paragraph for details), others were part of the workshop activities. One such activity which formed part of the workshop was to draw our footprints and to write and/or draw about what had

made an *imprint* on us in the full project. Imprints of footprints and other body parts is a method we have used throughout the project both involving paper and material in our surroundings like the sand in a sandpit. Along the way we have reflected with the children about the fact that an *imprint* is something that shows how we as people can make an *impact* on other people (through significant experiences) and on the world (like a *carbon footprint*). But at the same time the surroundings can also leave an imprint which impacts us (like the sand which will stay in the wrinkles of our hand and thus change how the hand looks and feels when we have made a handprint in a sandpit).

Figure 1. A boy's footprint in which he wrote: "We talked about connection on the grass. We talked about the borders of South Africa because of the corona virus."
Figure 2. A girl's drawing of her hand which has sand in its wrinkles after making an imprint in a sandpit.

Group dialogues

During the project interviews based on *utopia* as an idea [Blanes et al. 2016] inspired by relational aesthetic theory [Bourriaud 2002] were carried out as group dialogues. In November 2020 the dialogues focused on illuminating the children's experiences of the impact of integrating dance and visual arts in their schooling experiences based on a reflective cards exercise asking the children to write and/or draw their responses to four questions (see the questions of the four cards below).

The sessions started by doing individual reflective exercises to make the children think and express themselves creatively, and to find out what was significant to each of them. We did this using more indirect ways of asking that would at the same time also reduce possible experiences of power in our relationships. Once they had responded to each of the questions on the cards, we started the dialogue in the group by hearing their responses and discussing the different viewpoints as well as responding to the questions they had written as part of the exercise. This approach worked as a way to try to have longer and deeper responses than what we have experienced that we have been able to create with them in interview sessions that have mainly been based on a traditional semi-structured qualitative interview style. At the same time this

Figures 3 and 4. Some of the children wrote and drew on reflective question cards while sitting together around a table, others had the exercise as a task to do in class before an interview session (photos: Authors' own collection).

approach also worked to create more insight to what actually made sense to the children, what occupied them, as well as to give everyone an opportunity to reflect and formulate their own responses not being influenced by what others might have said, or feeling pressured by their peers to give certain responses.

Card no. 1: Please write about how you consider what we have done in our arts project in the past years in relation to other school work – what are similarities and differences?

Card no. 2: If you could dream about what schools would be in the future – what would you keep from school as it is? What would you change?

Card no. 3: If you were to interview someone about their experiences in our arts project, which questions would you ask? Please write three questions…

Card no. 4: Which questions would you like to ask us?

Usually we were two adults with a group of three-four children carrying out such dialogues, but this week it was only possible to carry out more lengthy interviews at the same time as we taught other parts of the class. We therefore decided that Charlotte took care of the interview sessions alone as she has always been leading and taking part as one of the adults in our group dialogues. The children were therefore used to her taking this role. There can be both advantages and disadvantages for a white person/cultural outsider leading such dialogues in this context, because it can cause some of them to say less (she is an outsider from Europe which to them means that she must be rich). On the other hand, some might say it is exactly because Charlotte is more of a stranger, that they were willing to say more in order to 'educate' her about their perspectives. Perhaps also the fact that she is female and that the

children knew that she has a daughter the same age as them might even have created a relationship which for some spurred confidence to speak. When considering the role of the interviewer and who can interview who and about what, we also need to take into account that this group of children over four years had known Charlotte as a teacher who would roll around on the grass, play and interact with them, as well as embrace and give them attention in workshops based on a child-centered pedagogy.

