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Early career teachers face a range of challenges in their first years of teaching and how these challenges are managed has career implications. Based on current literature, this paper presents a model of early career teacher resilience where resilience is seen as a process located at the interface of personal and contextual challenges and resources. Through a semi-structured interview the challenges faced by thirteen Australian early career teachers and the resources available to manage these challenges are examined. Findings show that beginning teachers experience multiple, varied and ongoing challenges and that personal and contextual resources are both important in sustaining them through the beginning year(s) of their teaching careers. The study emphasises the critical roles played by family and friends and the importance of relationships in the resilience process. Implications for future research and teacher education are discussed.

Keywords: teacher resilience; early career teachers; teacher retention; teacher education; teacher induction

Introduction

Teaching is a challenging profession, particularly for early career teachers as they meet the demands of the profession and establish themselves in a school community. Experiencing multiple challenges has been found to put beginning teachers at risk of burnout as early as their first year (Gavish & Friedman, 2010). With at least 25% of teachers in both Australia and the UK leaving the profession in the first five years (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2012, p. 100; House of Commons Education Committee, 2012, p. 35) and with an estimated 40-50% turnover in early years teachers in the United States (Ingersoll, 2012), teacher attrition is an issue of international concern. Teacher "attrition does not appear to be a

country specific issue but rather spans across a range of countries" (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2013, p. 26). While some researchers have focused on understanding teacher burnout (see for example, Hultell, Melin, & Gustavsson, 2013) it is also argued that this is an important time to better understand what sustains the majority of teachers who do remain in the profession (Clandinin, 2010).

Teacher resilience research has begun this important work by helping develop understandings about how teachers demonstrate resilience when they not only survive, but thrive, despite challenging circumstances (Beltman, Mansfield & Price, 2011). Resilience "… offers a useful lens which allows us to probe [teachers'] internal and external worlds to explore which factors, individually and in combination, influence their capacity to sustain their passion, enthusiasm and strong sense of fulfilment" (Gu & Li, 2013, pp. 288-289). This paper proposes a model of early career teacher resilience which brings together individual or personal characteristics, and the various social and cultural contexts of teaching which can both act as challenges or resources, and represents resilience as a dynamic process at the interface of the person and the context.

Personal challenges and resources for early career teachers

Personal challenges faced by beginning teachers can include a reluctance to seek help (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009;), low levels of self-efficacy (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010), concerns about content knowledge (McCann & Johannessen, 2004) or job security (Stallions, Murrill, & Earp, 2012), and philosophical differences in beliefs between preferred and actual teaching practices (McCormack & Gore, 2008). Poor social and emotional competence may lead to relationship difficulties and behaviour management challenges in the classroom (Cefai & Cavioni, 2014).

Despite such challenges, research has identified a range of personal factors that act as resources to assist teachers to manage challenges and have a sustaining effect on teacher

commitment. Examples include strong intrinsic motivation (Chong & Low, 2009), vocational

commitment (Gu & Li, 2013), sense of agency (Castro, et al., 2010), high self-efficacy

(Kitching, Morgan, & O'Leary, 2009) and problem solving skills (Castro, et al., 2010) along

with an enduring sense of optimism (Gu & Li, 2013) and hope (McCann & Johannessen, 2004).

Having social and emotional competence leads to teachers' "effective coping and resilience in

the face of stress" (Cefai & Cavioni, 2014, p. 136).

Contextual challenges and resources for early career teachers

At the contextual level, challenges for early career teachers may emerge in the

immediate classroom context, relating to issues such as managing challenging behaviour

(Demetriou, Wilson, & Winterbottom, 2009), meeting diverse student needs (Fantilli &

McDougall, 2009), forming positive relationships with staff and students (Le Cornu, 2013),

limited resources and equipment, and challenging teaching assignments (Stallions, et al., 2012).

The school community may also provide challenges such as dealing with difficult

parents (Goddard & Foster, 2001). Other challenges have been associated with school

organisation and administration such as heavy workload, time management and lack of

administrative support (Flores, 2006) and relocation to a rural or remote area (Sharplin, O'Neill,

& Chapman, 2011).

In Australia, the challenges of early career teaching have also been influenced by

national reforms such as a new national Australian curriculum (Australian Curriculum

Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2012) and Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

(Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011). Such reforms have contributed

to an increasing focus on accountability and teacher quality. Similar challenges are evident in

many countries (Cefai & Cavioni, 2014) and such reforms potentially "temporarily disturb the

relative stability of teachers' work" and can "challenge existing notions of professionalism" (Gu & Day, 2007, p. 1303).

Despite such challenging contexts for teaching, school communities also provide resources that help sustain beginning teachers. For example, Peters and Pearce (2011) discuss the impact of principal's personal support and leadership in supporting early career teacher resilience and Le Cornu (2013) argues relationships are critical to resilience building in new teachers. According to Corbell, Osborne and Reiman (2010) key factors associated with beginning teacher satisfaction, commitment and retention include mentor support, colleague support, administrative support, classroom management, student success, instructional resources, parental contacts and assignment and workload. Likewise, Phelps and Benson (2012) found that factors sustaining teachers included the chance to have an impact, positive attitudes of others, and professional development through collaboration and relationships. The importance of a caring professional community has been stressed in whole school approaches to support pupil and teacher wellbeing and resilience (Cefai & Cavioni, 2014). Assisting novice teachers is a collective responsibility (Caspersen & Finn, 2014).

