

Bridging Understanding and Action: An exploration of teacher resilience and the potential benefits of establishing peer group supervision in primary schools

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Overarching Abstract

These are challenging times for England's education community. Set against a backdrop of teacher stress, burnout and attrition, this thesis explores the concept of teacher resilience. Across a systematic literature review and an empirical research project (joined by a bridging document), it asks how we may better support our teachers in the face of on-going challenges, and in doing so help them maintain their motivation and commitment to the role.

The systematic literature review addresses the question: How can teacher resilience be protected and promoted? Seven recent, qualitative papers are identified, analysed and synthesised using meta-ethnography. Based on interpretations of key themes, a new model of teacher resilience is constructed. It is suggested that teacher resilience can be characterised as a collection of dynamic interactions between thoughts, relationships, actions and challenges. Teachers' relationships with key others and the actions they take (e.g. problem-solving) may operate – often in combination – as a buffer, which protects their beliefs about themselves and/or their role from external challenges. It is concluded that, given the right support, teacher resilience can be protected and promoted.

Based on the proposed model of teacher resilience, it is suggested peer group supervision (PGS) may offer one way of harnessing several protective factors – support from colleagues, problem solving and reflection & reframing. A collaborative action research project is therefore conducted that addresses the question: What can be learned, and what can be gained, by introducing primary school teachers to the process of peer group supervision? Across two half terms, PGS is piloted with seven teachers from in a single primary school, with a trainee Educational Psychologist (EP) acting as facilitator. The project is then evaluated via semi-structured focus groups. Data is coded and analysed using inductive thematic analysis. Findings suggest engaging in PGS can be a 'double-edged sword' for teachers but that the benefits outweigh the costs. They also suggest there is a range of largely controllable factors that mediate the relative success/failure of the process. Specific benefits, costs, facilitators and barriers are discussed. It is concluded that schools would do well to establish PGS as part of wider efforts to protect and promote teacher resilience, and argued that EPs are well placed to facilitate this process.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

I dedicate this doctoral thesis to three inspirational women, without whom it most certainly would not have been written.

The first is my mother, Ruth. For your unwavering interest, nurturing and faith. For the proof-reading, the thoughtful comments and the shared love of psychology.

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The theories I present here are developing, as the practice which generates them is developing. I hope the development is in the direction of social improvement. The theories are not presented as final statements, and they contain exciting dilemmas. I want to share the learning, both in terms of subjecting it to critical public scrutiny, and also in the hope that you will take what is useful and adopt or adapt it to your own context.

(McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, p. 11)

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Chapter 1. How can teacher resilience be protected and promoted?

1.1. Abstract

These are challenging times for the entire education community, with an estimated fifty thousand teachers leaving the profession every year. This chapter offers a systematic review of the literature surrounding the relatively young concept of teacher resilience, along with the multi-layered conditions that may promote it.

The review takes the form of a meta-ethnography. Following a systematic search of the literature, a small number of relevant, qualitative studies are identified and analysed. Key concepts from each paper are then synthesised, allowing interpretations to be made and a new model of teacher resilience to be constructed.

It is suggested that teacher resilience can be characterised as a collection of dynamic interactions between four broad constructs: thoughts, relationships, actions and challenges. Teachers' relationships with key others and the actions they take (e.g. problem-solving) may act – often in combination – as a buffer, which protects their beliefs about themselves and/or their role from external challenges. As with any meta-ethnography, the findings of this in-depth but small-scale review are open to alternative interpretations.

It is concluded that, with the right support, teacher resilience can be protected and promoted. Providing such support must therefore be a national priority. This responsibility must be shared primarily between school leaders, government policy makers and teachers themselves. Suggestions about the various contributions EPs can make to this process are offered.

1.2. Introduction

If education is valuable, and if it is to be a successful social and economic investment, the well-being, engagement, motivation and resilience of teachers are, also, important issues. However, teachers' resilience in the face of professional difficulties cannot be taken for granted.

(Lauchlan, Gibbs & Dunsmuir, 2012, p. 5)

1.2.1. Teacher Stress and The Revolving Door

These are challenging times for our entire education community. Exacerbated by a period of austerity, England's education system is becoming increasingly characterised by privatisation, decentralisation and the laws of the marketplace (Hill, 2009). Teachers are forced to contend with frequent and prescriptive government reforms, outcome-driven methods and high levels of accountability, and as a result many have been left feeling overworked, undervalued and professionally marginalized (Priestley, Edwards, Priestley, & Miller, 2012). It follows that according to recent government statistics, 'wastage' amongst the English teaching population has reached 10% per annum (DFE, 2016); excluding those taking age-related retirement, this equates to almost 35,000 teachers leaving the profession every year (DFE, 2016). More concerning still, this percentage rises to 25% for new teachers within their first three years (DFE, 2016). This situation has been likened to a 'revolving door', with large numbers of teachers being recruited whilst many others depart (Ingersol, 2002).

Several factors have been found to influence teachers' decision to leave, with excessive workload and stress often cited as the most important (Barmby, 2006; Smithers & Robinson, 2003). Indeed, teaching is increasingly recognised as a 'high stress' profession (Galton & McBeath, 2008; Kyriacou, 2000) and teacher stress is now an area of international research interest, along with the linked psychological phenomena of 'burnout' (Kyriacou, 1987, 2001). The consequences of high levels of stress amongst the teaching population are numerous. In individual terms, the costs are clear and can include damage to physical and mental health, self-esteem and personal relationships (Howard & Johnson, 2004). From a financial perspective, stress-related teacher attrition represents a significant loss of government investment (Gibbs & Miller, 2013). Finally, overly stressed teachers are likely to become increasingly less effective as their morale and commitment worsens, and so students' education may also be adversely effected (Day et al., 2006). As Kyriacou (1987,

p. 147) warns, “stress and burnout may significantly impair the working relationship a teacher has with his[/her] pupils and the quality of teaching... he[/she] is able to display.” For educational psychologists (EPs), concerned as they are with improving outcomes for children and young people and working as they often do *through* teachers, this situation warrants critical consideration.

1.2.2. An Alternative Approach: Resilience

Sitting parallel to the literature on teacher stress, burnout and attrition is a growing body of research that takes an alternative approach. This approach, seemingly influenced by the philosophies of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), explores teacher resilience. Resilience has been defined as “the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances” (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990, p. 425). The psychological concept itself is relatively young, with early research focusing on children and adolescents who manage to flourish despite adverse life circumstances (e.g. Werner & Smith, 1982). It was soon understood that resilience is not simply a personal attribute and efforts shifted to identifying both individual and community characteristics that act as ‘protective factors’ for vulnerable children, promoting positive outcomes in their lives (Howard, Dryden, & Johnson, 1999).

Around the turn of the millennium researchers began applying the concept of resilience to teachers (Bobek, 2002), again seeking to identify protective factors that help them resist work-related stress and burnout (Howard & Johnson, 2004). However, the relative infancy of this field means few empirical studies have directly examined teacher resilience – indeed, a review by Beltman, Mansfield and Price (2011) identified only 24 studies with teacher resilience as the explicit focus. Much of this research has been conducted in Australia and the USA (Beltman et al., 2011), where the issue of teacher attrition/retention is also high on national agendas (Ewying & Smith, 2003; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Further, much of it focuses on the resilience of newly or recently qualified teachers due to the exceptionally high attrition rate at this career stage, although others have pointed out that sustaining resilience throughout a teacher’s career is equally vital (Day, 2008).

1.2.3. Defining Teacher Resilience

Many conceptualisations of teacher resilience exist within the literature. Some appear to view the construct as being synonymous with retention – i.e. physical continuation in the role (e.g. Hong, 2012). Others argue this is insufficient and “Instead, what is required is a better

understanding of the factors that have enabled the majority of teachers to sustain their motivation, commitment and, therefore, effectiveness in the profession” (Day, 2008, p. 256). Therefore, like this systematic review, many papers adopt Day and Gu’s (2007) notion of resilience as “quality retention” (p. 1314) and focus on those teachers who “thrive rather than just survive” (Beltman et al., 2011, p. 186).

Furthermore, some continue to define resilience as a personal quality (Brunetti, 2006) and others have examined ‘resilience strategies’ that individual teachers can employ (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010). However, Johnson and Down (2013) have raised concerns that such a within-person focus fails to recognise systemic influences on human experience. Consequently, recent research has attempted to identify both individual and organisational conditions that promote teacher resilience. For example, in the studies reviewed by Beltman et al. (2011) external factors such as formal mentor programmes and collegial support were often seen to play a vital role in promoting teacher resilience, alongside internal factors such self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation. Importantly, however, such factors should not be viewed as innate, static or unrelated (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Rather, teacher resilience is best understood as a relative, dynamic and developmental process (Day & Gu, 2007), involving interaction between individual, relational and contextual/organisational conditions. Johnson and colleagues (2010, 2014) adopt the term ‘conditions’ – which encompasses practices, circumstances, situations, processes and events – to emphasise the conceptual shift away from reductionist notions of discrete factors. As highlighted by Beltman et al. (2011), “conceptualising such a multifaceted, complex construct is an ongoing challenge” (p. 195) and further research to “disentangle” (p. 196) it is required. This review, therefore, aims to build on that of Beltman and colleagues by bringing together recent studies that explore the construct of teacher resilience and the multilayered conditions that may promote it.

1.3. Method

The research question explored is: *How can teacher resilience be protected and promoted?* Teachers’ own insights are seen as key and so the review focuses on qualitative research, which is primarily concerned with how people see and understand their social worlds (Atkins et al., 2008). Following this, the review itself is also qualitative in nature, as “the method of synthesis should be appropriate to the research being synthesized” (Britten et al., 2002, p. 214). The method adopted was that of meta-ethnography, as detailed by Noblit and Hare

(1988). Britten et al. (2002) suggest meta-ethnography is perhaps the most well-developed method of qualitative synthesis and one that clearly originates from the same interpretive paradigm as the research it aims to synthesize. The seven overlapping stages of meta-ethnography proposed by Noblit and Hare (1988) are used as an organisational heuristic.

1.3.1. Phases 1 & 2: Getting Started & Deciding what is Relevant to the Initial Interest

Initial background reading identified the mixed-method review by Beltman and colleagues (2011). This proved a useful starting point, although its scope was wide. Therefore, it was considered an in-depth, qualitative synthesis of recent empirical studies examining teacher resilience would help to further 'disentangle' the conditions that promote it and contribute to understanding for practitioners.

Whilst Noblit and Hare (1988) suggest an exhaustive search of the literature is unnecessary for meta-ethnography, as the intention is not to aggregate 'all knowledge' on the subject, a traditional systematic search was never-the-less carried out to provide a comprehensive population of studies from which the final sample could be drawn (Atkins et al., 2008). The search was carried out between September and December 2014 using the following databases: Scopus, ERIC, British Education Index and PsychInfo. Although various combinations and synonyms were experimented with, the final search terms used were simply: (teacher OR "teaching staff") AND resilien*.¹

The initial search produced just over 900 results; however, a large number were quickly excluded based on their title alone, as it was clear they were unrelated to teacher resilience. Thus began a process of 'berrypicking' (Bates, 1989) – of steadily refining the search using an evolving collection of inclusion criteria. Within this model the searcher is not just modifying the terms of their search to get a better match for a single query; rather, "the query itself is continually shifting, in part or whole" (Barroso et al., 2003, p. 157). This involved reading the abstracts of over a hundred papers, as well as around forty in full, so a series of 'judgment calls' (Light, 1980) could be made as to the inclusion criteria required. Table 1, overleaf, provides the final set of criteria adopted, along with the reasoning behind them. With the addition of each criterion, the number of potential papers was steadily reduced until only six were identified for synthesis.

¹ The asterisk operator ensured variations of the word 'resilience' were also included in the search.

Table 1: Inclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Reasoning
Related to teacher resilience	Relevance to the research question
Written in English	Accessibility
Published 2004 or later	Modernity of conceptualisation of resilience adopted (dynamic, multi-faceted)
Empirical design, qualitative methodology, exploratory approach	Appropriateness for meta-ethnography
Published, peer-reviewed.	Quality
Qualified teachers as participants	Similarity of career circumstances for comparison
Conducted in Western countries (socio-politically)	Similarity of cultural settings for comparison
Explicit exploration of teacher resilience and the multi-layered conditions that promote it.	Relevance to the research question (refined)

1.3.2. Phases 3 & 4: Reading the Studies & Deciding how they are Related

Whilst reading the papers, contextual information about each study's sample, setting, method and theoretical framework were noted (see Table 2, below and continued overleaf).

Commonalities between the key concepts derived from each paper were then identified. In accordance with Noblit and Hare (1988), the interpretations and explanations offered by the original studies were treated as data. This process was complex as the papers all had slightly different focuses, agendas and theoretical frameworks and thus prioritized different aspects of their data. It was decided only concepts that arose in at least two studies were taken forward as themes – whilst necessary for pragmatic reasons, it is acknowledged that certain elements of certain voices were lost in this process.

Table 2: Contextual Information

Study	Sample	Setting	Method	Theoretical Framework
Doney (2013)	n=4 Early Career Teachers (ECT) (Science)	USA 4 secondary schools	Interviews, conducted 6 times over 2 years, supplemented by other methods such as classroom observations	Resilience Theory & Relational Culture Theory
Gu & Day (2013)	n=2 1 ECT & 1 experienced.	England 1 primary & 1 secondary school	'Portraits' based on semi-structured interviews, conducted twice a year over 3 years	No explicit presupposed theoretical framework

Study	Sample	Setting	Method	Theoretical Framework
Howard & Johnson (2004)	n=10 2+ years experience	Australia 3 schools	Semi-structured interviews	No explicit presupposed theoretical framework
Huisman, Singer & Catapano (2010)	n=12 ECT	USA 4 primary schools	Interviews	Positioning Theory
Johnson et al. (2014)	n=60 ECT	Australia Various primary & secondary schools	Interviews, conducted twice in 1 year, supplemented by 'mind maps' & 'line drawings'	'Social resilience'
Mansfield, Beltman & Price (2014)	n=13 ECT	Australia Various primary & secondary schools	Semi-structured interviews	Own conceptual framework of ECT resilience

1.4. Findings

As with any meta-ethnography, the 'findings' of this review are the interpretations of the author. Significantly, Major and Savin-Baden (2011) propose that approaches to interpreting qualitative evidence fall along the following continuum: analysis < synthesis < interpretation < construction. These approaches, they argue, build upon one another sequentially; that is, only once data has been analysed can it be synthesised, and so on. The finding of this review will now be outlined according to this continuum.

1.4.1. Phases 5 & 6: Translating the Studies into One Another & Synthesising the Translation

Beginning with the first of Major and Savin-Baden's (2011) proposed levels of interpretation, the identification of key themes represents my analysis of the data generated from the papers. These themes were: 'support from colleagues', 'strong and supportive leadership', 'support from family and friends', 'student-teacher relationships', 'sense of purpose', 'hope', 'problem-solving', 'reflection and reframing', 'self-efficacy', 'professional development', 'stressors' and 'stress relief'. These themes are elaborated upon below.

Synthesis – or “reciprocal translation” (Noblit & Hare, 1988, p. 38) – was then achieved by using a large grid to demonstrate how each theme was expressed across the

papers. This grid is reproduced in full in Table 3 (see pp. 9-14). The grid was primarily populated with what Schutz (1962) refers to as second-order constructs – interpretations of the participants' understandings made by the papers' original authors. Whilst their own words and phrases were used as often as possible, their interpretations were sometimes summarised to ensure the synthesis was clear. Supportive first-order constructs – direct quotes from the studies' participants that are intended to illustrate their own understandings – were also added whenever possible. Whilst the participants' exact terminology was preserved in an attempt to remaining faithful to their meanings (Britten et al., 2002), it is acknowledged that the extracts had twice been 'selected' (once by the original authors and then by myself) and so can only be an imperfect reflection of the fullness of participants' experiences (Atkins et al., 2008).

The reciprocal translation of studies was then synthesised to form third-order constructs – my own interpretations of the understandings of the authors of the original papers and those of their participants. By looking across the various constructs in the grid it was possible to derive an inferred consensus for each theme and this is provided in the second column of Table 4 (see p. 15). This represents the interpretation stage of Major and Savin-Baden's (2011) continuum. Again, effort was made to incorporate key words and phrases used by participants and authors, as denoted by inverted commas.

Lastly, construction – which Major and Savin-Baden (2011) describe as the creation of new meaning from existing evidence – was achieved by looking *across* the themes. In doing this, it became apparent that many seemed to fall into broad groups. 'Hope', 'sense of calling' and 'self-efficacy' all seemed to be related to beliefs teachers may hold about themselves and/or their work. 'Support from colleagues', 'strong and supportive leadership', 'support from family and friends' and 'student-teacher relationships' were all clearly related to the relationships teachers had with others. Finally, 'problem-solving', 'reflection and reframing', 'professional development' and 'stress relief' were all interpreted as actions teachers could take. 'Stresses' was the only stand-alone theme, although this was re-interpreted as challenges. The third column of Table 4 provides a short summary of my interpretations of these broad constructs – these will now be explored in greater depth, along with a "line of argument" (Noblit & Hare, 1988, p. 62) pertaining to the interrelationships that appear to exist between them.

