A Project entitled

Beginning Teachers' Relational Resilience in Hong Kong

Submitted by

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submitted to The Education University of Hong Kong

for the degree of Bachelor of Education (Honours) English Language

in May 2020

Declaration

I, Ho Wing Yan   , declare that this research report represents my own work under the

supervision of Dr. Poon Yu Hin, and that it has not been submitted previously for examination to any

tertiary institution.

Signed _   _____

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15th May, 2020

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

It is believed that Hong Kong teachers often encounter lots of different challenges and suffer from heavy work stress. According to the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union (HKPTU) (2018), because of the education reform with the school-based management, a detachment of the government and the Education Bureau in school's management is resulted. Without increasing manpower, plenty of tasks originally to be implemented by the government are delegated to schools. In addition, teachers are facing uncertain staff establishment, while contract teachers have struggled with permanent positions. Consequently, teachers were in immense stress with non-teaching tasks and uncertainty. The HKPTU and the Division of Clinical Psychology of the Hong Kong Psychological Society released the results of the Teachers' Work Stress Survey responded by 1,836 teachers. Around 30% of respondents reported moderately severe to severe symptoms of depression, while more than 10% of them showed symptoms of severe depression. The above research findings indicated a significant relationship between teachers' working hours and work stress.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

Since stress negatively influences teachers' capacity to fulfill their duties and reduces teaching quality (Feltoe, 2013), it is important to education by studying how teacher resilience helps beginning teachers cope with stress and challenges. However, it is believed that the current literature lacks an in-depth understanding of the interplay of personal and contextual factors about experiences of early

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career teachers (Johnson et al., 2014).   As there are few researches about beginning teachers'

resilience in the Hong Kong context, this research focuses on the interplay of personal and contextual

factors found in participants in this study.   Since teachers do not work individually, but involve

working and interacting with students, students' parents, colleagues, and principal.   These kinds of

relationship are also evident in school policies and practice.   Hence, this research aims at studying

teacher resilience for beginning teachers in Hong Kong, especially attempting to provide some

insights for beginning teachers about the concept of teachers' relational resilience.   It is believed to

be worthwhile to study teachers' relational resilience.

Moreover, the second reason is about personal relevance.   Since I am going to graduate from

the Education University of Hong Kong with a Bachelor of Education in English Language, it is likely

for me to be a teacher in the future.   As one of the focuses in this study, beginning teachers with few

teaching experiences in early years of career may experience stress or unavoidable challenging

circumstances.   As a future beginning teacher, I may also encounter adverse circumstances.   Thus,

this research can help expose to beginning teachers' relational resilience as well as strategies for

building my teacher resilience.

1.3   Research Questions

The research questions for this study are:

(1)   How do the individual and contextual factors interplay to influence beginning teachers'

resilience?

(2)   How do relationships work as a strategy to help beginning teachers build teacher resilience?

2.   Literature Review

Important concepts by different scholars about beginning teacher, teacher resilience, beginning teachers' resilience, factors influencing teacher resilience, and relational resilience have inspired my study.

2.1 Beginning Teacher

While Melnick and Meister (2008) defined beginning teacher as a teacher who has not yet completed three years of teaching after receiving initial teacher certification, Brock and Grady (2007) offered an insight into the meaning of beginning teacher.   According to Brock and Grady (2007), beginning teacher refers to a variety of individuals.   Some of them enter the teaching profession directly from college or after raising a family or after a business venture.   A few of them enter the teaching profession without teaching backgrounds and are learning to teach while working.   Many beginning teachers are experienced and making the transition to a new school.   Particularly, Brock and Grady (2007) used more words to describe beginning teachers who are recent college graduates. They mentioned that researchers described this stage of beginning adulthood as the exploratory-trial stage involving the initial transition from school to work with characteristics of insecurity, false starts

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and instability.   Those typical teacher-education graduate entering teaching directly from college are in the exploratory stage.   In addition, the first three years of teaching are considered as the apprentice phase by other authors.   For the first year of teaching, it is usually filled with high expectations and extreme difficulties.   The conditions under beginning teachers' first year of teaching determine the effectiveness, attitudes and behaviours that they will develop and sustain for their entire careers.   To decide whether to remain in the teaching profession, the first-year experience is a frequent factor for beginning teachers to consider.   On the other hand, March (2004) used lifecycle phases to explain teachers' career in different teaching periods.   Teachers in 2-5 years of teaching belong to the stabilization phase that is critical for teachers making decisions about whether they will continue in the teaching profession or not.

The above literatures shed light on the definition and description of a beginning teacher who is the focus in this research.

2.2 General Meaning of Teacher Resilience

The definition and characteristics of teacher resilience were defined by scholars as follows. Day and Gu (2014) stated the traditional derived notion of resilience as 'the ability to bounce back in adverse circumstances'.   For particularly teacher resilience, it is a developmental process occurring over time, involving 'the ability to adjust to varied conditions and increase the competence on facing adverse situations' (Bobek, 2002).   Teacher resilience also refers to specific strategies employed

when teachers experience adverse conditions (Castro et al., 2010), or emotional regulation and effective interaction in social environments involving a mode of interacting with events in the environment which is activated and nurtured in times of stress (Tait, 2008).   Day and Gu (2014) identified that some core considerations on conceptualizing resilience were suggested between disciplines, which mentioned that 'the presence of threat to the status quo, a positive response to conditions of significant adversity'; resilience is neither an innate nor a fixed quality, instead, it can be learnt and acquired (Higgins, 1994); personal characteristics, competences and positive impacts of the social environment that individuals work and live, independently and together, interact to contribute to the resilience building process.   Also, Day and Gu (2014) found that there are three distinctive characteristics for teacher resilience:

1. It is *context specific* in which teachers' resilient qualities are by taking in 'the more proximal individual school or classroom context' and 'the broader professional work context' (Beltman, Mansfield & Price, 2011).   Rich evidence from the educational literature shows that in-school management support for learning and development, leadership trust and positive feedback from parents and students are important positive impact on the motivation and resilience of teachers.