Process of resilience

Resilience has been approached from a number of perspectives from focusing on biological and personal levels through to neighbourhood and community levels (Reich, Zautra, & Hall, 2010). Teacher resilience research illustrates the importance of both the person and context in the resilience process as these "work together in complex, dynamic ways to shape the resilience of individual teachers in a developmental or cyclical way" (Beltman, et al., 2011, p. 188). Personal trait attributes such as cognitive flexibility and altruism are not enough to predict resilience, and social supports are also needed (Kent & Davis, 2010). Similarly, as Gu and Li (2013) found, "the nature and sustainability of resilience in teachers is not innate, but influenced by individual

qualities in interaction with contextual influences in which teachers' work and lives are embedded" (p. 300). Ungar (2012) has adopted an ecological position which "suggests complexity in reciprocal person-environment interactions" (p. 14) and as individual teachers face challenges in their environment, they actively use various strategies to overcome these (Patterson, Collins & Abbott, 2004). Therefore it is important to understand how teachers perceive and interpret their environment (Hong, 2012). The focus of the present study is on the process of resilience, where personal and contextual challenges and resources come together – at the interface of person and context.

Conceptual framework

Figure 1 presents our model of early career teacher resilience. The inner circle indicates personal aspects such as those outlined earlier in this paper and examined in our previous work investigating beginning teachers' perceptions of a resilient teacher (Mansfield, Beltman, Price & McConney, 2012). Personal characteristics could act as a challenge or a resource as they enable an individual to better overcome contextual challenges. The outer circles in Figure 1 show the multiple contexts that are important for teacher resilience, including family and friends, school colleagues, school administrative staff, and employing bodies. Such social and cultural contexts could provide challenges for teaches or could also be supportive and offer resources that enable them to thrive as professionals. At the interface of the person and the context, indicated by the shaded circle in Figure 1, we have located the resilience process. Castro et al., (2010) also regarded resilience as a process, whereby all teachers could be seen as using "a variety of resilience strategies" (p. 623). The focus is thus centred "not on key attributes of the teacher or resources in the environment, but on strategies teachers employ" (p. 623). Likewise, in this study we identify personal and contextual challenges and resources and then focus on the resilience process.
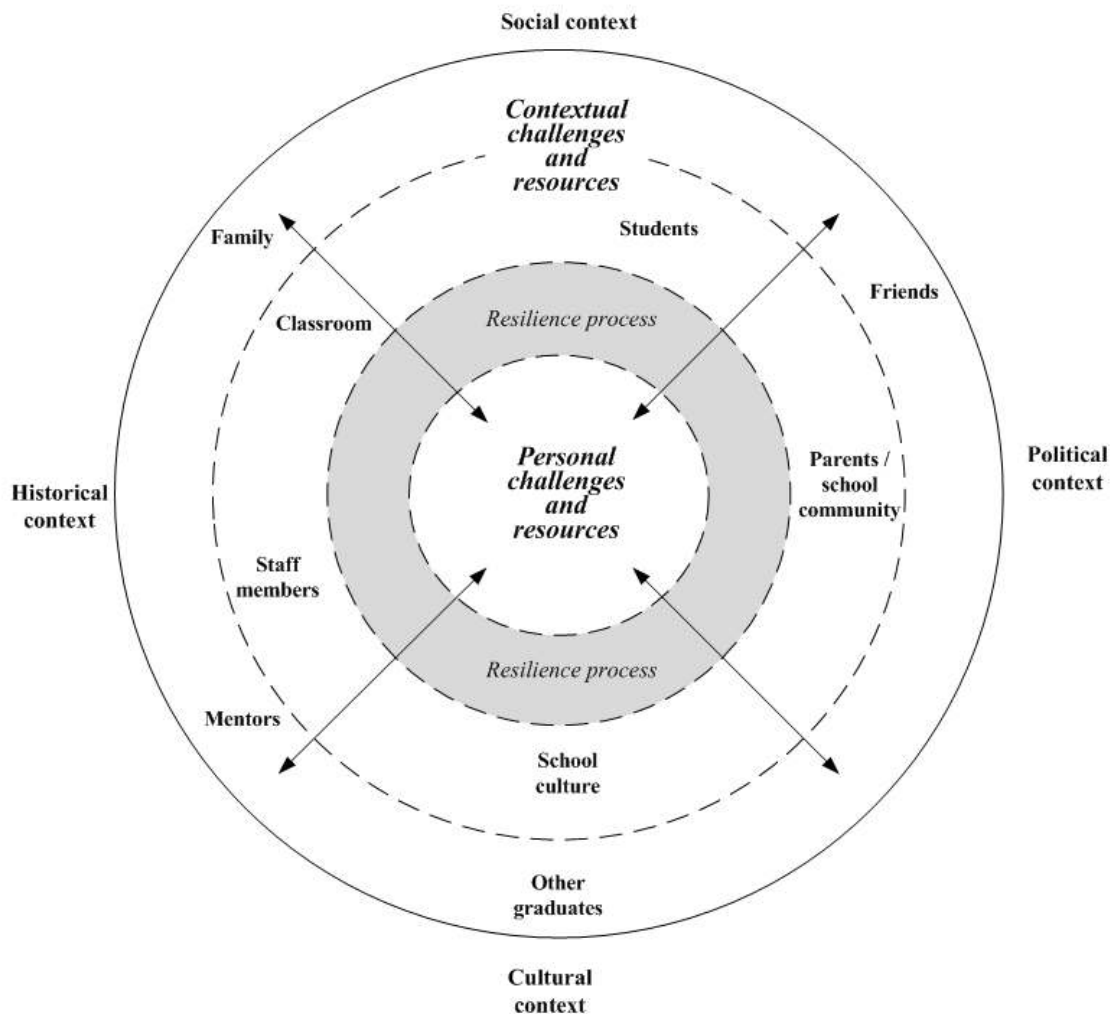
Figure 1. A model of early career teacher resilience