Table 3: Key Overlapping and Interrelated Themes

	Doney (2013)	Gu & Day (2013)	Howard & Johnson (2004)	Huisman et al. (2010)	Johnson et al. (2014)	Mansfield et al. (2014)
Support from colleagues	Co-workers part of teachers' relational support systems, primarily providing 'Support With School issues' e.g. lesson ideas, classroom management, "venting".	When staff are supportive of one another, both professionally and socially, this helps to keep motivation and commitment strong. "Team spirit", which encourages peer support & sharing of good practice, helps teachers sustain a positive professional outlook, especially in challenging times / circumstances.	Trusted colleagues provide regular, daily support, sharing experiences. They can boost morale because they know what you are going through and can help keep your spirits up. "I know I could turn to any member of staff and they'd all have a very good listening ear and be very supportive." "You can walk next door or to whoever you get along with at school and have a bit of a scream... and have a bit of a joke and it does make you feel better."	Significant adult relationships identified as the primary source of support, which include the 'in-school support' of fellow teachers & staff. Trusted colleagues can act as a "sounding board". "Having somebody listen to them individually and coach them and give the sense that [they] are valued as a professional and as an individual." New teachers support each other: "it's nice to have someone in the same boat. So we definitely give each other ideas and talk a lot... just share experiences."	Supportive schools ensure access to appropriate on-going support. For many, the most tangible source of such support was a school-appointed mentor, who shared resources & guidance: "[they] looked after me really well" Important for school communities to promote a sense of belonging & acceptance. Many teachers reported coping better when they received support from colleagues such as being asked about their welfare, being offered help and mixing freely with other staff.	Supportive colleagues can provide advice on alternative strategies & teaching approaches. Emotional and moral support from several staff members – able to go to them "either for a 'whinge' or to ask for assistance". Support from other graduates at the school, sharing a joke and resources.
Strong & supportive leadership		Senior leadership team approachable about school & personal issues, supporting staff "100%" & providing "back up".	Strong caring leadership was also a major source of personal support for all teachers.	A positive relationship needs to be developed between principals and their new teachers.	Principals play a critical role in developing school cultures – an "ethos of community and care" – supportive of new teachers.	

	Doney (2013)		Gu & Day (2013)	Howard & Johnson (2004)	Huisman et al. (2010)	Johnson et al. (2014)	Mansfield et al. (2014)
(Strong & supportive leadership, continued)	Providing recognition / appreciation through positive feedback & promotion, boosting confidence & commitment. School leaders create 'open, collegial and collaborative school cultures'.	Support of principals & deputies evident on a daily basis – e.g. with non-compliant pupils. Also support staff members over distressing incidents, (e.g. parental complains, pupil suspension); demonstrating they care.	"It's hard to take criticism from a principal when they haven't helped you at all."	One spoke of acknowledging individual staff contributions – providing "affirmations". Some leaders are part of new teachers' induction, meeting with them regularly and assigning a mentor: "We make sure there's someone that's going to be there to look after them."	Teachers with strong family support more able to maintain their commitment despite challenges. "[I've] an incredible amount of support from home... [My husband] has taken a huge role in the house, domestically and so on..." Family members who are also teachers can be a "sympathetic ear", with whom you can discuss "stupid problems without fear of being judged."	More resilient teachers tried to establish a realistic work-life balance, which included having family time & making time for friends. Valuing the support of family, friends & peers is seen as part of 'promoting a sense of belonging, acceptance and well-being'.	
Support from family & friends	Family, friends & significant other part of teachers' relational support systems, primarily providing 'Emotional Support', e.g. "Distraction from stresses at work... Moral support, conversation."	One teacher felt she would not have been able to maintain her enthusiasm for the job without the understanding and support of her partner who gave her space to work at home.	All teachers had diverse, caring networks of family and friends outside school, including partners with whom they could talk about their work (whilst trying to avoid 'dumping their work troubles' on them).	Out-of-school support (including family & friends) identified under the theme of 'significant adult relationships', although only one participant noted that her family was a source of support.			

	Doney (2013)	Gu & Day (2013)	Howard & Johnson (2004)	Huisman et al. (2010)	Johnson et al. (2014)	Mansfield et al. (2014)
Student-teacher relationships	Getting to know students on an individual basis important, contributes to sense of self-efficacy.	Forming positive relationships and connecting with students helps to create a healthy classroom environment, which in turn helps to build and sustain teacher resilience.		Teachers had both high expectations of students & also socio-cultural awareness – important to understand the challenges faced by children in urban schools. <i>"I hope I just taught them as much as they taught me."</i>	Schools should place student-teacher relationships at the heart of the teaching-learning process. ECTs should be supported to create engaging learning environments, which help to engage students & encourage constructive behaviour.	Relationships important on many levels, including the classroom level with students. <i>"I think it has really helped me in the classroom because I think I've got that line between... being a friend to them, but also being in charge... still having a good relationship"</i> <i>"The kids keep me there..."</i>
Sense of purpose	'Maintaining a sense of purpose' identified as an individual skill used by participants to counteract stress.	Initial strong calling to teach and continued enjoyment of working with children and watching them grow linked to intrinsic motivation and emotional commitment.	'Moral purpose' seen as agency enhancing. Teaching in disadvantaged schools is a choice, based on the belief that they have the chance of 'being able to make a difference' in children's lives.	The calling to work in urban schools and make a difference to these children motivates the teacher to keep trying. <i>"I felt like that's where I would be the most use."</i>		One teacher emphasised the importance of having <i>"a sense of knowing no matter what's going on, no matter how hard it gets, it's what I'm supposed to be doing. I am where I'm supposed to be."</i>
Hope				Hope motivates teachers to try again and achieve better outcomes & can be instilled via a significant adult relationship (e.g. a mentor).	Maintaining hope & optimism seen as part of the need to 'foster a sense of agency, efficacy & self-worth', which in turn forms part of the successful development of teacher identity.	The optimism & hope for the future of most of the participants seen as a sustaining factor. <i>"I am thinking perhaps next year it may get easier."</i>

(Hope, continued)	Doney (2013)	Gu & Day (2013)	Howard & Johnson (2004)	Huisman et al. (2010) <i>"I am really excited about next year and just taking everything I learned this year... and hopefully next year will be a better year."</i>	Johnson et al. (2014)	Mansfield et al. (2014)
Problem-solving	A key individual skill used by participants to 'change stress'. Participants adept at taking 'direct action' by recognising the source of a problem and finding ways to modify it.			Successful new teachers focus on analysis of the problems rather than assigning blame. <i>"Even though it was hard at times, I'd ask: 'Why are my students acting this way? Why is this going on?'"</i>	Teachers spoke of engaging in collaborative problem-solving with colleagues.	For some, problem-solving skills are a personal resource (linked to agency). <i>"look at the issue, resolve it or improve it"</i>
Reflection & reframing		Externalising / depersonalising unpleasant events seen to reflect a strong sense of agency. On 'assessing' such events: if they acted appropriately they chose not to see it as their fault; if they could have handled things better they learn from it & move on. They also sought to understand the student's or parent's motivation &	Linked to problem-solving ("problem-solving through reflection") Many participants' university mentor often helped them see problems from a new perspective and adjust their teaching accordingly.	Engaging in self-reflection a key part of successfully negotiating teacher identity. Reflexive teachers with strong identities were more resilient – this has a positive effect on their self-confidence & sense of agency. <i>"Don't take it personally."</i> Participants valued the opportunity to become 'reflective practitioners' during pre-service	Participants reflected deeply on their situations and considered available & potential resources. For one, reflection was: <i>"the one thing I tend to use"</i> to help her improve and <i>"don't be so hard"</i> on herself. Another kept a reflective journal – <i>"it not only sustained me, gave me the opportunity to look at myself and see what</i>	

	Doney (2013)		Gu & Day (2013)	Howard & Johnson (2004)	Huisman et al. (2010)	Johnson et al. (2014)	Mansfield et al. (2014)
(Reflection & reframing, continued)				<p>circumstances. Teachers generally taught to depersonalise stressful events by others (e.g. more experienced colleagues).</p>		preparation.	<p><i>I could do better.</i>" Another described an unpleasant event and how he was able to "look at it professionally and don't take it as a personal slight" and act accordingly.</p>
Self-efficacy	<p>Maintaining self-efficacy also identified as a key individual skill used by participants to 'change stress'. Achieved, for example, through enrolling in training, getting to know individual students & their needs better.</p>	<p>Confidence & sense of efficacy improved by seeing children make progress. Recognition from leadership can also improve individual & collective sense of efficacy, confidence & commitment. One teacher set herself targets to become more organised as part of growing self-efficacy.</p>	<p>A sense of one's own competence in areas of personal importance seen as a protective factor. Examples given include organisation and behaviour management.</p>			<p>Fostering a sense of agency, efficacy & self-worth seen as an important part of the successful development of teacher identity, which in turn is pivotal to becoming a resilient teacher.</p>	
Professional development			<p>Teachers valued professional development, formal & informal (e.g. asking for advice from experienced colleagues). This commitment to lifelong learning to improve classroom practice is based on positioning to be successful.</p>		<p>Supportive schools develop teachers' curriculum & pedagogical knowledge, encouraging & supporting them to undertake professional development.</p>		<p>"In meeting these challenges, though, she described developing a broader range of skills and strategies..."</p>

	Doney (2013)	Gu & Day (2013)	Howard & Johnson (2004)	Huisman et al. (2010)	Johnson et al. (2014)	Mansfield et al. (2014)
Stressors	Resilience is based on the interaction of stressors and protective factors. Nine stressors identified: Personal life versus career, extra-curricular activities, family wellness, inexperience, multiple preparations, control of decisions, turnover rates, inconsistencies and control of time.	Protective factors especially important in times of heightened stress and help teachers to recover from setbacks. Tensions of "juggling" work and family/social life, which can go "completely out the window". External inspection can lead to exhaustion & a loss of confidence & agency. Lack of parental support can be a constant external challenge.	Resilience is seen as the ability to resist stress (and burnout). Stressors identified include students being verbally & physically abusive or refusing to follow reasonable requests and parents being aggressive / abusive (major stressor) Dealing with students who are poor, hungry, abused or neglected can also lead to personal, emotional distress.	Classroom behavior identified as a challenge for most of the teachers interviewed. Poor relationships with significant adults (e.g. mentors) can hinder a new teacher's sense of hope.	Complex, intense & unpredictable nature of work one of the greatest challenges for ECTs: "It never stops, I think I've got this down and then it's hang on..." ECTs struggled with managing disruptive behaviour, catering for diverse learner needs & reporting to parents. High levels of accountability measures constraining & a threat to resilience. Isolation, mismatch between expectations & reality and lack of support & guidance.	Challenges were multiple, varied &, in some instances, on-going. Common classroom challenges: poor student attitude / behaviour & differentiation / diversity of student need. Common school-level challenges: "Juggling multiple balls" / high workload / lack of work/life balance (less contact with family & friends) & complaints from parents. Personal challenges (e.g. poor housing) less commonly cited.
Stress relief	Palliative techniques used to "control stress", e.g. physical activity, meditation.				More resilient teachers worked hard at nurturing their own well-being by eating well, exercising, getting plenty of sleep, making time for themselves etc. (employing proactive coping strategies).	For some, factors such as pets and/or exercise act as personal resources. "I go for a run, to the beach, try to avoid thinking of school – burn up energy and calm my mind."

Table 4: Interpretation and Construction

CONCEPTS	INTERPRETATION	CONSTRUCTION
<p>Support from colleagues</p>	<p>Support from trusted colleagues is perhaps the greatest contributor to teacher resilience. Teachers are able to provide each other with practical advice and resources, as well as the opportunity to share experiences, a joke or a 'whinge'. For new teachers, a mentor can provide a focus point for support and guidance, although sometimes they prefer to support one another as they have a sense of being 'in the same boat'.</p>	<p>Relationships: Teachers' work and lives take place within a broad network of interpersonal relationships, including those with colleagues, friends, family, school leaders and students. When these relationships are positive and supportive, a 'relational support system' is created around the teacher, which protects and promotes their resilience in a number of meaningful ways.</p>
<p>Strong & supportive leadership</p>	<p>Strong, supportive leadership protects teacher resilience by ensuring they have a sense of being 'backed-up' when facing challenges such as disruptive behaviour or parental complaints. School leaders should also be seen to be caring and approachable; they can also boost teacher self-efficacy by providing various forms of 'affirmation' and are pivotal in creating 'open, collegial and collaborative school cultures'.</p>	<p>Professional and personal relationships may provide differing means of support, with school colleagues and leaders especially adept at providing support with school and classroom level issues and family & friends typically key in providing emotional support. However, this distinction is by no means concrete and there may be considerable overlap.</p>
<p>Support from family & friends</p>	<p>Support from family and friends can provide teachers with a welcome 'distraction' from work related stresses. Their partners can also be supportive by giving them 'space' to manage their heavy workload through 'understanding' and taking on domestic responsibilities. When family & friends are also teachers they provide a particularly 'sympathetic ear' and a safe space for asking 'stupid questions'.</p>	<p>Relationships with students provide teachers with less direct support but are no less important – they can reduce challenges such as misbehaviour and can be integral to sustaining a teacher's sense of calling.</p>
<p>Student-teacher relationships</p>	<p>Forming positive student-teacher relationships is helped by establishing – and helps to establish – a healthy, engaging learning environment; this in turn should also minimise disruptive behaviour. Connecting with and getting to know students 'on an individual basis' can also reaffirm teachers' sense of calling and enables them to better understand their students' needs, boosting their sense of efficacy.</p>	<p>Relationships with students provide teachers with less direct support but are no less important – they can reduce challenges such as misbehaviour and can be integral to sustaining a teacher's sense of calling.</p>

CONCEPTS	INTERPRETATION	CONSTRUCTION
<p>Sense of purpose</p> <p>Hope</p> <p>Self-efficacy</p>	<p>Many resilient teachers speak of an 'initial strong calling to teach' – a desire to 'make a difference' in children's lives. Maintaining this sense of moral purpose and holding on to the 'enjoyment of working with children' is seen as a way of counteracting the stresses of the job and is linked to agency, intrinsic motivation and emotional commitment.</p> <p>For new teachers especially, maintaining a sense of optimism and hope for the future is seen as a sustaining factor. The belief that they can build on their experiences and that 'next year will be a better year' motivates them to try again and 'achieve better outcomes'. At times, this sense of hope can be fostered (or hindered) via significant adults in teachers' lives.</p> <p>For new teachers, developing a sense of efficacy & self-worth is an important aspect of forming a healthy 'teacher identity'. Maintaining and developing this sense of self-efficacy and 'competence in areas of personal importance' is seen as a key way of 'changing stress' and preserving teachers' confidence and commitment throughout their career. Self-efficacy can be boosted in various ways, including engaging in professional development, receiving positive 'affirmation' from school leaders, getting to know your students & seeing them make progress.</p>	<p>Beliefs: Teachers' beliefs about themselves and their work are key to their resilience – i.e. their on-going commitment and motivation. Specifically, the following beliefs are identified as particularly important: that one is capable and good at one's job, that one is following one's calling and making a positive difference, and (for new teachers especially) that things can only get better. Of course, the stresses teachers face often directly or indirectly challenge these beliefs. Therefore, it is assumed that these beliefs are actually at the core of the resilience process (i.e. what is ultimately being shielded), rather than factors that contribute to it.</p>
<p>Problem-solving</p> <p>Reflection & reframing</p>	<p>Analysing and solving problems (rather than 'assigning blame') is linked to agency and helps to make teachers resilient. Taking 'direct action' by seeking to recognise the source of a problem and finding ways to 'resolve or improve it' is a way of 'changing stress'. Problem-solving can be achieved through reflection and may also be a collaborative process, involving trusted colleagues.</p> <p>Also linked to agency, reflection can promote teacher resilience by enabling them to unpick, reframe and 'depersonalise' stressful events such as pupil misbehaviour. Instead of 'taking it personally', resilient teachers seek to understand the reasons underlying these events and choose to learn from these experiences without being 'too hard' on themselves. Again, colleagues and mentors can play a crucial role in helping new teachers to see things from a new perspective and teaching them depersonalising strategies. Of course, reflection can also be used by teachers to identify ways in which they can improve.</p>	<p>Actions: Resilience is not innate; rather, teachers and schools can take a variety of actions to protect and promote it. Thus, teachers are recognised as agentic when it comes to their own resilience. Often these actions seek to tackle challenges 'head on'. Many fortify teachers' sense of agency, efficacy and/or purpose, and thus their belief in themselves & their work. Significantly, whilst individual teachers may ultimately perform many of these actions... (Continued overleaf)</p>

CONCEPTS	INTERPRETATION	CONSTRUCTION
<p>Professional development</p>	<p>Closely linked to maintaining self-efficacy, regularly engaging in relevant professional development can help to sustain teachers' resilience. 'Developing a broader range of skills and strategies', along with 'curriculum and pedagogical knowledge', enables teachers to feel better equipped to 'meet the challenges' of their work. Opportunities for professional development can be both formal (i.e. training workshops) and informal (i.e. seeking advice from a more experienced colleague).</p> <p>Many teachers relieve stress and protect their own well-being by engaging in favoured pastimes and spending time with friends, family and pets. Some also directly and regularly employ palliative stress reduction techniques such as exercise or even meditation.</p>	<p>themselves (e.g. through purposeful thought), significant others can also play important roles. For example, problem-solving can be carried out in explicit collaboration with colleagues, mentors can encourage reflection and reframing, school leaders can help to arrange professional development opportunities and family and friends can form an integral part of stress relieving activities.</p>
<p>Stressors</p>	<p>Teachers face a number of stressors in their professional and personal lives that challenge their resilience. By nature, their work is 'complex, intense & unpredictable'. Common classroom stressors include poor student attitude / behaviour as well as catering for a diverse and potentially complex range of needs. Common school-level stressors include 'juggling' the high workload whilst trying to maintain a healthy work/life balance, as well as parents who are abusive/aggressive or who make a complaint. Of course, a lack of protective factors (e.g. poor relationships with students, colleagues or school leaders) can also contribute significantly to the stresses experienced by all teachers but perhaps especially by those new to the profession.</p>	<p>Challenges: The challenges teachers inexorably face are varied and changeable; whilst some take the form of crises, others are on-going. Many challenges directly or indirectly interfere with teachers' beliefs, e.g. by instilling a sense that one is not in control or is not good at their job. The resilience process is characterised by dynamic interaction between these challenges and protective factors (seen here as relationships and actions), with the latter being especially important during times of heightened stress.</p>

1.4.2. Phase 7: Expressing the Synthesis

In keeping with the assumption that the phases of meta-ethnography overlap, it is hoped the tables above go a considerable way towards expressing the synthesis. Here, I elaborate my line of argument by presenting it visually.

