DEVELOPING RESILIENCE IN GRADE 8 BOYS THROUGH PROBLEM-SOLVING

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My research group comprised 26 of the 160 Grade 8 students.

St Stithians Boys’ College is an independent Methodist day and boarding school situated in northern Johannesburg, South Africa, with an enrolment of approximately 770 boys.

Data collection tools included:
- Note-taking in a journal
- Video recording of lessons
- Recorded interviews of participants
- Student self-reflections sheets
- Ongoing discussions with core teacher

The blend of structured and unstructured, qualitative and quantitative data collection methods gave me a spectrum of data that I could analyse as part of the research. I looked for patterns in terms of words the boys used to describe their approach to problems and how they perceived their abilities to solve problems they had never seen before. I used the Likert-scale data to measure how individual boys tracked their own participation and resilience.

Four themes emerged from my analysis of the data:
1. The effects of a mixed ability group of learners
2. The boys own accuracy of self-analysis and reflection on their own abilities
3. The students’ intrinsic love of Mathematics versus Mathematics for marks
4. How strong of a Mathematics base the boys had coming into the challenge

In order for resilience to be developed, the findings suggest:
- Retain mixed ability context
- Redesign structure of the lessons (differentiated abilities in differentiated groups)
- Plan the timing of the course
- Be more flexible with how long boys need to problem-solve

Key Readings: