A Conceptual Model for Teacher Trainee Well-being: Challenges and Resources in an Ecological System

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Introduction

This poster outlines the development of a conceptual framework, based on the findings from initial data collection investigating well-being in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) (Thompson et al., 2020; Quickfall, Clarke and Thompson, 2021). In England there are sustained and significant issues in both teacher recruitment and retention (Perryman and Calvert, 2020, Worth, 2022), making this research pertinent.
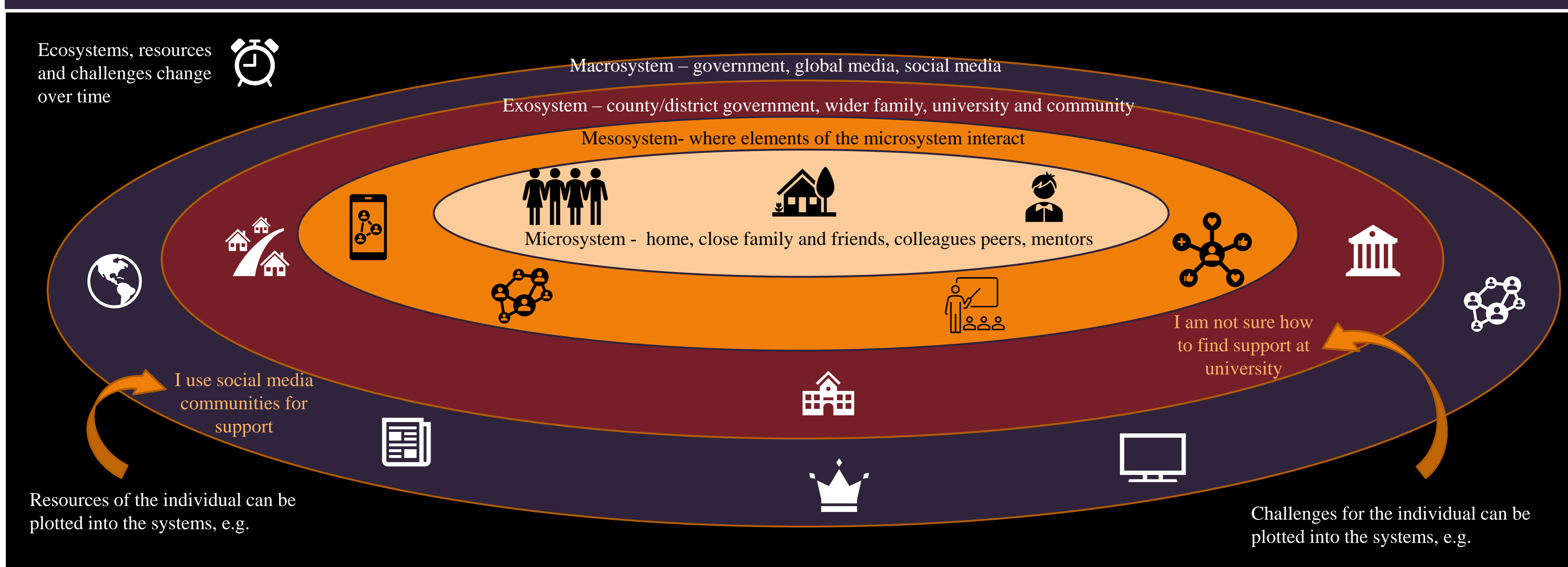
Studies on teachers' well-being are growing in number but tend to focus on factors which lead to stress and poor well-being, rather than those that support or promote health (Roffey, 2012). Studies have highlighted how teacher well-being affects teaching, student motivation and retention, and that issues related to well-being are one of the most cited factors for leaving the profession (Collie, Shapka,

Perry and Martin, 2015; Ofsted, 2019). Research on supporting and developing well-being for children in schools is growing, and government policies and publications have more recently highlighted this as an area of focus (DfE, 2018). However there remains a paucity of research into well-being for trainee teachers at a time when the recruitment crisis and mentor capacity in schools is far from resolved (Worth, 2022).

