

Original Research

Teachers on Self-Care

Lindsay E. Turgeon-Brown *

Windham Central Supervisory Union, 1219 Vermont Route 30, Townshend, VT 05353, USA; E-Mail: Leturgeon@gmail.com

* **Correspondence:** Lindsay E. Turgeon-Brown; E-Mail: Leturgeon@gmail.com

Academic Editor: Brandis Ansley

Collection: [Stress, Burnout, and Trauma in Schools: Coping Strategies for Teachers, Staff, and Students](#)

OBM Integrative and Complementary Medicine
2025, volume 10, issue 2
doi:10.21926/obm.icm.2502017

Received: November 19, 2024

Accepted: March 16, 2025

Published: April 07, 2025

Abstract

Teachers face at-work risk factors including compassion fatigue, burnout, dealing with violence, and a teacher shortage. A review of the literature shows that self-care can have positive benefits that mitigate and help to buffer these at-work risk factors. This study examines teachers' stories of self-care. The data suggests that self-care is a positive practice for teachers professionally and personally.

Keywords

Self-care; teachers; burn-out; compassion fatigue; teacher shortage; social-ecological model

1. Introduction

Teachers in the United States are enduring a crisis [1]. Teachers are dealing with aspects of the profession that lead to negative outcomes such as the teacher shortage, violence in schools, compassion fatigue, and burnout [2-6]. Teacher mental health and teacher job satisfaction are at an all time low [7].



© 2025 by the author. This is an open access article distributed under the conditions of the [Creative Commons by Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium or format, provided the original work is correctly cited.

The United States currently has a teacher shortage that has been concerning for years [3, 6]. In 2017, the annual teacher turnover rate was 8%, which was high compared to other high-achieving countries where teachers leave the profession at 4% or less [8]. According to an American Economic Policy Institute report on teacher labor published in 2019, the teacher turnover rate was 13.8% [9].

In addition to the teacher shortage, educators are also dealing with an increase of violence in schools [5] and a rising concern about the mental health and well-being of educators [7]. In one study, the American Federation of Teachers gave an 80-question survey to 30,000 teachers; 61% of them reported work was always or often stressful, and 58% of them reported that in the last 30 days, their mental health was in severe condition [10]. Teachers reported being stressed and reported working more than contracted hours each month (Ibid).

Educators are experiencing compassion fatigue [4]. The concept of compassion fatigue originated in the healthcare and the social service professions. Compassion fatigue happens when caregivers lose their sense of self and absorb the symptoms their clients' experience [11]. Compassion fatigue experienced by educators often stems from working with students experiencing trauma, poverty, and adverse childhood experiences [12].

In addition to compassion fatigue, educators are experiencing burnout [2]. Burnout is the experience of not liking your job anymore, whereas compassion fatigue includes enjoying your job but feeling overwhelmed from taking on its emotionality [13].

Teacher job satisfaction is declining [14]. In one study conducted by Merrimack College [14] on teacher satisfaction, results showed that only 12% of teachers were very satisfied with their jobs. Reasons for dissatisfaction included low levels of respect, little support from the public, unfair salaries, lack of autonomy, being deprofessionalized, and more time spent doing other tasks instead of teaching [14].

In other disciplines outside of education, research has shown that self-care can help to decrease burnout and compassion fatigue and increase compassion satisfaction [15]. Self-care is a way for teachers to care with awareness for their own needs and extend compassion to themselves [16]. Self-care, the concept of having a healthy balance in one's life, has been around since ancient times [17].

Self-care can protect against burnout and compassion fatigue [4, 13]. Teachers who report high engagement in intentional coping strategies (e.g., self-care activities, social, and leisure activities) experience lower levels of burnout than teachers who indicate lower levels of coping engagement [18, 19]. Teachers who practice mindfulness as self-care report that it helps them approach stressful situations with ease [20]. Teachers who report having a work-life balance that includes recreation share that these activities help to reduce stress [21]. The research shows that self-care activities help teachers feel more fulfilled and less stressed due to their professional work [22]. Teachers who practice self-care feel happier, feel more fit to teach, experience higher productivity, are more content at home and in schools, and report that self-care is essential to cultivate [23]. Teacher wellbeing is linked to overall teacher efficacy and student achievement [24].

1.1 Literature Related to Focus of Practice

The following section provides a comprehensive background on self-care research and scholarship from multiple disciplines across the globe. The research will illuminate the benefits of self-care and review various definitions.

1.1.1 Public Health

Many self-care inventories, webpages, articles, and self-care studies have their foundations in the public health concept of “wellness,” a term that came about in the mid-1900s when self-care was becoming a westernized concept. In the 1960s, Halbert Dunn published *High-Level Wellness*, a book that reframed the idea of health as a positive state of being instead of the absence of disease [25]. He reframed the concept of wellness as an integration of mind, body, and spirit, and if an individual focused on those aspects, they would feel more capable in their environment. Definitions of self-care today include a variety of aspects of wellness, including individual, professional, psychological, spiritual, physical, mental, social, and recreational. These different aspects and definitions of individual self-care can trace back to Dunn’s [25] theoretical underpinnings of wellness. Other authors have expanded the individual approach to wellness to create a model that involves organizational support for wellness throughout the professional pipeline and at many societal levels [26].

In 2022, the current World Health Organization's working definition of self-care is: “the ability of individuals, families, and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a health worker” [27].

1.1.2 Social Work

Social workers experience at work risk factors including burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma [28]. Self-care has led to personal growth and can help social workers struggling with risk factors at work [29]. Self-care helps social workers take better care of others [30]. Self-care for social workers promotes worker well-being, helps workers avoid emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization [31].

One prominent theory of self-care in social work includes two structures for self-care: personal and professional [32]. This framework for self-care has emerged for administrators and supervisors to examine how their policies, practices, and organizational culture either promote or discourage self-care to social work employees.

Personal self-care is defined as a process of purposeful engagement in practices that promote holistic health and well-being of the self, whereas professional self-care is understood as the process of purposeful engagement in practices that promote effective and appropriate use of the self in the professional role within the context of sustaining holistic health and well-being [32].

In one study of social work practitioners, researchers interviewed 42 participants about their experiences with self-care, organizational self-care, and barriers to self-care [33]. Social work practitioners reported individual self-care practices as good nutrition, leisure time, exercise, mindfulness, prayer, meditation, creating boundaries, and taking care of health needs. Participants reported interpersonal self-care as spending time with loved ones and venting. At the organizational level, participants reported self-care as offering breaks and vacations, a supportive organizational culture, team building activities, a culture of caring, humor, and administrative support. Social work practitioners reported barriers to self-care, including not having enough time, too many at-work demands, not having enough money, or having to take care of their family.

In another study, in which participants had their master’s in social work and delivered clinical treatments to patients with trauma, participants reported that self-care helped mitigate the burnout from dealing with human suffering [34]. On an individual level, participants reported

practicing physical self-care and emotional self-care. Interpersonal activities that participants reported included taking time to chat with co-workers, laughing, and spending time with loved ones.

1.1.3 Healthcare

Research has also shown that self-care benefits healthcare providers [35]. When healthcare professionals practice self-care, it can have a reciprocal benefit for patients and empower them to practice self-care more [36]. Self-care activities that promote neuroplasticity (yoga, mindfulness, biofeedback, massage therapy, etc.) have been shown to build resilience in medical care providers.

In modern medicine, self-care is usually viewed as part of preventative health and chronic disease prevention and often refers to the care patients administer to themselves between visits to the doctor [37]. The National Library of Medicine added self-care to its definitions in 1981 and defined it as “caring for self when ill, or positive actions and adopting behaviors to prevent illness” [36].

In nursing, Dorothea Orem created a prominent nursing theory called Self-Care Deficit Theory. She defined self-care as the learned and deliberately performed action to regulate development and function [38]. Orem’s theory suggested that every person could practice self-care, and nurses could help patients achieve their self-care goals. In nursing, the definition for self-care has also evolved to care that starts with an individual but includes a shared responsibility with a healthcare provider to self-manage illness [39]. For psychologists, the definition of self-care typically includes aspects of determining behavior and emotions [37]. Psychologists view self-care, in this context, as a health belief, expression of values, decision-making skills, and a component of self-identity [40].

In one Australian study, 232 health care professionals attended a well-being program that included a variety of self-care practices [41]. Participants reported that learning new coping and self-care strategies helped them manage stress and engage better with colleagues. In another study, doctors of cancer patients providing end-of-life care reported feeling burnt-out and compassion fatigue [42]. They also said story sharing and self-care helped mitigate their burnout [42].

