QUESTIONABLE PRACTICES? RELYING ON INDIVIDUAL TEACHER RESILIENCE IN REMOTE SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Early career teachers eager to find employment are often encouraged by employers to accept positions in remote locations which are traditionally difficult to staff. This paper reports research that examined a case study of a graduate teacher employed in a remote school. Drawing on resilience theory, we challenge the profession to consider whether in fact employers are relying on the personal resilience of early career teachers to cope with the rigors of teaching in remote schools and are remiss for not providing adequate support at school and system levels.

INTRODUCTION

Across Australia, there are many small schools located in geographically isolated small communities. Given the isolation and the complexity of the communities, these schools have struggled to attract and retain teachers (e.g. Herrington & Herrington, 2001, p. 425). The resulting high teacher transience has had a negative impact on students who are already significantly disadvantaged (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000). Previous research has identified many reasons that contribute to high teacher transience, such as professional and personal isolation (Herrington & Herrington, 2001; Irinaga-Bistolas, Schalock, Marvin, & Beck, 2007; Sharplin, 2002), limited professional support (Herrington & Herrington, 2001) and poor pre-service preparation (Baills, Bell, Greensill, & Wilcox, 2002; Halsey, 2006; Sharplin, 2002).

Despite these clearly identified difficulties associated with teaching in isolated areas, early career teachers who are keen to find employment are often encouraged by employing bodies to work in remote schools by promises of permanent employment, future positions in metropolitan schools and increased pay (Department of Education Science and Training, 2002; Sharplin, 2002). Furthermore, employers have used more subtle means to recruit teachers, such as offering positions in difficult to staff schools before those in more sought after schools are filled. In fact, these offers frequently come with a subtle enticement (or threat) that if rejected their application will be placed on the "bottom of the pile" and therefore applicants risk not being offered other positions. In this paper we argue that while such enticements can satisfy graduate teachers' extrinsic need for employment

security, they should also be accompanied by the tangible supports that early career teachers need to cope with the challenges of beginning teaching in isolated and remote schools.

Early career teachers experience great challenges during their transition to the profession (Bezzina, 2006). It has been identified as a time when they often feel very overwhelmed (Department of Education Science and Training, 2002) and the complexity of the challenges they face lead many to decide to leave the profession (Ewing & Langley Smith, 2003). The profession has acknowledged these difficulties (e.g. Department of Education Science and Training, 2002) and has continued attempts to support graduates through initiatives such as induction programs, mentoring arrangements and targeted professional development. More specifically, past research has indentified many policy and practice initiatives that support early career teachers in rural and remote schools. For example, innovative practices have been identified that utilise web-based technologies to reduce professional isolation (Herrington & Herrington, 2001), provide developmental induction including quality mentors (Irinaga-Bistolas et al., 2007), foster support networks (Lock, 2008) and provide specialised pre-service learning experiences (Yarrow, Herschell, & Millwater, 1999).

It is clearly important for early career teachers themselves, but more importantly for the students that they teach, that they experience a successful transition to the profession. Employing bodies have a vested interest in supporting this transition and it would be reasonable to expect that supporting policies and practices would be in place for all teachers, particularly those who are potentially more at risk because they are employed in remote schools.

In this paper, we present a case study of a graduate teacher who was employed in a remote school setting. The aim of the study was to investigate the resilience of an early career teacher employed in a 'hard to staff' school. From this case, we argue that the supporting factors that contributed to the teacher's resilience were mainly personal rather than situated or systemic. This is surprising given what the literature has indicated can support early career teachers, especially those employed in rural and remote settings. It further raises the question about employing authorities' propensity to rely on early career teachers' resilience – their capacity to adapt and cope despite being exposed to serious on-going threats to their wellbeing – rather than putting in place well researched and known to be effective support mechanisms for these teachers.

