



Caring for the Caregiver: Promoting the Resilience of Educators

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Educators play a central role in children's social, emotional, and academic development. From early childhood through high school graduation, much of children's time is spent in the classroom. Many children also attend out-of-school time programs providing structured after-school learning and play opportunities. When these environments are safe, positive, and supportive, they serve as critical protective factors contributing to children's healthy growth and well-being (Masten, 2014). But when educators face personal and professional risk factors, it can affect their ability to create these nurturing environments for their students, jeopardizing successful outcomes for children as well as their own well-being. In this chapter, we will first summarize the sources of stress educators commonly experience in their daily work, including a discussion of the new and unprecedented impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the impact of these stressors. We will discuss the emergence of social and emotional learning (SEL) as a potential new source of stress for educators but also as a unique opportunity to enhance educators' resilience and their effectiveness in promoting children's social and emotional competence. Finally, we will highlight promising approaches that address this important need.

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A Perfect Storm of Educator Risk Factors

It is well-documented that teaching is one of the most stressful occupations in the United States. A 2014 Gallup survey found that nearly half (46%) of K-12 teachers surveyed reported high daily stress, a rate that closely matches other demanding professions such as nurses (46%) and physicians (45%) (Gallup, 2014). In a more recent 2017 survey of teachers, 61% reported that work was “always” (23%) or “often” (38%) stressful (American Federation of Teachers, 2017), reporting a rate twice that of the general population. Self-reported engagement levels of teachers have also been found to be low, with only about a third (31%) of K-12 teachers reporting active engagement in their jobs (Gallup, 2014), with levels dropping significantly during the first few years of teaching.

Educators face a variety of stressors daily that impact their well-being and engagement in their work. A recent review of the education literature by Greenberg et al. (2016) categorized sources of teacher stress into four main types: (1) school organization factors, (2) job demands, (3) work resources that limit decision making and autonomy, and (4) teachers' personal resources and competencies. The first category focuses on stressors related to the school organization, such as culture, climate, and administrative leadership. Research has shown that organizations

characterized as unhealthy, unsupportive, or distrustful can increase stress and negatively impact job satisfaction among educators (Johnson et al., 2012; Kyriacou, 2001). Leadership changes (such as principal turnover) have also been associated with lower teacher retention, particularly with less experienced teachers (Beteille et al., 2011). Second, increasing job demands such as high stakes testing, excessive paperwork, reduced planning time, and unrealistic expectations have been shown to impact teacher well-being (Kyriacou, 2001; Lambert et al., 2009). Working conditions have also deteriorated for many teachers with more students lacking engagement and motivation, displaying problem behaviors, or arriving to school sleep-deprived or otherwise not ready to learn (McCarthy & Lambert, 2006). Teachers are also coping with an increasing number of demanding or unsupportive parents. At the same time, teachers commonly face a work environment where their participation in school decision making and sense of control within their classroom is limited (Gallup, 2014). Finally, Greenberg et al. suggest that teachers' own social and emotional competence to effectively manage their stress can play a critical role in their classroom effectiveness and in turn, their own well-being. These and other pressures have been well-documented for decades (Hammond & Onikama, 1997).

Effects of Stressors on Educators

Given the multiple stressors present in the teaching profession it is no surprise that educator health and well-being is often compromised. Although stress that is infrequent can impact the physical and emotional health of teachers, it is the influence of chronic stress that is more alarming. Across occupations, chronic exposure to a variety of stressors such as high job demands and workload, lack of personal control, insufficient rewards, quality of interactions in the workplace, perceived fairness in work decisions, and values related to the job can lead to the development of burnout over time when coping resources are inadequate (Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Maslach

et al., 2011). The phenomenon of burnout has been well-documented in the education profession; in fact, it has been asserted that there are more studies of burnout in teachers than any other professional group (Aloe et al., 2014; Lambert et al., 2009).

Burnout is defined as a psychological response comprised of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The most central aspect of burnout, emotional exhaustion, is characterized by a feeling of being emotionally overextended and drained of mental resources. It includes feelings of fatigue, loss of energy, and being worn out. Depersonalization is defined as a negative or cynical attitude toward aspects of the job, including the people one works with, such as students, parents, or colleagues. The third component of burnout involves reduced personal accomplishment at work, such as feelings of incompetence, low morale, or reduced meaning or fulfillment with the job. Within the education field, teacher burnout has been associated with increased stress levels, less satisfaction in the workplace, changes in attitudes about teaching, reduced teaching efficacy, and impaired teaching performance (Aloe et al., 2014; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005; Santavirta et al., 2007; Steinhardt et al., 2011).

