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## Hispanic Teacher's Experiences with Stressors While Working in Title I Schools: A Phenomenological Investigation Using a Self-Compassion Framework

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**HISPANIC TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH STRESSORS IN TITLE I  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION  
USING A SELF-COMPASSION FRAMEWORK**

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this exploratory phenomenology investigation was to understand what were Hispanic teachers' experiences with their occupational stressors while working in Title I elementary schools. Specifically, this investigation used a self-compassion theoretical framework to explore the emotional stressors of the participants ( $N = 19$ ) and how they cope to mitigate their feelings of burnout. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit Hispanic teachers from three Title I elementary schools within the same school district in Central Florida. The data were collected through individual interviews with the Hispanic teachers who volunteered to participate in the study. All data were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for themes following Colaizzi's (1978) methods. Trustworthiness measures employed throughout the investigation included the use of (a) clear articulation of methods in order to protect the integrity of the data, (b) reflection on the researcher's positionality and pre-conceived notions about the participants' experiences by using bracketing, (c) analyst triangulation of the collected data with peer debriefers, (d) member checking, and (e) a thorough description of previous literature (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Crossman, 2006; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015).

Five themes emerged from the data analyses: (a) general stressors, (b) emotional stressors, (c) cultural stressors, (d) coping skills, and (e) teachers' recommendations for administrators. The five themes aligned with previous research findings, offering significant implications for future research, teacher and counselor educators, and school personnel. Specifically, findings from this investigation contribute to the literature by providing an increased understanding of cultural and emotional stressors experienced by Hispanic teachers in Title I elementary schools.

To the Hispanic teachers who participated in this study, because their voices need to be heard

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **THE PROBLEM AND ITS CLARIFYING COMPONENTS**

### Introduction

This phenomenological investigation explored the experiences of 19 Hispanic teachers with stressors while working in a Title I elementary school. Data collection for this investigation was conducted through individual semi-structured interviews with the goal of capturing the essence of participants' meanings and experiences (Creswell, 2007) with stressors following a theoretical framework of self-compassion.

In an effort to provide an understanding of the reasons why I gravitated towards the topic of occupational stress in Hispanic teachers working in Title I elementary school, I have included in this chapter an autobiographical account of my experiences that led me to this phenomenon of interest (Moustakas, 1994). Next, I provide an overview of the stressors that have led to teachers' burnout and attrition, including the current state of minority teacher attrition. I also present the coping strategies that have been used to prevent teacher burnout followed by the introduction of the self-compassion construct and the potential benefits it presents to navigate stressors. I then state the research questions and purpose of the investigation, the research methods, and design. A discussion related to the rigor of the investigation and the trustworthiness of the methods is followed by an explanation of the data analysis as well as potential limitations and implications, and a chapter summary.

### Autobiographical Connection

In my first year as a doctoral student and graduate assistant in the counselor education program, I was assigned to work as a clinical coordinator for the practicum course at an

elementary Title I school. My main role in this job was to create relationships with the school administration and the teachers to generate referrals of students in need of counseling services. In addition, part of my responsibilities was to collect data in order to measure if the counseling services being offered by the practicum students were being effective in a school setting. Thus, part of the data collection was for the teachers to complete a Teacher's Report Form (Achenbach, 2001) on the student-clients receiving services. The majority of the population of the students, at this particular school, was comprised of minorities and economically disadvantaged students. That the school was classified as Title I which meant that students would receive additional resources and funding from the federal government in order to be effective academically. Such resources also meant more paperwork from the administration and teachers to complete. Teachers were also confronted with more challenging students and were faced with heart-breaking stories about how some of their students were dealing with poverty and other systemic hardships. From day one, I noticed how the majority of teachers cared for their students and would stop by the school counselor's office to unload some of the difficult things they were facing with their students. I was able to spend time sitting next to the school counselor's desk; and every time I was there, there was a new story to be told by one of the teachers of either a student who was abandoned by his or her family, another student who was homeless living in a hotel, or one instance when a student witnessed his uncle committing suicide.

I could only imagine how difficult it had to be for these teachers who had created a bond with their students to see their struggles. I could only assume how helpless the teachers had to feel at times. There were also positive stories shared by the teachers, (e.g., when a teacher

adopted one of the students, or the times that teachers would donate new shoes and clothing for the students in need).

I was also aware of the incredible pressures that the teachers had with the paperwork requirements, following curriculum guidelines, and testing. The toll of stress that the teachers were facing was quite visible for some of them. I will never forget when I overheard a teacher talking to another teacher stating that she was trying hard not to get on anxiety medication in order to cope with all of the stress. Accordingly, since I knew about the stressors that the teachers were experiencing, I personally noticed a great deal of resistance from the teachers who had to complete the assessments that we needed from them in order to assess if the students receiving counseling services were improving their behavior in the classroom. Not all of them, but a few, would make it hard to follow up with them and would delay returning the assessment forms. One teacher in particular was so upset at the fact that she had to complete the assessment form that she sent a strong email stating that she would make sure not to refer us to any students if it meant more paper work for her. My reaction to such statement was conflicted. Part of me understood the teacher's frustration, but at the same time I had a hard time believing that this teacher would rather see a student not benefit from counseling services than take about 10 minutes of her time to complete the form.

I tried my best to make a positive impression on the teachers and went the extra mile thanking them for their efforts. I realized I never wanted to be in their position. Most of the time, I felt like an outsider (and technically I was). The little experience that I had as an elementary school teacher was as a substitute teacher, and I had found it to be exhausting. Thus, I was able to somewhat relate to how difficult it can be to work as a teacher. I also realized that the teachers

played a significant role in the outcome of the student. In my opinion, I believe that students can sense a stressed teacher, one who often appears as lacking patience with students. From the school counselors, I learned that the school administration did not play a direct role in attending to the teachers' emotional stressors other than encouraging them for their good work and giving them an extra day off, I never noticed any other direct program within the school attending to the emotional wellbeing of teachers.

From the beginning of my doctoral program, I knew I wanted to explore self-compassion as part of my dissertation. I have taken extensive training on mindful self-compassion and personally benefited from the practice of being kind to myself, particularly when facing emotional stressors in my life. In one of the self-compassion trainings that I attended, some of the participants who were teachers had stated how useful self-compassion practices could be at the schools for teachers and students. To my surprise, when I searched in the literature, I could not find one study examining self-compassion practices with teachers. During my research, I also came across information about minority teachers, including Hispanic teachers, burning out and leaving their profession. I felt that given my opportunity to be working alongside of the teachers, I could reach out to them and interview them to learn about their stressors within a self-compassion lens. I was intrigued about how they handle stress and if in such a process, they tended to be harsh on themselves or kinder.

With the goal of understanding teachers' stressors, I determined to keep a homogeneous sample in my study and to interview only Hispanic teachers. Since, I am also Hispanic, I felt more hopeful that the teachers that I interviewed would be willing to build rapport with me if they recognized that we have the same ethnic background. I realized that my perception of being



a teacher was somewhat negative in regard to their job responsibilities and my biases were that all teachers were simply too stressed and frustrated with their jobs. I looked forward to hearing their stories and how they navigated their stressors and I continued to reflect in each stage of the investigation in order to put aside my biases and beliefs about how teachers navigate their stressors.

### Background and Overview

Teacher turnover in the United States is a significant and persistent problem (e.g., Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008; Borman & Dowling, 2008). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2013-2014) reported that approximately 17% of teachers leave their jobs annually. Roughly, 50% of new teachers leave their job within the first five years in education. The National Commission of Teaching and America's Future (2007) reported that the expense of teachers' attrition in the public schools of United States amounts to more than \$7 billion a year. The teaching profession is recognized as highly stressful (Kyriacou, 2001; Lambert & McCarthy, 2006) and teacher turnover is associated with high burnout levels from stress (DeAngelis & Presely, 2011; Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006). Teachers' burnout is one of the primary reasons for attrition in the teaching field (Chang, 2009). For those teachers that are experiencing burnout and remain in the field, may contribute to negatively affect students' learning outcomes, classroom management, and school environment (Olivier & Venter, 2003).

### Burnout in Teachers

Burnout in teaching has been examined for decades (Betoret, 2009; Carson, 2006; Ransford, 2007). The daily challenging events that teachers are presented within their fields can

bring a collection of unpleasant emotional experiences that could lead to emotional exhaustion (Burke, Greenglass, & Schwarzer, 1996). Earlier researchers focused on stress as the main precursor of burnout (Smylie, 1999), identifying key factors that contribute to teachers' stress and burnout include age, marital status, years of teaching experience, and level of education background. Furthermore, occupational related issues such as teacher student ratio, grade level, special education teaching, and workload were examined. Karasek (1979) concluded that the teachers' work stressors were caused due to a mixture of complex job demands with little control of their job role.

Maslach and Jackson (1981) developed a theoretical framework of burnout, which was comprised of three dimensions: (a) depersonalization, (b) reduced personal accomplishment, and (c) emotional exhaustion. Depersonalization presents when teachers start isolating or disconnecting from their professional peers. Reduced personal accomplishment occurs when teachers feel they lack the self-efficacy to be effective in their work and they do not take credit for their hard work (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Finally, emotional exhaustion includes feelings of emptiness, with lack of resources to navigate their stressors.

### Teachers' Stressors in Elementary Schools

Teacher stress and burnout are significant in elementary level education (McCarthy & Lambert, 2006). The various stress sources for teachers in elementary schools include the disruptive behaviors of the students, the workload, the organizational aspects, and time demands (Lambert, McCarthy, O'Donnell, & Wang, 2009). Such stress sources are compounded by the increasing administrative duties and scrutiny that teachers receive as a result of the educational system's focus on standardized tests (Moriarty, Edmonds, Blatchford, & Martin, 2001).

Moreover, a new generation of students that from an early age is exposed to increased technology is coming to class with fewer hours of sleep and limited motivation for learning the presented material (McCarthy & Lambert, 2006).

In addition, cultural shifts are occurring in our society that affect the elementary school classroom. Students are more likely to have parents who are working longer hours than in the past and to come from households where English is not spoken (McCarthy & Lambert, 2006). Teachers are no longer being recognized as authorities in education by parents (McCarthy & Lambert, 2006); rather, contemporary parents are taking the position of advocating for their children against teachers, often putting the blame on the teachers for their children's failures, a trend which is even more prominent in elementary schools (McCarthy & Lambert, 2006).

#### Emotional Challenges for Teachers in Title I Schools

Burnout is a significant problem for teachers in Title I schools. Title I schools are identified as those that receive additional funding to serve students from high poverty areas who often lack academic resources (Jacob, 2007). Historically, Title I schools tend to recruit a high number of teachers who are new in the field and, therefore, not as qualified to deal with challenging students and high-stress environments (Eckert, 2013). Researchers have investigated the incidence of teacher attrition in high-poverty schools, noting that problems with job satisfaction including (a) low salaries, (b) high demand of work from students that struggle to succeed academically, (c) little leadership support, (d) lack of time to prepare for classes, and (e) difficult student behavior that impedes learning the classroom leaving the teachers emotionally exhausted (Cochram-Smith, 2009; Fox & Certo, 2002; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Teacher

burnout and attrition also correlate with working environment, lack of programs for teacher preparation, and constant job stressors (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Jacob, 2007).

### Importance of Minority Teachers

The National Education Association (2008) reported that the alarming gap of minority teachers in the schools could cause a predicament, exposing students from K through 12 to fail to learn critical academic, personal, and social skills that will make them culturally sensitive citizens. Furthermore, a lack of minority teachers presents minority students with limited role models from their same ethnic background to whom they could relate in the schools (Shure, 2001).

Minority teachers tend to be more sensitive to attend to the needs of minority students and are more in tune to believe in the minority students' potential to excel in education (Allison & Rehm, 2007). Researchers have also indicated that an increase of minority teachers can have an impact on students' learning accomplishments, social awareness, and cultural sensitivity (Allison & Rehm, 2007; Salinas, 2002; Santoro, 2007). Salinas' (2002) statement summarizes the importance of minority teachers in the schools for student success: "Because of their own background, minority teachers are important because they can act as role models, encourage students to perform better, enhanced understanding of cultural differences, and break down students' stereotypes" (p. 1).

### Hispanic Teachers

Currently, in the United States, Hispanics are the largest and fastest growing minority population. Accordingly, Hispanic students at schools are reported to be around 12 million,

which is 25% of the student population in the nation (Ingersoll & May, 2011). However, the number of reported Hispanic teachers only represented by 7.8% in the field. The significant disparity of Hispanic teachers with Hispanic students is alarming, as the Hispanic population is expected to continue to grow at a fast pace (Parrado & Kandel, 2010).

### Coping Strategies for Emotional Exhaustion of Teachers

To date, the majority of school-based interventions for improving emotional wellbeing have been for the benefit of students (McCarthy & Lambert, 2006). Relatively little attention has focused on addressing management of stress and burnout among teachers in order to improve their wellbeing (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Richard, 2013). The programs that have been geared towards addressing stress and burnout of teachers are diverse in scale, but have unreliable degrees of success (Lambert et al., 2009; Richardson & Rothstein, 2008), suggesting a need for further exploration of programs that could address teachers' emotional wellbeing.

Within the lens of promoting emotional resilience for teachers to navigate the constant stressors at the schools, researchers have proposed emotional self-regulation strategies as coping strategies (Bullough & Baugman, 1997; Goss & John, 2003). Emotional self-regulation is a process where individuals can practice awareness of one's own behavior, subjective experiences, thoughts, emotions, and psychological reactions within that process (Gross & John, 2003). Teachers' emotional self-regulation plays a significant role on how they deal with difficult emotions in an effective fashion (Bullough & Baughman, 1997). The researchers emphasized the importance of teachers' ability to recognize which levels of stress are manageable versus the type of stress that can be counterproductive.

Researchers have proposed the practice of mindfulness and for individuals to learn to regulate their emotions through awareness practices (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007; Carmody & Baer, 2008; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Mindfulness is defined as a practice where individuals practice awareness of the present while free of judgment (Brown & Ryan, 2003). The practice of mindfulness increases self-awareness, self-regulation, emotional resilience, active self-reflection, and empathy and compassion for others (Davidson et al., 2003; Davidson & Harrington, 2002; Shapiro, Satin, Bishop, & Cardova, 2005; Singer & Lamm 2009). Mindfulness practices increase mental processes such as clarity and concentration, which can foster emotional regulation (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006). Accordingly, mindfulness approaches could be a useful tool for teachers to regulate their emotions and navigate their stressors when dealing with difficult work environments.

One of the related qualities of mindfulness is self-compassion. Although the practice of mindfulness aims for the individual to experience the present relating to the internal experience, self-compassion practice attends to the experiencer who is going through a difficult emotional time (Germer, 2009). In other words, mindfulness can bring present awareness of emotions, but self-compassion does the healing of the individual's emotional experience. Hence, the practice of attending to the suffering of oneself can be a useful tool to handle emotional regulation. In the next sections, the concept of self-compassion is introduced, including the theoretical tenets and the research supporting self-compassion, as the foundation for a potential resource for teachers to self-regulate difficult emotions to reduce teacher stress and burnout.

### The Concept of Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is grounded in the concept of basic compassion, which involves feeling for the suffering of others and staying connected with individuals in pain to alleviate their discomfort (Gilbert, 2009; Wispe, 1991). Self-compassion involves staying connected with the self and accepting one's own pain without harsh judgment, recognizing that inadequacies and challenges are normal and part of being human (Neff, 2003). As noted, self-compassion is related to the practice of mindfulness (Germer, 2009), which originates from the Eastern philosophy of Buddhism and encompasses the practice of being in the moment with a sense of curiosity, but detached from judgment (Hollis-Walker & Colosimo, 2011).

Kabat-Zinn (1990), founder of the recognized mindfulness-based stress reduction program, noted that self-compassion was one of the essential components of the practice of mindfulness. In addition, Shapiro et al. (2005) indicated the benefits of mindfulness practice for reducing stress and increasing self-compassion. Finally, the practice of self-compassion may be related to emotional intelligence, which encompasses the skills to recognize and be aware of one's own emotions and to use this knowledge productively (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Neff (2003a) has been credited with defining the construct of self-compassion as a skill to help individuals deal with life difficulties. Self-compassion has been conceptualized by using three main tensions that can overlap and interweave throughout one's experience: (a) self-kindness versus self-judgment, (b) common humanity versus isolation, and (c) mindfulness versus over-identification.

Self-compassion benefits individuals' psychological health, including contentment, conscientiousness, emotional regulation, positive thinking, decreased anxiety, and decreased

depression (Neff & Vonk, 2009). Self-compassion increases positive emotions and helps decrease negative thoughts for individuals (Germer & Neff, 2013; Hofmann, Grossman, & Hilton, 2011; Neff & McGeehee, 2010). Additionally, self-compassion may be used to treat depression (Diedrich, Grant, Hoffman, Hiller, 2014; Raes, 2010). Self-compassion also was found to relieve anxiety and improve psychological wellness in therapists (Neff et al., 2007).

### Statement of the Problem

The Albert Shanker Institute, in its 2015 report, noted that even though a significant number of minority teachers are being recruited every year, the biggest challenge to achieving diversity in the profession is the high rate of teacher attrition. In fact, minority teachers are leaving the profession at a higher rate than other teachers. The report identified that minority teachers' attrition outpaced non-minority teachers by 20% and growing, while non-minority remained flat. One of the main reported reasons for attrition was the teachers' stressful working conditions at the schools and their frustration with not having a voice in decisions about the classroom, leading to feelings of burnout.

In the past two decades, government officials and other organizations have incorporated a plethora of minority teacher recruitment programs creating partnerships with high schools, universities, and marketing to paraprofessionals at other schools (Roellke & Rice, 2008). In fact, over the years, financial support to attract more minority teachers into the schools has amounted up to \$60 million dollars. Many of these initiatives on recruitment programs are targeting areas to fill in teaching positions at hard to staff schools that are categorized as Title 1 with predominantly low-income families. As of today, almost every state in the United States



implements minority recruitment initiatives; yet, the gap of teacher minority is significant (Ingersoll & May, 2011).

The Albert Shanker Institute Report (2015) provided a number of recommendations for minority teacher retention including mentoring programs, incentives with partnerships with universities and school districts, support and cultural sensitivity training for the administration, and support training for minority teachers that working with challenging conditions of high-poverty schools. Unfortunately, most of these recommendations focused on school environmental conditions. Although these factors are critical to improving the working experiences of minority teachers, the efforts to implement such programs can be expensive and time consuming. Among the recommendations, there has been a lack of emphasis on examining the emotional challenges of the teachers and the need for them to learn coping strategies such as self-regulation (e.g., mindfulness practices for awareness of emotions) that may be useful in the daily challenges they have to face, especially in high-poverty schools.

### Self-Compassion for Teacher's Occupational Stressors

There is limited research examining the experiences of stressors with elementary school teachers in Title 1 schools; however, such exploration may be fruitful to understand how teachers experience facing negative stressors and if self-compassion plays a role for coping. Research on self-compassion with caregiving professionals has demonstrated benefits, including contentment, conscientiousness, positive thinking, decreased anxiety, and decreased depression (Neff, 2011; Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007; Raes, 2010). In general, self-compassion may be a useful life skill to help people navigate difficult situations. Thus, it is a logical inference that applying self-compassion during stressful times could contribute to promoting mental well-being for Hispanic

elementary teachers who are feeling stressed, and possibly burnout, while working in hard to staff Title I schools. The practice of self-compassion may allow teachers to feel less isolated and decrease their stress and feelings of inadequacy.

Developing the skill of self-compassion could enhance behavioral motivation, which is related to a healthier sense of self-worth and a decrease in burnout feelings (Allen & Leary, 2010; Breines & Chen, 2012). Neff (2003) predicted that people with higher self-compassion would be more effective in goal development and taking on difficult tasks. Accordingly, self-compassion may help minority teachers in elementary schools to be more effective in goal development and taking on difficult tasks.

A qualitative approach may be useful for examining elementary school teachers' experiences with occupational stress. Although there is a growing body of literature on self-compassion (Neff, 2011; Pauley & McPherson, 2010), most of it has been quantitative in nature, with a focus on the association between self-compassion and mental health. The studies that have been presented regarding self-compassion for helping professionals (e.g., Shapiro, Brown, & Biegel, 2007) have lacked a qualitative approach that would help us examine occupational stress within a self-compassion theoretical framework in a cohesive cultural group such as Hispanic individuals who are teachers in hard to staff schools. A qualitative approach could address a gap in the literature for a better understanding of occupational stress in minority teachers and as a first step to help us develop future interventions for teachers to learn self-regulation skills through self-compassion approaches that could enhance emotional resilience when dealing with negative stressors at work.

### Definition of Terms

Hispanic Teachers - For purposes of this study, I recruited teachers who identified as Hispanic. Hispanic is defined based on individuals' ethnicity including historical and cultural background that relates back to Spain. However, the U.S. Government extends the definition of Hispanics as individuals who trace their ethnic background from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central and South America, and other cultures with a Hispanic ethnicity such as Spain and Portugal (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

Title I Schools - Title I schools are identified as those that receive additional funding to serve students from high poverty areas who often lack academic resources (Jacob, 2007). Historically, Title I schools tend to recruit a high number of teachers who are new in the field; therefore, not as qualified to deal with challenging students and high-stress environments (Eckert, 2013).

ESOL - The term ESOL refers to English speakers of another language.

Burnout - The concept of job burnout originated in the 1970's when the psychiatrist Freudenberger (1975) described burnout feelings as a loss of inspiration and motivation for work. Later, Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) refined the description of burnout as "an erosion of engagement that what started out as important, meaningful, and challenging work becomes unpleasant, unfulfilling, and meaningless" (p. 416).

Emotional Exhaustion - One of the main tenets of burnout (Maslach et al. 2001). Defined as the feeling of being emotionally depleted and worn-out of emotional resources (Lee & Ashforth, 1990).

Emotional Regulation - The concept of emotional regulation refers to the ability to manage one's experiences with emotions and how they are expressed (Gross, 2002). Teachers could be

exposed to situations where strong emotions might arise such as anger, frustration, and sadness. An appropriate way to manage intense emotions for teachers could be useful for classroom management and to handle the daily pressures of the job (Sutton, 2007).

Mindfulness - Mindfulness is defined as a practice where individuals practice awareness of the present moment while free of judgment (Brown & Ryan, 2003). The practice of mindfulness increases self-awareness, self-regulation, emotional resilience, active self-reflection, empathy, and compassion for others (Davidson et al., 2003; Davidson & Harrington, 2002; Shapiro et al., 2005; Singer & Lamm, 2009).

Self-Compassion--Neff (2003a) defined the self-compassion as an extension of compassion towards one self during times of failures, suffering, or perceived inadequacies. Neff (2003a) expanded on the definition of self-compassion by including three main tenets- self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness.

### Research Questions

As a pre-requisite for understanding the experiences of elementary school Hispanic teachers in Title I schools when facing stressors, it was paramount to report the variety of ways in which the participants perceived to cope with their negative stressors. From a systemic point of view (e.g., Hispanic teachers in the same type of school setting), participants' experiences are potentially interconnected and interrelated (Von Bertalanffy, 1968). Therefore, this investigation was conducted to answer research questions relating to exploratory inquiries. Using a self-compassion theoretical framework, the following two questions guided this research study:

1. What are elementary school Hispanic teachers' lived experiences with stressors while working in Title I schools?

2. What are the elementary school Hispanic teachers' experiences coping with stress while working at Title I elementary schools?

Additional sub-questions followed to arrive at understanding the teachers' experiences with stressors following the tenets on the concept of self-compassion. For instance: What are Hispanic teachers' experiences with using self-kindness during a stressful time while working at the schools? What are Hispanic teachers' experiences with common humanity during a stressful time while working at the schools?

This study drew from phenomenology to answer the research questions and to deepen the understanding of what it means to experience stressors as a minority Hispanic teacher in a Title I elementary school. Finally, as a researcher employing an exploratory framework, I aimed to expand on the knowledge of self-compassion by exploring Hispanic teachers' experiences on how they cope with stress and challenges in hard to staff schools such as Title I.

### Research Methodology

I have chosen a qualitative phenomenological research design for this research study because of the emergent nature of the study and the appropriateness of qualitative design for exploratory purposes (Creswell, 2007). Through qualitative research, a clear and detailed understanding of a complex issue is afforded (Creswell, 2007). As Creswell (2007) noted, "The approach is attainable by talking directly with participants within their natural environments and invite them to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between researchers and the participants in a study" (p. 40). The findings of the research study were developed inductively from the responses provided by the participants' interviews and no prior hypotheses were presented.

The evaluation as a researcher on how to best answer the research question determines the most appropriate research methodology (Creswell, 2013; Glens, 2006). There are four possible types of qualitative research approaches: (a) exploratory, (b) explanatory, (c) descriptive, and (d) emancipatory (Marshall & Crossman, 2006). Exploratory qualitative studies aim to first understand the problem, distinguish and discern important categories, and describe implications for future research. An exploratory method aims to learn more about a little understood phenomenon. Explanatory methods encourage the researcher to explain plausible causations of a phenomenon. A descriptive approach is appropriate when the goal is to learn more about a phenomenon of interest and apply methods that can encourage participants to explore and talk in depth about their subjective experiences (Marshall & Crossman, 2006). Finally, emancipatory methods explore issues in the individuals' environment followed by improvements or solutions based on the feedback provided by the participants' responses (Clarke, Lehaney, & Martin, 1998). Given the prior discussion, and due to the fact that little is known about Hispanic elementary school teachers' experiences with occupational stress, an exploratory and descriptive phenomenological investigation was employed.

Furthermore, the selection of a specific qualitative research methodology also depends on using the most appropriate methodology that facilitates the answer to the research question (Creswell, 2013; Glens, 2006). Qualitative methodology approaches tend to fall into two different categories, which depend on the involvement of the researcher with the study to the research question, which could only require exploratory methods versus applied interventions to understand changes (Grinch, 2007; Glens, 2006). Therefore, qualitative research methodology

can serve in diverse situations in order to understand the presented phenomena from perspective that the participants would be experiencing (Glens, 2006).

### Design and Methods

In an effort to explore the meaning of lived experiences for the elementary school Hispanic teachers in a Title I school setting, I used Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological approach to enquiry. Colaizzi's (1978) procedural qualitative methods are influenced from the work of Giorgi (1970), which stems from the existential phenomenology. Colaizzi's (1978) focused on the process of validating the findings of the presented phenomenon from the participants. Therefore, Colaizzi's process called for the researcher to return to the analysis of transcripts based on the structured phenomenon.

Leedy and Ormond (2001) noted that phenomenology aims to provide a better understanding of individuals' subjective experiences, and how such experiences revolve around a particular phenomenon or situation--that is, "the lived experiences of several individuals about a concept or phenomenon" (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). Phenomenological investigations study lived and existential meaning and aim to describe and understand the core of the participants' meaning (Van Manen, 2003).

Through an exploratory and descriptive phenomenological investigation, I captured the experiences of occupational stressors with Hispanic teachers. Within a self-compassion theoretical framework, I examined how teachers experience and cope with their occupational stressors.

## Participants

Participants in this study were selected through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is selected when the inquirer looks for participants who are closely related to the research question in regard to their experiences or research site (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, Creswell (2013) noted that the ranges for sampling strategies in phenomenological studies are narrow. Thus, one of the common sampling strategies that I selected included criterion sampling which, according to the author, “works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 126).

With the approvals of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), chair advisor, and school district, Hispanic teachers who work in elementary Title I schools were recruited in the first semester of the 2016 school year. I enlisted the cooperation of the principals that I have been working with in three Title I elementary schools so that I could reach out to their teachers. I explained the study to those who volunteered and obtained their informed consent before proceeding. All participants were experiencing the same phenomenon being researched (Creswell, 2013).

The selection of sample size was guided by the concept of saturation from the collected data (Mason, 2010). In other words, in order to capture the different perspectives of participants’ qualitative samples needed to be significantly large to capture all important and uncovered perceptions. Saturation takes place “when the collection of the new data does not shed any further light on the issue under investigation (Mason, 2010, p. 3). Bertaux (1981) recommended 15 participants as the smallest acceptable sample; therefore, in order to assure proper saturation of data, I recruited 19 participants for this study.



### Data Collection Procedures

In phenomenological studies, the preferred data collection is through conducting face-to-face interviews (Creswell, 2013; McCracken, 1988). “Narratives, reflections, and thoughts can often be captured in an interview. Therefore, a phenomenological dissertation without interviews is like a man without a soul” (Almeida, 2012, p. 105). The goal with the interviews is to learn the meaning of the phenomenon experienced from a small number of participants (Creswell, 2013).

I followed Bernard’s (1988) interview recommendations in my research study. In order to explore the meanings and experiences of occupational stressors for minority teachers who work in Title I elementary schools, I conducted a semi-structured interview of each participant. Bernard (1988) noted that semi-structured interviews are best used when the participants are only limited to one interview. By following a semi-structured format interview, I provided a clear set of instructions, which provided guidance for the participants to stay on topic, while also welcoming the opportunity to explore new ways of seeing the phenomenon in question (Bernard, 1988).

The length of interviews averaged 45 minutes. I audiotaped the interviews and later transcribed them (Creswell, 2013). Prior to the interviews, I provided consent forms for the participants to review. I maintained confidentiality for the teachers in any reports that I wrote about my findings.

### Trustworthiness

I employed accepted strategies to document the validity of the study (Creswell, 2013). Although researchers seem to have a hard time agreeing to common grounds of validity

procedures with qualitative data, common key factors that are similar to the quantitative-based ideas of rigorous analysis exist (Colaizzi, 1978; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Kline, 2004). In order to promote a rigorous qualitative investigation, multiple methods designed to provide trustworthiness and integrity of the study are available (Creswell, 2013). The methods that I used to ensure trustworthiness in this study included: (a) clear articulation of methods in order to protect the integrity of the data, (b) reflection on the researcher's positionality and pre-conceived notions about the participants' experiences by using bracketing, (c) analyst triangulation of the collected data with peer debriefers, (d) member checking, and (e) a thorough description of previous literature (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Crossman, 2006; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015).

Following the guidelines for qualitative methods, the review of the literature was ongoing to allow for development of and evolution of the findings from the data analysis (Marshall & Crossman, 2006). Patton (2015) identified the step of analyst triangulation as a way to validate the analysis of qualitative data by using multiple analysts to review the findings of the data. The analyst triangulation step can provide a check on selective perception and highlight blind spots from the data analysis. The main goal is not to find agreement, but to understand several ways of interpreting the data (Patton, 2015). The process of setting aside pre-conceived biases or judgments is called bracketing, also known as *epoche* (Moustakas, 1994). The bracketing step is necessary in order to view the phenomenon under investigation, clear of judgments and as objectively as possible (Creswell, 2013). Descriptions of my steps to include bracketing were included throughout the present study. The positionality of the researcher is also presented to clarify the position or lens through which the researcher

construes the participants' world (Glens, 2006). Finally, trustworthiness in phenomenological research requires self-reflections of the researcher (Creswell, 2013). I captured my self-reflections through journal entries, and segments were provided as appropriate.

### Data Analysis

In phenomenological studies researchers work on data analysis seek for the following three outcomes (Thorne, 2000). First, the researcher wants to make sense of the gathered responses from the interviews. Second, the researcher looks for patterns and relationships within the identified meanings. Finally, the general discoveries about the phenomena in question can provide a better understanding (Thorne, 2000).

Colaizzi (1978) specified the use of structured methods for data analysis including the following steps: (a) transcription of the subjects' descriptions, (b) extraction of significant statements from each of the transcripts, (c) creating formulated meanings from the participants' significant statements, (d) gathering formulated meanings into theme clusters, (e) developing an exhaustive description from all the developed themes through the method of synthesis, (f) identifying the fundamental structure of the phenomenon, and (g) returning to the participants for member checking.

### Findings

A number of significant themes emerged from the data analyses. The five emerged themes included: (a) emotional stressors, (b) general stressors, (c) cultural stressors, (d) coping skills, and (e) teacher recommendations for school administrators. The identified five themes

were the result of lengthy personal reflection and through following the guidelines of Colaizzi (1978).

### Limitations

The present study was designed to explore and understand the experiences of Hispanic teachers in Title I elementary schools with their occupational stressors within a self-compassion theoretical framework. Consistent with phenomenology and qualitative methodology, the expected findings were the subjective experiences of each participant, based on their own meanings and understandings, which make it difficult to replicate the study (Krumpe, 2002). Another possible limitation lies in objectivity. Although, in qualitative research, objectivity is considered a characteristic of the research data rather than the researcher (Giorgi, 1988), it is possible that the data could reflect the researcher's meanings more than the subjective experiences of the participants. Member checks should help overcome their objectivity.

### Implications and Areas for Further Research

This study was expected to yield implications for practice, including, but not limited to: (a) better understanding from teachers on how they experience and cope emotionally with occupational stress, (b) better understanding from Hispanic teachers on how self-compassion may be helpful to prevent burnout and provide resources for emotional self-regulation that mental health counselors could offer, (c) possibilities for implementing self-compassion interventions to address teachers' emotional wellbeing and for burnout prevention, and (d) suggestions regarding how counselor educators can train future school counselors with a better understanding of the occupational stressors the minority teachers experience and consider as self-

compassion approach to promote wellbeing for teachers. In addition, this investigation was expected to generate insights that may raise new questions to explore for future research on the concept of self-compassion.

### Summary

The initial section of this chapter contains my reflection on working and interacting with teachers working in Title I elementary schools and how I arrived at the research questions. Next, I provided an overview of the background on teacher's stressors and the current state of minority teachers with burnout and attrition. I then described the theoretical framework of self-compassion that was used as a lens to explore the experiences of teachers when dealing with stressors. The purpose of the study with research questions including methodology, results, as well as my perceptions of the limitations, and implications with a brief conclusion complete this chapter.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of Hispanic elementary school teachers working in Title I schools. Specifically, I wanted to understand how Hispanic elementary school teachers navigate stressors working in a Title I elementary school within a self-compassion theoretical framework. Gaining new knowledge on how Hispanic elementary teachers experience and understand stressful times within a self-compassion theoretical framework could provide important insights on how to best develop future interventions to mitigate teacher burnout. For the purpose of this investigation, it was essential to complete a critical review of the relevant literature. As new insights were gained throughout the data collection, data analysis, and synthesis phases of the study, I revisited and updated this review of the literature (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

This review encompasses four main topics: (a) understanding teacher burnout and the relationship between burnout and emotional exhaustion; (b) the state of Hispanic teachers' attrition and emotional exhaustion, (c) coping interventions teachers employ to address stress within a self-compassion theoretical framework, and (d) possible self-compassion tenets that support Hispanic teachers' well-being. The first section of the chapter reviews teacher burnout and attrition. Specifically, reviewed is emotional exhaustion as one of the primary contributors leading to burnout for teachers working at Title I elementary schools. The second section of the chapter presents literature relating to minority teachers' levels of occupational stress and attrition and the need for interventions to mitigate educator attrition. The third section of the chapter presents a review of the coping interventions for teachers, emphasizing emotional balance.

Mindfulness interventions for teachers are reviewed that may serve to alleviate their occupational stress. Finally, the chapter concludes with a review of self-compassion and the theory's main tenets. The research question guiding this investigation are:

1. What are elementary school Hispanic teachers' lived experiences with stressors while working in Title I schools?
2. What are the elementary school Hispanic teachers' experiences coping with stress while working at Title I elementary schools?

To complete the literature review, I searched multiple information sources including books, research handbooks, dissertations, Internet searches, and refereed journals. I accessed most of the literature review sources through EBSCO Host, including ERIC, PsycInfo, and Web of Science databases. I also scheduled a meeting with a research consultant at the university's library to help identify any additional studies relating to teacher attrition, burnout, and self-compassion. A particular challenge I encountered was that I did not find any published research studies examining self-compassion in teacher populations; however, I found a number of studies examining self-compassion benefits in other helping professions that experience high incidence of burnout (e.g., nurses). Research published examining the theoretical construct of self-compassion began in 2003.

Throughout the literature review, I identified gaps in the literature that became apparent related to this investigation (e.g., lack of emotional balance interventions for teachers). In addition, I proposed self-compassion as an effective strategy to mitigate burnout in Hispanic teachers working in Title I elementary schools. I also discussed how the existing literature

supported taking an exploratory stance on minority teachers' experiences with self-compassion by using qualitative research methods.

### Teacher Burnout

Teacher turnover in the United States is a significant and persistent problem (e.g., Boe et al., 2008; Borman & Dowling, 2008). Snyder and Dillow (2013) from The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2013-2014) reported that approximately 17% of teachers leave their jobs annually. Approximately, 50% of new teachers leave their job within the first five years in education (Boe et al., 2008). The National Commission of Teaching and America's Future (2007) reported that the expense of teacher attrition in U.S. public schools amounts to more than \$7 billion a year.

The teaching profession is recognized as stressful (Kyriacou, 2001; Lambert & McCarthy, 2006). Teachers who experience stress for an extended length of time may experience burnout (Farber, 1998; Troman & Woods, 2001) and teacher turnover is associated with high burnout levels from stress (DeAngelis & Presely, 2011; Guarino et al., 2006). In fact, teacher burnout is one of the main reasons for attrition in the teaching field (Chang, 2009). On the other hand, teachers who are experiencing burnout and remain in the field may negatively affect students' learning outcomes, classroom management, and the school environment (Olivier & Venter, 2003).

The concept of job burnout originated in the 1970s when the psychiatrist Freudenberger (1975) described burnout feelings as a loss of inspiration and motivation for work. Later, Maslach et al. (2001) refined the description of burnout as "an erosion of engagement that what



started out as important, meaningful, and challenging work becomes unpleasant, unfulfilling, and meaningless” (p. 416).

Researchers have examined burnout in teaching for decades (Betoret, 2009; Carson, 2006; Ransford, 2007). The daily challenging events that teachers are presented with in their field can bring a collection of unpleasant emotional experiences that could lead to emotional exhaustion (Burke et al., 1996). Earlier researchers focused on stress as the main precursor to burnout (Smylie, 1999). Key factors that contribute to teachers’ stress and burnout include age, marital status, years of teaching experience, and level of education background (Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Dworkin, 1986). Furthermore, researchers examined occupational stressors such as teacher student ratio, grade level, special education teaching, and workload (Karasek, 1979), concluding that work stressors result from a mixture of complex job demands and limited control of their job role. Teachers at risk for burnout tended to see their work as lacking in inspiration and also lack goals for their job (Bullough & Baughman, 1997). Teachers also reported feeling confused as to what their role should be as an educator, suggesting lack of clarity on the expectations of the job. For example, teachers reported feeling conflicted as to what being an effective teacher means in regard to attending to the responsibilities related to teaching (Dworkin, 1986).

Maslach and Jackson (1981) developed constructs to identify burnout which were composed of the following three dimensions: (a) depersonalization, (b) reduced personal accomplishment, and (c) emotional exhaustion. Depersonalization presents when teachers start isolating or disconnecting from their professional peers. Teachers are at great risk for depersonalization due to the dynamics of the teaching profession, in which teachers tend to have

minimal interaction with their peers (Bennet & LeCompte, 1990). Because teachers spend most of their time with students, there is limited time to interact with teachers or administration staff that could relate with the demands of the job. Farber (1998) presented depersonalization in teachers as a form of defense mechanism, which allows them to be sarcastic about the students and the job responsibilities while continuing in the field at lower job productivity. However, although depersonalization could work as a buffer for teachers, it could also lead to isolation and increase the risk for burnout (Farber, 1998).

Reduced personal accomplishment occurs when teachers believe they lack the self-efficacy to be effective in their work and do not take credit for their hard work (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Finally, emotional exhaustion includes feelings of emptiness, with teachers lacking the resources to navigate their stressors. Teachers can present emotional exhaustion through lack of patience with the students and lack of motivation to manage their classrooms (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Other characteristics related to emotional exhaustion include fatigue, weakness, lack of energy, and feeling overworked (Lambie, 2007; Schwarzer et al., 2000). Emotional exhaustion makes teachers less responsive to the needs of their students (Chang, 2009). Accordingly, the emotional exhaustion dimension is a primary precursor to burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). When individuals talk about their experiences with burnout, emotional exhaustion is the primary topic (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Furthermore, emotional exhaustion is the first symptom reported before depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment occurs.

Aloe, Amo, and Shanahan (2014) examined, through a multivariate meta-analysis of 16 studies, how teachers' classroom management self-efficacy (CMSE) relates to the three

dimensions of burnout: depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment, and emotional exhaustion (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). They found that there is a relationship between CMSE and the three dimensions of burnout. They noted that the largest effect was between CMSE and personal achievement ( $r = 0.43$ ; 18.49% of the variance explained). In other words, when teachers sense that they can manage their classrooms, they also feel more accomplished. In addition, the investigators found that CMSE negatively correlated to emotional exhaustion ( $-0.27$ ; 7.29% of the variance explained) and depersonalization ( $-0.32$ ; 10.24% of the variance explained).

Although Aloe and colleagues' findings were consistent with earlier work and reviews (e.g., Brown 2012), there were some research limitations worth considering. First, the number of selected studies (16) was small due to the investigators' rigorous selection criteria. Second, the investigators only tested for three factors of burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) and focused on classroom management self-efficacy instead of expanding more on the different areas of self-efficacy. Nevertheless, the study provided better understanding to how CMSE relates to the presented different dimensions of burnout.

For purposes of this investigation on understanding teachers' stressors, in the following section, the construct of emotional exhaustion as presented by researchers as one of the primary topics that people that experience stress choose to talk about (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) and is suggested to be the primary dimension that can lead to burnout (Maslach et al., 2001).

### Emotional Exhaustion with Teachers

Carson (2006) investigated the relationship between teachers' burnout and emotional regulation by tracking teachers' ( $N = 45$ ) daily emotional experiences for a two-week period of

time with the use of virtual assistants. Carson (2006) found that repeated unpleasant experiences on a daily basis, such as frustration, anger, anxiety, and lack of hope, contributed to teacher burnout. Chang (2009) also found that the unpleasant emotional experiences that teachers reported, such as dealing with the frustrations of students' misbehavior in the classroom, contributed to burnout.

Other researchers have explored unpleasant emotions that could lead to emotional exhaustion in teachers, such as anxiety (e.g., Bullough et al., 2006), anger and frustration (e.g., Liljestrom, Roulston & d'Marraais, 2007), and guilt and shame (Carson, 2006; Hargreaves & Tucker, 1991). Bullough and colleagues (2006) stated that anxiety is activated from feelings of inadequacy or lack of preparation in the job. Disruption of relationships with colleagues, administrators, and parents can trigger anxiety in teachers (Bullough et al., 2006).

Bullough and colleagues (2006) interviewed teachers working in elementary schools ( $N = 21$ ) about their teaching-related dreams in order to explore the relationship of dreams with anxiety. The researchers found that teachers often dreamed of not feeling prepared for lesson plans or running late to class. Although the reality of the teaching profession is that not everything will be prepared in order for things to go well in the classroom, the teachers' most frequent fear was about lack of preparation. Other reported dreams included the fear of being judged by others, losing control of the class by turning on the students and yelling at them, and running behind schedule. The findings from this study supported those in a similar study by Hargreaves (2001); therefore, anxiety is evoked in teachers when they experience lack of control and feel threatened existentially (Lazarus, 2000).

Feelings of frustration experienced by teachers are one of the most frequent unpleasant emotions (Chang, 2009). Researchers have identified the sources of the teachers' frustration to include the following issues: (a) tedious administrative tasks, (b) keeping up with systematic changes, and (c) conflicts between their idealistic conceptions of being a teacher versus the expectations from the administration (Chang, 2009). A common source of frustration was lack of control over undesired events. Teachers were frustrated when students misbehaved and did not respond to instructions or classroom expectations, thereby making the teachers feel that they lost control. Sutton (2007) noted that the difference between frustration and anger can blur, as the presented emotional and physical symptoms could be similar, including intrusive thoughts, impulsive actions, and lack of coping. In fact, teachers may experience guilt when feeling frustrated and angry toward their students, another unpleasant emotion reported by teachers (Van Veen, Slegers, & Van de Ven, 2005).

Along the same lines, teachers can experience guilt when they perceive that they are to blame for something that is out of their control or in a situation that is not going well (Lazarus, 2001). For example, teachers might feel guilty because they feel responsible for the pace of their students' learning. Hargreaves and Tuckers (1991) noted that teachers' guilt emerged from conflicts in different situations: (a) teachers' commitment to keep students engaged, (b) unreasonable expectations of making an effect on the students as a teacher, (c) never ending demands from the school administration, and (d) personal high expectations. Liljestrom and colleagues (2007) indicated that teachers perceived their main role or moral duty to be helping family and students to alleviate their challenges in regards to students' learning.

Finally, guilt is an emotion that, if experienced chronically, can lead to shame (Zembylas, 2003). The author noted that shame might be an indicator of loss of hope in a situation that feels out of control for the teachers and can interfere with teachers' confidence, increase anxiety, and lead to depression. Zembylas (2003) noted that shame leaves individuals feeling powerless and with a deep sense of inadequacy. Particularly, new teachers could be more vulnerable to experience shame, since they have to adjust to a new school system, students, and class curriculum (Zembylas, 2003).

#### Teachers in Elementary Schools

Teacher stress and burnout are significant in elementary level education (McCarthy & Lambert, 2006). The various sources of stress for teachers in elementary schools include (a) the disruptive behaviors of the students, (b) the workload, (c) the organizational aspects, and (d) time demands (Lambert et al., 2009). Such stressors are compounded by the increasing administrative duties and scrutiny that teachers receive as a result of the educational system's focus on standardized tests (Moriarty et al., 2001). Moreover, a new generation of students, which is exposed to increased technology, is coming to class with fewer hours of sleep and a minimal aptitude for learning such as lack of motivation (McCarthy & Lambert, 2006).

In addition, cultural shifts are occurring in our society that affect the classroom. Students are more likely to have parents who are working longer hours than in the past and to come from households where English is not spoken (McCarthy & Lambert, 2006). Finally, teachers are no longer being recognized as authorities in education by the parents; rather, contemporary parents are taking the position of advocating for their children against the teachers, putting the blame on the teachers for their elementary school children's failures (McCarthy & Lambert, 2006).

Lambert et al. (2009) investigated teacher stress among a sample of elementary teachers ( $N = 521$ ) working in 16 elementary schools in the same county. Teachers were assessed using the *Classroom Appraisal of Resources and Demands* (CARD), elementary version (Lambert, O'Donnell, Kusherman, & McCarthy, 2006). The CARD was used to measure the teachers' stress based on their own perceptions of classroom demands and resources provided by the school. The researchers found that teachers tended to depersonalize from the students when reporting higher levels of emotional exhaustion. In addition, researchers found that the participants lacked positive social behavior with the students and reported lack of support from colleagues, parents and the community in general as major stressors. Although the study was limited in generalizability due to the participants all being from a homogenous sample, the findings provided increased understanding of factors that teachers in elementary schools deal with that can lead them to burnout.

#### Emotional Challenges for Teachers in Title I Schools

Burnout is a significant problem for teachers in Title I schools. Title I schools are identified as those that receive additional funding to serve students from high poverty areas who often lack academic resources (Jacob, 2007). Historically, Title I schools tend to recruit a high number of teachers who are new in the field; therefore, not as qualified to deal with challenging students and high-stress environments (Eckert, 2013).

Researchers have investigated the incidence of teacher attrition in high-poverty schools, noting that problems with job satisfaction including (a) low salaries, (b) high demand of work from students that struggle to succeed academically, (c) little leadership support, (d) lack of time to prepare for classes, and (e) difficult student behavior that impedes learning in the classroom,

leave the teachers emotionally exhausted (Cochram-Smith, 2009; Fox & Certo, 2002; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Teachers' burnout and attrition are also linked working environment, lack of programs for teacher preparation, and constant job stressors (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Jacob, 2007).

Pearman and Lefever-Davis (2012) analyzed the reflections of novice teachers ( $N = 12$ ) at 11 elementary schools on their experiences working in Title I schools. The purpose of this study was to understand if their reflections related with reasons for leaving the profession. All participants were white females. Investigators found that classroom management was one of the most challenging tasks. Teachers doubted their self-efficacy to properly manage student discipline. Therefore, the investigators inferred that the origins of attrition can arise early in the career of teachers, when they are not prepared with the proper coping skills to deal with classroom management challenges. Although some of the limitations of this study had to do with the sample being small and homogenous, the findings provide insights on factors that can influence what teachers perceive as stressors early in their careers when working in high poverty schools.

### State of Minority Teachers

#### Importance of Minority Teachers

The National Education Association (2008) reported that the alarming gap of minority teachers in the schools could cause students from K through 12 to fail to learn critical academic, personal, and social skills that would make them culturally sensitive. Furthermore, a lack of minority teachers presents minority students with limited role models from their same ethnic background where they could relate in the schools (Shure, 2001). Minority teachers tend to be



more sensitive to attend to the needs of minority students and are more in tune to believe in the minority students' potential to excel in education (Peske & Haycock, 2006). An increase of minority teachers can have an impact on students' learning accomplishments, social awareness, and cultural sensitivity (Allison & Rehm, 2007; Salinas, 2002; Santoro, 2007). Salinas (2002) summarized the importance of minority teachers in the schools for student success: "Because of their own background, minority teachers are important because they can act as role models, encourage students to perform better, enhanced understanding of cultural differences, and break down students' stereotypes" (p. 1).

The government and the educational system are continuing to work on initiatives to recruit more minority teachers and creating retention programs in order to increase their status in the profession. The Albert Shanker Institute Report (2015) provided a number of recommendations for minority teacher retention including mentoring programs, incentives with partnerships with universities and school districts, support and cultural sensitivity training for the administration, and support training for minority teachers that work with challenging conditions of high-poverty schools. Unfortunately, most of these recommendations focused on the school environmental conditions, and the efforts to implement such programs can be expensive and time consuming. What is missing in the recommendations is an emphasis on examining the emotional balance of the teachers so that they can learn coping strategies for the daily challenges that they have to face, especially in high-poverty schools, which foster more stressful environments due to the high number of low achieving students (Pearman & Lefever-Davis, 2012).

Minimizing and managing teachers' stress is one of the strategies that promotes a healthy classroom atmosphere and keeps teachers from burning out (McAfee, 2015; McCormick &

Barnett, 2011; Moore, 2012; Renshaw, Long, & Cook, 2015). Furthermore, supporting the capacity of the teachers to cope with classroom demands, and reinforcing their wellbeing, has positive implications for the learning of minority students and the overall success of the school (McAfee, 2015; McCormick & Barnett, 2011; Moore, 2012; Renshaw et al., 2015).

### Attrition and Retention Issues for Minority Teachers

The report of the Albert Shanker Institute (2015) noted that even though a significant number of minority teachers were being recruited every year, the biggest challenge to achieving diversity in the profession was the high rate of teacher attrition. In fact, minority teachers have been determined to be leaving the profession at a higher rate than other teachers. Minority teachers' attrition outpaced non-minority teachers by 20% and was growing, while non-minority attrition was flat. Among the reported reasons for attrition were the teachers' stressful working conditions at the schools and their frustration about not having a voice in decisions about the classroom, potentially leading them to burnout.

In the past two decades, government officials and other organizations have incorporated a plethora of minority teacher recruitment programs creating partnerships with high schools, universities, and marketing to paraprofessionals at other schools (Roellke & Rice, 2008). In fact, over the years, financial support to attract more minority teachers into the schools has amounted up to \$60 million dollars (Roelke & Rice, 2008). Many of these recruitment initiatives are targeted to fill teaching positions at hard to staff schools that are categorized as Title 1 with predominantly low-income families. As of today, almost every state in the United States implements minority recruitment initiatives, yet, the shortage on minority teachers remains (Ingersoll & May, 2011).

Ingersoll and May (2011) found that factors such as student poverty, number of minority students or teachers, and geographical location were not the reasons teachers reported leaving their jobs. A similar study examining African American teachers confirmed the same findings (Connor, 2011). The most significant factor that seemed to contribute to minority attrition was the harsh working conditions, which created job dissatisfaction in over 50% of the participants (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Job dissatisfaction included (a) frustrations with school administration; (b) student discipline problems; (c) little democracy in decision making, especially on how to manage the classroom; (d) limited resources making difficult work conditions; (e) large class sizes; (f) constant classroom disruptions; (g) poor salary; and (h) disenchantment with teaching responsibilities (Ingersoll & May, 2011). The aforementioned job dissatisfaction issues seemed to be exacerbated by the recruitment of minority teachers with limited experience who lacked the coping skills to manage challenging student behavior. The authors noted that the job dissatisfaction condition that had the strongest correlate with teacher attrition was the lack of autonomy for teachers to make decisions on how to manage or teach their class, which was most evident in minority teachers' participants (over 40%). In other words, these teachers reported feeling frustrated about not having a voice at their schools.

### Hispanic Teachers

There is a dearth of research specifically with Hispanic/Latino teachers in the literature. The limited presented studies were discrete in samples within the Hispanic/Latino teacher pipeline. Specifically, the experiences of Hispanic/Latino teachers in regard to how they relate to their occupational role and being a bilingual teacher have not received sufficient attention. Galindo (2007) used a narrative inquiry to explore how Chicana teachers' occupational identities

were shaped. Types of narratives that were used in search of this kind of identity were based on subject's experiences before and after they became teachers (Galindo, 2007). The author suggested that occupational narratives could characterize individual work style, ability, and attitudes that are important factors in establishing an occupational identity" (p. 255). The study was conducted with only one participant, a bilingual teacher with 16 years of experience. The data were taken from six interviews during a time period of one year. From the analysis of the interviews, the researcher presented how one teacher must navigate between two cultures and be able to cope with social marginalization. Although the sample consisted of only one subject, this study was a good guide for future researchers with interest in qualitative analysis targeting young Latino teachers and their rather complex problems.

Mayes, Cutri, and Montero (2004) examined issues from a first-year Latino teacher's ( $N = 1$ ) point of view in both institutional and ethical manner. Their holistic analysis addressed several major issues from everyday life of a Latino teacher. The main conclusion was that teachers could adopt an authoritative stance with students of color. This implies that they should care for students but also should have high academic expectations. Furthermore, administrators and other members of the school have to be more sensitive with novice teachers and be able to accept their cultural identities as strengths. It seems that the authors generalized conclusions despite the limitations of a small sample and lack of detailed information regarding analysis of teacher views. However, the researchers highlighted the need for more awareness and need for more recognition on Latino teachers' strengths from the administration.

A similar narrative study was conducted by Gomez (2009) who used Latina prospective teachers from a midwestern university in his sample ( $N = 3$ ). His aim was to explore life histories

of prospective teachers through their experiences at home, school, and university, particularly their experiences with white, middle class population. The researcher also examined how often subjects evoked their mothers' experiences and stories in interviews. The author used "Bakhtin dialogism" as a framework for research (Gomez, 2009). The main idea of Bakhtin dialogism is that people can explore and understand their identity and who they can be through conversations with others. Subjects reported, among other experiences, situations with peers and teachers that were unpleasant such as offensive comments, unfounded generalizations about their cultural and historical background, and teachers' expectations with classroom management.

Monzo and Rueda (2001) examined Latino teachers' ( $N = 8$ ) and paraeducators' ( $N = 24$ ) interactions with Latino students using classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The investigation was conducted in two public elementary schools from Southern California. The researchers addressed the following question: How shared sociocultural background of Latino teachers, with maximum of three years of experience, and paraeducators can affect interactions with students in a positive way? All subjects reported that sharing the language and culture of their students allows them to improve interactions in classroom and create atmosphere where they can encounter everyone's needs. Interestingly, there was a mediated effect of their professional roles on relationship with students, as paraeducators were more focused on meeting student's emotional needs and had more informal interactions than teachers. Reliability is always a major problem in observation, and this study was limited by the lack of independent observers. However, this type of study highlighted the important role of Latino teachers and paraeducators sociocultural background and knowledge of students' language that allows them to interact with them in ways that enhance their academic skills, school climate, and student engagement. The

next section of the chapter presents strategies that have been used to help teachers manage teacher stress

### Coping Strategies for Emotional Self-Regulation with Teachers

To date, the majority of school-based interventions for improving emotional well-being have been for the benefit of students (McCarthy & Lambert, 2006). Limited attention has focused on addressing management of stress and burnout among teachers in order to improve their well-being (Eisenberg, 2003; Ekman, 2004; Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Richard, 2013). Those intervention programs that have been geared towards addressing stress and burnout of teachers are diverse in scale, but with unreliable degrees of effectiveness (Lambert et al., 2009; Richardson & Rothstein, 2008).

With the goal of promoting emotional resilience for teachers to navigate the constant stressors at school, researchers have proposed emotional self-regulation strategies as coping strategies (Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Chang 2009; Gross, 2002). Emotional self-regulation is a process where individuals can practice awareness of their own behavior, subjective experiences, thoughts, emotions, and psychological reactions (Gross & John, 2003). In an investigation of emotional regulation with teachers, emotional self-regulation was a significant strategy for dealing with difficult emotions effectively (Bullough & Baughman, 1997). The researchers emphasized the importance of teachers' ability to recognize which levels of stress are manageable versus the type of stress that can be counterproductive.

Gross (2002) noted that regulation of emotions could be accomplished by either reappraising or suppressing emotions. The mental process of reappraisal helps individuals have a different perspective on the situation that is causing them distress in order to decrease any

unpleasant emotions. On the other hand, the process of suppressing emotions tends to make individuals avoid any unpleasant emotions, and this could impair effective cognitive reasoning resources and block the ability to think critically for a better outcome. Correspondingly, Liljestrom et al. (2007) indicated that teachers, more often than not, tended to suppress their emotions rather than reappraise them due to the societal expectations of the role of a teacher and how one should deal with emotional distress and anger. The over practice of suppressing emotions by neglecting or denying true emotions can lead to burnout (Carson, 2007; Chang, 2009).

### Mindfulness

Researchers have proposed the practice of mindfulness and other self-awareness approaches for individuals to learn to regulate their emotions through awareness practices, and increase well-being, empathy, and compassion (Brown et al., 2007; Carmody & Baer, 2008; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Mindfulness is defined as a practice where individuals practice awareness of the present moment while free of judgment (Brown & Ryan, 2003). The practice of mindfulness increases self-awareness, self-regulation, emotional resilience, active self-reflection, empathy, and compassion for others (Davidson et al., 2003; Davidson & Harrington, 2002; Shapiro et al., 2005; Singer & Lamm, 2009). Mindfulness practices increase mental processes such as clarity and concentration, fostering emotional regulation (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006). Hoffman, Sawyer, Witt, and Oh (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of 39 investigations indicating the use of mindfulness practices moderately improved mood symptoms and decreased anxiety ( $g = 0.59$ ;  $g = 0.63$ ). For participants who were formally diagnosed with anxiety and mood symptoms,

mindfulness interventions improved their symptoms ( $g = 0.97$ ;  $g = 0.95$ ), including improvements being maintained over follow-up.

### Emotional Balance for Teachers

Few researchers have examined the use of mindfulness training with teachers. However, studies of strategies for improving emotional balance have sometimes included a mindfulness dimension. Investigations involve diverse mindfulness approaches and trainings, including variations on length of interventions and breadth of lessons (Roeser et al., 2012). The following studies are the most recent interventions examining the effectiveness of emotional balance practices such as mindfulness with teachers.

The program for teachers called Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) was developed to attend to the emotional well-being of teachers in order to improve classroom management and student support (Jennings et al., 2011). CARE educated teachers on emotional skills through experiential activities such as reflective practices, recognition of difficult emotions, and response patterns to the difficult emotions. The main goal of CARE was for teachers to be more empathetic with students' needs and the classroom emotional environment, and maintain emotional regulation when dealing with difficult behavior of students.

Jennings and colleagues (2011) examined the effectiveness of CARE on teachers' emotional well-being. Participants were teachers who worked in urban and suburban public schools ( $N = 53$ ; 48 White, two African American, and two Hispanic). Participants received five full-day sessions of CARE over the course of five weeks. Participants were assessed pre-and post-training on general well-being, efficacy, burnout/time pressure, and mindfulness. In the



results, researchers found positive effects in teacher efficacy ( $p = .002$ ;  $d = .80$ ); burnout and a sense of time pressure post intervention results were significant ( $p = .025$ ;  $d = -.42$ ); and mindfulness influence was also significant ( $p = .044$ ,  $d = .56$ ). The participants were also surveyed for a program evaluation of the course, with 96% stating that their self-awareness improved, 92% reporting improvement on general wellbeing, and 77% reporting an increase on the ability to manage classroom behaviors more effectively. Limitations on this study include a small sample size that lacked diversity; there was no control group; and they did not assess for CARE's effects on classroom and student outcomes. However, the results identified that the CARE program has the potential to support teachers' emotional well-being in challenging settings and, consequently, improving the climate of classrooms and student behaviors.

Gold and colleagues (2010) examined elementary school teachers ( $N = 10$ ) to assess the effectiveness of a Mindfulness Stress Reduction Program (MBSR) in reducing stress in teachers. In this study, the researchers did not report detailed demographic information. Participants received the MBSR interventions in an eight-week (once a week) time frame. Participants were measured pre and post intervention for depression, anxiety, stress, and mindfulness. Researchers indicated improvements on depression ( $p = .05$ ) and stress ( $p = .02$ ) in the participants. Overall, although researchers used an empirically based model of mindfulness intervention, the small sample and lack of control group were recognizable limitations to their study. However, this study presents MBSR as a promising intervention to improve emotional well-being in general for teachers.

Likewise, Kemeny and colleagues (2012) found positive effects in their investigation of the effect of mindfulness meditation in combination with emotional regulation training in female

teachers ( $N = 82$ ). Researchers only recruited females because some of their primary measures would require assessing for nervous system responses, which could vary by sex. Ethnicity information of the participants was not provided in this study. Participants were randomly assigned to the intervention group and the control group. Participants received 42 hours of interventions within an eight-week period, including presentations on mindfulness, meditation practices for emotional awareness, and home practices. Data was collected from participants' self-reports pre and post within a five-month period (final,  $n = 76$ ). Self-report measures included assessments for depression, anxiety, negative and positive affect scales, levels of mindfulness, rumination, and social desirability. In addition, participants had their blood pressure and cardiovascular reactivity during stress assessed.

Researchers reported significant improvements from their findings. Self-reported depression from the participants declined in the intervention group ( $p = .0001$ ). Self-reported anxiety also had a decrease ( $p = .0001$ ) and trait negative affect was also reduced compared to the control group ( $p = .0007$ ). The examination on the sympathetic and parasympathetic activity on the participants showed no differences between the groups; however, participants that reported practicing meditation for longer periods of time showed a reduction on blood pressure. Finally, participants' compassion and awareness of suffering of others increased. Overall, the researchers identified the positive effects of an intervention to assist teachers in applying emotional self-regulation. Strengths of this study included the examination of psychological and biological responses before and after the interventions, large sample size, and the use of randomized assignment to treatment and control groups.

Roeser and colleagues (2013) conducted a similar study related to the effectiveness of

mindfulness and emotional regulation. They investigated the effects of mindfulness interventions on teachers' occupational stress and burnout. Participants ( $N = 113$ ) were teachers recruited from elementary and secondary schools (89% females). No minority teachers were reported to participate in this study. Researchers created intervention and control groups. The intervention group completed eight weeks of mindfulness training (once a week). Participants were assessed at baseline, post, and after a three-month follow-up. Participants were measured on mindfulness levels, awareness and concentration, occupational self-compassion, occupational stress and burnout, symptoms of anxiety and depression, and teachers' absences from work. In addition, researchers measured physiological indicators of stress, collected saliva from the participants to measure cortisol levels, and measured for blood pressure and resting heart rate. Finally, participants completed a program evaluation survey.

The results identified an increase in mindfulness when compared to the control group ( $p = .05$ ). Similarly, teachers' self-compassion showed a significant interaction between intervention and the three-month follow-up ( $p = .05$ ). Additionally, researchers found less occupational stress and burnout in the intervention group compared to the control group ( $p = .05$ ), including after the three-month follow-up. On the other hand, similar to Kemeny (2012), researchers did not find any differences in the cortisol levels or blood pressure readings between the intervention groups and the control groups. Overall, the findings identified that schools can attend to stressors of the job, including feelings of burnout, by helping teachers to learn self-regulatory coping skills (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Flook and colleagues (2013) examined the effects of a modified Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction training (MBSR). Teachers ( $N = 15$ ) were recruited from four public

elementary schools that had a significant number of low income and racial/ethnic minority population of students. Researchers reported 94% of the participants were of American-European descent. Participants were randomly assigned to either the intervention or control group. Participants in the intervention group attended the adapted MBSR (included specific school related activities) for a period of eight weeks, 2.5 hours weekly, with a one-day intensive session. Participants were assessed for psychological distress, mindfulness and self-compassion, burnout, teacher classroom behavior, cortisol measurement with saliva samples, and in neuropsychological and contemplative tasks. Researchers reported an improvement in the self-report measures that included a reduction of psychological symptoms ( $p = .005$ ), mindfulness increases ( $p = .032$ ), and improvements in self-compassion ( $p = .008$ ). In addition, participants showed a decrease in the burnout scale, specifically for emotional exhaustion. The control group showed a minimal increase in burnout.

From these findings, researchers indicated that teachers who do not receive any type of training related to emotional regulation such as MBSR can be prone to increased emotional exhaustion and a decrease in personal accomplishment. Although the sample size of the study ( $N = 15$ ) was rather small, including a control group and assessing for an intervention that was adapted for potential teachers' experiences in the classroom adds considerable strength to the study. Thus, this study added to the literature on how mindfulness interventions could influence self-regulation for teachers during stressful situations such as classroom management.

Most of the reviewed studies on mindfulness were focused on navigating classroom management challenges. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the reviewed studies, for the most part, did not have minority teachers in their samples. Although the reviewed studies on

mindfulness examined potential stressors that lead to anxiety and depression, limited attention has been given to personal frustrations that teachers could be facing such as not having a voice within their profession which was an important reported factor in minority teachers related with attrition.

One of the dimensions of mindfulness practices that appeared in a number of the reviewed studies was self-compassion (e.g. Flook et al., 2013; Roeser et al., 2013). Although the practice of mindfulness aims for the individual to experience the present and relate it to the internal experience, self-compassion practice attends to the experiencer who is going through a difficult emotional time (Germer, 2009). In other words, mindfulness can bring present awareness of emotions, but self-compassion does the healing of the individual's emotional experience.

Robins, Ekblad, and Brantley (2012) examined the role that self-compassion can play in MBSR trainings. They found that self-compassion was independent of mindfulness as a mediator for the positive effects of MBSR in regard to interventions for reducing worry. Self-compassion is one of the components taught in mindfulness interventions, but it is not the main concept in the trainings. It is, however, a practice that may have a role in emotional self-regulation and preventing teacher burnout; thus, it was determined to be worth exploring further. The next section of the chapter reviews the concept of self-compassion.

### Self-compassion

Self-compassion is based from the concept of basic compassion, which relates to feeling for the suffering of others and staying connected with individuals in pain to ease their discomfort (Gilbert, 2009; Wispe, 1991). Self-compassion aims at staying connected with the self and

accepting one's own pain without harsh judgment, acknowledging that inadequacies and challenges are normal and part of being human (Neff, 2003a). The skill of self-compassion can serve as an emotion regulation strategy and as a coping strategy for individuals to practice emotional awareness and better understanding of their emotions (Neff, 2003a).

As noted, self-compassion is related to the practice of mindfulness (Germer, 2009). It originates from the Eastern philosophy of Buddhism and encompasses the practice of being in the moment with a sense of curiosity but removed from judgment (Hollis-Walker & Colosimo, 2011). Kabat-Zinn (1990), founder of the recognized mindfulness-based stress reduction program, stated that self-compassion was one of the necessary components of the practice of mindfulness. Shapiro and colleagues (2005) examined the benefits of mindfulness practice for reducing stress and increasing self-compassion. The practice of self-compassion may also be interconnected to emotional intelligence which incorporates the skills to recognize and be aware of one's own emotions and to use this knowledge constructively (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

### Three Tenets

Neff (2003a) has been credited with defining self-compassion as a skill to help individuals deal with life difficulties. Neff (2003a) conceptualized self-compassion by describing three main tenets that can overlap and intermingle throughout one's experience: (a) self-kindness versus self-judgment, (b) common humanity versus isolation, and (c) mindfulness versus over-identification.

The first tenet is between self-kindness and self-judgment (Neff, 2003a). Self-kindness is the practice to be kind to the self, during challenging times. Personal imperfections and mistakes are seen and treated without resistance using a thorough and understanding approach, reframing

any negative criticism. In contrast, self-judgment drives individuals to give harsh criticism of their mistakes or actions. Overall, individuals who tend to be highly judgmental ignore their feelings by rejecting the self.

The second tenet is between common humanity and isolation (Neff, 2003a). Common humanity suggests that everyone makes mistakes and has challenging times in life. The experience of common humanity highlights for individuals that they are not alone in the world, and this thought ignites hope in challenging situations. The goal is to feel connected to others during a stressful time. In contrast, feelings of seclusion that result from an emphasis on personal inadequacies interrupt the possibility of connecting with others. Neff (2011) explained isolation as irrational and observed that the “why-me?” effect can complicate things for the individual.

The third tenet is between mindfulness and over-identification (Neff, 2003a). Mindfulness requires self-awareness and a sense of avid curiosity within that awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). During this process, feelings and thoughts are noticed and observed, free of judgment, thus decreasing emotional reaction (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Decreasing the emotional reaction is useful in learning from an experience by noticing just the facts, free of judgment, thereby allowing the experience to be what it is in the present without the unnecessary thoughts from the past or future (Neff, 2003a). Mindfulness is useful to prevent individuals from getting caught up in their own emotions and tending to over-identify with their problems, which can complicate the actual experience.

### Misconceptions About Self-compassion

Discussing some of the misconceptions or resistances to self-compassion presented over the years can clarify the emotional benefits of self-compassion. Neff (2011) identified three

common misconceptions. First, some people may incorrectly believe that self-compassion is self-pity. When individuals experience self-pity, they tend to be self-absorbed in their own misery by exaggerating their own problems. In contrast, the common humanity feature in self-compassion helps individuals recognize that they are not alone by recognizing the suffering as part of the human experience. In other words, individuals who practice self-compassion do not amplify their personal suffering. Neff (2011) supported this proposition with her research measuring an individual's brain region related to perspective-taking. Her findings indicated that self-compassionate people tend to take different perspectives on their problems. In addition, Neff indicated that self-compassionate people tend to be more emotionally balanced when facing hurdles in their lives by not over-amplifying their experienced suffering.

The second misconception related to self-compassion is the idea that, if an individual practices too much self-kindness, it will turn into self-indulgence. One example could be staying at home eating ice cream all day rather than going to work. Neff (2001) stated that the main goal of practicing self-compassion is the well-being of the individual as a result of self-caring. Just as parents want nothing but the best for their children, one who practices self-compassion is aiming for health and what is best for the individual. Self-indulgence is not what is best for the individual.

Another common misconception is the idea that self-compassion means being weak. In fact, Neff (2007) found that self-compassion is correlated with greater personal initiative to make difficult changes in life. However, there are not associations with performance standards. Therefore, an individual is more likely to be motivated by curiosity or a desire to develop skills to foster more resilience when faced with difficulties. Neff and colleagues (2007) also stated that



self-compassionate individuals are actually willing to take greater risks in life because they are not as afraid of failures. They know how to rebound from failures without harsh self-criticism.

#### Empirical Support for Well-being Through Self-compassion.

Researchers on self-compassion have indicated benefits in psychological health for those who practice self-compassion, including increased contentment, conscientiousness, emotional regulation, and positive thinking, and decreased anxiety and depression (Neff & Vonk, 2009). Self-compassion increases positive emotions and helps decrease negative thoughts for individuals (Germer & Neff, 2013; Hofmann, Grossman, & Hilton, 2011; Neff & McGeehee, 2010). Additionally, self-compassion may mitigate depression (Diedrich, Grant, Hoffman, Hiller, 2014; Raes, 2010). Neff and colleagues (2007) found that self-compassion helps relieve anxiety and improve psychological wellness in therapists.

A meta-analysis examined the relationship between self-compassion and well-being in general (Zessin, Dickhauser & Garbade, 2015). Researchers combined  $k = 79$  studies with an overall participant size of  $N = 16,416$  by analyzing the central tendencies and effect sizes through a random effect model. Specifically, researchers examined the relation of self-compassion with four different forms of wellbeing: cognitive, positive affect, negative affect, and psychological. Researchers reported finding an overall relationship between self-compassion and well-being ( $r = .47$ ; 22.09% of the variance explained), reinforcing the importance of self-compassion for individuals' well-being

Raes (2010) investigated the mediating effects of rumination and worry in a study of self-compassion and anxiety. Raes sought to operationalize processes involved, psychologically and physiologically, for individuals who benefit from self-compassion when experiencing anxiety

and depression; specifically, how rumination mediates the latter three. The sample ( $N = 271$ ; 214 women) was selected from first-year psychology undergraduates. A series of assessments were given to the participants: *Self-Compassion Scale* (Neff, 2003b), *Beck Depression Inventory-II* (Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996), *Ruminative Response Scale* (Nolen-Hoeksema, Larson, & Grayson, 1999), and *Penn State Worry Questionnaire* (Meyer, Miller, Metzger, & Borkovec, 1990). Raes' (2010) findings indicated that self-compassion was negatively correlated with anxiety, depression, and rumination ( $d = -.19$ ). In addition, the degree of positive influence of self-compassion over anxiety was significantly large ( $d = .37$ ). A limitation of the study was that the sample was largely female undergraduates and not clinical patients with chronic symptoms. However, the findings identified the internal relationship between negative thinking and self-compassion, which indicates that self-compassion could be the remedy for destructive emotions and negative thinking.

Odou and Brinker (2013) explored the relationship between rumination, self-compassion, and mood in Australia. Researchers recruited undergraduate psychology students from an Australian university ( $N = 187$ ; 133 females) ranging in ages 17 to 59. The stated hypothesis was "writing in a self-compassionate way will predict greater mood improvements compared to writing in an emotionally expressive way due to the greater processing of emotions" (p. 451). Participants were assessed on self-compassion, rumination, positive and negative affect, and state mood including assessing for negative mood induction. Participants were asked to think of an unpleasant and negative event in their lives that happened recently or in the past and then write about it for about four minutes. From there, participants were randomly assigned to either write in self-compassionate form or emotionally expressive.

From the findings, researchers indicated that self-compassion significantly was predictor of mood improvement,  $p < .01$ . Researchers noted the rather fast improvement of moods in the participants after writing self-compassion statements (about a 10-minute period). One of the noticeable limitations in this study was from the participants having to simulate their negative mood by recollecting an unpleasant event, which might impede for the results to generalize for clinical samples. Furthermore, the researchers did not measure for long term effects on the emotional processing. However, such findings indicate that self-compassion practices can provide relief from negative emotions and promote effective emotional regulation for individuals under stress (Odue & Brinker, 2013).

Hall, Row, Wuensch, and Godley (2013) examined the correlation between self-compassion and physical and psychological wellbeing among college students. The participants ( $N = 182$ ), 41 males and 141 females, responded to the *Cohen-Hoberman Inventory of Physical Symptoms* to assess psychosomatic symptoms such as lack of energy or difficulty sleeping. In addition, the *Perceived Stress Scale* (PSS) was administered to assess the students' perception of stress in the past month of their lives. Finally, the *Self-Compassion Scale* (SCS) was used to measure their level of self-compassion, and the *Beck Depression Inventory-II* (BDI-II) was used to assess depression in the participants. Self-compassion was a positive indicator across all the subscales of the well-being scale (44% variance) with self-compassion being the highest. The researchers identified that self-compassion was a positive influence for physical and psychological wellbeing. Although the study was limited to a sample of college students, and there was not an equal sample of males and females, the findings nonetheless identified the positive effects of self-compassion and supported further investigation into two key dimensions

of self-compassion, namely, self-judgment versus self-compassion, and over-identification versus mindfulness.

Johnson and O'Brien (2013) offered two inter-related studies on the concept. In their first study, the researchers investigated the correlation between the practice of self-compassion and lower levels of depression ( $N = 335$ ) in young adults (252 women, 81 men, 2 not specified). The data were collected through Survey Gizmo. The participants were tested on shame and guilt with the *Test of Self-Conscious Affect* (TOSCA-3; Tangney, Dearing, Wagner, & Gramzo, 2000), and with the *State Shame and Guilt Scale* (SSG; Marschall, Sanftner, & Tagney, 1994). In addition, the 26-item *Self-Compassion Scale* (SCS; Neff, 2003) was administered to measure the levels of self-compassion in the participants. The results indicated a significant correlation between self-compassion and lower symptoms of depression ( $d = .49$ ).

In their second study, Johnson and O'Brien (2013) performed an experimental induction to examine if participants who demonstrated high negative emotions (e.g., shame) would have a faster recovery by processing their shameful thoughts using the practice of self-compassion. The participants (15 men, 75 women) were selected from the first study ( $n = 90$ ). These participants had initially scored high in the TOSCA shame scale ( $Mdn 33$ ;  $n = 179$ ). In the second study, there was a decreased proneness to shame ( $d = .53$ ) in the participants from the therapeutic intervention of self-compassion. The results identified that the practice of self-compassion was an effective approach to help reduce destructive negative feelings like shame. A limitation in Johnson and O'Brien's studies was the low number of males in their samples. In addition, although the data indicated a decrease of shame-proneness through the practice of self-

compassion, there was not enough data to determine if self-compassion can be a positive factor in decreasing rumination as had been suggested by Raes (2010).

Smeets, Neff, Alberts, and Peters (2014) investigated the effectiveness of a brief self-compassion intervention. The researchers implemented a three-week self-compassion group intervention to promote resilience and wellbeing in female undergraduate college students ( $n = 27$ ). For the control group, an intervention to learn time management skills ( $n = 25$ ) was used. The interventions required three group meetings during the period of three weeks. Participants' wellbeing and resilience was measured before and after the interventions. Results indicated that the self-compassion training significantly increased the students' levels of self-compassion, positivity, and confidence (23% compared to -1% in the control group).

Other researchers have suggested self-compassion is a better option than self-esteem when dealing with difficulties in life (Leary, Adams, Allen, & Hancock, 2007). Leary and colleagues (2007) compared self-compassion and self-esteem. The researchers conducted a series of experiments by asking the participants to imagine doing poorly on a sports team and contributing to the team's loss, followed by a question of "How would you feel if this happened to you?" Participants who scored high in self-compassion reported no feelings of humiliation or ineptitude. In contrast, participants with either high or low self-esteem responded with statements such as "I am a failure." In the same study, participants were also asked to record videos of themselves talking about their attributes. They were told that someone else was going to watch the videos for feedback on how they presented themselves (e.g., personality, intelligence, articulation, and professionalism). The feedback was given positively to half of the sample and neutrally to the other half. The group with high self-compassion welcomed the feedback,

whether it was positive or negative. Participants with high-self-esteem were discouraged with the neutral feedback, commenting on their not being good enough. The study demonstrated that self-compassion serves as a platform to empower individuals to admit and accept their inadequacies without major emotional disappointments.

### Self-compassion Research with Individuals Exposed to High Stress

Given the positive relationship between self-compassion and markers of wellbeing, researchers have become interested in the effects of self-compassion interventions on people who are exposed to high stress. Studies have included individuals who work in health care, social workers, social work students, and parents of autistic children (Gustin & Wagner, 2013; Kemper Mo, & Kahyat; Neff & Fasso, 2014; 2015; Rickers, 2012; Ying, 2009).

One of the few qualitative studies presented on self-compassion (Gustin, & Wagner, 2013) was conducted with four clinical nursing teachers in order to understand their experiences with self-compassion as a vehicle for compassionate care. Researchers conducted an action research design by implementing a teaching-learning program in order to understand the clinical phenomena of being a caregiver and how it relates with self-compassion. Researchers met with the participants for a total of 12 hours to teach them about human caring using *Watson's Theory of Human Caring* (see Watson, 2008). Participants learned about the stages of caring through a variety of experiential and reflective exercises. For example, "Participants learned about themselves, each other, and compassion, while at the same time reflecting on how these activities could be used with students" (p. 2).

Gusting and Wagner (2013) generated their data through the reflective writing of the participants, recordings from the teaching sessions and joint oral reflections. The data were

analyzed through phenomenological methods by interpretation, thereby finding metaphors that would communicate deep meaning from the text of the participants. From the analysis, researchers identified the following themes: (a) being present with self and others, (b) consideration for human vulnerability, (c) being non-judgmental, (d) honoring needs by having a voice, and (e) acceptance of compassion towards others as a gift. Overall, the researchers identified the risks of compassionate caregiving with burnout, especially when the suffering of others touches the caregiver. It was determined that cultivating self-compassion and equanimity towards oneself while experiencing compassion can create an intentional process for the caregivers of giving and receiving. Furthermore, the researchers concluded that compassionate care is linked to being touched by the other's situation through the experience of common humanity; therefore, caregivers are able to connect to the suffering in meaningful ways. This requires self-compassion as a skill in order to take care of oneself (Gustin & Warner, 2013).

Kemper and colleagues (2015) examined the relationship between mindfulness and self-compassion with burnout and quality of sleeping of professionals in the health field ( $N = 213$ ). Researchers collected data from the participants through a cross-sectional survey. Participants were measured in sleeping quality, resilience, mindfulness, and self-compassion. Professions that the participants represented included, "dietitians (11%), nurses (14%), physicians (38%), social workers (24%), and other (12%)" (p. 1). Researchers identified a correlation with sleep disruptions mostly by perceived stress ( $r = 0.43$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). Sleep disruption in participants was also significantly negatively correlated with mindfulness and self-compassion ( $r = -0.27$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). Participants who scored high in resilience had a significant correlation with mindfulness ( $r = 0.5$ ;  $p = 0.01$ ) and self-compassion ( $r = 0.54$ ;  $p = < 0.01$ ). In addition, researchers found that

mindfulness and self-compassion were correlated with physical health ( $r = 0.37$  and  $0.29$ ;  $p = < 0.01$ ). Limitations of the study included lack of control group, therefore lacking causality and inferences on how interventions with self-compassion and mindfulness can influence positively or negatively sleep disturbances and resilience (Kemper et al., 2015). However, the study provided new indications on how self-compassion and mindfulness could play a role with sleeping disturbance and resilience.

Ying (2009) investigated the influences of self-compassion on the competence and mental health of graduate students in social work ( $N = 65$ ). The researchers hypothesized that main tenets of self-compassion (mindfulness versus over identification, self-kindness versus harsh criticism, and common humanity versus isolation) could mediate mental health and influence the sense of self-efficacy and competence in the students. Participants were assessed in self-compassion, sense of coherence, and in depression. Findings indicated self-compassion was a positive influence in depressive symptoms level ( $p < .001$ ). Participants who scored high in over identification versus mindfulness showed a significant tendency toward depression ( $p = < .001$ ). Researchers also indicated from their findings supported self-compassion association with sense of coherence ( $p < .001$ ). In the study, Ying identified the importance of self-compassion as an indicator of predicting perceived competence and mental health in social work students.

Neff and Faso (2014) examined the association between well-being and self-compassion with parents ( $N = 51$ ) in children diagnosed with autism. The sample identified as 80% Caucasian, 12% Hispanic and African American, and 4% Asian. Parents were assessed on the severity of autism symptoms that they observed in their children. In addition, parents were given the *Self Compassion Scale* (ACS; Neff 2003b). Other areas where the participants were measured



were on depressive symptoms, stressors with parenting, goal reengagement, life satisfaction, and hope for their future. The results identified a higher level of self-compassion correlated with greater well-being in general. Positive correlations were found with self-compassion and life satisfaction, hope, and goal reengagement (all  $ps > 0.05$ ). Researchers reported on major limitations in their study. Most participants were highly educated with above average incomes; More diverse participants might have led to different results. Conclusively, there is a significant role that self-compassion has with emotional resilience and greater life satisfaction in general despite the incredible challenges that one could have such as parenting a child with Autism (Neff & Faso, 2014).

Rickers (2012) conducted a phenomenological study with 10 social workers to explore their experiences with self-compassion in the midst of stress. Participants had initially completed an eight-week Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program (Kabat-Zinn, 2003) in which they learned basic skills on self-compassion practices. Participants represented diverse professional backgrounds within the social work field including: human service work, private practice, non-profit work, schools, hospitals, nursing homes, and crisis agencies. Ages of participants were in their 30s and older. The overarching research question was for the participants to think of times they experienced self-compassion when working as social workers.

Within the analysis of the data, Rickers identified five distinct themes. First, participants described their understanding of self-compassion based on five elements: acceptance, gentleness, mindfulness, calmness, and human connection. The second theme was the recognition within the participants of seeing self-compassion practices useful in their line of work during stressful times. In the third theme, participants described self-compassion as a vehicle to help others

address their stress and burnout. The fourth theme related to participants reflecting on how self-compassion experiences can change over time, where sometimes it can be an easy experience to practice self-compassion, and other times the process of experiencing self-compassion during a challenging time can be more difficult and self-compassion can be viewed as a life-long journey. The fifth theme presented participants who wished self-compassion skills development would have been part of their training, (e.g., supervision sessions), during their social work education.

Some of the limitations of the study included a small sample, and the lengths of the interviews were short in length (30 to 45 minutes). The findings that Reickers (2012) presented add new understanding on how individuals in the caregiving field experience self-compassion. Participants perceived self-compassion as acceptance and gentleness towards oneself, which added two more elements to the overall experience of self-compassion as it was initially defined by Neff (2003a). Neff (2003a) had originally identified three positive elements of self-compassion: self-kindness, mindfulness, and common humanity.

#### Self-compassion for Teachers.

From the literature reviewed, it is reasonable to conclude that self-compassion can be a necessary life skill to help people navigate through difficult situations. In fact, Neff (2003a) concluded that people who develop the skill will show greater psychological health than those with low levels of self-compassion because the pain that comes with suffering can be alleviated by avoiding the unnecessary distress that results when people are hard on themselves. Neff (2003a) further noted that the healthy practice of self-compassion allows individuals to feel less isolated, decrease stress and feelings of inadequacy, and decrease the need to be demandingly perfect. As a result, individuals can have greater life satisfaction and be more productive (Neff,

2003a). The skill of self-compassion may also enhance behavioral motivation which is related to a healthier sense of self-worth (Neff, 2003a). These positive benefits have been experienced by individuals (e.g., health care workers), who work in stressful situations (Gustin & Wagner, 2013; Kemper et al., 2015), social workers and social work students (Rickers, 2012; Ying, 2009), and parents with children diagnosed with Autism (Neff & Faso, 2014).

To my knowledge, there has been no research to date that has been conducted to explore how teachers experience negative stressors using a lens of self-compassion. However, this review of prior research substantiated that such exploration would be fruitful. Research on self-compassion with caregiving professionals has demonstrated such benefits as increased contentment, conscientiousness, and positive thinking, and decreased anxiety and depression (Neff, 2011; Neff et al., 2007; Raes, 2010). In general, self-compassion has been determined to be a useful life skill to help people navigate difficult situations. Earlier in this review, I noted the particular stressors faced by minority elementary teachers in Title I schools. It is reasonable to infer that applying self-compassion during difficult times could contribute to promoting mental well-being for minority elementary teachers who are feeling stress, and possibly burnout, while working in the schools. The practice of self-compassion may be a factor that allows these teachers to feel less isolated and decrease their stress and feelings of inadequacy.

