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Exploring the experiences of one team of teachers: Well-being and navigating the demands of the education profession

Abby Weiland
University of Northern Iowa

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EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF ONE TEAM OF TEACHERS:
WELL-BEING AND NAVIGATING THE DEMANDS
OF THE EDUCATION PROFESSION

An Abstract of a Dissertation

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Approved:

Dr. Sarah Vander Zanden, Chair

Dr. Jennifer J. Waldron
Dean of the Graduate College

Abby Weiland

University of Northern Iowa

December 2021

ABSTRACT

Much is changing in K-12 education contexts, including an emphasis on performativity and accountability (Au, 2016; Connell, 2009). Against this backdrop, teacher burnout and attrition have been the focus of numerous studies, including examination of organizational structures and factors contributing to burnout (Buckley et al., 2005; Konu et al., 2010). Insufficient attention has been given to how teachers are able to navigate the demands of this profession (Matteucci et al., 2017; Wilcox & Lawson, 2018). Efforts to retain teachers should not only emphasize factors associated with burnout or attrition, but also how they are affected by the systems in place, including relationships, policies and educational structures (Bottrell, 2009; Johnson & Down, 2013; Wilcox & Lawson, 2018). This study utilized qualitative methods, adopting an ethnographic perspective, to explore the experiences of one team of K-12 teachers, and how they negotiate their educational context individually and collectively. Following the ethnographic tradition, extensive time was spent in the field virtually, gathering various forms of data including interviews, classroom observations, team meeting observations, participant reflective journals, and documents. Through this study, I explored the following questions: How do teachers negotiate the demands of their educational context? What tensions do teachers express between their practices and ideologies? How might a team of teachers maintain their well-being while navigating their educational context? Three themes were identified from the data - a sense of trust and vulnerability amongst educators seemed to serve as a foundation for action, advocacy begets advocacy, and educators were able to maintain positive well-being through challenging the doxa of

their particular educational context. This research contributes to existing literature about how teachers are able to maintain a sense of overall well-being while navigating the demands of the education profession.

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Approved:

Dr. Sarah Vander Zanden, Chair

Dr. Sarah Montgomery, Committee Member

Dr. Mason Kuhn, Committee Member

Dr. Denise Schares, Committee Member

Abby Weiland

University of Northern Iowa

December 2021

DEDICATION

To Everly. Our little love. You joined our family in the middle of this journey, and were an inspiration to finish and a reminder to slow down.

To my parents. You inspired me to follow in your footsteps in education. I am the teacher I am because of both of you. You have believed in me longer than anyone else, and have challenged me to excel and to rest along the way. I will forever be grateful.

To Justin. We have walked an unconventional path in service of both of our dreams. I am thankful for your patience, your love, and your partnership.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Burnout in the education profession has been on the rise for many years (Brown & Roloff, 2011; Hakanen et al., 2006). Teachers leaving the profession, or attrition, has increased in recent years with forty to fifty percent of teachers leaving the field within the first five years (Brown & Roloff, 2011). Previous research highlighted the impact of burnout on teachers' health and ability or willingness to stay in the classroom (Iancu et al., 2018) and the role of various personal factors including gender (Konu et al., 2010; Watlington et al., 2004), level taught (i.e. elementary, secondary, etc.), and length of time in the profession (Konu et al., 2010). In response to growing concern around teacher burnout and attrition, researchers turned their attention to interventions and organizational changes designed to keep teachers in the field. These included strengthening mentoring programs for new teachers (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004), improving school facilities (Buckley et al., 2005), and providing personalized professional development for educators (Guarino et al., 2006); however, studies aimed at determining the effectiveness of these interventions showed an overall small effect (Iancu et al., 2018; Maricuțoiu et al., 2014). These research findings regarding the limited effectiveness of interventions for teacher burnout and attrition illustrate why it is critical for researchers to shift focus elsewhere.

Purpose of the Study

Efforts to retain teachers should not only emphasize factors associated with burnout or attrition, but also how they are affected by the systems in place, including relationships, policies and educational structures (Bottrell, 2009; Johnson & Down, 2013; Wilcox & Lawson, 2018). Against this backdrop, the education system might work toward the cultivation of systems cultivating teachers' overall positive wellbeing. The continuing empirical work in the field indicates that teacher wellbeing is important in the school context; however, a great deal of published work in this area offers theoretical conceptions of wellbeing and/or factors associated with teachers burnout or attrition, rather than empirical research focusing on strategies to cultivate teacher wellbeing.

This study was designed with the understanding that there is a need for additional research around how teachers are able to navigate the demands of their profession while maintaining a sense of overall well-being (Matteucci et al., 2017; Wilcox & Lawson, 2018). This study utilized qualitative methods, adopting an ethnographic perspective, to explore the experiences of one team of K-12 teachers, and how they negotiated their educational context individually and collectively. Following the ethnographic tradition, extensive time was spent in the field gathering various forms of data including interviews, classroom observations, team meeting observations, participant reflective journals, and documents.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are as follows:

- Research Question 1: How do teachers negotiate the demands of their educational context?
- Research Question 2: What tensions do teachers express between their ideologies and practices?
- Research Question 3: How might a team of teachers maintain their well-being while navigating their educational context?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant to research on how teachers negotiate the demands of their profession, and more specifically to research on teacher well-being, in four primary ways. First, this study answers the call for continuing research into factors involved in retaining teachers in education (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Chiong et al., 2017; Guarino et al., 2006). Particularly, it responds to Chiong et al.'s (2017) appeal for further qualitative research into the organizational and policy factors influencing veteran teachers' decision to stay in the profession.

Second, while there is a plethora of research around teacher well-being focused on early childhood educators (Cumming, 2017; Hall-Kenyon et al., 2014) and beginning teachers (Dishena & Mokoena, 2016; Johnson et al., 2014; Peters & Pearce, 2012), there is a lack of literature attending to how veteran K-12 educators are able to negotiate their educational context. Specifically, Borman and Dowling (2008) called for research focusing on teachers over the course of their careers, noting educators' needs and reasons

for staying in the profession change over time. Chiong et al. (2017) echoed this call, pointing to a need for further research into the multidimensionality of career teachers' motivations in the profession.

Third, much research in this area utilizes quantitative methodologies and thus, is large in scale (Kurt & Demirbolat, 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Qualitative research adopting an ethnographic perspective, in contrast, provides a language “to express this principle, that classrooms are *particular* social settings, mini-cultures in themselves, that are *not* universal” (Frank, 1999, p. 7, emphasis in original). Ethnography also creates a setting in which the researcher is able to see and feel the “places and spaces, food and drink, time and movement from the standpoint of people in the fieldsite who are different from the ethnographer” (Delamont, 2016). This experience offers drastically different data from that of a large-scale quantitative study.

Finally, while some literature describes the collective nature of teacher well-being and teachers' ability to navigate the education profession (Johnson et al., 2014; Morrison, 2013), many of the existing studies focus on *individual* teachers' narratives and experiences. This ethnographic study, instead, assists in highlighting the experiences of a team of educators, and how they collectively and individually navigate the demands of their context.

Social Field Theory

Bourdieu's social field theory is widely used and recognized in the field of sociology as a lens through which we can view social and cultural reproduction. Foundational to his work, and at times a focus of his critics, is the tension between

structuralism and constructivism. In a lecture given at the University of California, San Diego, Bourdieu (1989) referred to his work as *structuralist constructivism*. He describes structuralism as the existence of structures within the social world unconsciously guiding the practices of individuals, while he explains constructivism as “a twofold social genesis,” of habitus, fields and social classes (p. 14). In addition, Grenfell (2014), in an overview of Bourdieu’s work, noted, “The basis of his science is this simple fact of *coincidence* between the two; of an individual’s connection with both the material and social world” (p. 45). Field theory emerged out of the work of Bourdieu and colleagues in Algeria, as a theory fitting their observations did not yet exist.

In social field theory, individuals are seen to operate within a field, inhabiting varying positions, which result in differing perspectives and particular ‘habitus,’ mostly unconscious dispositions shaped by past experiences and which shape future practices (Bourdieu, 1977, 1989; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Maton, 2014). Within the social space, or field, individuals possess and transmit various forms of capital – economic, cultural, social, and symbolic. In his work, Bourdieu focuses primarily on cultural, social, and symbolic capital, positing symbolic capital is simply economic or cultural capital recognized and known (Bourdieu, 1977, 1989, 2016).

In order to fully understand how members in a field operate, the unconscious belief system driving individuals must be addressed. *Doxa* are unconscious and unquestioned perceptions of discourse, and are of particular import to the functioning of members in a field. *Doxa* exemplifies the set of beliefs, opinions and actions taken by a group (Bourdieu, 1977; Deer, 2014a). The study and understanding of *doxa* necessitates

an additional element of Bourdieu's work – reflexivity. Bourdieu cautions researchers of the need to be reflexive in their work lest they become overtaken by their own unconscious and unquestioned beliefs and discourses (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Deer, 2014b). Reflexivity requires an individual to become conscious of its own operations, i.e. to consider why one has approached a question from a particular direction.

Central to Bourdieu's work is how societies function or work; however, as a researcher, of particular significance to me is *why* societies, more specifically educational environments, function in a certain way. In this first section, I have briefly outlined the major elements of Bourdieu's theory. In the following sections, I will take each element on its own, acknowledging the multi-dimensionality of the theory, difficulty in piecing out each facet of a cohesive and interwoven theory, and inability to discuss all facets with complete depth. Nash (in Schubert, 2014) articulates this challenge well:

If it takes the best part of a decade to make sense of the core concepts of Bourdieu's theory only to find one has no more ability to understand the world than one did before, then perhaps not. Yet the struggle to work with Bourdieu's concepts...is worthwhile, just because to do so forces one to think. (p. 185)

In the following chapter, I will turn to applications of Bourdieu's theory in education, focusing specifically on K-12 classroom settings and pre-service teachers in post-secondary education programs.

Field and Habitus

In order to fully understand the interactions or actions of individuals, Bourdieu argues that we first must understand the social space in which they operate. He refers to this social space as *field*. In her summary, Thomson (2014) analogizes Bourdieu's field to that of a football field, in which a specific game is played. This representation allows us to visualize individuals occupying various positions, constrained by the boundaries of the field and the roles their particular positions embody. Bourdieu (1977) posits individuals are embedded in the structures of the field(s) in which they operate and act as players within a game, constantly striving to improve their position. Critics (Martin, 2003; Nash, 1990, 1999, 2002), point to a lack of human agency in his theory, critiquing the absence of conscious thought and action on the part of the players. Central to his concept of field, though, is a tension between human agency and the field's objective structures. It is not the absence of human agency, but the constraint of agency by the objective structures existing in the field that limit human agency.

Social fields are shaped by their own rules and histories, which are helpful in explaining how they came to be as well as changes within the field (Bourdieu, 1977, 1989; Thomson, 2014). Like "self-contained worlds," activities taking place within a field are typified by a hierarchical social structure in which "some people are dominant and who have decision-making power over the ways in which the little social world functions" (Thomson, 2014, p. 68). It is here where the intersection of structuralism and constructivism, the duality of field and habitus, is seen. Bourdieu (1977) explains, "the structures constitutive of a particular type of environment produce *habitus*, systems of

durable, transposable *dispositions*” (p. 72, emphasis in original). Individuals’ beliefs and dispositions are, in part, a product of the objective structures in which they operate.

Despite criticism (Martin, 2003; Nash, 1990, 1999, 2002), Bourdieu himself notes the ability of agents to construct a view of the world, though “this construction is carried out under structural constraints” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 18). Habitus, then, is the unconscious dispositions and preferences of individuals structuring activity on a social field, or what Bourdieu (1977) calls “history turned into nature” (p. 78). Central to our unconscious dispositions within a field is the history of the field and those who came before us.

Individuals internalize these dispositions and beliefs, and in turn produce and reproduce them (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Here, the metaphor of playing a game again becomes useful. Players, or agents within a game, come to the game with individual perceptions and thoughts; however, through extended play in the game, players begin to understand how the particular game is played and their position within that game. In this way, the field structures the habitus, while the habitus also helps to structure the field.

Doxa, Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy

Rules and norms supporting the development of habitus in a particular field are referred to as *doxa*. It is doxa that outlines how an individual is expected to behave in a specific social field, and might be considered simply as the ‘way we do things around here.’ Individuals’ behaviors and dispositions within a group are reinforced by other individuals within the group as well as by their institutions, affirming them and leading to the further reproduction of the group’s doxa (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron,

1990; Deer, 2014a). Within a field, the dominant and dominated groups have opposing interests in regard to doxa. The dominant group is interested in defending the doxa, or at the very least establishing orthodoxy to maintain their power positions within the field. Orthodoxy refers to a situation in which arbitrariness is exposed, but accepted, as it is still seen as the only possible way. Individuals within the field are both aware of and play by the rules of the game. Though this is not ideal for the dominant group, it is preferred to heterodoxy. In contrast, “the dominated classes have an interest in pushing back the limits of *doxa* and exposing the arbitrariness of the taken for granted” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 169, emphasis in original). Their goal is to introduce into the conversation heterodoxy, or the “existence of *competing possibles*” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 169, emphasis in original). To accomplish this, dominated groups must have the means, whether material or symbolic, to reject the doxa. Necessary to this endeavor are various forms of capital.

Cultural, Social, and Symbolic Capital

Though economic capital might be what initially comes to mind when considering capital, Bourdieu instead focuses on cultural, social and symbolic capital. He suggests it is “impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory” (Bourdieu, 2016, p. 83). Capital in all forms can be exchanged within networks and is equated with power. In certain situations, both cultural and social capital can be converted into economic capital, and like economic capital, independently contribute to the reproduction of social inequality.

Cultural capital exists in three forms: embodied, objectified and institutionalized. Taken separately, cultural capital in the embodied state occupies our mind and body, changing the way we think, speak and act. In the objectified state, cultural capital is represented in a material way such as in works of art, books, or museums. Finally, in an institutionalized state, cultural capital is represented by academic qualifications given by an institution in the form of certificates or degrees (Bourdieu, 2016; Moore, 2014). Possession of cultural capital, similar to other forms of capital, reveals inequalities reflecting greater inequalities in how individuals both acquire and possess cultural capital. Social capital is that which is accumulated via the connections and relationships one maintains through membership in a variety of groups. Resources, whether actual or potential, are linked to the development of these social networks. Individuals or groups invest in these networks to either maintain their social capital or develop this capital for the short- or long-term future.

When cultural or social capital is recognized or known by others, Bourdieu defines it as symbolic capital. Though this type of capital is not physical, it remains immensely valuable and powerful. “Symbolic power has to be based on the possession of symbolic capital. The power to impose upon other minds a vision, old or new, of social divisions depends on the social authority in previous struggles” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 23). Accumulation or possession of these forms of symbolic capital affords one power and allows the imposition of that power over others. Imposing power over others can be seen in a positive or negative light; however, it is often seen in negative forms known as symbolic violence within social fields.

Symbolic Violence

Inequalities in society created and perpetuated by social fields, doxa, habitus and various forms of capital all aid in answering the question of *why* we might desire to study society, and assuredly led to my inquiry into studying the social field of education. The ability to exert power over individuals, while at the same time obscuring the networks of power responsible is what Bourdieu refers to as *symbolic violence*. Society not only strives to classify individuals, but to do so in a way that gives certain individuals the ability to exert domination over others. Further, due to the structures and doxa within a field, “the dominant classes need only go about their normal daily lives, adhering to the rules of the systems that provides them their positions of privilege” (Schubert, 2014, p. 180). Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) specifically emphasized symbolic violence in education, continuing well into post-secondary education environments. They posited the reproduction of class structure is neither mechanistic or organic, but rather perpetuated through distinct strategies and practices of the agents within the field. In the functioning of schools, teachers teach students certain things and speak to them with particular language, all in an attempt to maintain the social order. These practices, the authors noted, are forms of symbolic violence in action. Bourdieu suggested symbolic violence, and more specifically, symbolic domination “is something you absorb like air, something you don’t feel pressured by; it is everywhere and nowhere, and to escape from that is very difficult” (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1992, p. 115). Due to the elusiveness of symbolic violence, it is particularly dangerous, and even more crucial to include in the conversation of forms of power in education.

Reflexivity

Though reflexivity is not unique to Bourdieu's work, his conceptualization differs from that of other researchers. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) described reflexivity as highlighting the import of self-analysis throughout the research process, acknowledging and understanding the role of the researcher as a cultural producer. Further, the authors point to three distinct biases that "may blur the sociological gaze" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 39). The first bias attends to the individual researcher and his/her social origins, social class, gender, or ethnicity and the biases stemming from these identities. The second bias is related to the position occupied by the researcher within the academic field and in the broader field of power. Due to their positions, researchers are in part defined by the field in which they operate, while at the same time working under the influence of the dominating powers within the field. The third bias, the *intellectualist bias*, concerns the tendency of the academic to view the world through the lens of interpretation instead of problem solving; "we risk collapsing practical logic into theoretical logic" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 39-40).

Reflexivity, then, demands a close analysis not solely of the individual researcher, but of the structures of the discipline as a whole, in Bourdieu's work, the total social scientific field. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) cautioned, "What has to be constantly scrutinized and *neutralized, in the very act of construction of the object*, is the collective scientific unconscious embedded in theories, problems, and (especially national) categories of scholarly judgment" (p. 40, emphasis in original). Of import to reflexivity is the ability to look past individualism to uncover the "collective unconscious" (Bourdieu

& Wacquant, 1992, p. 46) avoiding the projection of the individual onto the object. It is this collective unconscious that is of particular interest in this research project.

Organization of the Study

As teacher retention continues to prove challenging in educational systems (Buckley et al., 2005; Guarino et al., 2006; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004), many policies and organizational structures continue to focus on performativity and accountability (Au, 2016; Castro et al., 2010; Connell, 2009). In an educational climate in which staggering numbers of beginning teachers leave the profession (Brown & Roloff, 2011) and veteran teachers struggle to remain resilient in the face of daily challenges within the profession (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Chiong et al., 2017), researchers are calling for attention to the personal, relational, and organizational conditions of teachers' work (Gu & Day, 2013), and the roles these play in teachers' ability to navigate work and life over the course of their careers. The purpose of this study was to answer the call for further research into the interplay among personal, relational, and organizational conditions of teachers' work (Gu & Day, 2013); further research into the experiences of veteran teachers in navigating the demands of education (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Chiong et al., 2017); and to explore the collective responsibility for teacher resilience and wellbeing (Johnson et al., 2014; Morrison, 2013).

