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The Teachers Are Not Okay: The Complex Emotionality of the Teaching Profession

A dissertation proposal submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

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The Dissertation of Candice Murrietta is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my family and friends who held my hand and dried my tears through this process. It is because of you that I crossed the finish line. Mom, you taught me to be strong, independent, and resilient. Cyn, Ari, and Brother Bear, you always made me feel like I could do anything. Alyssa, you helped me transition to a new job that allowed my brain to free up space to do this work, and then continued to support me every step of the way. Amy, you never let me lose my dinosaur, and always listened while I thought through my next moves. Juanito, you were always eager to hear about my research and asked great questions. To the Fulton Family and Jer, you were always there to push me and were always ready to celebrate the major milestones. To my work family, you helped me find balance and encouraged me to care for myself first and foremost. Beth, you were the only boss that could have helped me survive a doctoral program. To the "Mean 18," my cohort mates, my family through the fire. I love you all!

A huge thank you to all my professors, and my wonderful committee for cheering us on. Dr. Wood, thank you for your feedback. It was encouraging and helped make my dissertation better. Dr. Hofstetter, you were so kind, encouraging, and motherly through every step of the way. Finally, to you Dr. Daniels, I simply would not be the professional and woman I am without. You have been a professional mentor from the moment I stepped foot in your classroom as a baby teacher. You have elevated me professionally in every way you could. Most importantly, I am lucky enough to call you my friend. I cannot wait to share a pepperoni and olive pizza with to officially cheers to this final chapter of school.

Lastly, it is impossible to mention everyone by name. Please know I could only do this with the love and support of God and my community. I am grateful to every one of you!

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A huge thank you to all my professors, and my wonderful committee for cheering us on. Dr. Wood, thank you for your feedback. It was encouraging and helped make my dissertation better. Dr. Hofstetter, you were so kind, encouraging, and motherly through every step of the way. Finally, to you Dr. Daniels, I simply would not be the professional and woman I am without. You have been a professional mentor from the moment I stepped foot in your classroom as a baby teacher. You have supported me professionally and personally in every way you could, and for that, I thank you. I simply could not have crossed every finish line without you.

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Abstract of the Dissertation

The Teachers Are Not Okay: The Complex Emotionality of the Teaching Profession

by

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The teaching profession is progressively becoming more challenging and leading to issues such as lower job satisfaction and burnout (Palad, 2023). Despite these challenges, teachers are encouraged to remain positive throughout their workday. Teachers' use emotional regulation strategies to suppress negative naturally felt emotions and work to outwardly display positivity towards the students and greater community they serve. Not addressing these negative

emotions results in emotional labor for teachers (Hochschild, 2012). This study aimed to understand how K-12 teachers define emotional labor and investigate the coping strategies teachers use to manage the emotional labor of the teaching profession. Utilizing qualitative research, this study employed semi-structured interviews to gain an understanding of how 15 K-12 teachers defined and coped with the emotional labor of the profession. Findings revealed participants defined emotional labor as: teaching as a primary part of one's identity, the emotional labor of finding a work-life balance, the emotional labor of caring for the whole child, the impact of COVID on developmental milestones, the emotional labor of difficult colleagues and administrators, the emotional labor of posed by new and experienced administrators, and the emotional labor of feeling devalued as a professional. Districts should create policies that encourage site level administrators to promote the well-being of teachers. Advocating for better conditions will improve outcomes for teachers and students.

Keywords: emotional labor, teachers, work-life balance, burnout, emotional regulation, coping

Chapter 1: Introduction

In American society, our occupations become a part of our identity (Unruh, 2004), and a person's professional identity is co-created by how society views the profession (Fitzgerald, 2020). Hence, seventy percent of Americans state they connect what they do for work to their life's purpose (Horovitz, 2022), and being a teacher is believed to have a higher moral calling (Fullan, 2020); yet teachers leave the profession at rapid rates (UNESCO, 2023). COVID-19, school shootings, low pay, pressures over test scores, and ever-changing legislative requirements are just some of the reasons educators are leaving and fewer people are joining the education profession (Maxouris & Zdanowicz, 2022; Will, 2021). However, those who receive professional and social support state they experience lower levels of burnout, and leaders should take steps to minimize the emotional exhaustion of teachers (Steiner et al., 2022; von der Embse, 2019; Yilmaz et al., 2015). Moreover, failing to address teachers' stressors may deter others from joining the profession, while providing interventions for teachers could improve the reputation of the profession and potentially attract teachers of all backgrounds (Steiner et al., 2022). This data reveals the need for further investigation, as research tells us that increased stress for teachers leads to poorer learning environments and decreased student outcomes (Steiner et al., 2022).

Statement of the Problem

The 2023 Gallup Poll State of the Workplace Report (2023) finds that in the United States and Canada only 31% of employees report they are "thriving" at work, 52% of employees state they are quiet quitting, 17% of employees say they are "loud quitting," meaning they are actively disengaged, and 47% of employees report they intend to leave and actively searching for a new job. The teaching profession is progressively becoming more challenging and leading to issues such as lower job satisfaction, burnout, and attrition rates are going down (Palad, 2023). In

education there is an overwhelming need for emotionally intelligent leadership as research states that 91% of educators report experiencing job related stressors and these stressors are further exacerbated by the secondary effects to their personal lives such as trouble sleeping, emotional stressors that affect mood with family and friends, and other physical manifestations of stress (Ogunsola et al., 2020; Will, 2021). Educators are voicing their frustrations around not receiving adequate interventions to minimize the negative effects of work related stress, and as a result are considering leaving the profession (Ogunsola et al., 2020; von der Embse, 2019;UNESCO, 2023; Will, 2021). Many teachers who are not leaving the profession express a decrease in their organizational commitment as they feel obligated to stay in their role or need to stay for financial reasons (Ogunsola et al., 2020).

Previous research has highlighted the emotional labor teachers experience has the potential to impact their organizational commitment. Therefore, education leaders should have an understanding of the difficulties teachers' face, so they may work to implement interventions that alleviate stressors. Schools often discuss trauma-informed practices as a lens to look through when trying to meet the socio-emotional needs of students (Bell, 2023). Comparatively, researchers and education leaders alike do not give the same explicit attention to how the education environment may be impacting teachers and how to help them flourish in their roles as educators (Bell, 2023).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how K-12 teachers define emotional labor and investigate the coping strategies teachers use to manage the emotional labor of the teaching profession. In addition, this study aimed to explore how teachers' use of emotional regulation strategies affect teachers' personal and professional lives.

Research Questions

This study used Arlie Hochschild's framework for understanding emotional labor. Hochschild (2012) uses "the term emotional labor to mean the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value" (p.7). Specifically, this study aimed to investigate the experiences of K-12 teachers, their perception and definition of emotional labor in the teaching profession, and the impacts of emotional labor on teachers in their professional and personal lives.

Research Questions:

1. How do K-12 teachers define emotional labor?
2. What emotional regulation strategies do K-12 teachers use to cope with the emotional labor of the teaching profession?
3. What are the impacts of emotional labor on teachers' personal and professional lives?

Research Methods

This study used a qualitative phenomenological study to explore the proposed research questions. Phenomenology is a qualitative type of research that allows researchers to explore participants' perceptions of a phenomenon (Fraenkel et al., 2012; Mertens, 2005). Hearing teachers' stories around their experiences with emotional labor was vital to answering the research questions. The underlying assumption of phenomenological research is that participants' will have different ways of interpreting the same experience, and using semi-structured one-on-one interviews led to richer and more detailed descriptions of a participants' experiences (Lareau, 2021; Mertler, 2021). Strengths of qualitative research include a focus on situations and people with an emphasis on participants' perspectives in a particular context (Lareau, 2021; Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, interview participants are considered experts in

emotional labor, as they are able to speak to the phenomenon from an informed place. Lastly, the qualitative design has an inherent openness that allowed for identifying unanticipated phenomena to explore new and unanticipated relationships (Lareau, 2021; Maxwell, 2013).

Participants were recruited from a single K-12 district in San Diego County. The research questions guided the data collection around teachers' definition of emotional labor and how they cope with emotional labor by interviewing K-12 teachers with 10 - 20 years of teaching experience. Participants were recruited through the use of purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a method of recruiting participants for qualitative research that allowed me the discretion to select participants who possess the experience and information needed to address the research topic (Creswell, 2015). The purposeful selection of teachers between 10-20 years in their careers aimed to investigate how experienced teachers define emotional labor as they have become established in their careers.

Significance of the Study

A considerable body of research has been done around the academic and socio-emotional needs of students, but limited research has explored the overall well-being of teachers despite teaching being ranked as one of the most stressful professions (Herman et al., 2020; von der Embse, 2019). Additionally, the vast majority of the research on emotional labor in the teaching profession has been conducted outside of the United States, resulting in an unclear picture of the emotional experiences of American teachers. As a result, this study aimed to offer education leaders insight around how K-12 teachers define emotional labor, so they can adequately address what teachers describe as the emotionally laborious elements of the profession, and create supportive systems that promote a culture of wellbeing for teachers.

Definition of Terms

Conversations around emotions in the workplace often include the terms emotional labor and emotional intelligence. Emotional labor is a construct first introduced in 1983 by Arlie Hochschild (Kruml & Geddes, 2000). Hochschild (2012) uses "the term emotional labor to mean the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value" (p.7). Whereas, being emotionally intelligent includes learning to navigate your own and others emotional needs (Kalita, 2022). Authors Salovey and Meyer (1990) define emotional intelligence as "the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p. 189).

Assumptions and Limitations

As a former middle school classroom teacher and a current Teacher on Special Assignment, I have experienced emotional labor and many of the negative impacts that result from sustained suppression of my own emotions. Hence, I became interested in studying the impacts of emotional labor on teachers and the profession. Considering my positionality as a teacher who has experienced emotional labor, an important area of inquiry to minimize my own biased assumptions in this research is understanding the perceptions of teachers. Specifically, I hold the biased assumption that emotional labor does exist in the teaching profession; however, this study sought to shed light on how K-12 teachers define and cope with emotional labor.

Limitations of this study also included sample size and time. A smaller sample size allowed for more time with fewer participants likely rendering a richer set of data. However, with more time a larger sample size may be more feasible and would have provided more

qualitative interviews to draw upon. With more time and participants, there may have been more opportunity to delve into emergent patterns around the emotional labor K-12 teachers experience.

Finally, I was struggling to recruit participants at the elementary and middle level, because my professional networks in these grade levels were not as established as they were with high school teachers. For this reason, I expanded my parameters around years of service to include interested teachers with 10 – 20+ years of experience in the teaching profession.

Conclusion

Teachers experience a myriad of stressors in their day-to-day work lives, and though much research has been conducted around the socio-emotional needs of students, more research is needed around best practices that can be utilized to mitigate stressors and improve the mental health and overall physical well-being of teachers (Herman et al., 2020; von der Embse, 2019). Due to the intense and consistent pressures teachers are facing, it is imperative that leaders understand the emotional labor teachers' endure and the link to physical and mental health consequences they face. Moreover, education is a profession that requires teachers to tap into their own positive emotions to build relationships with students and meet their social and academic needs (Chang, 2020; Wróbel, 2013). Avoiding the emotional needs of teachers can have consequences for teachers, students, and the education system (Ogunsola et al., 2020). If teachers are emotionally and physically well, their capacity to support students is not inhibited by their own mental health needs and they can devote the needed time and attention to all students and most especially our vulnerable populations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Today's organizational and educational climate demands a highly flexible and responsive approach (Anand & UdayaSuriyan, 2010; Melita Prati et al., 2003). Around one-third of American workers endure "substantial" emotional labor as a part of their profession (Hochschild, 2012). Public servants like educators, police officers, and nurses have been compared in terms of the emotional labor they exert on a daily basis; however, teaching has distinct characteristics that the other professions do not have, and little is known about the impacts of emotional labor on teachers (Chang, 2020; Ogunsola et al., 2022). First, educators' interactions with students are unlike any other profession due to the number of "clients," or students, they serve at a time and during this time students' behaviors can range from pleasant to intensely unpleasant (Wróbel, 2013). Second, education is different from other professions because of the length of time educators are responsible for both academic and socio-emotional needs of students (Ye & Chen, 2015). Finally, the unique nature of education can be emotionally laborious and have adverse effects on educators, making it one of the most stressful professions (Herman et al., 2020; von der Embse, 2019). For these reasons, the emotional experiences of teachers should be investigated to understand how to best mitigate the negative impacts and support teachers' overall mental health.

Stressors Associated with Teaching

Despite teaching being ranked as one of the most stressful professions, researchers have largely focused on the academic, social, and behavioral needs of students, but little research has been done on the overall well-being of teachers (Herman et al., 2020; von der Embse, 2019). Current research seems to indicate that teachers are spending more money on their classrooms and making less than other educated professionals with similar college degrees. Classrooms

remain underfunded with 94% of teachers reporting they spend their own money to stock their classrooms, and on average teachers spend $479 with 7% reporting they spend more than $1,000 a year (Walker, 2018). In the 2022-2023 school year, teachers were projected to spend approximately $820, adding up to a three billion dollar subsidy for schools out of teachers' own pockets (Litvinov, 2022). In addition, some teachers attain high levels of education, and they still earn no more than individuals with a high school diploma. The wage gap for teachers has reached an all-time high with teachers earning an average of 23.5% less than comparable college graduates, a phenomenon now referred to as the "teacher pay penalty" (Litvinov, 2022), and 25% of college educated individuals earn no more than those with a high school education (Shell, 2018). Underfunded classrooms and teacher pay continue to be a well-documented part of the national conversation around the struggles teachers face.

In recent years, teachers have also had to adapt to state mandated laws and education frameworks, a catalyst for instructional shifts that require teachers to update their curriculum and reallocate their instructional time to new initiatives. State standards, test scores, and performance evaluations are a source of stress for teachers (von der Embse, 2019). Classrooms are not only underfunded, but teachers are expected to ensure all students meet grade level requirements regardless of issues out of their control such as racism and poverty (Herman et al., 2020), and still the measure of a "good" teacher is based on grades (Hannigan-Martinez, 2019). Additionally, an increase in school shootings has added to the mental health support teachers are expected to provide students, yet only 16.9% of schools report having a crisis plan in place to support students and staff (Alexander, 2021). Consequently, teachers are now expected to ensure students' basic and socio-emotional needs are met so all students can achieve academic standards with very little support.

Research reveals a disproportionate amount of teachers are feeling the impacts of the demands in education with 91% of teachers reporting they experience job related stressors including trouble sleeping, emotional stressors that affect mood with family and friends, and other physical manifestations of stress (Ogunsola et al., 2020; Will, 2021). The result of prolonged exposure to the stressors associated with teaching result in emotional exhaustion and burnout of teachers (Chang, 2020; Keller et al., 2014). Emotional exhaustion and burnout can lead to negative attitudes toward one's occupation and lower task performance (Ogunsola et al, 2020; Yilmaz et al., 2015). Job related stress is also linked to absenteeism, teacher and principal turnover, as well as decreased student achievement (Ogunsola et al., 2020; Steiner et al., 2022).

The Impacts of COVID-19 on the Education Profession

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the stressors experienced by teachers and revealed much about the experiences of employees (Robinson et al., 2022), including the underlying emotions and emotional labor exerted to meet the demands of schools and provide support to all students (Kalita, 2022; Newcomb, 2021; Steiner et al., 2022). In the education world, educators and students were asked to transition to distance learning, forcing teachers to further modify their instructional practices resulting in decreased job satisfaction (Li & Yu, 2022). In the midst of caring for students, teachers experienced their own intrapersonal struggles around the amount of grief they witnessed in such a short time as colleagues and students lost loved ones (Brackett et al., 2020). The pandemic also increased the emotional responsibilities for teachers, as they cared for the well-being of their students and their own children at home (Newcomb, 2021). Teachers who had their own children further experienced increased levels of stress with mothers and fathers reporting a deterioration in mental health; however, women with

children experienced higher levels of stress than males or women with no children (Clark et al., 2021).

Nonetheless, reentering the classroom did not immediately alleviate teachers' stressors. Once teachers returned to their classrooms, many feared getting sick or carrying the virus to their families and other loved ones (Brackett et al., 2020). Those not directly affected by the health concerns or loss of loved ones still experienced various levels of fear of illness, inability to meet basic needs, social isolation, loss of income, and loss of family members (Moreno et al., 2020). Nearly three years later, new research continues to highlight teachers are experiencing the impacts of the pandemic at a heightened level as compared to other working adults (Brackett et al., 2020; Steiner et al., 2022).

Emotional Intelligence and Emotional Regulation in Education Leaders

In light of recent events, emotional intelligence has recently come into the conversation connected to leadership practices (Anand & UdayaSuriyan, 2010; Lubbadeh, 2020). Seminal authors Salovey and Meyer (1990) define emotional intelligence as "the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p. 189). A critical part of emotional intelligence is learning to navigate your own and others' emotional needs (Kalita, 2022), and education is a profession that requires teachers to tap into their emotions to build relationships with students in an effort to meet their needs (Chang, 2020; Wróbel, 2013). This means that teachers need to be emotionally intelligent to 1) regulate their own emotions, so they can build relationships with all stakeholders, and 2) approach hard to reach students empathetically as a step toward achieving educational equity for all students (Ye & Chen, 2015). Accordingly, teachers must have language to describe their emotional

experiences to name and appropriately regulate their emotions. McRae and Gross (2020) define emotional regulation as “attempts to influence emotions in ourselves and others” (p.1). In the context of emotional regulation and teachers, it is important to remember that while teachers may want to respond logically and positively to stressful situations at school, high levels of stress many trigger a fight or flight response in the brain, making it more likely for teachers to react emotionally rather than logically (Goleman, 2020). From a neuroscience perspective, emotional regulation is an executive functioning task that is performed by the amygdala, the part of the brain responsible for activating the emotional centers (Goleman, 2020). When information enters the visual cortex, the thalamus takes that information and makes meaning of it before deciding what part of the brain to send it to in order to respond accordingly (Goleman, 2020). When the fight or flight response is activated, the amygdala, the processing center for emotions in the brain is triggered, leading to an emotional response which is faster, but less accurate (Goleman, 2020). This means the brain can sometimes trigger an emotional response before the thalamus, the more logical part of the brain, can fully make sense of the information to send a more accurate response in the cortical regions of the brain (Goleman, 2020). Therefore, in order to be wholly attuned to teachers' emotional needs, education leaders need to be trained to identify critical components of interpersonal and intrapersonal emotional intelligence to support teachers in navigating their own emotions through explicit training (Chang, 2020; Ye & Chen, 2015).

Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace

Conversations about emotional intelligence in the workplace are relatively new. Beginning in the 1980’s, Wayne Leon Payne wrote a doctoral dissertation that included a framework for developing emotional intelligence (Desti & Shanthi, 2015). Yet, the concept of emotional intelligence did not enter the public consciousness until the 1990’s with the work of

psychologists Howard Gardner, Peter Salovey, and John Mayer (Desti & Shanthi, 2015; Kalita, 2022). It was not until 1995 that Daniel Goleman wrote the groundbreaking best seller *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, and emotional intelligence became a part of a global conversation about the impacts of emotionally intelligent leadership as an organizational practice (Lunenburg, 2011). Goleman's book has received attention from leaders in education, corporations, healthcare, religious organizations, and other human resources related fields (1995). In the education world, emotional intelligence was highlighted because educators are under constant pressure to perform their jobs while only exhibiting positive emotions despite the stressors they may experience daily (Chang, 2020; Ye & Chen, 2015).

The Emotional Competence Framework

If education leaders intend to be responsive to teachers' needs, they must be both personally and socially competent. In 2006, Daniel Goleman outlined an Emotional Competence Framework to support leaders in understanding what competencies are needed to manage themselves (Personal Competence) as well as aid leaders in fostering relationships among their employees (Social Competence). Goleman's newer research pushes the framework even further by looking at emotional regulation from a neuroscience perspective (2020). Goleman's research works in tandem with the Emotional Competence Framework to help leaders further understanding the nature of emotionality in the workplace.

According to Goleman, Personal Competence includes three elements: (1) self-awareness, (2) self-regulation, and (3) motivation. Self-awareness encompasses a leader's ability to recognize and accurately assess their own emotions, as well as maintaining the confidence that they are capable in all their duties required (Goleman, 2006). All leaders will naturally encounter varying degrees of organizational obstacles, and as a result, leaders need to be able to regulate

their own emotions during difficult times. Self-regulation involves being flexible, comfortable with different ideas or approaches, remaining ethical in their practices, and managing disruptive emotions and impulses (Goleman, 2006). Lastly, a leader with personal competencies has the ability to guide the organization to achieving their goals. According to Goleman (2006), the motivated leader aligns personal goals with the organizational goals, is ready to act on opportunities to meet their goals, remains committed despite setbacks, and strives to meet a standard of excellence.