Analysing experience-based material

How can we analyse empirical material that is not only in the form of words? In this project we have interview quotes from interviews with the children and teachers and material of a more arts-based nature in the form of photographs, drawings, reflective notes and video recordings. Analysing these varied experiences expressed through a variety of formats we maintain can contribute to deepened understanding about what impact arts education can have. In this case when trying to understand what it has been like to try to learn during and after lockdown for these children. This was done using an artistic-analytical approach [Degerbøl and Svendler Nielsen 2014] which underlines that form and content is interwoven and thus connecting with a phenomenological theory of knowledge focusing on people's lived experiences and placing emphasis on an understanding that the body-mind-surroundings are closely linked. The first step of our analysis was to choose specific quotes from interviews and pictures taken during the workshops in which something significant in relation to understanding the children's experiences of schooling in the aftermath of the first COVID-19 lockdown was expressed. The pictures and extracts were then looked at/ read again in order to determine which central theme was predominant. This was when we realised that the environment that was created in the arts-integrated project seemed to support some sort of resilience in the group and the material was organised according to 'resilience' as a central theme. When reading and looking through the material after it had been organised we asked, "What happens here?", "How can we understand what they are saying/doing?", "What might be deeper meanings that we can illuminate in combination with our conceptual framework?"

A glimpse into lives of primary age children in the Cape Flats

Before we can go into analyses of the impact on resilience of the educational environment that we had created, it is important to know who the children were, what their typical daily lives in school were like and what "school life" was like during lockdown. Below we will unfold these questions based on the experiences of the grade 7 children formulated with their own words.

The class consisted of a diverse group of children coming from different social as well as cultural and religious backgrounds (including Islam and Christianity) and

they spoke different languages at home (some isiXhosa and some Afrikaans) while English was the language of teaching at the school. Their home environments were noteworthy too as the area called the Cape Flats where they all lived are borne out of apartheid legacies of segregated neighbourhoods, amenities and places of trade and worship. Many of these spaces such as Khayelitsha, and Gugulethu have some of the highest crime statistics in the city and the unenviable title of "murder capital" of the country. Hardship and trauma become part of the social fabric of these children who live, learn and grow up in these highly charged zones of inequality. The financial insecurity in families of the children after lockdown was even greater than before. We heard from some of the children that they either had relocated, or were about to go to live with relatives in different areas. The reasons for such moves could stem from a variety of social ills including loss of jobs, gender-based violence, grave illness and unexpected death.

In interview sessions Charlotte sat with small groups of the children in turn and talked to them about their responses to the question cards presented above. Question no. 3 was: "If you could dream of schools in the future, what should schools be like? What would you change and what would you keep?" A few responses written on their cards follow hereafter:

> *"Every child should feel safe and sound and the school should give the uniform and stationary to children that don't afford it."* (Nizibone)[1]
> *"Children must attend school. Not just leave school if they don't want to come. The parents must make sure of that."* (Lelethu)
> *"We must make bigger classrooms. We must have many desks, many chairs, many textbooks, brand new textbooks. New menu on the feeding scheme. And many people helping the ladies who feed us. Bringing more food for other children. And making charities."* (Ovayo)
> *"Make more space and make more classrooms because some classrooms are overcrowded, so we need new classrooms."* (Lihle)

Fahiem as a response to Lihle said,

> *"I would keep the classrooms. It's big enough for 40 children to be into. But it's not big enough for 40 children to be in that class when we have a pandemic. So we need more classrooms."*
> *"If I had to change something from the schools it wouldn't be only like from the schools. The first thing I would change is that some schools don't take children that*

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[1] We have chosen to keep the children's own English wording in the quotes as this reflects their original responses.

are poor and there are many children sitting out on the streets. And the teachers make like they don't understand the situation of why the children are sitting on the street. But if the child comes to school and makes one mistake, the teachers be like 'you don't even pay school fees!' and things like that. And that really embarrasses children. And the other thing I would change at school is that on the foundation phase sides, it's not bricks, the fence is not made of bricks it's made with cardboard. So it is not safe. So I would change the buildings and the thing I would keep is the garden." (Ayema)

The themes coming forth in the children's responses all have to do with resources of the school and their families showing how poverty and safety are important issues of their daily lives. Safety both relates to them living in a society of high levels of crime and to health of children at school during this pandemic. Even before the pandemic the children experienced that some of their classmates stopped coming to school and they saw them hang around in the streets. So the issue of resources both relate to those of parents (or guardians/caretakers in some cases) needing to make sure that firstly children attend school, and furthermore to politicians to make sure that there is enough capacity in the schooling system for all children to be able to go to school both during and after a pandemic. This is complex in South Africa, where the lack of resources in formerly named Coloured and Black schools requires the government's attention, especially since the South African Constitution promotes the right to equal access to education for all citizens.[1]

The reality of 40+ children in a classroom did not work at the time of a pandemic when there had to be space for social distancing, but it does not work in any normal school day either. The fact that public schools in South Africa are overcrowded means that at the end of 2020, almost six months after schools started to open gradually after lockdown, there was still not space for all of the children to come to school every day of the week as social distance measures still needed to be taken care of.

