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Improving the Mental Health and Wellness of
Middle School Educators Post-COVID19

by

April Pearson

A capstone project submitted to the faculty of
Gardner-Webb University Hunt School of Nursing
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

U.S. public school teachers of all educational levels were challenged during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide education to students in alternative ways; face-to-face, hybrid model, or remote learning. This resulted in teacher stress, dissatisfaction, and turnover. Locally, after the 2020-2021 school year at East Iredell Middle School, 9 out of 22 educators resigned or transferred due to the stress and fatigue of teaching students in a hybrid model during the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this project was to promote the health and wellness of middle school educators. The PICOT statement is, what is the effect of an educational program on self-care modalities for middle school teachers on teacher satisfaction, stress, and retention. The sampling frame was 25 full-time teachers. A five-week program was developed offering nutrition, meditation, journaling, Zumba, yoga, and aromatherapy education. According to the pre-survey, 69% of teachers felt stressed fairly often or very often compared to 44% in the post-survey. Teachers reported a better understanding of self-care modalities, plan to use journaling, meditation, aromatherapy, and select healthier foods and snacks in the future.

Keywords

caring science, wellness, self-care, teacher stress, post-COVID-19

Problem Recognition

In March 2020, North Carolina schools would close for two weeks, beginning the state's experiment with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. In April 2020, North Carolina schools would close for the rest of the year. Since then, the pandemic has put K-12 education to the test. Teachers were challenged to continue exceptional teaching and education through e-Learning. Mastering distance teaching imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic was challenging for many teachers (Federkeil et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic brought extraordinary disruption to Higher Education (HE) institutions, locally and globally (Godber & Atkins, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic decreased the well-being of teachers both mentally and physically. According to Pressly, Ha, and Learn (2021), classroom teaching during COVID-19 increased faculty stress and anxiety. Baker et al. (2021) reported teacher experiences of considerable stress during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in poorer mental health and coping skills. Locally, after the 2020-2021 school year at East Iredell Middle School, 9 out of 22 educators resigned or transferred due to the stress and fatigue of teaching students in a hybrid model during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The purpose of this project was to promote health and wellness in middle school educators. In order to have healthy and productive teachers for the new school year, school district officials, parents, and community partners need to understand the significant impact that COVID-19 has had on the overall health of teachers. According to Sokal & Trudel (2020), a survey of 1,330 Canadian teachers echoed these findings and linked them directly to teachers' experiences of stress during the pandemic, revealing the increased demands placed on teachers as they learned how to teach virtually were also a key stressor.

Problem Statement

In August 2020, North Carolina school districts were challenged with overwhelmed teachers in a hybrid model. Locally, after the 2020-2021 school year at East Iredell Middle School, 9 out of 22 educators resigned or transferred due to the stress and fatigue of teaching students in a hybrid model during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Baker et al. (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic placed significant demands on teachers who experienced more stressors, reported worse mental health, and found it harder to cope and teach.

Literature Review

Teacher Stress During COVID-19

Teachers experienced considerable stress as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was related to poorer mental health and coping (Baker et al., 2021). Teachers who experienced more stressors during the COVID-19 pandemic reported that it was harder to cope and to teach (Baker et al., 2021). As a result of COVID-19, the education of students was an emotional challenge for teachers. Engagement in remote teaching was a structural change required of teachers. According to Kim & Asbury (2020), this challenge was exacerbated by pupils varying levels of access to online technology and willingness to engage. According to Kim & Asbury (2020), all of this ran parallel to teaching pupils remotely and continuing the non-teaching elements of the job, and the combination of these circumstances presented a potentially highly stressful situation for teachers. Remote learning was a challenge to students and parents, as well as to teachers. According to Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al. (2021), previous studies have found that working from home using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can create feelings of tension, anxiety, exhaustion, and decreased job satisfaction.

Teachers were also challenged with transitioning from remote learning back to in-person learning during the fall of 2020. While classes reopened in the Fall of 2020, teachers were uncertain of health and safety concerns and worried about their health as well as the potential for spreading COVID-

19 to their own families. According to Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al. (2021), 50.6% of the teachers sampled indicated that they were suffering from stress, with 4.5% reporting extremely severe stress and 14.1% severe stress. Additionally, 49.5% of the teachers reported experiencing anxiety, 8.1% reporting extremely severe symptoms and 7.6% severe symptoms (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021). Higher stress levels were found in female teachers than male teachers. Older teachers were more likely to verbalize their stress of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic versus younger teachers, and stress was found to be higher in older teachers than younger teachers (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021).

According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2022), working conditions influence teacher retention more than recruitment. The authors reported tangible physical conditions, such as safety, physical plant conditions, pupil loads, and the availability of supplies and equipment that influenced teacher retention, as well as workplace efficacy conditions, such as input into decision-making, opportunities for coaching and collaboration, administrative supports, and the collegiality of the environment (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). The authors clearly showed that working conditions, which include teachers' heroic attempts to address the many stresses that children and families experience in low-income communities, are much worse in many high-poverty schools and contribute to teacher turnover. According to Pressly et al. (2021), research demonstrated teacher burnout and shortages affected student motivation and student success, and high rates of burnout led to teacher shortages in many states.

Self-Care Strategies to Alleviate Stress

It is evident that teachers need support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples of support include instructional, technological, and emotional support. Supporting the mental health of instructional staff could also include individual and group self-care activities. Jaarsma et al. (2020) defined self-care as a process of maintaining health through treatment adherence and health-promoting practices (self-care maintenance), behavior and condition monitoring (self-care monitoring), and managing signs and symptoms when they occur (self-care management).

