

# Practitioner Research and Teacher Resilience

Teacher Resilience in an Age of Adversity

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# Teacher Recruitment and Retention

- Heavy workloads are leading to a crisis in teacher recruitment and retention .
- Recruitment: the UK will need an additional 47,00 teachers by 2024; the USA 300,000 teachers by 2020; in India 1,000,000.
- There is global concern about recruitment.

# Teacher Recruitment and Retention (2)

- Retention of teachers :
- UK – 25% quit in their first year, with 40% planning to leave in the next three years.
- USA, 8% of teachers leave each year – estimated 250,000, and many posts are filled by under qualified assistants;
- India, no statistics are available but grave concern is evident in policy papers.
- In short more teachers are leaving the profession than joining. But why?

# An Age of Adversity?

- Contexts are different in each country.
- Pay, local status and conditions and students' expectations feature on all articles about recruitment and retention.
- But these don't seem to be the factors at the heart of teachers' disillusionment.
- Vast majority of teachers are in teaching for something other than money and power.
- Future of their students, and that of their society. When opportunity to realise these is taken away, teachers leave.

# New Factors

- Stress factors for teachers:
- a rise in social upheaval;
- loss of status of the profession;
- diminution of resources; performativity and an increase in workload;
- a sense of being a cog in a wheel rather than a respected individual.
- To keep our teaching workforce, we need to help teachers develop resilience.

# Resilience – Can it be Learned?

- This is the question I want to ask.
- Is resilience a 'mental muscle' that can be exercised
- Or an attitude that translates 'challenges' into 'opportunities'?
- Or is it a set of approaches that can be learned?
  
- In my view, all of these things contribute.
  
- But I want to consider another set of factors that have emerged as part of a research project into teacher research and impact.

# CamStar Research Impact Project – a preview

- The context is the CamStar network, which is working with Cambridge Assessment International Education.
- One emerging main finding:
- teachers who research also have an enhanced sense of purpose and focus (agency) - which in turn means they identify as 'resilient'.
- So it seems that teacher research has a key role to play in resilience. How does this actually happen?

# CamStar (Cambridge, School Teachers and Research)

- In our research, the development of resilience through an evidence based approach emerged in three main areas: professionalism, knowledge and identity.
- Each area has a component that speaks to resilience, and how that can be developed and sustained.

# Knowledge and Resilience

- My first claim to resilience is through teacher knowledge.
- Teacher knowledge is multi faceted and multi dimensional. What the Camstar research reveals is that teachers feel an increasing sense of anomie in this field. Curriculum is defined through policy, assessment criteria define knowledge and pedagogy responds to these two imperatives.
- Teaching becomes transferring externally prescribed 'knowledge' into students' heads. And we see the result in this generation of learners whose sole concern when in the classroom is whether the content being taught is 'for the exam'.
- Learning is functional and teaching instrumentalist in consequence. So our 'why' question appears once again. But consider this quote from Stenhouse:

# Stenhouse and Teacher Knowledge

- Curriculum is the medium through which the teacher can learn his art. Curriculum is the medium through which the teacher can learn knowledge. Curriculum is the medium through which the teacher can learn about the nature of education. Curriculum is the medium through which the teacher can learn about the nature of knowledge. (Stenhouse: 1975:4)

# Knowledge and Discourse

- Teachers need to discuss, develop and enhance knowledge content and pedagogy.
- What seems to be happening is that the discourse of teacher knowledge is disappearing.
- And without a language to discuss teacher knowledge, there is no opportunity to explore more widely the 'nature of knowledge' that Stenhouse talks about.

# Discourse

- Durkheim's constructs of 'sacred and profane' discourses.
- The profane - the complexity of education is represented as simplified for accessibility with a non specialist audience.
- The sacred – the language of the profession – is the language that is disappearing. Without this, teachers have no access to new ideas – no theory of learning, or of teaching – in fact, of knowledge.

# Discourse and Resilience

- Engagement and control through knowledge requires the 'sacred' discourse of professionalism.
- Within this lies resilience through a shared, professional language to use with other teachers throughout the world.
- Teacher research is a powerful mechanism for achieving this.
- 'In order to function as intellectuals, teachers must create the ideological and structural conditions necessary for them to write, research, and work with each other in producing curricula and sharing power.'

