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‘Nothing fazes me, I can do it all’: Developing headteacher resilience in a complex and challenging educational climate

Abstract

Headship (School Principal) is a challenging role within a complex and ever-changing policy climate. This article explores the factors which influence headteacher resilience and their mental health. Existing research focuses on teacher resilience but there is a paucity of literature exploring the factors which influence headteacher resilience. This study was conducted in the United Kingdom (UK). Headteachers (n=16) participated in a semi-structured telephone interview. Participants were asked to categorise their mental health as either good or poor at the time of the interview in relation to the World Health Organisation definition of mental health. Participants represented the primary and secondary phases of education and the research included those who were new to the role and those who were more experienced. Male and female participants were represented in the sample. Participants identified a range of factors which influenced their resilience and mental health. These included individual factors, social/relational factors, implementing actions, exposure to challenges, professional learning and systemic factors. Systemic factors included pressures of managing restricted school budgets and external inspections and policy priorities. Participants emphasised the importance of coaching and access to external professional supervision both to support resilience and professional development. Although external professional supervision is common in health and social care professions, it is less common in the education sector, particularly in the UK. Greenfield’s (2015) model of teacher resilience has been adapted to address the factors which influence headteacher resilience. In conclusion, the study supports the use of external professional supervision and professional coaching for head teachers to support both their mental health and resilience.

Key words

Headteachers; resilience; mental health; coaching.

Introduction

The terms Head Teacher, School Principal and Headship are interchangeable terms which are used to refer to individuals who are employed to lead schools. Although these individuals are members of a school leadership team, the accountability for overall school effectiveness rests with them. The 2019 Teacher Wellbeing Index (Education Support, 2019) published in England identified that 84% of senior leaders in schools considered themselves to be stressed and 28% worked more than 61 hours per week, with 11% working more than 70 hours per week. The findings also indicated that senior leaders experienced more behavioural, physical and psychological symptoms compared with teachers and staff working in other roles.

Working as a senior leader, and specifically as a headteacher, is undoubtedly challenging but often deeply rewarding. Schools operate within a discourse of performativity which requires school leaders to do all they can to raise academic achievement. Schools in England are evaluated by inspectors on the basis of student outcomes, irrespective of the fact that varying school contexts and student diversity can impact detrimentally on these. At the same time, headteachers are often required to manage extremely tight budgets, deal with contracts of employment and manage parental complaints. Constant changes to education policy can create instability in schools and headteachers are often required to address new frameworks with minimal notice.

Head Teachers are not unprepared for the challenges of school leadership when they take on the role. Many do not embark on this role lightly. They are aware that it will be stressful, time-consuming and that they will face resistance (Kelly and Saunders, 2010; Stephenson and Bauer, 2010). However, they are often motivated by a desire to improve educational outcomes and therefore the life chances of children and young people. However, although this sense of moral purpose can strengthen their resilience (Greenfield, 2015), lack of access to support networks, negative school cultures and the broader educational policy context can also have a detrimental impact on their resilience and mental health (Greenfield, 2015). We therefore conceptualise both resilience and mental health as dynamic traits which are not just innate, but also influenced by a range of external factors which operate outside the individual.

Research demonstrates that multiple factors impact on staff wellbeing, including school climate (Gray et al.,2017). A negative school climate impacts on staff retention, absence and relationships between students and staff (Grayson and Alvarez, 2008). A positive school climate can support resilience (Greenfield, 2015). This study sought to examine the factors

which influenced the resilience and mental health of headteachers. It elicited the perspectives of both primary and secondary headteachers in one local authority on factors which influenced their own resilience and strategies to enhance their resiliency further.

Resilience

As a concept, resilience is not specifically tied to headteachers, or even at times to leadership. This is because aspects of resilience can be applied to all individuals facing challenging circumstances, including headteachers. Most literature on resilience comes from the field of psychology (Bosworth and Earthman, 2002; Seligman, 2011) and originates from the United States

There are many perspectives on resilience. Liebenberg et al., (2012) describe it as the 'ability to thrive in the face of adversity' (p.219) whilst Low Dog (2012) suggests resilience is the 'the ability to gather up our strength and all of our resources and overcome adversity' (p.178). According to Arias (2016), resiliency in education leaders comes from self-efficacy, personal agency, optimism, the building of relationships with others, support from family and friends and even through seeking out spiritual guidance. Thus, resilience has been conceptualised as a relational characteristic rather than being innate within individuals. Resiliency can be influenced by the macro and micro contexts in which school leaders operate, including access to support from others, school climate and educational policy. We therefore adopt an ecological perspective on resilience which takes into account the individual and their relationships with others as well as the influence of the contexts in which the individual operates.

According to Luthans (2002), at its most simple, 'resiliency is the positive psychological capacity to rebound, to 'bounce back' from adversity, uncertainty, conflict, failure or even positive change, progress and increased responsibility' (p.702). However, for some (see Zantura et al., 2008; Ledesma, 2014; and Lawton-Smith, 2017) there is more to resilience than simply bouncing back. Elle (2011) believes that leaders in particular bounce forward: 'not only do resilient leaders quickly get their mojo back, but because they understand that the status quo is unsustainable, they also use it to move mountains (p.80).

Zantrua et al., (2008) suggest there are two aspects or stages to resilience, 'recovery' and 'sustainability' (p.42). Recovery enables an individual to overcome a stressful event, whilst sustainability is the capacity of an individual to 'continue forward in the face of adversity'.

