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Calmness as a Quality of Teacher Presence and the Impact on Learning

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This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the program chair, has been presented to and accepted by the Department of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education.

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Calmness as a Quality of Teacher Presence and the Impact on Learning

by

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A culminating thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education

Dominican University of California

San Rafael, CA

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Abstract

This study seeks to identify the conditions for calmness within an educator's life and its impact on educators and students. Research shows that mindfulness practices can be implemented in the classroom and help students focus (Riner & Tanase, 2014). According to Kane (2018), implementing different practices and strategies of mindfulness can help regulate the internal and external stresses that happen daily. Currently, there is a lack of existing research on what educators do to calm themselves outside of the school day and how those practices impact their relationship with the students, helping students feel calm during school. Specifically, this study seeks to determine what practices educators use to calm themselves, what calmness is to the educators, and how it impacts student learning.

This mixed methods research with constructive and transformative worldviews explored the environmental practices of educators as it related to how they set the space for learning and creating the conditions for their own functional health. Six educational professionals who specialize in working with students with special needs completed surveys and participated in individual interviews. The school site where the educators work is a Title One school with a mostly low-socioeconomic student population. The educational professionals ranged from being in their first year to having worked in education for twenty-four years.

The data illuminated three major findings. First, creating boundaries and recognizing that, ultimately, teaching is also just a job proved to be important in creating healthier states for teachers to maintain balance in their lives and creating space for self-care routines. Secondly, it was identified how significant the state a teacher maintains impacts the experience of students and the way teachers can show up for their diverse needs. This second finding was noted in the

in vivo theme of “It’s a Snowball Effect.” Lastly, the role of support proved critical to the health and well-being of educators, and how feeling supported is essential, especially when stressed.

The significance of this study points to the need for cultivating healthier environmental care to support educational professionals. This includes maintaining a quality of presence that best serves equitable and inclusive learning for students. When educators take care of themselves, the students will be calmer, creating a better learning atmosphere. When educators are not prepared for the day and are mentally exhausted, the school day will become hectic, and students will have a harder time learning.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In training to become an educator, the researcher observed how stressful and overwhelming it can be for teachers to manage to be present for students, and their many personal, social, and academic needs while also having the space and time to attend to their own health and stability as well. For instance, while still working as a student-teacher, there were days when the researcher would feel especially overwhelmed, including coursework that needed to be completed, training for track and field, and teaching students. On a Wednesday afternoon, close to the end of the day, the researcher was working with a small group of third and fourth-graders. The researcher felt extremely overwhelmed by the coursework all day and unprepared to teach the small group. Trying to teach the students, the researcher was frustrated and felt the lesson was not being conveyed well. Struggling to create space between the stressors and teaching can cause the lesson to fall flat, making it difficult for students to learn information effectively. Experiencing this difficulty of teaching when stressed, and simultaneously observing other educators working under a lot of stress, inspired this research to uncover the practices for a balanced and healthy professional life, that support educators in successfully teaching lessons and focusing on each of their student's needs.

Statement of Purpose

There is substantive research showing the value of self-care, the impact of mindfulness practices on learning, and the role of space and design in facilitating learning. For instance, Myers, Sweeney, Popick, Wesley, Bordfeld, and Fingerhut (2012) found that social and family support was an important network to nurture self-care for women who were students in psychology Zysberg, Orenshtein, Gimmon, and Robinson (2017) further note that how a person handles stress impacts how likely they are to experience burnout. Harris, Jennings, Abenavoli,

Katz, Greenberg, and Schussler (2014) found that incorporating mindfulness practices like yoga helps teachers' well-being. With regards to the space of learning, Braster, Grosvenor, and del Mar del Pozo Andres (2011) found that classrooms have been designed poorly to support students' needs.

However, there is still a gap in the literature with regard to the perspective of teachers, what they do outside of the classroom to prepare themselves for the school day, and how they understand the impact of self-care outside of the classroom on the experience of students, especially those with special needs, inside the classroom. Incorporating daily self-care practices can calm educators and prepare them for the classroom. This might look like going home when contract hours are done, implementing an exercise routine, and setting boundaries between work and home life. Educators are expected to take on multiple tasks outside of their job description. Creating a balanced and healthy experience for educators will make it more equitable and inclusive for students' well-being and learning. The hypothesis of this research was that if and when educators are able to take time for themselves, they will be better prepared for the day, making the classroom environment calmer and better suited for students' needs.

Overview of the Research Design

This mixed-methods research project was conducted with constructive and transformative worldviews. The primary research questions are: (1) what do educators do to prepare themselves for inner calmness and steadiness before teaching, and (2) how have educators managed their time to implement self-care on a regular basis (3) How do educators understand the impact of their state on the learning experience of students in their classrooms? The research was conducted at a Title One school where the researcher served as a student teacher. The participants of the study are all educators employed at that research site and included a general

education teacher, a special day class teacher, a speech therapist, a resource teacher, the school psychologist, and an instructional aide in a special day class. All participants are females and have been teaching for between one and twenty-four years. This data was collected from individual interviews with educational professionals and a ten-question Likert survey about daily stressors. The interviews included sixteen questions about self-care, therapy, and classroom design.

Significance of the Research Findings for Educational Equity and Social Justice

The findings from the research highlighted the importance of setting boundaries and implementing self-care to support a healthy work-life balance, such as creating clear lines about not bringing work home. The second theme illuminated how students feel as a result of when educators are calm or stressed. For instance, one of the educators mentioned that she has a naturally soft voice when she feels calm and that students will often lower their voices to match hers. The third finding showed how feeling support is essential, especially when stressed. The educators found that getting support from loved ones at home and colleagues at work was essential to their self-care. Implementing all of these themes in educators' lives will help bring a calm presence into the classroom. Focusing on educators and their ability to support their students' needs and focus on each student as a whole can make the classroom environment more equitable for their learning. Working with a diverse group of students that have different needs for support, when an educator is not mentally prepared for the day, it can hinder the student's support. An equitable learning environment includes differentiated instruction, and educators will be able to support students' with learning differences better if they are taking care of themselves. This will affect the equity of learning, as a calm state for educators impacts how they are able to recognize and have greater actionable empathy to address systemic challenges faced

by diverse student populations (Low, 2021; Ducato, 2022; Callahan, 2022); whereas when people are tied up in stress, they are less responsive to and understanding of learning disabilities (Tagawa, 2021; Denton, 2022; Barboza, 2023), the social and home lives of students (Mosher, 2023), and the many systemic and identity barriers students face (Barragan, 2021; Nadler, 2023).

Research Implications

Based on the research, it became evident how important it is to set clear boundaries and create a schedule that works and supports self-care away from school by predetermining and establishing a routine to come in either early or stay late to complete preparation work, and to accept that sometimes not everything will get done. Participants also identified the importance of physical activity or exercise and how teachers need to engage in those activities regularly for their health and the social health of the classroom.

It also appears that creating mindfulness challenges among staff in school might facilitate healthy practices and a culture that prioritizes a healthy environment. Working with peers to create social-emotional learning opportunities and co-teaching opportunities with the curriculum may also facilitate greater self-care professional development to come to the school.

