Recovering from adversity:

How can we rebuild English Language Teaching as a resilient profession?

Plenary talk (to be) delivered at the 10th ELT Malta Conference "Celebrating Resilience"

9th October 2021

Abstract

As we tentatively return to a sense of normalcy after the COVID-19 pandemic, this talk problematizes what 'resilient adaptation' might mean in the context of ELT. Although resilience is not a new concept in our professional discourse, the pandemic is now forcing us to consider troublesome questions, including: 'Are all ways of understanding resilience equally helpful for language teachers?', 'Are individualistic definitions of resilience still relevant to what can only be a collective process of recovery?' and 'How might we make our professional community more resilient for the future?' To answer these questions, this talk will provide a brief overview of resilience scholarship in ELT. We will cover early work, which conceptualized resilience as a psychological trait, i.e., *something that (certain) people have*. Following that, we will turn to more contemporary perspectives, re-defining resilience as a process of adaptation to adversity, i.e., *something that we all do*. This discussion will foreground the role of social context (e.g., teacher associations, legislation, mentors) in supporting resilience; and it will also set the frame for problematizing potentially unhelpful ways in which resilience research is being co-opted to promote individualistic understandings of ELT. This discussion will provide us with a springboard for taking the definition of resilience one step further, as *something that we all must do together*. I propose that resilient action in ELT involves rethinking a number of the ways in which we view ourselves, our roles as teachers, and our professional action, and adopting a professional stance that is inclusive, intentional, and meaningful.

Short Bio

Achilleas Kostoulas teaches applied linguistics and language education courses at the University of Thessaly (Greece). Previous affiliations include the Universities of Manchester (UK) and Graz (Austria). He holds a PhD in Education and an MA in TESOL from the University of Manchester, and a BA in English Studies from the University of Athens. He also has considerable experience teaching English in a variety of private and state contexts in Greece. He has done some pioneering work in the psychology of language teaching and learning, including the publication –with Sarah Mercer– of *Language Teacher Psychology* (2018, Multilingual Matters, and *The Intentional Dynamics of TESOL* (2021, De Gruyter; with Juup Stelma). He is the author *A Language School as a Complex System* (2018, Peter Lang) and the editor of *Challenging Boundaries in Language Education* (2019, Springer).

Developing resilience as a language teacher: Focusing on teacher strengths

Proposal for a workshop (to be) delivered at the 10th ELT Malta Conference "Celebrating Resilience"

9th October 2021

Abstract

Language teaching has always been associated with inordinate demands on time, lack of autonomy, and organizational uncertainty, all of which can adversely impact the wellbeing of teachers. These challenges have been exacerbated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has necessitated a rapid adaptation of teaching practices, while removing structure and well-being support resources. This workshop aims to help teachers identify and develop their personal strengths as a means to counteract such adversity. In the workshop we will look into what resilience is, drawing on insights from fields outside education, and we will discuss their relevance to language teaching. Next, we will conduct hands on activities to collaboratively explore strategies for fostering resilience, with particular reference to the experience and strengths of language teachers.