Children's experiences of schooling during lockdown

The following group dialogues reflect what it was like for these children to try to learn during and after lockdown. Charlotte started the dialogues by asking, *"When you think about the time that you had the lockdown and you had to be at home and do schoolwork at home. How was that?"* Lelethu says, *"Some things we didn't understand."* Charlotte tries to clarify, *"And then you didn't know what to do?"* Lelethu, *"Yes, miss."* Charlotte then asks, *"Could you get help from the teacher?"* Lelethu, *"Yes but only…, not after two o'clock."* Charlotte asks, *"Would you call the teacher? Or how did you make*

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[1] Constitution of the Republic of South Africa no. 108 of 1996: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/images/a108-96.pdf

contact?" Lelethu says, *"No, WhatsApp."* Charlotte asks, *"So you had to write your question?"* Lelethu confirms, *"Yes."*

Charlotte asks, *"How much time do you think you spent during the days to do schoolwork during the lockdown?"* Chantal says, *"Five hours."* Lelethu says, *"No, I don't think I did my work for five hours, I think I did more than five hours!"* Chantal exclaims in surprise, *"Joh!"* Lelethu says, *"Because if you don't understand what you must do, then it takes you more time."* Charlotte confirms, *"Then you spend more time, yes. But was there something nice about doing your schoolwork at home? Or would you rather sit in class and do it?"* Lelethu responds, *"Sit in class and do it."* But Chantal says, *"It was better at home because it's more quiet."* Lelethu however experienced that, *"(..) it's also better at school because you'll ask the teacher whatever you want."* And then Chantal says, *"I can ask my parents."* Charlotte asks if they can also ask their friends, but Lelethu says, *"I don't have friends where I live."* Charlotte responds, *"But in school you have friends?"* And Lelethu says, *"Yes, miss. And I can't ask my parents because I don't live with my father. I live with my mother and she goes to work."* Charlotte says, *"Okay, so you had to be home alone?"* Lelethu says, *"With my two siblings."* Charlotte asks, *"Also during the lockdown, did your mother go to work?"* Lelethu confirms, *"Yes, miss."*

Through the interviews we became aware that very few of the children had support for distance learning from home and that this had a huge influence on their opportunities to learn that which was outlined in the curriculum as objectives for the year. Within the class there was a spectrum of diversity, from children who were more privileged who liked to do school work at home, because it was quieter than in school and they could get help from their parents. Others were less privileged and lived with only one parent and younger siblings that they had to take care of and help with their school work during the day when they were all home alone.

Unlocking lockdown experiences through creative expression formats

The framework in which the interviews took place was a weeklong arts-integrated workshop which we did with this class in the beginning of November 2020. The theme of the workshop was *Creating connections and overcoming obstacles* and it was planned as explorations of the concepts of "obstacle" and "connection" through dance and visual arts practice using different arts-integrated approaches. We had decided with the class teacher that we would work with 10 children at the time in alternate groups and the rest of the class would stay with her to do their school work.

We started the first session with the first group by sitting on the grass outside the school building. We talked about the concepts of "obstacle" and "connection" that we would be working on during the week showing a picture of a map of the world and the internet cables that connect us even in times of an obstacle like lockdown.

We talked about what a connection and an obstacle is, which connections and obstacles we know and how we connect with others, and might overcome some of these obstacles.

