




So Much New to Learn and So Much Unknown: Novice Teachers' Experiences During COVID-19

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Abstract

To support novice teachers, we need to listen to and honor their experiences in the classroom. This is true during the best of times and especially true amid the tumultuous teaching and learning experiences brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. In this paper, we discuss emergent themes from interviews with student teachers and early career teachers in spring 2021 about their experiences with the transition to virtual or remote teaching in response to COVID-19. We explore how student teachers and early career teachers experienced the stress of pandemic teaching, what they found supportive, and how their experiences can inform care-full practices in teacher education programs and university-based induction programs.

Keywords: *novice teachers, pandemic teaching, care, teacher education, teacher induction*

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Introduction

Transitions are times of excitement and stress, and experiencing multiple transitions simultaneously can compound stress. As the world transitioned to pandemic teaching in spring 2020, many novice teachers (i.e., student teachers and early career teachers) were in the middle of concurrent transitions in their professional lives. This induction phase of teachers' careers can be overwhelming and unsettled even in the best of circumstances (Curry et al., 2016; Feiman-Nemser, 2003) as novice teachers "transition from being student[s] of teaching to teacher[s] of students" (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1027). Regardless of how well started student teachers and early career teachers were by their teacher education programs in spring 2020, they entered pandemic-shaped "classrooms," which were previously inconceivable and for which they were not fully prepared. How, then, were novice teachers cared for in this time of professional transition during an unprecedented pandemic? Here, we explore the experiences of novice teachers during the rapid transition to

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virtual or remote learning during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (spring 2020), giving specific attention to the stressors and support they experienced. Based on interviews with eight novice teachers, we take stock of the ways in which care was commonly shown to study participants and explore opportunities for teacher education programs to provide care to novice teachers, especially when responding to urgent and immediate needs, addressing emotions, and providing tools and education necessary for effective teaching during unprecedented times.

Framing Our Perspectives

For the purposes of this study, we define novice teachers as those who were student teachers or early career teachers (i.e., 0–3 years of teaching experience) in spring 2020. Even when well started by their teacher education programs and in the best of circumstances, teachers' entry into the profession is marked by continued and tremendous learning and socialization (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Preservice teacher education programs encourage prospective teachers to analyze their beliefs, form new visions, establish subject matter knowledge for teaching, grow in their understandings of learning and learners, and begin to develop a repertoire of practice and tools for studying teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, pp. 1016–1019). When novice teachers transition from teacher education to the induction phase of their careers, learning continues as they gain local knowledge of students, curriculum, and the school context; design responsive curriculum and instruction; enact a beginning repertoire of practice in purposeful ways; create a classroom learning community; develop a professional identity; and learn in and from practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, pp. 1028–1030).

Emphasizing the criticality of induction in a teacher's career, multiple, ever-present conceptualizations of induction co-exist (Feiman-Nemser, 2010). *Induction* “shows up” in the professional lives of novice teachers (and in scholarly literature) as (a) a phase consisting of the first 1–3 years of teaching experience; (b) a program intended to support and facilitate newly hired teachers' entry into the profession; and (c) a process of socialization where teachers become enculturated into the profession, a school, or identity (Feiman-Nemser, 2010). Yet, these conceptualizations of induction are not so artificially siloed in the lived experiences of novice teachers, with each and all contributing simultaneously to novice teachers' experiences.

Attending to teachers' professional learning and experiences during induction is key to teacher retention and success—and may be ultimately tied to student success (Strong, 2009). Although some school divisions offer structured, formalized induction and mentoring programs to shepherd novice teachers through this specific career phase (Strong, 2009), these programs vary widely in duration, quality, and impact. Researchers suggest that working with a mentor teacher in the same subject area and having common planning or collaboration time with subject-area colleagues have the strongest effect on teacher retention (see Ingersoll, 2012). Yet, because induction is understood as more than solely a formal program, novice teachers are inducted into the profession even in the absence of formalized supports and structures (Feiman-Nemser, 2010)—and, as we saw during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, even when not in the physical school building. Therefore, the care-full support novice teachers receive warrants responsiveness to their needs and experiences in order to champion better beginnings in the classroom—especially during pandemic times.