Self-care modalities such as journaling, exercise, nutrition, yoga, aromatherapy, and meditation are examples of modalities that help reduce stress and anxiety. According to Argudo (2021), the use of personal and emotional writing skills as an alternative strategy to relieve stress is known as expressive writing. Expressive writing is a strategy that uses words in a healing way and can often be useful to process negative experiences (Argudo, 2021). Positive affect journaling (PAJ), and emotion-focused self-regulation intervention, has been associated with positive outcomes among medical populations. Smyth et al. (2018), conducted a study of 70 adults with various medical conditions and elevated anxiety symptoms from local medical clinics. Each participant was randomly assigned to a Web-based PAJ intervention. PAJ was associated with decreased mental distress, and increased well-being, and was associated with less depressive symptoms and anxiety after 1 month.

The first self-care modality in the study is exercise. Exercise is a beneficial self-care modality known to reduce stress. According to Parson (2018), exercise burns off excess cortisol and improves mood via endorphins. After five weeks, the teachers in the study reported feeling happier, feeling more satisfied, and less burned-out, as measured by the Professional Stress Scale by Cohen (2009). Exercise can also be a distraction from stressful situations and serves as an outlet for frustrations (Parson, 2018).

After exercising, participants can transition to a self-care modality that helps both the mind and the body. This modality is Yoga. Yoga combines core flexibility training with meditative postures to benefit both mental and physical well-being. Tellhed et al. (2019) conducted a study with seventy-one middle-aged adults who self-rated themselves as moderately stressed. Participants were randomly assigned to a 5-week yoga intervention called the Yoga and Mindfulness Intervention (YOMI) or a control group. The YOMI intervention consisted of 60 minutes of yin yoga practice with 30 minutes of psychoeducation twice a week. Participants also did a daily five-minute breathing exercise as a homework assignment. According to Tellhed et al. (2019), yoga can reduce perceived stress and stress-related mental illness such as anxiety and depression, as well as offer physiological benefits such as lowering blood pressure and cortisol levels. Yoga improves health by improving coping with stress.

Nutrition is also an important self-care modality that is often overlooked. Good nutrition, adequate physical activity, and healthy eating habits are important self-care practices in Saudi Arabia for the physical and mental performance of adolescents. In 2019, a study was conducted on 200 freshman nursing students over a one-month period at King Saud University in Saudi Arabia on nutrition self-care (Bashatah & Alahmary, 2020). The MIN-SC (Moore Index of Nutrition Self-Care) questionnaire was utilized for understanding attitudes toward nutritional status. According to Bashatah & Alahmary (2020), the MIN-SC questionnaire was developed in 2005 by Jean Burley Moore and was based on Dorothea Orem's conceptual framework, Theory of Self-Care Deficit, which has been applied among school children in the United States, Nicaragua, and Chile. The MIN-SC is 50 items that measure regular dietary intake, planning, and adjustment. The benefits of using the MIN-SC tool in this study is it assist in gathering baseline data for understanding attitudes toward nutritional status. The psychometric properties of the MIN-SC proved to be a valid and reliable tool for assessing the attitudes nutrition self-care among Saudi students. According to Bashatah (2020), only four (10.3%) of the students who indicated that they exercised regularly related that they always learned healthy eating habits from nurses, while 44 (43.6%) related that they never asked nurses about healthy eating habits. Bashatah (2020) also reported 30 (37.5%) of the female students sometimes discussed healthy foods with their friends, while only 11 (18.3%) of the male students indicated that they did so. Some of the female participants, that is, 16 (20%) of them stated that they assisted their family in shopping for food, while only eight (13.3%) of the male participants related that they did so. Bashatah (2020) also concluded that maintaining an optimum nutritional habit among students is vital and healthy eating habits help to promote quality of life for both children and adults.

Granero (2022) studied how specific diets improved or negatively impacted common mental health disorders in developed countries among adolescents and children. Graner's 2022 study focused on how diets high in antioxidants can improve mental health. Diets high in Vitamin C, Vitamin A, polyphenol and beta-carotene showed a lower inverse relationship with depression and anxiety (Granero,

2022). Graner (2022) stated that mental illnesses increase oxidative stress, heighten inflammatory markers and over-activate stress and neuroplasticity pathways. Graner (2022) concluded that improving the nutritional status of the patient will contribute to the individual's well-being and facilitate a better progression of medical conditions.

Another self-care modality that has been shown to improve health is aromatherapy. Aromatherapy can improve stress levels, along with mental and physical wellness, in middle-aged and elderly populations (Ke et al., 2022). The Mental and Physical Health Scale for the Elderly and the Stress Index Measurement Scale were used to measure the study outcomes. Ke et al. (2022) confirmed that the 5% concentration of the essential oil blend, formulated with essential oils lavender, bergamot, and marjoram has a synergistic effect that improves the physical and mental health of middle-aged and elderly people and reduces stress.

Literature Summary

Research supports the evidence that teachers were stressed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Baker et al. (2021) conclude that teachers were more stressed when challenged by teaching in a remote learning environment. Teachers were more challenged with teaching students in a remote learning environment. Student remote learning and various access to online technology presented stress for teachers (Kim & Asbury, 2020). Teachers were apprehensive of transitioning from remote learning back to in-person learning. Teachers were concerned about their own health and safety of getting COVID-19 along with the potential of bringing COVID-19 home to their own families.

