



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 four. 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 were 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. Further, NVivo software was used to create more fine-grained coding categories within each of the five dominant themes. The outcome was a *Draft Framework of Conditions Supporting Teacher Resilience*.

Stage 2: [2010]

The Draft Framework developed in stage 1 was trialled with nine schools – five in WA and four in SA – to 'check out' its veracity for the purpose of confirming and/or modifying it in the light of experience. Participating schools including ECTs, experienced teachers and school leaders worked with the Chief Investigators at a specially convened workshop to review this Draft. A similar workshop was conducted with representatives from the Industry Partners at one of the regular Roundtable meetings. At the end of these workshops a final *Framework of Conditions Supporting Early Career Teacher (ECT) Resilience* was produced.

The *Framework* (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 *Framework*. 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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Relationships

Relationships refer to the social and professional networks, human connections and belongingness experienced by ECTs. In schools that value relationships there is a continual focusing on the complex emotional needs of ECTs in the form of social exchanges that bring with them respect, trust, care and integrity. ECT resilience benefits significantly when these values are evident in policies and practice.

School Culture

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

Teacher Identity

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

Teachers' Work

Teachers' work refers to the complex array of 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.

Policies & Practices

Policies and practices refer to the officially mandated statements, guidelines, values and prescriptions that both enable and constrain ECT wellbeing. ECT resilience and wellbeing are 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:

Promote a sense of belonging, acceptance and wellbeing

- Foster relationships based on mutual trust, respect, care and integrity
- Help manage personal and professional challenges and conflicts
- Encourage involvement in professional, social and community networks
- Value support from family, friends and peers

Place student-teacher relationships at the heart of the teaching-learning process

- Develop positive and democratic relationships with students
- Communicate with and involve parents/caregivers in their children's learning
- Focus on the enjoyment that comes from interacting with students and their successes
- Develop learning communities where everyone encourages each other's learning
- Celebrate student creativity, innovation and success in and beyond the classroom

Foster pedagogical and professional growth

- Value the personal strengths, assets and resources of teachers
- Give specific, constructive and timely feedback
- Give explicit affirmation and acknowledgement
- Support communication with parents/caregivers/community

Promote collective ownership and responsibility

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

To enhance ECT resilience, it is important to:

Promote a sense of belongingness and social connectedness

- Value and practise affirmation
- Recognise and value 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 processes

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

Provide formal and informal transition/induction processes

- Appoint mentors/coaches/buddies
- Provide ongoing 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 behaviour, learning and wellbeing

To enhance ECT resilience, it is important to:

Understand the interplay between the nature of personal and professional identities

- Recognise that personal and professional identities are interconnected
- Recognise that teachers' identities are socially and culturally produced in context
- Understand the evolving nature of personal-professional identities
- Recognise that emotions are an integral part of 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 social and emotional responsiveness
- Maintain a sense of hope and optimism
- Promote work-life balance and wellbeing
- Seek help and support

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
- Acknowledge that teachers' work is demanding and tiring
- Negotiate multiple and complex relationships in diverse settings

Develop teachers' curriculum and pedagogical knowledge and strategies

- Provide opportunities for collaborative planning, teaching, assessment and reporting
- Allocate space and structures for teachers' critical and reflective work
- Focus on student diversity, passions and interests
- Promote creative, innovative and engaging curriculum practices

Provide support to create engaging learning environments

- Take collective ownership of students' wellbeing and behaviour
- Develop beliefs and practices that engage students and encourage constructive behaviours
- Create collaborative and democratic learning environments
- Make authentic connections between students' learning and their life-worlds

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

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, induction and ongoing learning
- 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 the school context
- Acknowledge the value of previous professional experiences and expertise
- Provide additional professional and financial resources for complex school settings

Implement transparent, fair and responsive employment processes

- Notify school appointments in a timely manner
- Provide opportunities for continuity of employment
- Ensure equitable access to support, resources and learning opportunities
- Make professional learning available to school leaders to support ECTs