In the second chapter, I explore social field theory within the educational landscape, research around teacher burnout and attrition, and the literature around combating burnout and attrition, including teacher well-being and resilience in education. In the third chapter, I outline the research design and discuss the processes involved in

data gathering and analysis. The fourth chapter gives a thorough account of one team of teachers' experiences during this research project. Finally, the fifth chapter discusses the findings in the context of current literature on teacher well-being and navigating educational contexts.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social Field Theory in Education

Though social field theory can and has been applied to numerous disciplines, much of Bourdieu's work focused on the field of education. Nash (1990) noted "the relevance of this for the sociology of education is obvious: in modern societies the school has become the most important agency for the reproduction of almost all social class" (p. 432). Due to Bourdieu's attention to the production and reproduction of social class as a main tenet in his social field theory, it follows that education is a primary research focus. As students progress through their school experience(s), they gain a specific perspective and set of beliefs; thus, the school has an active role in furthering the dominant habitus of the culture, perhaps even more powerful than the role of family (Naidoo, 2004; Nash, 1990; Reay, 1995). In addition, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) discussed the link between cultural capital and pedagogic communication, further highlighting the role of the school in perpetuating inequality among social classes. A multitude of scholars (see Colley et al., 2007; Deer, 2003; Grenfell, 1996; James, 2015; McClelland, 1990a, 1990b; Nolan, 2011, 2016; Nolan & Walshaw, 2012; Naidoo, 2004; Reay, 1995, 2004) utilized Bourdieu's social field theory as a framework for their research, which I will explore below.

Structure of the Review of Literature

In the following sections, I examine the current social field theory research in K-12 education. Following this review of the current application of social field theory in education, I explore teacher burnout and attrition. Finally, I examine ways to combat

these issues, including wellbeing and resilience, and describe common themes in the educational literature.

Social Field Theory in the K-12 Classroom

The wide use of Bourdieu's social field theory in educational research presents a view into classroom fields and students' and teachers' habitus (Flynn, 2015; Jones & Rainville, 2014; Reay, 1995). Though researchers have cautioned against the improper or overuse of 'habitus' within education research (Reay, 1995, 2004) and the limited focus of Bourdieu's field (Ferrare & Apple, 2015; Jones & Rainville, 2014), it remains a beneficial lens through which to view educational practices in the classroom. "For the researcher, using field as a construct to frame the different expectations surrounding teachers' pedagogy can shed light on the full range of competing influences and expectations that teachers have to juggle" (Flynn, 2015, pp. 20-21). Within the classroom, a multitude of influences on and expectations of teachers exist, from educational policies to curriculum to power relations among positions in the field. Researchers suggested, "teacher habitus is perhaps defined *by* the curriculum and expectations of assessment" (Flynn, 2015, p. 24, emphasis in original) and "find that teachers have little understanding of or interest in the practices they are being expected to implement in one way or another" (Jones & Rainville, 2014, 285). In other words, teachers at times unconsciously carry out required curricula and administer assessments as a part of their daily practice without giving it much thought.

Power relations within the field of a school building or district play a crucial part in how teachers operate. In recent years, the increasing role of instructional coaches

within schools has added another layer to power positions within the field. Jones and Rainville (2014) described the following:

This active wielding of power by literacy coaches through controlling discourse or establishing status in the context of teacher learning works against the potential power of literacy coaches acquired through acting with compassion and humility to prevent and alleviate suffering. (p. 285)

The expectations placed on teachers by literacy coaches, or by the field in general, contribute to generating “a sense of capital wealth, or absence of it,” share in determining the practice of teachers, and “will be closely related to feelings of confidence or otherwise associated with the habitus” (Flynn, 2015, p. 21) often resulting in “a continuous state of tension” (Räisänen, 2015, p. 43). This tension felt by teachers is communicated through “the message that becoming a teacher means being initiated into contradictory roles” (Toshalis, 2010, p. 196) and often results in a lack of *habitus-field fit* (Colley et al., 2007; Nolan & Walshaw, 2012), discussed in more detail in the next section. Within research utilizing social field theory, the roles of educational policy, curricula, and specific players within the field contribute to the habitus of teachers and their resulting practice, perhaps more so than their own beliefs or philosophies (Flynn, 2015; Jones & Rainville, 2014; Räisänen, 2015), thus compelling a discussion of teacher agency.

A debate about whether Bourdieu’s concept of habitus leaves room for agency exists in the literature (Martin, 2003; Nash, 1990, 1999, 2002), as habitus is often defined as an unconscious set of beliefs and actions. Critics pointed to the absence of conscious

thought and action on the part of the players in his theory; however, Bourdieu noted the ability of individuals to structure their world in addition to being structured by it (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). In this particular conversation concerning in-service teachers, while some teachers are able to enact agency and avoid “a repetition of...past habitus” (Räisänen, 2015, p. 51), numerous educators are unable to do so (Flynn, 2015). Of particular interest are the reasons behind this perceived lack of ability to enact agency with regard to teaching practices. Räisänen’s (2015) perspective as a teacher-researcher able to enact agency is worth consideration:

Did I try to improve my position elsewhere when I aimed for reciprocal actions in the classroom and gave up my dominative position in the classroom community? Maybe I tried to improve my position as an academic, a literacy researcher, who aims to implement literacy into practice according to the needs of the contemporary world and tries to gain success in that field... Perhaps as a teacher making the changes to the classroom literacy habitus I had an illusion of struggling for the things important in that field, but as a researcher I played the game to gain capital in the area of literacy education. (p. 56)

The tension Räisänen described lends a visual to the multi-faceted nature of agency within the classroom. To explore this further, I will now turn to pre-service education in higher education settings.

Playing the Game in Pre-service Education

A body of research has emerged in the area of pre-service teacher education, and more specifically, in mathematics education (Nolan, 2011, 2016; Nolan & Walshaw, 2012). In an attempt to understand discourses within the university and secondary school classrooms, Nolan and Walshaw employed social field theory and explored the mismatches between habitus and field. The researchers described a disconnect between an inquiry-based mathematics education encountered in the university field and the

cultural capital to be had in the secondary school field when individuals ‘play the game’ of traditional teaching methods. Playing the game in this sense allowed an individual to better experience what the authors refer to as a *habitus-field fit* (Nolan & Walshaw, 2012, p. 357), accumulating cultural capital in the process.

Colley et al. (2007) explained the result of a lack of habitus-field fit in vocational education students’ experiences as exclusion, further positing, “our data suggest that this is likely to be the result where an individual rejects or resists the vocational habitus” (p. 490). When pre-service teachers experienced a lack of habitus-field fit, wherein the habitus of the university education did not fit with the field of secondary math classrooms, they at times defended the habitus and resulting practices of secondary math classrooms (Nolan, 2011; Nolan & Walshaw, 2012) while also at times exhibited agency through the quiet, continued use of inquiry-based teaching techniques in the face of losing cultural capital within their field (Nolan, 2016).

Deer (2014a) explains the necessity of a crisis in cases where individuals are able to demonstrate agency and operate against the doxa; however, teachers utilizing teaching techniques in direct opposition to the doxa of their school seemed to employ a *doxa workaround* of sorts (Nolan, 2016, p. 325). The author noted one educator “learned the value of privileged (tried and true) cultural capital and the truth of how such capital ensures the protection and reproduction of existing power relations and social class distinctions. Ultimately, she learned the value of keeping quiet” (Nolan, 2016, pp. 324-325). Though beliefs about other effective math teaching techniques emerged for these educators, described as heterodoxy, the promise of cultural capital still held power to

keep them quiet. This doxa workaround allowed teachers to utilize the teaching methods they wanted, while also enjoying the benefits of cultural capital in their field.

Symbolic Violence in Education

Worth consideration in the study of a particular field is the *why* behind the certain doxa or habitus in that field; why do agents act in specific ways. Of particular import to this conversation is symbolic violence. Toshalis (2010) describes this type of violence as “symbolic because it operates at the level of obligations, debts, roles, expectations, discourses, and non-verbal communications rather than through physical harm” (p. 188). Symbolic violence in education plays out in the form of gender domination or oppression, judgment due to a lack of ‘correct’ capitals, discipline techniques, and ability grouping, among others (Duckworth & Ade-Ojo, 2016; Nolan, 2011; Toshalis, 2010). Symbolic violence is often exacted on students in daily classroom occurrences. Toshalis (2010) found interns (student teachers) regularly attempted to veil the symbolic violence of discipline practices including seating charts and acts of surveillance, while others (Nolan, 2011; Toshalis, 2010) also noted the symbolic violence of testing and the resulting classification of students and social reproduction.

Teacher Burnout and Attrition

In recent years, issues of burnout and attrition in teaching have come to the forefront of education research. Studies showed forty to fifty percent of teachers leave the teaching profession within the first five years, and those remaining are overworked and burned out (Brown & Roloff, 2011). It is not surprising, then, that research in recent years has examined myriad factors influencing teacher burnout and attrition. Burnout has

become more than simply a buzzword in educational environments and is now a central focus of research in the field. According to Maslach et al. (2001), burnout is characterized by exhaustion, the feeling of being overworked and overextended, cynicism, detachment from the work being done and the people with whom one works, and inefficacy, lack of competence and personal achievement within one's career.

Researchers gave substantial consideration to the reasoning behind teacher burnout and attrition. For example, changes in educational policy (Acton & Glasgow, 2015; Hebson et al., 2007), overload in work and extra role-time (Brown & Roloff, 2011; Le Cornu, 2013) and emotional labor involved in teaching (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006) have all been studied in relationship with/to burnout in education. Attention given to teacher burnout is warranted, as serious consequences exist. Researchers suggested alarming effects of burnout, such as stress-related physical and mental health issues (Hebson et al., 2007; Moore et al., 2011) and teacher attrition (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Clandinin et al., 2009; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll et al., 2014), leading to the question of how to prevent teacher burnout.

Teacher Retention

Given the issues of burnout and attrition in the field, there is growing concern around strategies to retain teachers in the profession. This concern has been investigated by a number of scholars (Buckley et al., 2005; Guarino et al., 2006; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). They described school districts who strengthened their mentoring programs for new teachers, worked to improve school facilities, and provided personalized professional development for educators; however, studies aimed at determining the

effectiveness of these interventions showed an overall small effect (Iancu et al., 2018; Maricuțoiu et al., 2014). These results beg the question of what might be done next to address the issue of burnout, or how these models might be transformed to increase their effectiveness.

Commonalities among these approaches include focusing on workplace environment and organizational change; however, research around more subjective aspects of burnout has begun to emerge. In recent years, attention within the burnout and attrition conversation pivoted to well-being and happiness. While heightened awareness about teacher well-being focused on the impact on students and schools, rising demands exist for highlighting teacher well-being as a priority in and of itself (Cherkowski & Walker, 2016, 2018). It is this dialogue on well-being to which I turn next.

Articulating Well-being

Across the literature, well-being is defined in a multitude of ways. Ashford et al. (2006) defined well-being as “a person’s emotional and psychological capacity to cope with demands across time, circumstance, and setting” (p. 530). Van Petegem et al. (2005) described well-being, specifically in relation to teaching, as a positive emotional state and harmony between context and person, meaning teachers must be “capable of attuning to their own needs and expectations to specific context factors and demands of the school” (p. 35) and must feel a fit with the school in which they work. The authors focused specifically on positive aspects of well-being aligning with various theories of and approaches to well-being from positive psychology (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Seligman, 2002, 2011), instead of a focus on burnout or stress.

Only recently have researchers begun to approach the issue of teacher well-being from this positive lens. The conversation has turned to retaining teachers through mindfulness (De Stercke et al., 2015), positive teacher leadership practices focused on well-being for all (Cherkowski, 2018), and developing resilience through relationships (Le Cornu, 2013). Cherkowski (2018) specifically emphasized teacher well-being as a priority in its own right, instead of simply as a tool to prevent burnout and attrition, or solely to benefit students.

Diverse personal factors have proven significant with regard to well-being, including gender (Konu et al., 2010; Watlington et al., 2004), level taught (i.e. elementary, secondary, etc.), and length of time in the profession (Konu et al., 2010). According to Konu et al. (2010), teachers in the elementary school setting, and males in general, tend to experience higher well-being. Further, much focus has been given to the critical role relationships play in teachers' well-being, specifically with teaching colleagues (Le Cornu, 2013; Morrison, 2013; Soini et al., 2010), school leaders (Cherkowski, 2018; Hebson et al., 2007; Konu et al., 2010), and parents of students (Le Cornu, 2013; Soini et al., 2010). Closer examination of relationships and well-being is warranted, a topic I explore in more depth next.

Relationships and Well-Being

In the following sections, the roles of colleague-teacher relationships and school leader-teacher relationships in teacher well-being are discussed.

Colleague-teacher relationships & well-being. The quality and depth of teachers' relationships with colleagues play a major role in their wellbeing. Much literature exists

on the vital role of positive collegial relationships in the lives of beginning educators (Le Cornu, 2013; McCallum & Price, 2010; Morrison, 2013); however, positive peer relationships seem to make a difference in teacher well-being throughout educators' careers (Acton & Glasgow, 2015; Soini et al., 2010; Webb et al., 2009). Positive collegial relationships enhanced teacher well-being through fostering a sense of belonging and connectedness (Acton & Glasgow, 2015; Johnson et al., 2014; Le Cornu, 2013; Morrison, 2013), providing emotional support in each others' personal and professional lives (Le Cornu, 2013; Soini et al., 2010), and building a trusting environment in which to take risks and share concerns (Le Cornu, 2013; Webb et al., 2009). Johnson et al. (2014), for example, described the power of collegial relationships in developing a sense of belonging, acceptance, and overall well-being. Interestingly, the authors also pointed to the need to "promote collective ownership and responsibility for the well-being of beginning teachers" (p. 540). This nod to a collective responsibility differs from the perspective taken in much wellbeing literature. Often, the impetus for developing relationships and caring for one's well-being lands on the individual educator. Eslinger (2012) described the need to be intrinsically driven to cultivate a system of collegial support and collaboration. He explained, "the education rhetoric of collaboration often does not manifest in the regular routines and practices of schools and teachers" (p. 226). In other words, while collaboration may be a buzzword in education today, the systems and structures needed for it to take place on a consistent basis are nonexistent in many schools.

Soini et al. (2010) reported that educators more often found their interactions with their professional community to be a positive resource rather than a cause of stress, while others described instances in which professionally distant colleagues resulted in feelings of disconnection and loneliness (Castro et al., 2010) and negative cultures damaged collegial relationships and the possibility to work collaboratively (McCallum & Price, 2010). In particular, Castro et al. (2010) noted the prevalence of managing difficult relationships with adults within the school environment, including colleagues – a feeling teachers described as “fending for themselves” and “antagonising” (p. 626). In contrast, these authors also noted teachers utilized a variety of strategies to manage challenging relationships, including using other colleagues as “buffers and allies” (p. 626), and building alliances.

Other critical aspects of relationships with colleagues included “social connectedness,” “reciprocation of ideas” (Le Cornu, 2013), “inclusiveness” (Webb et al., 2009), and “intelligent contact” (Soini et al., 2010). Johnson et al. (2014) and Le Cornu (2013) highlighted the role collegial relationships played in teachers’ ability to cope with the demands of the profession. Le Cornu (2013) – who studied building beginning teachers’ resilience – found that teachers felt more confident and thus were better able to cope with challenges. Even more, the author reported relationships not only benefited beginning teachers, but more experienced educators also found inspiration through their relationships with early career teachers.

School leader-teacher relationship & well-being. School leaders play an influential role in overall teacher well-being in both positive and negative ways. Previous

research emphasized the highly relational and interconnected nature of school leadership and support systems in place, and the influence of these connections on teachers' overall wellbeing (see Castro et al., 2010; Hebson et al., 2007; Le Cornu, 2013; Morrison, 2013). Aspects of school leadership and support included creating alliances with administrators (Castro et al., 2010), feelings of alignment and support (Morrison, 2013), a sense of acknowledgment for contributions (Johnson et al., 2014); and emotional and professional support (Le Cornu, 2013).

Positive relationships and positive teacher well-being was cultivated when school leaders showed genuine interest in teachers' overall well-being (Le Cornu, 2013; Webb et al., 2009), worked to develop positive relationships and interactions with teachers (Cherkowski, 2018; Le Cornu, 2013; Webb et al., 2009), openly helped and supported teachers (Konu et al., 2010; Peters & Pearce, 2012), and valued teachers' personal commitment and investment of time (Brown & Roloff, 2011). Le Cornu (2013) suggested it is not enough for leaders to develop positive relationships with teachers. Rather, they must develop a "culture that promoted a sense of belonging and social connectedness and where there was collective responsibility taken for teacher well-being and learning" (p. 5). Even more, Butt and Retallick (2002) and Cherkowski (2018) emphasized the need for leaders to develop an environment based on trust, respect and caring.

Conversely, where educators experienced scarce or inadequate relationships with school leaders, they reported feelings of anxiety and stress (Peters & Pearce, 2012; Soini et al., 2010), and further professional isolation. Eslinger (2012) found that he and his principal developed an informal contract working along the following terms: "So long as

I was able to deliver strong student test scores, I was provided with the professional autonomy to make decisions about curriculum and instruction” (p. 228). Hebson et al. (2007) specifically pointed to the detrimental role overemphasis on monitoring and demands for increased standardization has on teachers’ well-being. As school leaders are often responsible for keeping teachers accountable to standards and school initiatives, it follows that relationships between teachers and their leaders are damaged as a result of these practices. According to Butt and Retallick (2002), lack of support, recognition, trust, respect, and caring, and poor communication also led to negative teacher well-being.

Performativity and Accountability

A concern highlighted in the previous section, and raised by educators and researchers alike is a hyperfocus on performativity and accountability in the current educational environment (Au, 2016; Castro et al., 2010; Connell, 2009; Peters & Pearce, 2012; Webb et al., 2009). While some authors (Castro et al., 2010) found the “intensive bureaucratic demands” (p. 624) created problems for the first year teachers, others (Webb et al., 2009) assumed a more critical approach, reporting an “unrelenting focus on standards” (p. 415) and labeling it “a straightjacket of government control” (p. 420). Further, Connell (2009) criticized the very conception of teacher “effectiveness”, arguing against the notion “that there is always a ‘best practice’ that can be instituted and audited from above (p. 6). He asserted this structure of education emphasizes the individual teacher, and gets rid of the collective agency of educators.

These authors also noted a lack of administrative support in providing training to address the hyper-focus on performance. While a concentration on standards and accountability measures may originate at the state or national levels, educators often associated the emphasis with their local school leaders (Peters & Pearce, 2012; Webb et al., 2009). Connell (2009), in particular, advocated for intentionally fostering a positive workplace culture and argued against any singular model of monitoring educators' performance as it often damages the very culture it intends to support.

Role of Contextual Factors

Contextual factors play a significant role in the wellbeing of teachers (Eslinger, 2012; Johnson et al., 2014; Soini et al., 2010). Much of the literature in this area focuses on either first year or early career educators, and the ways in which the education community can better support their development and overall wellbeing (e.g. Johnson et al., 2014; Morrison, 2013; Pearce & Morrison, 2011). Attending to the needs of educators new to the profession is imperative; however, this does not reflect the breadth of challenges and support affecting veteran teachers, as well. Few studies regarding teacher well-being focus on teachers at varying points in their careers (Eslinger, 2012; Soini et al., 2010; Webb et al., 2009), while most concentrate on beginning or early career teachers. Using approaches that could benefit veteran teachers as well as early career teachers could highlight ways to more effectively address the struggles and necessities of the collective.

In their review of teacher wellbeing literature, Acton and Glasgow (2015) explored studies published from 2002-2012. The authors argued for a focus extending

beyond that of simply managing burnout and stress, and stated “an approach that promotes happiness and positive functioning is one that has the potential to improve and enrich teachers’ working lives into the future” (p. 111). Further, current existing reviews of teacher wellbeing research (Cumming, 2017; Hall-Kenyon et al., 2014) highlighted early childhood wellbeing, while K-12 general education teachers’ wellbeing remains understudied.

