ELT teachers' stories of resilience

Gwyneth James and Ana Carolina de Laurentiis Brandão

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Abstract

This study analyses ELT teachers' stories of resilience in Brazil and the United Kingdom. Resilience is a fundamental element in ELT teachers' lives. In Brazil, for example, teachers face major challenges such as the low status of English in the school curriculum, poor wages and lack of opportunities to practise their English. Also, in both Brazil and the UK, teachers have to cope with heavy workloads, excessive focus on exams and the undervalued status of the profession. These challenges, which may apply to other ELT contexts, demand the daily resilience of teachers to sustain them in the profession throughout their careers. The study takes the form of a narrative inquiry, a research methodology that considers narrative as both method and methodology. The field texts include recorded conversations and visual narratives gathered over the course of a year. The participants are six ELT teachers, three in Brazil and three in the UK. How the six teachers exercised their resilience in ELT contexts evidences both commonalities and differences. Coping with the feeling of isolation and the lack of teaching resources were some of the challenges faced by the ELT teachers. Self-reflection and a sense of vocation were among the key elements of their resilience. Investigating how teachers experience resilience in the Brazilian and British educational landscapes not only facilitates teachers' development in teacher training programmes, but also informs other teacher educators and researchers about the fundamental role of resilience in language teacher education curricula.

About the authors

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Glossary

MA TESOL – Master's in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

EFL – English as a Foreign Language

ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages

CELTA – Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

DELTA – Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

PGCE – Postgraduate Certificate in Education

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Context and literature review

1.1 Context

Teacher resilience is a relatively recent area of investigation (Beltman et al., 2011), and while Australia and the UK feature prominently in this research (e.g. Le Cornu, 2013 and Day et al., 2007, respectively), Brazil does not. In addition, the focus is primarily on mainstream education, with very little research on language teacher resilience in general (Hiver, 2018) and English language teachers' resilience in particular. This study, therefore, focuses on ELT teachers' resilience in Brazil and the UK.

Resilience is fundamental in all teachers' lives, and, in Brazil, teachers face significant challenges such as the low status of English in the curriculum of schools, poor wages and lack of opportunities to practise their English (British Council, 2015; Leffa, 2011; Miccoli, 2008). Also, in both Brazil and the UK, teachers have to cope with heavy workloads, excessive focus on exams and the undervalued status of the profession. These challenges all demand daily resilience to sustain teachers in the profession throughout their careers. Investigating how teachers experience resilience in the Brazilian and British educational landscapes not only facilitates teachers' development in their own teaching contexts, but also informs other teacher educators and researchers about the fundamental role of resilience in professional identity (re) construction and, consequently, in language teacher education curricula.

As ELT/TESOL practitioners and ELT/TESOL teacher trainers with over 20 combined years of experience in Brazil and the UK, we wanted to explore this under-researched area by using an innovative research methodology, narrative inquiry. This study aims for a more holistic approach to investigate teachers' lives (Kubanyiova, 2012), and, as we have personally relied on resilience and seen it in our trainee teachers, we wanted to investigate what 'everyday resilience' (Day, 2012) looks like. This is where stories of ELT teachers are particularly apt.

In our study, instead of focusing on problems teachers face (e.g. stress and attrition – see Clandinin et al., 2014) and seeking causes and concomitant solutions for such problems, we will examine the experiences of six early-career teachers, three in Brazil and three in the UK, who have demonstrated resilience in their work contexts. By 'early career' we are referring to those who have up to five years' teaching experience in an ELT context after initial training. We examine their experiences by focusing on what sustains them and enables them to thrive in their contexts. Specifically, we examine four research aims: 1) how the six teachers exercise their resilience; 2) what the relationship between resilience and English teaching is; 3) the comparison of teacher resilience in Brazil and the UK; and 4) how teachers' resilience can be fostered in language teacher education.

This research therefore has important implications for English language schools, ELT centres in universities and stakeholders in both Brazil and the UK and worldwide: if we can identify resilience in ELT teachers, we can help foster, sustain and manage it. In this way, we can help retain more teachers and improve the health of the profession as a whole: rather than just reacting to teachers' stress, we can also enhance the positive aspects of resilience. We recognise that resilience is not about creating 'islands' of individuals in their workplace but recognising that it is also borne of interaction with others (Gu and Day, 2007).

1.2 Literature review

1.2.1 Conceptualising resilience

Few studies have investigated the experiences of language teachers' resilience, particularly with regard to factors which contribute to teachers' resilience, how resilience can be cultivated and how important resilience is to high-quality teaching, whether in mainstream education or within ELT/applied linguistics. Current research has a heavy focus on explaining teacher attrition (e.g. Craig, 2017) and coping with stress, rather than investigating how resilience enhances teaching (Day, 2012) or can be used as a resource to help teachers recover when faced with adversity (Hong, 2012). Teacher resilience 'provides a way of understanding what enables teachers to persist in the face of challenges and offers a complementary perspective to studies of stress, burnout and attrition' (Beltman et al., 2011: 85).

How teacher resilience is conceptualised is somewhat complex, partly because this is an emerging field and partly because it is potentially wide-ranging (Beltman et al., 2011). One single definition of resilience does not exist in the literature; instead, a range of definitions is given, invariably describing it as involving a process, a capacity to overcome challenges and a trait or quality (see Mansfield et al., 2012: 357). This range can be viewed as problematic as it creates ambiguity and opaqueness, but it can also be viewed as demonstrating the multidimensional nature of resilience. In this report, the notion of resilience is defined as 'a complex, idiosyncratic and cyclical construct, involving dynamic processes of interaction over time between person and environment' (Beltman et al., 2011: 195).

1.2.2 Dimensions of resilience

To further refine how teacher resilience is conceptualised, Mansfield et al. (2012) investigated how 200 graduating and early-career teachers in Western Australia perceive resilient teachers. They suggest that teacher professional development as well as teacher education programmes should address four dimensions of resilience – profession-related, emotional, motivational and social (page 362) – in order to support the development of teachers' resilience. The profession-related dimension relates to aspects involved in teaching practice, e.g. organisation; emotional involves emotional responses to teaching situations, e.g. coping with stress; motivational includes issues such as self-efficacy; and social relates to aspects in the work context such as asking for help. Of these, Mansfield et al. found that their participants rated the emotional dimension as the most important.

Another study by Gu and Day (2007) examined the role of resilience in teacher efficacy in primary and secondary UK schools, and found that three dimensions were key to the way in which teachers sustained their resilience: personal (life outside school); situated (life in school) and professional ('their values, beliefs and the interaction between these and external policy agendas' (page 1,306)). Most noticeably, these dimensions were fluid, not fixed, and were affected by teachers' experiences, so if change occurred in one dimension this would impact on the teachers' ability to manage change in the others.

Both frameworks provide clear evidence of how teachers perceive and sustain resilience, but their focus is only on two countries and only in mainstream schools. Although some language teacher research exists (e.g. Estaji and Rahimi, 2014), it remains scarce. Very little research on resilience has been done on its perception or on the sustaining of resilience in ELT teachers in both Brazil and the UK, which are where our study is situated.

1.2.3 How teachers exercise their resilience

How teachers react to difficult situations they experience and exercise their resilience (or not) is often discussed in the literature on resilience in terms of individual factors (e.g. motivation) and contextual factors (e.g. professional development) which can be further defined as 'risk factors' (i.e. challenges) or 'protective factors' (i.e. supports) (Beltman et al., 2011). Individual risk factors include issues relating to self-efficacy (e.g. Castro et al., 2010) or confidence, although conversely some studies have found self-efficacy to sit more squarely inside individual protective factors (e.g. Kitching et al., 2009). Another risk factor which is frequently mentioned, particularly by early-career teachers, is 'an excessive amount of time to meet the demands of the profession' (Fantilli and McDougall, 2009: 823); and, finally, a disconnect between teaching beliefs and practice (e.g. Basturkmen, 2012). Individual protective factors include altruism as a reason for entering the teaching profession (e.g. Alexander et al., 1994), self-efficacy, professional reflection, importance of students, and support from colleagues (e.g. Day and Gu, 2007) and active responsibility for teachers' own wellbeing (e.g. Patterson et al., 2004).

Conversely, contextual risk factors include significant challenges in managing classrooms (e.g. Tait, 2008), an increased or excessive workload (e.g. Smethem, 2007) and lack of time (e.g. Fantilli and McDougall, 2009). Contextual protective factors are primarily the support received from the school in which teachers worked and from colleagues (e.g. Patterson et al., 2004). Attempting to pinpoint everything which characterises teacher resilience is complex and arguably impossible, but these are some of the more prominent factors found in reviews of such literature (see Beltman et al., 2011).

The interplay between these factors has also been reviewed to illustrate their complexity and the dynamic relationship that exists between them (see Beltman et al., 2011). Included in this review was the focus on implications for teachers, but, interestingly, the majority of studies placed the burden of enhancing resilience on pre-service teacher training programmes and employers (ibid.) rather than on the teachers themselves.

In all the above reviewed literature, none focus on ELT teachers and none give space for teachers to tell their stories of resilience, stories which play an essential role in understanding how teachers exercise resilience in their contexts and what strategies we can tease out to promote resilience in teacher education programmes and workplaces, thereby sustaining teachers in their profession.

1.2.4 How teacher resilience is investigated

Of the 50 studies on teacher resilience reviewed by Beltman et al. (2011), only two used narrative approaches: one used oral narratives (Fleet et al., 2007) and one used drawings (Sumsion, 2004). Neither used the methodological framework of narrative inquiry (e.g. Connelly and Clandinin, 2006), an approach which is both 'a mode of investigation and a mode of representation' (Craig, 2012: 91), nor visual narratives (e.g. Rose, 2012). Considering that teacher resilience is, as outlined above, a complex construct, narrative inquiry along with visual methods enable researchers to 'paint a complex picture of the issue in focus' (Benson, 2014: 164), which appropriately suits the demands of this area of research.

The scope of Beltman et al.'s (2011) review included pre-service, early-career and experienced teachers, but only six of the studies were UK-based and none were done in a Brazilian context. The authors recommend that further research examine resilience cross-culturally as most of the studies reviewed were from western cultures: 'Cross-cultural perspectives could offer further insights about the nature of teacher resilience and the role of contexts in building resilient teachers' (page 196). It is hoped that this study will add to the redressing of this imbalance.

