Promoting resilience for teachers and their students: A four dimensional view

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Why is teacher resilience important for students?

“How can I care for my students if I don’t care for myself?”

• Importance of resilience noted in ‘caring’ professions (for example, nursing – Ablett & Jones, 2007; social work – Horwitz, 1998; training for medical professionals - Howe, Smajdor, & Stöckl, 2012; Tempski, Martins, & Paro, 2012).

• Teachers as caregivers – ‘Caring for the caregiver’ (Fleming, Mackrain & LeBuffe, 2013)

• Teachers as role models for social and emotional competence

• Evidence of reciprocal benefits for students and teachers when implementing mental health programs (see for example, Tyson, Roberts & Kane, 2009)
The ‘Keeping Cool’ project
Mansfield, Price, Beltman, McConney, Wosnitza & Pelliccione.
Funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2009

Issues of concern

• High rates of Early Career Teacher attrition
• “Reality Shock” Teacher education to teaching (Friedman, 2004)
• Can “resilience” help?

Key project outcomes

• Annotated Bibliography and Literature Review
• Longitudinal Survey and qualitative data collection
• Website (www.keepingcool.edu.au) and Facebook

Three phase study
Phase 1: Literature review

How is teacher resilience conceptualized in the literature?

- “process of development that occurs over time” involving “the ability to adjust to varied situations and increase one’s competence in the face of adverse conditions” (Bobek, 2002, p. 202).
- “specific strategies that individuals employ when they experience an adverse situation” (Castro, et al., 2010, p. 623).
- “a mode of interacting with events in the environment that is activated and nurtured in times of stress (Tait, 2008, p. 58).
- resilience is related to “regulation of emotions and effective interaction in social environments” (Tait, 2008, p. 72).
Teacher resilience: what do we know?

Resilience is the outcome of a *dynamic relationship* between individual risk and protective factors (Benard, 2004).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Contextual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Risk factors</strong></td>
<td>• behaviour management (Howard &amp; Johnson, 2004)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• negative self-beliefs and confidence (Day, 2008)</td>
<td>• unsupportive leadership / staff (Day, 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• reluctance to seek help (Fantilli &amp; McDougal, 2009)</td>
<td>• heavy workloads (Day, 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• conflict between personal beliefs and practices (Flores, 2006)</td>
<td>• time required for non-teaching duties (Castro, et al, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Protective factors</strong></td>
<td>• casual employment (Jenkins et al, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• altruistic motives (Sinclair, 2008)</td>
<td>• collegial support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• strong intrinsic motivation (Chong &amp; Low, 2004)</td>
<td>• “strong, caring leadership” (Howard &amp; Johnson, 2004, p. 412)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• high self-efficacy (Day, 2008)</td>
<td>• mentor relationships (Olsen &amp; Anderson, 2007)</td>
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</table>

Issues emerging from the literature

- Variety of conceptualisations of resilience related to context and perspective
- Predominantly qualitative methodology used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of research</th>
<th>Location of research</th>
<th>Sources of data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early career teachers – 42%</td>
<td>USA – 34%</td>
<td>Interviews – 68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced teachers – 28%</td>
<td>Australia – 30%</td>
<td>Questionnaires/surveys – 35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed career stages – 18%</td>
<td>United Kingdom – 12%</td>
<td>Scales – 32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preservice teachers – 12%</td>
<td>Canada – 8%</td>
<td>Documents – 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ireland – 6%</td>
<td>Observations – 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Portugal, Singapore – 2%</td>
<td>Online discussion – 6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus groups – 4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student achievement – 4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Drawings – 2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- No studies found that directly asked teachers how they would describe a resilient teacher
Phase 2: Describing resilient teachers

"To be a teacher you have to be resilient!"

Investigating teachers’ perceptions of resilient teachers

- 125 early career teachers and 75 graduating teachers
- Open ended question - *How would you describe a resilient teacher?*
- Data analysis - Four team members involved in inductive coding. Three cycles of individual coding and team agreement, then categories and themes finalised.
How would you describe a resilient teacher?

