

Chapter 4

Building Resilience for Early Years Teachers



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Abstract Working in Early Childhood Education and Care presents particular demands for teachers' resilience. Helping pre-service teachers to explore strategies to respond to challenges in the supportive learning environment of pre-service learning is important to building strength and resilience for teachers' careers. In this endeavour, the BRiTE (Building Resilience in Teacher Education) online modules have been integrated across an Early Years degree at the University of Wollongong, Australia. Students complete one or more modules in relevant subjects, with the full suite of modules completed twice in the course of their degree. Integration in subjects includes activities responding to, or building on knowledge from a module. Ongoing research has involved interviewing students about challenges in their progress, and ways the BRiTE modules have assisted them in responding to these challenges. This has shown the value our students see in BRiTE, and has helped us to regularly monitor and make changes to the links between the modules and subjects in the degree.

Keywords Resilience · Early years/early childhood education and care · Professional learning

4.1 Quality Early Childhood Education and Care and the Role of the Educator

The role of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has shifted from a focus on 'care' as a means to support female or maternal workforce participation to the role of 'early education' in supporting children's short- and long-term development

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(Baker et al. 2008; Yoshikawa et al. 2013). The national and international evidence for the impact of high-quality ECEC is compelling. Participation in high-quality ECEC programmes has been shown repeatedly to be beneficial for children's current and future learning potential, promoting a lifelong solid and broad foundation for learning and wellbeing (Melhuish et al. 2015; O'Connell et al. 2016; Siraj et al. 2017). This is particularly the case for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Ruhm and Waldfogel 2012; Siraj-Blatchford 2004), with research strongly indicating that ECEC has the potential to ameliorate the effects of poverty in the short term and improve children's future prospects in the long term (Melhuish et al. 2015; Siraj and Kingston 2015).

A setting's quality depends on many process and structural variables, and the relationships between these and a well-educated high-quality workforce are not straightforward (Siraj and Kingston 2015). Despite the complexity in these relationships, the educator's role (with reference to all staff, that is, certificate, diploma and degree qualified) is the one factor which remains fundamental to quality practice. When it comes to quality practice, educators matter! Improving the quality of ECEC and learning outcomes for children demands a highly skilled educator—one who is capable of sound decision-making, while engaging in reflective and responsive practice and instruction (Cooke and Lawton 2008; Siraj and Kingston 2015). Positive and secure adult-child relationships are central to high-quality pedagogy (Howes et al. 2008; O'Connell et al. 2016; Pianta et al. 2007) and underpin educators' capacity to engage young children in meaningful learning experiences (Siraj et al. 2017).

Despite this growing awareness around educator effectiveness, many large-scale studies of ECEC suggest that too few educators have the necessary skills and knowledge to provide optimal environments to support young children's development (see Siraj et al. 2018). Strengthening the early childhood workforce is now a priority in many countries (Hamre et al. 2017; Ishimine et al. 2010; Siraj and Kingston 2015). High staff turnover is a strong indicator of reduced quality in ECEC (OECD 2013; Siraj et al. 2017). Low wages coupled with the low status of early childhood practitioners is a major contributor to this high turnover, which, in turn, has significant impact on ECEC quality (O'Connell et al. 2016). High staff turnover mitigates against the development of stable, secure attachments between children and educators (Whitebook et al. 2014). It also leads to repetitive loss of 'in-house' knowledge that hinders relationships on many levels. For example, high staff turnover causes disconnect between home and the educational context, which is associated with children's language, self-help and social, motor, adaptive and basic skills (Marcon 1999). This lack of consistency impacts negatively on children's social, emotional and language development.

