Exploring Teachers' Well-being Through Compassion

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ABSTRACT

This mixed methods case study examined teachers' levels of compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue, or the combination of burnout and secondary traumatic stress, and strove to understand how teachers experience these phenomena and what supports could be used to alleviate some of the harmful symptoms of compassion fatigue. For this study, I used a healing centered approach and the Compassion Fatigue Theoretical Model, after reviewing previous literature around compassion fatigue and satisfaction, workplace well-being, school well-being, and context specific efforts in the District of Columbia Public Schools system that involved teacher and staff well-being. The final research design produced findings around the importance of qualitative research in understanding well-being and compassion fatigue and satisfaction, suggestions for schools and districts to support teacher well-being, and the effect the pandemic has had, directly on teachers and indirectly through the pandemic's effects on their students.

INTRODUCTION

This research came out of necessity: a necessity for teachers, including myself, to make sense of the effects the last few years have had on our well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic had devastating effects - sickness, death, social isolation – and caused many drastic changes since its beginning in March of 2020. The pandemic presented new challenges and exacerbated existing systemic problems, and the effects of teachers working virtually for a full year and students learning virtually for a full year have yet to be fully understood, not only regarding academic and instructional outcomes but also social and emotional effects. As a deeply personal investigation, as I was a teacher while doing this study, this research sought to understand teachers' well-being through the lens of compassion and by utilizing a Healing Centered Approach and explored the following research questions:

RQ 1: What supports have you received that help you to maintain your well-being?

RQ 1a: As one indicator of well-being, what contributes to the current levels of teachers' compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue?

RQ 1b: How do the different aspects of one's identity affect a teacher's perception of well-being?

RQ 2: How can talking about well-being contribute to teachers' experiences of well-being?

The purpose of this study conducted at a school that is part of the District of Columbia Public School (DCPS) system, was to elevate teachers' voices, to learn their perspectives and experiences with well-being through compassion, and to empower teachers to advocate for themselves. Though there were no changes to measure within this study, there were findings and correlations made between supports, levels of compassion satisfaction and fatigue, and demographic factors, which have implications for the school, the district, and the education community at large.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years were completely unprecedented and full of unknowns as the entire world worked to live through the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers experienced the loss of knowing how to best do their job. The DC Policy Center releases a State of DC Schools each year in hopes of capturing the experiences of different stakeholders within the district. During focus groups for this report, teachers explained their lack of preparation for the virtual setting, especially since the district kept delaying making any official decisions, and the difficulties of adapting teaching materials and curriculum, which often had them feeling less effective (DC Policy Center, 2022). The stress of the first year of the pandemic, paired with new stressors the second year of the pandemic, such as ever-changing policies related to the pandemic and excessive numbers of students missing school because of sickness or quarantine, changed some of the essential duties of the teaching profession, lowering teachers' self-efficacy, causing some to burn-out and leave the profession.

KNOWLEDGE REVIEW: DEFINING WELL-BEING

Beginning with definitions, well-being, or wellness, is broadly considered one's positive affect towards their life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999; Lee Kum Sheung Center for Health and Happiness,

2017), and further research considers how individuals are related to the larger systems, such as a teacher to the rest of the school (Fox et al., 2020; Song et al., 2020). Drawing from the works of scholar-activists, Dr. Shawn Ginwright (2016) and Dr. Bettina Love (2019), this study advocates for a Healing Centered definition of well-being centering healing and hope in political and education policies. Ginwright (2016) stresses the importance of hope and agency as components of well-being and explains it as an active set of practices that will sustain, maintain, and expand a person and their community's health and hope. Further connecting this definition to the field of education is Love (2019), who wrote that wellness and well-being are a part of social justice work for teachers, aiding teachers in the fight against racism by arming them with love, grace, and compassion. Adding healing, hope, and humanity allows for a broader understanding of how a teacher can sustain, maintain, and expand their well-being practices and grounds the definition in antiracism. In conclusion, these are the definitions I use in this study:

> Well-being: An individual's sense of sustainable hope, maintained by a set of community healing practices that help individuals acknowledge the humanity in themselves and others.

> Teacher well-being: A teacher's sense of sustainable hope, maintained by a set of community healing practices that help teachers acknowledge the humanity in themselves, their students, the families of their students, and their colleagues.