Individual Teacher Action

An imperative for individual teachers to take action and seek out solutions to the challenges they faced is expressed in much of the literature around how teachers might navigate the demands of their profession (Castro et al., 2010; Matteucci et al., 2017; Pearce & Morrison, 2011). Castro et al. (2010), in particular, captured the weight many educators feel in navigating the profession and caring for their individual needs alone:

For me, it’s standing up for myself. I’ve got to stand up and fight for myself... You have to fight for your resources... You’ve got certain strengths and tools that you can use, limited compared to others, but you make a nuisance of yourself. I went right to it – started with the Vice Principal, didn’t get any effect, went to the Principal, didn’t get any effect. Got people saying, “yeah, we’ll do this.” [I] went higher up, and the next thing you know they are finding money to do things... If you need to accomplish something, do it. Tell them you’re going to do it. Go up the chain of command; you let them know that you’re going to talk to someone else about it. (p. 625)

Drawing on interview data, Pearce and Morrison (2011) described one teacher’s ability to “capitalise on her cultural and material resources” to fight against the dissonance she experienced between her beliefs and realities in teaching, and in turn maintain positive wellbeing. Similar to Castro et al. (2010), they argued teachers must advocate for

themselves and fight to hang on to their identities and truths as they navigated realities confronted in the field.

Development of personal and professional identities. Experiences of teachers' development of personal and professional identities are an important component in this discussion. One participant in Morrison's (2013) research explained, "Like no one really checks up on you in a professional kind of way... I can't say that I have really built professional relationships...everyone is kind of out for themselves in a way (Emily, 8 December)" (p. 126). While attention to educators' individual wellbeing and identity development is valuable, a hyper-individualized focus can lead to overemphasis on educators' responsibility for navigating their educational contexts and cultivating positive wellbeing in isolation. Castro et al. (2010) found teachers were often left to figure things out on their own, while Le Cornu (2013) reported "the early career teachers who felt empowered were very conscious of the importance of looking after their own wellbeing" (p. 7). Similar to these authors, Johnson et al. (2014) found in many cases, teachers were left on their own. The authors described this through one participant's story, "I feel like I've been left on my own to fend for myself" (p. 540).

Taking an active role. Meanwhile, in her study on building early career teachers' resilience, Le Cornu (2013) highlighted that while teachers need to feel supported, they must also take an active role in developing and sustaining the very relationships necessary for their wellbeing. The author advocated for teachers to be "positioned as *contributor* rather than receiver" (p. 12) and argued this intentional positioning creates an environment "not so heavily concentrated on a hierarchy of power" (p. 12). In other

words, Le Cornu (2013) offers a different perspective concerning individualization, viewing it as empowering rather than stressful. Matteucci et al. (2017) advocated for teachers to accept personal responsibility for work-related outcomes, stating teachers who did so were more likely to feel satisfied and positive toward their work.

A recurring theme in the wellbeing literature was that of tension between the individual and the context. Specifically, it was evident in the studies concerned with early career teachers' development of teacher identity (Morrison, 2013; Pearce & Morrison, 2011), resilience (Castro et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2014; Le Cornu, 2013; Peters & Pearce, 2012), collaborative work (Webb et al., 2009), and teacher agency (Eslinger, 2012). Johnson et al. (2014) argued, "applying a socially oriented conception of teacher resilience" contributes greatly to our ability to understand and promote teacher wellbeing (p. 542). More specifically, it is critical for the education community to take individual educators' narratives around wellbeing, or lack thereof, and attempt to "trace their links to the wider social cultural, historic, and institutional practices" (p. 542), a discussion to which I turn next.

Collective Versus Individual Responsibility

Many authors of the studies included in this review set also suggested that effective support for teachers' wellbeing was a collective responsibility. Though the concept of wellbeing stems from positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), a field primarily concerned with the individual, researchers are beginning to highlight the need for a collective response to address and support teacher wellbeing. In the discussion and suggestions for future work, Morrison (2013) advocated for pre-

service teacher educators and school leaders to jointly “assume some collective responsibility” for the transition between pre-service education and in-service teaching and beyond, noting this is a “crucial phase of work and life” (p. 131) that must be addressed.

This shift away from the individual was not reflected across all studies, though. While some authors discussed the importance of collaborative communities of support and highlighted the essential nature of relationships within education contexts throughout their papers, they argued the impetus for this work remains on the shoulders of the individual teacher. In particular, Castro et al. (2010), contended:

While understanding these components are essential to improving the experience of beginning teachers especially in high-need areas, they often require substantial financial resources, policy changes, and long-term efforts, all of which are beyond the scope of most teacher educators, school administrators, and teacher mentors.
(p. 628)

In other words, systemic change falls outside the scope of the teachers and administrators operating within the education space. The authors advocated for beginning teachers, in particular, to put in place resilience strategies in spite of the educational contexts in which they work. Similarly, Soini et al. (2010) suggested that while teacher wellbeing is closely situated in the social interactions within the complex and often contradictory nature of schools, the greatest opportunity to cultivate teacher wellbeing lies within individual teachers’ ability to put specific strategies in place.

Teacher Resilience

Traditional conceptions of resilience theory focus on the qualities of an individual. Luthar et al. (2000) defined resilience as “a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity” (p. 543). Many educational studies have utilized resilience theory as a framework for their research (Peters & Pearce, 2012; Taylor, 2013; Vance et al., 2015; Yonezawa et al., 2011). Peters and Pearce (2012) specifically examined the role of school principals in early teachers’ career resilience. The authors found differences in school leaders led to drastically different experiences for teachers new to the education profession. Early career teachers, the authors suggested, are vulnerable and “dependent on the goodwill and discretion of colleagues and leaders” (p. 260). Peters and Pearce (2012) placed great responsibility on school leaders to take interest in teachers’ wellbeing, participate in induction processes, model cooperative relationships, and create collaborative environments.

Contrastingly, additional researchers placed the burden on the individual educator (Doney, 2013; Vance et al., 2015). These authors highlighted the need for a combination of individual skills, including problem solving, self-efficacy, sense of purpose (Doney, 2013), and perseverance (Vance et al., 2015), as well as creating systems of support (Doney, 2013; Vance et al., 2015). Taylor (2013) further emphasized the individual, using phrases such as “empowered themselves,” “did not allow themselves to become oppressed by adversity,” and “used the skills they had to resist” (p. 20) in their descriptions of participants.

Social Theory of Resilience

While resilience theory is often associated with individuals, researchers have begun to conceptualize resilience through a social lens (Bottrell, 2009; Johnson et al., 2014). In her work on social resilience theory, Bottrell (2009) argued, “cultural practices, social processes, social change and the nature of individual-social relations are all significant aspects of the context for analyzing resilience” (p. 322). Researchers (Bottrell, 2009; Johnson & Down, 2013) called for future work problematizing the underlying social inequities instead of the individual teacher. Like Bottrell (2009), Johnson and Down (2013) argued for a “rigorous analysis of the impact of the broader social, political and economic context of teachers’ work” (p. 706). The authors advocated for an approach that moves beyond the individual to recognize the complexity of daily life as an educator, noting three main problems with the traditional approach to resilience: reductionism, hyper-individualism, and normativity. In other words, complex interactions are often reduced to independent variables, resilience is overly focused on the individual, and is rooted in middle class, Western values that do not take into account diverse perspectives (Johnson & Down, 2013). The authors contended:

If we accept that implicit beliefs, interests, and different assumptions influence what we label as ‘bad’ for early career teachers (i.e. what puts them at risk personally and professionally), and what we label as ‘good’ for early career teachers (i.e. what contributes to the achievement of positive outcomes), then we have to accept the possibility that *our* presumptions about these things might not be the same as other key participants. (p. 709, emphasis in original)

Questions posed by Bottrell (2009) in her work with young people from an inner-city housing development in Sydney provide a powerful lens through which I view the proposed research:

At the policy level there needs to be a question of limits - to what extent will adversity be tolerated, on the assumption that resilient individuals can and do cope? How much adversity should resilient individuals endure before social arrangements rather than individuals are targeted for intervention?" (p. 335)

In the current literature around teacher burnout, attrition, and retention, researchers continue to call for individualized programs and support for teachers; however, perhaps it is time instead to shift focus to the social arrangements, structures, and relational aspects of education.

Chapter in Review

In this chapter, I have outlined literature around social field theory in education, teacher burnout and attrition, and strategies outlined in the research to address these issues, including teacher wellbeing and resilience. Included in the next chapter are a description of the methodology, including a justification for adopting an ethnographic approach to answer the following research questions:

- Research Question 1: How do teachers negotiate the demands of their educational context?
- Research Question 2: What tensions do teachers express between their ideologies and practices?
- Research Question 3: How might a team of teachers maintain their well-being while navigating their educational context?

This chapter also includes a description of the selection of participants and the procedures for data gathering and analysis. Chapter 4 will present the findings of the study, while the

final chapter will include a discussion of the findings situated within the current literature around teacher wellbeing and navigating the educational environments, implications for teachers, schools, and education, and implications for future research.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of one team of practicing teachers, and the ways in which these educators maintain a sense of overall well-being while navigating the demands of their educational context. This chapter includes an in-depth description of the research design. Drawing upon educational ethnography, participant selection, data gathering, data analysis, and the procedures utilized to ensure trustworthiness and credibility are discussed.

Research Design

While many traditions exist within qualitative methodology, this particular research study adopted an ethnographic perspective. Green and Bloome (1997) described three differing approaches to the use of ethnography in education: doing ethnography, adopting an ethnographic perspective, and using ethnographic tools. Heath and Street (2008) explained, “As one might expect, the three reflect greater to lesser degrees of orientation to theories from anthropology” (p. 121). The decision to adopt an ethnographic perspective allowed this research “to take a more focused approach (i.e., do less than a comprehensive ethnography) to study particular aspects of everyday life and cultural practice of a social group” (Green & Bloome, 1997, p. 183), in this case one team of practicing K-12 educators.

Ethnographic research emphasizes the documentation of beliefs, behaviors and patterns within one culture-sharing group (Creswell, 2013). With particular regard to education, Frank (1999) suggested, “an ethnographic perspective provides a lens to

understand these particular patterns of classroom life which often become invisible because they become so regular, patterned, and ordinary” (p. 3). Spindler and Spindler (1982) echoed this suggestion when beginning ethnographic research in schools in the United States, by stating “what I observed was indeed strange enough, but since it was a mirror of my own cultural strangeness I could not see it - at first” (p. 23). Ethnographers go about the task of either making the strange familiar, or as is the case with education ethnographers like Spindler, making the familiar strange. In pursuit of this, Delamont (2016) posited:

During fieldwork it is possible to devise ways to see the familiar as strange, forcing oneself to take the standpoint of a person different from oneself. That is, if a man, imagine being female and do the research that way. If clever, work hard to experience things as a person who is incompetent at academic things and to see the school from the perspective of a failure. A failing teacher, a failing coach, a failing counsellor, or a failing pupil all have important perspectives on the school, sports team, guidance service or classroom. (p. 36)

As I conducted this research, it was imperative for me to take standpoints differing from my own as a white, female academic and teacher through prolonged engagement with my participants. In order to make the familiar strange, I remained cognizant of Frank’s (1999) reminder to her students:

They would be entering as strangers into a community that had been built up over a long period of time; one that had constructed particular ways of being teachers, students, and learners. They would be entering an ongoing stream of activity, crossing the river in the middle. They could look down from a bridge and watch the water rushing by but in no way would they be able to really understand what was happening unless they jumped in and swam down the river with this group. Even then, they would be missing events at the source. (p. 86)

Though classrooms in the midwestern United States may not initially appear strange due to my experiences in these spaces, as an ethnographer it was critical to remember I was entering an established community and sub-culture in which I *am* a stranger.

Educational researchers adopting the ethnographic tradition utilize theory, particularly theories derived from anthropology or sociology, to drive their work (Green & Bloome, 1997). Use of theory supports researchers in understanding networks and systems within a group. Attention to particular theories helps researchers by “focusing the researcher’s attention when conducting an ethnography” (Creswell, 2013, p. 92). In this study, Bourdieu’s social field theory served as the theoretical lens through which I focused my attention. Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and doxa, in particular, offer vehicles to consider the often-unconscious beliefs and actions taken by a specific group, in this case a team of teachers. Wolcott (1999) suggested two questions must remain at the heart of an ethnography, “What do people in this setting have to know and do to make this system work?” and “If culture, loosely defined as ‘shared knowledge,’ is mostly caught rather than taught, how do those being inducted into the group find their ‘way in’ so that the system is maintained?” (p. 69). It is this shared knowledge and understanding of how one particular team of teachers maintain their well-being that I was most interested in exploring in this study. Frank (1999) cautioned:

There is not “the” view of reality but “a” view. Students will see classrooms one way, teachers another, and ethnographers a third way. In juxtaposing these views, we come to see what is real from a variety of perspectives. To understand that

there is never a completely objective account is to realize multiple perspectives.

(p. 4)

Through this study, I was interested in realizing multiple perspectives as I explored how one team of teachers navigated their unique educational context.

Description of the Context

This study took place at Lakeside Elementary, a PK-6 elementary school building, during the 2020-2021 school year. To maintain confidentiality, a pseudonym is used in place of the school's name. Lakeside Elementary resides in an urban city in the midwestern United States. The school has two or three sections per grade level. Data gathering took place in the fall of 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic (Ghebreyesus, 2020). Due to the pandemic and regulations on visitors in the school building, data was collected solely through virtual formats. Interviews with educators and classroom observations were conducted via Zoom. Educators completed their weekly reflections, and shared weekly PLC agendas and additional documents through Google Docs.

Lakeside Elementary offered both virtual and face-to-face instruction during the 2020-2021 school year. In addition, the school building as a whole shifted to virtual instruction for ten days immediately prior to and following their fall break in November 2020. This shift occurred during the final two weeks of classroom observations for this study.

Participant Selection

Participants for this study were invited to join the study through convenience and criterion sampling. Convenience sampling is a procedure in which participants are chosen based on time, availability and location (Merriam, 2009). Criterion sampling uses a list of characteristics or specific attributes to drive the selection process (Patton, 2002).

For this research study, three criteria were employed during participant selection. The first criterion for selection of participants included educators who were currently teaching in a K-12 educational context. This criterion addressed the need for research focused on K-12 teachers, as much research in the field highlighted early childhood educators' wellbeing (Cumming, 2017; Hall-Kenyon et al., 2014). Second, participants had at least three years of teaching experience. This second criterion addressed the need for further research with veteran education teachers in the teacher well-being research space (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Chiong et al., 2017). Third, all participants in this study were chosen based on their membership within a single team (grade or content level). This criterion addressed themes from previous literature (Eslinger, 2012; Soini et al., 2010; Webb et al., 2009) emphasizing the import of collegial support in educators' ability to navigate and stay in the profession, and care for their well-being.

Before gathering data for this research project, permission to conduct this study was approved through the Standard Application for Human Participants Review document through the Institutional Review Board at my university. Permission to conduct this research was granted from the leadership at the study location, including the principal

and associate superintendent. Additionally, each participant signed a letter of consent granting permission to collect and analyze approved data.

Description of the Participants

The study focused on three participants on one team within a single K-12 educational context in the Midwestern United States. The following is a description of each of the participants in the study. The two main participants in the study each have ten years of experience in education. One participant teaches in a fourth grade general education setting, while the second participant is a special educator for third and fourth grade students. The third participant, an instructional coach, was added to the study through snowball sampling. When the two original participants discussed the work they engaged in as a team, they mentioned the instructional coach as an integral part of their work. Because of this, I extended an invitation to the instructional coach to participate in an interview. To maintain confidentiality, all three participants created their own pseudonyms, which are reflected below.

Lily. Lily taught in a fourth grade general education classroom at Lakeside Elementary. She self-identified as a White female. At the time of the study, Lily was in her tenth year of teaching. She taught in three different districts throughout her ten years in education. Previous to her current teaching position, Lily taught fourth through eighth grade special education in a small, rural district, and kindergarten through fifth grade special education in an urban school district, both in the midwestern United States. This was Lily's fifth year teaching fourth grade at the participating school site. Lily holds a masters degree in special education. Throughout the study, she highlighted the impact of

her work with previous teams on how she operates within educational spaces. During one interview, Lily discussed her work with teams throughout her tenure in education:

I've just always been on teams that have always wanted to work together and felt like it's, uh, it's our kids and we're going to share our kids and not just kind of like we're all on our own. Um, which has really helped me, I think a lot too. (Interview 1)

Some of the experiences Lily shared contributing to her emphasis on working as a part of a team and focus on collaboration in the teaching profession included beginning her career as a special education teacher, working closely with an instructional coach, and serving on the leadership team within her current school district. These experiences and identities are important, as they contributed to Lily's strong desire to rely on her colleagues and emphasis on working collaboratively.

Charlie. At the time of the study, Charlie was a special educator for students in third and fourth grade. She self-identified as a White female. She spent her 10 year career in education at the participating school site. Throughout her ten years at this school, she worked with students in third through fifth grades. She began this school year teaching both in person and virtually, transitioning to teaching fully in person mid-year.

Throughout the study, Charlie highlighted the role her work as a special educator had on her desire and ability to advocate for her students. During one interview, she discussed the shift she made in this area:

I feel like it's come a long way since I started. Um, this is my 10th year and my first year, I mean, I was a first year teacher, even like the first four years. I kinda just did what everybody told me to do, and this is how they've always done it. But now it's kind of like, no, you know what? They have an IEP [individualized

education program] for a reason. I am in charge of teaching these skills on their IEP. I'm not a study hall to help them, um, with, you know, catching up on classroom work. Obviously I want them to be doing what they're doing in the classroom, but if it's appropriate. So I feel like that with how we, the, with how education has changed, I feel like it's more acceptable. And I am outspoken and I kind of just stand up for my kids and it's kind of like, nope, we need to work on this because in the long run it's going to help them. (Interview 2)

Throughout Charlie's interviews and reflections, she described many ways advocacy shaped her as an educator. Working alongside an instructional coach supported her in advocating for her role as a special educator, in turn allowing her to advocate for what she felt was best for her students. These experiences shaped her work with various teams in her district, including her work with general education teachers, the district special education team, and the school's leadership team.

Marci. Marci worked with teachers and students in kindergarten through sixth grade as an instructional coach in the participating school site. She self-identified as a White female. Throughout her twelve year tenure in education, she taught first, second, fifth, and sixth grades in two urban school districts in the midwestern United States. In addition, Marci served as a field experience instructor at a mid-sized university and an adjunct instructor in education at a small, private university, both located in the midwestern United States. Marci collaborated with Lily and Charlie individually through coaching cycles, and as a team in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and Achievement Teams, a process used within the participating school site to analyze student data and growth. At the time of the study, Marci had worked with both educators for four years.

