

## RESILIENCE: PRECEPTS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper outlines the rationale for 'new knowledge' in teacher education programs that prepare teachers who are better positioned to enhance children's resilience and promote mental health and wellbeing. Resilience is seen as an important life-skill that enhances the emotional wellbeing of children and enables them to cope with life. It is argued that classroom teachers need this 'new knowledge' if they are to transform education for relevance in a 21<sup>st</sup> century 'knowledge society'.*

This paper explores assumptions about the knowledge base for teacher education programs. Teacher education programs are rethinking the attitudes, skills and knowledge required by teachers if they are to transform education for relevance in a 21<sup>st</sup> century 'knowledge society' (Grant & Wieczorek, 2000; Smith, 2000; The World Bank, 2002; Hargreaves, 2003). The world in which teachers do their work is changing. Schools today shape a world characterised by increasing social instability (Bentley, 2002; Hargreaves, 2003). 'New knowledge' which includes ways teachers of young children can support and enhance children's resilience, is necessary for teachers (Knight, 2002). Currently, there appears to be a gap in teachers' knowledge of the needs of children for their emotional-wellbeing. Closer links between education and health provide potential for addressing this imbalance.

Historically, the kinds of knowledge preservice teachers have explored in teacher education programs have reflected the dominant tradition of the period (Turner-Bissett, 2001). For example, in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, the paradigm reflected the industrial economy. Necessary knowledge included how to control large classes and develop skills associated with the craft of teaching. Values of morality and humility were considered appropriate for teachers. The twentieth century then saw a move to an applied science paradigm where experience for beginning teachers was considered the way to find the best teaching methods. It also saw the change to the child development tradition and child-centred approaches through the work of Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky. The last decade of the twentieth century saw an emphasis on the skills and processes of teaching rather than the knowledge needed. Turner-Bisset (2001) suggests that effective teachers require a professional knowledge base that includes knowledge, processes, skills, beliefs, values and attitudes. The paradigm of teaching as a knowledge-based profession accedes to consideration of what constitutes relevant knowledge.

Teacher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century ought to reflect the dominant paradigm of the times – the knowledge society. Central Queensland University has reconceptualized teacher education for the knowledge society, which has involved rethinking what constitutes relevant knowledge, attitudes and skills for teachers. The Bachelor of Learning Management degree at Central Queensland University organises its teacher education courses around four domains: Networks and Partnerships; Professional Knowledge; Pedagogy and Futures. These domains, or knowledge bases, are grouped for coherence but obviously interact and interrelate in the practice of teaching. Courses are not discrete entities of any particular domain. Though the focus will be on a particular domain, aspects of all domains will be included in the course. The ‘new knowledge’ required for the 21<sup>st</sup> century reflects the dominant trends of current society – the knowledge society. It is not possible to reflect on the knowledge teachers need without considering the needs of students, teachers, families and society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge society

It is widely recognised that there are challenges faced by students and teachers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that have not existed for previous generations (Bentley, 1998; Giddens, 2000; Grant & Wieczorek, 2000; Smith, 2000; Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003). The implications of living in a knowledge-rich society require schools to ensure students learn how to learn and how to embrace the future, at the same time as they master particular knowledge and skills. Teachers need to empower their students to believe in themselves and in their ability to influence their future. Students need to develop a sense of empowerment in terms of their capacity to be innovative and to cope with uncertainty and change. Resilient individuals will be better equipped for this society.

The knowledge society is a response to the knowledge economy. The global knowledge economy is transforming societies throughout the world (Bentley, 1998; Florida, 2002). There is increased competition and demand for innovative skills and knowledge in the labour market. Change is rapid and people are constantly required to use creative energy and acquire new skills. These skills include the ability to risk-take, problem solve and work collaboratively to maximise the competitive advantage. Collective intelligence is as highly valued as individual intelligence. To support the knowledge society, it is necessary to nurture the 'social capital' and provide life-related skills and attitudes for citizens.

