Recovering from Adversity:
How Might We Rebuild ELT as a Resilient Profession?
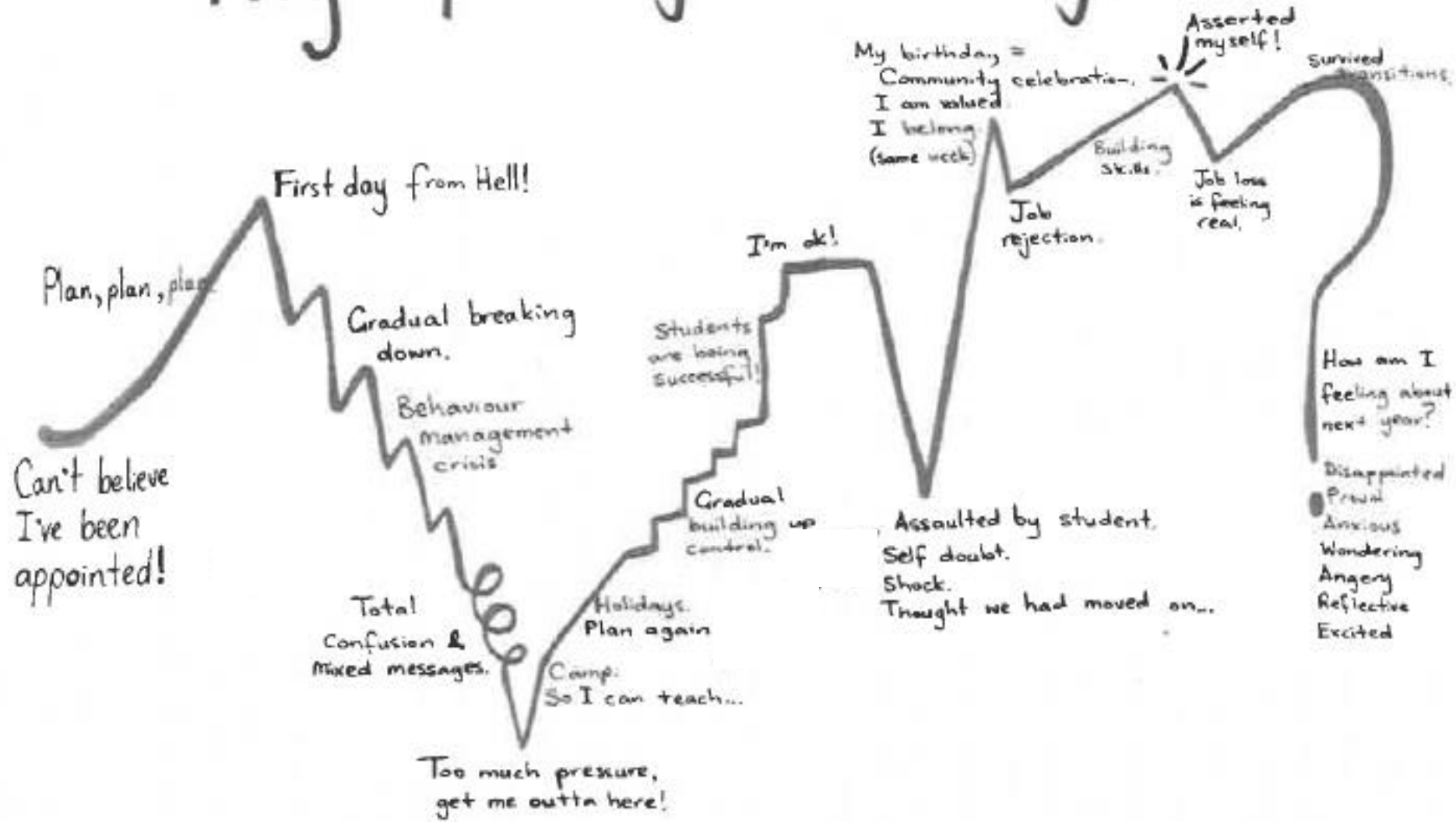
Achilleas Kostoulas