2

Methodology

This study took the form of a narrative inquiry, a research methodology that analyses experience as a storied phenomenon (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). In this approach, narrative is both the method (the stories participants live and tell) and methodology (a way of understanding experience). Understanding experience narratively involves situating field texts (the narrative term for data) within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space: temporality, sociality and place (Clandinin, 2013;

Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Temporality refers to the past, present and future of the experience. Sociality refers to personal and social conditions. Place refers to the influence of the location.

The participants were six early-career ELT teachers, having no longer than five years of teaching experience, three from Brazil and three from the United Kingdom. An overview of the participants' background is provided in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: ELT teachers in Brazil

Pseudonyms	Julia	Maria	Pedro
Age	35	38	23
Gender	Female	Female	Male
Years of ELT teaching experience	Four	Three	Three
Qualifications	Four-year undergraduate Portuguese-English language teaching degree	Four-year undergraduate Portuguese–English language teaching degree	Four-year undergraduate Portuguese–English language teaching degree
Context	State schools (EFL)	State schools (EFL)	State school (EFL) and university (ESOL)

Table 2: ELT teachers in the United Kingdom

Pseudonyms	Laura (L2 speaker of English)	Louise	Sienna
Age	48	63	34
Gender	Female	Female	Female
Years of ELT teaching experience	Two	One	Five
Qualifications	MA TESOL	CELTA	CELTA and DELTA
Context	Language school (EFL) and state funded (ESOL)	Language school (EFL) and state funded (ESOL)	Language school (EFL)

The field texts include: 1) recorded conversations (four per participant), lasting around one hour to one hour 45 minutes; and 2) visual narratives (four drawings per participant) and their recorded explanations provided at the end of each conversation. Conversations with the Brazilian participants were held in Portuguese. The excerpts used in the narrative accounts have been translated into English. The field texts were gathered between September 2017 and October 2018. An overview of the field texts is provided in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Overview of recorded conversations

Conversation	Date	Guiding themes
First	September 2017–October 2017	Participants' background; teaching trajectory; reasons for staying in teaching and, when applicable, for thinking about leaving teaching; English language learning trajectory (if non-native speakers)
Second	December 2017–January 2018	Challenging teaching situations and ways of dealing with them, and support to deal with professional adversities
Third	March 2018–April 2018	Further challenging situations and ways of dealing with them
Fourth	June 2018–October 2018	Images of resilient teachers

Table 4: Overview of visual narratives

Visual narrative	Context of production	Guiding questions
First drawing	First recorded conversation (September 2017 – October 2017)	How did you imagine English teaching before working in the field?
Second drawing	Second recorded conversation (December 2017–January 2018)	Could you draw yourself as an English teacher now?
Third drawing	Third recorded conversation (March 2018 – April 2018)	Could you draw yourself as an English teacher now?
Fourth drawing	Fourth recorded conversation (June 2018 – October 2018)	Could you draw a resilient teacher?

As Rose (2012: 305) highlights, 'discussing a photograph or a drawing with an interviewee can prompt talk about different things, in different ways'. Thus, the drawings were used to trigger reflections about teaching experiences during our recorded conversations with the participants, and to help us gain more insights into how they exercise their resilience. The scope of this study is, nevertheless, limited to the oral content. The visual content of the drawings will be addressed in future publications. Some of their exemplars are given in Appendices 1 and 2.

The analysis took a holistic-content approach (Lieblich et al., 1998). This type of narrative analysis 'uses the complete life story of an individual and focuses on the content presented by it' (page 13). It involved the identification of narrative threads, 'particular plotlines that threaded or wove over time and place' (Clandinin, 2013: 132) within three stages by: 1) identifying the narrative threads in every participant's experiences; 2) identifying resonant narrative threads for Brazil and the UK separately; and 3) identifying resonant narrative threads for both countries. The findings of this study are presented in the form of six narrative accounts, one per participant, which are structured around the narrative threads shaped by stories of resilience that emerged from the analysis. The resonant threads are explored in the section *Discussion*.

3

Being a resilient ELT teacher

This section contains the findings of this study, taking the form of narrative accounts of the six ELT teachers. These accounts are interpretative constructions of their experiences of living out the profession. They are structured around narrative threads shaped by stories of resilience that emerged from the analysis of our field texts. The section is divided into two main subsections: *Being a resilient ELT teacher in Brazil* and *Being a resilient ELT teacher in the UK*.

3.1 Being a resilient ELT teacher in Brazil

This subsection considers the narrative accounts of the three Brazilian ELT teachers that go by the pseudonyms Julia, Maria and Pedro.

3.1.1 Julia

Julia was born and raised in the countryside of Mato Grosso in Brazil. She is married with three children. At the beginning of this study, she was 35 years old and had been teaching English for four years.

Surviving the first week

Julia started teaching English accidentally right after she finished her language teaching degree: 'The [in-service] teacher who participated in PIBID [...] said "I'm on leave for three months and I want you to take my place [...] I like you because you're hardworking".' PIBID (Teaching Initiation Scholarship Programme) is a Brazilian teacher education initiative that provides pre-service teachers with opportunities to work with state school in-service teachers and get to know the school environment from the very beginning of their teaching degrees. Julia participated in the programme during her last term at university. She accepted the invitation for financial reasons. In fact, Julia did not feel 'ready to be an English teacher'.

The teacher left Julia with prepared activities for the first week. Given that she herself did not plan those classes, her first week was a 'disaster': 'Pupils bombarded me with questions in English, with words in English I didn't know. I wanted to die! I wondered, my God, what am I doing here? However, at the end of that week, she realised that pupils did not judge her for not being able to answer all their questions: 'I counted to ten [...] and said to him [a pupil]: "As I've only just started [teaching], I don't know.

Can I answer your question next class?" And he calmly [replied]: "Of course, teacher." I didn't see any frustrated faces.'

'I won't give up,' Julia decided. She then put a lot of effort into planning classes and things improved: 'I started to work hard [...] to study a lot [...] the first week was frustrating but the second week was easier.' She also took a private course to improve her English. In the end, by overcoming this frustrating first week, Julia began to identify with teaching: 'I was sure I wanted to stay in the profession. I can't imagine myself in any other profession than teaching,' she said to herself.

Falling in love with English teaching

Julia kept teaching English under part-time contracts: 'There weren't many classes. This demotivated me because, at first, I was there for the salary.' In fact, she also had to teach Portuguese and arts if she wanted to make a bit more money. But in her second year, after learning that some permanent English teachers had retired, she decided it was time to make a choice: 'I felt more confident [...] I believed that the more English classes I got, the more I would improve.' Furthermore, she would only have to study for one subject while preparing her classes. Julia then only taught English for two years under temporary contracts, initially at two schools and then just one. 'This even makes my work easier. I don't have to be moving from one school to another,' she explained.

During these years as an English teacher, Julia had to cope with a series of challenges that sometimes made her feel frustrated, such as her level of English, pupils lacking interest and their constant use of mobile phones. She developed some strategies for coping. For example, she invested a lot of time in class preparation by studying English by herself, predicting questions pupils might ask and varying activities to keep them interested: 'I always try to use different stuff; sometimes I have a look at the book and think, they deserve more. My strategy was and continues to be overcoming their expectations [...] if they think the teacher is laid-back, why are they going to be interested? So each day I try to dedicate myself more.'

As time went by, Julia identified with English teaching, especially because of students' positive feedback: 'Some thanked me. I saw the sparkle in their eyes. This motivated me to keep teaching English […] this is my reward. I fell in love with English,' she confided.

Managing ups and downs

Two months before the 2017 school year finished, an English teacher unexpectedly returned from leave and Julia's contract was abruptly terminated. For one month she could not teach, but, in December, the school arranged for her to teach geography: 'It was a challenge […] I studied day and night to be able to handle it.' Despite the upheaval, Julia was 'very glad' to be able to teach again in a very short time.

In the following year, Julia got a full-time English teaching position at the same school. The school began to adopt the *Escola Plena*, a full-time education system for sixth-form pupils in which traditional subjects are taught alongside courses designed to help them develop both personally and professionally. Originally, the State Education Department had intended to provide five days of training on the *Escola Plena* one week before classes started, but, in the end, only two days were provided, which was insufficient. Julia realised that apart from coping with the usual challenges, she was underprepared for *Escola Plena*, which contributed to 'a little anxiety, a little fear'. To cope, she searched for materials developed by other schools that had adopted the *Escola Plena*, including YouTube videos: 'I don't want to keep pupils there, let's say, for six, seven hours in my class just to tick off my hours […] so I'm preparing myself psychologically and trying to find out more about *Escola Plena*.'

The lack of interest of pupils was a big issue for her throughout:

> Sometimes, I go home sad and on the next day I'm cheerful […] wanting them to speak [English], wanting them to want to learn, but this is out of my control […] sometimes, I'm distressed […] today I left [school] tired. Those kids lacking interest, talking to each other. You wonder 'who am I talking to?' This demotivates you, but thank God there is another day […] and we cheer up and don't lose hope.

For Julia, giving up was never an option: 'We can't be discouraged […] we have to give our best.' The support from the principal and other teachers was crucial: 'We're developing strategies to overcome this […] [thinking] how are we going to win pupils over?' In summary, she understood the whole process of adapting to *Escola Plena* as a 'gem we're polishing little by little'.

Unfortunately, Julia's contract was once again abruptly terminated a few months before the end of the school year due to a transfer of an English teacher. Having bills to pay, she simply did not know what to do: 'I was desperate […] I could only cry.' She managed to find English classes at two other schools, although her workload reduced from 40 hours to 12. This was another beginning for Julia: new schools, new pupils. She kept her positivity and sense of commitment throughout: 'So many things happened in my life and I'm not unemployed. So there are good and bad sides […] the reception [from the schools and pupils] […] was good […] the aim is to work well wherever I am.'