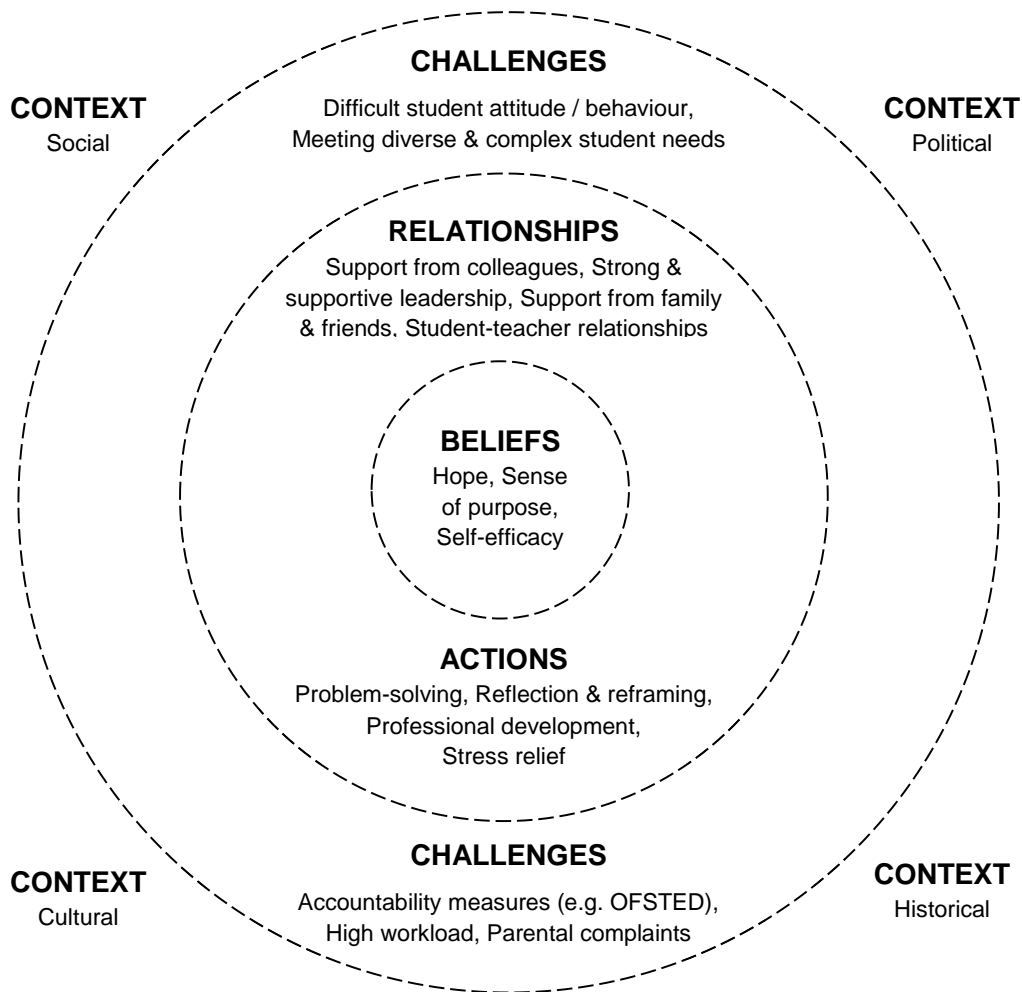


Figure 1: A model of teacher resilience

As can be seen, the broad constructs are not separately or equally positioned. Rather, 'Beliefs' sit at the core of the model, separated from 'Challenges' by a surrounding layer of 'Relationships' and 'Actions'. Although this was not explicitly incorporated in earlier parts of the synthesis, the entire process is seen as embedded in multiple levels of context. The lines separating each layer are dotted, to illustrate that the constructs continuously and dynamically interact. This line of argument is further developed in the discussion.

1.5. Discussion

Before proceeding, it must be acknowledged that the model proposed draws inspiration from that provided by Mansfield et al (2014). Thus there are a number of aesthetic similarities between the two. However, this synthesis of studies allows for important additions and adaptations to be made. For example, Mansfield et al.'s model presents the resilience process as an unqualified layer between 'personal challenges and resources' and 'contextual challenges and resources'. The model proposed above, by comparison, explicitly presents the resilience process as being characterised by key protective relationships and actions that provide a buffer between personal beliefs and external challenges. Each of these key constructs will now be explored.

1.5.1. Beliefs

One important element of my line of argument is that teachers' beliefs about themselves and their role sit at the core of teacher resilience. Thus, internal characteristics such as self-efficacy, hopefulness and sense of purpose (amongst other beliefs, as discussed later) are not in themselves seen as protective factors or resources that contribute towards resilience in a causal and unidirectional sense, as others imply (e.g. Mansfield et al., 2014). Rather, it is suggested that teachers' resilience and their beliefs embody a mutually constituting relationship. Sameroff's (2010) model of the dialectical and non-linear relationship between nature and nurture is offered here as a useful metaphor. Sameroff uses the Taoist diagram of the yin and yang to illustrate how two concepts (light and dark, nature and nurture, beliefs and resilience) can not only embrace but also interpenetrate one another in a constant, reciprocal transaction. Thus, by safeguarding and augmenting teachers' sense of hope, self-efficacy and purpose we are protecting and promoting their resilience (exactly how this might be achieved is the focus of the 'Relationships' and 'Actions' sections). This is perhaps an extension of the argument put forth by Gu and Day (2007), who state: "...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." (p. 1312).

Teacher self-efficacy is itself a growing area of research (Klassen, Tze, Betts, & Gordon, 2010) and one increasingly linked to resilience (e.g. Hong, 2012). Gibbs and Miller (2013) argue this link represents a clear role for EPs, who can help develop teachers' sense of efficacy (and thus also their resilience) through mechanisms such as training and consultation. Returning to the model presented, we can see interactions between the

themes emerging – self-efficacy may be improved via actions such as professional development, problem-solving and reflection and re-framing. Conversely, it can be threatened by some of the key challenges teachers face, such as pupil misbehaviour (Gibbs & Powell, 2012).

One of the portraits offered by Gu and Day (2013) illuminates the proposed interrelationship between these broad constructs – that *actions* and *relationships* can act (often in combination) as a buffer, protecting teachers' *beliefs* from external *challenges*:

An external inspection of the school [challenges] worked against her effectiveness and confidence as a teacher [beliefs]. She was exhausted and overloaded and experienced a crisis of confidence. She felt a loss of control and as a result she lamented that she did not 'really feel that good as a teacher'... [However,] support from her colleagues [relationships] helped her to learn to use a variety of strategies [actions] to manage, cope and maintain her sense of effectiveness at work and as a result, she saw her self confidence restored.

(Gu & Day, 2013, pp. 33-34)

The mention of feeling a loss of control raises another important point – that the selection of beliefs included in the model is not intended to be exhaustive. Whilst they did not emerge as primary themes in this review, other examples of belief-type constructs linked to teacher resilience include agency (Castro et al., 2010; Howard & Johnson, 2004) and identity (Day, 2008; Johnson et al., 2014). Interestingly, those papers that did mention agency typically did so in the context of problem-solving and/or reflection and reframing, further demonstrating the links between beliefs and actions.

1.5.2. Relationships

Further to my line of argument, relationships are seen as key to protecting and promoting teacher resilience. Teachers in each of the papers reviewed spoke of their connections with others and the positive effect they had on their motivation and commitment. Most commonly cited were relationships with colleagues, school leaders, pupils, friends and family (although university mentors and school administrative staff were also mentioned). In combination (and when positive), these connections form a network of support around the teacher. Indeed, Doney (2012) found the relational support system was “the most frequently used protective factor to counteract stressors” (p. 656). Similarly, in Huisman and colleagues'

(2010) study, teachers cited significant adult relationships as their primary source of support.

Relationships' centrality to the resilience process is highlighted in the work of Le Cornu (2009, 2013; Papatraianou & Le Cornu, 2014), who draws on Jordan's (2006) model of relational resilience. Jordan's model has its theoretical underpinnings in Relational Culture Theory (RCT), which Doney (2012) adopts as the guiding theoretical framework of her paper: "Like resilience theory, RCT focuses on overcoming adversity, but emphasizes that it is accomplished through the promotion of mutually empowering, growth-fostering connections..." (Doney, 2012, p. 648). Interestingly, Johnson et al. (2014) also claim to have adopted a framework based on "a new contextualised, social theory of resilience" (p. 531); however, whilst they have placed great emphasis on what this theory is *not* (reductionist or overly individualised) and *why* they have adopted it, there is little emphasis on what it actually *is*. As a result, it leaves the significance of human connections (as underlying social conceptualisations of resilience) underexplored.

Typically, across the studies, participating teachers drew differing forms of support from different relationships, with two broad categories emerging: professional support with school issues and personal support with emotional issues. Whilst some papers suggested the former is often provided by those within the school context and the latter by those within teachers' personal lives, this distinction is not always clear-cut (Papatraianou & Le Cornu, 2014). For example, colleagues could provide an element of emotional support through the sharing of experiences; conversely, there were several examples of friends and family members who were also teachers providing support with school-based issues. Finally, relationships with students provide teachers with less direct support yet play an important role in their resilience.² Notably, positive student-teacher relationships can contribute towards teachers' self-efficacy (Doney, 2012) and sense of purpose (Le Cornu, 2013), again suggesting a dynamic interplay between relationships and beliefs. Equally, Gu and Day (2013) highlight how mutually appreciative relationships with school leaders can enhance teacher efficacy, and Huisman, Singer, and Catapano (2010) describe how hope can be instilled via a relationship with a significant other, such as a mentor. There were also clear yet multifaceted links between relationships and challenges, for example, with supportive relationships becoming increasingly important in times of heightened stress (Gu & Day, 2013).

² For a detailed commentary on the importance of student-teacher relationships to teacher wellbeing, see Spilt, Koomen, and Thijs (2011).

1.5.3. Actions

Alongside relationships, my line of argument suggests that actions form a second, complementary dimension of the resilience process. It is noted that teachers themselves will be the ones who perform many of the actions identified and this brings with it a degree of tension. On the one hand, it positions teachers as agentic and empowered. It implies they have a considerable element of control over their own resiliency through their actions – they are not simply the passive recipients of external conditions, but active participants in the process. Huisman et al. (2010), one of the papers reviewed, adopts a theoretical framework based on Positioning Theory (Bullough, 2005) that emphasises teachers' agency. They argue resilient teachers 'position themselves' to be successful, by continuously changing their strategies and trying new things (i.e. actions). Castro et al. (2010) also emphasize this perspective and explore the 'resilience strategies' teachers may adopt (of which they identify four: help-seeking, problem-solving, managing difficult relationships and seeking rejuvenation and renewal – again, stressing that the actions included in the model should not be viewed as exhaustive) (see also Patterson, Collins, & Abbot, 2004).

However, a focus on teacher actions risks the responsibility for protecting and promoting their resilience falling inappropriately to them alone. Indeed, on reviewing a number of studies into teacher stress and burnout, Howard and Johnson (2004) conclude these problems "are still largely seen in terms of individual deficit and coping with them, an individual responsibility" (p. 402). Similarly, Johnson and Down (2013) raise concerns that discourses of resilience that focus too heavily on teachers as individuals may be misappropriated by "proponents of a neo-conservative agenda to shift responsibility for human well-being away from social organisations to the individual" (p. 708). They cite Fox, Prilleltensky, and Austen (2009), who speak of 'blame-the-victim' politics:

Blaming individuals for their widely shared problems and legitimising only individual solutions... makes people less likely to advocate social change... [and] thus reinforces the conservative notion that there's no need to change the system when you can change the person instead.

(Fox et al., 2009, pp. 7-8).

These are valid concerns and so the notion of 'actions' as contributors to teacher resilience is offered with caution. It is stressed that whilst teachers are themselves active agents, they operate only within and as part of wider systems (i.e. schools, society), which must also assume responsibility for ensuring their resilience (and, indeed, their general well-being).

Johnson and colleagues' (2014) paper is particularly useful in this regard, as they propose a framework of conditions supporting early career teacher resilience that is systemic in focus.

It is perhaps useful at this point to reemphasise that 'actions' and 'relationships' are offered as interrelated and interacting constructs (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, & Paloniemi, 2013). As already highlighted, many of the actions identified in the studies were carried out alongside significant others. Problem-solving can be done in collaboration with colleagues, professional development opportunities can be arranged by school leaders and stress-relieving activities may involve spending time with family and friends. Finally, reflection and re-framing can be encouraged by mentors (Huisman et al., 2010) or EPs working with teachers (Gibbs & Miller, 2013).

1.5.4. Challenges

The causes and effects of teacher attrition, stress and burnout have been well documented (Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, & Meisels, 2007; Kyriacou, 1987, 2001; Smithers & Robinson, 2003) and, as outlined in the introduction, the intention of this review was not to focus on what is going wrong, but on what is going right. However, to completely ignore the challenges teachers face would be naïve. As Beltman et al, (2011, p. 189) argue, "A full understanding of teacher resilience also includes an understanding of the personal and contextual challenges or risk factors present for teachers." Indeed, those participating in the studies reviewed often spoke of challenges they experienced and to silence their voices on this matter would have been an abuse of my power as researcher. Reflecting the key difference between solution-focused (de Shazer, 1985) and solution-orientated (Rees, 2008) approaches, it was accepted that acknowledgement of the problem forms an essential part of the change process, and that we should allow 'one foot in the pain' whilst keeping the other firmly planted in the possibility (Rees, 2008).

Thus, there is a need to acknowledge the challenges teachers face whilst also maintaining a focus on ways of protecting and promoting their resilience. Therefore, key stressors that arose from the papers were noted and grouped under a single, unified theme. This theme was later re-conceptualised using the label 'challenges' rather than 'stressors', inspired by Tait's (2008) argument that resilient, self-efficacious teachers see stressors as challenges rather than threats.

1.5.5. Context

The final element of my line of argument is that teacher resilience exists and occurs within context. Some of the papers reviewed considered specific elements of teachers' immediate context. For example, Huisman et al. (2010) were interested in the effects of working in an urban school, and Gu and Day (2013) paid particular attention to teachers' career-phase. Other papers related context to organisational conditions; for example, Doney (2012) wrote of stressors caused by personal, professional or contextual factors, with an example of the latter being high turnover of school personnel. Mansfield et al. (2014) also wrote of personal and contextual challenges and resources; on examination, the term 'contextual' seems to have been used to encompass everything that is not 'internal'. Interestingly, their model is also depicted as embedded in historical, political, social and cultural context, although they do not elaborate on this other than to suggest it as an area for further research. Similarly, by espousing a contextualized and social theory of resilience (although, note previous criticism), Johnson et al. (2014) seek insights into "the social, cultural, and political dynamics at work within and beyond schools" (p. 531).

This is perhaps closer to my use of the concept of context, which draws on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. In this way, the influence of context is acknowledged at varying levels, including the micro-system of the school and the macro-system of society. For example, in the introduction it was suggested that England's current political context has created significant challenges for teachers, increasing the need for them to be resilient. Furthermore, it is assumed that context fluctuates and shifts over time, as per ecological systems theory's chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). As Doney (2012) posits, as circumstances change over time so too do stressors associated with those circumstances and protective factors associated with those stressors. Again, the portrait extract from Gu and Day (2013) provides an illustration of this – the external inspection represented a change of circumstance and an increase in challenge, whilst the subsequent increase in collegial support represented an associated shift in protective conditions.

1.6. Conclusion

1.6.1. Summary

Beltman and colleagues (2011) suggest more work is needed to further disentangle our understanding of teacher resilience and ways in which it may be enhanced. On the basis of the systematic review reported in this paper, I have offered a new model of teacher

resilience that I hope contributes towards this goal. First, it is suggested that the process of protecting and promoting teacher resilience is dependent on the relationships they have and the actions they carry out. Strong and positive relationships with colleagues, school leaders, students, friends and family all combine to create a network of relational support. Supportive actions were found to include problem solving, reflection and reframing, engaging in professional development and relieving stress. These relationships and actions can form a protective buffer, which may safeguard teachers' internal beliefs from external challenges, such as pupil misbehaviour and high workload. These beliefs, which include those relating to teachers' sense of purpose, hope and self-efficacy, sit at the core of the model. Their protection and promotion is seen as the key to sustaining teachers' motivation and commitment to the role. Finally, it is acknowledged that the entire process is embedded in multiple levels of context.