This definition echoes CPED's (2021) call for the EdD to be framed around questions of equity, ethics, and social justice, as teachers who are afforded the opportunity to heal will be better equipped to teach their students with grace and compassion.

Workplace Well-being

The pandemic caused a shift in how workplaces view well-being, recognizing the need for flexibility in the work environment. Instead of merely thinking about job satisfaction, "today, employee well-being has expanded beyond physical well-being to focus on building a culture of holistic well-being [and] the growing need for flexibility in where, when, and how employees work" (Meister, 2021, para. 4). In response to the pandemic, workplace leaders have expanded well-being opportunities offered to their employees to include workplace flexibility (especially because of the safety concerns of the pandemic), free online counseling sessions, trainings for leaders on empathic leadership, delegating time in workday to non-work activities, and counseling or meditation apps (Jack, 2022; Meister, 2021). Instead of seeing workplace well-being as an unnecessary add-on, leaders are working to create environments where wellness opportunities are responsive to the needs of the employees to promote their performance and retention.

Well-being Through Compassion

The Compassion Fatigue-Compassion Satisfaction (CF-CS) theory is a helpful indicator of teacher well-being and was utilized as the primary driver for teacher well-being.

Beginning this research with interviews and conversations with teachers, I started to realize that the student-teacher relationship is the center of this job, and that can be the reason teachers stay and contribute to why they leave. A healthy and caring student-teacher relationship has many positive effects for the student but also for the teacher, and compassion satisfaction (CS) is the descriptive term for the pleasure that one derives from doing work with people who need

Figure 1. Theoretical Model of Compassion Satisfaction and Compassion Fatigue (Stamm, 2010, p.11)
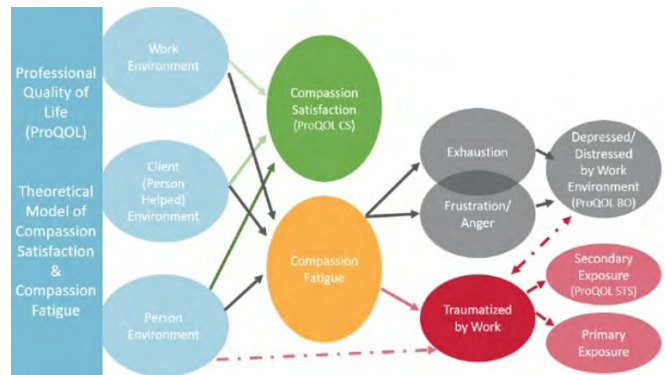
care (Stamm, 2010). Many teachers enter and stay in the profession because of the relationships formed with their students (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020; Roberts- Bitar, 2021; Steen, 2020), and the process of healing together helps build resilience in both. To maintain those higher levels of CS, organizational and leadership support, proper training, and resources are necessary. When teachers are given the tools they need to teach and support their students who are experiencing trauma, their self-efficacy increases, increasing their CS (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020; Fox et al., 2020; Yang, 2021; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Bandura describes self-efficacy as "people's beliefs in their capabilities to exercise control over their own functioning and over events that affect their lives… and can provide the foundation for […] well-being" (*Self-Efficacy Theory | Simply Psychology*, 2023, para. 1). In a study conducted with social workers who were working with clients with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), those that were given opportunities to learn evidence-based practices showed lower amounts of compassion fatigue (CF) and greater amounts of CS (Craig & Sprang, 2010), which has implications for teachers who have had more training or exposure to evidence-based practices for teaching students who have experienced trauma and even more training on managing their own experiences.

Sometimes used interchangeably with the terms secondary traumatic stress (STS), secondary traumatic stress disorder (STSD) and vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue (CF) was first used to describe the experiences of professionals such as lawyers, therapists, nurses, and social workers, and their repeated exposure to hearing about others' trauma and the effect it had on their mental health and well-being (Figley, 1995; Stamm, 2010). Figley's (1995) research shows that those who work closely with traumatized individuals sometimes begin to exhibit some of the same characteristics as their patients, noting that "those who have enormous capacity for feeling and expressing empathy tend to be more at risk of compassion stress" (p. 1), and CF has the potential to be widespread among educators because of the nature of this caring profession (Steen, 2020). Those experiencing CF may have elevated blood pressure, emotional dysregulation, interference with home life, may begin to become apathetic to the experiences of those they are helping, or their work performance may begin to suffer (Figley, 2002), and repeated exposure to CF could lead to burnout (Stamm, 2010). Studies done in the medical field, centering on clinicians, nurses, and medical students, show how some of the symptoms of CF could be alleviated by providing positive coping strategies, such as social

support, clinical supervision, and consultation (Jacobson, 2006; Kourkoutas & Giovazolias, 2015; Măirean, 2016; Shoji et al., 2014). Creating environments that will increase teachers' CS, while mitigating the effects of CF, could lead to teachers improving their overall well-being.

