Teachers resilience: A necessary condition for effectiveness

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of resilience in teacher effectiveness. The concept of resilience is located in the discourse of teaching as emotional practice and is found to be a multidimensional, socially constructed concept that is relative, dynamic and developmental in nature. The paper draws upon findings from a four year research project which explored career long variations in teachers' commitment and effectiveness. Portraits of three resilient teachers in their early, mid and late careers are used to explore the interaction between teachers' sense of efficacy, professional and personal identities, and their management of the interaction between these and the professional, situated and personal Scenarios which they experience in each professional life phase. Teachers' capacity to manage such interactions is a sophisticated process which contributes strongly to the relative strength of their resilience. Understandings of the role of resilience in teachers' management of the interactions between work and life over the course of a career and in different contexts adds to existing knowledge of variations in teachers' work, lives, and effectiveness and contributes to the debate on standards, quality and retention.
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1. Introduction

This paper examines the role of teacher resilience in enabling teachers to respond positively to challenging circumstances which they may meet over the course of a career. Resilience is of importance in teaching for three reasons. Firstly, it is unrealistic to expect pupils to be resilient if their teachers, who constitute a primary source of their role models, do not demonstrate resilient qualities (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Secondly, teaching is a demanding job in an emerging "age of diversity and sustainability" (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006,

p. 16). A shift in focus from teacher stress and burnout to resilience provides a promising perspective to understand the ways that teachers manage and sustain their motivation and commitment in times of change. Thirdly, resilience, defined as the capacity to continue to "bounce back", to recover strengths or spirit quickly and efficiently in the face of adversity, is closely allied to a strong sense of vocation, self-efficacy and motivation to teach which are fundamental to a concern for promoting achievement in all aspects of students' lives.

The empirical data on which this paper is based are drawn from a four-year large scale mixed methods research project involving 300 teachers in 100 primary and secondary schools (Day et al., 2006). In this work teachers were found to have common characteristics and concerns according to

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their years of experience. Six groupings were identified.[1] Within these groupings there were those whose perceived commitment was being sustained and others whose commitment was declining. In teachers' minds, and in the measured progress and attainment of their pupils, commitment was shown to be closely associated with effectiveness (Day et al., 2006: VITAE report). Portraits of three resilient teachers outlined in this paper help demonstrate the range of internal and external protective factors impacting on teachers' lives which, together contribute to the positive role that resilience plays in enabling them to thrive, flourish and sustain their effectiveness.

2. Contemporary contexts for teaching

The contemporary realities of teaching have for two decades been dominated by successive and persisting government policy reforms. These initiatives and the changing conditions in which teachers teach and students live and learn have combined to place strong "performativity" and increased workload pressure upon teachers. For example, in England the two terms of Labour government have already seen eight separate Education Acts and hundreds of separate initiatives (Chitty, 2004; Walford, 2005). Goodson and Numan (2002, p. 271) observe that like Britain, Sweden and New Zealand have also witnessed an era of the standards movement and similar "development of patterns of political and administrative control over teachers." The same applies to Australia, USA and many other countries worldwide. Hargreaves, warned that, "teacher's work is becoming increasingly intensified, with teachers expected to respond to greater pressures and comply with multiplying innovations under conditions that are at best stable and at worst

deteriorating" (Hargreaves, 1995, p. 84; also 2000, 2003). Teaching in the 21st century is rated as one of the most stressful professions (Kyriacou, 2000; Nash, 2005; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2001).

To date, in general, research related to the effects of centralised reform efforts has been produced by those who are critical of the reforms themselves, has tended to be small scale, and has focussed upon particular groups of teachers for whom reform is difficult and perhaps unacceptable. Jeffrey and Woods (1996) highlighted the emotional dissonances caused by the external inspection system in English schools; Troman (2000) and Troman and Woods (2001) conducted research on teachers under stress in what they called a "low trust" society in England; and Kelchtermans (2005) has written of teachers' vulnerability. Similar research has been conducted in Australia by Dinham and Scott (1996, 2000); in Canada by Burke and Greenglass (1993, 1995); and in America by Blase (1986), Farber (1991), and Nias (1999). There can be no doubt that reforms—particularly those which are poorly managed—at least temporarily disturb the relative stability of teachers' work and, in some cases, their beliefs and practices and self-efficacy, and that in general they challenge existing notions of professionalism (Bottery, 2005; Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996; Helsby, 1999; Sachs, 2003).

Essentially, research of the kind exemplified above presents potentially depressing portraits of the effects of reform upon teachers, perhaps because of the researchers' own values and perhaps because of their focus, important though it may be. Self-reports by teachers in response to surveys at least in part mirror these (Guardian, 2003). However, the reality is that most teachers adapt, at least survive, and do not leave the profession. Whether their work is more closely prescribed as a result of reform or not, they continue to do the best they can for the students they teach under changed and challenging circumstances, usually with their beliefs about their core purposes and values intact. The work and lives of such teachers has been neglected in the research literature and the question of promoting resilience in teachers in times of change remains an overlooked area.

