"Why Resilience?" A Review of Literature of Resilience and Implications for Further Educational Research

Ryan S. Santos, Claremont Graduate University & San Diego State University

Introduction

The influence of resilience is evident by its reach across diverse disciplines. Although resilience remains a familiar word in everyday English language, the term resilience carries different meanings across different contexts. However, the essence of resilience is described as the ability to bounce back from some form of disruption, stress, or change. The term resilience stems from Latin (*resiliens*) and was originally used to refer to the pliant or elastic quality of a substance (Joseph, 1994). Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of English Language (1958) defined resilience as "the ability to bounce or spring back after being stretched or constrained or recovering strength or spirit," and the American Heritage dictionary defined resilience as "the ability to recover quickly from illness, change, or misfortune."

This literature review seeks to better understand the construct of resilience and provide a context for how it can further studied in school settings. More specifically, the literature review is organized around 7 central questions: (1) How is resilience defined? (2) Is resilience an innate quality or a dynamic process? (3) How is resilience studied within the school setting, with a particular focus on urban schools? (4) What are the trends resilience research and where is it heading, and lastly (5) What are the benefits and challenges for future resilience research?

1. How is Resiliency Defined?

Nearly fifty years of research in resiliency has brought forth various perspectives and voices and, despite the vast body of research on resilience, there is little agreement on a single definition of resilience among scholars. In fact, scholars define the construct of resilience in a multitude of ways.

Richardson and his colleagues (1990) contended that resiliency is "the process of coping with disruptive, stressful, or challenging life events in a way that provides the individual with additional protective and coping skills than prior to the disruption that results from the event". Similarly, Higgins (1994) described resiliency as the "process of self-righting or growth", while Wolins (1993) defined resiliency as the "capacity to bounce back, to withstand hardship, and to repair yourself.

Resiliency, or resilience, is commonly explained and studied in context of a two-dimensional construct concerning *the exposure of adversity* and the *positive adjustment outcomes* of that adversity. While the construct of resilience is examined across various studies and scholarly articles, there is little consensus as to how researchers define adversity, let alone what defines positive adjustment outcomes*.

Resiliency is also defined as a "positive adaptation... is considered in a demonstration of manifested behaviour on social competence or success at meeting any particular tasks at a specific life stage". With respect to the school setting, scholars often use school achievement or results from state testing as a measure of positive adjustment outcomes. Masten (1994) contended that resilience refers to (1) people from high- risk groups who have had better outcomes than expected; (2) good adaptations despite stressful (common) experiences; and (3) recovery from trauma.

Garmezy (1993) asserted that the study of resilience has focused on answering two major questions: 1) What are the characteristics – risk factors – of children, families, and environments that predispose children to maladjustment following exposure to adversity? 2) What are the characteristics of protective factors that shield them from such major adjustment?

In her discussion of resiliency in children, Benard (1995) argued that resilient children usually have four attributes in common:

Social Competence: Ability to elicit positive responses from others, thus establishing positive relationships with both adults and peers;

Problem-solving skills: Planning that facilitates seeing oneself in control and resourcefulness in seeking help from others;

Autonomy: A sense of one's own identity and an ability to act independently and exert some control over one's environment; and

A sense of purpose and future: Goals, educational aspirations, persistence, hopefulness, and a sense of a bright future.

Werner and Smith (1992) explained how resilience has come to describe a person having a good track record of positive adaptation in the face of stress or disruptive change. Their longitudinal studies found that a high percentage of children from an "at risk" background needing intervention still became healthy, competent adults. They purported that a resilient child is one "who loves well, works well, plays well, and expects well".

Debate as to whether or not resilience is an innate quality or dynamic process is evident in the literature. Masten (1994) asserted that resilience must be understood as a process. He explained that resilience must be viewed as an interplay between certain characteristics of the individual and the broader environment, a balance between stress and the ability to cope, and a dynamic and developmental process that is important at life transition

Is Resilience an Innate Quality or a Dynamic Process?
During early waves of resilience research, researchers tended to regard and label individuals who transcended their adverse circumstances as "hardy," "invulnerable," or "invincible". Such labels implied that these individuals were in possession of a rare and remarkable set of qualities that enabled them to rebound from whatever adversity came their way – almost as if these fortunate individuals possessed a sort of magical force field that protected them form all harm.

Increasingly, however, researchers have arrived at the consensus that resilience is not some remarkable, innate quality but rather a developmental process. Masten (2001) referred to the resilience process as "ordinary magic," simply because a majority of individuals who undergo serious adversity "remarkably" manage to achieve normative developmental outcomes.