Developing the skill of self-compassion could enhance behavioral motivation which is related to a healthier sense of self-worth and a decrease in burnout feelings (Allen & Leary, 2010; Breines & Chen, 2012). Neff (2003b) predicted that people with higher self-compassion would be more effective in goal development and taking on difficult tasks. Accordingly, self-

compassion may help Hispanic teachers to be more successful in goal development and taking on difficult tasks.

One could infer that Hispanic teachers with high levels of self-compassion would have a positive self-attitude regardless of negative stressors and would avoid harsh self-judgment when making a mistake or feeling the pressures from the school administration and the classroom. In summary, the positive outcomes from self-compassion discussed in this section are desirable for teachers, and integration of self-compassion practices may be beneficial for teachers, especially for Hispanic teachers who believe their voices are not being heard and are overwhelmed with stress.

Although there is a growing body of literature on self-compassion (Neff, 2011; Pauley & McPherson, 2010), most of it has been quantitative in nature, with a focus on the association between self-compassion and mental health. Additionally, although the findings from self-compassion studies have provided important insights into psychological benefits, such findings need to be treated with caution as they have been largely correlational, thereby limiting an understanding of the direction of relationships between self-compassion and how individuals perceive the meaning and understanding of the construct (Neff et al., 2007). Therefore, a qualitative approach was determined to be useful for such exploration.

The studies that have been presented regarding self-compassion for helping professionals (e.g., Shapiro et al., 2007), have lacked a qualitative approach that would add to the understanding of the actual experiences of self-compassion. Furthermore, the findings from the literature review offer limited understanding of individuals' experiences of self-compassion and the meaning they might ascribe to these experiences, particularly as relating to minority group

teachers in the highly stressful environment of hard-to-staff schools. It is worth noting that although individuals in general tend to embrace the idea of compassion towards others, having the same notion towards oneself may be more novel (Neff, 2003b). A qualitative approach could fill a gap in the literature, providing a better understanding of how self-compassion is experienced and understood by such teachers. It could also serve as a first step in the development of future self-compassion interventions for teachers to learn self-regulation skills that can enhance emotional resilience when dealing with negative stressors at work. Thus, using a self-compassion theoretical lens, this review framed the following research questions for this study: (a) What are elementary school Hispanic teachers' lived experiences with stressors while working in Title I schools? (b) What are the elementary school Hispanic teachers' experiences coping with stress while working in Title I elementary schools?

### Personal Reactions

Guidelines for qualitative research stated that a disclosure of my biases related to self-compassion as a viable option for teachers to navigate stressors was warranted (Moustakas, 1994). I have been drawn to the concept of self-compassion as a result of my experiences working in schools. I noticed an emphasis on improving student grades and looking at different methods and programs to help students to be successful. However, I also noticed that school administrators did not stress the importance of emotional wellbeing as a factor that could improve grades or behaviors of the students. In my opinion, if emotional wellbeing is not being encouraged by administrators, the likelihood of its being used by teachers decreases dramatically. Teachers' well-being can reflect how their classrooms are being managed and how students overcome difficulties academically. In my review, I have observed that the literature has

shown the same overemphasis on programs to help students that I have observed in the schools. In contrast, I believe that student success starts with the wellbeing of teachers. Teachers are the role models and a potential positive influence on the attitudes and beliefs of the students.

The literature review identified that one of the main reasons minority teachers are leaving the profession has to do with their feeling that they do not have a voice. I believe that it takes a great deal of emotional exhaustion for teachers to get to the point that they feel hopeless enough to go ahead and quit their jobs, despite the fact that they could feel passionate about helping students in schools with high needs. Reflecting on my biases, I believe that, regardless of the obstacles that minority teachers might experience, especially with the school administration, having self-compassion resources could help teachers navigate such frustrations without getting hijacked into rumination thinking. Such thinking tends to lead to anxiety and potentially burnout. I think that using self-compassion practices as a tool to reduce teachers' anxiety is worth testing through research.

Due to the lack of direct research on self-compassion with teachers, it seemed appropriate to review studies where mindfulness was an intervention. The findings from these studies allowed me to explore how self-compassion plays a role within mindfulness practices. While I was taking the Mindful Self-Compassion trainings, I had the opportunity to have conversations with seasoned MBSR trainers. They all recognized that the quality of self-compassion in their teachings was limited and implicit. They also, in my opinion, seemed excited about the possibility that self-compassion could be further incorporated into their mindfulness courses. As I understand it, mindfulness is critical to have an awareness of the pain that individuals experience; however, it is not enough to take it to the next step in order to alleviate that pain.

Given the importance that self-compassion plays in alleviating individuals' suffering, I wonder if the teachers who have received the MBSR training have missed out on developing critical skills for attending to their own pain caused by stressful events at the schools. For example, teachers might be able to recognize that they are experiencing guilt and even identify the emotions that come with it in their minds and bodies but not take it further to self-soothing in a loving and kind way.

Upon reviewing the literature, I have been somewhat surprised by the lack of qualitative studies on self-compassion. Given the fact that self-compassion is such a novel concept in society and, according to Neff (2003a), there are so many sources of resistance to self-compassion, I expected to see more qualitative studies conducted to explore how different groups perceived and experienced self-compassion. I recognize that self-compassion studies have shown positive correlations with the wellbeing of individuals, but I think that there may be a short fall in improving future self-compassion interventions by missing important pieces of information that could come from individuals' perspective on the concept. For example, I offered a one-day self-compassion training to a group of 30 participants. A few months later, I followed up with one of the participants about her thoughts on the training and how she felt about self-compassion in general. She was candid enough to let me know that she felt self-compassion went against her religious beliefs by suggesting that she should rely on herself to alleviate a moment of suffering instead of relying on God. Her response was an eye opener for me on how the concept of self-compassion might not be welcomed by everyone and for more reasons than the resistances that Neff has (2003) identified.

With these observations and reflections in mind, my position prior to data collection was to be aware of my strong bias in favor of thinking that self-compassion could be useful for everyone. Therefore, I attempted to be cautiously optimistic as to how the participants would address their experiences with self-compassion and I also made a concerted effort to notice and record when participants' expressed negative thoughts or reactions to the concept. By noticing the participants' reactions, it also required that I be intentional about not leading the participants during the interviews.

### Summary

The review of the literature frames a study on how Hispanic elementary school teachers in Title I schools experience and navigate stressors. The first section explored burnout in teachers and how it relates to emotional exhaustion. The second section presented the state of minority teachers, specifically with Hispanic teachers and the interconnectedness with attrition and burnout due to emotional exhaustion. The third section reviewed the literature on the recent coping interventions for emotional balance on teachers, and the fourth section focused on the empirical review of self-compassion and how it contributes to emotional wellbeing. The chapter concluded with personal reactions from the literature review. Chapter 3 contains the methods and procedures used to conduct the research.



## **CHAPTER 3 METHODS**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore, using a sample of Hispanic teachers, their experiences with stress working in Title I elementary schools. Following a self-compassion theoretical framework on this phenomenon, the goal was to better understand how Hispanic teachers navigated their stressors and gain a more informed perspective on Hispanic teachers' coping skills. The two main research questions for this study were: (a) What are the Hispanic teachers' lived experiences with stressors working in Title I elementary schools? and (b) What are the Hispanic teachers' experiences coping with stress working at Title I elementary schools?

I present the following elements of the study's research methods in this chapter: (a) researcher positionality, (b) qualitative research rationale, (c) rationale for phenomenology, (c) site and setting, (e) research participants, (f) data collection procedures (g) data analysis, (h) ethical considerations, (i) trustworthiness, and (j) limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with a brief summary.

### **Researcher's Positionality**

The positionality of the researcher relates to the social and political context of the investigation in regards of the community, organization, or participants (Rowe, 2014). The position of the researcher influences every phase of the investigation process (Rowe, 2014). Processes such as the way the interviews are structured and conducted, recruitment of

participants, and how the data are managed, analyzed, disseminated, and published play a role in the researcher's positionality.

My role as a researcher with the participants was that of an outsider (Herr & Anderson, 2005). I did not work or collaborate directly with my participants within their professional roles as teachers. However, given my position working at the schools as the coordinator for the school-based counseling services, I have directly or indirectly interacted with some of the participants. Some of the participants were used to seeing me at the schools when I was there once a week. I realized that I was a familiar face to them and that such familiarity potentially made it easy for some of the participants to agree to be part of the investigation.

From the perspective of culture and gender, I had a different positionality with the participants. I closely identified with the participants given that I am also Hispanic and a female with a similar social background. Being from the same ethnic background allowed me to build rapport with the participants making them feel at ease and trust me with their responses. I strived to form a collaborative relationship with the participants, sharing experiences from similar life experiences and cultural platforms. Finally, I intentionally made a consistent, conscious effort to address my positionality with the participants to make sure I was not minimizing in any way their voice during the entire process of the investigation.

### Teachers' Positionality

It is worth presenting the positionality of the participants as minority teachers within their social and cultural perspective. Being a Hispanic teacher in school settings where the majority of the students and faculty are African American or White potentially makes the participants feel as outsiders. Furthermore, lacking Hispanic leadership might also be an influential factor on how

safe they feel at the school as far as being able to report any professional frustrations including potential discrimination. Based on the presented literature, participants also play an additional role as advocates for their minority students, more specifically, Hispanic students. They could play additional roles such as being translators for their students who are not fluent in the language and for the student's families. The teachers who participated in this investigation might feel isolated and could be experiencing distinct pressures such as having to over perform professionally due to the lack of representation of Hispanic teachers in their work settings.

### Qualitative Research Rationale

Qualitative research is a broad approach to understanding social phenomena through a constructivist or critical perspective (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Qualitative research is known to be pragmatic, interpretive, and based on peoples' lived experiences. Researchers who use qualitative study designs have holistic and complex worldviews which rely on complex reasoning that flows between deduction and induction (Marshall & Crossman, 2015). Accordingly, qualitative studies take place in natural settings with a focus on context and constantly evolving insights. Qualitative approaches are diverse; however, they can be distinguished by specific forms, terms, and focus.

By using a qualitative research methods, the researcher can understand the presented phenomena in diverse situations from participants' perspectives and experiences (Glens, 2006). Through qualitative research, the researcher achieves a clear and detailed understanding of a complex issue (Creswell, 2013). As Creswell (2007) noted,

The approach is attainable by talking directly with participants within their natural environments and invite them to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the

power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study.

(p. 40)

In qualitative research, the findings of the research study are developed inductively from the responses provided by the participants and no prior hypotheses are presented.

The selection of a specific qualitative research method depends on using the most appropriate methods and procedures to respond to the research question(s) (Creswell, 2013; Glens, 2006). The researcher determines the most appropriate research methodology for how to answer the research question(s) (Creswell, 2013; Glens, 2006). There are four possible types of qualitative research approaches: exploratory, explanatory, descriptive, and emancipatory (Marshall & Crossman, 2015). Exploratory qualitative studies aim to first understand the problem, distinguish and discern important categories, and describe implications for future research. An exploratory method aims to learn more about a little understood phenomenon. Explanatory methods encourage the researcher to explain plausible causations of a phenomenon. A descriptive approach is appropriate when the goal is to learn more about a phenomenon of interest and apply methods that can encourage participants to explore and talk in depth about their subjective experiences (Marshall & Crossman, 2015). Finally, emancipatory methods explore issues in the individuals' environment followed by improvements or solutions based on the feedback provided by the participants' responses (Clarke, Lehaney, & Martin, 1998).

Creswell (2013) recognized five main traditions in qualitative research: (a) case study, (b) ethnography, (c) phenomenology, (d) grounded theory, and (e) narrative research. Some of these research traditions may overlap; however, the main differences among traditions lie in the philosophical aspects of the social context that is being evaluated, data collection, and strategies

for analysis of the data. Consequently, the choice of research tradition is linked to the research problem, purpose, and research questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

Regardless of the research tradition chosen in qualitative studies, it is essential that researchers recognize positionality by considering one's beliefs and biases and reflecting on how these could impact one's approach and findings in a study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

Researchers in qualitative studies use reflexive practices in order to examine biases and subjectivities that could influence the findings in the research (Roulston & Shelton, 2015).

Reflexivity requires "explicit self-consciousness on the part of the researcher, including social, political, and value positions" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p.54). O'Dwyer and Bernauer (2013) expanded on the definition of reflexivity as "a researcher's world views, and biases that may influence their interpretation of participants' perceptions" (p. 11). May and Perry (2014) also elaborated on the concept of reflexivity with the following statement:

Reflexivity is not a method, but a way of thinking or critical ethos, the role of which is to aid interpretation, translation, and representation. It does not legislate or seek closure and cannot be confined to one element of the research process, bracketed, or appended; it is an interactive and continuous characteristic of good research practice. (p. 111)

### Rationale for Phenomenology Research

In the present study, I chose a descriptive qualitative phenomenological research design because of the emergent nature of the study and the appropriateness of qualitative design for exploratory purposes (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology is rooted in the philosophical perspectives of Husserl (1859-1938) and the core ideas were expanded by Heidegger (1889-

1976) and Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961). The main purpose of phenomenological research is to investigate the lived experiences of participants by identifying a core human experience as a phenomenon and then describing that phenomenon as accurately as possible from the participants' point of view (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Phenomenologists seek to understand the worldviews of the participants and examine them on their own terms (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Phenomenologists aim to describe what all participants share in common in regards to their experiences and worldviews, with the end goal of reducing the description of such experiences to the universal essence (van Manen, 2003). In descriptive phenomenology, the researcher is driven by the discovery and description of the participants' perceptions and lived experiences. Because I am driven to discover and describe the experiences of Hispanic teachers who work in Title I schools as they encounter and manage various stressors, a phenomenology approach was appropriate for this study.

van Manen (2003) described the core research activities for a phenomenological research study. First, the researcher identifies a phenomenon or lived experiences that could guide the research question. Second, the researcher explores the accounting of the lived experiences of the participants, taking from the beginning a reflexive approach to the essential developing themes that are forming from the accounts. Third, the researcher writes a description of the phenomenon, using both descriptive and interpretive processes. Finally, the researcher analyzes the data, identifies significant statements, and presents a thick description that highlights the overall essence of the phenomenon. In the next sections, I describe how I engaged in these core phenomenology research activities.

### The Site and Setting

The school district in which I recruited teachers operates 57 traditional schools, including nine high schools, 12 middle schools, and 36 elementary schools (Public Schools Review, 2016). Within the school district, Hispanic teachers from three elementary schools located at an urban community in central Florida participated in this study. It is worth mentioning that for the past few years this city has been involved in racial-justice movements due to various incidents related to individuals from the African American community; hence, there have been increasing cultural tensions in the social daily interactions within the members of the community.

For confidentiality purposes, I will refer to the schools as School 1, School 2, and School 3. The chosen schools have been designated as Title I schools, meaning that the school district receives annual Title I funding for these schools where a high percentage of children qualify for free and reduced lunch (Public Schools Review, 2016). Title I schools receive federal aid to ensure disadvantaged children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to get the best out of education (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Specifically, Title I funding is directed toward helping students to reach a minimum proficiency on challenging academic achievement standards and assessments for the state. Furthermore, Title I programs provide wrap around services for students who are homeless, neglected, or delinquent, in order to assist them and their families through transitions. A large portion of the funding is also allocated to teacher training and family engagement. Title I schools are required to recruit only highly qualified teachers who meet the state certification requirements (Public Schools Review, 2016).

The student population of School 1 consists of 701 students, including 55% Black, 21% Hispanic, and 18% White. A total of 94% of the student body qualifies for reduced lunch. The

ratio of students to teachers is 13:1 which is lower than the Florida average of 16:1. There are 55 employed teachers, a number that has remained stable for the past five years (Public Schools Review, 2016). In a Florida 5Essentials school report (UChicago Impact, 2016), researchers indicated that School 1 is strong in ambitious instruction (classes being challenging) and family involvement. The researchers also indicated that School 1 is weak in effective leadership by the teachers and principals sharing the same vision of success, and weak in collaboration of teachers to promote professional growth. The lack of family involvement was also weak.

School 2 serves 657 students, including 48% Black, 22% Hispanic, and 24% White students. A total of 70% of the student body is eligible for free lunch. The ratio of students to teachers is 12:1 and has decreased from 13:1 over the last five years. There are 57 employed teachers, and recruitment has grown by 16% over the last five years (Public Schools Review, 2016). In the Florida 5Essentials school report (UChicago Impact, 2016), researchers reported that School 2 is strong in ambitious instruction (classes being challenging) and neutral in supportive environment. The researchers also indicated that School 2 is weak in effective leadership by the teachers and principals sharing the same vision of success, and weak in collaboration of teachers to promote professional growth and lack of family involvement.

School 3 serves 756 students, including 18% Hispanic, 33% Black, and 32% White students. A total of 61% of the student body is eligible for free lunch. The ratio of students to teachers is 14:1, which has increased from 12:1 in the past five years. There are 54 teachers employed in the school, showing a growth of 6% over the past six years (Public Schools Review, 2016). In The Florida 5Essentials school report (UChicago Impact, 2016), researchers indicated that School 3 is strong in ambitious instruction (classes being challenging) and also strong in



supportive environment. In addition, the report indicated that School 3 is weak in effective leadership by the teachers and principals sharing the same vision of success, and very weak in collaboration of teachers to promote professional growth and lack of family involvement. Overall, it is worth noting that all three schools were found to be weak in effective leadership by teachers and principals.

### Research Participants

I used a purposeful sampling procedure to recruit participants for this study. Purposeful sampling is used when the researcher recruits participants who are likely to be informative on the research question, given their experiences or connection with the research site (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2007) noted that the range of sampling strategies for phenomenological studies is narrow. I used criterion sampling, which, according to Creswell (2013), “works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon” (p. 126).

My focus in this investigation was on the experiences of Hispanic teachers with their occupational stressors. With the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), chair advisor, and school district during the first semester of the 2016-2017 school year, I recruited Hispanic teachers who work in elementary Title I schools for participation in this study. Table 1 contains demographic and occupational information of the Hispanic teachers who participated in the study.

Table 1

*Demographic and Occupational Information of Hispanic Teachers*

#	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Country of Origin	Teaching		Occupational Stress	Support at School	Levels of	
					Years	Grade			Wellness	Satisfaction
1	Female	44	Married	CU	22	3	A	A A.	A	A A
2	Female	27	Married	PR	3	2	A	A A	A	A A
3	Female	44	Married	PR	5	ESL	A	H	A	A
4	Female	62	Married	CU	20	K-3	A A	A A	A	A
5	Female	46	Divorced	PR	13	2	A A	A A	L	A
6	Female	52	Married	PR	17	3	A	A	A	H
7	Female	55	Married	PR	27	2	A	A	H	H
8	Female	28	Single	PR	4.5	3	A A	A	A A	H
9	Female	43	Single	PR/IT	15	K to 5	A A	A	A	H
10	Female	32	Single	PR/IT	9	K	A	A A	B A	H
11	Female	62	Divorced	PR	28	5	H	B A	A A	L
12	Female	37	Married	EC/PR	12	2	A A	A	A	A
13	Female	52	Single	PR	26	ESL	A	A	A A	A A
14	Female	53	Divorced	PR	32	Pre-K to 5	L	A A	H	H
15	Female	46	Married	M	17	Pre-K	A	H	H	H
16	Female	28	Married	M	3	1	H	A	B A	B A
17	Male	28	Married	M	4	3	H	A	B A	B A
18	Female	32	Married	DO	2	1	H	A	B A	A
19	Female	25	Single	M	1	Pre-K	A	A A	A A	A

*Note.* PR = Puerto Rican, E = Ecuadorian, CU = Cuban, M = Mexican, DO = Dominican, IT = Italian, K = Kindergarten, Pre-K = Pre-Kindergarten, ESL = English as a Second Language; BA = Below Average, A = Average, AA = Above Average, H = High, L = Low .

I enlisted the cooperation of principals with whom I have been working in the three Title I elementary schools described previously so that I could reach out to their teachers. I have also developed an informal professional relationship with some of the Hispanic teachers who assisted me in spreading the word to other teachers who met the criteria. I provided an incentive of a \$50 gift certificate for each participant. I explained the study to those who volunteered and obtained their informed consent before proceeding. All participants experienced the same phenomenon being researched (Creswell, 2013).

Decisions about the sample size were guided by the concept of saturation (Creswell, 2013). Saturation occurs “when the collection of the new data does not shed any further light on the issue under investigation” (Mason, 2010, p. 3). In order to capture participants’ various perspectives, qualitative samples need to be sufficiently large to capture all important perceptions. Accordingly, Bertaux (1981) recommended 15 participants as the smallest acceptable sample size. Therefore, to assure proper saturation of data, 19 participants were recruited and interviewed for this study.

Participants completed a demographic information questionnaire (Appendix A) yielded the following demographic information. A total of 19 teachers, 18 females, and 1 male, volunteered to participate in the study. The ages of the teachers ranged from 27 to 62; however, only three of the participants were in their 20s, two in their 30s, five in their 40s, three in their 50s, and two in their 60s. All participants identified as Hispanic. The years of teaching experience ranged from one year to 45, and 12 of the participants had more than 10 years of teaching experience. All participants worked at Title I elementary schools with three

of the teachers working in ESOL and two teachers were engaged in Spanish teaching. The rest of the participants reported working in regular classroom teaching.

### Data Collection Procedures

I gathered data for this study through interviews. Interviews are appropriate when the researcher needs to elicit rich information, has a goal of developing thick description, and wants opportunities to clarify statements and probe for additional information (Marshall & Crossman, 2015). I followed Bernard's (1988) recommendations in conducting semi-structured interviews with each participant. Using a semi-structured interview format, I provided a clear set of instructions with guidance for the participants to stay on topic, while also welcoming the opportunity to explore new ways of seeing the phenomenon in question (Bernard, 1988).