CF, as a phenomenon, is a combination of two experiences: secondary traumatic stress and burnout. STS is a condition that is typically associated with a triggering event or experience when working with a person who has experienced trauma. When one is exposed to STS often or is unable to mitigate the effect of it on their lives, it can begin to add to one's experience of burnout. Burnout (BO) is a state of physical or emotional exhaustion that also involves a sense of reduced accomplishment and loss of personal identity (Mayo Clinic, n.d.), which leads to feeling exhausted and unable to cope, emotionally distancing from work, and a reduction in work performance (Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Healthcare, 2020), and when it comes to teachers, numerous factors can contribute to burnout, such as work environment, background, teacher preparation, and self-actualization. BO happens over a long period of time, but STS is typically associated with a specific exposure to the trauma or suffering of a specific client (Figley, 1995, 2002). What connects these two things is that repeated exposure to STS or not knowing how to manage it will lead to BO, which may cause one to leave their profession.

As seen in Figure 1, The Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) Theoretical Model (Stamm, 2010) outlines the positive and negative outcomes experienced by those in the helping profession. The model acknowledges that professionals do not only exist within the workplace, but they are shaped by their own environment, just as their clients, or in this case students, are shaped by their own environment. Though the ProQOL is a helpful tool, it is not and should not be used as a diagnostic tool since there are no official diagnoses of burnout or STS, but this tool provides a helpful way to separate the different environmental effects, which is why it was chosen. This model will be used to look at teachers' experiences of well-being and framed the design of this study. To summarize, for this study, the three measures of the ProQOL (Stamm, 2010) are defined as follows:

- CS - positive feelings about a teacher's ability to help their students
- STS - work related exposure to a student who has experienced a traumatic event; may include sleep deprivation, intrusive images, and avoiding reminders of the person's traumatic experience
- BO - gradual feelings of hopelessness and difficulties in dealing with work or being an effective teacher
- CF - breaks into two parts: BO and STS; some trauma at work can be direct (primary) trauma and/or student-related trauma and both contribute to CF in different ways.

METHOD

A case study design was chosen because the data collected are heavily dependent on the time and place. The research design began with a survey sent through Qualtrics, which included demographic questions, the ProQOL measure, and an open-ended question regarding the supports teachers received to maintain their well-being. Then, I proceeded with three interviews, including a researcher interview with myself conducted by a peer. Beginning

with the survey and then allowing people to open up and add meaning to the study's phenomena through speaking about their experiences was an efficient pairing. A combined analysis of the three data points- the quantitative ProQOL scores, themes from the open-ended question, and themes from the interviews- was then explored to answer the research questions.

Data Collection: Survey

To uncover certain aspects of these teachers' experiences, a survey sent through Qualtrics the was distributed to teachers to look at baseline levels CS and CF. The survey included demographic questions about race and gender and included the ProQOL as a Likert scale, as it is typically presented, totaling 30 questions. After the ProQOL, the survey included an open-ended question that simply asked, "At your school, what supports have you received when it comes to maintaining your well-being?" The final question of the survey asked the participants if they were interested in participating in an interview. After talking to instructional coaches at the studied school, I designated time for teachers to fill out the survey during their ongoing professional development time, and the survey was sent through an email. The entire survey took participants between 9-15 minutes to complete.

Survey Participants

Out of the 25 surveys received, five surveys were incomplete, which left 20 surveys completed for analysis, including mine. Five people volunteered to participate in the interviews, and 17 of the 20 participants completed the open-ended question. The breakdown of race and gender is provided in the following table and discussed further in the following sections.