To address workplace stress and how that stress impacts students' learning quality, district policies should adopt self-care practices, and they should look into professional development in self-care. Implementing a change within the idea of self-care for educators could better support them, which will better support the students' learning. When educators are able to take care of themselves, the classroom will become a better learning environment for students. When we ensure that educators are taken care of, they can come to school calmly, supporting an equitable learning environment. Students will be calmer, which will help them focus on learning rather than sensing their teachers are stressed, causing them to feel stressed as well.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This research aims to investigate the different strategies educators use to create calmness in their lives and how they include self-care in their profession. This literature review situates a theoretical framework around three primary themes. The first theme is a review of the impact of self-care on performance, especially in a professional setting. The second theme explored the more specific relationship between mindfulness and learning. And finally, the third theme examined the space of learning and the role of design in cultivating that space for health and productivity.

Self-Care

Definition of Self-Care

Levin and Idler (1983) note that self-care refers to activities individuals do to promote their health, prevent their disease, limit their illness, and resort to their own health. In the operational definition of self-care, the authors found emphases on the spiritual aspect of health, wellness behavior, self-medication, healing potential, self-administered primary medical care, management of chronic disease, and protection in the use of professional services. Levin and Idler (1983) also found the traditional health education literature focusing on risk and disease prevention.

Godfrey, Harrison, Lysaght, Lamb, Graham, and Oakley (2011) determined that there is a broadly accepted definition of self-care within the literature. The definitions vary between someone who engages in self-care behavior, what motivates self-care behaviors, and what healthcare professionals are involved in self-care. Healthcare professionals view self-care differently than the general public, along with different roles within the healthcare profession. Godfrey et al. (2011) found that after examining one hundred thirty-nine definitions of self-care,

they determined seven components of the definition and were connected to each component of the three variations. There was an evolution to the definition by the end of the 2000s that showed a more expansive definition. Godfrey et al. (2011) note that there are many layers to the definition of self-care, and identifying components in the definition can determine the different areas of potential research.

Application of Self-Care

Acker (2018) found that incorporating self-care among social workers helped with job satisfaction and turnover intentions. The study the author investigated was the relationship between self-care strategies, the role that stress plays, job autonomy, job satisfaction, and whether people intend on turning over. Acker (2018) surveyed four-hundred sixty-nine social workers to determine multiple measures of self-care and how it is included in professional support, professional development, coping strategies used, and how it affects job satisfaction. From the survey, Acker (2018) found that self-care strategies are associated with job satisfaction.

Monroe, Loresto, Horton-Deutsch, Kleiner, Eron, Varney, and Grimm (2021) determined that nurses' burnout rates impact job satisfaction, teamwork, and patient care. During the pandemic, front-line nurses have increased workloads and multiple stressors, causing burnout. A nurses unit that implemented Project7, a mindfulness intervention, had higher job satisfaction versus the control group of nurses that did not implement Project7. Monroe et al. (2021) found that implementing Project7 as a tool provided effective and accessible mindfulness to improve job satisfaction and teamwork and overall reduced burnout.

Miller (2022) found that the lack of knowledge about self-care was the primary obstacle to integrating self-care. The lack of self-care contributes to faster and higher levels of burnout for graduate psychology students. Miller (2022) also argued (1) that self-care should not be the

student's responsibility, and (2) that burnout may negatively affect psychologists' patients. Miller (2022) found that graduate students struggled to find both the time and the resources to implement self-care. The findings from the research point to the importance of implementing self-care into psychology programs so psychologists can integrate self-care into their own practices.

Types of Self-Care

Myers, Sweeney, Popick, Wesley, Bordfeld, and Fingerhut (2012) anonymously surveyed 488 psychology graduate students about their stress levels and self-care practices. To give effective guidance to stress management, they found that there needs to be an understanding of the role of stress in student's lives and the types of self-care that support their well-being. Myers et al. (2012) outlined several forms of self-care:

Sleep. There have been studies done on the relationship between stress and sleep. Myers et al. (2012) found that Individuals who get low-quality sleep are more likely to be stressed. Myers et al. (2012) subsequently conducted this research with other populations, including college students and medical and nursing students, and found the same results.

Exercise. Myers et al. (2012) found that regular exercise will help reduce stress. Callaghan (2004) notes that exercise is a neglected form of intervention for mental health. Throughout history, exercise was a way for people to prevent disease and promote well-being. Callaghan (2004) found that exercise reduces anxiety, depression, and negative mood and improves self-esteem and cognitive function.

Social Support. Myers et al. (2012) also found that students who were married had lower levels of stress than students who were not married. Turner, Edwards, Eicken, Yokoyama, Castro, Tran, and Haggins (2005) similarly found that psychology interns' self-care prioritized

time they were able to spend with family and friends' support, with humor, and fun experiences. Psychologists have a high burnout rate due to the demands of their job, and the requirements of managing, sensing, and displaying emotions can burden someone who does not take care of themselves emotionally. Myers et al. (2012) found that female students in the psychology program have shown a need for more social and family support than males in the field. The authors also found a decrease in stress for students who are married versus students who are not married.

Mindfulness practices. Myers et al. (2012) found that when practitioners both understand and embrace mindfulness practices, there is a documented decrease in stress levels as a result. However, there appears to be no significant change in stress levels for people who did the practice but who did not understand what they were doing.

The Role of Emotional Intelligence

Zysberg, Orenshtein, Gimmon, and Robinson (2017) examined emotional intelligence's role on the burnout experience with 230 daycare employees and 209 teachers. Zysberg et al. (2017) noted that burnout happens when there is physical and emotional exhaustion, which can feel like helplessness and lack of self-efficiency. Burnout can be attributed to stressors from the job and environment. The lack of professional training, low levels of decision-making, and lack of social support can contribute to a stressful environment in the workplace. However, Zysberg et al. (2017) also found that the risk of burnout is most directly correlated to the person's capacities for emotional intelligence. Someone with emotional intelligence is better equipped to manage emotions, adapt, and cope with challenges in their place of work. Zysberg et al. (2017) summarized that when educators are stressed, they are more likely to feel burnout. When

educators have emotional intelligence, they are able to handle stress in a productive way, and they will experience less burnout.

Mindfulness and Learning

Definition of Mindfulness

Kabat-Zinn (2005) defines “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experiences moment by moment” (p.144). Mindfulness has also been defined as paying attention in the moment without judgment, which can be learned through meditation and other mindfulness practices (Nicklasson, 2021; Baer, 2003). Being aware of one’s bodily function, feelings, and consciousness are aspects of mindfulness (Nicklasson, 2021; Schoeberlein, 2009).

Germer (2004) found mindfulness is the English translation of the Pali word *Sati*. 2500 years ago, Buddhist psychology used the language Pali, and mindfulness was the core teaching of the tradition. Germer (2004) includes a definition of awareness and how consciousness is connected with awareness and attention. Awareness monitors the inner and outer environment, and attention is the process of focusing. Germer (2004) notes that mindfulness is paying attention to what is present at the moment.

Black (2011) similarly found that mindfulness’s definition stems from the Pali language’s linguistic renderings. Black (2011) explained that *Sati* combined with *Sampajana* means awareness, circumspection, discernment, and retention. Black (2011) also found that mindfulness is widely viewed to be an inherent quality of human consciousness.

Anālayo (2019) found that there are, historically, two foundational ways of understanding the role and practice of mindfulness. First, there is a need to relate the qualities associated with mindfulness to its practical application. Second, one must have a clear knowledge and clear

comprehension of mindfulness to be with its practice. Anālayo (2019) determined that a better appreciation of mindfulness can be found when there is an increase in cross-disciplinary dialogue on specific aspects and functions of mindfulness application.