Care

Writing nearly thirty years ago, Nel Noddings (1992) observed “the need for care in our present culture is acute” (p. xi). The acute need for care in today's culture certainly has not waned since then, with the pandemic and concurrent social and political unrest bringing this matter into sharp focus. Undoubtedly, the normal stress experienced by novice teachers was exacerbated during pandemic teaching. We wanted to know how novice teachers experienced and responded to this and how we, as teacher educators, can learn from their experiences to offer care-full practices in our teacher education programs and university-based induction support going forward.

Care in teacher education and induction involves listening, taking meaningful action, and creating and sustaining a culture of care for both novice teachers and the profession alike (Noddings, 2012). Generally, the carer (teacher education or induction program) responds to the presumed needs of the one receiving care (the novice teacher). Care takes many different forms, both in and out of the classroom (Noddings, 1984, 1992), and is complicated by perceptions and expectations of care—on behalf of the carer and the cared for. Although there is little disagreement that “to care and be cared for are fundamental human needs” (Noddings, 1992, p. xi), care is not perceived and received equally by all. There can exist a chasm between what the carer intends as care and how the cared for perceives and receives those “caring” actions. Inasmuch, Noddings (2012) also asserts that the carer cannot know what caring is without listening to someone (i.e., the cared for) and understanding their needs.

Teacher educators’, administrators’, mentors’, and professional developers’ past experiences as teachers tell them only about *their* needs: how they experienced their initial years in the classroom and what support they thought they needed. “But perhaps too much of what we do as helpers, teachers, and liberators is based on assumed needs. We fail to engage the other in genuine dialogue and, simply because we assess certain needs as legitimate and important, we assume that others also have these needs” (Noddings, 2019, p. 140). In our efforts to offer support and show care to novice teachers during the emergency pivot to pandemic teaching in spring 2020, we may have thought, for instance, that teachers needed more training on technology or that they needed help communicating with families. Rather than focusing our care for novice teachers on these or other assumptions, a more care-full approach would be to listen and respond to the expressed needs of those we purport to care for (Noddings, 1984). After all, care should “[emphasize] receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness” (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006, p. 122). It is through *actions* that caring about “establish[es] the conditions under which ‘caring for’ can flourish” (Noddings, 1999, p. 36) and care is exemplified (Gay, 2018).

With this in mind, we sought to understand novice teachers’ experiences during pandemic teaching to answer: What care did novice teachers receive during pandemic teaching and how did they perceive that care? In this paper, we share the key findings from semi-structured interviews completed in spring 2021 with eight novice teachers about their pandemic teaching experiences (i.e., spring 2020 and fall 2021 teaching experiences).

Methods

The findings presented in this article come from a larger mixed-methods study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) on the pandemic-related teaching experiences of 23 novice teachers (i.e., student teachers and early career teachers). As part of the larger study conducted in fall 2020, we obtained appropriate institutional review board approval for the study and then recruited novice teachers nationally through professional connections (e.g., graduates of our programs, posts to social media pages of our professional organizations, etc.) and snowball techniques. Participants gave informed consent in Qualtrics and completed a 24-item, online questionnaire. The questionnaire included questions related to demographics, years of experience, teaching experiences during the pandemic, stress, and resources and supports. At the end of the questionnaire, participants had the option to volunteer to be interviewed by providing their contact information. Eight novice teachers agreed and completed semi-structured interviews during the spring 2021.

The interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom. The interviews lasted between 60 and 72 minutes (average length 50 minutes) and were conducted by a researcher with no prior relationship with the participants. The interview included questions about the novice teachers’ experiences during COVID and remote teaching, stressors experienced during this time, and resources that were helpful (see Appendix A for a list of interview questions). When the audio was transcribed, video recordings were deleted. De-identified audio recordings and transcripts were saved to a password-protected Microsoft OneDrive folder with two-factor authentication.

The interview transcripts were analyzed using inductive coding to identify, examine, classify, and categorize themes across the eight semi-structured interview transcripts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Yi, 2018). First, each transcript was read and initial codes were assigned through a process of line-by-line, thought-by-thought coding, with the interview questions as a guide. Then a review of the transcripts and codes was done to look for categories or groups of similar codes. Some of these included: care needed/wanted, care received, resources accessed (tools/training), care for others, and care for self. The research question guided the review of categories to unveil three overarching themes: care received, care wanted, and care for self.