Education is a relationship forward profession. Thus, the social competence elements of Goleman's framework may be especially vital to an education leader's understanding of the emotionality of the teaching profession and overall success as an education leader. Emotions are necessary in teaching to establish and maintain a positive learning environment (Wróbel, 2013). For this reason, education leaders need to be empathic (Fullan, 2011; Goleman, 2006; Wróbel, 2013). Goleman's framework outlines what empathy and social skills are necessary to be socially competent. According to Goleman (2006), social competence consists of two elements: (1) empathy and (2) social skills. Goleman defines empathy as an understanding and development of others, being able to recognize and meet the needs of customers, leveraging diversity of employees, and reading emotional currents and the power dynamics of relationships (2006). Secondly, Goleman defines social skills as an "adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others" (Goleman, 2006, p. 27). Specifically, Goleman names seven skills and further defines what each skill entails. Due to the subtle nuances of these skills, I outline them directly. The social skills outlined by Goleman include: (1) influence (2) conflict management (3) leadership (4) change catalyst (5) building bonds (6) collaboration and cooperation and (7) team capabilities (Goleman, 2006).

Emotionally intelligent leadership is complex and nuanced. Goleman's work illuminates the importance of seeing the humanity of the educators who serve in the profession. Understanding the interpersonal aspects of emotionally intelligent leadership can help leaders to motivating teams to work together, and thereby, work toward increased effectiveness and performance, building interpersonal trust and team dynamics, and inspiring employees to accomplish the vision of the organization (Prati et. al, 2003). Albeit, Goleman's emotional intelligence framework remains one of the leading models for emotional intelligence in academia, it should also be noted that little research has been done by other researchers beyond the various definitions of emotional intelligence.

Using Negative Emotions for Good

There are benefits to understanding the range of emotions teachers experience, and both positive and negative emotions should be valued. While teachers are largely expected to remain positive throughout their workday (Chang, 2020; Ogunsola et al., 2020; Wróbel, 2013; Ye & Chen, 2015), it is also important to understand not all negative emotions are bad (Cain, 2022). Emotions are a signal function that tell us about how we are experiencing the world (Hochschild, 2012). For this reason, leaders should not try to suppress employees' negative emotions. Negative emotions, such as pessimism, can have some positive effects (Grant, 2016; Thiel et al., 2012). For example, pessimism is often experienced in the workplace for a multitude of reasons, but it can cause an individual to be more self-reflective and question their own actions. Self-reflection can result in the reframing of how one thinks about a situation (Thiel et al., 2012). This can cause what organizational psychologist Adam Grant calls "Vuja De Thinking" (2016). Vuja De Thinking is the act of making a once familiar thought seem unfamiliar to introduce more creative solutions (Grant, 2016). One benefit of understanding teachers' perceptions around the

stressors they experience is it affords leaders the chance to help teachers reframe an otherwise negative situation into an opportunity to find a positive outcome.

The Delicate Balance of Emotionally Intelligent Leadership

Leaders should be careful to not let emotion override logic. For example, empathy as a skill can be taken too far (Lubbadeh, 2020). Leaders who are overly empathetic to the point of taking on other's emotions run the risk of not being able to adequately meet the needs of their employees for fear of hurting their feelings, and they may even hurt the organization by not delivering needed feedback to correct problematic behaviors (Lubbadeh, 2020).

Another potential pitfall for education leaders is engaging in charismatic leadership practices. Charismatic leaders can be so compelling, they leave employees feeling awestruck and unwilling to express themselves fully to the point of inhibiting emotions (Menges et al., 2015). This is problematic because suppressing one's emotions could have negative effects on interpersonal relationships, can deteriorate cognitive performance and memory, and is also associated with decreased job satisfaction and burnout (Chang, 2020; Menges et al., 2015), resulting in reduced task performance, leaves of absence, or absenteeism (Ogunsola et al., 2020; Yilmaz et al., 2015). Thus, being an emotionally intelligent leader helps cultivate a culture of relational trust where employees feel safe being authentic and vulnerable (Menges et al., 2015). This authenticity and vulnerability can lead to more supportive, open, and productive school climates.

Intrapersonal Elements

According to Goleman (2006), people unfamiliar with the skills of emotional intelligence can learn them if they are given the right tools. Education leaders should first look within themselves and evaluate what intrapersonal skills they possess and need to hone before they can

build capacity in others. First, leaders who are self-aware: know their strengths and weaknesses, can accurately measure their own mood and understand how it affects others, and are able to make decisions based upon their own values (Lunenburg, 2011). Second, leaders who self-regulate can control their emotions, have integrity, are adaptive, and stay optimistic through the ups and downs of organizational life (Lunenburg, 2011). Finally, self-motivated individuals who understand themselves report improve performance and achieve goals far beyond what is required (Lunenburg, 2011). In sum, education leaders should be models of emotionally intelligent leadership and continually reflect on their performance, because teachers need more than content knowledge to get through the workday (Ye & Chen, 2015).

Interpersonal Elements

Emotionally intelligent leaders also possess interpersonal skills. Leaders with interpersonal skills are socially aware, understand others' feelings, are empathetic, know how to meet the needs of their employees, and are aware of the political and social culture of the organization (Lunenburg, 2011). The interpersonal element of emotionally intelligent leadership includes the skills to manage relationships among staff. Relationship management skills include the ability to help others manage their emotions productively, influence others, and build strong relationships through effective communication skills and shared vision (Lunenburg, 2011). Yet, simply understanding emotional intelligence does not guarantee a leader can connect with those they lead (Goleman, 2006). For this reason, education leaders should actively work to develop the social skills needed to effectively motivate those they lead to action.

Emotional Display Rules, Emotional Regulation, and Emotional Labor

While education leaders are aware of, and attempt to mitigate, the negative impacts of many stressors that exist in the teaching profession, a lesser known phenomenon is emotional

labor. Hochschild (2012) uses "the term emotional labor to mean the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value" (p.7). Though public education is not for profit, in the teaching profession, emotional labor is a byproduct of the stress teachers experience in regulating their emotions to adhere to the emotional display rules of the education profession. While managing one's emotional state is a part of all professions; teaching is different from other professions (Chang, 2020). First, teachers serve many students at one time, and students' behaviors during that time can range greatly (Wróbel, 2013). Second, educators are responsible for both academic and socio-emotional needs of students (Ye & Chen, 2015). Teachers also face the challenge of meeting students' unique needs that can be varied and layered, including mental health concerns, learning disabilities, health conditions, and behavioral needs (Wróbel, 2013). As educators get to know their students, they better understand their needs and must determine what academic and socioemotional supports to use to scaffold instruction for all students. As a result, the classroom becomes an environment where a wide range of emotions can be experienced by an educator in a day; moreover, educators see their work as personal (Chang, 2020). This causes educators to consistently be aware of their emotions and the display of the emotions they feel (Chang, 2020).

Emotional Display Rules for Teachers

In the context of schools, teachers are asked to only display positive emotions; specifically, teachers are expected to be happy and ready to help at all times (Wróbel, 2013). The American teacher is asked to adhere to organizational display rules in which they verbally and non-verbally only display unconditional positive regard towards students, colleagues, and the greater community even when their display of positively may not be in line with their naturally felt emotions (Chang, 2020; Ogunsola et al., 2020; Truta, 2014; Ye & Chen, 2015). Emotional

display rules are defined as the need to manage the appearance or display of emotions in a given context (Chang, 2020; Ogunsola et al., 2020; Truta, 2014), and emotional display rules are learned when an individual interacts with the environment (Chang, 2020). It is presumed teachers will display positivity and show care for students and families by consistently being full of passion, active listeners who always respond appropriately, are modest, respectful of authority, and always accepting of all students (Ye & Chen, 2015). Examples of an educator's emotional display management include always showing enthusiasm during class, consistently and empathetically responding to all students' varied needs, and hiding any negative displays of emotions when working with difficult students, colleagues, and families (Wróbel, 2013).

The emotional display rules of the education profession dictate the four qualities teachers are expected to have: (1) display positive emotions towards children inside and outside of the classroom, (2) patiently and kindly communicate with families, (3) maintain positive relationships with colleagues to ensure a positive school climate, and (4) respect all school leaders (Ye & Chen, 2015). However, because teachers outwardly display joy or happiness, it does not mean they are necessarily internally experiencing positive emotions and may simply be acting out organizational display rules (Ogunsola et al., 2020). This is problematic because teachers who fake or hide their emotions to meet the organizational display rules report lower levels of occupational well-being (Chang, 2020; Ruiter et al., 2021), and increased stress levels for teachers result in less effective learning environments for students (Steiner et al., 2022).

Adherence to Emotional Display Rules Leads to Emotional Labor

Teachers are consistently expected to follow the emotional display rules of the school environment, despite being constantly bombarded with many stressors that can last the duration of the academic school year (de Ruiter et al., 2021). Teachers are encouraged to remain positive

and not show negative emotions, even if their internal naturally felt emotions do not match the external display of those emotions (Chang, 2020; Ogunsola et al., 2020; Wróbel, 2013; Ye & Chen, 2015). This leads to emotional labor. In education emotional labor is widely defined as managing one's emotional performance, accurately and visibly, using facial expressions and body language to match the organizational display rules (Chang, 2020, Hochschild, 2012; Keller et al., 2014; Wróbel, 2013; Ye & Chen, 2015; Yilmaz et al., 2015). Furthermore, Hochschild defines feeling and emotion as a sense, similar to hearing and seeing, in which emotions communicate information about our point of view (2012). Emotional labor requires a coordination between the mind and emotions, thus regularly engaging in this kind of labor can lead a worker to become estranged from a part of themselves (Hochschild, 2012). Consequently, not giving in to the naturally felt emotions and masking them to give the appearance of being positive and calm can result in emotional labor and even burnout if emotional labor is experienced over long periods of time (Chang, 2020).

Furthermore, emotional labor may also differ based on the grade level taught. Elementary teachers use more emotional regulation strategies and display more naturally felt emotions than secondary teachers (Yilmaz et a., 2015). For example, elementary educators have fewer students but are responsible for more extended communication and engagement of the families than are middle and high school educators. Similarly to high school educators, middle level educators have more students and can hold either a multiple subject or single subject credential allowing them to teach more than one subject. However, the developmental needs of secondary students require educators to understand the adolescent years, and educators are expected to be both content experts, as well as empathetically care for the socioemotional needs of students (Ye & Chen, 2015). On the other hand, high school educators have the added pressure of ensuring all

students meet graduation requirements and while still caring for students' academic and emotional needs (Wróbel, 2013). No matter the grade level, all K-12 educators experience varying degrees of emotional labor but for different reasons.

Employing Emotional Management Strategies to Cope with Emotional Labor

As teachers experience the emotional labor of the profession, the individual must decide to what degree they want to participate in following the organizational display rules. According to Hochschild (2012), "seeming to 'love the job' becomes part of the job" (p.6). However, the awareness of the display rules themselves, nor face-to-face interactions with students, do not necessarily motivate teachers to act in accordance with emotional display rules (Truta, 2014). Research suggests that teachers may perform emotional labor because of their own work ethic (Wróbel, 2013). Another factor is teachers' personality traits. Personalities vary greatly, and adherence to emotional display rules may be implicit and subconscious (Chang, 2020). To illustrate this, an educator who is a people pleaser may experience more pressure to hide their emotions when they endure a personal hardship like the death of a family member or a divorce. In this situation, a person who is innately a rule follower may experience more emotional labor than a colleague who feels more comfortable openly displaying naturally felt feelings within the professional context, such as talking to a trusted colleague or students. When teachers believe it is not professional to display their emotions, the emotion display rules require them to exert more energy to manage their emotions and doing so regularly could have detrimental effects to educators (Chang, 2020). It is crucial more research be done on the emotional experiences of teachers, because teachers directly influence student learning and teachers must understand how to regulate their emotions to improve effectiveness (Lee et al., 2016).

Surface Acting and Deep Acting

Teaching is a demanding profession, and the consistent emotional labor of the job can be emotionally exhausting (Keller et al., 2014). Researchers report organizational display rules are often such that positive emotions should be emphasized and negative emotions should be minimized or hidden entirely (Chang, 2020). Due to teachers' adherence to emotional display rules, they may be reluctant to accurately label their emotions with students; for example, opting to tell students they are not angry, but they are disappointed or frustrated (Chang, 2020).

Avoiding naturally felt emotions causes educators to engage in emotional regulation strategies. To avoid emotional exhaustion educators manage emotional labor by primarily using two coping strategies: surface and deep acting (Chang, 2020; Keller et al., 2014; Ogunsola et al., 2020; Wróbel, 2013; Ye & Chen, 2015). Both surface and deep acting are ways of managing one's emotions to match the organizational display rules; however, surface acting requires the employee to manage only the outward display as where deep acting requires the employee to manage both the internal felt and externally displayed emotions (Hochschild, 2012; Wróbel, 2013).

Surface Acting

Surface acting is defined as modifying one's outward emotional expression without changing the inner state (Chang, 2020; Hochschild, 2012; Keller et al., 2014; Wróbel, 2013; Ye & Chen, 2015). When a person engages in surface acting they are deceiving others about their naturally felt emotions but they do not deceive themselves about their feelings (Hochschild, 2012). For example, surface acting may be exhibited by educators through fake smiling during a difficult parent meeting or a lesson to hide the negative emotions they may feel (Wróbel, 2013). Teachers reported they employed surface acting techniques, such as faking or suppressing

emotions in one third of lessons covered (Keller et al., 2014). Surface acting is problematic for both the students and the educator. One problem associated with educators' emotional suppression, such as pretending to be calm when they are internally feeling angry, is teachers experience limited cognitive capacity during lessons (Chang, 2020). A second problem associated with emotional suppression is educators' distance themselves from their students (Chang, 2020). For example, teachers may choose to not answer students' questions while attempting to regulate their emotions to not exhibit outward expressions of frustration. Educators' inattention to their own emotional regulation may interfere with the delivery of the lesson or impact the level of support they provide to students, thereby decreasing the rigor or attention to students' needs.

Surface acting strategies such as faking, suppressing, or hiding emotions cause psychological stress and leads to burnout for educators (Chang, 2020; Keller et al., 2014). Younger educators are less skilled at deep acting and use surface acting as an emotional regulation strategy more often than veteran educators (Chang, 2020). For this reason, teacher education programs and professional development should be designed to help teachers reframe how they think about organizational display rules and teach them how to effectively manage their emotions (Chang, 2020; Lee et al., 2016). Interestingly, surface acting is more emotionally laborious than deep acting, because surface acting requires more energy when the internal emotional state does not match the displayed emotion, and research shows surface acting is positively correlated with emotional exhaustion (Wróbel, 2013).

Deep Acting

Deep acting is defined as changing one's inner feelings to match the desired external feeling (Chang, 2020; Hochschild, 2012; Keller et al., 2014; Wróbel, 2013; Ye & Chen, 2015).

Deep acting is different from surface acting in that when a person deep acts, they make faking unnecessary because they change their internally felt emotions (Chang, 2020; Hochschild, 2012). The goal is to try and create a feeling they wish they had or they try to manage a feeling they wish they did not have (Hochschild, 2012). An example of this could be an educator having a difficult day may reminisce about a strong lesson that went well with students or recall other positive experiences in teaching to ignite positive feelings and be able to display the appropriate organizational rules (Wróbel, 2013). As a result, the individual engaging in deep acting as an emotional regulation strategy experiences less emotional labor, because the internal feelings become aligned with the affective emotional display (Chang, 2020). Teachers should be trained in understanding their own emotions, as well as how to manage their own emotions before they become too intense to hide (Wróbel, 2013).

Emotional Exhaustion and Teacher Burnout

Both surface and deep acting require a consistent monitoring of one's expression and feelings, this constant self-reflection over a long period of time can lead to emotional exhaustion (Wróbel, 2013). Emotional exhaustion over a long period of time leads to burnout, and educators' burnout is related to the frequency with which they regulate their emotions (Keller et al., 2014). Burnout is defined as the psychological symptoms that are a result of chronic work-related stress (Keller et al., 2014). Educators who are more skilled at emotional regulation report greater job satisfaction and feel more personally accomplished in the profession (Chang, 2020). Honoring teachers' humanity through explicit training around emotional intelligence may support our teachers in improving job satisfaction (Chang, 2020; Ye & Chen, 2015).

Consequences of Teacher Burnout

Researchers argue that surface and deep acting commonly lead to health-related complications that can cause mental health issues such as depression, mental distress, and poor self-esteem (Ogunsola et al., 2020; Will, 2021). Continued exposure to emotional distress can also lead to health-related problems such as headache, struggle sleeping, or even cardiovascular problems (Ogunsola et al., 2020; Will, 2021). Additionally, because emotions cannot be quantified, teachers are often undercompensated for the emotional labor they endure (Ogunsola et al., 2020). While work ethic (Wróbel, 2013) and affective commitment to the organization may initially drive teachers, the emotional toll may ultimately become too costly and force them to make decisions around how to alleviate the negative impacts of their work related stressors, thereby impacting organizational commitment (Ogunsola et al., 2020).

Burnout and Organizational Commitment

Burnout in teachers may result in varying degrees of organizational commitment. While teaching is considered a moral calling (Chang, 2020), some teachers may ultimately choose to stay in the profession because they feel obligated to remain for ethical or moral reasons (Ogunsola et al., 2020). Others may choose to stay for economic reasons such as ensuring they receive benefits such as their pension, because it becomes too costly to leave (Ogunsola et al., 2020). Consequently, staying under the conditions of burnout may not be better. Suppression of emotions can create interpersonal struggles, decrease job satisfaction, and deteriorate cognitive performance and memory (Chang, 2020; Menges et al., 2015). Decreased cognitive function experienced by teachers during lessons (Chang, 2020) may result in students not receiving the adequate support needed. Seeing as teachers are expected to be role models who guide students

through learning and instilling democratic values, it is necessary for teachers to be wholly present when working with students (Yilmaz et al., 2015).

Conclusion

A review of the literature highlights the emotional hardships that educators face as a part of their work life. Though the conversation regarding emotional intelligence is relatively new, an unexpected result of the COVID-19 pandemic is a greater emphasis on the need for emotional intelligence in the workplace (Kalita, 2022). While all jobs endure some form of emotional labor (Hochschild, 2012), the current research demonstrates the previously unseen nuances of emotional labor and health risks posed to teachers. Due to the time and amount of students teachers serve at once, the teaching profession is not comparable to other service professions (Chang, 2020; Ogunsola et al., 2022). The unique nature of the teaching profession is such that researchers should investigate the variety of stressors, and the emotions educators experience daily, as they are expected to remain positive and emotionally constant with students and families (Chang, 2020; Ogunsola et al., 2020; Wróbel, 2013; Ye & Chen, 2015).

Moreover, daily life requires us to surface and deep act in some capacity (Hochschild, 2012). However, when feelings become a resource and are exploited for the good of the organization, the use of feeling is morally concerning (Hochschild, 2012). Teachers' consistent use of emotional regulation strategies, such as surface and deep acting, can lead to exhaustion (Wróbel, 2013) and even burnout (Chang, 2020; Keller et al., 2014). When teachers suppress their emotions, the consequences can be detrimental to not just the teachers but the organization as well. Teachers may experience intrapersonal and interpersonal struggles, decreased job satisfaction, and even decreased cognitive functioning (Chang, 2020; Menges et al., 2015).

Memory and performance struggles experienced by teachers (Chang, 2020), may result in negative impacts to student learning (Steiner et al., 2022).

New research by Steiner et al. (2022) tells us that teachers and principals continue to struggle post pandemic. While this research uncovers issues exacerbated by the pandemic such as staffing shortages, compounded effects of students socioemotional well-being, and interrupted learning (Steiner et al., 2020), what we do not know is how teachers are currently defining emotional labor and how they are coping with the impacts of emotional labor in their personal and professional lives.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The caring nature of educators brings emotionality into the classroom, and the teaching profession is unique because of the types of sustained interactions educators have with their students (de Ruiter et al., 2021; Truta, 2014). Education leaders need to be emotionally intelligent and understand the interpersonal and intrapersonal impacts of emotional labor on the teachers they serve, as well as the indirect impacts on organizational outcomes, collegial and community relationships, and the overall culture of the organization (Kalita, 2022). This study drew upon Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Framework (2006) and Hochschild's definition of emotional labor (2012) as a lens to formulate research questions, collect, and analyze data.

