



Links in the Chain

A Self-Study of Emotional Support in Teacher Education During COVID-19 Lockdown

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Abstract

In this self-study, I reflect critically on a chain of emotional support linking a preservice philosophy teacher, a pedagogical instructor, a school counselor, and a high school student during the first COVID-19 lockdown. With the help of a critical friend, I focus on my role as the preservice teacher's pedagogical instructor and examine the particular challenges and new opportunities granted to this profes-

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Note of Acknowledgment and Dedication: Professor Oren Ergas was my "critical friend" for this article and in life. He had clear, sharp sight and an uncompromising demand for perfection. But he was also a supportive friend, generous with his knowledge and time, caring and nonjudgmental on the personal level. Oren is gone now, after a long struggle with cancer. I miss his friendship and his professional partnership. This study, about professional and personal dialogue and support, is the right text to be dedicated to Oren's memory.

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sional and personal chain of response and responsibility under the conditions of remote learning. My interviews with the preservice teacher and a senior counselor revealed two main themes, which are also central objectives of my work in teacher education: integration of social emotional learning into subject matter contents and integration of preservice teachers into school staff during practical training. These two objectives merge in a holistic approach to teacher education. I suggest that teacher-educators should recognize three aspects of teaching in conditions of social distancing: the greater need for emotional support, unique obstacles to giving support, and new ways to overcome these obstacles. Additionally, I argue that we should embrace the new possibilities that digital channels offer us for creating intimacy and accessibility in our relationships with our students.

Introduction

The self-study described here was inspired by an event during the COVID-19 pandemic, involving a high school student, a preservice teacher, the preservice teacher's pedagogical instructor (PI), an educational counselor, and a school counselor. This is how it unfolded: Lian,¹ a 10th-grade student, sent a WhatsApp text to her philosophy teacher, Amy (a preservice teacher), after a lesson taught via Zoom during the first COVID-19 lockdown. The lesson's contents had aroused her anxiety. Amy recognized suicidal hints in the text and sent me (Amy's PI) a message, asking for advice. In turn, I called a senior educational counselor. She supported me over the phone and made suggestions. I passed these on to Amy and guided her response to Lian. Amy responded to Lian and updated Claire, the school's counselor; both actively supported Lian. This chain of support was empowering and hopeful despite its remote, non-face-to-face interaction.

In this self-study, I reflect critically on my response to the situation, the professional choices involved, and the interpersonal contexts in which the situation occurred. With the help of a critical friend, I examine the particular challenges and new opportunities granted to this professional and personal chain of response and responsibility under the conditions of remote learning, attempting to trace this unique path of help, empowerment, and hope.

In the next section, I give a theoretical background for my study. This is followed by the study methods and research questions. From this point on, the structure differs from a traditional one to best serve the study's line of thought. I present the case itself and its context so readers can join in my retrospective, reflective journey. Then, I bring the findings and discussion together, dividing them thematically into two sections. Finally, I present my main conclusion, along with a few afterthoughts.

Theoretical Background

A long series of educational thinkers have argued for schools' commitment to students' emotional well-being (Buber & Kaufmann, 1922/1970; Dewey, 1916; Korczak, 1980; Noddings, 1984/2013; Rogers, 1969). Given schools' organizational

structure, distribution of time and space, learning methods, and so on, meeting this goal can be difficult (Noddings, 1994), but recent work underscores its importance. For example, there is a growing awareness of social emotional learning (SEL) as central to teaching and learning (Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development, 2020). According to Schonert-Reichl (2017), SEL involves the processes through which individuals acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage their emotions, feel and show empathy for others, establish and achieve positive goals, develop and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

SEL has developed substantially in recent decades, including its implementation in the digital world (Walker & Weidenbenner, 2019), and is advocated by leading organizations, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Duraiappah & van Atteveldt, 2022). Contemplative pedagogy (Barbezat & Bush, 2013; Ergas, 2019), a theory positioning the learner at the center of the learning, draws on the SEL discourse. In work in this area, Hadar et al. (2020) showed that teachers can be taught about empathy and attention by exploring both in mindfulness practice.

However, there is a tendency to stress the value of SEL to school-age students. Arguably, it is equally applicable to learners of other ages and especially important for teacher-students. Indeed, there is a growing awareness of the importance of investing in the SEL competence of teachers during teacher training, as teachers' social and emotional skills are vital to student learning (Jones et al., 2013). Research has shown that novice teachers often feel unprepared and lack the ability to recognize common mental health challenges, such as anxiety, in their students (Koller & Bertel, 2006; Siebert, 2005), whereas teachers who are trained in emotional factors that impact classroom management feel better equipped to promote a positive school climate (Alvarez, 2007).

The message for teacher education is that efforts should be made to support the development of teachers' SEL competencies to optimize their classroom performance and their ability to promote SEL in their students (Jennings & Frank, 2015). However, a comprehensive report on the inclusion of SEL in teacher preparation programs in the United States found that even though all states address some area of teachers' SEL in their certification requirements, there is a mismatch between state-level teacher certification requirements and the extent to which colleges of education include SEL content in their required courses for preservice teacher education students (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). In other words, SEL is still not getting enough attention in teacher education programs.