I developed a semi-structured interview protocol by drawing from the literature. The main theme of the semi-structured interviews was exploration of the constructs dealing with occupational stressors using the conceptual framework of self-compassion outlined by Neff (2003a), including the tenets of self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. I adapted a protocol of questions from a former qualitative study that was similar to this study as far as participants not having had any prior training with the concept of self-compassion (see Pauley & McPherson, 2010). The interview protocol (Appendix B) included the following questions:

#### Main Open Question

- Please talk about your experiences with working in a Title I elementary school as a Hispanic teacher.

### Ethnic Background Questions

- Please tell me more about your ethnic background.
- Please share any insight on how being Hispanic plays a role with your stressors working at your elementary school.

### Focus on Stress

- Please talk about your experiences with specific stressors while working in a Title I elementary school as a Hispanic teacher.
- Please talk about your experiences on how you navigate your stressors while working in a Title I elementary school as a Hispanic teacher.
- From the scale of 1 to 4 how would you rate your level of stress where 1 is low-level stress and 4 is high-level stress?

### Focus on Self-Kindness

- Please share how you react when you make a mistake at work/outside of work.
- Please share any examples where you were able to forgive or be kind towards yourself after making a mistake at work/outside of work.
- Please share your thoughts on how stress influences your ability to be kind towards yourself. Provide examples.

### Focus on Mindfulness

- Please talk about your experiences with separating yourself from your emotions to remain as neutral as possible in stressful situations at work/outside of work.
- Please share your experiences (e.g., emotions) when you were not able to separate your thoughts and feelings from a stressful situation.

### Focus on Common Humanity

- Please share any experiences when you felt as if you shared similar stressors as others at work. What was that like?

### Closure

- If you were given the task to come up with recommendations for the school administration to help prevent burnout with teachers what would be your suggestions?
- Are there any other ideas or experiences related to what we have discussed today that you would like to add to our discussion?
- Do you have any other thoughts in general or additional comments that you would like to share?

A pilot test of the interview questions was conducted with three teachers who did not participate in the research. Pilot testing the questions was an important step for interview preparation and implementation (Turner, 2010). By pilot testing the questions, I identified any potential flaws, limitations, or weaknesses within the interview design.

Prior to data collection, I set the intention to put aside my own biases and judgments and collected the data with a sense of neutral curiosity. My goal was to allow participants to feel free and safe to express how they felt (Moustakas, 1994). Through the interview process, I engaged in the practice of researcher self-assessment referred to as bracketing or epoche (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Through this ongoing process, I relied on journaling to express my thoughts and feelings prior to and after interviewing the participants. The following statement is a sample of my journaling after interviewing a participant:

What was evident for me early in the interview is the additional pressure as a male that this teacher goes through. I took me by surprise how he felt certain expectations from being the Latin male where his “machismo” could help him handle the difficult students and that that was the reason they were assigning him those clients. I found myself asking for clarification on his “machismo” statement because it threw me off a little. Maybe because he seemed like a gentle kind young man to me and I had a difficult time visualizing his toughness. I also categorized him in my mind as the typical individual that truly believes that he has to be hard on himself in order to not self-indulge. He stated how his grandfather’s voice was always in his head about not being making things right all the time. (Field Journal, 2016, p. 7)

With the practice of bracketing, I was able to understand, describe, and then set aside any pre-existing beliefs or biases related to the content that was emerging from the interviews. Grinch (2007) stated that through the bracketing practice the researcher can (a) see the phenomenon with fresh lens, (b) emphasize on the phenomena with an open mind without prior agendas, (c) set prior conclusions aside, and (d) be present with the participant during the interview.

The interviews’ length of time averaged ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. I did (a) provide consent forms for the participants to review and sign prior to data collection (Appendix C); (b) audiotape the interviews and later transcribe them (Creswell, 2013); and (c) maintain confidentiality for the teachers in the written reports of my findings. Of the 19 individual interviews, three of the participants had interacted with me in the past in an informal professional capacity. The remaining of the participants were unfamiliar to me. I completed 15 of the interviews face-to-face and the remaining four via Skype due to conflicts with the participants’

schedules. Fourteen of the face-to-face interviews were completed in the participants' classrooms after contractual hours. I also met with one participant at a public library after school hours in a quiet room. All interviews were scheduled and completed over a three-week period during the month of October and November, 2016.

### Procedures for Data Analysis

To analyze the data, I followed Colaizzi's (1978) structured methods. Colaizzi offers a structured framework that is useful for novice researchers (Saunders, 2014). I was also influenced by the guidance of Saunders (2014) who described, through a contemporary lens, how to create a clear auditable trail following Colaizzi's (1978) method of analysis. My goal in analyzing the data was to find common themes and perceptions within the participants responses related to the phenomenon (stressors) in question.

#### Step 1: Familiarization with Transcripts

Data analysis began with the transcriptions of the participants' responses from the interviews. To save time, I secured the services of an external transcriber. Once I received back all the transcriptions, I reviewed each for accuracy by listening to the recorded interview as I read the transcript. I maintained a reflective journal for my analytical observations during the course of this review. The initial review of the transcripts revealed patterns across participants (Saunders, 2014). Noticeable patterns included similar frustrations with the administration among the participants and similar coping skills in regard to relying on other co-workers to talk or relate details regarding their occupational stressors.



## Step 2: Significant Statements Extractions

Through the process of reviewing the transcripts, I identified and highlighted participants' experiences with their stressors as Hispanic teachers working in a Title I school. I decided to abstain from using any software to analyze the data due to the fact that it can be time consuming to learn how to use the program and possibly interfere with the organization of the data (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, I completed the analysis and extraction of data manually, working page by page through each transcript.

Once I had read and highlighted each transcript, I returned to the transcripts and cut and pasted each highlighted statement into a separate document. I labeled each statement with the page and line number indicating where the statement can be found in the original transcript, allowing me to re-read the data with a fresh perspective, and to identify early themes as they emerged from the data (Saunders, 2014). During review and highlight of the transcription process, I continued to reflect on my thoughts and feelings through journaling and also had discussions with my chair and peer reviewers. Saunders (2014) suggested that the researcher take a few days away from the data in order to return with a fresh perspective to start the process of phenomenological reduction.

## Step 3: Development of Meanings

Colaizzi (1978) recommended that the researcher reduce significant statements into more general statements or meanings. Ashworth and Hagan (1993) elaborated on this developing meaning step as a way to avoid misinterpretation of the participants' perceptions. During the development of meanings, "bracketing" is essential. Colaizzi (1978) indicated that the use of bracketing in qualitative research was imperative in order for the researcher to suspend biases

and conduct a proper investigation. I conducted bracketing by keeping a reflective journal where I explored my own assumptions and biases, explored ideas that might arise from the data, and focused the direction of my thinking (Saunders, 2014). The following statement is an excerpt from my journal as I was finding meanings from the significant statements of a participant:

I had a particular interest in this participant because she had just recently quit her job at the school due to burnout. She couldn't point out at one thing specifically that led to her burnout but a combination of things. She used the word feeling lonely and hopeless and blamed it mostly in the administration or at least that is how I perceived it. (Field Journal, 2016, p. 12).

The next step was to closely analyze the content of the significant statements in order to derive a sense of their meaning. Fundamental questions asked at this stage included: (a) How do Hispanic teachers experience stressors? and (b) How is the theoretical framework of self-compassion reflected in how teachers navigate their stressors? I formulated meaning for each significant statement, taking into account the order by which one statement preceded the other (Haase & Myers, 1988). With the guidance of peer reviewers and chair of the committee, I sought agreement and confirmation with the formulated meanings to make sure that my interpretations were clear and auditable (Saunders, 2014).

#### Step 4: Transitioning Formulated Meanings into Cluster Themes and Member Checking

Once the formulated meanings were developed from the significant statements, the next step was to arrange the formulated meanings into clusters of themes (Colaizzi, 1978). I created tables with examples of the emergent themes, stating the process that led me to arrive at the interpretive decision to cluster the data. Theme clusters were collapsed into the emergent themes

with sub-themes that aligned with my research questions. Furthermore, I returned to my chair and peer reviewer to take a closer look at the relationship between the formulated meanings, theme clusters, and emergent themes to ensure accuracy and clarity (Saunders, 2014). In addition, at this point of my data analysis and in order to validate my interpretations to this point, I conducted a second step of member checking with the participants (Creswell, 2013). I sent individual emails to the participants with the following message:

The reason for this email is because you participated in my study for an interview with me about your experiences with stressors as a Hispanic teacher working in Title I schools. I have attached a table that includes the extraction of some of your statements that you provided during the interview. I included in the table what I interpreted from your statements (meaning) and I labeled them with a theme. If you could please assist me by responding to the following questions:

1. Do your statements read accurately?
2. Do you agree with the meanings?
3. Is there anything else that you would like to add or clarify?

Of the 19 participants, 11 responded to my member-checking request. From the responses, nine of the 10 participants responded, agreeing with the meanings and themes and had no additional changes to make. Their general comments included being grateful that I was conducting this study and wanting to read more about the study once it was published. Participant #2 disagreed with one of the meanings, reporting the following:

Everything looks accurate, there is only one meaning that I would change and this is easy to identify in the first box. The meaning was not that I was worried about being too

harsh but that instead of teaching I felt like I was constantly addressing extreme behavior and worried about protecting the other students in the class and teaching them. Basically, I felt like my time was too focused on the extreme behaviors rather than on teaching, meaning the majority of my students suffered (Member Checking Responses, 2017).

Participant #10 added more for clarification to her presented statement stating the following:

I was trying to convey how it is helpful to meet with other teachers daily and weekly to discuss current events and student concerns. Often, the hustle and bustle of teaching keeps us from having time to consult one another. Also, having colleagues to connect with daily helps to alleviate stressors (Member Checking Responses, 2017).

#### Step 5: Comprehensively Describing the Investigated Phenomenon

Colaizzi (1978) indicated that the researcher can develop emergent themes from the data into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon. An exhaustive description presented a narrative account with different dimensions of the experiences of Hispanic teachers with stressors in Title I schools, situated within a self-compassion theoretical framework. Additional feedback was requested from the chair and peer reviewers for validation and any necessary modifications.

#### Step 6: Description of the Fundamental Structure of the Phenomenon

From the comprehensive description, I developed a reduced essential structure of the phenomenon (Colaizzi, 1978). The reduced structure of the phenomenon included a description of the fundamental essence of how the phenomenon is presented within the participants' perceptions and experiences, including a description of how the processes and meanings from the

prior step resulted in the final outcome and are presented in the findings section (Haase & Myers, 1988).

### Ethical Considerations

There are a number of ethical considerations that are essential for the protection of the participants (Marshall & Crossman, 2015). The researcher must inform and protect research participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Due to the nature of this investigation, I anticipated no more than minimal exposure to harm or threats to the well-being of participants. Nonetheless, I employed a number of safeguards to assure protection of the rights of the participants.

No initial research was undertaken until I received the approval of the school district (Appendix D) and the Institutional Review Board of the University of Central Florida (Appendix E) to conduct the research. As noted previously, I obtained the informed consent of participants to participate in the study (Appendix C). I explained the study to them and answered their questions. I emphasized their right to withdraw from the investigation at any time. Second, I protected the participants' confidentiality by keeping their names and any other information that could expose their identities secured. Finally, I took precautionary methods to secure the data, including keeping any content from data collection under a locked password with only me as the researcher having access to this material (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

### Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness refers to the researcher's practices to ensure the validity and reliability of the investigation. Although researchers seem to have a hard time agreeing upon validity procedures with respect to qualitative data, common key factors that are

similar to the quantitative-based ideas of rigorous analysis do exist (Colaizzi, 1978; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Kline, 2004). To establish rigor and trustworthiness in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (2013) presented the following terms: *credibility*, *dependability*, *confirmability*, and *transferability*.

The term *credibility* in qualitative research refers to the validity and accuracy of the findings from the study, which is a key component in sound research (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Crossman, 2015). In order to enhance the credibility of the presented study, I triangulated my data collection methods. Gathering data from multiple sources gave me a broader view of the phenomenon in question. Multiple data sources included interviews from a large sample number (Marshall & Crossman, 2015). I established interpreter validity through clear articulation of my positionality as a researcher, clarification of my own assumptions up front, and reflective monitoring of potential biases through the use of journal writing. In addition, the use of two peer reviewers assisted me in looking for variations within the understanding of the phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). I used the assistance of two peer debriefers for data analysis. The first peer reviewer was my research assistance that was trained in mindful self-compassion and had helped me facilitate self-compassion workshops in the past. She assisted me with the review of transcripts, finding agreement with the significant statements, and identifying meanings and themes from the data. The second peer researcher has extensive experience in qualitative research. She has a Master's of Education in qualitative research from Harvard University and has taught graduate level qualitative courses and engaged in qualitative research for over six years. She collaborated with me on finding agreement with the meaning of the significant statements, identifying themes, and collapsing the themes into subthemes. This peer debriefer

collaborated in finding two additional subthemes to include during the analysis of my data. From our exchange of emails, she shared the following statement:

I added two subthemes: 1) Under General Stressors, I added "Stressors of teaching" for use with references to teaching difficult, just due to the nature of the job; 2) Under Coping Skills, I added "Finding Community" to cover situations where the teacher found common ground with someone (Email Excerpt, 2016)

The *dependability* factor for the trustworthiness of the investigation refers to the extent to which the research findings can be replicated. Lincoln and Guba (2013) stated the importance of questioning whether the findings are consistent and dependable with the collection from the data. In other words, the aim is to recognize inconsistencies and for the researchers to identify when the inconsistencies occur accurately. By having peer researchers to review my findings, while recording any discrepancies with detailed accounts, I increased the dependability of my study. I also employed member checking to corroborate the findings with the participants, which increased the dependability of the study (Moustakas, 1984)

The term *confirmability* refers to the extent where the results of study could be confirmed or corroborated by others (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Accordingly, I worked to recognize and address my biases and subjectivities that arise in the study. I reflected on my pre-conceived notions about the participants' experiences by using bracketing and ongoing journaling. I also recorded and preserved transcripts including any written notes on them, so other readers could confirm the findings of my study (Lincoln & Guba, 2013).

Finally, *transferability* refers to the potential for other researchers to extend this particular phenomenon to another population or context (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). I enhanced the

transferability of my study by presenting thick and rich description of the participants' perspectives and environments (Schram, 2003). In addition, the collection of data from three different elementary schools where the participants worked supported transferability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 2013).

### Summary

This chapter contains a detailed description of the research methods that were used in this study. Following a self-compassion theoretical framework, I have presented a qualitative approach designed to explore the phenomenon of Hispanic teachers' experiences with stress while working in elementary Title I schools. My sampling strategy was designed to find an appropriate number of teachers who met the criteria for the study and was informative on the research question. I described my data collection procedures and explained the rationale for those procedures. I have described my approach to data analysis as well as the steps that I took to assure the trustworthiness of the study.



## **CHAPTER 4 RESULTS**

### **Introduction**

Chapter 3 provided a rationale for conducting an exploratory phenomenological study of the experiences of Hispanic teachers with their occupational stressors while working in Title I schools. This chapter contains the findings from the data analysis, which include thematic analysis of 19 interviews and the emergent experiences and meanings that were used to facilitate the responses to the research questions. The findings are presented through a thick and rich description with verbatim examples to capture the meaning and essence of the experience of the phenomena of Hispanic teachers' experiences with occupational stressors. From the data analyses, five main themes reflective of the participants' experience along with subthemes are presented. To begin, I included a brief biographical sketch of each participant that may be used as a reference.

### **Biographical Sketches**

Participant #1 is a married 44-year-old female. She has been working as a teacher for over 22 years. Currently, she is a third-grade classroom teacher. She was born in Spain and both of her parents are Cuban. At the time of the interview, she stated that her occupational level of stress was about average and that the support that she receives from the school is above average as well. She reported her level of wellness as average and her level of satisfaction working in a Title I elementary school as above average.

Participant #2 is a married 27-year-old female. She has worked as a teacher for three years. Currently, she is a classroom teacher for the second grade. Her ethnicity is a mixture of

Puerto Rican and Caucasian. At the time of the interview, she stated that her occupational level of stress was about average and that the support that she received from the school was above average as well. She reported her level of wellness as being average and her level of satisfaction working in a Title I elementary school as above average.

Participant #3 is a married 44-year-old female. She has been working as a teacher for five years. Currently, she is a classroom teacher for Pre-k through second grade ESOL. She was born in New York but raised in Puerto Rico and both of her parents are from Puerto Rico. At the time of the interview, she stated that her occupational level of stress was about average and that she received high support from the school. She reported her level of wellness as being average and her level of satisfaction working in a Title I elementary school as average.

Participant #4 is a married 62-year-old female. She has worked as a teacher for 20 years. Currently, she is a classroom teacher for Pre-k through third grade. Her ethnicity is Cuban. At the time of the interview, she stated that her occupational level of stress was about average and that the support that she received from the school was above average as well. She reported her level of wellness as average and her level of satisfaction working in a Title I elementary school as above average.

Participant #5 is a divorced 46-year-old female. She has been working as a teacher for over 13 years. Currently, she is a classroom teacher for the second grade. Her ethnicity is Puerto Rican. At the time of the interview, she stated that her occupational level of stress was about average and that the support that she received from the school was above average as well. She reported her level of wellness as being low and her level of satisfaction working in a Title I elementary school as average.

Participant #6 is a married 52-year-old female. She has been working as a teacher for over 17 years. Currently, she is a classroom teacher for second and third grade. She was born in Puerto Rico but raised in New York. At the time of the interview, she stated that her occupational level of stress was about average and that the support that she received from the school was average as well. She reported her level of wellness as average and indicated that she had a high level of satisfaction working in a Title I elementary school.

Participant #7 is a married 55-year-old female. She has been working as a teacher for over 27 years. Currently, she is a classroom teacher for the second grade. She was born in Puerto Rico. At the time of the interview, she stated that her occupational level of stress was about average and that the support that she received from the school was above average as well. She reported her level of wellness and satisfaction working in a Title I elementary school as high.

Participant #8 is a single 28-year-old female. She has been working as a teacher for four and a half years. Currently, she is a third-grade classroom teacher. She was born and raised in Puerto Rico and moved when she was 18. At the time of the interview, she stated that her occupational level of stress was above average and that the support that received from the school was about average. She reported her level of wellness as above average and indicated she had a high level of satisfaction working in a Title I elementary school.

Participant #9 is a single 43-year-old female. She has been working as a teacher for over 15 years. Currently, she is a Spanish teacher for Pre-k through fifth grade. She was raised in Puerto Rico, her mother is Puerto Rican and her father is Italian. At the time of the interview, she stated that her occupational level of stress was above average and that the support that she

received from the school was about average as well. She reported her level of wellness as average and her level of satisfaction working in a Title I elementary school as high.

Participant #10 is a single 32-year-old female. She has been working as a teacher for over nine years. Currently, she is a classroom teacher for Pre-k. Her father is from Puerto Rico and her mother is Italian. At the time of the interview, she stated that her occupational level of stress was about average and that the support that she received from the school was above average as well. She reported her level of wellness being below average and indicated she had a high level of satisfaction working in a Title I elementary school.

Participant #11 is a divorced 28-year-old female who has worked as a teacher for over 28 years. Currently, she is a fifth-grade classroom teacher. Her ethnicity is Puerto Rican. At the time of the interview, she stated that her occupational level of stress was high and that the support that she received from the school was below average. She reported her level of wellness as being above average, and her level of satisfaction working in a Title I elementary school was below average.

Participant #12 is a married 37-year-old female who has worked as a teacher for over 12 years. Currently, she is a classroom teacher for the second grade. Born in New York, her mother is from Ecuador and her father is from Puerto Rico. At the time of the interview, she stated that her occupational level of stress was above average and that the support that she received from the school was average. She reported her level of wellness and her level of satisfaction working in a Title I elementary school as average.

Participant #13 is a single 52-year-old female. She has worked as a teacher for over 26 years. Currently, she is a classroom teacher for third through fifth grade ESOL students. She was

born in New York, but both of her parents are from Puerto Rico. At the time of the interview, she stated that her occupational level of stress and the support that she received from the school were average. She reported both her level of wellness and her level of satisfaction working in a Title I elementary school as above average.

Participant #14 is a divorced 53-year-old female. She has worked as a teacher for over 32 years. Currently, she is a classroom teacher for Pre-k through fifth grade. She was born in New York, and both of her parents are from Puerto Rico. At the time of the interview, she stated that her occupational level of stress was low and that the support that she received from the school was above average. She reported her level of wellness and her level of satisfaction working in a Title I elementary school as high.

Participant #15 is a married 46-year-old female. She has worked as a teacher for over 17 years. Currently, she is a Pre-K classroom teacher. She was born and raised in Mexico City. At the time of the interview, she stated that her occupational level of stress was average and that the support that she received from the school was high. She reported her level of wellness and her level of satisfaction working in a Title I elementary school as high.

Participant #16 is a married 28-year-old female. She has worked as a teacher for three years. Currently, she is a classroom teacher for the first grade. She was born in Mexico and moved to the U.S. when she was three years old. At the time of the interview, she stated her occupational level of stress as high and the support that she received from the school as average. She reported her level of wellness as high and her level of satisfaction working in a Title I elementary school as below average.

Participant #17 is a married 28-year-old male. He has worked as a teacher for four years. Currently, he is a classroom teacher for the third grade. With parents from Mexico, he was born in New York and went to school in Mexico for two years. At the time of the interview, he stated that his occupational level of stress was high and that the support he received from the school was average. He reported his level of wellness and his level of satisfaction working in a Title I elementary school as below average.

Participant #18 is a married 32-year-old female. She has worked as a teacher for two years. Currently, she is a classroom teacher for the first grade. She was born and raised in the Dominican Republic and moved at the age of 21. At the time of the interview, she stated that her occupational level of stress was high and that the support that she received from the school was average. She reported her level of wellness as below average and her level of satisfaction working in a Title I elementary school as average.