1.1.4 Teacher Self-Care

Self-care can protect against burnout and compassion fatigue [4, 13]. First-year teachers find self-care benefits their work attendance and overall feelings of well-being [43]. Teachers who report high engagement in intentional coping strategies (e.g., self-care activities, social, and leisure activities) experience lower levels of burnout than teachers who indicate lower levels of coping engagement [18, 19]. Teachers who practice mindfulness report that it helps them approach stressful situations with ease [20]. Mindfulness helps teachers be more present and responsive with their students, and overall, mindfulness helps decrease stress [20]. Teachers who report having a work-life balance that includes recreation positively say these activities help to reduce stress [21]. In higher education, student service professionals indicate that their health-related quality of life was positively associated with self-care [26].

The research shows that self-care activities help teachers feel more fulfilled and less stressed due to their professional work [22]. Educators can provide more quality education when they are not experiencing compassion fatigue [22]. Teachers need to have agency and understanding of their own needs to grapple with an educator's tasks and take appropriate care [44]. Self-care insulates against stress [45].

For educational leaders, resilience building is one way to foster self-care practices for teachers [46]. Leaders who value caring for the caretaker can offer teachers pre-service and professional development experiences to nurture and build resilience [47].

Murphy and colleagues [23] conducted a phenomenological study of teacher pedagogical well-being and teacher self-care in two public schools in one Finnish study. For this study, self-care was indicated as the intersections of interaction with students, interaction with colleagues, making evaluations, and choosing and developing instructional tools. After interviewing teachers, the study showed that teachers who practiced self-care felt happier, felt “more fit to teach,” experienced higher productivity, were more content at home and in schools, and reported that self-care is essential to cultivate.

Teachers in this study also shared that support for self-care at a management (organizational) level included support for professional development and acknowledgment of teachers’ hard work. Teachers in this study reported support at an interpersonal level as having supportive teaching relationships, having a best friend at work, having someone to laugh with, talk to, and listen. Teachers indicated more formal organizational support models, including a mentoring program where mentor teachers share their knowledge with new teachers. Teachers also considered interpersonal self-care support through teacher and student shared experiences. Teachers felt their self-care was supported when they had students' support and rapport with students.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

1.2.1 Introduction

Researchers across the globe have researched the construct of self-care in many disciplines, including public health, social work, education, and healthcare. Self-care is a complex construct that researchers have defined in many ways [37]. Other terms (such as self-management, self-monitoring, and self-help) are often used interchangeably as synonyms for self-care [48]. Self-care, the concept of having a healthy balance in one’s life, has been around since ancient times [17]. Self-care formally made its way into published research in 1946, according to a June 2019 PubMed search [48]. In the 1970s-1980s, self-care became a politicized radical movement for activist groups and marginalized peoples [49]. In her book, *A Burst of Light and Other Essays*, Audre Lorde writes, “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare” [50]. For many cultures, self-care is a concept based on the type of healthcare a society provides that aligns with established cultural and social norms [51].

Self-care includes various activities and practices. Some habits and states of mind considered self-care are adverse [44]. Adverse habits are intended to act as self-care but can create unintended consequences or administering self-care when a person needs actual professional support [49]. In the medical industry, an adverse effect is an unintended reaction to a medication [52]. Research literature has shown that, across disciplines, self-care has positive benefits such as helping to manage stress, reduce anxiety, and support well-being [53]. The theoretical framework will outline a new public health approach to self-care.

1.2.2 Social-Ecological Model

The theoretical framework for this study is Dr. Portia Jackson-Preston’s public health approach to self-care titled the *Social-Ecological Model for Self-Care* (see Figure 1) [34, 54]. Jackson-Preston encourages a model for self-care that is a multi-level approach. Jackson-Preston proposes a collective vision for self-care, “with individuals benefiting from the lived experiences of others, from social support, and accountability” [Ibid]. Her vision includes self-care that focuses on individual needs and preferences and has room to evolve. Preston argues the multi-level approach should be practical, holistic, inclusive, and supported by resources on many levels. The levels include individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and policy.



Figure 1 Social Ecological Model for Self-Care.

The *individual level* focuses on self-reliance. Practices that support self-reliance include individuals knowing information to monitor their health, engaging in healthy behaviors, journaling, creating self-care action plans, and engaging in critical self-care (exercise, healthy eating, play, rest, etc.). Self-care at the individual level should be a continuous/lifelong practice.

The *interpersonal level* focuses on social support and accountability and draws on the power of lived experiences. This level includes practices like communal story sharing, critical conversations about self-care, and helping to create and engage in healthy norms among peers and colleagues.

The *community level* (within an organization or in the neighborhood or business surrounding the organization) focuses on creating environments that foster self-care. Support at a community level would include providing places for physical exercise, meditation, and quiet time and providing access to healthy food.

The *organizational level* focuses on creating a culture of self-care. Support at an organizational level would include leaders modeling self-care and implementing organizational practices and procedures that support self-care. Examples of support at an organizational level include leaders asking for help, offering training on risk factors (burnout, compassion fatigue, mental health, etc.), practicing emotional intelligence, using transparent communication, giving time off, encouraging staff to recharge, and encouraging their employees to only work during paid hours.

The *policy level* (which could be laws or policies at the national, state, local level, or specific to an organization level) focuses on implementing values that foster self-care. Policies would advocate for individuals and work toward dismantling stressors (racism and inequality) that lead to inequitable and solvable health problems.

A shared characteristic across all self-care levels is that many resources are needed to support self-care. Individual self-care is not enough.

Embedded in Jackson-Preston's model is Bronfenbrenner's Social-Ecological Model for human development [55]. Bronfenbrenner theorized that a child's development not only has genetic factors but happens across many levels (microsystem, the mesosystem, the ecosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem). Jackson-Preston's framework also draws on UNICEF'S (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) use of Bronfenbrenner's Social-Ecological model [56]. UNICEF theorizes that human behavior is affected by factors at different levels (intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, societal).

Jackson-Preston's self-care model reconceptualizes the current self-care model in America, which reflects society's self-reliance value. Instead of changing the way structures support individuals seeking a lifestyle of health and well-being, self-reliance puts the onus and ownership directly and solely on individuals themselves. Jackson-Preston's new model also resists the American philosophy that you need to prioritize work and study over health and well-being.

Like many other aspects of this study, the theoretical framework borrows theories from domains outside of education, in this case, public health, and applies them to education. Many public health organizations have used Bronfenbrenner's Social-Ecological Model. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services applied the model to community engagement [57]. The WHO (World Health Organization) applied the model to violence in society [27].

2. Methods

2.1 Participants, Data Collection, Data Analysis Tools

This qualitative study used a narrative inquiry methodology [58]. The participants in this study were five teachers who worked at a rural school district in Vermont. This study addressed participants' experiences and meanings made about self-care. Data analysis tools included phenomenological in-depth semi-structured interviews with each participant. An interest survey was sent to all teachers in the organization to gain interest and gather demographic information. The results were analyzed using two types of coding and thematic analysis. Deductive analysis was used to code transcripts and narrative analysis was used to analyze stories [59, 60].

2.2 Setting, Participants, and Recruitment

The participants in this study all worked at the same supervisory union. All participants held a state-issued teaching license. The supervisory union comprises four elementary schools and one middle/high school. The sampling method was purposive sampling, defined as when participants are "chosen in a deliberate manner" [61].

Building principals received an email asking permission to recruit participants at staff meetings. The principals approved. Follow-up emails were sent to potential participants two to four days after the staff meetings, including a demographic survey through the supervisory union's school Google email account. Participants who wanted to participate in the study, completed it and returned the survey.

Principals gave recommendations for teachers to contact in addition to other recruiting methods. This sampling method is called snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is defined as “selecting new data collection units as an offshoot of existing ones” [Ibid].

The survey to participants had a 20% response rate from teachers. This was more than the six teachers anticipated to participate in the study, so a demographic survey was used to decide whom to interview. The demographic survey helped select the diverse participants. Diversity in this context was defined as self-identified gender, years of experience, and teaching assignments. Participants were chosen with a range of years of experience and grade levels. All participants reported that they were someone who practices self-care.

2.3 Data Collection Tools

Data collection tools included one in-depth/semi-structured interview with each participant. In-depth interviews are defined as “a technique designed to elicit a vivid picture of the participant’s perspective on the research topic” [62]. In-depth interviews are an effective qualitative method for getting people to talk about their personal feelings, opinions, and experiences. “They are also an opportunity for us to gain insight into how people interpret and order the world” [Ibid]. The interviews were 60-90 minutes long and conducted on the virtual meeting platform, Zoom.

Irving Seidman’s [63] framework was used for the in-depth phenomenological interviews. Seidman’s interview framework includes first getting to know the participant and talking about the participant’s life experiences, second understanding the participants’ life experiences in the present, and third uncovering the significance of the phenomena to the participant.

Field notes were taken from the start of the study through the data reporting [61]. Field notes documented participants’ body language, reactions, and actions during the interview as well as recorded phrases that relate to the research questions.