2. It is *role specific* that teacher resilience is closely associated with the strength and conviction of teachers' occupational commitment.   It is also inner calling to teach and commitment to serve, which differentiates teaching from other occupations (Hansen, 1995).   Teacher resilience is defined by Brunetti (2006) as 'a quality that enables teachers to maintain their

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commitment to teaching and teaching practices despite challenging conditions and recurring

setbacks'.

3. Being resilient means *more than 'bouncing back'* efficiently from challenges. Not only

   will teachers encounter the routine pressures and unavoidable uncertainties in everyday work

   and lives, they also encounter difficulties on their professional life phases.

According to Day and Gu (2014), in teachers' professional lives, five challenges to test

resilience were proposed which includes: increases in social problems, screen culture, pressures of

policy, standards and accountability, and high demand cultures. Hastings and Bham (2003) have

studied a research on the relationship between student behavior patterns and teacher burnout, which

found that students influence teachers' sense of emotional exhaustion, leading to feelings of

depersonalization and lack of personal achievement. According to Klassen and Anderson (2009),

the research found out that additional responsibilities like time constraints, student disrespect, and

student lack of sociability to be the strongest predictor of emotional exhaustion, teacher

depersonalization, and teachers' lack of personal accomplishment respectively. According to Day

and Gu (2014), with the increased participation in 'screen cultures', teachers are not accorded respect

in many countries, and what may be learnt from teachers must compete with what may be learnt from

the internet, social networks and other information and communication devices. It is suggested that

teachers in all schools may have to manage new sets of challenges in teaching. Thirdly, continuous

changes in external policy requires greater teachers' capacity to be resilient. Since teachers are

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essential mediating agents, changes in external policy leading to changing landscape of school governance, curriculum and classrooms have become more emotionally demanding to teachers. Apart from that, more and more standards and skills are suggested for teachers to achieve, which require amounts of emotional and intellectual energy as well as a persisting high level of motivation, commitment and resilience in a challenging and supportive environment. Lastly, increased workload or working hours tests teachers' capacity to be resilient under the higher demand cultures.

More recent evidence revealed that early career teachers are susceptible to stress, burnout and attrition at levels comparing to more experienced teachers (Fitchett et al., 2018). Under a variety of challenges in the teaching and school context, it is advisable for beginning teachers to develop their teacher resilience. Soulen and Wine (2018) suggested that new teachers who develop characteristics of resiliency may combat the challenges in their early years of teaching. Building beginning teachers' resilience may contribute to increasing teacher retention in the early years, as well as improving student academic achievement.

The above literatures about meaning of teacher resilience help provide a general idea and definition about the topic of this research. With a distinct focus on beginning teachers' resilience, the literatures also help depict the definition contributing to the research topic and inform the foundation for the research questions.

2.3 Factors Influencing Teacher Resilience

What this paragraph involved is the literatures about factors influencing teacher resilience, including individual protective and risk factors as well as contextual protective and risk factors, and the relationship between individual and contextual factors.   The definitions of risk and protective factors will be indicated first, and examples of these factors will then be categorized and mentioned in the following paragraphs about individual and contextual factors.   Since Beltman et al. (2011) reviewed recent empirical studies on risk and protective factors, while Mansfield, Beltman, Price and McConney (2012) gave insights into factors influencing teacher resilience, the literature review about individual and contextual factors in the following paragraphs is mainly based on what Beltman et al. (2011) and Mansfield et al. (2012) mentioned..

2.3.1 Risk Factors or Challenges

Beltman et al. (2011) reviewed that 'conceptualisations of resilience include a common connection of thread of adverse conditions or challenging situations that present as risk factors'. According to Mansfield et al. (2012), risk factors are crucial to teachers because they illustrate potential threats to the resilience development and indicate the range of challenges that resilient teachers can overcome productively.   Risk factors were identified that could lead to maladjustment and negative outcomes.   In the meantime, Doney (2013) suggested that risk factors mean that 'an event or experience that can be expected to cause stress', which carries the potential to interfere with

normal functioning. According to Daniilidou and Platsidou (2018), regarding teacher profession, risk factors can be related to both individual and environmental attributes.

2.3.1.1 Individual Risk Factors

When Beltman et al. (2011) reviewed researches about individual risk factors, few papers explored personal challenges or difficulties. What he had reviewed were negative self-beliefs or confidence as the most frequent individual risk factors, while the second most frequent individual risk factor was difficulty in asking for help, followed by a perceived conflict between personal beliefs and practices being used.

Likewise, Daniilidou and Platsidou (2018) mentioned that at the individual level, the most crucial risk factors are low self-esteem, difficulties in seeking help, anxiety and emotional exhaustion and inadequate preparation for the reality of work.

2.3.1.2 Contextual Risk Factors

Comparing with individual risk factors, Beltman et al. (2011) found out more extensive examination on the complex contextual challenges of lives and work of teachers from the literature.

Daniilidou and Platsidou (2018) suggested risk factors at the environmental level that are adversities teachers may face because of constant changes in the educational system that increases their uncertainty level, pressure and workload.