The present study

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the growing body of research on teacher resilience by using the conceptual framework in Figure 1, to examine the process of resilience in thirteen beginning teachers in Australia. The focus of the paper is on identifying challenges faced by this group of early career teachers and the ways they actively respond to these challenges using personal and contextual resources. Resilience, unfortunately, only can be said to manifest itself

when an individual is exposed to "a significant threat to their development" (Doney, 2013, p. 660), therefore it was necessary to examine the challenges experienced by these early career teachers. Like Sumsion (2004, p. 277) our focus was on "understanding the participants' constructions of what enabled them to thrive professionally", so it was important to ask participants about the strategies and resources they had used when faced with challenges. A commitment to the profession and "strength and determination to fulfil their original call to teach and to manage and thrive professionally" are characteristics of resilient teachers (Gu & Day, 2007, p. 1314). Therefore it was also important to ascertain whether these early career teachers saw themselves as having a future in teaching and the paper examines the perceived impact of challenges and resources on these beginning teachers' intentions to remain in the profession. Through this investigation we aim to offer a way of understanding the resilience process for early career teachers.

The main research question for the study is "how is early career teacher resilience shaped by personal and contextual challenges and resources?" In order to address this question, the following sub-questions shaped the collection of data:

- What personal and contextual challenges do early career teachers face?
- How do these beginning teachers respond to challenges using personal and contextual resources?
- How are challenges and responses perceived to influence intentions to remain in the profession?

Methodology

Because of the complex, dynamic ways that various characteristics work together (Beltman, et al, 2011), it would be expected that personal characteristics and perception of contexts would vary between individuals. This study therefore used qualitative methods as it aimed to

understand the meaning, for participants, of the events, situations and actions in which they are involved and the context in which these occur (Maxwell, 1998).

Participants

The participants were 13 beginning teachers (10 female; 3 male), in their first or second year of teaching. Ethics approval was obtained and participants gave informed consent for the interviews. Table 1 shows participant age ranges, gender, teaching level, and number of years teaching at the time of interview, as well as their work context details.

Table 1: Participants

Name	Age range	Gender	Year of teaching	Primary / Secondary	Employment status	School location
Debra	20s	F	1	Primary	Full time	Metropolitan
Joanne	20s	F	2	Primary	Relief (substitute)	Multiple schools, metropolitan area
Marissa	20s	F	2	Secondary	Full time	Metropolitan (hard to staff school)
Peter	20s	M	2	Secondary	Full time	Remote (closed mining town)
Natalie	30s	F	1	Secondary	Full time	Metropolitan
Fiona	30s	F	1	Primary	Full time	Rural
Mel	30s	F	2	Primary	Full time	Metropolitan
Michelle	30s	F	2	Primary	Full time	Metropolitan
Dave	30s	M	2	Primary	Full time	Metropolitan
Sarah	40s	F	2	Primary	Full time	Metropolitan
Richard	50s	M	1	Secondary	Full time	Metropolitan
June	50s	F	2	Primary	Full time	Rural
Cheryl	60s	F	2	Primary	Not currently	Previous experience in remote

Participants took part in one semi-structured interview, facilitated by a research assistant not previously known to the participants. The interview lasted about an hour and was conducted face-to-face or by telephone depending on each participant's preference and/or location.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection tool (see Appendix A for interview schedule). Face to face interviews are a suitable tool to "obtain in-depth information about a participant's thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations, and feelings about a topic" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 207). The interview questions were developed from the conceptual framework to focus on both personal and contextual resources and challenges. During the interview participants were asked to describe how they understood teacher resilience, challenges they had experienced, how such challenges had been addressed, the factors that sustained them in their teaching, and their future intentions.

Data Analysis

Each interview was first transcribed and then analysed to answer the research questions. Throughout the analysis process, multiple (three) researchers worked individually and then shared and compared findings to agree on interpretation of the data to enhance reliability (Fraenkel, Wallen & Huyn, 2012). There were few differences in interpretation, but where differences arose the researchers referred to the interview transcript to review and reach agreement.

The first stage in the analysis process involved researchers individually determining the challenges described by each participant (research question 1) and then agreeing on these.