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to understand how K -12 teachers define emotional labor and investigate the coping strategies teachers use to manage the emotional labor of the teaching profession. In addition, this study sought to explore how teachers' use of emotional regulation strategies affect teachers' personal and professional lives. I aimed to investigate teachers' definition and perceptions of the emotional labor they experience on a daily basis, as well as understand how they are coping with any emotional labor they face. One-on-one interviews with teachers allowed for their voices to be heard and provided participants with an opportunity to tell their own stories around what emotional labor means to them in the current context of the classroom.

This study used a qualitative phenomenological study to explore the proposed research questions. In particular, phenomenology is a qualitative type of research that allows researchers to explore participants' perceptions of a phenomenon (Fraenkel et al., 2012; Mertens, 2005). Strengths of qualitative research include a focus on situations and people with an emphasis on

participants' perspectives in a particular context (Lareau, 2021; Maxwell, 2013). Unlike quantitative research methods, which focus on numerical data, the underlying assumption of phenomenological research is that participants' will have different ways of interpreting the same experience, and using semi-structured one-on-one interviews led to richer and more detailed descriptions of a participants' experiences (Lareau, 2021; Mertler, 2021). Lastly, the qualitative design has an inherent openness that allowed for identifying unanticipated phenomena to explore new and unanticipated relationships (Lareau, 2021; Maxwell, 2013).

Research Questions

This study sought to investigate how teachers define emotional labor and understand how their perception around emotional labor in the profession influences how they cope with the stressors of teaching in their personal and professional lives.

The following research questions were used to guide the collection of qualitative data.

Research Questions:

1. How do teachers define emotional labor?
2. What emotional regulation strategies do teachers use to cope with the emotional labor of the teaching profession?
3. What are the impacts of emotional labor on teachers' personal and professional lives?

Setting and Context

For the purposes of this study, all participants were recruited from a single K-12 district in San Diego County. In an effort to preserve the anonymity of the participants, I have assigned the district in this study the pseudonym San Diego County School District. Participants have also been assigned pseudonyms and any identifying information has been generalized to further protect the anonymity of the participants. For example, I do not name specific health conditions

participants shared they have been diagnosed with, rather I speak about them in general terms, such as stating a participant reported struggling to cope with being diagnosed with an "auto-immune disorder" during the work day rather than explicitly name the disorder, so there are no identifiers reported.

The research questions guided the data collection around teachers' definition of emotional labor and how they cope with emotional labor by interviewing K-12 teachers with 10 - 20 years of teaching experience. Participants were recruited through the use of purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a method of recruiting participants for qualitative research that allowed me the discretion to select participants who possess the experience and information needed to address the research topic (Creswell, 2015). The purposeful selection of teachers between 10-20 years in their careers aimed to investigate how experienced teachers define emotional labor as they have become established in their careers. Moreover, teachers at this stage in their careers are generally expected to be informal or formal leaders on campus. Teachers at the midpoint of their careers are also expected to actively continue to attend professional developments and advance their theoretical knowledge of their practice, as they are not close to retirement.

Participant Selection

The criteria for the purposeful selection of 15 teachers included:

- 5 elementary school teachers, 5 middle school teachers, and 5 high school teachers
- Credentialed K-12 teachers within one public school district in San Diego County
- K-12 teachers with 10-20 years of teaching experience
- Teachers who are currently in the classroom and hold a full time contract

First, I specifically selected a public school district with the hope of interviewing credentialed teachers. The purpose for selecting a public school district was to ensure that all

teachers were certificated and held a California multiple subject or single subject credential, unlike charter school or private schools where teachers may not be required to have any teaching credentials, and in some cases may not hold any advanced degrees. Teachers who hold a teaching credential are trained in making pedagogically sound decisions for the students they serve and will have a foundational level of knowledge around teaching methods. The purposeful selection of a public K-12 district helped to ensure the stressors teachers' experiences were less likely to be a result of a lack of pre-service training.

Second, research highlights that 44% of teachers leave the profession during the first five years of their career (Ingersoll et al., 2018; UNESCO, 2023), for this reason teachers with 10-20 years of experience were selected, because they have made it past the initial stressors associated with learning the job and climate of teaching. During this point in teachers' careers, they are expected to still be engaged in professional development to further their practice and be informal or formal leaders on campus.

Lastly, the purposeful selection of teachers included teachers who held a full time contract in a K-12 public school. This criteria is an important distinction to make because teachers with part time or 6/5th's (overtime) teachers have a different workload, and may define, and experience emotional labor differently.

Participants were recruited through my professional network, as I have worked in K-12 education for 13 years. The purposeful selection of the research participants was done through snowball sampling. The purpose of using snowball sampling was to improve the possibility of building foundation rapport with interview participants through the word of mouth of other participants (Mertler, 2021), because I was not initially familiar with all sites or participants. Furthermore, I knew interviews around emotional labor may have potentially triggered

uncomfortable memories around traumatic experiences, and the discussion around coping strategies may be difficult for individuals who use negative or elicit coping strategies. For this reason, snowball sampling helped to quell initial concerns around confidentiality by having interview participants recommend a friend or colleague who met the criteria of the study. Participants of the study who met the criteria and completed the interview process, also expressed a willingness to participate in the study, because they trusted the person who recommended them for the study. This helped me, because when we began our interviews and I reviewed the consent form, participants' relationship with the others who recommended them allowed them to feel they could trust me as a researcher.

Data Collection

This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach and semi-structured interviews to help answer the research questions. Teachers who meet the criteria participated in a 1 - 1 ½ hour recorded video interview via Zoom. I chose to complete the interviews via Zoom, so I could record and transcribe the interview using the platform's embedded transcription tools. Secondly, I chose to complete my interviews via Zoom to provide the interview participants with the freedom to select a venue that is quiet and secure. Lastly, I selected Zoom interviews as the proposed platform to provide participants with more flexibility in selecting a time that works for their schedule and would eliminate the need to drive, thereby not adding any additional time to their participation.

The target participant saturation was 15 K-12 teachers, and research suggests this sample size is adequate to explore a qualitative phenomenon (Mertler, 2021). I chose semi-structured interviews because selecting a semi-structured interview protocol allowed me to ask follow up questions regarding interviewees' experiences with emotional labor that I may not have

considered in crafting the research questions (Lareau, 2021; Maxwell, 2013). In the context of a qualitative research design, participants are in essence considered subject matter experts (Lareau, 2021). Highlighting teachers as subject matter experts helped to paint a more complete narrative of the emotional labor faced by teachers in San Diego County Public School District.

Data Analysis

The goal of this study was to understand how teachers defined and coped with emotional labor; therefore, the collection and analysis of data called for a phenomenological approach. Analyzing qualitative data is a holistic process, as it attempts to factor in the data, setting, and any other information provided by the participants to make sense of the phenomenon under investigation (Mertler, 2021). Qualitative data analysis aims to identify patterns and themes into a framework to present key findings (Mertler, 2021). Accordingly, qualitative interviews allowed me the opportunity to capture richer data through interpersonal connection and follow up questions to support a more accurate analysis of key findings (Lareau, 2021; Mertler, 2021).

The strategies and techniques I use to make sense of the data and analyze the qualitative include:

- Transcription
- Coding
- Qualitative data software
- Analysis of themes

Because qualitative interviews can be rather lengthy, I may use the transcription feature within *Zoom* to accurately capture the data as presented by the interviewees. Using the transcription tool was also beneficial because it allows me to code the data collected in *Atlas.ti*. The purpose of coding is to identify words and phrases specific to the phenomenon being studied, and coding

can be done in various ways (Mertler, 2021). Due to the volume of data collected in lengthy semi-structured interviews, it was necessary to use the coding software, *Atlas.ti*, to identify frequently used words and help code the data. Once the data had been coded, I analyzed the themes to identify key findings. Participants of the study were sent the transcript of their interview, to clarify or correct any information that was not representative of their interview, a process known as member checking (Maxwell, 2013).

Issues of Validity, Reliability, Trustworthiness of Data

Issues of validity must always be assessed in relation to the purpose and circumstance of the research (Maxwell, 2013). As a researcher, I recognize that an important threat to validity is bias. Researcher bias considers the beliefs held by the researcher (Maxwell, 2013). As a result of my experiences with emotional labor, and after reviewing the literature, I hold a biased assumption that emotional labor does exist in the teaching profession. However, my role as a researcher, I did not assume that every single teacher in the profession experienced emotional labor. Therefore, was mindful of the types of questions I asked, and ensured questions were structured to engage teachers in sharing how they defined and experienced emotional labor. I example, I previously considered the following question: What types of emotional labor do you face being a teacher? However, upon reflection, I realized this question embeds a biased assumption that all teachers do face emotional labor within the profession. In an effort to address my biases, I reframed the question to investigate how teachers define emotional labor to understand their perceptions around what emotional labor means to them in the context of their teaching experience.

The second most important threat to validity is reactivity. Reactivity refers to the ways the researcher might influence the participant (Maxwell, 2013). I consider myself to be a social

and empathic person as a result of having a Bachelor's Degree in Social Science with an emphasis in Communication, and I am hyper aware of American conversational patterns and norms. For example, communication loops require feedback in a traditional Sender/Receiver Model. As a result of this formal education in Communication Studies, I am mindful of my verbal and non-verbal participation in conversation and work to make the others feel heard. Therefore, it was necessary for me to explain to my participants that I would not be engaging in traditional conversation patterns, because I was interested in their thoughts and wanted to hear them speak. I further explained I would hold a professional demeanor and give little to no verbal feedback in response to answers given. This was helpful to share upfront because many of my participants were recruited from my professional network and were familiar to me. Thus, I wanted to be sure my participants were clear that my verbal and non-verbal conversational patterns may be different than our social or professional interactions.

Finally, limits to generalizability are related to the participants and context. This study aimed to research K-12 teachers in one public school district in San Diego County. San Diego County is diverse and may not have the same demographics and culture as other sites in the United States. Additionally, another limit to generalizability includes the age group the teachers serve. This study sought to investigate the experiences of K-12 teachers, and will not be generalizable to higher education professors. Third, the study sought to include only full time, credentialed teachers, with 10-20 years of experience in a K-12 setting. Therefore, this research does not apply to educators in a charter school setting, because charter schools can have different requirements and may not require their teachers to hold a teaching credential. Teachers who work outside of a full time contract did not meet the requirements of the study, as their workload may have influenced how they defined emotional labor and to what degree they experienced

emotional labor. Though my study is not generalizable to other contexts, this study aimed to inform my work as an education leader, identify best practices for supporting administrators in understanding the need for emotional intelligent leadership to address emotional labor, and give teachers the language to identify what they are feeling so they can cope productively and minimize the negative impacts of emotional labor.

Positionality

Education is a very personal profession that brings up many emotions (Chang, 2020; Wróbel, 2013). Being emotionally intelligent as an education leader is necessary, because in many ways teaching is a labor of love. As a former classroom teacher, I have experienced many of the negative impacts that result from sustained suppression of my emotions. Specifically, I have felt the pressure to take on the emotional labor of the teaching profession as a professional expectation, and as a result, suffered greatly personally and professionally. Ultimately, I choose to leave the classroom to serve as a teacher leader within my district to have a reprieve from the daily stressors from being on a school site. With this research, I hoped to understand teachers' emotional experiences to create and implement systems that are responsive and alleviate the negative effects of emotional labor on teachers' personal and professional lives.

Limitations of the Study Design

Two limitations of this study were sample size and time. A smaller sample size allowed for more time with fewer participants, which rendered a rich data set. However, with more time a larger sample size would have been more feasible. With more time and participants, there may have been more opportunities to delve into emergent patterns around emotional labor.

Another limitation of this research is the location. This study was conducted in San Diego County, which is very socio-economically, socio-politically, and ethnically diverse. For this

reason, the findings may not be generalizable to other regions of California or the greater United States.

Chapter 4: Findings

This phenomenological study sought to understand how K-12 teachers define and experience the emotional labor of the teaching profession in their personal and professional lives. Fifteen individual interviews were conducted with five elementary school, five middle school, and 5 high school teachers to collect data around their emotional experiences and the impacts of the emotionality on the teacher. The research questions that guided the semi-structured interviews with participants were:

1. How do K-12 teachers define emotional labor?
2. What emotional regulation strategies do K-12 teachers use to cope with the emotional labor of the teaching profession?
3. What are the impacts of emotional labor on teachers' personal and professional lives?

Utilizing the lens of emotional labor, this qualitative study is grounded in Arlie Hochschild's framework to give context to how participants experience the stressors of the teaching profession and regulate their emotions as they teach and attempt to meet the needs of all students. The findings presented in this chapter are a result of coding and reflecting upon the emergent themes that arose from the 15 qualitative interviews conducted.

Overview of Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected in semi-structured qualitative interviews and recorded and transcribed via the Zoom application. Interviews averaged between one hour and one half hour. Interviews were coded using the coding software Atlas.ti. Once all interviews had been transcribed, I merged repetitive codes to highlight emerging themes. Using my reflective memos and my codes, I conducted a second round of coding to help organize themes into categories that helped answer the research questions using the stories of the participants. The quotes used are reflective

of the answers given by participants but have been edited for the purposes of clarity and anonymity. For example, I have removed linguistic fillers such as “like” and “umm” which were used to create nature pauses for think time and other specific examples that could have been used to identify the participants.

Participant Profiles

The participants in this study included 15 K-12 teachers across one suburban school district in San Diego, California. I used my professional networks to invite participants to the study. Initially, I sought out teachers with 10 - 20 years of teaching experience; however, I was struggling to recruit participants at the elementary and middle level, because my professional networks in these grade levels were not as established as they were with high school teachers. For this reason, I expanded my parameters around years of service to include interested teachers with 10+ years of experience in the teaching profession.

The table below provides a general overview of the participants’ grade level range and years of service as a teacher. Participants’ profiles are described in grade level groups, because their school contexts showed similar qualities and characteristics among the interviewees within elementary, middle, and high school teachers. This research sought to understand how K-12 teachers define and experience emotional labor. The themes that follow are applicable to all K-12 teachers. However, there were two sub-themes that was unique to grade levels. The first sub-theme is titled *The Emotional Labor of New and Inexperienced Administrators in High Schools*. The second sub-theme is titled *Elementary School Teachers and The Prolonged Use of Emotional Labor*.

Table 4.1 1 Participants' Current Grade Level and Years of Service

Teacher (pseudonym)	Current Grade Level Range	Years of Service
Evelyn	Elementary School	20
Claire	Elementary School	20
Natalie	Elementary School	28
Grace	Elementary School	23
Hannah	Elementary School	22
Alex	Middle School	16
Emily	Middle School	18
Sierra	Middle School	13
Avery	Middle School	20
Mia	Middle School	28
Olivia	High School	16
Jade	High School	18
Riley	High School	16
Vivian	High School	12
Brittney	High School	20

Elementary Participants

Five elementary school teachers were interviewed and represented a range of 20 years of service to 28 years of service in the classroom. Three of the elementary participants have spent all their years of service in K-6 classrooms, one participant taught middle school for a short period in their teaching career, and one participant taught high school for approximately half of their teaching career.

All elementary teachers described the importance of community building and strong teacher student relationships. The emotionality that elementary participants felt and engaged with

in their classroom is evident in the way they spoke about what makes a good teacher. One participant stated, “"I think a good teacher is someone who can first and foremost make a family in their class." Another participant shared, "For me a great teacher loves his or her students, and truly cares for their wellbeing as a whole person, and not just academically. They don't just see them as a number. A good teacher cares for them. Yes, they accomplish the academic goals, but they also know how they're feeling throughout the day." All participants spoke of their role as an elementary teacher with passion and felt that an integral part of teaching is caring for the whole child.

Middle Level Participants

Five middle school teachers were interviewed and represented a range of 13 years of service to 28 years of service in the classroom. Two of the middle level participants have spent all their years of service in middle level classrooms, two participants taught middle school and high school for a period in their teaching career, and one participant left the classroom for a short period of time to explore other roles in the education field, ultimately deciding that being a middle level classroom teachers was their calling.

Similar to the elementary teachers, the middle level teachers describe a good teacher as someone who supports the well-being of the whole child. One middle school teacher reflected on the multifaceted approach they took to their practice stating, “There's so many different layers to that. There's the human side of everything like rapport building. If my students come in smiling, and they can feel connected here, then they have purpose." The middle level participants described their students with an understanding of typical adolescent behaviors. Middle levels teachers also had an appreciation for middle school students’ humor, and they spoke about the levity and reprieve students’ humor brought to difficult moments experienced within the teaching

day. When describing the emotional regulation strategies needed to cope with a bad day, one middle level teacher laughed as they said, “But typically it usually wears off because someone will do something cute and make me laugh.” This sentiment was reflected in many of the middle school teachers’ interviews, highlighting how the emotional struggles teachers experienced throughout the teaching day were often quelled by humorous moments with students. This showcased the nature of teacher student relationship, and the importance of connection not only for the student, but also for the teacher's emotional well-being.

High School Participants

Five high school teachers were interviewed and represented a range of 12 years of service to 20 years of service in the classroom. All of the high school teachers have spent their years of service in high schools and have not taught other grade levels. Two of the participants interviewed reported that teaching is their second career, while the other three high school teachers have spent their careers as classroom teachers.

The high school teacher participants described their views of being a good teacher by starting their commentary with the joys of working with kids. Teachers describe the importance of having connections with all students and leading with compassion to build safe classroom communities that support students both academically and personally. Compared to the elementary and middle level teachers, the high school teachers coupled their views on caring for the whole child with a need to balance rigor. One teacher shared, “I think the most important thing in being a good teacher is having a connection with kids, a certain amount of comfort. I think that kids learn best when they have a teacher they trust; when they have a teacher they know is there to help them and support them.” Accordingly, another teacher expressed, “... a good teacher pays attention to what the kids need. I think being organized can be a part of it. I

think you have to know your destination, and really good teachers are clear about the steps that they're going to have to take to help you get there." Teachers' dedication to their students' overall well-being was evident; however, at the high school level, teachers discussed personal care as an entry point to the curriculum.

Themes

This study explored K-12 teachers' definitions of emotional labor in the teaching profession, and aimed to understand what coping strategies teachers are engaging in to cope with the stressors they experience in the profession. Additionally, this study sought to investigate the impacts of emotional labor on teachers' professional and personal lives. My research questions focused on an understanding of teachers' lived experiences with emotional labor and attempted to name the emotional experiences tied to the role of "teacher" in K-12 schools and authentically elevate the humanity of the educators interviewed for this study. In response to the research questions the following themes emerged:

RQ1: How do K-12 teachers define emotional labor?

Participants defined emotional labor as: teaching as a primary part of one's identity, the emotional labor of finding a work-life balance, the emotional labor of caring for the whole child, the impact of COVID-19 on developmental milestones, the emotional labor of difficult colleagues and administrators, the emotional labor of posed by new and experienced administrators, and the emotional labor of feeling devalued as a professional.

RQ2: What emotional regulation strategies do K-12 teachers use to cope with the emotional labor of the teaching profession?

The following themes arose: authentically felt emotions and humor with students, surface acting, deep acting, the role of significant others and families in coping, and the role of trusted colleagues in coping.

RQ3: What are the impacts of emotional labor on teachers' personal and professional lives?

Themes that were revealed as a response to the third research question were: secondary impacts to teachers' mental and physical health and impacts to organizational commitment and students.

Teaching as a Primary Part of One's Identity

This theme explored participants' expectations of themselves as teachers, the struggle to balance their work ethic, and personal lives. Participants described how their work ethic influenced the ways in which they acted out the role of "teacher," and the struggles they faced holding high expectations of themselves. All participants expressed a love for their job and the students they serve. Notably, participants acknowledged the reasons why teaching became a primary part of their identity. For some participants the role of teacher as a primary part of their identity seemed to be an element of the teaching profession teachers felt they needed to embody to do their jobs well, but the degree to which they embraced teaching as a primary part of their identity varied. For some participants, teaching as a primary part of their identity was something they not only recognized but also leaned into. For example, Natalie described constantly preparing for her teaching practice when she discussed her experience:

> My life is teaching. I don't know a personal life. I mean honestly, we're in July. We have been off of school for almost a month, and I have been into my new classroom once already. I've been shopping at Target and getting new things for my classroom. I've been on Amazon ordering pillows for my calming corner. Teaching is me. I think I'm retiring in 10 years. What the heck am I gonna do? I'm curious to know what teachers do after teaching, because I feel like I've been doing this ever since I was 18.

Similarly, Avery spoke of the identity conflict she feels around being her own person and a teacher. She stated, “It can be hard to separate. I feel like I am a teacher first sometimes and me second.” Despite this struggle to balance her work and professional life, Avery reported feeling as though she found her niche as a middle level teacher and spoke of her love for students.