They argue that survival alone is not enough to ensure an individual's wellbeing. Rather, focusing on moving forward and on new, positive goals is what is both needed and essential for building future resilience and maintaining health and wellbeing. For headteachers, maintaining a good work-life balance can support recovery. However, having a clear vision, goals and a sense of purpose can enable school leaders to continue moving forward in the face of adversity (Day, 2011; Day, 2017; Day et al., 2011). Events which are stressful for school leaders, such as school inspections, can re-energise them by providing them with a clear goal to focus on achieving.

Ledesma (2014) in her article, *Conceptual Frameworks and Research Models on Resilience in Leadership*, suggests there is actually a four-cycle phase to resilience: deteriorating; adapting; recovery and growing phases. Ledesma believes that where an individual is positioned in the cycle is largely determined by their capacity for resilience for that particular event or crisis at the time. Some will be unable to function as result of their experience. Others will adapt but not ever fully recover. Some will recover and return to their pre-event condition. However, according to Ledesma (2014) a small minority of individuals will reach the growing phase. For these individuals their resilience levels will be strengthened; they will thrive as a result of their experience.

The literature suggests that some individuals, especially effective leaders, embrace stress and challenges. Indeed, they might even be said to thrive at such times (Pearsall, 2003); they do more than merely bounce back. They see difficult situations as a learning opportunity and use them to tackle future challenges. Once a resolution is found, it can have the effect of re-energising them. According to Elle (2011) the most successful leaders remain optimistic, cultivate networks, see patterns that they use as insights to effect change, swiftly mitigate the impact of setbacks, use words carefully and engage in personal rewards, 'making time for activities that revitalize them physically, emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually' (p.81). In other words, they re-fuel.

This theme of resilience as a fuel that needs replenishing, and good leaders recognising this to be the case, is strongly evident in the literature. Often the metaphor of resilience as a 'fuel' source (Lawton-Smith, 2017; Ledesma, 2014) is used. According to Ledesma, the literature identifies three types of resilience fuel - personal values, personal efficacy, and personal energy. Together they account for building resilience capacity and help determine an individual's response to adversity. However, there are times when individuals, even the most resilient, need their 'fuel tank' of resilience topped up and Lawton Smith's (2017) study of

the coaching of eight senior leaders, from different sectors, which looked at their experience of being coached, had numerous examples of this. The senior leaders interviewed talked metaphorically about 'fuel', using it to describe resilience as a resource that needed to be 'topped up' from time to time; be that by switching off, taking a holiday or seeking support from others.

Values is a relatively new aspect of resilience that has started to appear in the literature. According to Lawton-Smith (2017) senior leaders in her study found it difficult to be resilient when their values were compromised or when they clashed with others, finding they 'clearly felt that their ability to be resilient was influenced by their values' (p.16).

Resilience then is something that is fluid and contextual, it evolves and changes over time for every individual, regardless of whether they are a leader. Individuals can be resilient in one context and less so in another and resilience can be strengthened over time. Sometimes the critical event that tests an individual's resilience can have a detrimental impact on their health and wellbeing, but for some it can be beneficial and lead to an individual's growth and change that they can then use as 'fuel' to build their resilience and help their steer their future direction. Resiliency in this way can be closely linked to individuals having a growth mindset. However, there is little, if any, literature on this in relation to leadership roles per se, and none in relation to school leaders specifically. Most of the growth mind set literature in education, like that of leadership effectiveness, focuses on the student (Yeager and Dweck, 2012) and how it can be used to improve a student's resilience and learning outcomes as evidenced, ultimately, in examination results.

Conceptual frameworks

This study draws on Greenfield's (2015) model of teacher resilience. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study which has specifically applied this conceptual framework to headteachers. Geenfield's (2015) model is shown in Fig. 1.

[insert Fig. 1]

The model demonstrates how resilience is affected by internal and external factors. Internal factors include having a sense of hope, purpose and high self-efficacy. According to the model these are protective factors which enable teachers to stay resilient. Radiating outwards from the centre, the model demonstrates that resilience is relational. Positive relationships

with colleagues, family, friends and students can support teachers to be more resilient. In contrast, negative relationships can have a detrimental impact on resilience. A school climate which is characterised by positive relationships with colleagues and students can therefore support resilience. The model also demonstrates that positive actions (problem solving, reflection, reframing, professional development and stress relief) can also support resilience. The model demonstrates that teacher resilience is affected by both the challenges that teachers experience in both their personal and professional lives and the broader policy context which influences education. We were interested in how this model might be used to support our understanding of headteacher resilience.

Professional learning and development as well as strong, relational professional learning communities that support teachers and headteachers can strengthen resilience and support good mental health. Greenfield (2015) identifies professional development as a mechanism for supporting resilience but does not specify forms of professional development that may be useful to teachers. We were interested in exploring whether the use of coaching and external professional supervision specifically might have a positive impact on resiliency and mental health in relation to the participants.

This study also draws on self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985) which explores the role of autonomy, competence and relatedness to human motivation. We have used this theory as a conceptual lens to analyse the experiences of head teachers based on our assumption that all of these three factors also influence resilience, given that they are identified, albeit using different terms, within Greenfield's (2015) model. We therefore assume that if these three conditions are not met, there will be a negative impact on both head teacher resilience and their mental health.