Killing a lion a day

Julia's attitude towards the profession helped her build her teacher resilience. 'Commitment to pupils' made her persist: 'I'm committed because I have to give my best each day […] I think that if I pretend I'm teaching, it doesn't tie in with my personality, it doesn't tie in with my function there as a teacher.' She was always reflecting on her performance and thinking of ways to improve: 'Sometimes, you prepare a class for two, three hours […] and it doesn't have the effect you expect. Then, you have to breathe, you have to think and you have to redo your planning, so the challenge is […] not giving up.' As teachers, 'we're always learning,' Julia emphasised.

Julia took class planning very seriously: 'You don't just plan only an interesting class […] you have to make pupils learn.' She tried not to let the lack of motivation of some of her pupils affect her: 'Sometimes I lack motivation, but then I say, "no way, if I have 30 [pupils] in my classroom, five don't want [to learn]. What about those 25? […] It's for them I prepare classes and it's for them I rethink them" […] this is a kind of overcoming'.

Being a resilient ELT teacher meant 'killing a lion a day':

> It's as if you overcome one difficulty today […] and tomorrow you have to be ready to try to kill another one [lion] again […] you have to be willing […] you overcome something every day […] The classroom is a challenge […] every day you're learning something different.

She thought that neither the university nor the state education system prepared her for killing her 'lions': 'The way of dealing with those challenges [at school] only develops through practice, through experience […] at university, it's more theoretical.' The state, meanwhile, 'wants us to solve the problems, but we don't have support in terms of qualifications [and] encouragement [such as] "our team is going there to help you".' Julia wished the state offered an English teaching course to help improve her teaching strategies and English. Being a PIBID scholarship holder 'gave me a certain confidence [but] I spent very little time at PIBID.'

Nevertheless, Julia saw the challenges she had to cope with as necessary to improve her teaching. 'These challenges come about to wake you up, change your strategy, change your way of teaching, think about what will attract pupils' attention.'

3.1.2 Maria

Maria was born and raised in a rural area in the countryside of Mato Grosso in Brazil. She is married with three children. At the beginning of this study, she was 38 years old and had been teaching English for three years.

Surviving the first month

Hesitant about pursuing a teaching career, Maria only applied for a teaching position two years after finishing her language teaching degree: 'I was afraid of facing a classroom.' She was accepted for a temporary full-time language teaching position at the same state school where she finished her studies: 'I was surprised by my attitude […] of accepting something I didn't know how to do, to be honest, because substituting is something different […] you go there to fill a gap and that's all.' Maria would teach Portuguese and English to sixth-form pupils for a whole school year.

Classroom management was not an issue, but Maria struggled to develop English content. It was:

very difficult. I got the English book [and when] I opened that thing, I said "my God!" I was under that torture for a month, on YouTube, studying, studying. I studied until late at night. At university, we don't learn the content we have to develop in the classroom.

After a month, lacking confidence in her ability to teach, Maria decided she had had enough: 'I went to the principal and said: "I don't want this! […] I can't handle it! It's too difficult! We see one thing at university, and then when you arrive here the reality is different!"' The principal, on the other hand, persuaded her to stay: 'No, Maria, you won't quit! What did you spend four years studying for? Did you waste your time? […] I'll give you a month; if you can't handle it, you talk to me.'

Pupils' positive feedback also motivated her to stay: 'All the pupils already liked me and praised me.' Moreover, Maria began to realise that she actually enjoyed teaching:

I said: "No, I won't give up. This is what I want." […] I think it was one of the best and worst experiences [of my life] – one of the best ones because […] I learned a lot, I learned how to deal with people, I learned content […] one of the worst ones because, as a first experience, I got a very heavy workload, and, on top of that, I got to teach English, which is a difficult language.

Maria's persistence and willingness to take challenges were crucial in this process:

I like challenges […] I'm learning it [English] […] practice becomes learning […] my learning [at school] was marked by interruptions as I mentioned before […] [and] I never took a private course […] I struggle [with the language], I don't deny [that I don't know English] […] but I confront it, that's why I say it's a challenge.

She learned to handle her lack of confidence in teaching English by dedicating lots of her time to preparing for classes and studying content online: 'I went to the computer, watched YouTube videos, read other types of content that explained what I was studying. It was like that and it's like that up to now.' Indeed, she developed a strong sense of commitment to the profession: 'I can't see myself doing something else anymore [and] I try to give my best.'

Coping with temporary contracts

As a temporary state schoolteacher, Maria soon learned that every school year represented a new beginning. After her first year as teacher, for example, Maria was accepted for a temporary full-time English teaching position in a different school when its English teacher retired. The school was 'stricter, and the principal would attend classes without advanced warning. In the following year, Maria again applied to teach English but had to teach geography and philosophy, as well, and at two different schools. This was a general issue because there were not enough English classes to make up a full-time contract, and therefore Maria had to teach other subjects. Also, motivation among pupils and provision of resources varied across the schools.

Maria managed to adapt. For example, she learned how to cope with the lack of resources: 'There is an IT lab which you have to share with all the other subjects […] when I want to use the lab and it's not possible […] I have a plan B.' When 'I use music in class […] I always take my stereo […] I find a way.' She also learned to deal with different types of pupils. For those lacking interest, she tried to motivate them with resources other than the textbook:

> *Eighty per cent of pupils live on a farm and aren't really willing to learn English […] then I say: 'Are you going to live on a farm forever? Don't you think about tomorrow?' I also like to diversify activities; for example, I realised they like music, films, so I work with that.*

At one school, some pupils were under the influence of drugs: 'I realised I didn't need to lash out at those people, because they weren't in their normal state.'

As for the experience of teaching other subjects, such as geography, Maria maintained a positive attitude: 'I accepted it and I went home happily […] geography seems to be easy but has its complexities […] but even so I'm enjoying [teaching it]. My only fear is not being able to work.'

English remained a challenge: 'The biggest difficulty is […] not being totally ready to teach English, particularly pronunciation.' But Maria continued to dedicate lots of time to preparing classes.

Teaching behind bars

Maria's transition to the 2018 school year was difficult. Her school adopted the *Escola Plena* system and so no longer delivered the early stages of the secondary education curriculum. As a result, pupil numbers fell dramatically, and so too did teacher numbers. Maria nearly missed out on a teaching position: 'I was desperate, there was no possibility for me to be in a classroom […] it was difficult for permanent teachers, not to mention temporary ones.' As it turned out, she learned that teachers were needed at the town prison and decided to apply: '[I was] really scared […] but I do like challenges.'

At the prison, Maria taught English, history, geography, maths, science, Portuguese, arts, and physical education at the level of years 7, 8 and 9 because prisoners were taking EJA (Youth and Adults Education Programme). Her 'class-cell', as she referred to it, was a cell in which she was locked up with ten prisoners and only a board and desks.

Challenges included the constant cancellation of classes, the noisy environment of the prison, the lack of teaching resources and the officers' ill will: 'The school is not welcome […] because it's extra work for them. They have to move prisoners; they have to check prisoners so they can go to the classroom.' Nevertheless, the biggest challenge was the environment itself:

> *I teach rapists, I teach murderers […] there's a guy there that killed his wife on Christmas day […] [Before] my challenge was content, [but] nowadays it's the environment […] A rebellion may happen while I'm inside […] once I heard a guy saying: 'Teacher, once I leave here I'll throw a bomb to blow up this place [and] kill everybody.' Then it crossed my mind: 'What if I'm here?' […] Yesterday, he said […] 'Teacher, what I really wanted is to find a rope […] a rope to hang my neck.' I get tired [because] I hear things I don't wanna hear […] it's what I hear, it's what I see. The way […] the officers treat them, they treat them like dogs […] a guy was feeling unwell […] [and the officer said:] 'Get up, good-for-nothing, otherwise I won't take you to hospital' […] you feel bad, you know?*

But once again, Maria adapted: 'You must be aware of everything because you aren't in a normal environment, you're inside a prison. You have to be aware of any movement all the time.' From the very beginning, she was very clear about her role there: 'I said: "Look, I'm only here to teach. I can't take anything. I can't bring anything."' She paid attention to details, including her way of dressing: 'I walk among them [...] avoiding bumping into anyone [...] because they aren't in contact with women [...] I wear loose blouses [...] no earrings [...] [or] lipstick.' Moreover, she adapted her content to their learning environment since they could not, for example, do homework in their cells: 'You can't be too demanding; you have to follow their rhythm.'

Despite the challenges, Maria actually preferred teaching at the prison:

I set the activity, explain the content, they do the activity, I correct it and it's over. I don't have to go through all that stress of shouting 'sit down' [...] nobody disturbs anybody. Everybody is quiet [...] they help each other [...] you are able to work. You plan [a class], [and] you are able to finish implementing it, but in the classroom [at schools] it's different [...] [in prison] they love English [...] it's incredible [...] they say: 'Teacher, it's so good when we learn new words. They are very hardworking. They are interested [...] they say the classroom is the best thing in the world, it's where they find peace.

Maria's workload was much lighter in comparison to the previous year:

In the normal school we have to prepare for classes [...] every day [...] design exams, correct exams, upload [the grades] in the system [...] there [the workload] is lighter, not to mention that there are only ten students [...] last year at the end of the day I had taught 150 students and there it's different [...] it doesn't make me that tired.

Above all, Maria found the prison more rewarding: 'I see their development and it's so good! It's so good to see them wanting to learn something! It's rewarding!'

Fearless to teach

For Maria, being a resilient ELT teacher meant 'being fearless to teach': 'First, we have to be very calm, very patient. Second, we can't be afraid of facing the obstacles, the challenges that life sets us. We know that in the classroom we face many challenges [...] we need to be patient [and] count up to ten.' With time, Maria realised that teaching English was not 'rocket science': 'Nowadays, I think it's easier [...] when we study, we are able to [teach it].' While she felt more comfortable with English content in her final school year (especially because she taught the basics), she still wanted to improve her language skills: 'I learned a lot [...] but it remains a challenge because I know I struggle [with the language] [...] I want to take a course because I can't only know the basics.'

Indeed, Maria was never totally satisfied with her teaching performance: 'I always think I can improve.' Furthermore, she was very committed to teaching. She did not see the profession simply as a 'way of making money': 'It was never easy, but I always chased after [what I needed] [...] if I had to develop content I couldn't learn, I studied it [...] even though I struggle, for example, with English, I try to work diligently.' This helped develop her teacher resilience.

