

The paradigm of self-care: An exploratory study of teacher perceptions for conserving and preserving oneself in the high-stress, people-intensive field of education.

by

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B.M.E., Florida State University, 1990
M.S., Nova Southeastern University, 2003

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2023

Abstract

Teachers all around the world are finding their profession laden with substantial stress. Many are considering quitting, or at a minimum, finding themselves taking time off in order to cope with the pressures of the job. Teachers are over-burdened by low pay and heavy workloads: planning and grading, high expectations, performance evaluations, standards-based accountability and testing, extra-curricular duties, undisciplined students, unsupportive administrators, and angry parents. Many educators are wondering if these demands are even worth the sacrifice any longer. While teaching is incredibly rewarding, something has to give. Effective self-care (ESC) can provide the much-needed relief to not only survive but thrive in all areas of life. However, self-care is an elusive and relative term that is becoming an emerging topic of interest in the research world, particularly during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. This study explores the paradigm of self-care from the perspectives of 24 teachers to answer: 1) How do teachers conceptualize what self-care entails? 2) What self-care strategies, if any, do teachers believe are most effective? 3) To what extent do teachers feel they effectively engage in self-care? and 4) What contextual, personal, or economic factors enable or constrain teachers' ability to engage in self-care? Utilizing an online survey and six one-on-one interviews, this mixed-methods study uncovered what teachers are experiencing in their daily lives: stress levels and demands are high, time is a rare commodity, being intentional with self-care is key, and healthy boundaries must be set in order to cope with the pressures of teaching and balance work and personal life. Furthermore, a construct based on research data was produced called the *Teacher Conservation and Preservation Synergy Model*® which demonstrates that exploring ESC for teachers is an essential and significant matter that should be kept at the forefront of our attention as we work to conserve and preserve education's greatest resource: our teachers.

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Approved by:

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J. Spencer Clark, Ph.D.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to, first and foremost, acknowledge my lovely wife, aptly named Ruthie or *Beautiful Friend*. She has been just that...a beautiful and best friend to me ever since we met in the spring of 1985. Ruthie has been such a tremendous support and encouragement throughout my college education, career, and certainly during the intense journey of my doctoral program. Ruthie did many things I would normally have done at home the last year of my Ed.D. program, so I could focus on the coursework, research, and writing involved when attainment of a terminal degree nears its end. Ironically, I have to admit that I did not practice much self-care during the final two months of writing this dissertation which was, instead, filled with incredibly pressing and demanding time constraints. Thank you, Ruthie, I could never repay you for giving me so much through our many years together. You are, without a doubt, the greatest blessing I've ever had in my life, and I love you more than you'll ever know!

I would also like to thank my handsome sons, Mark, Steven, Kyle, and Grant, who made it clear many times that they are proud of me for taking this important career step, even if it meant less video gaming or hanging out with them during the past three years. Thanks for all of your encouragement, belief, and support. I'm so proud of the men you are becoming!

My sister, Lisa, has been one of my biggest "balcony people" (Landorf Heatherley, 1988) since high school, cheering me on to greater success no matter how discouraged or bedraggled I became. Many of her suggestions have become my own achieved goals. Thank you, Lisa, for all the years of believing in me, motivating me, and truly being the "Wind Beneath My Wings" (Midler, 1988).

I would also like to thank my father, "Mark" Cesar, an immigrant from the Philippines, who gave me such an incredible paradigm of the United States that I truly believed (and still

believe) I could do anything I put my mind to accomplishing. I'm so grateful that my father gave me everything I needed (e.g., love, food, clothing, shelter), some of the things I wanted, and made me work for the rest.

My father showed me how to take things apart to see if they could be fixed, which saved me thousands upon thousands of dollars as an adult, because oftentimes they can easily be fixed. He taught me that "there's a solution to everything, you just have to sit and think about it." He taught me to play chess because "it's the game of life." I worked with him as a dishwasher, busboy, and waiter in a yacht club restaurant he managed for many years. It was there, I watched him consistently treat the cook (a fellow employee) and the physician (a yacht club member) with the same respect and kindness. He taught me, through role modeling, that no matter who you are, or the job you hold, a person is worthy of being treated with dignity. These were such incredible and valuable life lessons.

He often said to me, "You're my boy...my pride and joy," and "You live in the greatest country in the world. Be better than me. Do more than I did." Thank you, Dad, for the encouragement, example, inspiration, entrepreneurial spirit, resourcefulness, and a host of other life lessons that supported me in making the most of the American Dream!

I would be remiss if I did not mention my other best friend and writing partner, Steve Guglich. He has been a big part of my life for the past 25 years. We took all of our master's courses together, then we began writing fiction novels, plays, and scripts for a sitcom and a movie. He is now a published author of *The Veil Saga*, and I'm so proud of the dedication he has for writing. While we have mostly lived in separate states, Steve has been the brother I never had: a constant encouragement, a man of character, an amazing uncle to my sons, and someone who is there whenever I need him. Thanks for always being there, Steve!

A tremendous thanks goes to Dennis “Denny” McLoughlin, whom I met in the fall of 2006 at a 30-hour workshop in Manitou Springs, Colorado. I had no idea the impact Denny and his *High Trust Psychology*® workshop would have on me as a husband, father, son, sibling, friend, teacher, principal, and professor. Throughout the many years of workshops I attended, Denny inspired me to intentionally think about and act upon self-care as a means to stay fresh and enhance all relationships in my life. His teachings on how to elegantly handle difficult situations allowed me to enjoy the final years of my mother’s life, as she was a person with whom it was extremely difficult to relate and communicate. I’m so grateful for his permission to share the concepts taught in his *High Trust Psychology*® workshops. Thank you, Denny, for the indelible mark you left in my life and the lives of so many others!

Roughly fifty percent of doctoral students quit their programs and never earn a terminal degree, many due to a lack of faculty support and feeling isolated (Cassuto, 2013; Patterson, 2016). I was bound and determined not to be part of that dismal statistic, and I had amazing encouragement and guidance from every professor and staff member at K-State with whom I came into contact. Humble, kind, gracious, and student-centered, this wonderful faculty and staff are why K-State has such a successful College of Education. No student, doctoral or otherwise, could ask for better support!

To Dr. Spencer Clark, my major professor, thank you for being such an approachable and competent advisor. You seemed tireless in answering all of my questions and providing the guidance necessary to get my dissertation completed. Your course assignments are so thoughtful and well-designed; they give doctoral students an excellent start with their dissertation. To my other dissertation committee members, Drs. Todd Goodson, Vicki Sherbert, and Cynthia Shuman (my survey Jedi master), I am so grateful our paths crossed, and that you were willing to give

such valuable advice on crafting my research study. Throughout the entire process, it was evident you cared about me as a person and wanted the best outcome for this research study.

I'd like to also thank my study partner in the K-State Ed.D. program, Dr. John Markham. He was ahead of me in the program by one year, but we took several of my initial classes together where we commiserated through any frustrations and celebrated in our triumphs. It was a blessing to have his friendship as I adjusted my busy life to the new-to-me Ed.D. program. I'm grateful that we continue to stay in touch and share a meal together whenever I'm visiting the K-State campus in Manhattan, Kansas.

I took on the extremely busy role of GradCat University Supervisor (Graduate Teaching Assistant) as an assistantship to financially support me through the Ed.D. program. While grading coursework and mentoring students in the Master of Arts in Teaching program at K-State was incredibly demanding, it was also tremendously rewarding and fulfilling. It was as a GradCat that I had the extreme pleasure to meet and get to know Dr. Thomas Vontz, who has remained a strong advocate for me in my pursuit of a doctoral degree and post-secondary career goals. Thank you, Dr. Vontz, for your advocacy, cheerleading, and belief in me! Your constant encouragement and support are a tremendous blessing, and you epitomize the term "balcony people" (Landorf Heatherley, 1988). I also want to thank my GradCat supervisors, Dr. Susan Scherling and Mrs. Megan Mallon, for all their support while I figured out how to balance a full-time high school principal job with earning a doctorate and being a GradCat. A special thank you, Megan, for your advocacy and unending reserve of joy, positivity, grace, and encouragement!

I want to give a special thanks to Dorinda Beeley, a family friend who has a ministry rooted in the computer programming field and knows several teachers. As a result of her reaching out, five additional participants joined the study.

Of course, a special thanks goes to the participants of this study and their administrators for supporting us with a greater understanding of what comprises self-care according to teachers' paradigms. Without you, this study would not have been possible. Thank you for participating, and thank you for your service and sacrifice in education!

In 1989, I did my senior project at Florida State University called *A Voyage Through the Ages*, a band concert which I organized, rehearsed, and performed with 40 college students as their conductor. It was an amazing capstone experience that sparked a life-long dream, rooted deep in my soul, to be a conductor for a high-caliber, adult wind ensemble. The next 33 years were filled wondering whether or not my wish would ever come true. At times, it was heartbreaking, and I even begged God to take this desire away from me if it was never going to be fulfilled.

However, in August 2022, my greatest dream was finally realized, and I became the conductor for the New Horizons Band of Colorado Springs' Symphonic Band. This happened in the penultimate and hectic semester of my doctoral program, but working with the talented musicians, selecting music, studying the scores, rehearsing the ensemble, and performing with them has been a complete and utter joy. It is, for me, the epitome of effective self-care.

Thank you, Marty Slivka (NHBCOS Board President), for believing in me when my resume did not reflect the passion and drive in my heart that I have for conducting. Thank you, Symphonic Band musicians, for giving me such tremendous delight and pleasure during an extremely crazy time, as I finished my research and dissertation. You were so encouraging, gave

me fuel to complete my Ed.D., and you celebrated with me as graduation drew near. You made the last eight months incredibly special, and I look forward to making beautiful music with you for many years to come!

Finally, I would like to give a special thanks to all those whose thoughts and prayers were with our family in the past three years. Shortly after I started the Ed.D. program in the summer of 2020, we lost our third son, Kyle, at the age of 16. It was a tragic, painful, and harrowing time filled with intense grief and loss, and I will never be able to fully express how grateful I am for the comfort, support, and encouragement we received from our Lord Jesus, family, friends, and the professors and support staff at K-State.

While mentioned last, He is certainly not least. My Lord Jesus has been a constant companion, soul soother, and provider in my life. Even before I truly knew Him in the mid-1990s, I can look back across my life and recognize Jesus' guidance and mercy. Truly, He has been—and continues to be—the single set of footprints in the sand of my life, bearing me up when all seems lost and hopeless and filling me with joy through His Spirit. Thank you, Lord, for the blessings uncountable and generous hope you have secured for me in Your grace. It goes without saying...I am eternally grateful!

As is abundantly clear from these acknowledgements, I am blessed beyond measure to have so many amazing people and influences in my life. Please know that I cherish each of you, and deeply thank you, for being part of my wonderful, fulfilling journey of life!

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this research to all of the teachers who tirelessly, and oftentimes thanklessly, work in classrooms each day to improve the lives of students and inspire them to greater heights. You remind me of the Rangers of the North, from J.R.R. Tolkien's famous tales of Middle-Earth, who were misunderstood for their mysterious ways and often reviled by the hobbits of the Shire. Yet, towards the end of *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1954), the Rangers were instead found to be a people of high nobility and lineage, directly descended from an ancient and lost line of kings, of whom Aragorn was their chief. The Rangers sacrificially worked behind the scenes for centuries to protect the unwitting hobbits and their peaceful and simple way of life. Dear teachers...you are the Rangers. You are the protectors of those who may not like, appreciate, or understand you, but their lives are so enriched by your vigilance, hard work, and dedication.

Being on the front lines of the battle for education is incredibly difficult, draining, intense, sacrificial, and at times harrowing. However, teaching is also full of many rewards, triumphs, and joys that people in other career fields have difficulty understanding. I hope this study in the importance of effective self-care allows you to elegantly continue your fight to make society a better place through educating students. Please take care of yourself...you are worth it, and your family, students, and co-workers desperately need you!

Preface

My journey of wanting to earn a doctorate and become a post-secondary professor was born during my own college experience. Unfortunately, I had a few professors who cared more about their own egos than educating students. While attending Miami-Dade Community College in the mid-1980s, one professor told me not to go to Florida State University because I would “fail and be back in a semester.” Another professor at MDCC said he didn’t believe I had made it into FSU and wanted to see my letter of acceptance. There was a professor at Florida State University in the late 1980s who was upset I was the top student conductor because I had not been in his particular band under his tutelage or guidance. I later discovered that this same professor tried to prevent me from graduating on a technicality that was, thankfully, blocked by the Associate Dean. During my master’s degree program at Nova Southeastern University in the early 2000s, I had a professor who sat back and did very little work, delegating most of the teaching to the students. Another professor at NSU regularly wasted the students’ time during online class chats by discussing the latest *Friends* episode and talking about the fun she had on the weekends. When I asked about the final project details, which were very sparse at the time, the reply from the professor was “Don’t worry about the final project. You’re all going to get an ‘A’ anyways.”

Now, based on the above information, I don’t want you to think my college and university experiences were filled with mostly discouraging, negative professors. Case in point, the Associate Dean at FSU, Dr. Bentley Shellahamer—also an absolutely amazing professor—was one of my greatest advocates and gave me several meaningful opportunities to grow and develop as a band director. Dr. Shellahamer was the professor who sponsored and championed

my aforementioned *Voyage Through the Ages* band concert senior project. I wanted to be just like him “when I grew up.”

Throughout my associate, bachelor, and master degree programs, there were many professors who were not only encouraging, but adept at teaching important concepts. What’s more, they truly cared about their students and allowed us the freedom to make course customizations that would provide more meaningful learning experiences. Without the support of these valuable people, I’m not sure I would have survived my frustrations and angst with the professors who seemed only to care about themselves.

The encounters with professors who were terrible at teaching and with those who were inspiring educators shaped my desire to be part of the solution: I dreamed of eventually earning a doctorate degree to become a college professor. I wanted to treat students with respect while also ensuring they would get an outstanding education. However, life takes many twists and turns, and in the daily grind of my career and life, my dream died (or so I thought). Little did I realize in 1990 that my dream of teaching and supporting students at the post-secondary level would not become a reality for another 32 years.

I earned an Associate of Arts in Music from Miami-Dade Community College in 1987, and a Bachelor of Music Education from Florida State University in 1990. My teaching career started as an elementary music teacher for the 1990-1991 school year, a band director at the high school level for the next five years, and middle school for two more years. In 1998, I took a brief detour into the computer field before becoming a principal at a small, K-12 private school for five and a half years. During that time, I earned a Master of Science in Educational Leadership from Nova Southeastern University in 2003. Afterwards, I took another detour and became a county lead for Project HOPE’s crisis counselors after our small town of Okeechobee, Florida,

was devastated in 2004 by hurricanes Frances and Jeanne in a matter of two weeks. Nearly a year later, after providing a Project HOPE stress-relief seminar for employees of a local bank system, I was offered—and took—a job as a regional trainer for the bank’s seven branches.

My wife, four boys, and I moved to Colorado in 2006, where I was a principal of a charter elementary school for two years, then principal of a charter high school for 14 years. I find it quite ironic that I had zero desire to be an administrator during my college and early teaching career yet was in that role for over 21 years. I enjoyed being a principal, supporting my teachers and staff, and making a difference on a more global level, but the seed of my dream to be a college professor still lay dormant. While doing administrator work, I still found ways to teach which has always been my primary joy in education.

It was during my stint as an elementary school principal in 2006 that I met Dennis “Denny” McLoughlin. He was the presenter of an intensive, 30-hour *High Trust Psychology*® workshop. I was hooked! I’ve had a fascination with psychology ever since I was in ninth grade. Denny presented concepts which I had intuitively known but never experienced in the way he codified them, as well as ideas that were new to me. While many, including myself, found the workshop to be extremely unconventional for educator professional development, I was fascinated by the significance and practicality of the strategies offered and the energy, humor, drama, wit, and enthusiasm that Denny exhibited. I began to learn how important self-care is in order to elegantly handle difficult situations, not only in the classroom or workplace, but in our personal relationships as well.

For many years, I eagerly attended this annual, 30-hour workshop; and, with Denny’s permission, I eventually created my own one-day workshop called *Effective Influence*™: *Psychological Judo*™, which is based partly on some of his concepts. I have presented it

annually to teachers of various K-12 schools, and parts of it I taught in *Breakthrough to Better Relationships*[™], an eight-week course for Outlier University that was a teaching ministry of a local church. Most recently, I have incorporated an abbreviated version of *Effective Influence*[™]: *Psychological Judo*[™] into one of K-State's Master of Arts in Teaching courses. Clearly, sharing effective self-care strategies with others is a big passion of mine.

Why did self-care become incredibly important to me? I found that practicing it with consistency changed me and made me a better husband, father, son, sibling, friend, teacher, principal, and professor. Through the years, many people have shared with me how their new-found knowledge of self-care strategies learned at *High Trust Psychology*[®] and *Effective Influence*[™]: *Psychological Judo*[™] workshops have changed their lives for the better. I knew, in my heart, that self-care is vital to our joy, resilience, satisfaction, and health. However, my evidence was purely anecdotal.

When I started my doctorate program at Kansas State University in the summer of 2020, I wanted my dissertation topic to be related to self-care and its critical importance in conserving and preserving teachers. It was finally time to do empirical research in an area that I knew to be incredibly valuable to the field of education. Particularly, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, self-care became an emerging topic of great interest as people all over the world began thinking about how best to care for their physical, mental, and emotional needs in order to stay healthy, survive stress, and have a better quality of life.

The first step, outlined in this dissertation, is purely exploratory and seeks to understand the beliefs of teachers concerning effective self-care. I hope to do further research that will investigate to what extent particular self-care strategies are effective, but that will have to wait for another time and place.

Effective self-care is not just for teachers, but for all people regardless of their age, race, gender, faith, career, etc. Whether or not you are involved in education, my hope is that in reading this study, you will find yourself thinking more intentionally about self-care and its impact on your quality of life. I truly hope you find this research and its findings inspiring in terms of caring for yourself physically, mentally, and emotionally so that you can have a greater sense of joy, resilience, and satisfaction in all that you do.

Chapter 1 - Is Self-Care Really That Important?

Introduction

Teaching is a career that can exhaust the staunchest stalwart and frazzle even the most valiant; teaching is not for the faint of heart. Tending to one's own physical, mental, and emotional needs in a positively impactful way, otherwise known as effective self-care (ESC), is a critical part of longevity or "staying in the game" in the field of education. The "mass trauma" people faced across the globe as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has, and will continue to have, far-reaching consequences (Prideaux, 2021). As teacher burn-out and resignation rates rise in a post- and potential-pandemic world, and the difficulty of finding suitable replacements increases (Kamentz, 2022; Kessler, 2020), self-care is becoming an emerging topic of great importance as a means of conserving and preserving education's greatest resource: our teachers.

Strengthening teacher resilience through intentional self-care strategies in order to decrease absenteeism, increase retention and job satisfaction, and therefore effectiveness (Lesh, 2020; Miller & Flint-Stipp, 2019; Noonan, 2018), must become a priority for many school districts. However, self-care is an elusive term that is relative and difficult to define as a broad label for what can be considered effective across an entire faculty (Gay, 2018; Mariskind, 2014).

To illustrate, one teacher may experience self-care as they use an entire planning period to quietly sit in isolation and efficiently grade a stack of essay papers because it lightens the workload once home. However, a colleague on the same faculty may deem self-care as visiting other teachers to socialize during a planning period. Since self-care is different based on an individual's perception and preference, are there particular strategies that, if practiced with intentionality and consistency, are more effective than others? One way to discover the panacea of effective self-care (ESC) is to first ascertain teachers' paradigms of self-care.

This study seeks to explore the paradigm of self-care from the perspective of teachers and is designed to answer the following research questions:

1. How do teachers conceptualize what self-care entails?
2. What self-care strategies, if any, do teachers believe are most effective?
3. To what extent do teachers feel they effectively engage in self-care?
4. What contextual, personal, or economic factors enable or constrain teachers' ability to engage in self-care?

Utilizing mixed methods research, with quantitative and qualitative data, this study is an interpretive phenomenological analysis as described by Bedrettin Yazan (2015),

...the primary interest of qualitative researchers is to understand the meaning or knowledge constructed by people. In other words, what really intrigues qualitative researchers is the way people make sense of their world and their experiences in this world. (p. 137)

The research herein is *particularistic* as it is concentrated on a specific experience: teachers' perceptions of effective self-care and how it affects teacher resilience, identity, and job satisfaction. It is *descriptive* because it involves data and a review of literature that will provide a robust description of the problem and solutions which can be applied in other, broader settings. Finally, this study is *heuristic* as results will "shed light on the phenomenon, allowing the reader to extend their experience, discover new meaning, or confirm what is known" (Brown, 2008).

Using mixed methods research by employing a survey and one-on-one interviews, coding the data, and analyzing results, my hope was to uncover how teachers feel about self-care, and what, if any, are particular strategies they find most effective. While no panacea of effective self-care was found, the results revealed that teachers are experiencing high stress levels and

demands, time is limited, being intentional with self-care is key, and healthy boundaries must be set in order to cope with the pressures of teaching. These outcomes and others will be explained more fully in Chapter 4 – Findings or Results.

The first section of Chapter 1 will seek to trace how this topic emerged. The next segment will discuss where the topic will be observed and located in the educational context. The third part illustrates the various factors affecting the topic and how they can shape the outcome of the research in positive or negative ways. Considering these various dynamics supported the study's design so that it would yield more accurate and reliable results. Before we begin, there are a host of terms contained herein that need to first be defined for the sake of context. The following definitions are not comprehensive by any means; rather, they are listed here to provide context for terms used in this study.

Definition of Terms

Absenteeism – the condition of being absent from work.

Agency – one's ability to autonomously take action and influence situations.

Burn-out – the point at which remaining in a position becomes unbearable due to a lack of job satisfaction or support.

Charter School – a public school of choice that has an agreement (charter) with a sponsoring district to provide services in addition to that of the regular public schools in the same district (e.g., higher test scores, longer instructional day, magnet focus).

Doodle – an online polling platform that supports with scheduling meetings by allowing participants to choose an available date and time.

Effective Self-Care (ESC) – strategies which successfully support a person's physical, mental, emotional, and/or spiritual well-being.

Emotional Intelligence – recognizing and managing one’s own emotions and the emotions of others.

Hybrid Cohort – an educational model where students attend classes at home and in-person in cohorts as a means of maintaining separated groups for social distancing.

Identity – the overarching perception or belief a teacher has about their own role as an educator in terms of relationships, meaning, contribution, value, dedication, skills, experience, etc.

Intentionality – The willpower to ensure a task is accomplished.

Job Satisfaction – the feeling of fulfilment or contentment pertaining to one’s work duties and/or place of employment.

Longevity – remaining in one career field and/or place of employment for a long period of time.

Motivation – the willingness to take action in an endeavor.

Pandemic – the period of time during which a widespread illness occurred (e.g., COVID-19).

Paradigm – a systematic pattern of thinking or belief system based on a person’s perceptions.

Perception – how a person organizes, identifies, and interprets sensory information.

Post-Pandemic – the period of time after a pandemic.

Potential-Pandemic – the period of time during which a pandemic may occur.

Pre-Pandemic – the period of time prior to a pandemic.

Qualtrics – an online survey platform used by Kansas State University.

Regular District Schools – traditional district public schools.

Remote Learning – an educational model where students attend classes off-campus in an online environment either synchronously (at the same date and time) or asynchronously (not at the same date and time).

Resilience – the ability of a teacher to persevere through hardships and difficulties.

Retention – the act of retaining or keeping a teacher employed in the same school from year to year.

Self-Efficacy – one’s belief in their own ability to be effective or successful in accomplishing a goal or task.

Setting Boundaries – Ensuring that personal time is protected from intrusion by work or other activities.

Teachers – educators who are employed to teach students in all primary (K-5) and secondary (6-12) levels.

Time Management – organizing and allocating time for pursuits, responsibilities, and tasks to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of one’s efforts.

Turnover – refers to the migration and/or attrition of teachers and the consequent hiring and training of replacements.

Zoom – an online platform for conferencing that can generate audio (tracks/transcripts) and video recordings of meetings.

Theoretical Framework

Studying teachers’ paradigm of effective self-care (ESC) and the connection it has on their longevity in the field of education—as far as the research herein is concerned—involved exploring their self-efficacy (one’s *belief* in their own ability to be effective or successful in accomplishing a goal or task), their agency (the *ability* to autonomously take action and influence a situation), and their motivation (the *willingness* to take action in an endeavor). The interaction of all three influences—belief, ability, and willingness—is necessary when a change of behavior is either wanted or needed (Code, 2020). Therefore, if a teacher can implement

particular initiatives with ESC, will they gain a stronger resilience, identity, and job satisfaction; and, will that result in an increase of retention and reduce absenteeism?

To that end, this research study is grounded in Self-Efficacy Theory which is “the belief we have in our own abilities, specifically our ability to meet the challenges ahead of us and complete a task successfully” (Ackerman, 2018). Self-efficacy is a major factor when it comes to motivation (Zimmerman, 2000). However, barriers (e.g., time, intentionality, setting boundaries) to increasing teachers’ self-efficacy exist which can further confound job satisfaction, reduce retention, and increase absenteeism. These obstacles will be described more fully in Chapter 5 – Discussion and Limitations, whereas the next sections will cover the study’s topic more in-depth.

Situating the Topic

The topic of ESC can be narrowed to specific areas according to the epistemological awareness chart by Koro-Ljungberg et al. (2009). The chart places this topic squarely in the *Interpretivist* perspective. The particular distinctions that are related to the research topic are *Constructivism*, *Phenomenology*, and *Hermeneutics*.

The research herein involves *Constructivism* since the participant teachers constructed or explained their experiences and beliefs concerning ESC. It entails *Phenomenology* because the study illustrates how the participants perceive what ESC is to them. More specifically, this study is an interpretive phenomenological analysis as it explored the beliefs and experiences of teachers and their interpretation of such (Turner, 2016). Finally, this research is related to *Hermeneutics* since it is an effort to comprehend the whole person by exploring why ESC may or may not be an important factor in caring for oneself in order to gain a heightened awareness and control of various emotional states in order to attain a stronger sense of efficacy.

Conceptual History

The lack of research articles in the field of education concerning ESC, and the more recent dates of those which exist, seem to indicate that teacher self-care is an emerging topic of interest, particularly post-pandemic. However, the literature that is available, investigated further in Chapter 2, suggests that self-care is important in other careers where workers are immersed in a high-stress, people-intensive field (e.g., nursing, counseling). Certainly, stress is stress, and people are people, so it is not a difficult leap to connect the importance of teachers caring for themselves in order to conserve and preserve their continued service in the classroom.

Conceptual Shifts or Connections

It seems that a dramatic conceptual shift occurred at some point from self-care being regarded as something superficial and ethereal to the belief in its importance and impact as a means of self-preservation, health, success, and longevity. Crystal L. Beach, in her contributing chapter *Care Beyond COVID as a Teacher and Teacher Educator* (Shoffner & Webb, 2022), exhorts us to consider care as vital: “We *must* embrace care, not make it an afterthought because we are afraid others will view us as weak.” Does merely possessing skill, dedication, and sacrifice prevent one from burning out and leaving education to seek a less stressful career? Does a connection exist between ESC and a teacher’s self-efficacy (belief in oneself to be effective as an educator)?

Conceptual Shift Implications

There is ample research that shows ESC strategies support an improved sense of well-being which translates to more positive outcomes in life (e.g., home, work, relationships) (Torregrosa-Ruiz et al., 2021). However, teachers who have excellent pedagogical skills and commitment to the field, but do not care for themselves physically, mentally, and emotionally,

are placing themselves at risk for a decline in health, motivation, job satisfaction, and eventually burnout (Brown & Roloff, 2011).

Clearly, efficacy cannot be ruled out as an important factor and plays a tremendous role in driving one's motivation to succeed. In an article by Nancy Protheroe (2008), she quotes A.W. Hoy's definition of teacher efficacy: "teachers' confidence in their ability to promote students' learning" (Hoy & Spero, 2005). Developing this confidence with specific self-care strategies can be a powerful tool that magnifies one's ability to persevere. The more confident a person is at a task, the more emboldened that person may be to continue pushing through difficult times and refining a particular set of skills like eating healthier, developing a hobby, practicing better sleeping habits, and/or strengthening an important relationship. In the case of teachers, that self-assurance creates a sense of satisfaction which can support resilience when facing adversity. Resilience, in turn, creates even more confidence (Gu & Day, 2007).

If not directed properly with training and preparation, one can confuse efficacy or confidence with desire. A person who has a passion for a particular interest does not automatically have the skills or competence necessary to positively contribute to that activity (Omoredede et al., 2013). For instance, I would rather be flown by an airplane pilot who lacks a passion for flying, but has an amazing aptitude for piloting aircraft than a person who has always dreamed of flying, but could not pass pilot flight school exams. Likewise with education: just because someone has always wanted to teach, does not at all indicate their actual success in the classroom, ability to adapt and overcome obstacles, or long-term commitment to the profession. As I have mentioned during teacher training workshops through the years, "Just because you're in a garage, doesn't mean you're a car!"

As the battle between the two camps of self-care continues with one seeing it as “fluff” and the other regarding it as vital to the preservation of teachers—and any tents pitched along the way—perhaps the best result will be defining how teachers themselves believe self-care is best expressed or practiced. As previously mentioned, self-care is an elusive term to aptly and reliably define. Certainly, there is no shortage of resources rife with strategies for self-care; however, the question for teachers becomes “What is considered *effective* self-care for me?” More reliable research needs to be done to determine what, if any, effective methods exist of caring for oneself so that teachers can experience more job satisfaction and longevity in the field.

Reflection and Implications for Research

While much more is known about teacher coaching and its outcomes on effectiveness and student learning, there is not as much research or longitudinal data on how teacher self-care impacts success in the classroom (Kraft et al., 2018). I would like this study to be a starting point for additional research and how it can contribute to a greater understanding of the positive effects ESC can have on teachers. It was encouraging to read research that is more recent, like *Self-Care Amongst First-Year Teachers* (Baker, 2020). Although this study was small and specific, Leia Baker’s results echoed other researchers’ and authors’ findings (Lesh, 2020; Miller & Flint-Stipp, 2019) concerning the positive results self-care has on teacher morale and effectiveness. A book published as recently as August 2022, *Reconstructing Care in Teacher Education after COVID-19: Caring Enough to Change* (Shoffner & Webb, 2022), demonstrates that research along these lines is not only relevant, but necessary.

Prior to this study, my exploration of ESC was based on anecdotal observation. As a principal for over two decades, I have consistently made efforts to encourage self-care strategies with my staff and maintain morale that is positive, productive, and solution-oriented. The

feedback on these practices has been extremely positive; however, this type of circumstantial evidence is not suited for creating change that is widely accepted in the field of education. Therefore, I was eager to study ESC for my dissertation so that empirical and objective research could be accomplished to discover the impact self-care has on teacher resilience, identity, and job satisfaction. Initially, I wanted to study what particular self-care strategies (e.g., getting a good night's sleep, eating healthier, time management) were considered effective. However, as I further delved into study design, it became clear that first ascertaining how self-care is perceived by teachers needed to come first. Only then can we best understand what would be considered ESC.

I recognize that performing this type of mixed methods research, based on a survey with 24 participants and six one-on-one interviews, may not be as precise as a full-blown quantitative study using statistical data and a much larger sample population. However, getting to understand the topic of teacher self-care from the source will give stakeholders in education a springboard from which to produce further research. I can easily foresee doing additional studies on how the consistent practice of particular ESC strategies affects or impacts teacher resilience, identity, and job satisfaction. While one's desire and confidence do not necessarily equal effectiveness, regularly practicing ESC could be the catalyst needed to launch a teacher to greater heights of success. Afterall, the longer a teacher stays in the field, the better the *chances* of increasing skills and experiencing job satisfaction (Podolsky et al., 2019). Conversely, a teacher who quits the profession after a few years due to burnout will never gain the skills necessary to be effective—having, in effect, cut their career short. Since self-care is a universal human health need, perhaps professionals in other disciplines will be able to cross-reference this study to improve their fields' retention rates and decrease absenteeism.

Primary Actors or Agents

The primary actors or agents are full-time classroom teachers who participated in this qualitative research study. 24 teachers anonymously took the online survey; and, from that same population, 11 volunteered to participate in one-on-one interviews. I selected six of the 11 volunteers for their diversity (e.g., grade levels, gender, school models) in the field of education and how that variety would better represent the general population of teachers. Participants were secured through administrative approval, referrals from other teachers, referrals from people with whom I am acquainted who know teachers, teachers with whom I have previously worked, and some who are either in a master's program with a limited license as a teacher of record or are acting as a cooperating teacher in the same program.

The participants teach various grade levels: elementary (K-5), middle (6-8), high (9-12) school, and secondary (7-12). Subject areas taught by participants include—in alphabetical order—band, computer science, elementary general education, English, literacy intervention, mathematics, orchestra, physical education, science, social studies, and special education. The participants work full-time either in a regular district public school, charter public school, or a private school (see Location below for more details).

Of the 24 online survey participants, 29% ($n=7$) identified as male, 67% ($n=16$) identified as female, and 4% ($n=1$) identified as neither male/female. 71% ($n=17$) have taught in the classroom full-time for five or more years, 4% ($n=1$) have taught for three to four years, 17% ($n=4$) have taught for one to two years, and 8% ($n=2$) are still in their first year of teaching during the 2022-2023 school year (see Figure 4).

The six educators whom I interviewed one-on-one over Zoom teach a variety of subjects and grade levels: high school (computer science), middle school (English, orchestra, physical

education, science), and upper elementary school (general education). Half of the interviewed teachers work in a Colorado or Kansas regular district school, while the other half work in a Colorado charter school. The interviewees identified their genders as three females and three males.

The diverse population of teachers who participated in the survey and interviews are from various grade levels, genders, and types of schools; and, they are meant to be representative of educators at-large. Certainly, having many more participants (e.g., 200-500) in a similar study would add further validity to this type of research and allow a greater breadth of application to the general field of education.

Action and Concept

The actions with which the teachers engaged are directly related to exploring what teachers perceive to be effective self-care (ESC). The desired outcome was to codify the importance of this topic as a means of conserving and preserving oneself in education so as to experience a greater sense of resilience, identity, and job satisfaction. Longevity in the field of education creates a much greater *chance* that a teacher will become more effective in the classroom, and thus, have a greater positive impact in the lives of students (Podolsky et al., 2019).

A survey of participants was necessary to gauge what, in particular, teachers consider as ESC strategies. I initially planned on using focus groups as an effective way to collect qualitative information concerning the perspectives and experiences of teachers (Lederman, 1990), but due to scheduling issues with busy and stressed teachers, I chose instead to utilize one-on-one semi-structured interviews through Zoom as a way of capturing valuable insights on teachers' perceptions of ESC. Qualitative researchers widely recognize interviewing participants as an

effective way to gather data (Babbie, 2014; Creswell, 2012; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Fielding, 2008; Gubrium et al., 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

To more fully understand the participants' perspectives on what they deem as ESC, I used data derived from an anonymous online survey and several one-on-one interviews. Coding and analyzing the survey and interview data supported the conclusion that particular strategies, based on the perceptions of the teachers themselves, may be more *avored* as ESC strategies. However, no one-size-fits-all self-care strategy materialized that was perceived as effective by the participant population of teachers. Furthermore, themes emerged that demonstrated certain factors are at play when it comes to accessing and practicing ESC (e.g., time, intentionality, setting boundaries), which are detailed in Chapter 4 – Findings or Results.