Participants

All eight interview participants (seven identified as female and one identified as male; all identified as White; one identified as Hispanic or Latino) taught in public schools in spring 2021, with two teachers teaching upper elementary (fourth or fifth grade), three teaching middle school (sixth through eighth grade), two teaching high school, and one teaching both middle and high school. The participating novice teachers had fewer than 3 years of teaching experience. At the time of the interviews (spring 2021), three teachers had less than a year of teaching experience and five teachers had 1 year of experience. In this paper, we focus the analysis of their interviews on questions pertaining to professional supports (those provided and those needed), coping strategies during the pandemic, and advice for other novice teachers. Table 1 provides a profile of participants and the teaching positions they held at the time of the interview (i.e., spring 2021).

Findings

Three themes were identified through our inductive coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Yi, 2018): (1) care received, (2) care wanted, and (3) care for self.

Care Received

In the interviews, participants talked about the resources, tools, and supports available to them during pandemic teaching. As student teachers or early career teachers, they came to pandemic teaching with some resources, training, and experiences, but the new situation required new tools and emotional support. The novice teachers in this study shared their experiences as they navigated between their professional and personal lives, sharing how their administration offered technological training or encouraged self-care. In the following discussion, we discuss the care novice teachers recalled receiving during pandemic teaching (i.e., spring 2020 and fall 2020), as well as their perceptions of that care.

Table 1. *Participant Profiles*

Teacher	Gender	Racial/cultural identities	Years of teaching experience	Teaching assignment
Tiffany	Female	White	1st-year teacher	fifth grade; general education
Paige	Female	White	1st-year teacher	sixth grade; social studies
Sean	Male	White	1st-year teacher	HS math
Tenielle	Female	White; Hispanic or Latino	2nd-year teacher	fourth grade; math & science
Pilar	Female	White	2nd-year teacher	middle school; science
Sandra	Female	White	2nd-year teacher	seventh grade; life science
Natalie	Female	White	2nd-year teacher	HS; physics
Naomi	Female	White	2nd-year teacher	6th–12th grades; math & science

Technology Tools

When asked about what support they were offered, novice teachers frequently mentioned training in technology. One teacher shared that they received training on technology, but most discovered tools on their own or with co-workers. There were many mentions of specific software or applications (e.g., Flipgrid, Excel, Edpuzzle, etc.) and learning management programs such as Google Classroom. Some novice teachers shared that they felt their comfort level with technology was a strength not shared by all teachers in spring 2020. Yet despite this admitted level of comfort with technology, leveraging educational technology to engage students in meaningful virtual or remote learning experiences still presented a challenge to the novice teachers in this study.

For example, the participating teachers wondered how to use the technology to effectively engage students. Pilar worried she did not know what made a good lesson with the technology:

I really want, and I still want this. I want somebody to show me what a really good remote learning lesson looks like. I still feel like I've never seen it. And I just don't know if what I'm doing is good, you know? I feel like I'm doing the best I can, but I'm, like following these like, using the technology my school wants me to use, and I, you know, I've been observed and they seem to think I'm fine. But, like, I just want to see a really good remote lesson.

Professional Supports

Different types of care were received from different sources. All eight novice teachers mentioned care and support of their professional work from their colleagues and/or administration. They commonly referenced professional, interpersonal supports, including professors, college counselors, supervisors, mentor teachers, fellow students (for student teachers), administrators, co-workers, and the teaching community (new teachers). In addition, other teachers who understood the demands of the work and the challenges of the moment were frequently cited as sources of support. For some, these teachers were their co-workers, content team, or fellow student teachers. Teneille shared that the informational, social, and emotional support (Langford et al., 1997; Lloyd-Jones, 2021) she received from her co-workers was most helpful to her:

My co-workers probably [are] number one because they are the ones who they find better ways to do things ... trying to figure out better ways to make things work like just trying like okay, our kids' test scores look like this. How can we improve this? What can we do to offer resources to our kids? Looking and then as far as like emotional, we're just trying the best to take care of each other. Like when someone's having a bad day, even just saying to each other, "I see you. You're doing great" goes a long way.