Although there is wide recognition that a qualified workforce is key to ensuring high-quality ECEC, educators continue to experience instances of being underpaid, having low status, a lack of career options and inadequate professional learning opportunities. Working conditions affect quality as educators who find their work environments pleasant, supportive and a place where they are valued, are more likely to engage in stimulating interactions with children, and to perform better in

various roles and responsibilities that are everyday responsibilities for ECEC educators (Burchinal et al. 2002; Huntsman 2008). For example, Whitebook et al. (2014) and Goelman et al. (2006) found that wages influence all aspects of quality, including retention, the value placed on the educator's role, commitment to increasing qualifications and access to professional development. The OECD (2013) reinforces that the context and conditions in which staff work are strongly related to stable, sensitive and stimulating interactions with children. Yet research continues to document that the profession experiences burnout (Barford and Whelton 2010), a dissonance between job description and actual practices (Lee and Brotheridge 2011), issues related to relationships with colleagues (Cumming 2016) and working alongside professionals from other disciplines, including intervention services.

4.2 Fostering Resilience and Growth in the Early Childhood Profession

A key factor contributing to the quality of ECEC to strengthening educator pre-service and in-service professional learning is the quality of its workforce, including levels of qualification and education (ACECQA 2012; Lee and Brotheridge 2011; Nolan et al. 2014; Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2006; Sumsion et al. 2015; Temple and Emmett 2013). More specifically, variations in educator pedagogy and practice have been linked to the quality of professional learning to which educators are exposed, with professional learning encompassing both pre-service and in-service education platforms (Siraj and Kingston 2015). Professional learning impacts directly on pedagogy and practice within the classroom, and, specifically, on the learning opportunities and experiences offered to the children (Blau 2000; de Kruif et al. 2000; Phillipsen et al. 1997). The growing body of research around educator wellbeing and the ensuing impact on educator effectiveness underscores the need for a broader view of teacher preparation and the provision of professional learning, one that extends beyond a curriculum and content focus to include wellness promotion for teachers (Hall-Kenyon et al. 2014; Whitaker et al. 2013).

For the individual ECEC educator, there is evidence of poor physical and mental health (Corr et al. 2014, 2015; Faulkner et al. 2016; Laletas et al. 2017; Tansey 2008) and risk of burnout (Ammendolia et al. 2016; Ben-Zur and Michael 2007; Seti 2007). In her early work, Sumsion (2003; 2004) focused on individual resilience and career commitment, and the importance of personal qualities, contextual features and the interplay between them. The works of Gu and Day (2013) and Gu and Li (2013) attended to the ways in which teachers can be supported in terms of resilience, as individuals interact with the contexts in which they live. In Australia, a national initiative, KidsMatter Early Childhood, focused on and promoted children's mental health and wellbeing aiming to provide a continuous service development framework to promote protective factors, provide extra support where required and, when appropriate, facilitate early referral to external agencies. This was integrated into

the programme *Be You* in 2018 together with KidsMatter Primary and MindMatters and has drawn attention to the importance of professional resilience for early years educators. A study as part of the Start Well Project likewise identified resilience as important to maximise the social and emotional wellbeing of early childhood educators (Bennett et al. 2016).

In alignment with the intention of the BRiTE (Building Resilience in Teacher Education) project (Mansfield et al. 2016) (see also Chap. 3), we believe teacher education programmes have a role in assisting beginning teachers to develop their capacity for resilience. The following sections describe one approach to improving educator resilience within the context of an integrated pre-service professional learning platform.

4.3 The Early Years at the University of Wollongong

The Bachelor of Education—The Early Years degree focuses on the significance of early education (from birth to five years) to foster children’s health, development and wellbeing, giving them the opportunity to maximise their potential and develop a foundation for lifelong learning. Course content is designed to support pre-service teachers’ understanding of the role of high-quality early childhood education and care within local and global contexts, along with the role of effective pedagogy and practice to improve the lives of young children and their families. Students are supported to understand children as learners within and beyond the early educational context, and to understand their role as reflective practitioners with expert knowledge and the ability to impact children, families and the broader community.

The course learning outcomes acknowledge the diverse and dynamic nature of contemporary education and are aligned with Australian Curriculum specifications, incorporating appropriate content within subjects that are aligned with the Australian Quality Framework (AQF). Subjects within the programme are sequenced to build early childhood pre-service teachers’ knowledge, expertise and understanding, as well as their capacity to facilitate effective learning experiences that generate evidence of student learning. Professional development subjects form the ‘spine’ of the degree, integrated with diverse curriculum subjects that systematically build students’ knowledge, teaching capabilities and professional identities.

