

# **“Take a step back”: Teacher strategies for managing heightened emotions.**

## **Abstract**

From a social ecological perspective, there are multiple challenges that can lead to stress, burnout and attrition in teachers and school leaders. The capacity to manage negative emotions is important for emotion regulation, emotional intelligence, coping and mindfulness. Emotions also form one dimension of resilience as teachers use strategies to maintain their commitment and wellbeing. This paper examines those strategies nominated by 73 practicing teachers who completed online modules designed to enhance resilience capacity. An iterative process of coding of 206 separate responses led to 14 first order categories. These were then coded into four higher order categories of *Waiting*, *Assessing*, *Problem-Solving* and *Being Proactive*. The largest group of responses, aligned with mindfulness approaches, referred to the need to take a break to calm oneself and manage the emotions, before assessing the situation and engaging in direct problem-focused strategies. Participants also reported putting proactive strategies in place. Implications for teacher professional learning are discussed including the challenge of focusing on individual capacity when the source of challenges may lie in wider policies or workplace structure. Limitations include lack of corroborating observational data, and suggestions are made for further research to understand how teachers manage the emotional challenges of their work.

## **Acknowledgements**

The data collected for this research were enabled by the *Building Resilience in Teacher Education* (BRiTE) project funded through the Office of Learning and Teaching, Australia.

We would like to acknowledge undergraduate students Katherine Duncan, Jasmina Kovacevic and Wenting Hsu who assisted with this paper as part of a writing program.

## **“Take a step back”: Teacher strategies for managing heightened emotions.**

### **Introduction**

Teaching appears to be a less attractive career than in the past (Johnson et al. 2005) as teachers face challenges that stem from a variety of sources. Macro level factors include policy agendas and requirements (Day 2014) and overly heavy workloads (Willett et al. 2014). In a recent Australian study, principals reported the increasing time required for administrative tasks to be unreasonable, and “almost 60 percent of teachers reported that work stress was at unacceptable levels” (McGrath-Champ et al. 2018, p. 5). Challenges can occur within school settings such as lack of resources (Ebersöhn 2014) or using new pedagogical tools (Harper 2012). Individual level factors include reduced self-efficacy (Hong 2012) and less adaptive coping strategies (Chan 2008). Such challenges contribute to the high stress nature of teaching (Lee et al. 2016; Reiser and McCarthy 2018), and likelihood of emotional burnout and attrition (Chang 2009; Sharp and Jennings 2016; Skaalvik and Skaalvik 2016).

There are concerns internationally about attrition of teachers (OECD 2013), including school leaders (Day 2014; Riley 2017), experienced teachers (Kirk and Wall 2010), and early career teachers (Australian Government Productivity Commission 2012; Ingersoll 2012). While attrition figures may be poorly defined and variable (Weldon 2018), one outcome of the concerning number of teachers leaving is wasting national resources (House of Commons Education Committee 2012). There are adverse consequences for education communities including staffing shortages, reduced quality of instruction, and loss of cultural and intellectual capital (Chang 2009; Gallant and Riley 2014).

Nevertheless, most teachers do remain in the profession, and many researchers now use a resilience lens to examine what personal and contextual resources these teachers use to

retain job satisfaction and remain committed to the profession (Beltman et al. 2011). Teacher resilience occurs when individuals harness their personal and contextual resources and use strategies to overcome challenges and maintain their wellbeing (Mansfield et al. 2016). One group of personal resources important for resilience in teaching are associated with emotions (Mansfield et al. 2012; 2016). Teachers experience a range of emotions in their profession (Anttila et al. 2016; Lee et al. 2016), with the many and complex personal and social interactions contributing to its emotionally challenging nature (Sharp and Jennings 2016). Thus, recognition, management, and regulation of emotions are potentially critical components of teacher effectiveness and wellbeing (Hagenauer et al. 2015; Lee et al. 2016; Sharp and Jennings 2016).

Strategies teachers employ to manage and regulate their emotions can have positive impacts on their own and their students' wellbeing (Greenberg 2006; Hagenauer et al. 2015; Lee et al. 2016), or negative impacts such as increased teacher stress, emotional exhaustion, burnout and attrition (Chang 2009; Ghanizadeh and Royaei 2015). Given the concerns regarding the stressful nature of teaching and the importance of teachers knowing and using effective strategies that can support their wellbeing, the present study examines strategies that practicing teachers report using when experiencing heightened emotions.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This paper aligns with a social ecological perspective of resilience where complex reciprocal person-environment interactions occur over time (Ungar 2012). This views individuals as living and working within dynamic, multiple systems whereby “adaptive function of the individual is interdependent with many other systems at different levels of function that are continually interacting” (Masten 2014, p. 170). With regard to teacher resilience this means that dynamic interactions occur between individual teacher factors like sense of vocation,

efficacy and commitment, and the “external intellectual, social, and organizational environments in which they work and live” (Gu 2014, p. 503). Schutz and colleagues adopt a similar perspective when conceptualizing emotions in educational contexts. They posit that while emotional episodes include “cognitive appraisals, affective feelings, physiological responses, and behavioral tendencies”, such episodes are socially constructed and part of wider social-historical contexts (Schutz et al. 2016, p. 219).

In this paper, we focus on the individual or personal systems as we ask teachers about their own strategies, but view such strategies as arising from and within complex, dynamic systems. From a social ecological perspective, further understanding these strategies can assist with providing professional learning and empowerment for individuals, as well as informing schools and policy makers of teachers’ everyday strengths and needs.