Finally, this study uses Locus of Control theory (Rotter, 1966) as an analytic tool to make sense of the participants' experiences. The theory posits that individuals with an internal locus of control attributes successes or failures to their own efforts and abilities. In contrast, an individual with an external locus of control attributes their successes or failures to external factors and are more likely to experience poor mental health and demonstrate low levels of resilience because they believe that events are out of their control. More recently, locus of control has also been described as a coping resource facilitating certain coping styles Van den Brande et al., 2016). Thus, it has been assumed that individuals with an external locus of control avoid situations or resign themselves to failure and experience greater stress and poor mental health (Gore et al., 2016). Conversely, those with an internal locus of control are

associated with help-seeking and positive thinking, as well as lower levels of work stress in general (Gore et al., 2016).

Research questions

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

- What are the challenges of headship and how do these challenges influence their mental health?
- What factors influence headteacher resilience?

It is our assumption that resiliency id head teachers is a dynamic trait that is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors, including access to personal and professional support networks and the extent of the challenges that they are required to face.

Method

This was a qualitative study and data were collected using semi-structured interviews. An e-mail was circulated to all headteachers in one local authority to invite their participation in the project. The e-mail included information for participants and a consent form which participants e-mailed back to the researchers, thus assuring that informed consent was obtained (Cohen et al., 2018). The four elements of informed consent i.e. competence, voluntarism, full information, and comprehension (Cohen et al., 2018) were addressed through the participant information and consent forms and the professional status of the participants. In line with advice from Hammersley and Traianou (2012) participants were assured of their rights to anonymity and confidentiality. Due to the positions of authority held by the participants and the sensitive nature of the research, it was particularly important to uphold confidentiality and anonymity (Cohen et al., 2018). Ethical approval was also secured through the university ethics committee prior to any data being collected. 16 participants agreed to participate in the research. None of the participants were known to the researchers. Participants were not named in the research and were referred to using a code (HT1 representing Head Teacher 1). Names of schools or other organisations have not been included in this article to protect participants' anonymity. Participants were signposted, from the outset, to external organisations which could offer support if this was required after participating in the research. It was important to take into account the power relations which

were immanent within this research (Brooks et al., 2014). Within their professional contexts the participants hold a significant amount of power. However, within a research context arguably the balance of power was tipped in our favour. Regardless of this, it was important to us to ensure that we demonstrated through our interviewing techniques that we valued the professional status of the participants, that we respected them and that we viewed them as individuals with authority. Given their professional positions of power, it was critical that we protected their anonymity at all costs (Cohen et al., 2018).

Interviews provide opportunities for participants to interpret and make sense of their own experiences (Cohen et al., 2018; Sikes and Goodson, 2017). Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with headteachers.

Each participant was interviewed once, and each interview lasted between 20 and 40 minutes. 16 interviews were conducted in total. Participants were selected from both the primary and secondary sectors of education in one local authority in England. Participants were asked to declare their current mental health status using the definition of good mental health provided by the World Health organisation:

> Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.
>
> (WHO, 2018)

Participants were asked to use this definition to decide if they had good or poor mental health. The breakdown of participants is shown in Table 1.

The trustworthiness of qualitative research should be evaluated through applying the concepts of credibility and transferability of the data (Guba, 1981; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Credibility relates to the believability of the findings and therefore the confidence in them. In this study credibility was assured using interviews with multiple participants and member checks. Transferability was more difficult to achieve because the participants represented one local authority. However, the inclusion of male and female participants, with varied years of headship experience in both primary and secondary school, ensured that there was a degree of transferability.

Greenfield's (2015) model of resilience was used to shape the interview questions. The interviews explored factors that influenced the participants' resilience these questions are listed below:

- What do you understand by resilience?
- What personal factors influence your resilience?
- What actions do you take to improve your resilience?
- What school-related factors influence your resilience?
- What are the challenges of headship?
- How does the wider context (for example, policy) influence your resilience?

The telephone interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Audio recordings were transferred from the recording device and held securely on password protected software alongside the transcripts. Thematic analysis was conducted on the transcripts Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. Firstly, we became familiar with the data through reading and re-reading the transcripts. We then generated the initial codes and searched for themes. We checked the themes against the data before finally defining and naming them. We then used these to structure the findings.

Findings and discussion

The key findings are presented below under themes. The themes have been organised into participants' understandings of resilience, internal and external factors, actions, relationships, challenges, performance management and professional development. An example of assigning themes to data is shown in Table 2.

Understandings of resilience

Rather than viewing resilience as a fixed trait (Masten and Garmezy, 1985), participants with good mental health conceptualised resilience as fluid (Luthar, 2006; Roffey, 2017; Stephens, 2013). They recognised the relational aspect of resilience through drawing on networks of support to increase their capacity to respond to difficult professional challenges:

> *My resilience goes up and down depending on the challenges I face and the support that is available to me.* (HT5)

> *I draw on my family and friends when I am experiencing challenges. They help me to get through difficult times.* (HT7)

> *We support each other in school. We are a strong team. We get through most things together.* (HT9)

The ability to 'push through' regardless of circumstances is a dominant theme in the literature on resilience (Reyes et al., 2015) but this 'bounce-back' perspective only offers a partial understanding of resilience. The participants (particularly HT7 and HT9) demonstrated that resilience is not just about 'pushing through' adversity or 'bouncing-back' from it. They recognised that reaching out for support from family, friends and colleagues is a fundamental aspect of resilience. Some (for example HT5) recognised the dynamic nature of resilience in that it is influenced by a variety of factors, including the extent of the challenges that one is faced with.