The degree structure also incorporates the Professional Partners in Practice (PPP) programme, a uniquely designed mentoring programme that complements the academic and professional experience components of the degree. The PPP programme supports pre-service teachers to build connections, professional capacity and resilience, and promotes the development of mentoring relationships at all levels.

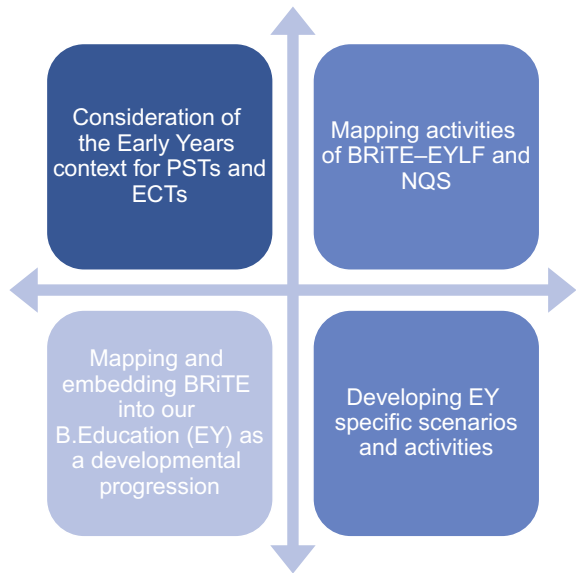
Common to many pre-service early childhood teaching degrees, the University of Wollongong (UOW) cohort is diverse, consisting of school leavers, diploma-qualified students (working in Early Childhood Education and Care [ECEC] services), mature age, rural, remote and international students. Students’ understanding and expectations are equally diverse, with many entering the degree with a romanticised view of

early childhood education and who may be challenged by the myths versus realistic expectations of the role. Upon graduation, individuals may enter into a leadership role, assuming responsibility for their team as the highest qualified but not necessarily the most experienced member. The appointment of graduates into leadership roles early within their career trajectory presents unique challenges, with research showing many graduates feel ill-equipped for these demanding roles (Irvine et al. 2016).

4.4 Contextualising BRiTE to the Early Childhood Educational Context

In order to bring BRiTE to the early childhood context, the authors, working alongside and including the early childhood academic team, determined a priority to ensure their students felt their voices, needs and practices were embedded within the modules. In contextualising the content, the following aspects, as shown in Fig. 4.1, were considered for our pre-service teachers (PSTs) as they enter the profession as early career teachers (ECTs).

Fig. 4.1 Our approach to contextualisation of BRiTE content for early childhood pre-service teachers



4.4.1 Mapping Against the EYLF

A mapping of the BRiTE content against Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF) (Department of Education, Employment and Workforce Relations (DEEWR) 2009) had been undertaken during the development of the BRiTE modules as a means of providing a connection to the ECEC context. The five principles within the EYLF reflect contemporary theories and research evidence concerning children’s learning and early childhood pedagogy, and underpin the practices that focus on assisting all children to make progress in relation to learning outcomes, including their transition to school.

- **Principle 1:** Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
- **Principle 2:** Partnerships (focus on families and support professionals)
- **Principle 3:** High expectations and equity
- **Principle 4:** Respect for diversity
- **Principle 5:** Ongoing learning and reflective practice (build professional knowledge and develop learning communities).

The EYLF emphasises that all children are born ‘*belonging*’ to a culture, which is not only influenced by traditional practices, heritage and ancestral knowledge but also by the experiences, values and beliefs of individual families and communities—developing their ‘*being*’ and ‘*becoming*’. The EYLF recognises children’s right to ‘*be*’ (connected to their sense of identity, agency and resilience) which assists children to ‘*belong*’ (share values, ideas, culture, feel safe and secure, contribute to their world) and then to ‘*become*’ (which recognises children’s natural inclination to wonder, create and be curious) (DEEWR 2009). All these principles of quality programmes make personal demands on early childhood educators contributing to their need for resilience.