Together, the researchers then determined whether the identified challenges were personal or contextual and how the challenges may be grouped. Next the interviews were analysed to determine how participants responded to challenges (research question 2). Again the researchers conducted this individually and then reached consensus. Participants' responses to the interview question asking about career intentions for the next 4-5 years were examined and then compared with the data regarding challenges and supports to explore possible relationships between challenges and responses and intention to remain in the profession (research question 3). A table summarizing each participant's challenges, resources and future intentions was developed, a brief overview of which is presented as Table 2, below.

Based on the summary table, an overview for each participant was created and a brief vignette developed to illustrate the process of resilience (managing personal and contextual challenges and responses) and their future intentions.

Findings

The early career teachers in this study experienced a range of challenges at the personal and contextual level and to manage these challenges, drew on both personal and contextual resources. A summary of these is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Participants' challenges, resources and future intentions

Name	Personal challenges	Personal resources	Contextual challenges	Contextual resources	Future intentions
Debra	Maintaining a social life with non-teaching friends Less contact with family Staying healthy Knowing when to stop and rest	Persistence (doesn't like giving up) Highly motivated to do well	Student diversity (students with social and emotional problems)	Family support and encouragement (talks to Mum every day) Friends Support from staff Mentor Some university units	Wants to remain at the school. Wants to have a baby in a few years. Sees a future in teaching.
Joanne	Working as a casual (relief/supply) teacher	Positive attitude Motivation and persistence Growing up in a low SES area Organisation Problem solving	Relationships with established teachers and administration School organisation and policies Others' perceptions of relief teachers	Family support (Mother is a teacher) One university unit Identifying with students	Wants to remain in teaching and obtain a permanent position
Marissa	Achieving work life balance (no time for hobbies)	Pets / exercise (acquired a puppy)	Lack of support for new initiatives and behaviour management School policies High staff turnover	Friendships with some staff Students Counselling	Wants to enrol in a Masters degree. Might apply for jobs in public relations. If gets a good

			Mentor has left the school		offer might take it.
Peter	Achieving work life balance	Positive attitude Motivation and persistence Prior difficult personal life experiences Pets / exercise Proactive in getting involved in community	Relationships with teachers and administration Single and living in a remote community	Family support (Mother is a teacher) Involvement in small community	Also wants to be a fire fighter and will keep applying. If successful anticipates returning to teaching in the future.
Natalie	Achieving work life balance Feeling overwhelmed	Positive attitude Help seeking Organisation Reflection Exercise	Prior knowledge and preparation Lack of classroom resources School organisation and policies Workload	Brother is an Assistant Principal Family Other staff Mentor	Wants to remain in teaching. Might start a family in a few years.
Fiona		Positive attitude Motivation and persistence Help seeking Self-belief and faith Organisation	Student diversity and students' social issues. Relationships/negotiating with parents	Good friends and mentors Support from other staff, administration and school community	Wants to continue working full-time in teaching.
Mel	Feeling overwhelmed	Positive attitude	Prior knowledge and preparation	Family and friends	Wants to remain in

		Help seeking Self-belief Problem solving Reflection	Student diversity School organisation and policies	Being a parent Other staff Professional Development opportunities	teaching
Michelle	Achieving work life balance Feeling overwhelmed Less contact from family and friends	Positive attitude Managing emotions	Prior knowledge and preparation Student diversity Relationships with teachers and administration School organisation and policies	Family and friends Being a parent Other staff Other graduates Professional Development opportunities	Wants to apply for part-time positions to manage work/family responsibilities
Dave		Positive attitude Motivation Help seeking Faith	Prior knowledge and preparation Student diversity	Family and friends Other staff Other graduates Students	Wants to remain in teaching.
Sarah	Achieving work life balance Maturity Determination to succeed	Persistence Motivation Help seeking	Student diversity Lack of classroom resources Relationships with teachers and administration School organisation and policies	Family and friends Other staff Other graduates	Wants to remain in teaching.

			Workload		
Richard	Feeling overwhelmed	Positive attitude	Prior knowledge and preparation	Other staff	Wants to remain in teaching.
		Persistence	Student diversity	Other graduates	
		Exercise	Lack of classroom resources	Professional Development	
		Determination	School organisation and policies	opportunities	
		Stubbornness		Pets	
June		Positive attitude	Prior knowledge and preparation	Family	Wants to remain in teaching
		Maturity	Relationships with teachers and	Daughter is a teacher	
		Motivation and persistence	administration	School staff	
		Help seeking	Assessment of students	Students	
		Self-belief		Mentor	
		Managing emotions			
Cheryl	Reflective	Positive attitude	Lack of classroom resources	Family	Seeking work helping children read.
		Nursing background	Relationships with teachers and	Daughters are teachers	
		Self-belief	administration	Friends	
		Problem solving	School organisation and policies	Other graduates	
		Managing emotions		Mentor	
		Reflection		Counselling	

The resilience process: managing challenges by drawing on resources

To illustrate the resilience process described in the conceptual framework, this section overviews how eight participants managed challenges by drawing on personal and contextual resources. The vignettes have been selected to show the range of experiences among the participants and also to illustrate the key themes emerging from the data.