Research in resiliency concludes that each person has an innate capacity for resiliency, a self-righting tendency that operates best when people have resiliency-building conditions in their lives. It is grounded in the belief that all humans possess an inborn developmental wisdom and seeks to better contextualize how teachers can to tap this wisdom. In her book, Fostering Resiliency in Children, Bonnie Benard (1995) claimed: *We are all born with an innate capacity for resilience, by which we are able to develop social competence, problem-solving skills, a critical consciousness, autonomy, and a sense of purpose.*

Researchers increasingly view resilience not as a fixed attribute but as an alterable set of processes that can be fostered and cultivated. Researchers emphasize the interactive processes – between the individual and environment and between risk and protective factors – as the crucial underpinnings of developing resilience.

Garmezy's (1991) triadic model of resilience provided a widely accepted framework for understanding the resilience process. Multiple scholars use this framework to study resilience. The triadic model described the dynamic interactions among risk and protective factors on three levels (individual, family, and environmental). The model also emphasized that resilience is a process that empowers individuals to shape their environment and to be shaped by it in turn.

Implicit in the concept of resilience as a dynamic process is the understanding that resilience can grow or decline over time depending on the interactions taking place between an individual and their environment and between risk and protective factors in an individual's life. Therefore, an individual may be resilient at certain times - and not at others - depending upon the circumstances and relative strength of protective factors compared to risk factors at the given moment.

Pushing scholars to look beyond the individual level of resilience, Seccombe (2002) asserted that: *the widely held view of resilience as an individual disposition, family trait, or community phenomenon is insufficient…resiliency cannot be understood or improved in significant ways by merely focusing on these individual-level factors. Instead careful attention must be paid to structural deficiencies in our society and to be*

social policies that families need in order to become stronger, more competent, and better functioning in adverse situations.

Resilience in Schools

Schools continue to function as one of the most powerful spaces to capitalize on the resilience of students. Research on resiliency in schools points to the fact that despite barriers to learning "at-risk" students still demonstrated levels of success. Similarly, Krovetz (1999) explained that "RT [Resiliency Theory] is based on defining protective factors within the family, school, and community that exist for the successful child or adolescent – the resilient child or adolescent – that are missing from the family, school, and community of the child or adolescent who later needs intervention.

Caring and Supportive Environments

Arguably, the most frequently cited protective factor evident in resilience research in schools is a caring and supportive school environment. The influence and importance caring and supportive school environments as protective factors persists throughout the literature. Henderson and Milstein (1996) stated that, "more than any other way, schools build resiliency in students through creating an environment of caring personal relationships". Echoing these words, additional researchers concurred that a caring and support ethos (across a child's family, community and school) is the most critical variable throughout childhood and even adolescence.

The presence of caring and supportive relationships creates the proper foundation for trust. As identified by Erikson (1963), trusting relationships serve as the base for healthy future development. Specifically within the school setting, Werner and Smith's study (1988) reminded us of the role that a teacher can play in creating caring learning environments that are critical in fostering resilience. Coburn and Nelson (1989) found the positive role models in the lives of resilient children were favourite educators who took deep interest in them. Students reported that these educators went beyond the traditional roles of teachers by serving as positive role models and individuals whom they could trust and demonstrated deep care. They explained that educator-student relationships are often characterized by "trust (adults keeping promises, confidentiality), attention (listening), empathy (demonstrating understanding), availability (spending time with youth), respect (involving youth in decision making), and virtue (good role modelling).

High Expectations

In addition to providing a culture of care and support, an ethos of high expectations also serves as a protective factor for resilient students. Schools that create a culture of high expectations for all students experience greater rates of academic success. As mentioned earlier in, Rutter's (1979) found that school environments could act as an important protective factor that buffer children against the adverse effects of stress. More specifically, Rutter concluded that schools focusing on academics, clear expectations and rules, and high levels of student involvement experienced higher rates of attendance and academic attainments and lower rates of delinquency and behavioural disturbances. Rutter's study revealed that behavioural disturbances decreased over time in schools possessing a culture of high expectations and increased in schools that did not foster similar learning environments. Rutter's work (1979) continues to serve as an anchor for subsequent work in the area of resiliency research in schools.