10th ELT Malta Conference "Celebrating Resilience" ♦ 8th – 9th October 2021
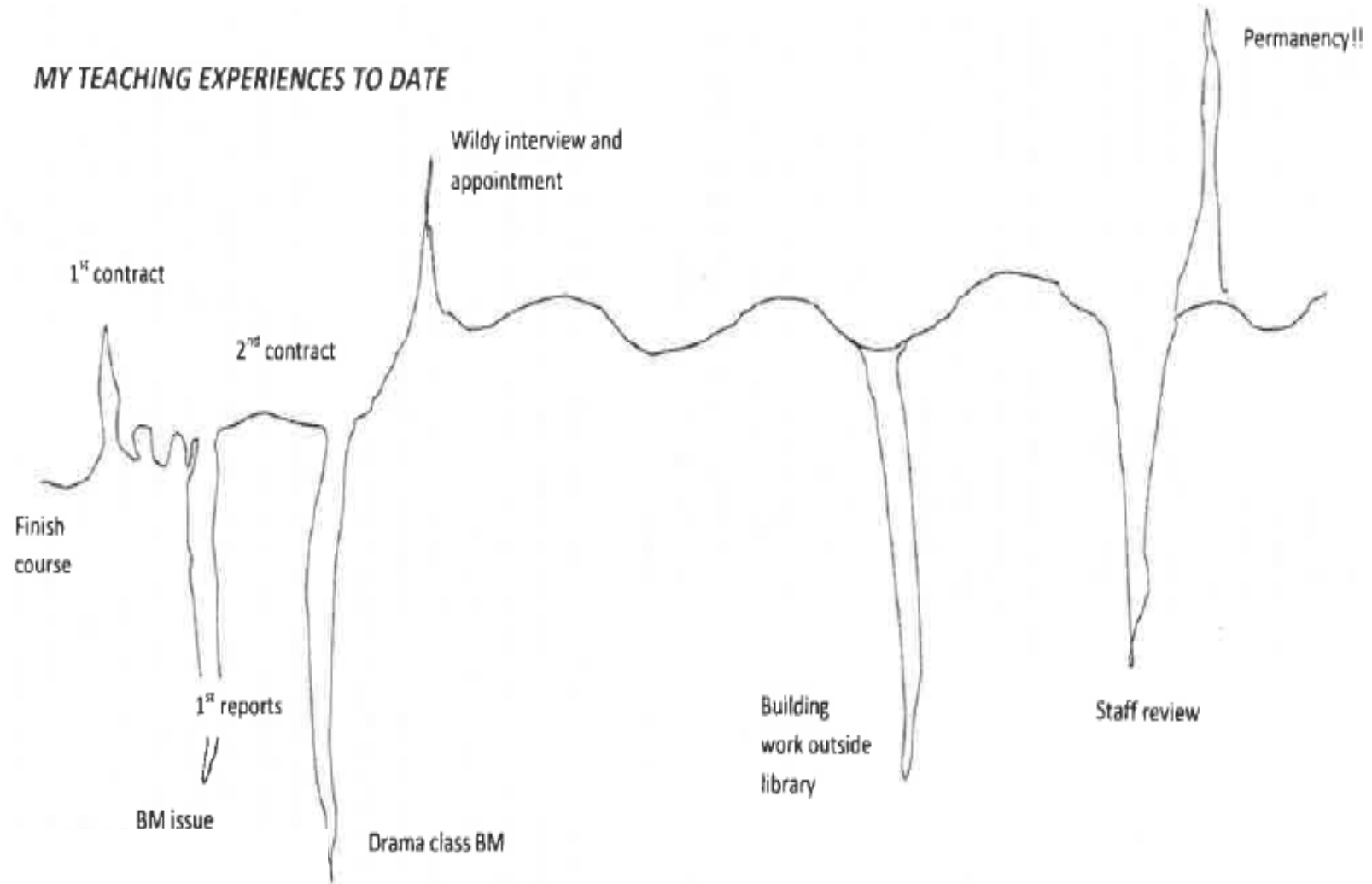
My first year teaching...

Johnson, et al. (2016). *Promoting ECT Resilience* (p. 56). Routledge.

MY TEACHING EXPERIENCES TO DATE

Wildy interview and appointment

1ˢᵗ contract

2ⁿᵈ contract

Permanency!!

Finish course

1ˢᵗ reports

BM issue

Drama class BM

Building work outside library

Staff review

Johnson, et al. (2016). *Promoting ECT Resilience* (p. 57). Routledge.

My teaching experiences so far...

My Teaching Experiences

Johnson, et al. (2016). *Promoting ECT Resilience* (p. 53). Routledge.
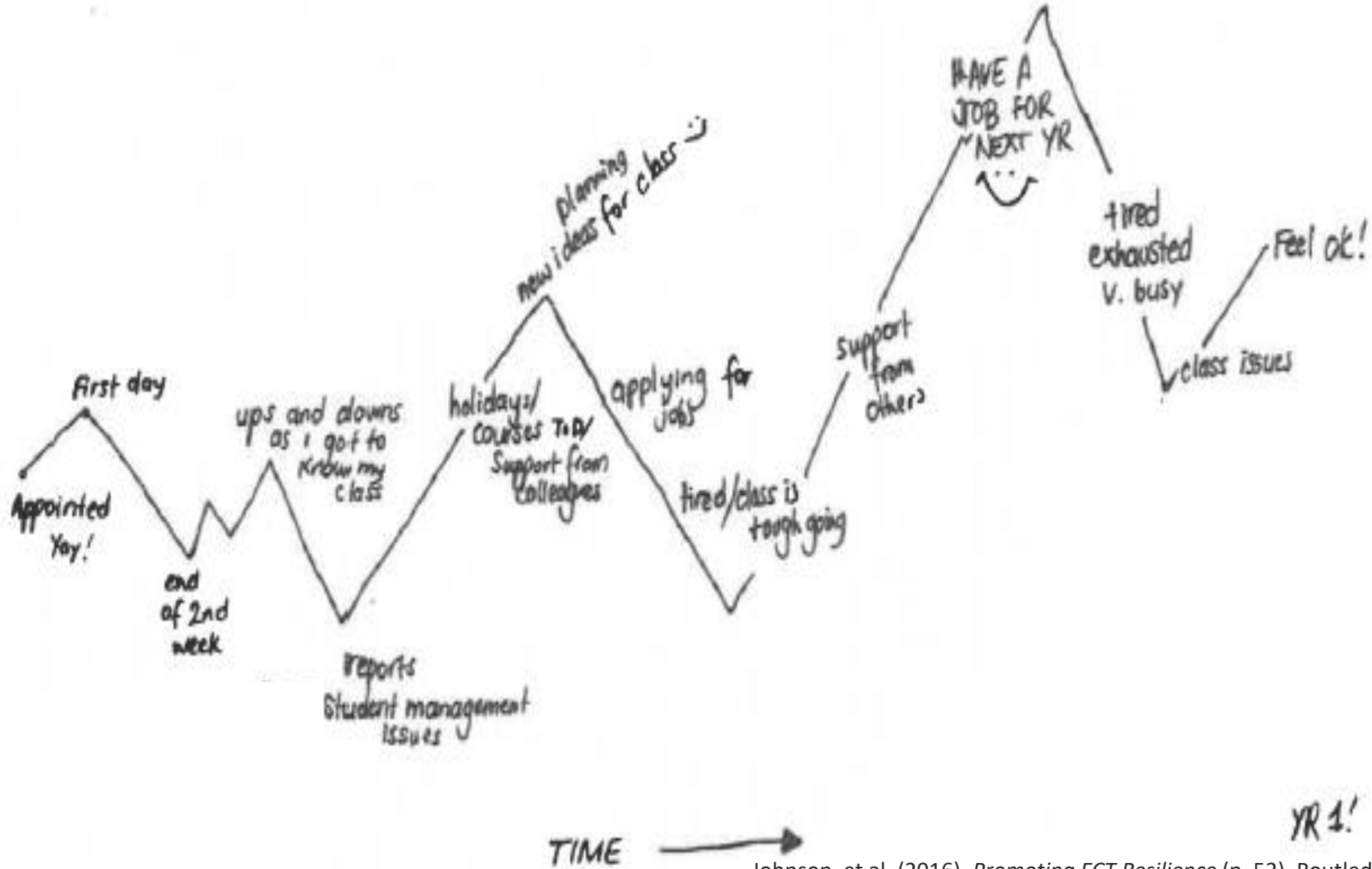
What is resilience?