- ‘Bounces Back’
- Copes with demands of teaching / stress
- Flexible and adaptable
- Positive and optimistic
- Seeks help/takes advice
- Manages emotions
- Cares for own wellbeing
- Enjoys teaching
- Enjoys challenge
- Focused on learning and improvement
- Okay with making mistakes
- Maintains motivation and enthusiasm
- Has problem solving skills
- Persists
- Doesn’t take things personally
- Has sense of humour
- Organised, prepared, good at time management
- Good communicator
- Committed to students
- Has confidence/self-belief
- Sets realistic goals
- Builds supportive relationships
- Effective teaching skills
What makes a resilient teacher?

How would you describe a resilient teacher?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of resilience</th>
<th>% of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>includes self-belief and confidence, not taking things personally, sense of humour, ability to bounce back, emotion regulation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>includes problem solving skills, persistence and perseverance, having realistic expectations, setting realistic goals, focused on self-improvement, being positive and optimistic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profession-related</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>includes teaching competence and skills, organisation, preparation, classroom management, facilitating effective learning, being flexible and adaptable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>includes asking others for assistance, interpersonal skills, ability to take advice from others, professional and personal support networks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emotional aspects (61%)

Able to bounce back

• “A resilient teacher is one who is able to bounce back from the stress and hard experiences and continue teaching effectively.”

• A resilient teacher can “keep their sense of humour and enjoy the job” and “laugh about the bad stressful events that occur and does her best to start each day with a happy attitude”

Manages emotions

• “A resilient teacher has a positive outlook, a friendly, calm disposition, is self confident and reliable and doesn’t sweat the small stuff. A resilient teacher doesn’t take things personally and remains objective in difficult situations.”
Motivational aspects (54%)

Maintain motivation

• “resilient teachers work hard to maintain a positive outlook on their work and leave school thinking about the highs rather than the lows.”

• “Sees the big picture to help them through stressful situations.”

• “have realistic expectations of themselves and others”

Persist

• “Persist and persevere through problems or situations” ... “are unrelenting when overcoming challenges within the classroom/school”

• “do not give up on improving themselves and their practice”
Organisation, preparation, flexibility, adaptability

• “One who is able to adapt to the demands of each student and class, have the tools at their disposal to react appropriately to each situation – be able to think on their feet and above all keep their sense of humour and enjoy the job.”

• “A teacher who is able to think on their feet if they are faced with a problem of faced with challenges in the classroom. Can think quickly of alternatives and find solutions, is reflective and flexible and takes suggestions on board.”
Social aspects (34%)

Collaboration, asking for help and taking advice

- “Someone who is willing to reach out for help to other supportive teachers and admin staff and someone who is willing to take and use constructive criticism.”

Professional and personal relationships

- “Has solid, honest relationships with colleagues.”
- “One that has someone to talk to about work related issues.”
- “Resilient teachers talk with each other.”
Multidimensional nature of teacher resilience

“A resilient teacher is someone who:

• Has effective time management and organisational skills
• Ensures a balance between work and leisure
• Has a positive attitude, even in times of difficulty
• Has realistic expectations of themselves and others
• Has the ability to ‘bounce back’ when experiencing adversity
• Sense of humour is essential!
• Willing to talk to others and ask the stupid questions!!”
Findings

• Challenges in investigating teacher resilience - only 20% of respondents described a single attribute as contributing to resilience.

• Additional attributes that have not emerged in the teacher resilience literature – for example, being reflective, emotional distancing (“not take things personally”).