The COVID-19 crisis has deepened the need for emotional support for children and youths, with a worrying growth of depression, anxiety, and other expressions of emotional distress (Racine et al., 2021). At the same time, the educational circumstances have magnified educators' challenge to express their own social emotional skills in class and to cultivate those skills among

their students (Hadar et al., 2020). Social distancing, school closures, and the sudden transfer to remote learning have diminished face-to-face encounters. Screens are the only channels left for communication. It is difficult to enhance social emotional skills and cultivate caring relationships between teachers and students under such conditions (Flores & Swennen, 2020). Yet this new reality has also created new opportunities to meet old objectives. For example, higher education students' performance was found to be improved during COVID-19 confinement (Gonzalez et al., 2020). The case under discussion exemplifies additional opportunities, as I show herein.

The school counselor is responsible mainly for students' emotional well-being in school. A main duty is indirect support through guidance of "significant others" in students' lives, mostly parents and teachers. Counselors' collaboration with teachers is important for many reasons. First, it is a way to cope with the quantitative overload of counselors who cannot reach every child in school; instead, they reach children indirectly through their teachers (Cholewa et al., 2016). Second, it can help achieve several objectives in the care of students, including the objectives to provide emotional support (Clark & Breman, 2009) and career development (Limberg et al., 2021). Both parties acknowledge the importance of working together. Teachers (Beesley, 2004; Clark & Amatea, 2004) and counselors (Gibbons et al., 2010) see collaboration as an essential aspect of a counselor's work. However, cooperation is a complex issue, even in normal school routines.

The need to improve the work collaboration between teachers and counselors is a common theme of the professional literature (Dixon et al., 2008), as improved partnership relations represent a basis for effective student counseling (Slijep evi & Zukovi , 2021). Strengthening the bonds between teachers and counselors may have additional benefits. First, it might reduce the reluctance of subject matter teachers to discuss emotions in their lessons (Ergas, 2017; Hargreaves, 2000). Second, ongoing dialogue with the counselor might contribute to a teacher's ability to recognize warning signs in the classroom (Reis & Cornell, 2008). Third, collaboration can help both sides recognize the differences between their professional specializations, permitting them to decide together who the right person is to help a student in any particular case. If the circumstances involve suicidal threats, for example, counselors tend to recognize signs of distress and to handle the situation better than teachers (Reis & Cornell, 2008), making it important to hand those cases to them.

In the case studied here, I examine this challenge in light of two additional obstacles: remote learning and the work of a preservice teacher.

Methodology and Research Questions

Self-study enables teacher-educators to learn by critically reflecting on their practical experience (Kitchen et al., 2020; LaBoskey, 2004). Therefore this ap-

proach was appropriate, given my wish to retrospectively examine the choices I made in the case under discussion and thus improve my work (Kitchen, 2020). A self-study based on a single case (Poyas, 2016) allows the practitioner to focus the reflective gaze on a unique educational situation and to attempt to encompass its total complexity. As Dewey (1957) taught us, the atomic unit of education is a particular educational practical situation. Following Dewey, Schwab (1971) compared the concrete educational situation to a complicated “bundle” that eludes simple theoretical generalization and therefore must be treated uniquely and holistically. Indeed, the case discussed here was complex. It included a chain of interpersonal relations of the preservice teacher with her high school student, with her colleagues on the school staff (especially the counselor), and with me, her PI. However, as the self-study centers on my own work, I will inquire into my responsibility in training and supporting preservice teachers.²

At the same time, as self-study represents a critical examination of “one’s actions and the context of those actions in order to achieve a more conscious mode of professional activity” (Samaras, 2002, p. xxiv), this inquiry may permit me to draw more general conclusions relevant to fellow teacher-educators facing similar challenges. Not enough attention has been given to teachers’ ability to identify risk situations and provide emotional support to students. Hence my study contributes to the literature, heeding Kitchen’s (2020) call to advance self-study through inquiry “into the wider teacher-candidate experience in their institutions” (p. 1023).

My research questions were as follows: What can I learn from this case about my own work as PI and about the *is* (the existing reality) and the *ought* (the best practice we can think of, recommend, and aspire to achieve) of teacher-educators’ work, in the mission of guiding teacher-students during their practical training? How are these tasks affected by the conditions of remote learning? What adjustments must be made to meet the special challenges of this context and to enjoy the special opportunities granted to the teaching situation under these conditions?

To enhance the study’s trustworthiness (LaBoskey, 2004), I consulted formal documents, including the school counselor’s role description and instructions for educators concerning recognition of warning signs from teenagers. I also used personal texts written during the event: WhatsApp messages from Lian to Amy and from Amy to me. I requested and received institutional review board approval to use these and to interview the adult participants. To enhance the study’s interactivity (LaBoskey, 2004), I interviewed the two figures who shared my experience: Amy, the preservice teacher, and Rona, the school counselor. Because of the lockdown, interviews were performed via Zoom, recorded, and transcribed. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour. The interview with Amy helped me to include her point of view in my analysis, and Rona taught me about the counselor’s role in guiding teachers to recognize signs of dangerous behaviors.

The interviews were semistructured. The preplanned questions for Amy were as follows:

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1. Please tell me about your experience with Lian.
2. Please tell me about your relationship with Lian before the case.
3. In your opinion, what made Lian choose you as the teacher to turn to for help?
4. What made you recognize Lian's message as requiring special care?
5. What were your considerations for and against turning to the school counselor?
6. What did you learn from the case?

The preplanned questions for Rona were as follows:

1. What are the "red" signs of danger from teenage students?
2. What guidance do subject matter teachers receive around this subject?
3. In your opinion, what should the cooperation between counselors and teachers look like?
4. How are all these issues affected by social distancing?

Additional questions came up during both interviews.

