

ENHANCING PRESERVICE TEACHERS' RESILIENCE: A REVIEW OF CURRENT LITERATURE

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Abstract

Resilience is the ability to adapt successfully in the face of stress and adversity. It is commonly known as bouncing back or striving and flourishing in spite of challenging circumstances. While there has been an interest in teachers' well-being in the context of COVID-19 school closures, research on resilience specific to preservice teachers (PSTs) is scarce. It is also not formally taught in teacher preparation courses. In this article, current research on resilience relating to PSTs were highlighted, with focus on the definition of resilience and ways resilience has been currently investigated in the teacher education field. The authors made a case for the need to teach resilience to PSTs to reduce current teacher attrition rates. By gaining a better understanding of teacher resilience, the authors saw areas that allow teacher educators to build in their courses resilience strategies so that PSTs persist in their education and apply such strategies in their work as teachers in the future.

Keywords: *Resilience, teacher resilience, preservice teachers, teacher education*

Introduction

Public education is facing a crisis. Research from Farley and Chamberlain (2021) claimed that teachers are at the brink of burnout and are leaving the profession at record numbers. Existing pressures for state mandated testing have not eased and students are experiencing gaps in learning to lost instructional time during pandemic closures. Additionally, students' non-academic needs are increasingly greater. Focus on accountability and data points has not eased, and teachers have been caught amidst changing school policies due to COVID-19 (Huck & Zhang, 2021.)

Most recently, teachers are facing intense public scrutiny and debate surrounding how and what they may teach in their classrooms. Many teachers are worried about parent or community backlash against their curriculum and instruction. This has brought about a growing amount of public scrutiny over what teachers are teaching and how they run their classrooms, leaving them feeling micromanaged and often disrespected. Moreover, pressing school safety concerns add intense fear and stress as teachers worry how to keep themselves and their students safe with school shootings on the rise. In some states, there is conversation about arming teachers to provide active shooter protection for their own classrooms.

Given the high levels of teacher stress and demands placed on teachers, it is not surprising that nearly half of teachers said they are likely to leave teaching in the next few years. Sixty percent of teachers say they experience job-related stress frequently or daily. Forty-five percent of teachers said they feel less effective at their job. When teachers are stressed out, the quality of their instruction, classroom

management, and relationships with their students suffers (Farley & Chamberlain, 2021). This problem is not localized to the United States. The crisis of teacher shortages, low recruitment rates, and high attrition is affecting education systems on a global scale. When the teaching profession loses nearly fifty percent of its workforce in the first five years of their careers, it is an understatement to say teaching is challenging.

In educator preparation programs, preservice teachers (PSTs) are taught pedagogical techniques, lesson planning, and classroom management systems, but they must also learn to enhance their resilience to do the work and persist with it, long enough to continue to hone their teaching skills. We believe that teacher educators must help them develop a level of resilience that most other jobs will never require. The purpose of this review is to provide an overview of resilience as it has been investigated in the field of teacher preparation to give teacher educators a starting point on how resilience can be taught or integrated within teacher preparation courses. The discussion began with definitions and descriptions of resilience and then proceeded to the current literature on resilience in preservice teachers. Future considerations were raised to contribute to this line of research. We provided an appendix containing resilience resources for teachers and teacher educators.

Definitions of Resilience

The American Psychological Association (2022) defined resilience as “the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands.” Similar to the construct of well-being, resilience is complex, multidimensional, and applied to different contexts; thus, various definitions of resilience are found in the literature and has become a contested term (Brewer et al, 2019; Wu et al, 2013). However, the American Psychological Association’s (2022) definition of resilience as an adaptive behavior versus a fixed trait has become widely accepted (MacLeod et al, 2016).

To add, Wu and colleagues (2013) summarized psychosocial factors that contribute to the development of resilience. They found certain characteristics and behavior that help individuals not to succumb to the negative impact of extreme stress. These include: (a) optimism (the expectation for good outcomes), (b) cognitive reappraisal (changing the way one views negative events), (c) active coping (using strategies to change qualities of the stressor and how it is perceived), (d) presence of and seeking social support, (e) humor, (f) mindfulness (concentration on moment-to-moment awareness of bodily activities and emotions or sensations), (g) physical exercise, (h) altruism, and (i) moral compass (internal belief system, guiding values or ethics), including religion and spirituality.

Characteristics of Resilience

Resilience has been described as “a dynamic, developmental and multi-dimensional construct that fluctuates over time and is influenced by multidimensional factors that include individual circumstance, situation, and environment” (Beutel et al., 2019, p. 609). As an adaptive behavior, resilience is dependent on a person’s effective responses to environmental challenges and resistance to the negative effects of stress (Wu et al, 2013). In addition, Farnsworth (2021) conceptualized resilience as highly related to social emotional learning, mental health, and purpose.