Table 1. Final Dataset Breakdown of Participants by Race and Gender

Participants by Gender	Number	Percentage
Female	17	85%
Male	3	15%
Total	**20**	**100%**
Participants by Race	**Number**	**Percentage**
Asian	1	5%
Black or African American	5	25%
Black or African American and Native American	1	5%
Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, White	1	5%
Hispanic, Latina/o/x and/or of Spanish origin	2	10%
Hispanic, Latina/o/x and/or of Spanish origin and White	1	5%
White	9	45%
Total	**20**	**100%**

Data Set 1: ProQOL Scores

To score the ProQOL, I followed the procedure outlined in the ProQOL manual (Stamm, 2010). After downloading the scores from Qualtrics to an Excel spreadsheet, I reverse scored the appropriate items, then created an Excel formula to sum the indicated items to find the three levels the ProQOL measures: CS, BO, and STS, the

latter two comprising CF. I completed this process the results- to ensure accuracy.

I began by examining the data in the order of highest CS to lowest, and then looked at their level of CS compared with the two other measures. As seen in the table below, nine of the teachers surveyed were experiencing high CS and moderate to low CF, (BO and STS), while half of the teachers surveyed (n=10) were experiencing moderate CS and moderate to low CF. There was one outlier: a teacher experiencing low CS and moderate to high CF. These data profiles were used to examine the data across gender and race as well.

Table 2. ProQOL Levels by CS

CF-CS Profile	Number
High CS and Moderate to Low BO and STS	9
Moderate CS, Moderate to Low BO and STS	10
Low CS and Moderate to High BO and STS	1

Data Set 2: Open-Ended Question Themes

Through inductive coding and based on prior experience coding the survey question from a pilot study, themes emerged that identified supports for teacher well-being. The first read of the survey responses was conducted to find evidence for supports and barriers to teacher well-being; the second read and coding was conducted to identify references to the different environments mentioned in the Compassion Fatigue Theoretical Framework (Stamm, 2010): personal, client, and work or in this case, personal, student, and school. I then narrowed those to themes that related to identified supports, to help answer the first research question.

Figure 2. Open-ended Question from Survey Coding Plan
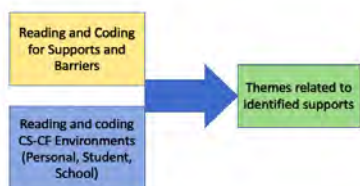
Out of the 20 teachers who participated in the survey, 17 provided answers to the question, "At your school, what supports have you received when it comes to maintaining your well-being?" The themes are identified in the table below, along with samples of teachers' responses.

Table 3. Themes and Sample Teacher Responses from Data Set 2

Themes	Sample Teacher Response
Support from coworkers	"Veteran teacher colleagues just being there to vent and give advice" "talking to colleagues"
Professional development and coaching	"Wellness coaching from instructional coaches and administration" "Additionally, some years instructional coaches have been very helpful"
Supports outside of the work environment	"I have a therapist. My religious beliefs also help me." "Support from family"
Lack of support and appeals for more support	"None" "There needs to be more support systems in place for teachers."

Data Collection: Interviews

The interview protocol was created using a tool that was specifically designed to measure Staff Well-Being (SWB) and adapted after a researcher interview. The Resilience in School Environments (RISE) Index: School edition, created by Kaiser Permanente (an insurance provider for DCPS) and Alliance for a Healthier Generation (2020), was created to empower schools to create safe and supportive learning environments by developing policies and practices that improve the social emotional health of all students and staff. The RISE Index served as a useful entry point when discussing teacher well-being, or as they are noted in the RISE Index, as Staff Well-Being as the questions pertain to physical environments that support staff, personal wellness, and collective care.

The role of the interviewer is key to creating meaningful interview experiences, which is why I decided to do a researcher interview. From the beginning I knew this study was going to be deeply personal, so careful consideration had to be made as to how my experiences shaped the data collection and analysis. I asked the instructional coach at my school, who also happened to be in a different cohort of the EdD program, to conduct a researcher interview, so that I could "generate insight and reflection on the study topic and processes as well as to experience being interviewed, using a protocol that [may resemble] the one used with your research participants" (Ravitch & Carl, 2019, p. 120). By having a colleague conduct the interview, I was able to experience what power dynamics could be at play. I also strove to begin constructing my understanding of my own reality before I engaged with the interviewees, because "in qualitative research, an ontological assumption is that there is not a single 'Truth' or reality […] and a goal of qualitative research is to engage with, understand, and report these multiple realities" (Ravitch & Carl, 2019, p. 6). Through my own interview process and by using researcher memos throughout the process, I gained a deeper understanding of positionality and allowed the research to be iterative and responsive to the participants.