Participant #19 is a single 25-year-old female who has worked as a teacher for one year. Currently, she is a Pre-K classroom teacher. She was born in New York and lived in Mexico for nine years. Her parents are both Mexican. At the time of the interview, she stated that her occupational level of stress was average and that the support that she received from the school was above average. She reported her level of wellness as above average and her level of satisfaction working in a Title I elementary school as average.

### Thematic Findings

From the data analysis, five main themes were identified that represented Hispanic teachers' experiences with their occupational stressors while working in Title schools: (a) general stressors, (b) emotional stressors, (c) cultural stressors, (d) coping skills, and (e) teacher

recommendations for administrators. In the following sections, I provide a thick and rich description generated from the participants' statements including direct quotations to represent the voice of the participants' experiences and to increase trustworthiness of the results (Creswell, 2013). Table 2 displays the themes, the subthemes and the frequency of each subtheme within each theme.

Table 2

*Themes and Subthemes Observed*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>Emotional Stressors</b>		
	Guilty feelings for students	46
	Physical and psychological exhaustion	110
	Struggling with home/work balance	72
	Sense of self-efficacy	76
<b>General Stressors</b>		
	Stressors with parents	50
	Stressors with student culture in Title I schools	49
	Stressors with administration's expectations	140
	Stressors with classroom management & challenging students	64
	Stressors for ESOL and Spanish teaching teachers	19
	Stressors of teaching	66
<b>Cultural Stressors</b>		
	Overt and covert discrimination	75
	Language barriers	18
	Discrepancy of one's cultural values with others	75
<b>Coping Skills</b>		
	Being critical vs. kind	94
	Mental and physical awareness	108
	Support system	132
	Finding purpose	66
	Advantages of being Hispanic	65
<b>Teachers' Recommendations for Administrators</b>		
	Administration to be more sensitive/ empathetic	47
	Administration to give more freedom for lesson planning	22
	More support for students' behavior management	26

## General Stressors

General stressors that teachers experienced were identified as stressors that related to the school environment and community including roles as teachers, students' behaviors, social exchanges with parents, and administration and other teachers. The following categories were identified from the general stressors main theme: (a) stressors with parents, (b) stressors with administration's expectations, (c) stressors with classroom management and challenging students, (d) stressors for ESOL and Spanish teaching teachers, and (e) stressors of teaching.

### Stressors with Parents

Participants ( $n = 13$ ) made notable observations concerning the tensions that they experienced with the parents at school, which mainly revolved around race/ethnicity and communication. One of the major frustrations for the teachers was the lack of support from the parents and at times aggressive behaviors towards them. Particularly, participants stated that they noticed more tensions with the African American parents in general. For instance, Participant #11 shared how one parent responded to her when she expressed her concerns in regards to behavioral issues with one of the students:

One parent told me to stop calling her--to just stop calling her. She was not worried about his behavior as long as his grades were good. As long as he was doing good in school with his grades, she did not care about his behavior.

Participant #7 also shared her experiences facing an aggressive parent by stating the following:

There is a need of parent orientation because a lot of our parents, they really lack the skills on how to work with the students and how to help them do homework and things like that. So, we tried to deal with that. We had a meeting with the guidance counselor



and myself and the parent. And we were explaining things. And the parent was all right. And then out of the blue, I think she already had her mind set, she got extremely loud and argumentative. I mean, we just stopped talking. We just let her. She needed to let things out... And we kept looking at ourselves like, Why is she telling us all this? So, I think that the poor woman is in such stress herself. And so, she was saying--which wasn't even discussed, "My child is not slow. I don't care what they're going to say, my child is not slow. I know my child dadada." All I wanted was for us to work together so the child would be successful.

Similarly, Participant #16 shared her experience with the African American parent of one of her new students:

What ended up happening is, when I told the parent about that incident, the parent was like--I don't know if she was just so upset about what has happened with the other teacher that she just like took off on me, but she was not receptive to me and that I don't--and again, I don't even know if it has to do with my ethnicity either. But she was just like very standoffish . . . she was basically screaming at me over the phone. I mean, I was just explaining an incident. I wasn't attacking her kid or anything. And it was really hard to calm her down. I don't know if that had anything to do with me being Hispanic. But I know that it took time for me to adjust to someone who was reluctant to work with me as her child's new teacher because this was probably within like three days of moving into my class.

Participant #16 also stated that her interactions with White parents was different from African American parents, stating the following:

With my white students, actually, I feel like the parents don't really pay attention to my race or even my ethnicity. They more so pay attention to how young I am. Or how long I've been teaching. So, they question that more so than how I, you know, just skip the tone.

From a different perspective, teachers also shared how they empathized with some of the parents acknowledging that it is difficult for them to navigate working hard and taking care of a family. Participant # 15 shared her experience communicating with parents:

The parents are not as involved as in other schools, I feel, because they have to work. Many of them work. But if I send notes or whatever, they do answer back. So, I think there is bit of communication there. I have some difficult parents but I've been able to cope with them when they see results.

Participant #6 shared how she tried to relate to parents:

I had parents that come in huffing and puffing--upset about their child. And what we had to do was just try to relate to the parents and try to say, "Okay, they're high; we're going to bring it down." We need to work this down. And we need to learn to talk to some of our parents because they just don't know how to communicate. Some of them really come out and they fight you. And they'll speak nasty to you and you've got to bite your tongue. You've got to say, I'm going to control this. If you can't, you have to step back. But you have to realize, it's a total different background, and you have to work it out.

#### Stressors with Student Culture in Title I Schools

Participants ( $n = 14$ ) reported their experiences working with the student population from Title I schools. A significant number of students from Title I schools tend to bring particular

challenges such as learning disabilities, low academic functioning, poverty, and lack of parental involvement. Most of the teachers ( $n = 14$ ) felt frustrated with the challenges that they have to face to navigate and understand the culture from which these students come. Participant #3 articulated her experience in this regard:

I know that every child is different and the learning is different like I have a lot, but some are very, very low and they are learning and the others are just explained one time and they get it. But some of them, they even need more time. So that's my stress right now with the students in that part.

Participant #7 also shared how she can tell the difference working with students from a Title school:

Well, it is different. I have worked in both settings and definitely the Title I, if we talked about the population, with the students--yes, it is different. Right now, where I'm working is a different culture of what I have worked before. There's more need. There's a need of support from the parents. We don't see a whole lot of participation.

Participant #19 also shared her experience working with students who struggle academically, stating the following:

Well, the level, I guess, academic level, because I remember in my pre-K kids, they were very high academically. In that, we have a lot of kids in here--we have both high, low, medium, you know. But a lot of kids do struggle. I'm not really sure if they all went to pre-school before Kindergarten. So, those are the things, in the community, we wonder as teachers because sometimes parents don't tell us.

Other participants shared their concerns with the conditions in which some of the students had to live and how it affected with their learning. Participant #10 wondered if some of her students coming from a below poverty background could not relate to any of the content that she was teaching them, since they had to just simply survive. In the interview she stated, “Students lived three blocks from the beach and had never been to the beach.” Participant #10 also shared how she would go out of her way to make her students that lived in poverty feel better:

I try to do my best to make everyone feel equal. If I see that a student is being a little shy because their sneakers are not new or because they have a sweater that has stains on it--I have taken kids’ sweaters home and washed them and then brought them back to school. I have students who didn’t have toothpaste or toothbrush at home, so this is what I taught fifth grade, of course. I have in my cabinet, toothbrush, toothpastes, brushes and hair spray so that when one particular little girl came to school, she could get all that done, because they didn’t have running water for a short period of time. But just try and make them feel more comfortable so that when they come to school, it is a better experience than what it is when they're at home.

Similarly, Participant #2 shared how much seeing a student deal with poverty affected her:

Coming to school and seeing a student crying in the corner because she didn’t have breakfast or she was hungry. Or the student whose parent comes with a brand new car to pick them up but they don’t have electricity at home. Certain things like that really got under my skin and it really frustrated me because I want the best for these students. And sometimes, the parents just don’t see that.

Along the same lines, Participant #1 shared her experience:

Some of them haven't been to the beach, you know, we live in Florida. So, it's hard to make a reference to something that they don't have an experience for. Or movies that a parent wouldn't find appropriate and these kids have seen. And it was definitely inappropriate for a child to see but somehow nobody cared that you saw it. Those are kind of things that I've seen. No matter where I taught in a Title I school, those kids kind of followed that pattern. They also fight over the smallest thing. If it's mine, it means the world to them. So, I kind of see that attachment to materialistic things, yet no, or a lack of, respect for other people's things. So, it's kind of a weird--you know, materialistic about some things but not about others. You know, some things are more important than others.

Participant #19 also shared her challenges with the culture of students in Title I schools:

My role, as your teacher, is I'm going to show you that there's a whole world out there. You don't have to stay in Sanford. You can live out of this. You can grow up and you can get out of this. Where I think today's kids are--these Title I kids that we're working with tend to not have that message. They're looking for that get rich quick scheme and it's okay if you're stealing as long as you get away with it. You know, it's okay to lie a little as long as you're getting away with it. And it's almost like they're always looking for that scamming. You know, that's not everybody but that's just definitely a majority of those kids that have that.

Participant #7 felt that she had to take on other roles in addition to being a teacher. In that regard, she stated the following:

We have always been, you know, the psychologist and a little bit of the doctor and all that in a Title I school. In my experience, that is, it's much stronger. I have seen myself trying to teach the children just basic manners and social skills, that these children, that they just seem to lack social skills.

Finally, Participant #14 voiced a sentiment that most of the participants also seemed to share, feeling that they were putting in extra work to navigate where these students were coming from, but it meant fighting the strong learned behaviors that were taught at home. Participant #14 stated, "I see teachers doing a lot of work, doing the best. But I think it's an attitude they bring from their homes."

#### Stressors with Administration Expectations

The majority of the participants ( $n = 13$ ) had experiences to share about their frustrations with administrators' expectations. In my analysis, I recorded 140 instances where participants highlighted unrealistic administrative expectations as being among their top stressors. Specific expectations of the administration that seemed to cause so much stress among the participants revolved around lesson planning in a tight schedule, classroom management, lack of proper communication, keeping up with the never-ending changes and paperwork, and the low wages considering all the responsibilities. Participant #2 stated:

I think, just as a teacher in general, some of the biggest stressors are that we're given such schedule of time that we're supposed to cover an unrealistic amount of material. And I think that's just a general stressor for teachers. I just felt, my latest year teaching, overwhelmed and constantly questioning the school system. I just felt like there was always this kind of argument going on in my head about them (administration) letting

down the students and them (administration) letting down the teachers that it was kind of like I couldn't deal with it. I always felt like almost angry about it. Like I felt like there's no justice. It's unfair. And that kind of--is what made my stress level so high.

Participant #11 shared:

I mean, I've known teachers that have been put on probation because they didn't have stuff turned in or they didn't have their files in order. But when do you expect us to do that if you don't give us the time during the day to do it? You want me to sit there, two hours after school and figure everything out and put everything in, that's exactly what we have to do.

Participant #5 also shared her frustrations with the overall restrictions she has to teach a lesson to her students:

Another frustration that I have and this one's one of the biggest frustrations I have, is that we're given--let's say, for example, we're given one or two days to teach a concept. And if the kids don't get it, then we have to move on. There's no time to go back. And as a whole group, they expect us to pull in small groups but then if a lot of the students are getting it then it's better to go ahead and knock it out. Do you know what I'm saying?

Participants also shared the same sentiment, wishing that the administration gave them more freedom to make the decisions on the best approach for a student to learn a lesson. In other words, participants felt that they did not have a voice on how to teach their students. Participant #5's statement on this issue represents the feelings expressed by most of the participants:

I think that's one of my biggest frustrations is that we know our children. We know our kids better than anybody out there does. We know their needs and we know their learning

styles. And it just seems like they don't take that into consideration. I get frustrated because, you know, we get evaluated and evaluations are a frustration for me because, you know what, I feel like, let me do my thing. Let me teach. Let me do it my way. Let me do what I know how to do and then evaluate me on that.

Participant #11 shared:

When it comes to lesson plans, they want it this way and they tell us exactly how to do it. And, you know, you can't have this missing and remember that it's a legal document and it could be brought up to court. And they make it just such a big deal about our lesson plans.

Another common factor where participants voiced their frustration was the lack of time to squeeze all of the required responsibilities. Participant #4 shared:

Because of the fact that the school I'm at is a turnaround school. It's been a D for three years now. And we have extended time. So, last year was an hour later. This year, it's a half hour later. There really is minimal time to plan because the time that the teachers have is used for meetings, and for professional duties, and for all kinds of other things, so there is very little time for the teachers to be able to plan independently. There is a lot of stress because DOE [Department of Education], the district is involved, so they're constantly doing walk throughs. And this is not just my stressors in the school. Teachers feel that they're kind of under the microscope constantly and that they're being asked to do a lot of things without being given the time to do them.



Participant #8 shared a similar experience:

There's a lot that is expected of teachers. And there's not enough time in the day to do everything that they are expecting us to do. And you just get into like the focus of a lesson and you're in the groove of something and you're explaining, and then you get interrupted a lot. And I know that it's not just in this school. It happens in different schools but we get so many interruptions. And the pressure of teaching in a grade that so much of it focuses on whether the students are going to pass or not isn't seen in the amount of pressure, like that's why I've been thinking about maybe next year, I might not even do third grade, I might just want to do a different grade level, just because of the fact that it's so much pressure and my students do well.

Participant #19 shared her perspective having all the responsibility and dealing with all of the new changes as a novice teacher:

Oh, my God, every day, it's something new, something new, and something new. I mean, it comes from the administration, from the District, and they're not in the classroom with kids 24/7 so they don't really know. They expect us to do so many things but yet we have so little--like we don't have enough time throughout the day. We don't get to do everything we do. So that--I feel stressed about that because I feel that I want to do everything right. This is my first year, so of course I want to look good.

Participant #12 shared her challenges of having to meet the administration requirements and at the same time meet the different needs of the students:

There are a lot of expectations that are being put on you--a lot of things. And a lot of them are unrealistic. And you feel like you're supposed to now have this fourth grader

who's working like a second grader to almost fifth grade work and it's not possible. And, you know, you feel like a lot of pressure is being put on you because of that. You feel like you have to work magic and, you know, we're not magic, we're humans, you know? So, you're trying. You have all kids coming in at different levels and you have some kids that are working on fourth grade curriculum. You have some that are working again, you know, below level. You have some that are working above level. And you're one person trying to meet the needs of 18 to 20 kids and you try the best that you can but when you're on your own it's not always that easy especially when you're told that you have to stick to the instructional plan. The meetings that you have to go to. You wish you had more time to plan more lessons but then you're scheduled or your planning times are scheduled with meetings. And then it's meetings that are going on about things that you are like, "Really? You could've just sent me that in an e-mail."

The lack of communication between the principal and the teachers seemed to also be a common issue for the participants. In this regard, Participant #5 shared the following statement:

They expect a lot and we sometimes don't get that support back. And I was not expecting to cry but--it's tough. It's really tough in that sense. And not just status, also the fact that sometimes there's a lack of communication. So, we will be told one thing and then we do exactly what they're asking us to do. And they're like, no. Yeah, we're not doing that anymore. Now, we're doing this. And I'm a very flexible person. And I have no problem rolling with the punches, so whatever is happening then I have no problem adjusting with it. But it's the fact that you have to constantly change exactly what you're doing.

Participant #17 also shared how difficult it was to adapt to the constant changes:

It can be as simple as you're doing this wrong or you were doing this program but now we want you to change everything completely. So, those are a couple of my experiences because once you feel comfortable with learning the program that they had set, now it's all set and it's "No, we want to change and you need to re-learn this one or learn a new one." It is frustrating. Work, again, like I was saying, everything's changing. People want things differently. You get a new student without being told or it's at the end of the day and you're being told, "Oh look at this. You have a new student," which was what happened once.

Furthermore, participants stated that the school administration did not communicate well regarding how to best support them [teachers] when dealing with difficult students. Participants felt that they had to figure it out on their own. Participant #11 shared her experience in this matter:

Probably observations and evaluations from the State and that type of thing when they're looking at our scores and when they're looking at our student performance and how-- basically they're connecting our work with our students' performance. That's one of the biggest stressors. I have a very low class, academic-wise. That definitely stresses me out because it's like, "Well, you need to fix this problem." Okay, well, I'm not a doctor. I can't fix their problem. They have mental issues and they are not medicated. It's documented. However, nothing is being done about it. I can only do so much, I feel like. I've stayed after school almost every day until like 5:30. That's two hours after my contract time, to figure out new plans and new ideas to fix their behavior, to improve it or

to try to do a little bit of something to make it better but--I don't know. I guess, I have to keep trying so.

Participant #18 also shared her perspective in regard to communicating with the administration:

Yeah and very outspoken and very “Let’s do this. Let’s do that. Can we do this? Can we do that?” And I just feel like it’s, every time that it’s not what they’re wanting to, what they’re used to or what the main person wants to do, so it’s not going to happen.

Along the same lines, Participant #11 shared an experience communicating with her principal, how she was running out of options on how to manage a difficult student and the feedback that she received seemed to be for her to figure things out on her own:

And I’m like, yeah, I know. I understand that. I said, “I just don’t know really what else I can do. I said I’m going to continue to work on different things and change different things and see if I can find something to make it work.” I said, “But I just want you to know that I’ve tried many different techniques. It’s not that I’m not trying.” And he said, “Yes I know. I just want you to reflect on this conversation and just try to think about other things that will work.”

Participants also felt that there was a lack of encouragement or strength-based focused feedback coming from the administration. Participant #16 shared how she and her colleagues felt about this issue:

And the teachers feel the stress because they [administrators] just keep telling you what you’re not doing right instead of telling you what you’re not doing right and giving you a suggestion of “This is how you can do it.” And then once you do it, follow up with now, “Great! You did a good job.” Just like we treat our students, I think. Administration

forgets that that's how they should treat their teachers. I got some negative feedback but there was no support to be given with that. And I just had to kind of figure it out myself or seek out other, like coaches, to see what I could do to get better. And I've gotten better through that, but it's not because they provided the support. So, they give you the negative feedback but then that's it. They put a period on it and then you're kind of left on your own.

Finally, participants expressed their frustration about their pay not justifying all the responsibilities that they face as teachers and that this added to their stressors. Specifically, participants felt high levels of stress when their pay raises were conditioned to their students' performance. On this issue, Participant #5 shared:

And then, you know, added on to that, the fact that we get paid so little and you're constantly trying to fight to just get a little bit of a raise. Meanwhile, they're adding all these extra expectations on you, but you're not getting paid.

Similarly, Participant #3 shared:

The pay--for the teacher, we have a lot of responsibilities and we have to be so responsible with the kids at school, whatever you have to do. Nowadays, it's different than before. When I was at school, everything is different. I know everything is different now but the education and the culture is different too. It's totally different.

### Stressors with Classroom Management and Challenging Students

Most of the participants ( $n = 15$ ) shared their experience with the challenges associated with managing a class with difficult students. Overall, participants felt overwhelmed and found themselves with few options when it came to handling challenging students with mental health

diagnoses that many times were being untreated. Participant #18 stated, “Just being able to keep the kids from interrupting and being on task, that’s hard. It’s time consuming and it’s hard.”

Participant #7 also shared her experience:

It’s hard. It’s hard. Sometimes, I'm like, okay just show me the exit because the children, they're very talkative. So, a very talkative class; and I don't know if I'd go into details but I have a student that--the parents are telling me that the child has Asperger. Okay, “Have you taken him to a doctor?” “No.” So, I don’t have tools where to grasp, but I can say, “Okay, if there’s a diagnosis, I can work with him.” If there are some accommodations that need to be done. None of that. So the child is a big-time behavior problem. He can't sit down. He falls down from the chair constantly. He’s constantly playing with his hair. So, constantly talking, constantly, constantly, constantly, constantly talking. I mean, tell him to be quiet. He’s talking constantly.

Participant #12 shared how she got through a school year with a challenging student:

You know, it starts to take a toll on you and you feel like, “I can't send this kid out of class every day. And you haven’t found another way to handle that child. So you try to become as creative as you can which I had to become but you know, like I said, I had to have this particular child on every 30 minutes. If he was able to just handle, keep himself under some control for 30 minutes, I would give him five minutes of computer time because I knew that he really liked that. And that’s how I got through it most of my year.

The same participant also shared how she had to stop being who she was as a teacher in order for the students to respect her:

You know, I could barely smile with them, which I learned really quickly, when they first started, I was myself and smiling and everything and they took that as a weakness. I mean, like to the point that I had a student pretty much try to throw his homework in my face because I didn't take it at that moment when he wanted. And that was the moment when I noticed I cannot be that myself with them. I cannot smile at them. I had to put him in his place very, very quickly and show them a different side of me. And so, that was really hard because I felt like I can't even go in and smile with you. I felt like it had to be a prison ward.

Participant #1 shared:

I have another case that the child--and it's very sad to say because these are only second-grade children. But this is a very mean person. This little child somehow likes to hurt people. Like, really, really strong. Like your mom is big and fat. So you don't say that to children. So, we have that kind of environment.

Participant #11 also shared her experience:

The group of students that I have are very challenging. I have a lot of physically aggressive kids. I have a few students with mental disorders. I have a handful of ADHD kids. So, it's just, you know, I have a very diverse group of kids and they definitely challenge me and everyone else that is trying to help or that they go to.

Participant #12 shared how students can really test her patience:

I've had a kid or two. I'm like, just leave. Just leave. I can't--and then they have to go over to the teacher next door. I'm like, you know what, I can't say anything mean to you. I can't hurt your feelings, so just leave.

The same participant also shared a challenging experience with another student:

I don't know if something extreme happens with one of the kids. One day, one kid picked a stick up to hit me with it and that kind of ruined my day. But it's a good thing it was at the end of the day.