On the other hand many participants described being unable to leave their role as a teacher at the school gates. Evelyn described the struggle of not being able to compartmentalize her work life stating, “I cannot just come home and not think about it. I have expectations of myself, and my students have needs.” Evelyn’s comments reflect her commitment to her work and dedication to meeting students' needs. Claire echoed a similar sentiment of feeling overwhelmed, while also acknowledging her expectations of herself might be unrealistic, “How is everything going to get done that needs to get done? Don’t get me wrong, I don’t think it has to be as hard as I make it.” Claire understood she may be doing more than expected but simultaneously discussed feeling pressured to keep up this work ethic to meet the demands of the profession.

For others, separating their personal and professional lives seemed important to them, but they struggled to do so. For example, Emily reported trying to create a greater work life balance, but felt as though teaching was a part of her identity that people outside of education wanted to discuss:

> I really try hard to leave it at the door, but it's also a topic of conversation. I feel like people always want to know what's happening in education…I feel like everybody is still caught up with what's happening since COVID. It’s like, ‘what have you had to deal with?’, and ‘I've heard it’s so different.’ A lot of people outside of education want to talk about education.

Some teachers expressed a desire for greater work-life balance, while others described feeling like teaching as a primary part of their identity gave them a sense of agency in making a

difference locally and globally. Sierra enthusiastically declared, “I have just been go, go, go doing a million things, because I'm interested in so many different things. I want to do it. Make a difference. I want to have a voice.” Mia also argued her role as a teacher gave her a sense of empowerment asserting:

> I think it affects me positively, because it makes me feel like this is really what I should be doing in our crazy world with all of our divisiveness. I feel like I'm teaching students to talk and to disagree. That's okay, and we can still be friends. I feel like on the larger scale of being a global citizen, I'm teaching the students how to find their authentic voice in themselves to share with the world. So yes, it does affect my life, because I do think about my job at home all the time.

Despite teachers feeling empowered by their role as a teacher, they articulated their want to do the best they can for students and themselves. Their strong work ethic kept them engaged in constant reflection on how to be a better teacher and how to best meet the needs of all students.

The Emotional Labor of Finding a Work-Life Balance

Along with the awareness that teaching is a primary part of one’s identity, participants lamented the struggle with finding an adequate work life balance. Participants expressed feeling exhausted from being “on” all day to care for students' academic and socio-emotional needs and struggling to transition to their personal lives. Evelyn explained the difficulties associated with switching from the role of teacher to the role of mom stating:

> I have teenagers at home right now, when I leave work, I'm driving. I'm driving my kids around picking up dinner, and it's not until I come home and sit down for dinner that I start to decompress a little bit. So during that time, when I'm driving, I'm still on the go. I feel like I'm still on. Teachers call this being on stage. You always kind of have to perform, so in the classroom you're on the entire day, right? When I leave work, I'm not necessarily in front of the classroom, but I'm still “on” as a mom. Then, I switch to the mom role, and I have responsibilities.

Likewise, Alex mentioned the struggle to “turn off” issues experienced during the workday and be present for his family. He reflected on the sadness of this struggle as he shared:

> There have been some times when I wasn't able to process everything at the end of the day with a challenging student, a difficult decision, or being told to do something that I don't agree with. And being so frustrated with that when I have to leave, I take it out at home.

In addition to Alex's reflections about taking his stressors home, Sierra also mentioned a similar experience of struggling to be fully present with her family during the school year. Sierra smiled as she said, "My husband always jokes that his summer wife comes home."

Participants disclosed they often took the emotional labor of the workday home, but others acknowledged carrying their personal lives into the classroom as well. Emily discussed how a teacher's personal struggles can also be brought into the classroom and become a barrier to finding a work-life balance. Emily stated:

> A bad day in teaching is often like something else is happening in your life. You're going to be super sensitive, whether it be that you are majorly hormonal right now, or that something major happened in your life and you can't let go of that once you reach the classroom. I think it's a profession where you have to turn everything off, and it's really hard to turn off everything sometimes when you step in that classroom. So those little things that might not bother you on a more chill day or a better day will bother you.

The struggle to compartmentalize the work day was not always related to family matters. Participants' work ethic continued to be a theme around why they struggled to find a work-life balance. Jade articulated how her desire to be a better teacher impeded her ability to not think about the classroom at home and impacted her emotionality after hours. She stated, "You can't turn off the day, right? You're still thinking about whether it went well. How can I do better? How can I do more with less? Whatever it might be, you bring the emotion home."

While compartmentalizing work and home seemed to be a struggle for all participants, various stages in teachers' personal lives made the struggle to find a work-life balance feel both more manageable, and at times, more difficult. Claire, now a veteran teacher, reflected on being

newlywed with a husband in grad school, having few other responsibilities, and how that has framed how she thinks about her approach to a work-life balance saying:

> It was a joke to myself that teaching was my hobby. My husband was in grad school, and we didn't even have a pet. It was like what else did I have to do. I'd get things ready for my classroom and do those things. And now, I enjoy the 'doing things'. I enjoy when I get prepared over the weekend. My week goes more smoothly, but that means there is time on the weekend that is spent getting ready.

While Claire spoke of being a new teacher with few responsibilities, Olivia explained the struggle of needing to be emotionally available to her own children and her students. Olivia grappled with her desire to be a great mother and teacher as she stated:

> I'm a single mom. I have two little kids, and I work full time. You know I have hundreds of students at once. For me, it's just constantly having to manage my own emotions, so that I can support others and in dealing with their emotions. And it's just taking on so much sometimes. I definitely hit points where I have to take days off. I just need a day of nothing or not hearing about anything… I think about my own children. They haven't seen me all day. Then, I have this guilt. I'm finally with my kids, but I am emotionally drained and overwhelmed. Then, I have to carry this emotional labor. Am I being a good mom? Am I spending too much time investing in my students and not my own kids? That to me is emotional labor.

With becoming an empty nester just around the corner, Riley described a different experience than Olivia:

> I think I'm at a good point of balance in my career and personal life right now. There are other factors involved in that. We became empty nesters. Instead of having three small children and working full time, and being a newer teacher, it became two children who moved out, and now it's just one left at home. Some of that had to do with my time being freed up, because I have fewer children at home and also growing in my career. I think time and age helps you learn what you should really sweat and what you shouldn't.

Still for some, the harsh realities of life would force a teacher to have to take time away from the classroom to care for themselves or their families. However, having the ability to take leave did not result in the ability to completely check out of the classroom. Alex conveyed he felt guilty taking time off to care for his wife when she was diagnosed with cancer confessing, "I felt

guilty that I had to take the time. I had to double check that it was not going to impact my years of service." He understood the high level of care that his wife needed during this difficult period, yet he could not shake the guilt that he was not working. Moreover, Alex additionally stressed that any time he took off of work could impact his years of service, which would impact his pay. What is important to understand about Alex's anecdote is that even when teachers can take time off to care for themselves or their loved ones, they simultaneously feel pressure to balance their professional responsibilities.

While balancing work and family life was a struggle for many participants, some of the emotional labor teachers reported feeling it was due to the structure of the workday. Vivian asserted, "This bell schedule change has been the biggest impact recently. I feel the ability to be a person, and I love the morning bit, because it works for me. But I don't get home until five or six. It's really rough for me." For Vivian, the structure of the workday left her feeling as though she did not have enough time at the end of the day to deal with her own life. As Vivian continued to process how she defined emotional labor, she elaborated:

> When we talk about teacher emotional labor, I think that people forget we're human beings. I have things going on, I mean right now. I have been open with my principal about the stuff that's going on in my life right now, but I shouldn't have to tell you the whole story of my life falling apart for you to hear me when I say, 'I can't do this today.'

Teachers' anxiety about wanting to care for their students and their own families became resoundingly clear through these qualitative interviews conducted in this study. Participants' love and dedication to being a teacher did often create a struggle for them to find a work-life balance. Teaching is a highly relational profession, and the relationships teachers built with students were grounded in genuine care for the whole child. This led to emotional labor, because the emotions

participants experience as a part of their humanity do not turn off when they transition between work and home.

The Emotional Labor of Caring for the Whole Child

Alongside teachers' own work ethic, their love for the classroom and the students they serve adds an additional layer of emotional labor. Teachers report seeing their students as their own children, thus wanting to provide loving and safe environments where students feel connected to the teacher and their classmates. Teachers' love for their students combined with the desire to provide emotional support for students, inherently means that teachers carry that love and concern outside of the school day, which adds to the emotional labor they experience as a part of the profession. Evelyn reflected on her definition of emotional labor when explaining that her students become akin to her own children:

> Teaching is not just what you're teaching, and it's all built on those relationships. Honestly, emotional labor is kind of like when I wake up, and I'm thinking about how is that kid that I haven't had in 4 years. These kids are my kids, and they'll be my kids, regardless of the ones that are graduating this year.

Many of the participants alluded to feeling pressured by society to meet the academic needs of students; however, they voiced their primary concern was caring for students' overall wellbeing. Most especially, participants reported feeling stressed about students whom they felt may not have their basic needs met outside of the school day. Like Evelyn, Natalie expressed a similar motherly sentiment saying, "They're your kids. And so it's hard, because not all of them are coming from that wonderful family life that you would want them to have." Grace candidly shared her understanding around the emotional labor of caring for the whole child when discussing her concerns over the lack of resources students may lose access to when they are not in the care of the school system:

> When I think of emotional labor, I think of how much baggage do I take home? I take home a lot more of that, because I know that they're not getting their needs met at home. These are kids that aren't living in a good space, you know. Are they better off at home, or better off at school for 12 hour days in ESS open to close? Having breakfast at school, and during vacations, they probably are missing food. So you think about these kids with that type of emotional energy is what I'm thinking of.

Having the knowledge that not all students have great home lives put pressure on teachers to ensure that they created safe spaces in their classrooms for students to experience joy in their day. Avery affirmed that a level of emotional labor comes from the experience of knowing students been through difficult situations while under her care. She illustrated this by stating, "I've had enough CPS reports to know that I don't know what they go home to sometimes, and so it's just like, I just don't want it to be a bad day for them." While Avery commented about knowing her students are struggling by notifications from formal processes like Child Protective Services, Evelyn noted that a spontaneous conversation could illuminate students' needs and spark a desire in teachers to go above and beyond to meet the needs of students. She discussed the culture of community in her classroom as she mentioned feeling the need to make a student feel celebrated on his birthday:

> For every student we sing them happy birthday. They get a pencil and a sticker, and for this little guy in particular, I did bring him cupcakes. I don't typically do that, but we had asked him what his parents were going to do, how he was gonna celebrate. He said that he really wanted a party, but his parents were too busy to give him a party. They have a brand new baby at home, and he has other siblings…typically the parents bring in cupcakes or something. They share a treat with the class, and that's how we celebrate. So I didn't really see that happening, because of just how busy the parents were. So yesterday, when they got those, that was fun. He was excited about that. It also brought him a present, too.

Participants acknowledged that their ideas of a good teacher include going outside of the scope of their contractual obligations to feel successful as a teacher. Riley communicated her vision of being a good teacher when she stated:

> If you've done this right, I mean you're a social worker. You are a therapist for some of these kids. I don't give therapy out, but I mean, you're a listening board for some of these kids about their problems. You have to get something done, but if a kid comes in with an emotional issue you have to put that aside and talk to them.

Participants shared that caring for the mental health of students has become a part of the job, and clearly weighs on teachers far beyond the years they have students in their classroom. As previously stated, teachers report feeling so close to the students they serve, they come to eventually see them as family. Unfortunately, the emotional labor of continuing to hold space for students beyond the year they are with their teacher led to intense feelings of sadness when they received sad news about their former students:

> I've cried over students. I've had students with suicidal ideations. I feel like I could tell them all day long. You need to be here. We enjoy having you here. The world will not be the same without you here, but there's only so much you can do. Last year, a student I had three years ago killed herself, and they took us all that had had her into the room and told us so that we could process it before teaching. You have kids that you can't reach. That's just so hard.

As participants shared these intense emotions, the struggle to balance work and family resurfaced for some. Participants acknowledged a need to build rapport with students and be emotionally available to them in times of crisis, and they explicitly cited this struggle as an element of emotional labor in the profession.

Being emotionally and physically present for all students' needs was not void of concern that the participants were primarily giving their energy to their students, and participants feared they may not be enough for their own children. Olivia reflected upon this as she shared the complexities of trying to be a good teacher and a good mother saying:

> I've had a lot of students talk to me about their mental health issues or traumatic things they've experienced. I've had kids open up and share things with me. I'm there to support them, and to listen, and to do what I can for them, but sometimes, after a while, I'm like, 'Oh, my gosh! I'm carrying all of these stories and the weight of all these stories.' Then, I have to go home and be a chipper, happy, fun mom for my kids.

While Olivia discussed the hardships of being a mother with young children, Evelyn looked back on her journey as a parent of older children. Evelyn's children are now teenagers and as she spoke she processed the guilt she feels around prioritizing her identity as a teacher, describing how she has made changes in her practice to be more present with her own children:

> When I first started teaching, my son was in second grade, and he would spend all afternoon in my classroom. Looking back, I wish I hadn't spent so many hours there. I wish I had taken him to the park more and played with him more. Now he's 17, and time just goes by so fast, and I do feel looking back, why did I stay there so long like? I know that I was getting work done. I wasn't just there for the sake of being there, but at the same time, I feel like I could have spent more quality time with the kids when they were younger. So now I don't stay there late unless I really, really have to. I do bring work home, but at least I'm home with them, so it doesn't feel so bad.

It is clear from the responses of participants that the level of care they exhibited for students blurred the lines for them in finding a work-life balance, because many teachers see the students they serve as their own. Thus, despite wanting a work-life balance, teachers cannot separate their work-life from their personal life, because they are personally and emotionally invested in their students.

The Impact of COVID-19 on Students Developmental Milestones

As participants reflected on the emotional labor of caring for the whole child, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' developmental milestones emerged as a sub-theme. All K-12 participants voiced some level of concern for the behavioral needs of students following the pandemic. Participants considered how the stay at home order kept students from engaging in social activities with peers that help them learn interpersonal communication skills. Now, three years after students returned from the pandemic, participants report concerns over students' lack of social skills and the rise in behavioral needs. Claire affirmed this when saying, "Along with

the educational needs of the kids, there are behavioral needs, and that is something that has just exponentially gone up since COVID."

Students' lack of social skills added a new stressor for teachers in caring for the whole child. As an elementary level teacher, Evelyn remarked that schools continue to deal with and discuss the impacts of COVID sharing:

> We talk about COVID a lot, because the kids we have right now we're little babies, you know, toddlers. They perhaps didn't have the typical toddler experience as far as going to the park or going to daycare and learning those social skills that are so key. I think we're seeing the effects in schools for sure.

Middle level teacher, Emily, along with the community, and her colleagues worried about the loss of learning during distance learning. She was relieved when the stay at home orders were lifted and felt that returning to the classroom would be beneficial to students. However, as time went on she felt that the loss of learning was the main focus of many people, but students' social skills were also not fostered resulting in students lacking social awareness. Emily described this with the following. "They're not picking up on nuances or jokes, and they're in sixth grade… And the way that they communicate is weird. They just need some social skills, even blowing their nose." Likewise, Brittney observed experiencing the lack of social awareness at the high school level resulting in an increase in bullying among her students. She added:

> I would say the kids have gotten meaner to each other in this post COVID phase. They don't totally understand how to operate with respect and kindness towards each other. I have freshmen right now, and the sort of bullying that they do to each other is frustrating. I wouldn't say, that's what pushes me to my edge. It's sort of like, I guess we have to have another conversation about working with kindness, and we don't have to be friends with everyone, but we do need to be respectful of everyone. And, you know, we do need to know how to work with all different types of people.

Jade highlighted how students' lack of interpersonal skills affected how they interacted with their teachers. Along with the peer to peer struggles, Jade reported feeling distance learning impacted teacher-student relationships negatively asserting:

> It's been a real difference since COVID on the positive aspects, and I think it just comes out of virtual learning. Kids didn't really learn certain skills. They didn't learn how to approach teachers. They didn't learn how to walk into a room when you're teaching and they are talking. They don't know how to not disrupt. It's been really interesting.

In synthesizing participants' reflections around the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the emotional labor of the classroom, all K-12 participants described observable differences in students' behavior. Participants spoke of students' lacking social skills and procedural skills adding time to lessons taught, because they had to stop and do more explicit modeling of skills students would have traditionally learned in previous grade levels. This added an additional layer of emotional labor to care for the whole child, because the time needed to care for students' social emotional needs took time away from the academic care they provided to students.

The Emotional Labor of Difficult Colleagues and Administrators

The emotionality of the teaching profession is not limited to the interpersonal nature of the teacher-student relationship. The emotions experienced during the workday can range from extremely positive to extremely negative, and teachers often share these experiences with trusted colleagues. Thus, the need to build community with colleagues becomes an essential part of surviving the profession. On the other hand, when teachers struggle to build trust among colleagues it can heighten the emotional labor they feel to an even greater level, because they lack a safe space to process through negative emotions. Emily pointed out that the emotional labor of the profession includes interpersonal relationships and the nature of collaboration among colleagues:

> Even colleagues are emotional, you know, because things get crazy. Things could be weird between colleagues, and that creates an emotional place to work. If you're not getting along with your colleagues, or if nobody will share their materials it is weird.

Like Emily, Hannah spoke of wanting safety among colleagues, but emphasized that "working with different types of personalities on a team could be more emotional labor." Moreover, the dynamic within teams left some participants feeling out of loop. Grace highlighted the team dynamic left her feeling as though she and her students were impacted by the friendship among two of her close colleagues, stating:

> There are three grade level classes. Two's company and three's a crowd. My teammates share a door. It's going to happen, them getting close. I get it, but it makes for a long year of my class being the one that has to get split in half for the bus ride, or my class being the one that has to get split at promotion. It becomes students one through 15 are over here, and 16 through 20 are over there. I'm done being the one that has to be split. And you guys have matching sweaters, I mean, how old are we? 'On Wednesdays we wear pink', come on, really? So it's a little old.

Grace's commentary reflects more than just her concern for her students. Her comments showcase that teachers' need to feel a sense of belonging in the workplace and when they do not have those bonds, it can build resentment within a team. The need for belonging can motivate teachers to find community outside of their grade level or content area teams to avoid feelings of isolation. Natalie conveyed the need for belonging, as well as the year long struggle of having to process through her feelings of isolation and the emotional work of being introspective to find ways to cope.

> You need that community of your own team or your own people, and I don't see my friends that are at different grade levels very often. You're with your team, so if you don't have a great, strong friendship with your team, it makes it really hard. You are very isolated, and that's how it was last year. It was that isolation as a teacher, and figuring those types of things out, that took a lot of internalizing and thinking, 'Okay, what is it that I need? And what is it that is causing this and those types of things with my students?'

Interestingly, like Grace, Natalie also mentioned feeling as though the lack of community on her grade level team had an impact on her students. Because teachers work to care for the whole child, feelings of isolation led participants to be attuned to how their students were also

impacted by the lack of community among colleagues, and therefore, not receiving an equitable experience.

Feelings of isolation from participants were exacerbated by a general sense that education seemed to have a culture of negativity. While some participants may have been actively included, they reported feeling emotionally disconnected from colleagues if they did not participate in the culture of negativity. This brought them back to feelings of isolation. Emily shared that while teachers may have trusted colleagues to turn to in difficult moments, she felt unheard in celebratory moments, leaving her feeling isolated from their colleagues:

> I think that there is a culture of complaining, and that is so hard right now. I think other teachers, when you say something went well, they are not always happy for you. I think there's so much negativity with teaching right now, and when you complain everybody's there. But if you're like, I had a really great lesson, nobody says that's awesome, you know. I mean, maybe they say that, but it's a fleeting moment and then they keep complaining about whatever else is happening in the teaching world.

For some participants, this caused them to retreat into their classrooms and not engage with their colleagues as a way to protect themselves and avoid participating in the culture of negativity they experienced. Avery stated, “I'm not saying that my team does that all the time, but I just don't get involved. Everybody's very opinionated, and our school is going through a lot right now, so I just kind of stay tucked away and stay quiet.” For some, avoidance was a coping mechanism that helped them mitigate the impacts of emotional labor. Olivia made clear the complexities of interpersonal conflict among colleagues, and why avoidance is a coping mechanism for some teachers. She introspectively reflected the following thoughts:

> I'm very conflict avoidant. Generally if I have an issue with another teacher in my department, I usually don't say anything. I'II just keep it in, and then it kind of builds up some resentment. Usually I'II talk to my teacher friends about what's going on. Usually I just talk it out with someone else, and once I talk about all those bad feelings, you get it out. Then I feel better. I'm still not addressing the main issue, that issue still stays there. but I just feel better in the moment.