Application of Mindfulness

Studies have also shown that meditation benefits adults; there has been increased research about practices to decrease stress for children. For instance, Lantieri (2008) studied-different mindfulness practices to incorporate in the classroom. A strategy to strengthen social and emotional learning is contemplative practices, such as reflective moments, which will help students focus on their minds and bodies. Lantieri (2008) found that some benefits include learning to increase self-awareness, greater body relaxation, improved concentration, and paying attention. In the study, teachers focused on two practices in a resilience program: progressive muscle relaxation that helps the body relax coupled with mindfulness exercises that focus on the mind.

Albrecht, Albrecht, and Cohen (2012) noticed that mindfulness is being used more frequently in schools worldwide. The authors note that mindfulness instructors recommend that teachers should feel comfortable and effective when teaching mindfulness in the classroom. In order to do that, mindfulness practices should be embodied in their own lives. Albrecht et al. (2012) suggest that school-based programs must be analyzed to improve knowledge of mindfulness.

As one example, Flever and Singh (2020) focused on a mindfulness program designed specifically for children called “Soles of the Feet.” It includes ideas, procedures, and logic that has various mindfulness approaches. Flever and Singh (2020) explain how Sole on the Feet was designed to implement mindfulness in classrooms so adults can improve their ability to support

at-risk students. The program focuses on mastering breathing and thinking routines to help with self-regulation. Flever and Singh (2020) found that implementing this program can help adults improve students' self-regulation, which will transfer to reducing disruptive behavior.

Kane (2018) found that creating a culture of calm can be facilitated through various mindfulness practices to help regulate the internal and external stresses that happen daily. These mindfulness methods help students and teachers have a calm and safe place in the classroom. This study includes data collected from physicians and psychologists on mindfulness. Kane (2018) found that the design, colors, posters with inspirational quotes, quiet space, and calming music throughout the day are all approaches to creating a calm classroom environment. These approaches support the educator in fostering mindfulness practices in the classroom, such as a poster on diaphragmatic breathing. The author saw that diaphragmatic breathing and setting the tone for the day are some strategies that can be easy to implement throughout the school day. Kane (2018) argues that educators should remember that mindfulness practices will not magically transform students' behaviors. Still, these strategies can be implemented to promote a positive and calming classroom environment.

Mindfulness Training

Kinnunen, Puolkanaho, Mäkikangas, Tolvanen, and Lappalainen (2020) found an increase in positive changes when participants used mindfulness skills. During the trial, participants experienced less burnout when incorporating mindfulness strategies from the program intentionally designed and given to them. The overall well-being of the participants was increased when implementing mindfulness strategies. The researchers found there was a transition in the participants' well-being. Participants started at an ill, then after engaging with the mindfulness program, moved to a neutral or balanced state, thereby showing an increase as a

result of the practice. When there is an increase in a person's overall well-being, it can improve other aspects of life, such as evaluative (life satisfaction) and eudaimonic (social well-being) are included in improving a person's well-being.

Harris, Jennings, Abenavoli, Katz, Greenberg, and Schussler (2014) found that mindfulness training reduced burnout. They studied the well-being of eighteen elementary school teachers and their classroom function. The program focused on stress management tasks, such as emotional regulation, mindful awareness, and compassion. Teachers completed a self-report survey about behaviors, feelings, and attitudes; they also participated in an in-person inspection measuring body-mass index, blood pressure, and saliva collection. Harris et al. (2014) found that when educators went through mindfulness training, they were more likely to tolerate negative emotions and distress. There was an increase in efficient classroom management for the participants who underwent the training.

Mindfulness Approaches

Eliuk and Chorney (2017) studied mindfulness practices to calm the racing mind. They outline how mindfulness practices have become more mainstream in schools and found that there was a decrease in bullying, hyperactive classes became calmer, and test anxieties were reduced. They argue that mindfulness practices in physical education should focus on movements. Additionally, being physically active should be a joy. Teachers' instruction methods can hinder a student's ability to engage in mindfulness. The researchers also advocated for giving students time to focus on what their bodies tell them as equally important to modeling and sharing specific mindfulness practices. There are also some barriers to mindfulness practices, including a lack of administrative support and teacher training.

Mindfulness and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). Riner and Tanase (2014) further discuss different approaches and how to implement calmness within lessons and during the school day for students with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). Riner and Tanase (2014) noted that medication for ADD is usually the front-line response, but other strategies should be implemented to support a student with ADD. One strategy that Riner and Tanase (2014) focused on was meditation. Increasing concentration and focus by using different meditation strategies, such as when students maintain a focus on an object or sound. A process for bringing back the mind is when students focus on the event and how it occurred versus what they wish happened. Riner and Tanase (2014) note that students need to be aware of the mindfulness practice for it to be done correctly. Lastly, The authors suggest frequent practice will help the wandering mind, of particular importance for a student with ADD, to “bring the mind back” and create a habit of being able to do so. To practice mindfulness, some strategies are to stay in the present, return when thoughts drift away, be non-judgmental, welcome whatever arises, open your heart, and “let go.”

Tools to Support Teachers with Student Mental Health

Brann, Boone, Splett, Clemons, and Bidwell (2021) focused on the importance of teachers being able to support students’ mental health after recognizing that there is pressure on teachers to teach, notice if a student has mental health troubles, and support that student with what they need. These researchers studied teachers and their confidence in supporting students with mental health and the development of teachers’ mental health literacy. Based on their findings, it was concluded that to ensure teachers can successfully support students, the SMH-SETS test evaluates teachers’ self-confidence regarding supporting students with mental health

needs. Brann et al. (2021) concluded that using the SMH-SETS test will be helpful for educators in the future to determine their effectiveness in supporting students.

Mindfulness Coloring

Kersten and van der Venet (2010) focused on how colors affect the emotion of someone. In the study, the authors noticed that people feeling calm were drawn to cool colors, and people experiencing more anxiety tended to be drawn to warm colors. Their study was built around the use of mandala coloring. Kersten and van der Venet (2010) also found that the association with color further impacted relationships to colors. For instance, while they found that there has usually been a positive association with green if someone had been in jail and the walls were painted green, that person may have a negative feeling toward the color green. Consequently, while they noticed association trends, they also acknowledged that there is no definitive answer. Carsley, Heath, and Fanjnerova (2015) found stress reduction for students when they colored in a mandala or completed a free draw before an exam. Students could calm themselves with this strategy before taking an exam, relieving test anxieties.

Classroom Design and Calmness

Fielding (2006) found that students need a mixture of outdoor and indoor learning spaces, quiet areas, messy areas, lab-like spaces, and a place for social interaction, with a variety of lighting levels and qualities that match the full spectrum of daylight. Our environment must reflect how we learn, allow for a change in lighting, and provide art on the walls, different colors, access to the outside, and natural lighting. The environment should include comfort for the students to best suit their needs in the classroom to improve their learning environment.

Lantiere (2008), who outlined the value of mindfulness practices in the previous section, also identified the value of a peace corner, as a place set aside for students to go to when feeling

overwhelmed or in need of a break. Lantieri (2008) documented one classroom where students brought in pictures that made them feel calm and comfortable to decorate the peace corner. Some decorations included postcards or pictures of unfamiliar warm places. Lantieri (2008) also noted that students cannot focus on learning when stressors are present in their lives and that incorporating strategies to implement calming the mind can increase their learning ability. These strategies can work in the classroom and at home.