3. The nature of resilience

The notion of resilience originated in the disciplines of psychiatry and developmental psychology as a result of a burgeoning attention to personal characteristics or traits that enabled some children,

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[1]*Early years teachers* (professional life phase 0–3 and 4–7): These teachers' original motivation for entering teaching contributed to their high level of commitment. Support and promotion played a significant role in their perceived identities. *Mid-years teachers* (professional life phase 8–15): This is the key watershed of teachers' long-term perceived effectiveness. These teachers were at the crossroads of their professional lives, deciding whether to continue pursuing career advancement or to remain in the classroom fulfilling the original "call to teach". *Mid-late years teachers* (professional life phases 16–23, 24–30 and 31+): Excessive paperwork and heavy workload were key hindrances to their perceived effectiveness. However, a distinctive group of teachers in the final phase of their teaching continued to demonstrate a high level of motivation and commitment. (DfES, 2006: VITAE report).

although having been classified as being at risk of having negative life outcomes, to adapt positively and thrive despite significant adversity (Block & Block, 1980; Howard, Dryden, & Johnson, 1999; Waller, 2001). The decade of 1980s marked the paradigmatic change to the concept of resilience which, whilst recognising the pain, struggle and suffering involved in the adaptation process in the face of adversity, focused more on positive qualities and *strengths* (Gore & Eckenrode, 1994; Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Over the following two decades, the focus of resilience research has developed from identifying personal traits and protective factors to investigating underlying protective processes, i.e. how such factors may contribute to positive outcomes (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). However, despite this progress in focus, Howard et al. (1999) and Luthar et al. (2000) maintain that research in the area of resilience will be seriously constrained if a theoretical basis for resilience continues to be missing in most studies. Moreover, the authors were unable to find research on teacher resilience which examines the impact of environmental and life factors upon teacher effectiveness.

(1) *Resilience as a psychological construct*: Fredrickson's recent development of a 'broaden-and-build' theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001, 2004) provides a useful psychological conceptual framework. Fredrickson (2004) observes that a subset of positive emotions—joy, interest, contentment and love—promote discovery of novel actions and social bonds, which serve to build individuals' personal resources. These personal resources, ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological resources, "function as reserves that can be drawn on later to improve the odds of successful coping and survival" (Fredrickson, 2004, p. 1367). In other words, positive emotions fuel psychological resilience:

> Evidence suggests, then, that positive emotions may fuel individual differences in resilience. Noting that psychological resilience is an enduring personal resource, the broaden-and-build theory makes the bolder prediction that experiences of positive emotions might also, over time, build psychological resilience, not just reflect it. That is, to the extent that positive emotions broaden the scopes of attention and cognition, enabling flexible and creative thinking, they should also augment people's enduring coping resources (Aspinwall, 1998, 2001; Fredrickson &

Joiner, 2002; Isen, 1990). (Fredrickson, 2004, p. 1372).

Most importantly, she suggests that, "the personal resources accrued during states of positive emotions are durable, (outlasting) the transient emotional states that led to their acquisition", and that "through experiences of positive emotions … people transform themselves, becoming more creative, knowledgeable, resilient, socially integrated and healthy individuals" (Fredrickson, 2004, p. 1369).

Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, from a psychological perspective, contributes to the conceptual basis for understanding the resilient qualities of teachers who are doing a job that is itself emotional by nature; and it mirrors the work of a range of educational researchers on the nature of teaching (Fried, 2001; Nias, 1989, 1999; Palmer, 1998). Hargreaves (1998, p. 835), for example, posits that emotions are at the heart of teaching:

> Good teaching is charged with positive emotions. It is not just a matter of knowing one's subject, being efficient, having the correct competences, or learning all the right techniques. Good teachers are not just well-oiled machines. They are emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy.

In her study of American high school teachers, Nieto found that what had kept teachers going in the profession was "emotional stuff" (Nieto, 2003, p. 122). She describes teaching as an intellectual endeavour which involves love, anger and depression, and hope and possibility. Nieto (2003) argues that in the contemporary contexts for teaching a learning community is an important incentive that keeps teachers going. In pursuit of learning in the "communities of practice" (Wenger, 1998), teachers will consolidate a sense of belonging and shared responsibility, enhance morale and perceived efficacy, develop aspects of resilient qualities, and thrive and flourish socially and professionally. More importantly, in this developmental progression, their resilient qualities do not merely serve the developmental progression; indeed, at the heart of the process, they interact with negative influences and constraints and develop in strength together with teachers' professional qualities. Similarly, the

VITAE research also observed that in the emotional context of teaching pupils' progress and growth constantly fuelled teachers' job satisfaction and motivation, but that this was mediated positively or negatively by a number of factors which affected their capacities to rebound from disappointments and adversity and sustain their commitment to the profession, and with this, their effectiveness.

(2) *Resilience*: *a multidimensional, socially constructed concept*: While the concept of resilience elaborated in the discipline of psychology helps clarify the internal factors and personal characteristics of trait-resilient people, the notion of resilience that is presented by the social work literature advances a perspective that views resilience as multidimensional and multi-determined and is best understood as a dynamic within a social system of interrelationships (Benard, 1991, 1995; Gordon, 1995; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Luthar et al., 2000; Richardson, Neiger, Jenson, & Kumpfer, 1990; Walsh, 1998).

We may all be born with a biological basis for resilient capacity, ''by which we are able to develop social competence, problem-solving skills, a critical consciousness, autonomy, and a sense of purpose'' (Benard, 1995, p. 1). However, the capacity to be resilient in different negative circumstances, whether these be connected to personal or professional factors, can be enhanced or inhibited by the nature of the settings in which we work, the people with whom we work and the strength of our beliefs or aspirations (Benard, 1991; Day et al., 2006; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Luthar, 1996; Oswald, Johnson, & Howard, 2003).