1.6.2. Implications

In the context of on-going challenges facing the education community, the exodus of teachers from the profession in England and the implications for children and young people, the findings of this review have a number of significant and potentially transformative implications. First, they contribute to the growing body of research that conceptualises teacher resilience as a dynamic and multifaceted construct. Moreover, teacher resilience was not found to be static or innate but something that can be encouraged and nurtured with the right support. Protecting and promoting teachers' resilience by providing such support is arguably, therefore, a national priority.

Although teachers were found to have a considerable degree of agency with regards to their own resilience, the matter is not their concern alone – both school leaders and national policy-makers have roles to play and many of the papers reviewed made recommendations to this effect. For example, Johnson et al. (2014) stress the importance of fostering a sense of connectedness and belongingness in schools; in their role as culture-creators, school leaders are central in this regard (Le Cornu, 2013). Huisman et al. (2010) suggest mentoring mechanisms be expanded, whilst others argue schools must be organised in ways that promote strong peer group support, for example through work-teams, social activities and supportive rather than competitive cultures (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Importantly, what each of these recommendations has in common is a united belief that teachers must be encouraged and actively supported to develop relational support systems.

Other recommendations focus on actions. For example, Johnson et al. (2014) argue new teachers should be encouraged to develop a strong sense of identity by engaging in self-reflection and that more experienced colleagues can enhance this process through modelling. They also stress the importance of teachers being provided with equitable and timely professional learning opportunities. Many papers imply teacher education programmes also have a key role to play in preparing teachers for the challenges they will face, for example, by developing their skills in collaboration, problem-solving and managing stress (Doney, 2012; Mansfield et al., 2014).

As previously suggested, these findings also have implications for EPs, who can support the development of teachers' self-efficacy and overall resilience by providing them with training (i.e. professional development) or supporting them to engage in problem-solving or reflection and re-framing. There is even potential for EPs to contribute more systemically to the protection and promotion of teacher resilience by working at a school, regional or national level. By working in consultation and collaboration with school leaders and policy makers, EPs can raise the prominence of teacher resilience and encourage the development of supportive practices and policies (Beltman, Mansfield, & Harris, 2016). Finally, by using their skills of research and evaluation, EPs can contribute to the growing body of research that seeks to better understand teacher resilience, a construct that is as complex as it is important.

Chapter 2. Bridging document

A possible stance is to say that the researcher's responsibility stops with achieving some understanding of what is going on... An alternative is to say that it is part of the researcher's job to use this understanding to suggest ways in which desirable change might take place and perhaps to monitor the effectiveness of these attempts.

(Robson, 2011, p. 7)

2.1. The Evolution of this Thesis

2.1.1. Overall rationale

In a very general sense, this thesis grew out of a belief that more needs to be done to support our teachers. This belief stems largely from my own personal experiences of primary school teaching, along with my continued observations of the educational world around me. Having qualified as a teacher in 2009, I quickly found my enthusiasm for the role somewhat dampened by numerous challenges for which I had not been fully prepared. I was frustrated by what felt like near constant and often ill-informed government interference, and by the significant proportion of my workload taken up by bureaucratic exercises. A heavy sense of scrutiny and accountability seemed to stifle creativity, created significant stress and led me to question my position (Lambert & McCarthy, 2006).

Since beginning my doctoral training in Educational Psychology in 2013, I have continued to see teachers leaving or on the verge of leaving the profession. I have heard repeated stories of educators being forced to take time off work due to stress-related illness and even in extreme cases taking their own lives (Paton, 2007). Therefore, my broad, initial focus was to be supporting teacher *well-being*; however, through conversation with my course tutors, I came to realise what really interested me was how teachers could cope with the challenges they must inevitably face, and from this grew my focus on *resilience*.

2.1.2. Moving from literature review to empirical research

I believe my progression from literature review to empirical research is relatively straight forward, as articulated by this chapter's opening quote. In short, my meta-ethnography identified ways in which teacher resilience can be protected and promoted; my empirical

research endeavours “to *use* this understanding to suggest ways in which desirable change might take place and... to monitor the effectiveness of these attempts” (Robson, 2011, p. 7, emphasis added).

Specifically, I have presented a model that suggests a number of key relationships and actions act to support teacher resilience. The logical next step, therefore, was to consider ways in which these supportive actions and relationships could be most effectively utilised. My attention was drawn to the potential of Peer Group Supervision (PGS), as this brought together several of the identified themes (namely support from trusted colleagues, problem-solving and reflection & re-framing) and because I have experienced first-hand the benefits of this process in my role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP).

Here it should be noted that whilst the model developed in my meta-ethnography certainly inspired my empirical project – and no doubt influenced my interpretation of the data generated – I did not set out to explicitly ‘test’ it. This seemed too ‘top-down’ and not in the spirit of the democratic, participatory approach I wished to adopt. Instead, it is hoped that theory can be used as a vehicle to generate new understanding (Ball, 2007).

2.1.3. Shifts in empirical research: The challenges of being truly participatory

The following empirical project is an example of what Robson (2011) calls ‘real world research’ and as a result it adopts a flexible design. This flexibility allows the researcher to adapt and respond to the changing world around him/her. Robson writes that such designs maintain ‘provisionality’ throughout the research process:

In flexible designs... the detailed framework of the design emerges during the study. The various activities of collecting and analysing data; of refining and modifying the set of research questions, of developing theory... and perhaps even reviewing the purpose of the study... are likely to be going on together.

(Robson, 2011, p. 72)

This extract resonates with my research journey. The exact design and focus of this project has shifted a number of times and for various reasons.

At its core, this project has always been a piece of Action Research (AR). AR is an approach to conducting research that is transformative, participatory and driven by social change (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, 2008). Initially, I intended to adopt a particular form of AR known as Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR aims to be truly democratic, by positioning those usually thought of as participants as co-researchers and by involving them

fully in the entire research process, from selecting the research topic itself to deciding what should happen as a result of the findings (Baum, MacDougall, & Smith, 2006). However, I quickly recognised significant tensions between the democratic principles of PAR and the realities of conducting this particular piece of research. Ospina et al. (2004) have written of the challenges of balancing democracy with authority, noting, “the democratic aspirations behind action research are much harder to achieve in practice than in theory” (p. 48). In my context, these tensions had two main sources. The first was my need to retain an element of authority for pragmatic purposes. Despite my determination that this project should not become disjointed from my practice as a TEP, it has ultimately been conducted to contribute towards my doctoral thesis, with unavoidable implications. For example, I was required by the university to submit a project proposal long before even identifying my future co-researchers; thus, decisions about the research focus and design were necessarily made unilaterally and not democratically. The second source of tension is captured by Opsina et al’s (2004, p. 49) question: “How can you hold out the expectation of having everyone participate while believing in the importance of voluntary engagement?” It was important to me that involvement in this project did not add significantly to teachers’ already heavy workloads – and I came to realise taking on the role of ‘co-researcher’ perhaps demanded more commitment than the teachers were able or willing to offer. Whilst concepts of participation and democracy continued to be important to the project, I nevertheless recognised that PAR was not the most honest and accurate description of what we were doing and hence sought to reframe it.

Instead, I was drawn to Cook’s (2009) work on facilitating collaborative AR within a community of practice, which she links to Reason and Torbert’s (2001) notion of third-person research/practice:

Third-person research/practice attempts to create conditions which awaken and support the inquiring qualities of first- and second-person research/practice in a wider community, thus empowering participants to create their own knowing-in-action in collaboration with others. In addition, third person research/practice may aim to speak out to a yet wider audience to influence and transform popular opinion, organization strategy, government policy etc.

(Reason & Torbert, 2001, p. 23)

2.1.4. Shifts in empirical research: The challenges of measuring change

The second significant shift in my research focus revolves around the notion of change. From the beginning, the foremost intention of this AR project was to bring about meaningful change within the local context of my partner school. Assuming that this was successful, it was then hoped that a “ripple effect” (Baumfield, Hall, & Wall, 2008, p. 7) might be created through careful dissemination of the project, thus instigating change on a wider scale. However, over time I came to realise that demonstrably achieving the first goal may be harder than anticipated for various reasons and that this may necessitate a slight rethink.

Firstly, as Baumfield et al. (2008) state, in order to demonstrate change through AR it is important to define a) the elements that we hope to change, b) what this change may look like and c) how it may be measured. As they explain, this is hard at the best of times because schools are complex systems, impacted upon by a wide variety of variables. However, teacher resilience is perhaps particularly hard to operationalize because it is – by definition – a multifaceted and dynamic construct, not yet fully understood. Pivotaly, resilience also has an inherent temporal dimension – it develops and evolves (or is damaged and erodes) over time. Therefore, I would argue it cannot be legitimately captured in a snapshot or be expected to change significantly (and measurably) over the course of a single term.

Furthermore, I came to recognise the existence of certain systemic issues within my partner school that I felt worked counter to the realisation of meaningful, long-term change. Some of these issues related to the school’s current context (e.g. competing pressures and priorities) and others to relatively entrenched themes of power and trust. Out of respect to the school, I will not go into these issues in any more depth here, suffice to say that as the project continued I began to question whether the changes made would be sustained following its completion. Kemmis (2009) acknowledges this potential challenge:

Action research aims to be, and for better or for worse it always is, a practice-changing practice. Better because it sometimes helps make better practices of education, social work, nursing or medicine; worse because it may have consequences that are unsustainable for practitioners of these practices...

(Kemmis, 2009, p. 464)

This sentiment is echoed by Stange and Phillips’ (2007, p. 98) simple observation that: “Real change is real hard in the real world.” Therefore, when it came to data collection, instead of focusing fully on the change that had (or had not) occurred, I decided to attend to

the teachers' perceptions of the process as a whole. As such, I acknowledge the line between AR and more traditional forms of qualitative research became slightly blurred. I hoped this approach would allow me to explore the circumstances in which change might (or might not) occur, with an eye to future possibilities. This is in-keeping with Elliot's (2007) position on quality in AR, in which he stresses the value of *potential impact* as well as *actual impact*. He argues that when it comes to AR: "lack of evidence of actual impact to date does not warrant the conclusion that it lacks potential value-for-use" (Elliot, 2007, p. 245).

2.2. Values and Stance

2.2.1. Ontology and Epistemology

I have approached this thesis from a position of critical realism – a "perspective that combines the realist ambition to gain a better understanding of what is 'really' going on in the world with the acknowledgement that the data the researcher gathers may not provide direct access to this reality" (Willig, 2008, p. 13). I have operated under the assumption that teacher resilience (for example) 'exists' and have endeavoured through my work to edge us closer towards understanding it (reflecting a realist ontology). At the same time, I fully acknowledge the transitive nature of knowledge and thus recognise the inherent fallibility of my interpretations (reflecting a critical / interpretive epistemology) (Scott, 2005).

This epistemological position is particularly relevant to my data analysis. My analysis has been data-driven (as opposed to theory-driven) and so is best described as 'inductive' (Boyatzis, 1998); however, as Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 84) note, "researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum." Therefore, whilst my analysis was certainly grounded in the data, I also acknowledge that my theoretical preconceptions will have played a part in my interpretations. As a researcher, I have played an active role in co-constructing meaning through my analytic choices, including "which data chunks to code and which to pull out, which patterns best summarize a number of chunks, [and] which evolving story to tell" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11).

Importantly, I also believe critical realism alone falls short of fully capturing my adopted stance. This is because I have placed value on action as well as understanding – on *doing* as well as *knowing*. As such, I have also drawn on the philosophical position of

pragmatism and on the transformative paradigm³. Very simply put, philosophical pragmatism argues that something can be said to be true if it ‘works’, i.e. if it helps people to settle problematic situations (Dewey, 1929). It also assumes a dialogic relationship between knowing and doing, as alluded to in McNiff and Whitehead’s (2002) description of ‘epistemological issues’ for action researchers:

Action researchers see knowledge as something they do, a living process.

People can generate their own knowledge from their experience of living and learning. Knowledge is never static or complete; it is in a constant process of development as new understandings emerge.

(McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, p. 18)

The transformative paradigm also concerns action and links it to the pursuit of social change (Mertens, 2010). Therefore, this worldview is also often linked with participatory forms of research such as AR (e.g. Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). As Creswell (2014) states, research conducted in accordance with a transformative worldview will have an action agenda that aims to change the lives of those involved and/or the institutions in which they work or live. This is certainly true of my research as applied to teachers and the English education system. I do make this claim with a degree of caution, however, as the transformative worldview is traditionally associated with the human rights of those oppressed on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status or disability (Mertens, 2010). Clearly, no direct comparison is being drawn between the challenges faced by these marginalised groups and those faced by teachers; however, teachers are certainly becoming increasingly *professionally* marginalised (Priestley et al., 2012) and I contend this also warrants transformation.

2.2.2. Theoretical Framework(s)

The meta-ethnography presented in Chapter 1 was largely guided by a simple theoretical framework based on recent theory/research into teacher resilience, i.e. that which conceptualises the construct as a relative, dynamic and developmental process involving interaction between individual, relational and contextual/organisational conditions (e.g. Day & Gu, 2007). I also believe any research on resilience is inherently influenced by the

³ Both positions are congruent with critical realism. Johnson and Duberley (2000, p. 148) describe critical realism and pragmatism as “interrelated philosophical terrains” and Mertens (2010, p. 2) describes the “ontological assumption” of the transformative worldview as one that “holds that there is one reality about which there are multiple opinions” (p. 2).

overarching themes of Positive Psychology – i.e. the need to focus on human potential and flourishing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Finally, whilst not a theory per se, I was also inspired by the principles of Solution Orientated approaches (Ajmal & Rees, 2001; O'Hanlon & Weiner-Davis, 1989), such as the belief that people have the necessary resources to overcome their own problems and that we must keep 'one foot in the pain and the other in the possibility' (Rees, 2008).

As explained previously, the model of teacher resilience constructed in my meta-ethnography provided part of the theoretical framework for my empirical research. Other key influences were Relational Culture Theory (RCT) (Miller, 1976) and Capital Theory (Nahpiet & Ghoshal, 1998). RCT posits that all human growth occurs through and towards mutually supportive and empowering relationships (Doney, 2012) and was the inspiration behind Jordan's (2006) model of relational resilience. I believe there are clear links between this model and the process of PGS, as described in the introductory section of Chapter 3. In short, if peer supervision helps to cultivate mutually empowering relationships between teachers, we may also hope that it contributes towards their growth and resilience.

Meanwhile, Capital Theory argues that organisations need both intellectual and social capital to be at their most effective. Here, intellectual capital relates to the knowledge and experience of a school's staff members whilst social capital relates to the quality of relationships between them (Hargreaves, 2001). As Hargreaves (2001) explains, "there are severe limits to the extent to which a school's intellectual capital can be mobilised if social capital is low" (p. 492). When social capital is high, on the other hand, "people readily share their knowledge, both intellectual and moral" (p. 492). Here we can see links to both the supportive and educative functions of supervision (Kadushin, 1992) and to the features of 'support from trusted colleagues' as identified in Chapter 1. Therefore, I see the introduction of PGS into schools as being closely linked to the development of their social capital and in turn to their teachers' resilience.

2.2.3. Ethics and Validity: Transformational Approaches and 'Honesties'

This research has received the full ethical approval of my university and has been conducted in accordance with BPS ethical guidelines (British Psychological Society, 2009, 2014). However, like Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007, p. 205), for me: "ethics is not merely a series of boxes to be ticked as a set of procedural conditions ... but is an orientation to research practice that is deeply embedded in those working in the field in a substantive and engaged way." They argue there exists "an intrinsic and fundamental

interrelationship between ethics and quality in practitioner research aiming towards an emancipatory goal” (p. 204). Thus, the following discussion about the validity and quality of the research is also a discussion about its ethicality. Specifically, many of the points made can be linked to Groundwater-Smith and Mockler’s (2007, pp. 205-206) series of overriding ethical guidelines for practitioner research:

- It should observe ethical protocols and procedures (*see point about university procedures and professional guidelines, above*).
- It should be transparent in its processes (*see discussion about ‘honesties’, below*).
- It should be collaborative in its nature (*see discussions about reflexive member checking and participatory approaches, below and throughout*).
- It should be transformative in its intent and action (*see discussions about transformational/catalytic validity, below*).
- It should be able to justify itself to its community of practice (*not discussed explicitly but arguably demonstrated throughout*).

Traditional notions of validity are based on a positivist understanding of truth (Hope & Waterman, 2003) and are thus inappropriate for this research project. Various alternative conceptualisations of validity exist across the qualitative and AR literature, with many differing phraseologies. Cho and Trent (2006) highlight that approaches tend to be either transactional (which prioritise the credibility of knowledge claims) or transformational (which prioritise resultant action and social change). Naturally, ‘traditional’ qualitative research tends to ally with the former approach, and AR to latter (Hope & Waterman, 2003). However, Cho and Trent (2006) argue convincingly for the rejection of such unhelpful dichotomies in favour of a more holistic, open and eclectic conception of validity. I have found their proposed model most useful, reproduced in Figure 2, overleaf.