Maria did not think the university provided her with enough support and preparation: 'We don't learn how to develop content at the university [...] it is more theory.' At school, she could not find this support either. There were continuing professional development initiatives, in which teachers discussed teaching approaches and shared issues, but there was no help 'overcoming what is happening [in the classroom]'. The state could very well offer an English course,' she added.

Maria developed her teacher resilience by herself as she kept living out the profession: 'It's Maria for Maria.'

3.1.3 Pedro

Pedro was born and raised in the countryside of Mato Grosso in Brazil. He is married with one child. At the beginning of this study, he was 23 years old and had been teaching English for three years.

Learning to see things differently

Even though teaching was not Pedro's 'dream', he secured a permanent Portuguese–English teaching position at a state school immediately after he finished his language teaching degree. The school was located in a rural area. The City Hall provided a bus to take the teachers and pupils there. All the pupils lived on farms. 'They live 40 kilometres away, some live 20 kilometres away, others live 60 kilometres away,' Pedro explained.

Given that there were so few English classes in the curriculum, Pedro first taught agricultural practices and Portuguese rather than English. This was actually a relief for him: 'I didn't want [to teach English]. I thought I wouldn't be able to do it in my first year.' He thought he would not be able to give a 'well-designed class' and feared having the uninterested pupils he taught during his English practicum. He only began teaching English in his second school year.

At the same time, Pedro took on a temporary position at the university to teach English. Juggling these two environments was not easy: 'I suffered a lot because I didn't have any time […] I barely had time to plan for the classes […] I really failed […] and then […] the house where I lived was really small and really hot […] I didn't have a desk.' Besides, he struggled to deal with so much responsibility:

> *I didn't have a clue of the level of responsibility. I worried more about the salary […] I had the education of hundreds of students under my responsibility […] I had to fill in class record books, prepare classes, design tests, correct tests […] I was thinking about that 24 hours a day, I couldn't relax.*

Pedro was proficient in English. He taught himself. He also took a heavily discounted private English course (since the owner recognised his considerable motivation). Despite being proficient, Pedro found English teaching 'very difficult'. Pedro struggled with teaching methodology: 'It was embarrassing […] my work was terrible […] I didn't see any results. I didn't know where to start […] I tried to work with grammar, translation. Sometimes, I translated songs […] but in the end it was more grammar, grammar and tests.' Nevertheless, he kept experimenting and trying his best. 'I managed to find a better way. I work more with things related to their daily lives.'

Pupils were tired from their long journey to school and lacked interest in English: 'They don't see the practical use of English. Some ask: "Why do I have to learn it?" […] Others simply don't want [to learn English]. I tried [to explain the use to them] but I think I failed.' Likewise, the university students were not interested in English: 'I tried what I could to make classes more interesting, but even so, many did not get interested.' Despite these difficulties, Pedro began to enjoy teaching:

> *I had been enjoying the profession a lot […] I discovered I like it. It changed my way of seeing things a lot, my way of seeing the world, people. After I started teaching, I stopped being so hard […] I'm still [hard] on myself […] but I learned a way that works with others.*

He found the profession rewarding: 'I have the opportunity to influence people in a positive way […] on the personal side […] [and] also in terms of choosing a profession that gives them better life chances.' The problem is 'I'm not paid enough to make a living', Pedro complained.

Teaching in a rural area

For Pedro, 'the state school classroom is the true challenge', not the university. He explained: 'It's very different to develop human beings at that age; it's more difficult, it's more complicated.'

Apart from pupils' tiredness and lack of interest, Pedro had to cope with a series of difficulties. For example, he had to teach pupils with a wide range of abilities: 'There are pupils that read a lot […] there are pupils that are semi-illiterate […] there are some that don't even know how to read and write.' He also had to teach pupils with special needs: 'It's complicated […] I don't how to deal with them properly.' Moreover, Pedro often faced poor discipline: 'They usually make jokes by swearing at each other […] we tell them off […] [but] a month, a month and a half later, they do it again […] there is also indiscipline related to talking.' Very few parents were interested in following the progress of their children.

Pedro struggled to follow a curriculum that was not adapted to the reality of pupils: 'It's impossible to follow it. The English one, for example, in Year 10, they meet the present perfect, but they don't even know the verb 'to be'.' In practice, he could not fail students: 'There are cuts in the school budget if they fail.' He also had to face the challenge of being the only young male teacher at the school: 'A girl made up a story that she kissed me in the park […] a girl asked to hook up with me […] I was afraid of that and ended up being tougher.' Pedro also found the journey to school exhausting. Furthermore, the bus was usually late for the first class.

Pedro tried hard to vary activities by using music, TV series or anything that could attract their attention, and resources apart from the textbook such as slides. He sometimes cut content because of the limits of the pupils: 'I end up not developing all the year's content. I go as far they are able to follow.' He also set extra activities for the motivated pupils, designed his own materials and thought about different approaches: 'My idea [...] is to integrate the subjects [...] the history teacher will work with the Vietnam War, [then I can] select songs that relate to that time, ads, posters.' To improve discipline, he separated unruly pupils.

Walking on stony and thorny ground

Being a resilient ELT teacher for Pedro was like walking on 'stony and, most of the time, thorny ground'. The stones and thorns were the 'conjunction of all the defects of [the pupils'] colleagues or parents' education, development, [and] the environment [...] things that suffocate and make them lose focus [...] lack of time, lack of conditions [...] [bad] influence'. Thus, it was necessary:

> [To have] a lot of patience to withstand the lack of interest and the extra hours of work [...] a lot of patience with poor discipline too [...] being crazy to invent new things, take risks [...] to know how to use your voice, body, posture, intonation and search for different activities that break up the pattern.

Education 'seems like make-believe', Pedro complained. He thought that something had to be done to improve education and never allowed colleagues' discouragement to affect him:

> Some people say, 'ah, but this is not changing', that same old talk. I don't have any patience to argue with people at this stage. I know it's not easy to change, but, at least, we have to try to improve the situation. I do my best [...] [but] something that discourages me is the impossibility of failing pupils.

Pedro felt that the school gave him no support in dealing with his challenges. The same applied to the university:

> We learn how to deal with theory [...] I left the course more prepared to be a future researcher [...] the practicum was good [...] but it wasn't enough [...] it doesn't give you an idea of what the classroom really is [...] what it means to face it by yourself.

Pedro taught himself while living out the profession: 'It's me and me. I improved [...] now I realise better when it's time to change my way of teaching.'

Pedro often thought about leaving teaching, not because he didn't like it but because of the poor salary: 'I even think about taking another public exam [...] and teaching at a private school. I like to give classes.'

3.2 Being a resilient ELT teacher in the UK

This subsection considers the narrative accounts of the three ELT teachers in the UK. The pseudonyms Louise, Laura and Sienna have been used.

3.2.1 Louise

Louise is British and lives in Hertfordshire with her husband. She has three grown-up daughters. At the time of this study she was 62 and had been teaching for just over a year.

Becoming a teacher: 'I just can't do anything else'

Louise wasn't great at school and left with only one A-level, so she did a secretarial course and then went on to work at the BBC for ten years. Only then did she go to university as she had wanted to become a surveyor, but within a month of finishing she had her first child, so this never happened. She was a stay-at-home mum until her youngest child was four and ended up working at her daughter's primary school 'on and off for 12 years', until the headteacher approached her:

> I'd been flattered by [the] headteacher who'd asked me if I'd ever thought about teaching. I suppose I was flattered because I always felt I'd taken the 'lower path' by going to secretarial college and not university after leaving school. It was how I felt about myself academically.

After finishing her PGCE, Louise described how her first two years' experience of full-time teaching was so all-consuming, with so much pressure to work evenings and weekends in order to be sufficiently prepared, as well as a huge amount of paperwork, that she soon came to the realisation that 'I can't do this full-time [...] My husband was hugely supportive and still is, and I was just horrible, I was just a thing possessed. I was hugely self-centred.'

Louise then stopped work before easing her way back into classroom teaching for about seven years on a job share, where she taught two days a week. Once the job share ended, tutoring followed and this led to Louise enrolling on a CELTA course, which she 'thoroughly enjoyed [but was] hugely hard work'. Despite it being hard work, she found it very interesting and the 'teaching staff were just lovely, and, you know, they welcomed you every time [and] they were very supportive'.

Although Louise received very positive feedback, she lacked confidence. 'I think all through my life I always thought I'm hovering down on that sort of secretarial level and there's always someone else better.' She still felt apprehensive when she went in to teach her ELT class: 'I have to feel nervous; if I don't feel nervous then I'm not going to do a good performance.' So in amongst all the insecurities, what is it that kept Louise in teaching? Her response was startling: 'Oh, I just can't do anything else.'

Teaching refugees: 'I'm obviously doing it all wrong'
Despite her nerves and lack of self-confidence, Louise has never thought of giving up ELT teaching: 'I can't see myself stopping this [...] because [...] if I can be of any help, just giving [the students] a bit more confidence [...] then I would like to continue doing that.' Louise was teaching both EFL and ESOL during the year the data was collected, though more the latter than the former. She was allocated three families for ESOL: two elderly women (Kalima and Eilijah, both pseudonyms) and a married couple. Kalima lives with her son and daughter-in-law. She is illiterate in Arabic and has no motivation to learn English, describing it as 'like learning to be a doctor'. Louise's interpretation was: 'I suppose she thinks it's impossible, it's so difficult [...] it's like me learning brain surgery.' At that point (i.e. December 2017) Louise had only taught her once and even that early on described it as a 'really difficult lesson, and I was really, really depressed about it.' Louise had tried to reassure her, but 'we got through very few words, so I had an hour and a half and it was really difficult, and then I thought, "well, I'm obviously doing it all wrong, and not quite sure what I should be doing", and it was horrible, it was really horrible.'

Louise felt both demoralised and full of self-doubt. She struggled with getting Kalima to even repeat words, and this is where a translator would have helped Louise with her teaching. 'I quit then, because even on the CELTA you're not taught how to teach somebody with no English.' Louise said this in our conversation in December, but it would be another six months before this situation actually came to a head.