Furthermore, research suggests that chronic stress and burnout are linked to poor physical health in teachers, such as an increased risk of headaches, gastrointestinal problems, cold and flu episodes, sleep disturbances, muscle tension, and hypertension (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 1999; de Souza et al., 2012) in addition to mental health problems such as depressed mood and decreased self-esteem and motivation (McLean & Connor, 2015; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005; Santavirta et al., 2007; Tennant, 2001). These physical and mental health problems can impact teachers' personal and professional lives and results in increased teacher absences and turnover.

Although reports have varied on the incidence of turnover in public schools, it appears that teachers are leaving the profession at an increasing rate. Recent estimates suggest the national

rate of teacher turnover to be about 16% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017), although this number varies greatly throughout the United States. Schools located in urban and rural areas, with high-poverty and high-minority students, have the highest rates of turnover, leading to inequities in educational access for students (Greenberg et al., 2016). This percentage is also highest for new teachers; recent estimates indicate that approximately 44% of teachers leave the profession within their first 5 years (Ingersoll et al., 2018). The loss of teachers comes at a high price for school districts. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF, 2007) estimates that teacher turnover costs United States public schools over \$7.3 billion dollars annually, with costs to districts associated with constant recruitment, hiring, administrative processing, and training of new teachers. The cost per teacher was estimated to range between \$4000 for rural districts to \$17,000 in urban districts (NCTAF, 2007). Given the high rates of turnover seen in some districts, this annual expenditure can be quite significant.

How Stress Impacts Ability to Care for and Teach Children

Of equal concern to the effects of stressors on the teachers' well-being are the effects of teacher stress on students. The negative impacts of teacher stress on students are many: in this chapter we will focus on only three: (1) reduced teacher availability and the impact on attachment and relationships with children, (2) impairments in ability of teachers to provide effective social and emotional learning (SEL) instruction and modeling of social and emotional competence, and (3) direct negative effects on children.

Reduced Teacher Availability

Teachers experiencing high levels of stress are less available to students both physically and emotionally. In addition to the higher rates of turnover described above, highly stressed teach-

ers also have impaired job performance, lower productivity and self-efficacy, and increased absenteeism (Aloe et al., 2014; Leithwood et al., 1999; Tennant, 2001). As a result of the physical sequelae of stress noted above and the decreased morale associated with burnout, teachers experiencing high levels of stress are not physically present in the classroom as much as teachers with lower levels of stress. High rates of teacher turnover and absenteeism can disrupt the formation of relationships between teacher and students and can negatively impact the quality of care provided to children (Howes & Hamilton, 1993).

Even when physically present in the classroom, highly stressed teachers who are experiencing burnout may be less emotionally available to their students; believe they no longer contribute to student learning and growth; and show lower quality interactions with students (Belsky et al., 2007; Hamre & Pianta, 2004). In their study of over 500 teachers, Lambert et al. (2009) reported that high-stress teachers tended to both depersonalize and distance themselves from their students, seeing "the children as objects rather than developing individuals" (p. 986). The impact of these outcomes influences both the teacher's ability to form healthy relationships with children and the ability to effectively manage the classroom, both of which contribute to the overall classroom climate and may negatively influence children's social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Distressed teachers are also less able to handle misbehavior or provide guidance to their students and create environments less conducive to learning (McLean & Connor, 2015).

For young children especially, the ability to form close relationships and attachment to teachers and caregivers is critical for healthy development. Early attachment may be distorted by parental or caregiver unresolved losses, traumatic events, or chronic stressors (Osher et al., 2020). When adults are stressed and unsupported it can negatively impact their ability to provide the level of quality caregiving that infants and children need to prepare them for school and life success. Research is clear that an adult's neglect of a child's physical or emotional needs, use of harsh