According to Mansfield et al. (2012), when resilience is evidenced by individuals' responses

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to challenging circumstances, risk factors within environment or context of teaching have been identified in the previous research. For instance, heavy workload, classroom management, being unprepared, lack of support and resources, poor hiring practices are probably risk factors leading to adverse circumstances for early career teachers. They are significant at illustrating potential threats to the development of resilience, and is literally related to the challenges mentioned earlier.

2.3.2 Protective Factors

Mansfield et al. (2012) stated that protective factors could contribute to positive adjustment and outcomes. According to Daniilidou and Platsidou (2018), suggested that protective factors influence resilience by mitigating the impact of risk factors. Protective factors are conceived in the relevant literature that they refer to those factors that mitigate effects of risk factors or enhance positive outcomes and a successful adjustment of an individual.

2.3.2.1 Individual Protective Factors

According to Mansfield et al. (2012), they mentioned key personal attributes such as altruistic motivatthey have explored factors including personal strengths contributed to teacher resilience. They are attributes including altruism, strong intrinsic motivation, perseverance and persistence, optimism, sense of humor, emotional intelligence, willingness to take risks, in which they may help teachers to 'bounce back' when facing challenges in their early years of teaching.

Hong (2012) investigates some major psychological factors affecting teacher resilience as well. They include: value, self-efficacy, beliefs and emotions. Value is an essential psychological factor for teacher resilience to see how much the teachers value their career for career decision-making. Likewise, intrinsic value refers to the interest and enjoyment obtained from the activity, which is related to the sense of vocation (Gu & Day, 2007). Teachers holding strong interest in teaching embrace the teaching work as an inner call to teach (Hong, 2012). Besides this, self-efficacy affecting a teacher's choices of activities and goals, how much effort they expend, how long they persevere when encountering challenges and their resilience to failures (Bandura, 1993; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Pajares, 1996). For beginning teachers relevant to self-efficacy, they make the career decisions by having 'a sense of success' to be an effective teacher (Birkeland, 2003). Moreover, teachers' beliefs can mediate behavior and self-perception (Korthagen, 2004; Van den Berg, 2002), which may influence their teaching practice and resilience in career decisions (Kirk & Wall, 2010; Pajares, 1992; Walkington, 2005). In addition, positive emotions like joy and satisfaction can increase teachers' efforts to deal with stressful conditions, confront adversities with optimism, and contribute to promote resilience (Deater-Deckard et al., 2006; Gu & Day, 2007; Tait, 2008).

2.3.2.2 Contextual Protective Factors

According to Mansfield et al. (2012), environmental factors are of importance to support teacher by conceptualizing resilience and its development. They include mental support for new

teachers, school and administrative support, support of peers and colleagues, and support of family and friends.

2.4 Relationship between Individual and Contextual factors

Most researchers agreed that 'resilience involves dynamic processes that are the result of interaction over time between a person and the environment', which 'is evidenced by how individuals respond to challenging or adverse situations' (Mansfield, 2012). Additionally, in the resilience process, evidence is found that both individual protective and risk factors and contextual protective and risk factors play a significant role.

These literatures help inform my study of the first research question about how personal factors interact with environmental factors to influence beginning teachers' resilience. With the factors proposed by previous researchers, these literatures gave insight to the concepts as well as the relationship between personal and environmental factors. Examples like altruism, strong intrinsic motivation, support of peers and colleagues are put forward as well.

2.5 Relational Resilience

Abundant strategies for building teacher resilience have previously been studied by scholars. Particularly, this research focuses on relational resilience. Consequently, literatures on relational resilience are studied in this paragraph. According to Day and Gu (2014), relationships refer to the

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social and professional networks, human connections and belongingness experienced by early career teachers. When schools value relationships, not only will they emphasize the complex emotional needs of early career teachers, but also encourage social exchanges to foster respect, trust, care and integrity. Indeed, relationships lie at the 'roots' of resilience that the presence of support, love and security fosters resilience by reinforcing people's innate strengths like self-efficacy and positive emotions (Luthar & Brown, 2007). Since resilience is not an innate quality as mentioned by Day and Gu (2014), it can be developed and influenced by context. Bryk and Schneider (2002) stated that teachers' worlds are organized around sets of role relationships: teachers with students, teachers with other teachers, teachers with parents, and teachers with school principal. Strong evidence from educational research suggested that when the social organization of the school characterized by supportive collegial relationships between different stakeholders fosters teachers' collective capacity, commitment and effectiveness (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004; Sammons et al., 2007; Day & Gu, 2010). It is cited that the impact of support for new teachers from school leadership and colleagues as highly crucial in building resilience through confidence and self-efficacy (Gu & Day, 2013). Promoting a sense of belonging, acceptance and wellbeing, placing student-teacher relationships at the heart of the teaching-learning process, fostering professional growth, and promoting collective ownership and responsibility for professional relationships help enhance early career teachers' resilience (Day & Gu, 2014).

On the other hand, Castro et al. (2010) has identified managing difficult relationship as one

of the resilience strategies.   Since difficult relationships with parents and colleagues can produce great amount of stress for the beginning teachers, seeking buffers and allies, avoiding the negative person, and collecting documentation can help teachers manage difficult relationships.   To deal with antagonizing relationships, seeking buffers and allies represented the most used strategy.   It involved recruiting another professional to help minimize the impact of a negative relationship, establish support for teachers to reduce the possibility of continuous conflict, and garner additional resources and expertise in managing difficult relationships.   For avoidance, it referred to avoiding interaction with the difficult person, or sidestepping a difficult person, which required the beginning teacher to discover alternative ways and resources for attaining needed resources or support.   It may provide some relief from potential conflict and adversity to beginning teachers.   Nevertheless, it rarely offers new insight, skills, or abilities to alter the impact of negative relationships for beginning teachers.   A few teachers used documentation as a strategy to manage difficult relationships, which could help beginning teachers reduce the impact and improve the outcome of meeting an antagonistic person. Documentation helped offer additional resources to establish credibility and legitimacy, and distance oneself emotionally from a negative encounter.