Timeline

This research study took approximately ten weeks to complete: one week to generate the required documents (e.g., approval letter, participant consent) and meet with school administrators for campus-wide approval to contact teachers; three days to send out email invitations to teachers and gather and collate signed, scanned, and returned consent forms; one week to deploy the online survey and gather results; one week to collate, code, and re-code the survey data; three days to design the interview protocol based on the survey coding; one week to perform the one-on-one interviews; one week to collate and analyze the data through coding and re-coding; and, four weeks to write up the analysis, conclusion, and final draft of this dissertation. Thankfully, as mentioned in the Acknowledgements section earlier, portions of this dissertation were already prepared as part of the K-State Ed.D. program's coursework.

Location

To ensure the research had stronger validity, it was conducted with a broader educator population of teachers in mind who are employed in several schools that embrace a variety of educational models. There were 24 full-time teachers who participated in the online self-care survey. Roughly over one-third (38%) work in regular district schools in Colorado, Indiana, and Kansas. Over half of the participants (58%) are employed in charter schools in Colorado, and one participant works at a private school in Colorado. Just under half (42%) are employed by a single network of five charter schools in Colorado which includes two K-5 elementary schools, one 6-8 middle school, one 9-12 college preparatory high school, and one 6-14 vocational/technical school. I worked in the high school as the principal for 14 years prior to the study, so there existed excellent relationships for me to introduce and invite teachers.

The following is a breakdown of online survey participants by state: four from the single charter school network's (Colorado) high school, three from its middle school, one from its elementary school, one who serves at all three of the network's original elementary, middle, and high schools, and one who works as a shared teacher at both its middle and high schools. There were four participants who worked in other charter schools in Colorado: two high schools, one middle school, and one elementary school. Six of the locations that employed the participants are regular district schools in Kansas: two high schools, one junior/senior high school, one school that serves special needs students, one middle school, and an elementary school. Two participants (one each) came from regular district middle and high schools in Colorado that are situated in suburban areas. One participant is employed in a regular district junior/senior high in Indiana. Finally, one participant works in a private elementary school in Colorado.

Primary Affecting Factors

There are several primary factors which could have affected the outcome of this research. One confounding influence could be teachers who agree to participate, but report inaccurate responses that do not fully reflect their true perspectives or experiences with self-care. This could be due to being too busy or unfocused to fully participate; or, it could be as a result of not having an accurate understanding of self-care (more on this below). In caring for others (e.g., students), teachers can mask their own emotional needs which creates an additional burden of staunching a cathartic means of relieving their own emotional tension (Dunn, 2021).

Another primary factor to consider is the various levels of, and current state and awareness of, the participants' self-care. There were several teachers who were invited and initially showed strong interest in participating; but ironically, they later apologized for dropping out due to their stressful and busy school and home life schedules. One principal in North Dakota was so strongly convinced this research was needed, he went to his superintendent to get approval to have all teachers in the district participate. Unfortunately, the superintendent did not approve; and, even though the principal sent out an email invitation to all of his faculty, no one returned a consent form. He explained that this was due to an overwhelming number of changes in the district—which recently merged with a neighboring district—that have caused a tremendous amount of stress, anxiety, and additional work for teachers.

In terms of other affecting factors, some participants may already have an established routine of self-care that is extremely effective. Others may be quite naïve in terms of self-care strategies or have underdeveloped, inconsistent habits concerning such. Still others may theoretically respond to various suggested strategies (see Figures 9-12) without any real-world experience in applying said tactics. This latter group can pose a problem for validity in that they

may suggest a strategy that, in theory, seems to them extremely effective, but in practice is not. For instance, a teacher who has never had a power hour or power day—where a substitute takes one or all of their classes while they catch up on grading, planning, relaxing, etc.—may respond very positively to having that type of self-care strategy. In theory, it may sound like a fantastic idea to the teacher; however, in reality or practice, they may experience more stress than it is worth having due to the additional planning for the substitute and then potentially correcting any issues that occurred with students, academic and/or behavioral, as a result of being absent. This unwanted stress was echoed by one of the interview participants.

While the online survey was only 19 prompts and took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete, some teachers may have experienced survey exhaustion as indicated by the following where the number represents the survey prompt(s) and *n* represents the number of participants who responded to the prompt(s): 1-12 (*n*=24), 13-14 (*n*=23), 15-16 (*n*=22), 17 (*n*=23), 18 (*n*=18), and 19 (*n*=17). However, the possibility of survey exhaustion cannot be quantified by these results as prompts 17-19 only had an essay text box. In hindsight, I could have done two things to mitigate this: either have a check box so participants could respond with “N/A,” or direct them to type “N/A” in the text box if they did not have a response. As such, their lack of responding to the final three prompts may be an indication that they did not have a response, so they left the text box blank.

Another confounding factor may be the various expertise levels, skillsets, or current state of job satisfaction of the participants. An experienced teacher who has established classroom routines and excellent lesson plans, but does not practice self-care, may be able to survive (but not thrive) without an effective self-care regimen. If involved as a participant, this person may not be able to fully express what self-care strategies are valuable as a means of conservation and

preservation. Conversely, a new teacher without established routines and effective lesson plans may have a reliable self-care routine that works, but due to the overwhelming stress of being a first-year teacher, is considering a different career choice. These various examples illustrate the relative nature of self-care and how data may be unreliable to make predictable or valid conclusions.

Teachers who are fatigued and stressed can thwart attempts to properly gauge attitudes and perceptions of self-care. Educators are well-aware of the various slumps that occur during “dry” periods of the school year, such as early November or February. The lack of sunlight from the winter season and being predominantly indoors due to colder temperatures can cause seasonal mood disorders (Melrose, 2015). Unfortunately, this study took place during January and early February, a dark and cold time for teachers who are busy planning, starting a new semester, and getting into the classroom groove after winter break. The normal workload and exhaustion that sets in can have a negative impact on the study if teachers are already feeling overwhelmed at the point the study begins.

Initially, I had very few teachers who showed interest in participating, so it became necessary to offer a drawing involving four Amazon gift cards as an incentive for any who took the survey. The level to which I experienced busy teachers too stressed to participate in a relatively simple, low-stress study that had an abbreviated time commitment is indicative of the need for further research to explore and discover effective ways of practicing self-care.

To counteract—or at least minimize—any research fatigue that could adversely affect the study, I purposely designed the online survey to take approximately 20 minutes, and the one-on-one interviews to be through Zoom (for teacher convenience) with a time of approximately 30

minutes. I asked for volunteers from the survey population, and out of the 11 who offered, I selected six to be interviewed who were from a generous variety of demographic backgrounds.

Another factor that may have interfered with the study's results is bias or subjectivity, which will be discussed in Chapter 5 with more detail. One of the sites where 10 of the 24 participants work is a single charter school network at which I was a high school principal for 14 years, and I was the former supervisor for six of the 10 teachers. Did participants respond based on their truthful, candid thoughts and feelings, or did they respond a certain way because they thought it is what was expected from their former supervisor?

Finally, a tremendous factor I had to consider was the possibility of the site schools moving toward a hybrid cohort or 100% remote learning model due to another pandemic or quarantine. Since March of 2020, our society has unfortunately become accustomed to fear concerning viral outbreaks. This has led most state and local authorities to apply strict protocols for social distancing and quarantining when deemed necessary. A research study's results, whether or not it is designed like the one described herein, can be completely corrupted by the interruption of customary patterns of operation. While the teachers who participated were thankfully not under any type of quarantine or closure during the study, it is worth noting that any future research should take this possibility into consideration when designing a study.

Constraining Factors

One major constraining factor was finding enough teachers from various school models, grade levels, subject areas, and experience levels who were willing to participate in the study. While the participants represent a wide variety of these variables, having many more participants (e.g., 200-500) could yield results that are more applicable to the field of education at-large. Soliciting site administrators was a challenge, particularly in our post- and potential-pandemic

society. School officials are extremely busy with ever-changing preparations, guidelines, restrictions, and expectations. During my last two years serving as a high school principal, I declined many research study invitations as a protection of my teachers' time. Therefore, I can relate to administrators who are burdened with more pressing matters than supporting an outside researcher.

Another constraining factor is the personal paradigm of the participants. Do teachers believe that self-care strategies can positively influence their resilience and job satisfaction? Some may think that only direct pedagogical coaching or other professional development training will improve effectiveness, and that self-care strategies are merely "fluff." Certainly, in my own experience, I have met and worked with administrators whose paradigms included this belief. Therefore, finding school officials who have faith that this type of work is valid and meaningful was somewhat challenging. When I did find accommodating administrators who sent out invitation letters on my behalf to their faculties, few teachers—none from some of the schools—responded by returning the consent form. Despite the unexpected low enrollment when compared to the number invited, I was still extremely grateful that 24 participated.

Enabling Factors

Enabling factors included the willingness of the teacher participants to candidly discuss their personal perspectives and paradigms about self-care and any strategies that are introduced like those in survey prompts 7-10 (see Figures 9-12). In addition, the approval of school administration supported whole-faculty email invitations to the study, even though a couple sites had no volunteer teachers respond whose administrators did so. Perhaps an enabling factor was any possible inspiration participants experienced as a result of contemplating self-care concepts not hitherto considered. In particular, one interviewee mentioned that she did not realize painting

her nails, which she loves doing, could be considered self-care until participating in this study. Certainly, the overwhelming stress and pressure teachers are under could have been an enabling factor as a few interviewees mentioned they were interested to hear the results of this self-care study. That eagerness may demonstrate a desire to either find more ESC strategies or take comfort in knowing others use similar strategies and/or are going through the same difficult challenges.

Problematic Factors

One problematic factor is the use of a survey and one-on-one interviews. Collecting qualitative data in those forms required strict protocols and careful coding of data to minimize bias. Qualitative data, while recognized as a valid, reliable, and widely used form of research (Babbie, 2014; Creswell, 2012; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Fielding, 2008; Gubrium et al., 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), captures information that is relative in nature to the experiences of the interviewee(s). For instance, if a teacher who just took the survey recently had their schedule or workload lightened, will they respond differently than if they are experiencing a more burdensome schedule or workload? There may have been an increased feeling of efficacy or job satisfaction—and therefore more favorable responses—simply based on the participants' schedule becoming less challenging rather than due to any actual self-care awareness or practice. Changes in maturation and/or motivation of the teachers can also contaminate results. Teachers, now more than ever, are experiencing tremendous stress from being over-worked in order to keep up with the demands of post- and potential-pandemic education. Qualitative surveys and interviews that are based on the teachers' opinions, paradigms, or experiences can be skewed to the negative or positive depending on perceptions of low or high self-esteem/self-worth.

Another issue that had a major impact on the number of participants was time. There were two school sites whose administrators were extremely supportive of inviting their teachers to participate in this study. In fact, as mentioned earlier, one took it to the district to gain approval to have all schools' faculty invited. However, from both sites only one teacher returned the consent form and participated in the survey.

Finally, a major problematic factor was coding the survey and interview data. Properly identifying meaningful codes and emerging themes is an art that takes much practice. At the time of the study, my experience level with coding was limited to assignments in my two qualitative research doctoral program courses. These assignments were well-designed, and I had excellent support from professors; however, coding the study data was challenging and left me wondering what I may have missed or misunderstood in the process.

Positionality Statement

If the research findings can be applied universally, students in many diverse schools would greatly benefit as their teachers' morale improves due to a greater awareness of caring for oneself physically, mentally, and emotionally (Lesh, 2020; Miller & Flint-Stipp, 2019). In addition, teacher retention could be positively impacted since greater effectiveness has proven to lead to improved satisfaction and morale (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). This would have a tremendous effect on education since school districts spend an inordinate amount of funding on hiring and training replacement teachers. One research study showed that urban school districts spend an average of \$20,000 to separate an educator, then recruit, hire, and train the new teacher (Barnes et al., 2007). Bear in mind, the \$20,000 figure was from 2007; whereas today, that amount is calculated to be \$29,725 when accounting for inflation and cost of living increases (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022).

Not only does this cost the district precious time and resources, but teacher turnover also negatively impacts student achievement (Klusmann et al., 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Less radical than resignation, but still adversely impactful, is the issue of teacher absenteeism. When a teacher takes time off to cope or recuperate from the stress of a classroom environment and other job pressures, students do not get the same quality of instruction from a substitute teacher (Norton, 1998).

Research on teachers' perceptions of what they consider to be effective physical, mental, and emotional self-care strategies is certainly not abundant. Therefore, I am excited to see where my research will go along these lines, and how it can contribute to a greater understanding of the positive effects self-care may have on teachers and their longevity in the profession. My goal was to design a research study that will produce positive results and have a beneficial impact on the field of education. To that end, the next chapter will review literature pertinent to this research in terms of teacher absenteeism, teacher self-care (including self-efficacy, compassion fatigue, gratitude, intentionality, time management, setting boundaries, emotional intelligence, pre-service preparation, and ongoing professional development), teacher resilience, teacher identity, and job satisfaction.

Chapter 2 - Review of the Literature

Introduction

As mentioned in Chapter 1, teacher turnover costs school districts an inordinate amount of resources (Barnes et al., 2007; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022) while also negatively impacting student achievement (Klusmann et al., 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Less radical than resignation, but still adversely impactful, is the issue of teacher absenteeism. When a teacher takes time off to cope or recuperate from the stress of a classroom environment and other job pressures, students do not get the same quality of instruction from a substitute teacher (Norton, 1998).

Self-care is critical to conserve and preserve teachers in the field of education (Lesh, 2020; Miller & Flint-Stipp, 2019). However, self-care is an elusive term that is relative and difficult to define as a broad label for what can be considered effective across an entire faculty (Gay, 2018; Mariskind, 2014). Furthermore, what was once considered as “fluff,” self-care is now viewed as vital to longevity in education (Shoffner & Webb, 2022). While much more is known about teacher coaching and its outcomes on effectiveness and student learning, there is not as much research or longitudinal data on how teacher self-care impacts success in the classroom (Kraft et al., 2018).

Teacher self-care involves their self-efficacy (one’s *belief* in their own ability to be effective or successful in accomplishing a goal or task), their agency (the *ability* to autonomously take action and influence a situation), and their motivation (the *willingness* to take action in an endeavor). The interaction of all three influences—belief, ability, and willingness—is necessary when a change of behavior is either wanted or needed (Code, 2020).

This chapter will review literature that supports exploring the paradigm of self-care from the perspective of teachers to better understand how they conceptualize what self-care entails, what self-care strategies, if any, do teachers believe are most effective, and to what extent do teachers feel they effectively engage in self-care. In addition, literature concerning topics that may affect teacher turnover and absenteeism, such as emotional intelligence, teacher resilience, and teacher identity, will be investigated along with the themes of self-efficacy, agency, motivation, and more.

Using mixed methods research by employing an online survey and semi-structured one-on-one interviews with full-time teachers, coding the data, and analyzing results, I sought to uncover what teachers believe about self-care; and, what—if any—are particular strategies they find most positively impactful as effective self-care (ESC). Of course, the subjective pieces of this research study can be problematic in quantifying the data (e.g., survey and interview prompts with open-ended questions). However, due to the qualitative nature of the research, subjectivity will play a major role in discovering the participants' perceptions and paradigms about self-care (Yazan, 2015).

Teacher Turnover

Teacher turnover prior to the COVID-19 pandemic was problematic (Dinham, 1994; U.S. Department of Education, 2018), but in our society's post- and potential-pandemic state of affairs, retaining teachers has become a pandemic in and of itself for schools across our nation and the world (Toropova et al., 2021). Joshua Fullard, in *The Pandemic and Teacher Attrition: An Exodus Waiting to Happen?* (2021), describes his study involving 2,000 teachers in the United Kingdom to ascertain the pandemic's effect on their desire to leave the field of education.

He discovered a staggering statistic: “Teachers are now almost twice as likely to leave as they were before the pandemic” (Fullard, 2021).

Another study which included almost 1,000 former public school teachers in all 50 U.S. states, found that “almost half of the public school teachers who voluntarily stopped teaching in public schools after March 2020 and before their scheduled retirement left because of the COVID-19 pandemic” (Dilberti et al., 2021). Moreover, the authors discovered that stress was the main factor for the exodus, and it was “almost twice as common as insufficient pay” (Dilberti et al., 2021). In an EdWeek Research Center poll of 1,907 educators, one-fifth stated they were “‘somewhat more’ or ‘much more’ likely to leave classroom teaching” (Will, 2020). An article by Meghan A. Kessler (2020) quotes the results of a survey by the Illinois Education Association where roughly 429 (33%) of over 1,300 teachers responded that they were contemplating resigning from education.

The high school where I was principal for 14 years has had several teacher openings throughout the 2022-2023 school year in a faculty that has approximately 26 teachers. That was unprecedented in my 21-year career as a principal. While there was always turnover, for the most part, we were able to quickly fill any vacancies. I have never experienced a staffing issue that challenging, dire, and worrisome where several openings existed throughout half or more of the school year. When I spoke to the current principal, I got the distinct impression that the pool of candidates is quite shallow. She shared that one of her teachers, in addition to the other open positions, resigned mid-year for a different opportunity. Unfortunately, this is not unique to my former school. Several administrators with whom I have spoken this year echo the same conundrum of finding suitable teacher candidates to replace those who have resigned. Substitute teachers have also become difficult to secure.

Teachers are not the only ones affected by the fallout from COVID-19. As reported in a news release by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP, 2021), the Gotham Research Group conducted a survey in 2021 with 502 pre-K through 12th grade principals. All of the participants had at least two years of experience as a school leader and currently worked in either a regular-district public school, charter public school, or a private school. The results revealed that 68% of principals were concerned about teacher shortages during the 2021-2022 school year, and almost 40% believe they will resign as a school leader by 2025 (NASSP, 2021). While changes in school leadership can be positive, the instability principal turnover creates places an additional burden of stress on the affected faculty. One study discovered that “teacher turnover spikes [about 11%] in schools experiencing leadership turnover” (DeMatthews et al., 2021).

Furthermore, finding an appropriate replacement when a teacher resigns is growing increasingly more challenging, leaving many districts to lower their standards in order to secure a teacher for an open position (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021). In at least one mid-western state, there is talk of allowing a person to be the teacher of record after earning an Associate of Arts degree, which speaks to the desperate state of affairs for teacher recruiting. Moreover, having faculty and staff cover for missing teachers places a massive strain on morale which may be precarious at best. I have found that the additional burden of losing a planning period or more (even when financially compensated), and not being able to keep up with the normal teacher workload, has caused some current faculty and staff members to consider a move to greener pastures.

In their article, *The Cost of Teacher Turnover in Five School Districts: A Pilot Study*, Barnes et al. revealed that urban school districts spend an average of \$20,000 to separate an

educator, then recruit, hire, and train the new teacher (2007). Given the increases in inflation and cost of living, this \$20,000 figure from 2007 would be \$29,725 in today's economy (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). This cost correlates to a single teacher, which is staggering when applying it to the total number of replacements needed in one district at any given time.

Not only does turnover cost school districts precious time and resources, but teacher turnover also negatively impacts student achievement, as Ronfeldt et al. discovered. The authors evaluated the effectiveness of “teachers who leave a school, as compared to those who replace them,” [and found that] “teacher turnover has a significant and negative effect on student achievement in both math and ELA [English/Language Arts]” (2013). Furthermore, the authors muse that there are other harmful repercussions—other than lower student achievement—that are caused by turnover like broken relationships and/or trust with peer faculty members and the “loss of institutional knowledge” (2013). In his collection of articles, Herbert Walberg (1974) echoes the negative impact teacher turnover has on student achievement. Since the purpose of education is to further student learning, and teacher turnover negatively impacts this intent, ESC strategies can be a means of stemming the tide of turnover.

In their meta-analysis of teacher attrition, Madigan and Kim (2021) found that there was a strong link between job satisfaction—or lack thereof—and the intention of a teacher seeking to resign. Common symptoms of teacher burnout include: 1) exhaustion – exceeding the limits of one's emotional state; 2) depersonalization – becoming increasingly more “invisible” in an effort to protect oneself from a perceived or real negative experience; and 3) reduced accomplishment – decreased production and performance as a result of dissatisfaction (Andrew et al., 2016).

In any discussion of teacher turnover, it bears mentioning that not all turnover is negative. In my own experience as a principal for over 21 years, replacing ineffective, apathetic, and/or

disgruntled teachers with faculty who felt “called” to the profession, who were positive and solution-oriented, who had a passion for student learning and growth, and were outstanding team members was always a tremendous boon for the school and its stakeholders.

Teacher Absenteeism

Teacher absenteeism is a common coping mechanism to stress (Dinham, 1994) and has a direct impact on student performance (Finlayson, 2009; Miller et al., 2008). It should come as no surprise that when a teacher is not present in the classroom, the consistent flow of established routines and instructional practices is disrupted. The gap between the quality of instruction that students are used to receiving and what a substitute teacher may provide can be inconsistent at best and completely unsuitable at worst. Upon their return, teachers have to regroup and resolve any issues (e.g., academic, behavioral) from the aftermath of having someone else teach their students, and they sometimes find that the substitute ignored the lesson plans they worked so hard to provide. This type of disruption costs precious instructional time. “Students with teachers who had fewer absences were found to have had significantly larger improvements in grade equivalency” (Woods & Montagno, 1997).

In addition to student achievement, one study concerning school reform uncovered the impact teacher absenteeism had on student safety in an urban school setting since a substitute is not as familiar with safety procedures or classroom management as the teacher of record (Bruno, 2002). My own experience as a school principal echoed this concern for student safety when a teacher was absent. Bruno also found that teachers in urban schools had greater rates of absenteeism due to additional stressors like gang violence. Consequently, the higher rates of teacher absenteeism led to a lack of student motivation to learn. According to Bruno (2002)

The use of substitute teachers puts added strain on the efforts of school reform by not only increasing the costs of instruction, but by changing the delivery of instruction from fully credentialed and permanent teachers to part-time and substitute teachers. In addition, with heavy reliance on substitute teachers to deliver instructional programs, the teaching efforts of the regular teacher towards school reform might be undermined. (p. 17)

In their research synthesis, Brown and Uehara (1999) mention several studies which reveal the negative impact teacher absenteeism has on student learning. Furthermore, teacher absenteeism affects one's own care and the well-being of their peers. Connecticut Education Association President, Kate Dias, said, "Some teachers have been coming to work sick to avoid adding duties to their colleagues' already heavy burden...It's an unhealthy situation" (Leavenworth & Stacom, 2021). The sacrificing of one's own health at the expense of exposing others in an effort to avoid placing additional stress on coworkers was reiterated by one of the teachers who was interviewed for this study.

In light of the aforementioned research, and much more that is available but not included herein, it is clear greater efforts need to be made to minimize teacher absenteeism in order to do what is best for student learning. Improved self-care can support a teacher's resilience and minimize their time out of the classroom due to absences. While Purser (1987) concluded that there was no statistical correlation with the effectiveness of educators and their years of involvement in the classrooms (longevity), it stands to reason that a person in any field must be consistently present in order to gain the necessary skills to be effective. Teacher retention through self-care could be positively impacted since greater effectiveness can lead to improved satisfaction, morale (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011), and effectiveness (Podolsky et al., 2019).

Teacher Self-Care

Since the art and science of teaching involves caring for others' well-being in a classroom setting, it is important that the field of education is seen as work that is similar to other high-needs, high-stress, and high-interaction care positions (e.g., nursing, counseling, first-responders). In caring for others, teachers can mask their own emotional needs which creates an additional burden of staunching any cathartic means of relieving their own emotional tension (Dunn, 2021). While self-care research concerning teachers is more sparse than in other fields (e.g., nursing, counseling), a cross-examination reveals similarities which can be readily applied to education.

One study dealing with compassion fatigue (more on this later in the chapter) and psychotherapists' lack of self-care (Figley, 2002), suggests that “stress management and self-soothing techniques are critical for surviving modern work—no matter the focus of the work” (p. 1440). Studies like this can similarly inform teachers of the importance and need to care for oneself physically, mentally, and emotionally, as they work in a field where there are so many negative impacts on several fronts like personal time, finances, freedom, upward mobility, satisfaction, etc.

Authors Sharon Lauricella and T. Keith Edmunds share a unique angle on self-care: having fun while teaching. In their article, *Ludic Pedagogy: Taking a Serious Look at Fun in the COVID-19 Classroom and Beyond*, they describe “four elements of this model: fun (motivation), positivity (affect), play (activity), and playfulness (attitude)” (Lauricella & Edmunds, 2022). They cite further research which shows the reasons behind why utilizing these components are important in creating an engaging and enjoyable teaching and learning experience. Although recently retired from school administration, my last 14-year stint as a high school principal

included teaching a one-semester Character and Ethics course for 13 years. I can confidently say, based on my own experience and verified by countless student evaluations of the class, that having fun in the classroom, without sacrificing standards or structure, makes teaching for the educator and learning for the students a much more engaging, stress-reducing, and fun experience. The next subsections will delve into the three influences and three initiatives that affect teacher self-care.

Self-Efficacy

Merriam-Webster (2023) defines efficacy as the “power to produce an effect;” therefore, self-efficacy is one’s belief in their own ability to be effective or successful in accomplishing a goal or task. Self-efficacy plays a tremendous part in driving one’s motivation to succeed (Zimmerman, 2000). Self-efficacy should not be examined without mentioning Albert Bandura, a prominent psychologist who not only introduced the term as it is related to social psychology, but who also did extensive research into the topic (Van der Bijl & Shortridge-Baggett, 2002). It is important to note that self-efficacy does not exist as a uniform construct across various kinds of tasks, subjects, levels of expertise, etc. (Bandura, 1997). In other words, a teacher who is extremely effective at physically exercising may not be successful at building relationships. Both are self-care techniques important for supporting physical and emotional health, respectively. Or, for example, a teacher may have a high level of self-efficacy with classroom management but is extremely ineffective at lesson planning. Both are essential sides of the same classroom teaching/student learning coin.

Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) explore other researchers’ work in an effort to define teacher efficacy and determine how best to measure it. While doing so, they uncover two theoretical strands made by Bandura (1986): an efficacy expectation (EE) and an outcome

expectation (OE). EE has to do with the question of one's ability to successfully accomplish a task, while OE represents one's predicted consequence if the task is successfully accomplished. Based on EE and OE, a person decides risk/reward based on competency related to the risk/reward. Whether it is for self-care or teaching students, one has to have enough self-efficacy to believe they can successfully gain whatever reward is to be had by a particular strategy or situation. If there is not enough self-efficacy, the person can feel incompetent and become unmotivated to put forth the necessary effort to improve.

In an article by Nancy Protheroe (2008), she quotes A.W. Hoy's definition of teacher efficacy: "teachers' confidence in their ability to promote students' learning" (Hoy & Spero, 2005). Developing this confidence with specific self-care strategies can be a powerful tool that magnifies one's ability to persevere. The more confident a person is at a task, the more emboldened that person may be to continue pushing through difficult times and refining a particular set of skills like eating healthier, developing a hobby, practicing better sleeping habits, and/or strengthening an important relationship. In the case of teachers, that self-assurance and efficacy create a sense of satisfaction which can support resilience when facing adversity at work (Schwarzer & Warner, 2013, pp. 139–150).

Agency

Agency is the ability to autonomously take action and influence situations. It takes agency to practice ESC no matter the difficulties faced in doing so. People act in order to influence or counteract change, and when undergoing "challenging conditions, individual strengths or weaknesses are put to the test, and robust persistence and enhanced effort are essential motivational resources for successful agency in development" (Heckhausen et al., 2018). Furthermore, "To the extent that individuals differ in their capacities to meet these

challenges, they will differ in the effectiveness of their agency” (Heckhausen & Wrosch 2015). Priestley et al. (2015) describe agency as not being a quality of those who act but the dimension of the actual actions taken by those who act. In other words, agency is not about the person but about the action taken by the person.

Agency does not exist in a vacuum but “builds upon past achievements, understandings, and patterns of action” (Priestley et al., 2015). Furthermore, the authors posit that agency is something which takes place as an action in the moment or present but is informed by the past and oriented in the future (p. 3). Agency has more to do with achievement and not capacity. Therefore, building one’s capacity to do an act does not guarantee the act will be successfully accomplished.

Motivation

While self-efficacy (belief) and agency (ability) are critical factors in making lasting, positive changes in one’s life, such as developing a habit of routinely practicing ESC, there is one more ingredient that must be added: motivation (willpower). Motivation is the willingness to take action in an endeavor. In their article, *Teacher Motivation: Definition, Research Development and Implications for Teachers* (Han & Yin, 2016), the authors define motivation as the “energy or drive that moves people to do something by nature” (p. 3).

However, motivation is a “dynamically evolving and changing entity” (Dornyi & Otto, 1998). It is based on one’s attitudes and beliefs. Therefore, when assessing one’s motivation to act, a careful inspection of the result of that action is necessary. Will the action bring pain (something detrimental) or pleasure (something beneficial)? Certainly, one can be spontaneously motivated to do something, but there will still exist some type of awareness of risk or reward

associated with the act...some sort of adversity to loss or payoff for gain that is perceived which moves the person to act (Preuschoff et al., 2006).

The temporal nature of motivation must also be considered. Will the action produce a lasting or temporary effect? Is the end result enough to move a person to take action? Plenty of people make New Year's resolutions, many of which involve some type of ESC. However, motivation often fails as commitments are cast aside when the difficulties of making lifestyle changes become less about theory (making the resolution) and more about practice (performing the resolution).

The triumvirate of belief, ability, and willingness creates a powerful change agent in one's life; and, these influences are interdependent, synergistic, and cyclical in nature. For example, a teacher who has the self-efficacy (belief) to teach effectively, the agency (ability) to do so, and the motivation (willingness) to be effective will most likely continue seeking ways to improve their practice and effectiveness in the classroom, and their self-efficacy, agency, and motivation can strengthen and reinforce one another. Such a teacher will have a greater chance of remaining in the field which will support higher retention and reduce absenteeism. Conversely, a teacher who has the self-efficacy and agency to change but lacks motivation will not be moved to do so (Code, 2020).

Caring for oneself takes the *belief* that self-care is positively impactful for health and wellbeing, the *ability* to accomplish ESC, and the *motivation* to perform it. Thus, if a teacher can improve their time management, intentionality with ESC, and setting boundaries, their self-efficacy can improve which will give them a greater sense of job satisfaction, increase retention, and reduce absenteeism. Of course, if the work environment (e.g., administration, policies, department expectations) is inflexible, a change to a different school site that is more conducive

to developing improved self-efficacy, agency, and motivation may be needed. With these improvements, one can have the confidence to make such a change rather than remain where there are feelings of hopelessness and job dissatisfaction which are major contributors to teacher burnout (Andrew et al., 2016).

Courtney Ackerman, in her article titled *What is Self-Efficacy Theory?* (2018), considers people with high self-efficacy to have an *internal* locus of control, whereas those with low self-efficacy have an *external* locus of control. She states, “The locus of control refers to where you believe the power to alter your life events resides: within you [internal locus of control] or outside of you [external locus of control]” (2018). In other words, people who believe the facility to change their life situations comes from within themselves have greater control over their lives, while those who deem that capacity to be in the hands of others have less influence to change their own circumstances. Dennis McLoughlin (founder of *High Trust Psychology*TM) frankly expresses this as, “Those who blame lose the ability to change” (n.d.).

Intentionality

Being intentional about self-care is critical when working in a people-intensive, high-stress job like teaching. Leia Baker, in *Self-Care amongst First-Year Teachers* (2020), studied the effects of self-care strategies on new teachers in terms of how they felt about teaching and their consistent attendance. She found that practicing specific strategies for self-care and wellness had a profound impact on how the participants felt during their first year of teaching. Tactics included mindfulness, staying hydrated, breathing exercises, taking time to be with friends/family, talking with co-workers, journaling, etc. The limitation to this study was that it only involved two first-year teachers.

There is ample research that shows ESC strategies support an improved sense of well-being which translates to more positive outcomes in life (e.g., home, work, relationships) (Torregrosa-Ruiz et al., 2021). However, teachers who have excellent pedagogical skills and commitment to the field, but do not care for themselves physically, mentally, and emotionally, are placing themselves at risk for a decline in health, motivation, job satisfaction, and eventually burnout (Brown & Roloff, 2011; Madigan & Kim, 2021).

Tina Boogren wrote a book titled *Take Time for You: Self-Care Action Plans for Educators* (2018) where she explores various needs, and plans surrounding such, on which teachers should focus: physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, self-actualization, and transcendence. In her follow-up book, *180 Days of Self-Care for Busy Educators* (2020), Boogren lists several ways a teacher may consider caring for oneself which include music, nutrition/hydration, sleep, laughter, technology, altruism, wardrobe, reflection, mindfulness, time use, etc. (Boogren, 2020). She includes self-care plans divided into four, nine-week segments that cover Surviving the Season of Sacrifice, Dealing with Disillusionment, Finding Balance, and Finishing Strong.

The intentions of a person involve their internal motivations and convictions. Can an *old dog learn new tricks*? The answer is a resounding *Yes!* “Through action and experience, you take advantage of your brain’s ability to modify its activity” (Ryder, 2021). This capacity for our brains to adapt and adjust to new experiences and stimuli is called neuroplasticity. The key is a person must be willing to alter their patterns of behavior. It is not a matter of *if* change in our behaviors can occur—regardless of age and circumstances—it is a matter of *when* a person is motivated enough to make changes, thus rewriting old patterns of behavior and replacing them with new or different patterns. In their meta-analysis on teaching neuroplasticity as it relates to

growth mindset, the authors found that there was a “positive effect on motivation, achievement, and brain activity” (Sarrasin et al., 2018). Therefore, a teacher who is properly motivated to establish new or more effective habits of self-care can experience the benefits of consistently and intentionally practicing ESC.

Time Management

Time management, the process of organizing and allocating time for pursuits, responsibilities, and tasks to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of one’s efforts, is a key piece of self-care and figures prominently in several studies. Antoine de Saint-Exupery said, “A goal without a plan is just a wish” (n.d.). When teachers can control their schedules, rather than allowing their schedules to control them, much can be accomplished by being more efficient in the science of teaching: preparing, planning, grading, maximizing instructional time, utilizing planning/preparation periods wisely (Ather et al., 2016; Etor & Anam, 2019; Sahito & Vaisanen, 2017), and avoiding being a *martyr*. Martyrs tend to over-work, upset themselves for not having enough personal time, then seek sympathy from those for whom they perceive are not working as hard. Martyrs develop negative, bitter attitudes and feel they are stuck “sacrificing” for the greater good while others sit idly by and let them do all the work (Parrott & Parrott, 2001).