2.4 Research Questions

1. How do teachers define self-care?
2. How do teachers experience self-care?
 - a. How have teachers experienced individual self-care?
 - b. How have teachers experienced interpersonal self-care?
 - c. How have teachers experienced a school that supports their self-care?
 - d. How have teachers experienced barriers or obstacles, if at all, to self-care?

2.5 Narrative Analysis

2.5.1 Everly’s Story

Everly is a veteran teacher with over 26 years of elementary classroom teaching experience. Everly feels that self-care is an essential practice for educators but also feels that due to the expectations of teachers, self-care can be challenging to practice. Everly shared, “there’s always been this expectation, you have to be a martyr. There are high standards for teachers.”

Everly’s family were all teachers, including extended family, and never thought twice about entering the teaching profession. Not only did she enter teaching without a second thought, but Everly also never considered that a career as an educator would require so much self-care. Everly

hadn't witnessed teachers in her family needing or practicing self-care as much as her career demands. At the beginning of her career, during the first several years of teaching, Everly worked more than the contracted hours most nights and spoke of an unwritten expectation that new teachers work extra hours. Everly reflected at the beginning of her career, "I just got really sick of doing school all the time. I wanted to be doing other things." Over the years, Everly has learned what works best for her teaching practices and likes to work early in the morning to get work done without interruptions; this gives her time and space to get ready for the day. Everly has grown aware of her self-care needs during her time as an educator.

On an individual level, Everly thinks self-care benefits her teaching practice and defines self-care as "something that I can do to put me back in the right headspace," personally and professionally. Everly shared that being in the right headspace lowers her stress; however, she doesn't feel a stress-free life is at all possible. Everly also shared that "self-care is something that I want to do, and that I feel good after I do it. I feel renewed somehow or replenished, or I feel like I've gotten to do something special." For Everly, this might include taking a spa day, spending time in the sunshine, breathing fresh air, spending time in nature alone with plants and the birds, taking a bath, playing with her dog, sitting on her deck (one of her favorite places), or reading. In her professional life, reflection is part of her self-care practice; after reflecting on her teaching practices, she has positive feelings. Everly participates in reflection and shares that she will "try to reflect on my way home, or I try to reflect over the evening."

Over time Everly's self-care practice has evolved, and she's learned she needs time and space to clear her head. She said, "if I never leave what I'm doing for my job, I'm completely ineffective because I am a jumbled-up mess." Everly values boundaries between work and home. Her self-care includes working only during the week and not on the weekends. If needed, Everly is flexible and does some professional work on the weekend to free up time for self-care during the week. Everly manages her time to assess her energy, moods, and self-care needs accurately.

Interpersonal self-care in Everly's life includes spending time with family, friends, and fellow teachers, and she especially enjoys going to auto shows. Everly and her family have a mutual understanding that sometimes Everly needs time and space to decompress from a fast-paced and busy work day. Everly's family respects that need and provides her with time and space to care for herself. Other teachers support Everly's self-care by helping provide little breaks to go to the bathroom and fill up water bottles throughout the day. Everly engages in a lot of conversations with other educators throughout the day. However, Everly experiences self-care as primarily an after-school event that is challenging to embed in the school day.

Everly and other educators sometimes spend time together after school, laughing and joking about the day's events. Everly and her fellow educators encourage each other to take days off when needed. Due to the expectation that teachers are martyrs, Everly often convinces other teachers to take days off for health-care appointments and helps other teachers work through the guilt they may feel for doing so. Everly reflected on her experiences with others on her teaching team and shared that she feels a "test-score" mentality gets in the way of teachers' self-care. She shared, "I think because it [test scores] get in the way of their mindset," they value the test score more than their well-being. However, Everly doesn't feel that is her truth. Everly thinks that, in a small way, students support her self-care. Students support Everly's self-care by showing genuine interest in her identity, and with that comes a teacher-student connection. This connection makes Everly feel like her students care about her.

Everly has limited experiences with schools that support her self-care. Everly's self-care is supported interpersonally between peers, but she dreams of a school experience where leaders support their self-care and model it for teachers. Everly feels this would encourage teachers to increase their self-care. Everly felt her self-care was supported "when the school board decided to have 15 absence days instead of calling them sick days and personal days." Before the school board changed the days, Everly felt encouraged to lie if she needed to take a self-care or mental health day because the days were labeled "sick days".

Everly shared barriers and teaching obstacles that led to her need for self-care. Barriers include her job's rigor and pace and absorbing her students' needs. "I spend an entire day with four or five students who are intensely attention deficit, that makes your head just spin. It is just full and makes it spin. I make hundreds of decisions a day, if not thousands. I don't always want to make a decision." Everly further explained her reasons for needing self-care, "I think my job requires me to just take into consideration so many needs of parents and families for good or for bad. Sometimes it's in a good way. And, sometimes it's in a bad way, and sometimes it's over the top, and most of the time, even though it's over the top, it's necessary to make things function." Everly explained her struggles with the amount of professional development, program change, and new directives/initiatives, which are decisions made by people in power. These directives are leading reasons for Everly needing more self-care than ever, "in general, there are so many things, constant things that are being asked to do and change and start and stop, and known and learn, and it's out of control, and it's wreaking havoc on people's mental states." Everly wishes she could have more autonomy in decision-making and feels this would support her self-care.

When I asked Everly to reflect on her self-care, she shared that she was grateful to be having the conversation with someone who was paying attention and caring. Everly shared that asking what was best for her was strange because others rarely asked her what was best for her teaching practice. She said, "teachers are supposed to be these martyrs and you're supposed to just suck everything up and deal with it because that's just what you're supposed to do" as a classroom teacher. However, Everly shared that she feels relaxed, de-escalated, and less stressed after she practices self-care.

2.5.2 Joe's Story

Joe is a high school teacher with 13-25 years of classroom experience. Joe is highly metacognitive about his needs as a human and an educator. Joe entered the teaching profession through a privileged pathway. Joe shared, "I was pretty privileged as a kid." Joe was a challenging student in private school and entered teaching in the most accessible subject for him. Joe was forthright in sharing that he has experienced physical traumas throughout his teaching career and regularly seeks therapy for mental and emotional reasons. Joe has worked as a high school sports coach and class advisor. Joe enjoys community cultural outings, including sports events and volunteering. Joe has also served on various committees. For Joe, self-care is a challenge to embed in the high school day, and he typically practices self-care during his free time after work. Sometimes Joe sneaks in a crossword puzzle in fleeting moments during the work day. The crossword puzzles help him focus on something that is not work-related.

Joe defined self-care as taking care of himself mentally-emotionally and being meta-aware of his needs. Joe also shared that boundaries between school life and home life are essential. He said,

“drawing lines between your school life and your out-of-school life, to focus on yourself without the guilt of the school day” is a critical practice. Joe shared that therapy and medication for anxiety are a large part of his self-care practice. His self-care also includes eating a healthy diet and exercising daily in nature. Exercising serves as mindfulness in Joe’s life. Joe also likes reading books and pop culture. Joe said that being able to spend copious time in nature and afford therapy was also a privilege in his life, and he realized that not all people have access to this kind of self-care.

Joe reflected that once he became a classroom teacher, it became immediately apparent that he would need self-care to sustain his practice. Joe shared that he realized early in his career that “you’re going to absorb so much trauma” from students. However, throughout the evolution of his career, Joe needed more self-care as time went on, “the actual need for me to take care of myself has increased tenfold in the last few years. I mean, that’s a reality of the job too, year to year. The job has always gotten harder, more complicated, more frustrating. I think that’s pretty well understood by all of us in the field. And, it’s very well understood by the research, not well understood by the public. It’s an increasingly [hard] job, year to year. You can see it in the attrition rate of teachers and administrators.”

Interpersonally, collegiality is essential to Joe’s self-care practices. Joe participates in many outdoor sports and shared that having activity partners are vital to him, “having a community of bikers and skiers is critical.” At work, Joe has “colleagues who are just always on the lookout for everybody’s wellbeing.” Joe is encouraged by his colleagues who personalize their classrooms, work out on breaks, walk around the school, and eat a healthy diet. On Friday, Joe and colleagues go to the bar for “the obvious collegiality piece, and the catharsis.” Joe has worked with students and parents on sports teams that supported his self-care by showing interest in “the person behind the teacher” and creating a connection outside the structural role.

Joe finds that summers off are critical for educators. Joe compared the stress of teaching to the pressure of nurses and ER doctors and offered some advice for new teachers about working through the summer, “I guess that would be something I would tell a new teacher, if you’re going to work through the summer. We all do it, but you need the reset. If you don’t reset, you won’t last.” Joe dreams of a reimagined world where teacher preparation programs emphasize teacher well-being, so new teachers are more equipped for the profession in their first three years.