What made Louise feel even worse was the fact that she was being paid for this teaching, and in her eyes at least, she was not doing a very good job: 'I just hope it's not too bad the next time, but I felt awful, and I think it's because it's paid as well; I think if I was a volunteer I'd go, "oh well, nobody has taught me how to do this", but here I'm paid so I should be giving a professional job.'

Keep on keeping on: 'I'm going to try again. I'm going to get back on the horse'
Yet Louise showed resilience at the same time as despair by reflecting on what had occurred and thinking through how she could change the lesson the next time she saw Kalima: 'So I came home and I had a big think about it.' Despite glimpses of resilience in her reflection, Louise realised that 'it's going to be very slow, and I think from my point of view I think I'm the sort of person that needs to see that what I've done has been effective'. Initially, Louise didn't view Kalima as a positive challenge, saying: 'It's not what I should be doing', but then she realised that 'people have done this before. It's not an impossible task, it's just I don't know how to do it [...] so anyway I'm going to try again. I'm going to get back on the horse.'

Louise here exhibited strength of character in reflecting on what went wrong and how to improve for future classes. She did this job because she wanted to help, but immediately this was followed by, 'but then am I capable of doing it, you know, it's this imposter syndrome'. Despite her pendulum-like thoughts swinging between competence and incompetence, she eventually came to the realisation that 'if I can work out how to crack this absolute beginner minefield, then I will have more confidence to apply that to other people'.

This all occurred after only one lesson with Kalima, so although Louise said she'd quit, her resilience is glimpsed here by her reflective attitude and commitment to her employer and her students. Additionally, the fact she was being paid and that people have succeeded before her in helping refugees to learn English kept her going. And perhaps the other two ESOL/refugee families, who were – initially at least – a positive contrast to Kalima, helped too: 'Life was much better because it was just lovely, it was just really nice. There was a lot of laughing and giggling, and it was lovely, yeah.'

Lack of progress: 'I'm almost like a social worker; it's not really the job that I was trained for'

In the first three months Kalima and Eiliyah had not progressed very far, with the resulting effect on Louise being rather negative. It seemed as though Louise was experiencing a rollercoaster of emotions, with her initial lesson with Kalima not going well but then having time to reflect on that and consequently regain a positive perspective, only to plummet to a negative one three months on: 'So as a professional, as somebody who's being paid, I find that quite difficult and, you know, I'm questioning myself thinking "well, I'm rubbish, I'm totally rubbish".'

Louise's unburdening resulted in these crushing self-evaluations, but she still didn't seem to accept that she couldn't possibly shoulder all the blame for the lack of progress; students have to meet their teachers halfway. And on a personal level, Louise got on well with both women, describing them as 'lovely'.

Later, Louise experienced a shift in her role and also her identity, where she likened herself to a social worker rather than a teacher:

> I don't know if I have the ability or the nous to know how to push them [two grandmothers] up, you know […] I'm almost like a social worker. I'm not sure I'm even a language teacher […] it's not really the job that I was trained for on my CELTA course – this is quite different.

Here, Louise's feelings of insecurity were evident because she felt unable to teach the two grandmothers effectively. She questioned whether she was teaching them in the right way and why they weren't learning what Louise was teaching them, concluding that it 'must be me, that's why they're not learning the words – because I'm not doing it. I'm not repeating it enough. I'm not presenting it in the right way. So all those feelings of insecurity are hugely there.' Added to this was the fact that her scaffolding had also been taken away with no curriculum to follow, so she felt she 'had to make it up step-by-step right from the word go'.

Louise also described teaching as a lonely profession in some respects, particularly because of the lack of support she experienced:

> It's very lonely, I think, being a teacher, very lonely […] it's a lonesome profession really. It's not – through my life I don't feel lonely, but there you are, the spotlight is on you – we're back to this analogy of stage really, spotlight is on you and have I learnt the right words? Is the script right?

The analogy she drew between teaching and being on stage is fascinating, although perhaps not new. She is centre stage and is expected to have learned her words to be able to play her part accurately, although arguably her last question is not one an actor needs to concern themselves with; that is more the domain of the writer.

Continuing with the rollercoaster metaphor, in all this downward movement of negative experiences and feelings, Louise still managed to demonstrate resilience. She did this by searching for and using various online sources and doing two brief courses in teaching ESOL (run by her employer). She also mentioned having learned a few snippets of Arabic to help her students and, at the same time, this learning experience helped her to empathise with her two elderly pupils somewhat: 'Well I feel here I'm saying, "oh, she doesn't even know one to ten" – well, I don't know one to ten in Arabic.'

From our conversations over the last six months or so, Louise seemed to have demonstrated resilience with Kalima, but questioned whether she (Louise) was 'just taking the money and running' and even went so far as to describe herself as 'very lazy'.

Breaking the cycle: 'A sad postscript to our talks'

In July, three weeks after our last research conversation, Louise emailed me to say she'd resigned from teaching Kalima:

> A sad postscript to our talks – see string of emails. I have resigned from teaching Kalima. Maybe this is where resilience comes in. I have tried very hard to sustain these lessons, but I am now at a point where I need to consider my own professional wellbeing. I was becoming increasingly depressed thinking about and teaching K and I could not find the key to open her interest and, possibly, her ability to learn.

3.2.2 Laura

Laura is a Dutch national and lives in Hertfordshire with her husband and two school-age boys. At the time of this study she was 47 and had been teaching for two years.

A natural step into ELT: 'I want to help other people'

Laura came to the UK in the early 1990s for postgraduate study where she met her husband. She discovered ELT through a combination of things: her interest in languages, having volunteered at her children's primary school, her sociable nature and having worked for a short while at a recruitment agency whose ethos she disagreed with:

> It's just sort of my motto that [...] I want to, you know, help other people and, you know, work for a purpose and not just for money. So I found that really off-putting and I thought 'actually what else can I do?' and I suppose that also led me to looking at teaching degrees.

This deep desire to help others was also apparent when she began teaching refugees after graduating from her MA TESOL in 2016; she said she's always had an affiliation with foreigners coming into a country and not feeling at home, although her own experience has been a positive one.

Laura currently teaches both EFL and ESOL, and the significance of what she's doing is derived from those she teaches: 'I think for me the people that I teach, the value comes from that.' Laura talked about both helping and protecting her students, but simultaneously acknowledged that 'I can't protect them from society in general, I can just prepare them a little bit, to the best of my ability and within the constraints that I have.' By constraints she meant the shortness of the courses and lack of resources, but even here she demonstrated resilience by acknowledging her limitations.

Having a portable classroom: 'Never knowing if you're going in the right direction'

Two key challenges Laura faced in her teaching were lesson planning and collecting resources. She strived to teach her students what was relevant, but she said that a 90-minute class took her half a day to plan:

> It takes me so long to do a lesson plan and, oh, it's daunting. But I've heard from other people who've been longer in ELT, even just primary school teachers, they said the first two years is [...] hell, and then afterwards you can use the same material.

She planned in great detail, firstly because she lacked confidence and likened it to 'the stage fright before you go into the lesson and you just hope it works because it's a long time, nearly two hours in front of, you know, a class', and secondly because of the bespoke nature of the students' needs: 'They all have different [needs/issues], because for me if you're tutoring you gear it towards their issues.'

In the same breath she therefore demonstrated resilience by moving from a place of uncertainty and being daunted to realising that she needed to provide something of relevance to her students, which was the source of her motivation. She also sought reassurance from people who managed her: 'We've spoken to people further up the chain [...] and they were very reassuring and said "look, what you're providing is okay".' This went some way in helping to build up her confidence.

Being alone and not always having the opportunity to speak with colleagues or check ideas with them was also difficult: 'You never know whether you do the right thing or not and whether you're going in the right direction, but you get your feedback from the students as such, so that's fine.' Ways in which she demonstrated resilience in this regard included receiving feedback from her students but also her colleagues when she had the opportunity to speak with them ('sometimes they come up with really, you know, interesting gems'); going through old coursebooks also helped, as did searching online for free resources and videos, and 'definitely, you know, the reassurance that it will get easier. I keep on telling myself that.'

Changing beliefs about teaching: 'It needs to be natural and not artificial'

Laura constantly evaluated the students' reactions while she was teaching and so knew when a lesson hadn't gone well: 'When you get the gaze and just a blank stare! You think, "uh-oh, they're not getting this".' Immediately, though, she demonstrated her resilience: 'You think, "ah, okay, let's try this again another way".'

Although she firmly believes in repetition plus practice to learn a language, lack of time precluded that: 'It's such a shame because I know the theory behind everything and, you know [...] constant repetition of things and one, you know, 90-minute-a-week lesson does not help with the repetition.' However, she showed resilience in saying: 'This is where I have to look at it from a positive point of view; at least they have had something so it's better than nothing, that's how I see it.'

Despite favouring a behaviourist tendency, Laura also saw the value in task-based learning. She thought that such an approach 'would have been much more helpful', yet immediately admitted that it would have been impossible: 'Logistically, I'm not allowed to take them in the car [e.g. for a task-based lesson]. I'm not allowed to take them anywhere [...] I don't know, it's really tough.' She fed this potential solution back to her employer, 'but there's nothing they can do in such a short term'.

Supplying individual learning plans (ILPs) was another area where Laura's beliefs underwent change. These ILPs for her refugee students needed to show evidence of improvement but were required in advance from beginner-level students, and, for Laura, teaching tended to be more organic; the students were from different educational backgrounds so arguably weren't used to being asked: 'It is tricky [...] it just reduces the actual valuable lesson time, but they [employer] want that as evidence so that's what they want.' Experiencing such restrictions and demands is something all teachers face, but this frustrated Laura to the point where it affected her identity and beliefs as a teacher: 'It's totally against my [...] against my vision of teaching. It needs to be natural and not artificial, so, yeah, I'll just have to deal with it, and that's definitely a challenge for me.' Despite this frustration, she managed by exhibiting sheer grit and determination: 'I'll just plough on! Which is I suppose where, you know, the resilience comes in.'

Maintaining perspective: 'I'm not a heart surgeon. It's not life or death'
In general, Laura dealt with all these challenges by putting them into perspective and telling herself that there are no long-term consequences in teaching if a lesson doesn't go according to plan: 'I'm not a heart surgeon or, do you know what I mean, it's not life or death.'