or inconsistent punishment, little expressive speech, and frequent changes in routine, which are all behaviors related to experiencing high levels of stress, lead to developmental risk. When adults provide clear, consistent expectations, positive emotional expression, stability, and responsive caregiving it promotes a child's potential and lays the emotional foundation that enables readiness for learning (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004). Children grow and thrive in the context of close and dependable relationships that provide love and nurturance, security, responsive interaction, and encouragement for exploration. According to Werner and Smith (1992), common factors among resilient children include having a close bond with at least one person that provided stable care, mothers' modeling of competence, and positive relationships with extended family members and caregivers when parental ties were not available. When the teacher or caregiver is unavailable to the young child because of chronic stress, these relationships can be disrupted and the consequences can be severe and long-lasting (Center on the Developing Child, 2016; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Consequently, approaches to promoting the resilience of children often include a focus on building adult capacity (Luthar & Eisenberg, 2017).

Impairments in the Ability of Educators to Model Social and Emotional Competence

According to Bandura (1977), individuals, including children, can learn through the observation and imitation of others, a phenomenon described as social learning. Within this theory, children perceive adults' behavior and may later imitate that behavior. This theory has been applied to help explain the development of prosocial behavior in children. For example, parental modeling of empathy and concern for others influences children's prosocial behaviors (Eisenberg et al., 1991; Fabes et al., 1990) and parents' ability to manage emotions influences the way children experience and express their own emotions (Eisenberg et al., 1992).

Teachers too, influence the social and emotional development of children. A multitude of social and emotional learning (SEL) curricula exist to promote these skills in children and youth (CASEL, 2021). These programs typically emphasize both direct instruction and continual modeling of the skills by teachers in the classroom. This modeling provides children with the opportunities to apply concepts to their daily lives, for example by observing a teacher appropriately manage a frustrating event or problem-solving through a peer conflict. Numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of SEL programs for students (Weissberg et al., 2015) and suggest that teacher willingness and ability to generalize social and emotional skills by modeling during interactions with students throughout the day impacts student behavior.

However, educators who are already overwhelmed by the demands of teaching may find it difficult to model appropriate social and emotional behaviors for children. Educators are constantly exposed to emotionally challenging situations, and if they are already experiencing high levels of stress, they may not have the capacity to effectively manage those emotions in the presence of children. Similarly, it may be difficult to model an appropriate conflict-resolution approach for students if teacher emotions, such as frustration, are already at a high level. When this occurs, students miss out on critical opportunities to apply learned skills to their everyday lives and may instead imitate inappropriate or ineffective behaviors. This may ultimately impact their ability to internalize these skills and may contribute to later emotional or behavioral concerns.

Direct Negative Effects on Children

A growing evidence-base explores the link between teacher stress-related behaviors and children's subsequent outcomes. For example, greater burnout in teachers has been associated with more student behavior problems in the classroom, decreased social adjustment among students, and lower academic performance and

achievement (McLean & Connor, 2015; Hoglund et al., 2015). Student mental health also appears to be associated with teacher stress. Milkie and Warner (2011) found that teachers who reported higher stress levels had more students in their classrooms with internalizing, externalizing, and interpersonal problems. Teachers low on self-efficacy (which is associated with high stress and burnout) have been found to demonstrate less effective teaching practices, impacting achievement, motivation, and self-efficacy of students (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). In a recent study using cortisol levels as a measure of student physiological stress, Oberle and Schonert-Reichl (2016) found that higher levels of self-reported burnout in teachers significantly predicted higher morning cortisol levels in students. This study was the first to link teacher stress to students' physiological stress regulation. These and other studies have contributed to our understanding that a "stress contagion" exists in classrooms whereby teacher stress has a direct effect on students (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016).

Two Recent Developments Providing Additional Sources of Stress

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced many new and unprecedented stressors in our lives. According to the 2020 edition of the American Psychological Association's (APA) annual Stress in America report, the United States is "facing a national mental health crisis that could yield serious health and social consequences for years to come" (APA, 2020, p. 1). The COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent impacts to work, health, and family responsibilities was cited as a significant source of stress by nearly 8 in 10 Americans (78%). Although financial stability and the economy were consistently cited as significant sources of stress prepandemic, about half of adults (52%) report experiencing negative financial impacts from the pandemic, with low-income adults disproportionately impacted (APA, 2020). The

increased awareness of systemic racism impacting our nation has also been cause for stress, with most adults (59%) regardless of race, reporting police violence toward minorities as a significant source of stress in their lives. These and other societal and political concerns have resulted in 77% of Americans citing stress over the future of our nation.