Olivia's comments again reinforced the idea that trusted colleagues are necessary for teachers to cope with the emotional labor of the teaching profession even as challenging relationships with colleagues can exacerbate it. She, like so many other participants, conveyed that a climate of disunion among colleagues led to underlined resentment, which in some cases, included impacts to students as well as teachers.

The Emotional Labor of New and Inexperienced Administrators in High Schools

High school teachers reported experiencing an added layer of emotional labor around new administrators. Many of the high school teachers interviewed had experienced recent changes in administration. Riley reiterated the struggle of trying to stay out of the culture of negativity among teachers but felt like she understood where many of her colleagues were coming from when the new administration lacked experience. Riley stated:

> Everybody's understanding is they don't have a lot of experience teaching, so we feel very disconnected. I've always tried in this career to not be an us versus them mentality, admin versus teachers, and some people keep bringing it back to that, but it is true. I think they have good intentions, at least most of the administrators have good intentions, but I don't think they know what to do. They don't have the experience.

Jade described wanting new administrators to build rapport with teachers prior to making sweeping changes to the school community:

> When new people come in and they suddenly decide, instead of getting the lay of the land first, they wanna change everything. You're like, 'Hey! I don't know, maybe figure out who we are first, get to know our personality.' We're willing to walk to the ends of the earth for you if we know who you are and what your intent is.

Jade's call for connection with administrators highlighted something important. Participants wanted to be loyal to their site and hard work for administrators, but they expressed a need to feel that administrators have teachers' best interest at heart. When participants did not feel seen and understood by their administrators, this led to emotional labor for participants.

Teachers are often fueled by intrinsic motivation, so administrators have the opportunity to leverage this motivation to meet the goals of the school site. Yet participants shared the key component that was missing were relationships between teachers and administrators.

Olivia further argued that administrators need to get to know the teachers they serve on deeper levels and operate from a place of mutual respect. She highlighted the hardships administrators' face, while simultaneously expressing a need to feel seen and valued as a professional and an individual:

> We have a relatively new administration right now, and there's a huge disconnect between staff and admin. Part of it is just not really knowing each other. I know that we're down an administrator, but just get to know the teachers, be in and out of classrooms, and get to know their personal lives. I think that having those kinds of relationships builds camaraderie and respect. I think sometimes there's this disconnect between the entire staff being disgruntled and grumpy, and admin. Seems to have absolutely no idea about that. That's kind of a problem, and the administration should recognize our stock is very negative right now.

Participants indicated that having a relationship with teachers would help teachers feel seen and help administrators know how to care for teachers. Knowing that teachers' work ethic in a sense forces them to go above and beyond for students, teachers most especially struggled when having issues in their personal life. Participants lamented that not having a relationship with their administrators was problematic during these periods of personal turmoil, because administrators did not know teachers were struggling. As a result, administrators were not attuned to teachers' needs, and in one specific case, Vivian's administrators did not listen to her when she said no to helping the administrative team with a presentation. Vivian emphatically expressed a deep disappointment with one administrator who did not hear her when she declined an opportunity to be a teacher leader. She angrily recalled a difficult moment in her career that left her feeling like she needed to share personal details of her life to be taken seriously. She stated the following:

> My life had fallen apart five days before. I was wearing pajama pants, and I went in and cried before the meeting. You didn't know, because you did not listen. Listen to me say no, and I shouldn't have to, I couldn’t explain it at the moment. You should have just taken my note, because as somebody that does almost everything, if I say no there's a reason.

As Vivian retold the story she seemed more than angry. She was deeply wounded by this experience. Vivian, an influential and strong teacher leader, is representative of many teachers with similar stories.

Adding to the emotionally laborious struggle to find a work-life balance, participants' emotional labor was exponentially compounded when administrators who had the power to see and support them did not know them well enough to have insight into their personal lives. Teachers' love of the classroom kept them torn between work and home. Participants felt having a relationship with their administrative team would allow administrators to deduce when teachers were “off” and needed tangible solutions to decrease the emotional labor they are experiencing during personally difficult times. Teachers' commitment to their classrooms never emotionally wavered, but the lack of support they felt during this time left them feeling resentful of their administrative team.

The Emotional Labor of Feeling Devalued as a Professional

Unfortunately, as participants struggled with the emotional labor of the teaching profession, they also felt the additional weight of societal views of the profession. Research correspondingly supports the notion that a person's professional identity is co-created by how society views the profession (Fitzgerald, 2020). For participants, the acute awareness that teaching continues to be a part of a politicized national conversation in the United States left them feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, and devalued as a professional. Avery shared the following:

> Education has been unchanged for so long, and now we've got the whole don't indoctrinate our kids kind of thing, and teachers are kind of vilified. Then during COVID they were calling us heroes, saying ‘we don't know how you do this,’ and now we're back, and it seems like everything that's wrong is our fault. And ‘how come you can't control these kids?’ And I mean, is it just…

Jade also acknowledged how changes in education made the professional feel transactional rather than transformational. The transactional nature she described was akin to a career in hospitality where the “customer is always right”. She highlighted an air of entitlement in which students and parents felt they had a right to demand service and felt free to question her teaching practices. She highlighted her disappointment in how she felt the profession has changed by stating:

> I feel less like a teacher now, and I feel more like a manager, like customer service. I feel like it's a little bit more of a ‘How can I help you today?’ mentality. And they're coming to me asking for that help, or demanding the help more like it, and ‘Show me this!’, or ‘Why are we doing this in the room?’ Or ‘I looked up this one thing, and I wanna know what's happening!’ And I'm like, you're not assuming good intentions or looking at the whole picture.

Specifically, parent complaints added a heavy burden to participants. Participants described feeling imposter syndrome, and at times, questioned their own judgment when parents brought concerns to teachers and administrators. In Olivia’s case, a prolonged issue with one family's concern added stress to her for an extended period of time. Olivia, a generally positive person who loves teaching, revealed how the biggest parent complaint she ever faced made her doubt herself:

> It was very drawn out. It wasn't dealt with quickly. There wasn't a solution quickly, so it was a month and a half long thing and that really, really impacted me. I went through these feelings of am I a bad teacher? Did I do something wrong? These parents seem to really dislike me, and how could I have avoided this? So that was hard. But again, that was probably the biggest parent issue I've ever had.

For participants like Olivia, these moments were exceptionally difficult. The acknowledgement there was no simple solution was not enough to alleviate her stressors. Brittney also disclosed a vulnerable truth sharing how her people pleasing tendencies impacted how she processed

through these difficult moments. Brittney asserted, “As teachers, we still sort of have a desire to make everyone happy. We want to make everyone proud.” Participants reported working very hard for everyone they serve and felt emotionally dysregulated when their efforts were misunderstood or questioned.

Due to the clash between how teachers saw themselves as professionals and the culture of negative societal views towards teachers, participants felt emotionally drained by the lack of respect for their efforts. Riley disclosed the tension she felt between empty compliments and the reality behind the treatment of teachers. Riley reflected on these contrasting sentiments when she shared the following:

> We love our teachers. We care about our teachers. But then, day to day, are you really showing that you care about teachers, and you think that they're so valuable and important? Why didn't you come to me when you had an issue instead of going to my boss first? Why do you say teachers are overpaid, because they get their summers off? Why do you make demands of teachers on a day to day basis? It's really easy to make these broad statements, but when you're specifically dealing with teachers, are you respecting them? Do you care about them? Do you think that it's a great profession? Do you love your teachers?

Sadly, the general sense of feeling devalued by society made some participants feel tragically dehumanized. This was exceptionally evident when Jade reflected on her feelings surrounding the potential of her own death. She cited feeling demoralized by the profession when she said:

> You could die tomorrow, and they would just have a new person in your seat, and they wouldn't even think about it, right? They just have to fill that job. So what is it that you're getting out of it to make it feel like you're not just that like cog in the wheel, right? And that way you can survive a little bit better.

Jade’s comment is exceedingly troubling and vividly showcases how the emotional labor of the profession has taken a remarkable toll on some participants. Feeling devalued as a professional made an already difficult and emotionally laborious profession feel disempowering, and for some, inhumane.

Common Coping Strategies Used to Mitigate Negative Emotions

Authentically Felt Emotions and Humor with Students

Participants reported experiencing positive and negative emotions throughout the school day. However, when participants were asked about how often they could express their authentically felt emotions, they shared that positive emotions were far more likely to be expressed authentically with all stakeholders. Authentically felt positive emotions were displayed through formal and informal celebrations with students, colleagues, the families they served, as well as participants' own family members. Positively felt emotions were easy for participants to authentically share with others, because they evoked many levels of joy and happiness. Participants were far less likely to temper or hide positive emotions. Interestingly, humor was regularly cited by participants as something that helped them experience positivity in the profession. For example, when Brittney was asked how often she experiences positive emotions during the workday, she correlated humor with her love for the profession. She explained:

> I love my job. I would say at least every class period there's some sort of positive emotion that happens. For example, pride, like ‘Oh, wow! That kid!’ or ‘Oh, my God! They did their homework today!’ Or ‘They're getting it!’, this is so good, or this kid finally participated. Or just like, oh, this kid's really funny, you know, so laughter. Humor.

While Brittney highlighted the frequency that humor adds positivity to her day, notably, humor also helped participants cope with negative emotions. Humorous moments with students helped them redirect any feelings of negativity in the moment. When asked about how she copes with negativity during the work day, Mia noted the following:

> I'll take a minute myself, and I'll just say to the students, ‘Okay, you guys are going to work on your own for a minute.’ I'll set a five minute timer, and then they'll work. But typically it usually wears off because someone will do something cute and make me laugh or make me smile, or make me know that I'm in the right place.

Riley also relayed a genuine love for her job and acknowledged that her students' humor helped offset the frustrations of her day. She voiced the following, “I love working with the kids. Even when they're driving me crazy like today, my second period drove me nuts, but it was hilarious, and we were all laughing about it.”

Humor helped teachers reconnect with their love of the profession in difficult moments. The levity of these humorous moments helped teachers not only experience the joys of connecting with students, but unbeknownst to students, their humor functioned as a coping strategy that supported teachers ground themselves during high stress moments.

Surface Acting

While humor was supportive to participants in some instances of high stress, other negative emotional events triggered the need for surface acting. Surface acting is a coping strategy where an individual will outwardly express positive emotions despite authentically feeling negative emotions internally (Wróbel, 2013). Participants shared stories, both in their professional and personal lives, that triggered a fight or flight response. In these moments, participants employed surface acting as a coping strategy to ensure students were not privy to their emotional dysregulation. Emily spoke of her use of surface acting in her workday by describing a time in which a student with special needs was having an emotional outburst. She explained that the student repeated the Pledge of Allegiance over and over during class. She stated, “It was probably more than 20 times. I had no idea what to do, and I feel negative emotions right now, because I don't know what to do.” Like Emily, many participants expressed concern over the lack of behavioral support. Managing the day to day routines of the classroom while handling high stress situations, forced teachers to use surface acting to cope through the situation at hand.

Participants described feeling as though they had to put their own emotions aside to continue to deliver a calm and stable environment to protect their students. Evelyn disclosed a time in which a student made a violent threat in her elementary classroom. Evelyn shared the following:

> When that student said if he could get a hold of a pocket knife he would kill all the girls, that was very alarming for me, right? But I couldn't express how I felt about that, how uncomfortable I felt with that statement. The kids were coming in. I had to get them settled. I was trying to start a lesson, while in the meantime, emailing administration for support. I'm emailing the principal. I'm calling. I'm doing a mini report while I'm trying to teach, and in those moments I am very stressed, so I don't show my authentic feelings. I'm there for the students. I'm on stage. I can't get off stage. At the end I can say, 'Oh, my gosh! You know, this person said, this… Then we had to have a conversation, and then we had to call…' I can say those things, perhaps to other teachers, or to my or to my family at home, but I can't say those things or share those frustrations in front of the class. I can't even let them know what was said. I'm not going to share with the entire class, so we move forward and try to keep it as calm and as a normal day as possible for them.

Evelyn adequately captured the complexities of the struggle to handle her responsibilities as a teacher and remain calm to not alert students to the threat posed by her student. The use of surface acting helped her cope through the emotional labor of the triggering event. Markedly, Evelyn acknowledged it was only after the day was over that she could express and process through her authentic emotions with her colleagues and family.

In some cases, the triggering high stress event happens outside of the workday and participants' emotionality needs to be managed to carry out their teaching duties. Riley shared a deeply sad story she had experienced only a week before our interview. One day, as she was leaving for work, she walked to her car to find police cars at her neighbor's home. She noticed her neighbors' son outside looking shocked and could hear his mother's cries coming from the house. Riley described how close she was with her neighbors, pointing out that their children

were raised together. Unfortunately, she discovered the husband had suffered a tragic death. Riley reflect on the situation saying:

> A week ago I left my house, and there were six cops at my neighbor's house. He died, and we're friends, we raised our kids together… I had to drive to school and teach that day. I cried all the way to school, and then I got there, and I was trying to take breaths and calm down. The kids came in, and they could tell something was wrong. I said, I just got some really bad news. Just give me a second, and I'll be fine.

Given that Riley was leaving for work, she decided to head to school. It was on her way to work that she began to process the gravity of what she had just witnessed. She mentioned the sadness she felt hearing her neighbor's teenage son describe the scene, as his mother, her friend wailed loudly in the background. As she drove to work she expressed her emotions authentically, but as soon as she got to work she felt compelled to compartmentalize the emotions she felt and turn them off to be present for her students. Though she described her students sensing she was not herself, she did not authentically express her emotions with students due to the sensitive nature of the situation. However, she carried the emotions of that morning into the classroom. Riley described curating her emotions as best she could to ensure her students were protected as much as possible from any negativity towards them. Riley explained that if her students had to witness her being emotional, then she was happy what they saw was only sadness:

> I feel like it's better if it leaks out as sadness versus getting short tempered with students. I had a friend whose kid was in a kindergarten class, and the teacher was going through divorce. She said her child never knew if they were going to have the happy teacher or the grumpy teacher, and this poor kid was so scared. The teacher would yell at the kids, because she was having a bad day. I thought, 'Note to self, I don't want to have that happen with me.'

This anecdote alone was powerful enough to make Riley fearful her own emotions could possibly frame how she interacts with her students. Earlier in the interview Riley mentioned that she understood not all students are coming from safe and supportive homes; thus, she wanted to

do everything she could to create an environment where students could experience joy in their day. Her desire to ensure that all students felt positive emotions in her classroom forced her to ignore her own emotional experiences; and therefore, amped up the level of emotional labor she experienced in the workday. She ignored her own needs for the benefit of her students.

Deep Acting

Surface acting was helpful for participants to get through emotionally triggering events in the short term. However, participants reported the consistent stress they felt day-to-day required a long term coping strategy to help them redirect their energy into a more positive space to help them sustain the lows of teaching. In these instances participants utilized the coping strategy deep acting. Deep acting differs from surface acting because deep acting requires the individual to do more sustained cognitive work to change the internally felt feeling to match the externally displayed emotion (Chang, 2020). As a result, the individual engaging in deep acting as an emotional regulation strategy experiences less emotional labor, because the internal feelings become aligned with the affective emotional display (Chang, 2020). For example, Jade affirmed that she has tried to put healthy boundaries into practice but struggles to maintain them because of the constant flow of responsibilities. Jade remarked:

> I'm exhausted. It's hard to go out at the end of the day. I start super early. I'm up really early. I'm at work early to try to get stuff done. I have tried to put up more boundaries. I used to plan and grade on weekends. Now I feel like I've mastered that whole less is more mentality a little better, but it just doesn't stop, right? There's just still something or another. A kid needs a letter of rec. They've added something else, or this student is dealing with trauma…

Participants reported the ongoing addition to teachers' list of responsibilities left them searching for more effective long term coping strategies. This led participants to engage in deep acting to help them sustain their motivation in the profession. Emily shared her thoughts around shifting her mindset, "You're kind of stuck, right? And so it's either enjoy the ride or be a miserable

person. Happiness is a choice, and boredom and misery are choices too. So, I think it's definitely a mindset that you have to switch, but it's still okay to gripe and moan sometimes, too."

Many participants were not consciously aware that this shift in mindset is a coping strategy called deep acting. However, they did describe the cognitive process they went through to help them reframe the emotional labor they experienced into a more positive thought pattern to ground them in their love for teaching. Sierra, a teacher with a chronic illness, shared that the painful episodes she experienced added additional layers of stress and physical struggles. She described how necessary it was for her to engage in deep acting, because the pain she felt at work was unpredictable. She explained, "There are days that are hard, and there are days that I don't think about it, because I'm actually feeling good that day. So, I'm trying to remind myself that I love what I do." Similarly, Riley used a comparison to her previous jobs to highlight her passion for working with students which she felt were the empowering elements of teaching saying, "In the bigger picture of what work life can be like, I really appreciate a lot of things about teaching. Not only working with the kids and doing something that I love, but you know I just think you have more autonomy in teaching." Participants had different experiences in their lives that helped them personalize the coping strategy deep acting.

The Role of Significant Others and Families in Coping

Due to the fact that teaching is a highly relational practice, many participants found it difficult to separate their work lives from their personal lives. Teachers are encouraged to build meaningful teacher-student relationships. Thus many participants reported feeling personally invested in their students' academic and personal lives as a way to build classroom community and rapport among the student and teacher. Participants reported when faced with stressors they often confided in their significant others, and their family members regularly to help them

process through the struggles they faced. With teaching being such a personal profession, participants needed to be deeply understood and comforted, often having them turning to their significant others or family members for emotional support. Grace disclosed she shares much of her day with her spouse because, “She is a teacher, and she gets it.” Having a spouse who is also a teacher provided her the ability to share without having to explicitly explain the hardships of teaching. Claire also reached out to her significant other for emotional support but felt bad about consistently oversharing about her stressors. She said, “My poor husband has to listen to me. He knows most of it and has seen me with the piles of papers.” While her significant other was not a teacher, she spoke about how he has learned to care for her emotional needs after years of her sharing her stressors.

Participants' stories shed light on how their significant others provided various levels of support in their coping process. As seen in the previous examples, active listening and being present was enough to make some participants feel heard and cared for by their significant other. However, some participants reported their significant others became active partners in helping them survive various stages in the professions. For example, when Hannah was a new mom, she struggled to keep up with grading. As Hannah struggled, her partner took on more of an active role to support her well-being as a mother and a teacher. To illustrate this point, Hannah shared the following about her significant other:

> He knows that was a really tough time, how hard that teaching was for me. I was having babies, and it was a lot on our family. I remember sitting and trying to nurse and grading papers. He would help me grade papers. He would say, ‘Okay, tell me what to circle. Give me this paper and tell me what to circle.’

Hannah not only looked to her husband as emotional support, he also actively helped her manage her workload. As time went on, Hannah eventually decided to leave her position at a high school and move to an elementary position hoping it would reduce her workload. After the move,

Hannah continued to seek her significant other's support in a different way. Later in the interview, Hannah reported sharing positive moments with him to have his support in the implementation of deep acting as a coping strategy. She mentioned sending photos and texts to her husband with the intention of balancing the negative perception of her profession with positive highlights saying, "I have to remember to keep things positive, so sending even just a little text saying, 'Okay. Remind me, this is why I'm doing this is really important for me.'" Interestingly, the move to elementary school did reduce the workload Hannah took on, but she still experienced emotional labor. Thus, as a more long term solution, Hannah proactively regularly captured moments to help her and her significant other connect to the positive emotions she experienced to keep her committed to the profession.

Evelyn, also an elementary level teacher, similarly detailed how her emotional exhaustion was a barrier to being fully present for her significant other and children. The emotional labor she experienced weekly left her needing to reach out to her family members for emotional support. When asked about her coping strategies on bad days she listed the people she reaches out to for emotional support. "I either call my sister, talk to my kids, or I'll tell my husband. He knows I need to talk about it, and after I am just kind of exhausted. There's always one day in the week." What is significant about Evelyn's commentary is the frequency at which she feels exhausted. She states that once a week she needs emotional support to cope with a bad day, and when she is done processing the events of the week, she is exhausted. She goes on to describe how the exhaustion impacts her saying:

> At least one day a week I sit down to watch TV, and I'm out. I'm asleep by 8:30 or 9:00 o'clock, and I don't even know when the kids go to bed. I wake up at midnight or one in the morning, and all the lights are out, so I go upstairs. I finally get ready for bed, and I crash, but I think it's just that mental exhaustion. I intend to get up and do something, and then it doesn't happen so for me.