Internal and external factors

In line with Greenfield's (2015) model, participants with good mental health were more likely to draw on their own sense of hope or sense of purpose to increase their resilience than participants with poor mental health:

> *I have great faith. I use prayer a lot, particularly in the car on the way to work, and this gives me a lot of comfort and fortifies my strength for the day ahead.* (HT11)

> *For me, one of the lucky things is that we are a church school, so we can come back to church values as to why we are doing the job.* (HT5)

> *I am guided by my purpose of wanting the very best for the children in my care.* (HT 7)

Some participants with good mental health also drew on their high self-efficacy to maintain resilience:

> *I have secured two successful inspection outcomes, so this helps me to stay resilient when things get tough. (HT 12)*

> *I know that I am doing a good job. The staff are happy, the children are happy, and we get great results. We have no complaints from parents.* (HT1)

McIntosh and Shaw (2017) identify internal factors which influence resilience. Internal factors include emotional control, goal setting and a positive outlook. The concept of 'growth

mindset' (Dweck, 1999) is helpful here in relation to positive thinking, learning from experience and moving forwards. Participants with good mental health were more likely to demonstrate these characteristics:

> *I always try to respond to challenging situations by staying calm. I think that it is my role as a leader to stay calm, especially during inspections.* (HT7)

> *Focusing on achieving small goals helps me to deal with challenges. If I can go home each day knowing that I have achieved something, then I can cope with my job. I try to focus on how I can improve in my job and what I am learning rather than focusing on the negatives. I apply the same principle to my staff too. We focus on how to improve rather than obsessing on what we are not as good at.* (HT9)

In contrast, those with poor mental health tended to focus on the challenges that they faced, thus focusing more on the external factors which influenced their resilience. Participants demonstrated an understanding that resilience is not solely an internal characteristic but is influenced by external factors such as heavy workloads associated with the job of being a headteacher. Participants with poor mental health focused more on the challenges associated with headship and the effect of these on their resilience:

> *Usually I'm quite a resilient person. I have bounced back several times. But this is one of the worst years I think I've ever had. I don't know how I'm still here, still smiling. It just shows we are a very resilient group of people are Headteachers. It's not that we don't have the passion, but its other people's jobs we have to do that's not our main purpose. Management continually takes over the leadership. I can't get into the classroom to monitor and ensure the children's learning is the standard that I want it to be.* (HT2)

> *Criticism from parents, Ofsted and the local authority have taken their toll on my resilience.* (HT4)

> *Personally, there seems to be this concept that you can teach resilience, most headteachers are resilient but it's just not manageable what we are being asked to do. Therefore, our health, life, relationships suffer. We become ill and people assume that we are not resilient. I've seen some really resilient teachers go under. We are told what to do by the powers above and have little control or not as much control as people assume. But it's the job, not that people don't have resilience.* (HT6)

> *My resilience is low. We are a requires improvement school, we have high staff and pupil turnover and I get no support from the local authority. (HT4)*
>
> *This year we have had numerous parental complaints. It wears you down.* (HT6)

It appears that participants with poor mental health demonstrated an external rather than an internal locus of control. Locus of control theory (Rotter, 1966) suggests that individuals have either an internal or external locus of control. Individuals with an internal locus of control believe that they have control of their own destiny and that they have the capacity to influence things that happen to them. In contrast, individuals with an external locus of control believe that external factors largely influence their lives. Participants with good mental health focused on setting and achieving goals and this was supported by ongoing reflection and review. In contrast, participants with poor mental health focused on the factors which were often outside of their control (for example, school inspections, parental complaints and restrictions to school budgets) rather than focusing on the actions they might take to address the challenges which they were experiencing.

Actions

Participants with good mental health identified various actions that supported their resilience. In the main, these focused on relaxation activities (HT 7), professional development (HT 9) and strategies to reduce workload (HT 16).

> *My main one is yoga. I do it twice a day, I get up really early in the morning and when I come in on a night. I spend a lot of time thinking about being healthy, eating well, I drink very little alcohol, things like walking the dog are good stress busters*. (HT7)
>
> *The induction process for new Headteachers is fantastic, it has improved. It wasn't good before but the local authority has listened to previous Headteachers. I have received professional development on health and safety and Ofsted, governance. In the induction programme we meet once a term for a year.* (HT9)
>
> *I have a good relationship with my previous head so I can speak to them and it helps because they are in a different local authority.* (HT16)

Greenfield's (2015) model identifies a broader range of strategies which were utilised by the participants with good mental health, but not by those with poor mental health. These include problem-solving, reflection and reframing:

> *We use the last staff meeting of each half-term to reflect on what we have achieved and what we need to do next.* (HT9)

> *Every time I experience something challenging, I try to put it into perspective. Often issues seem bigger than they really are, and I try not to let small things grow out of all proportion. I always try to learn from challenging experiences by thinking what can I take from this to make me more effective in the future?* (HT 11)

Participants with good mental health tended to reach out to others to support the process of reflection. For example,

> *I have a weekly reflection session with my Chair of Governors, and this really helps me to pinpoint what is going well and what I need to focus on.* (HT5)

In contrast, participants with poor mental health tended to become absorbed in challenging situations to the extent that they could not see beyond these. Sometimes the challenges that they experienced had a paralysing effect:

> *Complaints from staff and parents grind me down. They stop me from focusing on my job and I take them home with me. I can't sleep at night because I think about them too much.* (HT10)