4.4.2 Mapping Against the NQS

In 2009, the Australian state governments established a National Quality Framework (NQF) for all ECEC. The NQF took effect in 2012 alongside the establishment of the Australian Children’s Education and Care Authority¹ (ACECQA) and was designed to support greater unification across state and territory educational systems (birth to 5-year settings), while at the same time implementing both an Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF; DEEWR 2009) and a new National Quality Standard (NQS) assessment and rating system (ACECQA 2017). The National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education and the introduction of the NQF for ECEC (ACECQA 2017) signify a direct response to the research evidence about the importance of

¹The Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority is an independent statutory authority that assists governments in implementing the National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care throughout Australia.

Table 4.1 Mapping of module building resilience against the National Quality Standards

Module B topics	National Quality Standards (NQS)
What do you know about resilience?	QA5. Relationships with Children Standard 5.1 Respectful and equitable relationships are maintained with each child Standard 5.2 Each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive and responsive relationships
Resilience in schools	
What makes a resilient teacher?	
The resilience process	
Bouncing back/bouncing forward	
Why BRiTE?	

quality ECEC. While such policy initiatives may suggest a shift away from the provision of ECEC as a workforce productivity measure towards a focus on ECEC as a significant social and educational investment in children's future, many ECEC services struggle to achieve minimum quality standards, particularly regarding the provision of quality, play-based learning environments which have been shown to positively influence the effect of disadvantage and vulnerability on child development (O'Connell et al. 2016). This variance in quality is in part attributed to variability in educator knowledge, skills and practices and more recently to variances in educator wellbeing and staff instability (Ammendolia et al. 2016).

The Revised NQS (from 1 February 2018) brings together the seven key quality areas (QA) that are important to outcomes for children, with 15 standards including aspects of educational programmes and practices children are exposed to (QA1), as well as health and safety (QA2), aspects of the physical environment (QA3), staffing (QA4), relationships with children (QA5), partnerships with families and communities (QA6), and the manner in which services are managed and led (QA7). Under each standard, 40 elements in total describe the outcomes that contribute to the standards being achieved. The BRiTE modules were mapped against the NQS to assist early childhood educators in contextualising the BRiTE content to their practice. This mapping is represented in the following section including Tables 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5, which accompany a description of how BRiTE content is integrated across the degree.

4.4.3 Mapping BRiTE to the Bachelor of Education: The Early Years Degree

Integration of the BRiTE modules across the degree structure involved a collaborative and iterative process, whereby the early childhood academic staff met with the BRiTE research team to identify key focus areas embedded within the BRiTE programme and cross-referenced these to subject learning outcomes. In order to support and contextualise pre-service teachers' learning, clear links were made throughout the core degree content with the mapping of modules to both curriculum and practicum subjects.

Table 4.2 Mapping of Module R relationships against the National Quality Standards

Module R	National Quality Standards (NQS)
Maintaining support networks	QA4. Staffing Arrangements Standard 4.2 Management, educators and staff are collaborative, respectful and ethical QA5. Relationships with Children Standard 5.1 Respectful and equitable relationships are developed and maintained with each child Standard 5.2 Each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive and responsive relationships QA6. Collaborative Partnerships with Families and Communities Standard 6.1 Respectful relationships with families are developed and maintained and families are supported in their parenting role
Building relationships in new environments	

Table 4.3 Mapping of Module i Wellbeing against the National Quality Standards

Module i Topics	National Quality Standards
Personal wellbeing	QA2. Children’s Health and Safety Standard 2.1 Each child’s health and physical activity is supported and promoted Standard 2.2 Each child is protected QA4. Staffing Arrangements Standard 4.1 Staffing arrangements enhance children’s learning and development
Work–life balance	
Maintaining motivation	

Table 4.4 Mapping of Module T taking initiative against the National Quality Standards

Topic	National Quality Standards (NQS)
Problem-solving Ongoing professional learning Communicating effectively	QA6. Collaborative partnerships with families and communities Standard 6.1 Respectful relationships with families are developed and maintained and families are supported in their parenting role Standard 6.2 Collaborative partnerships enhance children’s inclusion, learning and wellbeing QA7. Governance and Leadership Standard 7.1 Governance supports the operation of a quality service Standard 7.2 Effective leadership promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a professional learning community