As described by Evelyn, the emotional exhaustion of the classroom impacted her at least once a week, resulting in her not being fully present for her immediate family and her children. Thus, waiting until after the workday to cope with the stressors of the week impeded Evelyn's ability to balance her work and personal life.

Perhaps most compelling, Natalie detailed how her emotional labor was taken on by her significant other in one emotionally difficult school year. Natalie spoke about feeling the emotional burden of seeing students whose basic needs were not able to be met by their families year after year. She conveyed a feeling of helplessness as she said, "You see them wearing the same jeans during the week, and they have holes in them. Those types of things are really hard to see, and we have families that are living out of their cars or living with other people…". She went on to explain how one particular case emotionally gripped her and her significant other stating:

> We had one family years ago. He's in college or out of college now. He's close to my daughter's age. We watched the family as they came through our school. I had the middle child and the youngest child. The youngest child would hover over his food. You knew that he was not getting fed enough, and my husband and I discussed if we could adopt them. We thought about: 'Where would they sleep? Could we combine our daughters into one room and put them in the other room?' That type of thing, because they were not getting what they needed from their family. Mom was addicted to drugs. Grandma and grandpa had custody, and they were so old and fighting with them. So, those types of emotional baggage that the kids come with your family. This is my family for that year, and even so, they carry on. I just took a 4,200 mile road trip, stopped in Texas, and met with one of my past second graders. She drove an hour to come visit with me.

While participants detailed their experiences with emotional labor, they simultaneously revealed their attempts to cope in the safe spaces provided by their significant other and other family members unwittingly transferred their emotional experiences on to others. Thereby illustrating the emotional labor of the teaching profession was not only felt by the participants themselves, but also by their loved ones.

The Role of Trusted Colleagues in Coping

Colleagues also played an important role in participants' emotional lives. Having trusted colleagues to process positive and negative emotional events during the workday was important for participants' emotional health. Sierra mentioned the importance of her colleagues in managing the emotional labor of the profession when she said, "Good days are usually when I can get out and socialize when I don't work through lunch, so I can go home and leave it here." The breaks in participants' day were regularly expressed as a time to decompress and process through the emotional labor experienced during the day. Claire remarked she spent, "a lot of break time before school recess, lunch after school, venting with next door teacher," and her experience was not unique. Jade felt similar about how important breaks were with her colleagues. However, she and her colleagues felt it was important to regulate their emotions by actively not talking about work. Yet, she acknowledged that in some cases a highly negative emotional response could break from this general rule. She communicated how protective she was over her lunchtime:

> I go in every day at lunch. I refuse to have kids in at lunch making up work or anything. Lunch is my time. That's my time with colleagues. That's where we get out and have an adult conversation, and I always strive to be with different people. I tend to sit with all different departments. We really do focus on not talking about school. We talk about anything else unless there's something like an email that came in that everyone's pissed about. Then, okay, we'll talk about it, but for the most part we don't talk about school. We're talking about their kids and vacations, and whatever else is going on. I think that's what you have to do, right? You have that happy hour, or if you have the same prep period as someone you grab breakfast or walk around with them. I think especially at your own school, you know the grind that takes out of you, in the good bad days and the bad days. So, I think that's really important.

Seemingly, the culture created on Jade's school site held great importance for their school community. She explained, "We do Snack Club every Thursday. Teachers sign up for it, and you

have to make something homemade. Retired teachers still show up for Snack Club on Thursdays."

Although not every site had a formal practice around how to build community among colleagues, all participants affirmed their colleagues played an important role in their ability to cope with emotional labor. Brittney voiced the importance of having a trusted group of colleagues. She shared the following, "I have a really good tribe of people at my school. Some of my coworkers have more years of experience than me and others have around the same years of experience." Brittney acknowledged the age gap that can exist at a site, but she did not see this as a barrier to building community with colleagues. Jade celebrated the age gap as something she enjoyed about the profession saying, "The part I love, and this is where teaching just makes me laugh, you could be 27 and your best friend is 67. The range of ages cracks me up." No matter the age gap, what participants made clear was how important their colleagues were to them. In Alex's case, he returned to his previous school site when he realized the connections he had with colleagues in his new setting were not as strong, and thus, did not provide him the same level of emotional support he had felt at his previous school. He reflected on both job settings stating the following:

> You have to have a strong tribe of people to help you through the difficult times. This is the greatest job I think, ever. Yeah, the pay is hard. There's a lot of things that happen. But it's a great job to have. I really do enjoy working with kids, and I enjoy working with my colleagues, you know. I think my colleagues here, really coming back to this space, was probably the best thing that happened to me. It was this school site, because I had people that were there during difficult moments.

Furthermore, Brittney and Alex both use the word "tribe" to describe a connected, trusted group of supportive colleagues. This suggests that participants see their colleagues as important because they share cultural understanding that those outside the profession do not share;

therefore, allowing colleagues to deeply understand one another on a deep level that is similar to that of the intimacy shared between significant others.

Elementary School Teachers and The Prolonged Use of Emotional Regulation Strategies

In one case, emotional labor did differ based on the grade level taught. First, the developmental needs of elementary school students require more time and attention from teachers. Second, elementary school teachers are expected to be both content experts in all subjects and seamlessly transition from one topic to another throughout the workday. However, the behavioral needs of students can make this a struggle. Additionally, while elementary educators have fewer students, they are responsible for more extensive communication and engagement of the families than are middle and high school educators. Finally, elementary school teachers do not have as many natural breaks in their days to implement emotional regulation strategies. For example, middle and high school teachers have multiple structured breaks in their day; passing period, nutrition breaks, lunch, etc. As where elementary teachers typically only have two breaks in the workday; recess and lunch. Therefore, elementary teachers are utilizing emotional regulation strategies for longer periods of time, as compared to their secondary colleagues. In the long run, this could lead to higher levels of burnout for elementary educators, because they do not have as many opportunities to regulate their emotions throughout the workday.

Secondary Impacts to Teachers' Mental Health and Physical Health

The previous sections have explored how teachers define and cope with the emotional labor of the teaching profession. Interviews with participants illuminated that teachers' coping strategies did not wholly alleviate the stressors they felt within their workday. As a result, participants reported feeling secondary impacts to their overall health. Participants shared the emotions they felt during the workday were not shed when they left the school gates, and they

struggled to transition from their work lives to their personal lives. Accordingly, participants reported feeling prolonged levels of stress that led to complications with their mental health, physical health, and burnout.

Impacts to Teachers' Mental Health

During interviews, participants were asked if they felt the teaching profession impacted their mental and physical health. The answers were resounding yeses, followed by stories that described the impacts to teachers' professional and personal lives. All participants felt they endured some level of mental health struggles ranging from mild to severe.

Considering the construct of emotional labor, if teachers' positive emotions are being leveraged to create a safe environment for the benefit of students alone, the expectation is then that teachers will deal with their negative emotions outside of their work with students and families. What is important to note in this section is participants described the impacts to their mental health as 1) pervasive and 2) leading to anxiety. For example, Natalie voiced that her mental health is impacted by the nature of the teacher-student relationships she has with her students. The care she described throughout her interview showcased a maternal care for all her students, thus the emotional bonds she felt towards her students became a part of her. To affirm this point, Natalie reflected on the ever present emotionality in teaching and wondered what it would be like to have a job where she could leave work and not carry the weight of her day into her personal life. When asked if teaching impacted her mental health, she stated:

> I mean, yes, because you bring home the kids with you. You bring home their problems. You bring home what they're doing, and I'll come home and cry with my husband about something that happened with a kid. So yeah, it's like there is no separation. I always wonder what it would be like to have a job where you close the door, go home, and don't think about it. And I'm like, yeah, that doesn't happen. That's not teaching.

Claire further added that while emotional boundaries are difficult to maintain, the demand on teachers to consistently be available for students and families via email was an additional barrier to creating healthy boundaries and turning off the workday once teachers leave their classrooms:

> Back in the day they had an email system that was internal. You couldn't access it outside, you know, so there was no way for the stuff to follow you. And so I have thought about taking email off of my phone. You know that to kind of create some better boundaries.

Additionally, Avery described feeling a sense of constant stress. She conveyed a sense of anxiety around her role as a teacher detailing some of the reflective questions she asks of herself regularly:

> Am I making everybody happy? And what does the principal think of me? I haven't heard from her in a while, is she mad? Is she good? But you know, it's like I'm constantly thinking about school and trying to be a good teacher. So yeah, it's always with me almost all the time. I mean, I have dreams about it. Of course, the first day of school dreams. You know I still have those after all these years. I still get nervous.

Jade similarly characterized the mental load as a consistent source of stress saying, “I am absolutely a lot more mentally overwhelmed, and absolutely feeling a little bit more overloaded constantly. It's kind of like it's always there.” Additionally, for some teachers like Brittney, anxiety manifested itself through feelings of fear. She noted that in some cases, the anxiety was recognizably tied to moments she feared she would get pushback from the families of students:

> Every time you go to start an *American Boys* unit, it's like alright, is this the time that someone's going to be really mad that we're reading a book about understanding perspectives and racial injustice and police brutalities. Is this going to be the time that I have to come up with a whole plan to accommodate this kid that doesn't want to read this book? And they're gonna tell me I'm indoctrinating their kid! And it's funny, because I've never gotten that email, but you hear about it from one person, and then you're just terrified. We do sometimes act in fear of the one, two, or three that do exist and do make your life difficult, you know.

What Brittney is describing is exceptionally problematic, she conveyed how simply understanding the controversial nature around literature and other supplementary materials was

enough to make her feel like she had to mentally prepare for a fight that has not yet come. The fear of pushback alone was enough to cause anxiety before teaching a unit.

While some teachers indirectly discussed having anxiety as a result of emotional labor, other participants named anxiety directly in their interviews. Emily shared how her anxiety leads to imposter syndrome:

> You have anxiety during the work day. Oh, yeah. I've been struggling a lot during the workday. Whether it be I'm trying to get through all of the material and feeling like I need to rush things. But then, I also want to have that relationship part with the kids. I want to have good discussions about certain topics that we're studying about, or a good piece of writing, or something like that. But it's then like, 'Oh, my God! We have to get through this, and we only have 4 weeks left.' When you feel those bad days and you feel hard on yourself, absolutely…it definitely changes how you feel about yourself. I got teacher of the year, but I'm like, how the fuck did I get that like? I feel like… 'Oh, my God! There's no bottom of the barrel.' I have imposter syndrome, or whatever people talk about lately, but I felt like it definitely impacts me.

Emily's revelations are profound because she not only has the language to articulate that she is experiencing anxiety throughout the workday; but she also states her anxiety around believing she is not doing a good job as a teacher directly impacts her self-esteem. Even after receiving formal accolades, Emily still struggled to acknowledge that her teaching practices were praiseworthy. Furthermore, like Emily, Grace worried about her anxiety and the long-term effects of teaching. She stated, "I know that I have anxiety and whatnot, too. Us teachers. We always seem to die after we retire, but hopefully we won't." Grace shared stories of colleagues passing after retirement, and revealed her genuine concern she will meet the same fate.

Consequently, some teachers come to see mental health concerns as an understood part of the job. For example, Jade's experience of enduring emotional labor over the years has led to her to become more empathetic to her colleagues' emotional needs. She shared:

> Every teacher I know, at different times, has their little breakdown, or is like, 'Oh, my God! Like what is happening?,' or 'I need to leave', or 'I need that…' Earlier

> in my career I probably judged that a lot more, and now I think you do whatever you need to do to survive, you know. And then that way you like it enough to want to keep coming back to teach.

Jade ends this statement by addressing her fears about burnout in her colleagues. Her statement alludes to a general acknowledgement that emotional breakdowns are inevitable in teaching, and she expressed concern that her colleagues need to regulate their emotions so they will return to work. She does not want her colleagues to burnout and leave the profession. However, for other participants like Alex, burnout does not seem to be a topic that is adequately addressed in education. Alex noted, "The emotional toll that this job can take on you is great." Alex went on to discuss how he felt that the mental health of teachers remains a taboo topic in education for some:

> I think mental health is still a very taboo topic to talk about. I feel like we're still in a space where we have inequity around who's allowed to have emotional spaces, and who we acknowledge. It's highly disrespectful to think we're looking at people with emotional trauma and emotional stuff, and we're not acknowledging and encouraging everybody just to talk about it. We still have gender expectations, right? Like women are perceived to be typically more emotional. I hear people still talk about women like they're more emotional than males.

Alex's commentary on gender norms and emotional expressions beg more questions about emotionality in the workplace. Alex asserts the lack of care for teachers' mental health is "highly disrespectful" and articulates the deep need for teachers' mental health needs to be directly addressed. Alex also reflects on the inequities within mental health care. He goes on to state that women continue to be perceived as more emotional than men. This is noteworthy, because teaching is a female dominated profession. Therefore, when teachers like Jade see emotional breakdowns as an expected part of the profession, we begin to understand that the emotional labor of teachers is being dismissed. The current intention around addressing teachers' emotional needs, as described by participants Jade and Alex, is to ensure teachers remain committed to the

profession. It is not because the education profession is committed to the teachers' overall well-being. Therefore, the profession is not adequately addressing teachers' emotional needs to prevent burnout.

Impact to Teachers' Physical Health

Participants of this study also reported experiencing lower levels of overall physical health. Namely, teachers disclosed they struggled to manage their weight, suffered from headaches, and discussed other markers of physical health. Most participants indicated they suffered some level of physical impacts to their health. Many participants affirmed they would like to be healthier and wanted to engage in more frequent exercise; however, they simultaneously cited feeling too mentally and physically exhausted by the end of the workday to be able to invest in their own physical health. Furthermore, many participants disclosed that even if their physical ailments were not directly correlated to the stress they experienced from teaching, their symptoms were exacerbated by the stressors they felt at work. Sierra, who has a chronic illness, noted that she experienced worsening symptoms while teaching, "My fatigue, my nerve pain, and migraines. Everything is worse during the school year."

Weight gain was cited as a top impact of teachers' physical health. When asked if teaching impacted her physical health, Evelyn reflected on how teachers are often celebrated with sweet snacks:

> I feel like we're constantly eating chocolate, or like treats or something, or donuts! So you have to really have will power, or just be able to have a little bit at a time. I try to exercise more than I did before, so now I go to the gym at least once a week. I know I should do more, but either way, at least once a week, and that helps a lot.

Natalie echoed this sentiment saying, "I think I am overweight because of the snacks in the teacher's lounge." Claire summed up this type of weight struggle as "a lot of stress eating of comfort foods." Like Evelyn, Emily correspondingly lamented feeling like teaching impacted her

motivation to prioritize her physical health. She said, “I would love to work out. I would love to take walks, but I'm exhausted when I come home.”

Additionally some health symptoms were described by participants as being correlated to specific times in their career. For example, Riley reflected on a term she felt drastically impacted her health:

> There was one term I had a group of students that were well known at our school. They kept all of them together, and they were in the same English class at the same time. I had them their junior year, and they were the worst class I've ever had. I literally think that is when my hair started to turn gray, and I gained weight. They were so challenging.

Two participants did report feeling like teaching helped them manage their weight, because teachers are expected to circulate the room, allowing them mobility they may not have in other jobs. Mia was happy that teaching allowed her to get her “steps in every day.” Albeit, Mia also cited physical pain as a result of standing.

> I'm standing a lot. I actually just went and saw the podiatrist two weeks ago. I'm getting older. I just had a birthday, and it feels like every year my feet are getting a little more sore, so I got some custom orthopedic inserts to fit into my shoes. They don't go in the cute shoes, though.

Olivia also felt that teaching afforded her the opportunity to move, and felt this was a positive thing for her schedule as a single parent:

> It's nice to have a job where I get up and move around a lot. I mean, it's hard to schedule going to the gym, but I think that's mostly being a parent. But I like that I have a job where I can get up and move around quite a bit, and so I don't know… physically, I would say teaching impacts me positively.

Still many participants revealed the emotional labor and stress associated with teaching manifested itself into physical symptoms that were difficult to manage inside and outside of the workday. Vivan explained how her negative emotions from managing difficult collaborative moments with colleagues lead to high levels of stress and doctors visits:

> I started to spiral. I was having all these weird pains, anxiety, gestation symptoms, and my face was going numb. I was getting this weird flushing where my face would be like a thousand degrees. I was dizzy and almost passed out at work…it would start, and then I could not make it stop. I almost passed that out on a colleague! I was having all these weird symptoms. So I was seeing doctors, and they did all kinds of blood work. I had a CT scan on my brain to be sure it wasn't a tumor, and at some point, I finally saw a doctor who said, 'Listen, this just sounds like you're stressed out. You need to figure out what's stressing you. I get that these are real symptoms, but I think it's stress.' To his credit, he spent a long time on that appointment. He talked me through understanding what was going on in my life, and I really started to think when I'm getting upset, I need to be better at taking care of myself.

While it was difficult for Vivian to identify the cause of her symptoms, Jade had a different experience. Earlier in her career, Jade was also diagnosed with cancer. She continued to work as she managed her treatment. As a result of her cancer journey, Jade explained she has become very familiar with her body and regularly saw her doctor:

> My physical health is pretty much a joke at this point. I saw my doctor this past year because I was dealing with some stuff, and they tested my cortisol level, which I guess is your stress level. It's supposed to be within a range of 10 to 20 or something, and mine dropped to point 0.8 last year, which was apparently bad.

Jade went on to share there were times she felt okay in the moment, but eventually understood her physical and mental health symptoms to be exacerbated by teaching:

> I am well aware of my physical health and my mental overload, you know, you carry it whether you think you do or not. There's those times where I'm like, I feel like I'm fine. And then it's like ‘Actually, I think you were really stressing out.’ And I didn't even realize I was stressing out, right? Because you're just kind of going, you know, doing all the things. I do think it's hard, the nice side of me is like, I get it… the district could do a lot of things for us, and I know they try. And they have programs, you know, do your mindful minutes, breathe, and do all those things. And I know that's a really great, helpful resource. But also telling me to do those things does nothing for me. Sending out a memo saying how much they care about it doesn't help me, right? It just feels like another box to be checked.

On the other hand, Emily acknowledged that the district could do more to actively care for teachers' and students' health needs. She shared a conversation she had with colleagues about the poor condition of the classrooms teachers worked in:

> I just had COVID a couple of weeks ago. I don't remember why, but we talked about how I had COVID. I think that our immunities are built up, but a lot of people aren't. One of our high schools still has swamp coolers. If those teachers have allergies, and they're stuck in a room with a swamp cooler, it's going to affect you. And I have a colleague at my school that had to move out of her classroom, because it was moldy. There's shit in schools we're not taking care of, and we're putting teachers' health by the wayside because of the conditions our schools are in. Our buildings in general are not good for most of our health.

What is profound about Jade's statements is that she is aware of the attempts made by the district office to communicate care for teachers' mental and physical health. Yet, the programs and well-meaning messages are falling flat with teachers, because they are productive solutions to meet the health needs of teachers. Jade's comments juxtaposed with Emily's anecdotes about the facilities in their district, highlight why these programs are being dismissed as "checking boxes." Teachers like Emily are well aware of immediate actions that could be taken to communicate to staff the district does take the health needs of their teachers seriously. In her comments, Emily easily identified two tangible solutions that could be addressed by updating and cleaning the facilities alone. This qualitative data suggests districts should engage their teachers in open conversation around the emotional labor they experience and their mental and physical health needs. Doing so can support districts in creating targeted supports that are effective in making teachers feel genuinely heard and appreciated.

Impacts to Organizational Commitment and Students

Participants largely could identify moments in their careers they have thought about leaving the profession, but they ultimately chose to stay in education for various reasons including: not knowing what else to do with their credentials, the "golden handcuffs" of a pension, and new roles within education. There were outliers in data with a few teachers like Mia who stated they have not thought about leaving teaching. She said, "I feel like this is where I should be." Two other participants reported they do not seriously consider leaving the

profession, because they left the corporate world to pursue teaching as a second career. Despite this, Jade acknowledged the hardships in teaching saying, “Sometimes you don't want to take it for granted, because you love it, but there's a lot of things that get in your way and impact your love for it.” Nonetheless, what was abundantly clear from all participants was they felt teaching is a calling and described the love they have for their job.

Historically, conversations about teacher burnout tend to be focused on keeping teachers in the profession. This attempt to keep teachers from leaving does nothing to address teachers’ levels of overall well-being and organizational commitment. The question whether or not teachers will leave the profession, but rather for those that choose to stay, it is important to note that emotional labor can impact organizational commitment and student learning. While work ethic (Wróbel, 2013) and affective commitment to the organization may initially drive teachers, the emotional toll may ultimately become too costly and force them to make decisions around how to alleviate the negative impacts of their work related stressors, thereby impacting organizational commitment (Ogunsola et al., 2020). Consequently, this can lead to negative impacts for both teachers and students.