(Giroux: 1988:xxxiv)

# Resilience Through Knowledge and Teacher Research

- The concept of research as shared voice was evident in the CamStar research:
- If enough people in enough schools are looking into a similar thing, they might reach similar conclusions, and that's going to be a very powerful voice. (Penny)
- But you know, it should be in there as part of being a good practitioner, it should be that you have an enquiry-based and evidence-based sort of stem to the way that you teach. (Simon)
- Through knowledge, comes confidence and resilience.

# Resilience and Professionalism

- My second claim to resilience is through professionalism.
- Every teacher I have worked with has defined themselves as a 'professional'. For teachers, there is the sense that they are there for the students, and will give up time, energy, resource and in ways that may use their own personal time and resource to ensure the students have a better experience.
- But increasingly, professionalism is being changed from autonomy to centralised (and controlled) 'standards' which define how teachers should teach and even behave.

# Professional Standards

- In the UK, the Professional Standards (against which teachers are inspected) state that, for example:
- teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

# Professionalism and Standards

- the very act of defining professionalism centrally removes autonomy and therefore the status of professionalism from teaching.
- If teachers do not define what it means to be a profession, there is no sense of belonging to a group with shared values and beliefs.
- So my second claim to resilience is through professionalism.

# Resilience Through Professionalism and Teacher Research

- Because it's not just the research that's significant, it's the path that doing research takes you on that makes you keep questioning what you're doing. Not in a kind of restless, agitated way, but in a kind of genuinely professional way. (Elaine)
- I often wonder why I enjoyed research. I think it gives you your own professionalism back. (Lee)
- I believe, as teachers, we're challenged more about our professionalism ... I think that we have a huge lesson to learn about how management interact and work with the classroom teacher... there has to be trust.... As a teacher researcher I know how students learn, and how I teach best and I can defend my views. I'm part of a wider knowledge community. (John)
- Through professionalism, comes belonging, and thus resilience.

# Identity and Resilience

- My third claim to resilience is through identity.
- 'Teachers' professional identity strongly influences their judgements and behaviour' (Beijaard et al 2000)
- 'The ways in which teachers achieve, maintain, and develop their identity, their sense of self, in and through a career, are of vital significance in understanding the actions and commitments of teachers in their work.' (Ball and Goodson, 1985:18)

# An Example of Identity

- An example might be in the notion of a good teacher. Self defined identity might look for criteria such as empathy, pastoral care, knowing your students.
- But there is also the constructed version of teacher identity which emphasises examination success, meeting externally set aims.
- The competing versions of a good teacher can cause stress when one individual attempts to meet all demands.

# The Answer?

- If teachers do not own their own sense of who they are, resilience is undermined. The fine line – indeed almost invisible line – that defines self identity and teacher identity makes teachers both stronger as teachers and more vulnerable.
- The answer?

# Identity and Agency

- Well, an answer perhaps , is teacher agency.
- Agency embodies action and self belief.
- Agency gives teachers the ability to determine how and where to take professional control.

# Agency and Self

- Teacher research enables teachers to articulate an identity which is rooted in an awareness of identity as able to be constructed, but equally, to be owned.

# Resilience through identity and teacher research

- I don't like to brag or things, so for me having a role within research in the school sort of maintains that, the sort of my, I suppose my identity outside the school. (Evie)
- You know I think that I would, without the research element, I'd probably feel much less like a 'proper' teacher, it's become a sort of established part of what I do, a part of, of my identity I think really. (Sarah)
- The identity of people seeing themselves as creators and owners of knowledge ... I think teachers don't sort of feel strongly enough about that but they are the owners'. (David)
- So in agency lies my third claim to resilience.

# Identity

- *Research has given me my own **identity**. It's made me take stock of what I believe in, what I want to be doing, how I want to be moving forward and it's given me power – professionally. Personally, I think that research has made me into an individual who **believes** themselves to be a professional ... so **professionally** it's done all of those things but **personally** I have more confidence in being a professional. (Lee)*

# Teacher Research, Knowledge, Professionalism and Identity.

- T.S. Eliot wrote: 'We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.'
- This is the journey that teacher research takes us on, and as knowledge, professionalism and identity awareness develop, so does resilience, so that we not only know the place for the first time, but we belong there.