Joe has experienced some leadership that has supported his self-care; however, he feels the system puts the onus on the teachers themselves. Joe has worked with administrators and coaches who “definitely take an interest and are concerned with teachers’ self-care and mental-emotional health.” Joe feels supported by his school when administrators build self-care time into professional development. Joe reflected on when the administration embedded self-care opportunities in professional development days. This time for self-care benefited him. However, Joe shared, “I think the majority of self-care and wellness practice has to take place outside of the building.”

Joe explained the barriers in his job that lead to his need for self-care. These barriers include “post-covid [student] behaviors, violence, anticipating violence, adult behaviors, arbitrary, capricious nature of evaluation, curriculum shifts, and documentation assessment, lack of respect, cultural bias, dealing with the attrition rate, struggling to retain qualified candidates, struggling to attract real talent. Sort of, the status of the job.”

Joe does find that self-care helps him combat risk factors that come with the teaching profession, “If you just look at the nature of the job, as far as trauma, projection of mental illness, projection of learning disabilities, all that. So if you go into it thinking like you’re basically consciously choosing to

be mentally ill, in the context of this job, you have to assume a certain amount of emotional oppression. So, I do a lot of wellness stuff. I do probably as much wellness stuff as I do work.” Joe feels that self-care helps combat the isolation that comes with teaching. Self-care helps him recover after dealing with violent high school students. Joe shared, “struggling with burnout myself, and you know, self-care is definitely helping.” Joe feels conversations around self-care are more important now than ever.

2.5.3 Brie’s Story

Brie is a middle school teacher and teacher mentor with 13-25 years of experience in various high and middle schools. At the beginning of her career, she took some time off to raise her children until they were school-aged and then returned to the profession.

Brie became a teacher because she enjoyed helping others and loved the subject of the content area she currently teaches. Brie never thought about how much self-care she would need to “plan in that self-care so intentionally to just be able to some days keep my head above water, other days to be able to do my best work.” Brie’s self-care shifted after returning to teaching. The profession added new responsibilities to the job, such as book studies, less time to set up classrooms, more initiatives, and more facilitated professional discussions.

Brie defines self-care as “what I personally need to do to make sure that I’m in a place emotionally, physically, and mentally to be able to be pretty close to my best on a daily basis for my students.” Brie practices self-care by making sure she gets enough sleep every night, hiking, quilting, and scrapbooking. When asked to share more about self-care, Brie was hesitant at first, sharing, “I’m not sure that I always practice self-care the way other people do. I won’t necessarily practice self-care from day to day within the building. I consider one of the ways I practice self-care to be mental health days.” After some light coaxing, Brie shared that she takes mental health days to add balance to her life. Sometimes Brie feels overwhelmed by her professional responsibilities, and mental health days help her manage her time. On some mental health days, Brie does whatever she wants to do for herself. Sometimes, she spends time catching up on professional work and grading because she has no time in the school day to finish all of her professional responsibilities. Mental health days help her feel that teaching isn’t “consuming my every moment and adding stress and anxiety in some way to my life.” Unfortunately, Brie feels it’s impossible not to let her work-life spill into her personal life. Brie dreams of a school structure that allows teachers to have breaks, the appropriate time to finish professional tasks, and time for physical activity. Brie schedules mental health days once a month, and she shared, “I always feel like it was worth doing. I always feel like I’m coming back better than I was.” Brie feels that she has to sacrifice herself to be an effective teacher if she doesn’t take self-care days.

On an interpersonal level, Brie loves spending time with her family and camping. At home, she has an agreement with her family that if she takes a day off, she will not be meeting anyone else’s needs. Brie is encouraged by her colleagues to take mental health days at work.

At her school, Brie shared, “I definitely feel supported.” The administration has never questioned Brie about taking mental health days, nor has she been turned down. The administrators are not tracking how she spends her preparation time even though there are many demands on teachers to document their time. Brie has been exempt from several professional development sessions to work on self-led inquiry instead. Brie feels like her administration supports her “even though they’re

not their ideas.” Brie thinks that even though there is no time to practice self-care during the day, administrators support teachers in taking time for self-care during the day. Brie feels supported when administrators build self-care into professional development days. Brie dreams of administrators giving her professional autonomy on professional days to finish tasks, scheduling, and planning. Brie feels that administrators encourage teachers to practice self-care and offer support.

Brie thinks that the mindset of teaching is a barrier to accessing self-care. Brie feels the profession manipulates teachers into forgetting that teaching is a job (paycheck) and they do not need to personally sacrifice themselves because “you’re doing it for the kids.” Throughout her years as an educator and practitioner of self-care, Brie has learned a valuable lesson. Brie has learned, “I don’t think I’m a better teacher when I put in more and more time, so that I’m doing more and more for my kids at school . . . The same problems are there, either way, the same student issues are there, either way, but the things that matter the most, are our relationships and interactions with each other. It’s not worth the amount of time to take away from sleep or family, or personal time or self-care.” Another barrier for Brie is the pace of her day. “I feel some days; I literally run ragged until it stops.” Sometimes Brie locks her classroom door just to have a minute to breathe.

Brie feels education has teachers balancing many working pieces. Brie struggles with the mental load, number of student questions asked/answered in a day, number of decisions, recall amount, preparation, organization, and personalized instruction. Working with students, Brie feels challenged by the amount of listening to students with emotional disturbances, supporting students living in poverty, keeping track of bullying, keeping track of standards, and honoring what students are going through. “Self-care is important because we want teachers who’ve been able to take care of themselves and can be as close to their best as possible without giving every last little part of themselves so that they’re a shell of a person.” Sometimes Brie can’t even remember what happened yesterday. Luckily, Brie shared that after she practices self-care she always feels better. She said, “I always feel like it was productive.” Brie thinks self-care helps her become the best version of herself.

2.5.4 Kai’s Story

Kai is a new primary teacher who has taught for 2-5 years. Kai wanted to be a teacher from a young age and loves teaching the primary grades. Kai entered the profession as a paraeducator. After the onset of COVID-19, an elementary school recruited Kai to teach.

Kai defines self-care as “taking part of my day to do something that I enjoy, and taking the time to do something that makes me happy.” Kai enjoys going for runs after work, hiking, going outside, playing with her dog, reading a book, cooking, spending time with her boyfriend, going to the gym, and calling friends and family. “I like to go on a run after work to kind of decompress, not have any thoughts in my brain.” Exercise is mindfulness in Kai’s life, “it makes me feel good on the inside, but it also just lets me escape into somewhere else where I’m not thinking about the 15,000 things I have on my to-do list.”

Before becoming a teacher, Kai did not realize how much self-care she would need to sustain her practice. When Kai first started teaching, she struggled with boundaries. Kai found out early on that she needed self-care. “It’s essential, and I found out the hard way. I was totally burnt out come summer.” Kai reflected on how in her first year, she burned herself out and didn’t realize it until the

school year had ended. “It started with me working really late, answering emails really late. I just kept it going and didn't give myself any break. I realized that with all of that hard work, I lost part of me.” Kai said it clicked when she realized she wasn't seeing her friends and family because she was always working. Her professional and personal identity blurred.

Now, Kai practices self-care every day. She started by structuring it but now listens to the needs of her mind and body. She still reminds herself to practice self-care. She says, “that's my dedicated self-care time, and I don't always want to, but I know it benefits me. It makes me happy.” Either way, Kai dedicates her time to taking care of herself. Kai thinks the benefits of her self-care practice include joy, happiness, positive mood, positive feelings, a happy mind, and a happy body.

Interpersonally Kai's self-care is supported by her boyfriend, friends, family, and colleagues. Kai's boyfriend respects her need for self-care and is patient, while Kai takes that time daily. Kai shared that connections are essential to her. She sometimes goes on walks with friends or family. At work, she goes on walks and has lunch with her teaching team to chat and connect. Kai shares her self-care with students and often brings pictures from nature to share with them. Kai also leads an after school running club and shares her love for exercise.

At school, Kai feels supported by her paraeducators, and they have an agreement that personal wellness comes first. Sometimes, an administrator will come into Kai's classroom to see if there's a task they can take off Kai's plate. Kai dreams of a relationship with leadership that includes trust and consistent communication, which would make Kai feel heard. Kai also dreams of a room where teachers can practice self-care during the workday because Kai doesn't feel like she has a safe place to do that right now. Kai shared that administrators and teachers had talked about self-care at staff meetings. Kai wishes that self-care was an “expectation for the whole school.” Kai would like the message from leadership to be that “everyone knows that you can take this self-care when you need to, and this is why it's important and necessary and essential for you to be a successful teacher.”