Luthar (1996) distinguishes between ego-resiliency and resilience, which also calls attention to the dynamic and multi-dimensional nature of resilient qualities. She argues that the former is a personality characteristic of the individual and does not presuppose exposure to substantial adversity whereas the latter is a dynamic developmental process and does presuppose exposure to significantly negative conditions (see also Luthar et al., 2000). This distinction implies that resilient qualities can be learned or acquired (Higgins, 1994) and achieved through providing relevant and practical protective factors, such as caring and attentive educational settings, positive and high expectations, positive learning environments, a strong supportive social community, and supportive peer relationships (Benard, 1991, 1995; Glasser, 1965; Johnson, Howard, & Oswald, 1999; Oswald et al., 2003; Pence, 1998; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimer, & Ousten, 1979; Wang, 1997; Werner & Smith, 1988). In accordance with the above distinction, Masten (1994) cautions against the use of ''resiliency'' which carries the misleading connotation of a discrete personality trait and recommends that ''resilience'' be used ''exclusively when referring to the maintenance of positive adjustment under challenging life conditions'' (Luthar et al., 2000, p. 546).

Resilience, therefore, is not a quality that is innate. Rather, it is a construct that is relative, developmental and dynamic, connoting the positive adaptation and development of individuals in the presence of challenging circumstances (Howard et al., 1999; Luthar et al., 2000; Rutter, 1990). It is both a product of personal and professional dispositions and values and socially constructed. It encompasses a sense of purpose and entails meaningful actions and participation. In addition, it develops along with and manifests itself as a result of a dynamic process within a given context. The social dimension of teacher resilience recognises the interactive impact of personal, professional and situated factors on teachers' work and lives and contextualises teachers' endeavour to sustain their professional commitment. An individual may demonstrate resilience in a certain context and/or in a certain professional/life phase, but fail to display similar qualities when time or space changes. Personal lives and working contexts may become unstable (e.g. failing health and classroom behaviour problems) in unpredictable ways, but whether the sudden changes are perceived as adverse conditions by the individual may vary depending on his/her scope of experience at the time of change, perceived competence and confidence in managing the emerging conditions, views on the meaning of engagement, and the availability of appropriate support within the context of change.

The VITAE research with 300 teachers in 100 schools over a four year period provides comprehensive empirical data which supports the notion of resilience as a psychological construct which is subject to influence by environmental, work specific and personal contexts. The portraits of the three teachers which follow will show that the socially constructed concept of resilience provides a fresh and more informative perspective to theories of teacher resilience and our understandings of how and why this varies among teachers over time.

4. Resilient teachers: their contexts and stories

The VITAE research, "Variations in Teachers' Work, Lives and Effectiveness", was a mixed method, four-year longitudinal study conducted in England with 300 teachers in 100 schools across seven Local Authorities, funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). The key aim of the research was to investigate factors contributing to variations in teachers' effectiveness in different phases of their professional lives working in a range of schools in different contexts. The main data concerning teachers' perceived effectiveness were collected through twice yearly semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with teachers. These were supplemented at various stages of the research by document analysis and interviews with school leaders and groups of pupils. Measures of teachers' effectiveness as expressed through improvements in pupils' progress and attainment were collected through matching baseline test results at the beginning of the year, with pupils' national curriculum results at the end. This mixed methodology enabled the identification of teachers who appeared to be more, or less, effective with their pupils over the life time of the project and why this was so.

The VITAE research found that teachers' capacities to sustain their commitment (i.e. resilience) were moderated by their professional life phases and their identities, and that these were mediated by the contexts or "Scenarios" in which they lived and worked. The management of the interaction between these were key to teachers' capacities to sustain their commitment (i.e. resilience). The mediating influences were found to consist of three dimensions: the *personal* (related to their lives outside school); the *situated* (related to their lives in school); and the *professional* (related to their values, beliefs and the interaction between these and external policy agendas). These dimensions were not static and change in one world affected teachers' abilities to manage the others. At any given time, teachers were experiencing fluctuations of different intensity in these dimensions which affected the relative stability/instabilities of their identities. Teachers need resilience as they experience different Scenarios if they are to sustain their commitment and effectiveness and if their pupils are to receive their best teaching. The support of the organisation is crucial in this respect both in terms of its structures and cultures. This paper raises issues, therefore, of leadership and colleagueship, pupil–teacher relationships, pupil behaviour and parental support; and it locates resilience in the discourse of teaching as emotional practice.

Three 'Scenarios' were identified (Day, Kington, & Gu, 2005), ranging from the least complex (Scenario 1) to the most complex (Scenario 3):

- Scenario 1: the three dimensions of teachers' identities (i.e. personal, situated and professional) are *in balance*; with gentle fluctuations that are able to be managed;
- Scenario 2: *one or two components* of teachers' identities are dominant, distorting others; fluctuations may be managed in the short term, depending upon internal and external factors (self-efficacy, support from home/colleagues);
- Scenario 3: *Extreme fluctuations* in all three dimensions are able/not able to be managed, depending upon strength of support from internal and/or external factors.