As participants reflected upon what constitutes a good and bad day in teaching, there was an awareness that bad days impacted teachers’ effectiveness with students. Olivia stated, “On the bad days you really start to question what you're teaching. Where on the good days you're really just more present, more excited about it.” Evelyn reported feeling as though her “brain is split” in moments of high stress. She explained, “Half of my brain power is going to teach a lesson and the other half is trying to manage the situation.” Similarly, Riley conveyed working very hard to manage her emotions and remain emotionally constant with her students:

> I'm not as perky. I don't want to say I'm more curt with them, because I try really hard not to be… really, really, really hard not to be. But maybe I'll say something

> like, ' I'm gonna tell you guys one time to close your chromebook, and I need to see you guys closing it,' or something like that when I'm not in the mood to be repeating myself 10 -20 times. Or I make a joke out of it. But it's rare that I become a little bit more than short with them. That's very rare. I try not to. I'll just get kind of sad and like, try not to start crying, you know.

This is especially problematic for lower elementary level teachers who did not have effective coping strategies to deal with naturally felt negative emotions while teaching. Conversely, secondary participants reported being able to set their students on a task for a brief period of time to provide themselves space to regulate negative emotions felt during a lesson. Middle level teacher Mia described how she does this:

> In the moment, I'll usually take a minute. We do mindful minutes at school. But I'll take a minute to myself, and I'll just say to the students something like, 'Okay, you guys are going to work on your own for a minute. I'll set the timer, and I'll be back in 5 minutes.' Then I'll set the timer, and they'll work.

Taking time away from students to emotionally regulate was also a strategy employed by high school teacher, Vivian:

> I tell them, 'Okay, I'm gonna pull the plug on this for like five min. I need you to be quiet, because you're not listening to instructions. And it's fine, you're still doing this activity, but you're not doing it how I wanted it done, and that is okay. But I need it to be quiet right now.' I put them in silent mode, so I can regulate rather than freak out and lose my mind.

Jade described feeling distant from students when feeling overwhelmed and needed to preserve her own well-being on bad days. "You're, for lack of a better term, robotic. You're just kind of there. You're the body in the room versus having the relationship that you would share those things with." She reflected on a period of time that she experienced prolonged stress:

> You know when I look back at it, I kind of blocked it out. I don't know… was I great? Was I not great? I don't know, because I just kind of was there. I taught. Could I tell you half the kids' names? Probably not. You were just kind of the body when it's more prolonged like that.

Furthermore, research suggests that emotions cannot be quantified; therefore, teachers are often undercompensated for the emotional labor they endure (Ogunsola et al., 2020). While it is

true that many participants did state that they feel called to teach, many also simultaneously reported feeling burnt out by teaching. Emily conveyed a sense of longing for retirement, so she could finally prioritize her health:

> If I had the opportunity to retire tomorrow I would. I love kids, and I love working with them, but I would be a healthier person if I didn't. If I stopped teaching tomorrow, I wouldn't drink as much because I would be as stressed. I would have more time to walk my dogs, exercise, and do the things I like to do. Plant my garden, you know, do those things, but I feel like there's so much time that you put in to be a teacher. You're there from bell to bell, but also you are there for a lot longer than that. You come in early. You kind of just stay late.

Natalie expressed her feelings of burnout and wanting to feel rejuvenated and excited for teaching once again saying, “I feel like I need to have that spark and get that excitement back in me. I feel like over the years, you get stuck in the same thing. I feel like I got stuck in a rut where I'm teaching second grade, and I'm doing the same thing.” Natalie considered leaving teaching altogether but chose to stay after reflecting on the question “what am I going to do?” Natalie and other participants' acknowledgement that they were no longer happy in their current position led them to consider leaving the profession. When asked if he ever thought about leaving the profession, Alex mentioned “not having a clear path of what it would look like” and he was unsure about what he would do. Emily characterized her decision to stay in teaching by sharing a similar fear, “We're so underappreciated as teachers. I don't feel like I have any faith that I could do another profession or that somebody would think I'm good.”

In an effort to alleviate some work related stress, some participants explained they decided to change their role within education. Hannah detailed how her work ethic often led her to taking on too many responsibilities, leading to her needing a change:

> After every eight years I went to a new school. I started a high school, and after eight years I opened up a new school within the district. Then, after nine years, I went to an elementary position. I said yes to things a lot, and I would get really stressed out. I didn't know how to bow out of things, because my personality is:

> you're in, you're doing it all, and you can do it. Other people probably wouldn't know that I was at home struggling. I was always on, so I feel like that has been released a little bit with this new position.

Alex also left his position as a special education teacher in favor of a greater work-life balance:

> I'm technically leaving SPED. I thought I was gonna stay in special education forever, because I thought that I was gonna be a solid advocate for kids with special needs, but I started to get caught up in that. Then I was just like, well, that's pretty much like a savior complex, and that's kind of lame to think that you are the one that's gonna be able to support these kids the right way.

Despite the great sense of responsibility Alex felt for his students, he ultimately chose to leave special education and become a general education teacher in pursuit of a greater work-life balance.

For one participant, a move to another position was temporary. Avery left the classroom for a brief period of time, allowing her to reconnect with her love of teaching:

> I became a librarian, which was kind of like leaving the teaching profession. I missed it so much. I missed having my own kids. I missed being in the classroom. It's like my way from home. When I come into the classroom I'm always like, Oh, look! I have this whole classroom. This is my classroom, you know, and I like to decorate it and stuff. I didn't have that as a librarian.

Leaving the classroom allowed her an opportunity to address her own needs, but she soon found herself back in the classroom because she missed the way that her own classroom made her feel.

On the other hand, some participants expressed a desire to leave teaching altogether but stated leaving the profession at the mid to later point of their career would impact their retirement. Thus, they could not financially afford to leave the profession. When asked if she ever thought about leaving the profession Grace declared, “I can’t take my years of service with me anywhere, so there’s that.” Claire also had a concise answer to the question of leaving the profession saying, “Yes, but I can’t afford to leave.” In addition to these comments, Hannah

shared that during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, she and her husband talked about moving to a different state:

> When Covid first happened, and we're like, Oh, do we need to move from California, what do we do? Do we go, like we've always thought, somewhere far away with lots of land? We were looking things up, and there was no way I could teach in a place that's rural. How do you get one of those positions? And even that, your salaries are half right. We already made a choice when we first started having kids. My husband, as the paramedic, was making less because of the service industry, so he stayed home with the kids. Now he's back to work, but we already took a huge pay cut with just having the teaching salary to start having a family.

Participants reiterated that their own work ethic and commitment to their students is a calling but also led to various levels of burnout. The emotional labor teachers experienced impacted both teachers and students. In some cases, participants reported needing to distance themselves from students to emotionally regulate, while other participants felt they needed to leave their positions altogether to care for their own mental and physical health needs.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the findings from 15 semi-structured interviews with K-12 teachers. The purpose of this study was to understand how K-12 teachers define emotional labor and investigate the coping strategies teachers use to manage the emotional labor of the teaching profession. Participants of this study defined emotional labor as the struggle to: manage teaching as a primary of ones' identity, find positive work-life balance, care for the whole child, work with difficult colleagues and administrators, and cope with feeling devalued as a professional. Participants employed a variety of strategies to cope with the emotional labor of teaching including: leaning into positive naturally felt emotions, using humor with students to reframe difficult moments, surface acting, deep acting, and seeking support from their families and trusted colleagues. Participants reported the emotional labor they experienced as a result of teaching impacted their mental health, physical health, organizational commitment, and their

ability to emotionally regulate while teaching. While participants' mental and physical health stressors manifested itself for different reasons, what was consistent among participants was they all carried emotional labor out of their workday, resulting in mental and physical health struggles and in some cases, relational dysregulation at home. Participants' attempts to regulate their emotions resulted in teachers' distancing from students, impacted teachers ability to form meaningful teacher-student relationships, and increased the prevalence of burnout in teachers. Findings of this study illustrated that the education system currently devotes a lot of time and resources towards investigating and supporting the socio-emotional needs of students but does not give the same level of care to the socio-emotional needs of teachers.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview of Study

The teaching profession is progressively becoming more challenging and leading to issues such as lower job satisfaction, burnout, and attrition rates are rising (Palad, 2023). Many teachers who are not leaving the profession express a decrease in their organizational commitment as they feel obligated to stay in their role or need to stay for financial reasons (Ogunsola et al., 2020).

The purpose of this study was to understand how K-12 teachers define emotional labor and investigate the coping strategies teachers use to manage the emotional labor of the teaching profession. In addition, this study aims to explore how teachers' use of emotional regulation strategies affect teachers' personal and professional lives. Participants' interviews were recorded and transcribed via Zoom. The data was coded using *Atlas.ti*. Data analysis was informed by Arlie Hochschild's construct of emotional labor, and aimed to explore how teachers' use of emotional regulation strategies affect teachers' personal and professional lives.

Conceptual Frameworks

This study used Arlie Hochschild's framework for Emotional Labor. Hochschild (2012) uses "the term emotional labor to mean the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value" (p.7). Though public education is not for profit, teaching is a relationship forward profession that asks educators to adhere to organizational display rules in which they verbally and non-verbally display unconditional positive regard towards students, colleagues, and the greater community even when their display of positively may not be in line with their naturally felt emotions (Chang, 2020; Ogunsola et al., 2020; Truta, 2014; Ye & Chen, 2015).

Therefore, Hochschild's Emotional Labor framework was helpful in analyzing and interpreting how teachers' suppression of their negative emotions impacted their overall well-being.

This chapter discusses the themes that arose and their implications and is grounded in the Social Competence elements of Goleman's Framework. Many leaders are taught to be introspective as they develop a vision for the type of leader they would like to be. Unfortunately, leaders often do not spend equal time understanding of the emotional needs of those they lead. For this reason, education leaders need to develop the capacity to to approach their work empathically (Fullan, 2011; Goleman, 2006; Wróbel, 2013).

Research Questions

1. How do K-12 teachers define emotional labor?
2. What emotional regulation strategies do K-12 teachers use to cope with the emotional labor of the teaching profession?
3. What are the impacts of emotional labor on teachers' personal and professional lives?

Methodology

This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore how teachers defined, coped with, and were impacted by the emotional labor they experienced in the teaching profession. Participants were recruited through the use of purposeful selection and snowball sampling. Participants included 15 K-12 teachers from one San Diego County public school district who self-identified as having 10-20 years of experience in public education. Participants engaged in a single, semi-structured one-on-one interview via Zoom. Interviews were recorded and transcribed using Zoom. I coded the interviews using the coding software *Atlas.ti* to identify themes. Participants also engaged in one round of member checking to ensure they felt their voice was accurately represented.

Recommendations

To effectively meet the emotional needs of K-12 teachers, all stakeholders, including districts, site level administrators, and teachers, need to be trained to understand the construct of emotional labor. Accordingly, Steiner et al. (2022) expound that principals and teachers report they want to focus their efforts on core responsibilities and increase connections among colleagues to build positive relationships to reduce the impact of pandemic era stressors. Additionally, education leaders need to be adept in identifying the critical components of interpersonal and intrapersonal emotional intelligence and support teachers in navigating their own emotions through explicit training (Chang, 2020; Ye & Chen, 2015). For this reason, recommendations are discussed through the lens of Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence Framework, which outlines what empathy and social skills are necessary to be socially competent in the workplace.

Recommendations for Districts

Participants of this study defined emotional labor as the struggle to: manage teaching as a primary part of ones' identity, find positive work-life balance, care for the whole child, work with difficult colleagues and administrators, and cope with feeling devalued as a professional. To address the needs of teachers, districts should work to develop cultures of socio-emotional care.

Meaningful Initiatives to Decrease Emotional Labor and Increase Teacher Well-Being

First, districts can begin by acknowledging that teachers have socio-emotional needs that have historically been ignored and seen as a byproduct of a relationship forward profession. While working with students, educators are faced with many different types of stressors resulting in a need to regularly engage in managing their affect and use self-regulatory strategies during the work day (Keller et al., 2014; Ogunsola et al., 2020).

Districts should have explicit training on the construct of emotional labor and its impacts to teachers with the understanding that doing so will benefit students as well. Districts should investigate how their teachers define and experience emotional labor. One way to do this could be to replicate this study to understand the specific needs of teachers within a district. Once districts have qualitative feedback from their staff members, they should understand research around mental and physical health and create research based policies and practices to effectively address the needs of teachers. Targeting the needs of teachers within a district will communicate to teachers they are valued and supports are authentic, not simply a checkbox measure. Jade expressed a want to be a thought partner with education leaders saying, "Come, talk to us before jumping into action or checking boxes. I think that being human, and realizing that we're all human trying to figure it out, would go a long way and maybe streamlining some of the process, or help to figure out what's going on." Once policies and programs are put in place, districts should be transparent about the process and communicate to all stakeholders the research based approach and the rationale for implementation.

Address the Socio-Emotional Needs of Teachers to Improve Outcomes for All Stakeholders

According to Lopez et. al. (2024), 40% of high school students report they do not feel connected to school, with this being particularly acute for students who experience racism, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ students. This research stressed the importance of the teachers stating, "Supportive teachers are a vital component of student belonging, outweighing even peer and parent support" (Lopez et. al, 2024, p. 2). Yet, the overall wellness of the adults in schools is at crisis levels with low educator morale contributing to high levels of turnover, further exacerbating schools' ability to support students and improve levels of school connectedness (Lopez et. al, 2024). Therefore, if teachers continue to adhere to emotional

display rules and fake or hide their emotions, research shows this results in lower levels of occupational well-being (Chang, 2020; Ruiter et al., 2021) and increased stress levels for teachers result in less effective learning environments for students (Steiner et al., 2022). For this reason, districts must prioritize teachers' socio-emotional wellbeing.

Teachers are bombarded with pressure to not only teach content but also ensure they are including social emotional learning practices in their classrooms. However, that same level of care is not extended to teachers. This is problematic, because student belonging is correlated to their perceptions of support and treatment from their teachers (Lopez et al., 2024). Participants in this study reported carrying the emotional labor they experienced during school hours and out of their workday, resulting in mental and physical health struggles and in some cases, relational dysregulation at home. Participants' attempts to regulate their emotions resulted in distancing themselves from students, impacted teachers' ability to form meaningful teacher-student relationships, and increased the prevalence of burnout in teachers. Therefore, if teachers are reporting distancing from students to regulate their emotions, then student connectedness is likely to decline. Olivia conveyed some attempts to care for teachers have been made, but her tone communicated these practices are not sufficient. She reflected, "I think maybe admin. is kind of recognizing the mental and emotional strain of teaching and doing things to better acknowledge and support teachers." Participants' experiences are consistent with the literature that cites continued exposure to emotional distress can also lead to health-related problems such as headache, struggle sleeping, or even cardiovascular problems (Ogunsola et al., 2020; Will, 2021). Thus, putting in structures in place to support teachers' overall well-being can help avoid burnout.

Moreover, participants reported the use of surface and deep acting to cope with the emotional labor they experienced, resulting in secondary impacts to their mental and physical health. In conjunction with understanding the construct of emotional labor, districts should treat teachers' mental health as a priority and understand the impacts to students when teachers do not have the opportunity to do this. They should also equip site level administrators with strategies to support teachers in emotional regulation. These strategies might include:

- Encourage teachers to share naturally felt emotions with students and explicitly teach school staff how to appropriately model self-regulation strategies as a model for students.
- Allow teachers to step out of the classroom during moments of high stress. Have an administrator or counselor take over a class for a short period of time, allowing teachers the opportunity to decompress and emotionally regulate privately before reconnecting with students.
- Encourage teachers to take personal days as needed for self-care.

Create a District Level Position to Prioritize Teacher Well-Being

Second, districts should create a district level position that is tasked with caring for people and culture across the district. Creating a designated position, such as a Director of People and Culture, will allow an individual or a team to continually invest in their employees by working with other departments to explicitly teach empathy and the social skills needed for leaders to understand the connection between teacher and student well-being. Directors should be responsible for disseminating current research to site levels and work to train site leaders in adequately addressing emotional labor and the benefits to teachers and students. While funding in schools is often a barrier to creating new positions, doing so will communicate to teachers their well-being is a priority in the district.

Recommendations for Site Level Administrators

Site level administrators should also work to understand the construct of emotional labor, its impact on teachers and students. Specifically, site level administrators should focus on honing their social skills, defined by Goleman as an "adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others" (2006, p. 27). Site level leaders work to motivate their staff for a variety of reasons that are all centered around benefiting students. As a result, administrators need to understand interpersonal communication skills to motivate their staff.

Build Interpersonal Relationship with Teachers

First, site administrators should build interpersonal relationships with all staff members. Administrators should be vulnerable with their staff, sharing about themselves personally and professionally in an effort to encourage them to do the same. Jade expressed a desire to see the humanity of her site leaders saying, "Be human and to show that side to your staff." A benefit to administrators knowing their staff personally and professionally is teachers are more likely to authentically share their needs. Another benefit for administrators in building authentic interpersonal relationships would be they are more likely to be attuned to teachers needs and can support teachers who don't tell to speak up; thus, helping to mitigate burnout. Hannah recommended administrators "look for the teachers that are hiding."

Participants also expressed wanting to know their leaders, especially when they are new administrators. Mia asserts, "In the last couple of years we've had a lot of movement with admin. New ones come in, so you know, getting to know those styles in the first year sometimes is just kind of a watch and wait." Claire recommended administrators understand the level of commitment teachers bring and expressed she wanted administrators to lead with a foundational level of trust saying, "Trust us as professionals to do the right thing." Administrators can engage

teachers in simple activities such as a Turn and Talk at the start of a staff meeting to encourage vulnerability among all staff members.

Visit Classrooms Regularly

Participants disclosed their desire to be seen and understood as professionals. Teachers wanted to have regular interactions with administrators with their overwhelming request being that administrators be in classrooms. Mia voiced the importance of administrators being present for teachers, “Just visibility. Just having admin visible and accessible if you need support with a student or a parent or an instance. They're there for you, and you know that you can count on them to get things done in a timely manner.” Unfortunately, many participants described feeling disconnected from administrators. Jade reflected on a conversation she had with colleagues, “All us teachers laugh that first week of school. Admins in and out of the rooms, and we're always like, ‘Oh, who came for you?’ Then, you won't see them for three or four months unless you're being evaluated.” While for some teachers this was a running joke, for others the lack of connection with administrators was mentally taxing. Additionally, others felt the disconnect was related to administrators' lack of understanding about the post COVID classroom. Evelyn pointed out the following, “I think for administrators, I would recommend they spend some time in the classroom, because if an administrator hasn't been in the classroom, I don't know if they can fully understand what it's like to go through a week or just a day.” Brittney echoed this encouraging administrators to visit classrooms saying, “Get in classrooms more and see what it's like, because in a couple of years teaching looks completely different than it did, right. Maybe you've only been an administrator for a few years, but it's drastically different than when you were there last.”

Express Gratitude for Teachers

Participants revealed they want their administrators to express gratitude for teachers individually. Teacher appreciated when gratitude was expressed to the whole staff, but felt like individualized positive feedback would be more impactful. Natalie shared the importance of frequent check-ins when she said:

> We have this conversation with my principal making sure that they check in frequently with their teachers personally, not whole group, not in staff meetings, but personally. 'Hey, how are you doing today?' Like even a note in their mailbox or something, so having that one-on-one kind of relationship.

Emily shared that small gestures can be meaningful. When asked what she felt like administrators could do to acknowledge teachers she stated, "I think that telling teachers that they're doing a good job or giving them positive feedback more often." Avery, an introvert, recommended that administrators not simply attend to negativity. She conveyed how she often feels overlooked by her administrators:

> I mean, it's like she's not causing any problems. Just let her do her thing, you know. Most of the time I'm okay. I would rather not be micromanaged, but it'd be nice to once in a while hear you're doing a good job. Thank you for not causing problems or whatever. Thank you for teaching whatever we ask you to, or you know, things like that. It would be nice to hear something kind once in a while, but again I totally get that. They're very busy up there.

On the other hand, Hannah talked about how her relationship with her administrator motivated her to step into a role nobody else wanted. Hannah's administrator knew her limits and expressed gratitude for her hard work. Hannah reported his awareness of who she was as a person helped her feel supported, because her administrator balanced her schedule to minimize stressors:

> "I didn't ask for AVID. He asked me to take it on. He asked me to be an AVID teacher, but he also asked me to be the AVID Coordinator, because nobody else would do it. He knew I could handle it. He knew what I could and couldn't do. But he wouldn't have put anything else on my plate. He knew he wanted me on the

> leadership team, and he wouldn't put anything else on my plate. He kept me in English and AVID and provided support. He knew how to balance it out for me.