In a more recent study examining over 700 high-performing, high-need schools, Barley and her colleagues (2007) concluded that academically successful schools cultivated a culture of high expectations. Researchers indentified 739 high-performing and 738 low-performing schools consisting of 50 percent or more students who receive free or reduced lunch. Survey data collected from participating teachers from these schools revealed that, "what appears to distinguish high-performing schools from low-performing ones is less the tangible aspects or technical processes of schooling, and more the intangible and sometimes elusive aspects, such as a school's mission, culture, and it's teachers' and students' attitudes and beliefs". High expectations in schools encourage and remind students that they are capable of achieving beyond their own belief. These messages convey the point that all students can succeed.

Meaningful Participation

Successful schools that foster resilience also recognize the value of creating meaningful opportunities for students. Katz (1997) contended that providing bountiful and meaningful opportunities for students is essential in emboldening resilience in children. These opportunities often provide children solace from toxic

or hostile environments. Perhaps more importantly, such opportunities often provide children to believe and dream in an environment that is both safe and stable.

Similarly, Benard (1995) explained that, "providing youth with opportunities for meaningful involvement and responsibility with the school setting is a natural outcome for schools that have high expectations. "Participation, like caring and respect, is a fundamental need." Scholars acknowledge a fundamental need to participate and remind us that students must not be viewed as empty vessels that we fill with knowledge. Schools are better situated to foster resilience through the use of cooperative learning strategies and opportunities to participate in school governance, service-learning projects (Brooks, 2006).

Resilience research is especially applicable to schools because they directly tackle the achievement gaps that can characterize children who grow up under conditions of poverty or social disadvantage (Condly, 2006). As indicated in the previous section, the impacts of these conditions, however, are off set by the presence of multiple protective factors. More specifically, caring and supportive relationships, an ethos of high expectations, and opportunities for cooperative learning serve as critical protective factors (Benard, 1995).

The following section of the review focuses on research illuminating the impact of resilience in urban school settings.

Resilience in Urban Schools

Although theory suggests that resilience can be fostered through relationships, cultivating a community with high expectations, and opportunities for participation in schools, there continues to be a paucity of studies examining resiliency within the school setting. Of these existing studies, the vast majority of research examining resilience in schools has focused on comparing resilient and non-resilient students (Reyes & Jason, 1993).

In a study comparing 133 resilient and 81 non-resilient Mexican American high school students, Gonzalez and Padilla (1997) found that resilient students reported significantly higher perceptions of family and peer support, teacher feedback, positive connections to school, value placed on school, and peer belonging. Using academic grades as an indicator for academic resilience, researchers found that the sole significant predictor of educational resilience was a student's sense of belonging in school.

While studying a cohort of tenth grade Mexican-American students, Alva (1991) studied factors contributing to academic resilience among students with similar socioeconomic backgrounds. Alva found that academically resilient students were more likely to report a greater connection to schools via networks with teachers and peers alike. Moreover, this study demonstrated that academically resilient students generally reported a more positive view of their intellectual abilities and expressed a greater sense of responsibility for their academic future. More specifically, resilient students were more likely to "(a) feel encouraged and prepared to go to college, (b) enjoy coming to school and being involved in high school activities, (c) experience fewer conflicts and intergroup relations with other students, and (d) experience fewer family conflicts and difficulties". Alva deemed that students who fit these criteria were academically invulnerable.

In a study comparing motivational levels of 60 resilient and 60 non-resilient middle school Latino students across 5 middle schools within a culturally diverse school district, Waxman, Huang, and Padrón (1997) found that there was no significant difference when comparing whether a student spoke English prior to starting school. Utilizing a stratified research design, researchers found that 67% of non-resilient students spoke a different language than English prior to attending school, while 76% of their more resilient peers also reported speaking a language other than English prior to schooling. Results did however reveal significant differences between these groups when comparing other factors. Resilient students spent significantly more time on additional reading, more time completing mathematics homework, and were less likely to report absenteeism or tardiness when compared with their counterparts. Lastly, Waxman and colleagues reported that resilient students had significantly higher perceptions of Involvement, Satisfaction, Academic Self-Concept, and Achievement Motivation than non resilient students".

Padrón, Waxman, Brown, and Powers (2002) asserted that "some English language learners (ELLs) do well in school despite coming from school and home environments that present many obstacles for learning." Researchers explained that research that is conducted from an educational resilience context allows

researchers to focus on the predictors for academic success, rather than on academic failure, for English language learners. Furthermore, they stated that when research focuses on the resilience of English language learners it "enables us to specifically identify those 'alterable' factors that distinguish successful from less successful students". The body of research that focuses on resilience in English language learners asserts that students can achieve academic success if educators focus on factors that are factors that they can change.