> *When we are due for an inspection, that is all I can think about. I lose sight of what really matters.* (HT6)

> *If I switch my e-mails on and there is a complaint from a parent, I take it personally and it ruins my day. It is all I can think about.* (HT4)

Most participants identified protecting personal time as a key strategy for increasing resilience and improving wellbeing, for example:

> *I try to switch emails off at weekends. I don't have them 'on tap'. If I need to send e-mails on a weekend, I put them on a timer so they only go out during work time.* (HT16)

Relationships

In line with Greenfield's (2015) model, participants identified how relational factors impacted on their resilience. Participants with good mental health talked about the importance of talking to other colleagues openly, maintaining humour and being open with colleagues about their own strengths and weaknesses:

> *I'm a very open Headteacher and I have experienced staff. I have no problem saying, 'at the moment I am tired or I'm finding difficulty with this.' I can talk to colleagues. I don't pretend I'm this, "nothing fazes me I can do it all", kind of guy. I pick up the phone to the advisors and the hub. I will ask for help when needed.* (HT1)

> *I have a strong, large team and we meet every Friday morning to talk about school issues. It keeps me on track. It makes me very secure in what we are doing. But the biggest thing is humour, we have such a laugh at work. It's a bit like a hobby now, I look forward to coming to work.* (HT5)

Social capital theory focuses on the ways in which individuals establish and maintain social relationships (Putman, 2001). Social capital is defined as the 'resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive action' (Lin, 2001, p.12) Social networks are vitally important to individuals because humans are hard-wired for social connection (Roffey, 2017). Individuals are interdependent beings and social networks can strengthen resilience, reduce stress and anxiety, particularly in times of adversity (Roffey, 2017). Participants with good mental health valued the social connections that they had formed within their schools and they drew on these heavily to support their resilience. They also emphasised the importance of a broader range of social relationships in supporting their resilience, including support from friends, family and positive relationships with students. Conversely, participants with poor mental health tended not to reach out for support from others:

> *I worry that if I talk to others about my challenges, that people will think I can't cope. I would never reach out for support from the local authority. I could lose my job.* (HT10)

> *I must be strong. I can't show any sign of weakness, especially to my staff or to parents. It would undermine my credibility as a leader. I don't always talk to my family, because if they knew I was struggling, they would worry about me.* (HT13)

> *I would never talk to other Heads about my weaknesses. It would spread like a wild fire.* (HT6)

Self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985) posits that relatedness is a key psychological need. Greenfield (2015) also identifies relational factors which influence resilience. Building connectedness in the workplace therefore not only influences resilience, it influences wellbeing. Participants with good mental health demonstrated higher levels of connectedness, better mental health and increased levels of resilience than those with poor mental health. Restricting opportunities for headteachers to develop connections with other headteachers therefore seems counter-productive. Developing workplaces which embrace human connectivity is therefore a logical way of increasing headteacher resilience.

Challenges

Jameson (2014) provides one of the few accounts of resilience from a systemic perspective. Headship is a challenging role which requires leaders to navigate external pressures (legislation, inspection, policy, finances etc) as well as responding to the pressures from governors, parents, students, staff and other key stakeholders. The broader educational policy climate can also influence headteacher resilience.

Experience within school leadership roles prior to headship was identified as a key factor which supported heads to address challenges:

> *I've been quite fortunate in coming through a route to headship that has given me a considerable amount of training. I've moved through the school system, up through a range of leadership roles and this has made me feel a bit more resilient. I've seen either first or second hand most situations. Whereas a lot of Headteachers are coming straight out of the classroom, and that can be quite shocking and difficult. Very few schools have an assistant head or are in a position where you can get a taste for things.* (HT2)

Challenges associated with school inspection dominated participants' accounts:

> *You are only as good as your last inspection. If you have a bad inspection it can seriously affect your resilience because you can lose your job.* (HT4)

> *One minute the school is outstanding. Then the goalposts change and suddenly it is given a notice to improve. That can really knock you down.* (HT8)

The stress of managing a school budget was also identified by over half of the participants:

> *All of a sudden you are in charge of a budget and people's livelihood and contracts, and that's where a lot of the stress comes from. My budget was cut and I had to issue redundancy notices. That was a difficult time and my resilience was rock bottom.* (HT5)

The experiences of the participants can be analysed using self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985). In cases where autonomy was restricted the participants demonstrated an external locus of control. For example, both HT4 and HT8 positioned themselves as passive rather than active agents in relation to school inspection. Their comments suggest that they felt that they had no control over the outcomes of the school inspection outcomes. Self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985) posits that autonomy is a key psychological need which is a pre-requisite for learning, motivation and wellness. HT5 also demonstrated a lack of autonomy in relation to the cuts to the school budget, again reflecting an external locus of control. Lack of ability to act and effect change is also an aspect that Greenfield (2015) links to teacher resilience. Improving headteacher autonomy could therefore influence resilience and should therefore be a key consideration of governors, local authorities and leaders of Multi-Academy Trusts.

Self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985) also identifies competence as a key psychological need. If there is optimal challenge, individuals can thrive within the workplace but if there is insufficient challenge or the challenge is too great, this can lead to poor wellbeing. Greenfield's (2015) model also identifies a relationship between the level of challenge and an individual's resilience. Getting the level of challenge just right therefore increases learning, motivation and wellness (Deci and Ryan, 1985) but also resilience. This has implications for headteacher performance management, a process through which challenges are often established.