It seems the teachers worked with their co-workers to solve problems and share resources. Naomi shared the value of brainstorming opportunities with her co-workers: "I think like on the daily the most, the best thing was working with my co-teachers to find those resources online. Like finding things that work for us"

For those in student teaching, their classmates and faculty were a source of support. Sean got help from an advisor and the other students:

There's like four or five of us total. We would do like Zoom conferences and just talk about how student teaching [was] going. How's everything, you know. What's up? Anything you want to talk about? So that really helped. Being able to just like talk to what are mostly friends and colleagues and then my professor ... so that helped a lot.

The structure of the classroom and the supports available through the shared experience were important in the early days of the pandemic.

Fellow teachers were not the only supports mentioned by novice teachers. When the administration was mentioned, it was often related to “checking in.” Paige said that simple gestures meant a lot during the stress of pandemic teaching: “My sixth-grade administration is ... always popping in and saying, ‘how are things,’ so I think the supports that have worked for me the most have been the simplest ones.”

In addition to these pop-in visits by administration, Paige’s school added a question to their daily required check-ins that asked teachers to share how they are feeling. Although associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and monitoring symptoms, this small task took on new meaning and caused Paige to reflect on her well-being. She shared that this small thing has “been really helpful to get me every day because I used to just click through it. And then every, I started thinking like, what if I really thought about how I’m doing and answered honestly? And it’s been great.” To Paige, this was one of the ways the administration supported teachers: just allowing space to recognize that wellness had an impact. Other teachers talked about how the administration encouraged the teachers to take care of themselves. Natalie shared that “our administration last year was really good about reminding us to take time for ourselves and get it done, but also, it’s really stressful. We’re all dealing with a lot.”

When asked about the care they received, novice teachers found support in relationships and opportunities to check in. The question “How are you” or “How are you feeling” had different meanings during the pandemic, but the teachers in this study reported that having space to talk about how they felt made them feel supported.

Personal or Emotional Supports

In addition to resources and professional support around their teaching, novice teachers spoke about support from outside of their school or university contexts. While teachers did not distinguish between emotional, instrumental, or informational support (Langford et al., 1997; Lloyd-Jones, 2021), the discussions revealed that novice teachers sought and received all of these kinds of support. Family and friends were frequent sources of support—especially during the pandemic—and although primarily associated with emotional support, novice teachers also suggested they turn to these more “informal” supports for information and advice as well. For instance, when Sandra was asked about what supports were most helpful, she shared “um just talking to my friends and my family and just, even if it wasn’t physically being there, just being there.”

While family and friends were frequently mentioned, another key group included teacher friends. Friends who are teachers, both in and outside of the novice teacher’s school (mostly outside), were a helpful sounding board. As Paige shared,

I have a small, but strong network of friends that are there for me. I also have two of my best friends who are also first-year social studies middle school teachers. So, we are all in different school districts ... we had been friends first and then are now also friends throughout teaching experiences. And it’s so nice at the end of the day to be able to like have people who really, really get exactly what it feels like to just be in this really weird situation.

Concerning the common experience of pandemic teaching, Pilar shared that another teacher who was also new was a great source of support, both emotional and informational:

Another teacher who we started at the same time. We were both new ... he’s a second-year teacher, so we also teach the same group of students ... That’s really how I deal with stress in the school building is like going to this other teacher and being like “I need to tell you what happened in class” or like, “I don’t know what to do about this situation.” So that’s, I think having ... like, you know support, has really saved me.

Friends who were not teachers were also an important source of support to the novice teachers in this study. As Paige explained,

It's nice to talk about not teaching stuff because I think sometimes, I have to be reminded, to like take a break and stop talking about school and about students and all the things ... and, just like push pause and walk away. So that's been, that's been good.

When it came to leaning on others, both in and outside of education, during the pandemic, Paige was quick to point out, "You are not supposed to just be like a one-man band, so you don't have to be."

Care Wanted

Like nearly everyone, novice teachers struggled with the unknown in the early days of the pandemic. While no one knew or anticipated the number of weeks schools would be closed or the challenges virtual or remote learning would pose, novice teachers had additional concerns. One stress for student teachers was not knowing if teacher certification would happen, how hours of student teaching would be figured toward their certification, and whether they would have to postpone their entry into the workforce. Tiffany shared: "My classmates and I were checking the governor's website and the [state Department of Education] website regularly because we wanted to see the updates about the certification requirements."