RESILIENCE

This study was framed by resilience theory, which is a useful lens through which to examine the success of early career teachers' employed in remote schools. We draw on Masten, Best and Garmezy's (1990, p. 425) notion of resilience as "the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances". We also view resilience as an ongoing process. However, to

recognise the complexity of resilience we have adopted a socially critical orientation where we acknowledge the psychological dimensions of resilience that help to explain some differences in human functioning, whilst placing more emphasis on the broader social, economic and political influences on human experience (see Johnson & Down, 2009).
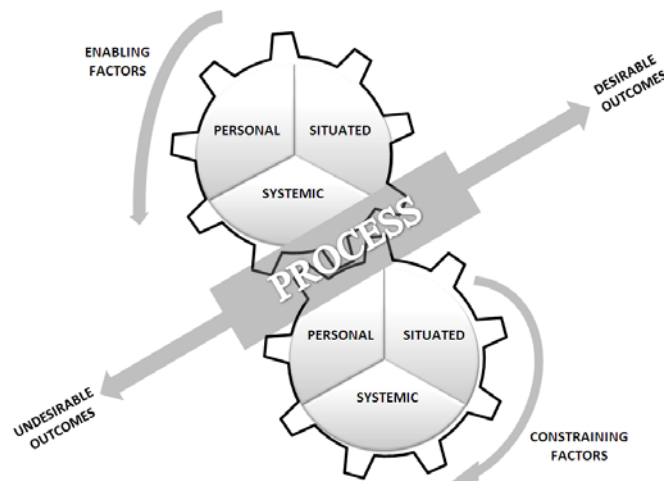

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Resilience (Papatraianou, n.d; Papatraianou, Sullivan, & Johnson, 2009)

From this broad understanding of resilience, we have drawn on a conceptual model (see Figure 1) that emerged from doctoral research into early career teachers (Papatraianou, n.d), which helps clarify some common misconceptions related to resilience (Papatraianou et al., 2009). This model conceptualises resilience as a situated construct, with three domains of factors: (a) the personal domain, (b) the situated domain, and (c) the systemic domain. The combination of factors within these domains can either enable or constrain an individual's resilience in a dynamic process. This emerging conceptualisation of resilience draws on ecological theory to avoid focusing on resilience as an individual rather than a collective concern (Johnson & Down, 2009). The personal domain refers to the factors which include self-esteem, agency, and relationships with family and friends (Bobek, 2002; Gu & Day, 2007). The situated domain refers to factors that are particular to the context of resilience being explored. In this case, situated factors include those that occur within the context of the school, for example a teacher's contributions to school decision-making (Liu, 2007), staff relationships (Swars, Meyers, Mays, & Lack, 2009) as well as the socio-economic ecology of the school (Buckley, Scheider, & Shang, 2005). Finally, the systemic domain refers to the broader national or international influences, governmental processes and regulations, departmental policies and procedures. The factors within these three domains can either *enable* or *constrain* an individual's resilience. These dynamic enabling and constraining factors interact creating a process that contributes to either desirable or undesirable outcomes. This broad model of human resilience affords a lens through which to examine the issues of early career teachers working in remote schools, and was used in this case study "as an intellectual tool to interpret the narrative text" to help create "new understandings" (Kim, 2008, p. 254).

METHODOLOGY

In this study, we drew on the traditions of interpretive qualitative case study design (Stake, 2000; Yin, 2003). The case study discussed in this paper was drawn from a larger Australian Research Council funded project (2008-2012) that investigated the resilience of early career teachers more generally (Johnson et al., 2010, 2013 - forthcoming). We, and our colleagues[3], identified a need for research that investigates early career teachers' resilience to gain a better understanding of the reasons why some teachers who face similar challenges stay in the profession, whereas others leave. From this larger study, a data set was created for one early career teacher, Meg, who was employed in a remote Australian school.

The case study design not only allowed a detailed and rich investigation of an early career teacher, but also enabled a focus on the broader context of a remote school setting (Flyvbjerg, 2011) which we considered very important for this study. This "particular case" (Stake, 2000) is intended to facilitate a greater understanding of the phenomenon of graduate teachers employed in remote schools settings in Australia and what enables or constrains their resilience. We acknowledge the limitations of a single case study (Flyvbjerg, 2011), because it remains unclear the extent to which this case illustrates other experiences of early career teachers employed in similar contexts. However, the richness of this case illuminates broader systemic and contextual issues that we argue require further investigation and attention.