Sahito & Vaisanen’s study (2017) discovered that time management affected a teacher’s JSM or job satisfaction and motivation. They state:

[Teachers] who achieve JSM are those who know how to: spend their time, set priorities, plan, organise their activities, schedule their assignments, delegate their time and work, stop procrastinating, minimise and manage external time wasters, focus on one task at a time and avoid multi-tasking, and feel positive to reduce stress and stay healthy. (p. 220)

Ather et al. (2016) found that there was a direct relationship between a teacher's time management skills and performance in the classroom. They recommend that intentional training on time management is added to pre-service programs and ongoing professional development. Etor and Anam (2019) found that a positive relationship exists between how a teacher performed in the classroom and their aptitude of managing time. Likewise, a study of over 1,100 German elementary teachers discovered "teachers' emotional exhaustion was significantly negatively related to students' mathematics achievement" (Klusmann et al., 2016).

Setting Boundaries

In order to protect valuable time and physical, mental, and emotional reserves, one must set firm boundaries between the various areas of life (e.g., work, home) (TFA Editorial Team, 2020). However, setting boundaries takes practice and courage, and it does not come easy for some who experience feelings of guilt or anxiety when declining the many requests of others that can encroach on one's personal time (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011). For example, a teacher who has difficulty self-advocating and saying "no" may find themselves working many hours after school planning lessons, grading, and doing supervisory duties during extra-curricular activities.

The ability to set healthy boundaries is an important part of teacher self-care in terms of alleviating stress and mitigating feelings of burnout (Mansfield et al., 2016). One researcher found that teachers were either successful or had challenges with setting boundaries, and some, as previously mentioned, even experienced feelings of guilt for establishing limits (Cherbero, 2022). Of course, the need to set clear boundaries, whether emotional (e.g., avoiding workplace drama) or physical (e.g., taking work home) is not just a teacher issue, but for anyone in a job that involves caring for others (Chatterjee & Jethwani, 2020; Waltz, 2016). Certainly, it was

extremely difficult for teachers to set clear boundaries between work and home during the COVID-19 pandemic for faculty teaching in remote or hybrid models (Openo, 2020). In my own experience as a principal and teacher during that harrowing time, I felt that the line between work and home was terrifically blurred and at times non-existent. Unfortunately, I developed an extremely bad habit—that I still struggle with today—of constantly checking emails at all hours of the day and early evening. While the above influences and initiatives impact teachers and their practice of ESC, the next subsections will discuss additional factors that also affect teacher self-care.

Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue is defined in a Berkeley School of Education article as “how much stress, burnout, and secondary trauma teachers are experiencing” (Yang, 2021). The author describes a study of 321 educators who were serving during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, where 93% felt the need for some type of “social-emotional support from their school upon the return to in-person instruction” and over half reporting they either “strongly or somewhat agreed feeling compassion fatigue” (Yang, 2021).

In their book, *The Resilient Practitioner: Burnout Prevention and Self-Care Strategies*, Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison (2011) clearly define the reasons for, and solutions to, burnout that are common amongst those in caring professions: counselors, therapists, teachers, and health professionals. They cite compassion fatigue and a lack of clarity as contributors to burnout. Conversely, the authors recommend the following tasks in order to develop resiliency:

Task 1: Lose One’s Innocence about the Need to Assertively Develop Resiliency and Self-Care Skills. Task 2: Develop Abundant Sources of Positive Energy. Task 3: Relish

the Joy and Meaning of the Work as a Positive Energy Source. Task 4: Search for Empathy Balance. (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011)

These tasks can also guide teachers to a healthier life balance and appreciation for their work despite the compassion fatigue that can set in when dealing with students on a daily basis. While compassion fatigue is generally mentioned in the fields of those serving the traumatized (e.g., nursing, social work, psychology), there is little research concerning educators and compassion fatigue. However, it is becoming an emerging topic—particularly post-pandemic—that is garnering attention in posts and articles across the Internet as teachers are forced to deal with students who have experienced trauma in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thankfully, there are many resources available online to support teachers who are coping with compassion fatigue as a result of the pandemic (TFA Editorial Team, n.d.).

Gratitude

Gratitude is a powerful weapon for bolstering resilience and fighting burnout (Deuskar & Abhyankar, 2022). There are several studies which indicate that gratitude should be given distinction when considering a self-care regimen and demonstrate gratitude's positive impact with a sense of well-being (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000; McCullough et al., 2002; Fredrickson, 2004). Research by Deuskar and Abhyankar (2002) showed a strong connection between gratitude, acceptance, positive relations with others, and mastery. Furthermore, Laly and Augustine (2015) discuss their findings and suggest a substantial correlation exists between gratitude and what they call the *psychological capital* of teachers, which is comprised of hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy and allows a teacher to persevere through difficulties. Neuroscience has shown that the brain “cannot easily focus on both positive and negative

stimuli” (Kolb, 2012). Therefore, if focused more on gratitude, a teacher would be less likely to dwell upon work issues that cause fear or anxiety.

Growing in Gratitude™ (McLoughlin, n.d.) follows the concept of Think-Feel-Do which is a cycle of cognition, emotion, and action. It demonstrates that whatever we focus on (Think), is what we become emotionally attached to (Feel), and will put effort into seeking (Do). This same concept appears in Thomas Lickona’s book *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility* (1992) where he echoes the Think-Feel-Do cycle in terms of character education:

Character so conceived has three interrelated parts: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior. Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good—habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of action. All three are necessary for leading a moral life; all three make up moral maturity. (p. 51)

Moreover, as Bandura states, “People develop biases depending on their preexisting beliefs, the kinds of attributions they make, and the sources of information they attend to or consider important” (1997). The Growing in Gratitude™ concept allows people to consider the impact of refocusing their thinking on things for which they are grateful. When thoughts are focused on gratitude, they will begin feeling more grateful, and experience a higher level of satisfaction with their circumstances (Deuskar & Abhyankar, 2022). Or, they may discover some other worthy goal for which to expend their energy intellectually, emotionally, and physically. To further explore this topic, a six-prompt survey titled *The Gratitude Questionnaire* (McCullough et al., 2002) can be examined to gauge one’s level of gratitude.

Emotional Intelligence

Daniel Goleman's book titled *Emotional Intelligence* (Goleman, 1995) officially introduced the idea that people can learn to recognize and manage their emotions and the emotions of others. It is crucial that teachers are not only well-versed in their content area, but also adept at understanding and gauging their own emotions and the emotions of their students and co-workers in order to stay motivated and experience a greater degree of job satisfaction (Sahito & Vaisanen, 2017). Nearly thirty years later, many effective tools or measures for emotional intelligence have been created and utilized (O'Connor et al., 2019).

“Research has shown that increasing EI [Emotional Intelligence] leads to more effective stress management, but this may also increase job satisfaction and overall well-being” (Vesely et al., 2013). Since teaching is an emotionally demanding, rewarding, and draining profession, the use of EI training can be a positive support for increasing one's identity, efficacy, and desire to remain in teaching. Teachers who become adept at understanding and gauging their own emotions and the emotions of their students and co-workers can stay motivated and experience a greater degree of job satisfaction (Sahito & Vaisanen, 2017). Since teacher burnout has an adverse impact on education (Barnes et al., 2007; Klusmann et al., 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2013), practicing effective self-care and emotional intelligence strategies can improve teacher resilience, minimize burnout, develop positive relationships, and preserve valuable educational resources.

Pre-Service Preparation and Ongoing Professional Development

Teacher pre-service preparation programs can be an ideal time to support the growth and development of self-care strategies like gratitude, time management, and emotional intelligence. Proactively introducing these concepts during pre-service coursework—before a teacher can

develop negative self-care habits—has shown positive results and can provide awareness of ESC which could support a teacher throughout their career (Ansley & Wander, 2021). Certainly, self-care topics like gratitude, time management, and emotional intelligence could be readily presented as part of in-service professional development for teachers already in the field.

Training teachers in ways that support their resilience, identity, and job satisfaction can be an effective way to conserve and preserve them in the field of education. However, professional development offered by schools must ensure that the training is effective and meaningful to teachers, not only in how it is presented, but how it can enhance self-efficacy and performance effectiveness (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003). Further research should be done to confirm that whatever ESC training is being presented to teachers is perceived by them to be valuable and worthy of their time; otherwise, it will be counterintuitive and serve to detract from self-care becoming “one more thing” to do for busy and stressed teachers.

Teacher Resilience

Qing Gu and Christopher Day performed a study involving the importance of teacher resilience that encompassed 300 teachers in 100 schools. The research from this broad study revealed that resilience needs to be characterized in two ways: 1) the physical act of remaining in the same position, and 2) the “maintenance of motivation and commitment” to that role (Gu & Day, 2007). This distinction is important because teachers can remain in one position for many years, but lack the drive to be effective when dealing with student learning.

In another study, resilience was linked with *positive adaptation* which is “reflected by higher levels of wellbeing and job satisfaction and lower levels of burnout...” (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019). The authors sought to quantify factors in the research concerning resilience and found that two fronts must be addressed in terms of bolstering resiliency. The first had to do with

the work environment by “ensuring supportive management, reasonable workloads, and positive school cultures where staff collaborate and socialize with one another” (p. 126). The second involved improving the individual’s ability to manage within the profession. This latter part, the authors recommend, needs further research to discover what strategies in particular would support resilience.

A qualitative study by Mansfield et al. (2012) surveyed 200 post-secondary education students who were graduating and those who were relatively new to the teaching profession. The authors constructed a four-dimensional framework to better understand resilience which included the following aspects: emotional, profession-related, motivational, and social. When considering all four qualities, they discovered that it is necessary for teacher education programs to “prepare intending teachers to deal with the realities of teaching including a range of diverse and adverse circumstances” (p. 366). This type of transparency may help future teachers to become more resilient as they can better prepare to unflinchingly face the reality and hardships of teaching.

Valerie Cherero, in her master’s thesis *Beyond Burnout: How Elementary Teachers Cope and Flourish in a Pandemic-Era School*, discusses the “need for qualitative research that illustrates teachers’ perceptions of burnout and flourishing” (Cherero, 2022). A belief in oneself to be effective, or self-efficacy, plays a role in teacher burnout (Gillet et al., 2022). Understanding teachers’ views about resilience and how to reinforce it to avoid burnout is critical to conserve and preserve educators.

Becky Bobek (2002) identifies eight essential areas that can advance and enhance a teacher’s resilience: “significant adult relationships, a sense of personal responsibility, social and problem-solving skills, a sense of competence, expectations and goals, confidence, a sense of humor, and a sense of accomplishment” (pp. 203-204). These important elements can make or

break a teacher new to the profession. For instance, a new teacher who builds constructive relationships with experienced teachers who have weathered the storms of their profession can have hope that they can also make it through difficult times. This is a major reason why effective teacher mentor programs have shown such positive results (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Mathur et al., 2012).

The ability to persevere through difficult challenges, whether personal or professional, is a crucial skill needed to navigate the rough waters of teachers' daily school experiences. Whether the storms are caused by difficult students, demanding administrators, low pay, a lack of resources, rude parents, a negative work environment, or all-of-the-above and more, being able to overcome obstacles and emerge relatively unscathed is an important part of self-care and longevity.

Teacher Identity

Teacher identity, as defined by Michalinos Zembylas, “serves as the repository of particular experiences in classrooms and schools, the site of thoughts, attitudes, emotions, beliefs, and values” (Zembylas, 2003). This is an important factor to consider as self-perception heavily affects motivation to acquire new knowledge and skills, as well as, how satisfaction is interpreted. A well-designed self-care program can further develop a teacher's identity if the strategies are specific, intentional, sound, and easy to implement (McKay, 2019).

Hanna et al. (2019) classified several domains that determined teacher identity: self-image, motivation, commitment, self-efficacy, task perception, and job satisfaction. These six areas demonstrated that teacher identity is not a single layer with which to consider but made up of multiple components that must be regarded with care in order to affect positive change. For instance, factoring a teacher's motivation involves understanding what drives them to be in

education, whereas gauging one's commitment level to the profession has more to do with willpower to remain despite obstacles. Certainly, the six domains are interconnected; however, exploring each one on an individual level will support a deeper understanding of a teacher's perceived identity.

James Noonan's qualitative study, *An Affinity for Learning: Teacher Identity and Powerful Professional Development* (2018), used teacher interviews to investigate the link between individuals' "unique set of values and interests, past behaviors, and aspirations for the future" (p. 10) with their experiences in professional development and how these influences can shape teacher identity. The author describes learning affinity as a "disposition toward learning experiences that either contributes to or emerges from one's professional identity" (p. 4). He goes on to identify three learning affinities in professional development: the *what* or content, the *who* or exemplary models, and the *with whom* or "interdependent exchanges of expertise" (p. 4). These affinities form strong beliefs that influence a teacher's identity in terms of how, where, and why they fit into education.

It is important to note that a teacher's personal identity cannot be fully separated from their professional identity, since cognition, emotion, and action are tied up in the same person who navigate both roles. Day et al. (2006) relate this to the "unavoidable interrelationships between professional and personal identities, if only because the overwhelming evidence is that teaching demands significant personal investment" (p. 603). The dichotomous identity of teachers is further confused when lines get blurred between work and home hours. Examples include, but are certainly not limited to, the amount of laborious grading teachers experience at any given time, and/or teaching demands during the COVID-19 pandemic. The fusion of personal and professional teacher identities can become unstable as stress from one role

encroaches on the other. ESC becomes critical as a buffer to support wellbeing for those, like teachers, who have entangled personal and professional roles.

Clearly, efficacy cannot be ruled out as an important factor and plays a tremendous role in driving one's motivation to succeed. In an article by Nancy Protheroe (2008), she quotes A.W. Hoy's definition of teacher efficacy: "teachers' confidence in their ability to promote students' learning" (Hoy & Spero, 2005). Developing this confidence with specific self-care strategies can be a powerful tool that magnifies one's ability to persevere. The more confident a person is at a task, the more emboldened that person may be to continue pushing through difficult times and refining a particular set of skills like eating healthier, developing a hobby, practicing better sleeping habits, and/or strengthening an important relationship. In the case of teachers, that self-assurance creates a sense of satisfaction which can support resilience when facing adversity. Resilience, in turn, creates even more confidence (Gu & Day, 2007).

Job Satisfaction

In their research, Sener et al. (2009) found a direct link between emotional intelligence (previously discussed) and job satisfaction. Identifying and managing emotional health is a major factor in job performance and satisfaction (Ignat & Clipa, 2012; Wong & Law, 2002; Yuan et al., 2014). Klusmann et al. (2016) performed a large-scale analysis in Germany with 1,102 teachers, and found that there was a negative relationship between the emotional exhaustion of teachers and the achievement level of their students. One study showed that an educator's biggest gauge of satisfaction was their students' achievement (Dinham, 1994). So, it stands to reason that "happy workers are more productive ones" (Iqbal et al., 2016).

Part of a teacher's job satisfaction, or lack thereof, is connected to a workload filled with hours of personal time spent planning lessons and grading student work. Butt and Lance (2005)

described a U.K. study involving 32 schools whose purpose was to explore the issue of workload and job satisfaction with secondary teachers. They found that 96% of the 635 teachers polled reported that they work after scheduled school hours (e.g., afternoons, evenings, weekends) for an average of 9.6 hours per week. Furthermore, their data showed teachers' most prevalent factor that affects job satisfaction was "excessive workload" (Butt & Lance, 2005). The authors describe four reasons—listed here by greatest to least impact—which affected teachers' sense of job satisfaction: 1) amount of tasks unrelated to teaching such as making copies, "filing, money collection, acting as a social worker, paperwork, form filling, duplication information and [creating] letters;" 2) "monitoring, assessment, recording, reporting and accountability," in particular the time needed to perform these tasks, being "overburdened" by them, the feeling that these tasks were often not necessary, and the burden of grading coursework (Butt & Lance, 2005).

When job satisfaction is at an extreme low, and there is no hope of improvement, teacher burnout is inevitable. Andrew et al. (2016) succinctly capture "burnout as emotional withdrawal from one's work and define it in relation to three interrelated constructs: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment" (p. 515). While burnout is covered in this literature review elsewhere, it is important to consider what can be done for teachers who experience burnout symptoms in an effort to increase their job satisfaction. Afterall, since our emotions are generally linked to our psychological state (Madigan & Kim, 2021), one may avoid being *emotionally exhausted* through regularly practicing emotional self-care by building positive relationships at school that provide encouragement and support (Boogren, 2018; Boogren, 2020). Moreover, a teacher who is in a state of *depersonalization*—disengaging from work and colleagues—may get more invested at school by practicing emotional intelligence

strategies in an effort to better understand and manage their own emotions and that of their students and colleagues. This could enhance the teacher's relationships which can increase job satisfaction (Dinham, 1994; Lavy & Bocker, 2017).

Major issues affecting educators, such as “working conditions, teacher workload, teacher cooperation, and student discipline” (Toropova et al., 2021), can greatly impact the satisfaction level—and therefore turnover and/or absenteeism rate—of teachers. In fact, job satisfaction may be one of the most critical components to staunch the tide of teacher attrition and absenteeism. If a teacher is satisfied with their job, they are more likely to be engaged in their work and overcome stress and challenges that confound others who are not satisfied (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

Conclusion

Relevant theories that support understanding relationships among variables in this study include those focused on self-care, emotional intelligence, resilience, teacher identity, and job satisfaction. While research into teacher self-care is more scarce than in other fields, like nursing, there are enough correlations in existing studies that are still applicable and relevant to education. Thankfully, there are many research studies that involve teacher resilience, identity, and job satisfaction.

Why is self-care so critical to teacher effectiveness? Think of the recommendation given to adult airline passengers in the event of an emergency that directs them to place the oxygen mask on themselves first, before their children. How can we properly care for others, as teachers do each day, without first caring for ourselves? Yet, many do just that...trap themselves on a treadmill, so-to-speak, of caring for others without any plan to stop, get off, and take a much-needed break for ESC.

How teachers perceive their purpose or role in education, better known as their teacher identity, introduces a subjective variable that makes quantifying identity difficult. One teacher may see themselves as an agent of change in the lives of young people. This person may find they are passionately drawn to gaining a deeper knowledge of content and learning more effective strategies of teaching, acting as an “engineer” and understanding not only how to affect change, but why change occurs based on a variety of techniques. Conversely, another teacher may find themselves in the profession as a matter of schedule convenience with nearly three months off salaried work throughout the year. This individual may lack the motivation to gain further knowledge and is content to drift along in a career that is functional. They operate as a “mechanic” and may only perform the duties necessary to continue in the position, never grasping the reasons why or how various techniques affect change in student learning. Developing a mission-perspective, engineer identity in educators is crucial in order for teachers to be truly effective, life-long learners who have longevity, success, and satisfaction in the field. Additional research can be done to explore how best to bolster teacher identity.

The theories involving self-care, emotional intelligence, resilience, teacher identity, and job satisfaction certainly involve qualitative research and impacted how I shaped my methods. The first step, and the one solely involved in this study, was ascertaining what teachers perceive as ESC based on their own paradigms. Measuring this involved subjective data derived from a survey and one-on-one interviews. The participants’ pre-conceived ideas/beliefs on self-care and their own ability with or understanding of resiliency, their self-perceptions of who they are as an educator and what their motivation is (or lack thereof) to learn and grow, and their understanding and awareness of job satisfaction, impacted the types of tools and methods used to ascertain how these variables affect teacher efficacy and longevity.

Adding teacher resilience and identity to this research supported a more thorough look into how teacher effectiveness and longevity is articulated and explained through the lens of teachers and how they care for themselves. Throughout the process of this study, I had to think deeper on variables that will have quite an impact on how, why, and to what degree my research will affect the field of education. There is a clear gap in the literature concerning teacher effective self-care strategies and their impact on teacher turnover and absenteeism, particularly given the brief time between the COVID-19 pandemic and now when so many are considering leaving the field of education. However, resilience cannot occur without some type of physical, mental, and emotional self-care. How can someone continue to persevere without renewing themselves on a regular basis? My great hope was that this study will do some part to fill the gap in research and provide clear direction on improving teacher resilience through intentional self-care.

There is ample research that has been done in the realm of teacher retention and the positive effect it has on student learning. Bridging the gap between self-care and retention or feeling fulfilled can support educators with greater efficacy, a stronger identity, and improved job and work/life satisfaction. Teachers who are effective in self-care and remain in the field can have a tremendous, positive influence in the lives of their students.

In the next chapter, Chapter 3, this study's methodology will be fully explained to include timeline, location, participants (e.g., description, selection), research design, data collection schedule, data collection instruments (e.g., self-care Qualtrics survey, one-on-one Zoom interviews, interview protocol), and data analysis (e.g., collection, coding, analyzing the survey and interviews). The latter will be a discussion on the method only, not the results. Results for

the methodology—in terms of participants’ perceptions on what they believe comprises ESC—will be explained in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3 - Research Methodology

Timeline

The research study took approximately ten weeks to complete: one week to generate the required documents (e.g., approval letter, participant consent) and meet with school administrators for campus-wide approval to contact teachers; three days to send out email invitations to teachers and gather and collate signed, scanned, and returned consent forms; one week to deploy the online survey and gather results; one week to collate and code the survey data; three days to design the interview protocol based on the survey coding; one week to perform the one-on-one interviews; one week to collate and analyze the data through coding and re-coding; and, four weeks to write up the analysis, conclusion, and edit the final draft.

Location

To ensure the research had stronger validity, it was conducted towards a broad educator population with teachers who are employed in several schools that embrace a variety of educational models. There were 24 full-time teachers who participated in the online self-care survey. Roughly one-third (38%) work in regular district schools in Colorado, Indiana, and Kansas. Over half (58%) of the participants are employed in charter schools in Colorado, and one participant works at a private school in Colorado. Just under half (42%) are employed by a single network of five charter schools located in Colorado which includes two K-5 elementary schools, one 6-8 middle school, one 9-12 college preparatory high school, and one 6-14 vocational/technical school. I worked in the high school as the principal for 14 years prior to the study, so there existed excellent relationships for me to introduce the study and invite teachers.

The following is a breakdown of online survey participants by state: four from the single Colorado charter school network's high school, three from its middle school, one from its

elementary school, one who serves as a teacher at all three of the network's original elementary, middle, and high schools, and one who works as a shared teacher at both its middle and high schools.

There were four participants who worked in other charter schools in Colorado: two high schools, one middle school, and one elementary school. Six of the locations that employed the participants are regular district schools in Kansas: two high schools, one junior/senior high, one school that serves special needs students, one middle school, and an elementary school. Two participants (one each) came from regular district middle and high schools in Colorado that are situated in suburban areas. One participant is employed in a regular district junior/senior high in Indiana. Finally, one participant works in a private elementary school in Colorado.

Participants

Description

The participants are teachers from the various schools described in the previous section. 24 teachers anonymously took the online survey; and, from that same population, 11 volunteered to participate in one-on-one interviews. I selected six of the 11 volunteers for their diversity (e.g., grade levels, subject areas, gender) as a representative population of teachers in general. Participants were secured through administrative approval, referrals from other teachers, referrals from people with whom I am acquainted who know teachers, teachers with whom I have previously worked, and some who are either in a master's program with a limited license as a teacher of record or are acting as a cooperating teacher in the same program.

The participants teach various grade levels: elementary (K-5), middle (6-8), high (9-12) school, and secondary (7-12). Subject areas taught by participants include—in alphabetical order—band, computer science, elementary general education, English, literacy intervention,

mathematics, orchestra, physical education, science, social studies, and special education. The participants work full-time either in a regular district public school, charter public school, or a private school.

Of the 24 online survey participants, 29% ($n=7$) identified as male, 67% ($n=16$) identified as female, and 4% ($n=1$) identified as neither male nor female. Nearly three-quarters of the teachers (71%, $n=17$) have taught in the classroom full-time for five or more years, 4% ($n=1$) taught for three to four years, 17% ($n=4$) have taught for one to two years, and 8% ($n=2$) are still in their first year of teaching during the 2022-2023 school year (see Figure 4).

The six teachers whom I interviewed one-on-one over Zoom teach a variety of subjects and grade levels: high school (computer science), middle school (English, orchestra, physical education, science), and upper elementary school (general education). Half of the interviewed teachers work in a Colorado or Kansas regular district school, while the other half work in a Colorado charter school. The interviewees identified their genders as three females and three males. The diverse population of teachers who participated in the survey and interviews are from various grade levels, genders, and types of schools; and, they are meant to be representative of educators at-large.

Selection

The sample selection was both convenient and purposeful. It was convenient for several reasons that have to do with ease of contacting an administrator to gain site approval, inviting a teacher known to me, or receiving referrals from someone: 1) I worked in the five-school Colorado charter network for 14 years as the high school principal from July 2008 until June 2022; 2) I have developed a positive relationship with some teachers in Colorado; and 3) a family friend knows several full-time teachers and referred them to me.

The sample population was purposeful in selection because my initial goal was to get a minimum of five teachers from each school to participate. Unfortunately, this did not occur due to the busyness and (ironically) the stress levels teachers were experiencing. However, I did receive 24 consent forms from participants who were—as described above—still an excellent representation of teachers since the sample population was comprised of a broad spectrum of grade levels, types of education models, and settings (e.g., urban, suburban, rural).

As more fully described above, participants were selected from a pool of volunteers who consisted of full-time, classroom teachers throughout the K-12 levels from regular district, charter, and private schools who have a wide variety of expertise in different subject areas. The selection process was originally meant to go to various sites via invitations sent through the administrators to all faculty in an attempt to get gender cohorts as equal as possible and capturing teachers with mixed experience levels from novice to expert. The goal of the selection process was to have an excellent representative sample across all grades, subjects, and settings. However, only 24 teachers returned consent forms through the various invitation methods. Thankfully, as described above, the 24 participants were an excellent, representative mix of school models (e.g., regular district, charter, private), grade levels, subject areas, expertise, gender, and regional location.

Volunteers were selected on a first-come, first-served basis as primary participants from invitations extended to the entire faculty of the participating schools. Approval to send out an invitation was given to me by several regular district and charter school administrators. In addition, a family friend who is not in education heard that I was doing a self-care study with teachers, and she sent my invitation to them which resulted in five participants joining the study. Some of the teachers are licensed by their home state's department of education in either

Colorado, Indiana, or Kansas, while others are considered *In-Field* by working in a charter school. In Colorado charter schools, an educator is allowed to be the teacher-of-record in a classroom and considered highly qualified or *In-Field* based on specific criteria related to the content area (e.g., bachelor's degree, a certain amount of post-secondary credit hours, passing the Praxis exam) (Colorado Department of Education, n.d.). Three of the participants are granted a special *Restricted* license to be full-time classroom teachers while they complete coursework and field experiences in a master's degree program. Finally, one participant works as a full-time teacher in a private school.

The return rate of the survey was 100%; however, there was some slight attrition within the actual survey as shown by the response rate of the last three prompts compared to the first sixteen. The explanation for this may well be that prompts 17-19 only had an essay text box:

17. Other than time or money, what factors influence the type of self-care strategies you practice?

18. Are there any self-care topics for which you would like more information or training?

19. Please share any final comments you have about self-care strategies.

In retrospect, I should have either included a check box for the final three prompts so participants could respond with "N/A," or I should have directed teachers to type "N/A" into the text box if they were choosing not to comment. As such, their lack of responding to the final three prompts either may be an indication that they did not have a response, so they left the text box blank, or they experienced survey fatigue. See Figure 3 for a graphical representation of the survey participation rate.

Research Design / Data Collection Schedule

As previously mentioned, the study took approximately ten weeks to complete. The design utilized an anonymous online participant survey that was deployed through Qualtrics over the course of one week and six semi-structured one-on-one Zoom interviews of volunteer teachers who also took the survey. Both methods had well-defined protocols, the purpose of which was to maintain consistency of prompts across all participants so that more reliable information could be gathered. This type of standardization, so-to-speak, also enabled codes to more easily emerge in the data analysis process.

The online survey was used to gauge the participants' attitudes and beliefs about what they consider as ESC. The survey was deployed online through Qualtrics and contained five of the six types of prompts described by Henning and Roberts (2016) to make the questionnaire as comprehensive as possible: *Yes/No*, *Choose All That Apply*, *Rating Scale*, *Choose One*, and *Open-Ended Questions*. Only *Rankings* was not used as a prompt type. A more detailed description of the survey is provided in the next section, and the entire protocol appears in Appendix D.

Semi-structured interviews were used to further understand participants' paradigms about ESC. This type of input is valuable to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' perspectives. The interview protocol was developed after coding the survey data to ensure that the information gathered was novel, meaningful, and not a rehash of survey data. Of course, when performing one-on-one interviews, there are some participant comments which are not a direct response to any protocol prompts. This is a positive feature of qualitative research where interview responses are unique to each person and play a critical role in understanding the individuals' perceptions. Thus, any instances where seemingly unrelated comments occurred during the interviews were

considered important to better grasp the teachers' paradigms of and experiences with self-care. In the next chapter, interviewee comments to prompts are recorded verbatim to bring them to life, so-to-speak, and give each teacher's unique *voice* a chance to be heard concerning self-care.

In one of the last emails concerning the survey, I asked for volunteers to do a 45-minute one-on-one interview over Zoom. I had several respond in the positive but wanted at least six to be interviewed. After looking over the survey participants' demographic information, I extended a few more invitations so that the interview population would be better representative of the field of education in general (see Participants – Description above).

Interviews were arranged using Doodle, an online polling platform that supports with scheduling meetings by allowing participants to choose an available date and time. Once booked, I sent each participant a calendar reminder through Google Calendar. All interviews took place over Zoom so that, 1) sessions could be recorded and played back as needed; 2) an audio transcript could be generated for coding purposes; and, 3) the teachers would have a more convenient way to be interviewed as a means of respecting their time. Replaying interview recordings became necessary for two reasons: 1) sometimes the audio transcripts were garbled, so recorded video footage was reviewed as needed to ascertain what exactly was said by the participants; and, 2) there were instances where it became necessary to see the interviewee's face(s) so that body language and facial expressions could convey additional meaning behind spoken words.

Data Collection / Instruments

The following instruments utilized in this research study can be found in the appendices:

1. IRB Approval Documents – Appendix A
2. Request for Approval by Administrator Sample Letter – Appendix B

3. Participant Informed Consent Letter – Appendix C
4. Participant Qualtrics Self-Care Survey Protocol – Appendix D
5. One-on-One Zoom Semi-Structured Interview Protocol – Appendix E

In order to participate in this study, teachers were required to sign, scan, and return the Participant Informed Consent Letter. Once received, the teacher was considered enrolled in the study, and an email with the Qualtrics survey link was sent to them. 24 teachers in total were enrolled in the study. The online survey was active or published in Qualtrics for seven days, and one email was sent to all enrolled teachers as a reminder to complete the survey.

The protocols for the participant survey and one-on-one interviews were designed to better understand the perceptions of what comprises ESC from the teachers' perspectives. The results of the research study supported a more comprehensive idea of how teachers can apply ESC in their own lives. Furthermore, the results can inform administrators and other education decision-makers of the top ESC strategies which may minimize absenteeism and increase teacher retention. These results or findings are discussed in the next chapter.

A matrix was created using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that listed the survey and interview prompt numbers, research questions (including the headings “demographic” and “generic”), and actual wording for each prompt. The matrix was a tremendous support in making sure that the survey and interview prompts stayed focused on answering the research questions.

Self-Care Qualtrics Survey

A survey protocol was developed with each of the four research questions in mind. The majority of survey prompts were linked to one of the research questions to ensure the survey remained centered on the study's purposes and that each question was represented. This was

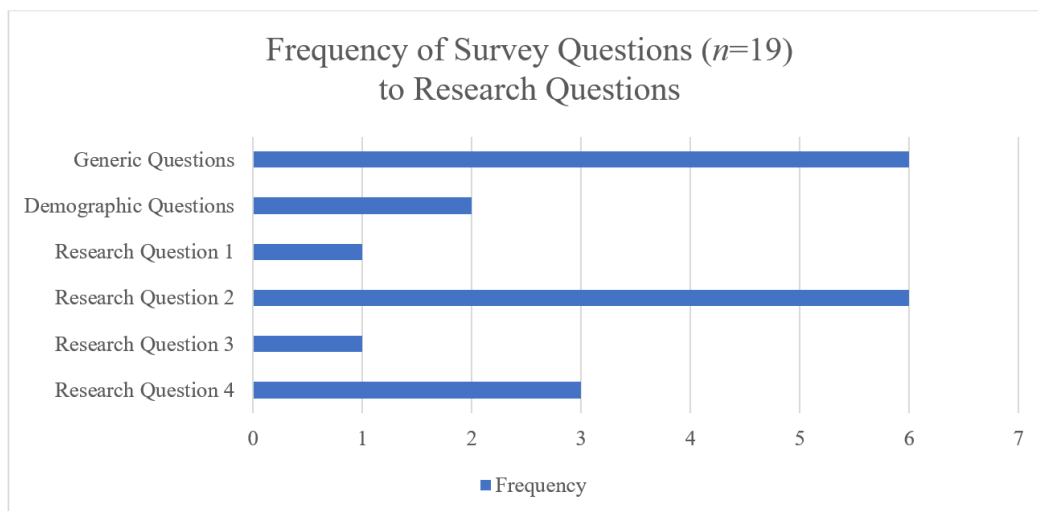
accomplished by noting to which research question the prompt related using a superscript indicator (n =number of prompts related):

1. How do teachers conceptualize what self-care entails? $n=2$
2. What self-care strategies, if any, do teachers believe are most effective? $n=6$
3. To what extent do teachers feel they effectively engage in self-care? $n=1$
4. What contextual, personal, or economic factors enable or constrain teachers' ability to engage in self-care? $n=3$

It is important to note that in addition to the survey prompts directly related to the research questions, there were also other prompts unrelated to them. Two were demographic prompts (e.g., 2. "I have been a full-time classroom teacher for...") and six were generic prompts (e.g., 13. "Self-care is important to my longevity in the teaching profession."). A visual representation of the frequency of survey questions to research questions is below (see Figure 1). The survey protocol that was used in the study can be found in Appendix D.

Figure 1

Frequency of online survey questions to research questions



The survey was designed using the Qualtrics online survey platform which is a convenient way for people to complete surveys using any Internet-connected device (e.g.,

computer, tablet, smart phone) while giving researchers access to responses that are compiled and reported automatically through a web-based data management system. The format of the survey incorporated five of the following six types of prompts: *Yes/No*, *Choose All That Apply*, *Rankings*, *Rating Scale*, *Choose One*, and *Open-Ended Questions* (Henning & Roberts, 2016). Only *Rankings* was not used as a prompt type. Two major interrelated factors to consider when utilizing a survey are participant fatigue and attention span. Fatigue can occur when a decline in interest is caused by survey prompts that are too numerous, complicated, irrelevant, and/or confusing (Sinickas, 2007).

Participants may not accurately answer prompts which invalidate results and frustrate research. Based on over nine million surveys they have implemented, On Device Research recommends a maximum of 15 survey prompts for participants using mobile devices to complete surveys (Teller, 2013). Participant attention span during a survey can also be problematic in gleaning valid data. In a qualitative study of 200 people, British researchers found that “people swap devices 21 times an hour” (Taube, 2014). The constant switching back and forth between devices may cause participants to get distracted and not respond with the focus necessary to fully engage in the questions being posed.

In their book *Student Affairs Assessment: Theory to Practice*, Henning and Roberts (2016) discuss six types of survey prompts: *Yes/No*, *Choose All That Apply*, *Rankings*, *Rating Scale*, *Choose One*, and *Open-Ended Questions*. *Yes/No* prompts are the simplest to answer and serve as a warm-up for the survey. However, I decided to use the only *Yes/No* prompt in the fifth spot as a mental break before answering an *Open-Ended Question*. As such, I wanted to make sure that the *Yes/No* question, in the form of “Agree” or “Disagree” was still meaningful and would provide excellent feedback.