During the pandemic, novice teachers had to balance an uncertain future with the present learning needs of their students. At a time when technology became the vehicle for all teaching, it is not surprising that the need for more training in technology and its uses in teaching would come up with novice teachers. Some teachers talked about their comfort with technology but knowing about technology and using technology to engage students meaningfully were different matters. Tiffany shared about the support she wished she had received:

How to teach very good kids to show up. But there's no, there would have been no reason for that if I had taken that before the pandemic. I would have said, "This is pointless training." Um, but definitely. Like just how to motivate kids to log into a computer to do school.

Natalie agreed:

I wish I had had a training on like, I wish I had had something before it started. I feel like I've had training since like, within the past few months. But I wish I had had a training on how to actually be engaging in the virtual synchronous class.

As all teachers struggled with motivating and engaging students from a distance, novice teachers shared their concerns about how to support student learning. Pilar shared:

I really want, and I still want this. I want somebody to show me what a really good remote learning lesson looks like. I still feel like I've never seen it. And I just don't know if what I'm doing is good, you know? I feel like I'm doing the best I can, but I'm like following these ... like using the technology my school wants me to use and I, you know, I've been observed and they seem to think I'm fine. But, like, I just want to see a really good remote learning lesson. That's what I want. Like what is the structure of it? What does it look like? What is, how long is it? How the transitions work, how are the teachers checking that their students are engaged? Like, that's what I want to see. Like not necessarily how to use this platform or this technology, but like, what is good teaching like.

The "not knowing how I am doing" or not being sure of the expectations was by far the most frequently mentioned concern. Novice teachers' work was filled with concerns about meeting expectations, and pandemic teaching made it more difficult for many of them to know what they actually needed to do. As the rest of the world seemingly figured out what it meant to teach students remotely, novice teachers were working on their instructional skills and curriculum development, while also working in a new or unfamiliar platform. They really wanted to know what was expected. Representative of other participants, Pilar put it this way:

That's the tough thing. What did I need? ... I'm honestly just not sure, because I need somebody to tell me what I need, you know.

Not knowing what was expected made it hard for novice teachers to know if they were doing the “right” things or being successful. To this point, Pilar shared that it is important for novice teachers to realize that they will not be perfect: “teaching is really hard ... it takes a lot of time to improve and figure out your style and all that and I'm working on that.”

Care for Self

At the height of the pandemic, there were many calls in the news and on social media for “self-care.” Teachers are not immune to these discussions and, in fact, the focus and need for self-care practices as a way to mitigate occupational stress and foster teacher well-being are growing across the career trajectory for teachers (e.g., Baumgartner & Anderson, 2022; Miller & Flint-Stipp, 2019; Owen & Whitney, 2022; Will, 2017). The novice teachers in this study participated in a number of coping activities that could be classified as self-care and recommended some practices to other novice teachers. These include exercising, connecting with others, journaling, playing video games, nurturing pets, spending time outside, and taking breaks. While most came to these things on their own, there was a ready admission by some novice teachers that they do not use some coping skills they know would be helpful.

Natalie shared that she struggled at times to stop working, seeing so much left to do. And other times, she struggled to get started. After sharing her greatest challenge during the spring of 2020, Natalie shares this advice for other student teachers:

My biggest advice on what hasn't really worked for me is creating just a specific space of “this is where I do work.” And “this is where I'm going to get work done.” And I'm gonna not work after four [o'clock], after my last class. And I'm just going to go ahead, shut it down, log out. If I need to get up a little bit earlier the next day, that's fine. But, just like creating boundaries within my home. I feel like it's like the biggest thing for me personally. That's what I would tell them.

Making space to care for themselves and creating (and maintaining) boundaries around work and home was necessary but difficult. Paige shared her journey: “I have not been awesome at it. Um, I have gotten a little bit better at being able to just like put it down and walk away and come back with a clear head whenever I can.” Boundaries, both physical and mental, were a big challenge. All novice teachers spoke about boundaries in some way: the importance of them or the difficulty with maintaining them. During pandemic teaching, with so much new to learn and so much unknown, learning how to create and maintain boundaries was paramount.

