

Teacher Resilience

During this shared time with you, I shall explore the complex area of teacher resilience, and how this should be viewed as a natural link to professional values. If monitored and topped up when required, personal resilience will impact positively on your mental health and wellbeing and provide enhanced engagement with learning and teaching activities and increase the effectiveness of your contribution within the wider colleague team in your workplace setting.

I also will share some of the capacities associated with resilience and how you might promote resilience throughout your professional setting. The concept of resilience is used frequently within education settings, and although there is familiarity around the concept, there is more than a suggestion that resilience, and being resilient, somehow will happen automatically, and levels can be boosted without any intervention on an individual's part. Ensuring that levels of personal resilience remain sufficient through and beyond the Covid19 pandemic require careful monitoring and management.

What is Resilience

Resilience can be described as the personal capacity to respond positively to adverse circumstances. These adverse circumstances will be unique to an individual, as others possess differing levels of resilience in coping with everyday challenges. How an individual rebounds from errors of judgement, disappointment or trauma, is at the heart of being resilient, ensuring that an individual can comfortably interact with others with respect and dignity.

Within the current Covid19 circumstances, teachers are being forced to become more aware of their levels of resilience and whether they have the capacity to deal with the varying challenges brought about through changes to learning and teaching and workplace practice.

There is a small but not insignificant challenge where it is assumed that teachers' mental health and wellbeing is sufficiently robust to engage with education changes and what will eventually evolve as the 'new norm' for education settings. However, there is a mismatch between the expectations of how teachers might support learner mental health and wellbeing and how teacher mental health and wellbeing itself might be supported. This will not happen by chance and requires to be addressed as a matter of urgency to ensure colleagues feel mentally secure for the challenges ahead.

Perhaps it might be useful to unpack what we mean by teacher resilience, and where our knowledge and understanding of resilience is derived. Our understanding of resilience is based on early research and literature from studies of children and young people who demonstrate the capacity to overcome risk factors in their personal lives. Early thinking was based on a deficit model whereby it was believed that some children had an inherent capacity to cope in challenging circumstances, whilst others struggled. More up to date thinking acknowledges that there is capacity for resilience in us all and that this can be nurtured at specific stages in an individual's life.

Fundamental to our understanding of resilience is the level of positive relationships, social and emotional skills, access to role models within the workplace, community and home. These require to be considered along with risk factors that will impact on the effectiveness on our personal level of resilience. So, for teachers, there is no difference from others in ensuring that effective resilience levels are in place and that there is capacity to respond to daily stress challenges, whether in the workplace, or at home.

You may be familiar with the stress bucket analogy. This is where our levels of stress are represented by the level of water in a bucket. Some of us will have smaller buckets, and some more water in our bucket than others. This indicates that we all have different circumstances and coping mechanisms to manage the levels of water (our stress) effectively. Our coping mechanisms are represented by taps that ensure our bucket does not overflow, thus becoming overwhelmed with stress.

Mindfulness, exercise, relaxation, restful and adequate sleep and sharing how we feel by talking are all examples of taps that control our stress bucket levels. However, you need to be mindful of the false taps that seem to reduce our stress bucket levels, but in fact flow back and top up our bucket. Staying up late; taking excessive alcohol or drugs; inactivity, procrastination; ignoring or suppressing problems are all examples of coping strategies that seem to provide temporary relief, but in reality, fill our stress bucket more quickly.

Perhaps we should embed teacher resilience as part of the professional values that contribute to both team working and quality learning and teaching experiences for learners. As an initial step towards considering this, embracing a coaching wheel model might be helpful in beginning to evaluate personal levels of resilience within the professional values continuum.

A *Coaching Wheel* is a visual tool, and is based on the *Wheel of Life* tool used to gain a snapshot and understanding of the balance and fulfilment of life. There are examples of coaching wheels (also known as a Self-Evaluation Wheel) that the General Teaching Council for Scotland have published to assist colleagues with reflection and self-evaluation, and it would be useful to revisit these examples if you have not done so already.