The more extreme the scenario, the more energy it took a teacher to manage and the more likely it was to test their resilience. Thus, where teachers experienced relatively mild fluctuations (e.g. positive, stable personal life, few problems at school in teaching and learning and with pupil relationships or behaviour, few threats to their sense of self as professional) then the less they needed to call upon their resilience. Their capacity to be resilient was influenced—positively or negatively—by personal, situated and professional factors. For example, an ineffective or unsympathetic Head of Department or Headteacher would erode resilience at a time of personal or classroom crisis; so too would an unsympathetic response to additional pressures at home or during the sustained illness of a close relative or child. However, strong personal support would result in the teacher sustaining resilience.

Of the 300 teachers in the study, 218 (73%) were able to sustain relatively positive identities across all professional life phases over the three-year period of the fieldwork. However, in each phase there were a number who did not. For the purpose of this paper, we have selected the stories of three teachers in their early, middle and late careers who illustrate different degrees of resilience in response to the differing challenges. Their stories chart the influences and Scenarios which helped or hindered them in this. Whilst the experiences of these teachers are not representative of the whole VITAE teachers' sample, their profiles are typical of the key

characteristics of teachers within their professional life phases, of the key personal, professional and situated factors that impact on their work and lives, and of the ways they mediate with these factors to sustain their motivation and commitment in the face of adversity.

Story 1: Stchel—an early years teacher: from declining self-efficacy to growing attachment

Stchel, 27 years old, a Year 6 teacher in an urban, very low socio-economic primary school, saw his vulnerable professional life trajectory move to an upward trend as a result of his promotion and increased self-efficacy and confidence in the profession.

4.1. Declining self-efficacy and attachment in an unsupportive environment

Stchel had worked in his current school for five years, originally taking the job because of his ideological commitment to the school's poor socio-economic context. But having experienced some unpleasant incidents with parents, he admitted that he felt a little depressed because of the lack of parental support.

A lack of support from the school leadership was another negative influence on his work as a teacher. He felt that he would sometimes like the management to give *him* more support—rather than the children. He was "getting fed up" of doing things that others really ought to be doing and felt there was some unfairness in the school. People did not always pull their weight and this was largely because of unclear management who did not always recognise Stchel, or others, for what they had done.

"When I started this school I was expecting to be told I'd done something good or bad and I wasn't praised or told off for doing things, so I didn't really know where I was. I've been here a little bit now so I don't expect praise or to be told off unless I do something really bad. It is just a lack of communication."

Ill health was, at the time, a critical issue for him. In 2003 he had had time off for several hospital operations.

Nevertheless, Stchel enjoyed interacting with other members of staff and the social aspects of working in his school, and this was a major element in his reasons for staying at the school. He had no behavioural problems with pupils in his class. He enjoyed teaching and the rewards that he had gained from working with children, but noticed that he did not have as much free time as his friends in other professions. He often did not leave school until 7pm and then did more work at home. Saturdays were spent catching up on jobs at home—shopping, washing, etc. and then he spent Sundays working. He was happy for work to dominate at this early stage of his career but felt that, "I don't know if I can take many more years of doing what I am doing. While I am young I'm fine. But as I get older, I don't know, as other commitments take over. I just want a bit of life really". Professionally, he had been becoming unhappier.

4.2. Career advancement and increased self-efficacy: conditions and outcomes of positive adaptations

In May 2005 Stchel was given more responsibility in the school. He was pleased to have the extra responsibilities and saw taking this on as a good move in terms of promotion and professional life

Table 1
Summary of variations in Stchel's experiences

Declining self-efficacy and attachment	Career advancement and increased self-efficacy
Scenario 2: Situated & Personal dimensions dominant	*Scenario* 2: Professional dimension dominant
Positive influences Staff collegiality, pupil behaviour	*Positive influences* Staff collegiality, pupil behaviour, promotion, school leadership
Negative influences School leadership, personal (illness), lack of parental support, lack of work–life balance	*Negative influences* Lack of work–life balance

development. This positive move, coupled with the appointment of a new deputy head, greatly improved his motivation and sense of effectiveness. The new Deputy Head had taken the school "out of the comfort zone," which Stchel thought was basically good, although a little challenging. Nevertheless, he was keen to prove himself. Taking on extra responsibility was hard at the outset and had had a detrimental impact on his teaching, but he felt that he was now managing better. Generally he felt more comfortable, more confident and knew what he was doing. He was considering changing schools and interested in taking on new roles (Table 1).

Story 2: Abi—a mid years teacher: from efficacy and effectiveness at risk to growing motivation and identity

Abi's professional life phase 4–7 was characterised by her efforts to settle in her current secondary school, her struggle with a lack of work–life balance and her deep resentment towards the performativity agenda. As a result, her professional identity was at risk and she was considering leaving teaching. This downward trajectory, had however, changed radically for the better at the beginning of her current professional life phase (8–15). Contributing influences were her new job (with promotion), her increased confidence in working with the performativity agenda, the prospect of an improved work–life balance, and her decision to return to Canada to teach. Abi ultimately regained her high levels of motivation, commitment and sense of efficacy in teaching.

4.3. Educational ethos at odds with professional values: identity, efficacy and effectiveness at risk

Abi was 30 years old and had taught English for nine years. She was Canadian and had taught there for four years before coming to England, where she worked in other schools. Abi had always wanted to be a teacher and entered teaching with a sense of vocation. This still applied although she felt that she had lost "some rose-coloured ideas" that she had had when she first became a teacher.

