

# Field Notes

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## Education Resilience Research Training in South Asia: A transformative and capacity building agenda

*The RES-Research training module, designed by the ERA Program, builds on the capacities of academics and education practitioners in fragile, conflict and violence affected contexts to undertake locally relevant and rigorous education resilience research. Following a pilot in Central America, another 9 month-long training is being delivered in South Asia. In November 2013, the first of two face-to-face workshops took place in Delhi, India, with participants from across the South Asian region.*

Development practitioners in fragile and conflict affected contexts are demanding better support for research, evaluation and assessments: whether it's conducting an exploratory needs assessment for an emergency intervention, monitoring and evaluating ongoing project impact or building the evidence base to design a reconstruction or post-conflict program. In contexts of overwhelming adversity it is crucial not only to get reliable and valid data but to also ensure that we are going about data collection in the right way. Doing research "right" in these contexts requires asking the right questions, talking to the relevant participants and stakeholders, using the most pertinent methods, and paying particular attention to ethics and power differentials. Evidence collection in fragile and conflict affected contexts should not only "do-no-harm" but in fact "do-good". This has been the preoccupation of the Education Resilience Approaches (ERA) Program.

To address these concerns, the ERA Program has developed the Resilience in Education Settings (RES)-Research training module. The module draws upon two complementary paradigms, one theoretical and the other methodological: resilience theory and the transformative research paradigm. Resilience theory



A member of the Nepal country team presents their resilience research design to the group.

As with all SABER tools, the RES-Research training module is openly available for education practitioners within the World Bank, as well as other agencies. The module consists of a research manual and handouts, power point presentations and additional guidance materials. If you are interested in using this tool please contact the ERA team for the appropriate resources.

Photos: Jo Kelcey / World Bank

### Education Resilience Approaches



The World Bank

The ERA Program is a World Bank program that offers a systematic process to collect evidence that can support local efforts to improve education services in violence and conflict affected contexts.

### Field Notes Series

The Field Notes series is produced to share lessons around this process in an effort to disseminate ERA's support for the collection of global evidence on resilience in contexts of adversity.

## Facilitator

**Joel Reyes** from the World Bank works with the Nepal country team to refine their research design.



seeks to understand the process by which individuals, communities and organizations recover from crisis, continue to perform in the midst of adversities and even radically change to prevent future risk exposure and/or mitigate negative impact (Reyes 2013).

The transformative research paradigm (Mertens 2009) provides methodological guidance to conduct

studies with vulnerable populations, recognizing both their exposure to overwhelming threats but also their assets such as strengths, opportunities and available services.

Through a nine-month training program, RES-Research builds on the capacities of academics and education practitioners in fragile, conflict and violence affected contexts

to undertake locally relevant and rigorous education resilience research. First piloted in Central America, the module has been adjusted and improved. Most recently, it was implemented in the South Asia region as part of the Multi-Donor Trust Fund for the System Assessment for Better Education Results (SABER) support by DfID, AUSAID and the World Bank.

### *The South Asian experience.*

In November 2013, twenty researchers from five countries (Afghanistan, Nepal, India, Bhutan, and Lebanon) met in Delhi, India, for the Resilience Research and Mixed Methods Training workshop.

They represented a variety of professions engaged in the field of education: Ministry of Education staff, University academics, staff of UN agencies, NGOs and consulting firms.

Over the course of four days, the participants learned and discussed resilience theory and its application to education settings, as well as the value of mixed methods research design to inform education policies and practice aimed at improving the lives of vulnerable populations.

To maximize the learning experience, the workshop was very practical and structured to allow participants to design their own education resilience research study.

Each country team selected a context of adversity and defined their education outcomes of interest. They applied a resilience framework to define their research purpose and practiced skills in mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) research design. Their efforts culminated in a final Education Resilience research proposal.

*I found the whole idea of resilience research really beneficial ... I think it will really focus the research on the positives which makes it easier to come up with solutions and interventions and recommendations. We can then go back to the respondents with this. We talked about this [during the workshop]; the importance of what you provide for the respondents. Often you go into a community and take information but if you have a transformative agenda you capture their experience and leave something behind for them. We are hoping resilience will better enable us to do this.*

**Participant from India**



**Facilitator**

**Michael Ungar** from the Resilience Research Centre presents on mixed-methods sampling approaches.

**Resilience theory and frameworks.**

As its name suggests, the RES-Research module is grounded in the concept of resilience within the social sciences. Broadly speaking this relates to the ability of individuals who live in contexts of considerable adversity to recover, perform, grow and even transform.