## **Background**

Viewing emotions as situated within multiple, dynamic systems means “there are a range of theories and methodologies available in investigating emotions and education” (Schutz et al. 2016, p. 291). Whilst emotions have been considered in their own right as a crucial component of education settings, the need for teachers to regulate their emotions, and how they do this, is another extensive body of work. Teachers are said to need to be Emotionally Intelligent which includes the ability to regulate or manage emotions. Broader concepts such as coping and mindfulness also include emotion management strategies. The following section provides a brief overview of some key points from different perspectives to inform the connection between emotions and the overarching lens of teacher resilience – the strategies that teachers use to manage their emotions in order to sustain their commitment and wellbeing.

## *Emotions and Teaching*

Emotions have multiple functions (Fried et al. 2015) and form an important personal dimension of teacher resilience (Mansfield et al. 2012). As already indicated, negative emotions are connected to teacher stress and burnout (Hong 2012), whereas positive emotions can assist in maintaining commitment (Anttila et al. 2016; Morgan et al. 2010). Teacher emotions are strongly connected to classroom management, relationships with students, and student learning and motivation (Meyer and Turner 2002; Woolfolk Hoy 2013). Teachers are aware of this and sometimes display emotions that they are not necessarily experiencing to motivate and enthuse their students for learning. The sometimes exhausting effort required to display emotions that are seen as appropriate, and the emotional work of maintaining caring relationships, are examples of emotional labour (Woolfolk Hoy 2013).

Emotion regulation “refers to the processes by which we influence which emotions we have, when we have them, and how we experience and express them” (Gross 2002, p. 282). Gross developed a process model of emotion regulation where specific responses occur over time. The complexity of classroom relationships and activities adds to the magnitude of the emotional work of teachers. The need “to regulate emotions in order to neutralize potentially negative or emotionally harmful situations is the hidden curriculum for teachers” (Newberry 2013, p. 35). In Gross’s process model, strategies to regulate or manage emotions can occur prior to the emotion (antecedent-focused), or occur after the emotion (response-focused) (Webster and Hadwin 2015). Antecedent-focused strategies include situation selection (e.g. avoiding a particular person), situation modification (where aspects of the setting are changed), attentional deployment (e.g. deliberately focusing on or away from certain aspects of the situation), and cognitive change (e.g. reappraisal of the situation). Response-focused strategies involve attempts to modulate the experienced emotion such as using relaxation techniques or suppression of the emotion. The strategies of reappraisal (seen

to be beneficial) and suppression (seen to be detrimental) are the two most researched. Suppressing outward signs of an emotion requires emotional labour, potentially emotional exhaustion (Ghanizadeh and Royaei 2015), and has negative effects on others (Gross 2002; Jeon et al. 2016).

The capacity for teachers to manage their own emotions is recognised as an important aspect of emotional intelligence and ultimately teacher resilience (Mansfield et al. 2012; 2016). Emotional intelligence scales have been used as measures of emotional regulation (Brackett et al. 2010; Corcoran and Tormey 2012). Emotional intelligence includes “emotional literacy” as well as “emotional competence” (Farrell et al. 2007, p. 239) which relate to personal, social and emotional attributes an individual can draw on to “adapt effectively to a given social context such as the school, workplace, or home” (p. 241). Teachers with higher levels of emotional intelligence are more able to recognise and reappraise their emotions – turning negative ones into positive ones (Newberry 2013). Whether emotion regulation is part of emotional intelligence or a component of self-management within broader sets of social and emotional skills, Woolfolk Hoy (2013) argues that teachers are not well-prepared for the expectation that they will be able to regulate their own emotions and help their students to do this too.

When faced with challenges, teachers use a variety of coping strategies, some of which involve management and regulation of emotions (Richardson et al. 2013). Developmental perspectives see coping as regulation when under stress, incorporating “the many kinds of regulation (emotional, attentional, motivational, behavioral, etc.) that are activated by stressful encounters” (Zimmer-Gembeck and Skinner 2016, p. 3). Lazarus (1991) categorised functional coping strategies for dealing with challenging situations as either emotion-focused or problem-focused. The situation modification component of emotion regulation has been likened to problem-focused coping (Gross 2002). Problem-

focused coping strategies are considered more effective as they directly address the source of stress and can be used in a preventative manner. Emotion-focused strategies are more reactive and more useful in situations in which there is little control over the stressor (Baumgartner et al. 2009; Frydenberg and Lewis 2002).

In stressful situations, teachers use coping strategies such as proactive problem-solving and help-seeking (Jeon et al. 2016; Sharplin et al. 2011). In teaching, it is often necessary to employ an emotion-focused strategy, such as focusing on breathing or taking a break, before using a problem-focused strategy for more long-term effects on emotional wellbeing (Chang 2009). This allows teachers to “temporarily regulate their emotions” (p. 213) before using strategies that focus on the problem and actions needed. Rather than being simply reactive, teachers also use proactive coping strategies, such as focusing on having a positive approach and building capacity to manage potential challenges.

There are also other bodies of work such as mindfulness approaches that incorporate emotions and their regulation and focus on specific strategies to manage emotions. Roeser et al. (2012, p. 167) summarise four areas of essential professional skills and knowledge for teachers, the fourth being “dispositions” or “habits of mind” that include:

... tendencies to gather data through all of the senses, to be aware of and reflect on experience in a nonjudgmental manner, to be flexible when problem solving, to regulate emotion and be resilient after setbacks, and to attend to others with empathy and compassion.

Interventions based on a mindfulness perspective can assist teachers to build their resilience in relation to stressful events and enhance their wellbeing as they promote awareness of emotions, emotion regulation, compassion and self-compassion (Schussler et al. 2018). Such interventions also increase efficacy and positive relationships with students and colleagues, as well as family members. Examples of strategies used include being nonreactive, pausing

and then seeking an acceptable solution, aligning with the sequence of coping strategies found by Chang (2009).

In summary, recommendations from a variety of perspectives, suggest that teachers could benefit from greater knowledge about their emotions and strategies to use when experiencing heightened emotions (Chang 2009; Woolfolk Hoy 2013). Our conceptual framework regards resilience as a broad, multifaceted and multilevel dynamic concept, of which management of emotions is but one part. Nevertheless it is an important part and the focus of the present study.