Juggling multiple balls …

Richard used the metaphor of juggling balls to describe the feeling of being overwhelmed by multiple demands - *"how to manage so many balls that are going up in the air?"* Aged in his 50s and in his second year of teaching in a secondary school, Richard described a major challenge as lack of teaching resources. He described going to *"second-hand book shops and pick up S&E books and resources and stuff like that"*. Lack of resources were compounded by his initial lack of knowledge about the school systems which meant he could not access the computer laboratory or library for ten weeks because there were no times available once he worked out the system. He felt disadvantaged and his students were not happy. He also explained how students resisted work that involved higher order thinking, and misbehaved when doing activities other than worksheets, "*if I hand out worksheets it settles down, I get work back, and I can say 'well look <u>what</u> they've done' but they <u>haven't learnt"</u>*. Fortunately he had very supportive colleagues and one in particular would casually observe his class and provide feedback on alternative strategies and teaching approaches. Richard was receptive to this and found it extremely valuable – *"it was always in that helping way, it was never in the sense of 'you're just not hacking it'"*. Richard also reported being told by staff in a particularly challenging school, *"when you come into the staffroom, if you have got to vent, just go for it, this is the place to do it"*. To help manage the challenges, Richard explained *"no matter what – I go for a run, to the beach, try and avoid thinking of school – burn up*

energy and calm my mind". He also described his persistence as *"oh, just sheer, I suppose, stubbornness in some sense, just to say 'right, you know, I'm coming back again!' [laughs] yeah, and like trying to do things differently"*. At the time of interview, Richard intended to remain teaching and stated that he would be a better teacher in about five years.

This is where I'm supposed to be …

Mel was in her 30s and in her second year of teaching and explained *"sometimes I feel overwhelmed on a daily basis … not overwhelmed in terms of I can't cope, but overwhelmed, sort of throw my hands up in the air and go 'what can I do'?"* Mel compared her personal feelings as a new teacher to a roller coaster ride. One day you *"can think you're very confident and self-assured"* and the next day *"it can be zapped from you"*. Differentiating curriculum to *"cater for children who are significantly below the rest of the class"* was a major challenge for Mel along with difficult classroom behaviour. In meeting these challenges, though, she described developing a broader range of skills and strategies and being able to *"ask for help more rather than pretend it's okay"*. Despite 'reflection' being *"one of things I hated at uni"* she acknowledged this was *"the one thing I tend to use"* to help her improve and *"don't be so hard"* on herself. She emphasised the importance of *"a supportive network of people around you"* and having *"a sense of knowing no matter what's going on, no matter how hard it gets, it's what I'm supposed to be doing. I am where I'm supposed to be"*.

I'll see you next year …

Sarah, a mother in her 40s, had an extremely challenging class with a range of academic, social, emotional and behavioural needs. She described having *"seven students in my class who are really challenging"* with issues including ADHD, poor working memory, poor

literacy and two students with severe allergies. To manage she drew on resources at the school and had emotional and moral support of at least five or six key staff members. Despite initially being reluctant to seek help (*"part of me doesn't want to admit I'm struggling"*), she felt able to go to anyone of these either for a *"whinge"* or to ask for assistance. Even though she had an assigned mentor she felt she didn't *"click"* with that person and instead would turn to others for help including a support group of students from university. They regularly keep in touch and share stories and ideas. Sarah also had *"an incredible amount of support from home, I have two teenagers, one with Downs Syndrome and my husband's allowed his employment to take a back seat ... has taken a huge role in the house, domestically and so-on, and just laughs and says to me, 'I'll see you next year!"* Sarah said, *"I really hope that this school re-employs me next year, and I get a chance to keep improving"*.

I can talk to my daughter ...

Teaching at a rural primary school, June (in her 50s) experienced some challenges with student assessment and despite having an assigned mentor, felt reluctant to ask for help from staff due to their huge workloads. Instead, she turned to her eldest daughter, a secondary teacher, for advice. Unlike her formal mentors and colleagues at school, it was with her eldest daughter that she felt she could talk about the "*nitty-gritty challenges"* she wouldn't talk to work colleagues about. June understood school leaders had heavy workloads, taking on extra teaching roles because of staff shortages, and so she didn't like to bother them. Instead she could ring her daughter any time and discuss "*stupid problems without fear of being judged"*. *"There are just some stupid questions that you just don't want to ask colleagues"*. June explained that she was able to develop strong relationships with her students, having had four children of her own - *"I think has really helped me in the*

classroom because I think I've got that line between, you know, being a friend to them, but also being in charge … still having a good relationship". June also acknowledged her skills in problem solving (*"look at the issue, resolve it or improve it"*) and managing emotions - *"You don't want to lash out" … "I have to be very focused and play the ball not the person"*. June intended remaining in teaching.

I have friends I haven't seen all year …

A personal challenge for Michelle (in her 30s) was the workload which meant she had less contact with family and friends because *"the amount of time that teaching takes up means that my friends and my social life have suffered quite a lot … I have friends I haven't seen all year"*. Through advice from a university colleague, Michelle learned to be realistic about her marking workload. She gave herself *"license"* not to mark every single word of every piece of work. *"It was a revelation"*. Michelle also outlined the difficulties of having a really complex and challenging class, with students with multiple disabilities, and having a complaint from a parent. She described being able to *"look at it professionally and don't take it as a personal slight"* and act accordingly. For Michelle, it was her *" I do the best I can"* attitude drawn from maturity and being a parent that sustained her. This enabled her to be realistic about her workload and her capacity as one person with 29 students. *"Being older and being a mum I'm like 'you know what?' it is my job, I have a son, I need my health and they're important too, its not just about work"*. Michelle stated, *"I choose not to get upset"*. Accompanying these beliefs was a sense that things will improve in the future. Michelle reported, *"I am thinking perhaps next year it may get easier"*. The following year, Michelle intended applying for part time work to balance her enjoyment of teaching with other commitments.