History of Classroom Design

Intentional classroom design can increase the comfort levels of students and educators and will make for the ideal learning environment. Kennedy (2007) outlined how classrooms have been designed poorly throughout the years. For instance, in the 1960s, designers decided that classrooms should have no distractions so students would not daydream and imagine the world outside the class. As such, classrooms were designed with few and even no windows. It was even considered a hazard to have windows in the class. This was also when air conditioning and fluorescent lighting were invented, so instead of having windows, they implemented these new technologies in their design. Kennedy (2007) has shown how some schools have been redesigned recently to include windows and ensure natural lighting comes into classrooms. The design allows for light to come in without heating the classroom. Not all schools have the luxury to redesign their classrooms to incorporate natural lighting, and it may not be a priority on the list of things to do for a school, Kennedy (2007) notes.

Braster, Grosvenor, and del Mar del Pozo Andres (2011) studied the cultural history of the classroom. Baster et al. (2011) found noticeable design choices included different writings and displayed documents like teachers' logbooks and observer reports. The study includes personal experiences from oral history interviews. Braster et al. (2011) note that the classroom's

space and design is an areas of concern for educators due to the practicality of the space and how it affects learning and social relations. Baster et al. (2011) found that within history, the structure of the classroom was not designed as an optimal learning environment.

Hutchison (2004) focused on losing a sense of place, which included spaces like classrooms. In the introduction, Hutchinson (2004) talks about the negative memories people have of classrooms and how this is often overlooked. The history and philosophy of place in education are rarely acknowledged. The author notes that schools have been given a role in shaping students' hearts, minds, and skills. Promises are shared within school settings, such as equal opportunities and hope for a better future. There are also multiple places within the school to consider, such as classrooms, gymnasiums, libraries, and many other places. These places are shared spaces by students and educators, and how the space is empowered contributes to how the space is used and valued (Hutchinson, 2004). Hutchinson (2004) mentions that this space is shared or can be determined by cliques. Understanding child psychology can contribute to understanding what place perception can mean for students. In Hutchinson's (2004) study, he realized that these considerations were not implemented in educational practices.

Outdoor and Physical Education as Part of the Classroom

The outdoors can be used as a classroom and not only for physical education. Avci and Gümüs (2020) conducted a study with two different 4th-grade classes learning a unit in social studies. One class did their lessons outside, and the other class remained inside. They tested students before the experiment to establish a baseline. After the students completed the social studies unit, they tested them again to see the difference in test scores. The scores for the class that learned their social studies unit outdoors improved more than those who learned in the classroom.

Azrin, Ehle, and Beaumont (2006) conducted a case-study on Attention-Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder as well as autism. They focused on seeing what conditions supported the student to sit still and work on gross motor skills. To start the study, they allowed the student to play with whatever they wanted for a minute outside, and then they began to implement that to create reinforcement for sitting still. They found that after using this strategy, the student could sit still and focus on the task. Notably, they found that providing outdoor playtime as a motivator helped create an atmosphere of calm in the classroom. The outdoor strategy is more efficient with a smaller class or individual student.

Webster, Zarrett, Cook, Egan, Nesbitt, and Weaver (2016) studied movement integration (MI) and what happens when it is infused in the classroom. Four themes emerged: challenges and barriers, current and ideal resources, current implementation process, and teachers' ideas and tips. The goal was to have teachers that rarely incorporate physical activity during the school day have their students participate in a program where they incorporate movement. The researchers interviewed the teachers after the program was implemented to see what they thought. Most teachers decided to include MI in their teaching, but they did it based on the students' needs. Teachers realized that, after having MI as a part of their day-to-day routine, students were sitting more still than usual and focusing slightly more during the lesson. There was a slight increase in the desired behaviors and focused attention during the school day.

Conclusion

The contribution of the literature to this project is the different practices educators can use to implement calmness and self-care in their daily classroom lives. Within the literature, self-care in psychology graduate programs focused on how it relates to the student's stress levels and how it will destress them by incorporating self-care. Mindfulness practices are helpful for

students throughout the school day, and this also helps teachers. Learning will become more efficient with consistent mindfulness practices, especially for students with ADD. The history of classroom design has not necessarily considered children's psychology and how children develop. Classrooms were designed with little to no windows and with fluorescent lighting. Newer designs incorporate natural lighting and a ratio of outdoor and indoor learning environments.

In the literature reviewed for this project, there is a lack of acknowledgment of what educators do to create a place where students and teachers feel comfortable. There is an important gap in knowledge as to what teachers do to destress themselves.

The purpose of this research is to determine what educational professionals do to calm themselves in consideration of the stressors they experience. Working with students can be mentally challenging some days, and learning about what educators do to destress can benefit other educators who need that support. The strategies educators use can help the students experience a calm learning environment when the educator is feeling calm. Students are observant and will reflect the emotions they see within the adult they are with. When the educators feel calm, it will help create an equitable learning environment for the students. The educator will have more attention readily available to address students' needs and to give them the individualized support they need to be successful learners. This will impact the equity of learning, because when educators are calm, they are better able to recognize and have greater actionable empathy to address systemic challenges faced by diverse student populations (Low, 2021; Ducato, 2022; Callahan, 2022); whereas when people are tied up in stress, they are less responsive to and understanding of learning disabilities (Tagawa, 2021; Denton, 2022; Barboza, 2023), the social and home lives of students (Mosher, 2023), and the many systemic and identity

barriers students face (Barragan, 2021; Nadler, 2023). With a diverse group of students with various needs, when educators are calm and focused, they can support students with differentiated instruction, being able to tend to their emotional needs and the other support students may need throughout the school day.

Chapter 3: Methods

There is research on the value of self-care, especially among students of psychology (Miller, 2022), the impact of different mindfulness practices in schools (Kane, 2018), and the impacts of design on the classroom (Kennedy, 2007) There is a lack of research on the effectiveness of self-care practices for educators and how it improves their teaching abilities to improve their lives and practices. This study sought to find what educators do to care for themselves and focus on their mental well-being to be effective educators for their students and create a calm classroom atmosphere.

Research Questions

These questions guided the research:

1. What do educators do to prepare themselves for inner calmness and steadiness before teaching?
2. How have educators managed their time to implement self-care on a regular basis?
3. How do educators understand the impact of their state on the learning experience of students in their classrooms?

Description and Rationale for Research Approach

This mixed methods research was conducted with constructivist and transformative worldviews. The research involved mixed methods research with qualitative data through a sixteen-question interview. All the questions were open-ended to produce data based on the participants' opinions. Participants were also able to express their outlook on the questions freely. Quantitative data was also used in the form of a ten-question Likert survey. Participants were able to reflect on their stress levels and pick a number that suited them. A constructivist worldview is designed toward understanding multiple participants' meanings in the world

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The participants could express their thoughts on the questions being asked freely, and the researcher then interpreted them to determine the themes based on the interviews. A transformative worldview is change-oriented, where the research is used to make a difference (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research is in support of making a change to the education profession to support educators with their mental health and reduce the likelihood of teacher burnout. The current system in place is leading to teacher burnout, and many educators are leaving the profession due to the lack of support.