Decision-making is an exhausting task for teachers during the best of times; decision-making during pandemic teaching took an exacting toll on novice teachers. Every decision seemed critical, as each one was new. Strategies for decision-making were shared by some teachers. Most of these were hard-earned lessons or advice they would share with others in their position, but maybe not as much a part of their lives as they might liked. Naomi eloquently shared the lesson she learned related to decision-making: “My mantra lately has been ‘make it easier on yourself’ because there are a million choices to make every single day, every single moment, and ... it gets emotionally overwhelming” Specifically, she developed a way to make decisions quickly and efficiently. It was also important to allow room for mistakes. Naomi shared,

Letting yourself trust yourself and make the mistakes Because if you're always “if I did this” - I'm always worried about the mistakes that I'm going to make, then I'm spending all of my time and energy worrying about mistakes, rather than actually doing things.

Such cognitive reframing often accompanied suggestions to “write down moments that make you happy,”

“allow yourself to feel frustrated,” “realize you aren’t the only one stressed,” and “accept what you can and cannot control.”

While novice teachers knew some things to do and gave advice, they were also quick to acknowledge that they either did not know these in spring 2020 and learned these through pandemic teaching or knew that these were important strategies but found it hard to practice them.

Discussion and Implications

Over the past few decades, there has been a “greening’ of the teaching force,” marked by “a dramatic increase in the number of teachers who are beginners” (Ingersoll et al., 2021, p. 11). This means hundreds of thousands of novice teachers were affected by pandemic teaching in spring 2020 (see National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). This study shares the pandemic teaching experiences of only eight such novice teachers during this tumultuous time. Although the small sample size of this study is a limitation, the ubiquitous disruption and uncertainty experienced by teachers—regardless of years of experience—worldwide during the pandemic aid the generalizability of this study’s findings (Merriam, 2001, 2002). Descriptions of the care participants received and how they perceived that care should allow readers to determine how closely this context matches their own and the extent to which findings are transferrable to inform their work with novice teachers in today’s pandemic-shaped classrooms and schools (Merriam, 2001, 2002).

The transition from teacher education to induction is complicated (see Feiman-Nemser, 2001, 2003, 2010). So, too, is caring for novice teachers during this time. Much of the support provided to novice teachers is research-based (see Ingersoll, 2012; Strong, 2009; Wang & Odell, 2002), yet the primary research on which we base new teacher support and mentoring programs was done in a different time—pre-pandemic. To presume what current novice teachers need, we use research from a context that does not currently exist—and might not again in many ways. During pandemic teaching, we missed the mark at times due to these presumptions. For instance, in the transition to virtual or remote teaching, teacher educators and school/district administrators presumed teachers (novice and experienced alike) needed technology training in the way of introducing a variety of technology tools. Yet, novice teacher participants in our study indicated that this was insufficient. Instead, they craved professional learning on how to meaningfully leverage those technology tools to support student learning during remote or virtual teaching.

Novice teachers, like everyone in spring 2020, experienced some dramatic changes and challenges. The eight novice teachers that spoke with us experienced some care, most often related to technology options and reminders to engage in “self-care.” While these check-ins were perceived as care, the novice teachers, nonetheless, struggled to do the work of caring for themselves. They reported how they grew in their understanding of caring for self throughout the pandemic teaching and the importance of boundary setting and caring, feeding, and valuing one’s personal self. When administrators and mentors acknowledged that this work needed to happen, novice teachers realized that it was not only acceptable but necessary for them to develop these skills.

Recognizing the importance of self-care, however, is only a first step. What we learned from these teachers is that they may not be adequately prepared to enact a complete approach to self-care. Two points from the data and research literature signal this possibility. First, many of the self-care strategies shared by the novice teachers in this study might be categorized as distractions or strategies for self-soothing (Stallman, 2020). While these can offer an immediate reduction of the stress, an exclusive or heavy reliance on these approaches might make sustaining well-being difficult. For example, turning to chocolate when having a bad day may help in the moment, but relying on this self-soothing strategy does not get to the root cause of the challenge. A comprehensive, individualized self-care approach does more than reduce the negative impact of stress, by also encouraging the pursuit of a positive, flourishing self (Cook-Cottone & Guyker, 2018; White & Kern, 2018) or

what McDowell (2010) calls “contentment, satisfaction, or happiness derived from optimal functioning” (p. 70). Self-care approaches to facilitate and sustain well-being include taking care of one’s physical health, paying attention to sleep so that the mind is sharp and able to respond to problems that come up, or creating healthy boundaries and routines around work and home responsibilities.