Table 4.5 Mapping of Module E emotions against the National Quality Standards

Topics	National Quality Standards (NQS)
Problem-solving	QA4. Staffing Arrangements
Ongoing professional learning	Standard 4.1 Staffing arrangements enhance children’s learning and development
Communicating effectively	QA5 Relationships with Children Standard 5.1 Respectful and equitable relationships are maintained with each child Standard 5.2 Each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive and responsive relationships QA7. Leadership and Service Management Standard 7.2 Effective leadership builds and promotes a positive organisational culture and professional learning community

Fukkink and Lont (2007) posit educator competence or ‘efficacy’ as being determined by three separate yet complementary domains: skills, attitudes and knowledge. One of the greatest determinants of educator efficacy involves the disparity between task difficulty and perceived competence (Tschannen-Moran et al. 1998). As such, Bandura (1977) suggested the accumulation of mastery experiences (i.e. experiences viewed as successful in a given context) is one way of enhancing perceived competencies. Witnessing or being informed of the successes of others in a similar position (i.e. vicarious experiences), along with verbal persuasion from others can boost self-efficacy, especially where the person’s level of experience in a given context is considerably low, as is often the case with pre-service educators (Bandura 1977). In addition, providing strategies for managing physiological and affective states construed as negative can promote educator efficacy, as these responses can be considered as a reflection of personal performance. While this model is designed for enhancing self-efficacy, the integration of knowledge with perceptions of educator effectiveness was seen to be integral to supporting the development of educator resilience and effectiveness (i.e. knowledge, attitudes and skills; Fukkink and Lont 2007).

A *knowledge, skills and attitudes* paradigm drove the design process whereby every effort was made to marry the *affective* components of BRiTE with the knowledge and skills addressed throughout the Early Years’ degree structure. As all subjects within the Bachelor of Education—The Early Years degree are linked to the NQS, the intention was for pre-service teachers to see the relevance of BRiTE to their learning and their work. In this way, the BRiTE modules were integrated into coursework to support reflective engagement and contextual understanding. As such, support strategies for resilience were provided within the subject content, embedding resilience into pre-service teacher thinking.

Module B: Building Resilience and the NQS

Module B focuses on the concept of resilience, providing pre-service teachers with the skills, knowledge and coping strategies necessary for dealing with challenging work environments. Common challenges such as how best to respond to or manage trauma-related or challenging behaviours are specifically addressed. The purpose of

this module is to contextualise pre-service teachers' learning to real-life challenges while preparing them for some of the 'real-world' experiences they are likely to face upon graduation. This module is initially embedded in a first-year subject exploring early childhood contexts and then is revisited in third year in a subject exploring familial and community diversity which addresses contemporary issues of cultural and familial diversity, parental separation, familial isolation, abuse and neglect along with out-of-home care. BRiTE-related activities focus on taking responsibility for self and actions, drawing on the lived experience for children and teachers with both the promotion and modelling of strategies. Table 4.1 shows the topics within Module B and the relevant NQS.

Module R: Relationships and the NQS

This module includes a focus on the inherent challenges of developing relationships with staff, and developing confidence as a peer/colleague with their mentors. At times, this may include coping with factors including intimidation. This module sits alongside our Professional Partners in Practice (PPP) programme, where pre-service teachers are placed with an Early Childhood Centre for the duration of their degree. The BRiTE modules are integral for supporting pre-service teachers to explore collegial relationships and teamwork, essential components of their professional practice. Relationships with families are central to the early childhood educational context. This module is also designed to support pre-service teachers in their interactions with families, a common challenge cited by many. Module R has been integrated within the first-year practicum subject and is designed to prepare and empower pre-service teachers for potential instances of conflict and imbalances of power that often occur within practicum placements. Common scenarios are explored and enacted during tutorial exercises. For example, in the situation where one is feeling bullied or intimidated by a parent or staff member, individuals are encouraged to identify options for responding to the aggressor other than moving to a defensive stance. As with all modules, 'Relationships' is revisited in the third-year practicum in which pre-service teachers are supported to engage with and navigate the challenges of working in multidisciplinary contexts. Table 4.2 shows the topics within Module R and the relevant NQS.