Data Gathering

Qualitative studies include multiple forms of data, often including interviews, observations, and the collection of documents (Merriam, 2009). While Merriam (2009) notes that, “data are nothing more than ordinary bits and pieces of information found in the environment,” these bits and pieces become data based on the “interest and perspective of the investigator” (p. 85). The specific data sources in this research project included semi-structured interviews, observations, participant reflective journals, and documents.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the two main participants three times throughout the course of the study, and once with the instructional coach. The interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom, and embodied questions on two themes: (1) systemic expectations and obligations and (2) how teachers navigated the demands of the teaching profession. Interviews lasted up to forty-five minutes in length, were audio-recorded and transcribed, and included researcher’s fieldnotes. Throughout the study, approximately four hours and 30 minutes of interview data was collected across all participants. Agar (1980) described the informal nature of the ethnographic interview:

You are not taking on the formal role of interrogator. The ethnographer is very much in the one-down position discussed earlier ...In this early dance, the informant takes the lead. The ethnographer’s role is to look interested and suggest a couple of turns toward the other side of the ballroom so that he can check the view from there. (p. 90)

Following this stance, initial interview questions were broad, allowing for the participant to take the lead. While “specific information is desired from all of the respondents”,

specifically in the first interview, “the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored” (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). A semi-structured interview format was chosen as it allowed me to “respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). The first interview took place following the first observation and week 1 reflection journal.

During the first interview, examples of questions to be explored included:

- What personal and professional practices help you stay...
 - Focused?
 - Energized?
 - Effective?
- Talk about some of the demands you feel in this profession.
 - If you had to choose three things that help you navigate the demands of the education profession, what would they be?
- Talk about the work you do with your team at school.
 - What are some of the greatest successes you’ve experienced with your team?
 - What are some of the greatest challenges you’ve experienced with your team?

A complete list of questions for the first interview is available in Appendix A.

A second interview was scheduled with each of the main participants toward the middle of the eight-week timeframe to clarify information already shared and to gain insight into information gathered from the weekly classroom observations, team meeting

observations, and weekly reflective journals. Questions for the second interview were mostly participant specific, though some common questions were asked of both participants. A third interview was scheduled with each participant at the end of the eight-week study, again to clarify information shared in the second interview, as well as to inquire about information gathered from classroom and team observations. An interview with the instructional coach also took place toward the end of this eight-week study. Questions for the third interview were participant specific and drawn from early analysis of previous interviews.

Observations

Weekly virtual observations were conducted with each educator, occurring within an eight-week timeframe. Throughout the study, I observed Lily's classroom for four hours and 24 minutes and Charlie's classroom for three hours and 38 minutes. Additionally, I conducted three observations of the team during their weekly collaboration time, totaling two hours and 46 minutes of team observation. Frequent virtual visits to the school environment offered a view into the implicit aspects of life within this school. Frank (1999) cautioned, "Other aspects of classroom life become invisible to the casual, infrequent visitor. These implicit aspects are built up over time by the members of classrooms through their conversations" (p. 45). Frequent virtual visits to the school environment and specific classrooms provided a window into the implicit aspects of classroom life. Further, Delamont (2016) described what to look at, how to look, and where and when to look during observations. In response to what to look at while observing, she asserted:

So it makes sense to begin by some unfocused scanning of the setting and its actions to record general ‘first impressions’. However, unfocused watching does not lead to good data, so the aim of the initial scanning should be to decide on some more focused observation: chosen because of the foreshadowed problems, or a theoretical concern or because whatever it is has captured the researcher’s imagination. (p. 102)

Following this stance, I used an observation protocol to support focused observation, typing field notes during all observations. The observation protocol can be found in Appendix B. This protocol was influenced by Frank (1999), specifically in her discussion around notetaking and notemaking. Notetaking, often written on the left-hand side, are descriptive field notes - observations without interpretations. Notemaking, on the other hand, are the researcher’s interpretations. Frank (1999) noted the prominence of questions in notemaking, as “the goal is always to generate more questions that require interviews or more observations to explore” (p. 10). Additionally, Delamont (2016) challenged observers to be “ruthlessly self-critical about where they do, and do not, go” (p. 105) for observation, cautioning against staying away from uncomfortable spaces. It is for this reason I observed team meetings in addition to the more comfortable classroom spaces.

Reflective Journals

During the eight-week duration of this research study, participants were asked to record their thinking once each week. Both participants typed their weekly reflections on a Google document. I asked teachers to reflect on instances in which they navigated demands in their daily work, specifically noting actions and beliefs associated with these events. Participants were encouraged to write or talk about other topics as seemed natural or related as they reflected. Reflections served as a researcher-generated document

(Merriam, 2009) and added an additional layer of information about the teams' experiences. Merriam (2009) explained:

In some ways documents are like observations in that documents give us a snapshot into what the author thinks is important, that is, their personal perspective, while observations allow us to see overt behavior. Such documents can tell the researcher about the inner meaning of everyday events, or they may yield descriptions of highly unusual or idiosyncratic human experiences..." (p. 142)

Reflective journals provided a space for educators to elaborate on the interview discussion or add personal thoughts about how they were navigating the demands of their educational context.

Documents

In addition to interview and observational data, Creswell (2013) noted the inclusion of various artifacts, or documents, in ethnographic research. Patton (2002) suggested documents offer a different perspective than that of interview and observational data by revealing "goals or decisions that might otherwise be unknown" (p. 293). To this end, I collected as many documents relating to requirements within the system as possible during my time with this team, including meeting agendas from all three team meetings I observed, essential standards for literacy and math, and daily schedules for both participants. In addition, I collected a copy of the facilitation guide protocol utilized by the participants in previous years, and digital public school announcements and posters utilized throughout the school building relating to concepts discussed in interviews and/or observations.

Further, Merriam (2009) suggested, "one of the great advantages in using documentary materials is its stability. Unlike interviewing and observation, the presence

of the investigator does not alter what is being studied” (p. 155). Gathering artifacts of this nature allowed me to “look for patterns of a culture-sharing group” (Creswell, 2013, p. 92) in language, actions, and beliefs across multiple sources of data.. With regard to document collection, Delamont (2016) noted, “the golden rule is to remember that all written records are socially produced” (p. 94) and to read documents skeptically while examining the author’s audience and the social context in which they were written. Through analysis of each of and across these forms of data, I attempted to gain a view of teachers’ experiences with the demands of the teaching profession, how they navigated these demands, and how these demands intersected with maintaining a sense of well-being.

Data Analysis

My analytic process included multiple, iterative stages, drawing from ethnographic approaches to analysis and narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993; Wolcott, 1994). As Creswell (2013) described, “the process of data collection, data analysis, and report writing are not distinct steps in the process – they are interrelated and often go on simultaneously in a research project” (p. 182). As such, my analytic process began while writing thick descriptions of my observations and through transcription, which closely followed each observation or interview. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed.

Interviews

Riessman (1993) argued, “transforming spoken language into a written text is now taken quite seriously because thoughtful investigators no longer assume the

transparency of language” (p. 12). Following this stance, I employed Jeffersonian transcription methods (Jefferson, 1984), noting paralinguistic signals (e.g., laughs, sighs, pauses, intonation, etc.) in addition to verbatim transcription of each participant’s words. Transcribing both verbal and nonverbal material allowed me to explore meaning and linguistic forms of the text, critical in narrative analysis (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Drawing on Riessman’s (1993) process for transcription, I began with a rough transcription, including “the words and other striking features of the conversation,” (p. 56) and then re-transcribed specific parts for detailed analysis.

Documents and Reflective Journals

Qualitative document analysis, also known as ethnographic content analysis, is a process in which the nature of documents is assessed (Altheide et al., 2008). Altheide (1987) suggested, “Ethnographic content analysis is used to document and understand the communication of meaning, as well as to verify theoretical relationships. Its distinctive characteristic is the reflexive and highly interactive nature of the investigator, concepts, data collection and analysis” (p. 68). Ethnographic content analysis was utilized with documents collected throughout the study and educators’ reflective journals. Through this form of content analysis, documents were coded and analyzed thematically.

Observations

Analysis of observations began with recording notes and recollections from the observation and writing a full narrative, or thick description, as soon after each observation as possible (Merriam, 2009). Expanding upon notes written in the field, both descriptive and reflective, allows the researcher to raise “questions about what is

observed” and speculate “as to what it all means” (Merriam, 2009, p. 131). Through this process, data collection and analysis occur in concert.

Coding

Coding is the process in which a researcher reads through data, “noting bits of data that strike you as interesting, potentially relevant, or important to your study” as if “having a conversation with the data, asking questions of it, making comments to it” (Merriam, 2009, p. 178). In this research project, open coding, or remaining open to any possibility throughout coding, was employed for each data source. For the first round of coding, a combination of in vivo and descriptive coding was used. In vivo codes come directly from participants’ words (Creswell, 2013), while descriptive codes summarize the data in a word or phrase (Merriam, 2009). Following an initial analysis, I began to group open codes into analytical codes - those going beyond description to interpretation of the data (Merriam, 2009). I kept a running list of these second level codes, returning to it and adding additional codes after reading and coding each piece of data. This process was ongoing throughout the data collection every two weeks, informing each wave of analysis.

I then sorted each set of codes into categories of similar ideas and meanings, and looked for commonalities and differences within and across interviews, teacher reflections, observations, and documents. Merriam (2009) described the data analysis process in this way, “Data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation” (p. 176). As I moved back

and forth amongst the pieces of data and between description and interpretation, I looked for common threads in participants' stories, contrasting experiences, and connecting themes (Fraser, 2004). From this, I identified themes to develop an understanding of how a team of educators navigated the demands of the teaching profession within their education context and how this related to their well being, individually and collectively. Table 1 below shows one particular category, professional relationships, sample codes leading to this category, and illustrative quotes from the data.

Table 1

Sample Codes, Definitions, and Example Quotes

Professional Relationships

Code	Definition	Example Quote
Collaboration	This code is meant to capture descriptions of working with colleagues within the school system, initiated by members of the group.	“And so I really lean on other people. We collaborate daily nonstop here. So that has really helped me stay focused. And then not feel like I'm kind of like on my own island by myself. I really do well when I'm bouncing ideas off of each other or other people. And just knowing that I have a team to kind of support me and bring me along the way.” (Lily, Interview 1)
Sharing the load	This code is meant to capture the division of the teaching workload amongst members of the team.	“We just had kind of a system, like I'll do two math slides a week and she'll do two math slides a week. I'll do two writing slides a week. She'll do two writing and then we'll kind of come together and do the reading together.” (Lily, Interview 3)
Advocacy	This code is meant to capture when an educator supports or stands up for a colleague or idea.	“But I think the fact that we've had those difficult conversations and special ed has been supported by our principal and our coach and our special ed coordinator and all of those things, but that has really helped too with those conversations.” (Charlie, Interview 3)

Table 1 depicts three codes in the professional relationships category. Here, the code of advocacy in part led to the theme advocacy begets advocacy, or the concept that when a colleague stands up for another educator, that educator seems more inclined to advocate for themselves, colleagues, or students.

Conceptual Memos

Throughout the data analysis process, I followed Creswell's (2009) suggestions of thinking aloud and writing notes about the general meaning of the data. I recorded memos weekly, after each interview and observation, memos after reading each set of reflective journals, memos relating to transcription and analysis, as well as notes about emerging codes and categories with definitions. Delamont (2016) noted the importance of analytic memos in qualitative research:

Because in qualitative research, whether interview based or documentary or ethnography, analysis has to be done from the earliest stages, in order to reframe the on-going data collection in a continuous 'loop', analytic memos are important for the single-handed researcher too. (p. 48)

Following this, memos served as a critical piece of my analysis loop within a single data source (e.g. observations) and holistically across data sources.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Qualitative research in general, and educational ethnographies in particular are not meant to be generalizable to the greater education profession. As Merriam (2009) explained, "One of the assumptions underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective

phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured as in quantitative research” (p. 213). Heath and Street (2008) echoed this sentiment in stating, “all ethnographic research is inherently interpretive, subjective and partial” (p. 45).

Qualitative researchers strive for transparency in the research process, laying out what Heath and Street (2008) referred to as *decision rules*, the rules guiding an ethnographer’s research. Qualitative researchers work to ensure trustworthiness and credibility. To support trustworthiness and credibility of this study, several methods and procedures were used, including triangulation, an audit trail, member checks, the use of a critical friend, and my position or reflexivity as a researcher.

Triangulation

Triangulation, or the process of comparing multiple sources of data to see if similarities are found across sources, was used in this research project (Merriam, 2009). Data gathered from interviews, observations, participants’ reflective journals, and additional documents were triangulated to confirm emerging findings throughout data collection and analysis. Interviews with and observations of participants with varying perspectives, as well as multiple observations and interviews with the same participants added an additional layer to the data, providing an additional opportunity for confirmation of themes/insights. Participants’ reflective journals were particularly beneficial in the quest for trustworthiness as they provided an outlet for participants to describe their perceptions, beliefs, and actions from an emic perspective.

Audit Trail

In addition to triangulation, an audit trail was used to establish trustworthiness and credibility (Merriam, 2009). The audit trail for this study included fieldnotes, conceptual memos, and data tables including codes, categories, and themes. Fieldnotes included the observation protocol mentioned in the section above, as well as reflections recorded after interviews and observations. Conceptual notes serve as memos “to the ethnographer about generic ideas that come from particular events, along with queries raised in the reflections column of fieldnotes” (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 79), and move to a deeper level than that of fieldnotes. Delamont (2016) argued, “The ethnographer needs to write regularly and to take the time to write up the fieldnotes (which are only ‘notes’) into a more permanent narrative, which will make sense long after the events” (p. 40). Memos were written weekly throughout the course of the research project and followed the three-part organization suggested by Heath and Street (2008): problems and setbacks, overview, and patterns, insights, and breakthroughs. Table 2 below shows illustrative pieces from my October 23 memo, the fifth memo I wrote during the data gathering process.

Table 2

Researcher Memo: October 23

Problems and Setbacks	Overview	Patterns, Insights, and Breakthroughs
<p>Virtual observation is proving to be even more challenging than I expected. It is difficult to get a “feel” for the classroom environment when watching through the screen. Even more, with Lily - there is so much movement in the room that my view is often cut off.</p>	<p>Observing the team meeting was interesting today - those present included both participants, the other 4th grade teacher, and one of the student teachers.</p> <p>The team shared their agenda with me which followed a specific protocol and four critical questions set up - what do we want our students to know/be able to do, how will we know if they’ve achieved this, what will we do for students who aren’t there yet, what will we do for students who are beyond expectations.</p>	<p>The team seems to be comfortable with each other - while it seems that Lily is kind of the leader of the group, all members spoke up, offered ideas, joked around with each other. This includes the teacher new to the team.</p> <p>I’m curious if teams have been granted “permission” to use their PLCs for planning purposes this year instead of to dig into the four critical questions on the agenda and/or discussion based on the facilitation guides, or if this is a decision the team has made for itself. Ask about this in future interviews. Watch what happens in future team observations as well.</p>

Member Checks

Member checks, asking participants to review my interpretations and final themes, were used twice throughout data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2013). Participants were asked to review interpretations after Interview 1 to ensure accuracy and to offer any comments or clarifications they had regarding my interpretations. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) pointed to the importance of member checks or validation, “When the interviewer’s interpretations refer to subjects’ own understanding of their statements, the interviewee becomes the relevant partner for a

conversation about the correct interpretation” (p. 290). A final member check occurred following the first draft of findings within chapter four. Each participant received a copy of the chapter to review and provide comments.

Critical Friend

The critical friend in research projects is used to come alongside the researcher and challenge ideas, allowing them to “notice nuances” they may not see on their own (Foulger, 2010, p. 149). Samaras (2011) further described critical friends as “trusted colleagues who seek support and validation of their research to gain new perspectives in understanding and reframing their interpretations” (p. 5). I engaged with two critical friends throughout this study: my advisor/dissertation chair, and a peer and colleague in teacher education. Deuchar (2008) highlighted the role of advisors as critical friends, describing this relationship as essential to the beginning researcher’s success. In this case, my advisor/dissertation chair asked probing questions, provided advice throughout the research process, and suggested literature relevant to the project, helping to clarify my data analysis and writing.

In addition, I met with a second critical friend, a peer in my doctoral program who at the time of the study was an assistant professor in a teacher education program at an outside university. We met twice throughout the data analysis process to discuss codes, categories, and identified themes. Baskerville and Goldblatt (2009) emphasized the slow progression of critical friendships in developing “trust, unguarded learning conversations, and the ability to go very quickly beyond the surface features” (p. 216). Due to our relationship fostered over the course of four years navigating the doctoral program and

engaging in projects and academic writing together, we were able to quickly go “beyond the surface features” to “challenging ideas and critical analysis” (Baskerville & Goldblatt, 2009, p. 216). This critical friend asked questions about the coding process, coded a section of interview data independently and then alongside me, and provided critical feedback around initial themes.

Researcher Position and Reflexivity

Finally, my position as a researcher, or reflexivity, assisted in ensuring trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (2000) described reflexivity as “the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the ‘human as instrument’” (p. 183). Merriam (2009) called for researchers to “explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research” (p. 218). In addition, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) pointed to three distinct biases that “may blur the sociological gaze” (p. 39), each of which will be taken in turn.

The first bias attends to the individual researcher and his/her social origins, social class, gender, or ethnicity and the biases stemming from these identities. I identify as a White, cisgender female, middle-class, educator and graduate student. I grew up in a two-parent, middle-class household that did not operate under “traditional” gender roles. Though my mother did the majority of the cooking and stayed home with my sister and I until we were both in elementary school, she later went on to work full-time in education and was the primary disciplinarian of the family. My dad worked as a full-time teacher, but assumed the primary role of cleaning the house and was the nurturer in our family. My parents worked as a team to care for our family throughout my childhood. As my

parents were both high school teachers, they had nights, weekends, and summers off and shared the role of caregiver during these times.

In addition, many women in my extended family hold advanced degrees, work(ed) outside the home, and self-identify as feminists and activists. My great grandmother graduated from college and worked in business, my maternal grandmother obtained her master's degree from Columbia University and was a professor at a community college, and my mom holds a master's degree in English. My experiences with non-traditional gender roles, as well as growing up with an extended family of women who modeled feminist ideals shaped my views on gender.

I grew up in a middle-class family with two educators as parents. Though I worked during the summer throughout high school, I never had to utilize this money to help with the family's bills or groceries. We always had food in our house, were able to take family vacations in the summer, and my sister and I had the opportunity to participate in extra-curricular activities throughout our childhood. I attended college as an undergraduate with a full-ride tuition scholarship, my parents assisted my sister and I financially throughout our undergraduate careers with the purchase of books and groceries, and I was able to obtain student loans to cover my remaining housing costs. It was not until I arrived at college that I fully realized the impact my family's support had on my successes growing up and the ways in which I was privileged within the education system. I understood how to navigate various structures within this system (e.g. scholarships, application processes, forms) because of the family I grew up in, and our collective knowledge.

In addition to these identities, I began to more deeply understand the role of my ethnicity as a White person from European descent, and my economic privilege during my third year of teaching. I taught in a district in which many students' families had recently moved to the United States from a different country, often in situations in which their families had fled their home country. Many of the families I collaborated with in this district spoke a home language other than English. They often struggled with living situations, transportation, and navigating the school and health systems because of language and economic challenges. It was during this time that I had to confront many assumptions and biases I held regarding students and their families. I stopped assuming each unfinished homework assignment meant a lack of responsibility, but rather often resulted from students taking care of younger siblings when they arrived home each night. Due to challenges with transportation, I reframed the way I thought about parents attending parent-teacher conferences. I rethought the ways in which I communicated with parents, making sure written information was translated or communicated at conferences when a translator was present.