### ***This Study***

Given the research findings that suggest the importance of emotion regulation and management for teachers, it is important to identify the strategies used by practicing teachers in their everyday lives. In the present study, we analyse data from the BRiTE professional learning tool to identify strategies that experienced teachers report using to regulate their emotions. Five evidence-informed interactive modules were developed to build preservice teachers' capacity for resilience (Beltman and Mansfield 2015). The modules are publicly available online and have also been completed by practicing teachers. Module content is revised regularly and users have the option of adding "tips" for successful strategies. The fifth BRiTE module *E: Emotions*, includes strategies for managing emotions in teaching, particularly in situations of stress and heightened emotions (Beltman and Mansfield 2015). The specific research question for this investigation was *What are the strategies that teachers report using when experiencing heightened emotions?*



## **Methodology**

The ways individuals, including teachers, manage their heightened emotions, particularly in situations of stress, has been examined using different methodologies, indicating “the complexity of investigating emotion” (Schutz and Zembylas 2016, p. 289). Much research on teacher emotions relies heavily on interview data or questionnaires (Chang 2009) as part of wider investigations, for example, on teacher stress (Hung 2011), identity (Kirk and Wall 2010), emotional labour (Akın et al. 2013) or resilience (Mansfield et al. 2012). A point of difference in this study, is that qualitative data were extracted from responses within an online professional learning module.

## ***Participants***

Participants were 73 teachers, primarily from Australia ( $n=65$ ; 89%), but also other countries (Spain, Great Britain, Greece, Portugal and the United States of America). Their schools were located in metropolitan ( $n=52$ ; 71%), regional ( $n=19$ ; 26%) and remote ( $n=2$ ; 3%) settings and included government ( $n=56$ ; 77%) and independent ( $n=17$ ; 23%) schools. About half ( $n=36$ ; 49%) were early career with 0-5 years of teaching experience and most ( $n=31$ ; 43%) were in the 26-40 year age group. Participants taught in Early Childhood ( $n=9$ ; 12%), Primary ( $n=39$ ; 53%) and Secondary ( $n=25$ ; 34%) fields of education. They were employed on a permanent full-time ( $n=29$ ; 40%), part-time ( $n=6$ ; 8%), fixed-term ( $n=9$ ; 12%), or casual basis ( $n=25$ ; 34%), with some ( $n=4$ ; 5%) doing relief work or not currently working. Participants thus represented a diverse group of practicing teachers who were in a variety of school types and settings, reflecting maximum variation sampling where the aim is to capture themes that “cut across a great deal of participant or program variation” (Patton 1990 p. 172).

## ***Procedure***

When registering for BRiTE, users consent to their de-identified information and responses being used for research purposes (BRiTE 2014-2017). The E-module focuses on emotional aspects of resilience and includes information and strategies related to emotional awareness, responding to emotions and managing emotions. At the end of the module an open-ended question asks users: *Knowing what you do about yourself, what are your top 3 strategies for managing your emotions when you feel your emotions becoming heightened?* All online data recorded in the modules from January 2015 to December 2017 were downloaded and responses from practicing teachers to this question extracted.

### ***Data Analysis***

The 206 individual strategies nominated by the 73 teachers formed the data set and were coded inductively through an iterative process of category development involving three researchers. Although participants were asked for their top three strategies, some provided only one, while others provided two or four strategies. A constant comparative method was used to categorise participants' responses (Hewitt-Taylor 2001). Coding was conducted in three phases. The separate strategies were coded into first then higher order categories across all strategies, then individuals' grouped responses were analysed.

#### ***Phase One Coding: First order categories.***

In the first phase, a total of 206 discrete strategies were isolated and then open coding used to develop the initial iteration of first order categories (Punch and Oancea 2014). Rather than focusing on individual participants' responses, the isolated strategies were analysed separately in order to gain an overall picture of all strategies used. To avoid using any specific framework, codes were not predetermined and emerged throughout the analysis (Hewitt-Taylor 2001). Like Webster and Hadwin (2015), we adopt an open-ended approach

rather than focusing on pre-existing strategies from any specific perspective. The analysis of strategies for categories and emerging themes was a recursive and inductive process. Three researchers were used to enhance the reliability and credibility of the coding process, and analysis was initially performed by one researcher reading the responses and ascribing a code to each strategy. Definitions of each code were recorded to ensure consistency and early iterations were verified by a second researcher. Later iterations and subsequent changes were effected through discussion and collaboration with a third researcher. When discrepancies arose, the data were either re-coded, or the category revised until consensus was reached. The final analysis resulted in fourteen first order categories of strategies (see Table 1).

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

*Phase Two Coding: Higher order categories of strategies.*

The second phase of analysis aimed to develop broader themes. First order categories were grouped where similar concepts seemed to be reflected in the categories, and the literature was used to deductively identify these “sensitizing” constructs (Patton 1990, p. 390).

Categories were identified by two researchers using an iterative process to ensure they represented the first order categories they contained. The final four higher order categories were: *Waiting, Assessing, Problem-Solving* and *Being Proactive*.

*Phase Three Coding: Managing emotions over time.*

Developing the higher order categories revealed a chronological element that aligned with previous work on emotion regulation and coping, and further analysis was conducted to determine whether this chronological aspect was also reflected in individual participants’ strategies. Complete participant responses, prior to the separation of strategies, were

examined for chronological themes. The following section presents the findings of each phase of analysis.