The data were gathered from two semi-structured interviews held with the early career teacher (one face-to-face and the other by phone) at the beginning and the end of the school year. Prior to the first interview, we provided the teacher with a concept map of themes and sub-themes for discussion. The interview lasted for approximately one hour. To guide the second interview, the teacher was asked to create a 'line drawing' highlighting critical points in her career to date since she started teaching (adapted from Sumison, 2004). In addition, data were collected during an interview towards the end of the year with the principal of her school. To prepare for this interview, the principal was provided with questions beforehand. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and imported into the NVivo8 qualitative research software program. Transcripts were coded and analysed using an inductive thematic analysis approach.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: MEG'S CASE

The findings are presented here as a case study and discussed throughout. Data analysis showed that the main constraints to Meg's personal and professional wellbeing were systemic and situated factors. Furthermore, these constraining factors collectively threatened Meg's resilience. However, the findings also show

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[3] Judy Peters and Rosie Le Cornu from UniSA, Barry Down and Jane Pearce from Murdoch University, and Janet Hunter from Edith Cowan University.

that personal enabling factors supported Meg's wellbeing and we argue that she demonstrated resilience by completing her commitment to the contract but also deciding to move on at the end of the year.

Isolation: "I didn't realise how far away it was"

Meg was a graduate teacher working in a remote Australian school in Banksia Plains[4]. Banksia Plains is an Indigenous community located 400km from the closest town, 7 hours to the nearest major centre by four-wheel drive, and over 1000 km from the closest major city. The population varies between 80 to 100 people depending on cultural activities. English is spoken as a second language. Facilities in the community consist of a school, health clinic and shop. Meg was one of only seven non-Indigenous people in the community running these facilities. The school has approximately 27 Indigenous students, but this number varies significantly due to the transient nature of the local community.

Employment practices: "That's how I ended up here"

Meg's priority upon graduation was to obtain employment. She explained, "I just really wanted a contract … and said I'd go anywhere and that's where I ended up". Meg's first offer of employment was at Banksia Plains. Whilst deliberating about the feasibility of the offer, she thought: "I'm young, I might as well give it a go". With the support of her parents and partner, Meg decided to accept the position; it offered good financial incentives, and she thought that it was "probably a good experience". Meg grew up in a rural area, which she believed would help her to prepare for the isolation that Banksia Plains would bring – she was "used to all the remoteness". Meg was positive about her appointment and looked forward to the year ahead.

In Australia, it is common for Education Departments to offer incentives to attract and retain teachers in remote schools. These range from pre-service scholarships worth up to $20,000 per year (e.g., the *Country Scholarships Scheme* in South Australia), sponsored practicum experiences in rural schools (e.g., the *Beyond The Line* initiative in New South Wales, and the *Over the Hill Program* in Queensland), HECS repayment grants (e.g., the *Partnerships in Teaching Excellence Scholarship* scheme in Tasmania), through to employment guarantees upon graduation, increased starting salaries, and generous study leave provisions following country appointments (e.g., the *Country Teaching Program* in Western Australia). Location allowances and benefits are also commonly paid in the larger Australian states to encourage new graduates to teach in rural and remote locations. Meg was encouraged to accept the position she was offered by the appeal of early notification, and the potential to gain permanent employment. She had indicated in her application that she was prepared to teach anywhere in the state not really expecting to be offered a position in a remote indigenous school. However, part of her decision

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[4] Please note: Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the participants.

to accept the position was the perceived threat of not being offered another position if she refused the offer. Meg explained, "I put it [the district] as a preference, so if I declined it then I'd go to the bottom of the pile." This quite explicit use of punitive consequences – being relegated to the bottom of a long waiting list for employment – was in contrast to the incentive based attraction schemes that operate in other parts of Australia.