The second bias is related to the position occupied by the researcher within the academic field and in the broader field of power. Due to their positions, researchers are in part defined by the field in which they operate, while at the same time working under the influence of the dominating powers within the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). As an advanced graduate student and member of the academic community, I possess various forms of capital, including cultural capital in its institutionalized state (Bourdieu, 2016; Moore, 2014) - my academic degrees and qualifications, and social capital - my networks

and relationships in various groups. Bourdieu (1989) suggested possessing these forms of capital grants one power, often imposed upon others. Developing awareness of the forms of capital I possess, and how these position me within the educational community has been influential for me. Throughout the past few years, my consciousness about and use of my social and cultural capital has shifted a great deal. When I earned my master's degree, I thought earning this degree meant I was more knowledgeable about literacy and was eager to impart this knowledge with colleagues through chairing committees and leading professional development. Over the past three years, though, I have come to see the capital as a way to lift myself and others in this profession, rather than an imposition of power over others. Because I hold advanced degrees, I am a part of many groups in which I cultivate social capital. Through this journey, specifically through my experiences in doctoral study, I have become increasingly cognizant of social and cultural capital, and strive to recognize and acknowledge this privilege in my work and interactions with others.

The third bias, the *intellectualist bias*, concerns the tendency of the academic to view the world through the lens of interpretation instead of problem solving; “we risk collapsing practical logic into theoretical logic” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 39-40). As a graduate student earning an EdD, my focus remains on education in practice. The professors in this program have maintained a stance toward problems of practice, pushing me toward a problem solving mindset and approach to research.

As a former classroom teacher, and current instructional coach and graduate student, I bring personal experiences within education to this research. My experiences

working with in-service teachers through my professional and academic career led to my interest in conducting research to learn more about how teachers conceptualize and care for their well-being, as well as how they navigate the demands of the profession.

Through conversations with teachers and my own experiences, I felt a tension between the spotlight on teacher burnout in research and lack of teacher voice or tangible change in schools. Throughout my years in education, I have advocated for myself as an educator in the K-12 educational environment, and have a history of advocating for my colleagues working in similar contexts, as well. While I acknowledge this tension and my personal beliefs, I entered into this research project with a focus on this team's unique experiences around negotiating the demands of teaching, and how this may or may not fit within overall well-being. Further, though I am not giving value to specific stories, the very task of identifying characteristic narratives and experiences, and categorizing them is innately culturally bound. It is important to note I might have conceptualized differently because of my particular background and experiences as a former classroom teacher, instructional coach, and graduate student.

Chapter in Review

This chapter outlined the methodology for this research study, including adopting an ethnographic approach to this qualitative study. The method for sampling participants, as well as an overview of the participants was described. Further, this chapter included a description of the methods for gathering data, including semi-structured interviews, observations, teacher reflective journals, and collecting documents. Steps for data

analysis and methods to ensure trustworthiness and credibility of the study were discussed. The chapter concluded with a statement on the researcher's reflexivity.

In the next chapter, results from the study will be detailed, accompanied by participant quotes and experiences from interviews, observations, reflective journals, and documents. Illustrative quotations will serve in illuminating each participant's and the team's experiences in navigating the education profession.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This chapter will first describe the data collected from two educators, Lily and Charlie (fourth grade classroom teacher and special educator) working as a team. Through the use of interviews, classroom observations, team meeting observations, reflective journals, and collection of documents, the ways in which Lily and Charlie navigated through the demands of their educational context will be discussed. Additional interview data collected from the instructional coach working with this team of educators is included as well to provide an enriched understanding of how the team worked together. The results from these sources of data are organized by addressing each research question separately. The research questions included:

- Research Question 1: How do teachers negotiate the demands of their educational context?
- Research Question 2: What tensions do teachers express between their practices and ideologies?
- Research Question 3: How might a team of teachers maintain their wellbeing while navigating their educational context?

Description of the Participants

The following is a description of each of the participants in the study. The two main participants in the study each had ten years of experience in education. One participant taught in a fourth grade general education setting, while the second participant was a special educator for third and fourth grade students. The third participant, an

instructional coach, was added to the study through snowball sampling. When the two original participants discussed the work they engaged in as a team, they mentioned the instructional coach as an integral part of their work. Because of this, I extended an invitation to the instructional coach to participate in an interview. To maintain confidentiality, all three participants created their own pseudonyms, which are reflected below.

Lily

Lily self-identified as a white female, with ten years of experience in education. She had taught at her current school for five years. Lily taught fourth grade in a general education classroom, and had worked on a team with Charlie for five years. She described herself as a “servant leader” who believes in working closely with her team. Lily also emphasized the importance of being open to learning from her colleagues.

Charlie

Charlie self-identified as a white female, with ten years of experience in education. She had taught at her current school for ten years. Charlie served third and fourth grade students as a special education teacher, and had worked on a team with Lily for five years. She described herself as “outspoken” and “not afraid to speak up for [her] students.” Charlie also viewed herself as a planner, and highlighted the importance of making sure each day is planned well.

Marci

Marci self-identified as a white female, with twelve years of experience in education. She had worked at her current school for four years as an instructional coach

serving teachers and students in kindergarten through sixth grade. At the time of the study, Marci taught fifth grade virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She described herself as an open, honest colleague who placed a high priority on transparency.

Negotiating the Demands of the Profession

The first research question in this study focused on the practices individual teachers employed to negotiate the demands of the teaching profession. Specifically, how do these educators negotiate their educational context? Participants in this study articulated a variety of ways they navigate through the demands of their educational environments, some of which were individualized, while others involved working closely with colleagues. Individual strategies for navigation included building boundaries between home life and school life, prioritizing what is most important, and being intentional with time at school. In addition, Charlie and Lily discussed thinking about what is in and out of their control as educators. Approaches involving working closely with teaching colleagues included adopting a ‘team’ mentality and embodying an openness to learning.

Boundaries Between Home and School

Both educators described a need to establish boundaries between life at home and their work in the school setting. This took the form of thinking about their priorities, both at home and at school, and then being intentional with how they chose to spend their time. Through building intentional boundaries, Lily and Charlie seemed to give themselves permission to leave their school work at work, even though there was always more work to be done. When asked about practices that help her stay energized and feel

effective in the profession, Lily reflected on the shifts she made in building boundaries throughout her career in education. She specifically highlighted the role her partner played early on in helping her create this separation:

And so I found myself staying at work later and later going in more on the weekends and, and it was mostly him who kind of like opened my eyes to it because it's really easy to, like I said, just get overwhelmed by that and kind of sucked into that. Um, and he was like, you know, you do have a life outside of school and, and it was kind of like, Oh yeah, I do. And I need to also prioritize that. (Interview 1)

Lily explained that while she continues to experience challenges in this area, an awareness of how she utilizes her time in and outside of school has made a difference in her ability to prioritize her time.

When asked about her process in building these boundaries, Charlie explained the importance of being intentional with how she uses her time at school:

I think the biggest thing is, I mean, having that schedule and making those, it's just, I don't know, it all fits together somehow. Like I have to get my big rocks done first kind of thing. Like making sure that I'm using my planning time wisely. So I'm not doing that at home. Um, which in the past it's been like, okay, that's when I run and make copies or, you know, do that. Well, I could do that in the morning quick, but my actual lesson planning and things I need to be doing during my planning time, because I actually have some this year. So I'm like, okay, I need to be intentional with my time. I have to, I might not want to, but I have to get this done because then I can focus on family time when I get home, which really helps. I can leave it here, go home. (Interview 1)

In addition to being intentional with how she uses her planning time at school, Charlie here also mentioned thinking about her 'big rocks.' In the participating school site, this language was used to describe prioritization. In other words, Charlie felt it was imperative for her to identify the most important use of her time, and ensure she

accomplished those pieces at school. This allowed her to build a boundary and focus on her family at home.

Lily's responses mirrored Charlie's in how essential it is for her to be intentional about how she uses her time at school, specifically using her planning periods well. When describing planning with her grade-level colleague, Lily expressed the tension she feels between the demands at school and focusing on her family while at home:

She [colleague] has a little baby at home and a junior high aged boy. And so, and I have two kids obviously, and so it's really hard to like find that balance, especially this year. I feel like with creating so many different things and so many slides and how much time that's all taking us. So we really do try, like we get a 45 minute prep period every day and we use all 45 minutes of that to prep. Um, and so, and we do that because we don't want to be up at night or like taking time away from our families. And so it's really it's - and I'm not saying I don't ever take time away from my family. Unfortunately I do. Um, but that balance is I've been working, really trying to work on too. (Interview 3)

Lily and Charlie both articulated the need to build boundaries between home life and school life amidst the ever-changing nature of education. Lily stated one of the main demands as an educator is operating effectively year to year through constant change, “And so like one year you feel like you're really rolling, you got it. And then the next year it's like, Hey, we're going to do math this way” (Interview 1). In order to navigate through these changes, both participants discussed intentionality in “shutting school off” while at home.

Circle of Control

Participants in this study discussed the importance of thinking about what is in their control as educators and what is outside of their control, specifically in response to questions asking about how they navigated challenging situations. They expressed the

necessity of this practice in their ability to navigate the myriad demands placed upon them in their educational context. Lily also noted the role the concept of circle of control, language used to describe what is in one's control, plays across their building, "Yeah. Yeah. Um, yeah. Circle of control is something that's ingrained in our brains. I think. Um, and our principal talks about it a lot. We teach our kids a lot about it" (Interview 3). The phrase "circle of control" appeared in various documents, including a Classroom Beliefs Poster (see Figure 2) displayed in Lily's fourth grade classroom. On this poster, co-created with her students, "circle of control" is defined as "you do you."

When asked about what they felt was in their control, both educators highlighted the work they do within their specific classrooms. Lily commented on her ability to show up each day with a positive attitude, as well as the opportunity to build a community within her classroom. Charlie focused on the control she has over lesson planning:

Um, but I think making sure that I am planned and over-planned for the day, for the week is in my circle of control. I, yeah, I can complain about how hard it is to do all this stuff. But if I don't feel prepared for the day doing things that I need to do to get ready, then I'm just setting myself up for a loss. So I mean, taking the time. Yeah. I don't want to do all that all the time, but nobody does. So that's your job. You have to do that. Get ready, get prepared. (Interview 3)

While both participants noted they felt their circles of control were smaller this year due to teaching in the COVID-19 pandemic, their desire to focus on what they could control was evident throughout the data collected. In her weekly reflections, Charlie expressed frustration, immediately followed up by the mantra, 'circle of control,' (Week 5, November 6; Week 8, November 30) as if she wanted to remind herself to focus on what was within her control as an educator. Reflecting on instruction with a small group composed of both in person and virtual students, she stated, "This was a typical day with

this group. Meaning...stress for me. What are these students really getting out of these lessons? How can I make this any better? Circle of control” (Week 5 Reflection). Here Charlie expressed frustration with the effectiveness of instruction with this group of students, followed by what appeared to be a reminder to herself to think about what is within her control.

When asked about what they viewed as outside of their control as educators, all participants mentioned laws affecting education, curriculum changes, and standardized testing. In her responses, Charlie expressed frustration with those involved in making laws affecting education, while also indicating a need to ‘just figure it out’ as a teacher, “The people that make, make the laws don't teach and they have no idea, but you kind of have to just go with that. We don't have a choice for that. Like they make the laws and we have to just figure it out” (Interview 2). Lily mirrored this sentiment of needing to ‘just figure it out’ when discussing standardized testing:

You know, there's some things that like, I feel like, I don't know, like every year we have to do certain things or like give tests or, um, things like that that maybe, you know, like no one really wants to do, but you just that's out of your control. So you just do it. Um, but yeah, I don't know. I don't know. (Interview 3)

While Lily and Charlie felt thinking about what is in and out of their control as essential in any year, they deemed it especially important when teaching through the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants seemed to communicate a need to let go of control over a variety of aspects of teaching this year in particular, in order to navigate teaching

in the pandemic. In a reflective journal entry, Lily articulated the need to let go of control with regard to virtual learning:

We started our week off with virtual learning. The biggest thing I have learned through this is to let go of control. I have a hard time doing this sometimes, but with virtual teaching/learning I have learned I don't have as much control over what students are doing on their computers at their own homes. I use breakout rooms and the chat feature as much as possible, but ultimately it is up to the child if they want to engage. (Week 8 Reflection)

During the final interview, Lily further described the need to let go of control while teaching virtually:

Um, and yeah, it was, it's, it's very challenging. You have to really learn. And which was really hard for me to just kind of, you are no longer in control. I mean, you have control, but no, you really don't like, because they're sitting at their house, and you're hoping they're paying attention. There's a few that, you know, are not paying attention because you ask them to share your screen and it takes them five minutes just to find the screen or 10 minutes just to find the screen, um, or they're turning their video off. And you're like, are you there? Are you there? Nope. Okay. Go ahead. Like, you know, and so you just realized like, yeah, you got no control. Um, and so you kind of learned to just kind of hopefully go with it and yeah. (Interview 3)

As shown here, Lily seemed to feel tension in how much control she had when teaching in a virtual format. In her response, she expressed a need to “just kind of hopefully go with it,” taking a stance she felt was necessary in order to navigate through the uncertainty and demands of teaching virtually.

Charlie, too, expressed this need to think about what is in her control while teaching in a pandemic. In the participating school site, instructional coaches were assigned to teach virtually instead of serving in their roles as instructional coaches, supporting teachers, during the 2020-2021 school year. Charlie discussed her frustration

with this change, while at the same time communicating a need to think about her ‘circle of control’:

The whole year. All the coaches are [teaching virtually]. Like the one year that we really, I mean, we've got brand new math curriculum, a pandemic. The one year that we need coaches. Okay, cool. But again, we're not in charge of that. Yeah.

Circle of control. (Interview 2)

This reaction reveals the tension Charlie felt in navigating the demands of teaching in a pandemic without the support of her instructional coach. While she expressed frustration with the school district’s decision to reassign instructional coaches this year in particular, she also commented that she had no control over the issue. In a memo after this interview, I reflected on Charlie’s perspective toward letting go of control, “Several times today, she talked about how it just is the way it is right now in our current environment and she can either be mad about it or she can accept it and keep moving forward” (Memo 6, October 29). At times, it seemed participants felt a sense of relief in letting things go in order to effectively navigate teaching both generally and more specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic; however, the concept of circle of control also seemed to serve as a form of control over teachers within this school context. Certain aspects of their profession were categorized as out of their control, and therefore, teachers should not worry about nor attempt to change them.

Working Together

Working closely with colleagues was highlighted throughout the data sources. Both Lily and Charlie viewed their grade-level teaching partners, PLC members, and

instructional coach as critically important to their ability to navigate the demands of the profession. One concept prevalent throughout the data sources was that of ‘team.’

Meeting agendas incorporated the phrase ‘collaborative *team*’ as a part of the standard heading, and included ‘*team norms*’ as a means to guide the meetings. In addition, the concept of team was frequently mentioned on the school’s website and throughout digital announcements, often through the use of the phrase ‘*Team Lakeside*’ to address students, staff, and families, or to discuss events for the collective group. Similar to the concept of circle of control, this *team* mentality seemed to at times serve as a relief for educators and a way to navigate challenges together, while at times it operated as a form of control.

Educators made decisions and engaged in activities based on what was best for the team.

Lily used the words *team* or *teammate* 85 times during her interviews, while Charlie used these words 56 times during her interviews. Lily described this team mentality in the participating school site:

We call ourselves like *Team Lakeside* here. And we really mean that. Um, and so I’m really fortunate to have coworkers who are kind of on the same page and they understand the ins and outs and the struggles and the, um, just kind of the things of the daily teaching. And so I really lean on other people. We collaborate daily nonstop here. And so that has really helped me stay focused and then not feel like I’m kind of like on my own island by myself. (Interview 1)

Further, Lily explained the use of *team* throughout the building, noting discussions taking place with her students, as well as amongst staff, at the beginning of the year about what it means to operate within a team. Each year, students and staff brainstorm and record what it means to them to work with a team and to be a positive teammate. Posters depicting these beliefs and expectations about being on the same team adorned the classroom and building walls, shown below in Figures 1, 2, and 3. Charlie mirrored the

feeling of all being ‘on the same team,’ while also noting the difficulty in working together effectively:

I think just having support at home and in school is key too, with that communication, that we're all on the same *team*, all have to work together and, um, that's hard, but we're figuring it out. So we're getting there. (Interview 1)

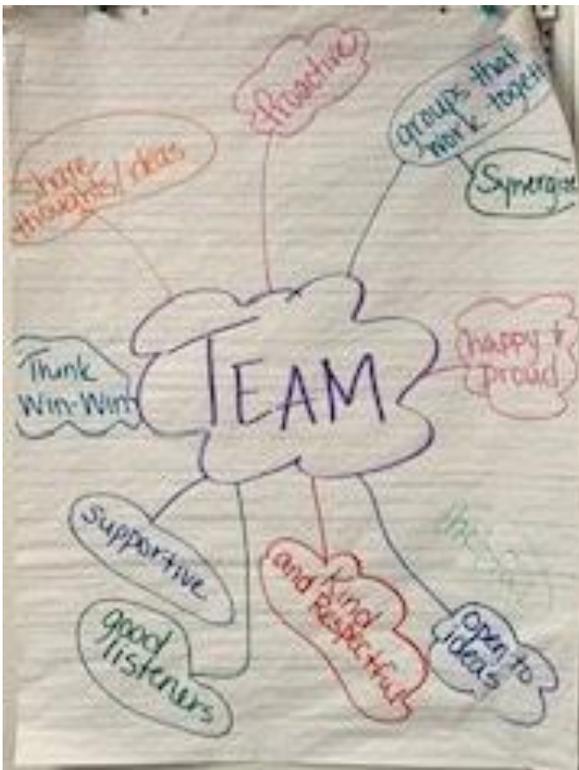


Figure 1 Team Web

Note. This web resulted from a brainstorming session about the concept of ‘team’ in Lily’s fourth grade classroom at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year.

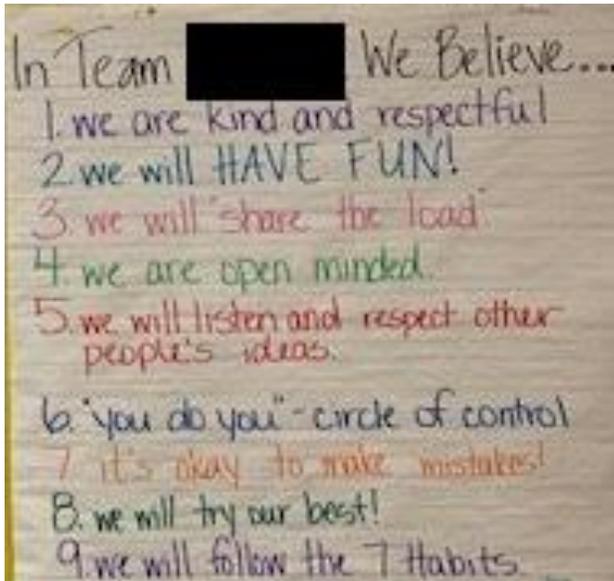


Figure 2 Classroom Beliefs Poster

Note. This figure shows Lily's fourth grade class's beliefs. Her classroom community is represented as "Team" followed by her last name.