## **Results**

### ***Phase 1. First order categories of strategies***

The first phase of analysis of the 206 strategies resulted in 14 first order categories. Table 1 shows the code and definition for each category, examples of responses, and the number and percentage of strategies for each category. Of the three most endorsed categories, *Breathing* ( $n=43$ ; 20.9%) was the most frequently nominated strategy followed by the categories of *General Assessment of the Situation* and *Perspective* ( $n=22$ ; 10.7% and  $n=21$ ; 10.2% respectively). *Perspective* was quite a broad category but aligned with the idea of cognitive reappraisal as participants made comments such as the need to not take things personally or think about the bigger picture.

### ***Phase 2. Higher order categories of strategies***

In the second phase of analysis, four higher-order categories of strategies were identified: *Waiting* ( $n=74$ ; 35.9%), *Assessing* ( $n=72$ ; 35%), *Problem-Solving* ( $n=35$ ; 17%) and *Being Proactive* ( $n=25$ ; 12.1%). Previous research on emotion regulation (e.g. Gross 2002) and coping (Chang 2009) proposed that strategies to manage emotions could occur in particular sequences and a chronological approach was the best fit for the higher order categories.

Figure 1 illustrates each of these higher-order categories in sequence, their frequency, and the first-order categories contained within them. The encompassed first-order categories are also displayed in sequential order. *Waiting* and *Assessing* together included over two-thirds ( $n = 146$ ; 71%) of the total strategies.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE.

The category of *Waiting* included conscious responses aimed at separating the self from the situation and calming oneself. Following *Waiting*, participants' responses reflected the idea of *Assessing*, in which they would assess the situation, showing awareness and acknowledgement of emotions and putting it into perspective. *Problem-Solving* included approaches that attempt to solve the problem causing the heightened emotion, through responses such as talking with others then taking direct actions. The fourth category of *Being Proactive* comprised ongoing and pre-emptive approaches to managing emotions on a regular basis, not only in times of stress, but with a view to the future.

### ***Phase 3. Managing emotions over time***

The higher order categories occurred chronologically. Phase three analysis found this sequential nature echoed within almost half ( $n = 33, 45.2\%$ ) of individual participants' responses. Many responses included breathing as the first step, for example, '*breathing and taking back control of my mood and reactions. Also, understanding that bad behaviour from students or criticism from other teachers or parents is not personal, it is only part of the job*' (ID#12588). Other sequences included, '*breathe calmly, keep it in perspective, bring compassion and understanding to the situation*' (ID#12593), '*take a step back, take a breath and evaluate the causes for the heightened emotions*' (ID#17744), and '*take a deep breath and try and calm down. Discuss my feelings with a colleague/friend. Write down my feelings*' (ID#14737). While not asked, nor prompted, for a sequence of strategies, the chronology found in emotion regulation and coping literature was mirrored in individuals' responses.

## **Discussion**

### ***Range of Strategies***

The work of teachers can be challenging as they interact with students, colleagues, administrators and parents. In this study, we examined the strategies teachers reported using to manage their heightened emotions. This is an important aspect of teacher (and student) wellbeing and has implications for class climate and longevity in the teaching profession. Whilst positive emotions can generate excitement and motivation (Fried et al. 2015; Morgan et al. 2010) and are seen by teachers to be more acceptable to express (Hagenauer and Volet 2014), the participants in this study responded with negative emotions in mind. They had just completed the final module in a series designed to raise awareness of potential challenges for teachers and provide activities and resources to enable them to manage and overcome these. This is likely to have shaped their focus on difficult rather than positive situations of heightened emotion.

Participating teachers came from a variety of backgrounds and nominated fourteen types of strategies. Many aligned with those suggested in the module tips and information, indicating that despite the participant differences there was some common knowledge relating to emotion management which is important for teacher commitment and wellbeing (Greenberg 2006; Hagenauer et al. 2015). While it is evident that certain aspects of the module resonated with teachers who completed the BRiTE program, it is not clear whether these strategies were encountered firstly within the module, or from other emotion management or mindfulness learning experiences. However learnt, the teachers revealed personal capacity in this area.

### ***Managing Emotions over Time***

In the first and most frequent higher order category of *Waiting*, individuals focused on taking time for immediate management of the heightened emotions through strategies such as focusing on breathing, the largest first order category. Responding to an emotion by

suppressing it is seen to be potentially harmful (Gross 2002). Such strategies may also be regarded as emotion-focused coping (Chang 2009; Lazarus 1991) which is not seen as necessarily productive and may indicate that individuals see the stressful situation as outside their control (Baumgartner et al. 2009). Emotion-focused strategies, however, align with current research on mindfulness (Reiser and McCarthy 2018; Shapiro et al. 2006) and using relaxation techniques can also be an effective response modulation (Webster and Hadwin 2015). The ability to be reflective, to recognise and manage emotions, and to distance the self are strategies reflected in mindfulness programs aimed at teachers (Anttila et al. 2016; Bernay 2014). Such programs include “protective factors such as awareness (physical, cognitive, emotional), emotional regulation, and compassion, including self-compassion” that help teachers build their resilience (Schussler et al. 2018, p. 7). In the present study, participants endorsed strategies that mindfulness interventions for teachers suggest can reduce stress and improve wellbeing (Jennings et al. 2011). Breathing and taking space to activate the sympathetic nervous system (Greenberg 2006) can be beneficial to calm oneself in order to adequately recognise and label one’s emotions, and, thus, then respond to the situation in an appropriate manner (Shapiro et al. 2006; Sharp and Jennings 2016).

Implementing emotion-focused strategies allows for the space and time to fully assess the situation. The strategies in *Assessing* included reappraising the situation from different perspectives, aligning with effective emotion regulation strategies. Schussler et al. (2018) found that teachers could “step away in that moment”, taking a “mini time-out”, but they needed to harness their sense of purpose and self-efficacy to continue to work “to achieve the best possible outcomes, especially for the students” (p. 21). The chronological flow of strategies from *Waiting* and *Assessing* to *Problem-Solving* in this study reflects this sequence. The problem-focused coping strategies found in the *Problem-Solving* category involved some

direct response such as getting advice or implementing actions, perhaps moving beyond emotional regulation and into coping.