Early notification and an offer for continuity of appointment were enabling factors related to system and school employment practices that supported Meg's resilience. Meg was offered the position at Banksia Plains some time before she was expected to begin, which supported her. This early notification of appointment was a key reason for her accepting the position. She explained, "I didn't really want to wait until two weeks before school to be told where I would be going. That's how I ended up there". The early job offer gave Meg time to prepare professionally and personally for the year ahead, which was important to her. Additionally, during the year, Meg was offered a permanent position with the Department if she remained at Banksia Plains for a further two years. This offer reassured Meg that she was valued and possibly contributed to her resilience. However, to ensure that Meg received the benefit of a metropolitan placement, she would have had to commit to working at Banksia Plains for a further two years. This commitment was just too much for Meg, and she decided to leave Banksia Plains at the end of the year and decline the offer of permanent employment[5].

SYSTEMIC AND SITUATED CONSTRAINING FACTORS

Soon into her appointment, Meg faced a myriad of challenges that affected her personal and professional wellbeing.

Unique Environment: "It's totally different to anything that you've ever done"

Meg was provided with a house by the Education Department. She explained one major feature of the house was, "I have to walk outside to my shower as it is separate from my house. ... I have a long drop toilet outside, because Banskia Plains has water shortage issues and there's no flushing toilets in the community, except for there's one in the clinic for health reasons."

Upon arrival, Meg's first challenge was to organise the classroom. "I walked into the school and it was a pretty big mess. ... I didn't know where anything was. Nothing was really in decent spots and you'd have to go fishing for lots of stuff." Although Meg considered that the school had good resources for students, there were few teacher resources available. A lack of resources is a problem that most early career

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[5] Although Meg chose not to accept an ongoing position at Banksia Plains, she accepted an offer to work in a rural town school the following year.

teachers face but such a situation is exacerbated in remote locations, because there are also fewer colleagues with whom to share resources (Johnson et al., 2010).

Meg was employed to teach a class of approximately 5-6 students spanning a total of six year levels from pre-school through to year 4. The number of students varied continually, with some students only attending for a few weeks at a time. Meg recalled one occasion that she described as "my lowest point" of the year: "I kind of just started to get my kids settled and starting to get to know them a bit and then all of a sudden these new kids just change it completely". Not only did the class double in size overnight, but the regular students started to stay away from school because of it. Meg explained why she felt disheartened by the transient nature of the student body. "There are some students that you think you're starting to develop that relationship with, and then they disappear ... and then all that you think you can achieve with this student goes out the window." Meg also found that having transient students made it "really hard to get any consistency with behaviour management".

Further, Meg thought that she was not well prepared for teaching such a wide range of year levels. "It's totally different to anything that you've ever done in uni". Her previous experience was only in mainstream classrooms and for a maximum of five weeks at a time. "Planning's probably been my biggest hurdle. I've had to try to make sure I cover three strands, three standards and that has been a bit hard." When student attendance was consistent, Meg felt more positive about her work, "This term has been pretty good. I have pretty consistent kids".

The literature has identified many challenges typically faced by teachers employed in remote Australian schools – particularly early career teachers – some of which have been linked with issues concerning pre-service education. For example, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (2000) found in their inquiry into rural and remote education in Australia that most pre-service teacher education programs do not adequately prepare early career teachers to develop the skills and knowledge required for teaching in remote contexts. Given the diverse challenges of teaching and living in rural and remote locations, pre-service teachers need to be prepared to face these challenges and conditions confidently prior to their appointment (Halsey, 2006; Lock, 2008; Sharplin, 2002). For example, pre-service teacher education programs should provide theoretical and practical components that equip early career teachers to teach multi-age classes (Baills et al., 2002) and Indigenous students (Halsey, 2005; Lock, 2008) competently and with confidence. Addressing these challenges at a systemic level should improve the quality of education that teachers provide to students in remote schools (Yarrow et al., 1999).