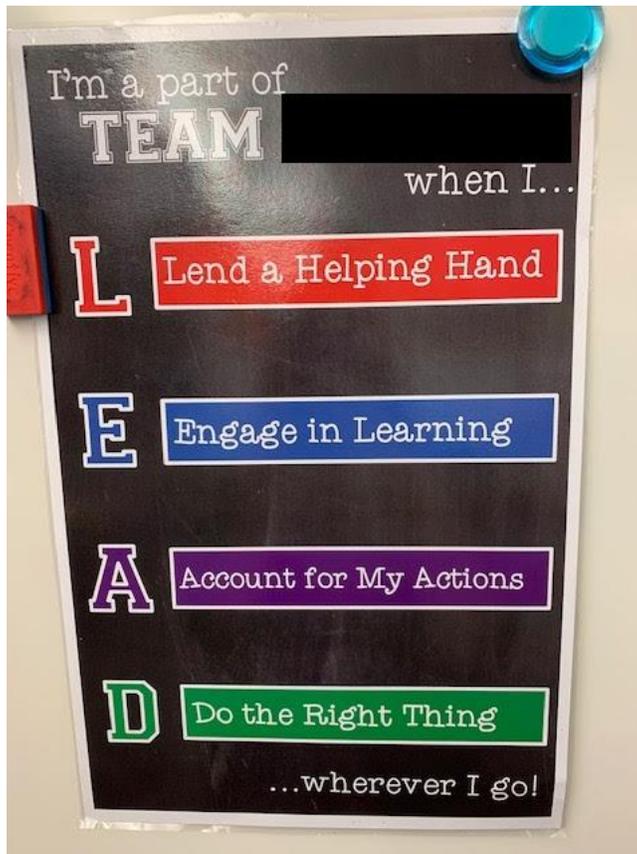


Figure 3 Team Lakeside Poster

Note. This figure shows a poster found in classrooms and hallways of the participating school building depicting what it means to be a part of “Team Lakeside.”

When asked to further describe what team means to them, the participants noted a ‘family feeling’ and an openness to learning from each other. Lily explained, “My coworkers have, especially through the quarantine, have really turned into like my second family or, and not just coworkers but friends too” (Interview 1). Charlie and Lily pointed to being open to learning labs and working with their instructional coach as of particular import to their ability to navigate demands within the profession. Learning labs are a form of professional development in the district, with the goal of providing “the

opportunity for a group of teachers to come together to unpack questions and challenges about their practice” (Sweeney, 2016, p. 1) through classroom-based observations and facilitated discussion. In the participating school site, learning labs were often organized and facilitated by the instructional coach. Lily noted the impact learning labs have had on her teaching:

I have learned so much just from observing other teachers, um, that you can take a lot away from doing that and then trying to apply it in your own classroom and then vice versa. They came and observed me. But then I also like, as intimidating as that can be sometimes, I think it's really rewarding as well, to see, to hear what they have to say, because you don't always stop and reflect about each lesson that you teach and what you said and what you did. You just don't have time to do all of that. (Interview 1)

In addition to being open to learning with and from colleagues through learning labs, both participants noted their work with the instructional coach, specifically highlighting the need to be open to learning through coaching. When asked to share personal experiences working with the instructional coach, Charlie described the shifts she made in her approach to this work:

Our instructional coach was doing coaching cycles. And so you could sign up for those, you feel kind of embarrassed at first. Like I know I'm not doing this right. I need some help, but that's not how it was at all. So now I'm like, when are you coming back? Because I need some help just to talk through things. (Interview 2)

The participating school site utilized a type of coaching called student-centered coaching. In this coaching model, coaches and teachers engage in coaching cycles. Cycles involve in-depth work with a coach, including weekly planning and classroom-based observation, modeling, or co-teaching. Student-centered coaching, in particular, focuses on a goal for

student learning (Sweeney, 2010). Charlie's initial uneasiness with coaching cycles and subsequent appreciation was echoed in my observational notes as well:

Charlie was more apprehensive about the coaching. In her interview this week, she told me that it was her principal that prompted her to sign up for a coaching cycle. She wasn't sure at first, as she felt this meant something was wrong with her or her teaching. After the first cycle, though, she explained how she wanted to do a cycle for every part of her teaching. She said she saw immediate changes in her teaching and then growth in her students, which prompted her to want to continue to work with the coach. (Memo 11, December 11)

Lily was less apprehensive about working with the instructional coach, and mirrored Charlie's appreciation of their time spent together. Lily began working alongside the instructional coach several years before this study. She described the relationship by stating, "She's been really helpful because once again, it's another set of eyes coming in. We have a common goal that I want to work on. She'll come in and observe; she'll help me figure out how I can improve" (Interview 1). It was evident throughout conversations with Lily and Charlie that relying on colleagues, including the instructional coach, was critical in their ability to navigate the myriad demands they encountered as educators.

Lily and Charlie's interviews, weekly reflections, and documents collected throughout the study were rich with information about how they went about navigating the demands of the teaching profession. They highlighted the importance of building boundaries between their home and school lives, prioritizing what is most important, and being intentional with their time. Even more, they pointed to an awareness of what is in and out of their control as educators as integral. When thinking about collective strategies to navigate the challenges they encountered, Lily and Charlie spoke to the importance of

working together, often referred to in their context as possessing a ‘team’ or ‘family’ mentality.

Tensions Between Practices and Ideologies

The second research question in this study explored the tensions educators experienced between their individual teaching ideologies and practices within their educational spaces. Classroom observations, reflective journals, and interview data provided insightful reflections for this second research question.

Tension: Relationships and Advocacy

An interesting discovery in this project is that both participants described feeling tension between advocating for either themselves as teachers or their students, and relationships with others in their educational context. Specifically, Lily articulated feeling tension between speaking up about her class size and her relationship with her administrator. In addition, Charlie discussed feeling tension between advocating for what she felt was best for her students and relationships with her teaching colleagues.

Relationships with administration. When asked about challenges within her education context, Lily provided an in-depth narrative about a time in which her fourth grade class size rose to nearly 30 students. She explained she began a particular school year with 28 students and in October, the decision was made to move a student from the other fourth grade section in the building to her class. Lily emphasized feeling overwhelmed and caught off guard:

So one night, one day and one morning, I think I randomly got an email saying that this girl was going to be moved to my class. And I was like, ok. So like, no one had warned me. No. And it was just like, in this email, I think it would be best if such and such would be moved to my room. This was after like 28 kids. And I

had eight on IEPs and I was just like, you can't do this to me. So that day, yes. I was way overwhelmed. (Interview 1)

Lily went on to describe uncertainty with saying anything about the situation, specifically highlighting an uneasiness with speaking up to her administration. She noted she typically stays quiet in cases like these and “normally avoids conflict” (Interview 1). In this instance, though, she communicated her needs to her administrator:

My [teaching] partner, she felt terrible because she felt like she was putting it all on me, you know, and like, which really she had no choice. It was not, it was not her decision at all. And so then we went down, like to my principal and we just talked it through and like, yeah, we were, I was just like, why? You know, I just feel like I'm getting dumped on here. And like, no one has warned me about this. And I normally do not say these kinds of things. Normally, I'm like, okay. Yeah, sure. Oh, I, for whatever reason, I was just like the nail in the coffin, like last thing. (Interview 1)

Shown here is the complexity of this particular situation in which Lily reached the limits of her capacity and spoke up for her needs as a teacher. Lily went on to describe the tension she felt between advocacy and maintaining a positive relationship with her principal:

If it's, if it's a situation like that, that is, it was weighing on me and it was affecting a lot of just me and my family and my kids, like everything. And so I do think if it reaches up to that point, like you do, I mean, you do have to stand up for yourself and just leave at least, and you don't have to like, come at, you know, come at your boss or come at your principal, like, like that. Um, but I think it is good to just kind of seek to understand where, where the decision is coming from. Even if you may not agree with it. (Interview 1)

While Lily's reflection on this situation included a positive sentiment about how the conversations with her administrator went, she exhibited some discomfort when recounting the story. In my observation memo after the interview, I noted, “ She seemed apprehensive to see her advocacy as a good thing, and mentioned that she normally just

does whatever she is asked to do” (Memo 6, October 29). These pieces of data speak to layers of complexity involved in the decision-making process in educational spaces, and more specifically, in teachers speaking up for what they need as professionals.

Relationships with colleagues. Charlie also shared that she experienced tensions between advocacy and relationships. She highlighted feeling this tension during her interviews and in interactions with colleagues in the team meetings I observed. Charlie pointed to a shift she felt in education the past few years and how this shift has allowed her to feel as though she can advocate and speak up. She explained how she felt this tension her first few years in education, yet believed she needed to adhere to the status quo in the building:

It's always been kind of in the past that resource teachers were seen as like a study hall. Like they [student] didn't finish it, so you need to do it. And it's kind of like, well, when am I supposed to teach them their, their IEP goals? Like, what am I supposed to do? Their specially designed instruction then if I'm, you know, and in the past I was just like, okay, that's, I'll do that because I was the newbie. And it's like, well, you have to do that. I don't want to, that's what we've always done. I don't want to upset the apple cart. (Interview 1)

Shown here is Charlie’s reluctance to challenge the status quo during her first years in the teaching profession. She articulated a desire to do what had always been done in her specific educational context. Over the course of her career, though, Charlie noted a shift in how she negotiated this tension, placing what she felt was best for students above the possibility of straining collegial relationships, “So it's like, I don't want to make anybody mad, but I don't know how to do my job if I'm, you know, doing this other stuff that isn't part of their instruction per their IEP” (Interview 1). Charlie also demonstrated her ability to speak up amongst her colleagues in a team meeting I observed. In this case, the team

discussed shifting students,' and in turn Charlie's, schedules to accommodate new building expectations around small group reading. While the changing schedules and new groups were proposed by the general classroom teachers on the team, including Lily, Charlie spoke up about what she felt was best for her students. My observational memo reflected her advocacy:

She [Charlie] advocated for her students and her groups just this week in the PLC I observed with guided reading groups during class time and intervention time. Lily and Charlie went back and forth about what was best for this student. Keeping her in the classroom to give her time to work on research with her group, or if it is better to have her work with Charlie to get more support through guided reading and word work time. (Observation, December 9)

When asked about what she felt influenced the shift from uncertainty to confidence in advocating for her role and for her students, Charlie struggled at first to pinpoint any one event or situation. Upon reflection, she highlighted the importance of her team coming to the realization together, "There was a shift and I can't pinpoint what it was, but it was kind of just, I don't know, maybe it was our team being like I'm sick of just not being able to do my job" (Interview 2).

Tension: Students and Structures

A second tension described by participants in their interviews and reflections, and noted during classroom and team meeting observations was between what the educators felt their students needed and existing structures within their educational context. Lily and Charlie articulated tensions with district and school building structures and expectations, including curriculum and schedules, as well as with structures specific to this school year because of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Structures and expectations aligning with the pandemic, specifically, included teaching in virtual, in-person, and/or

hybrid spaces and safety guidelines (e.g. mask wearing, social distancing, sanitizing classrooms and materials).

District structures and student needs. I observed tensions between what the teachers thought was best for their students and expectations and/or structures put forth by administration in the team meetings I observed. During one meeting in particular, also discussed in the previous section, the team talked about new expectations about the number of reading groups various students were expected to engage in throughout the day. Through their conversations, it was evident the team felt some tension between what they believed was beneficial for students, and adhering to the new structures and expectations set forth by administration. I recorded this in my observation notes:

Team talked about a data team meeting that occurred this week. Students who were very discrepant should be getting small group instruction with both the classroom teacher during intervention time and the special education teacher. It seems like the team is trying to determine the new expectations for students who are significantly below grade level. They seem confused about what they are expected to do. (Observation, December 9)

The following conversation took place during this same team meeting amongst Lily, Charlie and the other fourth grade classroom teacher (labeled here as Team Member):

Lily: Ok, so at this point, I would say, no you don't need to take [student].

Team Member: But he [principal] said we do.

Team Member: Ok, so the only time he can get pulled is during WIN [What I Need].

Lily: Yeah, because of my mini lesson. And then we have specials and our bathroom break.

Team Member: The problem with pulling one of the low ones during WIN is...

Charlie: Ok, hold on. What if I switch their phonics and guided reading and take [student] at 1:30? Switch her guided reading from 2:30 to 1:30, and then have [student] come to me from 1:50-2:10.

Team Member: But if he..

Charlie: But he could have a group with you at 1:30 and then come to me at 1:50.

Lily: I have to figure out how to get all these in now. (Team Meeting, December 9)

In her final interview, Charlie further reflected on the uncertainty she felt about the benefits of this structure for certain students, and pointed to challenges in entering into difficult conversations about what is best for students:

I mean, that's not helping either of those students, so hopefully we'll try it and see if it works. But I think the fact that we've had those difficult conversations and special ed has been supported by, um, our principal and our coach and our, like our special ed coordinator and all of those things, but that has really helped too with those conversations. They're hard and it's not fun to have, but I mean, I get it, both sides want the best for the kid and that's... Ok, well it's all of the things. We have to figure out a way to do all of them. (Interview 3)

Charlie continued to communicate challenges associated with the new structures in her interview, “That's where it was kind of tricky yesterday. Like there's so many kids and so little time, you know, to fit in all of those guided reading groups” (Interview 3).

Additionally, she shared uncertainty if the new structures were best for one of the students she served in particular, “I don't know. I just see that she would be an exception to the rule...I'm seeing her four times a day, so can that be okay? But I think we'll try this first and if it doesn't work, then I'll just bring that up again to [the principal]” (Interview 3). Shown here is the tension Charlie felt between what she believed was best for how to serve this student, and the school-wide expectations. While she communicated discontent, she also showed a willingness to try the new structures before speaking to her principal.

COVID-19 structures and student needs. Though Lily and Charlie's experiences teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic differed in many ways, both educators pointed to the challenges they encountered during this time. Lily taught in-person for the duration

of the school year, with the exception of five days around Thanksgiving break when the entire school district shifted to virtual learning. In contrast, Charlie began the year teaching both in-person and virtually, then shifted to all in-person instruction for approximately one week before the district went to virtual learning. After the five days of virtual instruction, she resumed in-person instruction.

Lily, in particular, noted the challenges in meeting students' needs in math. The school adopted a new math curriculum this school year, focusing on collaborative and hands-on learning. These experiences required the use of manipulatives and a great deal of interaction among the students. Lily described the challenges she experienced:

It's challenging because you're also trying to figure out, okay, how is this going to look with my kids in a COVID year? Um, when there, cause it's also very partner group based and hands-on manipulatives and things like that. And so that has been a challenge too in itself. (Interview 2)

She further elaborated on the challenges related to math instruction in her weekly reflection:

Math is a struggle. Kids seem really tired and less focused. I know part of this is due to not being able to be in partnerships and work together. So, trying to find ways to still allow them to interact while also keeping safe. (Week 1 Reflection)

Shown here is the tension Lily felt between keeping students safe and fostering interaction during instruction, a sentiment mirrored by Charlie. Charlie highlighted her concern for less interaction among her students due to safety guidelines during small

group reading. While teaching a reading group with a combination of students attending in person and virtually, Charlie pointed to the challenges associated with wearing masks:

It's hard. And I feel like, especially with guided reading because the people or the kids here have masks on and they're not in front of a camera, so you can't hear what they're saying. And then it's like, did this kid really read the page? Probably not. (Interview 2)

While Charlie noted the necessity of wearing masks to ensure the safety of everyone in the classroom, she also pointed to a lack of effective resources and equipment to help navigate these challenges, noting she had tried various microphones and speakers to encourage interaction among all members of the group. In one reflection, she expressed her frustration:

Teaching combined virtual and in person groups is so hard. I hate that everyone is struggling to hear with microphones, masks, etc in the way this year. Safety is key, but I just wish it was different. This group works very well together; I am curious what it would be like if we were all together in person. (Week 4 Reflection)

Challenges associated with COVID-19 protocols were echoed through team meeting observations, as well. The time spent making sure they followed all safety protocols, while also ensuring they met their students' need for interaction and engagement was something Lily, Charlie, and their entire team expressed frustration with.

As shown in this section, Lily and Charlie navigated tensions between their advocacy and relationships. Lily felt tension between advocacy and her relationship with administration, while Charlie felt this tension between her advocacy and relationships with colleagues. Added tension occurred between what the teachers felt was best for their

students and the structures in place in their school context, including school structures in general and structures related to COVID-19 in particular.

Maintaining Wellbeing as a Team

The third research question in this study considered the practices a team might utilize to maintain their wellbeing as they navigated their educational context. To explore this question, team meeting observations and interview data were particularly useful. Lily, Charlie, and Marci discussed a myriad of practices they use as a team to navigate the demands of their specific context, including developing a foundation of vulnerability and trust, investing time in each other and leaning on shared experiences, and sharing the workload of teaching.

Vulnerability and Trust

Being vulnerable with colleagues seemed to serve as a foundation for how this team navigated the demands of their educational context. Brown (2018) defines vulnerability as feelings of “uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure” (p. 19) In order to take action as a team, Lily, Charlie, and Marci explained that they must first be comfortable taking risks in front of each other, in turn exposing themselves emotionally. Vulnerability and trust seemed to go hand-in-hand; both operating in concert allowed this team to work through the challenges and demands they encountered. Lily described her experiences being open to learning from her colleagues and admitting when she did not know something, “I think like we've been really open with each other and um, and it's not necessarily like, okay, I've been in fourth grade for so long and I know it all, like I definitely don't” (Interview 3). In particular, Lily highlighted her relationships with

grade-level colleagues, at the time of the study and in the past. She pointed to the importance of improving her practice alongside teaching partners, with the support of the instructional coach. Lily characterized the work her team did with the instructional coach as built on trust, and explained the importance of challenging each other to grow:

I would sign our team up, and she [grade-level teaching partner] would just go with it and I'd text her and be like, 'hey, I signed up for a coaching cycle with Marci and I thought that we can use this and this.' And she'd be like, 'Oh, okay, sweet, great.' So she would meet. And we would go through like the achievement team process and, and she would, she would do it. Yeah, like I said, she's very open-minded to it. I learned a lot from her. (Interview 3)

Charlie, too, emphasized the importance of pushing through uncertainty, specifically when working with Marci, the instructional coach:

It's very intimidating to have a coach come in and watch you. And you're like, yeah, I need help. But I also don't want to admit that I don't know what I'm doing or that I do need help or want to better this. But after I did that - 'Marci, I would like you to come in for every subject because there's gotta be something out there that's new that I have no idea about or what I'm doing that could be better.' (Interview 2)

Both participants pointed to the support of the instructional coach in their ability to enter into challenging conversations, often requiring vulnerability. Marci, the instructional coach, began working with Lily and Charlie four years prior to the start of this study. She described how she built relationships with each of them individually through coaching cycles before working collaboratively with the team as a whole. When thinking about this team, she stated, "They're the team that's just like, okay, this might be wrong, but let's go. They embrace that mentality of learning as we go and it's okay to make mistakes" (Interview 1).