Module i: Wellbeing and NQS

This module focuses on the importance of planning ahead in relation to pre-service teacher wellbeing and initiatives to support their own mental health. This is achieved by unpacking the 'Circle of Security' and building on the relationship-based early intervention programme designed to enhance attachment security between parents/caregivers and children. The teamwork environment provides added challenges and therefore, the need for resilience, in navigating situations such as the following scenario which is presented to pre-service teachers:

In a team situation, the pre-service teacher may be given a directive that goes against their own philosophy, against a particular Standard, or against what another staff member has said to do.

Examples might be forcing a child to sleep; not allowing them to leave the table unless they have finished food; or insisting on building curriculum around school readiness rather than the individual needs of the child. Pre-service teachers initially complete the Wellbeing (i) module in the second year of their degree, following the completion of Modules B and R. To support engagement pre-service teachers are required to post blog entries to the subject Moodle site about lessons they had learned from this module. Posts reveal both renewed awareness of the needs they have to be supported in wellbeing, and some immediate benefits they have received from completing this module's activities;

I have an issue of isolating myself when I am under stress or not feeling like talking to people. Seeing the importance of relationships and keeping in contact has changed the way I think in that matter. Trying to view all outlooks in my career as positive and having meaning, I can tend to try and get things done and not think about the value in the process or be pessimistic about others who work hard. I can also become quite stuck in ways of doing things, so being more flexible and teachable is important for me. Also asking for help when I need it and not being proud in that matter. Lastly is also knowing when I need and rest mentally, emotionally and physically. I can tend to over work myself and I get overwhelmed. So taking this time is important and is very valued through leisurely activities I take part in. (2nd year pre-service teacher)

Table 4.3 shows the topics within Module i and the relevant NQS.

Module T: Taking Initiative and the NQS

This module supports our early years pre-service teachers to focus on the importance of resilience and functionality, and problem-solving strategies. The module is initially introduced in second year and is linked to the second-year practicum subject. Class forum discussion topics include: (a) reflection on one child's needs and behaviour and having multiple solutions versus being reactionary and having no Plan B. This involves pre-service teachers reflecting on their own self-regulatory abilities; (b) consideration of how early childhood teachers engage with families when lacking confidence, including the conversations with parents at drop-off and pick-up, and respectful dialogue with mentors and families; and (c) exploration of conflict resolution skills which include problem-solving ability, identifying solutions and alternatives, being able to plan, being proactive rather than reactive, and being flexible rather than having a fixed response. This topic is revisited again in a third-year subject that focuses on management and leadership within early childhood contexts. Table 4.4 shows the topics within Module T and the relevant NQS.

Module E: Emotions and the NQS

Module E is the final module introduced and addresses issues such as working with children with challenging behaviours, and forming relationships with families that are essential in the early childhood context are discussed. These situations bring emotions—those of the pre-service teacher, practicing educators and mentors, the child, the parents or caregivers and colleagues—into the forefront of tutorial and forum discussions and thinkings. The module is embedded in a second-year subject that focuses on effective partnerships in early childhood and is revisited in the final

session in a subject that focuses on transition to school with a particular focus on building collegial relationships across the prior-to-school and school contexts. Pre-service teachers are encouraged to consider quality reflective practice, where they are seeing this in practice and actively ‘doing it’. This may further link with effective leadership modelling and strategies. Table 4.5 shows the topics within Module E and the relevant NQS.

4.4.4 Embedding BRiTE as a Developmental Progression

During the course of the four-year degree, as shown in Fig. 4.2, the intention is for our pre-service teachers to undertake each module twice. Within the first two years of their study they complete the five modules, each embedded into core subjects. Within each module they engage with material with specific focus areas and points linked to subject content, and work through the cycle of knowledge, consideration of their professional practice and then reflection activities. These same modules are then repeated during Years 3 and 4 of the degree.