I also considered my own experiences in my work with Amy and her fellow preservice students in the months preceding the event. This work was documented in notes I had written during and after lessons and in feedback conversations.

To analyze the data, I conducted open and preliminary coding by reading each transcript carefully to identify units of general meaning and writing down analytical memos (subject thoughts). These memos were initial differentiations, through which I started to divide the story into three relationships (teacher–high school student, teacher–counselor, and preservice teacher–PI). Across these three relationships, I spotted two dimensions: working in normal conditions and working in the unique situation of remote learning. The three relationships on two dimensions gave me six categories. The next stage included rereading the transcripts and highlighting these six categories, in different colors. This helped me to cluster themes and eventually define three themes, divided into subthemes, as elaborated in the Findings section.

I was well aware that I could not possibly be objective about my work. Moreover, I had personal relationships with both interviewees: Amy as my student and Rona as my friend and colleague. Both were personally involved in the case, so they could not be considered objective partners in critical analysis of the case. Therefore, following Schuck and Russell's (2005) guidelines, I turned to a critical friend who could offer an alternative point of view on the data, processes, and conclusions. Oren Ergas was the right person for several reasons. First, he is an experienced researcher involved in the methodology of self-study and could help me design the study and ensure the trustworthiness of my interpretations. Second, he is a fellow teacher-educator. Third, SEL is one of his areas of expertise (Ergas, 2017, 2019). Professor Ergas helped me identify the main issues and crystalize my research questions. At the start of the process, I was somewhat overwhelmed by the complexity of the case in terms of the different characters involved and the multiplicity of professional challenges and responsibilities that I recognized. In a series of conversations, my critical friend encouraged me with small clarification questions to differentiate between the various links of the chain and to recognize

the important professional questions that came up around each. Later, he read the data from the interviews and thus was able to comment on my draft of data analysis. Finally, my critical friend read drafts of the article and commented on them, “demanding” clarity and coherence in the “storytelling” of the case and the layout of the analysis.

The Case: Personal and Professional Contexts

Practical Training Framework

Amy was participating in a pedagogical workshop on teaching philosophy in high school. The teaching preparation program in which she was enrolled is a postgraduate program, titled Career Change to Teaching—for Academics. The students in the program already have a bachelor’s degree in the discipline they will teach, and some already have experience teaching various subjects. The training program is 1–2 years (the exact length depends on the student’s prior academic degree). Completing the program entitles students to receive a teaching diploma, granted by the academic college and authorized by the Israeli Ministry of Education. The program includes theoretical courses in education and practical training, accompanied by a pedagogical workshop.

Most students in the program are placed for practical training in high school classes with cooperating “host” teachers who specialize in their disciplines. The case of philosophy as subject matter is different because there are very few philosophy teachers in high schools. Only approximately 15 schools in the whole country offer philosophy classes. As a result, I have difficulty finding host teachers for my teacher-students who specialize in philosophy. Yet the principals are happy to receive my students as “visiting teachers” and gain free extracurricular lessons for their schoolchildren. Therefore I have developed a unique mode of training in which the teacher-students go to schools regularly and work almost like the professional teachers. Every teacher-student receives a group of 15 10th graders (half a full class) and teaches them once a week for 2 hours without a host teacher in class. The pupils perceive the philosophy teachers as regular teachers, with full responsibility for teaching, homework, and evaluation. The training period is usually 1 year for each subject; most of the students specialize in two disciplines, so the complete process can take 2 years.

My work as a PI of this group starts with a few intensive days, during which we concentrate on rapid preparation for teaching. Then, I continue to supervise them through regular correspondence around their lesson plans and by weekly visits to school, during which I follow a different person in their teaching day, observe them in class every week, and then have a personal feedback conversation with that person. In addition, we have a weekly group reflection talk, and we meet for a workshop session to discuss the philosophical contents of their courses; pedagogical considerations; didactic skills; and relationships with students, staff members, and parents.

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The training period of Amy's workshop lasted 1 academic year (2019–2020). It was interrupted in the middle by a complete lockdown; the philosophy lessons were stopped, but after a few weeks, they were restarted via Zoom. That year was already challenging for the team, even before the pandemic, because the school counselor was on maternity leave in the first months, so the preservice teachers and I had not met her at the school "orientation day," and the grade coordinator was replaced twice.

My Relationship With Amy

Amy started the training program with prior teaching experience and had a bachelor of arts degree in philosophy. It was clear from the beginning that she was handling the challenges of teaching, and her class was attentive and cooperative. However, the professional dialogue between us was not very smooth. The lesson plans she sent me did not follow the designs I recommended to the group. They seemed too academic and difficult and not adjusted to pupils' age and academic ability. Amy tried to correct this, but repeatedly sent me drafts that were not adjusted, and she generally did not apply my recommendations. At one workshop meeting, we had a difficult conversation in the college's garden. Amy cried and said she needed help, but she did not seem to understand how to apply my comments. She also said that a past student had praised my work and that she had come to our college especially because of me. I felt she was trying to convey the message that she was willing to learn from me. I realized that her high expectations about our relationship had probably created extra tension and difficulty accepting my criticism of her lesson plans. I was surprised by the intensity of her feelings, and I discovered her vulnerability, previously well hidden behind her opinionated image—a mixture of strength and weakness that reminded me of my own personality.