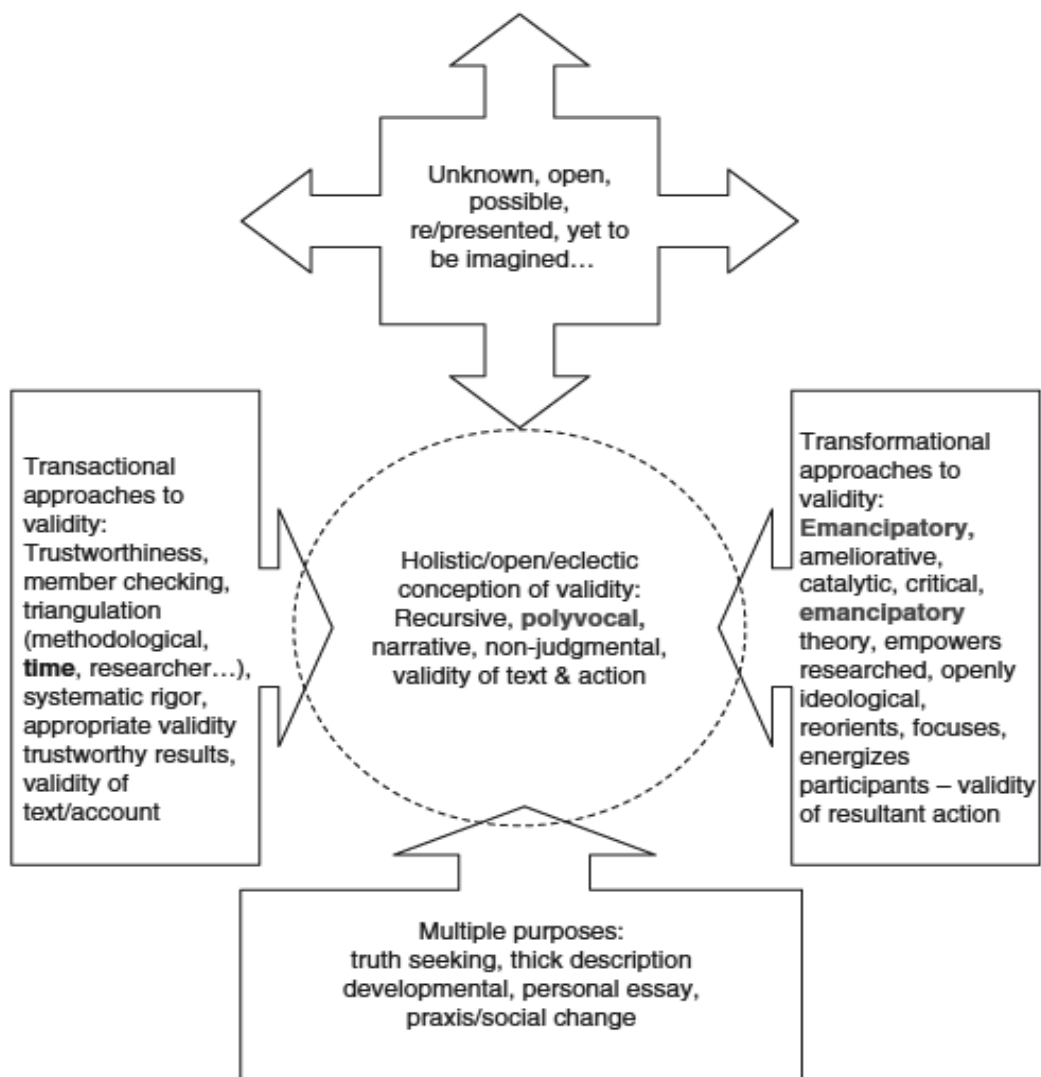


Figure 2: A framework for understanding validity in qualitative research (from Cho & Trent, 2006)

Crucially, the fluid nature of Cho and Trent’s (2006) model does not negate the need for researchers to “make overt the validity approaches incorporated and why” (p. 334). The primary purpose of this research was praxis/change and so I have placed particular importance on transformational approaches to validity. According to Cho and Trent (2003), validity in this approach is largely determined by the relationship between researcher and researched. Whilst noting my previous reflections about the difficulties of being ‘fully participatory’, I have certainly been committed to carrying out research *with* as opposed to *on* others (Heron & Reason, 2001). The teachers and I discussed matters such as the nature of the supervision sessions and the method of data collection, and their opinions and ideas helped shape the project.

Cho and Trent (2003) go on to cite three major 'validity criteria' for this approach: member checks as reflexive, critical reflexivity of the self, and redefinition of the status quo. The first criterion refers to the necessity for constant dialogue between researcher and participants regarding their lived experiences. Throughout this project I often set aside time for speaking informally to the teachers about their experiences of being in the group. Sometimes this was as simple as checking whether they were still finding the supervision sessions useful and wanted to continue; on other occasions I shared some specific reflections on a previous session and asked for their thoughts. In terms of critical reflexivity of the self, I have found my own sessions of research supervision with my university supervisor pivotal. These have allowed me to move between being immersed in the lived reality of the research and then somewhat distanced from this context (van der Riet, 2008). I have been able to give voice to some of my reflections about my position as practitioner-researcher and, with her support, deconstruct and analyse some of the tensions I have felt in this role. Finally, redefinition of the status quo can be likened to the concept of 'catalytic validity', which refers to the degree to which the research empowers and energizes the research participants (Lather, 1986). Whilst I recognise this project is perhaps unlikely to make significant and immediate waves across the entire school (see the preceding section on the challenges of measuring change), my findings do suggest that it may have created some ripples for the teachers involved. In-keeping with Elliot's (2007) aforementioned thoughts on potential value-for-use, it is impossible to judge what future impact these ripples may have.

Also key to my approach to validity has been Savin-Baden and Fisher's (2002) notion of 'honesties'. Distinct from 'trustworthiness' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), this concept allows us to acknowledge the fragility of truth and to engage with the messiness and complexity of real world research. Throughout this process, I have been committed to maintaining transparency and honesty on a number of levels: with the participating teachers, with myself, and with my 'audience' (Baumfield et al., 2008). Similarly, Savin-Baden and Fisher (2002) speak of engaging with honesties through situating ourselves in relation to both our participants and the data, and also by voicing our mistakes (amongst other ways).

Regarding the way I have situated myself in relation to the participating teachers, I have certainly made no claims to remain objectively outside the research process. This would have been inappropriate for a collaborative AR project such as this. Rather, I believe I have adopted a dialectical position of insider-outsider (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; van der Riet, 2008). I was part insider because of my pre-existing relationship with the school through my

role as TEP and because I was careful to position myself as member of the group (albeit with some additional responsibilities). Yet there were differences in our identities that meant I was also part outsider. Unlike the others, I was neither a teacher nor a school employee. Furthermore, I acknowledge it was impossible to completely remove the power imbalance inherent in our slightly different roles within the process. Whilst there were inherent complexities in occupying this “space between” (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 61), it is hoped that it also allowed me to engage in both empathetic and distanced processes as the research required (van der Riet, 2008).

My stance also has implications for how I situate myself in relation to the data. As stated, I make no claims to complete neutrality and choose to acknowledge and own my biases. I have been open about my desire to support teachers and about my hope that PGS may prove to be a useful mechanism in this regard. Of course, this has the potential to influence the way I have interpreted events and data. It is hoped my efforts to retain critical reflexivity of the self will have helped to safeguard against this as much as possible (Willig, 2008). Furthermore, I was aware that my biases could also have led the teachers to tell me what they thought I wanted to hear, particularly during the final evaluative focus groups (Nichols & Maner, 2008). Therefore, I stressed that I truly valued their honest and genuine thoughts on the process – that comments on the costs would be just useful as those on the benefits. It is hoped that over the course of the research we formed trusting relationships that allowed for reciprocal honesty.

Finally, I have given voice to the mistakes, tensions and mess encountered throughout the research process (see preceding sections of this bridging document). Cook (2009) suggests that engaging with or even acknowledging mess can be uncomfortable given our need to be definite and to *know*; however, “If accounts of research omit descriptions of the messy areas experienced by so many researchers, descriptions of research in practice remain incomplete and do not offer a true and honest picture of the research process” (Cook, 2009, p. 279).

Chapter 3. What can be learned, and what can be gained, by introducing primary school teachers to the process of peer group supervision?

3.1. Abstract

Given the current educational climate, there is an increasing need for teachers to be resilient in the face of challenges. Previous research has suggested factors that may protect and promote teacher resilience; however, there is a current paucity of intervention studies. Building on the model of teacher resilience presented in Chapter 1, it is suggested that peer group supervision (PGS) may offer one way of bringing together and harnessing several protective factors – support from colleagues, problem solving, and reflection and reframing.

Alongside seven teachers from a single primary school, a collaborative action research project is conducted that addresses the question: What can be learned, and what can be gained, by introducing primary school teachers to the process of peer group supervision? PGS is piloted across two half terms, with the author – a Trainee Educational Psychologist – acting as facilitator. The project is then evaluated via semi-structured focus groups. Focus group data is put through successive layers of coding, analysed using inductive thematic analysis and displayed using two thematic networks.

Findings suggest that engaging in PGS can be a ‘double-edged sword’ for teachers but that the benefits outweigh the costs. They also suggest there is a wide range of largely controllable factors that mediate the relative success/failure of the process. Specific benefits, costs, facilitators and barriers are explored. The findings are then discussed using the overarching concepts of relatedness, agency and climate.

Although findings cannot be easily generalised due to the scale and nature of the project, it is concluded that teachers and school leaders would do well to establish PGS mechanisms as part of wider efforts to promote teacher resilience. It is argued that Educational Psychologists are well placed to facilitate this process.

3.2. Introduction

3.2.1. Teacher resilience and the need for action

Amongst widespread stress, burnout and attrition across England's teaching profession (DfE, 2016; Howson, 2009; Kyriacou, 2001), teacher resilience is emerging as a promising area of research (Beltman et al., 2011). Teacher resilience may be defined as the process by which teachers maintain their motivation and commitment to the role (Day & Gu, 2007). Despite growing understanding of this relatively new concept, a recent review found a paucity of relevant intervention studies (Beltman et al., 2011). Hence, there is a need not only to further our understanding of teacher resilience but also to actively *use* this understanding.

A central finding of the meta-ethnography presented in Chapter 1 was that teachers' relationships are pivotal to the maintenance of their resilience (see also Le Cornu, 2013), with support from trusted colleagues being particularly significant (Doney, 2012; Huisman et al., 2010). Given this, it was argued that teachers should be encouraged and supported to develop relational support systems in school (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Engagement in purposeful actions – such as problem solving, reflection and reframing – was also found to be key to teachers' resilience. Such actions are reminiscent of the process of professional supervision.

3.2.2. Supervision and its absence from the teaching profession

Distinct from line management, supervision has been defined as:

...what happens when people who work in the helping professions make a formal arrangement to think with one another... about their work with a view to providing the best possible service to clients, enhancing their own personal and professional development and gaining support in relation to the emotional demands of work.

(Scaife, 2001, p. 4)

Professional supervision plays a pivotal role across many helping professions; in the field of educational psychology, for example, it is cited as being central to the delivery of high quality services (Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010). Yet, as Hulusi and Maggs (2015) highlight, supervision is noticeably absent from the teaching profession. They suggest the lack of a bounded, reflective space – combined with the emotional demands of the job – can lead to teachers losing touch with their motivation for the role. Hawkins and Shohet (2006, p. 6)

write that a “lack of supervision can contribute to feelings of staleness, rigidity and defensiveness which can very easily occur in professions that require us to give so much of ourselves...” This refers to burnout, a phenomenon common amongst teachers and caused by the cumulative effects of stress (Kyriacou, 1987, 2001). However, Hawkins and Shoheit (2006) argue supervision is about more than preventing stress and burnout; rather it “enables supervisees to continually learn and flourish, so they spend more time working at their best than would otherwise be possible” (p. 6). Here there are links to resilience and the notion of “thriving not just surviving” (Beltman et al. 2011, p. 185).

This paper contends, therefore, that there is a need for supervision-like support mechanisms to be introduced into schools. Indeed, many have already taken up this mantle, beginning with the pioneering work of Hanks (1985, 1999) and her collaborative problem-solving groups. Hanks’s (1999) approach involves teachers engaging in professional dialogue in order to address work-related problems and provide mutual support, much like supervision (Scaife, 2001). Hanks’s model has been adopted (e.g. Wright, 2015) and adapted by others, such as Stringer and colleagues’ (1992) ‘Staff Consultation Groups’ and Jackson’s (2002, 2008) ‘Work Discussion Groups.’ Others have introduced Forrest and Pearpoint’s (1996) ‘Solution Circles’ into schools (Brown & Henderson, 2012; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015). Despite variations in terminology and format, these approaches all utilise the peer group as a source of learning and support.

3.2.3. Peer group supervision and relational resilience

Peer group supervision (PGS) can be contrasted with more traditional forms of professional supervision, which typically involve a hierarchical relationship between supervisor and supervisee(s). Instead, PGS is characterised by a fluid and changing relational dynamic, in which the roles of supervisor(s) and supervisee(s) are shared between those taking part. In addition to the group context allowing for the contribution of multiple perspectives (Proctor, 2008), it is suggested this approach to supervision has several advantages that may be explored using Jordan’s (2006) model of relational resilience. Drawing on Relational Culture Theory (Miller, 1976), this model asserts that resilience is cultivated through growth-fostering relationships characterised by a) mutuality, b) empowerment and c) the development of courage. First, PGS helps to foster mutuality by largely (although perhaps not completely) removing traditional imbalances of power between supervisor and supervisee. Thus, it can also be empowering, as participants are positioned as contributors as well as receivers of support (Le Cornu, 2013). Furthermore, the lack of a designated

supervisor – whose views and ideas can sometimes be privileged above others – can foster a sense of collective autonomy and agency amongst the peer group (Mills & Swift, 2015). Finally, the development of courage can arise from the sense of safety that PGS can provide. People are more likely to be courageous – to voice their insecurities and open themselves up to critical self-reflection – when in the company of trusted and encouraging peers, as opposed to a superior (Orchowski, Evangelista, & Probst, 2010).

Of course, the group context may also have disadvantages. As Hawkins and Shohet (2006) note, groups can become collusive and form strong norms that are counter-productive yet hard to challenge (e.g. see Hulusi & Maggs, 2015). For example, sharing anxieties could lead to what Houston (1985) refers to as the ‘Ain’t it awful?’ trap, in which the peer group unintentionally reinforce one another’s sense of powerlessness. Similarly, this environment could lead to covert competition between peers, for example in terms of who is dealing with the most challenging problem or is the best at offering advice (Houston, 1985).

In order to avoid such pitfalls, it may be helpful to have someone act as a facilitator during PGS sessions, whose role would include monitoring and attending to group dynamics (Hakwins & Shohet, 2006). Significantly, unlike a supervisor, a facilitator would not be assumed to have any more knowledge, experience or power than the rest of the group – they simply have a slightly different role (see also Wright, 2015). This can be likened to Wagner’s (1995) approach to psychological consultation, in which the Educational Psychologist (EP) and teacher are seen as bringing different but equally valuable experiences, knowledge and skills to the process. Indeed, EPs seem particularly well placed to take on the role of facilitator, given their understanding and experience of professional supervision, their ‘insider-outsider’ (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; van der Riet, 2008) positioning within the school system (see Bridging Document) and their wider skill set (see Gaskell & Leadbetter, 2009).

3.2.4. The present study

The present study attempts to build on the work of Hanco (1999), Stringer et al. (1992) and others, and to utilise our growing understanding of teacher resilience as part of an action agenda. Based on the model of teacher resilience constructed in Chapter 1, it is suggested that PGS may offer one way of bringing together and harnessing several protective factors (namely support from trusted colleagues, problem solving and reflection & reframing). Through a collaborative action research project with seven teachers from a single primary

school, the following question is explored: *What can be learned, and what can be gained, by introducing primary school teachers to the process of peer group supervision?*

3.3. Method

3.3.1. Context

This research took place within a rural primary school in North East England, with around 180 pupils on roll and a staff body of 32 (including teachers and teaching/support assistants). Situated across two neighbouring sites, the school was the result of an amalgamation of the local infant and junior schools just one year previously. One result of this substantial period of change was a high degree of staff turnover. During the research, the school were also anticipating an imminent OFSTED inspection.

3.3.2. Action Research

This project took the form of collaborative Action Research (AR). AR is an approach that is flexible, emancipatory and driven by a desire for change (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, 2008). AR is traditionally framed as a cyclical process that corkscrews between clear and iterative phases of reflection and action (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). However, this project adopted what Heron and Reason (2001, p. 183) refer to as a “Dionysian inquiry culture,” whereby group members took a more flexible and improvisatory approach to making sense of what went on in the last action phase. Compared with traditional, linear models of AR, this approach is arguably more able to deal with the “spontaneity and untidiness” of real life and real world research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, p. 48).

3.3.3. Research Process

Figure 3, overleaf, provides a graphical representation of the three main stages of the research process. A more detailed description of each stage follows.

