



# An overview of the research project

## Aims

The research aims to:

- develop a 'human resilience' theoretical framework to study the complex lives of early career teachers to identify the practices, processes and resources they use to engage productively with the challenges of their profession;
- identify the range of circumstances (influenced by socio-cultural and systemic school policies and practices, personal dispositions and life events) that put early career teachers 'at risk' of leaving the profession;
- better understand the dynamic and complex interplay among individual, relational and contextual conditions that operate over time to promote teacher resilience; and
- identify specific policies, practices and resources that best promote early career teacher resilience.

## Data collection and analysis

This project involves an innovative linked three stage process:

### Stage 1: [Completed]

Across two states of Australia – WA and SA – this study undertook 59 semi-structured interviews with ECTs in terms two and three of the 2009 school year with a follow-up interview in term 4. In the second round of interviews 51 school leaders were also interviewed, giving a total of 169 interviews of 30-60 minutes duration. Where possible, at least one interview was conducted on site. These 'work stories' were then transcribed to produce over 1800 pages of interview data. These data was analysed at two workshops held over five days where the Chief Investigators identified five emergent themes based on a preliminary analysis of the interview data. As well, NVivo software was used to create more fine grained coding categories within each of the five dominant themes. The outcome is a *Draft Profile of Conditions Supporting Teacher Resilience*.

### Stage 2: [2010]

The Draft Profile developed in stage 1 will be trialled with six schools – three each in WA and SA – to 'check out' the veracity of the Profile for the purpose of confirming and/or modifying the Profile in the light of experience. These workshops will adopt the principles and strategies of Action Research to guide the processes of collaborative evaluation and reflection. Participating schools including ECTs, experienced teachers and school leaders will work with the Chief Investigators at a specially convened workshop to review the Profile. A similar workshop will be conducted with representatives from the Industry Partners at one of the regular Roundtable meetings. At the end of these workshops a final *Profile of Conditions Supporting Teacher Resilience* will be produced.

The *Draft Profile* (overleaf) is an attempt to map the key themes and issues from the perspective of ECTs and school leaders. Therefore, it should not be read as a comprehensive document that attends to all issues, policies and strategies but a heuristic device designed to generate conversations among stakeholders. This overview will lay the groundwork for the important task of developing a more sophisticated analysis and set of explanatory documents and professional development materials in stage 3.

### Stage 3: Materials Development [2011]

In stage 3, the Chief Investigators will begin the task of writing a series of five professional development modules based on the dominant themes identified in the Profile. These modules will be informed by the fieldwork and the scholarly literature and disseminated for further comment among participating schools and Roundtables.

## Acknowledgements

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- Australian Education Union South Australia Branch (AEUSA)
- State School teachers Union of Western Australia (SSTUWA)

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Finally, we wish to thank the principals and teachers from participating schools who willingly shared their knowledge and experience of what life is like for early career teachers (ECTs).

## Relationships

Relationships refer to the social and professional networks, human connections and belongingness experienced by ECTs. ECT resilience is fostered when schools continually focus on their complex emotional needs by promoting relationships and social exchanges based on respect, trust, care and integrity.

*To enhance ECT resilience, it is important to:*

### Promote a sense of belonging, acceptance, and wellbeing

- Foster relationships based on mutual respect, trust, care and integrity
- Give support to manage personal and professional challenges and conflicts
- Create opportunities to be involved in professional, social and community networks
- Value support from family, friends and peers

### Foster pedagogical and professional growth

- Value the personal strengths, assets and resources of teachers
- Provide specific, constructive and timely feedback
- Explicitly acknowledge and affirm development and growth

### Promote collective ownership and responsibility

- Cultivate a generosity of spirit
- Share responsibility for maintaining positive relationships
- Create time and spaces for dialogue and collaboration
- Work together to personalise relationships

## School Culture

School culture refers to diverse values, beliefs, norms, assumptions, behaviours and relationships that characterise the daily rituals of school life. ECT resilience appears to flourish in those schools that actively promote collaborative relationships, professional learning communities, educative forms of leadership and democratic decision-making.