In the previous example, Hannah reflected on feeling like her talents were seen and utilized, but she did not feel as though her administrator was taking advantage of her work ethic. Sadly, teachers' work ethic is often exploited in exchange for food or other small rewards. Hannah cautioned administrators not to use food as a reward pointing out it will not boost morale or build community in the long run:

> We get a lot of food. Free pizza in the lounge, or whatever it is, and I don't think food is what teachers necessarily need. I love it, sure. Give me a free lunch, but that's not what's really gonna connect us, right? It's not going to make us feel supported. It's the release of time. It's being seen and feeling valued.

Interestingly, Hannah stated that food will not connect colleagues. This is profound, because many participants expressed that a major way they coped was through bonding with trusted colleagues. Therefore, expressing gratitude through food falls flat with many teachers and does not address their need for connection.

Create Cultures of Care and Belonging

Creating a culture of belonging among the adults in the school is vital in supporting teachers' mental health. Administrators should work to build community among colleagues, because trusted colleagues were a main source of coping for participants. Furthermore, participants explicitly asked for authentic opportunities to build community and connect with colleagues. Natalie emphasized how personal relationships can affect school climate, “It's the personal relationship that very clearly impacts the professional relationship, and therefore, the climate of the school.” Participants proposed different ideas about how to improve staff morale and build community. Natalie suggested administrators could encourage all staff members to join a happy hour, “Hey, we're doing a happy hour. Everybody come kind of thing, so everybody can

feel like they will be talked to and welcomed, and be there." Though a happy hour may be as a small gesture, off-site community building can be very powerful. Hannah heard that a neighboring school's administrative team took their teachers off-site for team building, and she noted this as a suggested way to bring colleagues with different philosophies together in a collaborative and fun environment. She felt that team building was valued more in the corporate world but not in education, particularly because she had seen team building valued on one campus within her district. This left her feeling like her voice was unheard, as she and her colleagues had asked for off-site team building:

> We're just separated into two different mindsets. There's "these types" of teachers and "these types" of teachers, and we don't always see eye to eye. So, just having that team building like we've asked for, even just on one of our professional developments. Can we just go into a ropes course or something? And I've seen some schools, like my sister's school, go to the bay. What are those boats like a canoe thing, or whatever at Mission Bay? They have this whole team building day before school started, and they all met at Mission Bay, and did this whole team building thing on boats. I think it's the actual program for companies, or whatever, and teens. But these are things that you see a lot in the corporate world. But you don't really see it in teaching.

Notably, teachers who did feel like community building was a value of their campus, reported feeling happier at work. Olivia described the sense of community at her site she felt from the start, "I loved being there too, there was just such a community. I just felt like I belonged here, and I still feel that way; the community, the relationship with kids. I just feel like it's such an inclusive school. It's such a strong community."

As a result, districts and site administrators should encourage play, not simply academic rigor, understanding that connections among colleagues are made during this time and benefit school culture. Furthermore, participants reported that one way they were able to experience authentically felt joy was through humor in their classrooms. Research suggests that the student-teacher relationship improves school connectedness for students (Lopez et. al, 2024).

Additionally, participants stated that humor with students helped them cope with stressors in the profession and reconnected them to the love they have for teaching. Equally important, participants shared that their work ethic and passion for those they serve motivated them to continually do their best they could for students. Therefore, administrators need to realize that encouraging play will not decrease teachers' desire to work hard, rather it offers teachers a reprieve from emotional labor and helps them connect to themselves and others.

Utilize Staff Meetings to Support Teachers Socio-Emotional Needs

Administrators often cite lack of time as a barrier to devoting meaningful time to teachers' well-being. Participants wished that administrators would be more thoughtful about how they schedule professional time. Brittney articulated how well-meaning administrators often end staff meetings early under the guise of providing teachers the "gift of time" saying, "I think it's very well intentioned, but it doesn't feel that way. What am I supposed to do with this random 20 minutes that you've decided to give us? I don't think it's intended this way, but it feels dismissive." On the other hand, Claire shared that administrators filled teachers' professional time and did not allow them the opportunity to handle their own needs stating, "Different administrators consider that time available for them to require stuff from us." However, administrators can use staff meetings to create a shared understanding of theoretical frameworks, such Goleman's Social Intelligence Framework and Hochschild's Emotional Labor Framework, to give all staff a common language to adequately communicate their needs. In addition to these topics, administrators might consider teaching conflict resolution skills and interpersonal communication skills, since participants' communicated a strong need to have healthy interpersonal relationships with colleagues.

Deal with Issues in a Timely Manner

Open communication during uncertain times is a strategy administrators can implement to help alleviate the stressors of teachers. Budget cuts, discipline issues, and parent complaints were cited by participants as being particularly stressful times in which open communication in a timely manner would be supportive to teachers' mental health. Avery shared feelings of disconnection from her principal caused anxiety, "When was the last time we got an email from our principal? It's been like three weeks. Do we know what's going on with our schedule? Everyone's stressed about what's going on with the budget? What does she know? What am I gonna be teaching next year?"

Lack of follow through on important issues allowed participants to feel like they were not always supported by their administrators. Riley conveyed how detrimental lack of support can be to teacher morale saying, "Supporting teachers is more than just sitting down and hearing your side. So, for example, if a teacher has an issue with a parent, our district is very quick to give the parent what they want. That's demoralizing to teachers." Other participants felt that lack of accountability for students and colleagues was especially frustrating. Avery emphasized that "follow through with discipline" would help teachers feel supported. In addition to accountability for students, Mia added that accountability for fellow colleagues would help alleviate some stressors. Mia emphasized the following:

> I also feel like admin has a kind of trust in teachers, especially teachers who are older. But I also feel that teachers need to be held accountable, and when certain teachers aren't held accountable, and they just keep doing whatever they want, it makes the other teachers who are accountable, frustrated. When rules are set at school, and people don't follow them, and then you share that with your admin, and nothing gets done.

Furthermore, administrators should be quick to communicate updates to teachers during difficult times, understanding they carry the weight of conflict with them. Lack of communication

heightened emotional labor for teachers, and the uncertainty of these long term issues added to teachers' stress level. This is concerning because engaging in emotional suppression throughout the workday impacts students as well. For example, the use of surface acting to suppress emotions such as pretending to be calm when they are internally feeling angry, limits the cognitive capacity of teachers during the delivery of a lesson (Chang, 2020).

Teacher Recommendations

While there are things teachers can do to reduce the impacts of emotional labor, the reality remains that systemic change will only happen when districts acknowledge the emotional labor of the teaching profession and implement systemic changes to improve the well-being of teachers. Districts and administrators should acknowledge the work ethic and passion teachers bring to their work every day. Thus, recommendations for teachers will likely not be taken seriously by teachers, or may not be realistically able to be implemented, unless improving the well-being of teachers becomes an organizational value in conjunction with policies and practices that communicate genuine care for teachers. Brittney aptly communicated the frustration she felt with hearing administrators encourage self-care while simultaneously not implementing any practices to help them make time for self-care. She stated, “During Covid, there was definitely a conversation about ‘take care of yourself', this self-care sort of verbiage that I got very tired of. They were asking us to get all these things done, but also make time to take care of ourselves, and it's like, how can both of these be true?” Her reflections should be a call to action for districts and administrators that self-care is not possible without a restructuring of the expectations put on teachers. Unfortunately, teachers’ work ethic and emotions continue to be exploited for the good of students; however, districts are not prioritizing pouring back into teachers for all their hard work. Therefore, these recommendations are given with respect to

teachers and an acknowledgment that true change cannot happen without the support of the district and site level administrators.

Prioritize Your Well-Being

Being a teacher is believed to be a higher moral calling (Fullan, 2020), and participants echoed they felt called to teach and expressed much passion for their careers. Additionally, in American society, our occupations become a part of our identity (Unruh, 2004). Participants also reported feeling like teaching was a primary part of their identity, and in some cases that was a welcomed identity teachers were proud of, while others felt like it was a part of their identity they could not escape. All things considered, it is understandable that teachers feel strongly about their teacher identity. However, teachers should embrace the intersectionality of all the identities they ascribe to and prioritize other identities that allow them to lean into self-care. Teachers should also acknowledge and tend to their mental and physical health before the needs of the classroom. Administration and other colleagues should encourage teachers to hold space for students' struggles, and acknowledge that within the constructs of the current school system, teachers can only do so much with the time they are with students.

Create Boundaries

Teachers should create personal boundaries that support them "turning off" the classroom and allow them to prioritize their health and personal lives. The display rules of the education profession ask teachers to display respect and positive emotions towards students, colleagues, and families inside and outside the classroom at all times (Truta, 2014; Ye & Chen, 2015). These organizational rules often extend to outside the classroom as well. Namely, participants mentioned email as a stressor, because email made them feel though they had to be available to all students after their contract hours.

Because teachers cite strong levels of work ethic, districts and administrators can encourage teachers to take time away as needed to refresh themselves, because they will come back. While others may choose to leave the profession for various reasons, that should be a welcomed option for the individuals with an understanding that a teacher who is struggling cannot be effective for students. However, in an effort to increase retention of teachers and reduce burnout, teachers should find ways to create space in your workday to complete work related tasks, such as empowering students to lead small groups giving teachers time to check in with students, so they do not have to sacrifice their personal time to support students. If this is not a feasible option for teachers, they may consider asking for release time within their workday to plan or grade. Finally, teachers should take personal days as needed and communicate their needs to trusted colleagues and administration to minimize the stress and guilt.

What remains problematic about offering teachers these recommendations is that the construct of emotional labor intends to leverage the emotions of the employee for the benefit of the organization. Therefore, it is not incumbent upon the employee to primarily be the catalyst for change. Historically, the teaching profession has assumed emotionality and stress were part of the profession that teachers knowingly signed up for, and consequently, teachers' well-being has not systemically been prioritized.

Recommendations for Credential Programs

The reality is that many teachers do not have an accurate sense of emotional labor and the impacts to the teacher before they enter the profession, let alone a credential program. Research suggests teacher education programs and professional development should be designed to help teachers reframe how they think about organizational display rules and teach them how to effectively manage their emotions (Chang, 2020; Lee et al., 2016). Furthermore, participants in

this study urged credential programs to include some training around the emotionality of the teaching profession and practical solutions to cope with stressors. Alex shared the following, “I think there are mental health challenges for teachers, just the stress of what you learn about your students and really rough situations some of them are in, you know. The credential program doesn't prepare you for that.” Emily similarly shared she wished she had learned about the emotional parts of the job before entering the classroom. Emily argued:

> How do you prepare for the emotional parts of the job, and all the different facets that you are going to need to handle in your classroom… all of the different hats you have to wear, and all of the different things coming at you? I think that's emotionally exhausting. I think the credential program says, ‘Well, you will be in charge of having to follow the IEP. This is what you need to get a job, and this is how you write a lesson plan. Do you know how long it's been since I've written a lesson plan? Since my program I had to do maybe one of those, but I've never written a lesson plan unless it was for being observed once every few years.

According to the California Learning Resource Network (2024), the cost of a credential program can range from $3,000 - $10,000 dollars per year, with an overall total of $40,000 - $120,000 to meet all the necessary education requirements to receive an undergraduate education and a teaching credential. Additionally, considering that teachers are so impactful to students' success, the profession should work to educate future teachers how to mitigate the stressors of teaching to improve retention. Credentials programs should consider adding a prerequisite course to promote the well-being of teacher candidates as they enter their programs, helping to set them up for success and avoid burnout in future generations of teachers.

With trends such as “Quit Quitting” and “Lazy Girl Jobs” trending on social media, we can see that younger generations are already encouraging one another to fight for a positive work-life balance. Quit quitting was popularized on TikTok by an engineer in his 20’s named Zaid Khan (Rosalysk & Selukh, 2022). According to Khan, Quit Quitting is a philosophy that encourages workers to not define their work by their productivity and no longer go above and

beyond for the organization (Harter, 2023; Rosalysk & Selukh, 2022). According to Gallup, 50% of the American workforce is already quitting (Harter, 2023). This phenomenon is catching on in other countries as well. In Japan this phenomenon is referred to as “shokunin’ and specifically is meant to refer to artisans who are “...deeply dedicated to their craft, always striving for perfection in what they make” (Rosalysk & Selukh, 2022). According to Rosalysk & Selukh (2022), this trend asks workers to separate their ego from their profession, stop striving for perfection, and start completing tasks only within contract hours. In China this trend is referred to as “Tang Ping”, meaning to lie flat meant as rejection of societal pressures to work long hours (BBC, 2021).

Furthermore, Quit Quitting was taken a step further by TikToker Gabrielle Judge who has encouraged Gen Z’ers to embrace being called lazy in exchange for a remote job that provides a greater work-life balance (Perna, 2023). Judge is not actually advocating for workers to be lazy, rather she encourages others to get a “Lazy Girl Job”, meaning they seek employment that offers flexibility and preserves their energy for more meaningful activities after work (Perna, 2023).

As it currently stands in the teaching profession, most teachers are expected to work or be available to students outside of contract hours. Therefore, if this trend continues to gain popularity with younger generations, the teacher profession will become largely unattractive to younger generations, resulting in a teacher shortage. According to Perna (2023), 80% of Millennials and Gen Z’ers see mental health as an organizational priority. In other words, it is no longer enough for the teaching profession to assume that a calling to be a teacher will be enough to continue to exploit the productive and passion teachers bring to the profession.

Implications for Social Justice

Advocating for better conditions will improve outcomes for teachers and students. Districts should create policies that encourage site level administrators to promote the well-being of all stakeholders. Research suggests that younger generations are seeking to improve mental health conditions in the workforce and are rejecting societal pressures to prove they are dedicated to their profession by burning themselves out. Investing in teachers' well-being will likely improve happiness, productivity, and support the socio-emotional needs of the students they serve.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study is to understand how K-12 teachers define emotional labor and investigate the coping strategies teachers use to manage the emotional labor of the teaching profession. In addition, this study aims to explore how teachers' use of emotional regulation strategies affect teachers' personal and professional lives. Future research should be done to investigate how credential programs are preparing future teachers for the emotionality of the teaching profession. Furthermore, research may seek to investigate how credential programs are promoting the mental health needs of teacher candidates.

More research is needed to further investigate how emotional labor impacts various groups of teachers and how they cope with emotional labor. Emotional labor affects social groups to varying degrees (Hochschild, 2012). A comparative approach should be taken to evaluate the ways in which teachers of color may need additional support to improve retention. Additionally, further research should be done to understand how gender identity impacts teachers' emotional labor and the exacerbation of secondary effects to teachers' personal lives. Currently, "our culture invites women, more than men, to focus on feeling rather than action"

(Hochschild, 2012, p. 57). However, education leaders should work to value the emotional experiences of all teachers. Administrative credential programs may choose to use this research when training future administrators on best practices in supporting all staff members.

Conclusion

Findings of this study illustrated that the education system currently devotes a lot of time and resources towards investigating and supporting the socio-emotional needs of students, but does not give the same level of care to the socio-emotional needs of teachers. Participants of this study defined emotional labor as the struggle to: manage teaching as a primary of ones' identity, find positive work-life balance, care for the whole child, work with difficult colleagues and administrators, and cope with feeling devalued as a professional. In an effort to cope with emotional labor, teachers employed a variety of strategies to cope with the emotional labor of the profession including: leaning into positive naturally felt emotions, using humor with students to reframe difficult moments, surface acting, deep acting, and seeking support from their families and trusted colleagues. While there were some participants who experienced minimal levels of emotional labor, all participants reported some degree of mental and physical impacts to their health. A majority of participants experienced high levels of stress throughout the workday and reported secondary impacts to their personal lives. Participants reported the emotional labor they experienced as a result of teaching impacted their mental health, physical health, organizational commitment, and their ability to emotionally regulate while teaching. While participants' mental and physical health stressors manifested itself for different reasons, what was consistent among participants was they all carried emotional labor out of their workday, resulting in mental and physical health struggles and in some cases, relational dysregulation at home. Participants' attempts to regulate their emotions resulted in teachers' distancing from students, impacted

teachers ability to form meaningful teacher-student relationships, and increased the prevalence of burnout in teachers.

A statistic often cited in education remains that 44% of teachers leave the profession during the first five years of their career (Ingersoll et al., 2018; UNESCO, 2023). However, what is far less researched is how the emotional labor of the teaching profession affects teachers' well-being and their level of organizational commitment. Teachers are considered foundational for a country's economic success and global influence; therefore, not providing adequate support for teachers can have far reaching consequences beyond the classroom walls (Ye & Chen, 2015). The education system should commit more research and resources to investigating the socio-emotional needs of teachers and the further impact on students.

Appendix A: Invitation to Participate

Hello,

My name is Candice Dorn and I am a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership at California State University San Marcos. I am conducting a research study to find out more about the impacts of emotional labor of the teaching profession on educators. The purpose of this form is to inform you about the study, and ask for your consideration in becoming an interview participant.

Why am I being invited to take part in this study?

You are invited to take part in this study because you have been recommended by a personal or professional acquaintance as someone who meets the criteria of the ideal interview participants.

The criteria is as follows:

- Credentialed K-12 teachers within in Poway Unified School District
- Teachers with 10-20 years of teaching experience
- Teachers who are currently in the classroom and hold a full time contract

What will I do if I agree to participate?

If you are selected as a participant for this study you will be invited to participate in a one-on-one interview to gain insight into your emotional experiences as an educator. The estimated time for your participation in this study is approximately 1-1.5 hours. The interview will be conducted in a virtual setting, and the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed for accuracy. Following the interview, you will receive a copy of all written analyzed data that pertains to your interview to ensure your voice is accurately represented. If you choose to have anything omitted or changed, I will honor your request(s). Following your participation in this study, you will receive a $25 electronic gift card as a thank you for your time.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate at any time, even after the study has started. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study, there will be no penalty.

What are the benefits to me for being in this study?

Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation is the addition to the field of knowledge that examines the ways in which the emotional labor of the teaching profession impacts educators' personal and/or professional lives.

What happens to the information collected for the study?

Your responses will be confidential. Interviews will be conducted via Zoom to provide you with the opportunity to select a date and time that is convenient, as well as allow you to select a venue that is safe for you to speak freely.The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name or other personal information as applicable will not be used. All digital records will be stored in a password-protected computer account accessible only to Candice Dorn. All paper documents will be locked in a file cabinet. Data will be retained for up

to 5 years after the project is completed after which any paper records will be shredded, and any digital files will be erased.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me? Is there any risk to me by being in this study? If so, how will these risks be minimized?

There are minimal risks and inconveniences to participating in this study. These include:
1. A potential for feeling discomfort when participating in the interview.
2. The time you spend participating in the study might be considered an inconvenience, but every effort will be made to keep the observations, focus groups, and interviews during your regular working hours and/or at a time that's most convenient for you.

Who should I contact for questions?

If you have questions about the study, please call me at (phone number) or e-mail me at (email). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the IRB Office at irb@csusm.edu or (760) 750-4029.

Thank you in advance for your consideration to participate in this study.

Sincerely,
Candice Dorn

Appendix B: Interview Questions

General Questions

1. Do you agree to this interview being video recorded? (The consent form will be provided, but this is asked once the recording begins as an additional safeguard.)
2. List the teaching credentials you hold.
3. Do you currently hold a full time teaching contract in PUSD?
4. How many years of teaching experience do you have? (must be 10-20 years of experience)
5. What grade level and subject do you currently teach?
6. What grade levels and subjects have you taught throughout your career?

Interview Questions

1. Tell me the story of your journey as an educator thus far.
2. Describe a typical day in your classroom?
3. How do you define what it means to be a good teacher?
4. How do you think society defines what it means to be a good teacher?
5. How often do you experience positive emotions during a typical work day?
6. How often do you experience negative emotions during the work day?
7. What does emotional labor mean to you?
8. What does a good day in teaching look like for you? How do you feel on a good day?

a. Do you celebrate good days? Do you include anyone in your celebration; colleagues, significant others? Why or why not?

9. What does a bad day in teaching look like for you? How do you feel on a day day?

a. How do you cope with bad days? Do you have anyone you can turn to on bad days?

10. Do you feel like you can express your authentic feelings during the school day with:

i. Students?

ii. Colleagues?

iii. Families and community members?

11. Does teaching impact your personal life in any way? How does that make you feel?

12. Has teaching impacted your physical or mental health in any way? How does that make you feel?

13. Have you ever thought about leaving the profession?

a. If so, why did you consider leaving? Why did you choose to stay?

14. Do you have any recommendations for school leaders and administration around how to support teachers' emotional health?

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