Performance management

The terms 'performance management', 'appraisal', 'evaluation' and 'review ' are often used interchangeably (Eddy-Spicer et al., 2019). However, irrespective of terminology, headteacher performance management generally encompasses two dimensions: the development of headteacher capacity and accountability for performance (Davis et al., 2011; James and Colebourne, 2004).

All participants highlighted the role of performance management in supporting their resilience but their experiences of it were mixed. They emphasised the importance of performance management being an on-going process rather than a one-off event:

> *Performance management has been ineffective. I had targets but these were not revisited until after Easter. This didn't motivate me and it did not support my resilience. There should be on-going dialogue. We have revised it for next year.* (HT14)

In addition, participants with good mental health tended to emphasise the need for the process to offer support and challenge. In England, school Governing Bodies perform a significant role in the management of headteacher performance. It has been emphasised that 'striking the right balance between support and challenge highlights the importance of the underpinning relationships' (Eddy-Spicer et al., 2019, p.178). Effective performance management hinges on a combination of robust challenge and support, both of which are accompanied by constructive dialogue, relational trust, situational awareness and a systems perspective (Eddy-Spicer et al., 2019).

> *From our perspective, it's really tight, but I brought it with me. It involves three governors and an external consultant, it's quite rigorous but supportive and that support helps me to stay resilient.* (HT7)

> *I expect to be challenged, otherwise I won't improve. However, the combination of support and challenge is also important.* (HT1)

Although no participants resented being challenged, those with poor mental health tended to emphasise the need for contextual factors to be considered when setting targets:

> *Often, I am set targets which are not realistic. I have been told to get 92% of my Year 6 cohort to age-related expectations. It is impossible, given their starting points.* (HT6)

> *I am not afraid of being challenged. I challenge my staff every day. But when it comes to being set targets by people doing my performance management, I expect them to consider my knowledge of the school, its context and my knowledge of the staff.* (HT3)

Despite the widespread implementation of teacher and headteacher performance management in the UK education system, international research has identified a lack of understanding of the processes and outcomes of the performance management of senior school leaders (Davis

et al., 2011; Goldring et al., 2009; Radinger, 2014). Some participants (for example, HT5) questioned the role of governing body involvement in the process of performance management and opened up debate about whether the process should be led by headteachers who understand what the role entails:

> *I've always found it very strange that the governors are the ultimate ones that do my appraisal as they know nothing about my job. They do buy in an advisor, but at the end of the day they are the decision makers. You wouldn't get that in another industry. You wouldn't get three people off the street and talk about targets; it doesn't make sense. It should be done by our peers.* (HT5)

Participants acknowledged that although checks and balances would need to be implemented to ensure that the process is sufficiently robust, they wanted their performance to be managed by other headteachers rather than by colleagues from the governing body. Some participants identified the relationship between effective performance management and their own resilience and the need for ongoing dialogue. Although some participants had experience of external consultants being involved in the process, this was not the case for all. Several participants thought that performance management should be conducted by a serving headteacher, employed in a similar school and dealing with similar day-to-day challenges. Although research has identified the importance of taking into account the situational context (Eddy-Spicer et al., 2019) which headteachers are working in, there is limited emphasis in the existing literature on what this entails, particularly for headteachers who are working in challenging schools or where staffing issues are a concern.

Professional development

All participants agreed that high quality professional development which is led by other headteachers, rather than external consultants, was critical to supporting their resilience:

> *Professional development is on and off at the moment. It's high on everyone's agenda. There have been some changes but not enough. It needs to be quadrupled. I want it to be led by other heads who have been there and done it and have addressed the challenges that I am facing.* (HT10)

Some participants identified the value of coaching as a professional development tool to support resilience.

> *I've been coached and found it very effective. At the same time but you're conscious you're putting more work onto another Headteacher. However, that's the kind of workload you don't mind.* (HT6)

> *I'm a big supporter of coaching. The art of conversation is about growth, it is important to have professional conversations even when people are really busy. It gives you time to reflect. Id a positive experience. My coach reflected back what I was thinking and gave me professional endorsement.* (HT9)

One participant (HT11) emphasised the importance of external professional supervision. This approach is common in other professions including health-related and social care professions, but it is not common in education. This is despite the fact that headteachers are required to address complex child and family circumstances and sometimes have to make decisions which have far-reaching consequences:

> *Access to resources such as external professional supervisors is the best option because if you have someone to talk to face-to-face it is more powerful than e-mail support and other forms of support. However, it has to be non-judgemental and non-threatening.* (HT11)

The term 'coaching' is used in a variety of professions and is typically associated with promoting professional reflection and growth without guided instruction (Sardar and Galdames, 2018). It is an ambiguous term which means various things to different people. However, it is generally accepted that the process of coaching involves self-learning (Lane, 2010) and self-development (Coates, 2008).

Currently, it has been well reported that headteachers face a range of challenges including isolation, work–life balance, task management and stress during the implementation of change (Stephenson and Bauer, 2010). According to Kelly and Saunders (2010) 'contemporary headship is a complex, demanding and multifaceted job with wide-ranging accountabilities' (p.129). Challenges such as loneliness (López, Ahumada, Galdames, and Madrid, 2012), work–life balance (Bisschoff and Watts, 2013), stress and frustration, task and time management (Hobson, 2003) and rapid change in educational policies (Starr, 2011) can result in demotivation.