In relation to the second research question, the above literatures help offer a general meaning about relational resilience and inform various relationships involved in teachers' career.

3. Methodology

3.1 Qualitative Research

In order to obtain in-depth information about beginning teachers' resilience in Hong Kong, qualitative research method was adopted. Jamshed (2014) mentioned that there are plenty of qualitative methods like interviewing and observation developed to have in-depth and extensive understanding of the issues by textual interpretation. In this research, interviewing was adopted as the data-collection method. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a specific topic on beginning teachers' resilience in Hong Kong. A set of interview questions included in the Appendix was prepared to ask the participants, and the flow was like a conversation. Interviewees were seen individually. To gain spontaneous information from the interviewees, these semi-structured interviews involved open-ended questions to elicit sharing or even in-depth information. Individual interviews were conducted for one on one conversation. The sampling method was purposive sampling that maximum variation sampling was adopted. As a result, the selected sample met the purpose of the study that the beginning teachers being interviewed corresponded to the research focus. Different beginning teachers in different settings were selected to maximize the diversity related to the research questions. Since this qualitative research focuses on 5 beginning teachers, the findings and discussion in this research cannot be generalized to all the beginning teachers in Hong Kong. Yet, conducting study with 5 beginning teachers in Hong Kong can also give insight into beginning teachers' relational resilience in Hong Kong when there are not many researches carried out regarding this topic.

To protect participants' rights and offer confidentiality, participants were informed about the background of this research and their names in this study were pseudonyms in this research. Consent forms were distributed to the participants before interviews and they have the right to refuse to participate in this research.   Also, request for recording of interviews was explicit.

3.2 Participants

To understand beginning teachers' perspectives towards teacher resilience, beginning teachers in Hong Kong were interviewed in the research.   To fit in the topic and base on the literature, the participants are beginning teachers working in different secondary or primary schools in Hong Kong, who have been teaching less than a total of three complete school years.   Gender and teaching subject of the participants were not restricted.

The participants of this study are 5 in-service beginning teachers at different years in their teaching careers teaching different subjects in different local aided schools (see Table 1).

Table 1. Background of 6 in-service beginning teachers in Hong Kong

Name (pseudonym)	Sex	Teaching experience (year)	Type of school	Subject
Amy	F	3	Aided secondary	Mathematics and Computer

Kay	F	1	Aided primary	Chinese
May	F	1	Aided primary	English and General Studies
Sue	F	2	Aided secondary	Mathematics and Computer
Tom	M	2	Aided primary	Music, Mathematics, General Studies

4. The Study

The following sections present the interview findings with 5 informants. Interview data were coded and categorized according to three research questions:

(1)   How do the individual and contextual factors interplay to influence beginning teachers' resilience?

(2)   How do relationships work as a strategy to help beginning teachers build teacher resilience?

4.1 Individual and Contextual Factors

In this section, the findings about the first research question 'How do the individual and contextual factors interplay to influence beginning teachers' resilience?' will be discussed.   To give a brief overview of the interview data related to the first research question, the following table (see Table 2) illustrates individual and contextual factors as well as risk factors of 5 respondents, and how they view the interplay between their individual and contextual factors.

Table 2 Interview data in terms of individual and contextual factors

| Name (pseudonym)	Individual protective factors	Individual risk factors	Contextual protective factors	Contextual risk factors	Interplay
Amy	1. Optimism 2. Emotional intelligence 3. Adaptability	/	1. Support from colleagues	1. Heavy workload	Yes
Kay	1. Optimism 2. Beliefs	1. Lack of experience	1. Support from colleagues 2. Support from peers	1. Heavy workload 2. Classroom management/ disruptive students 3. Learners' diversity	Yes
May	1. Beliefs 2. Motivation	/	1. School policy 2. Support from colleagues 3. Support from students' parents	1. Learners' diversity	No
Sue	1. Optimism 2. Motivation	1. Lack of experience	1. Support from mentor 2. Support from colleagues	1. Heavy workload 2. Lack of lesson preparation time	Yes
Tom	1. Optimism 2. Sense of humour 3. Willingness to take challenges and risks	/	1. Support from school 2. Support from colleagues	1. Heavy workload 2. Stress	Yes

In terms of individual protective factor, the interview data reflects that optimism was mentioned by most of the respondents (i.e. 4 respondents). *'But with these colleagues, at the same time I'm optimistic. Also, my students care about me. So, these make me want to continue being a teacher'* and *'With those difficulties I have mentioned, I think I can handle them in this stage, in which personality contributes a lot in this condition. I would say that I have an optimistic personality'* are typical quotes from Sue and Kay can help illustrate optimism as the individual protective factor. For individual risk factors, both two informants mentioned lack of experience. A typical quote from Sue expressed her lack of experience in her first year of teaching: *'As a beginning teacher, plenty of things were very difficult to me in my first year of teaching… In addition to lack of experience, I was not familiar with a lot of things.'*

When it comes to contextual protective factors, all the informants mentioned support from colleagues. A typical quote from Sue '*…my mentor is so nice and supportive by teaching me how to teach better and comforting me*' helps illustrating support from colleagues. Talking about contextual risk factors, most informants (i.e. 4 respondents) mentioned heavy workload. A typical quote from Amy '*Heavy workload undoubtedly caused stress to me. During the period of heavy workload, it's about lesson observation, assignment inspection and planning for examination that no doubt I cannot bounce back*' gave examples about heavy workload.