Research Design

The researcher interviewed six elementary educators at a school in northern California on self-care and the practices they use to support their service and work in the classroom. The research took place over one month and sought to elicit narrative insights on the impact of self-care and mindfulness on the well-being of schools

Research Site and Entry into the Field

The school site is a Title one northern California K-8 school with approximately seven hundred and two students currently enrolled (Education Data, 2023). More than five-hundred students are eligible for free and reduced-price meals at school (Education Data, 2023). The school counts approximately fifteen different ethnicities and over four hundred English Learners who also speak a diversity of languages, including Bulgarian, Gujarati, Spanish, Arabic, Filipino, Punjabi, and Vietnamese (Education Data, 2023). To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for the questionnaire and the notes taken during the interviews.

Participants and Sampling Procedure

All participants were employed and worked at the school in northern California at the time the researcher was student teaching at this school site. The researcher recruited educators in

person by asking if they were interested in participating in the study. Having a connection and having worked with each educator during this school year formed a connection and made the educators more likely to agree to be interviewed. The research focused on six educators from the researcher's student teaching school site. Participants are educators who have a connection with the researcher. All educators have worked with students with learning differences. The educators included a general education teacher, two special education teachers, a speech specialist, the school psychologist, and an instructional aide. All of the educators who were interviewed are women who have been in the teaching field for between one and twenty-four years.

Methods

Each of the six interviews lasted around 30 minutes and took place in the participants' classroom. The interviews included sixteen open-ended questions (See Appendix A) focused on self-care, what educators do to prepare themselves for working in schools, and the practices they implement in the classroom. At the end of the individual interviews, the participants completed a 10-question Likert questionnaire (See Appendix B).

Data Analysis

The researcher collected mixed-method data through open-ended interview questions and a questionnaire. All interviews were recorded on the researcher's iPhone using a voice memo application, which was later transcribed. The researcher wrote analytic memos during and after the interviews to track participants' body language, expressions, and pauses. After analysis of the transcribed individual interviews, the researcher examined for bias and added any ideas connected to this study (Maxwell, 2013). This helped the researcher build an understanding of participants' emotions and feelings by comparing them to the analyst memos of the individual interviews.

Open coding was used in the research to break down data and organize it based on categories found in the research. Then focused coding was used to identify recurring themes and data. These themes were then organized into different categories to determine further the recurring themes and their relationship to the research. Next, the concept map was created based on these recurring themes (which were developed from individual interviews and questionnaires). The concept map helped identify emergent themes within the research. It was created to help further confirm the different themes within the research and what themes emerged (Maxwell, 2013). The researcher then determined the main themes and sorted them into categories: boundaries, self-care, and having a support system. This helped the researcher understand the different subcategories' key points for the data analysis. The researcher's participants recognized an equity gap within the access to self-care in the educational profession. Due to this understanding, the success of implementing boundaries, self-care practices, and having a good support system can better support educators in creating a calm classroom environment for their students.

Validity

The researcher is a student teacher and is either a colleague or personally knows the participants in the study. The relationship between the researcher and the participant could affect the answers the participant gave in the interview and questionnaire. The researcher also has a personal investment in learning what other educators do to help create a calm atmosphere in their personal lives. As a future teacher, learning about the different self-care methods can benefit the researcher's teaching. This creates a sense of personal bias within the research. Educators are given very little time for preparation for the school day and time for themselves. The researcher has experienced various stressors with student teaching, athletics, and academic work. This stress

has impacted the researcher's teaching ability and success in teaching. There is a bias to determine what other educators do to be successful when there are other stressors in life.

To account for bias, the researcher used several validity checks. The researcher has been working at the elementary school for the school year, which has created trust with the educators. The long-term involvement and rich data help validate the findings (Maxwell, 2013).

Interviews were collected through audio recording, qualitative data in the research from six educational professionals, and quantitative data, Likert surveys, created triangulation (Maxwell, 2013). During this study, the researcher used discrepant evidence to counter themes to validate the qualitative data (Maxwell, 2013). Validating the participants during interviews, respondent validation was implemented to ensure the information being received from interviews was accurate and help identify biases and understand what was observed (Maxwell, 2013).

Chapter 4: Findings

The focus of this research was on understanding what educators do to prepare themselves for inner calmness and steadiness before teaching. Three primary themes emerged after interviewing six educators. The first and central theme was how and why educators set boundaries to create a maintainable work-life balance, the importance of creating healthier boundaries, and creating space for self-care routines. The second major finding identified the ways by which students are able to sense when educators are stressed or calm and how it impacts the experience of students. This finding was noted by an *in vivo* recording of one participant's reflection that "It's a Snowball Effect," how the state of the teacher impacts the state of the class as a whole. The third and final theme is the amount of support educators get from their families and loved ones when they are stressed and how feeling supported is essential, especially when stressed.

This study looked at how educators have created a work-life balance, despite the obstacles of the different tasks required of their job. The educational professionals interviewed were all women and had been in the education field for one to twenty-four years. Four out of the six participants are married. One educator has a teenager, and another is expecting their first child. An educator was recently engaged over winter break, and one is single.

Boundaries: "It's Just a Job"

During interviews, educators described how they are more than just teachers, that they have families, personal interests, and pastimes that extend beyond the work they do at school. M, a recently married speech pathologist for the elementary school (serving grades kindergarten through fifth grade), notably recalled her mother's lesson. M's mother had also been an educator

and told M that being a teacher is “just a job.” This stuck with her and has helped her to make a boundary of not bringing work home:

I think education is a profession where it's sort of this unspoken or spoken thing where you should not have a good work-life balance, where you know, you're just so devoted to the children, etc., I think that that makes people burn out, and that's a really unfair expectation to have for people. So I think about the kids all the time, and I'm not at school. I'm constantly trying to problem solve, but I also really try to limit that in myself as much as possible because they know I'm just not going to be as good of an educator for them, if I'm not getting that time away from [work] mentally.

Creating boundaries showed up as being essential in helping several of the participants in maintaining a healthy work-life balance. J, a general education teacher and soon-to-be mother, who had been teaching for six years, explained that teaching was a part of her personality. With experience, though, she realized she needed to set boundaries to create time for herself and her husband. J used to spend all her free time doing preparation work, and she said that at the beginning of her teaching career, it was great, and she loved it. Once the 2020 COVID pandemic hit, and she started teaching in a hybrid format, J realized that she needed to more clearly set a boundary of not bringing work home and not doing work on the weekends so that she has time to spend with her husband and dog. J created a schedule that works for her, including coming to school early to get preparation work done and leaving the work behind when she heads home in the afternoon.

NC, a Special Day Class teacher for transitional kindergarten through second grade, said she felt like she had switched jobs when she set boundaries. NC would stay at school late and would over-exert herself at work.

I do feel like as I've gotten older, and the more years that I've taught, I've been able to see where that boundary is when I need to disconnect and leave—when it's past my contract time—to go home and do all those other things. I feel like the more days in a row that I don't do that, I find that it becomes impossible to balance myself and the classroom and all of that. As a first-year teacher, I really struggled, because it felt like you're expected to do everything, and you're just learning how to do it. And so I just remember working so late and so many hours. I feel like I've switched jobs now. Because of that [boundary I created], I recognized [that] I couldn't do this job with the amount of hours that allow me to be a whole person and do my job.

She found that it took experience to determine where that boundary is for her and ensure that she does not stay past her contract hours so many days in a row and burn herself out. NC talks about how she is now able to recognize when it feels like she is doing too much, and it starts to take a toll on her.