According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2022), working conditions, safety, pupil load, and administrative support influenced teacher retention more than recruitment (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). Teacher burnout and shortages affect student motivation, student success, burnout, and teacher shortage in many states (Pressley et al., 2021). Teachers needed instructional, technological, and emotional support.

Self-care modalities were found to help with stress and anxiety. Journaling is a self-care modality that can help with stress and anxiety. Expressive writing like journaling can relieve stress and is a strategy that uses words in a healing way and can often be useful to process negative experiences (Argudo, 2021).

Exercise is a self-care modality known to reduce stress. Exercise is a self-care modality known to help to reduce stress, and often is used as an outlet for frustrations. Yoga is another self-care modality that combines core flexibility training with meditative postures to benefit both mental and physical well-being.

Nutrition and healthy eating habits are important self-care practices (Bashatah & Alahmary (2020); Granero (2022)). And finally, aromatherapy can improve stress levels, along with the health and wellness in middle-aged and elderly populations (Ke et al., 2022).

Needs Assessment

Sample Population: Middle School Educators

This project will involve 25 full-time teachers, at East Iredell Middle School, ranging in age from 23 to 60 years. Six veteran teachers have between 17 to 36 years of teaching experience. The majority of the teachers at East Iredell Middle have 5 years or less teaching experience.

Sponsors and Stakeholders

Sponsors identified for this DNP project include the Iredell- Statesville School Student Health Advisory Committee (SHAC), East Iredell Middle School Leadership team, Student Support Services Director, Lead Nurse, Superintendent, and community leaders. The goal of the SHAC council is to educate, empower, and encourage both students and employees of the Iredell-Statesville School district in their lifelong pursuit of wellness. The SHAC council strives to provide a workplace, classroom, and school environment that promotes the development of physical, mental, emotional and social health. Group activities, individual programs, and educational opportunities are the goal of the SHAC council aiming to equip the employees and students with the knowledge to live more healthful, professional

and personal lives. Committee members of SHAC include Iredell-Statesville School employees (Superintendent, Student Services Director, Lead Nurse, East Iredell Middle School Nurse, Elementary School Principal, Executive Director of Human Resources and Staff Wellness, Lead High School Physical Education Teacher, Lead Middle School Physical Education Teacher, Lead Elementary Physical Education Teacher, Assistant Superintendent of Operations and Athletics, Director of Child Nutrition Program and School Counselor).

Resources include Iredell County Health Department Director, United Way, Get Fit Iredell/Girls on the Run, Director of Community Outreach at Lake Norman Regional Hospital, Corporate Wellness Director at Iredell Memorial Hospital, Davis Regional Medical Center, Statesville Family Medicine Clinic, Drug, and Alcohol Coalition of Iredell, Insight Human Services, and Partners Behavioral Health. The East Iredell Middle School Leadership Team consists of the principal, two assistant principals, a school nurse, school counselors, media coordinators, two teachers, and a content instructional coach.

The SHAC council will support the East Iredell Middle School Nurse in the effort of providing both school district and community support to improve the mental and physical wellness of East Iredell Middle School teachers post COVID-19 with resources to improve anxiety, stress, recruitment, and retention of teachers. The purpose of this leadership team is to focus on student achievement through staff training, facilitate teamwork and collaboration, and to problem-solve and monitor the academic success of students. The leadership team is also responsible for identifying and addressing staff needs and finding resolutions to support staff needs. The East Iredell Middle School Leadership team supports school nurses' efforts to reduce teacher stress during the return to in-person learning.

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) assists in the identification of all internal and external factors that influence the success of making a change or implementation of something new. As can be seen in Table 1., strengths include a supportive School Administration, a school

counselor certified in Mental Health Counseling, two teachers with expertise in holistic modalities, and a supportive School District Leadership Team.

Table 1. SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>School Counselor is Certified in Mental Health Counseling.</p> <p>School Counselor can educate staff on mental health modalities and informational presentations at monthly staff meetings in promoting mental health wellness (Benefits of Mindfulness, Meditation, EAP (Employee Assistance Program information).</p> <p>1 Teacher is a certified Yoga Instructor and Essential Oils educator.</p> <p>School District Leadership team supportive in improving the mental health and wellness of teachers at East Iredell Middle.</p>	<p>9 out of 22 teachers resigned at the end of the 2020-2021 school year. High teacher turnover rate.</p> <p>No time allotted on staff development days to check on teachers' mental health and stress levels during COVID-19.</p> <p>Monthly Staff meetings are not consistent; thus, it is hard for school counselors to give presentations on mental health resources and mental health modalities.</p> <p>No wellness/mental health days allotted for in the school year calendar.</p> <p>End of the Year student test scores dropped post COVID-19 pandemic as a result of hybrid and remote learning, thus increasing more stress and anxiety on teachers to help improve test scores in the 2021-2022 school year.</p>	<p>External resources include local hospitals, local parks and recreation centers, local mental health agencies, other community resources mentioned in stakeholders.</p> <p>Student Services Director may consider hiring a counselor(s) available for wellness concerns of teacher's mental health (on-site counseling after school or during teacher planning period).</p> <p>Funds through the school district are available for rewards such as ice cream truck social, etc.</p> <p>School principal may ask for additional funds from the school district to support mental health and wellness for teachers.</p>	<p>Currently, external resources (YMCA, outpatient mental health copays/cost/memberships) are not affordable for teachers' income.</p> <p>Limited mental health counselors in the local area.</p> <p>Local mental health providers both have limited hours and do not provide/ have limited telehealth options for counseling sessions.</p> <p>School Counselor may leave the school or school district for better career options in the community.</p> <p>Teacher at school that is a yoga instructor works part-time, thus limits the teachers with times that she can volunteer her time to continue to teach yoga.</p> <p>Currently, there is no online support for teachers, no online access for students.</p>