"a process of, or capacity for, or the outcome of
successful adaptation
despite challenging and threatening circumstances"

(Garmezy & Masten, 1991: 159, emphasis added)

Garmezy, N., & Masten, A. S. (1991). The protective role of competence indicators in children at risk. In E. M. Cummings, A. L. Greene, & K. H. Karraker (Eds.), *Life-span developmental psychology: Perspectives on stress and coping* (pp. 151-174). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Overview of this presentation

I. Early perspectives on resilience

II. Contemporary perspectives on resilience
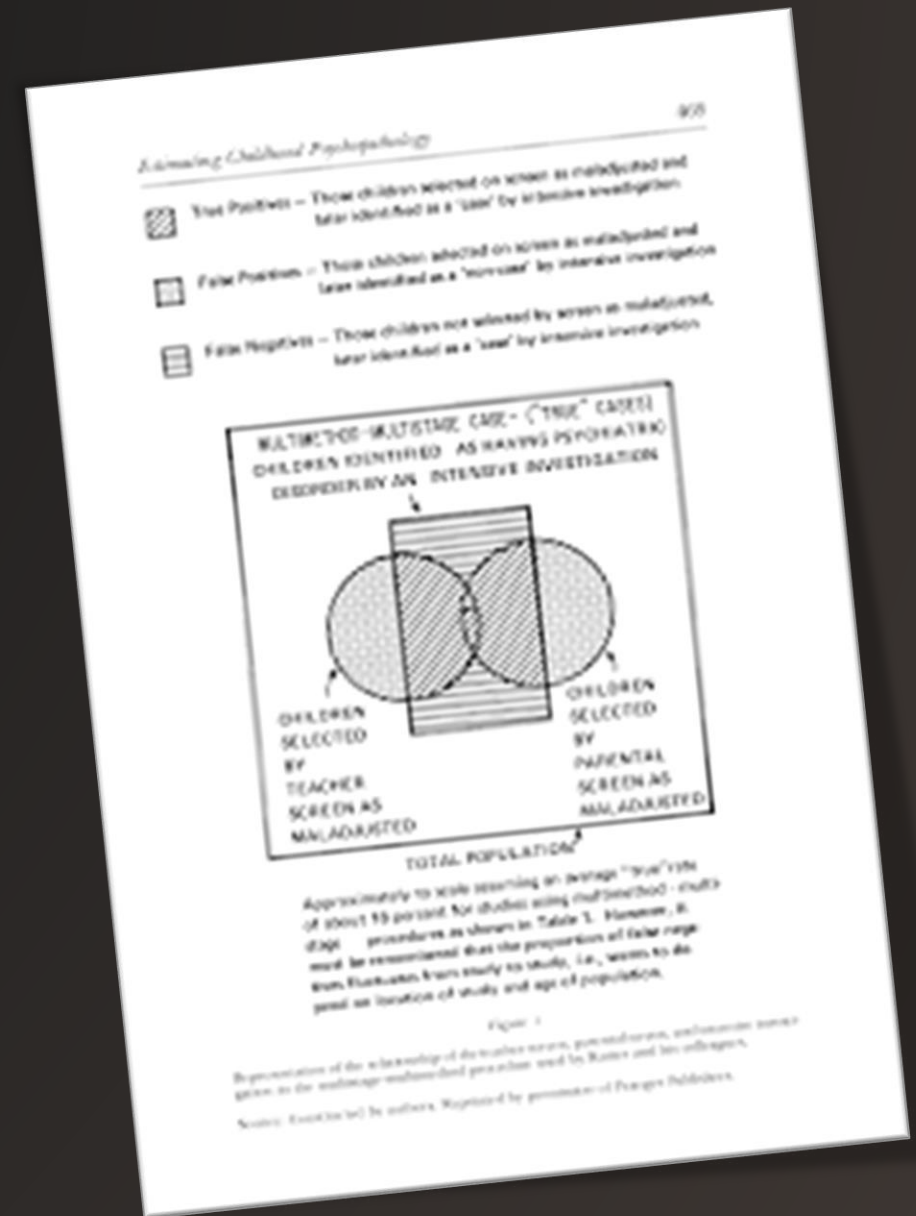
III. A (better?) way forward

Understanding
Supersurvivors

Early perspectives on resilience

Early resilience research

- Studies of people who had faced <u>extreme adversity</u> (e.g., war, exposure to psychopathology during childhood, domestic abuse)

- <u>Aim</u>: to identify people who had 'escaped' the risks, and through them learn about the 'protective' factors or resources that mitigated adversity.

Early resilience studies

Study	Design	Aims / findings
Bleuler (1972/1978)	Longitudinal study of schizophrenics and families	Evidence of resilience
Murphy (1962)	Longitudinal study of 32 infants	Changes in ecology that contribute to mastery of external pressures.
Gottesman & Shields (1972)	Twins and families of schizophrenics	Etiology of schizophrenia, developmental patterns, why some patients move away from the disorder.
Isle of Wight Studies (Rutter, 1976, 1979)	Epidemiological study of children population	While one stressor is not problematic, multiple stressors can have significant likelihood of reducing positive outcome. School acts as a protective factor.
Garmezy (1984)	200 children in US urban environments with health issues	Social competence highlighted as a protective factor
Werner (1992, 1993)	32-year longitudinal study of 660 children	Identified high-risk individuals and investigated their competence in adult life. Identified internal and external protective factors.
Minnesota Risk Research Project (Garmezy, 1991)	Children of parents with schizophrenia	Postulated 'protective' factors.
Benson (1997)	Longitudinal study involving 350,000 students (6th-12th grade)	40 developmental assets (external & internal).

Traits connected to resilience

- Influential person (e.g., teacher / parent) (Hechtman, 1991).
- Strong social orientation (Murphy & Moriatry, 1976)
- Autonomy (Murphy & Moriatry, 1976)
- Close bond with caregiver during first year of life (Werner, 1984)
- Sociability (Werner, 1984)
- Independence (Werner, 1984)
- Support from family & peers (Gonzales & Padilla, 1997)