One limitation with *Yes/No* questions is the ease for which respondents can either flippantly or mistakenly answer one way or another. While I designed the question so that it would be clear what a “Yes” (“Agree”) or “No” (“Disagree”) response would glean, there is no guarantee that intentional frivolity or responses made in error did not occur. *Yes/No* may be the simplest type of questions to answer, but they can also produce the least reliable results if responses were not made in earnest. The only *Yes/No* prompt included on the survey was:

5. I believe self-care is important for teachers.

Choose All That Apply prompts are used to get additional choices from participants. However, the limitation to this type of prompt is that if participants choose diametrically opposing responses, that particular set of responses would be invalid. For instance, if a participant chooses “Spending time with friends” *and* “Alone Time” as self-care strategies, the results create confusion as to which is more important and to what extent, if any, these are used by the respondent as self-care.

Initially, I had listed all the many self-care strategies from which to choose in one prompt to stay closer to the preferred online survey maximum prompt limit for the sake of attention span (Teller, 2013), but changed this to four separate prompts by category of influence (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual) in order to have a higher level of organized data. One of the challenges in doing so was to decide if certain strategies that could be attributed to more than one category should only be included in one of the four lists (e.g., Should “Cleaning/organizing” be applied to the physical, mental, or emotional category?). Certainly, “Practicing a hobby” supports mental self-care, but it can also appeal to the physical and/or emotional needs of a person. For example, a teacher could have a hobby of running which supports physical (exercise), mental (distraction from thoughts), and emotional (release of anxiety) self-care.

In the end, I decided to put strategies that could apply to more than one category in only one of the four since the various category titles were not as important to the respondents as they were for me to parse survey results. Furthermore, for each category, an “Other” selection with an opportunity to type a choice not listed was provided in case a respondent felt strongly about a strategy that was not included in a particular category. The prompts falling under the *Choose All That Apply* category included in the survey are as follows:

7. What **physical** self-care strategies are most effective in your own life? It had 11 choices in addition to “Other” and “None.”

8. What **mental** self-care strategies are most effective in your own life? It had 10 choices in addition to “Other” and “None.”

9. What **emotional** self-care strategies are most effective in your own life? It had 12 choices in addition to “Other” and “None.”

10. What **spiritual** self-care strategies are most effective in your own life? It had 6 choices in addition to “Other” and “None.”

Unfortunately, there was a design flaw with all four of the *Choose All That Apply* prompts where the first two participants could not select any of the choices. The second participant to attempt the survey contacted me to let me know that they could not select any responses for prompts 7-10. I went into the survey management system and discovered I had incorrectly programmed those prompts as *Pick, group, and rank* rather than *Multiple choice – Allow multiple answers*. This was a novice mistake due to my unfamiliarity with the Qualtrics platform. Once corrected, the second participant was able to finish the survey. I went back and checked on the first participant’s responses and found out they had typed in the answers as a workaround. I contacted the first teacher, asked if they would re-take the survey, and deleted the

original responses so there were not duplicates in the data set. Thankfully, both who encountered issues were extremely kind and fully supportive, and the other participants never realized there was an issue as it was resolved by the time they took the survey.

While *Rankings* is one of the six types of prompts that Henning and Roberts (2016) discuss in their book, I chose not to use this method due to the limitation that the more choices one has, the easier it is to get lost and have the response muddled by confusion over priorities.

I used a *Ratings* scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree) for six of the 19 prompts. They were designed with only four responses to force participants off any potential neutral positions (e.g., Neither Agree or Disagree). I did not want teachers to “straddle the fence of indecision” as Henning and Roberts express (2016). A limitation with this type of prompt is that the degree to which one Strongly Agrees/Strongly Disagrees and merely Agrees/Disagrees is relative to the participant. Furthermore, the reasons one selects a response can vary. For example, if a *Ratings* prompt states, “Good nutrition is effective self-care,” and is answered as “Agree,” is it because the teacher believes the statement is true due to life experience and practice? Or, is it because it is theoretically true to the respondent without any real-world application? The idea of good nutrition is relative. Case in point, many people agree that eating vegetables is part of good nutrition, but may disagree on whether or not they should be fresh (raw or cooked), canned, or frozen in order to be considered “good nutrition.” The *Ratings* prompts included in the survey are as follows:

3. In my **professional** life, as a teacher, my stress level is...

4. In my **personal** life, my stress level is...

13. Self-care is important to my longevity in the teaching profession.

15. If I had more **time**, I would regularly practice the top self-care strategy I listed for #11.

16. If I had more **money**, I would regularly practice the top self-care strategy I listed for #11.

The latter two (15 and 16) included a text response box and asked participants to explain their choice.

Choose One compels the participant to commit to only one of the responses provided and allows for coding themes to become more readily apparent. A scale was necessary to gauge how often, if at all, participants practiced self-care strategies. A modified version of the Mindful Self-Care Scale rubric (Cook-Cottone & Guyker, 2018) was used for prompt 14 to support respondents with frequency of practice that spanned a week and month: Regularly (3 or more times per week), Often (1-2 times per week), Sometimes (around 3 times per month), Rarely (around 1 time per month), or Never (0 times per month). There were three *Choose One* prompts included in the survey:

1. I have been a full-time classroom teacher for...

2. I teach students in...

14. To what extent do you engage in self-care activities that are meaningful to you?

Open-Ended Questions allow the participant to more fully express their opinions and ideas about the prompt topic(s). While analyzing this type of data is more complex than other prompt styles (e.g., *Yes/No*, *Choose One*), it supports a greater understanding of the participants' perspectives.

One flaw in my survey design was that prompts 11, 12, 15, 16, and 18 suggest the participant go to a previous prompt's response(s) as a reference point. However, when actually

taking the survey, there was not a way to go back to previous prompts. Therefore, participants were forced to recall from memory what they had responded. Since our memories are notoriously inaccurate, particularly as we age (Devitt & Schacter, 2016), having participants rely on a reference point that cannot be accessed could have tainted the data for those prompts. Retrospectively, I should have run additional tests of the survey before publishing and activating it for participants. There were six *Open-Ended Questions* included in the survey:

6. *To me, self-care means...*

11. *Out of all your responses in prompts 7-10 (strategies in the Physical, Mental, Emotional, and Spiritual categories), which is your top choice that you feel is most important for your own self-care?*

12. *Out of all your responses in prompts 7-10 (strategies in the Physical, Mental, Emotional, and Spiritual categories), if funding was available, which is your top choice you would like to see your school district provide or support?*

17. *Other than time or money, what factors influence the type of self-care strategies you practice?*

18. *Are there any self-care topics for which you would like more information or training? List them in order of importance to you (most important first). See the lists in prompts 7-10 for ideas.*

19. *Please share any final comments you have about self-care strategies.*

One-on-One Zoom Interviews

The semi-structured interview protocol was designed post-survey to ensure that the gathered data was an augmentation or provided an additional angle to the responses already collected via survey. Using this type of investigative method is well suited for qualitative

interpretive phenomenological research because it allows participants to “define the world from their own perspectives, not solely from the perspective of the researcher” (Hancock et al., 2021). Furthermore, it allows for an “open-ended, in-depth exploration of an aspect of life about which the interviewee has substantial experience, often combined with considerable insight” (Charmaz, 2014).

The four research questions were reviewed, and each interview prompt was labeled with a superscript number referencing to which research question it belonged. This was done to guarantee that all four research questions were covered in some way, and it was helpful in tracking the frequency with which each research question was represented in the various interview prompts (n =number of prompts):

1. How do teachers conceptualize what self-care entails? $n=4$
2. What self-care strategies, if any, do teachers believe are most effective? $n=5$
3. To what extent do teachers feel they effectively engage in self-care? $n=2$
4. What contextual, personal, or economic factors enable or constrain teachers’ ability to engage in self-care? $n=2$

The interview protocol (see Appendix E) was designed in a script format and included an introduction by me with instructions, two brief questions to warm-up participants and put them at ease, 10 main prompts on self-care, a reflection prompt that challenged interviewees to consider how they will start implementing their favorite ESC strategy, and a wrap-up statement thanking them for participating and inviting each to share any last thoughts or feedback.

While one-on-one semi-structured interviews are very effective for qualitative research like this study, participant fatigue and attention span—as described earlier—can also be negative factors if the sessions are not run efficiently (e.g., use and respect of participants’ time) and

effectively (e.g., adding depth to the survey previously taken). Therefore, a strict interview protocol with a friendly, conversational tone was developed to address any potentially negative influences while ensuring consistent data is collected from participants. This approach, as Carter McNamara (2022) states, “ensure[s] that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee; this provides more focus than the conversational approach, but still allows a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting information from the interviewee.”

Interview Protocol

In this next section, the prompts and rationale for using each are provided. To view the complete interview protocol, see Appendix E. The superscript number at the end of all interview prompts represents the research question to which it is related. The prompts that were used in the introductory Kickoff are as follows:

1. *What do you like to do for fun?*² Using *fun* as a point of inquiry generates one of four important self-care strategies in ARFF™ – Achievement, Respect, Fun, and Freedom (McLoughlin, n.d.). This prompt serves as a model for an easy, generic, and neutral conversation starter in any setting; furthermore, it provided insight on the second research question which involves what the teacher believes are most effective self-care strategies.
2. *How often do you get to do that?*³ This is a simple way to answer the third research question which relates to how often the teacher engages in self-care.

The prompts that were used in the Grand Tour are as follows:

1. *What are the first things that come to mind when you think of the term self-care?*¹

This prompt is designed to elicit an instinctive “gut” reaction from interviewees as to

- what predominantly surrounds their thoughts of self-care, elucidating their primary conceptualization of it.
2. *100% of participants surveyed agreed that self-care is important for teachers. Why do you think it was unanimous?*¹ This question is worded so as to gain a deeper understanding, through the perspective of the interviewee, why self-care is important to teachers.
 3. *The survey revealed that almost half of the 24 participants chose Physical strategies as their top choice for both personal and school-based self-care. What are your thoughts on why the Physical category was chosen so often?*² This prompt was crafted to discover the reasoning behind why so many participants selected the *Physical* category of self-care, and it served as a means of gleaning interviewees' paradigms on physical strategies.
 4. *What are your thoughts on how self-care may or may not affect a teacher's longevity in education?*¹ 70% of survey respondents "Strongly agreed" that self-care affects a teacher's longevity in the field. This prompt is worded so that I could explore why this is the case—to what extent self-care is impacting longevity—without choosing a side so as to avoid "leading the witness" by adding "may or may not."
 5. *The survey revealed that **time** was a recurring theme when it came to self-care (not enough, scheduling conflicts, struggles with time management, etc.). How does time affect your ability or inability to regularly practice self-care?*³ This prompt was an effort to discover how time plays a role in either preventing or supporting a teacher in practicing self-care. Several survey respondents mentioned time management—either

- struggling with it or a desire to have professional development to improve—so I wanted to see if the interviewees could express why time was a recurring theme.
6. *What **helps** you to engage in effective self-care? It could be anything from people, personal or professional situations, scheduling, finances, resources, etc.?⁴*
 7. *What **prevents** you from engaging in effective self-care? It could be anything from people, personal or professional situations, scheduling, finances, resources, etc.?⁴*
- Both of these prompts (6 and 7) were challenging to design as I needed to address the fourth research question in terms of what enables or constrains a teacher's ability to engage in self-care. They both went through several iterations as some examples (e.g., personal) were difficult to word so as to best capture what I intended as contributing or limiting factors.
8. *If you had a magic wand, and could have anything, what would you give yourself in terms of self-care? Why did you pick that?²* This question was created as a fictional way to glean the teachers' top choice for self-care. Using a fantasy example of inquiry supports the use of imagination, freeing up the interviewee to pick a favorite choice regardless of any real limitation of resources (e.g., time, money, ability). The follow-up question (*Why did you pick that?*) is a clarification of their response so that reasoning was included.
 9. *What advice would you give to a new teacher concerning self-care?²* By eliciting a call to give advice, this prompt was intended to determine what is considered significant information about ESC that the interviewee would pass on to others.
 10. *Did participation in the survey and this interview change your perceptions about self-care? In what ways?¹* My goal with this question was to find out what effect—if

any—being surveyed and interviewed had on the participant. Did the study support more awareness, provide a deeper understanding, cause one to begin practicing self-care, etc.?

The final prompt was a Reflection:

*When you were asked, “If you had a magic wand, and could have anything, what would you give yourself in terms of self-care?” What steps do you see yourself taking this week or this month to get that for yourself?*² The first part was worded in a way that used the fictional magic wand of prompt 8 as further examination of what the interviewee saw as a favored self-care strategy for themselves. The last part is a challenge to the interviewee to consider what, in particular, they would intentionally do in an effort to apply action towards getting what they would magically have as self-care.

Data Analysis

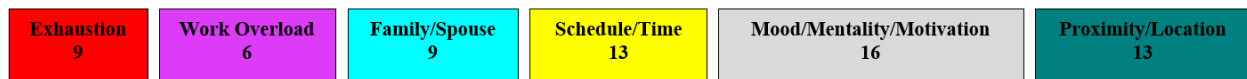
Self-Care Qualtrics Survey

To more fully understand the 24 participants’ perspectives on what they deem as ESC, I used the data derived from the aforementioned survey and one-on-one interviews. For several survey items, a simple analysis of the responses yielded results which were easily placed into tables. However, the responses that involved verbatim comments, where participants explained their reasoning, required coding. This was accomplished by downloading the survey responses from Qualtrics, transferring them to a Microsoft (MS) Word document, and analyzing the data for codes and themes. This method was approached in an inductive manner by reactively allowing codes to emerge through frequency rather than deductive analysis where particular codes are pre-selected and sought out in the data set.

MS Word’s highlighting colors were used to differentiate between codes. For instance, prompt 17 asks, “Other than time or money, what factors influence the type of self-care strategies you practice?” 23 of the 24 participants responded, and I created colored boxes at the top of the page for each discovered code and recorded the number of times a particular code appeared in the data (see Figure 2). I went back through for a second pass to ensure nothing of importance was missed. This tally allowed me to make conclusions during data analysis.

Figure 2

Coding example for online survey prompt 17 (n=23)



As you can see, Mood/Mentality/Motivation was mentioned more times (16) than any other code; therefore, it had a stronger influence than Work Overload or Exhaustion in terms of whether or not participants practice a particular self-care strategy. This begs the question, “How can Mood/Mentality/Motivation be improved so that a teacher is more likely to practice an effective self-care strategy?”

One-on-One Zoom Interviews

All six interviews were conducted over Zoom and recorded with audio transcripts that were downloaded from the online platform. The transcripts were converted into a Microsoft Word document, with the raw data at the bottom and a copy of the to-be-scrubbed transcript at the top. While I am incredibly grateful that I did not have to type all interviewee responses, I did have to go through each transcript to remove breaks and odd errors that Zoom transcribed so that there was only a script with the interviewer’s and interviewee’s comments. Often, a video had to be viewed again—in some cases, several times—to understand and correct errors made by Zoom (e.g., switching names of interviewer/interviewee, duplicated words, incorrect words, punctuation marks). The following is an example of the raw and scrubbed sections of one

transcript (note: the participant's real name was replaced with a pseudonym to maintain anonymity).

Raw:

```
6
00:01:15.770 --> 00:01:19.500
Alex Marquez: So so just to start off. What do you like to do for fun.

7
00:01:19.600 --> 00:01:22.220
Gloria: I like to read books.

8
00:01:22.520 --> 00:01:27.980
Gloria: and I like to run or

9
00:01:28.260 --> 00:01:29.640
Gloria: clean the water
```

Scrubbed:

Alex Marquez: So, just to start off. What do you like to do for fun?

Gloria: I like to read books, and I like to run or be in the water.

In total, there were 84 interview transcripts to edit: six participants multiplied by 14 prompt responses. Once this complex process was completed, the responses from each interview question were transferred to another Microsoft Word document so that all six responses of participants for a particular prompt would be organized into a single section for ease of coding. Any ancillary responses, due to additional questions or comments, that were related to a particular prompt were included with the prime responses related to that prompt.

All comments were then put into tables that depict the interviewee's pseudonym, their responses to prompts, and the themes that emerged (see Figures 21-32 in the next chapter). In this final transfer of verbatim comments into chart form, extraneous words and phrases (e.g., "you know," "like") were eliminated and any interrupted thoughts that were incomplete (e.g., "I

was—anyway—") were removed to decrease distraction, increase readability of the interviewees' responses, and allow the reader to *hear* their voice in a way that was more fluid and comprehensible. Zoom automatically removed any instances of "um," and I did my best with punctuation marks but ask for the reader's grace as transcribing interviews and assigning punctuation with conversational verbatim comments can be a messy business fraught with error. Since there were only six participant interviews, a similar process—as described above in Participant Self-Care Survey and depicted in Figure 2—was applied for their responses in an effort to discover codes and themes existent in the data. A pseudonym was assigned for each of the six interviewees using www.randomwordgenerator.com (1s0s, 2019) to create a random name and maintain their confidentiality and anonymity. The genders of the pseudonyms were matched to the preferred genders of the interviewees out of respect for their tone and voice.

As previously mentioned, tables in Microsoft Word were created that listed the prompt and columns for the pseudonyms, verbatim comments, and themes. The latter column was used as a means of summarizing any thematic elements that emerged from the verbatim comments. These tables appear in their entirety in Chapter 4 (see Figures 21-32). A brief summary was included after each table for any explanations, interpretations, and/or understandings of the participants' responses to the various prompts.

Despite providing a clearer, more robust picture of participants' experiences, one limitation of using open-ended questions in an interview—or survey for that matter—is the challenge of coding the responses (Creswell, 2012). It is safe to say that qualitative researchers would find analyzing closed-ended data much easier than coding open-ended responses in terms of discovering emerging codes, discerning themes, and finding patterns within the data as this process, by nature, is much more subjective than analyzing quantitative data. However, as

demonstrated in the next chapter, thematic elements did, in fact, emerge which tell the tale of teachers' perceptions and difficulties implementing ESC. As previously mentioned, I applied an inductive methodology for coding which allows codes to reactively emerge based on frequency rather than deductively analyzing the data by seeking out pre-selected codes. In Chapter 5, the results of the data collection described above will be discussed. Any prompts and their explanations in this chapter and the next chapter, while redundant, are strictly provided for the clarity of context concerning the prompts as they relate to the findings of the study.

Chapter 4 - Results or Findings

Introduction

This chapter will explore the results or findings of the study whose design was fully described in Chapter 3. It will begin with the results of the survey, explore the data gleaned from the interviews, then discuss the overall, big-picture findings when considering the survey and interviews as a whole. While many approaches exist to analyze qualitative data, “most strategies have in common a basic process: repetitive, ongoing review of accumulated information in order to identify recurrent patterns, themes, or categories” (Hancock et al., 2021). The methodology used in this study was inductive where codes and themes are allowed to emerge through frequency without any pre-disposition or pre-selection of codes by the researcher. Through this complex process of coding data, common themes emerged to form a more panoramic view of how self-care impacts teachers with the central and essential elements being time, intentionality, and setting boundaries.

The following section will detail the findings for the survey and interviews to include a discussion of how each prompt supported an answer to the research question to which it was related (indicated by a superscript number after each prompt). For reference, the research questions are as follows:

1. How do teachers conceptualize what self-care entails?
2. What self-care strategies, if any, do teachers believe are most effective?
3. To what extent do teachers feel they effectively engage in self-care?
4. What contextual, personal, or economic factors enable or constrain teachers’ ability to engage in self-care?

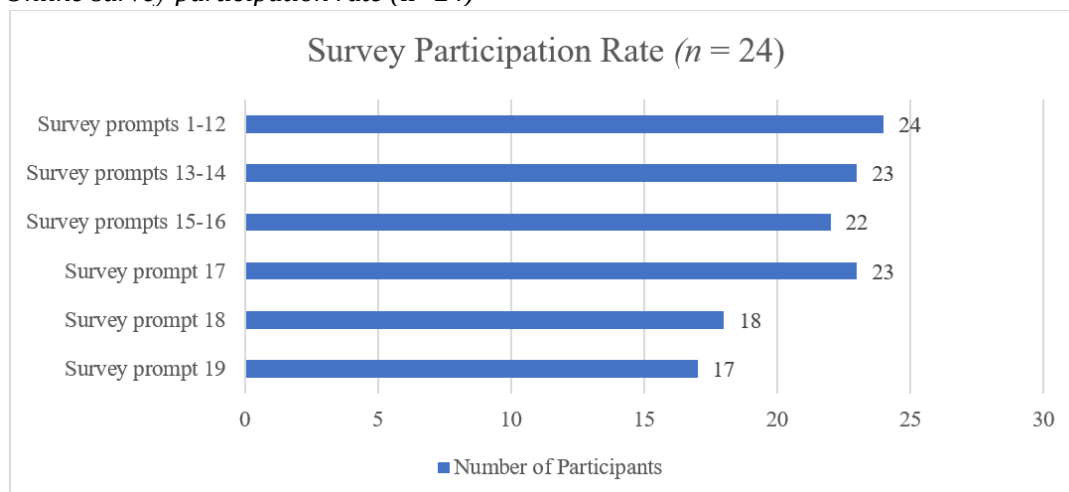
Unfortunately, many of the figures graphically depicting survey data are on the page following the introduction of the prompt and explanation to which it refers. This was done for aesthetics to avoid large, blank gaps in the chapter. For the sake of readability, I have made mention in the summary when a figure is on the following page.

Self-Care Qualtrics Survey

The self-care online Qualtrics survey had 24 teacher participants. There was some attrition in the participation rate (see Figure 3) towards the end of the survey that is more fully discussed in Chapter 5. Each survey prompt is listed below in the order it appeared on the survey. The superscript numbers following the prompts indicate to which research question it was related. If a superscript number is absent, it indicates a demographic or generic prompt that is unrelated to any research questions. Two prompts (1 and 2) were demographic, and six prompts (3, 4, 5, 13, 18, and 19) were generic. The survey participation rate for each prompt is as follows:

Figure 3

Online survey participation rate (n=24)



I have been a full-time classroom teacher for... (See Figure 4.)

The purpose of this prompt was to better understand how the teachers' experience levels correlated their responses to prompts related to the various research questions. The majority of teachers (71%; $n=17$) who participated in the survey have been teaching in the classroom full-time for five or more years. This experience, then, can serve as a solid gauge of effective self-care practice since the maturity level represented in the majority include teachers who have been in the field long enough to develop positive survive and thrive ESC habits. Of course, as I mentioned in an earlier chapter, "just because you're in a garage, it doesn't make you a car." Therefore, just because a teacher has been in the field a while, it does not necessarily mean they have developed positive and effective self-care habits. The next highest category of respondents were teachers who have been in the field for one to two years. However, as with the above garage and car expression, being a relative novice does not necessarily mean that effective self-care strategies have not been developed and practiced.

Figure 4

Results for online survey prompt 1 ($n=24$)

I have been a full-time classroom teacher for... [Choose one.]		
	<i>n</i>	%
This is my first year	2	8%
1 to 2 years	4	17%
3 to 4 years	1	4%
5 or more years	17	71%

I teach students in... (See Figure 5 on the next page.)

This prompt supported an understanding of which grade level(s) the teachers serve. The secondary level was most represented with middle school (grades 6-8) having eight participants (33%) and high school having nine participants (38%).

Figure 5

Results for online survey prompt 2 (n=24)

I teach students in... [Choose one.]		
	<i>n</i>	%
Lower Elementary (K-2)	1	4%
Upper Elementary (3-5)	3	12%
Middle (6-8)	8	33%
High (9-12)	9	38%
Miscellaneous (e.g., K-12)	3	13%

In my professional life, as a teacher, my stress level is... (See Figure 6 on the next page.)

In my personal life, my stress level is... (See Figure 7 on the next page.)

Inquiring about one's stress level at work and home was important to explore as a means of comparing to other responses concerning self-care. For instance, participants reported stress levels in their professional lives as teachers being 58% *Moderate* and 8% *Severe* (see Figure 6 on the next page), while in their personal lives, 29% selected *Moderate* and 13% chose *Severe* (see Figure 7 on the next page). Meanwhile, 96% of participants either *Strongly agreed* or *Agreed* that self-care is important to their own longevity in teaching (see Figure 15). Furthermore, 83% of teachers surveyed responded that they either practiced meaningful self-care activities *Often* or *Regularly* (see Figure 16).

A glaring question emerged: If 96% believe self-care is important for their longevity as a teacher, and if 83% are practicing self-care activities that are meaningful, why did 66% have *Moderate* or *Severe* stress levels as teachers (see Figure 6 on the next page) and 42% in their personal lives (see Figure 7 on the next page)? What is/are the missing variable/s that would lower the stress levels of teachers? More in-depth research is needed to uncover affecting factors and discover what in particular can be done to reduce or mitigate the stress levels of teachers in the field.

Figure 6

Results for online survey prompt 3 (n=24)

In my professional life, as a teacher, my stress level is... [Choose one.]		
	<i>n</i>	%
None	0	0%
Mild	8	34%
Moderate	14	58%
Severe	2	8%

Figure 7

Results for online survey prompt 4 (n=24)

In my personal life, my stress level is... [Choose one.]		
	<i>n</i>	%
None	0	0%
Mild	14	58%
Moderate	7	29%
Severe	3	13%

I believe self-care is important for teachers.

A research study involving teachers' perception of self-care would be remiss if it did not include a prompt frankly asking whether or not participants believed self-care was important for people in their profession. All (100%) of the teachers ($n=24$) surveyed agreed that it was indeed important. When compared to other responses (e.g., stress levels), it reveals that the topic of self-care is universally recognized as important, but teachers are either: 1) not aware of self-care strategies that are effective for themselves, 2) do not practice ESC, or 3) are not committed to ESC (e.g., too stressed, too busy, not enough time). The latter was the basis for the interview question that explored what types of factors prevent one from practicing ESC.

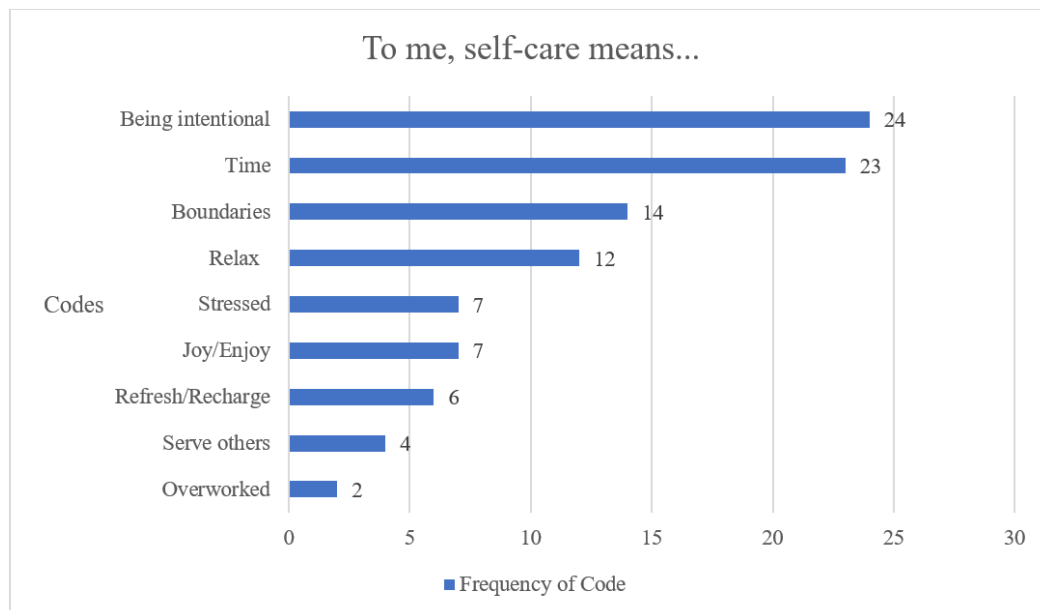
To me, self-care means...¹ (See Figure 8 on the next page.)

The process of coding—described in Chapter 3 (Data Analysis – Self-Care Qualtrics Survey)—revealed nine codes listed in order of frequency: Being intentional, Time, Boundaries, Relax, Stressed, Joy/Enjoy, Refresh/Recharge, Serve others, and Overworked. The two most

frequently mentioned codes were Being intentional ($n=24$) and Time ($n=23$). This data revealed that ESC involves an intentionality or need to ensure it is practiced in order for it to be effective. Teachers surveyed recognized the importance of being intentional with ESC; however, time was a limiting factor. Casey Combden, Canadian entrepreneur, once said, “To know and not to do, is not to know” (n.d.). In other words, awareness of a need does not make the need manifest; it’s the difference between theory and practice. A teacher who *knows* (theory) self-care must be intentionally performed is not the same as a teacher who is actually *doing* (practice) it. Self-care must be something that is deliberately achieved or accomplished in order for it to have the intended effect on one’s health. To illustrate further, a person who *knows* (theory) eating healthy is beneficial is not going to experience those health benefits until they *actually eat* (practice) healthier foods.

Figure 8

Results for online survey prompt 6 ($n=24$)



For the next four prompts, participants were allowed to select as many choices as they wanted from a list of multiple items in the different categories (e.g., physical, mental, emotional,

spiritual). Each category also included an *Other* and *None* choice with a text box provided for *Other* to collect data on self-care strategies not included in the list. The results of the comments provided by selecting *Other* appear in the explanations of findings for each category.

What physical self-care strategies are most effective in your own life?² (See Figure 9 on the next page.)

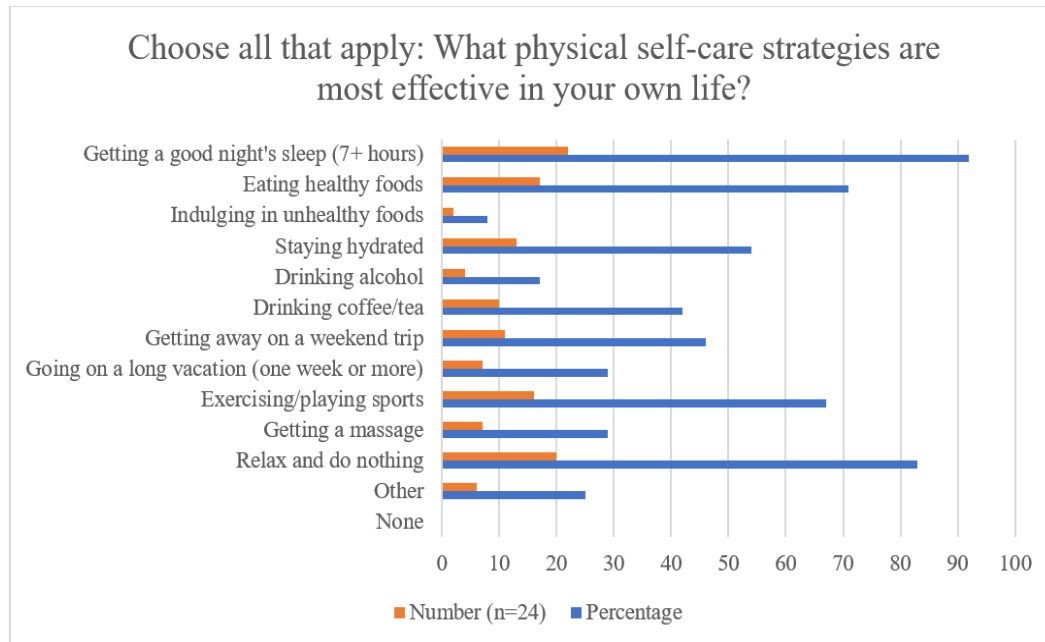
The four choices selected most were *Getting a good night's sleep* (92%; n=22), *Relax and do nothing* (83%; n=20), *Eating healthy foods* (71%; n=17), and *Exercising/playing sports* (67%; n=16). *Getting a good night's sleep* was defined as 7+ hours per night. It is unclear whether getting a good night's sleep was selected most due to the knowledge of its importance and impact on health, the difficulty achieving it, or the experience of having it. Of course, the same is true for *Eating healthy foods* and *Exercising/playing sports*. The three prompts that were similar to this one (8, 9, and 10) have this same flaw where it is difficult to understand the reason behind why the particular selections were made.

Six participants selected the *Other* category and responded with the following:

- “Taking a long bubble bath.”
- “Getting away from my family and expectations to do something I enjoy for an hour or two.”
- “Playing music, attending sporting events, listening to music.”
- “Working outside.”
- “Napping.”
- “Walking, stretching, deep breathing, pampering.”

Figure 9

Results for online survey prompt 7 (n=24)



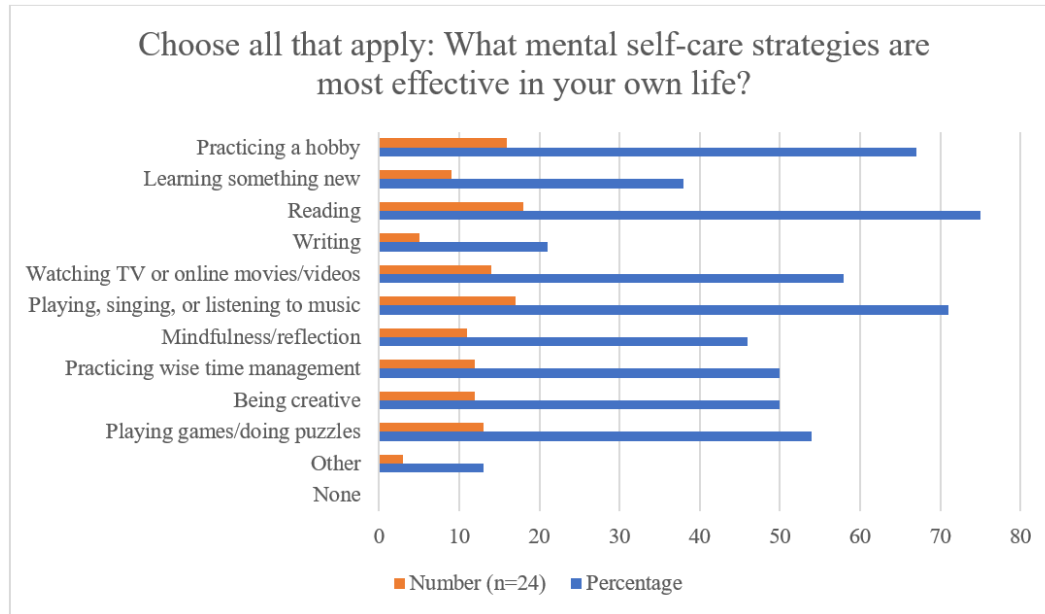
What mental self-care strategies are most effective in your own life?² (See Figure 10 on the next page.)

The three responses selected most were *Reading* (75%; n=18), *Playing, singing, or listening to music* (71%; n=17), and *Practicing a hobby* (67%; n=16). Five of the 12 choices fell in the middle range between 38% and 54%: *Learning something new* (38%; n=9), *Mindfulness/reflection* (46%; n=11), *Practicing wise time management* (50%; n=12), *Being creative* (50%; n=12), and *Playing games/doing puzzles* (54%; n=13). Three participants selected the *Other* category and responded with the following:

- “Playing video games.
- “Engaging in Christian religious activities.”
- “Cooking and baking.”