I'm still going to teach …

In her remote school, Cheryl (in her 60s) was assigned to take all classes from ages 1-7 during the other teachers' DOTT (Duties Other Than Teaching) time. *"I literally went from one class to the next with different boxes with different varying tasks because of the different age groups all at different stages of the task and I found that was absolutely the worst."* Poor housing also compounded other challenges of beginning a new career. *"I arrived and there was a stinking fridge full of dirty old rotten food, a toilet that was bunged up, that was coming back and the air conditioner that had no filter … I would say that was probably a huge stress".* Although the challenges of being in a remote location were not unexpected, having previously worked in remote areas as a nurse, *"what was very disappointing was just the total disregard"* by her employer and the bureaucracy. Drawing on skills developed in nursing, Cheryl kept a reflective journal - "*having been a nurse I always documented … it not only sustained me, gave me the opportunity to look at myself and see what I could do better… it was fantastic."* Cheryl was also sustained by the support of other graduates at the school with whom she could share a joke and resources, and her two daughters who were teachers. Although on leave at the time of the interview, Cheryl wanted to continue in a teaching role, helping children learn to read.

I'm going to want to come back …

Peter (in his 20s) also worked in a remote school and described the challenges of being away from *"support structures"* such as friends and family. In his first term, another teacher, whose son was in his class, made a complaint about him. "*She complained about something that I'd done, which was very trivial … it was upsetting because she complained about me and then she just flat out ignored me for two weeks".* After meeting with the teacher, Peter *"realised that I needed to be a bit more proactive in terms of going and asking her … for*

ideas and going and checking with her, rather than waiting for her to come up with a problem". Despite describing the incident as *"really hard, that was something that really rocked me"*, he said *"I have bounced back from that and now we get along quite well ... that was something that I learned, that I'm going to come across these people and I need to be proactive in dealing with it."* Peter acknowledged support from the school administration and other teachers, in general. He was also proactive in becoming part of the community through coaching a soccer team and starting a band that played at the local pub once a month. In addition he explained, *"I'm bringing my dog up for the fourth term which is going to be very good for me ... going home to a dog that's glad to see me. I'm a single teacher so it's quite hard ... there aren't too many single girls, if you could say that - that's what I'm doing to help me out."* His main support, however, was his mother. Peter's mother had taught for 25 years and was *"a very sympathetic ear ... she knows the frustrations that you get, the difficulties you encounter ... she offers me advice and more often than not, just listens when I complain about something ... I would find it very difficult if I didn't have my mum to talk to about it".* Peter described the importance of being able to *"weather the storm"* and *"just put one foot after the other".* At the time of the interview, Peter was *"quite happy"* teaching, however, was going to re-apply for the fire department with the view that *"teaching is one of those things I'm going to want to come back to".*

The kids keep me there ...

Marissa (in her 20s) had been working at a number of schools and at the time of interview was teaching in a 'hard to staff' secondary school. Marissa stated *"the biggest challenge is not having any type of recognition, help or support – if you want to do something new, you do it by yourself and there's no help".* Achieving a satisfactory work-life balance was her most frequently mentioned challenge - *"it's just been so stressful that I haven't had time to*

get back into any of my hobbies that I used to do", although she did explain she had a puppy that forced her to walk every day. Marissa expressed a desire to move out of teaching. She reported, *"if I could just teach the kids and do wonderful things for them without all the other stuff that comes … the negative things that people put on you, that would be good"*.

Discussion

This study has examined the personal and contextual challenges and resources of 13 early career teachers and presented a model of early career teacher resilience where the resilience process is located at the interface between person and context. In the following discussion, each research question will be briefly addressed and the model will be revisited. Limitations of the study and directions for future research will be considered. The paper concludes with some implications for teacher education and induction.

Research Question 1: What personal and contextual challenges do early career teachers face?

Beginning teachers in the study experienced multiple, varied and ongoing challenges. While research has identified a range of challenges faced by teachers this study shows how the challenges were not singular 'critical incidents' or 'crises' but were multiple and varied, and, in some instances, ongoing. Furthermore, the challenges occurred in multiple spheres (work and home) of participants' lives thus supporting Gu and Day's (2011) argument that teacher resilience is not simply related to bouncing back from specific events, but is "the capacity to maintain equilibrium and a sense of commitment and agency in the everyday worlds in which teachers teach" (p. 5). This "everyday resilience" (Day & Gu, 2014) emphasises the multiple, varied and ongoing challenges teachers manage in their daily work.

The data also showed that participants experienced more school level challenges

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(relationships and school organisation) and classroom challenges (diversity and classroom management) than personal challenges. The literature points to the critical role played by school contexts in relation to early career teacher resilience (Johnson et al., 2012), and this study contributes by showing that these challenges were most prominent. Some of the challenges described by participants such as Peter and Cheryl, may be unique to teachers who need to move away from home to take up a teaching position. In remote Australian schools, challenges may sometimes be extreme for inexperienced teachers and additional support is required – expecting an individual to only draw on personal resources is insufficient (Sullivan & Johnson, 2012).