- Teacher feedback (Gonzales & Padilla, 1997)
- Value placed on school (Gonzales & Padilla, 1997)

- Optimistic outlook / hope (Gillispie et al. 2007; Werner, 1984)
- Intelligence (Alvord & Grados, 2005)
- Connections and attachment (Alvord & Grados, 2005)
- Internal motivation (Masten, 2001)
- Sense of control (Kuterovac-Jagodic, 2003; Gilespie et al. 2007; Regher et al. 2000; Soet, Brack, & Dilorio, 2003)
- Hardiness (Bonanno, 2004)
- Positive emotions (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004; Mancini & Bonanno, 2009)
- Extraversion (Campbell-Sills et al., 2006)
- Spirituality (Bogar & Hulse-Killacky, 2006)
- Self-esteem (Kidd & Shahar, 2008)

- Positive affect (Zautra et al., 2005)
- Self-efficacy (Gillispie et al., 2007; Benard, 2004; Gu & Day, 2007 Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001)
- Coping (Gillispie, et al., 2007)
- Competence (Gillispie et al., 2007)
- Connectedness to social environment/ belonging (Denz-Penhey & Murdoch, 2008; Gonzales & Padilla, 1997)
- Personality (Mancini & Bonanno, 2009)
- *A priori* beliefs (Mancini & Bonanno, 2009)
- Identity complexity (Mancini & Bonanno, 2009)
- Comfort from positive memories (Mancini & Bonanno, 2009)

But how is that helpful?

- If <u>all</u> these factors contribute to resilience, then there is <u>no one</u> factor that is especially useful in predicting successful adaptation.

- Also, many of these factors are <u>static</u> – but how does this account for personality changes over time?

Traits connected to resilience

In language education

Recent years have seen a proliferation of resilience models and resilience-like constructs that draw on this work. These include:

- grit (e.g., Teimuri et al., 2020)
- buoyancy (e.g., Yun et al., 2018)
- hardiness (e.g., Maddi, 2016)
- perseverance (e.g., Kirk Belnap et al., 2016)

These studies are premised on the shared belief that identifying a strength or strategy will somehow reduce student demotivation and/or teacher attrition.

Belnap, R. K., Bown, J., Dewey, D. P., Belnap, L. P., & Steffen, P. R. (2016). Project perseverance: Helping students become self-regulating learners. In T. Gregersen, P. D. MacIntyre, & S. Mercer (Eds.), *Positive psychology in SLA* (pp. 282-302). Multilingual Matters.

Hiver, P. (2016). The triumph over experience: Hope and hardiness in novice L2 teachers. In . Gregersen, P. D. MacIntyre, & S. Mercer, (Eds.), *Positive psychology in SLA* (pp. 168-192). Multilingual Matters.

Teimouri, Y., Plonsky, L., & Tabandeh, F. (2020). L2 grit: Passion and perseverance for second-language learning. *Language Teaching Research*, 1362168820921895.