Figure 10

Results for online survey prompt 8 (n=24)



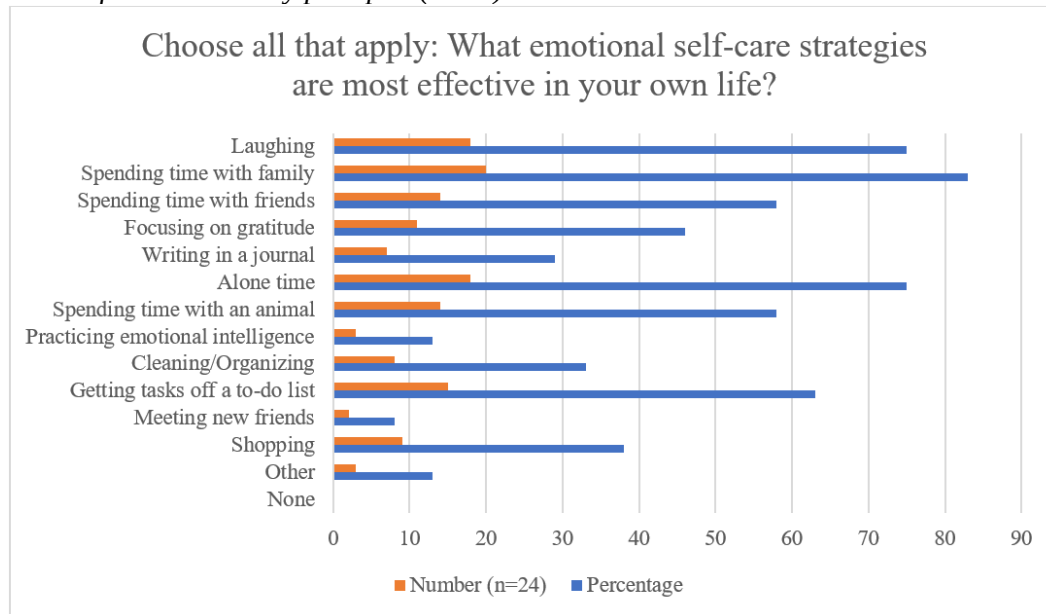
What emotional self-care strategies are most effective in your own life?² (See Figure 11 on the next page.)

The four responses participants selected most were *Spending time with family* (83%; n=20), *Laughing* (75%; n=18), *Alone time* (75%; n=18), and *Getting tasks off a to-do list* (63%; n=15). This data correlates to the major theme of time (not enough or challenges managing it) that emerged from other prompts in both the survey and interviews. Clearly, *Spending time with family* is something valued by most participants as an emotional self-care strategy; however, time plays a major role in whether or not this can be achieved to the satisfaction of respondents. Three participants selected the *Other* category and responded with the following:

- “Talking to my wife.”
- “Religious activities such as prayer and singing religious songs.”
- “Listening to music.”

Figure 11

Results for online survey prompt 9 (n=24)



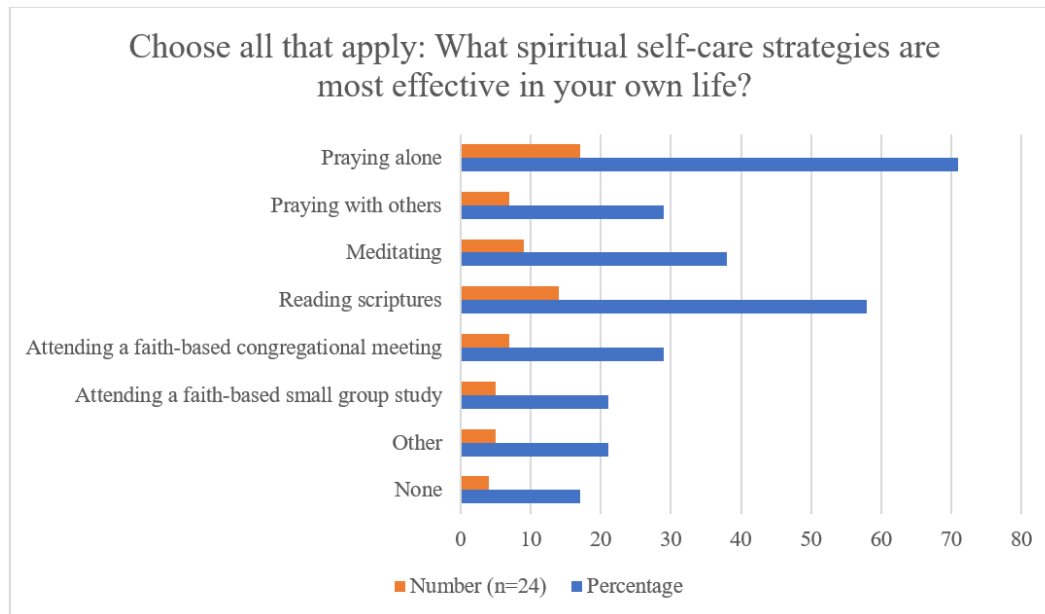
What spiritual self-care strategies are most effective in your own life?² (See Figure 12 on the next page.)

The two responses that were chosen most were *Praying alone* (71%; n=170) and *Reading scriptures* (58%; n=14). Since time was such a major theme, these two may be difficult to practice for teachers and may depend on how strong their commitment to their faith is in terms of frequency of practice. Five participants selected the *Other* category and responded with the following:

- “Conversations with others in the same faith (not necessarily about self-care).”
- “Listening to podcasts/teachings about Jesus.”
- “Being outside in nature.”
- “Reading devotional books.”
- “Listening and singing worship music, journaling.”

Figure 12

Results for online survey prompt 10 (n=24)



Out of all your responses in prompts 7-10 (strategies in the Physical, Mental, Emotional, and Spiritual categories), which is your top choice that you feel is most important for your own self-care? Please explain.² (See Figure 13 on the next page.)

Nearly half (46%; $n=11$) of teachers surveyed responded that physical strategies were most important for their self-care. This could be due to an increase in endorphin production during physical activity (Thoren et al., 1990), and thus, a favored choice. In *Exercise and Stress: Get Moving to Manage Stress* (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2020), the authors provide four “stress-busting benefits [to exercising]: 1) It pumps up your endorphins; 2) It reduces negative effects of stress; 3) It’s meditation in motion [i.e., focusing on physical activity releases mental and emotional stress]; and 4) It improves your mood” (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2020). Additional research could be done to explore what physical strategies, in particular, could be encouraged and/or implemented at the school to further support the practice of ESC (e.g., holding competitions where teachers track the number of steps they take at work). Two participants chose a combination of responses

(*Physical and Spiritual, Physical and Mental*) which explains the total number and percentage exceeding 24 and 100%, respectively.

Figure 13

Results for online survey prompt 11 (n=24)

Out of all your responses in prompts 7-10 (strategies in the Physical, Mental, Emotional, and Spiritual categories), which is your top choice that you feel is most important for your own self-care? Please explain.		
	<i>n</i>	%
Physical	11	46%
Mental	4	17%
Emotional	5	21%
Spiritual	5	21%
N/A	1	4%

Participants were asked to explain their top choice of which category is most important for their own self-care. Two teachers said that not getting enough sleep was an issue because:

- “It exacerbates my issues like ADHD.”
- “If I’m not physically rested, everything else falls apart. I can’t find the energy, stamina, or focus for the rest [of the strategies] when I’m exhausted.”

However, the other teachers mentioned physical activity as a positive force:

- “I feel best when I’m taking care of my body physically...when I’m moving.”
- “When I am active, I am living in the moment.”
- “It seems the most effective when I push myself [physically].”
- “Keeping myself highly fit enables me to accomplish all the other self-care strategies I employ.”
- “These activities provided the best relaxation for me, working out being at the top of the list.”
- “My top choice is a combination of getting physical exercise while meeting with others. Going for walks or hikes with family and friends is the most important outlet for self-care for me.”

Out of all your responses in prompts 7-10 (strategies in the Physical, Mental, Emotional, and Spiritual categories), if funding was available, which is your top choice you would like to see your school district provide or support?² (See Figure 14 on the next page.)

Once again, the physical category was the most chosen by teachers surveyed (42%; $n=10$). This prompt centered around the school district providing or supporting their top choice for self-care. One participant chose a combination of responses (*Physical* and *Emotional*) which explains the total number and percentage exceeding 24 and 100%, respectively. Verbatim suggestions from the teachers who selected the physical category are as follows:

- “Pay for [once-a-month] in-house massages.”
- “It would be nice if the district provided a free membership to a fitness center close by the school.”
- “...if they supported more things like ways we could exercise or massages...”
- “Gym equipment specifically for teachers; I’d love to have a small gym with treadmills, stair-steppers, ellipticals, etc.”
- “Coffee/Tea would be an easy enough pick-me up to offer.”
- “Time to do nothing and relax. I wish our school district could truly support teachers being off on the weekends and the evenings.”
- “Membership for gyms/exercise passes.”
- “Exercise opportunities; maybe some kind of teacher sporting team or exercise class would be cool [like] yoga, Zumba, indoor soccer, etc. I think this could create camaraderie with other teachers, and physical exercise can be really good for the soul, mind, and body.”
- “Healthier foods...if my district could provide healthy snacks, it would help so much with those issues [eating poorly due to a lack of time to prepare healthy food].”

Figure 14

Results for online survey prompt 12 (n=24)

Out of all your responses in prompts 7-10 (strategies in the Physical, Mental, Emotional, and Spiritual categories), if funding was available, which is your top choice you would like to see your school district provide or support?		
	<i>n</i>	%
Physical	10	42%
Mental	5	21%
Emotional	7	29%
Spiritual	0	0%
N/A	3	13%

Self-care is important to my longevity in the teaching profession.² (See Figure 15.)

Nearly all (96%) of the 23 teachers who responded to this prompt indicated they either *Strongly agree* (70%; n=16) or *Agree* (26%; n=6) that self-care is important to their longevity in the field of education. This result demonstrates that self-care is a critical component for districts to consider in order to stem the massive tide of teacher attrition and absenteeism our country and world continue to face (Dinham, 1994; Toropova et al., 2021).

Figure 15

Results for online survey prompt 13 (n=23)

Self-care is important to my longevity in the teaching profession. [Choose one.]		
	<i>n</i>	%
Strongly agree	16	70%
Agree	6	26%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly disagree	1	4%

To what extent do you engage in self-care activities that are meaningful to you?³ (See Figure 16 on the next page.)

A sizeable majority (83%) of the 23 responding teachers indicated that they either *Regularly* (48%; n=11) or *Often* (35%; n=8) engage in self-care activities that are meaningful to them. *Regularly* was defined in the survey as three or more times per week; whereas *Often* was classified as one to two times per week. As was discussed in the findings for prompts 3 and 4

concerning professional and personal stress levels, if 83% of teachers are engaging *Regularly* or *Often* in meaningful self-care activities, but 66% of the same population reported experiencing *Moderate* or *Severe* stress levels, what is missing? Why are stress levels so high if, in fact, the teachers are engaging in self-care so often? Certainly, additional research needs to be done to explore the various types of self-care strategies being practiced by teachers, to what degree (e.g., quality, frequency), and to what effect.

Figure 16

Results for online survey prompt 14 (n=23)

To what extent do you engage in self-care activities that are meaningful to you? [Choose one.]		
	<i>n</i>	%
Regularly (3 or more times per week)	11	48%
Often (1 to 2 times per week)	8	35%
Sometimes (around 3 times per month)	2	8.5%
Rarely (around 1 time per month)	2	8.5%
Never (0 times per month)	0	0%

If I had more time, I would regularly practice the top self-care strategy I listed for #11.⁴

(See Figure 17 on the next page.)

Of the 22 teachers answering this prompt, 82% indicated they either *Strongly agree* (45.5%; *n*=10) or *Agree* (36.5%; *n*=8) that if they had more time, they would regularly practice their top self-care strategy. Verbatim comments for those choices are as follows:

Strongly agree

- “I just need more time to sleep.”
- “I wish I had more quiet time to meditate and pray.”
- “I never have enough time or energy to balance all and just survive.”
- “I find myself having to do all the things (teacher, wife, mom) and don’t make reading fiction a priority for myself in most cases.”
- “Often, I am working from home or leaving late, and so time is limited. If I didn’t stay late or play catch up on weekends, I would have more time to read books and relax to do nothing.”

- “I constantly feel torn (and guilty) about wanting to do things with family/friends but knowing (and feeling the weight of the constant to-do list) I have work to do.”
- “Sometimes my time is rushed or limited with God, because I need the extra sleep or my job demands so much time from me with working long hours whether it is in the building or at home.”

Agree

- “A little more time to end my day focused on God would be nice.”
- “More time for self-care would mean I am better equipped to be the best teacher.”
- “With ever-changing schedules with my family, it is difficult to maintain consistency in my self-care.”
- “I am not terrible at practicing self-care to begin with. However, time is always the limiting factor!”
- “I would spend more time in the evenings outdoors if I felt I had the time to do it.”

Figure 17

Results for online survey prompt 15 (n=22)

If I had more time, I would regularly practice the top self-care strategy I listed for #11. [Choose one and explain.]		
	<i>n</i>	%
Strongly agree	10	45.5%
Agree	8	36.5%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly disagree	0	0%
N/A – I often engage in self-care anyway	4	18%

If I had more money, I would regularly practice the top self-care strategy I listed for #11.⁴

(See Figure 18 on the next page.)

Almost half (45%) of respondents either *Strongly agree* (27%; *n*=6) or *Agree* (18%; *n*=4) that they would regularly practice their top self-care strategy if they had more money, while 23% chose to either *Disagree* (18%; *n*=4) or *Strongly disagree* (5%; *n*=1). It is important to note that money issues stem from a variety of causes (e.g., low pay, fiscal irresponsibility, caring for an

elderly parent). Consequently, it is difficult to ascertain why money is a factor and how it affects ESC without additional research. Verbatim comments for this prompt are as follows:

Strongly agree

- “[Money] is not always available to spend on myself.”
- “I would engage more frequently in weekends away or vacations as a means of self-care.”
- “Would love to do more travel, camping, go to fun places, mostly to see family and enjoy activities with them if [money] wasn't an issue.”

Agree

- “Good places are expensive.”
- “Well, if I had more money to spend on treats for myself, I definitely would!”
- “I have to work a second job in the evenings. Having that time to relax, do nothing, and be off from school would be helpful.”

Disagree

- “More affected by workload than money.”
- “It’s more of a time and not money issue for me.”
- “My number one response doesn’t have a cost associated with it.”
- “I am not sure if I would go on walks or hikes with people more often if I had more money.”

Strongly disagree

- “No money needed to practice the top self-care strategy.”

Figure 18

Results for online survey prompt 16 (n=22)

If I had more money, I would regularly practice the top self-care strategy I listed for #11. [Choose one and explain.]		
	<i>n</i>	%
Strongly agree	6	27%
Agree	4	18%
Disagree	4	18%
Strongly disagree	1	5%
N/A – I often engage in self-care anyway	7	32%

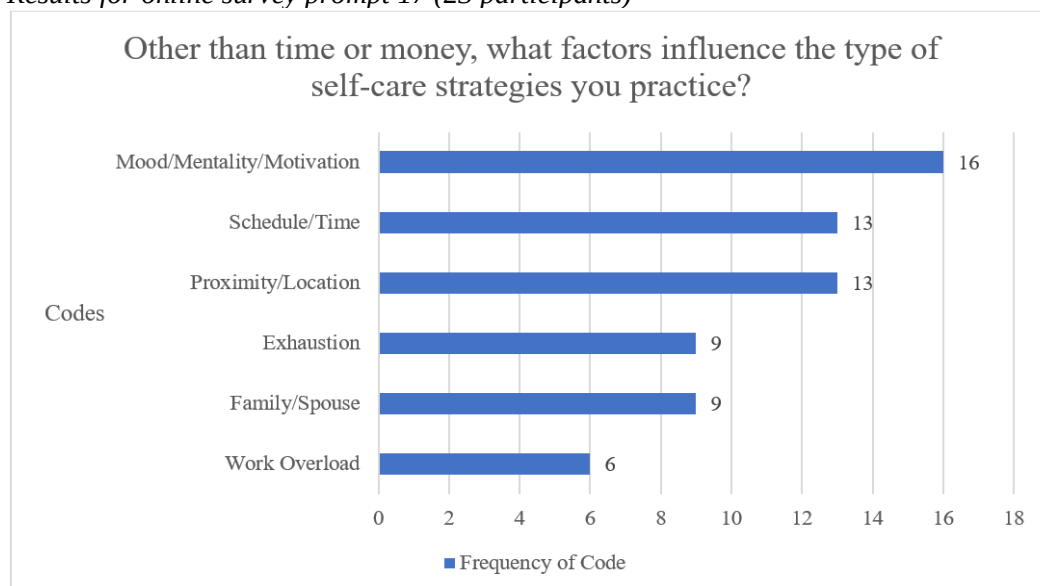
Other than time or money, what factors influence the type of self-care strategies you practice?⁴

(See Figure 19.)

Two participants entered a response indicating there were no other influential factors to declare (N/A). However, 23 teachers who replied to this prompt mentioned the codes “mood,” “mentality,” or “motivation” 16 times across their responses as to what other factors, not counting time or money, influence the type of self-care strategies they practice. “Schedule” and “time” were tied at 13 mentions each with “proximity” and “location.” When combined, the data reveals that teachers’ emotional and mental state affect their ability to access self-care in a meaningful way. In addition, the amount of time it takes to do so, or lack thereof, and where they are or need to get to in order to practice ESC also limits self-care opportunities. Since the code Mood/Mentality/Motivation was mentioned more times (16) than any other, it had a stronger influence than Work Overload or Exhaustion in terms of whether or not participants practice a particular self-care strategy. This begs the question, “How can Mood/Mentality/Motivation be improved so that a teacher is more likely to practice an effective self-care strategy?”

Figure 19

Results for online survey prompt 17 (23 participants)



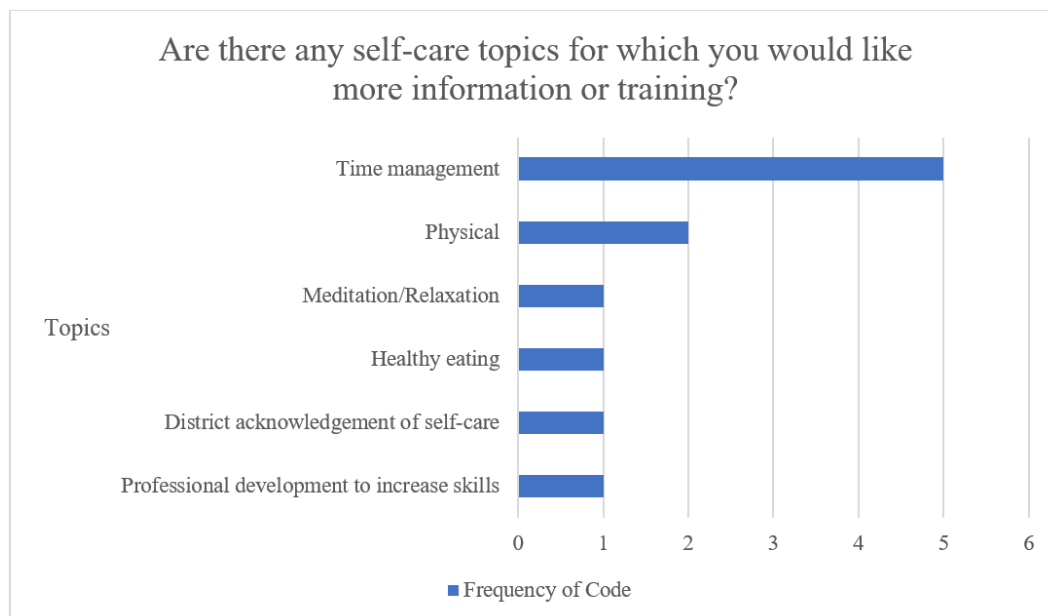
Are there any self-care topics for which you would like more information or training?

(See Figure 20.)

Nine participants entered a response indicating there were no self-care topics for which they wanted more information or training (N/A). Of the 18 participants who responded, five (28%) indicated they would like more training or information on time management. This makes sense in light of the importance teacher participants placed on time when 82% of the 22 teachers *Strongly agreed* or *Agreed* that if they had more time, they would regularly practice their top self-care strategy. Time management training has shown to improve teachers' work performance (Etor & Anam, 2019) and can be a powerful tool to support busy teachers with wisely prioritizing and effectively using their time (Eerde, 2003). However, if provided by the school district, the teachers who want to show gains in time management should be diligent to faithfully implement the skills learned in order to maximize their use of time.

Figure 20

Results for online survey prompt 18 (n=18)



Please share any final comments you have about self-care strategies.¹

The following verbatim comments were collected from participants ($n=17$) as a wrap-up to the survey. It is evident from the candid nature of the responses below that the topic of self-care is important to teachers with a few meaningful and poignant caveats.

- “I know it's important for everyone, it's just not something that I feel I am free to do in my life and in my marriage.”
- “Self-care needs to be a priority, but we have to get past the stigma of it being ‘selfish’ or ‘self-centered.’ If the education profession valued and supported it, then more teachers might make it more of a priority in their lives.”
- “Our insurance at school does not offer mental health services. This is a huge problem as the expense to get mental health help is overwhelming.”
- “I think most teachers understand the importance of self-care, but don't know how to fit it into our schedules. The demands from our schools are so great, that when our administration reminds us to practice self-care it is more frustrating than it is helpful.”
- “I would like to see administrators take [self-care] more seriously, I'm fighting burnout right now, and it's going to take more than a massage and some meditation for me to want to stay with the profession.”
- “I try and take one day off per month. I plan this day and spend it entirely on self-care, no work allowed. I also find that learning to say ‘no’ is important.”
- “More resources on creating the time for self-care could be extremely helpful. Often, we have a difficult time saying ‘no’ to people, and there are times where we need to in order to better take care of ourselves. By taking care of ourselves first, we can then better say ‘yes’ in the future.”
- “My job is trying to give us every other Friday off for more self-care, which has been helping, but we have to fit the work in other times because the [work]load does not change. It helps only a little because our other days are longer and more full.”
- “I think it is important to realize self-care looks different for everyone, so there is not a one-size-fits-all option that a school district could provide (e.g., training on how to meditate) that would be the best use of everyone's time.”
- “Thanks for choosing this topic. It needs to be brought to the forefront and be seen as a vital component to teacher success!”

- “I think it would be nice to know that it's okay to have introverted self-care strategies.”
- “I think that self-care strategies are the surface, and they are laid over things like values, identity, and beliefs. While I think that learning self-care strategies can lead to greater awareness around one's values and beliefs, ultimately, I believe that you have to do the hard work of defining and living by those values and beliefs. Self-care stems from a strong understanding of one's values, beliefs, and identity, and we would do well to devote time to that.”
- “I think it takes some self-awareness to know what fills your cup. Knowing your priorities to fill your cup is also important. Having clear boundaries and not feeling guilty for them. Having reasonable and clear [homework] grading expectations from the administration also matters. I've been at my school (which I love) for a while, and even though I've been told some expectations for a few departments, I am still unclear about work collected on a Thursday or a Friday. When are those assignments supposed to be graded by? Tuesday a.m.? Then I am grading over the weekend, or I am grading until 9:00 p.m. one or two nights some weeks. It's a fact.”
- “Every person is different, and I have found that districts that mandate ‘self-care’ are not taking care of every staff member. They are casting a wide net of tried-and-true methods and catching as many as possible.”
- "Self-care is important to get recharged. Summer is a big part of my self-care, so that I can reenergize for the rest of the year. What other occupation has an extended time needed to get ready for the next school year, a new group of students, or possibly a new grade level with new curriculum to teach? At the beginning of the year, I did not make time for self-care, and it caused me to begin complaining about the job that I love...so I had to find a way to balance home and work."
- “While higher pay could help teachers better engage in certain self-care strategies, I would say the main input that would help teachers attain better self-care would be getting time back in each day. Because of a lack of staff in teacher assistant roles, teachers like me can get overwhelmed with both the routine work tasks and dealing with problem students. This can lead to me not taking care of myself properly.”
- "Our employer just recently provided all employees and their families with an Employee Assistance Program that provides free resources which include confidential personalized care for a variety of personal life issues such as mental health, life coaching, and more. I think this is a great start for those who choose to use the benefits. I also wish that whatever planning time we have would be protected, meaning not filled with meetings. This would help cut down on work time after hours. Most days after work should be a time to wind down and spend with family. Family is irreplaceable. Employees are replaced quickly.”

One-on-One Zoom Interviews

The first introductory question and its follow-up prompt were used as a warm-up to get the interviewees comfortable in the process. Next, 10 prompts were presented as a Grand Tour followed by a reflection question and wrap-up prompt. Names attached to specific responses are pseudonyms assigned to maintain the participants' anonymity. The genders of the pseudonyms were matched to the preferred genders of the interviewees out of respect for their tone and voice.

***What do you like to do for fun?*²**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, using *fun* as a point of inquiry generates one of four important self-care strategies in ARFF™ – Achievement, Respect, Fun, and Freedom (McLoughlin, n.d.). The responses to this opening prompt garnered a wide array of self-care strategies that comprised mostly the physical and mental categories: exercising (e.g., running, swimming), relaxing (e.g., near a firepit, reading books), playing games (e.g., video games, board games, puzzles), listening to live music, traveling, photography, and outdoor pursuits (e.g., going to the mountains, camping, fishing, shooting, long walks, disc golf). Each of the six interviewees quickly and emphatically responded to the question with something that demonstrated it is a meaningful and effective self-care strategy for that teacher.

***How often do you get to do that?*³**

This follow-up question included a few different time frames and revealed the frequency to which they practiced their favorite *fun* activity: daily (reading), a few times a week (exercising/running, disc golf, video gaming, and reading), every weekend (exercising/running, relaxing by a fire pit, disc golf, and eating out), and once every couple of weeks (game night with friends). There were some beloved activities which were not frequently practiced due to the cold weather season (e.g., running), busyness of their work and home life schedules (e.g.,

camping, fishing, shooting), or region (being in the water). The latter interviewee lives in Colorado, where there is not an abundance of water like along the California coast where the participant was raised.

The following prompts were used in the Grand Tour, or main body of questions, and appear in the order they were presented during the interview. The superscript number after each prompt indicates the research question to which it references.

What are the first things that come to mind when you think of the term self-care?¹

Figure 21

Results for Zoom one-on-one interview grand tour prompt 1

Name	Response	Themes
Andrew	“The first things that come to mind are keeping myself happy and relaxed so that I can be the best version of me. And obviously, that's different for everybody: what makes people tick. So, exercise and video gaming keep me calm.”	• Staying happy and relaxed to be best version of yourself
Gloria	“The thing that comes to mind when I think of the term self-care is really sharpening the saw. Being somebody who's read the <i>7 Habits of Highly Effective People</i> , I think that Stephen Covey does a really good job explaining how you need to take care of yourself and make sure that you're at the best that you can be in order to do your best job and take care of those around you. So, it's stuff that keeps you sharp and keeps you healthy.”	• Staying sharp and healthy to be best you can be • Caring for others
Kate	“What comes to mind is being intentional. Self-care can mean so many things to different people, but in order for it to count as self-care, I believe it needs to be intentional...that you're carving out some sort of time to do the things that you enjoy, or that help you to relax, or make you happy, or whatever. So that's the first thing. For me, taking time for different relationships...it's not selfish. It's not by yourself, but putting time and energy towards maintaining relationships. [That] is part of what I think of as self-care, because I guess that's important to me. And then also, some self-care for me needs to be alone, just me, not anyone else involved. Even if it's locking myself in a room for twenty minutes, lying in bed, and staring at the ceiling...just being able to reflect and shut off the outside factors and influences that keep all the tabs open in my brain.”	• Being intentional: carving out time to do things you enjoy like relaxing, being happy, building relationships, being alone to reflect
Kenny	“It would be, first of all, taking care of yourself physically. If I just sit around and eat, eat, eat, and obese up, that doesn't help me at all physically. And then, for being a teacher, [taking care of yourself] mentally and physically, because it can be a taxing job at times. And mentally, just to be able to sit somewhere and just to not have to think, not have to explain something, or [get] something done...just to have	• Caring for yourself physically and mentally: eating properly, relaxing

	that little bit of time to just relax. And actually, to think about nothing and not have to do anything.”	
Sergio	“One of the first things that comes to mind [is] just putting yourself first, thinking about what you need to do to stay healthy, and to stay alert, and mentally awake. [Having fun is] definitely my favorite [thing] to do. I enjoy doing that and probably consciously spend more time thinking about doing [that]. So, putting yourself first to stay healthy, and to stay alert and mentally awake, [and] having fun.”	• Putting yourself first • Staying healthy, alert, mentally awake • Having fun
Traci	“It's kind of a health thing, especially coming off of the pandemic. I feel like [it's] doing what you need to keep your physical health a little bit, which is probably kind of a weird thing for me to say, because not all of my self-care things are necessarily good for physical health. But I feel like that's important, because if you're physically run down, then you can get mentally run down, and [then] you have to call in sick to work. So, I think just protecting your physical health is important, but mentally too. Also, when I think of self-care, I just think of shutting off stress for a little bit.”	• Keeping up physical and mental health to minimize absences • Shutting off stress

This opening prompt in the Grand Tour was designed to elicit an instinctive “gut” reaction from interviewees as to what predominantly surrounds their thoughts of self-care, elucidating their primary conceptualization of it. All participants recognized that there needs to be some measure of intentionality and maintenance for self-care whether it was to relax, be happy, reflect, eat properly, or stay healthy.

100% of participants surveyed agreed that self-care is important for teachers. Why do you think it was unanimous?¹

Figure 22

Results for Zoom one-on-one interview grand tour prompt 2

Name	Response	Themes
Andrew	“If you don't take care of self-care, then you get burned out, you're grumpy, and you have no motivation, and then that translates to not a good demeanor with your students. And when you don't have a good demeanor, then that leads to conflict, and then class is not enjoyable for you or your students. And when it's time to grade, you just don't want to grade because you're done, you're tired, [and] you're burned out. So yeah, it's important, and it's really hard for teachers to ease back on the amount of work they're doing, because they feel like they have to be a hundred percent in all the time for their students. So yeah, it's hard to dial it back and have a reasonable amount of work.”	• Can get burned out, grumpy, lose motivation, poor demeanor, exhausted • Must simplify workload
Gloria	“Because this is a hard job. This is a very, very hard job, and we spend eight to ten hours a day giving of ourselves and trying to manage ourselves in the midst of everybody else's crazy. And it is difficult, it is. It takes a toll on your energy level, and if you let it, your happiness	• Sacrificing self for students takes toll on energy,

	level and your joy level, if you're not careful. And you want to bring your best self to your students, because anybody who's teaching should be there for the kids and not for themselves. Otherwise, they're not going to make it right. So, I would just say that everybody recognizes this is a really hard job, and they know that they need to take care of themselves, so they are their best selves for their students.”	happiness, and joy • Being best self for students
Kate	“Because teaching takes so much out of you, it's depleting of your own resources. I don't want to call it draining, because that sounds so negative. But there's no doubt that you come in, you have to be on one hundred percent of the time, deal with all of the outside factors, just roll with the punches, and get through the period of time where you are at work teaching. It's unlike other jobs, where you can hide away in the corner. It's just very involved in the public. And then, when you're not with students, you're with colleagues, administrators, parents, or whoever it is, [and] you just have to be on all of the time. So, I think that if you don't devote some time to self-care, and doing some things that you enjoy, it's just very depleting.”	• Teaching depletes one's resources • Very public position that is people-intensive • Must be intentional with self-care
Kenny	“Because [teachers have] been in the field for a while. Anywhere you post, it says, ‘If teachers just worked an eight-hour day...’, there'd be no coaching, no grades getting done, [or] anything else. So, we work more than an eight-hour [day]. It's not a factory job where you clock in and clock out. And we do burn sometimes fifty to sixty hours a week...sometimes more, depending on your position. So, we just have to have that [self-care] because it's go, go, go. And because of what we're dealing with, we're dealing with kids...children, and they are the future. And to know that we can help a kid or destroy a kid with one sentence...one word we have. And so, always being on that high alert of trying to keep yourself in check is very important, so we don't stress out in front of a kid or something like that. So, you have to do [self-care].”	• Self-care required to serve • Lots of work after-hours, constantly busy, always on high alert
Sergio	“I think it's unanimous, because we create the weather in the classroom, and if we're not taking care of ourselves, then that reflects on our teaching, which then turns into the kids reflecting that back to us. So, the weather we create in the classroom is really important, and if we don't care for ourselves first, it'll just be a stormy day all the time.”	• Must take care of self • Teachers create environment in classroom
Traci	“I think that part of it is because [self-care is] sort of a buzzword right now, and everyone's talking about it, so it's in the forefront of people's minds. I think that's probably part of it. But I do think, again through the pandemic, more teachers are willing to say, ‘I need some time for myself.’ We're just not expected to be as much of a martyr as we used to be even earlier in my career, and I don't know that [it's] necessarily like administration that's allowing us not to feel that way, but more each other. We're kind of encouraging each other to take care of ourselves. I wouldn't say the pandemic is what I feel caused the shift, but it definitely pushed it to the front of the conversation. Did you ever read Ronald Dahl...[the] author who did <i>Charlie and the Chocolate Factory</i> ? He has this quote that I love in one of his books. It's basically that if you have good and happy thoughts, they'll shine from you and	• Self-care is a buzzword • Setting boundaries is important • Need encouragement of peers for self-care

	make you...I don't know...he's kind of saying that if you have negative thoughts, they make you look ugly, which is not true, but it is in a way."	
--	--	--

This question was worded so as to gain a deeper understanding, through the perspective of the interviewee, why self-care is important to teachers. The depth provided by interviewees supported a greater insight on the intentionality of practicing ESC and also protecting one's personal time by setting clear boundaries. It also spoke of sacrificing for the sake of students and how a teacher's attitude drives the classroom climate despite any feelings of exhaustion and burnout. If this sample population of six interviewees is representative of teachers at-large, then ESC is a critical factor for teachers to remain long-term in the field of education.