4.1.1 Interplay Individual and Contextual Factors

By directly asking respondents' views about the interplay between individual and contextual factors influencing their teacher resilience, respondents with optimism as one of their individual protective factors believed that the interplay existed when there is a risk factor or challenge. After analyzing how interviewees' individual and contextual factors interplay, it is believed that the interplay existed in all 5 interviewees. Two ways of interplay between individual and contextual factors are analyzed and it is found that both ways of interplay enhance informants' teacher resilience (see Figure 1). In figure 1, there are two routines to depict two ways of interplay between individual and contextual factors. The first way of interplay is shown with a broken line, while the second way of interplay is displayed with a solid line. Even though they are in different routines, both ways of interplay have the same destination that is to enhance teacher resilience as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Interplay between individual protective factors and contextual protective factors.
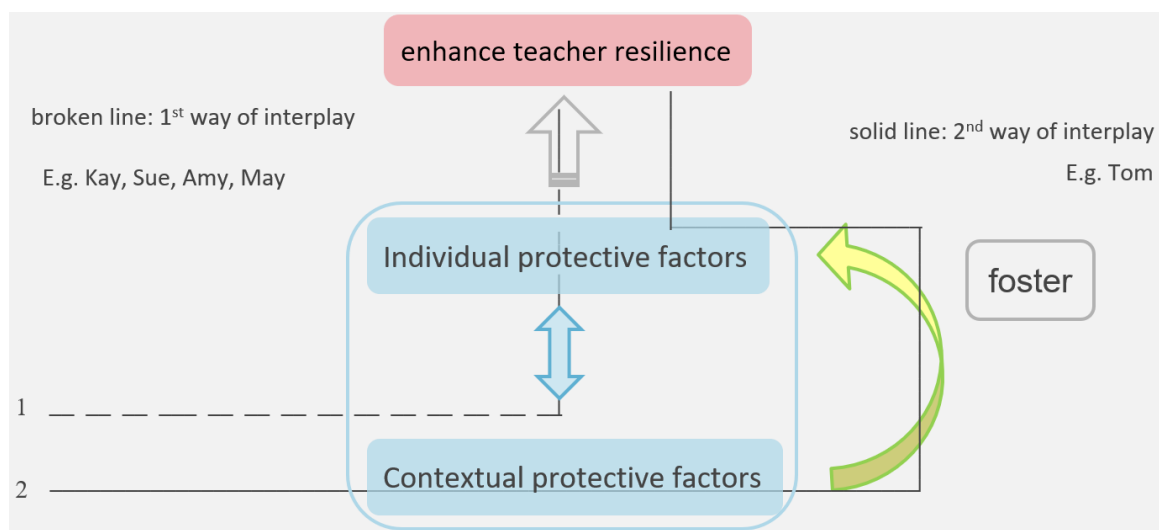
With the interview data, the following story from Kay demonstrates the first way of interplay between her individual and contextual factors in novice teaching when she encounters risk factors or challenges. Kay is an early-career primary Chinese teacher with 1-year teaching experience. Regarding the first interview question about difficulties or challenges in teaching, she actively kept talking about different difficulties with examples. Kay is very clear about different difficulties she has encountered, which included heavy workload, classroom management, lack of experience and learners' diversity. She seemed to be vulnerable to burnout with the most risk factors recorded among all the interviewees, however, she believed that so far, she could handle these difficulties. In her point of view, her optimistic personality had been playing a crucial role to be resilient:

"For me, my personality is the biggest reason which helps me face the challenges mentioned earlier. I think I'm optimistic. When I encounter difficulties, I try to comfort myself, or seek help from my colleagues to get more suggestions from others. Sometimes, I tell my own problems and feelings to my friends and try to find the solution to the problems."

When it comes to the way of the interplay between individual and contextual factors, Kay said that it was related to her optimism as well:

"I reckon that there is a relationship. The colleagues I am working with are quite nice. They are willing to answer my questions. Meanwhile, I'd say my optimism would not frequently bring me into conflict with others. Instead, my colleagues may be impressed by my

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optimism and are willing to give me a helping hand."

From Kay's case, we can see that when she faced challenges including heavy workload, classroom management, lack of experience and learners' diversity, her optimistic personality worked as her individual protective factor. Her optimism allows her to comfort herself and actively seek help from her colleagues to try to get suggestions and find the solution to her problems or challenges. In the meantime, Kay's colleagues feel her optimistic personality. This also gave a good impression to her colleagues that she is kind and easy-going. Therefore, her colleagues are willing to help her that support from colleagues works as Kay's contextual protective factor. In this way, the interplay between Kay's individual protective and contextual protective factors is found to enhance her teacher resilience that she believed that she could handle those challenges.