Interview Participants

Teacher time is valuable, so interviewees were chosen according to their interest. I excluded some because I worked closely with them, and I wanted to maintain distance between myself and the interviewee, mitigating bias and assumptions. The next thing I considered was the score profiles, ruling out the volunteer who was an outlier experiencing low CS and high CF. That left two teachers, who both had high CS, but different levels of BO and STS, which allowed the exploration of these experiences and a deeper understanding of context. These teachers will be referred to as Teacher 1 and Teacher 2, as this was the order in which I interviewed them. Their demographic information and ProQOL scores are seen in the table below, along with the my own.

Table 4. ProQOL Scores of Interviewees

	Gender	Race	CS	BO	STS
Researcher	Woman	White	34 (Moderate)	32 (Moderate)	27 (Moderate
Teacher 1	Woman	White	48 (High)	19 (Low)	26 (Moderate)
Teacher 2	Woman	Black	45 (High)	25 (Moderate)	21 (Low)

Data Set 3: Interviews Themes

In the interview manuscripts, I assumed I could find descriptions of how teachers were experiencing CS, BO, and STS, so to code the interviews, I used a reflexive thematic analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). First, I used an inductive approach similar to the one used for the survey question, but as I got deeper into this approach, I realized I needed to focus on strategically mitigating my biases. I switched to a more deductive approach and looked for reoccurring ideas, which became the themes, within the interview transcripts. After naming those themes, I utilized NVivo to organize the data and view it by hierarchy, seeing which themes were most mentioned, as seen below.

Table 5. Interview Codes from NVivo

Name	Files	References
Suggested and existing supports	3	35
How students affect teachers' well-being	3	18
Identity	3	10
The effect of coworkers	3	9

ANALYSIS

Moving from evidence to analytics, I used a combination of thematic analysis and phenomenology to help shape the narrative of interpretation. Using Ravitch and Carl's work (2019) as a guide, I identified methods of analysis that would be helpful:

- phenomenology: focus on the experiences of the participants in an examination of shared experience; analysis remains as close to data as possible
- thematic analysis: develop themes to answer research questions; used in multiple methodological approaches

Though I assumed this entire process would involve a thematic analysis, I realized the experiences of CS and CF are phenomena that varied with each teacher, so the interviews attempted "to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of described phenomena" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 150) and to make meaning of the CF and CS phenomena that teachers were experiencing or not experiencing at the time.

The analytics brings me back to the research questions and how each of the data sets pertain to the research questions, as seen below.

Table 6. Modified Analytics of Research Questions by Dataset

	ProQOL Measures	Survey Open Ended Question	Interviews	Combined Interpretation
RQ 1		X	X	X
RQ 1a	X	X	X	X
RQ 1b	X	X	X	X
RQ 2			X	

RQ 1: What factors do teachers name as supports to their well-being?

With this question, I wanted to explore my hypothesis that teachers can identify supports for their well-being, either that exist or that they would like to see exist, and not every teacher needs the same thing. Utilizing the themes created through coding, two categories could be created: supports suggested and existing supports. Overall, the interviews allowed for an opportunity to explore existing and suggested supports, and the supports named were both a part of and outside of the work environment. As teachers identify supports for their own well-being, a platform must be made to raise their voices, and I hope that this study can help do that. Some of these suggestions are doable, but they are not the only things that need to happen, especially when it comes to the systemic challenges that educators face.

Table 7. Existing and Suggested Supports from Data Sets 2 & 3

	Supports suggested	Existing Supports
Survey Question		Professional development and coaching
Interviews	Administration and leadership knowledge Space for teachers Nutrition and exercise Diversity and choice	
Overlap		Breaks Supportive team and coworkers Supports outside of the work environment

RQ 1a and b: As one indicator of well-being, what contributes to the current levels of teachers' CS and CF, and how do the different aspects of one's identity affect a teacher's perception of well-being?

For this question, I began with a phenomenological approach, thinking about the experiences of each interviewee, how they described each phenomena: CS, BO, and STS. Putting those data sets together specifically for these three participants, including myself, I sought to answer this question about what is contributing to these teachers' CS and CF. I also hypothesized that the levels experienced could vary due to race and gender and that most of the experiences of BO were because of the effects of the pandemic. The interview questions were designed to give context and understanding to what CS, BO, and STS look like for teachers, and how they are experiencing them, and those themes from the interview are seen in a table, along with each interviewees' scores, in the following sections.