Though there are enormous economic benefits of the knowledge economy, there are also detrimental effects for society. These include people putting personal gain and self-interest before the social good; short-term gain in favour of loyalty and long-term commitment; hunger for profit and greed causing mistrust, fear despair and even crime (Hargreaves, 2003). On a global scale, distinction between social classes, differing cultural values and beliefs can result in inequalities which ultimately lead to extreme action such as terrorism in an attempt to redress what is seen as social injustice. These societal complexities pose new challenges for educators as they search for ways to maximise the advantages for every student in their care, and necessitate a review of

the kinds of knowledge students need to be equipped with (OECD, 2001).

The human consequences of globalisation as witnessed in events such as September 11, 2001 when America experienced the extremes of terrorism, showed that a knowledge economy that had put its faith in high-technology surveillance was just as vulnerable to terrorism. America, a leader in the knowledge economy of globalised markets, information and knowledge was plunged into an age of insecurity (Hargreaves, 2003).

Vail (1999) argues that increased insecurity in society is significantly destructive to human potential. He suggests it causes people to feel disillusioned, powerless and hopeless. It damages self-esteem and causes high levels of anxiety.

According to Hargreaves (2003), this leaves educators with two missions for teaching – how to teach *for* and *beyond* the knowledge society. Educating students who can contribute to the knowledge society with relevant knowledge and skills and who can also have a strong sense of social justice. Investment is needed in intellectual capital and social capital. Teachers who have the support of policy makers can build human capacity to engage successfully in the knowledge economy. Hargreaves (2003 p. 53) suggests

*Teachers and schools should be the catalysts of change in the knowledge society, are too often its casualties – casualties of the weakening welfare safety net; of pupil's disrupted families....; of reduced expenditure for and commitment to the public good.*

### **Implications for teacher education**

Teaching in the knowledge society offers new opportunities to educators. Teachers in schools have the opportunity to be proponents of the knowledge society providing a sense of optimism about the future. They also have the opportunity to provide support for young people and families coping with the changes demanded of them. New skills, knowledge and attitudes are required for this to eventuate. Teachers require relevant professional knowledge. Teacher education programs should ensure relevant knowledge becomes an integral aspect of their programs. Teacher education can become the catalyst of change in the knowledge society.



In Australia, national educational policy review is reflecting this opportunity (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003). Queensland educational policy has gone beyond the rhetoric of the knowledge society to implementation of policy. Queensland is experiencing the simultaneous renewal of schools and teacher education. The general climate of educational change with Queensland's Smart State Education and Training Reforms for the Future (Queensland Government, 2002) and the Queensland State Education – 2010 document (Queensland Government, 2000) initiatives demand renewal. Tertiary education plays an important role in the construction of knowledge and in building the intellectual capacity on which knowledge production depends. Tertiary education promotes lifelong learning practices that must be a central philosophy for a society prepared to adapt and change.

Central Queensland University has responded to the challenge of making teachers frontline knowledge workers of the knowledge economy and change agents for the knowledge society. The Bachelor of Learning Management degree puts theory into practice regarding teaching and learning. The implementation of this degree has involved creativity, trust and risk taking. It makes the most of professional partnerships by developing professional learning communities where the capacity to respond to the knowledge society is cultivated for practising teachers and preservice teachers alike. The collective intelligence and social capital on which knowledge economies depend are key components of the degree in design and implementation. The learning community is extended to include a range of professionals in related fields. Specific details of the degree, the vision of Professor Richard Smith, are beyond the scope of this paper. The focus here is on how relevant knowledge to enhance resiliency has been developed in the degree.

The knowledge needed to develop resilience is transdisciplinary. It requires the integration of knowledge and skills from a number of disciplines. It requires strong partnerships between education and health. According to Anspaugh & Ezell (2001, p 2), "Health education offers students an opportunity for personal growth and enhancement not duplicated anywhere else in the school curriculum".