The final higher order category of teacher strategies is that of *Being Proactive*. Rather than being part of the previous sequence of strategies, strategies in this group would not necessarily occur when emotions are heightened as they aim at prevention or amelioration of future stress and may occur on a regular basis. As well as linking to proactive coping, this category also aligns with research by Schussler et al. (2018) which identified in teachers' responses the code of self-care, exemplified as "teachers' recognition of the importance of taking care of themselves or purposeful actions to achieve that end" (p. 20). Given that this category in the present study was by far the smallest with only about 12% of responses, it could mean that participants were only focused on what they did in the moment of heightened emotions, or it could indicate a need for further professional learning in this area.

### ***Implications for teacher professional learning***

The resilience of early career teachers has been a recent focus in Australian literature, and the BRiTE framework was established primarily for building resilience skills and strategies in preservice and early career teachers (Mansfield et al. 2014; 2016). The teachers who participated in the program nominated strategies, including coping strategies, and breathing and mindfulness techniques associated with a range of resources from both academic literature and more popular resources. The BRiTE modules may have acted as a stimulus to enable more experienced teachers to reflect on their current knowledge and practices in relation to managing emotions at work. Further analysis of the data within these online modules (currently over 9000 users by January, 2019) could identify needs of different groups for professional learning, not just in relation to emotions, but also to other aspects of wellbeing and resilience in the education workplace. As Webster and Hadwin (2015) suggest,



effective professional learning programs that cultivate teacher resilience must include more than a focus on emotion management, and need to also include wider skill building and structural and social supports. The BRiTE modules have a broader focus and could be further modified to include strategies directly relevant to other groups such as experienced educators and leaders.

One interesting point is that all strategies provided were those involving harnessing resources from *within oneself* such as thinking differently or self-calming, or from *within a personal support network* of trusted colleagues or friends. No participants specifically mentioned school leaders or administrative staff, counsellors or support groups, or further professional learning, even though they were engaged in a professional learning tool while writing their strategies. We know from a social ecological perspective that resilience may be challenged or resourced from more distal contexts (Beltman et al. 2011) and that the availability, extent and nature of these challenges and resources can vary in different national settings (Mansfield et al. 2018). Research has shown the importance of leadership support (Day and Gu 2014), professional learning communities (Johnson et al. 2014) and specific programs at school or district level (Schussler et al. 2018) in sustaining teacher resilience. This leads to a potential difficulty in encouraging teachers to engage in professional learning focusing on aspects of resilience such as managing emotions when the strategies they endorse focus on more proximal areas of action – the self and the immediate social network.

On the other hand, there is an ethical dilemma if the sources or triggers of stress and burnout lie beyond a teacher's everyday control – such as increasing administrative demands, lack of job security, or changing curriculum (Johnson et al. 2014; Day and Gu 2010), but the 'solutions' in terms of strategies are all seen to lie within the personal and micro-level realms of teachers. As we consider where the responsibility for teacher resilience may lie, Johnson et al. (2014) exhort us to look first at the social and political landscape of teaching, rather than

adopting a deficit model that blames the teacher for lacking personal resources. Individuals are not solely responsible for developing resilience. It is a collective responsibility (Ebersöhn 2014; Gu 2014).

### ***Limitations***

As this relatively small group of participants was diverse in terms of experience, location and so on, analysis and subsequent generalizations based on participants' demographics are not possible from our findings. Determining whether there are differences in strategies for managing emotions across demographics merits further investigation. For example, if Secondary teachers state different strategies than Primary or Early Childhood teachers, this would be of relevance for both preservice and teacher professional learning.

Participants' background knowledge and previous experience with resilience and strategies to manage emotions prior to completing the online modules is unknown. As participants chose to complete the online questions of their own volition, it is possible that they were already quite aware of their emotions and how to manage them. Additionally, because the analysed responses came from a question posed at the end of the module, it is not known how participants would have responded without the prior instruction and/or awareness of managing emotions to which they were exposed in the E-Module. A pre-module questionnaire regarding teachers' current strategies for managing heightened emotions could indicate any changes in knowledge. This could also include positive emotions which participants did not seem to think of in their responses even though these play a key role in sustaining teachers (Morgan et al. 2010). Preliminary analysis of interviews with those using the modules indicate that even when a strategy is already known, completing the modules builds that individual's sense of self-efficacy, aligning with the literature indicating that

individuals need to have the confidence to use the strategies they learn (Schussler et al. 2018). Additionally, observations of practice, focus groups, or face-to-face interviews with teachers to gather in-depth data could provide a more thorough understanding of the context in which teachers use these strategies and supplement the current findings.

## **Conclusion**

This study analyses online data, specifically related to emotions, through a systematic qualitative approach. Teachers first focused on staying calm, assessing the situation, and then moved on to problem-focused strategies. Analysis revealed similarities to emotion regulation and coping strategies, as well as to techniques common to the practices of mindfulness. Teachers also were proactive, reporting using ongoing strategies to be better prepared for future times of heightened emotions. Study limitations include a lack of knowledge about participants' previous exposure to professional learning in this area and self-reports were not verified through other data such as observations of practice. Enhancing teacher self-awareness regarding emotions can build capacity for resilience (Mansfield et al. 2016) and lead to improvements in relationships with "colleagues, students, and family members" (Schussler et al. 2018, p. 9). Such outcomes are important for reducing concerning levels of teacher attrition and burnout. Teacher educators, professional learning providers and employers can provide contexts that support teacher professional commitment and wellbeing, using resources such as the BRiTE modules to assist in maximising teachers' personal knowledge and skills regarding the management of heightened emotions.