I reacted spontaneously and told her that she did not have to send me lesson plans for the moment, because she was doing well in class and it put extra pressure on her, instead of helping her. I added that she was welcome to send me teaching materials in the future if she wished. After this conversation, the atmosphere improved. She handed in lesson plans only a few times, but when she did, she was more willing to accept my suggestions. She also became more involved in the group reflection talks. After my observation of her teaching in class, which was very good, and the reinforcing feedback talk we had afterward, I sensed that the "crisis" in our relationship was over. Later, she turned to me more often than other students in her peer group to ask for my advice, and after the case under discussion, we maintained contact. She consulted with me about her permanent placement in school and about her work as a professional teacher. The difficulties we had had were not mentioned again, not even in the interview for this study.

The Case

One morning in April 2020, I received a WhatsApp message from Amy, asking for advice. It was the second lesson on Zoom, after approximately 12 lessons

in school and 3 weeks of no lessons at all. Amy sent me her correspondence with Lian, her teenage pupil, in which the girl talked about a feeling of deep anxiety and used expressions that included suicidal hints. Amy sent me the written response she was planning to send her and asked for my opinion (detailed quotations are in the findings). I called Amy and praised her for turning to me for help and told her that I thought it was better to call Lian and talk, rather than to respond in writing. I also thought she should share this information with the relevant professional figures in the school. We deliberated together who we should turn to. As mentioned, we had not met the counselor; thus we did not think of her as a relevant option. Amy felt that the class's head teacher might not respond sensitively enough, and I agreed, based on prior cases. However, I was certain that we must not give up on the school's involvement. I told Amy that I wanted to think about it and would get back to her soon. At that point, I called Rona, a friend and colleague who teaches and trains school counselors. Rona praised Amy's awareness of warning signs and said we must turn to the school counselor. She also emphasized a few points that must be included in Amy's talk with Lian once she called her.

I called Amy again and passed on Rona's comments. We agreed on a sequence of actions. Then, I called Claire, the school counselor. She said that she knew Lian well and that Lian did indeed have some emotional difficulties but was being treated by a psychologist and had a supportive family. In the next 2 days, there were several additional conversations between all those involved. We were glad to hear that after Amy's encouragement, Lian contacted Claire for help.

Findings and Discussion

The chain of support that emerged here included three dyadic relations: teacher–pupil, teacher–counselor, and preservice teacher–PI. The findings from the interviews established two themes representing the first two relations: (a) the preservice teacher's relationship with her pupils in class, focusing on issues of emotional distress and warning signs, and (b) the preservice teacher's team relations with coteachers and counselors during practical training. As a self-study of my work as PI, I was interested mainly in my responsibility concerning these relations. Hence the third professional and interpersonal relationship incorporated both themes.

In each of the next two sections, I discuss one theme, with several subsections presenting different layers of the theme. I inquire first into the teacher's challenge around that relationship in normal work and under the special conditions of remote learning before moving to the teacher-educator's responsibility.

Teacher–Pupil Relationship

Teacher–Pupil Relationship in School and Remote Learning

The analysis of this link in the chain probed the integration between teaching

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theoretical content and dealing with emotional issues (SEL). The case of Amy (a philosophy teacher) and Lian (a high school pupil) shows that when this integration holds, it nurtures both aspects and allows meaningful teaching and learning.

The emotional dialogue between Amy and Lian was based on the fact that Amy was a subject matter teacher. She met Lian and her class only once per week for 2 hours. Her role did not formally include social and emotional responsibility (unlike a counselor or a head teacher) and did not allow the conditions for an intensive relationship. Furthermore, subject matter teachers often shun the discussion of emotions in their lessons (Ergas, 2017; Hargreaves, 2000). In this case, emotional issues came into their relationship mainly because of the content Amy was teaching and probably also as a result of Amy's interpretations of the content and the pedagogical choices she made in preparing and teaching her lessons.

When I asked Amy to tell me about the case, she said, "It all started when we were reading Descartes' cogito" (i.e., "I think, therefore I am"). Her response referred to the content of the lesson, not to any interpersonal event in or out of class. This was also apparent in Lian's WhatsApp message to Amy. Right after mentioning her anxiety, she moved to discussing a short film from the Zoom lesson. The film presented the idea that life may be a game or a simulation. Amy said, "I will try to watch it, if it is too hard for me, I will stop and tell you." After a few minutes, she wrote, "I watched it. It's mind-blowing. If it is true, it's scary, because it means that our life is actually manipulated by somebody who controls us." Then she added,

Don't get me wrong, I would never take my own life or wish to die. . . . but I think that right now I don't really live. I also think this life is meaningless, no matter what I achieve in my life I will die, and it will all be forgotten. I thought many times that if I could choose, I wouldn't have come to this world.

Amy thought the emotional dialogue between them emerged from the philosophical contents of the lesson:

The connection between us was created around what we learned. Lian felt stress around philosophical questions, she felt an existential threat. I also had these kinds of thoughts when I was her age . . . and I think that brought us closer together, it was around the contents.

The letter Lian sent to Amy at the end of the school year supported this understanding by indicating a connection between the lesson's content and the emotional support she received:

In the beginning I didn't like philosophy lessons. I found them confusing and scary. Then I started liking them and liking the teacher. I started investigating more into the issues discussed, and it helped me in my life, in dealing with my anxieties, and with boredom, because now I know there is always something to think about. . . . It was a complicated year, and I think the philosophy lessons helped me cope with it. Thank you for a wonderful year, full of learning. I really don't know what I would have done without these lessons and without your help.

In Lian's letter, we can see how the personal relationship is interwoven with the subject contents. Importantly, teaching Descartes can be done differently, by focusing on the validity of his argumentation, but Lian's letter reveals that Amy's approach engendered a willingness to "open up" emotionally and share her feelings.