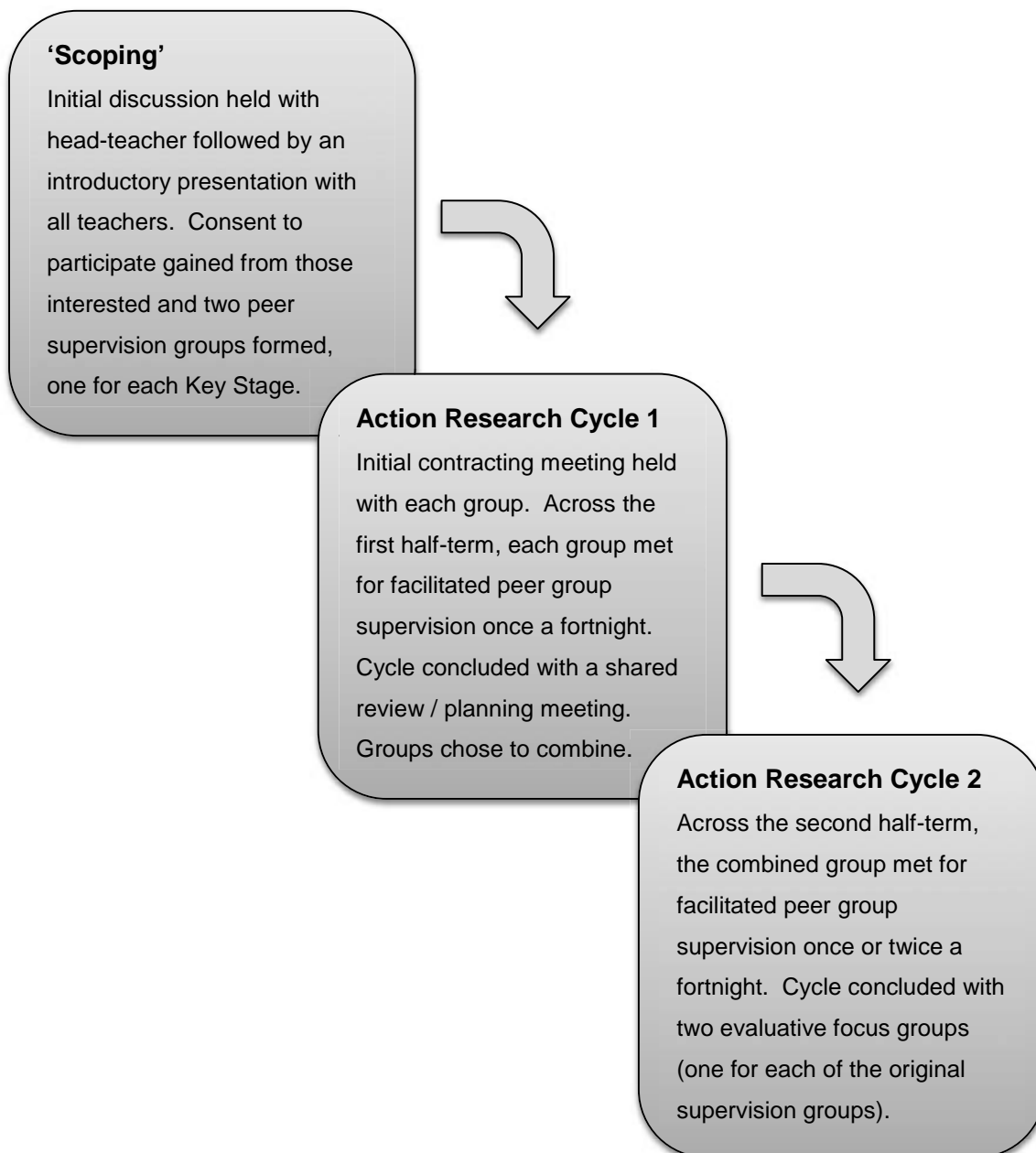


Figure 3: The research process

3.3.3.1. 'Scoping'

I began by meeting the school's head-teacher to discuss the project. Gaining her support was essential in ensuring it was ascribed status and protected time (Baumfield et al., 2008). Amongst many other things, it was agreed the supervision group(s) could meet during staff meeting time to avoid adding to teachers' workloads.

The project was then introduced in a staff meeting and all teachers were invited to participate. Information sheets (Appendix A) and consent forms (Appendix B) were distributed and the voluntary nature of the project was stressed. Teachers were then given

two weeks to consider the proposal. Initially, only three consent forms were returned, all from Key Stage 2 (KS2) teachers. Following another discussion with the head-teacher, this was interpreted in light of the recent merger and the current lack of firm relationships across Key Stages. Therefore, a separate supervision group was offered for each Key Stage and, subsequently, four Key Stage 1 (KS1) teachers also agreed to participate.

3.3.3.2. Action Research Cycle 1

This cycle began with my joining each group for an introductory 'contracting' meeting (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006), where it was agreed we would meet once a fortnight (on alternate weeks) for around an hour. Each group also drew up a set of 'group rules', covering issues such as confidentiality, respectfulness and positivity. As Hawkins and Shohet (2006, p. 184) note, "Simple ground rules help to avoid or limit destructive group processes and create a climate of safety."

In the following session, I introduced the teachers to Solution Circles (Forrest & Pearpoint, 1996) as one way of structuring our discussions (see Box 1). Whilst I intended to introduce a range of models and approaches to supervision (see also Bartle & Trevis, 2015), both groups expressed a clear preference for continuing with Solution Circles and this was respected.

Box 1: The stages of a Solution Circle

A Solution Circle is an approach to group problem-solving that involves four stages:

1. A problem presenter describes in detail a problem they are experiencing.
2. The rest of the team brainstorm various possible solutions.
3. The problem presenter then leads a discussion about potential solutions.
4. First steps are identified and agreed.

(adapted from Forrest & Pearpoint, 1996)

The cycle ended with both groups coming together for a shared review/planning meeting. This reflected an important stage of the reflection-action cycle, as together we looked back on the process and considered changes we wished to make moving forward. A prompt sheet was distributed at the start to facilitate the discussion (Appendix C). The most significant change the teachers wished to make was to join together as one large group from there on.

3.3.3.3. Action Research Cycle 2

The combined group and I continued to meet regularly for PGS across the second half-term. As per the teachers' preference, we continued to use Solution Circles as a framework for discussion. A final evaluation of the project was then carried out via semi-structured focus groups (one for each of the original supervision groups).

3.3.4. Data Gathering

The two semi-structured focus groups provided the primary data source. Both were carried out in the teachers' school and lasted thirty minutes to an hour. A simple interview schedule was used to guide the discussions (Appendix D), although we were free to deviate and pursue new and unexpected lines of thinking. Following Stringer et al. (1992), the four main questions sought to explore teachers' perceptions of PGS in terms of benefits, costs, facilitators and barriers.

Using focus groups had the advantage of maintaining the project's collaborative nature and encouraged the development of shared understandings. However, group dynamics can affect who speaks and what they say (Robson, 2011), especially when members have pre-existing working relationships and hierarchies (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Therefore, as with the supervision sessions themselves, managing the group dynamics during the discussions required careful facilitation.

3.3.5. Data Analysis

The focus group data was transcribed and analysed using inductive thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis provides an approach to analysing qualitative data that is both accessible and flexible (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The stages to the analytic process are presented in Table 5, overleaf. Movement between stages was iterative and reflexive. In brief, the raw data was put through successive levels of inductive coding. Boyatzis (1998) describes coding as recognising an important moment in the data and then *seeing it as something*. Layers of coding were conceptualised using the labels 'Descriptive', 'Interpretive' and 'Pattern', following Miles and Huberman (1994). The codes themselves were then analysed, allowing for the identification of themes. A theme can be defined as "a pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organises the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1988, p. 4). Themes were then refined, organised and displayed using thematic networks:

“web-like illustrations... that summarize the main themes constituting a piece of text”
 (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 386).

Table 5: The Stages of Data Analysis

Stage of Analysis	Description	Purpose	Example
Descriptive Coding	Surface-level, line-by-line analysis of raw transcript. Basic data reduction along with paraphrasing when deemed appropriate, annotated with some initial reflective remarks (in italics).	Primarily to ease subsequent analysis and increase data familiarity. Reflective remarks tentatively begin the process of interpretation.	See Appendix E
Interpretive Coding	‘Chunks’ of descriptive codes combined and summarised, supplemented with illustrative direct quotes (in italics).	To further condense the data, with increased interpretive intent. Direct quotes used to ensure continued grounding in data.	See Appendix E
Pattern Coding	Succinct phrases assigned to interpretive codes. ‘Code book’ generated for subsequent cross-referencing and checking, broadly organised into benefits, costs, facilitators, barriers and general / miscellaneous.	To support the identification of patterns / commonalities / tensions within and between the focus groups’ data.	See Appendix E
Identifying Themes	Related pattern codes clustered. Key clusters interpreted as themes.	To identify the significant, salient and unifying patterns from within the data.	See Appendix F
Refining Themes	Initial themes refined and arranged into Basic, Organisational and Global Themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001).	To improve the ability of the thematic analysis to accurately ‘tell the story’ of the data. To identify higher order themes across those already identified.	See Appendix F & Table 6
Constructing Thematic Networks	Basic, Organisational and Global Themes presented using ‘web-like illustrations’.	To summarise and display the findings of the analysis in a way that is compact and easily accessible.	See Figures 5 & 6.

3.4. Findings

From the 72 pattern codes assigned across the data, eighteen initial themes were identified (see Appendix F); three were subsumed into others following a process of refinement, leaving fifteen 'Basic Themes' (see Table 6, overleaf). Basic Themes are defined by Attride-Stirling (2001, p. 389) as "simple premises characteristic of the data." As illustrated in Table 6, further analysis allowed for the deduction of several middle-order 'Organising Themes' – "clusters of signification that summarize the principal assumptions of a group of Basic Themes" (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389). Finally, consideration of the Basic and Organising Themes allowed for the deduction of two 'Global Themes' – super-ordinate claims that encompasses the principle metaphors of the data in its entirety (Attride-Stirling, 2001). These themes will now be explored.⁴

⁴ Note that the headings given to the boxes used throughout the findings section are purely descriptive of the extract and should not be confused with the themes identified in the thematic maps.

Table 6: From Basic to Organising to Global Themes

BASIC THEMES	ORGANISING THEMES	GLOBAL THEMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PGS provides a forum for the development and utilisation of supportive collegial relationships. • PGS encourages open inter-staff dialogue. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Teachers experience mutuality within PGS. • PGS provides opportunities for shared problem-solving and the proactive realisation of change. 	<p>Engaging in PGS can have both interpersonal and practical benefits.</p>	<p>Engaging in PGS can be a ‘double-edged’ sword but, overall, the benefits outweigh the costs.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PGS can emphasise problems and lead to increased frustrations. • PGS takes time – time that could be spent on other things. • Those not taking part in PGS may feel excluded. 	<p>Engaging in PGS can also have both emotional and pragmatic costs.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, teachers found PGS to be beneficial. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important for group members to have positive, open and respectful attitudes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ The establishment of group rules can help to encourage such attitudes. • The group facilitator plays a variety of important roles. • PGS requires a safe, consistent and comfortable physical space. 	<p>Facilitators to PGS exist on both the human and physical levels.</p>	<p>A range of largely controllable factors – the responsibility for which is shared across various stakeholders – mediates the relative success/failure of PGS.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organising PGS requires good within-school communication. • PGS is one of many competing demands on teachers’ time. • Teachers need others to make up for a perceived lack of power. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ However, teachers also feel a need to exclude certain others (e.g. senior managers) for reasons of safety. 	<p>Barriers to PGS largely pertain to its status within the school.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers are facing a range of significant contextual challenges at both a school & national level. • The relative importance of PGS is dependent on context. 	<p>PGS, like everything, takes place within complex systems embedded in multiple layers of context.</p>	

3.4.1. A 'double-edged sword' but the benefits outweigh the costs

Discussions around the benefits and costs of partaking in PGS highlighted some important tensions, expressed in Figure 4's thematic network.

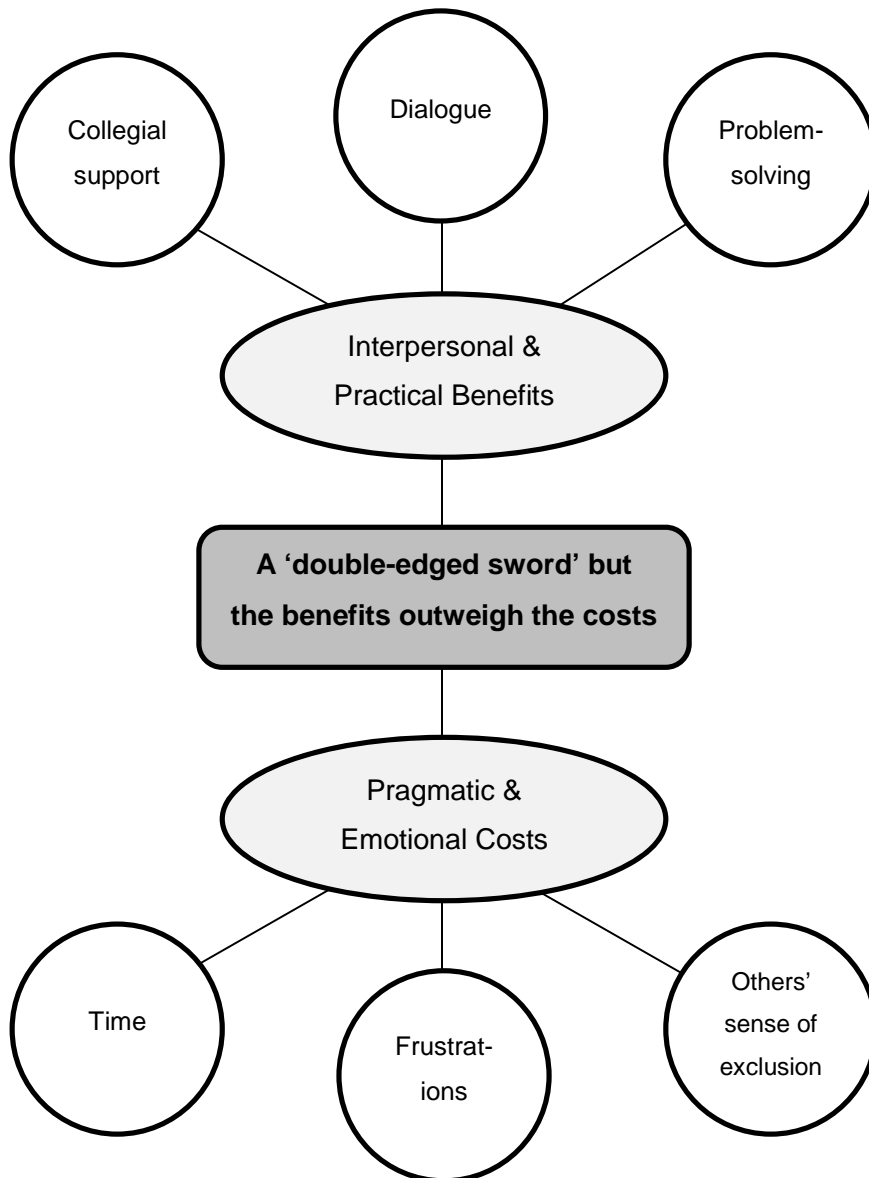


Figure 4: Thematic network relating to the benefits and costs of partaking in peer group supervision

The teachers were able to identify several advantages to the process of PGS; however there were also disadvantages that sometimes came hand-in-hand. This led one teacher,

Alice⁵, to draw on the metaphor of a double-edged sword on several occasions. In Box 2's excerpt, for example, she reflects on Emily's comment that supervision had highlighted numerous problems across the school, suggesting this felt both reassuring and frustrating simultaneously.

Box 2: A double-edged sword

A: It's like to me though right that's a double-edged sword, because although it's highlighted a lot, the fact that I'm not alone in thinking that makes me feel a little bit better.

B: Right.

A: But in the same breath, it also makes me so frustrated...

(Transcript 2, Alice & Ben, Lines 297-299)

Whilst this comment was directed at a particular aspect of PGS, wider analysis suggests the metaphor can be applied to the process as a whole. Teachers experienced both advantages and disadvantages to taking part that had to be internally weighed. This 'cost-benefit analysis' will have allowed each individual teacher to come to a judgement as to whether the process was worthwhile.

Positively, teachers from both groups seemed to conclude that the benefits outweighed the costs. Sometimes, this was stated explicitly; for example, following a discussion about disadvantages, Megan stated, "I'd still rather have done the group than not..." (Transcript 2, line 309) – a comment met with agreement across the group. Indeed, the KS2 teachers in particular remarked how much they had enjoyed the process and wanted it to continue (see Box 3).

Box 3: Positive comments

B: ... do you have any other comments at all about your experiences of taking part in peer group supervision that we haven't covered in previous questions?

A: No. I'd do it again.

M: I want it to go on.

B: OK. Super.

E: Keeping it going...

(Transcript 2, Ben, Alice, Megan & Emily, Lines 859-863)

⁵ All names used are pseudonyms.

Interestingly, whilst the KS1 teachers also concluded that the benefits outweighed the costs, their feelings were slightly less emphatic. This tentative positivity is reflected in Box 4's excerpt, which documents Natalie's answer to a direct question about the balance between advantages and disadvantages. An exploration of specific benefits and costs follows.

Box 4: Tentative positivity

N: I think it has been beneficial.

W: Yeah.

N: Once we've come and we've done it.

W: Yeah.

N: It's just the initial coming and sitting down.

B: Mm.

N: But once we've done it we've all gone away and kind of gone 'Oh actually, that was quite useful and it was worth coming and sitting and doing it'.

L: Yeah.

(Transcript 1, Nicola, Wanda, Ben & Louise, Lines 203-210)

3.4.1.1. Interpersonal and Practical Benefits

The teachers identified a range of interpersonal and practical advantages to taking part in PGS. Perhaps the biggest benefit was that it led to the development of trusting and supportive relationships between the group members. Several spoke of how they had been able to get to know one another better over the course of the project; this counteracted a shared sense of isolation and made them feel part of a team (see Box 5).