Research Question 2: How do these beginning teachers respond to challenges using personal and contextual resources?

Despite the multiple challenges that contribute to teachers leaving the profession (Buchanan, 2012) participants were actively trying to use personal resources to address these challenges. Some expressed the view that things would improve in the future as they gained experience. Phrases such as being able to "weather the storm" and "ride the waves" were used to express this view. The optimism and hope of most of these participants is acknowledged as a sustaining factor. Bullough and Hall-Kenyon (2011) suggest that hope helps teachers cope and endure in times of challenge and McCann and Johannessen (2004) argue that new teachers "endure difficulties because they believe that, ultimately, things will get better" (p. 141). It was evident too that participants reflected deeply on their situations and considered available and potential resources. Reflection has been found to be an important activity for resilient teachers (Mansfield, et al., 2012).

Participants also drew on contextual resources such as those explored in previous research (see for example, Johnson, et al., 2012). Despite the literature about the importance

of mentor relationships in the early years of teaching, for these participants, there was minimal evidence of this being successful. A similar finding emerged from other interviews with Australian early career teachers (McCormack & Gore, 2008). What is important is not simply having a mentor, but the quality of that relationship. A notable finding of the present study, however, is the critical role played by people outside the school context in supporting beginning teacher resilience.

Those participants with strong family support and informal support networks (Papatraianou & le Cornu, 2014) seemed to maintain their commitment despite challenges. For participants such as Marissa, however, who had multiple challenges and little family support, commitment for teaching in that setting seemed to be dwindling. The participants in this study were also interesting because of the number who had immediate family members in the teaching profession. Family members who are also teachers have been found to have a positive influence on the motivation to become a teacher (Beltman & Wosnitza, 2006). It may be that beginning teachers who are familiar with the work conditions of the profession and have close relationships with those for whom teaching has got better over time, are more inclined to perceive the same will happen for them. Furthermore, they are likely to be familiar with the discourse of the profession and perhaps have more realistic expectations for the early career years. Just as the immediate family could be the strongest social influence on becoming a teacher, it would seem that having strong family support was an indicator of intention to stay, for these participants. Whether or not new teachers with positive teacher models in their family are more likely to sustain a long-term commitment to the profession is an avenue for future research.

This study is consistent with recent studies arguing relationships are critical for building capacity for resilience (for example, Aspfors & Bondas, 2013; Doney, 2013; Ebersöhn, 2012; Le Cornu, 2013; Peters & Pearce, 2011). Relationships were important on

three levels, firstly at the classroom level with students, secondly at the school level with other staff, administration and parents, and finally out of the school context. Lack of support has been cited as the biggest indicator of a desire to leave the profession (Buchanan, 2010) and so building support through relationships is critical. In some cases participants intentionally became involved in the wider community to build those 'protective' and supportive relationships (Peter). As Gu and Li (2013) argue, "teachers' worlds are made up of multi-layered relationships" (p. 298) whose quality positively or negatively contributes to the resilience building process.

Research Question 3: How are challenges and responses perceived to influence intentions to remain in the profession?

The number of challenges reported by these beginning teachers varied greatly as shown in Table 2, yet this was not a strong indicator of their intentions to leave the profession. It is notable that those planning on leaving experienced both contextual and personal challenges. This finding highlights the dynamic interplay between personal and contextual challenges and resources that shape resilience.

In much literature there is an assumption that resilient teachers are those who stay in the profession (see for example, Mackenzie, 2012). While it is reasonable to assume that many resilient teachers do stay, does that mean that teachers leaving are not resilient? This study confirms the complex nature of teacher resilience and ways in which resilience may be demonstrated. For example, Cheryl, who considered herself resilient, made a decision to leave an untenable working environment and intended seeking another teaching position. Similarly, Michelle was going to apply for a part-time position that better suited her family commitments. Both these participants made employment decisions based on a desire to improve their own wellbeing, using decision making and problem solving strategies

(Patterson, et al., 2004), illustrating the potential role played by teacher agency in the resilience process (Castro, et al., 2010). These findings indicate that resilience may manifest itself in decisions to alter working contexts to improve personal wellbeing and in maintaining "equilibrium and a sense of commitment and agency" (Gu & Day, 2011, p. 5).

A model of early career teacher resilience

In Figure 1 a model of early career teacher resilience was presented. The model diagrammatically represented personal and contextual challenges and resources, and located resilience as a process occurring at the interface of person and context. Other graphical representations of resilience have been presented in the literature (see for example, Day & Gu, 2010; Ebersöhn, 2012; Wei, Shujuan, & Qibo, 2011). Resilience is a dynamic construct that can be difficult to graphically represent. Rogoff (2003) discussed the difficulties of graphically representing dynamic constructs with concern that "the ways models have diagrammed the relation between the individual and the world lead us, perhaps unintentionally, to a limiting view of individual and cultural processes - as separate entities" (p.42). In our model resilience is located at the interface, or between the person and the context, where the individual is affected by and affects their environment (indicated by the double-headed arrows), aiming to reflect the interrelatedness, mutuality or reciprocity of the individual person and the environmental context. As our findings indicate, the dynamic interplay that occurred between personal and contextual challenges and resources highlights the potentially infinite variations in way the resilience process occurs for beginning teachers. The findings of this study highlight that teacher resilience is influenced by different combinations of "mediating factors embedded in the personal, relational and organisational conditions in their workplaces" (Gu & Day, 2011, p. 8).