Amy described the history of their relationship as follows:

From the beginning she expressed a resentment toward philosophy lessons. She would go out in the middle of the lesson and talk to me with disrespect. I didn't understand how to reach her. Then I decided to turn to her in a friendly manner, I asked how she feels in class, and approached her with a positive attitude. She responded that the content made her anxious, as she thought of the meaning of life and felt overwhelmed by these emotions. I identified with these feelings and told her that coping with such content with my aid may be a better solution than running away from them. I invited her to keep me informed and allowed her to go out for a moment if she needs a break. I promised to help her catch up with what she missed in such case.

I recognize Amy's empathy and identification with Lian's existential experience as important factors. The crucial moment here was when Amy recognized Lian's behavior as emotional difficulty with philosophy rather than disobedience or personal resentment of her as a teacher. Amy approached Lian empathically rather than authoritatively. Equally important was Amy's true concern for Lian's emotional well-being and her priorities that placed this concern above behavioral aspects like obedience or academic performance. Amy's expression of flexibility allowed Lian to feel confidence and laid the ground for mutual trust.

Amy talked about her relationship with Lian after the case, when the "emergency" was over. Amy emphasized that her role still focused on the content and had not become therapeutic:

When I learned from the counselor that Lian is receiving therapy, I understood that I can offer her something else. I am not a professional therapist, I cannot cope with her anxieties, but I can offer points of view on the issues that trouble her that may help.

Amy spoke about the importance of adolescent students' exposure to personal-existential issues, not in a therapeutic context, but through a cognitive-theoretical lens: "I think that a personal setting of counselor meetings is important, but it is also important to discuss these issues at a universal level."

Amy's insights suggest what can happen when a teacher encourages deep inquiry into content with existential and emotional meaning. The joint process of diving into issues relevant to students' inner lives lays the foundation for an emotional discourse that offers possibilities of growth and healing, without crossing the line into the therapeutic space. In philosophy, there are lots of opportunities for such experiences, because the subject deals with "real" questions relevant to every individual's life and applicable in practical philosophy (Amir, 2018) and philosophical counseling (Knapp & Tjeltveit, 2005; Paden, 1998).

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To what extent are the last insights valid in conditions of remote learning? If the foundation for an emotional discourse between teacher and student is the dialogue around the subject matter, then, in theory, there is no reason why such dialogue could not happen in remote learning—through practices of reading, writing, or discussing vocally or in writing through technological platforms like Zoom and Padlet. But is this actually the case?

Amy believed that the conditions Lian needed to share her distress and receive an appropriate response were based on the face-to-face interaction in the first semester and, as such, were already in place:

Had it been a hundred percent remote learning, I don't think it would have happened, because remote learning allows people to disappear. Students who don't want to be there just vanish, and it is much harder for the teacher to see that. Establishing a relationship requires face-to-face meetings.

Rona raised similar doubts about the possibility of creating the conditions for emotional sharing and response in remote learning:

I perceive the remoteness as a situation that reinforces risks. What most worries us about youth at risk is the possibility of recognizing risks in time, or to provide an accessible environment, so that they can reach out and ask for help. In digital relationships, accessibility is reduced on both aspects, and that worries me a lot.

Yet the case occurred during the lockdown, when Amy and Lian had not met for almost 2 months. I wondered if the new situation had contributed to the creation of conditions for dialogue. Amy admitted that it had: “The lockdown had transferred our dialogue to WhatsApp. It allowed me to be in contact with them outside of the time of class. New channels of communication were thus opened here.” I asked Rona what she thought about the possibility of an increased degree of intimacy in teacher–pupil dialogue during remote learning. She confirmed it, but added a caveat:

I agree that WhatsApp opens a new channel for emotional support, but we also miss an important aspect. When a child meets the teacher in class, that establishes trust. The relationship is gradually built through the day-to-day encounter. The child watches how the teacher reacts to other students who turn to her in class. Is she patient, attentive, and supportive? Based on this observation, the child can assume what the response would be if he or she would turn to the same teacher. Without this interaction, the basis for trust becomes extinct, and the probability that the child would turn for help is diminished.

Ultimately, both Amy and Rona recognized remote learning as a loss of opportunity to establish a supportive teacher–pupil relationship. For one thing, the pupils had less opportunity to get to know their teachers and recognize them as potential partners in dialogue; for another, it was harder for teachers to see a pupil's personal emotional state. At the same time, both recognized some new opportunities.

I suggest avoiding idealizing life in schools and remembering how hard it is to have a simple personal conversation because of the lack of time and place. The

term corridor talk is well suited to describing quick encounters under inconvenient physical conditions, without the required privacy. In contrast, Zoom talk includes only those who are to participate, and it can be set in a time and place convenient for all parties, without the limitation of work hours and geographic distance. Remembering all this may help us see the new conditions in which we work not only as a loss and a disadvantage but also as an opportunity for new and improved working patterns. Of course, the change has troubling implications for educators' work schedules and our rights to privacy and free time, but in times of emergency, it has clear advantages.

The Teacher-Educator's Responsibility in Teacher–Pupil Relations

The foregoing approach involves a refreshing definition of the teacher-educator's role in deliberating with their teacher-students on relations between subject matter content and social emotional aspects of the learning process. The question deriving from Amy's case is how to train teachers to use a holistic approach to the art of teaching that combines academic knowledge and rational thinking with feelings and social and emotional meanings.