Yun, S., Hiver, P., & Al-Hoorie, A. (2018). Academic buoyancy: exploring learners' everyday resilience in the language classroom. Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 40(4), 805-830.

Resilience as something we 'have'

- Many of the early studies on resilience reinforced the 'conceptually grievous' (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013: 15) belief that resilience is a relatively stable trait: something (some) people 'have'.

- A corollary of this belief is that some people may <u>not</u> have, or may not be able to develop, resilience.

Fletcher, D. & Sarkar, M. (2013). A review of psychological resilience. *European Psychologist, 18*(1), 12–23.

Rethinking resilience

Since the 2000s, there have been several changes in the way we understand resilience:

1. Emphasis shifts from individual factors to their <u>interaction</u>;

From product to process

Rather than simply studying which child, family, and environmental factors are involved in resilience, researchers are increasingly striving to understand <u>how</u> such factors may contribute to positive outcomes.

(Luthar *et al.*, 2000: 544, original emphasis)

Luthar, S. S., Cicchetti, D., & Becker, B. (2000). The construct of resilience: A critical evaluation and guidelines for future work. *Child development, 71*(3), 543-562.

Rethinking resilience

Since the 2000s, there have been several changes in the way we understand resilience:

1. Emphasis shifts from individual factors to their <u>interaction</u>;

2. Resilience is seen as a <u>process of adaptation</u>, not as an outcome, i.e., something that we 'do', rather than something that we 'have';

3. Resilience is seen as a process relevant <u>to everybody</u> ('ordinary magic'), rather than few 'supersurvivors';

Resilience as 'ordinary magic'

Resilience does not come from rare or special qualities, but from the operations of ordinary human systems […] from their relationships in the family and community, and from schools, religions, cultures and other aspects of societies.

(Masten et al., 2009: 129)

Masten, A. S., Cutuli, J. J., Herbers, J. E., & Reed, J. M.-G. (2009). Resilience in development. In S. J. Lopez. & C. R. Snyder (Eds). *The Oxford handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 117–312). OUP.

Rethinking resilience

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3. Resilience is seen as a process relevant <u>to everybody</u> ('ordinary magic'), rather than few 'supersurvivors';

4. <u>Low-level but persistent stressors</u> should be included in the concept of risk, alongside catastrophic events.

The challenge we faced

Can we develop an understanding
of resilience
that is relevant to language education?

Why do we need a domain-specific theory of resilience for language teaching?

1. Many teachers are consistently exposed to stressors that are easy to overlook (e.g., language anxiety, performance assessment)

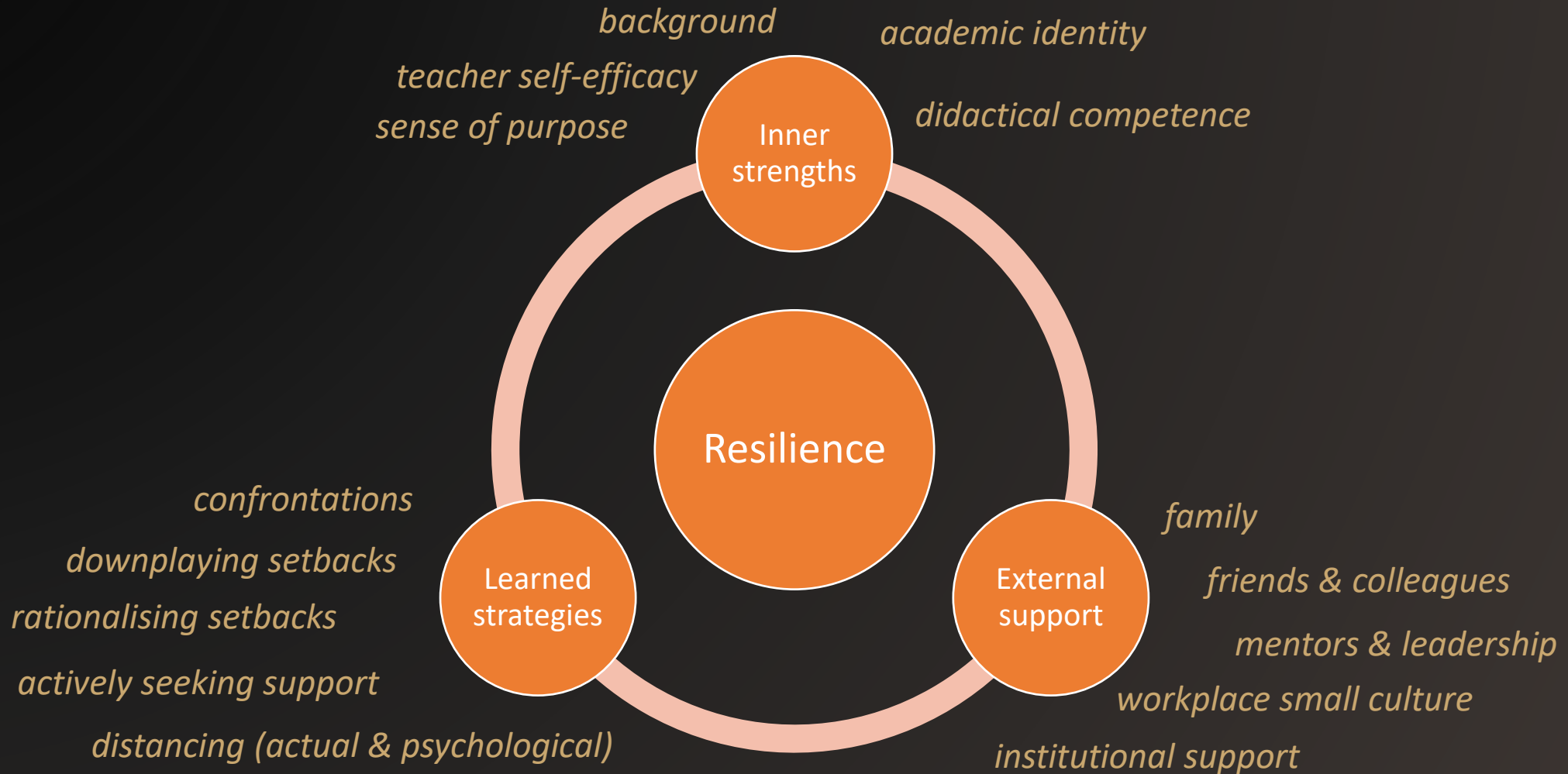   *(sustained competence, rather than recovery)*