The “mentality of learning” described here was evident across data sources, including team meetings and in the educators’ weekly reflections. In a research memo, I noted, “All navigating was done through the work of a team - seemed to be that relationships allowed them to navigate through” (Memo, September 28). In a research memo after a team meeting observation, I again noticed rapport amongst the participating team members, “The team seems to be comfortable with each other - while it seems that Lily is kind of the leader of the group, all members spoke up, offered ideas, and joked around with each other” (Memo, October 23). As highlighted here, Lily and Charlie actively participated in team meetings, not only by sharing ideas and collaborating in the creation of instructional materials, but also by challenging each others’ ideas. The ability to push back on each other further demonstrates their vulnerability and trust in each other as educators and teammates.

Investing Time/Shared Experiences

Through my conversation with Marci, the instructional coach, it was clear she placed a high priority on investing time in the teachers she worked with and creating shared experiences with teachers. When asked about her journey working with the fourth grade team, and with Lily and Charlie specifically, she told a narrative focused on slowly building genuine relationships over the course of several years. In a memo after talking with Marci, I noted, “It was clear she had invested quite a bit of time into both of these teachers, and was patient in her work with them individually before tackling challenging conversations as a team” (Memo 11, December 11). This story was one echoed by Lily

and Charlie in their interviews as well. Marci described the relationships she built with Lily and Charlie in this way:

You build relationships by the work you do together. And that couldn't have been more true for both of them. Um, the coaching work that we did is how we were able, how I was really able to create those relationships. (Interview 1)

Charlie reflected on her relationship working with Marci:

I think the second that you do one coaching cycle, you're like, Oh my gosh, this is awesome because it's just digging deeper into what you're doing and bettering your teaching for the kids. So that's what I think has grown a lot in that we're more open to allowing outside people to come in and help your team. And it's okay. (Interview 2)

Lily described her relationship with Marci over the past few years in this way:

I've always signed up for coaching cycles with Marci and to the point that like, our principal makes fun of us and tells me I need to cut the cord. And I just, I'm like, it's never going to be cut. The knot is tight. (Interview 3)

It was evident the relationships they built with each other and the ensuing connections allowed Lily, Charlie, and Marci to work alongside each other in navigating the demands of their professional lives.

In addition to the relationships fostered between each of the participants and their instructional coach, the fourth grade team as a whole also seemed to rely on shared experiences in maintaining a sense of wellbeing while navigating the demands of the profession. After observing a team meeting, I noted, "They seemed to navigate through with shared experiences (each person shared frustrations and common experiences with students) and laughter" (Memo 12, December 18). Through their weekly PLC meetings,

as well as common planning times, the fourth grade team invested quite a bit of time into each other. While some of this time was mandated by specific district structures, such as weekly PLC meetings, the teachers on this team invested time in each other through modes outside of these structures, as well. For example, Lily shared a story about how teachers invested time in each other through quarantine from the previous school year. This took place while the district was entirely virtual due to the COVID-19 pandemic:

And then like with quarantine, I feel like that brought us even closer together, even though we were apart. Every Friday morning we would do BYOC - bring your own coffee Zoom. And we would just, and it was just solely just to get together and do something fun. (Interview 1)

Through these optional Friday morning coffee meetings, teachers were able to share their experience teaching through the pandemic, and invest time in each other in an informal way.

Sharing the Load

Lily and Charlie identified ‘sharing the load’ as of particular importance in navigating the demands of the education profession. Sharing the load to them meant sharing the workload associated with planning instruction, creating materials to utilize in the classroom, and analyzing student data to plan next steps for students. Both educators pointed to a lack of time as a significant barrier in navigating the demands placed on them. Because of this barrier, sharing the workload with their colleagues was essential. The team spent a great deal of time during team meetings dividing the planning and creating instructional materials. Built on the foundation of trust and vulnerability

discussed earlier, the team appeared to have full confidence in relying on each other's work. This trust and confidence allowed them to complete the work in a more effective manner. Lily explained how she and her grade-level colleague split the task of creating instructional slide decks for each content area:

Sharing the load I think has been a huge part of this year. Um, we're creating slides like madness over here. And so, uh, yeah, we just had kind of a system and we're living week by week, but, um, yeah, like I'll do two math slides a week and she'll do two math slides a week. I'll do two writing slides a week. She'll do two writing and then we'll kind of come together and do the reading together.
(Interview 3)

Charlie, too, viewed sharing the load amongst her colleagues in a positive way. When asked to share her experiences working alongside her special education colleagues, Charlie described the collaborative nature of their work, "Our special ed team has just gotten so much closer and it's because we're sharing everything and it's not a big secret of what you're doing" (Interview 1). She continued on to describe her interactions with the fourth grade team:

Our virtual special ed teachers meet and the virtual fourth grade teachers are talking with our fourth grade teachers and sharing and making slides. And like, this is kinda awesome... And again, we do everything on Google, so everything is shared and we're doing, we're sharing everything. (Interview 1)

Across the data, the participants attributed their ability to navigate the time demands of teaching to sharing the load with colleagues. Lily, in particular, emphasized this practice was woven into who she is as an educator while teaching in "normal" times as well as during the COVID-19 pandemic:

I think like, especially ever since I came to Lakeside, the fourth grade team has always just kind of shared the load and always collaborated and shared ideas and things like that. So I think that's just kind of like, just the way I do things in the normal... (Interview 3)

These excerpts from Lily and Charlie's interviews paint a picture of the critical role sharing the load with their colleagues played in their everyday lives as educators and in their ability to handle the demands of the profession. For Charlie, this meant sharing the load with the grade level teams she worked with, both virtually and in-person during the pandemic, as well as the special education team in which she was a member. For Lily, sharing the load with her grade-level colleagues was essential.

Abundant stories and examples of how the participants worked as a team to maintain their well-being while navigating the demands of the profession were observed in interviews and team meeting observations. Lily, Charlie, and Marci described the need for trusting and vulnerable relationships amongst team members, the importance of investing time in one another, and the power of shared experiences. Their stories and descriptions of sharing the load with colleagues paint a picture of the role leaning on one another plays in their ability to navigate the demands of the profession, while maintaining overall positive well-being.

Chapter in Review

In this chapter I described results from the study, highlighted by participant quotes and experiences from interviews, reflective journals, observations, and documents. I have identified and described data related to each of the three research questions. In the

following chapter, I will discuss the themes I identified throughout data analysis, including vulnerability and trust as a foundation for action, advocacy begets advocacy, and maintenance of wellbeing through challenging the status quo. Implications for teachers, administrators, teacher educators, and policy makers will be discussed, along with recommendations for future research. The chapter will conclude with a summary and my reflection as a researcher.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This culminating chapter will share the overall thematic findings from the data gathered and analysis of the study. The first theme identified from the data was that a sense of vulnerability and trust amongst educators served as a foundation for action. The second theme was the concept that advocacy begets advocacy; when colleagues advocated for each other, they were more willing to advocate for themselves and/or their students. Finally, the third theme was that educators were able to maintain a sense of wellbeing through decisions on when to challenge the doxa, or rules and norms of a particular group, in their educational context. Implications of the findings, including an expanded participant focus and a longitudinal study to explore relationships and well-being over time, will also be discussed.

Vulnerability and Trust as a Foundation for Action

Through Lily, Charlie, and Marci's narratives, it was evident that vulnerability and trust were elements to their ability to navigate the demands of the education profession. Even more so, the connections fostered through being vulnerable with and trusting in each other appeared to operate as a foundation for taking action. Le Cornu (2013) and Webb et al. (2009) emphasized the necessity of building a trusting environment within the school context through which educators were able to take risks and share concerns. Le Cornu (2013) described the environment built among teaching peers when in relationship:

They [teachers] felt encouraged knowing others felt the same way they did. They valued the time together to explore solutions to problems. They developed their ability to talk about teaching and interact in a professional way... This affirmation and non-judgmental support encouraged personal and professional agency. (p. 6)

In this way, a trusting environment served as a foundation for taking action. Like educators described by Le Cornu, the participants in this study appeared to enact agency, in part, due to the support of their colleagues. For Lily, this support came in the form of trust and vulnerability with her grade-level colleague:

I think it's also helpful because she [fourth grade colleague] will talk about things that are happening in her class and I'm like, Oh yeah, you know, that's happening in my class too. What could we do? Or those sort of things. Or like, these are things that I'm seeing, what are some things that you're doing to like help or fix those things, like different strategies and things like that. I think we've been really open with each other. (Interview 3)

Here Lily and her teaching colleague were able to take action to adjust instruction based on their openness and honesty with each other about what was and was not working within their individual classrooms. According to Collay (2010):

Teachers who are fully committed to student learning take action on students' behalf within flawed organizational structures whether they consider themselves formal leaders. Taking action requires both commitment to students and the capacity to enact change within and beyond the classroom." (p. 230)

For Charlie, action stemmed from trusting relationships with her teams of special educators and general education teachers, as well as through her commitment to students. In a reflective journal entry about making sure she maintained focus on her students' IEP goals, Charlie shared, "This is a daily struggle for all resource teachers across the district

and we are in constant communication on how to best teach this area to these students. It gives me comfort knowing I'm not alone in this boat!" (Week 7 Reflection). Here a trusting relationship amongst special educators seemed to lead to ongoing communication and subsequent action. She also articulated several times throughout the study her commitment to her students and their needs. When discussing challenging conversations that have occurred with her colleagues, Charlie explained:

I think the fact that we've had those difficult conversations and special ed has been supported by our principal and our coach and our, like our special ed coordinator and all of those things, but that has really helped too with those conversations. They're hard and it's not fun to have, but I mean, I get it, both sides want the best for the kid. (Interview 3)

As Collay (2010) asserted, Charlie's action on behalf of her students required both a commitment to her students and their needs, and the capacity to enact change. Here, Charlie seemed to have the capacity to enact change through the encouragement and guidance of leaders within her school environment, including the special education coordinator, principal, and instructional coach.

In her work with practicing teachers, Collay (2010) highlighted the importance of collegial support in teachers taking action within their schools, "Participants were supported by caring and visionary teachers or mentors within and beyond school" (p. 228). Support and encouragement from visionary teachers within the systems in which they worked provided teachers with a foundation on which to act. For Lily and Charlie, the instructional coach in their building seemed to serve as a visionary colleague and mentor. In addition to support from teaching peers, Lily and Charlie's narratives highlighted the compassionate and humble approach Marci took in her coaching work, in

turn helping to alleviate some of the challenges of being an educator. Lily described her work with Marci in this way, “I just have always learned a lot from Marci and I like having her in here and maybe it is probably like, I just got comfortable with her”

(Interview 3). Similarly, Charlie articulated her relationship with Marci:

I love her. I miss her so much, but, um, we've gotten so close too, and that's where it's great that it's like, I volunteered to do coaching cycles, which were huge and big help to help not only my teaching, but those hard conversations that you had to have with, um, your teammates.” (Interview 1)

Through conversations about her coaching work in general, and her journey with Lily and Charlie specifically, Marci highlighted humility as a necessary trait in her work:

So I feel like one of my biggest, um, it's a strength looking back at it, but at the same time it was like super scary, was admitting that I don't know and admitting that I'm not sure. And saying that I'm learning too. Um, so I really truly feel like modeling that, that growth comes from challenges and growth comes from saying the hard things and trying new things. And I, I really feel like I modeled that a lot with them, with the whole staff. And I mean, I was pretty transparent with them saying like, all right, we're doing achievement teams, never done it before. Not sure how this is going to go. It could be a total flop, but let's try it together. (Interview 1)

Here Marci discussed the implementation of achievement teams, a process used in the participating school site to look at and analyze student data within PLCs. Marci described the achievement team process in this way:

So it's, what do you want them to know? How do you know all the questions, but it's very specific. It's very like, um, what is the one standard that we're really gonna focus on? What's the pre-assessment scores? How do we break this standard down into a progression? Where do the - each student fall? How do we create strategy groups based on this progression? When are we going to meet with those kids? How are we gonna monitor along the way? And how does our post assessment, like, how do we see our apples to apples? Like, so it's really just taking a unit or a standard and like really, really look at it closely. (Interview 1)

She noted the uncertainty she felt when implementing achievement teams for the first time, and highlighted the importance of navigating the process and learning together.

Marci continued on to describe how she is open and honest with the teachers she works with:

They're not wondering what you're going back and writing. I also shared whenever we took notes or did anything, um, any, I had a Google folder for every teacher and every grade. And so it was always open. I shared it with them. So anything that I wrote, anything I did was always right there. So it was never like what she what's she writing down, you know, or what is she saying? And, um, I think that was a big part of it too, that, um, just that openness and honesty. (Interview 1)

Castro et al. (2010) noted the importance of using colleagues as “buffers and allies” (p. 626) in order to navigate challenging situations and relationships within the school context. Through the trusting and vulnerable relationships created alongside the instructional coach, Lily and Charlie were able to build an alliance of sorts. The relationships cultivated with the instructional coach seemed to support them in navigating the demands of their educational context. These relationships, along with those developed with their grade level colleagues, provided a foundation for them to take action within their educational spaces.

Advocacy Begets Advocacy

While trust and vulnerability supported a foundation for a team oriented approach, individual action propelled the participants to advocate for themselves, their colleagues, and their students. Lily, Charlie and Marci shared varying experiences with the role of advocacy in their careers in education; however, a common thread was the importance of the advocacy of those around them. For each of the educators, when their colleagues

advocated for them, they in turn expressed an inclination to advocate for themselves, their fellow teachers, and their students. According to Pearce and Morrison (2011), it is critical for teachers to advocate for themselves as they navigate the demands in the field. While it may be clear that teacher advocacy is necessary, the teachers in this study pointed to the importance of their colleagues in being able to do so.

For Lily, this appeared in the challenges she experienced with class sizes in her fourth grade classroom. She explained that while she typically does what is asked of her, in this case, it was the support of her grade-level colleague that prompted her to advocate for herself:

I think it also helps that my teammate too, she was like advocating for me before I advocated for myself. I think that helped a little bit too. Um, and so because the student was coming from her room and she felt terrible about it, um, and it wasn't her fault. It just, it was just the situation that it was. Um, and so, but I do think it is important. Like if it's, if it's a situation like that, that is, it was weighing on me and it was affecting a lot of just me and my family and my kids like everything. And so I do think if it reaches up to that point, like you do, I mean, you do have to stand up for yourself. (Interview 2)

Lily's grade-level colleague, Jan, had over thirty years of experience in education, all of which took place in this particular school district. In order to offer what Bourdieu (1977) calls 'competing possibles' to the doxa, or rules and norms of the particular field, one must possess various forms of capital. In this case, the field was the particular school site, and the rule Lily appeared to operate by was to not challenge the administration's decisions. Lily articulated this rule throughout her interviews, "I have a hard time saying no to things. And so I just constantly am like, yeah, sure. What's another, like, what's another committee, what's another kid. What's another whatever. So that was hard for me" (Interview 2). Jan, it seemed, possessed sufficient capital to offer an alternative

possibility for Lily - that of advocating for her needs as a teacher to her administration. For both teachers, these needs included the ability to build relationships with classes of reasonable sizes. Lily in particular needed a more feasible workload as an educator. According to Bourdieu, this type of capital, symbolic capital, includes “the power to impose upon other minds a vision, old or new, of social divisions” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 23). Jan was able to offer Lily a new vision of the hierarchy of power within the school building, one allowing for Lily to question the decision-making process of her administration.

During her recounting of this experience, Lily also articulated reaching a ‘breaking point,’ “I think it reached, I just reached like my breaking point with that [class size]” (Interview 2). Deer (2014a) highlighted the necessity of a crisis in cases where individuals are able to demonstrate agency and operate against the doxa. Reaching her breaking point perhaps served as a crisis for Lily, which, along with the advocacy of her teaching colleague, allowed her to exhibit agency as a teacher.

Charlie, too, described her journey of feeling as though she could advocate for herself and her students. She highlighted the role of the instructional coach and special education consultant from the Area Education Agency (AEA) as of particular import:

But of course that is with our AEA rep and our instructional coach that helped us with all of those tough conversations that it's kind of like, how do I tell my colleagues that I've worked with every day that I can't help you do what you feel is very important? And it is very important, but not necessarily, that's not like a big rock for this student. (Interview 2)

Here, Charlie described the necessity of advocating for her students and what they needed to the general education teachers she worked alongside. It was support from the special

education consultant from the AEA and her instructional coach that resulted in her feeling as though she could engage in difficult conversations with the general education teachers.

In addition, Charlie highlighted pushing back against the structures that had existed for many years within the school site, a precarious endeavor. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) asserted, individuals within a particular field internalize the established dispositions and beliefs, and in turn unconsciously produce and reproduce them. Because of this, interrupting the reproduction of specific beliefs and structures within the field often presents a challenge. Charlie described the role Marci, the instructional coach, played in pushing back against the existing doxa in her educational context:

It's always been kind of in the past that resource teachers were seen as like a study hall. Like they didn't finish it, so you need to do it. And it's kind of like, well, when am I supposed to teach them their, their IEP goals? Like, what am I supposed to do? Their specially designed instruction then if I'm, you know, and in the past I was just like, okay, that's, I'll do that because I was the newbie. And it's like, well, you have to do that. I don't want to, that's what we've always done. I don't want to upset the apple cart. But I think the last couple of years when we got an instructional coach was huge because she was so vocal for us and fought for everybody. It's like, okay, remember they have, they have their jobs. Like I have my job to do, and it's not to finish what they didn't get to. (Interview 1)

While Jones and Rainville (2014) cautioned about the added layer of power that can sometimes stem from the addition of instructional coaches to a school staff, and the negative consequences therein, it seems as though the instructional coach in this context exemplified the “potential power of literacy coaches acquired through acting with compassion and humility to prevent and alleviate suffering” (p. 285). In this context, Marci worked alongside Charlie, guiding her as she advocated for her students’ needs and together shifting existing practices within the school building.

Lily and Marci drew attention to the culture they felt needed to exist within a school site for advocacy to take place. Marci articulated her views:

I just think that we are in a different boat in terms of, we learn together, we learn from each other than we were the first couple of years. And so I think when you have a culture that supports that, I think the advocacy is a lot easier. Um, I think those conversations are a lot easier because it takes the me and the we, the personal part out of it. And it takes the, Hey, this isn't about me knowing everything, it's about us learning together...And so I think, I definitely think advocacy depends highly upon the culture that is set by the group. (Interview 1)

Here, Marci again pointed to the importance of humility and an openness to learning together as a foundation to teachers feeling comfortable advocating for students and for each other. Marci's narrative echoed the findings of Le Cornu (2013) in emphasizing a "culture that promoted a sense of belonging and social connectedness and where there was collective responsibility taken for teacher well-being and learning" (p. 5). Lily mirrored this sentiment of collective responsibility when describing advocacy with her administrator, highlighting the importance of an environment centered on 'seeking to understand':

If you're just literally going in there to seek to understand, or just, can you explain you know, can you give me a little bit more information on how this decision was made or things like that? I do think, I think that is perceived a little bit better.

(Interview 2)

Lily's attempt to seek to understand her administrator's perspective is shown here; however, she also described the need for her administrator to seek to understand her point of view as well, "I think it helps though that he saw like, okay, yeah, she is really struggling and not just putting on a front" (Interview 2). Seeking out the perspectives of

others was important to this team, in their interactions with school leaders and with each other. The team emphasized the essential nature of a culture that honors each person's perspective, and takes up collective responsibility in order for advocacy to take place.