Amy had arrived at my workshop with prior insights into the emotional and existential meanings of the philosophical questions and theories we teach, mostly based on her personal and academic experience. I did not have to enhance her awareness of such content. However, as I mentioned, Amy's lesson plans at the beginning of the year were highly academic, and her participation in the pedagogic workshop may have encouraged her to bring her personal connection with the content into her teaching. In the workshop, we emphasized those aspects of the teaching process and exemplified ways abstract philosophical ideas can be made relevant and accessible to teenagers. In the interview, Amy reminded me that a week before her personal talk with Lian, I had invited each of the teacher-students to think about one student in their class with whom they had a special difficulty. We thought together about these cases and came up with possible solutions. We also discussed the possible connection between certain behavioral problems and the emotional challenge raised by the content. Amy mentioned this group discussion as a source of inspiration for the way she treated Lian.

These insights led me to an interesting understanding of my work as PI. I have long recognized the central influence of Paulo Freire (Shor & Freire, 1987) and Nel Noddings (1994) on my work. Freire taught me to seek relevance and connection to the student's cultural context. Noddings encouraged me to focus on empathy and care and invest time and effort into cultivating interpersonal relationships in class. Amy's case made me see a vital connection between these two legacies. When the learning is relevant and applicable, students become authentically connected to the material, and this allows for a strong bond between students and teacher. Bonding is a necessary condition for the growth of empathy and open emotional dialogue.

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I now offer these insights to PIs in different disciplines and to other teacher-educators. I suggest that SEL should not be approached as a separate field. We should guide our teacher-students in the process of developing pedagogical content knowledge (PCK; Shulman, 1986), in a mode that will enhance relevance and permit an authentic connection with students' lives, thus establishing interpersonal connections and beginning an open emotional dialogue between students and teacher and among students. In some cases, the authentic connections concern cultural diversity, so a culturally responsive pedagogy must be established (Gunn & King, 2015; Rychly & Graves, 2012). In other cases, the emphasis is simply on the individual's psychological or interpersonal issues, such as the instance discussed here.

We have to ask how we can help our teacher-students recognize these opportunities in all disciplines. It is easier in the humanities, where personal and interpersonal issues are always present. But science, through the right approach, can also elicit inquiry into human values. I am certain that we can identify meaningful and relevant questions in every subject. We must explain to our teacher-students that teachers who invite their pupils to a real dialogue and encounter with the human aspects of the learned contents can become educational figures to whom pupils will turn for a meaningful personal dialogue. SEL is thus intermingled with theoretical learning and becomes an inseparable part of the PCK of every discipline.

Indeed, this has been the trajectory of contemplative pedagogy, mentioned earlier (Barbezat & Bush, 2013; Ergas, 2019). According to this approach, the role of the subject matter is to create personal meaning (Ergas, 2019), and all learning ought to invoke some form of "know thyself." This pedagogy sees SEL as a set of valuable life traits that are necessary ingredients in the teaching of all disciplines. Barbezat and Bush (2013), for example, demonstrated that teaching economics students a compassion meditation changed the way they understood economic theories with respect to equity.

The Teacher-Educator's Responsibility When Danger Signs Appear

Special attention ought to be given to my responsibility for the well-being and safety of both Lian and Amy. Fortunately, Amy was sensitive enough to recognize Lian's cry for help immediately. She told me in the interview that once Lian mentioned death, even in negation, she saw it as a "red light." This recognition came from Amy's life experience and sensitive personality. She had not received training from me or anyone else in such matters. The teacher-student training program did not include content on pupils' emotional distress. The situation might have been much worse if another teacher-student with less interpersonal intelligence and intuition had received Lian's message.

It has been shown that learning about these issues contributes to a teacher's ability to recognize and handle warning signs in the classroom (Reis & Cornell, 2008). This case made me realize that I cannot rely on luck; teacher-students must

receive guidance during their training, especially when placed as teachers in charge of a class. The class sees the teacher as the responsible adult, and the children might turn to the teacher with clear or elusive messages of distress. Amy agreed with me that prior discussion about these issues could have helped her. Rona added that preservice teachers are especially prone to becoming recipients of such messages; because they are so young, high school students see them as more likely to understand their feelings. But Rona emphasized that we must avoid giving preservice teachers direct responsibility for handling such issues so they can enjoy the benefits of their liminal state as trainees:

In practical training, they adopt a professional attitude, and the behaviors of professionals, but at the same time the responsibility is not really theirs. This situation is a great opportunity for growth, it is like a womb, a safe environment to grow in.

Rona's words clarified that part of my responsibility as PI is to give my teacher-students a clear message: If they see signs of distress, they cannot, under any circumstances, stay alone. They must share the situation with me. Rona taught me another important point as well—that part of my role is to help teacher-students recognize relevant prior knowledge that might help them handle signs of distress:

Their lack of professional experience turns any such experience into a first experience. Yet it is surely not their first experience in meeting a person in distress. You must tell them: You are an experienced person, you were a teenager yourself, you have friends, siblings, maybe you have children. You have probably dealt with distress of people around you, or of yourself. You can use your personal experience and gradually turn it into professional knowledge.

These insights led me to recommend that PIs invite teacher-students to make their personal and professional prior knowledge conscious to themselves and to share it with their peers in the training program. For that, we must create a safe environment and a meaningful relationship between the members of the training group and bring up content that will encourage teacher-students to share their personal knowledge and empower them as potent and able supporters of others.