Box 5: Being part of a team

A: It's nice being part of a closer knit team that feels like a team, I think as well.

M: Mm.

E: I think yeah definitely being part of a team and not just feeling isolated, you feel stronger don't you when you're part of a team?

(Transcript 2, Alice, Megan & Emily, Lines 20-22)

These trusting relationships fostered a sense of security within the group, which in turn encouraged open dialogue. Wanda, for example, reported feeling as though she could now go and speak to any of the other group members about anything. Similarly, Laura

mentioned how she would not ask 'stupid questions' in staff meetings: "But here I will... Because it doesn't matter, there's no pressure" (Transcript 1, Line 84). For the KS2 teachers, this sense of safety allowed them to relieve pressure by 'blowing off steam' with one another without fear of consequence. Furthermore, hearing others talk openly about the challenges they were facing made the teachers realise they were not alone. As Wanda stated, "...you realise that your problems are not just yours, that everybody else has the same. 'Cause sometimes you feel... like it's always your problem, like there's nobody else is going through the same situation." (Transcript 1, Line 55).

In addition to these interpersonal benefits, the dialogues that took place in PGS also had practical utility. The Solution Circle approach encouraged problem-solving and allowed teachers to share different ideas and perspectives. Group members reported that some discussions led to real changes in their classroom practice or across the school. Furthermore, as Louise highlighted, the solutions were often transferable across group members (see Box 6). Interestingly, Megan suggested that engaging in PGS had changed them as professionals by making them "more proactive" (Transcript 2, Line 75). Of course, there were also some disadvantages, which will now be discussed.

Box 6: Transferable solutions

L: And sometimes it wasn't necessarily *your* problem but you think 'Oh, well that happens in my classroom sometimes. So-

N: Yeah, 'I can try that.'

L: Or 'Oh yeah, I've done that before'

W: Yeah.

L: It can link, even if it wasn't your problem or your Solution Circle... I took a lot of things from that discussions we had and used it in the classroom.

(Transcript 1, Louise, Nicola & Wanda, Lines 20-22)

3.4.1.2. Pragmatic and Emotional Costs

The teachers also identified some pragmatic and emotional costs to participating in PGS. The main pragmatic cost was that the process took *time*, a scarce resource for teachers. As Nicola explained, "It's just in your head you're thinking I could be doing this and this and this. You know, because we've got a thousand things to do" (Transcript 1, Line 173). The exact timing of the sessions could also be costly, as group members sometimes missed things covered in staff meetings. Furthermore, teachers were sometimes required to attend a staff

meeting in addition to supervision – as the KS1 teachers pointed out, this led to some long nights. Interestingly, the KS2 teachers spoke of having accepted that the process would take time and, therefore, they did not see this as a significant disadvantage. For them, having supervision during staff meeting had the desired effect, as summarised by Emily’s declaration: “I haven’t felt like this has been an extra for us” (Transcript 2, Line 371).

In terms of emotional costs, both groups cited frustration following some discussions, rooted in their sense that there were some things they could not change (Box 7). Alice described this frustration using the double-edged sword metaphor: “it does put into perspective what you can change or alter or improve, [but]... it’s annoying that there’s another load of stuff that actually you’d like to [change/alter/improve, but can’t]” (Transcript 2, Line 764). Often these discussions involved what Louise described as “the bigger issues” (Transcript 1, Line 154), which they felt were out of their control.

Box 7: Experiencing frustrations

W: I think some of the issues that have been brought up as well have been quite frustrating because they’re too big for us to deal, to sort, and in a way you really do want to do something about it but actually it’s out of our hands.

L: There’s nothing you can do.

B: Right. OK.

W: I know I’ve found that quite frustrating.

L: Mm hm.

(Transcript 1, Wanda, Louise & Ben, Lines 147-151)

Finally, some of the KS2 teachers worried that those who were not part of the group may have felt somewhat excluded (see Box 8). In contrast, the KS1 teachers did not think this had been an issue in their part of the school. Rather, their colleagues were curious and asked them questions about what supervision was like and how they were finding it.

Box 8: Others feeling excluded?

E: I think other people who haven’t been involved in the group might have been put out a little bit, yunno?

B: Yeah?

E: Kind of, who, so when people are not involve in something it kind of-

A: And see you getting on with somebody else there can be some jealousy.

(Transcript 2, Emily, Ben & Alice, Lines 336-339)

3.4.2. Success / failure mediated by largely controllable factors

Discussions of factors that helped and hindered the running of PGS led to the construction of a second thematic network, illustrated in Figure 5, overleaf. The teachers identified a range of facilitating factors that generally related either to the people involved or the physical supervision space, and some barriers that could all be broadly linked to the status of PGS within the school. Whilst not an explicit point of conversation during the focus groups, what seemed particularly important about these mediating factors (both positive and negative) is that the majority are largely controllable. In other words, the relative success/failure of PGS was not a matter of chance but of inclination, dedication and organisation. Furthermore, it was recognised that the responsibility for these mediating factors was shared between the teachers, the facilitator and the school leadership. This line of argument is developed across the following sections, which explore specific facilitators and barriers.

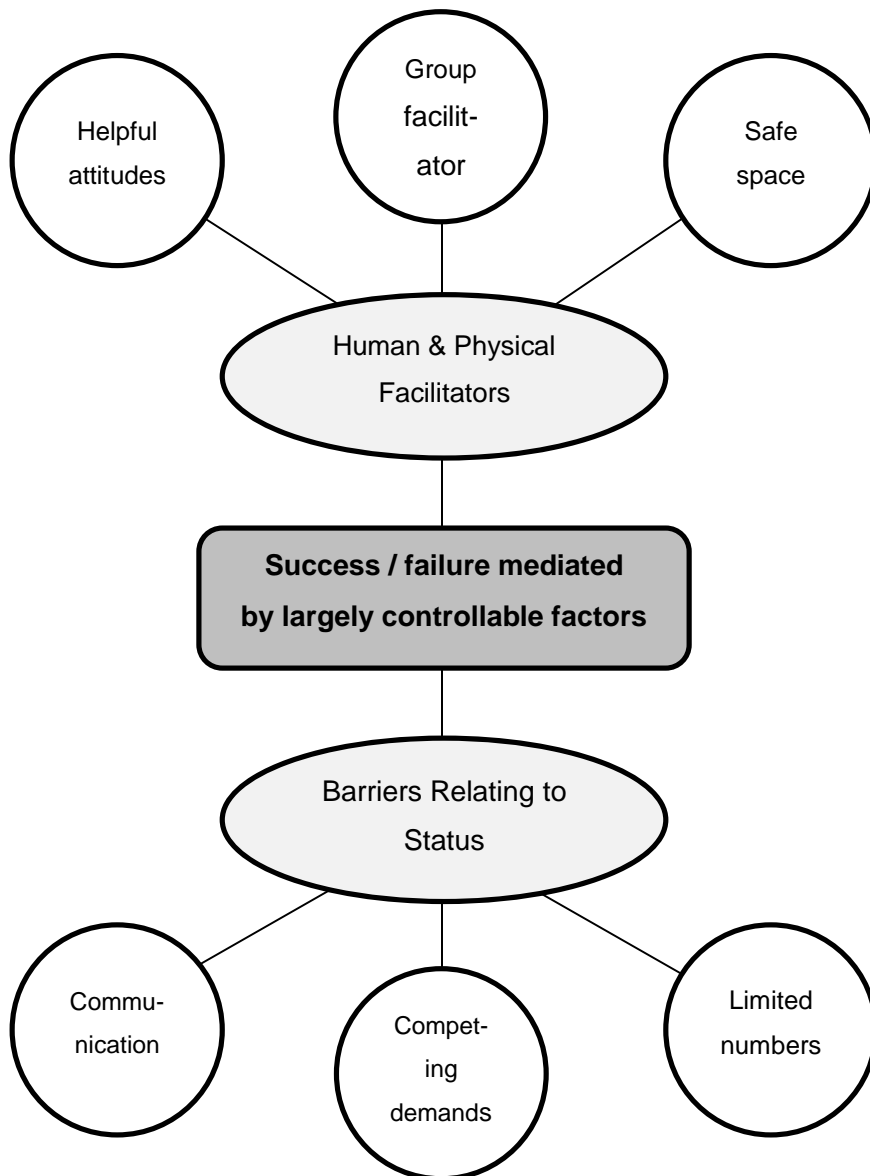


Figure 5: Thematic network relating to the facilitators and barriers to partaking in peer group supervision

3.4.2.1. Human and Physical Facilitators

Both groups of teachers identified their own personal attitudes as one of the most significant facilitators, particularly linked to three main attributes: respectfulness, openness and drive. They emphasised the importance of being respectful – of listening and valuing each other’s opinions. Moreover, they also felt agreeing the group rules at the start had been key in establishing this level of respect. Openness was also seen as important, with the two groups privileging different aspects – Alice and Megan spoke of being willing to talk in front

of others and share opinions, whereas for Louise and Wanda openness was demonstrated through “taking on advice” and “admitting that we need help sometimes” (Transcript 1, Lines 272-273). Finally, the KS2 teachers stressed the importance of approaching PGS with the drive to make a difference. For Alice, “it’s like a positive outlook, we’ve, we’ve got the will or the wish to try to do something positive” (Transcript 2, Line 574).

Both groups also cited the group facilitator as a significant facilitating factor. They identified a range of helpful roles I had taken on as facilitator, including leading them through the procedural aspects and keeping them on track, as well as attending to the group dynamics. As demonstrated in Box 9, this was often spoken of in terms of being a calming influence.

Box 9: A calming influence

W: And sometime some people get too aggravated with something, something particularly, needs someone just to pull it back, rather than raise it even more.

B: Mm, yeah.

W: Calm the situation back down.

B: OK, to kind of de-escalate a little bit. OK.

W: Yeah.

L: Mm hm.

(Transcript 1, Wanda, Ben & Louise, Lines 289-294)

My being external to the school was also seen as important. For example, Megan mentioned it was sometimes helpful that I could bring an outsider perspective to discussions, as “it’s harder when you’re in the middle of it, to see what’s going on” (Transcript 2, Line 502). Finally, the group members identified that having an external facilitator helped to drive the supervision process. For the KS1 teachers, this was particularly essential, as without an external facilitator they foresaw that competing pressures would probably have led PGS to be side-lined. As Natalie explained: “it would have been ‘Oh well we can’t do it tonight so we’ll have to, we’ll catch up week.’ ... And it doesn’t happen” (Transcript 1, Lines 391-394). Interestingly, the KS2 teachers agreed it was helpful to have someone external drive the project forward initially, but they felt confident that once it had been established someone internal could take on the role. Indeed, they expressed an interest in taking turns facilitating themselves in the future.

In addition, some physical facilitators were identified. Firstly, the KS1 teachers reported that having refreshments provided at the end of a long day boosted their energy

and general morale. Secondly, the KS2 teachers felt it was facilitative that the room in which the supervision sessions were held was consistent, comfortable, light and private. This was key in ensuring the space felt safe and protected.

3.4.2.2. *Barriers Relating to Status*

Teachers were also able to identify some barriers to the successful running of PGS, which may all be linked to the status of the process within the school. For example, one of the barriers identified was poor communication across the school – messages about supervision did not always reach the teachers, meaning they were not always prepared for the sessions. It may therefore be assumed that these messages were not given particularly high priority by the school hierarchy. This is a clear example of mediating factors being controllable – this barrier could be easily avoided via some simple school-level changes, especially if PGS were to become more established.

The most significant barrier identified by the teachers was the number of competing demands on their time. On some occasions supervision had to be cancelled because it clashed with something that was given higher priority by the school leadership (e.g. an important staff meeting) or the teachers themselves (e.g. an imminent observation). Furthermore, they all had various after-school groups and meetings to attend, which meant finding another mutually convenient time was difficult.

Finally, both groups intimated that the relatively small number of teachers involved in the project sometimes created a barrier. There was a common sense that more could have been achieved had more of their colleagues been involved. It seems likely uptake was limited due to PGS's status within the school at the time, i.e. that of a voluntary pilot project. Were it to become viewed as an integral part of teaching practice then this barrier might be negated. As illustrated in Box 10, overleaf, Emily reflected on this issue proactively in terms of next steps.

Box 10: More teachers needed

E: If we can, persuade a few more people to come along I think that would be beneficial too.

M: Mm hm.

A: Yeah. Well I think we're secure, and I think we're secure enough now-

E: It'll change the dynamics but I think, yunno-

A: That's not a bad thing.

E: -we've gotta be brave and kind of embrace things and think if we want to change it's not going to change with just the three of us-

(Transcript 2, Emily, Megan and Alice, Lines 867-872)

3.5. Discussion

Some of these findings will now be discussed in light of relevant theory and research, including the model of teacher resilience proposed in Chapter 1. The overarching concepts of relatedness, agency and climate are offered as holding particular interpretive significance.

3.5.1. Relatedness

For the teachers engaged in this study, perhaps the most significant benefit of engaging in PGS was that it brought them closer together. From this new position of closeness, they were able to develop trusting, supportive relationships –something identified as a key protective factor across teacher resilience research (e.g. Doney, 2012; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Le Cornu, 2013). This finding may be interpreted using the concept of relatedness. Self determination theory (SDT) states that relatedness – a feeling of being connected to others – is one of just three, basic psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2002). Along with autonomy and competence, SDT argues relatedness is essential if human beings are to persist and thrive (Ryan & Deci, 2002). The teachers in this study intimated they drew strength from their collegial relationships, in-keeping with the notion that resilience and relatedness are interlinked. This premise is central to Jordan's (2006) model of relational resilience, which posits resilience is cultivated through growth-fostering relationships. In terms of my proposed model, relatedness can perhaps be thought of as occupying the interstitial space between beliefs and relationships, as it is essentially a belief *about* relationships. This study has suggested that bringing teachers together through PGS can

help to develop supportive collegial relationships, thus increasing their sense of relatedness and, ultimately, their resilience.

It is also useful to consider this finding in the context of Capital Theory (Nahpiet & Ghoshal, 1998), which suggests organisations need both intellectual and social capital to be at their most effective. Here, intellectual capital relates to the knowledge and experience of a school's staff members whilst social capital relates to the quality of relationships between them (Hargreaves, 2001). According to Hargreaves (2001), social capital has both a structural component (relating to the networks in which people are embedded) and a cultural component (relating to the level of trust, reciprocity and collaboration between people). Thus, it may be suggested that establishing PGS within the school helped to improve its structural social capital in the first instance. Over time, this also led to the development of cultural social capital and ultimately facilitated the sharing of intellectual capital across the group members.

Finally, it is also interesting to consider Putnam's (2000) assertion that there are two different forms of social capital: "some networks link people who are similar in crucial respects and tend to be inward-looking – bonding social capital. Others encompass different types of people and tend to be outward-looking – bridging social capital" (Putnam, Feldstein, & Cohen, 2003, p. 2). The initial need to offer two separate supervision groups may be interpreted in these terms. Originally, the KS1 teachers appear to have only felt comfortable forming a network with their closest peers, suggesting a relatively low level of bridging compared to bonding social capital. However, bonding was effectively transformed into bridging by the subsequent joining of the two groups. Positively, both groups also reported finding the process the most rewarding once they had all come together – when relatedness was at its highest.

3.5.2. Agency

Although less prominent than the developed sense of relatedness, there was one other key benefit to the teachers' engagement in PGS – they felt it put into perspective the aspects of their practice (be they individual or collective) they could change or improve. This can be explored using the concept of agency. According to Eteläpelto et al. (2013, p. 61), "professional agency is practiced when professional subjects and/or communities exert influence, make choices and take stances in ways that affect their work and/or their professional identities."

In her doctoral thesis, Wright (2015) suggested participation in collaborative problem-solving groups (Hanko, 1999) – a process similar to PGS – could promote teachers’ professional agency. Significantly, agency has also been linked to teacher resilience. Gu and Day (2013), for example, have previously defined teacher resilience as “the capacity to maintain equilibrium and a sense of commitment and agency in the everyday worlds in which teachers teach” (p. 5). For Castro et al. (2010), teachers adopt ‘resilience strategies’ by exercising professional agency, and so for them the concept is pivotal. In terms of my proposed model, agency can be seen to occupy the space between beliefs and actions, as it is a belief *about* actions. By bringing teachers together to collaboratively problem-solve (an action), PGS can be said to promote their sense of agency (a belief) and, ultimately, their resilience.

Yet this study has highlighted some important tensions linked to the concept of agency. Teachers reported that the PGS process also drew attention to a range of things they felt unable to change or improve due to a lack of control. As such, it may be that at times their professional agency felt under threat. This is perhaps in-keeping with an ecological view of agency, which argues that an actor’s ability to achieve agency depends on the interaction between their capacities and environmental conditions, which may either enable or constrain (Priestley et al., 2012). In this case, social and material factors (i.e. the power dynamics and physical layout of the school, respectively) sometimes worked to constrain the teachers’ sense of professional agency. This tension links directly to the sense of frustration they sometimes encountered.

3.5.3. Climate

Mirroring the approach taken in Chapter 1, it is acknowledged that a full understanding of the opportunities offered by PGS must also include a consideration of the threats. The teachers engaged in this study often made reference to the current climate, which they implied was characterised by negativity, mistrust and fear. They spoke of feeling isolated, under significant pressure and in need of more support. Whilst they experienced this climate most acutely in the microenvironment of their school, it was also believed to pervade the entire education system.