CF-CS for Researcher

As the only interview participant with moderate CS, I also had moderate BO and STS, making my scores both similar and different from other participants. A main theme in this interview that explains the levels of CS and CF was how the pandemic affected students and the work environment. During the interview, I mentioned how the pandemic has caused many students to quarantine for days at a time and the continued absences affect their learning and behavior, as it interrupts their routines, which made it feel difficult for me to do my job well, lowering my CS. The effect of the pandemic was a reoccurring theme throughout all three interviews, which is helpful in contextually understanding these different levels.

Table 8. CS, BO, and STS for Researcher

	Compassion Satisfaction (CS)	Burnout (BO)	Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)
ProQOL Measures	34 (Moderate)	32 (Moderate)	27 (Moderate)
Themes from Interviews	-Positive effects of students on well-being -Effect of coworkers	-Pandemic's effect -Effect of coworkers	-Student environment and families -Pandemic's effect on students

CF-CS for Teacher 1

What was notable regarding Teacher 1's interview was her emphasis on both the positive and negative experiences she has had with coworkers. She noted that having one or two people to talk to or with whom to share resources "can make your job so much easier," but she also mentioned how other teachers' negative attitudes have had an affect on her as well. Also, she had a moment of self-reflection as she thought about her STS score, attributing it to the pandemic and the effect it has had on her and her students. She particularly mentioned one student who had recently experienced a loss in their family and how that was adding to her STS at the time of filling out the survey.

Table 9. CS, BO, and STS for Teacher 1

	CS	BO	STS
ProQOL Measures	48 (High)	19 (Low)	26 (Moderate)
Themes from Interviews	-Positive effects of students on well-being -Identity and passion -Supportive coworkers and team -Suggestions • Exercise	-Pandemic • Health concerns • Effect on students -Effect of coworkers	-Student environment and Families

Connections for Researcher and Teacher 1 to Survey

As Teacher 1 and I identify as White, I sought to make connections across race to the survey data, seeing what supports were identified. Both interviewees mentioned the existence and importance of having a supportive team, and there was a significant number of White identifying participants who also identified their team or coworkers as a support (55%). After that, the second most mentioned support was personal environment (44%) supports, such as family and therapy.

Table 10. Supports Mentioned in Survey Response for White Participants

	None	Coworkers/ Team	Coaching/ PD	Personal Environment	Breaks
Identified as White	-	5	2	3	1
Identified as White and more races	1	-	-	1	-
Total	1	5	2	4	1

Connections for Researcher and Teacher 1 to ProQOL

Teacher 1 was one of two (22%) teachers identifying as only White that had a high level of CS, while six (66%), including me, identified as moderate CS and one (11%) as low CS. Teacher 1 and I were the only two survey participants with a moderate measure of STS, while the rest were low (67%) and one was high (11%). The number of BO was evenly split between low and moderate (four of nine; 44%), while including the two teachers who identify as White and more racial identifiers would show that six of 11 (55%) were experiencing moderate BO and four of 11 (36%) were experiencing low BO.

CF-CS for Teacher 2

Teachers 1 and 2 both had high levels of CS, but their scores of BO and STS were swapped. Teacher 2, according to the survey, was experiencing moderate BO and low STS, which she partly attributed to it being so close to the end of the school year. She was quite surprised at her level of BO, but she was able to name some issues that affected her while at school.

Table 11. CS, BO, and STS for Teacher 2

	CS	BO	STS
ProQOL Measures	45 (High)	25 (Moderate)	21 (Low)
Themes from Interviews	Positive effects of students on well-being Aspects of identity Suggestions: exercise and therapy	Lack of community and negative effect of coworkers Pandemic: effect on students Aspects of identity	Student environment and families

Teacher 2 discussed how outside supports helped her, such as religion and therapy, and her connections with work colleagues were typically professional, saying, "I think […] our school doesn't seem to have the strongest sense of community […] I don't feel comfortable talking to anyone at school with anything like deep and personal." She also noted that her BO level could be attributed to the stress of teaching students who are significantly behind because of the pandemic and because of how late in the school year the interview occurred.

Connection to ProQOL Measures

Teacher 2 was surprised at her moderate level of BO, but upon further exploration, all participants identifying as Black or African American (including those with more than this identifier) were experiencing a moderate level of BO at the time of the survey. Looking for other comparisons with Teacher 2, I found that four of six (57%) teachers were also experiencing high CS, and Teacher 2 was actually the only teacher identifying low levels of STS, while the rest were all moderate (86%).