## **References**

Akın, U., Aydın, İ., Erdoğan, Ç., & Demirkasımoğlu, N. (2013). Emotional labor and burnout among Turkish primary school teachers. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 41(2), 155-169. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s13384-013-0138-4>

- Anttila, H., Pyhältö, K., Soini, T., & Pietarinen, J. (2016). How does it feel to become a teacher? Emotions in teacher education. *Social Psychology of Education: An International Journal*, 19(3), 451-473. doi:10.1007/s11218-016-9335-0
- Australian Government Productivity Commission. (2012). Schools workforce: Research report. Canberra. Retrieved from <http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/study/education-workforce/schools/report>
- Baumgartner, J. J., Carson, R. L., Apavaloaie, L., & Tsouloupas, C. (2009). Uncovering common stressful factors and coping strategies among childcare providers. *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 38(5), 239-251.  
<http://dx.doi.org/dbgw.lis.curtin.edu.au/10.1007/s10566-009-9079-5>
- Beltman, S., & Mansfield, C. (2015). What does resilience mean for the teaching profession? *Professional Educator*, 14(6), 26-28. Retrieved from <https://search.informit-com-au.dbgw.lis.curtin.edu.au/fullText;dn=210345;res=AEIPT>
- Beltman, S., Mansfield, C., & Price, A. (2011). Thriving not just surviving: A review of research on teacher resilience. *Educational Research Review*, 6(3), 185-207.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2011.09.001>
- Bernay, R. (2014). Mindfulness and the beginning teacher. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(7), 58-69. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2014v39n7.6>
- Brackett, M. A., Palomera, R., Mojsa-Kaja, J., Reyes, M. R., & Salovy, P. (2010). Emotion-regulation ability, burnout, and job satisfaction among British secondary-school teachers. *Psychology in the Schools*, 47(4), 406-417.
- BRiTE. (2014-2017). Welcome to the BRiTE program. Retrieved from <https://www.brite.edu.au/>
- Chan, D. W. (2008). Emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and coping among Chinese prospective and in-service teachers in Hong Kong. *Educational Psychology*, 28(4), 397-408. doi:10.1080/01443410701668372
- Chang, M.-L. (2009). An appraisal perspective of teacher burnout: examining the emotional work of teachers. *Education Psychology Review*, 21, 193-218. doi:10.1007/s10648-009-9106-y
- Corcoran, R. P., & Tormey, R. (2012). How emotionally intelligent are pre-service teachers? *Teacher and Teacher Education*, 28(5), 750-759.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2012.02.007>.
- Day, C. (2014). Resilient principals in challenging schools: the courage and costs of conviction. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 20(5), 638-654. doi:10.1080/13540602.2014.937959
- Day, C., & Gu, Q. (2010). *The new lives of teachers*. Oxon, UK: Routledge.
- Day, C., & Gu, Q. (2014). *Resilient teachers, resilient schools*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ebersöhn, L. (2014). Teacher resilience: theorizing resilience and poverty. *Teachers and Teaching*, 20(5), 568-594. doi:10.1080/13540602.2014.937960
- Farrell, P., Woods, K., Humphrey, N., Curran, A., & Morris, E. (2007). Emotional Intelligence and education: A critical review. *Educational Psychology*, 2(April 2007). doi:10.1080/01443410601066735

- Fried, L., Mansfield, C., & Dobozy, E. (2015). Teacher emotion research: Introducing a conceptual model to guide future research. *Issues in Educational Research*, 25(4), 415-441.
- Frydenberg, E., & Lewis, R. (2002). The Coping Scale for Adults: correlates of productive and nonproductive coping. *Australian Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 19(1), 5-17. Retrieved from <https://search.informit-com-au.dbgw.lis.curtin.edu.au/fullText;dn=127834;res=AEIPT>
- Gallant, A., & Riley, P. (2014). Early career teacher attrition: new thoughts on an intractable problem. *Teacher Development*, 18(4), 562-580. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2014.945129>
- Ghanizadeh, A., & Royaei, N. (2015). Emotional facet of language teaching: emotion regulation and emotional labor strategies as predictors of teacher burnout. *International Journal of Pedagogies & Learning*, 10(2), 139-150. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/22040552.2015.1113847>
- Greenberg, L. (2006). Emotion-focused therapy- A synopsis. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 36(2), 87-93.
- Gross, J. J. (2002). Emotion regulation: Affective, cognitive, and social consequences. *Psychophysiology*, 39, 281-291.
- Gu, Q. (2014). The role of relational resilience in teachers' career-long commitment and effectiveness. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 20(5), 502-529. doi:10.1080/13540602.2014.937961
- Hagenauer, G., & Volet, S. E. (2014). "I don't hide my feelings, even though I try to": insight into teacher educator emotion display. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 41(3), 261-281. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s13384-013-0129-5>
- Hagenauer, G., Hascher, T., & Volet, S. E. (2015). Teacher emotions in the classroom: associations with students' engagement, classroom discipline and the interpersonal teacher-student relationship. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 30, 385-403. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10212-015-0250-0>
- Harper, H. (2012). Teachers' emotional responses to new pedagogical tools in high challenge settings: illustrations from the Northern Territory. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 39(39), 447-461. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s13384-012-0075-7>
- Hewitt-Taylor, J. (2001). Use of constant comparative analysis in qualitative research. *Nursing Standard*, 15(42), 39-42. Retrieved from [http://link.library.curtin.edu.au/p?pid=CUR\\_ALMA51112570730001951](http://link.library.curtin.edu.au/p?pid=CUR_ALMA51112570730001951)
- Hong, J. Y. (2012). Why do some beginning teachers leave the school, and others stay? Understanding teacher resilience through psychological lenses. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 18(4), 417-440. doi:10.1080/13540602.2012.696044
- House of Commons Education Committee. (2012). Great teachers: Attracting, training and retaining the best. London: The Stationery Office Limited. Retrieved from <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmeduc/1515/151502.htm>
- Hung, C. L. (2011). Coping strategies of primary school teachers in Taiwan experiencing stress because of teacher surplus. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 39(9), 1161-1173.