Weaknesses include lower End of the Year student test scores post COVID-19, no time allotted on

staff development days to check on teacher's mental health and stress levels during COVID-19, 12 teacher resignations at the end of the 2020-2021 school year, monthly staff meetings are not consistent; thus, it is hard for school counselors to give presentations on mental health resources and mental health modalities. There were no wellness/mental health days allotted for in the school year calendar, There is no proactive strategy in identifying signs of teacher stress or anxiety in the classroom.

Opportunities include School Leadership team needs to reach out to both internal school resources (yoga instructor and mental health counselor) and external resources (local hospital, local parks and recreation center, local mental health agency) for assistance in improving mental health and wellness of teachers, School Counselor can educate staff on mental health modalities and informational presentations at monthly staff meetings in promoting mental health wellness (Benefits of Mindfulness, Meditation, EAP (Employee Assistance Program information), School Administrators need to seek additional funding from school district to boost teacher morale at East Iredell Middle (ice cream truck social, Friday snacks, Teacher of the Week), and East Iredell Middle Leadership team need to be more proactive in identifying when a teacher is displaying signs of stress or anxiety in the classroom. Threats include no time allotted on staff development days to check on teacher's mental health and stress levels during COVID-19, monthly staff meetings are not consistent, thus hard for school counselor to give presentations on mental health resources and mental health modalities, no wellness/mental health days allotted for in the school year calendar, and currently, there is still a teacher shortage at East Iredell Middle and district-wide.

Summary

After reviewing the SWOT analysis of the East Iredell Middle school, the project leader decided that the strengths and opportunities outweighed the weaknesses and threats. There are sufficient strengths and opportunities to improve the health and well-being of middle school teachers. Abundant community resources and supportive school administrators will promote a successful and sustainable project.

PICOT Statement

What is the effect of an educational program on self-care modalities for middle school teachers on teacher satisfaction, stress, and retention?

Desired and Expected Outcomes

Desired and expected outcomes include a decrease in educator stress levels and an increase in educator satisfaction and retention by participating in self-care modalities offered at East Iredell Middle School.

Team Selection

Team selection includes DNP project leader, East Iredell Middle Counseling team, East Iredell Middle Administration, and Lead Nurse of Iredell-Statesville schools. The DNP project leader was assisted by East Iredell Counseling team in the organization and assistance of guest speakers for this project.

Cost Benefits Analysis

Table 2 outlines the cost-benefits of the DNP project. The project is very cost-effective, with totally \$110 in out-of-pocket expenses for the DNP project leader and 2 days of teacher compensation time for the school district.

Table 2. Cost Benefits Analysis

Teacher compensation for time	15 hours (compensation time)
Yoga Instructor	free
Essential Oil class	free
Meditation class	free
Zoom meetings with teachers	free from school district Zoom account
Nutritional cooking class (local hospital Dietician)	free

Teacher Journals	\$20
Zumba class	free (school gym)
Meditation class	Online zoom (free)
Yoga mats	\$90
Total Cost:	\$110 plus 2 days of teacher compensation time.

Goals, Objectives, and Mission Statement

The goal of this project is to provide an educational program on stress reduction and self-care modalities. The objective of this project is to improve teacher satisfaction, decrease stress, increase morale, and increase teacher retention. The mission of this project is to promote health and wellness in middle school educators.

Theoretical Framework

Dr. Jean Watson believed that caring is the center of the nursing practice (Watson, 2008, p.18). Watson believed that caring promotes mind/body/spirit. The intention of this theory was to focus on nursing as an emerging discipline with unique values, knowledge, and practices. Human Caring Science focuses on health promotion, as well as the treatment of disease. Dr. Watson believed that nurses should be concerned with promoting health, preventing illness, caring for the sick, and restoring health. Human Caring Science includes the interaction of science, art, and the humanities.-According to Watson (2008, p.18), a caring science is informed by an ethical-moral-spiritual stance that encompasses a humanitarian, human science orientation to human processes, phenomena, and experiences.

According to Pajnikihar et al. (2017), Watson's theory describes the heart of contemporary nursing as person-centered transpersonal caring, meaning wholeness of mind, body, and soul. According to Watson (2008, p.41), we must treat ourselves with loving-kindness and equanimity,