Barriers to Kai's self-care include lack of time and fatigue. Kai communicates and talks with 18 students all day. Many unexpected things happen in her day in addition to planning, teaching, following through with student behaviors, communicating with parents, meetings, report cards, taking and analyzing data, using instructional practices, and changing teaching strategies. In addition to these barriers, Kai feels like the “go, go, go” pace of teaching never stops. At the beginning of her career, Kai felt selfish and guilty over taking time for herself when she could be lesson planning. Then, she realized, “our class will survive, and we'll get through it” without a rigid schedule and lesson plans, but they would not get through it without a happy and joyful teacher.

Through self-care, Kai has learned “that it's essential, it should be a priority for people.” Kai truly believes self-care is a powerful practice that benefits herself and her students, “I think self-care overall benefits my teaching practice because self-care makes me better. Then, therefore, I can transfer that energy to my students when I come to school.”

2.5.5 Kenra's Story

Kenra is an essential arts teacher with 13-25 years of experience. Kenra's journey into teaching was unconventional. Kenra tried several careers and educational paths before landing as an essential arts teacher at an elementary school. Kenra feels that teaching found her. Kenra had a rocky start learning classroom management but worked hard to grow her practice. Kenra is also a

teaching mentor and a self-described “wellness champion.” Kenra leads her school wellness program throughout the year.

When I asked Kenra if she considers herself a teacher who practices self-care, she said, “A teacher who tries to practice self-care. I’m a workaholic.” Kenra went on to describe how her upbringing shaped her mindset around self-care. Kenra experienced adverse childhood experiences growing up. “The model that I got growing up when it came to self-care was, it’s not necessary, and it means you’re lazy. We had no expectations for self-care. We had no expectation of boundaries. It was just work all day long, even when I was a kid.” Kenra reflected that she was raised “with a very rigid expectation as to what a woman or girl should be” and that women should be taking care of everyone else before herself. The feminine caregiving mindset led to Kenra feeling guilty when she practiced self-care. Kenra took this mindset into teaching and didn’t realize she needed so much self-care until a life-changing moment.

About ten years into teaching, Kenra had a near-death experience. One of her organs had gone bad, causing many health issues and a long recovery. After she recovered, she started practicing self-care more. Kenra defines self-care as “doing what I need to do for myself whether or not it benefits another person directly.” Self-care in Kenra’s life now includes boundaries around work, not taking work home, treating herself to little things, enjoying a gourmet cocktail or snack (but not to excess), spending time with her husband, spending time with family and friends, sexual activity, sleeping late, and relaxing. Kenra also enjoys watching TV, getting enough sleep, cuddling with her dogs, joking, going clothes shopping, getting her nails done, going out to eat, being left alone, having time to clean her house, and baking. Kenra is very big on exercise. Kenra said, “exercise tends to be my medication.”

Interpersonally Kenra feels supported by her husband. At work, wellness events are a large part of her self-care. Kenra plans and engages in several wellness events each semester for fellow staff to participate. “We have brunch together and laugh. I think that is enormous self-care. I think it builds community.” During the day, Kenra jokes with colleagues, shares chocolate, vents, and chats. Kenra values her close teacher relationships as well.

Kenra’s position is currently under the supervision of two public administrations and both, at times, supported Kenra’s self-care. At school, Kenra had a principal she felt was someone she could go to for help and support. This principal made her feel valued. The other public administration supported Kenra’s self-care when they gave her health insurance and started giving her yearly holiday bonuses. The compensation made Kenra feel validated. Kenra dreams of a school where wellness practices are valued more. Kenra dreams of more community building for teachers “because if teachers feel safe around each other, they’re going to work better together.” Kenra also values flexible leadership and allows teachers to schedule self-care time when possible.

Barriers Kenra faces to self-care include a large workload and the stigma she feels around her essential arts position. Kenra works many weekends and plans many events as part of her essential arts role requirements. There is a large community piece to her role. Kenra feels that essential arts teachers are not treated the same way as classroom teachers, “I feel like specialist teachers are treated like babysitters, and I do not like that.” Ultimately, Kenra finds that time gets in her way the most, “the amount of stress I have is more about the time I have to put into work, which makes me want self-care, but I don’t have time for self-care. So it gets pushed down to the end of things.”

When I asked Kenra how self-care affects her teaching practice when she does find the time to prioritize it, she said, “I think trickling down it is [benefitting]. I think if I’m less stressed, I am less

exhausted, I'm a better teacher, and I am more able to reflect on what I'm doing. I never stop learning, and I never stop experimenting. Right now, I am working on teaching yoga and mindfulness to students, and a side benefit of that is getting me back into yoga, which is very beneficial to me. I think those practices, especially with the SEL needs that the kids are having right now, will make me a better teacher."

2.6 Ethics Statement

Ethical considerations were in place to protect human subject participants throughout the study. This research study followed the guidelines set forth by Southern New Hampshire University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). This study was approved by the IRB on March 12th, 2022 and assigned the number IRB-FY2022-15. The legislation followed by the IRB is 45 CFR part 46, also known as the Common Rule. All participants signed and returned a notice of informed consent before each interview. Additional protections of subjects included requesting verbal consent to record the Zoom interview before it started. Zoom also notified participants when the recording started. This research article does not disclose any identifying information in publishing the excerpts from the final self-care narratives. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants.

3. Discussion of Themes

3.1 Positive Benefits

All five participants shared that self-care positively benefits their personal lives or teaching practice. Joe shared that self-care was helping him deal with risk factors that come with the teaching position. He said, "struggling with burnout myself, and you know, self-care is definitely helping."

Kenra talked about how a teacher who practices self-care and is less stressed and exhausted benefits her students. She said, "I think trickling down it is [benefitting]. I think if I'm less stressed, I am less exhausted, I'm a better teacher, and I am more able to reflect on what I'm doing."

Kai also shared that her self-care benefits her students' well-being. She said, "I think self-care overall benefits my teaching practice because self-care makes me better. Then, therefore, I can transfer that energy to my students when I come to school."

Brie shared that her self-care days are productive and the days help her move toward the best version of herself.

Everly also shared that she's a better version of herself after practicing self-care. She said self-care puts her back "in the right head-space, and it doesn't have to be just professional, it could be personally too."

All five participants reflected on how self-care positively benefits their personal or professional lives.

3.2 Need for Self-Care

All five participants responded "no" to the question: going into teaching, did you think you would need so much self-care to sustain your practice? Each participant shared a very different experience with their coming to understand their self-care needs.

Kai, a new teacher, answered, "No, I didn't. And it's even something now that I find myself, still kind of reminding myself that's my dedicated self-care time and I don't always want to, but I know

that it benefits me. It makes me happy. For today's example, it was a really long day and I felt myself getting really tired and thinking, I just wanna go home, but I knew that going to the gym or going on a run would make me feel better after."

Kenra's answer to this question centered around the feminine ethic that was instilled in her growing up. She did not think she would ever need so much self-care, not to mention as a teacher. "The model that I got growing up when it came to self-care was, it's not necessary, and it means you're lazy. We had no expectations for self-care. We had no expectation of boundaries. It was just work all day long, even when I was a kid. There was a very rigid expectation as to what a woman or girl should be." Kenra still struggles to prioritize self-care to this day.

Everly, despite being surrounded by teachers, never considered how much self-care she would need. She said, "No. And there were people around me doing that job and although they enjoyed doing special things, like my mother enjoyed doing things with her children and she enjoyed doing things with her friends, and my grandparents kind of the same way. I didn't see it as they needed to do something to renew themselves. It's interesting. Then talking to them now, like talking to my mother and everybody, they talk about how different it is. They always felt like they were really busy, but they look at us now and they're like, it's a completely different thing." Everly reflected on how what she witnessed growing up does not match her current experience as a classroom teacher.

Brie shared about her teacher preparation program and how little she was prepared for her self-care needs. "In my teacher preparation program people talked about boundaries like don't take your work home. I don't remember it vividly. I don't think it came up in a way that was as realistic as the job really is. So, no, I don't think I ever thought that I would have to plan in that self-care so intentionally just to be able to keep my head above water some days, and other days to do my best work."

Joe's experience with realizing he needed self-care happened rapidly after experiencing the profession. He said, "Not at first, but it becomes almost immediately apparent or maybe not going in, but it becomes once you hit the classroom. It becomes immediately apparent that you're dealing with some pretty nontraditional emotional crises. You're gonna ride a roller coaster, you're gonna get the seasonal affective disorder. You're gonna absorb so much trauma. I don't know anybody that goes more than a month in a classroom without recognizing just about all of that."

All five participants shared that they had not realized how much self-care they would need. Over time many of them evolved their self-care practice to acutely reflect their needs.

3.3 Boundaries

All five participants spoke about the importance of having boundaries between personal and professional life.

Joe said that it's important "defining those lines between school and home life. I'm kind of a veteran teacher at this point, so I know my limits in terms of what I'm willing to do at school and what I'm not." Joe explained that he doesn't always say no, he feels better having grown the skill of setting boundaries for the amount of work he will do.