Abi taught Key Stage 3 mixed ability classes of 23–25 pupils in her school—a large, 11–16, rural, moderate socio-economic Beacon Community College which had GCSE results well above similar schools. The sourcing of pupils from "council estates" was new and she had been shocked by the adverse home conditions for learning that some of the pupils faced.

Abi's school provided strong professional and personal support, but the department was less supportive. She liked the nice working environment at her school and got on well with her colleagues. Having been in the school for a year, Abi felt "a lot more at ease." She knew her students better and had established rapport with them.

She found it difficult to "switch off" easily. Her personal drive to enable students to succeed was the cause of her high self-efficacy. When she arrived home she still had more work to do and spent half a day at weekends doing school work. She described herself as sometimes being in trouble at home for being "in teacher mode". She could not imagine, "not being in teaching". Abi's partner was living in a different city. They had been separated for over a year, and this had negatively affected both her work and personal life. Abi felt tired and less organised because of her weekend travelling to visit her partner.

The performativity agenda had had the greatest negative impact on her morale and motivation to teach because it ran counter to her personal philosophy of teaching. She felt that testing and marking seemed to be more important than fostering pupils' independent learning. There had been a fall in her motivation in the third year of the project. Abi began to feel increasingly that she had "less control over what I teach and how I teach it". The accompanying pressure meant that she, "had less time to build relationships". She spent a lot of time "marking, reading, filling in results, feeling under pressure to teach something well and quickly". This had led to a feeling of being "overwhelmed" and "more grumpy at work", with no time to teach fun, creative lessons that would help with social skills as well as learning.

Abi was not sure whether she would remain in teaching long term as she found it "emotionally draining" and "mentally tiring", although she did like it and achieved good results.

4.4. Support and recognition—growing efficacy, motivation and identity—restoring mastery and control

The beginning of Abi's new professional life phase also meant a new beginning of her professional and personal life. She was more settled in her current school and began to get on well with her

Table 2
Summary of variations in Abi's experiences

Identity, efficacy and effectiveness as risk	Growing motivation and identity
Scenario 2: Professional & Personal dimensions dominant	*Scenario* 2: Professional dimension dominant
Positive influences School leadership, staff collegiality, teacher-pupil relationships	*Positive influences* School/*departmental leadership*, staff collegiality, teacher-pupil relationships, promotion (new job), personal (relationships)
Negative influences Educational policies, target-driven culture, personal (relationships), lack of work–life balance, pupil behaviour, lack of support from departmental leadership	*Negative influences* Educational policies, target-driven culture, pupil behaviour

Head of Department. Abi found the overall pupil behaviour "challenging," nevertheless, "the rapport with the children" in the classroom continued to motivate her as a teacher. She still liked teaching and enjoyed seeing the children progress. Support and recognition from the school and departmental leadership, coupled with staff collegiality, contributed to her high sense of effectiveness. Mentoring PGCE students made her think more about her own teaching and had also positively impacted upon her perceived professional identity and effectiveness. The target driven culture remained a negative influence on her work, but Abi did not feel as strongly as before. She had tried to find ways to get around the rules, tests and targets and learned to inject her own interests in teaching.

Abi was moving to a Birmingham school with a promotion in the new academic year. She looked forward to her new job because it also meant her reunion with her partner and improved work–life balance. She did not want to leave her current school, but felt that her personal relationship was equally important. She was also thinking of getting married and having a family—"all the stuff you do in your 30s." Her decision to move to Canada in the future had also helped in that it gave her hope of working in a place where she could enjoy pursuing her student-centred teaching (Table 2).

Story 3: Sadie—a late years teacher: sustained commitment and a strong sense of self-efficacy

Sadie suffered from relentless pressure as a consequence of adverse personal events and heavy workload. Nevertheless, she had managed to sustain high levels of motivation, commitment and sense of effectiveness both as a teacher and as a manager. Her high levels of self-efficacy and agency, together

with support from her small friendly school, had made the major contribution to her positive professional outlook.

Sadie, 47 years old, was Head Teacher in a small, rural, high socio-economic Church of England primary school. She came from a teaching family and had always wanted to be a teacher. She had taught for 26 years and still enjoyed working with children.

4.5. Thriving in capacity against all the odds

When she first joined the school, Sadie found that there was "a competitiveness [in the school], to a degree that it became destructive in the classroom and between parents and staff, so the whole nature was grim." Pupil behaviour was appalling too. She appointed a new highly committed and enthusiastic teaching staff, created a positive teaching culture, and turned the school around. Good relationships between the staff and the pupils and parents had benefited from the small friendly school environment. For Sadie, the professional and personal support from the staff and the governors had had the greatest positive impact on her feelings of effectiveness.

Her husband was very insistent that she had a work–life balance. During the week, Sadie often worked late in the office so that she could spend most of the weekends with her family.