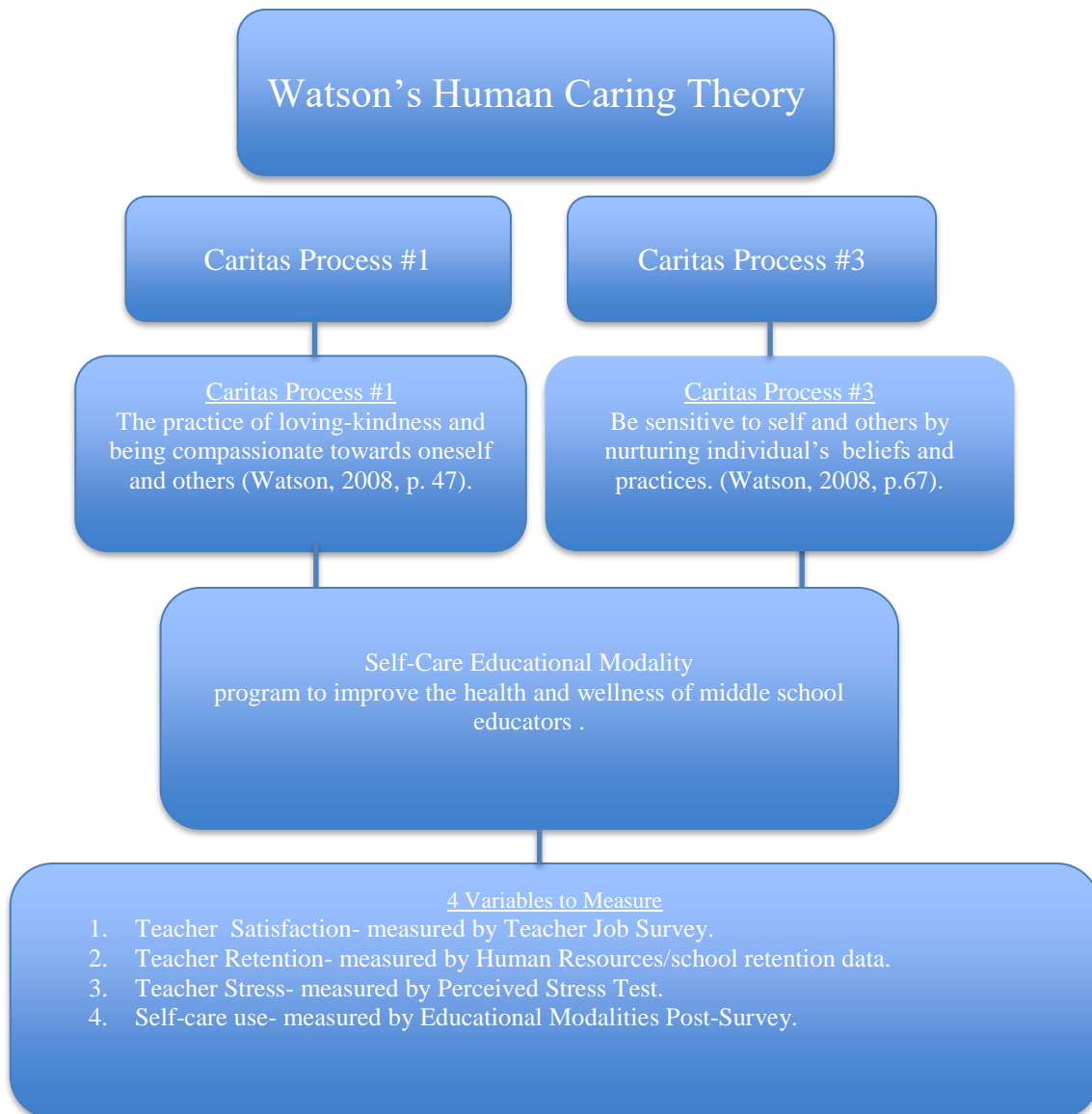
gentleness, and dignity before we can accept, respect, and care for others within a professional caring-healing model. Watson's theory also describes caring as an interpersonal happening between two persons with transpersonal dimensions Watson (2008, p.41), According to Watson, caritas processes facilitate healing, honor wholeness, and contribute to the evolution of humanity. Watson described the caritas processes as follows:

1. Cultivating the Practice of Loving-Kindness and Equanimity Toward Self and Others as Foundational to Caritas Consciousness.
2. Benefits Authentically Present: Enabling, Sustaining, and Honoring the Faith, Hope, and Deep Belief System and the Inner-Subjective Life World of Self/Other.
3. Cultivating of One's Own Spiritual Practices and Transpersonal Self, Going Beyond Ego-Self
4. Development of a helping-trusting relationship;
5. Promotion and acceptance of the expression of positive and negative feelings;
6. Systematic use of the scientific problem-solving method for decision making;
7. Promotion of interpersonal teaching-learning;
8. Provision for a supportive, protective, and or corrective mental, physical, sociocultural, and spiritual environment;
9. Assistance with gratification of human needs; and
10. Allowance for existential phenomenological forces (Watson, 2008, p.30).

Human Caring Science and DNP Project Integration

Jean Watson's Human Caring Science will be used in this DNP project as a philosophy to guide an intervention designed for middle school educators to reduce stress through the use of self-care modalities. Human Caring Science is an appropriate theoretical framework for the project goal of improving the health and wellness of middle school educators Post-COVID. This DNP project will focus on two Caritas Processes. Caritas Process #1 is the practice of loving-kindness and being compassionate towards oneself and others (Watson, 2008,). According to Watson (2008, p.47), "this model invites, if not requires, nurses to attend to self-caring and practices that can assist in their own evolution of consciousness for more fulfillment in their life and work"(p.47). Caritas Process #3 is being sensitive to self and others by individual's beliefs and practices (Watson, 2008). Increasing teacher satisfaction and decreasing stress, maybe the result of self-care. According to Watson (2008), "without this lifelong process and journey, nurses can become hardened and brittle and can slow down our compassion and caring for self and others"(p.67).

Figure 1- Conceptual Theoretical Empirical



Methodology

The purpose of this project is to promote physical and mental health wellness in middle school educators. The PICOT statement is, what is the effect of an educational program on self-care modalities for middle school teachers on teacher satisfaction, stress, and retention. The project uses a descriptive methodology. The principal and the school district's Executive Board granted permission for the project to be conducted at the middle school.

