

Beyond Survival

Teachers and Resilience

Key Messages from an ESRC-funded Seminar Series

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Foreword by Sir Tim Brighouse

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Foreword

Teachers and Resilience

The ideas in this booklet have come from a lot of careful thought, by practitioners, academics and groups involved in supporting teachers, about the demands of teaching. In particular they have shared ideas about how teachers can be sustained during those times when the pressures build up. One important message from those discussions is that we shouldn't see those periods as times when teachers simply have to cope with stress. Instead, we need to get better at understanding what schools can do to build teachers' resilience, so that the pressures are more manageable.

The ideas discussed here are organised around the notion of resilience, something we usually associate with children and their development. Resilience is taken into the context of schooling to argue that schools and particularly school leadership can create environments where it is nurtured and teachers are able to interact in responsive ways with students without feeling vulnerable to the demands of the work. As Graham Handscomb put it in his contribution - school leadership can do a great deal to create environments where teachers are able to feel they can make a difference.

Sir Tim Brighouse
former Commissioner for London Schools



Resilience is not simply an individual trait, but a capacity that arises through interactions between people within organisational contexts.

Key Messages

Teachers and Resilience

This booklet presents the main ideas emerging from an ESRC seminar series about teachers and resilience. They concern how resilience can be fostered amongst teachers in order to sustain their wellbeing and commitment to education and schooling. The key messages are as follows:

Teaching is emotionally demanding work, and levels of work-related stress, anxiety and depression are higher within education than within many other occupational groups.

Rather than focusing on managing stress, however, this booklet argues that a more productive approach would be to focus on fostering resilience.

Resilience is not simply an individual trait, but a capacity that arises through interactions between people within organisational contexts.

Teachers' resilience can therefore be nurtured at various career stages through initial training, continuing professional development and support networks.

Most crucially, school leadership has much to contribute to the development of individual and collective resilience.



Resilience can be fostered or diminished through the social environment e.g. leadership interventions in establishing and nurturing structures and cultures.

The Nature of Resilience

Contexts Count

What is resilience?

This booklet is about how we can recognise and foster teachers' resilience to sustain their wellbeing and their commitment to education and schooling and, through this, their effectiveness. What do we mean by resilience? The term has its origins in child development research where it is seen as a capacity to recover from adverse events. For children, it is built through relationships with 'caring prosocial adults' and 'good intellectual functioning' (Masten and Coatsworth, 1998). More recently, interest has grown in the capacity of adults to be resilient over a career, in different contexts and in times of change. Outside education, there is still a focus on resilience which is defined as the ability to overcome extreme adversity e.g. war, famine, serious physical or psychological trauma. However, within education, there is an increasing recognition that the nature of teaching and learning and the contexts in which this takes place demands what we might call 'everyday resilience'; that the capacity to be resilient is an important factor in teaching and teacher effectiveness over time; and that resilience can be developed. It is certainly not simply a personal trait. The social environment is important and resilience can be fostered or diminished through the environment (for example, leadership interventions in establishing and nurturing structures and cultures).

Why is resilience an issue for education?

The problem caused by lack of resilience is a significant one. Employees in the education sector report more work-related psychological ill-health, particularly stress, anxiety and depression, than do employees in other sectors. The Labour Force Survey's successive Self-Reported Work-related Illness Surveys are a reliable source of evidence in this respect.¹ It was estimated that in 2009/10, 133 000 people whose current or most recent post in the last year was in the education sector



suffered from an illness which was caused or made worse by their job.² In the case of teachers, much of this illness is psychological/emotional ill-health i.e. stress, anxiety and depression. Other evidence suggests that this situation may be improved. Frederickson (2004), for example, has developed a ‘broaden-and-build’ theory of positive emotions. She suggests that, ‘through experiences of positive emotions...people transform themselves, becoming more creative, knowledgeable, resilient, socially integrated and healthy’ (Frederickson, 2004:1369); that ‘the personal resources accrued during states of positive emotions are durable, [outlasting] the transient emotional states that led to their acquisition’ (2004:1372). In other words, they serve as resources which assist people to cope with adversity.

Why a seminar series about teachers and resilience?