2. Teachers have access to different kinds of resources than 'supersurvivors'

3. The processes that make someone a more resilient person are not always the same processes that make us better teachers.

A model for language teacher resilience

- The image depicts a <u>resilience system</u>, a complex dynamic system that we suggest is common to all people.
- The system consists of three <u>nodes</u>:
  a. Inner strengths
  b. External support structures
  c. Learnt strategies
- The nodes are deliberately <u>underspecified</u>: they likely differ from person to person.
- Emphasis is on their <u>interconnections</u>, i.e., the lines connecting the nodes.
- Resilience is an <u>emergent outcome</u> of this interaction.

Kostoulas, A. & Lämmerer, A. (2017). Making the transition into teacher education: Resilience as a process of growth. In S. Mercer & A. Kostoulas (Eds), *Language Teacher Psychology*. Multilingual Matters.

An example:

background

academic identity

teacher self-efficacy

sense of purpose

didactical competence

Inner strengths

Resilience

confrontations

downplaying setbacks

rationalising setbacks

actively seeking support

distancing (actual & psychological)

Learned strategies

External support

family

friends & colleagues

mentors & leadership

workplace small culture

institutional support

Kostoulas, A. & Lämmerer, A. (2017). Making the transition into teacher education: Resilience as a process of growth. In S. Mercer & A. Kostoulas (Eds), *Language Teacher Psychology*. Multilingual Matters.
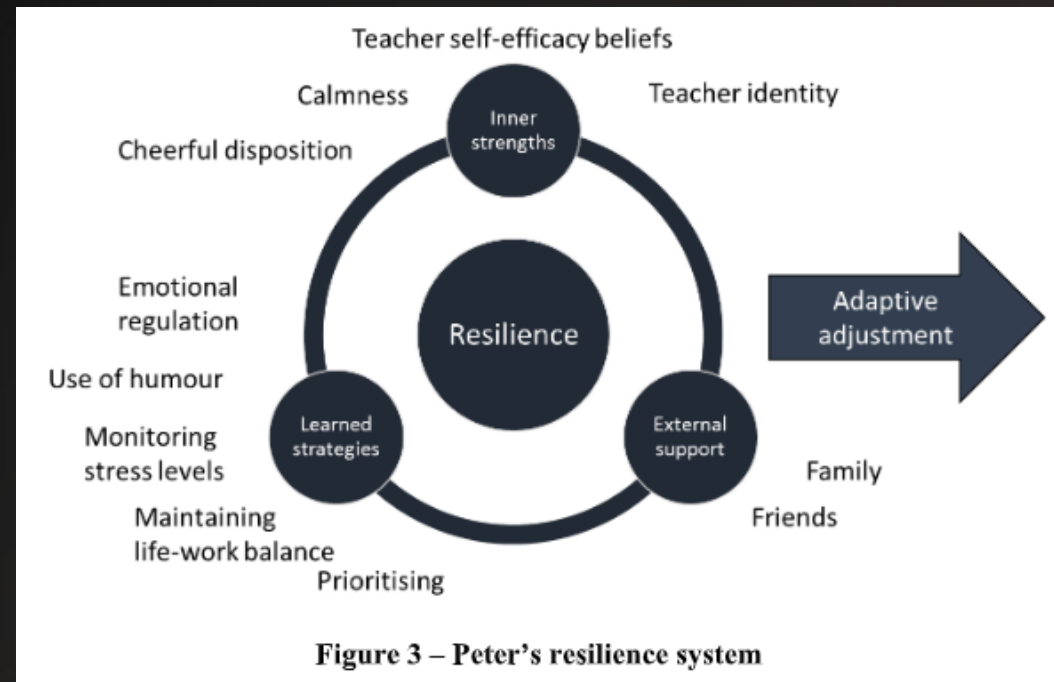
Language teacher immunity

- "a coalition of factors including resilience (…) teaching efficacy, motivation to teach, psychological well-being, and openness to change".