*To enhance ECT resilience, it is important to:*

### Promote a sense of belongingness and social connectedness

- Value and practise affirmation
- Be responsive to diverse perspectives, practices and backgrounds
- Foster trust and goodwill
- Minimise isolation
- Take collective responsibility for teacher wellbeing and physical safety

### Develop educative, democratic and empowering ways of working

- Promote distributive leadership
- Work through problems respectfully
- Include all school personnel regardless of employment status
- Make an ethical commitment to social justice

### Provide formal and informal transition and induction processes

- Appoint mentors, coaches and buddies
- Provide on-going induction
- Apply equitable processes regardless of length and nature of appointment
- Promote understanding and appreciation of the different roles in the school

### Develop a professional learning community

- Promote opportunities for risk taking and innovation
- Provide environments and resources that optimise teaching and learning
- Provide opportunities for collaborative learning
- Take collective responsibility for student learning and wellbeing

## Teacher Identity

Teacher identity refers to the development of one's awareness and understanding of self as a teacher. Teacher resilience is more likely when ECTs successfully engage in processes of self-reflection and self-understanding which sustain a coherent sense of personal identity while at the same time allowing for the emergence of a robust teacher identity.

*To enhance ECT resilience, it is important to:*

### Understand the interplay between personal and professional identities

- Be aware of the interconnectedness of personal and professional identities
- Recognise that teachers' identities are socially and culturally produced in context
- Understand the evolving nature of personal and professional identities
- Recognise that emotions play an integral part in identity development

### Engage in self reflection

- Accommodate new and different ways of thinking
- Challenge and develop beliefs, assumptions, values and practices
- Negotiate the contradictions, dilemmas and tensions of teaching
- Employ proactive coping strategies

### Enable the development of a strong sense of agency, efficacy and self-worth

- Commit to the ethical and moral purposes of teaching
- Develop a high level of emotional intelligence
- Maintain a sense of hope and optimism
- Nurture wellbeing and work-life balance

## Teachers' Work

Teachers' work refers to the complex array of skills, practices, knowledge, relationships and ethical considerations that comprise the role of the teacher. It acknowledges the ways in which teachers' work is being reshaped in the context of a broader set of economic, political and cultural conditions. ECT resilience is promoted when the focus is on understanding the complex, intense and unpredictable nature of teachers' work rather than on individual deficits and victim blaming.

*To enhance ECT resilience, it is important to:*

### Acknowledge the complex, intense and unpredictable nature of teachers' work

- Attend to the physical, intellectual, relational and emotional dimensions of teachers' work
- Make provision for the emotional and tiring nature of teachers' work
- Negotiate multiple relationships in complex settings

### Develop teachers' curriculum and pedagogical knowledge and strategies

- Provide opportunities for collaborative planning, teaching, assessment and reporting
- Allocate space and structures for teachers' intellectual work
- Focus on student diversity and difference
- Promote creative, innovative and intellectual work

### Provide support to create engaging learning environments

- Take collective responsibility for the management of student behaviour
- Develop practical skills and strategies to manage the classroom environment
- Share and demonstrate context specific strategies
- Model and promote autonomous and collaborative decision-making

### Ensure access to appropriate ongoing support, resources and learning opportunities

- Provide equitable and timely access to needs-based professional learning
- Support the development of pedagogical beliefs, values and practices
- Provide adequate release time

## Policies & practices

Policies and practices refer to the officially mandated statements, guidelines, values and prescriptions. ECT resilience and wellbeing is enhanced when systems' policies and practices show a strong commitment to the principles and values of social justice, teacher agency and voice, community engagement, and respect for local knowledge and practice.

*To enhance ECT resilience, it is important to:*

### Provide relevant, rigorous and responsive pre-service preparation for the profession

- Foster stakeholders' collective ownership for preparation
- Provide diverse, rigorous and carefully planned pre-service professional experiences
- Ensure coherence and connectedness between on-campus courses and the dynamic demands of the profession

### Create innovative partnerships and initiatives that assist smooth transitions to the workforce

- Support professional development suitable to school context
- Acknowledge the value of previous professional experiences in similar settings
- Provide additional resources in complex settings

### Implement transparent, fair and responsive employment processes

- Notify appointment in a timely manner
- Provide the potential for continuity of employment
- Appoint to roles and schools suitable to expertise
- Ensure access to timely and appropriate ongoing support, resources and learning opportunities
- Provide induction and ongoing processes for learning
- Provide additional release time
- Provide school leaders with professional learning