Our interest in resilience in teaching arose during the studies of teachers’ lives undertaken over the last ten years in the School of Education and the Institute of Work, Health and Organisations at the University of Nottingham and in the University of Oxford’s work on the demands of practice in the caring professions more generally. The Nottingham work, for example, showed that although some teachers suffer stress or burnout as a result of the demands of the job, others do not and that, therefore, contexts count. It seems that some school environments are better than others at fostering a capacity to deal with the challenges of teaching (Day and Gu, 2010). It became equally clear that rather than continue to focus upon stress, a more productive approach would be to focus upon resilience.

Because the Nottingham studies focused on the teachers rather than their work environments we set up an ESRC seminar series to ask the question ‘How does resilience in teaching arise and how is it sustained?’ The series brought together school leaders, practitioners, teacher educators, researchers in education and educational and occupational psychology and members of policy communities to discuss the resilience of teachers in schools.³ A key finding from these discussions was that resilience emerges in interactions in workplaces where practitioners are taken seriously and able to take forward their intentions and exercise

professional agency in their day to day decisions in their workplaces. Therefore, as discussions continued, the role of school leadership in fostering the resilience of the professionals in their intellectually and emotionally demanding work in schools, and the values and strategies which they used to achieve, this became an increasingly important consideration.

The emotional demands of teaching have been long-recognised. For example, teachers were one of the first professional groups in the UK to have government-sponsored guidance written for them about how to prevent and manage stress. However, the evidence discussed in the seminar series made it clear that demonstrating resilience by being able to recover from everyday, as well as especially challenging difficulties in the workplace, was not an individual responsibility. Rather, as shown by the examples within the next section, resilience was a capacity that arose in interactions between people and the practices they inhabited in their workplaces.

Approaches to Fostering Resilience

Increasing teachers' capacities to be resilient is both a moral and a strategic concern which can impact on teacher recruitment and retention and on training and continuing professional development. In the cases that follow we offer examples from participants in the seminar series of how resilience is being tackled in different contexts and career stages. These include: initial teacher education; school leadership; teacher support; teacher support networks; and (for contrast) nurse education.

Fostering Resilience through Initial Teacher Education

Lindsey Smethem and Philip Hood

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Context

This contribution focuses on beginning teachers during their initial teacher education year (postgraduate teacher preparation) in which they aim to gain qualification as teachers.

Resilience in this context

Resilience appears as beginning teachers develop confidence that they will attain qualified teacher status, and feel that they have a sense of agency in their role as teacher and feel supported in the challenging task of becoming a teacher. Importantly this resilience is not an innate psychological quality, but a capacity which is socially constructed and recognises that learning to teach is complex, demanding and as teaching is an interactive profession, it is also unpredictable.

Example of fostering resilience

Fostering resilience involves working with beginning teachers and their school based mentors to:

- establish realistic expectations of roles and responsibilities of mentor and beginning teacher in the training process
- devise challenging targets for development which also recognise success
- recognise the challenges in learning to teach and the reasons for these, and establish a collaborative rather than individualistic approach to seeking solutions
- establish mutually respectful relationships which challenge and support
- critique their own beliefs, values and practice
- work together to improve teaching and learning
- value teacher well-being.

It also involves working with mentors to:

- devise supportive yet challenging ways of giving feedback and advice
- appreciate the personal, emotional, pedagogical and professional challenges of learning to teach
- encourage a sense of agency in beginning teachers.

Finally, it is important to work with beginning teachers to:

- improve self evaluation of teaching e.g. through use of video analysis of teaching
- develop a supportive, trusting network of peers and colleagues who work collaboratively and appreciate their role in others' development (thereby exercising reciprocity).

Reflections and learning points

It is crucial to acknowledge the importance of relationships and open, honest yet sensitive communication in a challenging professional training course.

Fostering Resilience through School Leadership

Graham Handscomb

Essex School Improvement and Early Years

Context

This example of fostering resilience focuses on how resilience issues are experienced at the school level and what resilience looks like from a practitioner perspective. In particular it explores our understanding of the relationship between self-worth/self-efficacy and resilience, and how one school's approach to increasing the "density" of leadership has increased its capacity to be resilient. This school's experience is set against the context of local authority vision and support which regards "the function of leaders and managers is to add value to the work of others... build self-esteem and self-confidence... and to provide challenge and renewal (Handscomb, 2005). The school is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive, The Boswells School, Chelmsford, Essex, with a very successful dynamic headteacher, David Crowe, who is on his second headship. He worked closely with me on developing the Essex LA Sustainable Leadership in Essex Strategy which sets out the steer for leadership succession planning and new forms of leadership for Essex's 570 plus schools.