Everly shared that having boundaries doesn't necessarily mean they fit into the structure of the school day. She emphasized that her boundaries are personalized to her. Boundaries for her look like "getting myself to school before there's a lot of people there. It's definitely getting out of school

in the afternoon and doing something else in the afternoon. It's definitely not doing tons of school work on the weekend.”

Kai emphasized the importance of boundaries between work and home. She explained how she became acquainted with self-care as a teacher in a very unhealthy way because of “not having any boundaries with work.” Kai described that in her first year of teaching she didn't take enough breaks to the point she had to sleep for a whole week after the school year had ended. She described this as burning herself out.

Brie described that boundaries are important because they help her enjoy all aspects of her life. Brie wants to “still enjoy all of it. I wanna enjoy teaching too. Not just like being able to enjoy the evening at home when I'm not teaching. So I definitely set boundaries.”

Kenra shared that her advice to another teacher practicing self-care would be to set boundaries between work and home. “Have boundaries when it comes to work. I try really hard not to take a lot of work home with me.”

All five participants set personalized boundaries between work and home.

3.4 Time in Nature

Three teachers talked about spending time in nature as self-care. Kali said, “I'm outside in nature, a lot.” Kai likes to take runs outside and spend time with her dog. Everly shared about experiencing self-care in nature on her deck, “I can be outside in the fresh air. I can be in the sun, but not in too much sun. I think it's because it's in the perfect spot in my yard. On three sides I've got trees and there's nobody back there. There's no other stuff, I put my plants out there and I can watch the birds from there if I want.”

When I asked Joe to talk more about being in nature he shared his self-care had an, “exercising outdoors piece.” Joe told me that self-care meant, “a lot of time in the outdoors and a lot of outdoor sports. That is the biggest part of my wellness practices.”

3.5 Exercise

All five participants described the importance of exercise in self-care. Kai said, “I love moving my body. It makes me feel good on the inside, but it also just lets me escape into somewhere else where I'm not thinking about the 15,000 things I have to do on my to-do list.” Exercise is mindfulness in Kai's life. Joe shared that exercise is mindfulness in his life and said, “I get my exercise at least five days a week.” Joe likes to exercise in nature. Everly shared that her exercise comes from having a dog. She said, “walking the dog four times a day. A tremendous amount of self-care.” Kenra shared, “Exercise tends to be my medication.” Brie shared that hiking and walking her dog are forms of self-care. All five participants incorporate exercise as self-care.

3.6 Pets

All five participants shared that having a dog was part of their self-care. Joe shared that his dog had passed recently before the interview. He said, “I had a dog as well. That was pretty key.” After Everly brought up her dog, I asked her if she considered her dog to be a part of her self-care and she said, “I don't necessarily think of my dog, you know what I mean? I think he's important to my self-care. I don't think it's always obvious to me that he is.” Kai shared that part of her self-care is “going

on a run and playing with my dog.” Kai shares her love for exercise with her dog. Brie shared that she likes to go hiking with her dog. Kenra shared that walking her dog isn’t always self-care because the dog is reactive, but she loves snuggling her dogs at night as part of her self-care. All five participants include their dogs in their self-care.

3.7 Lack of Self-Care at the Beginning of Teaching

Three participants reflected on the beginning of their career experiences around self-care. Kai, Joe, and Everly shared that there was little self-care in the beginning of their careers. Kai shared about a path that led her directly to burnout. Joe spoke about how his perspective on self-care evolved. Everly shared that there’s an unwritten expectation for beginning teachers that doesn’t include self-care within the profession.

Kai shared her story of burnout. “What happened was it didn't hit me until the end of the year because I feel like I was in like, I don't know what mode, but something where it was just go, go, go. And then when summer came, I think I slept for about a week. I kind of knew that that was coming. So I knew I could sleep for a really long time. And that's what it was, which of course, is not healthy.” That is when Kai realized self-care is essential.

Joe said, “I think I probably didn't have the perspective on how much work it takes to, you know, balance out the need for wellness on the job, or actually getting the practices, habituating, and sticking to the practices you need outside the classroom to sort of stay even keel.” Joe shared that learning his self-care needs happened over time but in the beginning he didn’t have enough perspective to practice self-care.

Everly reflected, “I can remember my first year. All the teachers around me knew it, it was almost like a joke, your first couple of years, you don't do anything other than school. Don't plan on doing anything other than school. You’re going to be in school late. You're going to be there on weekends. It was like the norm and the expectation.” There was no room for self-care at the beginning of Everly’s career due to unwritten expectations.

3.8 Barriers or Obstacles to Self-Care

All five participants shared barriers in the teaching profession that lead to their need for self-care.

Joe shared that compassion fatigue creates a need for his self-care. Joe said, “if you just look at what a teacher is going to, by the nature of the job, absorb in a year, as far as trauma, projection of mental illness, projection of learning disabilities, all that.” Over time, Joe found a balance to his self-care but shared the guilt involved. He finally learned, “you can take focus on yourself without the guilt.”

Everly shared that the pace of the day and the number of responsibilities create her need for self-care. “I think just in general. There are so many things, just things, constant things that we're being asked to do and change and start and stop, and know, and learn. It's out of control. I make hundreds of decisions a day. If not thousands, I don't always want to make a decision.” Everly was explaining the amount of change within the system is unsustainable. Everly shared that the stigma and unwritten expectations of teachers being martyrs is why she needs so much self-care. Everly feels teachers are expected to self-sacrifice at all costs to be effective. Self-care is one way she helps manage this expectation.

Kai also spoke about the pace of teaching, and the responsibility teachers face. “There's a lot. It's quick. There's a lot going in on one second. You may be teaching a math lesson, and the next second, someone may be crying because their friend said something unkind. Then maybe you have a parent emailing you about something they're unhappy with. It could be anything. But there's just so much unexpected.” In addition to the pace and responsibility, Kai also shared that sometimes when she practices self-care, she feels like she should be doing something else because there are always so many things for a teacher to get done.

Brie shared that sometimes the heaviness of working with students experiencing adverse experiences and the amount of instructional responsibility leads to her need for self-care. Brie spoke authentically about how she realizes she doesn't have the power to change her students' life circumstances. Brie prioritizes her self-care so she can show up and be a great teacher to her students. Although Brie faces barriers to self-care, she loves teaching, and self-care helps her maintain her love for it.

Kenra is in a unique, essential arts teaching position where she sometimes works with the school but also has a lot of weekend responsibilities. Kenra finds the workload challenging but always finds time to take on new projects such as teaching yoga to students. Kenra struggles with feeling guilty when she takes care of herself due to the expectation growing up that it was a woman's job to sacrifice.

Joe, Everly, Brie, and Kai all spoke or alluded to having little time to practice self-care in the work day. In Everly's opinion, “everyone should have time. Everyone should have time in the mornings, and the afternoon to be able to fill your water bottle, go to the bathroom, get a cup of tea or whatever it is that you do. Right now, I don't know that during the day that there is self-care time. I don't think there's time. Or if there is, I can't come up with one.” Joe also said there was no time in the school day, “there's no time. I think the majority of self-care and wellness practices have to take place outside of the building.”

Brie shared that she doesn't have enough time to finish her professional responsibilities, let alone practice self-care. “I don't have enough time to grade everything or make lessons. None of that can happen at school. I can barely print during those hours. I can't, prepare new lessons during that time. I can't grade everything I need to grade and give feedback during that time. I need to schedule students for feedback. I need to communicate with parents, answer emails. I mean, on the weekends, I definitely put in another four hours for sure. I bet I work about 55 hours a week.”

Kai didn't share that she didn't have enough time to practice self-care, she explained that there are no options for her during the day. Going on walks at schools serves as self-care, but there is no place for her to relax. In her classroom she feels like she needs to be doing something on her to-do list.

4. Discussion

The objectives of this study were to collect the stories of educators and their experiences of self-care. The objectives were met through narrative inquiry methodology and analysis of teacher stories. All teachers in this study expressed that self-care has positive benefits in their lives and suggests that self-care is essential for educators to help them reduce stress and be their best selves at work which is a significant finding of this study. This study has contributed to scholarship and has practical applications in education. This study was built on scholarship about self-care from other disciplines

such as social work, public health, healthcare, and business and applied the concepts to education. This study adds to the scholarship about teacher self-care and uncovers how practitioners experience self-care. In addition, this study contributed to the scholarship about the power of teachers telling their stories. Continued research on teachers' self-care experiences at various levels of the ecological model is needed.