> I think the teaching profession, if you're not careful it can totally destroy your home life — I think the hardest thing for people to do is to find the balance — I've only realistically found the balance in the last five to six years ... I also live away from school now — I travel 100 miles a day — that has actually helped because without living

Table 3
Summary of variations in Sadie's experiences

Sustained a strong sense of efficacy and commitment	
Scenario 2: Professional & Situated dimensions dominant	*Scenario* 2: Personal dimension dominant
Positive influences	*Positive influences*
Personal (husband support)	Staff collegiality, teacher-pupil relationships, pupil behaviour
Negative influences	*Negative influences*
Pupil behaviour, teacher-pupil relationship, lack of staff collegiality, educational policies, target-driven culture	Personal (husband's illness)

so close to school I can't pop in during the holidays or weekends — and it's good reflection time sitting in the car with nobody hassling.

Personal events had recently had a detrimental effect on her work. Sadie's husband was suffering from severe depression, which, coupled with an Ofsted inspection, put her under tremendous pressure. Coming to work became a relief and remedy for her at the time. In the end she went down with shingles. But she insisted that she had never felt out of control because she believed that she had the ability to manage tensions and bring back her work–life balance. Her husband's condition had gradually been improving and Sadie found herself more relaxed at home.

Despite the negative factors, Sadie continued to enjoy working with children and high levels of motivation and commitment in her job. "Seeing children enjoy learning" had been the main source of her motivation and commitment.

> I enjoy being a teacher. I love being a teacher. I'm very enthusiastic about my job. If I wasn't I wouldn't stay in the job. I do feel there are expectations that are unfair from the government and from parents and I do feel that there is a cultural element of parental responsibility being passed to our shoulder by the government as well as parents.

Sadie was also highly confident in her ability to be an effective teacher and an effective manager and enjoyed a high level of job satisfaction. Although she derived great pleasure from her pupils' good SATS results, she did not think that the results had affected her approach to teaching at all. She disapproved of the target-driven culture and believed that exam results were only a snapshot of her pupils' achievements. She was proud that her school

was not driven by government initiatives and tests because she saw herself now as being well placed, with her enhanced experience and confidence, to implement the actions that she believed were best for her children's learning. She commented that, "I feel positive about what I'm doing."

> Confident from lots of ways. Confident from what the statistical data shows me, also confident because I have feedback verbally and written from children, parents and staff. We did a questionnaire on the effectiveness of the school for the parents and it was the most incredibly positive response you could imagine. Things have moved forward and the school has become a community.

As for her next career move, she might apply for a headship in a larger school, but there was "no burning desire" yet (Table 3).

5. Variations in resilience across teachers' professional lives

The professional and personal experiences of each of the three teachers described can be seen as being reflected in their journeys of self-adjustment and professional growth within particular contexts or Scenarios which mediated these. In all their journeys the teachers were confronted by professional and personal pressures, tensions, and challenges to their values, beliefs and practices. But what shines through was their capacity to build upon favourable influences and positive opportunities in their work and life contexts, to overcome the emotional tensions of the Scenarios in the environments which they experienced, and to maintain positive emotions and a sense of vocation.

For all the three teachers, their "inner motivation to serve" (Hansen, 1995, p. 6) called them into

teaching and it had been this very motivation and a sense of meaning and moral purpose that underpinned the pursuit and exploration of their professional values and ideologies. These internal values and motivation, fuelled their capacities to exercise emotional strengths and professional competence and subsequently provided them with the resilience which enabled them to meet the challenges of the changing environments in which they worked. As a consequence, then, the potentially negative effects of experiencing stressful work and life events were managed and translated into positive personal and professional resources upon which these teachers could draw and benefit when developing and sustaining their positive professional life trajectories over the course of their careers.

5.1. Developing the professional assets of teachers

(i) *Sustaining a sense of vocation*: The sense of vocation is an important professional asset of teachers. It fuels teachers' personal resources with 'determination, courage, and flexibility, qualities that are in turn buoyed by the disposition to regard teaching as something more than a job, to which one has something significant to offer' (Hansen, 1995, p. 12). Stchel had deliberately joined his school to make a difference to students from socio-economically deprived backgrounds. Both Abi and Sadie had a strong calling to teach since childhood and continued to enjoy the pleasure of working with children in their current schools. Their response to the original call to teach had formed an important part of their professional identities, and had interacted with "an inner incentive which prevents [the] person from treating his work as a routine job with limited objectives" (Emmet, 1958, pp. 254–255). This interaction had helped them to sustain commitment in the profession.

Hansen (1995) argues that in contrast to *profession* which has an emphasis on public recognition and larger rewards, the language of *vocation* "takes us 'inward' into the core of the [teaching] practice itself," that is, "what many teachers do, and why they do it" (Hansen, 1995, p. 8). For all the three teachers, pupils' progress had clearly stayed at the heart of their strong sense of vocation, or "sense of mission" (Nieto, 2005, p. 204). Abi struggled to separate her identity as teacher from her identity as person, i.e. not be in 'teacher mode' whilst at home. Both Stchel and Sadie gained rewards and motivation from seeing their children learn and develop.

These three teachers' "missionary zeal" and "moral values" (Nias, 1999, p. 225) had, to a larger or lesser extent, functioned as internal psychological and emotional supports for them, encouraged them to be "vocationally and professionally committed" (Nias, 1999, p. 225), and helped them to find strength and power to achieve "personal autonomy and personal significance" (Hansen, 1995, p. 6). Thus, teachers' vocation is associated with a strong sense of professional goals and purposes, persistence, professional aspirations, achievement and motivation—the essential qualities that Benard (1995) has observed in resilience. It is an essential component of teacher resilience, which at the same time promotes resilience in teachers.