Resilience in this context

The evidence from this case study helped to demonstrate the potent role that "leadership in the workplace" plays in "building upon professional' capacity to be resilient" (Day and Gu, 2010). It showed that coping with the potential stresses of school life was not about having less work; rather to the contrary, the more responsibility, the more genuine opportunity that staff had to exercise leadership, the greater the sense of resilience. Leadership empowerment led to self-efficacy which in turn led to resilience capacity.

By ‘density of leadership’ I mean growing leadership throughout the school. So rather than the notion of distributed leadership which can have connotations of leadership tasks and roles being delegated to a number of others in the school, density leadership involves growing leadership throughout the school where everyone (all staff teaching and non-teaching, and students) takes on leadership functions and real responsibilities. So leadership becomes a kind of condition, a way of being within the school and one of the dominant cultural features that permeates the school. In summary, ‘density’ denotes a proliferation of leadership which populates all aspects of the school’s life. It also embodies the notion of deepening intensity and concentration of leadership rather than leadership opportunities being cast wide and dispersed.

Example of fostering resilience

So at the heart of fostering resilience in the experience of this particular school was the promotion of a ‘density of leadership’. This term was preferred to ‘distributed leadership’ because the approach was less about a sense of senior leaders distributing leadership opportunities to others, but rather about nurturing a culture in which the density of leadership was grown within the very fabric of the school. The key features of this were:

- seeing leadership as a process, not an event
- establishing a school teacher academy; this was a structure in which the school was organised into a number of development areas with staff at all levels playing a role in leading the organisational areas
- nurturing and supporting an enquiry and research culture throughout the school (Handscomb and MacBeath, 2003)
- commitment to collaboration within and beyond the school.

Reflections and learning points

- More is better! In aiming to foster resilience in colleagues it pays to empower them with responsibility. As long as this involves genuinely enabling them to take action and make a difference in the life of the school it can lead to increased self-efficacy rather than a sense of an increased debilitating workload.
- Density rather than distributed leadership. Every member of staff a leader.

- Control plus trust leads to greater resilience. Investing in colleagues so that they are trusted and given greater control of their work lives helps to foster resilience capacity.
- Moving forward may mean stopping doing some things to make way for other things. Innovation comes through the abandonment of policies and practices that will not deliver the needs and aspirations of the school, its staff and learners... and implementing those that will!
- Maintain the commitment to being a research-engaged school.
- Senior leaders are there to add value, not burden. They help to lay the context and bring purpose to day to day work of colleagues.

Fostering Resilience through School Leadership 2

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Context

Leadership in Secondary Education. Headship and Senior Leadership Team responsibilities.

Resilience in this context

Absence of resilience at the most senior levels of leadership in schools can present itself as a deterioration in the general functioning of the school and can be evidenced in a variety of areas. These include loss of direction in terms of funding and budgeting; curriculum developments; teaching and learning strategies; control of discipline; staff-pupil relationships and school-community relationships.

Example of fostering resilience

The example chosen is a case study of one headteacher who faced an extremely difficult situation on taking over the management of a large, apparently successful, secondary school in the Midlands. It focuses on one element of 'loss of control' i.e. failure to oversee the staffing budget so that overstaffing was allowed to exist. During his first week in post, the headteacher found that his new school was over staffed by 22 teachers – in other words he would have to make 22 redundancies in his first year in position. This difficult situation had not been made apparent to him during his interview and indeed, it had not been made apparent to the governors by the previous head teacher. The history was that the school the product of the merger of two schools and there had been a persistent failure to address the overstaffing this merger had caused.

The headteacher proceeded to split the management of the school between himself and his deputy. The deputy head ran the everyday functioning of the school for a year while the headteacher concentrated

on resolving the staffing situation with as little acrimony and distress as possible. The story of his success is remarkable in itself, but, in the context of this report, it is his ability to foster and sustain his resilience to stress/pressure during this period which is of interest.