Educators have experienced these and other risk factors specific to the teaching profession (Bintliff, 2020). For example, teachers have faced abrupt school closures and transitions to remote learning. Many teachers had to quickly learn new technologies and redesign their curriculum to meet the needs of students learning at home. As schools reopened in the fall of 2020, teachers had to cope with teaching and reaching students in a variety of learning formats (remote, in-person, and hybrid learning approaches), while also facing concerns for their own safety and that of their family. For educators who are also parents, they've faced added stress related to childcare (APA, 2020). In March 2020, the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence launched a national survey to learn about the emotions teachers were feeling near the start of the pandemic. Teachers were asked to describe, in their own words, the three most frequent emotions felt each day. Findings from nearly 5000 teachers revealed that the five most mentioned emotions were anxious, fearful, worried, overwhelmed, and sad (Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, 2020).

Emergence of Social and Emotional Learning

Over the past 25 years, increasing attention has been placed on the promotion of social and emotional competence in children and youth. Social and emotional competence has been defined as "the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions" (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2020).

These competencies are critical skills that often serve as protective factors, buffering children and youth from the negative effects of risk and adversity and thereby supporting their resilience (Masten, 2014; Masten & Garmezy, 1985).

A growing body of research has linked social and emotional competencies to important outcomes for children and youth (Weissberg et al., 2015). For example, Durlak et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 213 studies involving more than 270,000 students that investigated the outcomes of universal school-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs. They found that students in well-implemented SEL programs showed positive outcomes compared to students in control groups in a wide range of domains, including increased social and emotional skills; improved attitudes toward self, school, and others; decreased behavioral concerns; and an average 11 percentile point gain in tests of academic achievement. A follow-up study showed many of these positive effects persisted across time and were also associated with higher graduation rates and college persistence (Taylor et al., 2017). These and other studies substantiate the conclusion that social and emotional competence is foundational to positive development and school success.

As a result of these benefits, the promotion of social and emotional competence has become commonplace in thousands of schools and out-of-school time programs across the United States and around the world (Weissberg et al., 2015). According to recent national surveys, most principals report being committed to developing students' social and emotional skills (DePaoli et al., 2017) and nearly all educators surveyed believed SEL can benefit all students and should become a greater focus in schools (Bridgeland et al., 2013). Many evidence-based programs are now available to promote social and emotional competence in children and youth (CASEL, 2021), with these programs typically being delivered by educators in the classroom. Similarly, in the early care and education field, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recommends the use of *developmentally appropriate practice*, which includes a strong emphasis on a

teacher nurturing a child's social and emotional development by basing all practices and decisions on current research and understanding of child development, individually identified strengths and needs of each child, and the social and cultural background of each child (NAEYC, 2020). These practice standards reflect the recognition of the importance of SEL by leading professional organizations concerned with the well-being of children and youth.

With respect to policy, a growing number of state departments of education and local school districts have adopted SEL standards. CASEL reports that all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and four of five U.S. territories have preschool educational SEL standards, while fourteen states currently have standards for SEL in preschool through 12th grade (Dusenbury et al., 2018). At the federal level, recent legislation including The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 and the Every Student Succeeds Act provide support for state and district-wide implementation of SEL programming.

As the evidence for the critical importance of social and emotional competence in promoting success in school and life continues to accrue, and as more state and local educational agencies adopt SEL standards, teachers are increasingly expected to teach and promote these skills in the classroom. For many teachers, this is yet one more mandate to add to their growing list of responsibilities. And often, this mandate comes with little preservice training in SEL. Preservice teacher education programs currently offer few, if any, opportunities to learn about and gain experience in implementing SEL (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017) leaving teachers feeling unprepared to effectively deliver SEL programming to their students (Bridgeland et al., 2013). Furthermore, few preservice programs provide opportunities for teachers to cultivate their own social and emotional competencies and protective factors despite the high rates of stress in the profession and the growing recognition of the essential role teacher well-being plays in student outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Paradoxically then, the expectation that teachers promote the social and emotional competence of their students

may be a source of stress for the teachers themselves and jeopardize their own resilience.