One who exhibits resilience is able to act on a goal that is personally meaningful and beyond the self, enabling him or her to contribute to society. Resilience is also considered inseparable from personal

efficacy and emotional intelligence (Badenhorst, 2021). Additionally, MacLeod and associates (2016) provided a list of descriptions of resilience which included but not limited to: “bouncing back” from adversity, “adaptive capacity to maintain independent functioning and well-being”, and “possession of perseverance, competence, strength, and protective processes” (p. 267).

In the broad context of higher education, it has been documented that resilience plays an important role in helping students overcome challenges, maintain equilibrium, and attain academic success (Brewer et al, 2019). On the other hand, resilience among professionals was “linked with personal well-being, professional longevity, workplace collegiality, and supportive workplaces and policies” (Mansfield & Beltman, 2019, p. 586).

Teacher Resilience

While the majority of empirical studies on resilience have focused on at-risk children, adolescents, and military personnel who had experienced trauma (MacLeod et al, 2016), research on resilience in the context of the teaching profession has flourished in recent years (Mansfield & Beltman, 2019; Mansfield et al., 2020). Teacher resilience is characterized in academic literature as the use of internal and external resources and adaptation strategies to meet the challenges of the profession. Studies have shown that teachers who are resilient exhibit “job satisfaction, commitment, efficacy, engagement, motivation, well-being and positive sense of identity” (Mansfield & Beltman, 2019, p. 583). Moreover, resilience is considered an essential teacher disposition and an aspect of teacher identity that can be modeled to students (D’Emidio-Caston, 2019; Beutel et al., 2021).

It has been documented that strategies for handling challenges and skills that contribute to developing resilience may be included in preservice teacher education (Mansfield et al., 2016; Mansfield & Beltman, 2019). In fact, teacher preparation programs were urged “to build teachers’ capacity to listen and be responsive to their learners’ needs, to hold realistically high expectations, to encourage growth mind-sets, and to offer relevant opportunities to participate in meaningful activities involving choice, decision-making, and problem solving that lead to productive and fulfilled lives” (D’Emidio-Caston, 2019, p. 140). However, most current studies on well-being were done with in-service teachers. For example, Kangas-Dick and O’Shaughnessy (2020) conducted a systematic review of literature on interventions that promote resilience among teachers and found that a growing body of literature supported the understanding that external and contextual factors bear heavily on fostering teacher resilience. They found that providing increased social support and building a positive school climate where trusting relationships between teachers and other members of the school community were critical in promoting high resilience among teachers.

In Australia, resilience is one of the qualifications for selecting teacher candidates (Gilmore, Welsh, & Loton, 2019). Most recently, *The Australian Educational Researcher*, a peer-reviewed journal, released an issue in 2019 solely dedicated to the study of teacher resilience. The journal presented empirical research with preservice and in-service teachers using traditional and innovative methods. Many of the studies featured contributed to the field by showing the ways in which teacher resilience can be promoted through professional learning experiences (Mansfield & Beltman, 2019).

Our interest on resilience stemmed from our own experiences as teacher educators who have had to listen to, support, and provide resources to our students who personally reached out to us when they had undergone severe stress while enrolled in a teacher preparation program. Sources of stress stemmed

from both personal circumstances and academic challenges, which threatened program completion. As teacher educators, we saw the need to investigate how resilience may be fitted into our respective practices. We considered that a logical starting point of this investigation is to review the scientific literature. In the following section, we presented the research studies we have reviewed.

Studies of Resilience with Preservice Teachers

Literature Search Method

We conducted a comprehensive literature search using Texas A&M University-Kingsville library's electronic database, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), and Google Scholar. We used the following search terms: teacher education, resilience, and preservice teachers. We limited the search to scholarly, peer-reviewed research articles published from 2012 to 2022. Based on this search, we initially found ten scholarly articles relevant to PST and resilience but excluded articles that did not report empirical research. From an article by Kangas-Dick and O'Shaughnessy (2020), we discovered and reviewed two empirical studies conducted with PSTs on resilience. Thus, for this review, we studied a total of seven research articles directly dealing with preservice teacher resilience.

Results

Table 1 lists the research studies we reviewed. We listed the studies alphabetically, based on first authors' last names. We also indicated the methodology used, the countries in which the studies were conducted and researchers' main findings.