> *The children to begin with did not smile at all like we are used to seeing them do. They also seemed very passive and inwardly focused, especially the girls immediately sat down and just stared at the grass. The boys moved around, but it was not the 'fooling around' in a playful way that we have often seen, it seemed as if they had no focus. We felt there had been a big change in the mood and engagement since we were last with the group in January 2020. It was almost like they were not 'there' even though physically they were sitting, or moving around us. But we decided to stand in a circle and start to do some breathing exercises and some soft warm up exercises to awaken and ground our bodies by moving each body part in turn, and then to do opening and closing movements connecting and disconnecting the different body parts, slowly moving closer to connect our body parts to each other (however maintaining social distance). These were all exercises that we have done with the group in other workshops thus acknowledging we might need to start doing something that would feel recognisable and safe by way of regressing to where we have been together before. Gerard then brought in a bundle of string and started pulling differently sized pieces of it and asking half the children to hold one end of the string each. We started to connect to each other by way of holding someone else's strings and then to create obstacles that others would explore moving over, under and around. Suddenly, there were smiles and giggles in the group and the atmosphere seemed to have loosened by the playful engagement in the exercise. We were now all breathing more deeply and in tune again.*
> (Reflection by Charlotte on workshop day 1, Nov. 2020)

Figure 5. The concepts of "obstacle" and "connection" explored through movement maintaining social distance (photos: Authors' own collection).

In the next session Liesl and Fabian initiated a mixed media lockdown group artwork on a long piece of paper. As a first process they asked the children to write or draw what people and which activities they missed being connected to during lockdown. The children wrote words like: "Best friend, cousins, basketball, swimming, brother, netball, my father, mom and dad, mall."

Figures 6, 7, 8 and 9. Working on mixed media lockdown art work
(photo: Authors' own collection).

The next step was to write or draw a response to "What obstacles did you experience during lockdown?" and "How did this obstacle make you feel?" Looking at the piece of paper there were words and sentences like: "Not seeing friends", "Missing cousins", "People making road blocks to protest so I couldn't get through", "It makes me very sad and frustrated because I can't see my friends and family", "Frustrated and hurt", "Angry", "Sad", "I need a father especially in my life." Liesl and Fabian carried on a discussion about how they could overcome the obstacles they had experienced during lockdown, some examples written on the paper were: "By wearing a mask and asking permission to seeing the person", "Walking around the road block of people."

Liesl and Charlotte later took the words of the children into a combined movement/visual arts session in which the children created short choreographic phrases in pairs based on three chosen words from the art work which not necessarily

had to be their own words. They then took turns one person at a time to dance their phrase moving from point A to point B while the other person would move along and draw the energy of the movement pattern on a new long piece of the paper roll stretching from point A to point B. Each pair did this using the same piece of paper, so we ended up with a new collaboratively made piece of art based on the movement expressions.

Figures 10, 11 and 12. Composition work based on three words from mixed media lockdown artwork (photo: Authors' own collection).

Liesl as project partner from the Zeitz MOCAA Centre for Art Education had suggested we could use the museum as a place for a closing of the week and the entire four-year project. On the last day we thus worked with the children and one of their teachers in the museum situated in the heart of Cape Town's touristic Waterfront area. This was for some of the children an area that they had never been to. Cape Town at this time was still in a level of lockdown, the museum had only recently reopened and only a few tourists had started to come back to South Africa after the country's border closures. This meant we almost had the museum to ourselves and could provide the children with an intense and safe experience not exposing them to big crowds of people.

We decided to organise the day at the museum the same way as the other workshop days in which there would be sessions involving visual arts expression, movement expression, or an integration of both. Liesl and Fabian first worked with the group in the education centre which is a closed space to which no museum guests

had access. Then we moved to the museum's atrium which extended all the way to the top floor where guests could look down from the different floors. Gerard and Charlotte facilitated a movement session working on connecting body parts and people moving with different speed in a spectrum changing between fast and slow-motion, at different levels in space changing between the upper, middle and low levels and with different sizes of the movements from huge to tiny, these were all accompanied by drumming by Fabian and musician Zama Qambi whom we invited to join us for the last day.


Figure 13. Forming movement shapes accompanied by drumming
(photo: Authors' own collection).

The idea of "overcoming obstacles" was introduced in the form of the long pieces of the string that we knew from the first day of the week, but now held at each of their ends by adults of our group. The strings were moved constantly to create challenging obstacles for the children to overcome by rolling under, jumping over etc. which created interesting visual images. This also happened in dialogue with the drummers and their music inspiring a fast and intense energy, different to the calm and giggly energy of the same exercise in the beginning of the week.