There seemed to be one important indicator explaining how this manager, faced with such a challenging situation, managed to turn it into a personal and managerial success story. Comments he made during a recorded semi-structured interview for my doctoral research suggest that he has a strong concept of his own effectiveness and capacity to design and control events in the school.

The interview asked him to consider changes in his work practice and in his working environment – to what extent were these changes 'the result of national or local government policy directives... or have they been the result of decision making at an internal level.' His response was clear; he was certain that the changes which had taken place in these categories were the result of his decision-making, not as a result of a response to government directives. I have interviewed over twenty senior key personnel in the NHS and in higher and secondary education, and the degree of autonomy felt by my participants varied widely – even although they were all acting within the same public services driven framework. My interview with this headteacher is a particularly powerful example of the link I have found between the perceived autonomy of a participant and their resilience to the pressures and strains they perceive to exist within their role.

Reflections and learning points

The application of these findings would be to explore further whether fostering autonomy or the capacity for responsible effectiveness within the function of senior managers in education would lead to changes in working practice which, in turn, would lead to more satisfaction with the role of a senior manager in education. We have a desperate shortage of prospective senior leaders in education, particularly in secondary schools. Case studies like this provide empirical evidence of the emotional mechanics of managerial success.

Fostering Resilience through Teacher Support

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Context

The work of Educational Psychologists in schools and the support provided for teachers.

Resilience in this context

Teachers may become professionally ‘troubled’ by aspects of the development, progress or behaviour of a child or group of children. The perception by a teacher (or teachers) of the ‘difference’ experienced may derail their professional competence. Their response to this experience may depend on a number of factors including: resilience, efficacy beliefs, and the support of colleagues and/or other professionals.

Example of fostering resilience

The following is an example taken from the work of Andy Miller (2003) quoting from an interview with a teacher talking first about how isolated she felt in trying to work with a boy whose behaviour could be a problem in school:

‘I was very aware that the rest of the staff... would blame Darren for anything because they have always have done... I was having a lot – no a fair amount of opposition from the head... any kind of misdemeanour on Darren’s part was just jumped on... you can feel quite isolated in a school.’ (p72)

and then talking about how an educational psychologist had helped:

‘The first thing she did for me, if nothing else, she made me feel that I was worthy and she made me feel that I was doing the right thing. She

made me feel that all was not lost and she gave me more confidence to go on and to persevere... she was really sort of heartening and she sort of spurred you on to do more.’ (p81)

Reflections and learning points

This example serves as a reminder of how isolated, demoralised and demeaned teachers can be whilst trying to do what they want to do as teachers. Without the support provided it is possible that this teacher’s beliefs in her competence and professional purpose could have been further eroded. Ultimately this may lead to resignation (and thereby a loss of the ‘investment’ in that teacher’s training and expertise) and/or educational failure/exclusion for the child. Teachers’ resilience cannot be taken for granted and may sometimes warrant support from qualified and experienced other professionals.

Fostering Resilience through Teacher Support Networks

Kevin Armstrong and Julian Stanley

Teacher Support Network

Context

This is an example of a teacher whose resilience was boosted by phone counselling support, provided by Teacher Support Network (TSN). TSN provide free and confidential practical and emotional support to all training, serving and retired teachers in England, Scotland and Wales.

Resilience in this context

The teacher phoned TSN feeling shaken and indecisive after a series of incidents at school with her head of department. On several occasions, she had been upset by interpersonal conflicts with her colleague, and for the first time in her teaching career, after successive attempts to improve her relationship with the head of department had failed, she had begun to doubt her own abilities.

Example of fostering resilience

The TSN coach helped the teacher to feel less hurt by the situation, and more confident in her ability to cope with and resolve it in future. Through the coaching, the teacher was able to step back and assess how best to respond both practically and emotionally to the difficulties with her head of department. The TSN coach discussed the various options and coping strategies that were open to the teacher, and she agreed to give many of the ideas a go. Ideas included doing a twice weekly yoga workout, eating regularly, getting enough sleep and generally taking care of her health and wellbeing. In subsequent coaching sessions, the teacher said she was feeling less tired, and had improved clarity of thought to calmly and effectively address the problems.