Connection to Survey

In connecting the survey data to this teacher's experiences, I noticed that of all the teachers who identified as Black or African American, including those who identified as other races as well, none mentioned coworkers or their team as a support for their well-being. Connecting this trend to Teacher 2's experiences with not having

deep and personal connections with colleagues and her observation of a lack of culture within the staff, this could show a lack of community and support for teachers identifying as Black. To the survey question, the majority (*n* = 4) of this set of teachers replied "none," while three teachers answered with either coaching or supports from their personal environments. One of the teachers specifically identified "wellness coaching" as a point of support, as opposed to curricular support, which is an important distinction. Further research is needed to reveal why these teachers mentioned coaching and outside support as opposed to their team or coworkers.

Table 12. Supports Mentioned in Survey Response for Black or African American Participants

	None	Coworkers/ Team	Coaching/ PD	Personal Environment	Breaks
Identified as Black or African American	3	-	2	-	-
Identified as Black or African American and more races	1	-	-	1	-
Total	4	-	2	1	-

RQ2: How can talking about well-being contribute to teachers' experiences of well-being?

To address this question, I included a specific question in the interview protocol: "Has talking about the survey and your wellness today made you feel better or worse about your well-being?" The response to this question was overwhelmingly positive, and each participant gave specific reasons as to why they think this experience was helpful. Both Teachers 1 and 2 saw the survey and this interview as a moment of self-reflection, such as when Teacher 2 mentioned, "It makes me feel better, it makes me see some growth that I've had." Teacher 1 also called the interview experience a "mini therapy" explaining, "I think it's been really better because it gives you a check and a second to reflect." Self-reflection can be an important tool to leverage when it comes to supporting teachers' well-being.

Limitations of the Analysis Approach

The people who volunteered to be interviewed were limited, as was the time in which to complete the interviews and the study; representation was not as diverse as I would have hoped. In the analytics section and in response to RQ1, since I only had participants who identify as White and who identify as Black or African American, I focused on those two racial designations in the analytics process. Even though the participants spoke of aspects of their identities as part of their experiences with well-being, they are only one representative of that group and do not represent all people who identify as such.

IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to elevate teachers' voices, to learn their perspectives and experiences with well-being through compassion, and to empower teachers to advocate for themselves. There were findings and correlations between supports, levels of CS and Fatigue, and demographic factors, which have implications for the school, the district, and the education community at large.

The first and perhaps most obvious implication is that teachers have been affected by the pandemic, mostly through their students' experiences. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have not been fully processed, but this study can provide insight into how it has affected teachers directly and indirectly through their students. Prior to the pandemic, Black and Latinx students were already disproportionately experiencing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) (Merrick et. al, 2019; Coffin & Meghani, 2021). As the majority of students in the studied district are Black (68%) and the majority of students at the researched school are Latinx (90%), it can be expected that some students are coming to school with ACEs, leading to STS for teachers. The CF-CS Scale combined with interviews was a helpful way to capture teachers' experiences of BO and STS because it separates the student-specific STS from the gradual burdens and stress gathered throughout the school year.

In the district, the academic delays of students, pandemic-caused absences, and the added pressure of the teacher evaluation system, have impacted teachers' experiences of BO. Students have experienced delays in academic progress, nationally and specifically in DCPS, and teachers have had to find ways to bridge those gaps (DC Policy Center, 2022; Northwest Evaluation Association, 2022). The pandemic caused increased absenteeism, for both teachers and students, and when multiple teachers are out, more responsibilities fall on the present teacher; when students are out, they not only miss academic content but miss out on the routine of the school day and socialization with peers. The pandemic has taken its toll on teachers and students, and using the Compassion Fatigue Theoretical Model, supplemented with qualitative interviews, has helped broaden the knowledge around the pandemic's effect on teachers.