As a mother of a teenager with whom she is very close, ND has worked as a Resource and Special Day class teacher for twenty-four years. She finds that protecting her time, in terms of both the hours and her emotional state, in order to spend time with her child is really important to her. When she gets home, she wants to make sure she is able to spend time with her family and dog. ND chooses to stay past contract hours to complete her Individual Education Plans and other paperwork, but only because she does not want work to take time away from her child later in the evening or on the weekends. ND will stay until five or six to get her work done each day, which includes preparation work and paperwork. Having a teenager who is in multiple extracurricular activities, when ND leaves school later, it works well with picking her 15-year-old and dog up from school and grandma's house.

Self-Care

During interviews, the educators thought about the different ways they implemented self-care into their daily lives. Some commonalities among self-care activities included spending time with family and loved ones through activities such as going for walks, cooking a meal together, or even just eating together. Three of the participants also have dogs and each talked about how walking their dogs was a form of self-care and exercise. Their dogs get them all to go outside and walk.

J, the soon-to-be mom, explained that, unfortunately, the school has only talked about self-care and the resources to which they have access only briefly during a couple of staff meetings, and then never again:

All I know is that I've heard that about [resources] a couple of times, and then nothing else. So I don't know how important it is to [the school] if they have only shared it once or twice in the past couple of years. I don't even know if it's still available. I don't know if those were COVID opportunities or ongoing opportunities, I have no idea. That makes me feel like maybe it's not as important. If we [don't even] know what it entails, then I don't think it's [prioritized].

Some of the participants felt that self-care is achievable on a daily basis, and others had to find ways to implement it, which included setting boundaries. M, the speech pathologist, felt like schools are not going to provide educators with self-care time and that they have to find ways to make time for themselves. She shared, “You just have to have really strong boundaries for yourself to allow for that. So nobody's gonna give it to you. So that's just something that you have to decide to prioritize for yourself.” M talked about what self-care she enjoys doing at home. M shared, “I like cooking up like when I don't have to cook like I tried to pick one fun

thing to cook every weekend. So I really look forward to a new recipe.” M and her husband have a fun meal that they will cook on the weekends. This meal is something that they have never cooked before, and it is a fun challenge to cook something new.

There was a lack of response to what educators do to calm themselves during school day hours. Educators did mention going for a walk to pick students up or during their breaks, but not much else was said. ND also mentioned drinking water, and interviewee J brought up that breathing while stressed is self-care for her during the school day.

Therapy

Several participants commented positively about psychotherapy, and how they had seen a therapist or know people they respect who see a therapist. They all believed that therapy is something that can really help but none were partaking in therapy at the time of the research.

However, one participant, X, who works as a special day class instructional aide, shared that she is interested in going to therapy but also feels hesitant. She identifies as Hispanic and shared that she feels that her culture often frowns on therapy, especially if the person has everything they need, such as money, a stable job, and a house. As such, she said it is not something that she would consider at that time, in fear that it may not be helpful. Instead, and according to her, she has cultivated what is for her very healing by spending time with family.

B, the school psychologist, who also recently got engaged, has been working for six years, but this is her first year at this school site. In her psychology program, she had been required to go through therapy herself. She noted that she was not sure if all psychology programs required it, but that she enjoyed doing therapy and thinks it is really helpful for a lot of people. B explained that she had exited therapy, but it is something that she would do again if she felt like she needed it. As the school psychologist, she recalled that during her program they

made it clear how beneficial it is for their students to go through the services that they will soon be providing for others.

NC, the special day teacher, used to do therapy right around the time she started teaching, but she has not participated in therapy in a long time. NC said that she would be interested in starting up again, but the medical insurance provided by her job does not provide the best therapy. And, ND, the experienced resource teacher, has also participated in therapy in the past but felt that the weekly commitment was too much, especially with the hours at the end of the day during which she stays at school to get all the paperwork done. With her increased caseload throughout the years, and while raising a daughter, she said it would not work with her schedule, but that she would like to return to therapy if it was every other week.

“It’s a Snowball Effect”: Calmness or Stress

Participants noted how stress ripples through a classroom and how students can detect it. The good news is that calmness also has a ripple effect. ND, the resource teacher, when speaking, has a naturally soft voice and has noticed that when working with students, they will lower their voices to match hers. ND mentioned, “I kind of have a quiet voice anyway. But it kind of brings their voices down.” Her calming voice helps the students calm themselves when working in her classroom. ND stated, “when a teacher is yelling and stressed, they feel stressed, and they don't want to be there. Then it's like a snowball effect.” Conversely, J, the general education teacher, explained that when she is feeling frustrated and stressed, she notices the impact on the lesson she is teaching, and that can carry over to the following lesson. To account for this impact, when J feels stressed or frustrated, she noted her vulnerability to be honest with her students about how she feels. She does this to show her students that she is human and has

these types of emotions too. J, also described how she will do breathing exercises in front of the students to be an example of what she does to regulate her feelings.

Becoming Thermostats for Calm and Safe Learning

B, the school psychologist, further noted how students have difficulty regulating their emotions and need their teachers to self-regulate to model for the students what they should do when they have “big” emotions:

That is a big connection because you have to share your calm with kids because they're not as able to regulate themselves. And so you help them regulate by regulating with them. If you're dysregulated, then there's no chance to get them back to calm because maybe they don't have those skills yet. I do think the teacher or the educator's ability to regulate themselves plays a huge role and how regulated the kids are.

Both B and J identified how having educators who are able to self-regulate can help students regulate their emotions, and it will help set the tone for learning. All the educators interviewed agreed that students can feel the educators' emotions, which impacts students' feelings and the environment for learning.

X, the instructional aide, recalled a day the special day class was short-staffed. X remembered how focused the classroom teacher had been in making sure that they remained calm all day, and how doing this helped the students feel comfortable. Having a calm presence helped the students feel regulated, and they were able to keep on with the routine of the class, which is very important for the students in the class. X has also said that the students will come up to her and ask what is wrong when she is feeling sad that day. What stands out to her is how sensitive the students can be, and how deeply they must feel the undertones of teachers' lives. Even when she has pretended that she is not sad she has been amazed that students notice her

feelings and ask her about them. NC describes that if educators are “not in a place to feel good, then how do we expect our kids to be able to be in an environment that feels good?”

Classroom Decoration and Design

The educators were asked how they felt a classroom should look and what should be included to create an environment that supports teacher presence and the impact of calmness on learning for students. There was consensus that students' work should be presented around the classroom. All the participants also noted that the educator should feel comfortable in the space in which they are spending the majority of their time (i.e., the classroom or office). The special day teacher, NC, brought up lighting, and how she was told to avoid using both ceiling lights, if not necessary, and too many things on the walls, as they can both be overstimulating, especially for autistic students. Alternatively, when she taught general education, she was told to incorporate a lot of decorations on the walls. This represented, among the participants, a general feeling that there is a lack of research-based knowledge on what actually best serves students. NC also talked about how there is a lack of education about how to decorate a classroom and if certain colors or decor will be distracting for students:

I think the fact that we live with fluorescent lighting is really not cool in education, because it's just not good for our bodies. I think natural light is [important] toward feeling like you're not stuck inside all day. And in special education, we've been told that too much going on in the room and having too much on the walls and too many different colors [should be avoided, as it's a] distraction. Our students really have a hard time with this visual overload. We've been told to keep it minimal. But, I also feel like it needs to feel warm and inviting. We are in this space so much that it needs to feel comfortable.