The sampling frame is 25 full-time teachers. Two of the school educators will be excluded from the sample as they will be teaching self-care modalities in the project. The project leader will send an email to all educators at the middle school with details about the project, including the location, duration, and objectives of the educational offering. All teachers will be invited to attend the introductory meeting. A five-week program will be explained and implemented, as outlined in Table 3. Four outcomes will be measured for the project: teacher satisfaction, stress, teacher retention, and use of self-care modalities.

Teacher Satisfaction. This variable will be measured using the Teacher Job Survey. Permission to use the tool was obtained. The Teacher Job Survey has 7 items, using a 4-point Likert Scale. This instrument is a "valid international teacher assessment" with "Cronbach's alpha reliability for teacher job satisfaction at .87" (Toropova, Myrberg, & Johansson, 2021, p. 9-10). This survey will be given to participants before (week 1) and after the self-care modalities education (week 5).

Stress. This variable will be measured using the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, 1983). Permission to use the tool was obtained. Perceived Stress Scale is a psychological tool that measures the perception of stress and the degree to which a person views their life as stressful. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)

is a 14 item, 5- point Likert scale. Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983) describe evidence for concurrent and predictive validity, as well as test-retest reliability of .85 and coefficient alpha reliability of .84, .85, and .86 in three different samples. The PSS has also been described as a reliable and valid measure of perceived stress in Hispanic Americans with either an English or Spanish language preference (Baik et al., 2019). This survey will be given to participants before (week 1) and after the self-care modalities education (week 5).

Teacher retention. This variable will be measured using EIMS School District Human Resources data.

Use of self-care modalities. This will be measured using the Educational Modalities Post-Survey developed by the project leader. This is a 10-item yes/no survey. Face validity established with faculty advisor. There is no reliability data at this time. This survey will be given to participants after self-care modalities education (week 5).

Participant Protection and Confidentiality

Informed consent will be reviewed in person at the first group meeting. Each participant will be given a packet which includes the consent and the surveys in an envelope. The DNP project leader will review the packet contents and answer questions, then leave the room for 10 minutes so volunteers can complete the forms. If willing to participate, educators will sign and keep one consent and put a second signed copy of the consent in an envelope marked consents. If the educator does not want to participate, he/she will put unsigned consents in that envelope and will be free to leave the room before the project leader begins the first education modality session (reflective journaling). Those willing to complete anonymous surveys can fill them out and put them in the envelope and seal. If they are not willing to complete the forms, they can simply return them uncompleted to the envelope and seal. The DNP project leader will then return to the room and collect all the sealed envelopes and proceed with Week One activities.

Participation in the project (education, self-care, and surveys) will be completely voluntary. Educators are free to participate in education without completing the surveys. There will be no repercussions

if choosing not to participate or in choosing to withdraw at any time. Consents and anonymous survey data will be confidentially stored in a password-protected computer in a locked office and locked file cabinet in the school nurse's office. Some educational sessions will be online via Zoom. Only those signing consent to participate will be sent invitations to the Zoom sessions. The DNP project leader is employed as the school nurse at East Iredell Middle School and has no supervisory responsibility to any of the educators.

The principal offered volunteers up to 15 hours (two workdays of paid time off) to participate in the self-care project. Educators can fill out paperwork for exchange time as per school district policies directly to the principal, with no involvement from the DNP project leader

Table 3 – Educational Program Timeline

Timeline

Week 1 (In-Person from 3:30pm to 4:15pm)

Project Interest Meeting in Media Center (expectations, introduce self-care modalities, estimated time to participate in the study)-(5 minutes)
Review and Sign Consent Forms (5 minutes)
Distribute and complete Perceived Stress Scale, Teacher Job Survey, and Educational Modalities Survey (10 minutes)
Introduce the benefit of journaling/Distribute Journals for weekly journaling (25 minutes)

Week 2

(Day 1) 45-minute class on the benefits of Essential Oils by Cheryl Wenzel
(Online Zoom Meeting at 7pm)

(Day 2) 45-minute Yoga class by Cheryl Wenzel in School Gym
(In-Person from 3:30pm to 4:15pm)

Week 3

(Day 1) 60-minute Meditation class/Intro to free Meditation/Calming APPS by Lynn Stone
(Online Zoom meeting at 7pm)

(Day 2) 45-minute Zumba class by LeAnn Rucker (City of Statesville Parks and Recreation)
(In-Person from 3:30pm to 4:15pm)

Week 4

(Day 1)- 45- minute Educational class on preparing nutritious meals/snacks

by Dietician Tina Wilson
(Online Zoom Meeting at 7pm)

(Day 2)- 30-minute Discussion on journaling experience by project leader April Pearson
(Online Zoom Meeting at 7pm)

Week 5

(Day 1- 3:30pm to 4:15pm Meeting In-Person with DNP project leader April Pearson)

Distribute and complete Perceived Stress Scale, Teacher Job Survey, and Educational Modalities Survey (15 minutes)

DNP project wrap up session with participants on experiences with self-care modalities/Thank-you from project leader (30 minutes)

Implementation

Once IRB approval was obtained, the project leader-initiated implementation. Sixteen teachers volunteered to participate in the DNP project study, plus two teachers participated as presenters. Implementation went entirely as planned. Each educational session was recorded, both in-person or Zoom sessions. Twelve teachers attended each session. Two teachers watched recorded sessions due to coaching responsibilities in after school sports. Two other teachers had either prior obligations or a part-time job during the educational sessions. All four teachers verbalized to the DNP project leader that they reviewed each recorded educational sessions within 24 hours during their planning period or lunch time at work.