Teaching in an Indigenous community school presented unique contextual challenges for Meg. For example, she found it difficult teaching students for whom English was a second language. Meg explained that her students tended to speak English only at school and therefore their proficiency varied greatly. She described one student, "He doesn't really speak much English and he's not ready to be in a

school classroom. I don't really know where to even start with him". Meg also worried that her lack of pre-service education compromised her teaching ability, "I don't think I've got the skills to teach these kids because I don't have any ESL [English as a second language] training". Meg also found that the language barrier challenged her ability to manage the students' behaviour because students fought and bullied each other in their first language and she was unaware of what was going on. She explained, "A lot of the time I can't tell when they're teasing. I only realise when they're actually getting violent, that there is a problem. Not having an Indigenous Education Worker makes it a bit difficult because I can't communicate in English because the students often don't understand". Often remote schools employ an Indigenous Education Worker from the local area to provide language and cultural support (Dare to Lead & Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2007), however this support was not provided at Banksia Plains because the school was unable to fill the position.

Professional Support: "I don't have enough understanding or support to develop good teaching"

Meg found that little formal mentoring and support was given to her both from within the school and from external sources during her appointment at Banksia Plains. She explained that the principal and the other teacher were new to their roles and to the school and therefore nobody was able to act as a mentor. Meg said, "There's no one to really go to because the other teacher and I are both new so we don't have any other mentors, that's been a big thing." Meg explained that the principal was unable to provide support because she "was flat out trying to learn the ropes of being a principal ... she had a lot of work on her plate ... it was just a bit tricky." Meg also felt that the principal did not have the skills required of a mentor. "She didn't really know what brand new teachers need as support. She's trying to help as much as she can, but it's not the kind of assistance that you need." Hence, Meg was reluctant to seek help from the principal. "I haven't really been forthcoming. I don't know, it's too hard to ask for it. I wouldn't approach her because it felt like maybe she just didn't have enough time." Meg believed she missed learning opportunities because of this lack of mentoring. Meg said, "Critical feedback ... I haven't had any."

In remote schools, typically there are few experienced teachers to mentor early career teachers (McConaghy, Lloyd, Hardy, & Jenkins, 2005), which contributes to their attrition (Irinaga-Bistolas et al., 2007). As a result, early career teachers employed in remote locations often need to be fully reliant on their own skills and resources in a generally unsupported environment (Miller, Paterson, & Graham, 2005). That is, a lack of system and situational supports for early career teachers forces them to draw on their personal resources when facing challenges to their professional wellbeing.

Another constraint for Meg was her frustration by the lack of opportunities to participate in professional development, because they were not offered or she found

them difficult to access. Although Meg was entitled to be released for half a day per week to undergo training and professional development, she explained that "It's just too far away ... you have to travel so far. It'll take you two or three days to get there and back, so it's really quite hard to get out for training".

As part of her initial district induction, Meg was introduced to the literacy program used in Indigenous schools called the 'National Accelerated Literacy Program'. She found this professional development limited and thought she needed more help implementing the program. Meg explained, "We've only had one day of training on it and then we were expected to go in and teach it, but once we get back to school there has been no sort of support in that role. That was really hard." With other professional development she completed, Meg felt similarly unsupported. "They would give you resources, but not really show how to use them or how to incorporate them into your teaching." On one occasion, Meg drove for four hours to a neighbouring school, to spend time with a literacy coordinator. Meg observed the coordinator model strategies and skills which helped her gain a basic understanding of the program. Additionally, the system provided an Early Years Coordinator who visited Meg once a term to offer professional, context-specific support. Meg explained, "She comes out once a term and shows you what's been going on in other schools, so that's really good". However, these system structures were very limited in their nature and could have been offered more comprehensively. Meg's case suggests how district induction and professional development has the potential to enhance resilience in teachers working in remote locations. There is a clear need for early career teachers to be connected and professionally supported which can be addressed at a system and local level. Overall, Meg felt as though she did not have the same opportunities to access professional development and support as teachers in the metropolitan area. She explained, "I don't want to lose touch with the mainstream - I feel like I need to get back."

Meg's case illustrates a lack of quality ongoing professional development as a major challenge for teachers working in remote schools. Access to appropriate professional development is made very difficult due to the lengthy travel often required, the costs of which are not always covered, and a lack of available relief teachers to cover classes (Stokes, Stafford, & Holdsworth, 1999). Compounding these difficulties, teachers in remote locations are often critical of the quality of professional development being offered to them by education departments (McConaghy et al., 2005). As a consequence, teachers in remote schools can feel that their career prospects are hampered because they are 'out of touch' with the latest issues and directions occurring in metropolitan locations (Stokes et al., 1999). Professional isolation has been identified as a major reason for teachers not being attracted to or retained in remote locations (Herrington & Herrington, 2001).