Reflections and learning points

Resilience, health, wellbeing and work effectiveness all interrelate, and

can and should be nurtured. The case suggests that these characteristics cannot be reliably selected, because individuals and the environments they operate in inevitably change over time. It also demonstrates the benefit that a person who may be perceived as lacking resilience at any given time can gain by being able to: (i) share a concern with someone else, (ii) learn how to process their emotions differently, and (iii) gain the knowledge and confidence to manage their health and wellbeing in new ways. In the context of the wider education workforce, TSN has evidence that costly sickness absence rates would fall, and teacher retention and pupil outcomes would improve, if teachers' health and wellbeing was better supported.

Fostering Resilience through Nurse Education

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Context

Nursing is widely viewed as a stressful occupation and there is an international body of literature on stress and burnout that associates adverse challenges in the working environment with problems in retention of the nursing workforce. Relatively little attention has focussed on the reasons many nurses remain and “flourish” despite these challenges. Following a review of the literature to explore resilience as a strategy for overcoming workplace adversity in nursing contexts, Jackson, Firko and Edenborough (2007) recommended that resilience-building is incorporated into nurse training. Pre-registration nurse education courses in the UK are 50% university-based and 50% based in clinical practice placements. In line with other Higher Education Institutions, peak times for course attrition are during the first year. In the local context we have identified key points in the course when nursing students are more likely to present to the University Counselling Service with common concerns:

- First year: negative experiences in clinical placements related to communication or relationship difficulties with clinical staff, particularly mentors.
- Final year: anxiety about capacity to cope with the pressures observed in the workplace and disquiet about effect on patient care of stress and cynicism amongst healthcare professionals.

Resilience in this context

Resilience is demonstrated by students who are able to reflect constructively on their experiences, voice concerns and access appropriate guidance, supervision and support and develop the personal and professional skills necessary to meet challenges. They not only “bounce back”, but move forward. Lack of resilience may lead to some students experiencing anxiety, distress or depression. A negative experience may prime them for further difficulties in subsequent placements, which may impede their progress. At worst, a lack of resilience may result in course drop out, or leaving a career in nursing prematurely.

Example of fostering resilience

The University of Nottingham Counselling Service has developed a programme of workshops for nursing students, designed to foster resilience and tailored to critical points in the course:

As part of the Induction Programme

- a brief interactive presentation on maintaining and expanding self-care and support systems.

“Assertiveness and Effective Communication in Clinical Placement”

- a safe space for discussion of placement issues
- an opportunity to understand and practice effective communication skills
- addresses issues around bullying in the workplace
- develops students’ personal and professional support systems.

“Resilience: Maintaining the Capacity to Care”

- aimed at students in the later stage of their training
- explores the difference between coping and resilience
- identifies and builds on personal skills, qualities and strengths
- explores the connection between resilience and compassion towards the self and others
- encourages student learning based on negative and positive experiences on placement
- introduces psychological and systemic theories to enhance understanding of why and how things go wrong