DEFINING WELL-BEING: One of the key hurdles in explicitly defining the 'elusive' (Ortega-Alcázar and Dyck, 2012) concept of well-being is that it is not a discrete entity but rather multi-factorial and multi-dimensional (Dodge et al., 2012; Masters, 2004). There are many well-being scales and indices, providing tools to monitor and evaluate well-being but much

research draws on quantitative data (for example; Compare and Grossi, 2014; Tennant et al., 2007). As there a remains a paucity of research into well-being in ITE we were conscious that existing quantitative data collection methods may be reductive and narrow responses from our participants. It was felt important to remain sensitive to capturing the lived experiences of trainees. With this in mind, we have used Dodge et al.'s model of well-being, as a balance of resources and challenges which is constantly in flux. Resources can be physical, psychological, emotional, external, experiential – and so can challenges. For example, a parent who is a teacher could be considered a resource. It could also be considered a challenge, for different reasons or at different times.

The Model

Ecosystems, resources and challenges change over time

Macrosystem – government, global media, social media

Exosystem – county/district government, wider family, university and community

Mesosystem- where elements of the microsystem interact

Microsystem - home, close family and friends, colleagues peers, mentors

I use social media communities for support

I am not sure how to find support at university

Resources of the individual can be plotted into the systems, e.g.

Challenges for the individual can be plotted into the systems, e.g.

Following on from an extensive European pilot and rounds of data collection, we created a conceptual model incorporating Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979). Bronfenbrenner theorised that an individual's world can be described as an ecological system, where different and complex groups of people, objects, events and ideas interact to influence how we develop and behave (Ashiabi and O'Neal, 2015). Bronfenbrenner placed the individual at the centre of a system and advocated a complex view of the world in order to understand challenges and experiences. This aims to gain an increasingly holistic overview of where the resources trainees draw on to support their well-being are

based in their ecological system, and where the challenges they experience are situated. This will support trainee reflection on their individual well-being as well as structural and/or systemic changes to policy and practice as themes emerge.

First, students are introduced to the idea that their world can be visualised as an ecosystem, with different systems. These vary between individuals, for example, some students may include a religious community in their microsystem and their faith as a resource, whilst others would plot religion in the macrosystem. This makes an interesting discussion and introduces Bronfenbrenner's model as a tool for

considering children's life experience and unique view of the world, too.

Once resources and challenges are plotted across systems, there is an opportunity to spot patterns and reflect on the well-being ecosystem as a whole. The model demonstrates the complexity of well-being and there are no 'easy fixes' or particular patterns that point to solutions – but the action of plotting and reflecting on one's own well-being can provide time and space to identify interesting features, appreciate resources (particularly strengths of the individual and the community) and inform how we react when things change.

Practical Applications

We recommend the use of this model with teacher trainees, allowing them to analyse their own resources and challenges first. We used an adapted 'see-saw' diagram (Dodge et al., (2012, see Thompson et al., 2020 for an example). The process of using the model encourages students to think about the areas of their life where their challenges come from and impact upon, and where their resources are. They can then begin to draw their own conclusions about where they may need more support.

For example, one student mapped most challenges in her microsystem, whilst her resources were individual and in the exosytem. She began to think of ways she could redeploy those resources by sharing her personal challenges with trusted university tutors, who she counted as a major resource for her well-being.

This model and analysis could also be used with experienced practitioners, or in consideration of child well-being (young children were Bronfenbrenner's original focus). Identifying where your resources and challenges sit, and where your support and safety are, may not remove the challenges but this could be a tool in the kit for reflecting on teacher training and other life experiences.

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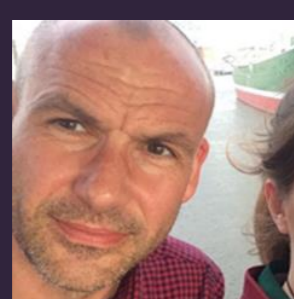
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