- Ingersoll, R. M. (2012). Beginning teacher induction: What the data tell us. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 38, 47–51.  
[https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1239&context=gse\\_pubs](https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1239&context=gse_pubs)
- Jennings, P. A., Snowberg, K. E., Coccia, M. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2011). Improving classroom learning environments by Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE ): Results of two pilot studies. *Journal of Classroom Interaction*, 46(1), 37-48.
- Jeon, L., Hur, E., & Buettner, C. (2016). Child-care chaos and teachers' responsiveness: The indirect associations through teachers' emotion regulation and coping. *Journal of School Psychology*, 59, 83-96. doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2016.09.006
- Johnson, B., Down, B., Le Cornu, R., Peters, J., Sullivan, A., Pearce, J., & Hunter, J. (2014). *Promoting early career teacher resilience: A socio-cultural and critical guide to action*. Oxon, UK: Routledge.
- Johnson, S., Berg, J., & Donaldson, M. (2005). *Who stays in teaching and why: A review of literature on teacher retention*. The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, Cambridge: Harvard Graduate School of Education.
- Kirk, J., & Wall, C. (2010). Resilience and loss in work identities: A narrative analysis of some retired teachers' work-life histories. *British Educational Research Journal*, 36(4), 627-641. doi:10.1080/01411920903018216
- Lazarus, R. S. (1991). Progress on a cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotion. *American Psychologist*, 46(8), 819-834. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.46.8.819>
- Lee, M., Pekrun, R., Taxer, J., Schutz, P., Vogl, E., & Xie, X. (2016). Teachers' emotions and emotion management: integrating emotion regulation theory with emotional labor research. *Social Psychology of Education: An International Journal*, 19(4), 843-863. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11218-016-9359-5>
- Mansfield, C. F., Beltman, S., & Price, A. (2014). 'I'm coming back again!' The resilience process of early career teachers. *Teachers and Teaching*, 20(5), 547-567. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2014.937958>
- Mansfield, C. F., Beltman, S., Broadley, T., & Weatherby-Fell, N. (2016). Building resilience in teacher education: An evidenced informed framework. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 54, 77-87. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.11.016>
- Mansfield, C. F., Beltman, S., Price, A., & McConney, A. (2012). "Don't sweat the small stuff": Understanding teacher resilience at the chalkface. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28, 357-367. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2011.11.001
- Mansfield, C.F., Ebersöhn, L., Beltman, S., & Loots, T. (2018). Great southern lands: Making space for teacher resilience in South Africa and Australia. In M. Wosnitza, F. Peixoto, S. Beltman, & C. Mansfield (eds.). *Resilience in education: Concepts, contexts and connections* (pp. 53-71). Cham: Springer International Publishing. <https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783319766898>
- Masten, A. S. (2014). *Ordinary magic: Resilience in development*. New York, NY: Guilford
- McGrath-Champ, S. Stacey, M., Wilson, R., & Fitzgerald, S. (2018) Understanding work in schools: *The foundation for teaching and learning. 2018 Report to the NSW Teachers*

*Federation*. University of Sydney; Curtin University.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11937/71410>

- Meyer, D. K., & Turner, J. C. (2002). Discovering emotion in classroom motivation. *Educational Psychologist, 37*(2), 107-114.
- Morgan, M., Ludlow, L., Kitching, K., O'Leary, M., & Clarke, A. (2010). What makes teachers tick? Sustaining events in new teachers' lives. *British Educational Research Association, 36*(2), 191-208. doi:10.1080/01411920902780972
- Newberry, M. (2013). The demand of multiplicity in the classroom: Emotion regulation and cognitive load. In M. Newberry, A. Gallant, & P. Riley (Eds.), *Emotion and school: Understanding how the hidden curriculum influences relationships, leadership, teaching, and learning* (Vol. 18, pp. 25-48). Bingley, UK: Emerald.
- OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development]. (2013). Teaching and learning international survey, TALIS, conceptual framework. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/education/school/TALIS%202013%20Conceptual%20Framework.pdf>
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Punch, K. F., & Oancea, A. (2014). *Introduction to research methods in education* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Reiser, J. E., & McCarthy, C. J. (2018). Preliminary investigation of a stress prevention and mindfulness group for teachers. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work, 32*(1), 2-34. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01933922.2017.1338811>
- Richardson, P. W., Watt, H. M. G., & Devos, C. (2013). Types of professional and emotional coping among beginning teachers. In M. Newberry, A. Gallant, & P. Riley (Eds.), *Emotion and school: Understanding how the hidden curriculum influences relationships, leadership, teaching, and learning* (Vol. 18, pp. 229 - 253). Bingley, UK: Emerald.
- Riley, P. (2017). *The Australian principal occupational health, safety and wellbeing survey. Executive summary*. 2016 Data. Retrieved from <http://www.principalhealth.org/au/reports.php>
- Roeser, R. W., Skinner, E., Beers, J., & Jennings, P. A. (2012). Mindfulness training and teachers' professional development: An emerging area of research and practice. *Child Development Perspectives, 6*(2), 167-173. doi:10.1111/j.1750-8606.2012.00238.x
- Schussler, D. L., Deweese, A., Rasheed, D., Demauro, A., Brown, J., Greenberg, M., & Jennings, P. A. (2018). Stress and release: Case studies of teacher resilience following a mindfulness-based intervention. *American Journal of Education, 125*(November 2018), 28. doi:0195-6744/2018/12501-0001
- Schutz, P. A., & Zembylas, M. (2016). Where do we go from here? Implications and future directions for research methods on emotion and education. In M. Zembylas & P. A. Schutz (Eds.), *Methodological advances in research on emotion and education* (pp. 287-293). Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Schutz, P. A., DeCuir-Gunby, J. T., & Williams-Johnson, M. R. (2016). Using multiple and mixed methods to investigate emotions in educational contexts. In M. Zembylas & P.