4.1 Opportunity for the Literature

This study contributed a unique narrative inquiry that centers teacher self-care stories which adds to the extant literature on self-care. This study added to the content knowledge around self-care. In this study, teachers' stories of the self-care phenomenon were both the interest and method of study [63]. This study added a researcher-advocate perspective because the data collection tools and data reporting elevated and empowered teachers to share their professional practical knowledge and craft knowledge [64]. This study included participants as part of the research process through co-creating knowledge. This study also offered participants self-care at an interpersonal level. Sharing lived experiences is interpersonal self-care and falls under social support and accountability [26]. Story sharing and validating is a form of care [65]. This research offered an opportunity to support teachers by learning from their stories and experiences [22].

5. Conclusions

The results of this study suggest that self-care has positive benefits for teachers personally and professionally. Please refer to the results section and Tables 1-4 for the data specific to each level of the Social-Ecological model. Themes in the research included that pets, boundaries, time in nature, and exercise were important self-care practices. Another distinctive theme was that teachers all faced barriers or obstacles to teaching that create a need for self-care. Themes emerged about the beginning of each teacher's career including that none of them realized how much self-care teaching would require, and they faced an unwritten expectation that new teachers will have no time for self-care.

Table 1 Teacher Participant Definitions and Experiences of Self-Care.

How do teachers define self-care?	How have teacher’s experienced self-care?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - something teachers want to do - activities that renew and replenish - special activities - activities that put teachers “back in the right headspace” - activities for enjoyment and happiness - having an awareness of needs - activities that support emotional, physical, and mental wellbeing - activities that make teachers less stressed and better for their students - focusing on meeting their own needs “whether or not it benefits another person directly” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - as martyrs - stress deescalation - with the same frequency as work hours - to help combat absorbing students’ needs - taking self-care days - lack of self-care leading to burnout - burnout prevention - workaholic/feminine ethic - benefits to students - for happiness and enjoyment - to keep their “head above water” - to be “their best selves”

Table 2 Self-care at Individual and Interpersonal levels of the Socio-Ecological model for Self-care.

How have teachers experienced individual self-care?	How have teachers experienced interpersonal self-care?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - taking a spa day - spending time in the sunshine - exercising - skiing - mountain biking - breathing fresh air - spending time in nature alone with plants and the birds - taking a bath - time with dogs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - spending time with family and friends - going to the bar with teachers and friends - going to auto shows - calling family and friends - spending time with fellow teachers - providing breaks to fellow teachers - families that respect alone time - encouragement from other teachers to take days off - laughing and joking with coworkers, family, and friends

- sitting on deck
 - reading
 - reflection
 - therapy
 - crossword puzzles
 - getting enough sleep every night
 - Hiking
 - Quilting
 - Scrapbooking
 - taking days off from work
 - catching up on work
 - going for runs after work
 - Cooking
 - spending time partner
 - going to the gym
 - calling friends and family
 - boundaries around work
 - summers off
 - personalizing classrooms
 - eating a healthy diet
 - not taking work home
 - "treating yourself"
 - enjoying a gourmet cocktail or snack (but not to excess)
 - spending time with family and friends
 - sexual activity
 - sleeping late
 - Relaxing
 - watching TV
 - going shopping
 - getting nails done
 - going out to eat
 - being left alone
 - cleaning home
 - baking
 - outdoor sporting events
 - having activity partners
 - camping with friends and family
 - mutual agreements about alone time
 - creating connections with teaching teams
 - going on walks during lunch break
 - sharing pictures of nature with students
 - having lunch with colleagues
 - wellness events at work
 - sharing chocolate snacks
 - venting with colleagues
-

Table 3 Self-care support from schools and barriers/obstacles to self-care.

How have teachers experienced a school that supports their self-care?	How have teacher experienced barriers or obstacles, if at all, to self-care
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - when “sick days” were relabeled as “absence days” - leaders concerned with the mental-emotional health of their teaching staff - self-care embedded in professional development days - leaders who support self-care days - leaders who always approve days off - allowing teachers to follow self-led inquiry on professional development days - leaders who allow teachers autonomy with scheduling, planning, and finishing tasks - leaders supporting teacher ideas - strong paraeducator and teacher relationships - leaders who encourage self-care at staff meetings - connections between teachers and in teams - school boards offering health insurance - leaders who listen and support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - rigor of the teaching job - absorbing students needs - making 100’s-1000’s of decisions a day - considering the needs of many stakeholders - amount of cumbersome professional development - frequency and abundance of programming change and initiatives - post-covid student behaviors - violence - anticipating violence - adult behaviors - evaluation - curriculum shifts - documentation - assessment - lack of respect - cultural bias - dealing with the high attrition rate - struggling to retain qualified candidates - struggling to attract real teaching talent - student projection of mental illness - student projection of disabilities - unexpected happenings during the day - pace of the job - parent meetings - report cards - changing instructional practices - stigma

-
- large workload
 - lack of time to practice self-care in the work day
-

Table 4 Themes.

Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- positive benefits to practicing self-care- teacher need for self-care- boundaries are self-care- time in nature is self-care- exercise is self-care- pets help teachers experience self-care- teachers experienced a lack of self-care at the beginning of their career- teacher experiences barriers or obstacles that create a need for self-care- sharing stories and asking questions about self-care was innately a self-care experience- sharing self-care stories was empowering

5.1 Significance of the Inquiry

This study has contributed to scholarship and had practical applications in education. This study was built on scholarship about self-care from other disciplines such as social work, public health, healthcare, and business and applied the concepts to education. Research is lacking on teacher self-care and this study adds to the scholarship about teacher self-care and uncovers how practitioners experience self-care.

5.2 Limitations

The demographic of the research site was a delimitation because of limited racial diversity in the surrounding geographic area. Another delimitation was the nature of qualitative research. Qualitative research does not indicate cause and effect or universal results. The results of this study cannot be generalized to a larger population [61]. This research design had limitations. Narrative inquiry aims to answer the same question repeatedly, posing no answer but only constructing new knowledge.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Dr. Irv Richardson, Dr. Sara Truebridge, Dr. Jackson-Preston, and Dr. Bernadette Weltsek for their guidance and support with this study. The author would also like to acknowledge her husband, for without his support this study would have never happened.

Author Contributions

The author did all the research work for this study.

Competing Interests

The author has declared that no competing interests exist.

References

1. Love TS, Love ZJ. The teacher recruitment crisis: Examining influential recruitment factors from a United States technology and engineering teacher preparation program. *Int J Technol Des Educ.* 2023; 33: 105-121.
2. Farber BA. Treatment strategies for different types of teacher burnout. *J Clin Psychol.* 2000; 56: 675-689.
3. Goldhaber D, Gratz T. School district staffing challenges in a rapidly recovering economy. Arlington, VA: National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research; 2022; CALDER Flash Brief No. 29-0122.
4. Hammel K. Compassion fatigue: It's a part of a teacher's lived experience whether it is a global pandemic or not. Manchester, NH: Southern New Hampshire University; 2021.
5. Kamenetz A. 6 in 10 teachers experience physical violence or verbal aggression during COVID [Internet]. Atlanta, GA: GPB Education; 2022. Available from: <https://www.gpb.org/news/2022/03/19/6-in-10-teachers-experienced-physical-violence-or-verbal-aggression-during-covid>.
6. Perna MC. Why education is about to reach a crisis of epic proportions [Internet]. Jersey City, NJ: Forbes; 2022. Available from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/markcperna/2022/01/04/why-education-is-about-to-reach-a-crisis-of-epic-proportions/?sh=2cdd3a0078c7>.
7. Jensen S. How can we support the emotional wellbeing of teachers? [Internet]. New York, NY: TED Talks; 2019. Available from: https://www.ted.com/talks/sydney_jensen_how_can_we_support_the_emotional_well_being_of_teachers?language=en.
8. Carver-Thomas D, Darling-Hammond L. Teacher turnover: Why it matters and what we can do about it [Internet]. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute; 2017. Available from: <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/teacher-turnover>.
9. García E, Weiss E. US schools struggle to hire and retain teachers. The second report in "The Perfect Storm in the Teacher Labor Market" series. Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute; 2019; ED598209.
10. American Federation of Teachers. 2017 educator quality of work life survey [Internet]. Washington, D.C.: American Federation of Teachers; 2017. Available from: <https://www.aft.org/2017-educator-quality-life-survey>.
11. Figley C. Compassion fatigue: Coping with secondary traumatic stress disorder in those who treat the traumatized. 1st ed. London, UK: Routledge; 1995.
12. Alisic E. Teachers' perspectives on providing support to children after trauma: A qualitative study. *Sch Psychol Q.* 2012; 27: 51-59.
13. Figley C. It might not be burnout: Recognizing compassion fatigue and building resilience. *J Oncol Navig Surviv.* 2017; 8: 194.
14. Merrimack College. 1st Annual Merrimack College Teacher Survey: 2022 Results [Internet]. North Andover, MA: Merrimack College; 2022. Available from:

<https://www.merrimack.edu/academics/education-and-social-policy/merrimack-college-teacher-survey/>.