For another informant May, though she did not believe in the existence of interplay between her individual protective and contextual factors influencing her teacher resilience, the same way of interplay is analyzed. May is a primary English and General Studies beginning teacher with 1 year of teaching experience. With her teaching aspiration *'In teaching, there should be no distinction of classes'*, her beliefs in teaching served as an individual protective factor. Although she encountered learner diversity as a challenge in teaching that a third of students in her class are with special educational needs (SEN), she has never thought of giving

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up teaching them.   A quote from her *'Although it's tough to teach SEN students and this made me feel frustrated, my teaching aspiration supports my teaching and reminds me not to give up. If I give up, my students' learning will not be improved'* showed her intrinsic motivation or inner call to teach.   Hence, it is believed that May wants to overcome challenges and she received colleagues' support that *'They then gave me comfort by telling me a similar situation in their classes and said that it's normal'* and *'they suggested me try some new methods to teach them. After that, I realized that my teaching was not that bad, and my colleagues are willing to help. Hence, I try to change my teaching strategies and help students' learning'*.   She has also been building positive relationships with students' parents to understand students' family ground to foster better cooperation between the school and students' parents.   An interplay is then found between her belief in teaching as her individual protective factor and support from students' parents and colleagues as her contextual protective factors.

When it comes to the second way of interplay, Tom is the only example in this form of interplay.   He is a primary Music, Mathematics and General Studies teacher with 2 years of teaching experience.   As a beginning teacher, he mentioned that stress came from both teaching, non-teaching tasks and administrative work.

"There is a lot of unfamiliar work for a beginning teacher.   While I am doing lesson preparation, I have to handle teaching and administrative work like organizing activities, leading handchime team, managing various projects.   With different types of heavy workload,

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it's difficult to focus on the same thing.   Under this circumstance, I suffered from a relatively

high level of stress."

As we were talking about teacher resilience, although heavy workload and stress served as contextual risk factors for Tom, support from school and colleagues provided a supportive workplace, which serve as contextual protective factors to foster his optimistic personality and a sense of humour as his individual protective factors to be resilient.   This interplay helped Tom sustain his capacity to be resilient as he said:

"At the beginning of my teaching, I always worried about overlooking something and

being not prepared.   Nevertheless, with the support from the environment, I was relieved.

Gradually, it helped me develop optimism and a sense of humour.   Later on, being resilient is

not a problem."

From Tom's case, we can see that his optimistic personality and sense of humour are not attributes that he had in his first year of teaching career.   Rather, his contextual protective factors such as support from colleagues and school fostered his individual protective factors like optimism and sense of humour to enhance his teacher resilience.

The findings show that it is less likely for a single individual or contextual protective factor to counteract a larger number of risk factors or challenges as illustrated in by cases from

Kay, May and Tom.   Tom clearly stated that if there is only one of the individual or contextual

protective factors, it can hardly support his teaching.   Instead, two ways of interplay between

individual and contextual factors are found in all the interviewees to enhance or sustain their

teacher resilience.   The results support the conceptualization of resilience that "teacher

resilience is a dynamic process or outcome that is the result of interaction over time between a

person and the environment" (Mansfield, 2012).   Also, the findings support the definition of

resilience by some researchers that resilience is related to "regulation of emotions and effective

interaction in social environments" (Tait, 2008, p. 72) and involves "a mode of interacting with

events in the environment that is activated and nurtured in times of stress" (Tait, 2008, p. 58).

As Gu and Day (2007) suggested, studies on resilience emphasize that both positive and

negative external environmental factors create the resilience phenomenon in the process of

building resilience.   The individual protective factors assisting an individual to be resilient

when facing a risk factor or challenge are often the result of environmental conditions that foster

the development of these characteristics.   From the interview data, this relationship was

identified in a way that contextual protective factors fostered the development of personal

protective factors of an individual to enhance beginning teachers' resilience.

By comparing two ways of interplay in Figure 1 and cases from the above informants,

it is found that although the individual protective factor held by Kay and Tom is the same, which

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is optimism, the interplay found in these two cases is not the same.   The ways that the same

individual protective factor interplay can be different.   The relationship between the individual

protective and contextual factors can be one-way or two-way, which depends on the case of the

respondent.

4.2 Beginning Teachers' Relational Resilience

In this section, the findings from 5 informants regarding the second research question:

'How do relationships work as a strategy to help beginning teachers build teacher resilience?'

will be discussed.   As Bryk and Schneider (2002) stated that teachers' worlds are organized

around sets of role relationships, namely teachers with students, teachers with other teachers,

teachers with parents and teachers with school principal, the interview data reflects teacher-

teacher relations, teacher-student relations and teacher-parents relations.

	Relational resilience with teachers	Relational resilience with students	Relational resilience with students' parents
Emotional capital	- develop a trusting and supportive working relationship in workplace - understand each other	- Develop a good rapport - Positive feedback	- Support, understanding →motivation
Intellectual capital	- Help tackling problems - Make suggestions on improving teaching	/	/

	strategies - being able to learn from each other - share ideas and experience		

4.2.1 Relational Resilience with Teachers

According to Gu (2014), a strong sense of staff collegiality has been found to be essential in building intellectual, emotional, and social capital in schools. Therefore, teachers and especially those working in schools serving socioeconomically deprived communities, can maintain their integrity and commitment in times of change.

As support from colleagues were reported by all 5 beginning teachers as a contextual protective factor, supportive collegial relationship was suggested by all respondents as a strategy to build their teachers' resilience. It is commonly found that respondents were willing to seek help from colleagues when they encountered challenges. Castro et al. (2010) suggested that help seeking requires the novice teacher to work with others to obtain needed information and resources. He discovered that help-seeking strategies involved seeking 'adopted' mentors, advocating for resources, and acquiring allies to resolve problems. As a resilience strategy, it requires beginning teachers to take the initiative to find support when there is a lack of resources. By building supportive teacher-teacher relations, informants adopted

help-seeking strategy to build their teacher resilience.