(ii) *Developing a sense of efficacy*: Rutter (1990) describes self-efficacy as one of the very robust predictors of resilience. According to Hoy and Spero (2005, p. 343), teachers' sense of efficacy is their "judgements about their abilities to promote students' learning." These self-judgments and beliefs "affect the effort teachers invest in teaching, their level of aspiration, the goals they set" (Hoy & Spero, 2005, p. 345). Similarly, Gibson and Dembo (1984) posit that teachers' efficacy beliefs influence their persistence and resilience when things do not progress smoothly.

For Stchel, Abi and Sadie, their perceived efficacy made differing contributions to their endeavours to develop. As an early years teacher, Stchel suffered from the inadequacy of management support, which he greatly regretted. The VITAE findings suggest that in-school support has a significant impact upon early years teachers' self-efficacy as they are in a phase of gaining experience and establishing their professional identity in the classroom as well as in the profession. Promotion, which is often associated with recognition from the management, was shown to have greatly improved his motivation and efficacy. In her study on teachers' careers, Rippon (2005) has also observed teachers' strong desire to "broaden horizons":

Each new role marked a transition point when the teacher had become confident in their current role and needed to face a new challenge, taking on challenges in their current posts which took them beyond the direct responsibilities of their remit or finding new posts entirely. All forms of proactively investing in the development of their career for altruistic, intrinsic or extrinsic motivations. (Rippon, 2005, p. 284).

Stechel was no longer considering leaving teaching. Instead, he had a clearer vision of his work and was keen to prove himself.

In common with Stchel, Abi had also experienced a period of developing her sense of efficacy. However, in contrast with Stchel, Abi had prior teaching experience in Canada. The source of her stress and struggle was the mechanism and structure of the English education system. Nias (1999) traces the connection between teachers' moral purposes and vulnerability and postulates that, "guilt and loss of self-esteem through the betrayal of deeply held values can be emotionally damaging as appropriating or resistance" (Nias, 1999, p. 225). Her observation to a large extent explains the emotional strain that Abi had experienced. She sadly found that her personal interests and professional values were out of line with the government target-driven initiatives and regretted that she no longer had the time and energy to provide care for her pupils. The recovery of her self-efficacy had benefited from improved support from the departmental leadership, her successful self-adjustment to her department and school, and her improved work–life balance. More importantly, the "rebounding" process itself reflects her high level of personal efficacy. It was a process of her persistently mediating with structural (macro), situated (meso), professional and personal (micro) factors. Bandura (2000) introduces self-efficacy belief as "a vital personal resource" and explains why it may affect individual's self-motivation and life trajectories:

> When faced with obstacles, setbacks, and failures, those who doubt their capabilities slacken their efforts, give up, or settle for mediocre solutions. Those who have a strong belief in their capabilities redouble their effort to master the challenges. (Bandura, 2000, p. 120).

Bandura argues that, "among the mechanisms of self-influence, none is more focal or pervading than belief of personal efficacy" (Bandura, 2000, p. 120).

In contrast with Stchel and Abi, Sadie, with 26 years of teaching experience, believed strongly in her problem solving capabilities. She possessed a very high level of self-efficacy and remained strong and positive regardless of adverse influences either at work and/or in her personal life. She was particularly proud of her capabilities of leading her school to go against the tide of government's target-driven initiatives and pursue the best education for the children. In Bandura's terms, her

exercise of control over adversity and positive (emotion and psychological) well being require "an optimistic sense of personal efficacy" (Bandura, 1986, 1989):

> This is because ordinary social realities are strewn with difficulties. They are full of impediments, failures, adversities, setbacks, frustrations, and inequities. People must have a robust sense of personal efficacy to sustain the perseverant effort needed to succeed. Self-doubts can set in quickly after some failures or reverses. The important matter is not that difficulties arouse self-doubt, which is a natural immediate reaction, but the speed of recovery of perceived self-efficacy from difficulties.... Because the acquisition of knowledge and competencies usually requires sustained effort in the face of difficulties and setbacks, it is resiliency of self-belief that counts. (Bandura, 1989, p. 1176).

Thus, a strong sense of self-efficacy is another essential component of teacher resilience. To rebound from setbacks and adversity, teachers need the strength of self-efficacy beliefs; and conversely, their sustained effort and perseverance in the face of difficulty will strengthen their sense of efficacy and result in a stronger sense of resilience. In other words, the development of teachers' self-efficacy consistently interacts with the growth of their resilient qualities. It is by nature a dynamic, developmental process—the key characteristic of resilience.

5.2. Meeting the challenge of the environment

Studies on resilience also emphasise that both positive and negative external environmental factors "create the resilience phenomenon" (Gordon, Longo, & Trickett, 2000, p. 2) in the process of resilience building. According to Henderson and Milstein (2003), the environment impacts on an individual's resilience in two ways. They note that the changing expectations about schools and the composition of the student population are key environmental factors that challenge teachers' sense of effectiveness and well being.

> First, the internal protective factors that assist an individual in being resilient in the face of a stressor or challenge are often the result of environmental conditions that foster the development of these characteristics. Second,

immediate environmental conditions present, in addition to the stressor or challenge, contribute to shifting the balance of an individual's response from one of maladaptation or dysfunction to homeostasis or resiliency. (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 7).