The literature highlights the damaging effects of an educational system based on competition, accountability and the measurement of narrow outcomes (Hutchings, 2015). Not only has this high-pressure climate been shown to significantly contribute towards teacher stress, attrition and ill-health (Kersaint et al., 2007; Lambert & McCarthy, 2006), but

this also has a knock-on effect on children and may even be damaging for them directly (Hutchings, 2015).

Linked to this high-pressure climate, the teachers also spoke of feeling cautious about asking questions and seeking help, for fear senior leaders would interpret this as a sign of weakness. Difficulties with help-seeking were also identified in Beltman et al's (2011) review into teacher resilience and cited as a significant risk factor. Such avoidance is particularly highlighted in the resilience research with early career teachers (Buchanan, Prescott, Schuck, Aubusson, & Burke, 2013; Mansfield et al., 2014), the career-phase consistently linked with the highest level of attrition (DfE, 2016; Howson, 2009). Interestingly, help-seeking is cited as one of Castro et al's (2010) 'resilience strategies', suggesting that when teachers *do* feel confident enough to seek help they are more likely to maintain their motivation and commitment. Positively, this study found that PGS provided teachers with a safe space in which they felt comfortable asking questions and seeking help.

Overall, the teachers felt PGS is more necessary now than it may have been several years ago. This is, of course, inline with the very concept of resilience a dynamic response to changing levels of adversity (Day & Gu, 2007). As argued in Chapter 1, shifts in context naturally lead to shifts in challenges, which must in turn be met with appropriate shifts in protective factors (Doney, 2012). Presently, the educational climate has seen a significant increase in the challenges teachers are facing. This requires teachers, school leaders, policy makers and indeed all those involved in education to ask: How are we to respond?

3.6. Conclusions

3.6.1. Overview

This collaborative action research project explored the question: What can be learned, and what can be gained, by introducing primary school teachers to the process of peer supervision? Teachers described the process as a double-edged sword, but concluded the benefits outweighed the costs. Benefits identified include fostering collegial support, providing a safe forum for open dialogue, and encouraging collaborative problem-solving. Therefore, it is concluded that teachers may gain an enhanced sense of relatedness and also of agency, through partaking in PGS. Conversely, some costs of participation may include time expenditure and feelings of frustration linked to power limitations. It was also suggested that the process of PGS can be facilitated by group members adopting respectful, open and self-motivated attitudes, by the efforts of a group facilitator – whose role is

multifaceted – and by the provision of a comfortable and protected physical space. Barriers to the process can include poor communication, competing priorities and limited uptake, all of which it was suggested might be overcome if PGS were to gain notable status. Finally, it was also recognised that teachers are working in challenging circumstances. The current educational climate, characterised by high levels of competition and accountability, puts them under significant pressure and works against openness and collaboration. It is arguable that in such a context efforts to actively protect and promote teacher resilience must be increased, and PGS may be one mechanism that contributes towards this endeavour.

3.6.2. Implications

It must first be acknowledged that, due to the size and nature of this empirical project, the findings cannot be easily generalised in the traditional, positivist sense. However, meaningful conclusions may be drawn, and implications stressed, using Pierce's (cited in Hartshorne & Weiss, 1931-1935) notion of abduction – the development of an explanatory idea based on close engagement with the available data. This is the central message of the quote from McNiff and Whitehead (2002) offered in this thesis' epigraph.

With this in mind, it is argued this study contributes to the growing pool of research pointing towards the utility of a) developing teachers' supportive collegial relationships and b) encouraging collaborative problem-solving, through the establishment of mechanisms like PGS (e.g. Brown & Henderson, 2012; Creese, Norwich, & Daniels, 2012; Hanko, 1999; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Hulusi & Maggs, 2015; Stringer et al., 1992). This has implications for various stakeholders across the education community. As active agents, teachers may need to be proactive in establishing their own support mechanisms (Castro et al., 2010); however, as argued in Chapter 1, this should not be their responsibility alone. Teacher training programmes can help prepare teachers by developing their skills of collaboration and problem-solving, and by encouraging them to form support systems (Doney, 2012; Mansfield et al., 2014). School leaders can play a pivotal role in creating supportive school cultures (Le Cornu, 2013), and to this end would do well to establish PGS in their schools and afford the process due status. EPs can work collaboratively with schools by introducing them to such mechanisms through training (Stringer et al., 1992) or by direct example, taking on the role of group facilitator (Wright, 2015). They can also attempt to influence policy on a wider scale by raising the profile of teacher resilience and the potential benefits of PGS in local and national forums (Beltman et al., 2016). Finally,

policy makers can use their power to shift the educational climate in more supportive and collaborative directions. Of course, one may question the likelihood of such a political shift but herein lies the need for resilience. The challenges are considerable, but with the right support they can be faced. During this study, one teacher made a comment about their school expecting an OFSTED inspection that I believe can be applied to England's entire education community:

I think this is the time when we really need to actually pull together.

(Transcript 1, Wanda, Line 455)

4. Appendices

4.1. Appendix A: Project Information Sheet

Project Information Sheet

Introduction

My name is Ben Greenfield and I am a final year Trainee Educational Psychologist from Newcastle University, currently working with Durham Educational Psychology Service. As part of my on-going work with your school, I will be helping to set up and run a collaborative action research project and hope some of you may be interested in joining me as co-researchers!

What is the purpose of this project?

The purpose of this action research project will be to establish, pilot and evaluate a peer supervision group in your school. Peer group supervision is something that takes regularly place in many helping professions, such as counselling and educational psychology. Distinct from line management, it provides a protected time and space for practitioners to get together in order to learn from and support one another, through joint reflection, discussion and problem solving. I know from experience that it can be a very helpful and supportive process and believe it is something that teachers would find beneficial. By running this research project in your school, we will be able to explore any benefits (and challenges) we experience along the way.

What will the project look like?

This, in part, is up to you! We will have joint ownership of this project and so I hope your thoughts and ideas will help to shape it. Having said this, I do have some initial ideas that I am happy to share in order to get us up and running. Depending on the number of you that would like to be a part of this project, we can form one or two small peer supervision groups. These groups could meet once every two to three weeks, for around an hour of your school's normal staff-meeting time. If the project runs for one term, this means that we may end up having somewhere between four to six sessions. At the end of each half term, it would also be helpful for us to have a focused group discussion about how we have found the process so far and about anything we would like to change. With your permission, it would be really useful if these conversations could be audiotaped so that any outcomes can be explored in detail.

What will happen to the information?

This project is being run, in part, to contribute towards my doctoral thesis. As a result I will need to produce a written report of the research that will be submitted to my university. Any personal identifiers will be removed and all information will remain entirely confidential. All data collected will be stored on a password-protected computer, which only I (the researcher) will have access to. Any audio recordings will be securely destroyed once the data has been transcribed and the report has been written.

Please note that you are under no obligation to take part in the project and if you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any point and for any reason.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions about the project or about peer supervision in general. My email address is: b.greenfield@ncl.ac.uk. Alternatively, if you have any questions that you would prefer to direct to my research supervisor at Newcastle University, Wilma Barrow, she can be reached via email at w.barrow@newcastle.ac.uk or by post at the following address:

School of Education, Communication & Language Sciences,
Newcastle University,
King George VI Building,
Queen Victoria Road,
Newcastle,
NE1 7RU

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information.

4.2. Appendix B: Consent Form

Consent Form

- Have you read and understood the information pack provided? (please circle where applicable)
YES / NO
- Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and been given satisfactory responses?
YES / NO
- Are you aware that at any time, up until the formal report is completed, you can withdraw from this study?
YES / NO
- Do you give your permission for two focus groups to be recorded (audio recording only) and be transcribed for the purpose of this study only?
YES / NO
- Are you happy to take part in this study and give your informed consent?
YES / NO

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

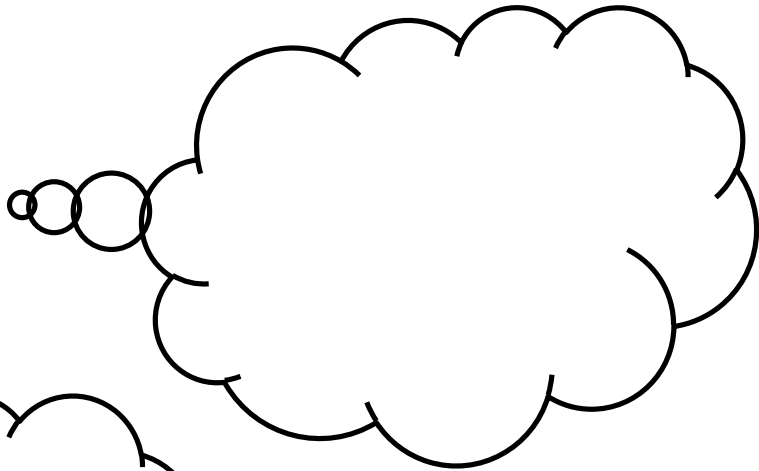
4.3. Appendix C: Mid-point Review Prompt Sheet

The [xxxxx] Primary School Peer Group Supervision Project *Reflecting on Cycle 1 and Planning for Cycle 2*

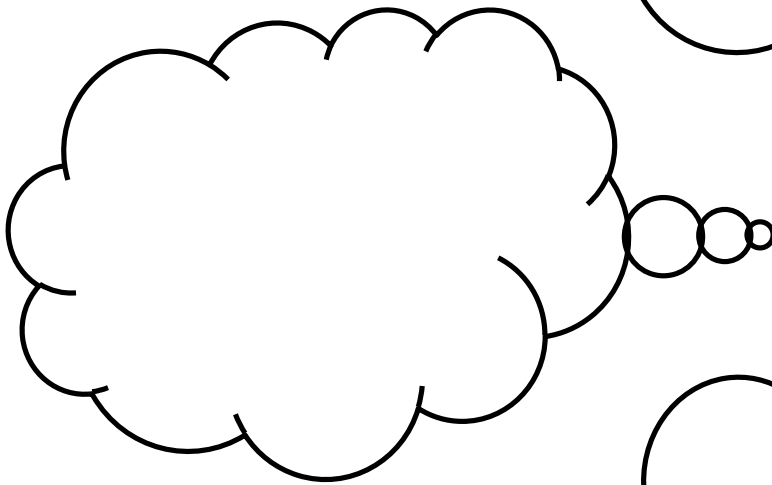
You might like to think about our supervision sessions so far in terms of:

- *Logistics*
- *Focus*
- *Tools*
- *Group Processes*
- *Outcomes*
- ...

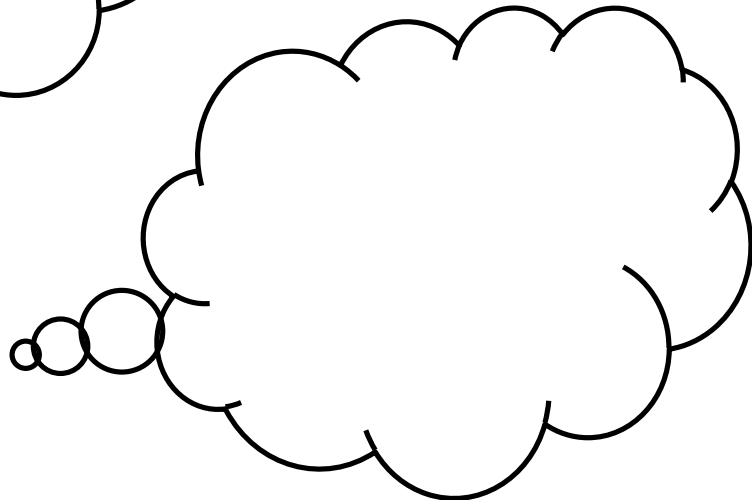
What helpful things
could we do more of?



What unhelpful things
could we do less of?



What new and potentially
helpful things could we try?



4.4. Appendix D: Focus Group Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

Introductory comments (Explanation, reassurances)

- What, if any, do you think have been the benefits/advantages of taking part in a peer supervision group?
 - Functions of supervision – learning, support, management?
 - Group context?
- What, if any, do you think been have the costs/disadvantages of taking part in a peer supervision group?
 - Time, competing priorities?
 - Group context?
- What have been some of the factors that facilitated the setting up and running of the peer supervision group?
 - School level?
 - Group/individual level?
- What have been some of the barriers to the setting up and running of the peer supervision group in school?
 - School level?
 - Group/individual level?
- Do you have any other comments about your experiences of taking part in peer group supervision that has not been covered by the previous questions?

Closing comments (Next steps, thanks)

4.5. Appendix E: Example of Data Coding

Line No.	Verbatim Transcript	Descriptive Code	Interpretive Code(s)	Pattern Code(s)
1	B: OK, so the first question then, is: What, if any, do you think have been the benefits and advantages of taking part in a peer supervision group?	Question 1: What, if any, do you think have been the benefits/advantages of taking part in a peer supervision group?		
2	((Pause))			
3	B: Mm hm.			
4	A: Being able to discuss things with colleagues in a calm and supportive way.	Being able to discuss things with colleagues in a calm and supportive way. <i>((Discussions not always calm outside of sessions?))</i>	Supervision allowed teachers <i>“to discuss things with colleagues in a calm and supportive way.”</i>	Encouraging open dialogue Time to talk
5	B: OK.			
6	M: I think it gave us an opportunity to get to know each other better. People that we don't normally get the chance to.. I don't normally get the chance to talk to certain members of this group-	It allowed group members to get to know each other better. We don't normally get the chance to talk to one another because we work in isolation.	Teachers often <i>“work in isolation”</i> . Supervision allowed group members to get to know each other better.	Getting to know one another Counteracting feelings of loneliness/isolation
7	B: Mm.			
8	M: Because we work in isolation. So it was good to sort of get to know each other a little bit better.			
9	E: Mm.			
10	B: OK.	((Agreement))		

4.6. Appendix F: Code Book

CODES (72)	THEMES IDENTIFIED (18)
<p>Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting to know one another • Little things (e.g. smiling, saying hello more) • Counteracting feelings of loneliness/isolation • Supporting one another • Reassuring through sharing • Blowing off steam • Providing a safe space • Feeling happier / improving morale • Encouraging open dialogue • Improving inter-staff communication • Providing time to talk • Sharing ideas / perspectives / experiences • Actively addressing problems • Finding solutions • Using ideas in the classroom • Encouraging 'proactivity' • Improvements in school • Benefits extend beyond supervision sessions 	<p>Peer Group Supervision (PGS) provides a forum for the development and utilisation of supportive collegial relationships.</p> <p>PGS encourages open inter-staff dialogue.</p> <p>PGS provides opportunities for shared problem solving and the proactive realisation of change.</p>
<p>Costs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing frustrations at being unable to solve some issues • Highlighting problems can be disheartening • Exploring problems can sometimes feel unhelpful • Blowing off steam can sometimes be destructive • Discussions not always relevant to all members • Taking time away from other things • Missing things in staff meetings • Long nights • Others may feel excluded • Perceptions of others may be less positive 	<p>PGS can emphasise problems and lead to increased frustrations.</p> <p>PGS takes time – time that could be spent on other things.</p> <p>Those not taking part in PGS may feel excluded.</p>
<p>Facilitators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having respectful attitudes • Being willing to listen • Being willing to seek and accept help • Being willing to talk openly in front of others • Being positive and self-motivated • Providing a protected, consistent space and time • Providing a physically comfortable space • Providing refreshments! • Facilitator keeping group on track and acting as a guide • Facilitator managing group dynamics / processes 	<p>It is important for group members to have positive, open and respectful attitudes.</p> <p>PGS requires a safe, consistent and comfortable physical space.</p> <p>The group facilitator plays a variety of important roles.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External facilitator driving the initiative and encouraging commitment • External facilitator providing an outsider perspective • Establishing group rules • Having supervision during staff meetings meant time was less of an issue 	<p>Establishing group rules helps to encourage helpful attitudes.</p>
<p>Barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of time • Other commitments / competing priorities • Lack of power • More teachers needed • Senior leadership needed to solve certain problems • Poor within-school communication 	<p>PGS is one of many competing demands on teachers' time.</p> <p>Teachers need others to make up for a perceived lack of power.</p> <p>Organising PGS requires good within-school communication.</p>
<p>General / Miscellaneous</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers work in a climate of fear • Teachers feel under pressure • Teachers feel unsupported • Supervision more necessary now than it used to be • Supervision particularly beneficial during periods of high pressure • The benefits outweigh the costs • A positive, useful experience • Teachers want supervision to continue • Teachers want supervision more often • Teachers felt comfortable within the group • Equal relationships amongst group members • Everybody has a voice • Senior leadership need to see how teachers feel • Uncomfortable speaking openly to senior leadership • Group would need control over senior leadership's attendance • Need for anonymity in feedback • Staff politics • A double-edged sword • Would have preferred supervision on a different day • Willing to accept time commitment, especially if during directed time • Open to trying new things • Internal facilitator would have to be passionate • Supervision is qualitatively different to team meetings • Supervision is not a 'fix-all' solution 	<p>Teachers are facing a range of significant contextual challenges.</p> <p>The relative importance of PGS is dependent on context.</p> <p>Overall, teachers find PGS to be beneficial.</p> <p>Teachers experience mutuality within PGS.</p> <p>Teachers retain a need to exclude certain others from full participation PGS.</p>

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