For instance, May's colleagues served as both emotional and intellectual capital to support her when she faced the challenge of learners' diversity.   Supportive colleagues who were willing to give her suggestions about teaching strategies were her additional resources on teaching.   When May's colleagues understood her situation, they served as her emotional capital.   As I mentioned support from school, principal, colleagues or friends as examples, she said:

'I would like to specifically highlight how the support among teachers enhances my teacher resilience.   From the beginning of my teaching career to October, I really wanted to resign my teaching position because teaching was difficult, and students didn't understand my teaching even if I made effort to teach them'.

As May's colleagues felt her disappointment to teaching SEN students, they not only understood her situation and listened to her problems and feelings in the staff room, but also made suggestions for her on how to improve her teaching strategies and ways to enhance learning outcomes or arouse students' attention.   In this way, supportive colleagues are the intellectual capital for May with teaching her and providing suggestions about teaching:

'We confront the same situation and students in our daily teaching.   They always encourage me to keep me going, listen to my problems and feelings and teach me different

strategies.   They're supportive… They are very nice that I feel less frustrated after talking with them'.

Help-seeking strategy worked for Amy, a Mathematics and Computer secondary teacher with 3 years of teaching experience as well that she used to seek help from mainly those she was familiar with.   Supportive colleagues who help tackling her problem work as intellectual capital for her:

"In my first year of teaching, my school provided me with a mentor scheme.   However, it was useless.   I usually figure things out on my own and seek help from others most of the time."

As for Tom, supportive colleagues not only served as intellectual capital to help tackling problems, but also provided guidance for his administrative work and shared ideas and experience with him:

"For example, they often particularly tell me the details of some administrative work like how it was done before and what to do in the future.   The instructions are very clear.   Now, the schedule doesn't allow much flexibility for me.   Then, they share some related experience with me to make it familiar to me and guide me to discover possible variation."

When supportive colleagues were intellectual and emotional capital, a caring,

supportive and trusting working relationship can be developed into a bond of friendship to build teacher resilience. This supportive relationship was found in Sue's story, a secondary Mathematics and Computer teacher with 2 years of teaching experience. Although Sue is not working in the same school as she was in her first year of teaching, she appreciated this strong social and intellectual bond with her old colleagues who were two fresh graduates teaching in the same school:

"We get along well and support each other. When I encountered difficult colleagues or students, we stayed together and helped each other. It's rare… It's very supportive… We hang out together. We went hiking together just a few days ago. On my last day, my mentor and colleagues went kayaking together. We were happy."

According to Solomon and Flores's (2001), a trusting relationship is 'cultivated', 'a matter of human effort' and thus 'never something "already at hand"': 'it can and often must be conscientiously created, not simply taken for granted' (2001, p. 87). From Sue's story, we can see that she did not simply take this precious bond for granted, instead, this is 'a matter of human effort' that she offered help as well to develop this supportive relationship with her colleagues.

From the stories of the above informants, we can see that these beginning teachers have developed trusting and supportive working relationships with emotional and intellectual capital

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in workplace. The findings reaffirm the importance of trusting and enduring working relationships between peers in promoting individuals' learning and growth and through this, creating creative and productive intellectual capital within the workplace (Gu, 2014). When respondents develop relational resilience to build their teacher resilience, they trust their colleagues in providing additional resources for them to learn. By attaining resources after seeking help, they understand ways to tackle problems or face difficulties.

4.2.2 Relational Resilience with Students

The findings support one of the distinctive characteristics for teacher resilience from Day and Gu (2014) that positive feedback from parents and students are essential positive impact on teachers' motivation and resilience. This is especially when teachers' hard work is valued and understood by students. Like Gu (2014) proposed, good rapport with the students continues to be central to the sense of fulfilment and commitment for many teachers in different phases of their professional lives. From Sue's story, we can see that good rapport with students requires effort and time to develop. In her perspective, time for adaptation was needed between students and her. She told quite a long story about the conflict among her Secondary 4 students and her about a new seating designed by her. Because of the new seating plan, she received a complaint from a student' parent:

"My Secondary 4 students were not satisfied with a new seating plan designed by me…

As they gradually saw how effective it was, they would understand the reason of the seating

plan design.   I designed that seat for him for the last homework lesson.   Moreover, I didn't

allow them to choose their seats because I wanted them to focus on doing Mathematics when I

was teaching.   Finally, my students believed that changing seats was quite good that they

could make new friends.   Although I am quite upset sometimes, I feel glad when I see students'

improvement."

Sue's sense of fulfilment and commitment allows her to think in students' perspectives

to enhance their learning.   As she received positive students' feedback and realized that

students care about her, in her mind, *"these make me want to continue being a teacher"*.

Teacher-student relations therefore work for beginning teachers to build their teacher resilience.

4.2.3 Relational Resilience with Students' Parents

From May's story, it is found that good relationships with parents serve as her emotional

capital that parents' support and motivation build and sustain her teacher resilience.   Since

May teaches SEN students, she is in contact with SEN students' parents.   May felt parents'

understanding and gratitude.   As they have much more understanding towards each other, they

build

"Sometimes I feel their helplessness when we're chatting.   It motivates me to teach

better when they cannot teach but send their children to our school and expect teachers with

professionalism and ability to teach their kids.   Even though I encounter difficulties in

teaching, I think I'm more professional than students' parents that I need to try my best to teach... we have good relationships which they understand teachers' difficulties. They understand that teachers really tried our best to provide lots of materials to support their children... They thanked me for teaching their kids. I'll try my best to teach with these parents' encouragement and understanding."