The general education teacher, J, shared what she called the imbalance of her pet peeves having either no decorations or unnecessary decor on the walls. She says decorations should be relevant to what is being taught. For example, anchor charts made for a lesson, so students can go back and reference the content, is an example of a relevant classroom decoration. I also noticed, in J's classroom, a calming corner where students can take a break if they feel overwhelmed.

Feeling Supported is Essential, Especially When Stressed

The participants noted in the Likert responses that they have support systems when stressed. During the interviews, they talked about how they would spend self-care time with their family and significant others. J, the general education teacher, said when she gets home from school she talks to her husband about the day. J notes:

Every day I go home, and my husband asks me how the day was... Some days are fine, some days are great. And, some days are not fine or great. That day can really impact the following day. So when I have that time at home, talking through the day with my husband, my sisters, my friends, or whoever I might be around that night, it helps me to get through those emotions, so that I'm not, I'm sorry, but pissed off when I come into school the next day.

J will talk to her husband or family when stressed to help prepare for the next day of teaching so these feelings do not roll over into the following day. She has also talked about how her second-grade team is very supportive, especially since she will soon leave for maternity leave.

Interviewee M, the speech therapist, had a very stressful IEP meeting that involved lawyers.

After the meeting, she talked with her team that was also in the meeting to go over what had happened. They supported her after the meeting. B, the school psychologist, described how she gets support from her fiance:

I'll try to make dinner because sometimes I don't [always] get a chance to sit down for a meal. So I'll make dinner with my fiance and we will go on a walk. Maybe we go out to eat or something like that; nothing crazy. It's nice to just have space to be human for a little bit.

Spending quality time together helps take her mind off of her work, which is difficult for her sometimes, and taking time to do other things supports her in that.

However, many felt less supported by the administrators and district personnel. For instance, J felt out of the loop regarding the long-term substitute that would work with her class during her maternity leave, which had created stress for her. Others identified concerns with the ongoing union negotiations regarding teacher salaries as a place of dissent, as well as the way personnel is used to support classes that need help.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter are based on the research questions-what do educators do to prepare themselves for inner calmness and steadiness before teaching? How do educators manage their time to implement self-care regularly? How do educators understand the impact of their state on the learning experience of students in their classrooms? The findings from the interviews determined the need for setting boundaries in order to maintain a healthy work-life balance; without a healthy work-life balance, it will be difficult for educators to be ready to teach every day. The importance of self-care for educators was also noted, especially implementing some form of self-care on a daily basis, such as cooking a meal with a loved one, which can help reduce stress. Educators are stressed, and there is a need for support; having a good support system in place can help and may include talking to a family member or loved one about what has happened that day. The findings from this research determine there is a positive

effect on educators' calmness when they are implementing boundaries and their own version of self-care practices in their daily lives. Educators' responses varied based on when they were interviewed and how busy they were, but overall, they were less stressed to mid-stressed based on the Likert questionnaire that was given to them. New insight found in this study, found that having boundaries to support a healthier work-life balance, implementing self-care routines, and having a good support system outside of school, made it clear that these participants are managing their stress levels with these strategies. More research is needed to determine if a lack of boundaries, self-care, and support are contributing factors to educators feeling stressed.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The findings in this study indicated that setting boundaries, implementing self-care on a daily basis, and having a support system were all ways that educators create calmness within themselves. Boundaries included not bringing work home and not staying past contract hours. The educators agreed that spending time with family and loved ones was essential to self-care. Students can feel educators' emotions, and this can affect how the students feel and experience learning and support in the classroom.

This chapter explains and compares the literature review to the study the researcher has completed. It will compare the similarities and differences between the research findings and themes from the reviewed literature, which includes teacher burnout, self-care, and mindfulness practices. It will then support educators in making space for themselves and separating teaching from their personal lives. Creating boundaries supports a healthy work-life balance and, overall, supports the educators' mental health. Self-care practices on a daily basis will also help decrease stress. The minimal number of participants in the study, all participants being from the same school site, and the few interactions after the interviews were limitations for the study. Future research should include a variety of educators from different backgrounds, school sites, and job descriptions to determine if other educators use similar tactics for creating calmness. In addition to interviewing educators, interviewing students would ensure that the research provides a more complete understanding of impact. Including a longer study, to gather data over time, could help determine if the self-care practices are efficient and if it will provide long-term stress relief.

Burnout has been a big topic of discussion lately, especially in education. Zysberg et al. (2014) note that a person's personality and ability to manage stress will increase or decrease the risk of burnout. All educators that were interviewed for this thesis project had made a change in

order to maintain their mental well-being. Being capable of implementing boundaries to avoid burnout is part of managing the stress that educators experience.

Self-care is a practice that educators have been implementing into their daily lives. When Myers et al. (2012) did a study with psychology graduate students, all the female students showed a need for social and family support. The educators that were interviewed for this study identified a similar need. The participants said they felt they had support from their families and time to engage in activities in their personal lives, such as walks and meals with family members.

Mindfulness has been used to decrease stress levels in schools. Harris et al. (2014) conducted a study with eighteen educators and found that with the increase in mindfulness activities, such as yoga, there was a decrease in stress among educators. Some educators interviewed for this study said they implement mindfulness in their teaching, which they said helps the students and themselves destress.

Implications for the Literature

Zysberg et al. (2014) focused on the personality of educators, whereas this project focused on what the educators said about their stress levels and preferences for managing stress. Zysberg et al. (2014) found that the ability to manage stress will determine if the educator will experience burnout. Myers et al. (2012) did a study on psychology students, and there was no connection to educators in the study. There is a difference between psychology students and educators; while both careers are stressful, they have very different field experiences. Myers et al. (2012) found that incorporating sleep, exercise, and social support were some forms of self-care that psychology students found helpful to destress during their time at school. Although there is a difference between psychology students and educators, these are all forms of self-care that could benefit educators when limiting their stress.

There was little to no research in the literature about what educators do to implement self-care. The literature discussed whether psychologists should implement self-care into their school programs and whether there is a problem of burnout among psychology students. The literature also discusses teacher burnout and how it can be decreased with self-care. Still, Harris et al. (2014) only talked about implementing mindfulness and yoga through a program for educators. The researchers did not talk about what educators do on their own time; they tested how stressed educators are and whether yoga and mindfulness helped reduce stress. Based on the literature, the educators were not implementing these strategies on their own time and only participated during the program. This differs from the researcher's study, where the researcher focused on what educators do for self-care on their own time.

Implications for Practice and Policy

These findings support the value of educators in creating the time and practice to implement self-care. Implementing boundaries early on in a teaching career can make a difference in the job and reduce the likelihood of burnout. Establishing a routine and practice for self-care was identified as important. And recognizing the role of support, both inside and outside of the school, has proven critical to nourishing teachers, and, by extension, providing students with teachers who are in a state to best support diverse needs.

Classrooms

In the classroom, educators should first focus on implementing boundaries for themselves, such as a schedule to work for them. Some educators enjoy waking up early and getting preparation work done in the morning, and others may enjoy staying later to get prepared for the following day. Routine is important for educators and students. Having a structure for each day can make the school day less stressful if there is a routine in place for the students.