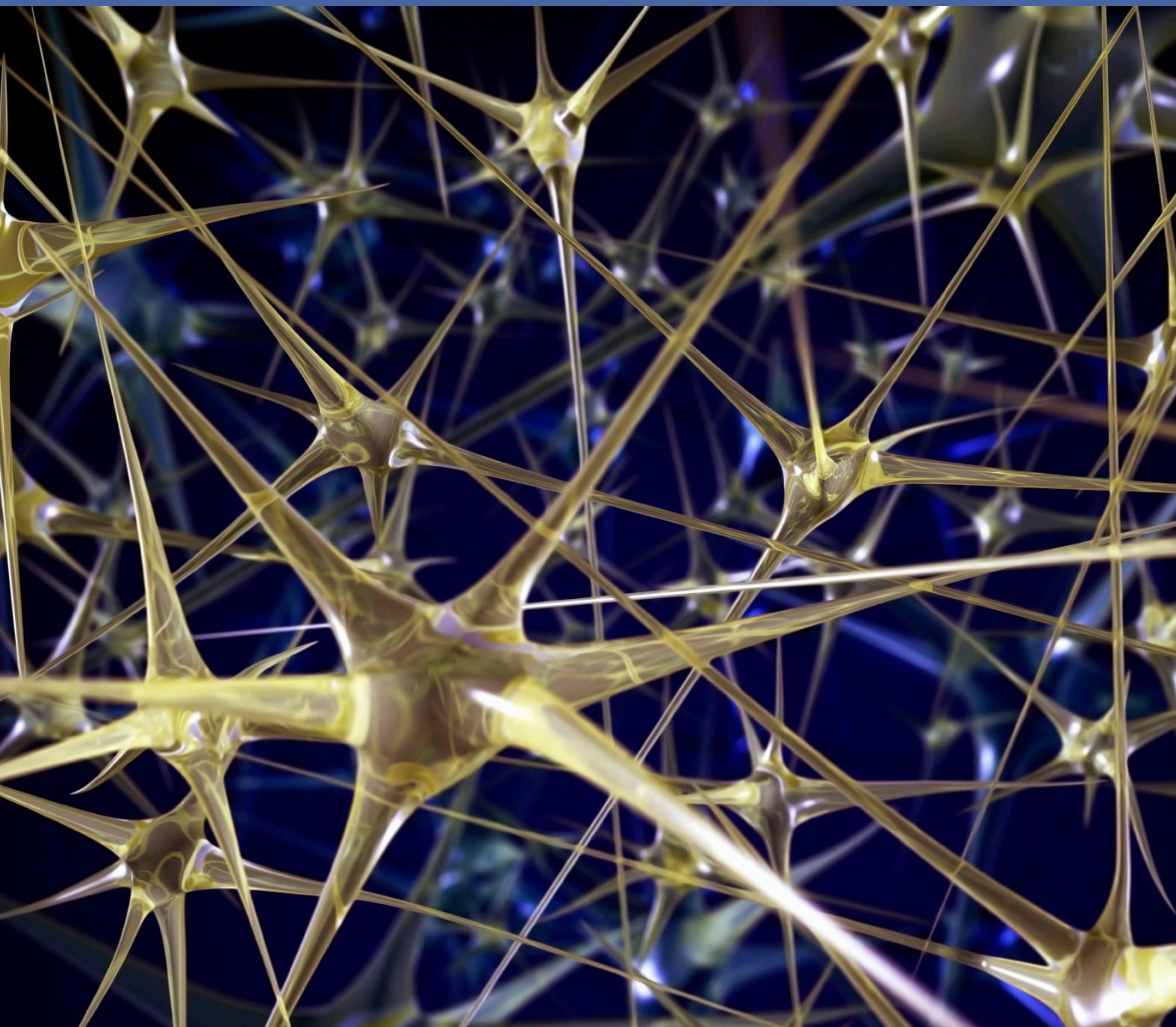
- enhances students' capacity to envisage their future role in influencing caring practice within the workplace.

The School of Nursing has also implemented a series of actions which would foster resilience, including Student Forums for the first placement which offers a supportive environment to share and explore placement concerns. They have been so well evaluated by students and clinical staff that it is planned to continue them throughout the course. Other initiatives include “buddying” and peer-mentoring. Reflective practice is a key element of the course and all students have a Personal Development Plan and maintain a reflective diary.

Reflections and learning points

Based on the assumption that resilience is not innate but can be fostered through a range of approaches, we suggest that building resilience should be integrated into professional training programmes that:

- have a supervised professional placement component
- require inter-personal interactions
- involve potentially challenging working conditions (both predictable and unpredictable)
- must meet professional standards and public expectations.



Most crucially, school leadership has much to contribute to the development of individual and collective resilience.

Conclusion

The Importance of Leadership

The collection of cases is only a first step in unravelling how teachers' resilience may be fostered. We think, nonetheless, that it is an important step, pointing towards what schools can do to promote and sustain the wellbeing and commitment of colleagues who work in them.