Building up their research, these researchers employed one of the few experimental studies focusing on resilience in school settings. In 2002, Padrón and colleagues designed, implemented, and tested the Pedagogy for Improving Resiliency Program (PIRP), a program created to embolden resilience for English language learners. Set in an urban elementary school, results from this year long study of six forth and fifth grade classrooms revealed that students in treatment classrooms expressed more positive classroom learning environments and held significantly higher gains in reading assessments. Data also demonstrated classroom teachers who received the PIRP intervention provided more explanations to students, allocated more time for student responses, and encouraged student success.

In one of the most recent studies of resilience in schools Kanevsky and colleagues (2012) examined the impact of museum-based intervention (School in the Park) designed to promote the resilience of third and fourth grade students at an inner-city school. Over the course of two years, researchers compared the academic resilience and personal development of students participating in the study with those who did not. School in the Park reinforces and supplements school-based instruction with specialized learning opportunities uniquely available in the museums and zoos at San Diego's Balboa Park...where core curriculum is embedded in art, science, and cultural setting provided by Balboa Park. While participation groups reported higher levels of academic resilience, both participants and nonparticipants reported similar levels of character, self-efficacy, and attitudes towards school. The only differences evident between both groups occurred when examining students' reported academic self-concepts.

Esquivel, Doll and Oades-Sese (2011) reminded us that effective schools, according to research in resilience, "minimize the risk and adversity to their students to the maximum degree possible, maximize protective factors available to their students through whatever means, and take whatever means and steps necessary to intervene early and boldly when students show early evidence of social or emotional disturbances or disorders".

While the previously mentioned studies offer insight into how resilience can be facilitated within school settings, Doll and her colleagues (2011) claimed that "resilience perspectives should not be overgeneralized to schools...because risk and resilience wax and wane over time and daily decisions about students' needs for support must be flexible and responsive to these changes". The significance of resilience models for school practice, however, is due principally to the construct of protective factors. Esquivel and Doll (2011) stated: *Schools that fail at providing high-quality educational opportunities to underprivileged youth contribute to the adversity experienced by their students. Alternatively, many schools are sites of high-quality opportunities to interact with positive adult models and supportive peers, and school routines and practices can foster essential student abilities to maintain effective relationships, establish and work towards ambitious personal goals, self-regulate personal activities and behaviours, and manage emotions.*

As indicated previously, the vast majority of research examining resilience in schools has focused on the comparison of both resilient and non-resilient students. More specifically, these studies have employed descriptive, causal-comparative, or correlational research. Masten and Coatsworth (1998) provided insight into the challenges of school-based resiliency: *Efforts to understand resilience have made it clear that children typically have multiple risk factors and multiple resources contributing to their lives...Thus, it is unlikely that a 'magic bullet' for prevention or intervention will be found. Intervention models emerging from this realization describe cumulative protection efforts to address cumulative risk processes.*

New Frontiers of Resilience Research

Richardson (2002) explained that a new wave of research has begun to integrate personal and environmental components of resilience by examining resilience more holistically and postured in an interdisciplinary manner. Accordingly, resilience is now being studied psychologically, biologically, and

socially and involves an interaction of individual and environmental characteristics. Leckman and Mayes (2007) argued that in rats, and presumably in humans, environmental conditions and the amount of nurturing received in early life "can fundamentally alter the expression of key genes involved in stress and response and reward mechanisms that may underlie attachment and bonding".

More recent resilience research asserts that gene-gene interactions and gene-environment interactions also contribute to adaptation and resilience in complex ways. Although the interactions between biological mechanisms and risk and protective factors in the environment are not fully understood, researchers who explore genetic aspects of resilience believe genetics alone cannot determine how an individual will respond to adversity. Instead, biological and genetic factors can be viewed as protective factors, much like environmental factors.

Although it is challenging to determine exactly how biological, genetic, and environmental factors interact to determine each individual's level of resilience, there is neurological evidence to support the psychological data that show some people may be relatively high or low in resilience. Waugh et al. found that when people with higher resilience were shown a cue signaling there was an equal chance they would see a distressing picture or neutral picture, they only exhibited neural reactions indicating an unpleasant emotional response if they actually saw the distressing picture. Resilient people also returned to baseline cardiac and neurological states sooner than those with low resilience when exposed to stressful situations.