Recognizing these gaps, leading organizations have begun to emphasize the need to build the capacity of educators to promote the social and emotional competence of their students more effectively. For example, in their recent consensus report summarizing the state of knowledge, practice, and policy in the field of SEL, the Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (2019) concluded that, “Supporting teachers so that they can support students is essential” (p. 25). Furthermore, in the accompanying “Practice Agenda,” one of five recommendations is to “Build Adult Capacity—Provide opportunities for school faculty and staff, families, after-school and youth development professionals, and future professionals...to learn to model and teach social, emotional and cognitive skills to young people” (Berger et al., 2019, p. 10). Similarly, CASEL (Mahoney et al., 2020) has recently updated their theory of action for effective systemic implementation of SEL to include as a core focus the need to “strengthen adult SEL competencies and capacity by cultivating a community of adults who engage in their own SEL, build trusting relationships, and collaborate to promote and consistently model SEL throughout the school” (p. 3).

Following these recommendations of promoting both educator capacity and competencies, we are provided with a unique opportunity with dual advantages. First, by promoting the social and emotional competence of educators, we can expand their repertoire of key protective factors that can help address the many risk factors and stressors experienced daily. This can ultimately enhance educator well-being and resilience. Second, the promotion of educator social and emotional competence can enhance their ability to deliver SEL programming more effectively to their students, resulting in improved student outcomes.

Programs Promoting Educator SEL and Resilience

In response to calls to better support and enhance educators’ social and emotional competence and resilience, a growing number of interventions are now available to both preservice and in-service educators. We will focus here on a few promising approaches.

One such approach is single or multisession professional development opportunities designed for educators and offered by education or SEL-focused organizations. Often delivered as webinars or virtual courses, they provide just-in-time access to important and relevant topics at the forefront of teachers’ minds. For example, the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence launched a self-paced 10-hour course for teachers and school personnel in October 2020 focused on enhancing knowledge and skills for managing difficult emotions in times of stress (Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, 2020).

Mindfulness-based interventions have also emerged as an effective method for promoting teacher well-being and reducing stress (Klingbeil & Renshaw, 2018). The Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) program is one such approach. CARE is a professional development program designed for educators and focuses on teaching mindful awareness, emotion skills, and compassion practices. Offered in a variety of formats to meet the specific needs of schools (in-person, online, short workshops, or as a retreat), the program has shown positive benefits for teachers, students, and classroom outcomes across several studies in the United States and Europe (Jennings et al., 2013, 2017, 2019). Additional mindfulness-based intervention programs with promising benefits for educators include the Community Approach to Learning Mindfully (CALM) program (Harris et al., 2015) and the Stress Management and Relaxation Techniques in Education (SMART) program (Roeser et al., 2013).

The Devereux/Aperture Approach to Fostering Educator SEL and Resilience

The Devereux Center for Resilient Children, recognizing the critical need for supporting the resilience of adults as a requisite for enhancing the social and emotional competence and resilience of children, developed a program designed to enable adults, particularly early care and education teachers, to reflect on and enhance important protective factors in their lives. Building on this work, Aperture Education, which was formed in 2017 as a spin-off company by the Devereux Center for Resilient Children and Apperson, an educational technology company, has extended these resources for use by K-12 teachers, developing a professional development program that continues to include reflection and skill development as core components. We will discuss each of these programs in turn.

Building Your Bounce

The Devereux Center for Resilient Children's approach to educator resilience begins with *The Devereux Adult Resilience Survey* (DARS; Mackrain, 2007). This self-reflective instrument is designed to help adults, including teachers, reflect on the presence of important protective factors in their lives. The DARS items are based on information gleaned from a thorough literature review of adult resilience, national focus groups with adults who care for and work on behalf of young children (e.g., parents, home visitors, infant mental health specialists, and early care and education providers) and conversations with national experts. The focus groups and conversations with experts focused on gathering information related to (1) what behaviors adults felt were important to help them "bounce back" or cope successfully with risk and adversity as well as, (2) what behaviors adults need to provide nurturing, quality care and instruction to young children. The DARS was developed to accompany the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment Program for Infants and Toddlers (Mackrain et al., 2007); therefore, the focus groups and literature reviews focused on parents,

teachers, and other caregivers of young children. However, the protective factors identified and the items on the DARS are applicable to all adults.