## Resilience

In researching this study, one of the biggest challenges has been the range of terms used to describe what I have termed 'resilience'. 'Positive mental health' is another term used (Raphael, 2000). There is often confusion about what is meant by the term "mental health". The term is often confused with mental illness so many prefer to talk about emotional wellbeing instead of mental health. Emotional wellbeing is also used to describe this construct. Resilience, in this paper, is seen as an important life-skill that enhances the emotional wellbeing of children and enables them to cope with life.

The notion of resilience has received renewed interest in education circles. Its meaning and significance for children and young people has been redeveloped and empirical research on resilience has burgeoned in recent years (Doll & Lyon, 1998; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Grothberg, 2001). Resilience as a construct indicates an ability to remain optimistic despite significant adversity. Fuller (1998, p 75) describes it as the "the happy knack of being able to bungy jump through the pitfalls of life". Resilience in children is linked to emotional wellbeing. Goleman (1995) describes this ability as 'emotional intelligence'. He considers emotional competence an essential life skill with application during school life and into working lives. It supports effective teamwork, problem solving, risk taking and the ability to cope with change.

In order to overcome challenges and develop resilience, children draw on strengths, both internal and environmental (Thomsen, 2002). Research into the resilience of children and young people in adverse circumstances suggests that we can learn from these children by identifying the characteristics that promote resilience (Rowling, Martin, & Walker, 2002). Resilience-enhancing factors can be encouraged and promoted in children who currently lack them. A resilience approach builds on children's strengths and finds ways to strengthen their support networks (Bernard, 1997; Luthar, 2000; Fuller, McGraw, & Goodyear, 2002). Programs that promote resilience appear to be effective preventative interventions for students facing adversity (Doll & Lyon, 1998; Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

There has been recognition that mental health promotion is as important as physical health promotion. Research has been undertaken

into what that means for children. In 2000, the first national survey was undertaken commissioned by the Mental Health and Special Programs Branch of the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care. The Child and Adolescent Component of the National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (Sawyer, Arney, Baghurst, Clark, Graetz, Kosky, Nurcombe, Patton, Prior, Raphael, Whaites, & Zubrick (2000) studied 4,500 children and young people from both rural and metropolitan areas of Australia. What the research shows is that there are a number of risk factors and protective factors that have important implications for educators Raphael (2000).

## Partnerships

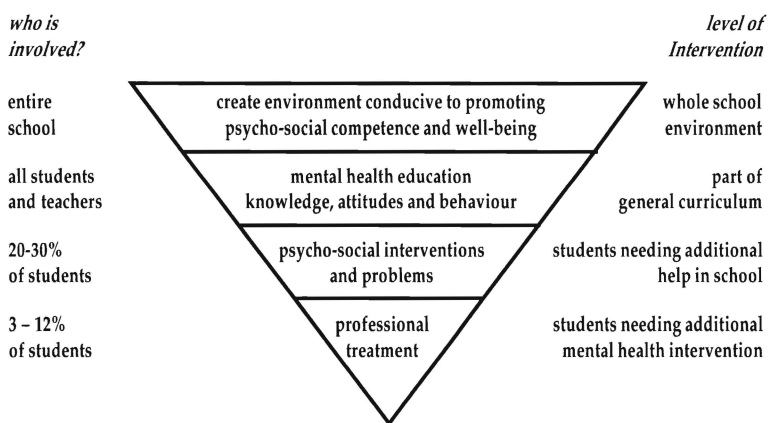
Researchers are beginning to explore the correlation between social-emotional wellbeing and the effectiveness of school-based prevention, intervention and health promotion programs (Waring, Hazell, Hazel & Adams, 2000; Rissel & Rowling, 2000; Wyn, Cahill, Holdsworth, Rowling & Carson, 2000; Hunter Institute of Mental Health, 2001). Partnerships between education and mental health research and practice provide hope and support for students in the knowledge society. Studies (Freiberg, 1999; McNeely, Nonnemaker & Blum, 2002) show a correlation between students who feel cared about by people at their school i.e. school connectedness, and the school environment. School-based programs that change the environment of the school rather than trying to change individual children offer solutions that are proactive, with a focus on prevention and health-enhancement, rather than reactive interventions.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) espouses the benefits of the partnership between education and health. The World Health Organisation sets out models for mental health promotion in schools. It suggests that schools are ideal places to develop mental health programs for children as they provide the environment and conditions that foster resiliency (WHO, 1999).