Moreover, there is an intent across the degree for pre-service teachers to consider their growth over time, with an associated link to professional identity. To support this activity, the pre-service teachers’ responses in the online modules are date/time stamped. Four criteria are presented to the pre-service teachers regarding effective reflective practice, noting that reflection is a process of ‘meaning-making’ (Rodgers 2002, p. 845) where the movement from one experience to another is considered in terms of relationships and connections; a way of thinking that is systematic, rigorous and disciplined; occurs in community and within interactions; and values the personal and intellectual growth in self and others (Rodgers 2002). In this way, the practice of reflection is both prompted and supported, as stated by Dewey (1933): ‘We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience’ (p. 8).

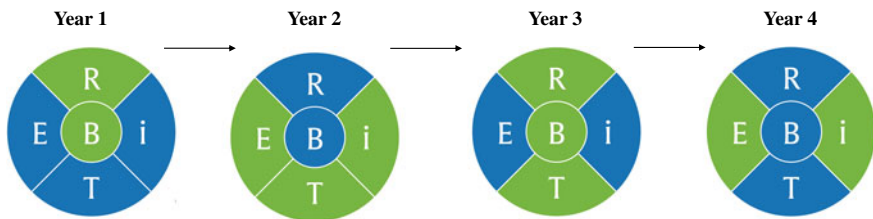


Fig. 4.2 Pattern of module engagement across the four-year degree (green shading denotes module offering)

Links between content knowledge and application, and then the process of reflection, drawing on learnings and prior experiences, are ongoing during tutorial discussions and associated activities, building on content provided in lectures and pre-readings. The value of providing opportunities for student reflection is best illustrated by the following pre-service teacher's blog entry:

Upon completing all 5 modules I have had a reflective process about my thoughts and actions as an educator. I found that I lacked in developing relationships with people I did not know and have no thought about ways I could develop and engage in these opportunities including being open and reflective on how other people see me as an educator or as an individual. I found that my health and diet was not the best when it came to emotional times as I would drink coffee and rely on chocolate in times of need. After completing the wellbeing module I realised that I should be thinking about myself more and respecting my body by exercising. Through developing expectations and goals can help develop understandings of children's emotions and can help to further planning in the future. (3rd year pre-service teacher)

4.5 Feedback and Findings on Impact of BRiTE

Our research has shown how integrating the BRiTE modules into the Bachelor of Education—The Early Years has built pre-service teachers' knowledge and strategies to support their resilience. Pre-service teachers identified benefits for their practice in completing the BRiTE modules, and further commented on the integration and relevance of BRiTE content within their studies:

I didn't really see the relevance as much when I first did them, I felt they were a burden, but having completed them I understood how really relevant they were. They are really practical for an educator in the field. They helped me to become aware and think about the issues. (3rd year pre-service teacher)

And,

My confidence has definitely grown, just having all these good relationships and knowing I can do that, you know these were strangers to begin with and now it's worked out so well. So just sort of knowing that moving forward and that I guess I'm capable, things like that. (3rd year pre-service teacher)

One of the goals for embedding BRiTE into our degree was to emphasise the importance of relationships as a core element of achieving success as an early childhood educator, and to guide pre-service teacher reflection and development of a portfolio within their subject learnings. Given the current workforce challenges concerning educator attrition and mental wellbeing of staff, initiatives that support educator reflection, problem-solving and resilience while engaging with real-world scenarios and challenges can only benefit the sector as a whole and should become a compulsory component of teacher education.

Findings from this study attest to the need for a stronger focus on pre-service teacher resilience as a core component of university education. The meaningful integration of the BRiTE modules within course content serves as a potential model of practice that could be adopted more broadly. The wellbeing of university students

is a concern that extends beyond the pre-service teacher platform, as evidenced by recent findings from the 2019 Advance HE and HEPI Student Academic Experience Survey which showed university student mental wellbeing as being well below that of the general population of young people (Neves and Hillman 2019). The growing concerns around mental health, both nationally and internationally, highlight the value of course content and structures that are specifically designed to produce capable, competent, reflective and resilient graduates who are ready to take on the challenges of ‘real-world’ employment.

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