- A. Schutz (Eds.), *Methodological advances in research on emotion and education* (pp. 217-229). Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Shapiro, S. L., Carlson, L. E., Astin, J. A., & Freedman, B. (2006). Mechanisms of mindfulness. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 62*(3), 373-386.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/jclp.20237>
- Sharp, J. E., & Jennings, P. A. (2016). Strengthening teacher presence through mindfulness: What educators say about the Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) Program. *Mindfulness, 7*, 209-218. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12671-015-0474-8>
- Sharplin, E., O'Neill, M., & Chapman, A. (2011). Coping strategies for adaptation to new teacher appointments: Intervention for retention. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 27*, 136-146. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2010.07.010
- Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2016). Teacher stress and teacher self-efficacy as predictors of engagement, emotional exhaustion, and motivation to leave the teaching profession. *Creative Education, 7*, 1785-1799.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ce.2016.713182>
- Ungar, M. (2012). Social ecologies and their contribution to resilience. In M. Ungar (Ed.) *The Social Ecology of Resilience: A Handbook of Theory and Practice*. New York: Springer
- Webster, E. A., & Hadwin, A. F. (2015). Emotions and emotion regulation in undergraduate studying: examining students' reports from a self-regulated learning perspective. *Educational Psychology, 35*(7), 794-818. doi:10.1080/01443410.2014.895292
- Weldon, P. (2018). Early career teacher attrition in Australia: evidence, definition, classification and measurement. *Australian Journal of Education, 62*(1), 61-78. doi:10.1177/0004944117752478
- Willett, M., Segal, D., & Walford, W. (2014). *National Teaching Workforce Dataset: Data Analysis Report*. Department of Education. Retrieved from [https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/ntwd\\_data\\_analysis\\_report.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/ntwd_data_analysis_report.pdf)
- Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2013). A reflection on the place of emotion in teaching and teacher education. In M. Newberry, A. Gallant, & P. Riley (Eds.), *Emotion and school: Understanding how the hidden curriculum influences relationships, leadership, teaching, and learning* (Vol. 18, pp. 255-270). Bingley, UK: Emerald.
- Zimmer-Gembeck, M. J., & Skinner, E. A. (2016). The development of coping: implications for psychopathology and resilience. In D. Cicchetti (Ed.), *Developmental Psychopathology* (3 ed., Vol. 4, pp. 485-534). Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.



**Table 1** First order categories: definition, examples and frequency (and percentage of total strategies)

First Order Categories	Definition	Examples (with Participant ID number)	n (%)
Breathing	Take a deep breath or focus on breathing.	<i>Breathe to calm myself down</i> (ID8411) <i>Take a deep breath</i> (9393) <i>Breathe</i> (12592)	43 (20.9%)
General Assessment of the Situation	Think about the situation and the context.	<i>Think about the best way to deal with the situation before reacting</i> (9393). <i>Assess the situation</i> (11535). <i>Consider previous situations/ emotions that have occurred</i> (14107).	22 (10.7%)
Perspective	Put the situation into context, look at the bigger picture or take the 'self' out.	<i>Don't take negative comments or behaviours from teachers, parents or students personally</i> (12624). <i>Remember that this too shall pass!</i> (12653) <i>Keep in mind the facts and concentrate on the best outcome for all involved</i> (12653).	21 (10.2%)
Response	Respond to the situation, emotionally and/or practically.	<i>Use other strategies about thinking about student behaviour</i> (12607). <i>Offer to discuss later</i> (12660). <i>Ensure you respond and behaviour in an appropriate manner</i> (12624).	20 (9.7%)
Self-Reflection on Emotions	Listen to oneself and work through how one feels.	<i>Write down my feelings</i> (14737). <i>Regulate my emotions</i> (12620). <i>Acknowledge my emotions and name them</i> (12620).	15 (7.3%)
Share/Talk	Talk to a person outside of the situation.	<i>Talk about it with others</i> (8493). <i>Use your support network</i> (12445). <i>Talk to colleague</i> (12640).	15 (7.3%)
Mental removal	Take a short mental time out to lower heightened emotions	<i>Regroup</i> (14674). <i>Take time out</i> (16771). <i>Pause</i> (13305).	14 (6.8%)
Other/Empathy	Think of the other person and be empathetic.	<i>Try to consider other people's emotions and their perspective</i> (17712). <i>Check your thoughts and think about it from the other point of view</i> (12555). <i>Bring compassion and understanding to the situation</i> (12593).	14 (6.8%)
Physical removal	Physically take oneself out of the situation.	<i>Remove myself from the situation if possible</i> (13800). <i>Find a quiet place for a few seconds</i> (17005).	12 (5.8%)

		<i>Step away from the situation and take a break (17533).</i>	
Exercise	Physical activity.	<i>Take a walk (11568). Exercise (12626).</i>	9 (4.4%)
Self-Care	Self-care that was not common with other strategies.	<i>Have a cuppa tea (12659). Engage in a hobby or personal interest (16605).</i>	7 (3.4%)
Self-Awareness	Awareness that one's emotions are heightened.	<i>Be aware of my own emotions (8360). Be aware (15944).</i>	5 (2.4%)
Meditation	Participate in a mindfulness or meditative practice.	<i>Calm thoughts (12541). Mindfulness activities (17741).</i>	5 (2.4%)
Planning	Plan ahead for difficult situations and emotions	<i>Have a strategy to deal with situations (8360). Be proactive (12628).</i>	4 (1.9%)
<hr/> <i>Total</i>			206 (100%)

**Figure 1** Managing emotions over time: sequence of first and higher order categories