It was clear that the participants attributed significant value to coaching. It was also evident that access to coaching was variable across the participants. Although some had benefitted from coaching, this was mainly due to the fact that they had sourced the opportunity

themselves rather than it being offered to them. As the relationship between coaching and headteacher resilience has been established in research (Sardar and Galdames, 2018), the provision of coaching as an entitlement, rather than a choice, for headteachers, is likely to improve resilience, motivation and retention.

Greenfield (2015) locates professional development under actions within his conceptual model of teacher resilience. However, this places the onus on the individual to access opportunities that support professional learning. In contrast, our participants emphasised the importance of professional development through coaching, supervision and other forms of professional learning being provided rather than having to seek such opportunities.

Reconceptualising the model

Our data demonstrate that Greenfield's (2015) model of teacher resilience can be adapted to produce a revised conceptual framework which outlines the factors which influence headteacher resilience. This is presented in Figure 2.

[Insert Fig. 2]

The participants' resilience and mental health was influenced by a range of factors. These included:

- individual factors (hope, sense of purpose; self-efficacy and actions)
- relational factors (personal and school-related) and the extent of the challenges the leaders faced.
- Access to high quality continuing professional development (CPD) through coaching, external professional supervision and other forms of professional learning led by peers was also viewed as being essential in supporting resilience. We have separated this out in the model to emphasise its importance.
- The challenges that they faced (for example, parental resistance).
- Broader systemic factors (school inspections, budgets and educational policy) also impacted on the participants' resilience.

Each layer in Fig. 2 can have a positive or negative impact on mental health. For example, having a sense of purpose, high self-efficacy and taking action can result in high levels of resilience and good mental health, a lack of these can also have a detrimental impact on both.

Access to supportive social networks can increase resilience and result in good mental health but exposure to negative relationships with colleagues or an inability to access support from others (personally or professionally) can lead to a decline in both resilience and mental health. Access to high quality professional development can have a positive impact on resilience and mental health whilst lack of opportunities to access professional development can impact detrimentally on both. Where challenges in relation to parental resistance, school budgets, schools inspections and the broader educational policy climate are considered too great, this can impact negatively on mental health and resilience but reasonable levels of challenge might also have a positive impact on both.

Although the model in Figure 2 has similarities with the model in Figure 1, this revised model separates out CPD as a separate protective layer which supported the resilience of the participants. To the best of our knowledge this is the first adaptation of Greenfield's (2015) model. Figure 2 therefore represents our contribution to knowledge.

Conclusion

This study has explored the factors which have influenced resiliency in headteachers. Drawing on the work of Deci and Ryan (1985) we have explored the contribution of autonomy, competence and relatedness to resilience. We have argued that when headteachers have autonomy (internal locus of control), optimal challenge (competence) and when they experience relatedness through connections, these conditions allow them to thrive.

The data demonstrate that access to professional learning is a protective characteristic which supports resilience. To emphasise the important role of coaching and professional supervision in supporting headteacher resilience, we have included this as a separate layer within our proposed model of resilience. The use of coaching, external professional supervision and professional development led by headteachers are strategies which participants particularly valued in this study. Participants emphasised the importance of performance management processes being peer-led rather than being implemented by governors or other professionals who have a limited understanding of the role. We have emphasised the importance of the performance management process being conducted by headteachers who are employed in similar school contexts so that they understand the challenges that headteachers are experiencing. However, we have also emphasised the need for the process to be rigorous. As

far as we are aware, this is the first study to apply Greenfield's (2015) model of teacher resilience to headteachers and we believe that this is the first adaptation of Greenfield's (2015) model.

In this study participants with good mental health tended to demonstrate a sense of hope and purpose. They were focused on achieving goals and moving forward. In contrast, those with poor mental health often became absorbed in the challenges that they faced, and this prevented them from focusing on school improvement. Participants with poor mental health often blamed external factors for negatively impacting on their resilience. In contrast, participants with good mental health often engaged in regular reflection and review and sometimes this was a collaborative activity with the whole staff team. Participants with good mental health often reached out for support from others and were more willing to talk to colleagues and family members about the challenges they were experiencing in their professional roles. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to have explored resilience in headteachers with good and poor mental health.

In conclusion, the study supports the use of external professional supervision and professional coaching for head teachers to support both their mental health and resilience. We recognise that this was relatively small sample of participants from one local authority and consequently this means that the findings may not be generalisable. With hindsight, we also acknowledge that the decision to ask participants to categorise their mental health into either good or poor was too simplistic, given that mental health exists along a spectrum, is dynamic and dependent upon the contexts in which individuals operate. For school leaders and teachers, it also fluctuates at specific points during the academic year, and is particularly adversely affected during times when there are spikes in workload.

Declaration of interest statement

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Data availability statement

The data set is held on Leeds Beckett University's password protected electronic storage system.