Barriers and Threats

Three teachers reported internet difficulties at home during the Zoom sessions in the afternoon. Two teachers reported that they chose not to journal because they were too tired to write. One teacher reported that she did not feel comfortable exercising in front of her colleagues, so therefore she did participate in Yoga and Zumba in-person. A few teachers experienced “spotty” internet service at home during the afternoon Zoom activity sessions. At the end of the project period, all teachers completed the post survey, and discussed their experiences with self-care modalities with

the project leader.

Interpretation of Data

The mission of this project was to improve the health and well-being of teachers. The goal of this project was to provide an educational program on stress reduction and self-care modalities in order to increase teacher satisfaction and retention and decrease stress.

Teacher Satisfaction

The Teacher Job Survey by IEA International was given to participants before the education program as a measure of satisfaction. As can be seen in Table 4, nine out of 16 (56%) teachers reported that in the last month they were *sometimes* or *almost never* content with their profession as a teacher. The majority of teachers completing the survey reported being proud of their work, find purpose and meaning in their work, and plan to continue teaching. On the other hand, the majority of teachers completing the survey reported dissatisfaction at this school, not enthusiastic with the job, and not inspired by their work. The Teacher Job Survey was not administered to participants as a post-survey, in error.

Table 4. Teacher Job Satisfaction (Pre-Survey)

	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Never or almost never	Results
I am content with my profession as a teacher.	2	5	9	0	56% report sometimes or almost never content with their profession as a teacher.
I am satisfied with being a teacher at this school.	3	2	9	2	69% feel sometimes or never satisfied as a teacher at this school.
I find my work full of meaning and purpose.	6	3	7	0	56% find their work full of meaning and purpose.

I am enthusiastic about my job.	3	2	11	0	69% report sometimes or almost never enthusiastic about their job.
My work inspires me.	2	3	10	1	69% report sometimes or almost never inspired by their work.
I am proud of the work I do.	2	8	6	0	62.5% report sometimes or almost never proud of the work they do.
I am going to continue teaching for as long as I can.	3	6	6	1	56% plan to continue teaching for as long as they can.

Teacher Stress

Participants in the project completed the Perceived Stress Survey before and after the education program (see Table 4). All questions in the Perceived Stress Survey describe how one perceives their feelings and thoughts during the last month. Answers ranged from *never* to *very often*. According to the pre-survey, 69% of teachers felt stressed *fairly often* or *very often* compared to 44% in the post-survey. According to the pre-survey, 50% of teachers could not cope with all that they had to do *fairly often* or *very often*, compared to 19% in the post-survey. Teachers *fairly often* or *very often* felt difficulties were piling up so high that they could not overcome; pre-survey (44%) and post survey (20%). Teachers reported they were *never* or *almost never* angered because of things that happened that were outside of their control (pre-survey 40% and post-survey 60%). Teachers reported often feeling that they were effectively coping with important changes that were occurring in their life *fairly often* or *very often* pre-survey (63%) and post-survey (81%). According to the pre-survey, 19% of teachers *often* felt that they were on top of things compared to 56% in the post-survey.

Table 5- Perceived Stress Survey (Pre/Post Results)

In the last month,	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often
how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?	0 / 0	4 / 10	7 / 4	4 / 1	1 / 1
how often have you felt that you were unable to control important things in your life?	0 / 3	5 / 8	7 / 4	3 / 1	1 / 0
how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”?	0/0	3/7	2/2	5/4	6/3
how often have you dealt successfully with irritating life hassles?	0/1	1/3	5/6	7/5	3/1
how often have you felt that you were effectively coping with important changes that were occurring in your life?	0/0	0/0	7/3	6/6	3/7
how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?	0/0	1/0	5/4	4/5	6/7
how often have you felt that things were going your way?	0/0	0/0	8/5	8/9	0/2
how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?	0/1	0/2	8/11	8/4	0/0
how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?	0/0	1/0	6/3	6/9	3/4
how often have you felt that you were on top of things?	0/0	3/0	10/7	2/6	1/3
how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?	1/1	3/5	8/7	4/3	0/0
how often have you found yourself thinking about things that you have to accomplish?	0/0	0/1	4/7	5/4	7/4
how often have you been able to control the way you spend your time	0/0	0/0	7/7	6/4	3/5
how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?	0/2	6/9	3/4	4/1	3/1

Teacher Retention

The DNP project leader was unable to obtain recruitment and retention rates for the 2021-

2022 school year from the Iredell-Statesville School District Human Resources Department. East Iredell Middle School recruitment and retention statistics were received by the school principal, however, and shared with the DNP project leader. From April 2022 to May 2022, one teacher (6%) in the project requested a transfer to another school within the school district. One (6%) teacher will be teaching abroad in the fall and will not be returning to the Middle School. Anecdotally, fourteen out of sixteen teachers participating in the self-care project stated that the Self-care Modality Educational Program encouraged them to return to work at East Iredell Middle school the next school year (2022-2023).

Self-Care Modalities Survey

All the teachers reported having a better understanding of self-care modalities and greater confidence in using self-care modalities to decrease stress or anxiety (see Table 5). All the teachers planned to exercise twice/week as a self-care modality to reduce stress. The majority of teachers stated that they would continue to use journaling, yoga, meditation, calming APPS, and using essential oils to reduce stress. Ninety-four percent of teachers plan to select healthy foods/snacks as a self-care modality to reduce stress.