Table 1

Research studies reviewed

Author, Year of Publication, and Country	Title and Methodology	Key Words/Themes	Main Findings
1. Beutel, D., Crosswell, L., & Broadley, T. (2019). Australia	Teaching as a 'take-home' job: Understanding resilience strategies and resources for career change preservice teachers Qualitative: Focus groups	Support	The focus groups identified a range of specific strategies that supported teacher resilience which included: Seeking support, de-personalizing the situation, and leveraging your internal discourse.
2. Farnsworth, M. (2021). USA	Story as advocacy: preservice teachers discover resilience, purpose, and identities of well-being Qualitative: Narrative inquiry	Resources Identity Self-affirmations	Participants utilized both internal and external supports to overcome obstacles. External resources included extended families and religion which helped students to mediate trauma. Internal resources included self-affirmations increased self-insight and produced new outcomes, helping mediate identity confusion.

3. Garner, P. W., Bender, S. L., & Fedor, M. (2018) USA	Mindfulness-based SEL programming to increase preservice teachers' mindfulness and emotional competence Quantitative: Experimental	Social emotional learning	Social emotional learning interventions designed for students may also bolster teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy and competence.
4. Gilmore, G., Welsh, S., & Loton, D. (2019) Australia	An Australian case for relational resilience: Building academic pathways in first year, preservice teacher education Mixed methods: Survey, Document analysis, Focus group interviews	Self-perceived academic factors	Results suggest a lack of relationships between resilience and self-perceived academic factors, including academic performance in a first-year unit and student demographics
5. Mansfield, C. F., Beltman, S., & Weatherby-Fell, N. (2020) Australia	'I Actually Felt More Confident': An online resource for enhancing pre-service teacher resilience during professional experience Qualitative: Interviews	Self-reflection	The BRiTE (Building Resilience in Teacher Education) online module promoted self-reflection and engagement through a variety of activities, was personalized, and encouraged deep thinking in an authentic context.
6. Petko, D., Egger, N., & Cantieni, A. (2017) Switzerland	Weblogs in Teacher Education Internships: Promoting Reflection and Self-Efficacy While Reducing Stress? Quantitative: Experimental	Writing	Writing weblogs with problem-focused writing assignments seemed to be beneficial, especially when peer feedback on individual weblogs is received.
7. Thieman, E. B., Marx, A. A., & Kitchel, T. (2014). USA	"You've always got challenges": Resilience and the preservice teacher Methodology: Phenomenology	Reflection Doing a good job	Three themes emerged: youth experiences are a key component toward reflection on resilience, the uncertainty of the reality of the job could counter resilience, and belief that "doing a good job" is key to resilience in teaching.

Research Questions

To guide our review and analysis, we asked the following research questions:

1. How is resilience currently investigated in the field of teacher preparation?
2. What can be learned from the studies investigating resilience in PSTs that may be translated to current practice of teacher educators?

Findings

Resilience research in teacher education. We found that current resilience research solely focused on preservice teachers as subjects is scarce, yet it is promising and holds potential for meaningful and

practical line of research. The studies we found are varied in terms of theoretical framework and methodology, but researchers agreed on the need to study resilience to promote future teachers' longevity and well-being. Researchers who conducted qualitative studies mainly used interview as a data collection method while quantitative studies were supported by analyses of survey data. The table below presents research questions asked in the studies we reviewed and the manner in which studies were implemented.

Table 2*Theoretical framework, research questions, and data collection*

Authors	Conceptual Framework	Research Question(s)/Hypotheses	Data Collection	Participants
1. Beutel, D., Crosswell, L., & Broadley, T. (2019).	Socioecological lens used to discuss the range of personal and contextual strategies used to enhance resilience	1) What are career change PSTs' understandings of resilience? 2) How do they perceive teacher resilience? 3) What strategies they use when faced with challenges during professional experience?	Interview: focus groups	Nine PSTs enrolled in a graduate entry teacher education program at an urban university
2. Farnsworth, M. (2021).	Social emotional learning and cultural lenses	How do PSTs determine their resilience by writing stories of overcoming obstacles?	Written stories and exit tickets collected during the term of instruction	16 female, rural students, majority were first generation college students at a large rural county in Oregon
3. Garner, P. W., Bender, S. L., & Fedor, M. (2018)	Prosocial model (social-emotional competence can support teachers in coping with teaching demands)	PSTs participating in an mindfulness-based intervention infused with social emotional learning content would show higher increases in mindfulness and emotional competence than their counterparts assigned to a control condition that included only meditative awareness.	Experimental study	87 PSTs, 83 females 4 males