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Table 1. Participants

Participant	Gender	Years of Headship	Number of Headships	School phase	Mental Health status	Length of interview audio recording
HT1	Female	1-5 years	1	Secondary (11-16)	Good	30 minutes
HT2	Female	1-5 years	1	Primary (4-11)	Poor	36 minutes
HT3	Male	1-5 years	1	Primary (4-11)	Poor	20 minutes
HT4	Male	6-10 years	2	Junior (7-11)	Poor	27 minutes
HT5	Male	21-30 years	1	Primary (4-11)	Good	32 minutes
HT6	Female	11-20 years	2	Junior (7-11)	Poor	31 minutes
HT7	Female	6-10 years	3	Infant (4-7)	Good	29 minutes
HT8	Female	6-10 years	1	Primary (4-11)	Good	26 minutes
HT9	Male	6-10 years	2	Secondary (11-16)	Good	23 minutes
HT10	Female	11-20 years	2	Primary (4-11)	Poor	30 minutes
HT11	Female	6-10 years	1	Primary (4-11)	Good	32 minutes
HT12	Female	1-5 years	1	Primary and secondary (4-16)	Good	30 minutes
HT13	Female	6-10 years	1	Infant (4-7)	Poor	25 minutes
HT14	Male	6-10 years	2	Primary and secondary (4-16)	Good	23 minutes
HT15	Female	6-10 years	2	Secondary (11-16)	Good	26 minutes
HT16	Male	1-5 years	1	Primary (4-11)	Good	31 minutes

Table 2. Assigning themes to data

Theme	Data
Understandings of resilience	*My resilience goes up and down depending on the challenges (HT5) –* ***Dynamic*** *I draw on my family and friends when I am experiencing challenges (HT7)-* ***Relational***
Internal and external factors	*I know that I am doing a good job (HT 1)-* ***Self-efficacy: internal motivator*** *I have secured two successful inspection outcomes (HT12) –* ***External motivators***
Relationships	*But the biggest thing is humour, we have such a laugh at work. It's a bit like a hobby now, I look forward to coming to work.* (HT5)
Challenges	*My budget was cut and I had to issue redundancy notices. That was a difficult time and my resilience was rock bottom. (HT5)*
Performance Management	*Performance management has been ineffective. I had targets but these were not revisited until after Easter. This didn't motivate me, and it did not support my resilience. There should be on-going dialogue. We have revised it for next year.* (HT14)
Professional development	*I've been coached and found it very effective.*

	(HT6)

Fig 1. Greenfield's (2015) model of teacher resilience

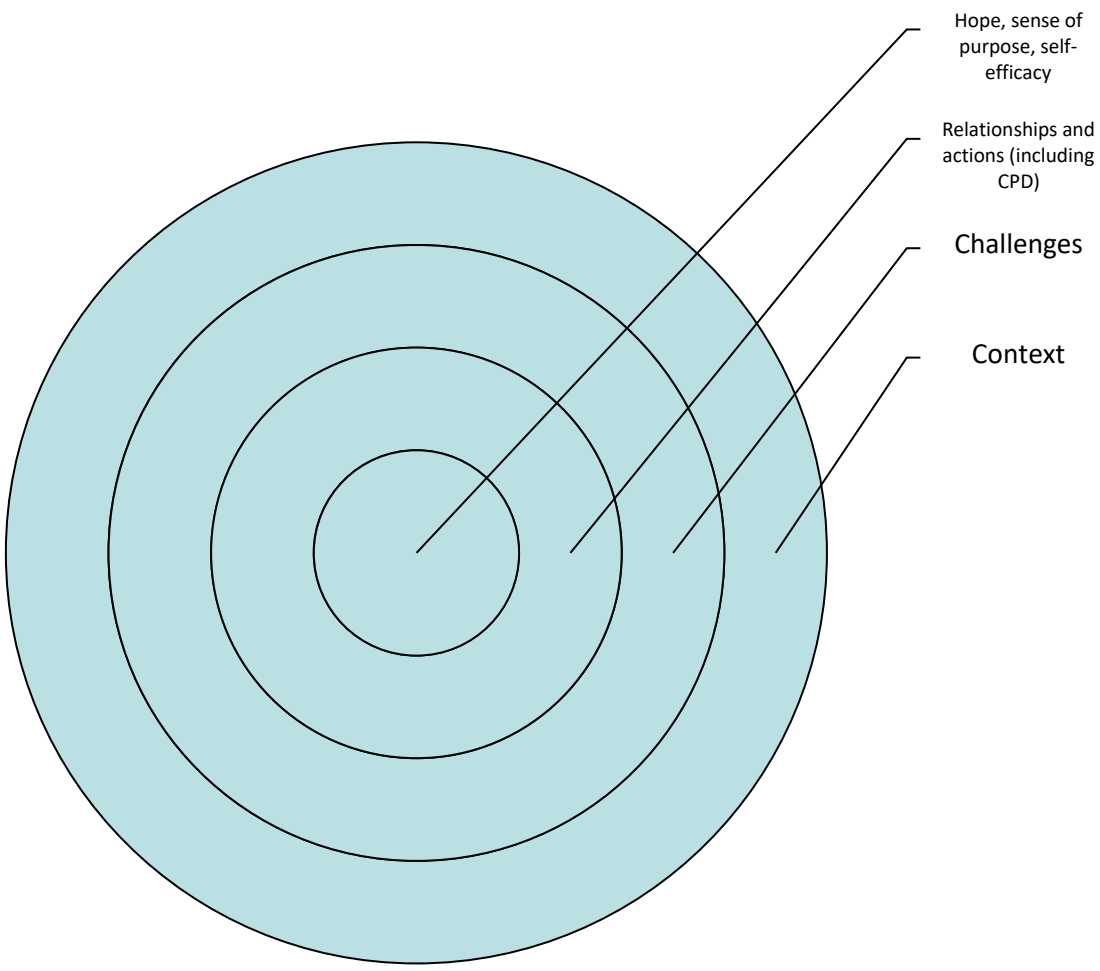

Fig 2. Headteacher resilience: a suggested model