Table 6. Educational Modalities Post-Survey

I have a better understanding of self-care modalities to help me to decrease stress or anxiety.	Yes 16 (100%)	No 0 (0%)
I have the confidence to utilize self-care modalities to help me decrease stress or anxiety.	Yes 16 (100%)	No 0 (0%)
I plan to use journaling as a self-care modality to reduce stress.	Yes 13 (81%)	No 3 (23%)
I plan to use Yoga as a self-care modality to reduce stress.	Yes 11 (69%)	No 5 (31%)

I plan to use meditation as a self-care modality to reduce stress.	Yes 12 (75%)	No 4 (25%)
I plan to use calming APPS as a self-care modality to reduce stress.	Yes 11 (69%)	No 5 (31%)
I plan to use Zumba as a self-care modality to reduce stress.	Yes 7 (44%)	No 9 (56%)
I plan to exercise twice/week as a self-care modality to reduce stress.	Yes 16 (100%)	No 0 (0%)
I plan to select healthy foods/snacks as a self-care modality to reduce stress.	Yes 15 (94%)	No 1(1%)
I plan to use essential oils as a self-care modality to reduce stress.	Yes 13 (81%)	No 3 (19%)

Discussion

Sixteen teachers participated in the Self-Care Educational Program (72% response rate). The educational program was offered in person and via Zoom. If participants were unable to participate in either in-person or Zoom educational sessions, the educational sessions were recorded for later review on Zoom. Meditation APPs were quick and accessible for teachers to use both at work and at home. Teachers verbalized that initially that self-care would not help them with stress and anxiety, however, after the five-week project, teachers reported their intentions to continue using self-care modalities for physical and mental health.

Results and the Literature

The results of this educational self-care modality does reflect research that there are benefits to

teachers participating in self-care modalities. The average reduction in BP following mindfulness meditation was similar to that achieved with standard validated non-pharmacological measures implemented in routine clinical practice, such as regular aerobic exercise (Ponte Marquez et al., 2019). The practice of meditation was included in the educational program. Aromatherapy can improve stress levels, along with mental and physical wellness, in middle-aged and elderly populations (Ke et al., 2022). Evidence shows that mind-body therapies are affordable, easily-practiced, and safe and that they improve perceived stress, health-related outcomes, and quality of life among various community-dwelling and clinical populations (Alhawatmeh et al., 2022). This sample of teachers enjoyed the experience and plan to continue using several self-care modalities when feeling stressed.

Results and the Theoretical Framework

The findings of this project relate to Dr. Jean Watson's Human Caring Theory. Watson believed that caring promotes mind/body/spirit (2008). Human Caring Science focuses on health promotion, using caring, healing energy. A person must love and care for self before one can love and care for others. The goal of the project was to improve the health and well-being of teachers, so that the teachers could provide a loving learning environment for their students. Holistic self-care honors the whole person body, mind, and spirit. Human Caring Science includes the interaction of science, art, and the humanities, and is represented by modalities such as meditation, journaling, yoga, exercise, aromatherapy, and healthy food selections.

Practice Implications

According to Wanless (2018), principals and professional learning leaders can take specific steps to create a conducive teacher learning climate before embarking on a new professional development program and can ensure that professional learning experiences maintain this climate during coaching and group sessions. The school district may want to adopt policies for promoting self-

care modalities for teachers during the school day or on personal time. Simple strategies like centering and breathing can be taught to teachers and students to de-escalate tension and anger. Sustaining a weekly program that encourages self-care would show teachers and staff how much they are needed and appreciated. This would certainly improve satisfaction and retention.

Lessons Learned

As a leader, this author collaborated with the teachers to make this project successful. Teacher suggestions were valued as the program was developed and timelines were created. Initially, this author listened to veteran teachers about their experiences of stress and anxiety. In the future, new teacher input would be considered as well. Some participants were new teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic during the 2020-2021 school year. This author learned that age/work experience as a teacher was a factor in teacher's motivation to participate in certain healthcare modalities. Certain teachers will pick different modalities they prefer over others. For example, the veteran teachers overall, liked journaling and meditation. Some teachers had body image concerns and were not comfortable about how they looked in exercise clothes. Younger teachers preferred meditation, Zumba, and yoga. Sometimes incentives increase participation among teachers. The principal offering compensation time motivated greater participation in the educational program.

Future Recommendations

This author recommends that the school administration and leadership team listen to teachers and other staff members when they verbalize that they are experiencing stress or anxiety. The school administration team, along with the counseling department need to continue to provide resources in support of teacher stress and anxiety. The school nurse will also be a vital resource to teachers as well. This school nurse might institute new programs a Walking Club, Journal/ Book, or a Monthly Meditation Club at lunchtime and after school for those wanting to participate.

Conclusion

The goal of this project was achieved by improving the health and well-being of teachers at East Iredell Middle school through self-care modalities. Teachers now have the tools to practice self-care modalities in decreasing stress and anxiety. Teachers reported a better understanding of self-care modalities, plan to use journaling, meditation, aromatherapy, and select healthier foods and snacks in the future. The principal is eager to continue an open dialogue with the teachers in an effort to reduce stress and anxiety and increase recruitment and teacher satisfaction. Overall, teachers appreciated the benefits of self-care modalities in reducing their stress.

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