- Typified by "the dual nature of the protective configuration developed—at times, serving a necessary armoring purpose, but at others, threatening the very functioning of the individual by mounting resistance to change"

Hiver, P. & Dörnyei, Z. (2017). Language teacher immunity: A double-edged sword. *Applied Linguistics, 38*(3), 405-423.
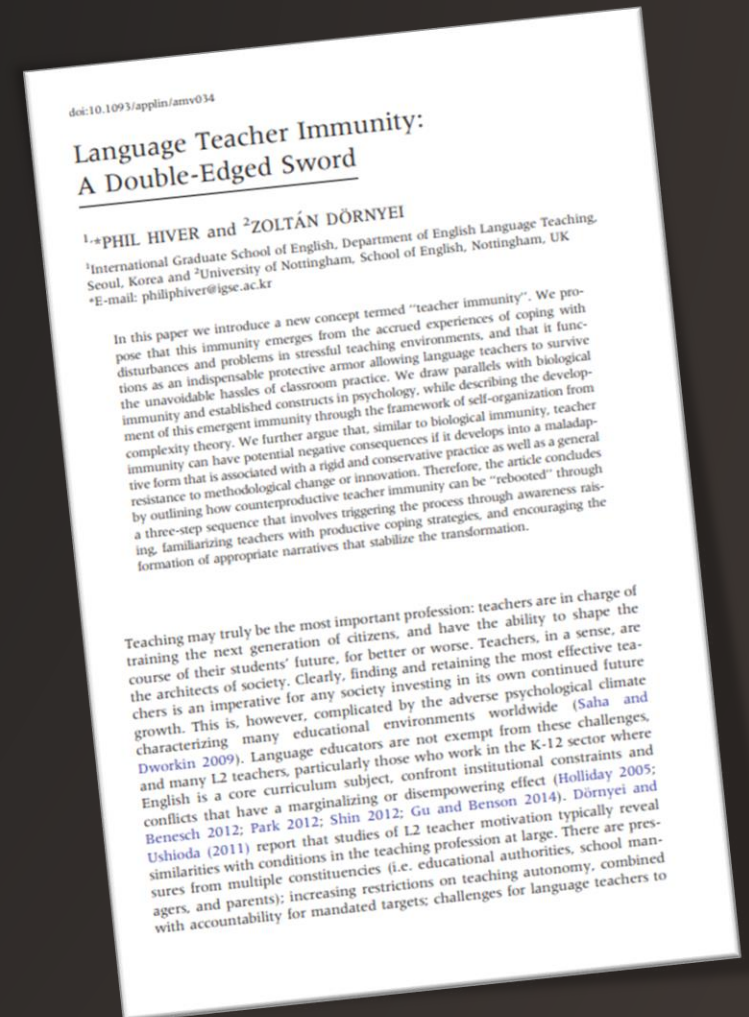
Adaptive and maladaptive adjustment

Adaptive adjustment

Figure 3 – Peter's resilience system

Kostoulas, A. & Lämmerer, A. (2020). Resilience in language teaching: Adaptive and maladaptive outcomes in pre-service teachers. In C. Gkonou, J. King, & J.-M. Dewaele (eds.), *The emotional rollercoaster of language teaching* (pp. 89-110). Multilingual Matters.

Maladaptive Adjustment

Figure 4 – John's resilience system
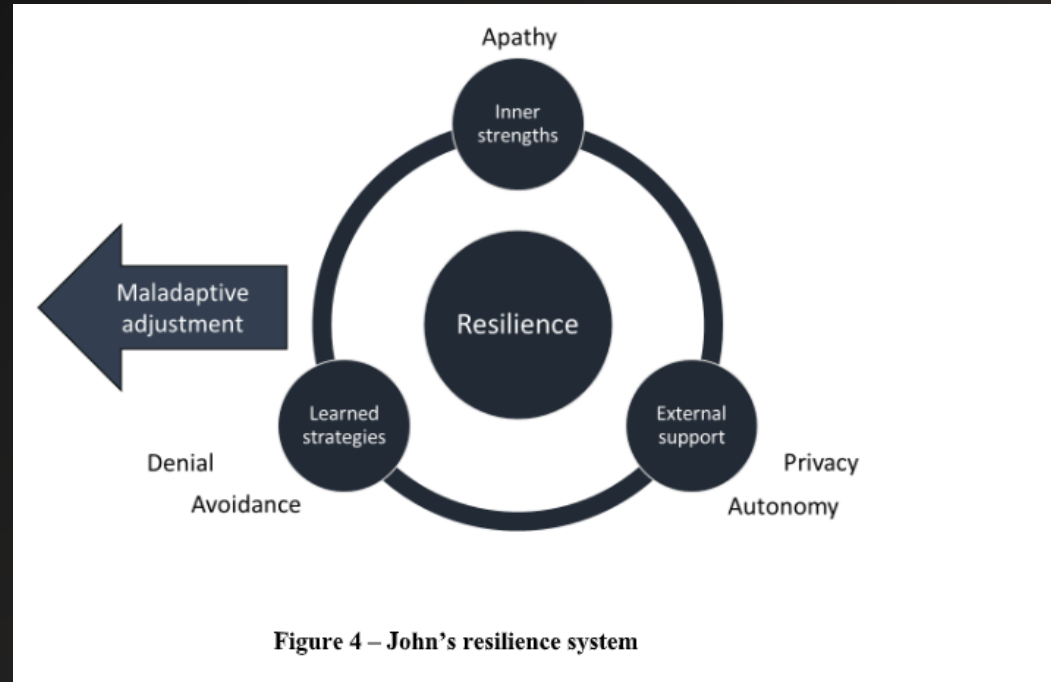
Kostoulas, A. & Lämmerer, A. (2020). Resilience in language teaching: Adaptive and maladaptive outcomes in pre-service teachers. In C. Gkonou, J. King, & J.-M. Dewaele (eds.), *The emotional rollercoaster of language teaching* (pp. 89-110). Multilingual Matters.