***The survey revealed that almost half of the 24 participants chose Physical strategies as their top choice for both personal and school-based self-care. What are your thoughts on why the Physical category was chosen so often?*²**

Figure 23

Results for Zoom one-on-one interview grand tour prompt 3

Name	Response	Themes
Andrew	"First of all, physical activity turns on those amazing endorphins, so you get the runners high. And just an hour of workout can give you that reset on your mental attitude. For many people, physical exercise is difficult, so it requires a lot of focus. While you're focused on physical activity, you're not thinking about all the things that stress you out during the day, so it resets you in more than one way, and it helps you focus on just you and whatever you happen to be doing in that moment. When I'm running on the tread[mill], I'm just thinking about one foot in front of the other, and trying not to fly off the end. It's a great reset for me, at least."	• Releases endorphins • Resets mental attitude • Redirects mental focus
Gloria	"I don't know about other people who are teachers, but I'm a teacher for the students. I can't imagine [working] an office job; [that's] not for me. And so, I imagine that there are some teachers who really appreciate being up and out and about. If you keep your physical self healthy, your immune system is going to be better, and you're going to be able to battle all those germs that kids bring in. And there's something that has to do with stress and physical release of that tension in that stress...walking, dancing, hiking, just being in the outdoors, or something to get that tension and the energy out."	• Being there for students • Increases immunity • Releases tension • Being outdoors
Kate	"A lot of people see a mutual benefit, probably from including some self-care with physical activity, because it's healthy, and it's a way to kill two birds with one stone, if you will. And then, a lot of people just assume that's what you mean by [the] physical category, like	• Healthy, relaxing • Releases endorphins • Lots of benefits

	something that involves a physical activity. So, most of the time, people who use physical activity as a way of taking care of themselves, it's fulfilling to them, and it's, I want to say, relaxing, releases endorphins, and it just has a lot of benefits.”	
Kenny	“For me, if you have to take a day off because you're sick, it's more work to take a day off. You have to prepare lesson plans. Sometimes you gotta come in and re-teach the lesson. Also, it affects everybody else who [you] work with. In this day and age, you can't get a substitute without begging, for the most part. If you take off, because you know you haven't taken care of something, it might fall on your colleagues that have to do more that day. Nobody should want to have to put that extra on anybody else. So, it's important to keep that up, because it's more work to take a day off to be sick than it is to come in [to school] and push through it till the weekend, and lay in bed all weekend. [Just] take care of it. It's actually [to] save yourself more work by having to do lesson plans for a sub, maybe having to come in. All the pre-preparation that goes into that is actually more work. It's not like you can work it as [an] assembly line and say, ‘Hey, I'm not coming in today.’ It affects more work for yourself and for your colleagues.”	• Be proactive to avoid absences: too much prep work before and re-teaching after, not fair to colleagues, students do not get what is best
Sergio	“Because it feels good to work out. It’s also beyond just the natural release of the endorphins and doing something physical, and I think there's almost always a sense of accomplishment with that, too, so that you build your achievement with that physical activity.”	• Feels good • Releases endorphins • Sense of accomplishment
Traci	“I think [physical strategies are] kind of in your face a little bit, and they’re something that you do [and] it doesn't [require thinking]—like some of the other categories on the [survey], like mental [with] reflecting and meditating. You have to be really purposeful to do those. Also, this is just for me personally, this is probably not very healthy mentally, but I don't like to dwell on the negative things. And so, if I'm doing something physical, like taking a walk or whatever, then I'm not focusing on my inner thoughts necessarily, but just stepping away from them a little bit. So, I don't know if that's the same for other people, but I do think that we're all so tired of just thinking about all this heavy stuff that doing something physical just lets you step away from that.”	• Does not require thinking • Have to be purposeful • Distracts and provides escape from inner thoughts

This prompt was crafted to discover the reasoning behind why so many participants selected the *Physical* category of self-care, and it served as a means of gleaning interviewees’ paradigms on physical strategies. The release of endorphins appeared most as the interviewees’ response to physical strategies being the top selection of survey participants. While there is not definitive empirical evidence linking endorphin production with feelings of euphoria or other dispositions (Dishman & O’Connor, 2009; Siebers et al., 2021), there exists plenty of research

about the benefits of physical activity and its positive impact on mental health or wellness—for example, the article by Silva et al. (2019)—which was echoed in the interviewees’ comments.

The next most mentioned comment was the redirection from mental stress or easing of tension that physical activity provides.

***What are your thoughts on how self-care may or may not affect a teacher’s longevity in education?*¹**

Figure 24

Results for Zoom one-on-one interview grand tour prompt 4

Name	Response	Themes
Andrew	“[Self-care] definitely affects their longevity. I mean, they say, a teacher has to survive the first two years before they really decide that’s what they want to do. And if you’re not doing self-care, then you burn out that much faster. So, I think if you don’t learn that lesson quickly, you will burn out. You could last three, four, or five years before you call it quits, but those who learn self-care will be in a better state to be a long-term teacher ten, fifteen, twenty years.”	• No self-care equals potential for burnout • Self-care equals longevity
Gloria	“If somebody is not taking care of themselves, they’re probably not going to last very long, only because this job is so taxing, and you have parents shouting at you and kids yelling at you and making excuses. I don’t know what’s happened to the world, but teaching is way harder than it was before COVID[-19]. Right now, these kids are just like ‘I don’t have to listen to you. I’m going to do whatever I want. I don’t need to be here.’ At least that’s what it feels like when they’re not being quiet and learning. So, I think if a teacher doesn’t make sure that they’re top notch, they’re gonna get sick, they’re gonna get burned out, and then they’re gonna quit.”	• No self-care equals lack of longevity: potential for illness, burnout, and resignation
Kate	“[Self-care] could have a huge, huge impact on longevity, because I think with any job that I’ve ever had, at least there [is] some point where you start to feel a little burned out, and I can see that that could really be a thing teaching. And even though I’m really, really new to it, it’s just very high, high stress—not always negative stress—but just busy stress. And there’s always something to be accountable towards, and you know a lot is expected of you. There are a lot of things to juggle, and I just think that if you don’t find ways or outlets to still have time to do the things that are important to you outside of your job...that burnout is going to be more prevalent. Sometimes this is a profession where, I hope, people who are in this profession feel the rewards from doing it, but it can sometimes feel a little bit thankless. Not everybody appreciates what you do, and you know that you put everything you have into it. And so, I think that self-care helps with limiting some of those burnout feelings.”	• High stress • High accountability • High expectations • Heavy workload • Self-care can limit feelings of burnout • Must have other outlets • Teaching is rewarding but thankless
Kenny	“Well, with everything...if you get beat down, you can’t take it anymore. People just quit. A lot of people you’ve seen since 2020 have been leaving the teaching field because of some of the stresses that go	• Can get beat down and quit

	along with it. And if you don't take care of yourself, you're not going to make it through that time. When it gets into a mental mess where you're just like, 'I just can't take this,' because you've allowed yourself no time to rest or recuperate. That takes a toll on you, and people just say they're done because they haven't allowed themselves to rest over the weekend."	• Post-pandemic stress causing attrition • Feelings of hopelessness
Sergio	"If you don't take care of yourself, your career is going to be short, because you just won't be able to last. You'll get burned out. I think [self-care is] very important with longevity as teachers, because we are the center of the classroom. Hobbies are things outside of the school that are just different from what you do [for work]. I'm a musician [and teach music], so doing a musical hobby outside school, that doesn't work the same for me as doing stuff like fishing and disc golf."	• No self-care equals burnout • Teachers are center of classroom • Hobbies should not be related to work duties
Traci	"[Self-care is] just this kind of cliché thing to say, but it's kind of all about balance [which] doesn't look the same for everyone. And I don't really feel like I've ever necessarily felt burned out as a teacher, but that's just who I am too. I don't let myself get to that point. So, I think it's important for some people. Some people really need to know where to draw the line, otherwise they will burn out. And I know tons of teachers that are young and old that have gotten to that place. So, I think it's about helping people recognize what they need to help them stay a teacher longer. And so, maybe that is how self-care can help, is just by teaching people what [self-care is]. Even the survey that you sent out with the different categories, a few of those I was like, 'Oh, I didn't even think about this as self-care, but it really is.' And so, I put in my survey to not just tell people what they have to do for self-care, or what it should mean to them, but I think if they teach people how to recognize that for themselves, that will really help people be able to stick around longer. [Having a glass of wine] has been one of the things that helps me transition from work day to now I'm at home, and I'm a regular person again, even if I have stuff I have to work on at home. But it's just kind of a mental thing; but also [a] relaxation thing too."	• Self-care about balance • Self-care unique to individual • Set boundaries • Teach what self-care entails • Awareness is important • Simple things can be self-care

Nearly three-quarters (70%) of survey respondents “Strongly agreed” that self-care affects a teacher’s longevity in the field. This prompt was crafted to capture the perceptions of teachers concerning why or how their longevity relates to self-care. Three interviewees mentioned burnout as a consequence of not practicing self-care. Notably, negative themes emerged like “potential for illness,” “resignation,” teaching being “thankless,” “beat down,” “quit,” and “attrition.” Since the lack of ESC can lead to turnover, education decision-makers are strongly encouraged to find solutions for implementing ESC in meaningful and effective ways.

The survey revealed that time was a recurring theme when it came to self-care (not enough, scheduling conflicts, struggles with time management, etc.). How does time affect your ability or inability to regularly practice self-care?³

Figure 25

Results for Zoom one-on-one interview grand tour prompt 5

Name	Response	Themes
Andrew	“Oh, there's definitely never enough time in the day. I think that's really the hard part for most new teachers is you teach literally all day, and so the one-hour prep time is not enough to grade your assignments. So, the first thought is to take it home and finish it. But then that pushes off dinner and family time, and whatever else. And so, it's hard to get the self-care in if you're focusing one hundred percent on school work. I think you have to really not only change what you're grading—and you can still give in-depth assignments—but only grade smaller portions of it, or only grade certain assignments that you can actually, grade quickly. That way, you have more time for self-care. If you do nothing but school, you will have your grade book a hundred percent updated all the time, but you will definitely be burned out that much faster. So, I've really toned down—not the number of assignments I do—but how often I grade them. I don't feel as guilty leaving holes in my gradebook over the weekend. I'll just get to them when I come back the next week. So, if I need to, I'll at least mark down on the gradebook what's been turned in versus missing. That way, students have feedback and admin can see that you've at least thought about your gradebook. But not everything can be graded by the next day, by any long shot. That's why I could never be an English or history teacher. That's too much mental effort to a) decipher their handwriting, and then b) decide what they were actually trying to say. Then, after you've done both those things, you have to actually assign a grade based on what everyone else also said. Math and computer science are so much more cut-and-dry. We have some subjectivity, but there's more of a correct or not correct answer that you could objectively grade in a much easier fashion.”	• Never enough time • Workload intrudes on home life • Must alter approach to lessen grading load • Implement strategies for greater efficiency
Gloria	“[Time] has quite a bit to do with it, because you have to have time to do things. That's the one resource that's not something you can multiply. With my life, I have to trade things. If I want to read, I have to trade time with my husband or trade time, like maybe I won't grade these 30 papers tonight...I'll do it during my planning period tomorrow. If I want to go for a run, that's at least an hour when I can't be doing something else. I guess it's just where I decide to put my priorities at that moment. Is cooking dinner more important? Is getting my kid to bed more important? What's more important at that time? Sometimes even the little fires come up and take over, and they're a little bit more important than ‘Oh, I can take care of myself later. I'll do that tomorrow, or I'll do that right before bed.’ Then you're too tired to do it before bed, so I think that you have to [be intentional]. It's like going to a doctor's appointment. You have to schedule that time, and	• Cannot multiply time • Must trade things to make time • Decide priorities • Be intentional

	you have to make it non-negotiable. If you don't, then it's probably going to get pushed off to the side, because it's [about] yourself.”	
Kate	“Time is a huge factor. I'm somebody who—I mean people tease me—my family teases me because I thrive on being busy. I wouldn't necessarily call it a good thing, but I don't really sit still very often, and it's always from one thing to the next. I manage to get a lot of things in, but time is a limited resource, and you know we all need sleep, which we probably don't get enough of. You have to delegate your time. It's easy in this profession to take more home with you than you should, and devote more time at home than you really should. It's really hard not to, and so I can see that that is a factor. A lot of people have families. For me, that's my biggest time cost outside of work is just trying to be there for my kids, be supportive of all their things, and get them to what they want to do. I know it's a finite amount of time that they're gonna still be in our house. You want to do it all, but that's definitely a limiting factor for me. It's one or the other sometimes, you know what I mean? As much as I try to be thoughtful about the time that I spend doing different things, it's still a finite amount of hours in the day.”	• Thrive on busyness • Time is limited resource/finite • Must delegate time • Easy for teachers to take work home • Family time is biggest cost outside of work
Kenny	“We all have twenty-four hours, so sometimes it's a decision that this is what I have to do. I'm almost sixty, and I still teach sixth grade gym class. I have to make myself get up early to come in and go to the gym, so I can try to keep up with these kids. So, it means I don't get to stay up late, and I have to do what I have to do in that timeframe. It's a sacrifice, and I gotta go to bed early, because I have to get up early, and it's making the conscious decision to do what you absolutely have to do. And you know you had to do it like that. We talk about the leadership stuff we do with the kids all the time, and you know your bigger rocks? Take care of those first, and the little ones will fill in. And so, first you have to make sure you're mentally and physically ready for the day. If not, you can go bats quick!”	• Time is finite • Requires sacrifice • Make conscious decision to do what must be done • Prioritizing is important
Sergio	“My main restriction is my contract hours, and I have chosen wisely on the extra activities I am required to do and the outside work-hour kind of things or extra jobs. So, for me, I have the free time. I've scheduled it out to where I purposely carve time out of my schedule to do free time stuff, and to make sure that I do something outside on the weekends. I even try to take one day a month [off] and just don't do any work or anything like that. It's just a personal day to go do something that I enjoy. So, for me, time isn't that big of an issue. I've been able to carve time out of my schedule so that I can do the activities that I like. I definitely make it a priority, and I've been working hard to take one day a month during the week where I'll get a sub, and then I just do self-care...things I enjoy doing.”	• Choose extra activities wisely • Must be intentional with schedule • Take off one day a month for self-care • Make self-care a priority
Traci	“I mentioned reading earlier. I don't always have time or energy, like the mental energy to do that. I definitely do feel that if I'm busier or I don't have the time, it does kind of knock me back a little bit. I think that's probably the same for everyone. I would assume that I'm not the only one who has felt that we were so busy during teaching remotely or hybrid, that most of us just had to force ourselves to shut the computer and walk away. I mean, this is obvious, you just have to	• Not always time for self-care • Must be intentional with time

	make the time for it. I can recognize when I'm starting to get grumpy, or just like 'I'm so done with this!' And then, I'll just shut myself away and read, even if I don't have time. So, yeah, it definitely affects my ability in that there aren't enough hours in the day ever. But now, I'm getting to the point that it's okay. I'm not gonna check my email if I don't want to in the night, and it's okay. So, just forcing the time is necessary.”	• Recognize when self-care is needed • Time is limited • Permit yourself to take a break
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This prompt was an effort to discover how time plays a role in either preventing or supporting a teacher in practicing self-care. Several survey respondents mentioned time management—either struggling with it or a desire to have professional development to improve—so I wanted to see if the interviewees could explain why time was a recurring theme. Five of the six interviewees expressed the limited or finite nature of time, whereas all six expressed that intentionality was necessary in order to take the time to care for oneself amidst all the busyness of work and home life.

What helps you to engage in effective self-care? It could be anything from people, personal or professional situations, scheduling, finances, resources, etc.?⁴

Figure 26

Results for Zoom one-on-one interview grand tour prompt 6

Name	Response	Themes
Andrew	“It was really just trial and error. When I started [teaching] in the middle school, I started in the middle of the year, so I didn't get the full training. I was literally trying to do what we're saying not to do. I would grade one hundred percent of my students' work every single night, and it was impossible. It was keeping me awake too long. Then one day, the teacher coach said, 'You're grading everything every day? No, that's not how it's supposed to be done.' It's like, whoa...okay, that's amazing. So then, you only audit; you're minimizing the amount. For effective self-care, you have to decide how much you can actually reasonably handle. That is really down to experience and partially on what your admin in school requires of you. I obviously have an advantage, because I have electives, so I get to make it up. I don't have to align with state curriculum. I think you can still do that, if you get with your teachers or not, you can decide what's a reasonable amount that everybody can handle. So, effective self-care really comes down to self-advocating and putting limits on how much you can reasonably do.”	• Learn to be more efficient • Set boundaries • Know your limits • Self-advocate
Gloria	“I'm at the place where I've heard things and learned about things enough that I recognize [self-care is] important. I don't like who I am when I'm grouchy, angry, and easily frustrated. I don't like how that	• Self-care is important

	affects the people around me, so I think that's part of it. I'm also part of a network marketing company now, so a lot of people are like, 'That's a lot of things that are on [your] mind!' You have to take care of your self-care, and I think it's just kind of [urgent]. That idea of self-care is just kind of a reminder. Most of the things that I want to do for self-care are free-ish. I gotta go buy running shoes every year or two, or I think that if I had stuff that was financially burdensome for my [self-care], I wouldn't do it. I also go to a small group on Wednesdays and talk to people about Jesus. That's fun for me. I think having them—they know I'm committed to going there—helps me to remember to go, and to not just be tired and be like, 'Well, I'm not gonna go,' because every time I go, I'm glad I went."	• Self-care must be budget-friendly • Spiritual self-care is important despite tiredness
Kate	"For me, sometimes self-care looks like spending some time nurturing some of my relationships with people. I do better with that when opportunities present themselves. I'll think to myself, 'Gosh! I don't have time for this, this, or this,' but it helps for me to have someone say, 'Hey, we're getting together on this day, and we're gonna have a scary movie night. Would you like to come?' And then it's like, 'Yes, I can put that in my schedule,' and then I'm happy that it's in my schedule, because I want to see all those people. It's not necessarily something that I would be like, 'Oh, I need to schedule this,' so, I'm not very good sometimes at thinking of the things [to do], but I enjoy being asked to do the things. I try to be as efficient with my time during the school day. In planning times, I usually take a working lunch, which is probably not good, but I try to get grading and stuff done because I don't want to have hours and hours of grading to do when I get home. I do bring stuff home, but mostly I [grade at school]. So, I carve out a few hours to sit down [at school] and just do it so I'm not doing that every night when I get home. I'm being productive trying to get as much done as possible at school. Financially, just being smart. I really enjoy get[ting] together with my friends every couple of years and do[ing] the Rock boat, which is a cruise. That's gonna take some planning, both time and financial, to put resources aside to make that happen. But I don't feel like I'm completely selfless to the point of detriment. I'm a mom and a wife, and my family means everything to me. But I'm really comfortable saying, 'Hey, I want to go do this thing, I'm gonna go with my friends, this is gonna be me time, and I'm gonna do it.' [My family members are] supportive of me, so that helps...that's good."	• Nurture relationships • Prefer others to encourage activity participation • Be intentional about work efficiency and productivity • Be smart financially • Plan ahead for self-care • Family means everything • Set boundaries to make time for self
Kenny	"It's just knowing that if I don't [do self-care], then any day could be your last one. It could wear you down completely on any day. So, it's a matter of this has to be done more than it's something that I get to choose to do. We have to make ourselves get up and do what we have to do if it means coming in early to grade so you're ahead of time. Or getting your lessons [done]... it's something that just absolutely has to be done. You can't neglect that. If I don't [get it done], it affects my students. If I take too many days off, they don't get their actual lessons from me [but from a sub]. You know your students; you know your class. So, it's in order to make sure that my students get the best that I know they're going to get, which is the best I'm going to try to give them...to stay well for them, so I can be here for them, so they get	• Commit to self-care for sake of self-preservation • Sacrifice and stay healthy to give students the very best • Family can provide encouragement

	what would be the best. There are thirty kids per class depending on [your schedule]. You also have your family. If you have family—if you're single, I don't know how the single folks do it—your people can encourage you. I just do it, because it's what I have to do, whether anybody encourages me or not. I have to be here, and that's what I do. It's why most of us want to be here is these kids. So, it's just, you know, I just do it.”	
Sergio	“Well, it's really just having the time, like knowing what to do, where to go. I have a small group of friends, and that's who I usually play disc golf with, so my friends [help]. Then, the same group, we fish together a lot. But a lot of times, I do a lot of things solo. I enjoy going doing things alone and spending time by myself a lot of times.”	• Know what to do and where to go • Activities with friends • Spending time alone
Traci	“People definitely help me, because I would probably be fine just left to my own devices, all by myself, all the time. I call myself an extroverted introvert, but I also need my people. When people will invite me to go do something or it's like ‘Let's go out to dinner tonight,’ or whatever, it helps...even if my instinct is just to stay at home, or just be by myself. That really helps me. Those truly are self-care things for me, just being around my people. And then, I feel like finances are always kind of at play, but not always helping. Sometimes it's hurting a little bit like when I really want to go to this concert, but I [know I] shouldn't spend the money. So that's just normal life, but it does kind of impede. If I've got money coming in it's, ‘Okay, let's do this!’ [People and finances] are my two biggest ones. But people really do help me kinda come out of my shell and get excited for stuff that has nothing to do with work. Even though I work with most of my friends, we do stuff outside of school.”	• Need people to provide support and encourage activity participation • Finances determine some self-care activities • Some colleagues are friends

As stated in the previous chapter this and the next prompt were challenging to design as I needed to address the fourth research question in terms of what enables or constrains a teacher's ability to engage in self-care. They both went through several iterations as some examples (e.g., personal) were difficult to word so as to best capture what I intended as contributing or limiting factors. During the interview, I clarified and gave examples of the various types of helps or hindrances that could affect access or practice of self-care. Setting boundaries and being intentional with self-care, once again, were common themes that emerged.

What prevents you from engaging in effective self-care? It could be anything from people, personal or professional situations, scheduling, finances, resources, etc.?⁴

Figure 27

Results for Zoom one-on-one interview grand tour prompt 7

Name	Response	Themes
Andrew	“Ooooh, when life throws you curve balls. Right now, my wife is out of town, so I'm effectively a single parent. I have to go home, feed the dog, cook dinner, and pick up [my son] from wrestling practice. So that takes up a huge amount of time, and I have less time to relax. Obviously, if you don't have the ability to have time to yourself for self-care, then it's just gonna get pushed to the side. You would then have to find different ways to make time. You might actually find a babysitter so that you can have time to yourself, or tell your kid it's okay to watch TV for several hours while you go to your room and do something else. You have to make time, and then obviously life sometimes doesn't allow you to have as much time as you would like. For me, my wife makes four times as much as I do, so I can afford to be a teacher. I don't have that extra stressor. If teaching was my only job, how am I going to pay for everything else? So, another good, effective self-care [strategy] is to marry someone who makes a lot more money than you.”	• Unexpected interruptions and schedule demands prevent self-care • Be intentional about finding ways to make time • Spouse's higher income supports self-care
Gloria	“I think [what prevents self-care] would be other people's schedules. Also, I hate being behind on my grading. I don't like to do it all on the weekends, so I try and do it [during] prep periods, but sometimes you have longer assignments. My kid...he's got sports a couple of days a week. I'll be coaching [track and field] here shortly, and while it's related to running, that does go into the evening, and it pushes things back. And sometimes it's just planning, and it's just working those priorities. It's not living in that second quadrant of being proactive. It's just putting out the fires. Oh, and the cold weather, because I hate running in the cold! Those would be some of the things like schedules and stuff. I don't have a treadmill. I think that if I had one, I would run on it. But I do know that running on a treadmill is way different for me than running on the road. It's harder to run on [a treadmill] for me, so while I keep my heart rate up, and it would keep me in the habit of it, I don't have a place to put one. I think that it would be fun to have one. [Another teacher] has one, and she gets on hers, and I'm like ‘Dang!’ Sometimes I wish I just had space to have one.”	• Other people's schedules • Workload • Time limits • Weather • Home space limits self-care • Be proactive and prioritize to support self-care
Kate	“Having the perception that I don't have the time for [self-care], or not being intentional...intentional about setting aside time for it would be my biggest thing. I've gotten much, much better with age, but I have an incredibly hard time saying ‘no’ to anything. People know that about me, which is bad because it gets to be a bad cycle. I get asked a lot to help with things, or and I want to help as much as I can. I'm a helper, but sometimes that would be another thing...the ability to say ‘no.’ The hesitation to say ‘no’ to things that I know I really can't give my best. I'm still working on it. I know some people are just much better at [saying ‘no’] than others, though I have some friends who are	• Difficulty being intentional • Difficulty saying ‘no’ without feeling guilty

	just like, ‘Yeah, no! I don't want to do that. I’m not gonna.’ And I’m like, ‘Huh, how do you do that? Can you not sleep at night?’ They're like, ‘No, I’m fine.’ I don't have that gene.”	
Kenny	“Sometimes, for a lot of us, it's the clock. We work sometimes fifty to sixty hours a week, and so there are those times when you don't get to go home and just relax. You go home, you crash, and you get back up, and the alarm goes off, and you go back again [to work]. Maybe that day you can find some time to just sit, be still, and just relax for a little bit. It might not be [that] you get to spend the whole weekend on the couch, because we all have [things] we’ve got to take care of. But [it] might just be like a little five-minute siesta...just sit down, and just do nothing. Let your body recuperate for a few moments.”	• Too busy and exhausted for self-care • Find time to relax
Sergio	“Weather is the biggest one, because I do outdoor stuff. It was great we didn't have school today [because of the snow closure], but I had to be stuck inside my house all day long, which is not so good for me. Weather is definitely a big one. Luckily, in Colorado, the weather is great here most of the time. Just like this last weekend, we had [temperatures in the] fifties, and this weekend we'll probably have fifties again. And just work in general. Since being a conductor [of an after-hours ensemble], I have outside hours and there's the weekend and things like that. But it's really not that much. And so, it's just like the weather holds me back, and maybe sometimes not wanting to do [things] by myself, and not having necessarily that crew that I can hook up with at those times.”	• Weather is a big factor • Difficulty getting with friends • After-hours work prevents self-care
Traci	“I mentioned finances [earlier]. Sometimes, that truly does harsh my vibe when I want to do stuff. Otherwise, really the only thing that impedes [self-care] is just myself and not taking the time to do whatever it is that makes me happy or relaxed. Otherwise, I don't really feel like there are any negative influences that keep me from doing that.	• Lack of finances • Not being intentional

As stated above with the sixth prompt, these questions were challenging to design as I needed to address the fourth research question in terms of what enables or constrains a teacher’s ability to engage in self-care. They both went through several iterations as some examples (e.g., personal) were difficult to word so as to best capture what I intended as contributing or limiting factors. During the interview, I clarified and gave examples of the various types of helps or hindrances that could affect access or practice of self-care. Scheduling (time), lack of being proactive, lack of finances, difficulty saying ‘no’ to others, and even the weather were primary factors affecting teachers’ ability to practice ESC.

If you had a magic wand, and could have anything, what would you give yourself in terms of self-care? Why did you pick that?²

Figure 28

Results for Zoom one-on-one interview grand tour prompt 8

Name	Response	Themes
Andrew	“Oh, good, grief! It's a magic wand, huh? I would just have more time in the day, and then you can magically spend all that time getting grading done, and you won't have to worry about everything else. Yeah, that's just more time because I already have the financial aspect taken care of.”	• More time to reduce grading workload
Gloria	“I would have a pool, because I love the water, and I love swimming. If I could just sit in a pool, I would be the happiest person in the world. I came from California, and I was in San Diego, so I regularly went to the beach. My favorite thing to do was to get there at six o'clock in the morning, and run on the beach without any shoes...it was my favorite. I grew up with a pool because my grandma had one, and we were there all the time. I think that as tempting as it would be, I don't think I'd want to move back to California. [Colorado] is where our opportunities are. My husband...he's doing really, really well with his business and stuff. And I love [my school], and I can't imagine trying to find another school like this school. So, I think it's just kind of a trade-off.”	• Pool: love water and swimming • Beach: running on it • Preferred location is a trade-off
Kate	“My instinctual answer would be to give myself x amount of time [to] just hibernate like a bear, just shut off everything, and just be able to relax, think, sleep, rest, and re-energize. But having said that, knowing myself, I'd probably be like, ‘Well, I don't really know how hibernation works.’ I'd probably be terribly bored after twenty minutes, and then I'd be like, ‘What am I going to do?’ So, I always think that's a good idea. If I could just get a hotel room, go there for seventy-two hours, and not have anyone there. It sounds good, and then I think I would just be so bored and beside myself, and not know what to do. Otherwise, if I had a magic wand, I'd maybe create an extra day during the weekend or something. I always feel like weekends just fly by way too soon. It'd be really nice to have that third day every week to just take that time for myself. I would [absolutely] extend my work day to have a three-day weekend in a four-day work week. For the kids, it would be an interesting dichotomy, because I do think by the end of the day, they're pretty spent. So, research-wise, what would be in their best interest for a learning environment? But I would totally work a longer day to have a three-day weekend. That's always entertaining to hear people say, ‘Oh, you get off so early,’ and I'm like, ‘Yeah, trust me, I'm usually working while I'm falling asleep.’”	• More time to relax, think, sleep, rest, re-energize • Some ideas only work in theory • Would extend work day to get three-day weekends (more time) • Public perception that teachers get lots of time off
Kenny	“Oh, every week it would be a three-day weekend. Just for that little bit of...I got my stuff, I got a day to do my chores, and a day to fill in, and a day to just completely rest and recover. So, it'd be a three-day weekend every weekend. I would [work longer hours to make that happen]. I would love to work four tens, Tuesday through Friday	• Would extend work day to get three-day weekends (more time)

	[with] Saturday, Sunday, and Monday off. I would gladly do a ten-hour day for those. Four tens, which would be more students in the room, and you'd have more hours in the afternoon to do grading. But I think the four days, if that worked, that would be grand in my opinion.”	
Sergio	“Well, I’m fairly content, but I guess if I had a magic wand, it would probably be a financial thing, so I'd be able to fly to the greatest fishing place or the greatest disc golf course and then be able to fly back with no problem. So yeah, it would be a financial thing. It'd probably be more like a pile of money and gold. If I had the money to just fly somewhere...like today, I could have just hopped on a jet and gone somewhere in Florida where it's nice and then flown back.”	• More money to have fun and travel
Traci	“Gosh! I probably would give myself more vacations. I love going on vacation. I love traveling, but it's hard to find the time and finances and all of that. So, I would [also] say a break from [my second job] too, because there is no clear break ever from that job. And so, just a vacation where I did not have any emails or anything to be thinking about. That is definitely what I would do. And why would I do that? Just for the pure getting away, seeing new places, being around new things, and doing some of those others like having time to read or go out to eat, or whatever. So yeah, that's what I would do with my magic wand.”	• More time and money to travel, read, and go out to eat • Break from second job

This question was created as a fictional way to glean the teachers’ top choice for self-care. Using a fantasy example of inquiry supports the use of imagination, freeing up the interviewee to pick a favorite choice regardless of any real limitation of resources (e.g., time, money). The follow-up is a clarification of their response so that their reasoning was included. Half of the teachers interviewed mentioned that they would create more time either to reduce workload or to have an additional day on the weekend. Two said that they would be willing to work extra hours during the week in order to have a three-day weekend.

What advice would you give to a new teacher concerning self-care?²

Figure 29

Results for Zoom one-on-one interview grand tour prompt 9

Name	Response	Themes
Andrew	“Definitely set limits and know that even if you feel like you're not giving one hundred percent, you are. The students will know, based on how you present yourself and your enthusiasm for your subject, whether you are a good teacher or not. It doesn't have to be one hundred percent of the time you have this amazing, in-depth, super-	• Set limits • Simplify workload to preserve self

	deep-thoughts assignment where you have something that has to be graded every single day. So, you can have an amazing curriculum in class without having a hundred percent of your time taken up by developing curriculum and grading assignments.”	
Gloria	“I would say schedule [self-care]. Find something that you love, even if it's just one thing. If they like to play soccer, go find an indoor soccer league that meets on Saturdays or something. But I would definitely tell them that you have to keep yourself tuned, to be able to be your best self for your students.”	• Schedule self-care: be intentional • Find something you love to do • Keep yourself tuned
Kate	“Well, that's a good question, because those are all things that I'm still learning [as a new teacher]. I think establishing good boundaries would be a good starting place. By nature, most people in this profession [have] a hard time saying 'no' to things, and just being a helper by nature and a caregiver by nature. Not always, but a lot of my colleagues are like that. And so, establishing boundaries. One of the things I'm perfectly terrible about, and I'm really trying to improve, is feeling the need to respond to parents and kids over the weekend and within an hour. That's fine every once in a while, but then it just spirals into this...I have to have an off time. That would be a piece of advice. And you know, we're kind of circling back to where I started just reflecting on being intentional about [self-care], because there's no right or wrong answer for self-care. It looks so different for everybody. You've got to know what self-care looks like for yourself...what makes a difference for you, and then be intentional about carving time out to do it. So, that would probably be my piece of advice.”	• Establish boundaries • Be intentional with time for self-care • Know what is meaningful self-care for you
Kenny	“For a new teacher, not beat yourself up, and know that your first year is going to be probably the worst ever. You just keep going, don't quit, and ask for help. And just say, 'Hey, look, I don't understand this.' Instead of thinking you have to stay and do it all. Ask for help, and just learn to relax, and just say, 'Hey, you know what? It's time. I've graded papers for the last three hours. I'm done. I'm not grading, and I'll get them done when I get them done!' So, it's just one of those deals where you have to give yourself time to rest and to make mistakes even. Sometimes second and third year [is the] worst year. It certainly does get better once you get into your groove. And I would say, try not to copy other teachers. We're not cookie cutters. We all have our own different personalities and way of doing things. Look for what you can glean from others to say, 'That's a great idea,' but don't try to imitate that person. I would say the history lead in sixth grade...she's an amazing teacher. If I ever tried to teach like her, my brain would explode because she's so amazing at what she does. I teach the way I teach. I could not teach how she [teaches]...she's full of so much information, it's insane.”	• Be kind to yourself • Stay the course • Self-advocate • Set boundaries • Give yourself time to rest and make mistakes • Gets better when in the groove • It is okay to be unique
Sergio	“[Self-care] should become a necessary part of their teaching as far as it's something they consciously need to think about, just like they do their lesson plans. They need to put it into a concrete thinking of what they're going to do and not just let it happen and assume that things are	• Be intentional about self-care • Set boundaries • Stay positive

	going to happen. I'd also let them know that it's okay, as a new teacher especially, to say 'no' to things, because I've noticed a lot of the older teachers always try and push some of the less fun kind of responsibilities onto the new teachers. [The new teachers] are always too willing to say, 'Yeah, of course, because I just want to be involved and get the experience.' But I think it's important, if you want to stay, have longevity in your career, stay positive, and be the best teacher that you probably can be, then that self-care is very important, especially as a young teacher."	
Traci	"So, we were talking about that glass of wine [earlier], or that sort of ritual, and that's something that I actually had shared a few years [ago]. I had an intern, and they were like, 'How do you balance at work and at home?' I definitely always give my interns the advice of having something that can kind of switch you [from work to home]. Even if you have papers to grade or something that you want to do at night, just something that can kind of routinely, even if it's listening to a song on the way home in the car, or something to transition you from work life to your personal life again. But I also think that new teachers are much better than we are at stepping away from work. I honestly think they could give us better advice, because they just don't feel that [obligation to duty]—I mean when we both probably started as educators, it was just like this is what you do, and you've got to get all this stuff done, and you go above and beyond to make everything so great—and I think they still manage to get everything done they need to, but they're much better at just saying, 'Okay, I'm done for the day at five-o'clock!' So honestly, I almost feel like they could give us a better advice."	• Have a routine to wind down after work • Set boundaries • Learn from others regardless of age or experience

By eliciting a call to give advice, this prompt was intended to determine what is considered significant information about ESC that the interviewee would pass on to others. Five of the six interviewees stated that setting boundaries was important advice for new teachers. Half of the teachers advised new faculty to be intentional with ESC. "Kenny" provided excellent advice by saying that new teachers should be kind to themselves and self-advocate, while "Traci" said that we can learn how to do ESC from others regardless of age or experience.