The VITAE study established the complex interactions between moderating and mediating factors on teachers' commitment and resilience. In particular, situated factors—leadership of school and department, staff collegiality, teacher–pupil relationships, and behaviour of pupils—were found to be contributing influences on teachers' efficacy, commitment and perceived effectiveness. It also extended previous work on teachers' careers by investigating the variations in the impact of critical influences on teachers in different phases of their professional lives.

(i) *External policy contexts*: External policy contexts, heavy workload and work–life tensions appear to have had stronger influences on teachers' self-efficacy and sense of effectiveness in the middle and later professional life phases (from 8 to 15 years) (Day et al., 2006).

Teachers' expertise is context dependent and "highly idiosyncratic in nature" (Bullough & Baughman, 1997, p. 131). Huberman (1989) observed that when contexts change, tensions emerge. Abi's initial struggle in her new school exemplifies such tensions. For Abi, moving to a new education system imposed an extra layer of emotional strain on her. In comparison to situated in-school factors, structural factors—standardisation and the performativity agenda—had a greater impact on her declining motivation. In addition, she had to deal with growing tensions between her work life and personal life and began to feel the need to consider the next direction of her professional life—typical characteristics of teachers within professional life phase 8–15. This phase is a key watershed in teachers' careers—a period that is of significance to development and change in teachers' professional identities.

Woods (1999, p. 120) identifies *appropriation* as one of the four important accommodation strategies that teachers adopt in the face of the changes—"the seedbed of stress and burnout." Sadie was the very essence of what Boyle and Woods (1995) describe as a "composite leader" who meets statutory requirements and stays true to her own beliefs. With years of experience, she was able to enjoy a strong sense

of "responsible freedom" (Rogers, 1969) in the profession in pursuit of what she believed was the best for the growth of the children. Whilst Woods (1999, p. 123) claims that successful adaptation to initiatives and change is "very hard," Sadie's determination and sustained commitment to her professional and moral beliefs suggest that teachers can develop in strength in such an emotionally stressful process and derive joy and fulfilment from "those components of his/her job which s/he values" (Evans, 1998, p. 11). In other words, adversity also promotes the development of resilient qualities (also see Benard, 1991; Henderson & Milstein, 2003; Oswald et al., 2003; Pence, 1998; Rutter et al., 1979; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993).

(ii) *School contexts*: In the early years of teaching the importance of in-school support predominates. Stchel's enhanced confidence and desire to "broaden horizons" in the teaching profession had greatly benefited from the positive effects of supportive school leadership and "appropriate collegial relations" (Nias, 1999, p. 223). His experience is typical of early years teachers (Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Hoy & Spero, 2005; Sikes, Measor, & Woods, 1985).

For both Abi and Sadie, staff collegiality was a contributing influence on their positive professional outlooks. Nieto (2003) suggests that to retain teachers' commitment in the profession, schools need to become places where teachers find community and engage in intellectual work. In addition to supportive leaders and colleagues, good teacher–pupil relationships had also had a positive effect on these three teachers' upward professional life trajectories.

In their study on teacher turnover, wastage and movements between schools, Smithers and Robinson (2005, p. i) observed that

> Teachers are more likely to stay in schools where there is a clear sense of purpose, where the teachers are valued and supported, and where appropriate appointments have been made. The impact of good leadership could be outweighed, however, by factors largely outside a school's control such as location, cost of living, demographics and teachers' personal plans.

Stchel's and Abi's experiences illustrate that they would have been lost to the teaching profession if there had not been a positive change in the leadership. Elsewhere, Werner (1990) warns that,

"when stressful life events outweigh the protective factors, even the most resilient … can develop problems" (Werner, 1990, p. 111).

6. Conclusions

Resilience is a multi-faceted (Oswald et al., 2003) and unstable construct. The nature of resilience is determined by the *interaction* between the internal assets of the individual and the external environments in which the individual lives and grows (or does not grow). Thus, the manifestations of resilience vary from person to person and fluctuate over time, according to the Scenarios which they meet and their capacities to manage these successfully.

Previous research on teachers' work in contexts of performativity has tended to focus on factors affecting teachers' decisions to leave the teaching profession. This research suggests the need to distinguish between two forms of retention in the teaching profession: their physical continuation in the role; and, the maintenance of motivation and commitment as key indicators of quality. Whilst the answer to this second form of retention is less easily observed, being located essentially in teachers' values and resilience to meet the challenges of different Scenarios in their work and lives, it has major implications for their effectiveness and well being. We call this second aspect of retention, *quality* retention. Underlying resilient teachers' endeavours to exert control over difficult situations, is their strength and determination to fulfil their original call to teach and to manage and thrive professionally.

The interaction between teachers' sense of efficacy, professional/personal identities and their management of the interaction between these and the professional, situated and personal Scenarios which they experience in each professional life phase is a sophisticated process which contributes strongly to their resilience which is a necessary condition for their effectiveness.

What is required by all concerned with enhancing quality and standards in schools, therefore, is a better understanding of the factors that enable the majority of teachers to sustain their motivation, commitment and effectiveness in the profession. It is, therefore, likely to be fruitful to examine why and how generally teachers maintain a continuing positive contribution despite the range of experiences they encounter in their work environments which challenge their commitment.

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