The result of this process was the creation of a set of 23 items that relate to four adult protective factor domains. The *Relationships* grouping (5 items) addresses behaviors that reflect *the mutual, long-lasting, back-and-forth bond we have with another person in our lives*. Sample Relationship items include "I have good friends who support me," and "I have a mentor or someone who shows me the way." The *Initiative* grouping (8 items) inquires about *the ability to make positive choices and decisions and act upon them*. Sample Initiative items include "I try many ways to solve a problem," and "I can ask for help." *Internal Beliefs* (6 items) asks the adult to reflect on *the feelings and thoughts we have about ourselves and our lives, and how effective we think we are at taking action in life*. Sample Internal Beliefs items include, "My role as a caregiver is important," and "I am hopeful about the future." The *Self-Control* grouping (4 items) probes behaviors related to *the ability to experience a range of feelings and express them using the words and actions that society considers appropriate*. Sample Self-Control items include, "I set limits for myself," and "I can calm myself down." Adults completing the DARS are asked to reflect on the presence of these protective factors in their lives and then indicate that, "Yes" that protective factor is present, "Sometimes" it is present, or it is "Not Yet" present. The DARS has demonstrated high internal consistency and shown to demonstrate convergent validity with the well-established Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC; Connor & Davidson, 2003; Ball & Mackrain, 2009).

A guiding principle of the Devereux Center for Resilient Children is that assessments should provide information that guides the development and implementation of strategies to enhance the resilience of the person who is the subject of the assessment. That is, the purpose of assessments developed by the Center is to promote, not just measure, resilience. In keeping with this principle, that DARS is accompanied by a self-reflective journal, *Building Your Bounce: Simple Strategies*

for a Resilient You (Mackrain & Bruce Poyner, 2013). In addition to including the DARS, this resource provides strategies, derived from both research and practice, which are linked to the 23 items and designed to promote adult resilience. For example, in relation to the Internal Beliefs item, “*My role as a caregiver is important*” one of the strategies is to first list all the routine, sometimes tedious, things that one does as a teacher. Next the adult is asked to reflect and write down the positive effects of these routines on themselves. A teacher might list as a routine task writing weekly progress notes on each child, but then reflects and realizes that those notes enable her to see progress in her students’ abilities and communicate that news to parents and the child. After completing the DARS, the adult selects one or more of the items that receive a rating of “Sometimes” or “Not Yet” and then selects a related strategy from Building Your Bounce to promote the development of that protective factor.

As a self-directed and self-reflective approach, the DARS and Building Your Bounce can be utilized by an adult interested in enhancing their resilience. Although it can be used in group settings, it can also be utilized by a single adult. As a self-reflective approach, the results do not have to be shared or discussed with others enabling participants to be more honest and forthright. In addition, as Kyriacou (2001) noted, it is important for teachers to discover which strategies work best for them. Although professional development is available from the Devereux Center for Resilient Children in the use of the DARS and Building Your Bounce, it is not required. As such, these resources are easily used by a variety of adults and complement group interventions, such as mindfulness-based approaches described above.

Educator Social-Emotional Reflection and Training (EdSERT)

Growing out of the Devereux Center for Resilient Children but with a focus exclusively on K-12 settings, Aperture Education has recently developed the Educator Social-Emotional Reflection and Training (EdSERT) program (Robitaille &

LeBuffe, 2019) to address the critical need for resources that support educator social and emotional competence and resilience. EdSERT is a professional development program designed for use by school-based teachers and out-of-school time program staff working with children and youth in K-12th grades. EdSERT has two main goals: (1) to improve the efficacy of SEL instruction and ultimately student outcomes by enhancing the social and emotional knowledge and skill set of teachers, and (2) to enhance teacher well-being through the development of social and emotional practices that increase coping skills, well-being, and resilience.

The EdSERT program provides professional development, including both knowledge acquisition and skill development, related to eight key social and emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills, goal-directed behavior, personal responsibility, decision making, and optimistic thinking. These competencies are derived from the CASEL framework (CASEL, 2020) and align to the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) system (LeBuffe et al., 2018), a widely used suite of tools to measure and promote K-12th grade students’ social and emotional competence. This alignment provides teachers with a deeper understanding and improved ability to instruct, model, and integrate the competencies they are teaching to their students.