After the performance moment we took the class on a tour to one of the museum's exhibitions called "Home is where the art is" which included art works and objects sent by people of the city responding to a call of the museum to the public to contribute with a piece to illustrate life during lockdown. The last room of the exhibition focused on work that expressed the experience of time and abstract interpretations of the concept of time during the pandemic. The theme of the exhibition in this way linked directly to the theme of our workshop week and gave rise to more informal possibilities of talking to the children about coping during their lockdown experiences based on which of the art works they thought were interesting and why.

As the day closed, we went back to the education centre to produce new long art works drawn in collaboration of groups of 10 children, inspired by our movement energy pieces done in the beginning of the week. The focus of this final task was also inspired by the works of the last room of the exhibition asking each of the children to start drawing lines in various colours and styles and in the end the children's different lines were connected on the paper. As a final event we connected all the paper pieces on the floor of the atrium and used them to initiate a final reflection about the theme of connections and obstacles, of our experiences of the day, the week and the project all together.
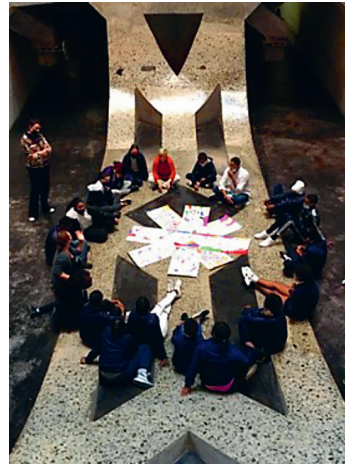
Figures 14 and 15. Connecting visualisation of movement and final reflection of project (photo: Authors' own collection).

What is it about arts education which can have an impact on supporting a resilient environment for children? – Children's perspectives

In the interview sessions the children were asked if they would like to read aloud what they had written in response to the question no.1 on their cards which was "What is similar and what is different about the arts project and about school?" Some examples were:

"In the art project we learn about borders and then geography. In school we also learn about borders. And the difference is this is fun, the art project is fun and in school you mostly do work and writing. It's not so fun." (Achmat)

"Art is like... what we did today with the connections with the strings (..). It broke almost every time and we just laughed." (Fahiem)

"At school we don't do art very much but in the arts project we do. And I like it because we are free to do whatever we can do." (Lelethu)

The children characterised the arts project as being "fun" and a time when they could laugh. The change of mood of the children was also evident in Charlotte's reflections (described above) of the first session of day 1 in which we introduced the strings as a tool to keep social distance at the same time as focusing on creating connections and playing with overcoming them as obstacles. To us they seemed very quiet and passive when we first started that morning, as if they were "away" psychologically and that it was the first time for long that they had laughed. In times of trauma, it is important to release tension and from the children's perspective it seems that this is some of the potential that arts education has.

In response to question no. 3 which was to formulate questions to ask someone who has participated in an arts project the children were asked to choose questions to ask the others around the table.

> Ayema reads her first question, *"What made you do art and what made you think that art would be a good thing for you?"*
> Bianca wants to reply and says, *"What made me do art is you can express your emotions while you drawing. And what made me think art would be good for me is that I would draw and express my emotions."*
> Zahra reads, *"What did you like the most?"*
> Achmat says, *"I liked the movements the most. Moving around, exercising. Because it loosens your body."*
> In the group of Lihle, Michaela, Ovayo and Fahiem, Michaela reads her first question aloud: *"How have the activities helped you with your day-to-day life?"*
> Ovayo says, *"To feel more comfortable... in your own body."*
> Michaela says that she thinks, *"Art calms you. It calms you down. And you get to be able to explore your creative side and see what you can actually do."*

The discussion among the children based on the questions they formulated themselves was an indirect way of creating knowledge about what was important to them. When they asked others "what is good about arts", we interpreted it as stemming from their own experiences of the arts project, which was something good to them. Those who responded to the question mentioned that it gave opportunities for expressing emotions, to loosen one's body, to be more comfortable "in" your own body, and it calms you down and you can explore ideas.