Take a few moments to reflect on the use of a Self-Evaluation Wheel as an effective professional tool, then consider the content of the GTCS examples related to the Standard for Career-Long Professional Learning, and Professional Values. Copies of these self-evaluation wheels along with a blank version are linked to this video podcast. The GTCS Standards examples may also be downloaded from their website.

Specifically, identify how teacher resilience might underpin each of the component parts of these Standards, then consider how you might begin to record your personal level of resilience on the scale of 0 to 10. This will create a snapshot of your resilience level related to each component.

You will probably require additional time to complete this task, so you should select pause at the end of the music, then press play again when ready to move on.

There are no right or wrong responses to your personal reflection and your response will be different from other colleagues. What is important, is that you have identified the level of resilience you possess in relation to the component parts of the GTCS Standards and that you have recorded your personal snapshot, along with a narrative of where you might improve your personal level of resilience.

Developing Teacher Resilience

Levels of teacher resilience are based on three influencing attributes:

The first being Intrinsic. This attribute relates to genetics, gender, temperament, personality and intelligence.

The second being internal. This attribute relates to the level of self-regulation of emotion and impulses, problem-solving, capacity for reflection and reasoning, self awareness, patience and perseverance.

The third being external protective. This attribute relates to positive role models, positive relationships, high expectations, participating in activities and teams, caring for others, sense of meaning and belonging, previous experience of successful coping mechanisms.

It is within the third influencing attribute (External Protective) that colleagues will have most influence in enhancing their personal levels of resilience.

Recognising Personal Strengths

Evidence indicates that colleagues with a high level of resilience will engage in creative hobbies or sports related activities. They also will possess enhanced personal qualities in relation to caring for others. Receiving compliments and positive acts of kindness has an influence on psychological, emotional and physical wellbeing, and the same is also true for the person who gives compliments and acts of kindness. This has a positive impact on the brain, heart and immune system and can help to keep depression in check.

Take a few moments to reflect further on what might contribute to your personal strength in meeting the challenges of your workplace setting.

If you require additional time to complete the reflection you may select pause at the end of the music, then press play again.

There are no right or wrong responses to your personal reflection and your response will likely be different from other colleagues. What is important to acknowledge is that you instinctively want to give compliments to learners, but are reluctant to do the same with colleagues. Perhaps it is time to redress this imbalance for colleagues and the

wider team by openly sharing compliments and acts of kindness as part of teacher professional values.

Resilient Colleagues do have Challenges and Setbacks

It is important to highlight that resilient colleagues still have challenges and setbacks, but it is the quality and effectiveness of their reflective and problem-solving skills that help to address these, thus learning from experience and positively moving forward. Teachers do respond positively to praise, compliments and acts of kindness - well why wouldn't they, but there seems to be a majority who think it inappropriate or patronising to do so. If done sensitively and professionally, the feel good factor of being on the receiving end cannot be put into words and provide an essential top up to personal resilience levels.

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Further Reading

Duffield, S and O'Hare, D (2020) *Teacher Resilience During Coronavirus School Closures*. Leicester: British Psychological Society.

[Available at:-

<https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/new-bps-advice-supporting-teachers'-resilience-during-school-closures>]

Gu, Q and Day, C (2013) Challenges to Teacher Resilience: Conditions Count. *British Educational Research Journal* Vol.39, No.1, February 2013, pp. 22-44

Morgan, M., Ludlow, L., Kitching, K., O'Leary, M., and Clarke, A (2010). What Makes Teachers Tick? Sustaining events in new teachers' lives. *British Educational Research Association*, 36(2), pp. 191-208.

Video Short - How Stress Affects Your Body and Mind (including the 'The Bucket Analogy') - Braive (formerly Tankeboksen) [https://youtu.be/CZTc8_FwHGM]

Mentally Healthy Schools - Coronavirus Toolkit: Resources for Building Resilience. [<https://bit.ly/3d1DeBm>]