Did participation in the survey and this interview change your perceptions about self-care? In what ways?¹

Figure 30

Results for Zoom one-on-one interview grand tour prompt 10

Name	Response	Themes
Andrew	"I would say no, but mainly because I'm not a super veteran teacher with ten years on my belt. I would say, with five years teaching, I've	• Self-care ideas already set

	already learned the hard lessons, so my ideas about how it should be done were pretty much already set, so it didn't change my views. It definitely makes me think about how other people do [self-care], because they are not as lucky as I am.”	• Made me think of how other people do self-care
Gloria	“It made the idea of self-care more broad...that there are way more things, cause I didn't necessary think that going to my small group was a form of self-care. But it was one of the suggestions on [the survey], and I was like, ‘Oh, I do that!’ I'm kind of on the introverted side, and so sometimes it's work to make myself go [to small group]. But once I'm there, it's good. And I really like the opportunity to talk to people about Jesus, because you just can't have those general conversations [at work], and it kind of helps me grow as a person in things. That's something that I really want to do is just continue to grow as a person. So, I think my perceptions of [self-care] were a little bit more narrow, and I think that that allowed me to understand that there's a lot more in the realm of self-care than I had originally anticipated or thought.”	• Broadened ideas of what encompasses self-care
Kate	“I think, ever since I answered the survey, and then after speaking today especially, I know in my mind what it takes, and I know what my philosophy about [self-care] is, which is to be intentional. Whether I honor that in myself all the time is a different story. I try to. I think I do better than some people, but I could probably do better still. And so, it just brings it to the forefront of the mind a little bit, thinking about what are some ways every week that I can be more intentional about doing things that will help me in one way or the other. And having firmer boundaries when it's appropriate, saying ‘no’ when I should say ‘no,’ and not taking on more than I need to, and things like that. So, it helps me be a little bit more reflective of the practice [of self-care] for sure.”	• More awareness of and reflection upon self-care • Be intentional • Set boundaries
Kenny	“Not really. I've always tried to do [self-care]. I know it's important for the kids, for us to be here, and for ourselves. I mean, every time—this is a three-day weekend coming up and everybody is looking forward to it—you get that extra day, just sit and relax, and hopefully do nothing and just relax. So, I've always done that. My perception of self-care hasn't changed because I've always tried to do it in some way.”	• Perception has not changed • Already had set habits of self-care
Sergio	“A little bit. Since taking Denny's [High Trust Workshops], I've really focused on [self-care] more and made my concrete goal of taking that one day a month, and just conceptualizing it, and thinking about it in terms of what would I say to a new teacher definitely does make me think about like, man, I wish someone would have said that to me. So yeah, it definitely involves my perspective. It's even more important, because I didn't take a day in January, and I probably should've. And it's one of those things when I think I'm doing it well, it's always...it's okay to reflect back on what I actually am doing.”	• Already focused on self-care due to workshops • Wish someone would have mentored me on self-care when new • Reflect on self-care activities
Traci	“Yeah, there were some things on the check off lists or things to choose from [in the survey] that I didn't consider self-care, but I totally see how it is [now]. I really, truly haven't spent that much time thinking about self-care for myself. I just kind of know what makes me happy and know what I need. I think it's definitely given me some	• Broadened ideas of what encompasses self-care

	food for thought about why is that something that makes me feel like I'm having self-care, or am I doing everything that I should be? Maybe eating my potato chips isn't the best...but yeah, it definitely made me realize that there's a lot that I do that's really, truly self-care. I mean, this is silly, but painting my fingernails...I love to do that! It's really relaxing and soothing to me, and that's self-care, even though it doesn't seem like much. So, it gave me some different ideas and some thoughts like, 'Oh, maybe I should try that,' or 'This could be something that might work for me, too.'"	• More awareness of seemingly insignificant things being effective self-care • Inspired to try other things
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My goal with this question was to find out what effect—if any—being surveyed and interviewed about self-care had on the participant. Did the study support more awareness, provide a deeper understanding, cause one to begin practicing self-care, etc.? Four of the six teachers mentioned that they became more aware of ESC, while half said that the checklists in survey prompts 7-10 helped them realize there was more to ESC than they originally thought (e.g., attending a faith-based small group, painting fingernails). “Sergio,” as mentioned in several of his responses to this and other prompts, has had the advantage of attending Denny McLoughlin’s *High Trust Psychology*® workshops where he learned many self-care strategies. These workshops, from my own personal experience, have taught me also to practice self-care regularly with many positive effects in my professional and personal life. “Sergio’s” own testimony echoes the positive impact of Denny McLoughlin’s teachings as he expresses contentment in his personal and professional life as well.

With the Grand Tour (main body) of interview questions completed, the next prompt was posed as a way to get participants to reflect on a previous question (prompt 8) in an effort to challenge them to consider how they would take action to get their ESC in the near future.

When you were asked, “If you had a magic wand, and could have anything, what would you give yourself in terms of self-care?” What steps do you see yourself taking this week or this month to get that for yourself?²

Figure 31

Results for Zoom one-on-one interview reflection prompt

Name	Response	Themes
Andrew	“For more time? I mean the only thing I could do is the same thing I'm doing already, where I have active assignments that we're working and doing together in classes. But I don't grade 100% of them as a complete project. I might just look at a tiny piece of it and see, ‘Did they do this part?’ Yes or no, and I'll grade just that one part, so I can still have things in the grade book that show we are busy and learning. But I'm not spending hours and hours looking over every piece of code, or analyzing every frame of an animation. I'm just looking for those key things that are important to the lesson that I taught.”	• Continue doing what is already being done: simplify assignments and grading methods
Gloria	“I don't. I just think that being land-locked in the middle of the country...I resigned myself to being able to sort of see water sometimes. I like to run along I-25 where that creek is, so even being next to water sometimes is nice. When we go camping, I try and find a place that has water, so I guess I do a few things just trying to get there. I took my kid to swim lessons all the time, so at least I was there [when] he was in the water. I just recently found out that [my neighborhood] has a pool. So, I could look into that. I think they have a pass or something where you can go regularly, but I haven't looked into that yet.”	• Run near water • Get a local pool membership
Kate	“Well, it's an interesting weekend that we're approaching, because I have some time to myself. My husband's taking my girls to Memphis this weekend for a soccer tournament, and this is the second year in a row that they've gone. I don't go because it's [parent-teacher] conference week every year. I have the next four days with no work, just conferences today, so it's allowing me a lot of time to get my grading done, and even work on my classes a little bit. I've been trying really hard to. I stress myself out so bad when I wait till the last minute, and so I've been trying to work ahead a little bit when I can, so that I don't have all this stuff to do at the end of the weekend, which is what a responsible student should do, but it doesn't always look like that, you know? I'm looking forward to trying some things this weekend, getting a little bit of exercise, and taking my dogs for a walk. I have a friend coming [from out of town] to meet up with another friend, and we're gonna get together Saturday night and play some board games. So, I have a plan for that, and I do plan on allowing myself to sleep in—whatever that might look like—one of these days this weekend. So, that's my plan. It ended up being a good weekend to put some of these things into practice.”	• Upcoming weekend plans: spending alone time, time with friends, exercising, taking dogs for a walk, sleeping in • Too stressful to procrastinate; trying to work ahead
Kenny	“We do what we can. You make due over the summer time, you rest up like crazy, and during those long week breaks—spring and Christmas—you do what you can. I guess I could start [making extra time] on a Friday afternoon because Friday afternoon you get out 3:45	• Looking forward to longer breaks to rest and recharge

	[or] 4:00 o'clock. Now you still got a little bit of time, and you could maybe go home and get more stuff done in one way, and then give yourself more time to rest and relax, and then just tell yourself, 'Look, I don't care what gets done. If it doesn't get done, it's going to be there later on, anyhow.' And just say, 'I'm resting today.' I believe that's straight up Old Testament stuff, which is like, 'Hey, take a day and rest.' If not, you burn your candle at both ends, and before you know it, you've gone a month without doing [self-care], and you wear yourself out. We're America...just go, go, go, go, go! The other cultures, a lot of them, they take a break in the middle of the day, they allow themselves that time to rest, and they're not always hit the floor running and go all day. Sometimes it's just, 'Hey, it'll get done!' To some folks it might look like people are being lazy, but I think that's a lot of that self-care, just saying, 'Hey, if we stress everybody out, [or] if I stress myself out and burn myself out, then I'm no good to anybody.' So, you've got to take that time, and so that's how I look at it."	• Setting boundaries • Being intentional • Being proactive • Self-care does not equate to laziness
Sergio	"Well, one of the things I also do that's for self-care, in a way that's a little different, is I [buy] physical gold and silver. So, I am making progress that way, and it causes me to save my money a lot differently and look at money a lot differently. And so, that's what I use my [night job] money for, and it's working out pretty good. I'm well on the way, I think, to having a solid retirement. I'm kind of working towards that in a way. And to be honest, you can gig [as a musician] every weekend if you really wanted to. I mean it. It takes a little while to get established, but once you do, and your name gets out there, [if] you say you have a quartet group, you can get gigs pretty much every single weekend...enough to where it's like, 'Wow!'"	• Plan and work towards retirement • Leverage talent to make money on the side
Traci	"Well, I did just get approved for some [rock] band tickets. So, that is happening! I'm very excited about that! But I think that just prioritizing what is important to me, and just knowing...for example, last summer I tried to travel right at the end of May, beginning of June, and it was so much [second job] stuff going on. It was crazy. It was really like mental health-wise not great; I did not get much self-care on that vacation. So, this year, I'm planning a different date to travel. And so, I think just knowing what I need—that's my reoccurring theme—just planning out in the next month or so, that's when it's time to start thinking about the end of school, and there's so much going on at school. So, just knowing like, 'Oh, I've got a really long week. Let's plan to go out for dinner on Friday, because that'll be fun and less stressful.' You won't have to cook or whatever. So just little things like that and planning for [an out-of-state conference], too, that's coming up."	• Going to rock concert • Prioritizing and being intentional with time, money, and self-care • Planning ahead, wisely scheduling around work

The first part of this prompt was worded in a way that used the fictional magic wand of prompt 8 as further examination of what the interviewee saw as a favored self-care strategy for themselves. The last part is a challenge to the interviewee to reflect or consider what, in

particular, they would intentionally do in an effort to apply action towards getting what they would magically have as self-care. Two of the six interviewees mentioned that they would be intentional about ESC and set boundaries, while all contemplated how and when they would take advantage of their magic wand response.

To wrap-up the interview and give participants a chance to express their final thoughts, this prompt was posed:

Before we finish, do you have any questions or feedback you'd like to share with me?

Figure 32

Results for Zoom one-on-one interview wrap-up prompt

Name	Response	Themes
Andrew	"No. I would love to see the results. It's so interesting to see how different teachers deal with different things. When we look at the results, will you know how many years a teacher has, or what kind of subject they teach? That would be, to me, [good] to know those types of things...to be able to give context your answers."	• Interested in results to give context to study prompts and responses
Gloria	"I don't think so. I wonder if there's not a lot of research on teachers in self-care because of the vacations we get. But I don't think that, unless you're a teacher, you recognize how we would not be teaching if we didn't have breaks like that, because it is so hard. So that's interesting that there's [more] research in other fields [on self-care], but not for teaching. And I think that's starting to change after COVID [-19] and everybody having to teach their own kids."	• Breaks (e.g., summer, winter, spring) are necessary for longevity, but may be perceived by public as superfluous • More research post-COVID-19
Kate	"I do feel like people don't do [self-care]. They're not taking the time to nurture the things that they need to. I do a decent job of it. I feel like I could always do better, but I'd be a pretty miserable person if I didn't continue to nurture the areas that really make me happy and bring me joy. There are a lot of people who don't [practice self-care]. I'd be miserable."	• Must practice self-care to avoid being miserable
Kenny	"No, and I wish you well."	• N/A
Sergio	"No, I mean, it's great getting to chat with you and share some of my experiences as a teacher, and what I've been trying to do to make sure that I enjoy this career. It's been nice to kind of reflect on it, too, and think about it...kind of remove myself and look at what I'm doing. It's just kind of cool. So, I thank you for that opportunity to participate. And hopefully, you got some good info from me."	• Nice to reflect on what I am doing for self-care
Traci	"I think it's interesting. I love hearing others' perspectives too, so I'm really looking forward to it. Thank you for including me."	• Interested in results to hear other teachers' perspectives

This final prompt was asked to give participants a chance to share any feedback or ask questions about the study. Responses, of course, were varied, while two of the six interviewees said that they were interested in the results of the study to give context to it and hear what other teachers had to say about self-care.

While coding the survey and interview data provided its own challenges, common themes from the survey and interviews emerged: time, intentionality, and the need to set clear boundaries in an effort to protect home life outside of school. The next chapter will broach what should be done with the data of this study and what limitations existed that could be improved upon for further research into ESC.

Chapter 5 - Discussion and Limitations

As the Alan Parsons Project so succinctly asked in the early 1980s, “Where do we go from here...?” (Parsons & Woolfson, 1980). This chapter will discuss next steps for further research and candidly examine limitations of the study. It serves as an open invitation or call to arms, if you will, to any who would like to add their thoughts, voice, and research to the fight for conserving and preserving teachers through effective self-care (ESC).

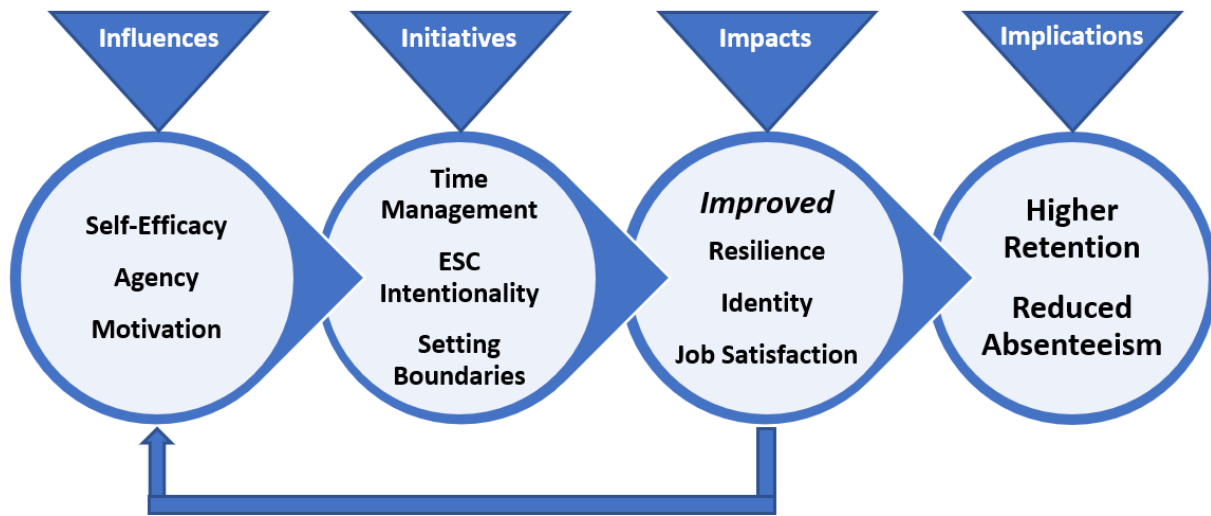
Discussion

This study is grounded in Self-Efficacy Theory which is “the belief we have in our own abilities, specifically our ability to meet the challenges ahead of us and complete a task successfully” (Ackerman, 2018). Self-efficacy is a major factor when it comes to motivation (Zimmerman, 2000). However, according to the data produced by this research, barriers exist (e.g., time, intentionality, setting boundaries) to increasing teachers’ self-efficacy which can further confound job satisfaction, reduce retention, and increase absenteeism.

This study explored teachers’ perceptions of self-care and uncovered the interplay between nine elements: three influences (self-efficacy/belief, agency/action, and motivation/willingness), three initiatives (time management, ESC intentionality, and setting boundaries), and three impacts (resilience, identity, and job satisfaction). The results are two implications (higher retention and reduced absenteeism). All of which combined to form a construct (see Figure 33 – *Teacher Conservation and Preservation Synergy Model*®) that delineates the synergistic nature of the various factors.

Figure 33

Teacher Conservation and Preservation Synergy Model[®]



The interaction between the nine elements is essential in order to be successful with ESC and thus experience higher retention and reduced absenteeism. A teacher must have the belief (self-efficacy), the action (agency), and motivation (willingness) to routinely practice ESC. Moreover, a teacher must also manage their time wisely, be intentional with ESC, while also setting clear boundaries to protect the time and practice of ESC. Namely, they must make the time to practice ESC, have the desire and action that demonstrate a commitment to doing it, and possess the courage to prevent other activities and distractions from intruding on self-care. However, teachers cannot act in a vacuum, per se; they need the support of school leaders when it comes to time and setting boundaries which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The byproduct of improved resilience, identity, and job satisfaction is even stronger self-efficacy, agency, and motivation. The process (as presented in Figure 33) is synergistic and cyclical in that improved resilience, identity, and job satisfaction lead to a greater sense of self-efficacy, agency, and motivation, which can—once again—reinforce resilience, identity, and job satisfaction (and so forth).

However, when one of the factors is missing, the intended impacts of improved resilience, identity, and job satisfaction—and thus higher retention and reduced absenteeism—will be weakened or compromised. For example, a teacher who has time for ESC but lacks the motivation to do something that involves consistent practice—whether important or trivial—or, has the motivation to do ESC without the time, or the time and motivation, but allows other things to interfere, will find themselves neglecting their well-being. This can create a vicious cycle where a teacher metaphorically continues to beat themselves up for avoiding the very things they know are important to their physical, mental, or emotional health.

Three Influences: Self-Efficacy, Agency, and Motivation

Self-efficacy, one's *belief* in their own ability to be effective or successful in accomplishing a goal or task, plays an important role as an influence for improving resilience, identity, and job satisfaction. All of the survey participants agreed that self-care is indeed important for teachers. Furthermore, all but one teacher surveyed agreed that self-care is important to their longevity in the field of education. This result demonstrates that self-care is not only significant to teachers, but it is a critical component for districts to consider in order to stem the massive tide of teacher attrition and absenteeism our country and world continue to face (Dinham, 1994; Toropova et al., 2021).

Agency, one's *ability* to autonomously take action and influence situations, is another critical piece of improving resilience, identity, and job satisfaction. Nearly all of the participants responded that they practice self-care either one to two times a week (*Often*) or three or more times a week (*Regularly*). Therefore, teachers' agency is high according to the data from the survey.

Motivation, or the *willingness* to take action in an endeavor, is the third influence critical to implementing ESC. Since most of the teachers surveyed often or regularly practice self-care, it can be assumed that their motivation to do so is, like their agency, high. However, this study revealed that sheer exhaustion from stress and workload had a tremendous impact on teachers' motivation to practice ESC.

If self-care is important to teachers (in general and for their longevity in the field of education), and teachers' agency and motivation are high, then incorporating particular ESC initiatives should be easier to achieve. These initiatives—revealed by the study's participant teachers—are time, intentionality, and setting boundaries.

Time

Since time played such a major role in teachers accessing and applying ESC, how can their use of time be adjusted to make room for ESC? One answer may be for school leaders to find novel and innovative ways of freeing up teachers' time. Such solutions can include:

- Power Hour – hiring a substitute to give teachers one period off to catch up on planning, grading, or ESC. The substitute can cover seven various periods of different teachers in one day. Power hours can be done as often as once a quarter to give teachers a little boost in time; or, they can be expanded to encompass more than one hour (e.g., two hours, an entire day).
- Gregarious Grading™ – using rubrics to support students with peer grading (i.e., trade-to-grade). Well-designed rubrics allow students to know assignment expectations so they can achieve success. While this involves developing the rubrics, properly training students how to provide meaningful feedback to their peers, and

teacher accountability, the investment in time will pay off as students learn to monitor their work and less grading goes home with the teacher.

- Teacher Assistants – having a responsible and reliable student, parent/guardian, or staff member (hired to roam) to provide support with grading, distributing papers, filing, copying, etc. can free up a teacher’s already over-burdened schedule.

Another solution is to provide time management training through professional development to support teachers with learning how to use time more wisely and efficiently. Seasoned teachers can provide advice and support to those newer to the field of education. Time management training can also “cross pollinate,” so to speak, by having a positive impact on a teacher’s busy home life schedule. This type of broad-ranging professional development can be a game-changer and gives teachers the support they need to develop healthier habits of ESC. Additional research could be performed to explore what time-saving ideas and time management professional development opportunities would be most effective for schools to implement.

The final Grand Tour prompt (10) of the interviews revealed that the checklists for physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual self-care strategies in survey prompts 7-10 supported teachers with a greater understanding of ESC approaches that they either did not realize counted as ESC or were new ideas not yet considered, but worth trying. Perhaps having professional development using Tina Boogren’s (2018; 2020) books on teacher self-care would support a greater awareness of the many and varied types of self-care strategies that can be considered and implemented. Recognizing current ESC already in practice and/or discovering new strategies may support teachers with a stronger sense of efficacy and hope. At the very least, the multitude of ideas Boogren presents can be a springboard to inspiring ESC in teachers’ lives.

Intentionality

Awareness of ESC is simply not enough to make positive changes. There must be action behind the awareness or desire to incorporate ESC. Intentionality involves will power (performing tasks that positively impact our well-being), and it also involves what Sean Covey (1998) calls “won’t power” (shunning things that negatively impact our welfare). Intentionality is a much more difficult issue to solve as it involves a person’s internal motivations and convictions. One teacher surveyed astutely stated

I think that self-care strategies are the surface, and that they are laid over things like values, identity, and beliefs. While I think that learning self-care strategies can lead to greater awareness around one's values and beliefs; ultimately, I believe that you have to do the hard work of defining and living by those values and beliefs. Self-care stems from a strong understanding of one's values, beliefs, and identity, and we would do well to devote time to that. (Teacher Participant, Self-Care Qualtrics Survey, 2023)

As mentioned in Chapter 2 concerning Growing in Gratitude™ (McLoughlin, *High Trust Psychology*®) and the Think-Feel-Do cycle, action comes after cognition (thinking about the risk/reward of the action) and emotion (feelings of attachment to the ideation). How can motivation to act be increased so that ESC becomes a consistent practice in the life of a teacher? How can the values, beliefs, and identities of teachers be discussed so that one develops these important components in healthy ways?

In my experience as a teacher, principal, and lay counselor, I have found that people are not motivated unless the promise of pleasure (e.g., more free personal time, significant salary increase) or fear of pain (e.g., falling further behind in grading, getting further into debt) is great enough to make changes in behavior and develop new habits. The good news is that through

neuroplasticity or “through action and experience, you take advantage of your brain’s ability to modify its activity” (Ryder, 2021). Therefore, a teacher can develop new habits if motivated to do so. Further research can be done to discover the link between motivation and ESC.

Setting Boundaries

Throughout the survey and interviews, participants consistently mentioned the need to set boundaries in order to protect personal time after work hours. This study revealed that doing so, in many cases, was easier said than done. Some teachers experienced feelings of guilt or shame when attempting to navigate how to turn down someone when approached to do activities, a need, duties, or favors. Many participants noted that the courage to set boundaries was paramount to one’s self-care regardless of the type of strategy(ies) involved (e.g., physical, mental, emotional, spiritual). Some considered taking a stand to establish a boundary selfish and not fitting for the sacrifice a teacher needs to make in order to do what is best for their students. However, the vast majority recognized that setting boundaries was critical to starting and maintaining ESC. Self-care, when implemented in balance, is no more selfish than the directive on airplanes for adults to put on their oxygen mask first before helping others—even their own children. Simply put, a teacher cannot give, at work or home, if there is nothing left to give.

Three Impacts: Improved Resilience, Identity, and Job Satisfaction

Teachers’ resilience is critical to combatting stress and difficulties; however, as a result of the interaction between the influences and initiatives described above, can teachers experience improved resilience, identity, and job satisfaction? All of the participants responded that they are experiencing some type of stress (e.g., mild, moderate, severe) in both their personal and professional lives. Over half have moderate to severe stress at work, and just under half have that same level of stress at home. Furthermore, all agreed that self-care is important for teachers in

general and for their longevity in the field of education. Therefore, teachers recognize the role ESC plays with resilience in supporting their ability to defend themselves against and withstand the tremendous pressures of their job.

While this study did not show a direct relationship between ESC and teacher identity, an assumption can be made according to the data. All interview participants seemed to already possess a strong teacher identity based on their responses. If the vast majority of participants—of whom those interviewed one-on-one were a subgroup—responded that they either regularly or often engage in self-care activities that are meaningful to them, and all teachers surveyed unanimously agreed that self-care is important for teachers, then it can be assumed that teachers who regularly practice meaningful ESC have a stronger sense of identity than those who do not. This assumption, of course, should be studied further to determine if it is valid.

The final prompt of the survey—the one which invites participants to share any final comments they have about self-care strategies—did reveal a frustration that exists between teachers’ desire to practice ESC and the attitudes of decision-makers in their work environment. The supposition being if teachers were better able to practice ESC, free from the constraints of heavy workloads and high expectations/stress, they would have greater job satisfaction. Some of the survey comments are rather poignant and reflect this sentiment:

- “Self-care needs to be a priority, but we have to get past the stigma of it being ‘selfish’ or ‘self-centered.’ If the education profession valued and supported it, then more teachers might make it more of a priority in their lives.”
- “Our insurance at school does not offer mental health services. This is a huge problem as the expense to get mental health help is overwhelming.”
- “I think most teachers understand the importance of self-care, but don't know how to fit it into our schedules. The demands from our schools are so great, that when our administration reminds us to practice self-care it is more frustrating than it is helpful.”

- “I would like to see administrators take [self-care] more seriously, I'm fighting burnout right now, and it's going to take more than a massage and some meditation for me to want to stay with the profession.”
- “More resources on creating the time for self-care could be extremely helpful. Often, we have a difficult time saying ‘no’ to people, and there are times where we need to in order to better take care of ourselves. By taking care of ourselves first, we can then better say ‘yes’ in the future.”
- “I've been at my school (which I love) for a while, and even though I've been told some expectations for a few departments, I am still unclear about work collected on a Thursday or a Friday. When are those assignments supposed to be graded by? Tuesday a.m.? Then I am grading over the weekend, or I am grading until 9:00 p.m. one or two nights some weeks.”
- “Thanks for choosing this topic. It needs to be brought to the forefront and be seen as a vital component to teacher success!”
- “At the beginning of the year, I did not make time for self-care, and it caused me to begin complaining about the job that I love...so I had to find a way to balance home and work.”
- “I also wish that whatever planning time we have would be protected, meaning not filled with meetings. This would help cut down on work time after hours. Most days after work should be a time to wind down and spend with family. Family is irreplaceable. Employees are replaced quickly.”

Two Implications: Higher Retention and Reduced Absenteeism

Teacher stress and burnout is rampant, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic. When reviewing the survey and interview data, it is clear that ESC is an important, but relative, topic for teachers to sustain them in the field of education. There is no one-size-fits-all approach that a school can implement as an effective-self-care panacea. However, school leaders should consider how they can make advances with teachers' time according to their responses in this study: lighter workloads, more time to grade and plan during work hours, protecting planning periods from meetings/extra tasks, and professional development on time management strategies.

In terms of a teacher's intentionality to practice ESC, their own self-efficacy, agency, and motivation must come into play. A school district cannot encourage intentionality; it comes from

within...one's internal mindset and convictions. So, what more can a school district do to encourage teachers' practice of ESC? Setting boundaries should be seen as a two-way street: a responsibility of the teacher to develop the necessary courage to draw a firm line between work and personal time, and an obligation of school leadership to support an environment conducive to protecting teachers' personal time.

The results of this study reveal that self-care is related to one's self-efficacy, agency, and motivation, but practicing it takes time commitment, intentionality, and setting boundaries in order for it to be effective and have the intended effect of improving one's health and well-being. In doing so, a teacher can experience stronger resilience, identity, and job satisfaction which, in turn, can increase retention and reduce absenteeism. While these findings give hope for schools looking to stem the tide of teacher turnover and absences, this study had shortcomings which will be discussed next.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study that may have negatively impacted the data and conclusions, some of which are discussed in Chapter 1 as confounding or constraining factors. Self-care is such an elusive and relative term (Gay, 2018; Mariskind, 2014) that it is difficult to find consistency in its understanding and/or application across any given population, such as the sample of teachers involved in this research study.

Self-care is Broad

The first limitation to consider is the sheer breadth of the topic. Self-care is not simply comprised of one or two dimensions, but has a multitude of facets, all of which can be organized in broad categories (e.g., physical, mental, emotional, spiritual). However, sometimes particular self-care strategies overlap one or more categories which can blur the line between where they fit

into one's life, muddling the perception of their effectiveness. For example, "Gloria" said during her interview that she experiences ESC when attending a faith-based, weekly small group gathering. While it is clear this strategy is spiritual in nature, "Gloria" mentions that attending small group gets her physically moving, causes her to develop mentally, and is emotionally fulfilling. It is meaningful, fun, and a break from the norm while also providing rich relationship-building. I had difficulty sorting the strategies into the four categories, so it can be assumed that survey participants may have struggled with why a particular strategy they thought should be in one category was in another. Therefore, when the surveyed teachers were asked to select various strategies from a list in each category (survey prompts 7-10), inaccuracies—whether intentional or not—may have been made in the selection.

Participant Bias

The next limitation to be addressed is potential bias of the participants. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, self-care is an elusive and relative term (Gay, 2018; Mariskind, 2014). It should be recognized that as such, participants' perceptions and paradigms of self-care are all unique to their knowledge, experiences, work and home schedules, and capacities to execute self-care (e.g., motivations, intentions). Therefore, it is quite possible that some participant bias was introduced during the survey and interview responses due to the relative nature of the research topic.

Researcher Bias

Due to a lack of time and resources, no third-party consultant was used to code the survey or interview data. Therefore, one limitation may be any novice errors or bias that may have been introduced in the analysis of the data as a result of my inexperience with qualitative research and

data coding. Having the data coded by an experienced third-party consultant would support a more accurate verification and validation of results.

Another consideration is my long-standing affinity for self-care and the paradigm of its importance in the lives of teachers. Afterall, for many years as a principal, I set aside professional development funding to offer free tuition, meal stipends, and time off for teachers to attend the intensive, 30-hour *High Trust Psychology*® workshops. Moreover, I have taught workshops over the years that specifically taught others how to take care of themselves in order to live healthier and more resilient lives. I had to be extremely cautious in this study to let the empirical data speak to any trends (e.g., preferences, aversions) rather than build a case for ESC's importance based on my own anecdotal experience with self-care, regardless of how convinced I was of its benefits and impact in my life and the lives of others.

Participant Exhaustion and Attention Span

As mentioned in Chapter 3, two major interrelated factors to consider when utilizing a survey are participant fatigue and attention span. Fatigue can occur when a decline in interest is caused by survey prompts that are too numerous, complicated, irrelevant, and/or confusing (Sinickas, 2007). Participants may not accurately answer prompts which invalidate results and frustrate research. Based on over nine million surveys they have implemented, On Device Research recommends a maximum of 15 survey prompts for participants using mobile devices to complete surveys (Teller, 2013). I had to pare down the original number of survey prompts after discovering Teller's (2013) research in an effort to mitigate any exhaustion participants may encounter.

Participant attention span during a survey can also be problematic in gleaning valid data. In a qualitative study of 200 people, British researchers found that “people swap devices 21

times an hour” (Taube, 2014). The constant switching back and forth between devices may cause participants to get distracted and not respond with the focus necessary to fully engage in the questions being posed. Of course, with an anonymous survey taken at the leisure of participants’ time and locale, there was no way to control for attention span. Thankfully, Qualtrics doles out the survey prompts in smaller chunks which gives frequent visual change to the survey in an effort to support with participant concentration.

The online Qualtrics survey included 19 prompts with a total of 24 teachers who took the survey. In exploring the participation rate for the survey, 24 participants completed prompts 1-12, while prompts 13-14 and 17 had 23 participants, prompts 15-16 had 22 participants, prompt 18 had 18 participants, and the final prompt (19) had only 17 of the 24 participants. When one looks strictly at the numbers, it appears some participants may have stopped responding towards the end of the survey. However, the possibility of survey exhaustion cannot be quantified by these results as prompts 17-19 only had an essay text box with which to respond. Teachers who decided not to respond to prompts 17-19 either may not have had any comments to leave or gave up due to survey exhaustion. This was a formatting error that will be discussed in the next section.

Design Flaws

One flaw in my survey design was that prompts 11, 12, 15, 16, and 18 suggest the participant go to a previous prompt’s response(s) as a reference point. However, when actually taking the survey, there was not a way to go back to previous prompts. Therefore, participants were forced to recall from memory what they had responded in order to provide an answer. Since our memories are notoriously inaccurate, particularly as we age (Devitt & Schacter, 2016), having participants rely on a reference point that cannot be accessed could have tainted the data

for those prompts. Retrospectively, I should have run additional tests of the survey before publishing and activating it for participants so that I could evaluate what they would experience and proactively make any necessary adjustments.

As mentioned earlier, survey prompts 17-19 had only text boxes which were left blank by some participants. This caused me to wonder if there was survey exhaustion involved in the lack of responses, or if the participants did not have any replies. In hindsight, I could have incorporated two solutions to mitigate this flaw: either have a check box so participants could respond with “N/A,” or direct them to type “N/A” in the text box if they did not have a response.

Work Environment

Another limitation that could affect the data, analysis, and conclusions of this study is any discrepancy between workplaces where there is an inherently better work environment compared to a school site where the atmosphere is negative in terms of morale and/or self-care. This type of inconsistency in work environments affects results in terms of job satisfaction, retention, and possibly teacher identity. I recognize that this study lacks data on the working environment—whether positive or negative—of participants; thus, any factors related to such that can contribute or hinder one’s job satisfaction are missing. Research should be done that includes this important variable to account for work environment as an integral part of one’s desire to remain in the current job.

Sample Size

While I am grateful for the 24 teachers from multiple states who generously gave their time and efforts for this exploratory study, having many more participants (e.g., 200-500) in a similar study would add further validity to this type of research. A greater sample size of

teachers would better represent the overall population of educators lending greater credibility to any data or results.

Of course, in any study, limitations of research may be mitigated—or at the very least minimized—by constantly asking, “What are we not seeing, or what is missing, in the design or data of the study?” I did my best to work limitations out so that any conclusions made based on the collection and analysis of data would be as valid as possible. However, as described above, limitations did in fact exist. Thankfully, the qualitative nature of the data, regardless of any shortcomings, still supports a beneficial understanding of teachers’ perceptions of self-care.

In the next and final chapter, we will explore what kind of impact this research study has, and can have, on the field of education, and it will end with an examination of the four research questions involved in the study to connect any conclusive results with each question.

Chapter 6 – Implications and Conclusions

While this study revealed fascinating results, further investigation into how effective self-care (ESC) impacts teachers' resilience, identity, job satisfaction, and longevity in the field may yield more promising evidence to embolden decision-makers at the state and local levels to explore, discover, and provide solutions to the massive issue schools everywhere are facing: increased teacher attrition and absenteeism.