She also acknowledged her limitations as a teacher, for example when the students hadn't been as receptive as she had hoped:

> *They want to learn but, at the same time, if they're not putting in the work themselves [...] as a teacher you're helpless [...] I think I found that quite hard. But I also realise that's part of being a teacher [...] it's, yeah, frustrating, I think [laughs], so you have to become resilient to that and say, 'okay, if they don't put in the work there's not a lot else you can do'.*

Her resilience is evidenced here when she said that the problem was all part and parcel of being a teacher, i.e. recognising where your boundaries are.

> *So [sighs] problems, yes, but then you just have to move on and think of the success stories and think, 'okay, right'. I also look back, thinking, 'what could I have done differently' [laughs] and then, but that's just me. I like to reflect as well and see if I can learn from the situation.*

Is this a case of mind over matter? Being strong willed? Simply being pragmatic? As Laura herself said, 'I don't beat myself up about it.' Instead, she drew a line under that experience, 'because sometimes this is how it goes in teaching.'

3.2.3 Sienna
Sienna is British and lives in Hertfordshire with her husband. At the time of this study she was 33 and had been teaching for five years.

Moving into ELT: 'I should have done this years ago!'
Sienna currently works at a private language school teaching EFL. After graduating in history, she seemed to drift for a few years before deciding to do the CELTA. 'I thought, "I don't know if I'd be any good at it or not" because I've always been a bit shy really, unless it's with people I know well, and I thought, "well how would that work with students?".' But the CELTA changed that mindset and she discovered teaching was 'really stimulating and really enjoyable [...] and I just thought, "oh my God, I love this so much, why didn't I do this before? I should have done this years ago."' She loves the creativity of ELT, the travel opportunities it gives, the lightbulb moments her students have and seeing their progress, 'and, you know, that you may have had something to do with it.'

After finishing her CELTA, Sienna went to Ecuador to teach. 'It was difficult at times, but I still never imagined myself stopping, and I still can't.' Glimpses of resilience were apparent when she talked about those difficulties. The first was being separated from her boyfriend (now her husband) and her family:

> *The first couple of weeks I was walking around broken-hearted really [...] I did miss him [her boyfriend] a hell of a lot, but I knew even then there's no point leaving. [I thought] "there's no point going home, because like I need this experience. I've always wanted to go to Ecuador and now I'm here. If I leave now I'll regret it." And I thought to myself then, "think of yourself in a year's time, will you regret having stayed and, of course not, you'll be so glad that you stayed", and so I did stay.*

The other difficulty was her father passing away. Because he was in remission when Sienna left for Ecuador, she 'went to Ecuador in good faith thinking, "yeah, he's OK"', but then he got sick again and, despite an operation, he passed away while she was home for Christmas. She kept going because 'while I was teaching I wasn't thinking about it […] and also Dad would have supported me whatever decision I'd made, but I think secretly he would have been glad that I went back, because he enjoyed talking to me about it.'

Sienna demonstrated resilience through doing new things, experiencing new things and teaching. Google Video, emailing and writing a blog also helped her cope.

Error correction: 'There are some battles that aren't going to be won' and 'There's more than one way to skin a cat'
In all the positives of Sienna's teaching experience, one of the areas she struggled with was error correction. She explained that if she didn't correct errors, she felt that she 'let [the student] down'. This disappointment at failure led to Sienna's justification of why she believed error correction to be important: errors can fossilise if left; students expect to be corrected; the potentially negative reaction from the other students to her as a teacher if the error is left uncorrected; and, ultimately, it's the teacher's responsibility to correct errors.

On occasions, error correction resulted in the error being repeated rather than corrected, and Sienna 'sighs internally', adding 'it's also just frustrating sometimes', leading her to ask, 'what's the point?' It became apparent that despite appearances to the contrary, this was a demonstration of resilience as she asked herself, 'well, I still understand them, what's more important? […] There are some battles that aren't going to be won in a moment like this, so I thought well there's more than one way to skin a cat.'

Sienna was quick to show resilience by saying that this didn't mean teachers shouldn't error correct. She was encouraged that other teachers have also experienced similar frustrations: 'I'm thinking, "oh, it's alright, it's not just me".'

Everyday challenges of the classroom: 'Oh, how lovely to see you! You don't normally come on Tuesdays, do you?' and 'What was the traffic like this morning?'
Two main challenges Sienna experienced in her teaching were continuous enrolment and lateness.

Students usually started on a Monday but theoretically any day was possible. Often Sienna didn't know who would be in her class on a given day because of the slightly ad hoc nature of students attending classes, and she described this as stressful. To ameliorate this, she had to come prepared with various iterations of activities in case students turned up on different days. Sienna developed a 'list' with students' names at the top and activities down the side to keep track of who had done what, but she still found this stressful:

> There was a student who […] never comes on a Tuesday, and then guess who was there! And I walked into the class, I thought, "oh, how lovely to see you! You don't normally come on Tuesdays, do you?" […] Luckily there was one [activity] that I could easily just get on my email […] but it was stressful, it was stressful! I nearly had a heart attack!

The second challenge was students arriving late and interrupting the class, which 'can be a bit of a headache sometimes'. In terms of addressing lateness, Sienna 'wouldn't do it there and then in the middle of the class with the other students watching, almost certainly listening in'. Instead, she would wait until the other students were having a discussion and then address the student individually: 'I might say, "what was the traffic like this morning?" I usually have like a sort of small talk and chat at the beginning anyway' to counter latecomers.

Despite never being sure who would turn up in class and students arriving late, Sienna evidenced resilience in both situations. Of note is that neither continuous enrolment nor lateness were dealt with on her CELTA training.

Teaching stresses/low points and fostering resilience

Planning is one of the main stresses Sienna faced. When she first qualified, she spent too much time planning a lesson: planning 'would just take forever, it would stretch into whatever time I had', and this created an endless cycle of 'either just planning or actually teaching'. She spent time reflecting on that to arrive at a solution for the future where she now doesn't spend quite so much time on planning, again demonstrating resilience. She said, 'planning is not so much of a problem now' because experience has helped. Sienna is 'quicker at adapting the coursebook; it used to take me forever. I remember on the CELTA course it would take me an entire day just to plan one hour', but she admitted: 'It's not perfect […] it still takes a bit too long sometimes.'

Other stresses/low points for Sienna came when she reflected on lessons that didn't work, but her resilience was immediately apparent: 'But then I'd think, "well, why, you know, why was that? What should I do differently next time?"' She also tried 'not to dwell on things that went wrong. You know, try to keep positive, and also to realise that it happens to everyone, no matter what position they have, or how long they've been teaching.'

4

Discussion

This section will be centred around three of our four research aims: 1) how the six teachers exercise their resilience; 2) what the relationship between resilience and English teaching is; and 3) the comparison of teacher resilience in Brazil and the UK. The fourth aim, namely how teachers' resilience can be fostered in language teacher education, will be addressed in the section *Implications*.

How the six teachers exercised their resilience in ELT contexts evidences both commonalities and differences. Across the Brazilian narrative accounts, pupils' behaviour and diverse needs, as well as the feelings of being unprepared and isolated, were the main challenges faced by Julia, Maria and Pedro. Such challenges are documented in studies exploring aspects related to early-career teacher resilience in other contexts (e.g. Castro et al., 2010; Fantilli and McDougall, 2009; Flores and Day, 2006; Gu and Day, 2007; Johnson et al., 2015).

Issues such as the lack of interest in English and misbehaviour really affected Julia, Maria and Pedro given that 'responding effectively to students' diverse abilities, needs and behaviours is likely to be even more taxing for those who are new to teaching' (Johnson et al., 2015: 37). It affected Maria to the point that she preferred teaching in the heavy environment of a prison where students were more interested and there was not 'all that stress of shouting "sit down"'. In Julia's case, the lack of commitment of pupils and their unruly behaviour sometimes affected her motivation to teach. For Pedro, there was also the difficulty of responding to pupils' wide range of abilities (ranging from reading and writing struggles to avid reading) and special needs.

Responding to pupils' behaviour and needs was even more taxing for Julia, Maria and Pedro because they were not provided with adequate preparation. In fact, this is a recurring complaint of early-career teachers (see Fantilli and McDougall, 2009; Flores and Day, 2006; Johnson et al., 2015). They felt unprepared because the language teaching degree was too 'theoretical'. It did not provide them with enough teaching experience or opportunities to learn content and how to develop it in a real classroom. Consequently, apart from struggling to attract pupils' attention and show them the purpose of learning English, Julia, Maria and Pedro struggled to define teaching aims and approaches. Pedro's statement about his practicum echoes the challenge of feeling unprepared shared by all the Brazilian ELT teachers: 'It doesn't give you an idea of what the classroom really is [...] what it means to face it by yourself.' Julia and Maria also struggled with their English skills. Unfortunately, as a British Council study (2015) reveals, they are not the exception: 55 per cent of English teachers from Brazilian state schools do not have any opportunities to practise their English, and 22 per cent struggle to speak the language.

Feeling isolated, Julia, Maria and Pedro had to develop their own strategies to face adversities. In general, they had no support from the schools or the State Education Department. Developing their resilience was a 'lonely process' – just as it was for Flores and Day's (2006: 229) participants: 'They learned "while doing" and "by performing the tasks" required of them' (page 228). Some of the Brazilian ELT teachers' statements emphasise this feeling of isolation. 'It's Maria for Maria,' Maria once said. 'It's me and me,' Pedro said. Julia, at least, could have the support of her colleagues while trying to implement the *Escola Plena* system in one of the schools in which she worked.

Julia, Maria and Pedro also had to cope with the challenge of being multi-subject teachers because there were few English classes in the curriculum. Pedro had a tenured position, but Julia and Maria had to face the uncertainty of being temporary teachers, a challenge also highlighted by Johnson et al.'s (2015) participants. For Pedro, poor wages also represented a challenge, as they did for Fantilli and McDougall's participants (2009). He even considered leaving the profession because of that.