Maintaining Well-Being Through Challenging the Status Quo

In their own unique ways, the participants in this study maintained their well-being through challenging the status quo of their educational contexts, referred to by Bourdieu (1977) as doxa. Both participants challenged the doxa in a variety of ways, including setting boundaries between work and home and pushing back against existing structures within their school context. Prior to being able to challenge the doxa of a particular social field, one must become conscious of the ways of thinking and being, a shift to heterodoxy (Bourdieu, 1977). According to Flynn (2015) and Jones and Rainville (2014), educators at times carry out daily practice through unconscious dispositions and actions, or what Bourdieu (1977) refers to as habitus. Charlie, in particular, experienced this in her early years in the profession. While she became conscious of her actions and dispositions with experience, she described the practices she carried out early on in her career as aligning with what had always been done in her school context. Flynn (2015) postulates that, "It is difficult to untangle what teachers feel they must do with the curriculum from what teachers might believe is good practice" (p. 24). Flynn further explained:

Although teachers understood what they *should* do, they did not necessarily feel that they *could* teach in ways suited to second language acquisition or literacy

development. This field-related tension between what teachers knew and what they felt able to do was a key finding. (p. 25)

The tension described here between a teacher's beliefs or knowledge and their practice has been referred to as a lack of habitus-field fit (Colley et al., 2007; Nolan & Walshaw, 2012), often leading to struggles within the profession (Räsänen, 2015). Across interviews, Charlie highlighted the tension she began to feel between what she believed was most beneficial for her students and the practices she carried out as an educator.

In an effort to alleviate these struggles and maintain a sense of well-being, Lily and Charlie individually and collectively challenged the status quo, or 'the way we do things around here,' in their educational context. Once one considers the "existence of *competing possibles*" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 169, emphasis in original), in order to subsequently push back on the rules of the field, one must possess various forms of capital. Social capital seemed to be critical for both Lily and Charlie to disrupt the doxa of their particular field. Bourdieu (2016) described social capital as that which is accumulated through the connections and relationships one maintains. Through the relationships Lily and Charlie formed with each other, their respective teams, and the instructional coach, they were able to challenge the often long-standing rules, beliefs, and/or ways of being in their school building. For Lily, this was evident in her challenging the increasing number of students in her classroom, and for Charlie in her challenge of how special education was structured in the participating school site.

In addition to social capital, cultural capital, both in embodied and institutionalized states, enabled Lily and Charlie to imagine a different way of being, and

push back on the rules of their field. Cultural capital in the embodied state occupies our mind and body, changing the way we think, speak and act, while in the institutionalized state is represented by academic qualifications (Bourdieu, 2016; Moore, 2014). Charlie, in particular described the accumulation of cultural capital in the embodied state:

This is my 10th year and my first year, I mean, I was a first year teacher, even like the first four years. I kinda just did what everybody told me to do, and this is how they've always done it. But now it's kind of like, no, you know what? They have an IEP for a reason. I am in charge of teaching these skills on their IEP. I'm not a study hall to help them, um, with, you know, catching up on classroom work. (Interview 2)

Charlie believed her years in education, accumulating these forms of capital, allowed her to speak out about what she believed was best for students. In this case, she advocated for her role in working with students on their individualized goals, instead of serving as a “study hall” to catch them up on work assigned within their general education classroom. The shifts Charlie made were similar to the findings of Pearce and Morrison (2011), when studying the narratives of new teachers’ experiences entering the field of education. Speaking about one new teacher in particular, the authors highlighted the new narratives she built through various forms of capital:

Later, she constructed new narratives that enabled her to envisage a different future as a teacher. These decisions reflect Norah’s ability to capitalise on her cultural and material resources...Here, habitus provides the lens for viewing the structures and guiding framework for choice, while dissonance emerges as a force for action. (p. 54)

Charlie’s ability to leverage various forms of capital as a force for action mirrored Pearce and Morrison’s findings among new teachers in their study. Like Norah, the teacher mentioned above, Charlie was able to create a new vision for herself as an educator, one different from who she was as a beginning teacher in the profession. Creating new

practices based on this vision is of particular import. Räsänen (2015) described the process of fitting “new practices into the habitus of a classroom community and being a teacher” as a “long, multi-layered and continuous process of ‘becoming’” (p. 51). The process of becoming described by Charlie over the course of her ten years in education reflects that characterized by Räsänen (2015). Charlie’s journey was both continuous and multi-layered, supported by her experiences, colleagues, and school leaders.

Throughout the study, Lily and Charlie were supported in their work and advocacy by the instructional coach. Jones and Rainville (2014), in particular, noted the role coaches can play in challenging the doxa of a particular social field:

Coaches can analyze power relations in grade levels and schools, recognize the capital teachers bring with them into the classroom and the capital teachers perceive as being respectable, understand the circulating discourses among colleagues, and enter these complex spaces to recognize suffering and respond with compassion and humility” (p. 285).

Marci recognized the various forms of capital Lily and Charlie possessed and supported them in leveraging this capital to navigate the complexities of their social field. In a discussion about supporting Lily and Charlie in speaking up about what they needed as teachers and what their students needed with the rest of the staff in the building, Marci explained:

So that was another big challenge is them recognizing what they were doing, naming it and the importance of it. Like they could, they just started doing it. But, how do you advocate for that for the rest of- like, if you guys are finding this important, how do we share this with other people? You know, how do you advocate? Because you're not just advocating for yourself and what you think is good for teachers, but you're advocating for students, you know, like our whole building. (Interview 1)

Marci here described the risks she challenged and supported Lily and Charlie in taking amongst their colleagues. Le Cornu (2013) and Webb et al. (2009) called attention to the importance of positive collegial relationships, like those experienced by Charlie, Lily, and Marci, in enhancing teacher well-being through building a trusting environment in which to take these types of risks.

Pearce and Morrison (2011) pointed to the ability to capitalize on forms of capital and fight against the dissonance between one's beliefs and the realities of teaching, as essential in maintaining well-being as an educator. When experiencing a lack of habitus-field fit (Nolan & Walshaw, 2012), resulting in the type of dissonance described here, it is difficult to maintain one's sense of well-being. Through the awareness and use of various forms of capital to disrupt the status quo and make change within educational spaces, the tension resulting from a lack of habitus-field fit is lessened. Charlie's journey in education, as described earlier in this chapter, reflected the reduction of this tension. Over time, she disrupted the status quo in her educational context, diminishing the tension between her beliefs about what was best for her students and her practices within her classroom and school.

Van Petegem et al. (2005) described well-being as a positive emotional state and harmony between the educational context and the educator. When experiencing positive well-being, Lily and Charlie shared this sense of harmony between themselves and their context. The three themes discussed - vulnerability and trust as a foundation for action, advocacy begets advocacy, and positive well-being maintained through a disruption of the doxa, highlight the power of positive relationships amongst educators. In the

following section, implications and lingering questions for future research will be discussed.

Implications

The implications of this research are broad and useful to not only educators and administrators working in K-12 school contexts, but also to teacher educators and educational policy makers.

Implications for Educators & Administrators

With the increasing numbers of teachers feeling burned out and leaving the field of education (Acton & Glasgow, 2015; Brown & Roloff, 2011), particularly in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic (Pressley, 2021; Sokal et al., 2020), it is critical for educators and administrators to consider the context and practices that might support teachers' overall well-being. Research indicates if teachers do not feel supported in their profession, by colleagues and/or administration, their well-being may suffer and they may leave the teaching profession altogether (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). The participants in this study also demonstrated that teachers were able to navigate the challenges of the field and feel an increased sense of well-being when they cultivated trusting relationships with their colleagues.

Administrators and other school leaders may consider the role trusting, vulnerable relationships play in supporting teachers' well-being. Marci highlighted the importance of creating these relationships over time, through doing work on a regular basis alongside teachers. In addition, she cautioned against attempting to challenge teachers' thinking or practices without investing in them on a daily basis. As an instructional coach, time and

humility were pivotal to the work she engaged in with teachers. Administrators and other school leaders may consider the time and effort it takes to cultivate these relationships amongst and with teachers when making decisions about hiring, shifting teachers to different positions and/or grade levels, and structuring collaboration for educators. What little time teachers currently have for collaboration in schools today is often taken up with administrative and managerial tasks and meetings. In lieu of this, administration and school leaders must create, through the careful development of schedules that give teachers blocks of common time without students, and protect this time to collaborate with colleagues.

In addition to building and supporting trusting relationships amongst teachers, it is critical for teachers to advocate for each other when they have the ability or capital to do so. The need for teaching colleagues to advocate for each other was evident in the teachers' comments. Lily commented, "My teammate too, she was like advocating for me before I advocated for myself" (Interview 2), and Charlie explained, "But of course that is with our AEA rep and our instructional coach that helped us with all of those tough conversations" (Interview 2). These comments highlighted the essential role of colleagues in the educators' ability to advocate for themselves and/or their students. The implications of these reflections for teacher leaders and educators are that it is imperative to develop an awareness of the capital they possess, and use this capital to stand with and advocate for one another within their educational contexts, both individually and collectively. Collective approaches could take the form of focusing on the "the structural,

institutional and relationally situated nature of teachers' work" (Johnson & Down, 2013, p. 713), as well as the role of culture within the school context.

Implications for Teacher Educators

Beginning educators may have an even greater need for support in building trusting, vulnerable relationships with teaching colleagues and school leaders. Research indicated the vital role of positive collegial relationships for teachers new to the profession (Le Cornu, 2013; McCallum & Price, 2010; Morrison, 2013). These relationships and supportive systems, however, can be an extension of the foundation set in teacher preparation programs. Openness and honesty about what novice teachers may encounter when entering the education profession might begin with stories and experiences shared by teacher educators, along with strategies they utilized to navigate through these real-life situations. In addition, teacher preparation programs can support relationship building and teach genuine collaboration skills through the use of a structure like PLCs within the pre-service classroom. Within these learning communities, teacher educators can share their experiences in negotiating the demands of the profession, challenges in doing so, and strategies for maintaining well-being. Even more, teacher educators can utilize learning communities to teach pre-service teachers (PSTs) how to approach the profession with a focus on the collective (Castro, et al., 2010; Johnson, et al., 2014), instead of an overemphasis on navigating through challenges as individual teachers.

Similar approaches might be taken to proactively prepare teachers for the possibility of a lack of habitus-field fit once they enter the teaching profession (Nolan,

2016). Nolan and Walshaw (2012) described a lack of habitus-field fit as a mismatch between habitus, the beliefs and actions about content and/or pedagogy associated with their university preparation, and the field, the educational context they enter as novice teachers. Räisänen (2015) explained this often results in “a continuous state of tension” (p. 43), perhaps inhibiting teachers’ ability to maintain positive well-being. Preparing PSTs for the possibility of this mismatch, and equipping them with strategies to navigate such challenges, is critical. In order to support PSTs, teacher preparation programs might facilitate the development of supportive networks of peers through the use of a structure like PLCs in the university environment. In addition, ensuring PSTs engage in extensive time in field experiences in real classroom contexts would allow them to experience the realities of education policy and structures of local school contexts prior to entering the field.

Implications for Policy Makers

The participants benefited from multi-faceted support in order to navigate the demands of their educational contexts. While much of this support comes from individuals within the profession, including teaching colleagues, instructional coaches, and administrators, the time and structures implemented by school systems are a direct reflection of policies enacted within education at local, state and federal levels. A hyper-focus on performativity and accountability (Au, 2016; Connell, 2009) is a concern, and often presents a barrier to teachers’ ability to maintain well-being within educational spaces. Even more, teachers often associate mandates with building leadership, possibly straining the relationships between teachers and administration. If policy makers are

committed to addressing issues of teacher burnout and attrition, and supporting teachers' overall well-being, integrating systems and structures empowering teachers and their advocacy would provide a foundation for this endeavor. Including and amplifying teacher voices in decision-making processes at all levels is critical. In addition, it is recommended that policy-makers take into consideration the over-emphasis on individual practice within the education profession, and instead focus on structures and systems allowing for the collective agency of teachers. Structures might include those utilized by the educators in this study, including engaging in coaching cycles with an instructional coach. As Bottrell (2009) argues,

At the policy level there needs to be a question of limits - to what extent will adversity be tolerated, on the assumption that resilient individuals can and do cope? How much adversity should resilient individuals endure before social arrangements rather than individuals are targeted for intervention?" (p. 335)

The question for policy makers, then, is how they might interrogate the social arrangements in school systems, instead of focusing solely on individual educators.

Recommendations for Future Research

Just as the implications for school leaders, teacher educators, and policy makers emphasize a focus on the collective instead of the individual, the recommendations for future research also address the significance of collective agency and wellbeing within education spaces. Specifically, two recommendations are advised in future research: expansion of the group of participants to include several teams within one educational context and a longitudinal study to explore relationships and wellbeing over time.

Expanded Focus

One of the main purposes of this research was to add to the limited literature addressing the experiences of veteran K-12 educators in navigating the demands of their educational spaces alongside a team of colleagues. While many large-scale quantitative studies exploring burnout in teachers (Kurt & Demirbolat, 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018) and studies investigating various factors contributing to teacher burnout and attrition (Guarino et al., 2006; Konu et al., 2010; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004) exist, there is insufficient research focused on the narratives of teachers in the field, specifically in relation to collective teacher wellbeing. Continued work utilizing qualitative methods, such as the narrative and ethnographic approaches used in this study, might help fill the need to amplify voices of teachers in the field. Expanding the focus of research to include additional teams within an educational context may provide insight into the social field as a whole, allowing for the exploration and understanding of the diverse social spaces in which teachers operate. Exploration of multiple teams will also illuminate the systematic structures which hinder or facilitate wellbeing and offer other school contexts a lens to examine their practices.

Longitudinal Study

Additionally, a longitudinal study allows for the researcher to observe how teams of teachers build relationships, as well as collective agency and wellbeing over time. As participants in this study noted, the trusting and vulnerable relationships they cultivated amongst teaching colleagues seemed to provide a foundation for action and advocacy. A longitudinal study might shed light on how teachers and school leaders create spaces in

which these types of relationships are cultivated and flourish. A longitudinal study may also provide insight into how teachers' strategies and practices around navigating the demands of their field shift over the course of years, specifically through changes and initiatives within their educational spaces. As Johnson and Down (2013) argued, a "rigorous analysis of the impact of the broader social, political and economic context of teachers' work" (p. 706) is warranted and critical. Exploring the intersection of changing educational policy and the structures in a local school context over time might offer beneficial insight into the realities of how teachers negotiate the broad context of their work. A longitudinal study offers the space and time to conduct such rigorous analysis of educational contexts.

Conclusion

Educators are burning out and leaving the profession in increasing numbers (Brown & Roloff, 2011; Hakanen et al., 2006), and these challenges are only exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Pressley, 2021; Sokal et al., 2020). To address these realities within the education profession, many researchers focused on individual strategies to navigate the demands of the field (Doney, 2013; Vance et al., 2015). More recently, there has been a call for studies to explore the systems, structures, and beliefs within educational spaces, as well as collective strategies for educators to maintain well-being while navigating the challenges of the profession (Bottrell, 2009; Johnson & Down, 2013).

This research sought to address the call for studies on the collective well-being of educators, the strategies teams of teachers may use to navigate the field of education, and

the interplay among personal, relational, and organizational conditions of teachers' work. This qualitative research study, using ethnographic methods and narrative analysis, explored the experiences of one team of practicing teachers, and the ways in which these educators maintain a sense of overall well-being while navigating the demands of their educational context. The findings illuminated the importance of cultivating and supporting trusting, vulnerable relationships amongst educators. These trusting relationships seemed to provide a foundation for teacher action. The findings also showed that when teachers advocate for each other, they appeared to be more willing to advocate for their students and/or themselves; advocacy beget advocacy. Finally, the findings illustrated the importance of disrupting the status quo, or doxa, within educational spaces in order to maintain well-being, both individually and collectively.

This study lends support to the idea that exploring the “dynamic and complex interactions between individuals and their social and geographic contexts” (Johnson & Down, 2013, p. 703) from a collective standpoint is a promising approach to supporting the overall well-being of educators. This qualitative study assisted in adding to the existing literature around collective teacher well-being; however, additional research is needed to further explore the experiences of teams of teachers within educational spaces. There is a need to learn more about how educators navigate the social fields in which they operate - on both a larger scale and over time.

Reflection of the Researcher

As I reflect on the process of completing my dissertation, methodological shifts due to the COVID-19 pandemic remain prominently in my mind. In the midst of my

dissertation research, within a few weeks of successfully recruiting participants for this study, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. After months of searching for participants aligning with the goals of this research project, and finally connecting with a team of teachers interested in participating, schools around the country shut down, including the school site I was to use for this research. In the months following these school closures in March 2020, I was uncertain whether I would be able to gather data in the school at all due to COVID-19 protocols, or if the same group of educators would be willing or able to participate once the 2020-2021 school year began. After much discussion with the school district and the team of teachers, I was approved to begin my research virtually in the Fall of 2020.

As an emerging researcher utilizing ethnographic methods, the shift to virtual data collection posed myriad challenges. Without the ability to be physically present in the classroom and meeting spaces with participants, I wondered about my ability to get a sense for the ways of being in this educational context. Prolonged engagement with the participants certainly occurred; however, the ability to study aspects of daily life within this school context was perhaps limited. The methodological changes due to COVID-19 protocols were disappointing for me as a qualitative researcher, yet this experience has shaped my future research interests in both an expanded focus and extended time alongside educators in one school space.

Reflecting on the research process, data analysis, writing, rewriting, and the unexpected evolutions of this project, it has been the experiences and narratives of the educators in this study that sustained my work. I will always regard the opportunity to

hear the stories of teachers and being welcomed into classroom spaces as an honor. Amplifying the voices of teachers in the field, and examining the structures and systems educators navigate within and around continues to be my passion and driving force.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview 1 Protocol

Interviews will be semi-structured with questions to spark conversation and follow-up questions to explore participants' responses on a deeper level. Examples of the questions that will be asked during the first interview include, but are not limited to:

- What personal and professional practices help you stay...
 - Focused?
 - Energized?
 - Effective?
- Talk about some of the demands you feel in this profession.
 - If you had to choose three things that help you navigate the demands of the education profession, what would they be?
- Talk about the work you do with your team at school.
 - What are some of the greatest successes you've experienced with your team?
 - What are some of the greatest challenges you've experienced with your team?
- Describe a time when you felt overwhelmed or depleted with a situation at school.
 - How did you go about navigating that situation?
 - How do you maintain your well-being in these situations?
- Describe a time when you felt successful and energized with a situation at school.
 - How did you go about navigating that situation?
 - How do you maintain your well-being in these situations?
- Talk about what matters most to you in this profession.
 - How do you maintain clarity about what matters most to you?

APPENDIX B
OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Environment	
Participant(s): Date: Start Time: Stop Time: Classroom/Team Meeting (circle one) Number of Students: Number of Adults:	Documents Collected:
Sketch of Environment:	
Additional Description of Space:	

Field Notes	
Notetaking (description)	Notemaking (comments, initial thoughts, questions, and synthesis)