In contrast, participants with low resilience reacted to threats or even a possibility of threats sooner and for longer periods of time, as indicated by activity in the amygdala and insular areas of the brain. Due to various systems involved in determining resilience, Kim-Cohen (2007) argued it is important to study resilience at levels of analysis ranging from the molecular to the behavioral to the cultural. It is difficult to study all of these contexts and their interactions simultaneously, and research on all of these levels is needed to increase educators' understanding of resilience. However, the bridge between neuroscience and education is in its emerging stages of development, therefore it is important for scholars to build upon the existing body of resilience research, especially within school settings.

Conclusions

Although much progress has been made in the area of resilience research, there is still no definitive set of factors that constitute risk or protective factors. These could be any variables shown to increase or decrease the likelihood of a variety of positive or negative outcomes. Risk factors are often defined as environmental factors that originate in childhood and are sometimes the opposites of protective factors (e.g. strong social skills vs. poor social skills; secure attachment vs. insecure attachment). However, Hoge et al. stressed resilience is more than the "flip side" of risk factors.

Resilience research has identified a multitude of protective factors, with some of the most prominent being secure attachment style and a health relationship with an adult during childhood, temperament, internal locus of control, sense of coherence, and biological and genetic factors. However measures of resiliency had not been developed until recently, making it very difficult to generalize results or compare studies.

Needless to say, some theorists have critiqued the concept of resilience, pointing to its shortcomings. More specifically, Rigsby (1994) argued the strong individualistic image of success gives the impression that anyone can get ahead, that there is equal opportunity to do so, that one can always "get it together," and that disadvantages are for the individual to overcome. He continues to argue that assumptions about success may lead to linear, simplistic predictions about risk therefore drawing the attention away from the interaction of people, context, and opportunities.

Other theorists have found the term too vague. Gordon and Song (1994) argued that the main difficulty in defining resilience may well be that it is not a single construct. Clearly, the concept of resilience can be variously defined and continues to evolve. Nonetheless, the basic premise of the concept of resilience is far reaching, and its promise as a human behavior and practice concept has yet to be realized.

Continued research in resilience is dependent on time, context, and individual being studied. While resilience researchers using quantitative methods attempt to control and predict the phenomenon of resilience, much can be lost in the pursuit of quantity. Kanevsky (2012) shared, "large sample sizes will strengthen quantitative designs. However, case studies and other qualitative methods can provide deeper

insights into the complex dynamics of student relationships with others and their schools and life experiences" (p. 470). In fact in his review of the qualitative contributions of resilience research, Ungar (2006) claimed that, "qualitative research addresses two specific shortcomings noted by resilience researchers: arbitrariness in the selection of outcome variables and the challenges accounting for the sociocultural context in which resilience occurs

As articulated in review of literature, resiliency lies in the eye of the beholder. The various layers and contexts in which resilience is studied are filtered through the lens of the researcher. The attempts to predict and control for resilience are complicated because every individual's process is unique. The research suggests that field of resilience can be expanded if told through the voices researchers deem resilient. Ungar (2008) explained: *Avoiding bias in how resilience is understood and interventions are designed to promote it, researchers and interveners will need to be more participatory and culturally embedded to capture the nuances of culture and context. The better documented youth's own constructions of resilience, the more likely it will be that those intervening identify specific aspects of resilience most relevant to health outcomes as defined by a particular population.*

As evident in the body of resilience research there is a long standing body of research using quantitative and qualitative research methods, however, these methods are commonly implemented independent and in isolation of one another. The field of resilience research, specifically within the school settings, can be furthered through the use of a mixed methods design that contextualizes students' experiences through the combination of both numbers and voices.

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ACARA General Capabilities
Personal and Social Capability

*I*n the Australian Curriculum, students develop personal and social capability as they learn to understand themselves and others, and manage their relationships, lives, work and learning more effectively. Personal and social capability involves students in a range of practices including recognising and regulating emotions, developing empathy for others and understanding relationships, establishing and building positive relationships, making responsible decisions, working effectively in teams, handling challenging situations constructively and developing leadership skills.

Personal and social capability supports students in becoming creative and confident individuals who, as stated in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA 2008), 'have a sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity that enables them to manage their emotional, mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing', with a sense of hope and 'optimism about their lives and the future'. On a social level, it helps students to 'form and maintain healthy relationships' and prepares them 'for their potential life roles as family, community and workforce members' (MCEETYA, p. 9).