Lack of resilience as an educational challenge

We have already indicated that teachers are particularly vulnerable to stress, anxiety and depression. Lessons from wider studies of workplace stress indicate just how important tackling these problems is for schools. Evidence suggests that employers tend to underestimate the extent of psychological ill-health amongst their staff. Psychological ill-health, whether work-related or not, is estimated to cost UK employers approximately £25 billion per annum (Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, 2007). On average this equated to £1,000 per employee. A small organisation with 50 staff might lose around £50,000 a year. This figure includes sickness absence and replacement costs, but also the reduced productivity of staff who are still at work but who are unwell. This latter phenomenon has been called 'presenteeism'.

The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health's report in 2007 estimated that presenteeism accounted for at least 1.5 times as much lost working time as absenteeism. Although precise figures for the education sector are not available, there is every reason to assume that the extent of presenteeism there may be as considerable as it is for the workforce as a whole: a substantial number of teachers may be attending for work whilst not well. Over time this suggests that they will not be able to teach to their best. It has also recently become clear that once on the road to recovery, people do not have to be completely well to work: in fact, going back to work can help recovery (Seymour, 2010). Nonetheless, the most commonly asked question is how do we prevent work-related ill-health?



Leadership and context as central to fostering resilience

The scientific literature on stress prevention and management has shown that there is much that can be done to improve working environments. Current evidence suggests that a partnership approach, where problems are tackled by individual-level and organisational-level initiatives may well work best. The developing literature on resilience bears parallels with the stress management literature, but is wider in its concerns, more forward-looking and positive. Rather than ask ‘How can we prevent stress and mental/emotional ill-health?’ the question it raises is ‘How can we foster resilience?’ ‘What type of training, support, work environment, culture and leadership and management practices will facilitate its development?’ The answers to these questions in the Seminar series suggest that, like young children, teachers’ resilience lies in the contexts and the relationships in which they develop as professionals and not simply in their personal attributes.

We have, therefore, come to understand resilience as the outcome of a dynamic process of interaction within and between teachers’ biographies and their socio-cultural contexts. The dynamic leads to resilience, capacity building and renewal when professionals’ responsible intentions are taken seriously and they are able to follow them through into action. Interventions in schools, through leaders who recognise their role in fostering individual and collective resilience, would, therefore, seem to be a way forward. However, as we have seen in the cases, school leaders too need the wherewithal to allow the exercise of teachers’ professional agency in their day to day decision-making.

Resilience as particularly relevant to teachers

It is clear that resilience is a multi-faceted and unstable construct. Its nature and sustainability throughout teachers’ different professional life phases will be determined by the interaction between the strength of the vocation of individual teachers, those whom they meet as part of their daily work and the collective resilience of the organisation in its internal and external environments. Their capacities to manage

unanticipated, as well as anticipated, events effectively will be mediated by these.

It is the complexities and subtleties of the emotions that many teachers experience and manage in every school day – including teaching increasing number of those who have behavioural problems, those who find it difficult to engage in learning and those who are emotionally anxious and troubled because of unhappy family relationships at home – that makes what they do unique. It is the ongoing demands on their intellectual energy, competence and capacity to connect self and subject and students that distinguishes the teaching self from the selves of other professionals. Many teachers would argue that coping with adverse circumstances in the minefields of every school day, although at its best immensely rewarding, is also emotionally draining and physically exhausting. In times when organisational and professional change are inevitable in order to meet new local, national and global social and economic challenges, it is those who are supported in managing connections between their educational values, beliefs and practices with those of their colleagues and organisations through the exercise of individual, relational and organisational resilience who are most likely to manage everyday uncertainties of learning and teaching and are able to overcome setbacks in different work settings.

We leave you with the question ‘How can teachers’ resilience be fostered?’. We hope that the ideas and examples presented in this booklet, along with those in the other publications and outputs emerging from the Seminar Series, will prove helpful to answering this question in different contexts!

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Teachers and Resilience

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- 1 The most recent data available from the government Health & Safety Executive show that, according to the Labour Force Survey, teaching, health and social services report higher rates of self-reported stress, anxiety & depression than other occupational groups (see www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress/occupation.htm).
- 2 The associated prevalence rate, 4,300 people (4.3%) working in the last year was statistically significantly higher than the rate for all 'industries' (3,500 per 100,000 people - 3.5%).
- 3 The seminar website can be found at <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/education/research/crsc/researchprojects/teachersandresilience/index.aspx>

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