I recommend future research be done that involves the discussion, training, and faithful implementation of particular self-care concepts and strategies (see Appendix F) with participants to ascertain which, if any, are effective in maintaining or improving their physical, mental, and emotional health. While these strategies have been useful in professional development, many have only anecdotal testimonies with no empirical research to validate their effectiveness.

Self-care should be seen as a critical component of pre-service teacher preparation programs and ongoing school professional development. Since teacher attrition and absenteeism has become a pandemic after *the* pandemic (Toropova et al., 2021), and because job satisfaction plays a major role in whether or not a teacher experiences longevity in the field of education (Brown & Roloff, 2011), it behooves state, district, and local decision-makers to take a careful look at ways to encourage self-care, improve working conditions, reduce teacher workload, encourage cooperation amongst school stakeholders (e.g., board members, administrators, teachers, students, parents/guardians), and increase support for student discipline issues (Toropova et al., 2021).

Over half of the participants (58%) who took the survey reported their professional stress as a teacher was *Moderate*, and 8% chose *Severe* (see Figure 6). Meanwhile, 96% of participants either *Strongly agreed* or *Agreed* that self-care is important to their own longevity in teaching

(see Figure 15). Furthermore, 83% of teachers surveyed responded that they either practiced meaningful self-care activities *Often* or *Regularly* (see Figure 16). One question emerges: If 96% believe self-care is important for their longevity as a teacher, and if 83% are practicing self-care activities that are meaningful, why did 66% have *Moderate* or *Severe* stress levels as teachers and 42% in their personal lives? What is/are the missing variable(s) that would lower the stress levels of teachers? More in-depth research is needed to uncover affecting variables and discover what in particular can be done to lower the stress levels of teachers in the field. Further research should include how school leaders can support teachers with time management, decreasing workloads, and protecting teachers' personal time.

Most of the participants who took the survey—83% of the 23 responding teachers—indicated that they either *Regularly* (48%; $n=11$) or *Often* (35%; $n=8$) engage in self-care activities that are meaningful to them. *Regularly* was defined in the survey as three or more times per week; whereas *Often* was classified as one to two times per week. As was discussed in the findings for prompts 3 and 4 concerning professional and personal stress levels, if 83% of teachers are engaging *Regularly* or *Often* in meaningful self-care activities, but 66% of the same population reported experiencing *Moderate* or *Severe* stress levels, what is lacking? Why are stress levels so high if, in fact, the teachers are engaging in self-care so often? Certainly, additional research needs to be done to explore the various types of self-care strategies being practiced by teachers that uncover three variables, namely to what degree (e.g., frequency), to what effect (e.g., quality), and to what impact (e.g., success)?

As a result of my research in ESC, a model was produced that can support teachers with understanding various factors that influence whether or not they are absent from work and/or remain in their job long-term. This construct, the *Teacher Conservation and Preservation*

Synergy Model® (see Figure 33), can also assist school leaders with considering what, in particular, can be done to conserve and preserve teachers. The influences of self-efficacy, agency, and motivation—as shown in the model—provide the impetus necessary for improving the three impacts: resilience, identity, and job satisfaction. These impacts can be further bolstered by creating curriculum and activities involving the three initiatives (time management, intentionality, and setting boundaries). More specific details can be found later in this chapter.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy does not exist apart from the experiences and paradigms formed from achievement and success in life. Therefore, in order to increase a teacher's self-efficacy, they must be involved in activities that breed courage through success. While these situations may be challenging or difficult, they must be arranged so that the teacher's level of *competency* is higher than the *standard* (McLoughlin, n.d.). For example, if a teacher is going to be assigned to teach a new class, the administration should notify the teacher as far in advance as possible, so that they have time to familiarize themselves with the curriculum, resources, subject matter, and any pedagogy or processes necessary to be successful and effective for student learning in the new course.

Building one's competency first, before raising the standard, will support greater self-efficacy that the task at hand can be accomplished correctly and effectively. Conversely, during the pandemic lockdowns—when teachers were spontaneously expected to create curriculum with online platforms (high standard) for which they were unfamiliar (low competency)—much stress and pressure was felt by teachers as expectations (standards) continued to change before the skills (competencies) necessary to succeed could be mastered. The feeling of hopelessness, when a target keeps moving no matter how skilled one gets, is the antithesis of self-care.

Triumphs, no matter how small, create courage, which increases one's self-efficacy or belief of success in any given enterprise. As a teacher experiences success with managing time more wisely, being more intentional with ESC, and setting healthy boundaries, they can improve their resilience, identity, and job satisfaction, and consequently, their self-efficacy, agency, and motivation will strengthen.

Agency

Like self-efficacy, agency does not exist in and of itself; rather, it “builds upon past achievements, understandings, and patterns of action” (Priestley et al., 2015). In order to increase teachers' agency, they must be given the proper tools (e.g., resources, training) and an environment conducive for taking initiative and influencing their surroundings so that a foundation of positive experiences can develop. School administrators should consider how best to provide the necessary resources and create a school atmosphere that encourages teacher agency.

Motivation

Belief (efficacy) and ability (agency) are not enough to make lasting, positive changes in one's life; it also takes a *willingness* (motivation) to take action in an endeavor. Motivation is an integral piece to alter behavior in ways that are beneficial and meaningful. Yet, motivation is a “dynamically evolving and changing entity” (Dornyi & Otto, 1998). As such, it is difficult to nail down, so to speak, what motivates teachers to practice ESC. Administrators should include teachers in any discussions when determining what, in particular, would be considered as meaningful ESC to them. This, of course, would not serve as a panacea for ESC—due to the uniqueness of teachers' individual preferences—but would supply valuable feedback concerning ESC strategies that can be encouraged in the workplace.

School leaders should consider a more customized approach to ESC rather than a one-size-fits-all tactic. While this type of individualized or relativistic style would be more difficult to implement, the overall effect it could have would be much more personal and meaningful to and appreciated by the teachers involved. However, there may be some single strategies that could be applied across an entire faculty. According to this study, a substantial motivator for ESC would be giving back time in a teacher's schedule to complete tasks that are normally relegated to off-campus hours (e.g., grading, planning).

As I put the finishing touches on this work, my attention is immediately drawn back to the four research questions posed at the beginning, the answers to which—I hope in some measure—have been satisfactorily addressed. At a minimum, it is clear that additional research is necessary to determine what strategies, in particular, are most effective for teachers' well-being and longevity in the field of education. Such research can be expanded to support school stakeholders with implementing practices in the workplace that could have a profound, prolonged, and positive impact on teacher retention and attendance. Further studies can support the universality or transferability of this study's results to broader applications or other professions.

Each research question is posed below with final thoughts as a brief summary of findings discussed elsewhere. A superscript number at the end of each research question indicates how many times it was addressed by a survey and/or interview prompt during the study.

How do teachers conceptualize what self-care entails?⁶ Participants were clear that being intentional was critical to practicing effective self-care. Merely *knowing* (e.g., beliefs, perceptions) the importance of self-care is not enough; one must *do* self-care—be purposeful in the practice of it—in order for it to have the intended effect. Time, as mentioned in other places

herein, is a paramount, yet rare, commodity connected to a teacher's ability to perform ESC strategies. The majority of participants expressed their frustrations with the amount of time it takes to satisfactorily complete their work (e.g., planning, grading) and how burdensome and troubling it was to work afterhours in an effort to keep up with job obligations in order to do what is best for their students.

Teachers articulated a desire to have set boundaries, as in some other fields that allow and even encourage personal time to be protected. However, several mentioned that the expectations of school administrators and sheer workload prevented teachers from keeping work from intruding on their home life during evenings and weekends. Expectations and duties included, but were not limited to, creating and editing rigorous lesson plans, meaningful and timely grading feedback, afterschool supervision, extra-curricular duties, meetings during planning periods, thinking/worrying about how to deal with discipline issues, and communicating with parents/guardians. Some stated that relaxing is crucial to their self-care, but struggled doing so due to the daily demands of classroom teaching, while others made it a point to carve out time for self-care knowing the impact it has on their health and well-being.

What self-care strategies, if any, do teachers believe are most effective?¹¹ Physical strategies seem to be the most preferred and effective, perhaps because of the endorphins created by physical activity, the achievement one feels after practicing it, or the popular and research-based knowledge of its wellness benefits. However, mental, emotional, and spiritual strategies were nearly tied in importance albeit with not as many responding as heartily as they did with the physical category. In terms of district support, several indicated that school-provided gym memberships, exercise equipment, or massages were their top choices for ESC. Some were frustrated that administrators and colleagues tout the praises of self-care and encourage them not

to take work home, yet the pressure to perform and complete work expectations afterhours is ever-present like an invisible elephant ignored by some but obvious to others.

Participants made an appeal to administrators in support of reducing their workload which would go a long way towards alleviating the time constraints and busyness that teachers so often experience. The need for time management training was a common theme that could assist teachers with making wiser and more efficient decisions when prioritizing tasks like grading and planning. The realization of simple ESC strategies—that were not understood as such but were practiced—or the introduction of new strategies never-before pondered, gave credence to the idea of having professional development that focuses on the multitude and vast variety of ESC strategies that exist and are covered in-depth by writers like Tina Boogren (2018; 2020) or Melanie Shoffner and Angela Webb (2023), who have a passion for ESC and its positive impact in the lives of teachers.

To what extent do teachers feel they effectively engage in self-care?³ The vast majority of participants responded that they either *Regularly* or *Often* engage in self-care activities that are meaningful to them. However, as previously mentioned, time plays a major factor in whether or not it actually gets accomplished. Reasons vary from not having enough time, scheduling issues, and struggles with being efficient. Some have established routines that support their commitment to regular ESC practice, while others are hampered by issues that arise from intrusive (e.g., burdensome workloads, unexpected interruptions) work, family, and home life demands. The incongruity of responses that regular self-care is occurring coupled with time being a constraining factor begs for additional study.

Moreover, the regular practice of a strategy one believes to be *meaningful* in their lives does not necessarily equate to its *effectiveness* in producing a positive result for their health and

wellbeing. For example, if a person does long-distance biking as self-care because it is *meaningful*, it may not be *effective* self-care because riding for long distances happens to be reinjuring an old knee wound. This, in turn, may eventually cause the person to have knee surgery, which will prevent the person from practicing that type of self-care during recovery and possibly longer. Since our paradigms of ESC have a profound impact on how, when, and why it is practiced—if at all—further research should examine the differences between what is *meaningful* versus what is *effective* in terms of self-care strategies.

What contextual, personal, or economic factors enable or constrain teachers' ability to engage in self-care?⁵ Most participants agreed that if they had more time, they would regularly practice their favorite self-care strategy. Having more money, however, did not play as much of a role as time in supporting or limiting a teacher's ability to practice their top self-care strategy choice. Teachers mentioned that their mood, mentality, and motivation were also factors which affected their ability, often in a negative sense, to engage in ESC. Therefore, pre-service teacher preparation programs and in-service professional development should include time management instruction to support teachers throughout their training and career with valuable scheduling and organizational skills.

Setting boundaries to protect one's home life and private time was a common theme with participants, yet many continue to struggle with the fight to guard non-work hours, and they are growing weary of the enormous effort and commitment it takes to do so. Therefore, it behooves leaders at the state, district, and school levels to make strides in supporting their teachers by setting clear boundaries so that the line between work and personal time is not blurred but well-defined. Some solutions, like hiring extra personnel to reduce teacher workload, may seem costly at first and are easily dismissed by those responsible for managing tight budgets. However, when

compared to the enormous expense of replacing a teacher who is burned out, hiring additional personnel can be a much wiser and more laudable investment in precious human resources.

Is it possible for administrators to embrace and welcome the practice of encouraging established work life boundaries for teachers? I posit that it is, and administrators can reap the benefits of protecting teachers' personal time by experiencing lower attrition and absenteeism, and therefore, higher student achievement (Klusmann et al., 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2013) and a safer school environment (Bruno, 2002).

Intentionality was a crucial piece in the self-care puzzle. Teachers expressed that it took deliberate commitment and execution to ensure their self-care occurred in a way that was meaningful. Perhaps school leaders can utilize incentives to support greater intentionality like power hours (see Chapter 5, Time), gym memberships, bonuses, etc. Sadly, due to struggles with not having enough time, many found being intentional to be extremely difficult and the root cause of not practicing ESC.

One of the participants during an interview said it best:

Self-care can mean so many things to different people, but in order for it to count as self-care, I believe it needs to be intentional...that you're carving out some sort of time to do the things that you enjoy, or that help you to relax, or make you happy. ("Kate," 2023)

Thankfully, teacher self-care is becoming an emerging topic of great interest. People in every walk of life are still coping with the stress and angst caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic. Many are left to wonder if they can hang on and make it through the anxiety and pressures of teaching full-time. As a result, countless teachers—and even administrators—are looking for greener pastures, some of which are not related to the field of education.

As uncovered in this study, stress levels and demands are high, time is a rare commodity for educators, being intentional with self-care is key but problematic, and healthy boundaries must be set in order to cope with the intense burdens and challenges of teaching. Leaders and decision-makers at every level (e.g., state, local, district, school) are desperately trying to find a way to stem the tide of teacher attrition and absenteeism which has become, itself, a pandemic after *the* pandemic. Therefore, exploring self-care strategies that are truly effective is an essential and significant matter that should be kept at the forefront of our attention as we work to conserve and preserve education's greatest resource: our teachers.

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Appendix A - IRB Approval Documents



University Research
Compliance Office

TO: J. Spencer Clark
Curriculum and Instruction
Manhattan, KS 66506

Proposal Number: IRB-11427

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 11/23/2022

RE: Proposal Entitled, "The paradigm of self-care: A case study of teachers' perceptions about conserving and preserving oneself in the high-stress, people-intensive field of education."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects / Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Kansas State University has reviewed the proposal identified above and has determined that it is EXEMPT from further IRB review. This exemption applies only to the proposal - as written – and currently on file with the IRB. Any change potentially affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation and may disqualify the proposal from exemption.

Based upon information provided to the IRB, this activity is exempt under the criteria set forth in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, **45 CFR §104(d), category:Exempt Category 2 Subsection ii.**

Certain research is exempt from the requirements of HHS/OHRP regulations. A determination that research is exempt does not imply that investigators have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research; it means only that the regulatory requirements related to IRB review, informed consent, and assurance of compliance do not apply to the research.

Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, the University Research Compliance Office, and if the subjects are KSU students, to the Director of the Student Health Center.

Electronically signed by Phill Vardiman on 11/27/2022 2:04 PM ET
On Behalf of IRB Chair

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Informed Consent Form

comply@k-state.edu | 785-532-3224

Federal law mandates that all signed and dated informed consent forms be retained by the P.I. for at least three years following completion of the study.

WAIVER OF INFORMED CONSENT: *There are limited instances where the requirement for a formal informed consent document may be waived or altered by the IRB.*

45 CFR 46 states that "An IRB may waive the requirement for the investigator to obtain a signed consent form for some or all subjects if it finds either:

- 1) That the only record linking the subject and the research would be the consent document and the principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality. Each subject will be asked whether the subject wants documentation linking the subject with the research, and the subject's wishes will govern; or*
- 2) That the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context."*

If a study employs only questionnaires and surveys as the source of their data, it may generally be assumed that to answer and return the questionnaire is an appropriate and sufficient expression of free consent. However, there are circumstances that might call this assumption into question - e.g., teacher-student relationship between the investigator and the subject, etc. However, a statement should be included on the questionnaire or survey form indicating that participation of the subject is strictly voluntary, the length of time reasonably expected to complete the questionnaire or survey form, and that questions that make the participant uncomfortable may be skipped.

Form Content

PROJECT TITLE: Full title of project. If possible, the title should be identical to that used in any funding/contract proposal.

PROJECT APPROVAL DATE/ EXPIRATION DATE: provided in the approval letter, must be in place before distributing to subjects.

LENGTH OF STUDY: Estimate the length of time the subject will be expected to participate.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Must be a regular member of the faculty.

CONTACT DETAILS FOR PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: Name, phone number and/or email address of the P.I.

IRB CHAIR CONTACT INFORMATION: *For the subject should he/she have questions or wish to discuss on any aspect of the research with an official of the university or the IRB. These are:* Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224; Brad Woods, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

PROJECT SPONSOR: Funding/contract entity.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: Explain in lay terms that this is a research project, and why the research is being done.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED: Explain in lay terms and in language understandable at the 8th grade level how the study is going to be conducted and what will be expected of participants. Tell participants if they will be audio or videotaped, if they will be paid, etc.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT:

Explain any alternative procedures or treatments if applicable.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED: Describe any foreseeable risks or discomforts from the study. If there are no known risks, make a statement to that effect.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: Describe any *reasonably expected* benefits from the research to the participant or others from the research.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: Explain how you plan to protect confidentiality.

IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS: *In cases where more than minimal risk is involved.*

PARENTAL APPROVAL FOR MINORS: If minors or those who require the approval of a parent or guardian are participants, you should include a space for their consenting signature.

PARTICIPANT NAME/SIGNATURE: Name of research participant and signature.

WITNESS TO SIGNATURE (PROJECT STAFF): Staff signature.

PROJECT TITLE:

The paradigm of self-care: A case study of teachers' perceptions about conserving and preserving oneself in the high-stress, people-intensive field of education

**PROJECT APPROVAL
DATE:**

09/26/2022

**PROJECT EXPIRATION
DATE:**

09/25/2025

**LENGTH OF
STUDY:**

5 Months

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: J. Spencer Clark, Ph.D.

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Alexander D. Marquez

CONTACT DETAILS FOR PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: [REDACTED]@ksu.edu

IRB CHAIR CONTACT INFORMATION:

Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224; Brad Woods, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224

PROJECT SPONSOR: Kansas State University

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

The purpose of this study is to understand teachers' paradigms of self-care and seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do teachers conceptualize what self-care entails?
2. What self-care strategies, if any, do teachers believe are most effective?
3. To what extent do teachers feel they effectively engage in self-care?
4. What contextual, personal, or economic factors enable or constrain teachers' ability to engage in self-care?

(Note: This study is considered research; and thus, consent/assent is necessary for the research to be conducted.)

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:

This research is based on case study methodology by utilizing a survey and focus groups, coding the data, and analyzing results in an effort to discover how teachers feel about self-care, and what, if any, are particular strategies they find most effective.

To secure volunteer participants, Alex Marquez will contact administrators of various school sites to gain approval to contact faculty who may be interested in contributing to this research. An online survey protocol will be generated. Once a sample population has been selected, participants will take the online survey. Based on the data analysis of the survey results, a focus group protocol will be developed. Teachers from each school site will then participate in a one-hour in-person or Zoom focus group.

Data from both the survey and focus groups will be coded, analyzed, and reported in a dissertation in fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctorate of Education in Curriculum and Instruction program at Kansas State University.

BIOLOGICAL SAMPLES COLLECTED (Describe procedure, storage, etc.):

No biological samples will be collected. The only data collected from participants will be in the form of responses from an online survey and in-person or Zoom focus groups.

Whole genome sequencing will not be included as part of the research

You will be informed of clinically relevant results that are discovered as part of the research.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT:

Not applicable.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:

No known risks, deceptions, or discomforts are anticipated.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED:

The research will be utilized by other researchers and school stakeholders to better understand what teachers' perceptions of effective self-care entail. No incentives will be rewarded to the participants for engaging in this study.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:

Confidentiality of records identifying participants will be strictly maintained. The names of all participants will be coded with a pseudonym to protect the privacy of the individual. The assigned pseudonym will be connected with demographic data and responses belonging to the actual individual participants. Survey responses will be stored on Alexander D. Marquez's secure, password-protected device, and focus group recordings (Zoom) will be stored on Alexander D. Marquez's secure, password-protected Kansas State University Zoom account. Note: End-to-end encryption (E2EE) will be used to prevent any potential data breaches.

The information or biospecimens that will be collected as part of this research could be used for future research studies or distributed to other investigators for future research studies without additional informed consent.

IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS? ☐ Yes ☒ No

PARENTAL APPROVAL FOR MINORS: Not applicable. Participants in this study will only include adult teachers.

Terms of participation: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant.)

PARTICIPANT NAME:

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE:

**WITNESS TO SIGNATURE:
(PROJECT STAFF)**

DATE:

DATE:

Appendix B - Request for Approval by Administrator Sample Letter



December 6, 2022

Dear [Administrator]:

My name is Alex Marquez, and I am a doctoral student at Kansas State University's College of Education. Now, more than ever, teacher turnover and absenteeism are creating tremendous challenges in education. I am studying self-care and its effects on preserving and conserving teachers. As part of my dissertation, I am asking for permission to contact your faculty to secure volunteers who will share their perceptions of self-care. Contacting teachers would be handled by invitation through the school's administrative assistant acting as a liaison in order to protect the privacy of volunteers and non-volunteers. My goal is to answer the following research questions:

- How do teachers conceptualize what self-care entails?
- What self-care strategies, if any, do teachers believe are most effective?
- To what extent do teachers feel they effectively engage in self-care?
- What contextual, personal, or economic factors enable or constrain teachers' ability to engage in self-care?

Teachers who volunteer to support this study will take a 20-minute online survey and attend a one-hour focus group with their fellow faculty members either in-person or by Zoom. The faculty of different schools will not participate or interact with one another. The survey will be available for seven (7) days in early January 2023. The focus group will be scheduled after-school by campus between January 30, and February 6, 2023.

While there is no compensation—financial or otherwise—for contributing to this study, all participants and their administrators will receive a copy of the analyses and conclusions in the form of my dissertation once it is approved and published by Kansas State University.

If you would like your faculty to be involved in this important work, please sign, scan this form, and return it to me by email at amarq333@ksu.edu no later than December 14, 2022. If you have any questions, please feel free to email me or call [REDACTED]. I look forward to partnering with you and your faculty to better discern teachers' perceptions of self-care.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Alex Marquez".

Alex Marquez

My signature below serves as administrative permission for the researcher, Alex Marquez, to contact the faculty through the administrative assistant in an effort to secure research participants.

Signature of Administrator

Date

Printed Name of Administrator

Title

Appendix C - Participant Informed Consent Letter



December 12, 2022

Dear Teacher:

My name is Alex Marquez, and I am a doctoral student at Kansas State University's College of Education. Now, more than ever, the stress and challenges of teaching are affecting educators' longevity and resilience. I am studying self-care and its effects on preserving and conserving teachers. As part of my dissertation, I am seeking volunteer teachers from several schools who will share their perceptions of self-care. You are officially invited to participate in research that seeks to answer the following questions:

- How do teachers conceptualize what self-care entails?
- What self-care strategies, if any, do teachers believe are most effective?
- To what extent do teachers feel they effectively engage in self-care?
- What contextual, personal, or economic factors enable or constrain teachers' ability to engage in self-care?

As a fellow educator, I know how busy you are, so I have made participation easy. Teachers who volunteer to support this study will take a 20-minute online survey and attend a one-hour focus group with their fellow faculty members either in-person or by Zoom. The faculty of different schools will not participate or interact with one another. The survey will be available for seven (7) days in early January 2023. The focus group will be scheduled after-school by campus between January 30, and February 6, 2023.

While there is no compensation—financial or otherwise—for contributing to this study, all participants and their administrators will receive a copy of the analyses and conclusions in the form of my dissertation once it is approved and published by Kansas State University.

If you would like to participate in this important work, please print pages 2 and 3 of the below IRB Informed Consent, sign, scan, and return it to me by email. The invitation to participate will expire on December 31, 2022. Please note: the "Length of Study" listed on the IRB Informed Consent is five (5) months. This time frame is not for participants, but for the researcher to gather and analyze data. Participants will only need to do the 20-minute online survey and a one-hour focus group. If participating, you will be sent an online survey link in early January. Please check your spam or junk folder for any emails from amarq333@ksu.edu. If you have any questions, please email me or call [REDACTED].

I look forward to partnering with you to better understand your perceptions of self-care as a means of preserving and conserving your valuable work with students in the classroom.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Alex Marquez".

Alex Marquez

Appendix D - Participant Qualtrics Self-Care Survey Protocol

Participant Qualtrics Self-Care Survey Protocol

The responses to this survey will be used as part of a study that seeks to answer the following questions:

- A. How do teachers conceptualize what self-care entails?
- B. What self-care strategies, if any, do teachers believe are most effective?
- C. To what extent do teachers feel they effectively engage in self-care?
- D. What contextual, personal, or economic factors enable or constrain teachers' ability to engage in self-care?

Intro: Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. The length of time reasonably expected to complete the survey is approximately 20 minutes. Prompts that make the participant uncomfortable may be skipped. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts about teacher self-care.

- 1. I have been a full-time classroom teacher for... [Choose one.]
 - This is my first year
 - 1 to 2 years
 - 3 to 4 years
 - 5 or more years
- 2. I teach students in... [Choose one.]
 - Lower Elementary (K-2)
 - Upper Elementary (3-5)
 - Middle School (6-8)
 - High School (9-12)
 - Miscellaneous (e.g., K-12, 2-3, 5-6) [Please explain.]
- 3. In my **professional** life, as a teacher, my stress level is... [Choose one.]
 - None
 - Mild
 - Moderate
 - Severe
- 4. In my **personal** life, my stress level is... [Choose one.]
 - None
 - Mild
 - Moderate
 - Severe
- 5. I believe self-care is important for teachers. [Choose one.]
 - Agree
 - Disagree
- 6. To me, self-care means...

Note: For prompts 7-10, “effective” is defined as “producing a decided, decisive, or desired effect” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/effective>)

7. Choose all that apply: What **physical** self-care strategies are most effective in your own life?
- Getting a good night’s sleep (7+ hours)
 - Eating healthy foods
 - Indulging in unhealthy foods
 - Staying hydrated
 - Drinking alcohol
 - Drinking coffee/tea
 - Getting away on a weekend trip
 - Going on a long vacation (one week or more)
 - Exercising/playing sports
 - Getting a massage
 - Relax and do nothing
 - Other: _____
 - None
8. Choose all that apply: What **mental** self-care strategies are most effective in your own life?
- Practicing a hobby
 - Learning something new
 - Reading
 - Writing
 - Watching TV or online movies/videos
 - Playing, singing, or listening to music
 - Mindfulness/reflection
 - Practicing wise time management
 - Being creative
 - Playing games/doing puzzles
 - Other: _____
 - None
9. Choose all that apply: What **emotional** self-care strategies are most effective in your own life?
- Laughing
 - Spending time with family
 - Spending time with friends
 - Focusing on gratitude
 - Writing in a journal
 - Alone time
 - Spending time with an animal
 - Practicing emotional intelligence (awareness and control of self and others’ emotions)
 - Cleaning/Organizing
 - Getting tasks off a to-do list

Meeting new friends
Shopping
Other: _____
None

10. Choose all that apply: What **spiritual** self-care strategies are most effective in your own life?

Praying alone
Praying with others
Meditating
Reading scriptures
Attending a faith-based congregational meeting
Attending a faith-based small group study
Other: _____
None

11. Out of all your responses in prompts 7-10 (strategies in the Physical, Mental, Emotional, and Spiritual categories), which is your top choice that you feel is most important for your own self-care?

Top choice: _____
Explain: _____

12. Out of all your responses in prompts 7-10 (strategies in the Physical, Mental, Emotional, and Spiritual categories), if funding was available, which is your top choice you would like to see your school district provide or support?

Top choice: _____
Explain: _____

13. Self-care is important to my longevity in the teaching profession. [Choose one.]

Strongly Agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

14. To what extent do you engage in self-care activities that are meaningful to you? [Choose one.]

Regularly (3 or more times per week)
Often (1 to 2 times per week)
Sometimes (around 3 times per month)
Rarely (around 1 time per month)
Never (0 times per month)

15. If I had more **time**, I would regularly practice the top self-care strategy I listed for #11.

[Choose one and explain.]

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

N/A – I often engage in self-care anyway (2-3 times per week)

Explain: _____

16. If I had more **money**, I would regularly practice the top self-care strategies I listed for #11. [Choose one and explain.]

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

N/A – I often engage in self-care anyway (2-3 times per week)

Explain: _____

17. Other than time or money, what factors influence the type of self-care strategies you practice?

18. Are there any self-care topics for which you would like more information or training? List them in order of importance to you (most important first). See the lists in prompts 7-10 for ideas.

19. Please share any final comments you have about self-care strategies.

Closing: Thank you for participating in this survey. Your support will assist with understanding how teachers perceive self-care, and what strategies, if any, they believe are most effective. You will receive a copy of the results and conclusions once this study is completed and published in a dissertation as a graduation requirement for the researcher's Ed.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from Kansas State University.

Appendix E - One-on-One Zoom Semi-Structured Interview

Protocol

One-on-One Zoom Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. The length of time reasonably expected to complete the Zoom interview is 30-45 minutes.

The responses from this interview will be used as part of a study that seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do teachers conceptualize what self-care entails?ⁿ⁼⁴
2. What self-care strategies, if any, do teachers believe are most effective?ⁿ⁼⁵
3. To what extent do teachers feel they effectively engage in self-care?ⁿ⁼²
4. What contextual, personal, or economic factors enable or constrain teachers' ability to engage in self-care?ⁿ⁼²

In this interview protocol, the spoken script in italics will be used with participants. The superscript numbers at the end of all interview prompts reference the research questions listed above.

Introduction

Hi... I'm Alex Marquez, and as you know, I'm doing research about teachers' perceptions on self-care. My goal is to find ways to conserve and preserve teachers as education's best resource. During this interview, I'll ask about your opinions of—and experiences with—self-care. This interview is recorded over Zoom so that I can go back and review the transcript; however, your responses will remain completely confidential and anonymous, so please respond as candidly as possible. I'll post each question in the chat and read it aloud for your convenience.

Kickoff

We're going to start with a few, simple questions.

1. *What do you like to do for fun?*²
2. *How often do you get to do that?*³

Grand Tour

Interview Questions:

1. *What are the first things that come to mind when you think of the term self-care?*¹
2. *100% of participants surveyed agreed that self-care is important for teachers. Why do you think it was unanimous?*¹
3. *The survey revealed that almost half of the 24 participants chose Physical strategies as their top choice for both personal and school-based self-care. What are your thoughts on why the Physical category was chosen so often?*²
4. *What are your thoughts on how self-care may or may not affect a teacher's longevity in education?*¹
5. *The survey revealed that **time** was a recurring theme when it came to self-care (not enough, scheduling conflicts, struggles with time management, etc.). How does time affect your ability or inability to regularly practice self-care?*³

6. What **helps** you to engage in effective self-care? It could be anything from people, personal or professional situations, scheduling, finances, resources, etc.?⁴
7. What **prevents** you from engaging in effective self-care? It could be anything from people, personal or professional situations, scheduling, finances, resources, etc.?⁴
8. If you had a magic wand, and could have anything, what would you give yourself in terms of self-care? Why did you pick that?²
9. What advice would you give to a new teacher concerning self-care?²
10. Did participation in the survey and this interview change your perceptions about self-care? In what ways?¹

Reflection

Interviewer: When you were asked, “If you had a magic wand, and could have anything, what would you give yourself in terms of self-care?” What steps do you see yourself taking this week or this month to get that for yourself?²

Wrap Up

Interviewer: Thank you so much for participating in this important study. I hope it helped you reflect self-care and the role it plays in our health and longevity. You’ve been such a big support for my research, and I’m grateful for our time together. Before we finish, do you have any questions or feedback you’d like to share with me?

Appendix F - Additional Self-Care Strategies

1. Sleep Journal – Getting proper sleep supports thinking more clearly, increasing immunity, experiencing restfulness, and better memory retention and recall (Besedovsky et al., 2011). The optimal amount would be an average of 7.5 to 8 hours per night.
2. Diet Journal – Healthy eating supports better sleep, increased immunity, improved brain function, and increased energy levels (Crichton-Stuart, 2018).
3. Emotional Health-gauging Tools – Identifying and managing emotional health is a major factor in job performance and satisfaction (Ignat & Clipa, 2012; Wong & Law, 2002; Yuan et al., 2014).

- a. ARFF™ (McLoughlin, *High Trust Psychology*®) – Supports with understanding how one reacts to and experiences Achievement, Respect/Love, Fun, and Freedom by completing simple statements. ARFF™ can be determined by responding to the following:

Achievement: “I get a sense of achievement or feeling of accomplishment when I...”

Respect: “I know I am loved and respected when I (hear, see, feel)...”

Fun: “For total fun, I like to...”

Freedom: “A perfect day would be like...”

Once identified, a person can more easily become aware of what parts of ARFF need additional support to provide an overall feeling of emotional wellbeing.

- b. Growing in Gratitude™ (McLoughlin, *High Trust Psychology*®) – Follows the concept of Think-Feel-Do which is a cycle of cognition, emotion, and action. It demonstrates that whatever we focus on (Think), is what we become emotionally attached to (Feel), and will put effort into seeking (Do). This same concept appears in Thomas Lickona’s book *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility* (1992) where he echoes the Think-Feel-Do cycle in terms of character education:

Character so conceived has three interrelated parts: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior. Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good—habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of action. All three are necessary for leading a moral life; all three make up moral maturity. (p. 51)

Oftentimes, we tend to complain, feel disenchanting, and begin looking for a way to avoid and escape our circumstances. The Growing in Gratitude™ concept allows people to consider the impact of refocusing their thinking on things for which they are grateful. When thoughts are focused on gratitude, they will begin feeling more grateful, and seek to experience a higher level of satisfaction with their circumstances (Deuskar & Abhyankar, 2022). Or, they may discover some other worthy goal for which to expend their energy intellectually, emotionally, and physically. Additionally, *The Gratitude Questionnaire* (McCullough et al.,

2002), a six-prompt survey, can be used as a means of gauging one's level of gratitude.

4. Time Management – Supports more efficient organization of tasks. Antoine de Saint-Exupery said, “A goal without a plan is just a wish.” When teachers can control their schedules, rather than allowing their schedules to control them, much can be accomplished by being more efficient in the science of teaching: preparing, planning, grading, maximizing instructional time, utilizing planning/preparation periods wisely (Ather et al., 2016; Etor & Anam, 2019; Sahito & Vaisanen, 2017), and avoiding being a martyr. Martyrs tend to over-work, upset themselves for not having enough personal time, then seek sympathy from or are bitter towards those for whom they perceive are not working as hard (Parrott & Parrott, 2001).
5. Emotional Intelligence – Daniel Goleman's book titled *Emotional Intelligence* (Goleman, 1995) officially introduced the idea that people needed to be aware of and manage the emotions of oneself and those with whom they work. It is crucial that teachers are not only well-versed in their content area, but also adept at understanding and gauging their own emotions and the emotions of their students and co-workers in order to stay motivated and experience a greater degree of job satisfaction (Sahito & Vaisanen, 2017). Nearly thirty years later, many effective tools or measures for emotional intelligence have been created and utilized (O'Connor et al., 2019).
6. Additional Strategies – Tina Boogren's books, *Take Time for You: Self-Care Action Plans for Educators* (2018) and *180 Days of Self-Care for Busy Educators* (2020) include a multitude and variety of strategies (e.g., laughter, comfort, cognition, active rest). In addition, the idea of a Power Hour (or Power Day) can be incorporated where the school provides a substitute for one class period (or an entire day) so the teacher can have extra time to plan and grade.