Teacher resilience in a period of transition: a case study of a language teacher trainer in a university context

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Despite increasing interest in teacher psychology, much empirical work to date has been fragmented, and has often tended to study psychological constructs and their behavioural manifestations in de-contextualised ways. By contrast, the interconnections between psychological traits, and the ways in which they relate to the ecologies of language education are not yet well understood. This presentation reports on an instrumental case study that examined the psychology of a language teacher at a time of transition in her career from a holistic perspective, in order to develop an understanding how personality traits and affordances in her professional context interacted to produce psychological phenomena. Anna, the participant of this study, recently began working as a teacher trainer at a university, having worked previously for several years as a secondary school language teacher. By drawing on data from retrospective interviews, in which Anna reflected on her first semester as a university lecturer, I will show how she was able to adjust to the challenges of her new professional role by drawing on psychological traits (e.g., self-efficacy beliefs), and on contextual factors (e.g., peer support). It will be argued that the interplay of these factors led to the emergence of Anna’s resilience, defined as her ability to adjust to changing and potentially adverse circumstances. It will be further suggested that her resilience was mediated by aspects of her psychology; and that it was associated with the development of a strong academic identity. Using the findings of the study as a starting point, a contextual conceptualisation of resilience will be put forward, in which resilience will be described as a situated psychological construct that emerges from the transactions of individuals with their environment, and recursively influences their psychology.

Keywords: teacher psychology, resilience, teacher education.