The second point of data that indicates these novice teachers were perhaps underprepared to engage in self-care that promotes wellness is the gap between the advice they would give other teachers and what they actually practiced. This is seen repeatedly when the teachers describe challenges with setting boundaries between their work and personal time. Although these novice teachers have learned that it is important to have boundaries and would give advice to new teachers to create and maintain them, the novice teachers we interviewed acknowledged that they struggled to follow this advice. While they knew what might help them take care of themselves, they did not have the skills to enact it.

This study has implications for the ways in which we integrate care-full practices in our teacher education programs and university-based induction programs. Teacher education programs, university-based induction programs, and schools that seek to support novice teachers’ development need to attend to the skills associated with self-care. Yet, this is a sticky wicket: Teacher education programs, university-based induction programs, and schools, alike, need to attend concurrently to the systems, structures, and policies that demand increased, individual attention to self-care in the first place. “The ethics of care sees persons as relational and interdependent rather than as self-sufficient independent individuals” (Mor, 2018, p. 22), yet too often during their initial years in the classroom, novice teachers are expected to be self-sufficient, independent, and expert. Images of novice teachers’ experiences commonly evoke “sink or swim” mentalities—even during “normal” times (Curry et al., 2016). Coupled with the reality that COVID-19 forced an end to relationships and interdependence in classrooms/schools from which classroom and school communities are still recovering, there is an ever-pressing need to shift our perspective when it comes to the support and care shown to novice teachers. Rather than asking ourselves what supports we should give or what training we should provide, approaching teacher education and induction from a responsive ethic of care implores us to listen authentically to novice teachers and direct our praxis to champion their better beginnings in the classroom.

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Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Background

- What three phrases would you use to describe yourself as a teacher?
- Can you please tell me a little about why you want to become a teacher?
- Can you tell me a little about your current position? How long have you taught here?
- Tell me about the context of the school.

Professional Identity

- Why did you become a teacher? What would you say led you to this work?
- Was there something in particular that helped you initially decide to become a teacher?
- What fulfills or sustains you in your work as a teacher? (Put another way: How do you find purpose or meaning in your work?)

Experiences During COVID-19 and Emergency Remote Teaching

- What was your experience around teaching during the pandemic and moving to remote teaching/learning?
- What supports were available to you? What resources were available to you from the school to help you address/handle your stress? What about outside of the school? What supports or resources were available to you outside of the school that helps you to address/ handle your stress? How does this compare to now?
- What supports did you access or draw on?
- What supports were most helpful to you?
- None of us living today have experienced anything quite like the present pandemic, but have you ever experienced anything that you feel relates (hurricane, flood, trauma, etc.)? How did this prepare you for the current crisis?
- In what ways, if any, did your teaching experience change due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Can you tell me about pandemic teaching? What did a day look like for you last spring? This fall?
- FOLLOW-UP: If you engaged in emergency remote teaching, what did you do?
- What resources/tools did you use? What did you need? What training did you draw on?
- What were your greatest challenges during spring 2020?
- What were your strengths for addressing the needs of spring 2020?
- What training do you wish you had had?
- If you were to advise another student teacher, first-year teacher, what advice would you give for handling the day to day? For handling major challenges?
- What are your plans for next semester? Next year? Where, what, how will you teach?

Stress and Coping

- When you feel stressed about your work, what do you do? Explain. What tends to work best?
 - FOLLOW-UP: If you don't do anything when you are stressed, what could you do to help relieve your work stress? Explain.
 - FOLLOW-UP: If you don't feel much stress at work, what would you say is the secret? Explain.
- What are some ways (best practices) to reduce stress at work that you could offer to other teachers?

Being a Teacher

- In your opinion, what is the most important part of your work during a typical year?
- What about now? Has this changed with the COVID-epidemic?
- What do you think is the most important part of being a student? How would you describe your students? What do you feel is the role of adults in a student's life?

Resources for Success

- Success means different things to different people and given the current circumstances your definition of success may have shifted. What does it mean to you to be a successful teacher during the COVID-19 epidemic?
- What helps you to be a successful teacher?
- Who is your professional role model? What qualities make this person a model of professionalism for you?

Closing

- Is there anything else that you would like to share?



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