The training focused on what resilience means for education services, how it relates to education outcomes of interest, the importance of contextual relevance and the various levels at which we can understand resilience mechanisms to operate—the individual, the community, schools and the broader education system.

Participants were also challenged to consider that resilience is present in the most vulnerable situations and even in seemingly dysfunctional groups, since it is often hidden (as in the resilience of troubled youth) and maladaptive (seeking a

*I'm a PhD student and teacher, however I also engage as a freelance researcher from time to time. I'm in the second semester of my PhD and I did my MPhil in mainly qualitative research. As such I'm less aware about the quantitative aspects and mixed methods research. That's why this workshop helped me...I am thinking that I will be designing my PhD research based on this approach. So it was interesting and fruitful for me. It was very good!*

Participant from Nepal

sense of protection and control, for example, in youth gangs or armed combatants).

Resilience is also a dynamic process and not a personal trait. It develops in the interactions between individuals, their environment, and available services and opportunities (Ungar 2008). Thus, resilience relevant education services are needed to provide adaptive alternatives and foster assets that are life sustaining, protect from risks and promote educational outcomes.

**Methodology to support social justice.**

The complex and dynamic social processes encompassed in fragile, conflict and violence affected contexts require a commensurate methodology. The transformative research paradigm focuses on

building evidence to understand the status quo that feeds fragility, conflict, violence and inequality. It also actively pursues evidence that can support social justice outcomes, as more equitable relations and opportunities can contribute to improve the well-being and development of all groups in a society.

The use of mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) is the primary approach to capture both an in-depth understanding of people's lives and the general and transferable trends within and across populations. Ethics (or "axiology") permeate the overall research process within a transformative paradigm, and better allow us to tackle the key operational components of any research or evaluation design: questions, sampling, data collection, analysis, interpretation and dissemination.



**Participants from Afghan universities present their education resilience research ideas.**

## Contextually relevant research designs.

Based on this systematic framework, the participant country teams each chose a research topic and developed unique and rigorous education resilience study proposals. The five broad research areas presented by the different country teams were as follows:

- ➔ The learning process of vulnerable displaced children living in urban slum areas (Nepal)
- ➔ Improving access to school in vulnerable remote rural communities (Bhutan)
- ➔ Improving access for girls and young women into higher education (Afghanistan)
- ➔ The influence of supportive peer interactions for Syrian refugee youth living in host communities (Lebanon)
- ➔ Exploring education related resilience processes of gender minorities (India)

The workshop sessions led each team through the research design process such that they left the workshop with a resilience based research schema.

*What excited me was the way you mixed the human aspects of the study and the methodology of developing a study. This was new for me and I appreciated it very much. It was an aspect that I am not used to studying or that I have seen in my previous professional experience. It's very important for the context in which we do these studies. It's about people and trying to help people who are under stress and already in crisis so we have to be more aware about their experiences.*

*The methodology helps really to develop a research study more easily. I used to develop studies for other organizations and I remember it was overwhelming. Now I have more of a framework to think about it and to delve inside the complexity. It was very interesting.*

**Participant from Lebanon**

## Practice-based capacity building and ongoing support.

To avoid the pitfalls that can beset one-off trainings, the RES-Research module looks to ensure sustainable impact through a practical component. Workshop participants undertake a "pilot case study" on education resilience.

The ERA team provides guidance and technical support over this five month practicum through cost-effective virtual technical assistance and ongoing training (emails, Skype, Video Conferencing), in addition to seed funding to offset some of the costs of implementing the research design.

Participants share their lessons learned across country teams, building a supportive peer learning process fostered further during the face-to-face workshops.

A second RES-Research workshop, to be held in South Asia in early April 2014, will bring the teams together again after their pilot data collection phase. The workshop will provide additional training on data analysis and the ways that education resilience research can better inform policy and programming.

Ultimately, ERA seeks to strengthen the local capacity for collecting education resilience evidence by targeting its tools to researchers and higher education actors in conflict and violence affected contexts.

*In addition to the resilience research workshop in South Asia, similar training has taken place in the Middle East (West Bank and Gaza), Africa (South Sudan and Mali) and Latin America (Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Colombia). For interest in conducting similar Education Resilience Research workshops, please contact the ERA team:*

[www.worldbank.org/education/resilience](http://www.worldbank.org/education/resilience)

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**Facilitator**

**Donna Mertens** from the *Journal of Mixed-Methods Research* and participants from Bhutan discuss transformative research design.

## References

- Mertens, D. 2009. *Transformative Research and Evaluation*. The Guilford Press: New York.
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