4. Gilmore, G., Welsh, S., & Loton, D. (2019).	Two dimensions of resilience: intraindividual and individualistic responsibility	1) Is there an association between resilience, demographics and academic outcomes? 2) Is there an association between self-perceived skills, demographics and academic outcomes? 3) To what extent do these students' accounts of their experiences in the course emphasize relational factors rather than individualist traits in building resilience?	Mixed methods including a quantitative survey, document analysis: course documents, assessment tasks, and semi-structured focus group interviews	Methods include a survey (n = 43), documents from the course, and focus group interviews (n = 9) of pre-graduate students of diploma of education (PSDE)
5. Mansfield, C. F., Beltman, S., & Weatherby-Fell, N. (2020).	None directly stated	How did using the BRiTE modules influence PSTs confidence and resilience during their final professional experience?	Participants were interviewed about their impressions of BRiTE, the influence they perceived engaging with it, if they recalled content from the modules, and whether they would refer to the modules in their future teaching.	13 PSTs enrolled in a Graduate Diploma initial teacher education course at an Australian university.
6. Thieman, E. B., Marx, A. A., & Kitchel, T. (2014).	Active agent model of teacher resilience	1) How does the motivation for becoming a teacher relate to resilience of the preservice teacher? 2) What qualities of resilience do PSTs perceive they possess and how might this impact their performance? 3) What questions do PSTs have on the school year relating to coping and stress? 4) What resilience strategies do the PSTs use?	Interview transcriptions, one journal, and field notes from semi-structured interviews	Ten pre-service agricultural education teachers in their last year of coursework in agricultural education at the University of Missouri.
7. Petko, D., Egger, N., & Cantieni, A. (2017)	None explicitly stated	How does the use of weblogs in teacher education internships impact student stress levels, efficacy, and reflective abilities?	Experimental: The study compares four experimental groups of teacher education students working with different assignments for weblog writing, with a control group working without weblogs but with an assignment for a retrospective written report.	176 prospective primary and indergarten teachers in their second year of study. 21% male and 79% female students randomly assigned to one of five groups, i.e., four experimental groups and one control group

From research to practice

As scholar-practitioners, one of our main goals in conducting this study is to find ways how we can bridge research to practice. We found that resilience strategies that researchers have documented used by PSTs was a specific area of application to our work as teacher educators. The following resilience enhancement strategies may be shared with PSTs: (a) seeking support from families, peers, field supervisors or mentors, (b) depersonalizing stressful situations, (c) self-affirmations based on previous success, and (d) using the BRiTE (Building Resilience in Teacher Education) online modules to aid self-reflection.

Future Considerations

As teacher educators, we asked the following questions as a response to the discoveries we have made in this literature review:

1. Should there be a differentiation of resilience across academic disciplines? If yes, how could preservice teacher resilience look like in specific academic disciplines (e.g., special education, math, science, literacy education)? How can specific strategies be studied for each discipline and be translated into meaningful practice?
2. How can teacher resilience, as a professional disposition, be given a spotlight at the state and national levels to be a component of teacher preparation, as it is formally done in other countries?
3. How can preservice teachers begin to consider resilience as a trait that is not only developed by them but also modeled for their future students?

We formulated these questions based on our intention to join and promote the discussion of resilience which we believe transcends the current focus on standardized testing as a teacher certification tool. If we are to prepare future teachers for the demands of the profession, we must also equip them with knowledge, attitude, and skills that will help them remain committed to it.

Conclusion

There is consensus in the literature reviewed that resilience, both as a construct and behavior, is important to be introduced, explored, developed, and enhanced among PSTs. Inclusion of resilience awareness, enhancement, and strategies should be seriously considered in preservice teaching. There is evidence of its success in the studies we reviewed although the data examined are varied and not robust. Most quantitative studies used small sampling size, and qualitative studies are highly reliant on participants' subjective views. For us, the most practical discovery we made as teacher educators was the user-friendly, structured, online, research-based learning module called BRiTE (<https://www.brite.edu.au/>) that teacher educators can readily include in a course or education program to help teacher candidates understand and build resilience strategies.

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Appendix

The following online resources are provided to aid educators who may be considering integrating resilience into their practice:

1. Building your resilience - <https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience/building-your-resilience>
2. Building resilience in teacher education - <https://www.brite.edu.au/>
3. Resilience guide for parents and teachers - <https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience/guide-parents-teachers>
4. Resilience and teaching: New resources available for teachers - <https://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/psychology-teacher-network/introductory-psychology/resilience-teaching-resources>
5. Five science-backed strategies to build resilience - https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/five_science_backed_strategies_to_build_resilience