Listening to the children's explanations it seemed apparent that the pedagogical approach that focused on fostering creative processes in combination with its focus on embodied learning, made these experiences possible. Through the project the children became more aware of their own embodied sensations (art "loosens one's body", "makes you more comfortable in your body", "calms you down"). This is not

something we have told them, but apparently something they have experienced and become aware of through four years of reflective and multi-modal exercises focusing on the embodied and sensuous dimension of doing arts.

The art project's impact on supporting a resilient environment after lockdown – a teacher's perspective

During an interview Charlotte had with one of the teachers ("teacher M") while at the museum on the last day of the project week she asked how the period of lockdown had been for the children and if a lot of them had experienced sick people in the family:

> *"Yes, some have experienced loss, whether it be an aunt, uncle or grandparent, yet they showed up to school and carried out their day as best as they could. Some learners may not have lost a loved-one, but nearly everyone knew of someone who contracted the virus, or is suffering with it still. So there was a lot of that. There was a lot. But... I don't know if it is their home, but they somehow just come to school and whatever happens at home, they leave it there. Kids are very strong. They came to school like it was fine, and everything just moved on. It is families who live together three generations. And I can only imagine how traumatic that must be for a kid and for the family. There has been a worldwide pandemic and yet somehow they manage to deal with it all so effortlessly. But the ever-present fear of Covid-19 is definitely something that is now felt in the classroom environment. As a result, returning to school has been an adjustment for all, especially where emotional support is concerned. As a teacher I've needed to check in on learners more frequently, deal with emotional outbursts more often and speak about the reality of Covid-19 more regularly. Conversely, there are also many learners who have not been too phased about the pandemic, and so the emphasis on awareness of the virus and prevention towards it has been immensely engrained in my contact time with them."* (Teacher M)

The teacher continues, *"I thought of it earlier, it's been four years, but it feels like it was the other day when they started this project actually. It's crazy."* Charlotte says, *"When I interview them, I can hear that they remember so much from, even from the very first workshop we had."* The teacher exclaims, *"No I remember so much!"* Charlotte continues, *"They can say exactly which exercises we did. And the Math teacher once said, well "they don't remember what we did in Maths yesterday, but they remember what they did with you last year.""* The teacher says, *"See, when it makes an impact!"* Charlotte then asks, *"How do you think it makes them feel to be here at the museum? The contrast between what they are seeing in their daily lives and what they're seeing here?"* The teacher responds, *"I think that's why they're so intrigued by everything and*

they're so shocked by everything. Because they're not used to it..." Charlotte asks, *"It's overwhelming in a way?"* The teacher says, *"Yes. I mean, they're not going to come on a weekend to visit the Zeitz, you know? Unfortunately, their circumstances just don't allow for that. It is like... some kids that, actually a part of this group, were involved in my environmental club and they took part in a beach clean-up project. They were so excited to participate in the project and only once we arrived at the beach, I realised just how many were simply excited to just be at the beach. In the classroom environment you don't always realise how many of them are not exposed to experiences which some might see as 'normal,' or take for granted. So, experiences like these make an impact. The different spaces have an impact on you in a different way."*

A last question was if the teacher thinks having had an artist who could have come and worked focusing on their experiences just after lockdown would have been a good thing, or if it would have been difficult because of all the trauma:

> *"I think it would have been a good thing. Because I think even with the trauma, the only way they can deal with it, is if they express it. And for some of them talking is not how they express themselves. They don't particularly like that. And I think that would've been brilliant if we could have had somebody provide our learners with an alternative avenue of self-expression. Whether they experienced COVID personally or not, the mere presence of this pandemic has altered every learner's lifestyle and that calls for reflection and introspection, especially at an age where they may not be able to deal with all of these changes. And I think if they were given that chance just to express themselves through any other medium, other than talking, that would've helped many more learners. Once school resumed after our first lockdown period, I provided each of my learners with a COVID diary. They were given free rein to write any and everything regarding their emotions and experiences during this time. I told them I would not read it either, so that they felt a sense of safety and confidence to write about exactly what they were experiencing. And I tried to get them to write every day. Like what happened? How did you feel? You know, just to release some of their built-up emotions. But I do think more emphasis on providing that support would have been ideal. It would've helped them a lot. Just to work through everything. And maybe also to acknowledge their own feelings through a different medium. Because I think when you put it so far behind you don't really get rid of it... I think if anything this pandemic has shown all within the education system that we need to do things differently. And that what we're doing is not the best plan. We need to change."* (Teacher M)

The teacher also told that in South Africa teaching on-line could only work for the most privileged which meant that some children in the country were homeschooled.