The Comprehensive School Mental Health Program model set out by the World Health Organisation is a useful guide in understanding the involvement of the school at a number of levels. The triangular model describes four levels of support (Figure 1). The levels represent

different levels of support ranging through the school ethos and environment involving the whole school community; the general curriculum involving all students and teachers; school-based intervention programs; and for a small percentage of students (3-12%) professional treatment. The widest level involving the whole school community recognises that collaboration between the school, parents and community agencies is likely to provide the best support for children and young people. Teachers and school personnel share the task of both providing proactive prevention programs and identifying those students who may need further support through intervention programs.

**FIGURE 1: Comprehensive School Mental Health Program**



*(Sheehan, Marshall, Cahill, Rowling, & Holdsworth, 2000. p 10)*

Programs such as MindMatters have been designed around this framework and have been implemented successfully in Australian schools (Wyn, Cahill, Holdsworth, Rowling, & Carson, 2000).

A Health Promoting School makes changes in the school environment, school policies and practices. It is a program that nurtures resiliency and social skills. In order for teachers to effectively implement the framework, they need: to possess relevant knowledge of the issues; to reflect on their own attitudes about mental health promotion; and to develop the skills required to recognise and respond to risk factors.

Teachers also need to develop networks of support. This means fostering partnerships with health professionals such as psychologists and counsellors, and other community services.

Traditional models have focussed on intervention for at-risk individuals or groups designed to “fix” the problem. Mental health promotion theory and practice has a preventative focus and is more about creating a healthy environment for children. It shifts the focus from a negative to a positive mindset.

### **Teacher education response**

Teacher education programs are logical places to begin at least raising the awareness of the knowledge, attitudes and skills required. A teacher education course using a Health Promoting Schools Framework has been designed, implemented in the Bachelor of Learning Management Program and the effects of the course on the participants evaluated. The course includes the ‘new knowledge’ believed necessary to enhance children’s emotional wellbeing. The evaluation assesses the relevance and effectiveness of the course in preparing teachers who are better positioned to promote the emotional wellbeing of children. The course prepares teachers to enhance children’s resiliency by developing relevant attitudes, knowledge and skills for the teacher. It is proposed that teachers who are equipped with relevant knowledge, attitudes and skills are well placed to: support children who are considered ‘at risk’; and promote emotional wellbeing for all children.

The course, titled Building Learning Partnerships, has been designed to achieve this. The course summary describes the aims.

*An essential component of the core business of learning managers is to create supportive learning environments in which all students can maximise their learning. To do this effectively requires knowledge and understanding of the social and emotional needs of students. The development of partnerships between schools, parents and community support agencies enhances the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people by developing a capacity for resilience, which prepares them to meet current and future challenges. This course aims to provide learning managers with background knowledge and skills that will encourage them to feel comfortable and confident about promoting the mental health of children and*

*young people. It aims to develop positive attitudes to mental health promotion, which acknowledge the importance of 'connectedness' between the student, family, school and community. The course will develop partnerships with a range of professionals including social workers, psychologists and counsellors and encourage the sharing of transdisciplinary knowledge. (Central Queensland University, 2003).*

## **Course content**

The course consists of four modules. The titles of the modules are: Resiliency; Change, loss and grief; Child Protection; and Harm Minimisation. Determining the content for the course was a challenging task. Briefly, the content includes:

### **Module 1: Resilience**

- Understanding resilience
- Building resilient learners
- Building community – the role of the educator
- Programs that promote resilience eg MindMatters