Having a routine inside and outside the classroom can help the educator with their boundaries of what they can do during the day. Including exercise within the routine is an excellent way to reduce stress, so is incorporating the recommended amount of sleep for each night. Another boundary the participants discussed in their interviews was not bringing work home. By not bringing work home, the participants were able to spend more time with their families and friends. Creating space for personal time at home is a boundary that should be encouraged. Mindfulness practices and social emotional learning should be included in classroom schedules.

Schools

Schools should be incorporating opportunities for self-care for educators. During the research, it was made clear that there is a lack of resources on self-care being provided by administrators. Including professional development on self-care practices could better support educators, and it would support students learning. If there are resources provided and professional development, educators can incorporate the learned self-care practice in their teaching to help reduce students' stress along with educators. An established social-emotional learning focus may also help teachers model managing stress for themselves and their students. Including professional development of social emotional learning will bring knowledge to why learning and using social emotional learning in school will support students with their academics. Incorporating various staff activities outside of professional development and team planning will connect educators and build a stronger bond within the staff. This could include having periodic lunches catered or potluck lunches with the staff members, and instead of professional development days, going on a staff field trip or some form of activity during that time. Team building will bring everyone together and can support educators in a relaxed, calming way, away from the daily stressors of this important career.

Policy

Educators need self-care in order to maintain their careers. Otherwise, more educators are at risk of burning out and leaving the profession.

One change that could better support educators is school or district policies that clearly support teacher self-care. Creating boundaries can help educators protect their emotional battery and prevent them from wearing down. Implementing self-care practices on a daily basis will support educators and their emotional and physical well-being. Support systems for educators, when they are stressed, are crucial for educators' mental health.

A policy should be set in place for educators to have professional development on self-care. Mandatory time for self-care during stressful weeks or times, such as conference week, would benefit educators greatly to help relieve stress during those times. During staff meetings, including self-care, to make the meetings less stressful. Within the research, it was noted that the current therapy services that are provided for educators are part of the reason why educators are avoiding therapy. Including improved benefits for therapy would better support educators and improve the increased feeling of burnout educators are facing. Forms of therapy could include group therapy for educators to come together and discuss similar or different experiences. Allowing therapy during contract hours, during after-school hours, could support educators who feel they do not have time for the service, but would like to go to therapy. Focusing on what educators need will transfer to better support for the students.

Limitations of the Study and Future Research

There were a few limitations within this study, including the limited number of participants, the singular location, and the length of the study.

Limitations of the Study

Participants. One limitation of this study was the number of interviews done. Only six interviews were conducted in this study, and all were women. There was also a lack of diversity among participants. This provided a limited perspective of what it is like to be an educational professional, and it could be different for a broader group of educators. Another limitation is that only educators were interviewed. Students could provide a different perspective on if they notice and feel educators' stress. Interviewing educators' family members to determine what they do to support the educator would be a valuable take on the study. Including administrators would increase the variety of data for the study as well.

Location. All of the participants in this study were also from the same school site. The problem with interviewing participants from the same school is that educators from other schools, districts, or counties could have different experiences. It made the study focus on one school site, so the responses were based on what this school site offers its educators for self-care.

Duration. The duration of this study was, overall, extremely short. The participants were interviewed a single time, with a few brief follow-ups due to working closely with the researcher. The interviews lasted from twenty to thirty minutes. The duration of this study could have been longer.

Future Research

In future research, more educators should be interviewed and should incorporate various educators with diverse job descriptions, along with a broader demographic sample of educators. Middle and High school educators should also be a part of future studies on this topic. Administrators, students, and educators' family members should be included in the interview

process. This would increase the study and data collection to provide the research with a wider range of information.

Other districts could be included in the study to determine if this is something that educators from other places feel similar to the participants in this study. Students could also be interviewed about their classroom stresses and if they can sense when their teachers are stressed. This also includes what strategies students enjoy to calm themselves or what they have learned to work on calmness in class.

Increasing the length of the study would provide more information and data to interpret if the strategies that educators implement can support the longevity of stress relief. It would also give the study time to implement various strategies to determine if some are better suited than others. Including sleep and exercise in the study to further investigate the importance of different self-care practices and if they would benefit educators would also be an interesting outlook to investigate.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there has been little to no research on how educators implement self-care in their daily lives and how they transfer calmness from their personal lives to the classroom. This study has focused on these areas and found that educators must set boundaries and implement self-care to cultivate calm within themselves to transfer into the classroom. Students can feel when educators are stressed or calm, which can determine the tone of the classroom. Feeling support from loved ones is not only a part of self-care, but it is essential for educators to have support when they are stressed. Implementing these findings can not only support educators but will also support students learning. When educators are cared for, they will be better prepared to teach students and create an equitable learning environment. Students come from

diverse backgrounds, and not every student learns the same way. Some students will face systemic challenges and when stressed, educators will not be able to support students in the most effective way. When educators implement their different forms of self-care and support, they can take care of each student and provide the support the student needs. Making the learning environment more equitable for the students learning, especially students with learning differences.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Would you like to free draw or color in a mandala?
2. How do you, as an educational professional, prepare yourself for inner calmness before/during teaching?
3. What are your thoughts about therapy? Is it something that you do or are interested in doing?
4. What is self-care for you? Is it going outside, working out, art, etc.?
5. What do you think is the relationship between a teacher's inner calm and the calmness of the classroom or the impact on students' learning?
6. Do you think it is important to cultivate that quality of calmness in your personal life to transfer into the classroom?
7. Do you feel like there is time for self-care in the education profession?
Taking into consideration school responsibilities/ family responsibilities.
8. How do you create time for yourself? What does that time look like for you?
9. Do you feel like you have a good work-life balance? For example, trying to spend time with family, not bringing work home, or doing activities you enjoy.
10. What do you think is the role of the space in a classroom and how it pertains to learning?
11. Does the design of color and emptiness of wall space impact the experience of learning for students?
12. What things should be included or not included when decorating a classroom?
13. Are there mindfulness practices that you implement in your teaching?
 - a. What are they?

14. Do you implement brain breaks during the school day with students, and if so, what kinds do you use?
15. Is physical movement implemented in your teaching?
 - a. Is it something that you think would help students get settled in the classroom?
16. Is the structure of your classroom conducive to an optimal learning environment?
 - a. If not, what would you change?

Appendix B: Likert Survey

Scale 1-10 1: doesn't apply to you 10: yes, extremely applies to you

1. How anxious do you feel at school?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. How anxious do you feel on a regular basis?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Do you become overwhelmed easily?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Do you have trouble relaxing?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. Does your mind feel like it's racing when the school day is over?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. Do you feel you handle your daily stressors well?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. When you begin to feel stress how easily are you able to calm yourself?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. Do you feel like you are able to cope with daily stressors?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9. Do you prioritize eating healthy and getting the recommended amount of sleep?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. Do you feel like you have a support system when you are feeling stressed?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Appendix C: IRB Approval Letter

DOMINICAN
UNIVERSITY
of CALIFORNIA

Jan 31, 2023

Kiana Pelton

50 Acacia Ave.

San Rafael, CA 94901

Dear Kiana,

On behalf of the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants, I am pleased to approve your proposal entitled *Calmness as a Quality of Teacher Presence and the Impact on Learning* (IRBPHP Initial IRB Application #[11108]).

In your final report or paper please indicate that your project was approved by the IRBPHP and indicate the identification number.

I wish you well in your very interesting research effort.

Sincerely,

Michaela George, Ph.D.

Chair, IRBPHP

Cc: Matthew E Davis