Problem-solving skills, commitment to the profession, optimism and self-reflection were crucial for helping Julia, Maria and Pedro exercise their resilience. These were traits observed in resilient teachers from other contexts (see Gu and Day, 2007; Johnson et al., 2015; Patterson et al., 2004; Tait, 2008). Julia, Maria and Pedro dedicated lots of time to preparing for their classes so they could handle their lack of experience with teaching and meet the challenges of their school environments and pupils' backgrounds. Julia and Maria also learned to adapt to different teaching environments over time and developed strategies to improve their English, especially by using online resources.

Julia, Maria and Pedro were really committed to pupils' learning. They tried hard to attract pupils' attention and make them see the purpose of learning English. Julia's statement illustrates this commitment: 'Sometimes I have a look at the book and think "they deserve more".' Despite lacking confidence, and feeling demotivated and frustrated sometimes, they managed to keep an optimistic attitude. Julia, for example, saw the challenges she had to face as an opportunity to grow as a teacher. Maria maintained a positive attitude even when she had to teach subjects other than English. Pedro believed he could do something to improve education and never allowed colleagues' discouragement to affect him. Overall, Julia, Maria and Pedro were always reflecting on their performance and, therefore, imagining ways to improve.

At first, Julia, Maria and Pedro did not see themselves as teachers. But as they lived out the profession, they began to identify with teaching and develop a sense of vocation, which is 'an essential component of teachers' resilience' given that it is 'associated with a strong sense of professional goals and purposes, persistence, professional aspirations, achievement and motivation' (Gu and Day, 2007: 1,311).

Across all the UK narrative accounts, time and particularly time spent planning was a key challenge faced by Sienna, Laura and Louise. These issues have also been mentioned in other studies focusing on teacher resilience, e.g. Kyriacou, 2001 (in Howard and Johnson, 2004: 400). Although not an overly surprising finding, it nonetheless adds to the growing body of evidence which highlights one of the key demands of teaching. Speaking with colleagues and getting help and advice from them as well as finding resources online were two of the main ways in which all three coped with these demands. The former strategy is well documented (e.g. Patterson et al., 2004), but the latter was not specifically mentioned in the literature reviewed.

Related to planning, Laura and Louise also had the added pressure of having to find their own resources rather than being given a coursebook or syllabus to follow, which links to claims by Fantilli and McDougall (2009) that teachers are in a singular profession such that the moment they are qualified, they have comparable responsibility – and arguably expectations thrust on them – with teachers who have years of experience – unlike, for example, lawyers and medics, who have a gradual phasing in to their professions. Louise doubted her ability time and again, thinking, 'I'm not quite sure what I should be doing', which she found 'horrible' and which impacted negatively on her teaching practice and at times her own wellbeing. For Laura, this challenge also manifested itself in her teaching practice, and never knowing if what she was teaching was 'right' because of not having a syllabus or coursebook provided for her. Time and again she sought reassurance from people who managed her (i.e. her employer) as well as her students, and this exercising of resilience by asking for feedback from colleagues and students is also echoed in the literature (e.g. Gu and Day, 2007). Another strategy she used to demonstrate resilience was reflection, which is also well documented in the literature (e.g. Howard and Johnson, 2004). Both Louise and Sienna took time to reflect on challenges they faced in the classroom too.

The comparison to stage fright was also something mentioned by both Laura and Louise, using the metaphor of being on stage when they went into a classroom and needing to learn a script prior to that. Many teachers would use metaphors to provide 'a concrete image for abstract, or not easily understandable, phenomena' (Hanne, 2011: 226), namely standing in front of a class and teaching, but no research reviewed for this report has mentioned this so specifically. Perhaps lack of self-efficacy would be the closest comparison in this regard.

School policy was another challenge, for example continuous enrolment and lateness (Sienna). How Sienna dealt with these was to create resources for the former to help her see which students had attended when and what activities they had done. Lateness was also dealt with by trial and error by allowing time at the beginning of class for latecomers rather than challenging or confronting them. Interestingly, neither of these issues were part of her initial teacher-training course, so are amongst those practices learned while on the job rather than in preparatory courses. Laura also faced pressure from her employer to produce ILPs for her students, and she said that providing these ILPs in the way the employer wanted (i.e. at the beginning of the course) affected her beliefs as a teacher, but eventually she dealt with this by developing a positive mindset: 'It's totally against my vision of teaching [...] [but] I'll just have to deal with it, and that's definitely a challenge for me.'

Other challenges faced by teaching practices were, for example, dealing with error correction and not seeing it occur (Sienna), which has been documented by Ng and Farrell (2003), among others. Sienna's way of exercising resilience was to recognise her limitations and then reflect on the fact that other teachers have also experienced these difficulties, i.e. she is not the only person to experience this. Both Laura and Louise recognise their limitations at points, too. Laura did this by maintaining perspective and realising that she cannot be completely responsible for her students' motivation and progression, so she recognised where her limits ended and where her boundaries were. Perhaps this is also indicative of taking responsibility for her own wellbeing. In Louise's case it took longer for her to recognise her limitations, initially feeling burdened by the fact that her students were not progressing, and it was all her fault. Eventually, however, she arguably demonstrated resilience by resigning, as she did from her first primary teaching position, because to have continued would have had a deleterious effect on her own wellbeing.

Discontinuity between teaching beliefs and practice was a challenge Laura experienced, and is reviewed in depth by Basturkmen (2012). For Laura, this was due to her belief that repetition is the key to learning a second language, but not having the time available in her classes (only one 90-minute class a week) to really implement this. She dealt with this by shifting her focus from a more grammar translation style of teaching to a more communicative one, i.e. one based on tasks, again through reflection and developing a positive mindset.

4.1 Comparisons across the six narrative accounts

Below is a summary of comparisons across the six accounts, using the dimensions of resilience as outlined by Beltman et al. (2011).

Individual risk factors:

- lacking confidence in teaching/stage fright (Julia, Louise)
- anxiety about not being able to teach (Julia, Maria, Pedro, Louise, Laura)
- teaching as a lonely profession (Julia, Maria, Pedro, Louise).

Contextual risk factors:

- heterogeneous classes, especially illiterate/semi-illiterate (Pedro, Louise).

Individual protective factors:

- staying in teaching through enjoyment and a sense of fulfilment (Julia, Maria, Pedro Louise, Laura, Sienna).

Contextual protective factors:

- commitment to the profession and by extension, to motivating students (Julia, Maria, Pedro, Sienna, Louise, Laura).

Additional comparisons not categorised:

- entering the teaching profession by accident (Julia, Maria, Pedro, Louise).

4.2 Differences across the six accounts

4.2.1 Brazil

Individual risk factors:

■ English language competence (Julia, Maria).

Contextual risk factors:

■ teaching subjects other than English (Julia, Maria, Pedro)

■ coping with instability, e.g. temporary contracts (Julia, Maria)

■ coping with pupils' misbehaviour and lack of interest in English (Julia, Maria, Pedro)

■ coping with lack of preparation (Julia, Maria, Pedro)

■ coping with danger in prison (Maria)

■ responding to pupils' diverse needs (Pedro)

■ lack of continuing teacher education opportunities (Julia, Maria)

■ lack of support (Julia, Pedro, Maria).

4.2.2 UK

Individual risk factors:

■ time spent on planning (Louise, Laura, Sienna).

Many insights gained from our study echo those gained from previous research on teacher resilience in general (e.g. reflection and wellbeing), but there are also notable differences, the main one being that this study is situated in the field of ELT. From Brazil in particular, the pressure to teach subjects other than English was apparent from all three participants, as was the uncertainty of job contracts being renewed beyond a year. Lack of confidence arose in both contexts, but in Brazil it was focused on English language ability, whereas in the UK it was a lack of self-efficacy, the latter of which runs counter to much of the research reviewed by Beltman et al. (2011).

5

Implications

Having identified resilience, glimpses or otherwise, in our six participants, how can we help foster and in turn sustain it in language teacher education? Responsibility to foster resilience lies with both the teacher themselves and the contexts in which they teach; it does not lie solely with one or the other (see Beltman et al., 2011). Howard and Johnson (2004) claim that 'protective factors that can make a real difference in teachers' lives are often relatively simple to organize, easy to support and/or are learnable' (page 415), i.e. that resilience can be learned rather than being something we have or do not have as an innate resource on which to draw (Day and Gu, 2007).

Specific implications for second language teacher education drawn from this narrative inquiry are:

■ more attention should be paid to the transition from pre-service teacher to in-service teacher in teacher preparation courses

■ strategies for minimising the feeling of isolation can be taught and promoted in both pre-service programmes and staff development sessions on the job in language school contexts

■ strategies for resilience can be taught and promoted in both pre-service programmes and staff development sessions on the job in language school contexts

■ dealing with stressful situations (e.g. continuous enrolment) can be added to pre-service programmes

■ peer or mentoring support can be more visibly promoted and encouraged on the job in language school contexts.

Fostering of resilience in all six of our participants was key to them remaining committed to the profession and to students in particular:

> Teachers are [...] motivated by fear of losing their students – losing them to the abysses of poverty, joblessness, low expectations, boredom, peer pressure, disaffection, lost opportunity, substance abuse, alienation, family disintegration, and, particularly for those who are poor or marginalized, to the utter lack of prospects for the future. In the face of these daunting challenges of modern society, caring is, in fact, an integral part of teaching and learning. Teaching involves caring deeply about students as human beings and, at the same time, caring just as deeply that all students have rich opportunities to learn academically challenging material that will maximize their life chances (Cochran-Smith, 2003: 372).

To conclude, Hiver (2018: 245) talks about the 'need to establish the relevance of teacher resilience to our field [i.e. language teaching] empirically and conceptually – its applicability cannot be assumed a priori'. It is our belief that with this study, we have begun to establish the relevance of teacher resilience to the field of ELT, although much further research, particularly using narrative approaches, would be a clear recommendation.