15. Alkema K, Linton JM, Davies R. A study of the relationship between self-care, compassion satisfaction, compassion fatigue, and burnout among hospice professionals. *J Soc Work End-of-Life Palliat Care*. 2008; 4: 101-119.
16. Krop J. Caring without tiring: Dealing with compassion fatigue burnout in teaching [Internet]. Ottawa, ON: Education Canada; 2013. Available from: https://www.pacesconnection.com/g/aces-in-education/fileSendAction/fcType/5/fcOid/480670134290024219/fodoid/480670134290024218/Caring%20Without%20Tiring_Dealing%20with%20compassion%20fatigue%20burnout%20in%20teaching%20%283%20pages%29.pdf.
17. Albuck M, Gillis L. The Evolution of Self Care [Internet]. Consumer Healthcare Products Association; 2021. Available from: https://www.chpa.org/sites/default/files/media/docs/2021-07/IRI-Evolution-of-Self-Care-POV_FINAL.pdf.
18. Herman KC, Hickmon-Rosa JE, Reinke WM. Empirically derived profiles of teacher stress, burnout, self-efficacy, and coping and associated student outcomes. *J Posit Behav Interv*. 2018; 20: 90-100.
19. Ansley BM, Houchins DE, Varjas K, Roach A, Patterson D, Hendrick R. The impact of an online stress intervention on burnout and teacher efficacy. *Teach Teach Educ*. 2021; 98: 103251.
20. Jennings PA, Siegel DJ. *Mindfulness for Teachers*. 1st ed. Norton Professional Books; 2018.
21. Yang X, Wang L, Ge C, Hu B, Chi T. Factors associated with occupational strain among Chinese teachers: A cross-sectional study. *Public Health*. 2011; 125: 106-113.
22. Yang C, Greenstein JE, Manchanda S, Golshirazi M, Yabiku T. Preventing compassion fatigue among educators: An educator resiliency study during the COVID-19 pandemic. In: *School violence and primary prevention*. Cham: Springer International Publishing; 2023. pp. 653-686.
23. Murphy TR, Masterson M, Mannix-McNamara P, Tally P, McLaughlin E. The being of a teacher: Teacher pedagogical well-being and teacher self-care. *Teach Teach*. 2020; 26: 588-601.
24. Collie RJ. Australian studies link teacher well-being to student outcomes. *Learn Prof*. 2024; 45: 26-28.
25. Dunn HL. *High level wellness*. 1st ed. Wellingborough, England: R.W. Beaty Limited; 1961.
26. Jackson Preston P, Peterson H, Sanchez D, Corral Carlos A, Reed A. Serving students takes a toll: Self-care, health, and professional quality of life. *J Stud Aff Res Pract*. 2021; 58: 163-178.
27. World Health Organization. Self-care interventions for health and well-being [Internet]. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2022. Available from: https://www.who.int/health-topics/self-care#tab=tab_1.
28. Cox K, Steiner S. *Self-care in social work: A guide for practitioners, supervisors, and administrators*. Washington, D.C.: NASW Press; 2013.
29. Smullens S. *Burnout and self-care in social work: A guidebook for students and those in mental health and related professions*. 2nd ed. Washington, D.C.: NASW Press; 2021.
30. Badali MA, Habra ME. *Self-care for psychology students: Strategies for staying healthy & avoiding burn out*. New York, NY: School of Social Work; 2003. Available from: <https://socialwork.buffalo.edu/content/dam/socialwork/home/self-care-kit/readings/self-care-for-students.pdf>.

31. Bressi SK, Vaden ER. Reconsidering self care. *Clin Soc Work J.* 2017; 45: 33-38.
32. Lee JJ, Miller SE. A self-care framework for social workers: Building a strong foundation for practice. *Fam Soc.* 2013; 94: 96-103.
33. Martin EM, Myers K, Brickman K. Self-preservation in the workplace: The importance of well-being for social work practitioners and field supervisors. *Soc Work.* 2020; 65: 74-81.
34. Jackson Preston P. We must practice what we preach: A framework to promote well-being and sustainable performance in the public health workforce in the United States. *J Public Health Policy.* 2022; 43: 140-148.
35. Hotchkiss JT. Mindful self-care and secondary traumatic stress mediate a relationship between compassion satisfaction and burnout risk among hospice care professionals. *Am J Hosp Palliat Med.* 2018; 35: 1099-1108.
36. Howell DS. *Self-care in healthcare: Caring for yourself as you care for others.* 1st ed. Victory in Action; 2018.
37. Martínez N, Connelly CD, Pérez A, Calero P. Self-care: A concept analysis. *Int J Nurs Sci.* 2021; 8: 418-425.
38. Orem DE. The self-care deficit theory of nursing: A general theory. In: *Family health: A theoretical approach to nursing care.* New York, NY: John Wiley; 1983. pp. 205-217.
39. Chambers R. The role of the health professional in supporting self care. *Qual Prim Care.* 2006; 14: 129-131.
40. Gantz SB. Self-care: Perspectives from six disciplines. *Holist Nurs Pract.* 1990; 4: 1-12.
41. Wilson V, Donsante J, Pai P, Franklin A, Bowden A, Almeida S. Building workforce well-being capability: The findings of a wellness self-care programme. *J Nurs Manag.* 2021; 29: 1742-1751.
42. Kearney MK, Weininger RB, Vachon ML, Harrison RL, Mount BM. Self-care of physicians caring for patients at the end of life: "Being connected... A key to my survival". *JAMA.* 2009; 301: 1155-1164.
43. Baker L. Self-care amongst first-year teachers. *Networks.* 2020; 22: 2.
44. Showalter SE. Compassion fatigue: What is it? Why does it matter? Recognizing the symptoms, acknowledging the impact, developing the tools to prevent compassion fatigue, and strengthen the professional already suffering from the effects. *Am J Hosp Palliat Med.* 2010; 27: 239-242.
45. Sherman DW. *Nurses' Stress & Burnout: How to care for yourself when caring for patients and their families experiencing life-threatening illness.* *Am J Nurs.* 2004; 104: 48-56.
46. Aguilar E. *Onward Cultivating Emotional Resilience in Educators.* 1st ed. Jossey-Bass; 2018.
47. Truebridge S. *Resilience Begins with Beliefs: Building on student strengths for success in school.* 1st ed. Teachers College; 2014.
48. Riegel B, Dunbar SB, Fitzsimons D, Freedland KE, Lee CS, Middleton S, et al. Self-care research: Where are we now? Where are we going? *Int J Nurs Stud.* 2021; 116: 103402.
49. Kazdin C. When does self-care do more harm than good [Internet]? New York, NY: Zocdoc, Inc.; 2019. Available from: <https://thepapergown.zocdoc.com/when-does-self-care-do-more-harm-than-good/>.
50. Lorde A. *A burst of light and other essays.* 1st ed. Firebrand Books; 1988.
51. Narasimhan M, Allotey P, Hardon A. Self care interventions to advance health and wellbeing: A conceptual framework to inform normative guidance. *BMJ.* 2019; 365: 1688.
52. Federal Drug Administration. *Finding and Learning about Side Effects (Adverse reactions).* 2022

53. Gobin R. *The self care prescription: Powerful solutions to manage stress, reduce anxiety & increase wellbeing*. 1st ed. Althea Press; 2019.
54. Jackson-Preston P. *The Missing Ingredient in Self Care* [Internet]. New York, NY: TEDx Talks; 2019. Available from:
https://www.ted.com/talks/portia_jackson_preston_the_missing_ingredient_in_self_care.
55. Bronfenbrenner U. Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *Am Psychol*. 1977; 32: 513-531.
56. United Nations Children's Fund. *The Behavioural Drivers Model: Conceptual Framework for Social and Behaviour Change Programming* [Internet]. Amman, Jordan: UNICEF; 2019. Available from:
https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/5586/file/The_Behavioural_Drivers_Model_0.pdf%20.pdf.
57. Department of Health and Human Services USA. *Principles of Community Engagement* (NIH Publication No. 11-7782) [Internet]. 2011. Available from:
<https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/11699>.
58. Clandinin DJ, Connelly FM. *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. 1st ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers; 2000.
59. Labov W. *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*. 1st ed. University of Pennsylvania Press; 1972.
60. Reed J. *Appreciative Inquiry Research for Change*. 1st ed. Sage; 2007.
61. Yin RK. *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*. 1st ed. The Guilford Press; 2011.
62. Mack N. *Qualitative research methods: A data collector's field guide*. 1st ed. Research Triangle Park, NC: Family Health International; 2005.
63. Seidman I. *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press; 2019.
64. Barth R. *Lessons Learned Shaping Relationships and the Culture of the Workplace*. 1st ed. Corwin Press; 2003.
65. Coles R. *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination*. 1st ed. Houghton Mifflin; 1990.