There are four main components to the EdSERT program: (1) professional development, (2) self-reflective assessment, (3) personal development plan, and (4) strategies. The program is organized as eight modules, one for each of the eight competencies. Each module contains the four program components with content specific to the competency being addressed. There is also an introductory module providing an overview of SEL and EdSERT. Two delivery options are available: a digital delivery of the modules via a learning management system or a paper-based delivery with printed booklets for each competency module.

Each module begins with a brief introduction to the focus competency, including a definition of

the competency and an overview of why it is important to both teachers and students. Teachers are then presented with a 10-item self-assessment and asked to reflect on their current teaching practices related to the focus competency. For example, on the self-awareness self-assessment, the teacher is asked to consider the statement, “*I have identified specific ways in which my personal values, beliefs, and biases have influenced my teaching practices and interactions with students,*” and then indicate on a 5-point Likert scale if that statement is “Not at all like me,” “Somewhat like me,” or “Very much like me.” The decision to focus on teaching practices rather than more general behaviors or attitudes (e.g., “*I am aware of how my personal values, beliefs, and biases influence my relations with others*”) is intended to both increase educator buy-in and to keep the focus on the primary goal of improving SEL instruction and student outcomes. The practices included on the self-assessments were developed through reviews of the research and practice literature and informed by a national advisory board composed of experts in the fields of education and SEL. Feedback was elicited from teachers and administrators (e.g., principals, counselors) via interviews and focus groups throughout development.

Once teachers have completed the self-assessment for the focus competency, the next step is to complete the Personal Development Plan. This tool encourages the educator to engage in a four-step process. First, they are prompted to review their self-ratings and identify Areas of Strength, Emerging Practices, and Growth Opportunities. In the second step, they identify one to three Focus Areas. Often, focus areas are chosen because they are Growth Opportunities (i.e., areas where the educator rates the practice as “Not at all like me.”) However, an educator may give themselves a high rating of “Very much like me” and still choose that item as a focus area if they want to broaden and build that skill. For instance, even though the Self-Management item, “*I use effective strategies for managing multiple priorities in order to get things accomplished,*” was rated highly, an educator might still want to focus on learning new strategies to do even better.

This flexibility enables educators to focus on what they regard as most important to them, their students, and their school or program, rather than having their personal development plan being determined solely by a score on an item. The third step is selecting a growth strategy that addresses the identified focus area and finally in step four, the educator articulates a plan on how often, when, and how long to use the strategy. This flexibility and personalization, along with the private nature of this process encourages frank and honest self-appraisal and meaningful personal development plans, which has been highlighted as a core principle for enhancing educator social and emotional competence (Gimbert et al., 2021).

EdSERT provides teachers with six to eight research-based and practice-informed strategies per competency that are aligned to the practices in the self-assessment. About half of the strategies are designed to focus on enhancing the teacher’s own competence in that area. For example, the optimistic thinking item “*I can list specific ways in which my work as an educator adds pleasure and meaning to my life*” includes a strategy focused on raising awareness of all the ways teaching is meaningful for themselves and for their students. The remaining strategies are focused on enhancing actual teaching practices used in the classroom. For example, a second optimistic thinking item “*I create an environment for students that encourages the expression of gratitude, appreciation, and celebration for one another*” includes a strategy to assist teachers with developing a habit of optimistic closure (e.g., set aside a few minutes at the end of the day to reflect on what went well that day) that can be used with students at the end of each school day.

Incorporating many of the same values as described for the DARS and Building Your Bounce, the EdSERT resources can be implemented in a group setting (such as a professional learning community) or individually by teachers. In addition to being self-reflective, EdSERT also provides the opportunity to incorporate teacher choice in both the selection of social and emotional practices of focus and strategies.

Conclusion

Nearly all adults in the United States experience stressors of too many demands and too little time. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated concerns over employment, financial stability, health, and family responsibilities for many adults. For teachers, the stressors are many and multiplying. Existing demands such as administrative requests, lack of control, high stakes testing, and student behavior problems have been coupled with abrupt shifts to remote learning, students facing increased risk factors, and mandates to deliver social and emotional learning with little prior training. These risk factors are overwhelming the coping resources of educators. It is critical that schools promote the well-being of teachers and work to enhance their capacity so they can in turn support students in acquiring the social and emotional skills and protective factors that are essential for school and life success. Supporting teachers' resilience is a promising practice that is vital to educational planning efforts at the national, state, and local levels.

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