Once schools re-opened in June 2020 by gradually allowing classes back, it was still the parents' decision whether they would send their children to school. If they did not feel that this would be safe, they could sign a form saying they would take on the full responsibility of teaching their children at home. When parents chose to homeschool, there was no daily interaction with teachers. These children only came to school when there were tests and exams. Many parents in South Africa opted for homeschooling, with the result that the children of, for example, this class returned to school at different stages between June and November. Some did little school work at home, if anything at all. For children who do not have support for learning at home it is of paramount importance to be able to go to school even in the restricted ways that they have experienced after lockdown. According to the teacher M it is also like they go into another space when they are in school. In school they can escape from a hard reality of their home for a while, so schools also function as a kind of shelter for the day for those children who live in difficult circumstances.

This teacher experienced that it was hard for many children to express themselves about how they feel in words. During lockdown she gave them the task of keeping a diary to try and help them to release some tension of what they were experiencing through writing their thoughts down. Her viewpoint is that through other means of expression they release some of the tension that she could see that they were carrying. The diary was a personal task that they did not have to share with anyone, not even the teacher. The activities of the arts project on the other hand were focused on sharing thoughts and ideas providing the children opportunities to listen to responses from their peers that may resonate with something in their own life.

Integrated arts education supporting resilience – the potential of an embodied perspective

Based on the interview extracts and our observations we can now discuss what has become important issues to include when considering how arts education can have impact on supporting resilience among primary school children in post-lockdown schooling. The COVID-19 pandemic added to adversities experienced by many South African children. If resilience is "the phenomenon of 'bouncing back' from adversity" [Theron and Theron 2010: 1], then it would be possible for these children to bounce back from the COVID pandemic measures of social distance once they were released. However, this would not solve the adversities of their daily lives which became worse during the pandemic. The negative and long-term impact of this pandemic is not something they will get over. It will influence their lives in many ways both in socio-economic terms and in terms of what we understood from talking to the teachers that they have lost of learning from their curriculum. This might again influence their qualifications to move on in life.

A literature review of studies of South African youth resilience by Linda C. Theron and Adam M. C. Theron [2010] indicates a gap in research in relation to culture and contextual roots of resilience. Likewise, we have not found any studies of resilience in this context that include an embodied perspective. We suggest that when an embodied perspective is also included in a theoretical understanding of the notion of resilience, and this perspective is implemented to guide educational practice, it may result in schools to be able to better promote environments that support resilience. But it is also important to consider if these children are already resilient due to their life circumstances. How important a trauma was the COVID-19 pandemic in their lives? Our experience is that in the areas where the children live, there was not much of a lockdown and not many people would keep to social distancing rules or wear masks, only when older family members started to get sick and some passed away, did they start to experience COVID-19 as another danger in their lives. South African resilience researcher Adrian D. Van Breda [2019] examines the relationship between resilience, culture and context. He compares what resilience means in the Global North and the Global South and concludes that it has different meanings which in an intercultural project like this, is important to be aware of. Even South African researchers might be influenced by literature and definitions coming from Western thoughts as such literature is dominant in the field. But he notes that resilience in the North refers to "how one overcomes or recovers from a discrete, traumatic event" whereas this definition does not work in the South where life for many is a "life-long trauma in the form of colonialization, war, poverty, death, illness, starvation, gender-based violence and exploitation" [Van Breda 2019: 10] and further notes that "when one's entire life is traumatising, one cannot ask if acceptance helps one to return to a former level of functioning or to achieve positive outcomes" [Van Breda 2019:10] as this will never have an end after which a positive outcome can be distinguished. Van Breda [2019] highlights that "acceptance" seems to be a common sign of resilience among groups that were involved in his studies. He also notes that this makes sense in contexts when you do not have control of the adversities you are experiencing in your daily life. "Acceptance" manifests as keeping silent as a coping mechanism and he gives examples from interviews in which people have said that they do not like to talk to others about how they feel [Van Breda 2019]. Van Breda [2019: 11] however, questions if acceptance works as "sooner or later the bad thoughts and feelings return (..) the slightest reminder triggers a resurgence of distress (..)" and that acceptance relates to *lack* of agency rather than *sense* of agency which in a phenomenological perspective [Sheets-Johnstone 1999] can be developed by becoming aware of what we are able to experience and do as moving bodies.