I now recognize an interesting analogy between my relationship with Amy and hers with Lian. A turning point in the case was the moment when Amy chose not to stay alone with the responsibility and turned to me for help, even though our relationship was not a smooth one in the beginning. The "crisis" in the first semester was a moment of choice for me. Reflecting on my reaction, I notice it was not my regular mode of professional behavior. I let go of my control around her lesson plans and sought to let her know that I trusted her and cared more about her feelings than her academic performance. At this point, I recognize parallel considerations: My attitude toward Amy mirrors Amy's attitude toward Lian. In both cases, the student was not cooperative and did not respect the teacher's requests. The teacher identified the student's behavior not as resentment of the process or as personal disrespect but as an expression of emotional discomfort. The teacher

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chose to initiate a personal dialogue expressing empathy with the student's experience and showing flexibility around academic demands by giving precedence to the student's emotional well-being over her academic performance. In both cases, the student felt trust, allowing her to turn to the teacher in a moment of distress.

I do not suggest that Amy treated Lian in this way simply because of my reactions to her, but I am proud to recognize this analogy and our parallel choices. This analogy has reinforced my understanding of the dual process of teacher education: The way we treat our teacher-students has consequences for them as students and also for them as teachers in the present or in the future.

I believe that the conclusions of this theme of my self-study are always relevant to teacher education work, but in the conditions of the pandemic, they have heightened relevance, first, because of the growth in the emotional difficulties of both students and teachers; second, these challenges are sharpened because our teacher education work is done remotely, at least part of the time. The natural framework for holistic integrational training is the pedagogical workshop, where teacher-students share experiences from practical training, learn PCK in their subject matter, and get support and guidance from the PI. When the pedagogical workshop takes place over Zoom, it becomes difficult to establish familiarity, confidence, and trust—but these attributes are required to make the workshop a safe place for growth and development.

At the same time, the pandemic has made us more aware of the emotional needs of teacher-students. A study about PIs' work during the first year of COVID-19 (Hadar et al., 2020) found that PIs spontaneously chose to give extra attention to emotional aspects and to teacher-students' personal well-being; consequently, SEL abilities received more attention in the workshops.

Team Relations

Team Relations in School and Remote Learning

Turning to the counselor was not Amy's first choice, because she did not know her before the case. Research has found that teachers tend to avoid turning to the counselor when a relationship has not been established (Cholewa et al., 2016). However, Rona clarified to me that turning to the counselor is the right thing to do, regardless of previous acquaintance, based on the legal regulations of the Ministry of Education concerning suicidal threats (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2002) and the school counselor's formal job definition (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2004). Rona stressed that it was forbidden for Amy to handle this situation on her own, especially because of her status as a preservice teacher, but added that even professional teachers are required to report and get the counselor involved immediately upon recognizing suicidal hints expressed by a student.

Data show that in the case of suicidal threats, counselors tend to recognize signs of distress and to handle the situation better than teachers (Reis & Cornell, 2008), but in Rona's interview and also in our phone call at the time of the event, she

understood our hesitation. In many cases, she said, teachers view this as a violation of student privacy and as possibly hindering the student's trust in the teacher. They fear that if they share the information, the student will stop sharing their feelings and remain alone with their distress.

Amy mentioned this dilemma. On one hand, she wanted to get a professional colleague involved to share the responsibility for Lian's well-being: "I had to make sure that it's not only in my hands, that there are more people who are looking at her and are present for her." On the other hand, she had reservations:

I remembered that it made me nervous, that she might resent talking to the counselor. Maybe I would have to force it on her and report against her will. I didn't want her to regret sharing with me . . . [so] before calling her I prayed to succeed in telling her what she needs to hear. I was afraid that I betrayed her trust, that she turned to me and opened up, and I might be closing this door. . . . It's like my reaction might make her feel that it is abnormal to open such places in her soul, to share . . . as if I told her, "Go to the specialists and not to me."

The dilemma is exacerbated when secrecy is not an option. Rona made it very clear to me in our first phone call that Lian must know that Amy was planning to turn to the counselor out of care for her safety, regardless of her consent. Amy would thus deliver a determined message that she meant to protect Lian's safety above and beyond any other consideration.

Like teachers, counselors are obliged to report to professional figures. Rona told me about dilemmas concerning the professional duty to report while not hiding her report from the child:

I had kids who said "I want to tell you something, but only if you promise not to tell anyone." At that point, I already had to tell the child that I cannot promise that, and still to convince her to share with me.

In Amy's case, turning to the counselor led to a number of positive results. First, Lian responded positively to Amy's request to turn to the counselor. Amy was surprised: "From this case, I've learned that in this age they don't really resent speaking with adults. . . . They actually want to. . . . Maybe it is not correct in all cases." Second, Claire, the school counselor, responded well and respected Amy's place. She supported the decision to refer Lian to her, but she said Lian was very "picky" about the people with whom she shared her feelings. If she had chosen Amy, it was a sign of trust that we must respect. Therefore she did not try to "take over" the case. Rather, she suggested that although she would talk to Lian, she would also talk to Amy and guide her in how to proceed; Amy was appreciative that the school counselor honored the child's choice to share with a specific teacher and saw the importance of the continuity of dialogue between them: "When I called Claire, she wasn't treating me like 'I'll take it from here,' she actually treated me as an important figure in the case."

Claire's choices reflected a perception of her role as school counselor, helping

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pupils through their teachers, not through direct contact. Rona also emphasized this approach as central to counselors' work:

School counselors are a special type of "helper." Often we are not the ones to provide support directly. Professional ethics lead us to guide other people on how to offer support. If the teacher is the natural candidate for the child's call for help, we respect that; we see them as important sources for the continuity of the process.