When May feels parents' hopelessness, she feels her inner calling to teach and motivation as well. She has to try her best to teach because she is a professional teacher in parents' eyes. With parents' encouragement and understanding, May has been building her teacher resilience as well as a mutually supportive relationship with parents that she received positive feedback from parents. Meanwhile, her hard work was valued.

The findings regarding to the second questions reaffirm that relationships lie at the 'roots' of resilience that the presence of support, love and security fosters resilience (Luthar & Brown, 2007). From the stories of these interviewees, supportive relationships foster their teacher resilience to sustain their everyday teaching. The interview data reflects emotional and intellectual capital for teacher-teacher relations and emotional capital for teacher-student and teacher-parents relations. These findings agreed with what Gu (2014) mentioned about social relationships and networks in and between workplaces for teachers. They bring intellectual, spiritual, and emotional resources which teachers can use to enhance their collective efficacy and shared beliefs of professional influence and responsibility and improve

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the achievement of their students ultimately.

5. Implications for Teacher Education

The current study sheds light on the interplay between individual and contextual factors to influence beginning teachers' resilience and beginning teachers' resilience on 5 beginning teachers in the Hong Kong context.   Regarding the first research question, this study has potential implications for individual protective and risk factors and contextual protective and risk factors for early career teachers.   Two ways of interplay depicted in Figure 1 are analyzed to try to give an in-depth understanding on how the interplay between individual and contextual factors influences beginning teachers' resilience.   The second research question helps understand how relationships work as emotional and intellectual capital for 5 beginning teachers in the Hong Kong school context.

6. Limitation of the Study

As this research is an assignment with the approach of using a qualitative research to analyze beginning teachers' relational resilience in Hong Kong, the number of participants in this study is limited.   Due to the sampling size in this research is 5, which is not large and the cases included are not typical, findings in this study cannot be generalized into all beginning teachers in Hong Kong.   The figure used to show the interplay between individual and contextual factors is used to describe and analyze 5 informants only in this study.   Furthermore,

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since the research questions in this study focus on the interplay between individual and contextual factors to influence beginning teachers' resilience and beginning teachers' resilience, other components like teaching subjects and gender of the beginning teachers, school culture, school policy and school type are not being discussed.   In the future research, these elements could be used to compare to add to the present study.

7. Conclusion

This research has reported 5 in-service beginning teachers in Hong Kong about the topic of beginning teachers' relational resilience in Hong Kong.   Though it only reflects limited responses of Hong Kong beginning teachers, the findings offer some insights about the interplay between individual and contextual factors influencing beginning teachers' resilience, which enrich the understanding of factors affecting beginning teachers' resilience that two ways of interplay are analyzed and discussed.   The study about beginning teachers' relational resilience reflects supportive teacher-student relations, teach-teacher relations as well as teacher-parents relations.

In conclusion, it is hoped that this study enhances understanding towards beginning teachers' relational resilience, which is crucial in beginning teachers' everyday teaching when they are suffered from different challenges and stress in Hong Kong.

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Researcher version

1. In your daily teaching, what are the <u>difficulties</u>?

   - In terms of teaching tasks or non-teaching, administrative tasks?

   - Do you think these difficulties are challenging?

2. During your teaching career, what is the <u>major/most impressive</u> difficulty?

   - What did you feel?

3. How <u>often</u> do you face difficulties?

Describe and explain the definition of teacher resilience to the interviewee.

4. Do you think you have teacher resilience? / Do you think you can 'bounce back' from

   the adverse situations?

5. <u>How long</u> does it take you to bounce back from the adverse situations?

6. In terms of <u>personal factors</u>:

   How do personal factors influence your teacher resilience?

(self-efficacy, beliefs, altruism, strong intrinsic motivation, perseverance and persistence,

optimism, sense of humour, emotional intelligence, willingness to take risks and flexibility)

7. In terms of <u>environmental factors</u>:

How do your environmental factors influence your teacher resilience?

(mentor support for new teachers, school and administrative support, support of peers and colleagues)

8. For the <u>risk factors</u>, how do the risk factors influence your teacher resilience?

(Heavy workload, classroom management, being unprepared, lack of support and resources, poor hiring practices)

9. Did the personal and environmental factors interact to influence your teacher resilience? How?

10. Do you think relationships can help work as a strategy to enhance teacher resilience?

- What kind of relationship(s) can you think of? (e.g. teachers with students, teachers with other teachers, teachers with parents, and teachers with school principal)

- Is/Are the relationship(s) supportive? How?

Interviewee Version

1. In your daily teaching, what are the <u>difficulties</u>?

2. During your teaching career, what is the <u>major/most impressive</u> difficulty?

3. How <u>often</u> do you face difficulties?

4. Do you think you can <u>'bounce back'</u> from the adverse situations?

5. <u>How long</u> does it take you to bounce back from the adverse situations?

6. Do you have any <u>personal factors</u> like beliefs and optimism which influence your ability to bounce back?

7. How do these <u>personal factors</u> influence your ability to bounce back?

8. Do you have any <u>environmental factors</u> like mentor support for the new teachers which influence your ability to bounce back?

9. How do these <u>environmental factors</u> influence your ability to bounce back?

10. Are your <u>personal and environmental factors</u> affecting each other?

11. How do the <u>risk factors</u> influence your ability to bounce back?

12. Do you have any relationships like student-teacher relationship and relationship with colleagues which help build your teacher resilience?

13. How do relationships work as a strategy to help build your teacher resilience?