In the interview with the teacher that we refer to above she also stated that her experience was that the children did not like to talk, they were quiet and did not

seem to be so influenced by what had happened at home. But she also acknowledged that they were carrying these experiences and that when they worked on expressing them in other ways than talking, for example, in our arts project, they seemed to release some of the tension they were carrying. Through the four years we worked with the class we managed to facilitate talking about personal/challenging issues that according to teacher M were not normally something they would talk about. This may have been possible through our long-term work with them in which we created a certain confidence and an educational space in which it was the norm to share thoughts and experiences. We see signs of this in the way they responded in the group dialogue sessions and interpret this to be part of the impact that this work has had on the children. Our interpretations of the children's notes on reflection cards as well as what they said during group dialogues is that they learned to not just "accept" what is, but to question and be critical based on what they feel. But most importantly, perhaps, is that they learned techniques to let go of tension and to feel and be aware of embodied sensations, have had experiences of relating to their peers in new ways and to use their imagination to create and express ideas.

Even though we as the adults in the project came from different cultural backgrounds, as educators we shared an urge to empower children and for them to not just accept what is, but aspire to contribute to changing their lives and society in positive ways. We acknowledge, however, that this is an ethical issue in a place where only few might actually ever have such possibilities as suggested by Theron [2012] while she questions if only a few in reality will be in a capacity to change their lives, is it then better not to make them aware of such opportunities? Our group's shared interest in the embodied perspective may very well stem from "Western notions of self-awareness and being in touch with one's emotions" [Van Breda 2019: 11] and it might clash with the Global South understanding of resilience. In a context where there is so much pain it may not be useful for children to connect too much with their emotions and sense of self. It might be more useful to do fun activities that make them laugh and look ahead. We as artist-educator-researchers had to constantly consider and discuss these issues and we found that we needed to introduce alternative possibilities in a balanced, thoughtful and abstract way, as we were sensitive to feeling into the responses of the children and to be alert to what seemed to be meaningful and engaging to them. We did this by taking point of departure in exercises based on basic body movements (e. g. opening, closing, rolling, stretching), in different developmental patterns, or focusing on moving in different levels of the space, speed or size of the movements, or copying, contrasting and complementing each other's movements or colours of our painting work. These are ways to connect to our own embodied experiences and to engage intersubjectively. While working with the children we reflected with them about different experiences and themes of life, but

they were free to choose which thoughts to share and which thoughts to keep to themselves. They could still benefit from what others were sharing when their stories resonated with their own lives.

Theron et al. [2020: 9] question if it might be useful to "challenge unquestioning acceptance of the resilience-enabling value of the self in contexts that lack the social and ecological resources needed to complement personal capabilities." We could add here that perhaps the personal capabilities to live a resilient life can be strengthened through embodied learning processes and that this can happen at the same time as educational activities being "culturally sensitive" [Theron 2012: 340]. This we have also highlighted in an analysis of the pedagogical approach of our project which we have termed an "embodied and culturally sensitive arts-integrated pedagogy" [Svendler Nielsen et al. 2020].

In school curricula in the late 1990s in South Africa the arts played a more important role than the areas do in the curriculum which schools follow today. Including more focus on arts education, based on our study, we claim, would possibly contribute to creating better conditions to promote resilience and impacting children's conditions for learning in school. Teacher M in the interview said that she thought this pandemic had "shown all within the education system that we need to do things differently. And that what we're doing is not the best plan. We need to change." In saying this she referred to both the way teaching is structured and what areas are in focus in South African schools. If we are to change anything we need a different approach and such an approach might very well include a renewed focus on arts education and an embodied perspective of resilience, considering how this may have impact to strengthen conditions for learning in schools.

Acknowledgements

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