Crisis Point: "It was like a big punch in the guts"

During first-term holidays, Meg was positive and looking forward to returning for Term 2: "I came back really positive and really energised ... pretty excited". Unfortunately, this soon came to an abrupt end. "When we got back here, we found the school had been broken into and it was pretty trashed ... they had written all this stuff about me" she recalls, describing the scene. "It was like a big punch in the guts ... a bit of a downer." Meg felt betrayed, and this incident became one of the catalysts for her decision to leave Banksia Plains. "Well you know, you leave everything behind, all your family and your friends to come out here ... I didn't have to be here ... it was pretty disheartening."

In summary, these challenges significantly threatened Meg's personal and professional wellbeing and therefore her resilience. Drawing on the conceptual model of resilience is useful to frame and understand these constraints. Meg's case shows that the major threats to her resilience were due mainly to factors in the situational and systemic domains. The challenging living conditions, lack of professional resources, broad age range of students, transient nature of students, her lack of preparation to teach English as a second (foreign) language, lack of mentoring and support, and limited opportunities to participate in professional development are all 'malleable' factors from the systemic or situated domains. Most of these challenges have been identified in previous research, however what is important is that Meg still encountered them.

This paper now turns to examine the factors that supported Meg's resilience. Given that research has identified many concerns related to teachers employed in remote locations leading to many recommendations (e.g. Department of Education Science and Training, 2002), this case indicates that there is still much work to be done.

PERSONAL ENABLING FACTORS

The data from the interviews indicate that despite many challenges to Meg's wellbeing, this early career teacher managed to sustain her commitment to her students and fulfil her employment contract. The factors that supported Meg's resilience throughout the year were mainly from the personal domain. There was some evidence that factors from the situated and systemic domains had potential to be more influential in supporting Meg's professional wellbeing, but unfortunately, they were limited. The supports 'got' her through the year, but they were not enough to 'keep' her there.

Relationships: "My mum's pretty good to talk to"

Meg's personal relationships and, to some extent, her professional relationships substantially contributed to the resilience she demonstrated throughout the year. Meg frequently spoke about her relationships with family and friends and the

important role that they played in helping her to maintain resilience throughout the most difficult periods of her appointment. Meg often called her mother, who is also a teacher, to seek advice about her problems, "My mum's pretty good to talk to about the problems I'm having ... she's very supportive". Additionally, Meg formed strong relationships with her two colleagues at the school. Both of her colleagues were new to the school, which seemed to facilitate a sense of connection. Meg got on well with the principal even though, as noted earlier, she felt the principal was unable to support her in a leadership capacity.

The relationships Meg had with family, friends and colleagues helped her to deal with the social isolation she experienced, which is common with teachers working in remote areas (Irinaga-Bistolas et al., 2007; Sharplin, 2002). There is evidence in the literature that these established and new social networks are important to teachers feeling supported (Gu & Day, 2007; Sharplin, 2002), especially professionally (Herrington & Herrington, 2001). The quality of Meg's personal and professional relationships contributed to her resilience during the appointment.

Having grown up in a rural area, Meg demonstrated an awareness of ways to connect with the community in this remote location. Meg explained that she was "willing to meet people and have a go" and "you really need to get involved in the community". Not wasting any time, within the first few weeks, Meg attended a community barbeque and cricket game, and invited other staff members to her house to socialise. Meg found that, "people from school, are all really great people, and I get along with them really well". Meg also developed supportive relationships with other non-Indigenous residents living in the town. Meg explained that the non-Indigenous residents lived on the same side of town and that the Indigenous people liked to "keep to themselves because they're very private". She said that the non-Indigenous residents tended to socialise together, which lead to Meg feeling a sense of belonging and reducing the social isolation often experienced by early career teachers working in remote locations (Irinaga-Bistolas et al., 2007; Sharplin, 2002). Having previously lived in a rural location, it can be said that Meg possessed 'social capital' and a 'sense of rural social space' , which assisted her to reside and work in a remote location (Baills et al., 2002; Lock et al., 2009; White & Reid, 2008). Furthermore, Meg demonstrated agency by drawing on this capital and being proactive in developing relationships with the local community (Sharplin, 2002; Yarrow et al., 1999).