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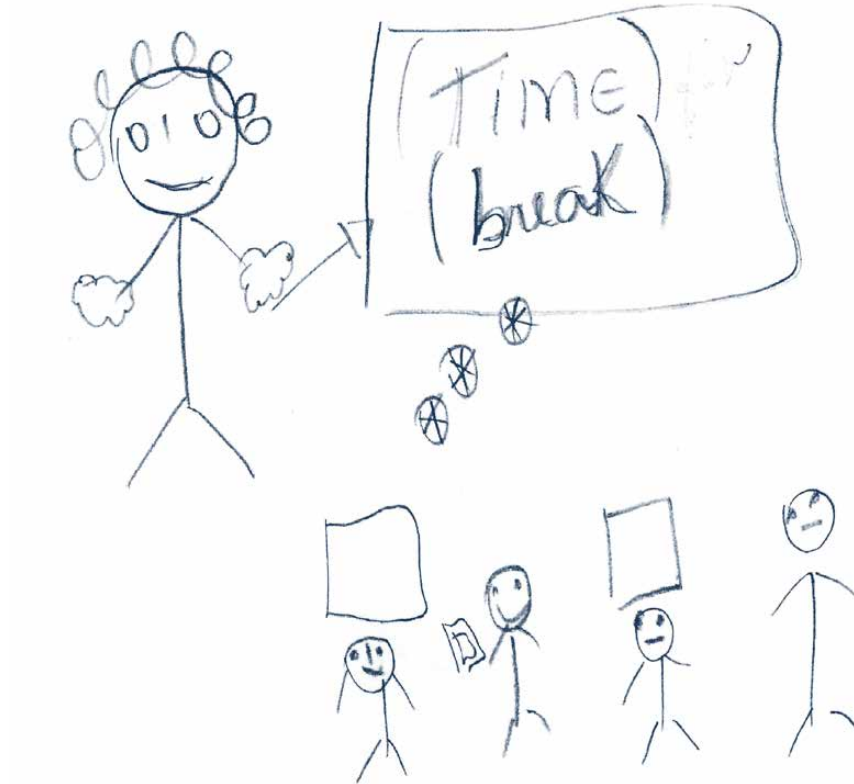
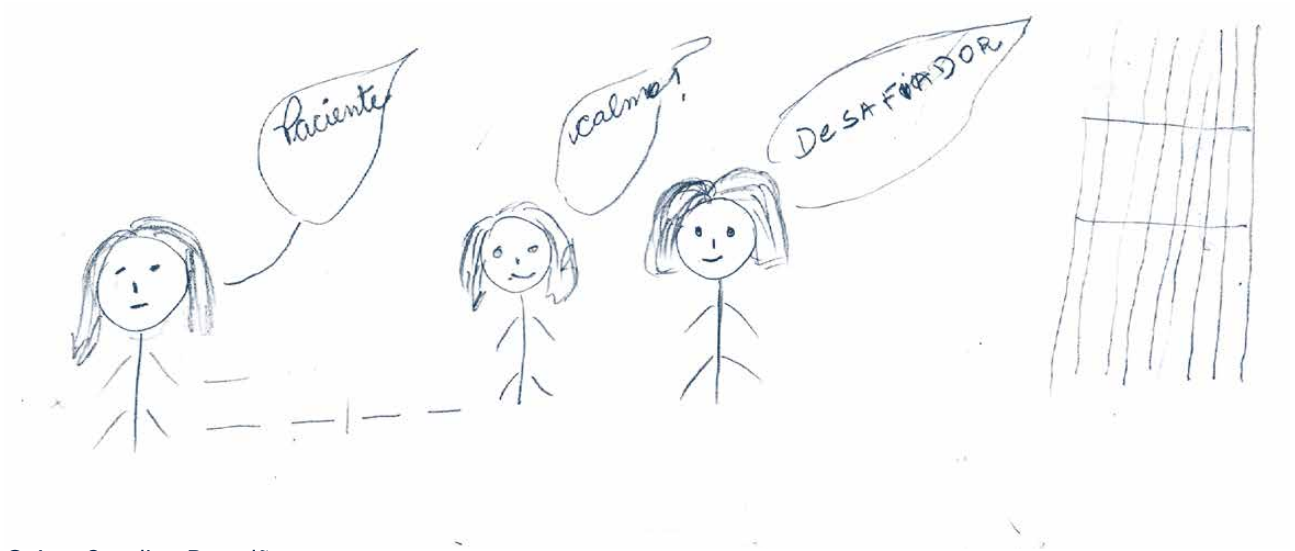# Appendix 1

A set of drawings from ELT teachers in Brazil

These are examples of the drawings produced by the ELT teachers in Brazil. They were requested during the fourth recorded conversation with each participant. The guiding question was 'could you draw a resilient teacher?' To produce their drawings, they were given a pencil, an eraser and a blank A4 sheet of paper.

Julia's resilient teacher

© Ana Carolina Brandão

Maria's resilient teacher

© Ana Carolina Brandão

Pedro's resilient teacher

© Ana Carolina Brandão

Appendix 2

A set of drawings from ELT teachers in the UK

These are examples of the drawings produced by the ELT teachers in the UK. They were requested during the fourth recorded conversation with each participant. The guiding question was 'could you draw a resilient teacher?' To produce their drawings, they were given a pencil, an eraser and a blank A4 sheet of paper.
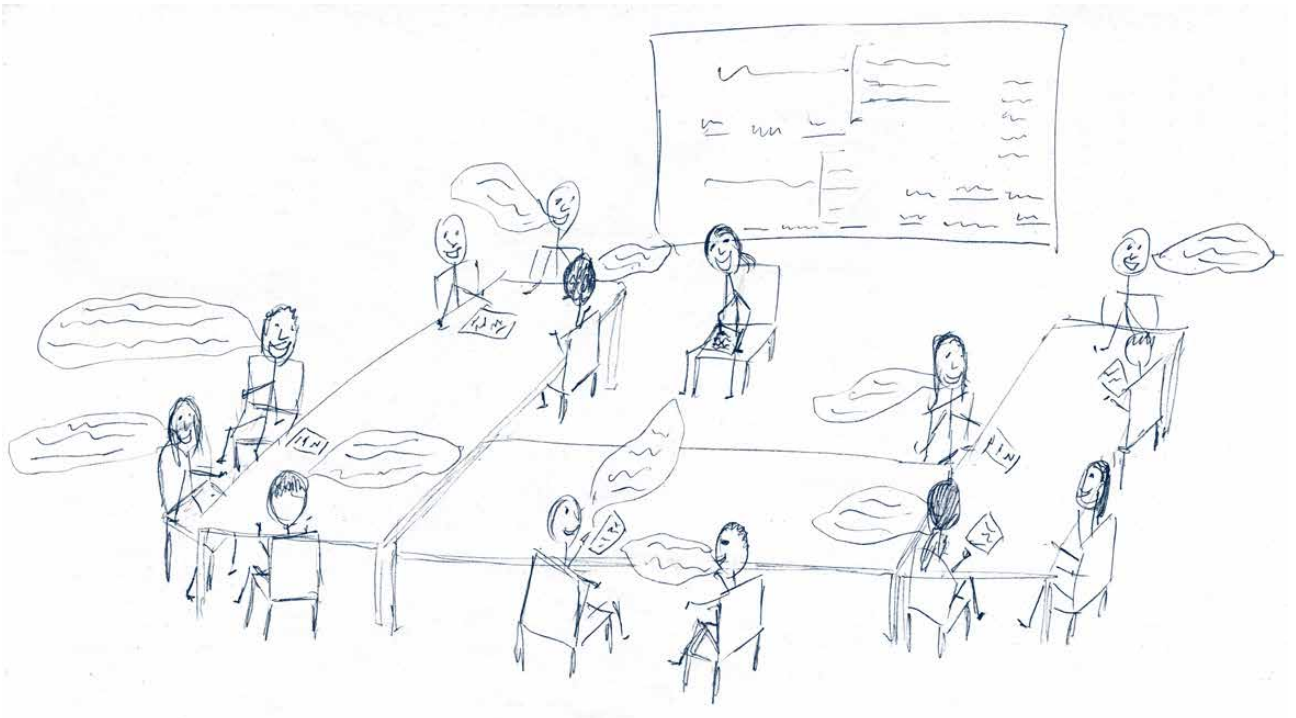
Louise's resilient teacher
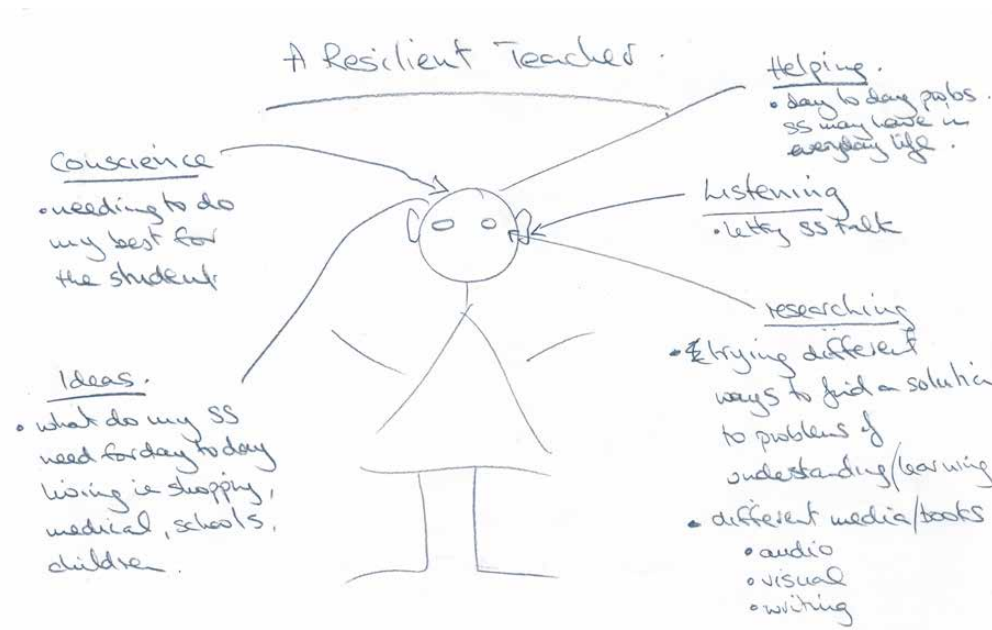
© Gwyneth James

Laura's resilient teacher

© Gwyneth James

Sienna's resilient teacher

© Gwyneth James