Previous research (Beltman, et al., 2011) and the present study have revealed resilience to be a somewhat idiosyncratic phenomenon as each person brings his or her own experiences and characteristics to multiple, changing contexts. The model of early career teacher resilience presented may be a useful starting point for future researchers. The model could be made more detailed through adding specific individual challenges and resources such as those reported in our previous work (Beltman, et al., 2011; Mansfield, et al., 2012). Likewise further research relating to the contexts of teaching could add more detail to the outer circles. Different theoretical perspectives may want to privilege the person or the context in using the model, or focus a lens on particular aspects such as those that have been highlighted in other studies like the school culture (Cefai & Cavioni, 2014).

Limitations of the study and directions for future research

One limitation of the present study was that in some ways it represented a "snap shot" view of resilience as data were collected at only one point in time. Resilience needs to be examined over time as it may "take time to unfold" (Reich, Zautra & Hall, 2010, p. 15). Day and Gu (2007) found differences in the stressors relevant for teachers at different career phases, as well as differences in the way teachers drew on personal and contextual resources. Nevertheless the teachers in the present study were asked to reflect on their experiences over their first year of teaching so to some extent the importance of changing circumstances over time (Doney, 2013) was incorporated. Following the journeys of these teachers would be informative as longitudinal research following the same teachers over time is lacking.

A second limitation of the present study was that corroborating data regarding the reported features of participants' experiences and contexts were not gathered. Conducting observations over time or interviews with colleagues, family members or the teachers' students would add to the depth of understanding of teacher resilience and offered some

triangulation of data. Relying on self-reports has been viewed as a limitation in research, but using recollections of the past has also been regarded as being "interpretative and concerned less with the actuality of experience than with the conceptual evaluation of the subjective structure of one's life story" (Galbo & Mayer Demetrulias, 1996, p. 407). Such recollections incorporate experiences and perceptions and so are valuable in examining constructs such as resilience.

Implications for teacher education and induction

Although the sample size for this study was small, there are some useful implications for teacher educators and employers. The study highlights the ongoing need for teacher education programs to prepare students for the multiple challenges of the profession as well as build personal resources to draw on in challenging situations. Such personal resources may include a range of skills (coping skills, stress management, problem solving skills) as well as social and emotional competencies. Woolfolk Hoy (2013) suggested that teacher education can prepare graduates to self-regulate their own social support networks, which can be important for building resilience. Particular strategies can also be used to prepare teachers for diverse employment contexts, such as Australian rural, regional and remote schools (Trinidad et al., 2013). The contextual challenges noted in this study also indicate there may be particular strategies beginning teachers can use to more quickly become familiar with school organisation and systems and to build supportive relationships with other staff. These may include engaging in an 'environmental scan' to understand school procedures and key personnel (administrative / library staff as well as school leaders), initiating conversations with staff to informally determine 'go to' people for support, and actively becoming involved in the school community. Employing bodies, school leaders and more experienced colleagues may need reminding of the key role they play in enabling and

developing such relationships. Likewise formal and informal mentoring systems have the potential to play a significant role, as do family and friends, in supporting beginning teachers. The model of early career teacher resilience could be used as a reflective tool for intending graduates and beginning teachers, and as already indicated, for teachers at different career stages.

Conclusion

Entering a challenging profession in challenging times, the early career teachers in this study primarily demonstrated how the complex, dynamic process of resilience enabled them to *"weather the storm"* and say *"I'm coming back!"* The model of early career teacher resilience presented is a way of representing and furthering our understanding of the important field of teacher resilience.

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Appendix A: Interview schedule outline

1. What teaching have you been doing this year? E.g. if relief, contract etc; year levels; type of school; subject areas if secondary/specialist

2. Our project is about resilience – how would you describe a "resilient teacher"?

3. Resilience is often thought of as being a mix of various risk and protective factors in different parts of our lives (or give our brief definition). Even though you are a "teacher" you are also part of different groups. I'd like to ask you about yourself, your workplace, friends and peers, your family and the community in which you are living.

   a. If you think about yourself as a person, what would you consider to be any characteristics that would hinder or have hindered you in being a resilient teacher?

   b. What would you say are your strengths that are helping you be a resilient teacher?

   c. As a teacher you are in a particular workplace. What characteristics of your workplace/school(s) have made it easier or more difficult for you to be a resilient teacher?

   d. How have your family and friends helped or hindered you in this first year?

   e. Are there any features in the community where you live and work that have made things easier of more difficult for you?

4. If not already mentioned ask: Is there anyone you would consider to be a mentor in this first year who has supported and encouraged you as a teacher?

5. In this project we are investigating what we could do differently in our pre-service courses to assist teachers in their first year. What advice would you give to those organising pre-service / initial teacher education programs?

6. What was most helpful to you about your training / preparation?

7. What are your plans for the next 4 or 5 years?

8. Do you have any other comments that you would like to make about resilience or about being an early career teacher?