As mentioned, the professional literature supports the value of teacher–counselor collaboration. On the basis of this case, I stress that such cooperation is desirable also because of the teacher's potential to become a supportive figure for their students through academic contents. Counselors who cooperate with teachers can find at least one responsible adult in the school community for each child, someone with whom the child has shared interests, and thus create a meaningful, open dialogue. By so doing, they establish a channel that will be helpful and supportive with small, day-to-day challenges and in times of greater need and distress.

What happens to all this in remote learning? To answer this, we must illuminate the preconditions for fruitful dialogue between teachers and counselors. The informal relationships built into the school life routine, leading to an "open door" policy, are main factors. Another factor is the presence of the counselor in the teacher's room and in public spaces, such as corridors, schoolyards, and cafeterias, to facilitate spontaneous encounters (Cholewa et al., 2016). During lockdown, these recommendations cannot be applied.

However, other recommendations can be relevant and applicable, even during social distancing. Counselors are called upon to consider themselves leaders (Baker et al., 2009) and to be proactive (Limberg et al., 2021). They should initiate encounters with teachers to heighten teachers' awareness of their presence in school. On a practical level, counselors are encouraged to introduce themselves in staff meetings and to send written messages on issues they can help resolve (Cholewa et al., 2016). In remote learning, they can make use of the digital channels used in other aspects of schoolwork, such as lessons and staff meetings, to be present and heard and initiate digital dialogues to establish acquaintance and trust with the teachers.

The Teacher-Educator's Responsibility

Reflecting on my dilemma about whom to turn to and Rona's clear message that it is our duty to approach the counselor, I am surprised that after 18 years of working as a schoolteacher and more than 10 years of escorting preservice teachers in schools, I still needed clarification. I view this as a blind spot in my understanding of the situation, some of which is due to circumstances (e.g., Claire's maternity leave, the COVID-19 lockdown). But I also did not do enough to establish the relationship between the preservice teachers and the school staff. Given this, I recommend PIs not give in to the complex circumstances of school life and make a deliberate effort to ensure that preservice teachers are familiar with their colleagues in school,

including head teachers and the counselor, so they can cooperate with them and receive professional assistance. This effort is important for the practical training period and for team relations in their future schoolwork.

In a practical sense, this objective can be achieved through direct dialogue and cooperation of the PI with school staff and leaders before the teacher-students' arrival at the school and during the whole period of the practical training. The PI should clarify to both sides the importance of teamwork and initiate dyadic and group meetings of all the professionals involved.

I recommended earlier that teacher-educators integrate SEL into the PCK of every discipline, and now I recommend integrating also the issue of team relations into this holistic approach. My recommendations entail erasing as much as possible the dividing lines between separate courses and the practical training in teacher education and to take a multidisciplinary approach that revolves mainly around the teacher-students' practical training and allows integration of the different aspects of teacher training. Teaching is an interdisciplinary art that combines theoretical, emotional, and social work in one activity—teacher education should also be perceived this way.

Main Conclusions and Final Remarks

The case of Amy and Lian is a story with a happy ending. In analyzing my part, I recognize a few points where I did the right things and contributed to the positive results and a few points where my work as PI was lacking—points that make me consider myself lucky that things worked out eventually, despite my neglect. I believe that the lessons I've learned will allow me to improve my work in future cases, and I hope to help readers improve their work as PIs.

As I reflect on Amy's case, I recognize two central objectives of my work in teacher education. The first is the integration of SEL within subject matter contents to guide and support teacher-students in their relationships with their pupils. The second is the integration of preservice teachers into school staff during practical training. Now I understand that the two issues are actually one, or rather, the good handling of team relations is one of the conditions that allows SEL to be integrated into regular work but also into teaching during periods of high risk.

SEL and team relations are naturally connected, as both revolve around the social emotional aspects of the work in school. Another way to recognize the connection is by looking at the chain of support created in the case under discussion. Lian's story ended happily, thanks to the fact that no one was left alone. Lian turned to Amy for help, Amy turned to me, and I turned to Rona and Claire. Each of us felt the need to get support in order to support. This chain was created within a few minutes, despite the hundreds of kilometers between us. We taught each other that caring makes a difference.

In addition, just as we recognized earlier that the pandemic gave teachers new

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opportunities for social communication in digital channels that are sometimes more intimate and safer, so, too, we can see that new work patterns were created in the PI's work. These patterns made it more feasible for Amy to turn to me in a moment of distress. Digital channels of communication break the limits of time and space of our work.

Generalizing my conclusions of the case, I suggest that teacher-educators, as other educators, should recognize three aspects of teaching in conditions of social distancing: the greater need for emotional support, the unique obstacles to giving support, and the new ways to overcome these obstacles. Finally, we can look at remote learning not simply as an unfortunate situation we want to end; rather, we should embrace the new possibilities that digital channels offer us for creating intimacy and accessibility in our relationships with our students.

Having said that, I see the need for further research to establish a solid foundation for these insights. First, there should be an evaluation of how PCK, SEL, and team relations are treated in teacher education programs. Second, we must try to integrate them into holistic programs and then accompany these trials with research. In both cases, there should be a focus not only on the experiences of the lecturers and PIs but also on the learning experiences and impressions of the teacher-students.

Notes

¹ All names are pseudonyms.

² In what follows, I use the terms *teacher-student* and *preservice teacher* interchangeably, although *teacher-student* applies more closely to Amy's relationship to me.

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