Students with well-developed social and emotional skills find it easier to manage themselves, relate to others, develop resilience and a sense of self-worth, resolve conflict, engage in teamwork and feel positive about themselves and the world around them. The development of personal and social capability is a foundation for learning and for citizenship.

Personal and social capability encompasses students' personal/emotional and social/relational dispositions, intelligences, sensibilities and learning. It develops effective life skills for students, including understanding and handling themselves, their relationships, learning and work. Although it is named 'Personal and Social capability', the words 'personal/emotional' and 'social/relational' are used interchangeably throughout the literature and within educational organisations. The term 'social and emotional learning' is also often used, as is the SEL acronym.

When students develop their skills in any one of these elements, it leads to greater overall personal and social capability, and also enhances their skills in the other elements. In particular, the more students learn about their own emotions, values, strengths and capacities, the more they are able to manage their own emotions and behaviours, and to understand others and establish and maintain positive relationships.

Organising elements for Personal and Social Capability

Self-awareness

This element involves students developing an awareness of their own emotional states, needs and perspectives.

Students identify and describe the factors that influence their emotional responses. They develop a realistic sense of their personal abilities, qualities and strengths through knowing what they are feeling in the moment, and having a realistic assessment of their own abilities and a well-grounded sense of self-knowledge and self-confidence. Students reflect on and evaluate their learning, identify personal characteristics that contribute to or limit their effectiveness and learn from successes or failures. In developing and acting with personal and social capability, students:
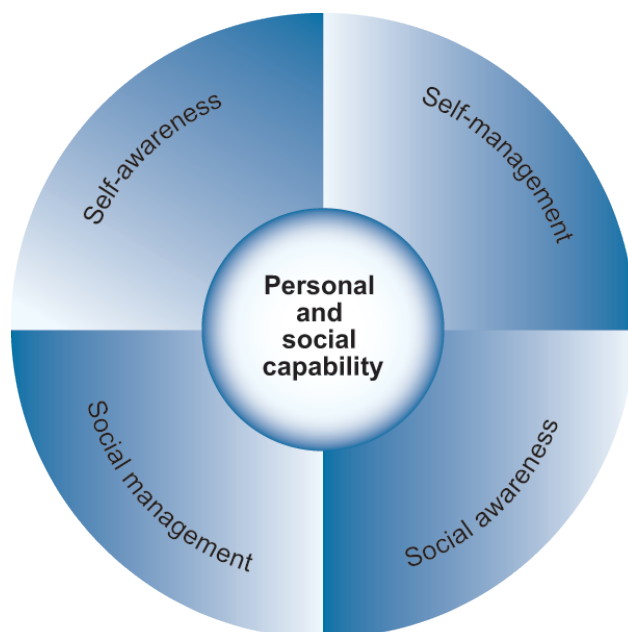
- recognise emotions
- recognise personal qualities and achievements
- understand themselves as learners
- develop reflective practice.

Self-management

This element involves students developing the metacognitive skill of learning when and how to use particular strategies to manage themselves in a range of situations.

Students effectively regulate, manage and monitor their own emotional responses, and persist in completing tasks and overcoming obstacles. They develop organisational skills and identify the resources needed to achieve goals. Students develop the skills to work independently and to show initiative, learn to be conscientious, delay gratification and persevere in the face of setbacks and frustrations. In developing and acting with personal and social capability, students:

- express emotions appropriately
- develop self-discipline and set goals
- work independently and show initiative
- become confident, resilient and adaptable.

Social awareness

This element involves students recognising others' feelings and knowing how and when to assist others.

Students learn to show respect for and understand others' perspectives, emotional states and needs. They learn to participate in positive, safe and respectful relationships, defining and accepting individual and group roles and responsibilities. Students gain an understanding of the role of advocacy in contemporary society and build their capacity to critique societal constructs and forms of discrimination, such as racism and sexism. In developing and acting with personal and social capability, students:

- appreciate diverse perspectives
- contribute to civil society
- understand relationships.

Social management

This element involves students interacting effectively and respectfully with a range of adults and peers.

Students learn to negotiate and communicate effectively with others; work in teams, positively contribute to groups and collaboratively make decisions; resolve conflict and reach positive outcomes. They develop the ability to initiate and manage successful personal relationships, and participate in a range of social and communal activities. Social management involves building skills associated with leadership, such as mentoring and role modelling. In developing and acting with personal and social capability, students:

- communicate effectively
- work collaboratively
- make decisions
- negotiate and resolve conflict
- develop leadership skills.