Teacher identity: "You've got to be pretty flexible"

The ability of early career teachers to challenge beliefs, assumptions, values and practices is important to their resilience (Johnson et al., 2010). Meg demonstrated an ability to navigate the contradictions between her expectations and the reality of her situation throughout the year at Banksia Plains, when interacting with her students and considering systemic practices. Early in the year, Meg discovered that many of the teaching practices she had learned in her pre-service education were not conducive to effective student learning in her remote context. She found it necessary

to reconsider the structured lesson times and activities that characterise teaching and learning in mainstream metropolitan schools. Meg needed to make lessons highly flexible, to ensure that the students participated and remained engaged. Meg explained, "You've just got try and do as much as you can in a way that the students respond to, and make things really engaging for them, which can be really difficult. … If I do stuff that they don't want to do, they'll leave during the class." On one occasion, Meg had to cancel a lesson to allow her only student to sleep; "You've got to be pretty flexible up there … plans change all the time". Such adaptations demonstrate Meg's ability to integrate new experiences into her existing understanding of self as a teacher, which has been found to contribute to early career teacher resilience (Pearce & Morrison, 2011, p. 53).

Despite the challenges she faced, the commitment that Meg showed throughout the year towards the ethical and moral purposes of teaching was significant to her negotiation of a professional identity. Meg felt that she did not have all the necessary skills or knowledge to help her students effectively, but she did not blame herself for this, instead realising that a combination of other factors contributed to the difficulties she faced. Meg said, "I don't have enough resources, enough things to develop good teaching". Meg's ability to negotiate various contradictions, minimising any self-blame, enhanced her resilience.

Initially, Meg committed to work the full year for the benefit of the students. When she eventually decided not to continue teaching a second year, she explained that she did not have enough to give the students: "I'm feeling like I'm not achieving what I should be achieving, and it's not necessarily the students' fault – it's more that I don't feel like I've got enough to give them". This reasoning illustrates Meg's professional and moral purpose, and characterises a part of who she is as a teacher. Meg's capacity to justify and negotiate such contradictions ensured that she was able to see out the year despite the challenging circumstances she faced, and to remain in the profession. Meg's commitment to the ethical and moral purposes of teaching fostered her resilience and contributed to her positive self-worth and agency. This supports the study by Trimingham and Hitchon (2004) which found that a graduate teacher's enjoyment of the students and community in a remote setting helped to sustain her commitment to the job.

In summary, personal factors supported Meg and enhanced her wellbeing. Meg's relationships, social capital and sense of rural social space, development of a professional identity, and ability to navigate contradictions are all personal factors that helped to contribute to a desirable outcome for Meg. However, these enabling factors lie with the individual and not in the situated and systemic domains.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this case study indicate that despite many challenges to her personal and professional wellbeing this early career teacher managed to sustain her commitment to the students and to the teaching position she had accepted in a remote setting. The remote context of Meg's appointment meant that she faced challenges such as extreme living conditions, isolation, teaching students with complex needs, limited opportunities for collaborative work and a lack of professional support or learning opportunities.

In conclusion, the findings of this study suggest that pre-service providers, employing bodies and schools should ensure that they implement policies and practices that support early career teachers to develop resilience on a number of levels. Over a decade ago, Stokes, Stafford and Holdsworth (1999) argued that although many incentives are offered to attract teachers to remote areas, simply attracting teachers is insufficient; more needs to be done to support teachers to remain at such schools for as long as possible. Given that enabling factors from the situated and systemic domains are malleable or more controllable than those from the personal domain, we see these as the most promising sites to promote teacher wellbeing in remote settings.

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