

Preface

Training to become a teacher takes time and commitment and costs money; it therefore seems that only wilful carelessness lies behind the wastage and personal distress arising from drop out in the first year of teaching. Yet so many clever and committed beginning teachers find they cannot endure their experiences during that first year. This exceptional book is based on a 4-year Australian Research Council funded study entitled *Addressing the Teacher Exodus*. Addressing is a key word. The book does not simply describe what goes wrong for Early Career Teachers (ECT); instead it provides insights and ideas that can help to make the first year of teaching a productive time, the first stage in a teacher's development as a creative and agentic professional who is able to support student learning responsibly.

The project has produced these ideas because it started by acknowledging that the first year of teaching is tough. At the same time it recognised that the last things that schools needed were cohorts of teachers who had survived simply because they were, in the Darwinian sense, the fittest. The research team therefore set out to identify and create a framework of conditions which support ECT resilience. This could have been a risky venture. Resilience is a word that can make the hackles rise. All too often it is associated with personal coping and can lead to blaming those who do not or cannot cope. The team's approach to resilience was very different. They aimed at taking a 'balanced, complex and sophisticated conception of resilience capable of recognising the importance of social, cultural and political influences at work', and they did just that. This book explains how all these forces shape ECT experiences and how they can, in turn, be shaped to guide and support these professionals in the early stages of their careers.

We should not underestimate what a breakthrough the team's approach is in the field of resilience. It shifts the focus from the individual to the environment and how the environment is constructed to build capability and the exercise of professional judgement in the demanding job that is teaching. But more than that, the approach helps everyone involved in training, recruiting and supporting ECT to see what we can do to keep good committed people in the profession. Teacher educators, school leaders, local policy makers and implementers all have a great deal to learn from this book.

It is compelling reading. The stories of individual ECT take us straight to the heart of each point that is being made and the rich interview data gathered from ECT and school leaders constantly remind us of the everyday realities of being an ECT and trying to the best for them. The text does not focus on what is difficult, though we are regularly reminded of what constrains and frustrates ECT resilience. Instead, it identifies strategies that have succeeded in sustaining ECT as active and purposeful learners. These strategies are focused at the individual level, such as ways of bringing out the creativity of ECT; at the institutional, for example enhancing university and school partnerships; and at the local through improving recruitment and retention policies. At the same time it speaks directly to ECT, reminding them that they are human beings who also need to attend to their personal relationships.

The authors say that they aimed at producing an accessible book which is practical and helpful. It is that, but also more. The study is based in two States in Australia, but it has global relevance. The team describes modestly how they have also drawn on the ‘wisdom’ to be found in existing research on induction and transitions into teaching. They have done that with great delicacy. They have also contributed to that wisdom. The ideas offered here for reflection and discussion will, if taken seriously, help us all to see how we can best nurture informed professionals who can make a difference in the schools in which they teach. Read it, it offers what it says on the tin and the tin is crammed with good ideas.

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Early Career Teachers

Stories of Resilience

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2015, XXIII, 124 p. 2 illus. in color., Softcover

ISBN: 978-981-287-172-5