• Both the literature and our empirical data emphasise the importance of considering both the individual and the context in providing supports or constraints for the development of teacher resilience (66% of respondents included context in their answers).
Phase 3: Considering context

4 Dimensions of resilience

- Profession-related dimension
- Emotional dimension
- Social dimension
- Motivational dimension

- The resilient teacher...
- Students and classroom
- Staff members/colleagues
- School and broader school community
- Family
- Friends
- Contexts that support or challenge resilience
Interviews

• **Process**
  • Contact with those completing surveys who had agreed to participate further
  • 14 interviews (face to face and by phone) – conducted and transcribed by project Research Assistant

• **Participants**
  • 11 female, 3 male; all in 1st or 2nd year of teaching
  • 4 in 20s, 5 in 30s, 3 in 40s, 2 in 50s

• **Data analysis**
  • Examined overall challenges and responses across participants
  • Examined process of resilience within participants
# Findings: Challenges

101 separate challenges; ongoing demand rather than critical incidents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Interpersonal</th>
<th>Infrastructure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work-life balance e.g. no time for hobbies</td>
<td>Family and friends e.g. less contact</td>
<td>Policies and practices e.g. poor housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal attributes e.g. perfectionist</td>
<td>Teachers and admin. e.g. lack of recognition or support</td>
<td>School organisation e.g. moving rooms; lots of meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge e.g. lack of reporting</td>
<td>Students e.g. challenging behaviour; multiple needs</td>
<td>Classroom resources e.g. lack of teaching materials and resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel overwhelmed e.g. “trying to juggle fifteen thousand balls”; “it’s like a roller coaster”</td>
<td>Parents e.g. parent complaints</td>
<td>Pre-service preparation e.g. teaching in different area; lack of admin experience; 1 year course</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Findings: Vignettes

Sarah: “I am where I am meant to be”.

Joanne: “You’re just a relief teacher”.

Richard: “The staffroom is the place to vent”.

Jessie: “I am resilient, that’s why I’m leaving, but I’m still going to teach”
Findings: Strategies used in response to challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus on the students</th>
<th>Keep calm</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use problem solving skills</td>
<td>Focus on what you love about the job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect</td>
<td>Enjoy the kids / have fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get organised</td>
<td>Manage emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build resources</td>
<td>Positive self talk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Debrief with partner</th>
<th>Believe in yourself</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ask for help rather than pretend it’s okay</td>
<td>Have realistic expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to your mentor</td>
<td>Persist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to other staff</td>
<td>Focus on improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek counselling</td>
<td>Build confidence</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

And ... exercise!
“No matter what I go for a run ... burn up energy and calm my mind”
Implications from this study:

For teachers and school professionals:

• Importance of boosting protective factors (professional, emotional, motivational and social).

• Critical role played by support networks in and out of the school context.

• Modelling resilience in the classroom: Take opportunities to model and talk through ‘resilient’ responses to challenges with students.

• Be proactive in supporting colleagues and students in their own resilience development – help create a culture of resilience.

• Be especially supportive to newcomers in the school environment.

• Care for yourself – so you can care for the students.
• Improvement in hiring practices, induction, support and targeted professional development

• Teachers’ motivations are primarily altruistic so “financial perks”, an extrinsic motivator, unlikely to dramatically impact on recruitment and retention rates (Chong & Low, 2009) but.....

• Rewards and leadership opportunities could be beneficial for some new teachers depending on their initial motivation and for those who have been teaching for 3 or 4 years

• Provide opportunities for staff growth and career development
Emerging questions

- Whose responsibility is teacher resilience?
- Role of individuals, employers, schools, family and friends?
- What kinds of professional learning might provide opportunities to build resilience for school professionals?
- What might teacher resilience “look like” to more experienced teachers?
- Future directions?
  - longitudinal research following career paths focusing on resilience
  - developing resources/professional learning to support the capacity for teacher resilience
Final thoughts from teachers ...

“There are days when I think ‘oh, I could just go and work in an office and earn more money and have less stress (laughs) but then there’s days when I think ‘gee, I’m lucky’. So it’s those days that you hang on to and they get you through ... every job has its ups and downs”
Final thoughts from teachers …

“I use the analogy of a branch … the branch can break with stress, but if a branch is allowed to be exposed to the wind and the seasons it becomes more flexible, it shapes itself accordingly…”

Thank you

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www.keepingcool.edu.au
References (1)