Rethinking our resilience work

- The key takeaway from Kostoulas & Lämmerer (2020) is that it is possible to be (or become) a very resilient person, and at the same time to develop a personality that is <u>incompatible</u> with being a good teacher.

- While individuals should strive for anything that makes them more resilient, language teacher psychology should foster those traits, strategies and support structures that (also) make a person a <u>better teacher</u>.

Some more issues to rethink

- To what extent has our resilience work been unhelpfully emphasising the 'separate self' (Jordan, 2013)?

- Is resilience research being confused with positive psychology, and its unrealistic expectations for sustained positivity (van Deurzen, 2009)?

- Is resilience research being (ab)used to encourage over-reliance on individual forms of coping, as opposed to social support structures (Wong & Roy, 2018)?

Jordan J. V. (2013). Relational resilience in girls. In S. Goldstein S. & R. Brooks (eds), *Handbook of resilience in children* (pp. 73-86). Springer.

van Deurzen, E. (2009). *Psychotherapy and the quest for happiness*. SAGE.

Wong, P. T. P. & Roy, S. (2018). Critique of positive psychology and positive interventions. In N. J. L. Brown, T. Lomas, & F. J. Eiroa-Orosa (eds), *The Routledge international handbook of critical positive psychology* (pp. 142–160). Routledge.

Resilience for ELT

From individual teachers to communities

The COVID-19 pandemic

- Technical and pedagogical challenges forced us to question our self-efficacy beliefs

- Social & professional support structures were overburdened and /or disrupted

- Existing experience was less relevant, resulting in feelings of inadequacy and disorientation

A new challenge

Can we develop an understanding of resilience that makes us
collectively readier
as a professional community to cope with adversity?

Beyond individual teachers

"rather than tinker with individual-level capacities to cope,
we must change the society-level odds
stacked against individuals
that block their opportunities to achieve a better future"

Southwick, S. M., Bonanno, G. A., Masten, A. S., Panter-Brick, C. & Yehuda, R. (2014). Resilience definitions, theory, and challenges: interdisciplinary perspectives. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology, 5*(1), doi: 10.3402/ejpt.v5.25338

Becoming more connected

A relational-cultural perspective (Jordan, 2013: 82) on resilience suggests us that:

"we grow through
and toward connection"

This serves as a reminder that in our professional lives, too, reinforcing relationships can be as important as developing individual strengths.

Jordan J. V. (2013). Relational resilience in girls. In S. Goldstein S. & R. Brooks (eds), *Handbook of resilience in children* (pp. 73-86). Springer.

Being connected

Being intentional

Being courageous

Building meaningful relationships

Some suggestions (Jordan, 2013: 83) about being more connected include:

- Being open about vulnerability

- Being empathic

- Having relational confidence

- Having relational awareness

Relational resilience means developing the ability to "the ability to connect, reconnect, and/or resist disconnection" (*ibid.*)

Jordan J. V. (2013). Relational resilience in girls. In S. Goldstein S. & R. Brooks (eds), *Handbook of resilience in children* (pp. 73-86). Springer.

Becoming more intentional

In Stelma and Kostoulas (2021) we note that a lot of activity in ELT is either <u>contingent</u> (i.e., it happens without much deliberate thought) or <u>normative</u> (i.e., it is influenced by institutional tradition).

Contingent and normative activity
are highly vulnerable
to disruption

We suggest that intentional activity, i.e., activity that is planned and purposeful, generates professional structures that are more flexible and more robust.

Stelma, J. & Kostoulas, A. (2021). *The intentional dynamics of TESOL.* De Gruyter.

Engaging in intentional activity

Building on Stelma & Kostoulas (2021) the following guidelines seem useful for becoming an agent of positive change in ELT:

- <u>Everything is connected</u>: Being attuned to all the activity in, and around, the language classroom;

- <u>Everything can be improved</u>: Actively experiment with change and monitor effects (e.g., Action Research, Exploratory Practice);

- <u>Everything has consequences</u>: Be thoughtful of how our actions can change our professional context.

Stelma, J. & Kostoulas, A. (2021). *The intentional dynamics of TESOL.* De Gruyter.

Developing professional courage

A key characteristic of the educational response to COVID-19 was the courage to improvise, in the absence of institutional support.

Courage is the capacity to mobilise internal and external resources in order to overcome a challenge, in conditions that cause fear and / or hesitation.

Professional courage makes it possible to imagine, and eventually enact, different and potentially better ways of professional being.

Jordan J. V. (2013). Relational resilience in girls. In S. Goldstein S. & R. Brooks (eds), *Handbook of resilience in children* (pp. 73-86). Springer.

Being connected

Being intentional

Being courageous

Fostering professional courage

Thinking about the COVID pandemic:

What was one thing you did,
which you had not thought possible?

How has that made you feel?

What has that made you think about yourselves?

Changing perspectives on resilience

Something that (some) people 'have'

Something all teachers 'do'

Something that we (should) all do together

Restarting ELT as a resilient profession

- ❖ Be connected
- ❖ Be intentional
- ❖ Be courageous