### **Module 2: Change, loss and grief**

- Understanding change, loss and grief
- The role of the educator in supporting children and families who have experienced change, loss and grief
- Programs that support those who have experienced change, loss and grief eg Seasons for Growth

### **Module 3: Child Protection**

- Child protection policy
- Bullying and harassment
- Family and domestic violence

### **Module 4: At risk school populations**

- Harm minimisation
- Understanding risk factors
- The role of the educator

There are so many important areas to cover and limited time in just one course. In developing the curriculum, other factors such as the perceived needs of the community and the opinions of practising teachers were sought. Classroom teachers were asked what knowledge

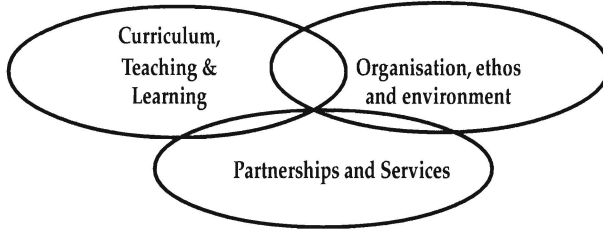
and skills they found they most commonly required. This information was very useful in informing content chosen. Current research into areas of perceived need was also taken into account. For example, in the “Child protection” module, issues around domestic and family violence were discussed as research shows alarming numbers of children and young people in Australia today are exposed to domestic violence (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996; Irwin, Waugh & Wilkinson, 2002). The “At risk school populations” module takes into account research into ways of promoting positive mental health that reduce risk factors for students experiencing stress and distress which, in extreme cases, can lead to suicide. The module examines some of the common myths about suicide. The module “Change, loss and grief” acknowledges the many changes for students that result in a loss situation. Some of the changes include: families relocating; separation or divorce of parents; the death of a parent, grandparent or significant other; children/parents living with life-threatening illnesses or drug abuse; loss of employment for a parent or significant other. People who experience loss of any kind go through a grieving process (Nagy, Morland, & Barnard, 1999). A teacher who has an awareness of how to support students in these situations can promote students’ emotional health.

## Health Promoting Schools Framework

The conceptual model used for the course is the Health Promoting Schools framework. The framework is based on a holistic view of health and focuses on creating supportive environments to promote health. It generally has three components: a formal curriculum undertaken by the whole school; the ‘hidden’ curriculum that involves school ethos and supportive environments; and the development of partnerships with families and the local community. The underlying philosophy is one of empowerment and support. The programs reflect the paradigm shift from a deficit-based to competency based approach where all students are encouraged to have the knowledge, skills and attitudes to deal with the changes in their lives. The health promoting schools concept has been adopted worldwide (WHO, 1999). In Australia, MindMatters uses this approach (Wyn, Cahill, Holdsworth, Rowling,

& Carson, 2000). The model uses interconnecting domains of curriculum teaching and learning, school ethos and environment and partnerships and services (Figure 2). The interaction of the domains creates the health promoting school environment.

**Figure 2 The Health Promoting Schools Framework**



*(MindMatters, Creating Connections booklet p18)*

If teachers are to support this model of proactive mental health promotion in schools, it appears logical that our teacher education program, the Bachelor of Learning Management, incorporate the principles in the course Building Learning Partnerships so that future teachers are equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to support children and young people.

### **Future directions**

It is not the purpose of this paper to document the results of the evaluation of the implementation of the course. In order to allow a comprehensive evaluation, a multiple-case study methodology was employed. Preliminary findings suggest that it has been successful in raising preservice teachers' awareness of the issues related to fostering resilience for students. It has provided them with new knowledge and practical skills. It appears to have promoted positive attitudes and highlighted the importance of issues related to students' emotional wellbeing. A full endorsement for the course will only be possible when these preservice teachers have the opportunity to field-test what they have learnt. The 'new knowledge' incorporated in their teacher education program, will hopefully equip future teachers to provide children and young people with the strongest chance of success in the knowledge society.



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