Another important implication in this study is that experiences of CF, CS, and STS vary among teachers, should be tracked throughout the school year, and can be explored further through qualitative methods. Much like how teachers track, monitor, and respond to their students' data throughout the year, the same should be done for teacher well-being. Whether by leadership, school-based mental health professionals, instructional coaches, or a staff wellness committee, this type of data collection and analysis could be crucial to identifying when teachers need support and with what they need support, and aggregating this data by race, gender, grade level, or other demographics could help reveal trends and opportunities for growth that need to be addressed. Creating opportunities for teachers to self-reflect and learn from their experiences of maintaining their well-being could be a tremendously effective tool. The key is to ensure the time for this process to happen, for example, by delegating time for teacher well-being during the weekly professional development. Better teacher well-being has been found to positively impact students as well, so this time would be well spent for both teachers and students (Laskowski, 2020).

This study found trends within its small population size, such as four of five (80%) of the Black identifying teachers experienced moderate levels of STS, and six of nine (66%) of the White identifying teachers experienced only moderate levels of CS. Previous research on how race and gender affect experiences of CF-CS are inconclusive; for example, in a study examining CF in the virtual setting during the pandemic, researchers found that White educators reported significantly higher CF than Black educators (Yang, 2021). Some studies have found minority status and resilience serve as a protective factor against CF, while a study done with genetic counselors found a correlation between non-White

counselors and higher levels of CF (Lee et al., 2015). A recent report by the RAND (research and development) corporation found that teachers of color were more likely than White teachers to report symptoms of depression, and also found that Black or African American teachers were significantly less likely to report experiencing frequent job-related stress (66%) than White teachers (74%), and Hispanic or Latinx teachers (76%) (Steiner et al., 2022). Other factors should be considered when studying CF-CS with teachers, such as years of experience, student demographic data, and organizational support, but for any of those variables, without qualitative data, it will be difficult to truly understand the trends across racial groups.

Qualitative methods are opportunities to add insight and perspective to observed phenomena and can be used to support equity-centered policies. It is not enough to understand the amount of CS and Fatigue, but to truly inform change, qualitative research can be useful in understanding how and why a given program or intervention may or may not work as intended and how to improve that program from the perspective of a specific group of stakeholders (Goger & Ford, 2021), such as understanding the historical mistrust that systemically underserved communities have for the medical system because of discrimination from healthcare providers (López-Cevallos et al., 2014; Sheehan & Geyn, 2021). These opportunities for connection and story-telling can lead to more transformative relationships that center care and trust (Ginwright, 2022), which needs to be felt between teachers, but also between leadership and teachers. Through understanding the experiences of teachers and how their different environments-personal, school, and student- can affect their well-being, policies for teacher well-being can lead to true healing.

The last major implication is that flexibility in the workspace could help support teachers' well-being. Flexibility in the workspace is not a new idea, but it has gained more attention for schools and many other businesses out of necessity since the beginning of the pandemic. The National Center for Education Statistics (2022) found that eighty-three percent of public school teachers reported that all or some of their classes normally taught in person were moved to online distance-learning formats during the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020. Not only were schools closed, but many other workplaces, workers, and technology had to adapt quickly to identify how to effectively work at a safe distance. That learning, paired with the identified supports of breaks and days off identified by teachers in this study, has implications for schools, the district, and the education community at large.

The pandemic caused businesses to rethink their workspaces, including options for working from home and engaging in virtual work. Working from home can help employees find work-life balance and save people time from commuting, and on days when asynchronous offerings are required, people can work at their own pace. Though there are many benefits to virtual work, threats to productivity include distraction challenges at home, isolation and limits on team building, and the planning that is required to ensure that employees know how to access and finish their work (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020; Meister, 2021; Stoller, 2021). The benefits of in-person school are substantial; yet having some flexibility on certain days could be helpful. For example, one school offers flexibility on the four designated Records Days (a day for teachers to report grades at the end of each quarter), allowing teachers the option to work virtually or to come into the school building. This simple offering for teachers has made them feel supported and trusted, while also giving them flexibility and autonomy.

CONCLUSION

This research was a deeply personal process, as I was a teacher studying teacher well-being, at my own school. Try as I may to mitigate the effects of my positionality as a researcher and a White woman, I recognize that these identifiers bring unearned power and privilege that are impossible for me to break down in the length of one interview. To address those issues, I did use more open-ended questions in the interviews and surveys, utilized a member check (allowing interviewees to read what I wrote before sharing), and used researcher memos to process and track changes made. Also, as part of my doctoral program, I had many opportunities to engage with critical thought partners, both professors and fellow cohort members, to challenge and push the rigor of this work. As teachers continue to feel burnt out along with the joy of teaching, teacher well-being should be prioritized as a necessary lever for teacher retention and community healing.

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