Along the same lines, Participant #14 was candid enough to share how she almost gave up as a teacher after a difficult experience managing a class:

I was just given a class and it was like talking to myself that day. And they don't want to listen. Even their home teacher calling [for their] attention, they were talking. They were not listening. And I felt so bad that I got down in my car and I started crying and I said, "I'm never going to come back again. Never! Never! Never!" I spent so much time preparing all the activities for that class and they put me down. So, that day, I got in my car and I said, "I'm not coming back." And I started crying, and I stayed in the parking for a long time.

Finally, participant #3 shared how she had to be on the defensive with her students all the time:

What I said at the beginning, there's no respect from students. And you've got to be careful too what words that you use that they don't use that against you. Or if you do something like if you're raising your voice, they're going to say something different or if you're touching or something. It's kind of a little bit of stress there.

### Stressors for ESOL and Spanish Teaching Teachers

Based on the experiences that were captured in the interviews, it was determined that a small group of the participants ( $n = 5$ ) were not in regular classroom teaching. Some worked as ESOL teachers, and others taught Spanish traveling to different schools. These participants



shared their unique experiences with occupational stressors that were not necessarily related to the rest of the teachers' experiences. For instance, Participant #3, an ESOL teacher, felt the pressure to help students learn English when they barely knew the language. She shared the following statement:

I feel--well, like I'm talking to my husband all the time when I come back from school, saying how was my day? At school, I have the beginners, so they don't know the English at all. And I have a goal that I want those students to be successful. My goals is high; it has to be a little bit lower so that I meet that goal with my students.

Participant #3 also shared that she felt she had to be an advocate for her students to the other teachers, educating [the teachers] about the process that it takes for a student to comprehend another language so they would not get labeled as slow learners. In this regards she shared her experience:

Because, I don't see anything. I don't agree what she's saying. Because they're beginners, they are coming to this country and they don't know the language. And they are learning and a new culture and a new language and a lot of new things so it's normal.

Another ESOL teacher discussed her perception of her program not being valued as other programs in the school. Participant #4 shared:

Whether it was an innocent oversight or not, it just turned out that we were left off. Just little things that kind of make us feel unwanted--not unwanted but probably not valued. When the schedule was being revised, earlier this year, yet there was a meeting with ESE for ESE to make sure that they could fit in the schedule but ESL wasn't included. So, again, that was something else that both of us took as "Well, you're not important."

Funding for programs, it would be “Oh, well, we just ran out of money. We won't be able to fund the program for ESOL.” Or it could be when we moved, ESOL couldn't get the room for our supplies where other departments that were smaller than ours that had less supplies would get the storage rooms that they needed. Little things like that. There was never time for ESOL to do it. “Oh, well, not everybody,” and as I went through the list it was everybody had done it, but we hadn't. So, little things like that, those are the kinds of things that I'm talking about.

From a different angle, it seemed that the participants in this group were the most frequently asked to help out with translations to parents or other students outside their classrooms. Although all of the participants indicated they did not mind this additional task, they did recognize that it took time away from their already tight schedule. Participant #6 shared her thoughts on this topic:

It's part of your job. And that's not right. You are doing an extra thing and whether you're translating on phone or a meeting, they should take that, you know. That's just part of my job. That's an extra--not even extra money in my pocket. You know, otherwise, if you will go to the County or somewhere else out there, making use of a translator, they have to pay this translator.

From the experiences of the teachers who taught Spanish, their main stressors came from dealing with students who refused to learn Spanish. Teaching Spanish to elementary students was a new implementation for this school district that started a year ago, and initially many students, according to the teachers, resisted learning another language. Participant #9 shared:

I had to work a lot with them to show them that like they can learn any language. They don't have to be Spanish to learn a foreign language and that we should all get along and all of that. I still have that struggle but it has been minimized because I kind of trained them last year. So, it was a constant battle with them.

The Spanish-teaching teachers also experienced resistance from some of the home teachers who did not support or encourage the students to cooperate in class. Participant # 14 shared:

I mean, most of that with behavior, or like smaller classes, or more cooperation from the teachers, too, because if the teachers kind of like enjoy the class or transmit that positive energy, they encourage their kids to learn Spanish and they see it as a positive thing. But other teachers, like they don't express the same enthusiasm and the kids' teachers see them, are in the classroom, or they stay, or they participate, or they try to send fun things. But some others, they just ignore me and go the other way, so the kids know that Spanish is not important because their teacher doesn't make it important.

### Teaching Stressors

Participants ( $n = 16$ ) reported specific stressors related to teaching. Overall, participants talked about the challenges of teaching with different levels of learning in the classroom, testing the students and having the restricted time for the students to learn a lesson plan, which does not prepare them properly for testing successfully. Participant #2 stated, "It was very difficult because, I felt like I was constantly rushing these kids through the material and they weren't getting time to really benefit from my teaching. So that's a big stress."

Participant # 1 shared:

I'm not a robot. They are not robots. It's not a hard labor kind of job where I'm just filling envelopes. It becomes personal. There's a lot of your personality that goes into it. There's a lot of your preferences on your style and the style that the children learn it as opposed to the style that you're teaching it. All these things can cause a stress. So, I think, trying to be there takes a very conscious effort and that's another big stress for sure because we're pushed with all the academics and the test teaching--the tests and teaching them the standards but you still have to teach them how to be kids and how to be human.

Participant #7 shared:

So it's always like I said, it's catching up, trying to catch up and it gets really, again, overwhelming. I'm like, oh my goodness. I forgot that today was Friday and I was supposed to take the kids to the library on Fridays at 8:30. And its quarter to nine and I didn't make it. So that kind of thing.

Along the same lines, Participant #11 shared her experience trying to teach students who were significantly behind academically:

And she saw exactly what was going on. She saw how low my students were. She saw they could barely write--more than half of them had difficult with that, because I'm not going to say all of them. But, more than half of them could not even write a sentence off of the board. I wrote a sentence down. I wanted them to copy the sentence onto their sheet of paper. More than half of them had difficulty with that. There's really, I find myself kind of between a rock and a hard place because it's just like, what else can I do? There's really nothing else I can do and as a teacher you can't, like we don't like to let things go. You know what I mean?

Participant #12 shared a similar perspective:

It's very stressful, and I don't think a lot of people understand just how stressful it is. I think people just think we just go in and we're just working with kids and everything and we're drawing and we're painting and everything is all fine and dandy. And the reality of it is that it's not like that at all. And sometimes, what the instructional plan, it doesn't meet the needs of everybody so you have to now go ahead and try to figure out, Well, how am I going to meet the need for this one? How am I going to meet the need for that one? And it's stressful. You feel a lot of pressure.

A few of the participants ( $n = 3$ ) shared their perspectives of teaching while being new in the field. Participant #6 shared her experience:

When you're in a facility, in a school that you've got some teachers that have been there for so many years and then you're coming in as a rookie, that's totally different. Everything's new to you and when you speak to others that they don't have the same mind as yours and you're working in a team, it's really hard. You know, it makes you feel out of place.

Other participants being new in the field shared their experiences with having a second hand in the classroom and co-teaching. Participant #18 shared:

Teaching is not an easy job. And especially the first year, whereas when most people either quit or they stay. And that was a great help. And I say it all the time. I'm like, we need more hands in the classroom

On the other hand, Participant #19 had a different perspective on having a co-teacher:

She's just so set in her ways she can't think outside the box and she doesn't see the whole picture, you know. Oh yeah, that's a good idea. We can try that; you know? So that stresses me out because I want to do things my way of course but she's so set in her ways that sometimes it's like, Oh, no. We're not going to do that that way. We're going to do it this way. It's like, okay. So sometimes, I just like sit back, relax, let her take her whatever she's teaching them.

### Emotional Stressors

Participants ( $N = 19$ ) reported experiencing emotional stressors that were related directly to their occupational responsibilities and their emotional connection with the students. The following subthemes were identified within the theme of emotional stressors: (a) guilty feelings for students, (b) physical and psychological exhaustion, (c) struggling with home/work balance, and (d) sense of self-efficacy.

#### Guilty Feelings for Students

Most of the participants ( $n = 14$ ) reported complex feelings of guilt that resulted from various circumstances. Some of the teachers felt guilty for having to sacrifice so much precious time from lesson teaching due to addressing the difficult behavior of some of the students; thereby, impacting the rest of the class. Participant #2 stated how she felt in this regard, "One of the students, I would have to chase him. Sometimes, he would try to climb the fence and it was just very overwhelming and I always felt really guilty because I felt bad for my other students too." Participant #12 expressed similar feelings:

For me, in my classroom, I always wanted to make the kids feel safe. I always wanted them to feel happy in there. It was a good place. You know, with lots of smiling, high-fiving them. Every day, I would greet them at the door. Give them hugs if they needed hugs goodbye. So that year was really, really rough for me because I couldn't do that.

In contrast, Participant #1 shared feeling guilty for her students living in difficult situations such as living in poverty or lack of parent involvement where she could not find solutions to alleviate the student's circumstances:

That's hard, because, again, I take it very personally. And I think a lot of what we do, because we are working with children, it is personable, you know? And I think a lot of our kids are missing that human contact and that human connect.

Participant 10# expressed similar frustrations:

Stressors, for me would also be students coming in and wearing the same clothes that they've worn all week or just not being able to relate to other students who do come into the classroom that attend the school because it's a School of the Arts and not a Title I school. And being able to see the difference in the students, and the students being able to understand, that is a real stress for me because I want all of my students to come in and feel equal.

Participant #2 also talked about feeling guilty for not being as effective with her students compared to other teachers:

For me, I would just feel guilty, I think, about how I was teaching. Especially last year, I felt overwhelmed with stress. I would look into other classes and see teachers doing extravagant projects or something and I'd feel like I'm not doing enough for my students.

Finally, Participant #10 had two of her students murdered by their father, which she felt somewhat responsible for and ended up taking a year off from work in order to come to terms with the significant loss of two of her students. She shared her struggle with the loss:

My stress levels were through the roof and I learned a lot that year. But I felt like I had almost let him down because I should've seen it with the experiences and working with parent conferences and seeing the parent come in. And I didn't realize it until years later, when I really thought back on the situation, how different the parent was - in the approach to his child's education and the approach to his mannerisms and how he spoke of each different child. And it just made me really angry that I didn't take notice of it earlier. Because I wondered, could I have changed something? Could I have said something that would have made the outcome completely different? So that was really tough.

Therefore, the statements above point out the emotional challenges for the participants based on economic and cultural backgrounds representing the evident inequities in the classroom. Furthermore, the statements of participants feeling responsible for their students' misfortunes potentially reveal some of their self-harsh judgments that could be adding additional stress to their experiences.

### Physical and Psychological Exhaustion

There were 110 statements related to participants ( $n = 16$ ) sharing how exhausted they felt physically and psychologically from work. Most of the participants ( $n = 16$ ) attributed feeling exhausted due to the perception that there is really never a break while working and even when at home. Participant # 1 shared:



Yeah because, I was exhausted at home. I was exhausted at school. There was always something to do and you're never done. It's never gone away. You're never like, "Oh, I have nothing today." There is always something."

Participant #2 talked about how her predisposed mental health conditions were exacerbated due to the emotional exhaustion stating, "It's a constant battle everyday so I think that it creates a lot of stress, especially if you're a person with a background that's not able to handle as well, maybe. Like, has anxiety or something like that."

In addition, Participant #12 talked about feeling overwhelmed:

I mean, teachers, we do what we do because we love it, because we want to help these kids. But sometimes you just feel very overwhelmed, like you just feel kind of alone. You kind of feel like people don't understand. They just think it's this easy thing and they have no idea all the paperwork that you have to do . . . you know, they think you can handle it and you do handle it but it doesn't mean that you're not tired and stressed and overwhelmed.

Participant #16 shared a similar experience, stating, "So, definitely, I mean, if you're tired all the time because you're working all the time, your performance isn't going to be as great."

Participant #19 talked about feeling the stress in her body, more specifically a constant tension in her shoulders. In contrast, Participant #17 talked about feeling depressed at times due to her emotional exhaustion from stress:

Stress often plays a role in that simply because--I mean, you're always anxious--well, at least, not always. But I'm always anxious. And I mean, I go through my troubles. I'm pretty sure that I've been pretty depressed at one point. And it's just my feeling. It's just

how I go. I go through these motions of elation at the beginning of the school year. But then by the time December comes, it's ready to walk out--and it could be a factor of things.

Finally, Participant #5 was candid enough to share how she was on the verge of quitting due to feeling so burned out. It seemed that she felt trapped in her job:

The only reason that I don't think I quit teaching, because I think about it all the time. I mean, I do think. . . that if I went somewhere else to start all over again, even though we don't make a lot of money, but I'm not going to make the money that I'm making now, starting off a job somewhere else. But if I ever could afford to--because it is, it's exhausting.

#### Struggling with Home/Work Balance

Most of the participants ( $n = 17$ ) found it challenging to find balance with work and home. It seemed for them that no matter how hard they tried, extra work had to be taken home in order to catch up with grading or administrative paperwork. Some participants have stated making it a point to come to work hours earlier or staying after hours just to avoid having to bring work home. As stated by most of the participants, quality time with family was extremely important for them and as being Hispanic usually quality time with family extends to more than your immediate family, which made it even more challenging to find the time for them.

Participant #1 made a resolution to not bring work home as she shared the following statement:

And it wasn't fair to them. And it wasn't fair to my husband to come home and just be angry and miserable. And so, I had to let it go. It has to stay there. Back in the year 2000, my New Year's resolution was to not to bring any more work home. If it doesn't get done

in the classroom, it doesn't come home. And like it stays there. If I can't get it done--I mean, I would stay later or come in earlier, check papers during lunch. There's always a pile of papers somewhere and I just--I don't bring it home anymore. I've learned to organize my day whereas the kids are working I'm working.

In contrast, Participant #2 stated, "So it all merges together. I would say the personal life with work at times." Similarly, Participant #10 stated the challenge of spending quality time with family and having to catch up with the additional expectations of being a teacher such as keeping up with certifications:

I like to enjoy my niece and my nephew. I like to spend time with my family. And during the week, there's no time. During the school day, there's no time for me to do what I need to do personally for my own re-certification for me, it adds a lot more stress on the weekends because now I'm taking time to do reading these articles, taking these short assessments and just trying to get the points that I need to re-certify without having to go through the whole process of re-testing.

Participant #17 also voiced the importance of spending time with her family and having to sacrifice this time due to being too busy from work:

You know, it's very rare that we do go and see them. And I mean, you know, growing up Hispanic that's what you, you always had your family there for you. I mean, I'll call my brother or my brother will call me. But it's one thing to speak to them, it's another thing to actually spend that time with them. And I feel like with family it's always been, you know, you forget about everything

Other participants struggled financially having to find a second job in addition to their full-time teaching job. Participant #16 shared what was it like for him to balance the second job:

In terms of the amount of things that I have to do, I've always been super hardworking so I had to get another job this year so that we can save up some money; and that has completely changed the way I time manage and money manage, and so, all of those personal stressors are becoming part of my work stressors as well.

### Sense of Self-Efficacy

A sense of self-efficacy was conceptualized based on how the participants perceived themselves as capable of completing their occupational tasks and being effective teachers. Participants ( $n = 15$ ) reported doubting their own capabilities in completing or being effective with occupational tasks due to being tired and stressed. When their sense of self-efficacy was doubted it seemed that their harsh criticism would increase, which as a result could potentially increase their stress. Participant #5 talked about how she perceives this issue:

I get frustrated that I don't do everything that I'm supposed to do or for example, I'll take my bag home with work and sometimes I'm just so tired, I just don't get to it. And then I get upset with myself. I'm like, you know, you did nothing at home. But there are a lot of times that I just shut down. And so, there are things that needed to be done and didn't get done. So I am hard on myself and I always wonder, how do the other teachers do it? How do the other teachers make it work and have everything done that needs to be done? I don't know but I mean, a lot of teachers tell me the same thing, oh yeah, no we're not cut out blah, blah, blah, but sometimes I feel like I'm so far behind that I wonder if I am in effect--you know, I wonder what's wrong with me.

Therefore, the statement of participant #5 indicates that she is probably isolating more instead of relying on the common humanity of recognizing that other teachers are probably going through similar difficulties.

Participant # 3 shared how she did not feel ready to complete a task from work, “I thought it was doing mistake and I said, should I go and talk to my administrator to tell him that I wasn’t ready? For me, I wasn’t ready. And I wasn’t ready.” Similarly, Participant #1 shared her thoughts about owning up to her own mistakes related to work, “If I made the problem, I made the mistake, I want to be the one to fix it or at least try to fix it. And sometimes I’ve overstepped a boundary that I maybe didn’t have to--trying to fix something.”

Participant #12 shared:

Seventeen years in the school that I came from, from here, okay? And then I moved here. So, I said, but you know what, I have had the experience. I’ve seen tough kids. I can deal with tough kids. And then after last year, I said, I can do that. And the group that I had was doable, so I said, okay, I’m up to the challenge. I had just put myself into a very, very big plate.

From a more positive perspective, Participant #6 stated that even when she realizes that many of her students have a hard life, it felt good for her to see that she could make a difference for them:

I’ve been here, like I said, for so long and I enjoy working with the kids. And I could go somewhere else and find other jobs but for some reason, I just enjoy working with these Title I students. They need a lot of love and attention--a lot of understanding and it’s a lot. It’s not like a normal class. Like in a movie that everything’s going to be a perfect day. And when I come home, I feel good when I come home and I say, “Look, I did that

today.” I have a little guy. He’s always looking forward to helping me, or working with me, or he did this, and he smiled today. He actually focused, you know, and it feels good. . . a lot of my parents are low income, you know. We provide--and that makes me feel even better that I’m able to help and provide them with some foods during holidays, you know, and things like that.

### Cultural Stressors

The cultural stressors for Hispanic teachers while working in Title I schools was an essential component that surfaced from the data analysis. Hispanic teachers shared their experiences related to how their ethnicity and cultural background played a role in adding to their occupational stressors. The following subthemes were identified from the cultural stressors themes: (a) overt and covert discrimination, (c) language barriers, and (d) discrepancy in one’s cultural values with others.

#### Overt and Covert Discrimination

Participants ( $n = 13$ ) shared their experiences with cultural stressors working at Title I elementary schools. Some of the participants could not help but compare their past experiences of being at another school where there was more diversity (e.g. Miami or Brooklyn compared to their present setting located in Sanford, Central Florida, where the majority of the student population was African American. In comparing experiences while working at another school, Participant #14 stated, “I didn’t have that much stress in Puerto Rico because as soon as you’re Puerto Rican, the students and the school accept you. We don’t have these kinds of issues over there. We are all mixed”

Participant #4 shared:

It's just; I go back to the differences of what it was like working in Miami and working up here. And I remember when I moved up here, it hit me how much prejudice still existed up here, outside of Miami, how different it was.

Although participants were not always able to pinpoint if they felt they were being discriminated against, at times, it seemed more instinctual, something that just did not feel right for them.

Participant # 4 shared her sense of covert discrimination by the administration:

Well, with the administration, I think it is--again, the overall feeling sometimes that we may not be perceived as being equal to the other teachers, that somehow we're a little bit less. Here, it's not overt. Like I say, it's that underlying feeling and I cannot pinpoint it. I try to look back and try and see other than the example I gave you where I was asked to be part of a committee because they needed a diverse ethnic representation and I happened to be the only Hispanic available. It's just a feeling that, as a Hispanic, I am not looked at as being of equal value or equal worth as the non-Hispanic teachers.

And this is something that I've only experienced up here in central Florida.

Similarly, Participant #1 wondered if she was being selected for a project based on her own merit or because they needed a minority in the group. Participant #1 shared the following statement in this regard:

Some principals are more--I don't know if they're deliberately doing it or maybe they didn't notice it, but there'll be like two whites, two blacks, two Hispanics, two--you know what I mean? Like, are you doing this on purpose or is it just a coincidence that you just happened to need somebody in that grade level or someone with that experience. So, it

would be curious to see when you're doing a special project, who are you picking and for what reasons?

Participant #16 shared that she did not feel safe to share any issues related to being Hispanic at work if there were not any leaders that were Hispanic that she could trust or related with her.

But in terms of team leaders, I don't think there's a team leader that's Hispanic, from what I'm aware. So, if I say something to my team leader, I expect them to relay the message to the group but I don't think a Hispanic leader is in place right now, so it doesn't feel like if I had any concerns about myself being Hispanic or student's ethnicity not getting their needs met, then there wouldn't be someone to voice my opinion to that would-be leader, in that sense.

Participant #3 shared a similar sentiment:

I mean, like I was saying early with admin. Like, I don't want to cause a ruckus, so I'm not--and I felt as if, if there was a Hispanic person on the hierarchy, I would be more willing to speak to them--male or female. But because there isn't, I kind of don't want to overstep my boundaries.

From a male perspective, Participant #17 felt the pressure to represent well as a Hispanic male teacher without letting the administration down, but at the same time he felt it was unfair that he kept getting the most challenging students in his classroom. He shared the following experience:

Being Hispanic gives that whole machismo mentality as far as float back into my mind of why are you stressed when you shouldn't be because you should have control like in your classroom or control on your life. That is what I just tend to hear. And I've tried to forget



about it but it's hard. I feel as if, so far, they definitely--I wouldn't say they have pigeon-holed me into a sense of "Oh, you're Hispanic so we're going to give you like the tough kids." But there have been certain situations where I guess being a Hispanic they seem--it's like that toughness they would say where, I guess, anybody or just society would think of you as having that tough mentality where there is no give in you and they're in the straight and narrow. So that means that if you can change all the students, so they'll place you with a difficult class because they, is just from my experience and that I would feel as if they think to themselves, "Okay, he would be the most beneficial because of their background or because of their ethnicity."

Participant #11 also felt that the administration was being biased by placing many of the Hispanic students who struggled with speaking English as their second language in her classroom. She shared how she felt about this:

As a Hispanic teacher, I would probably say I get a lot of the Spanish-speaking students, first, placed in my classroom because I am Spanish-speaking and because I have an ESL background. I do tend to see a lot of the Hispanic students placed in my room. I mean, I feel like sometimes it's a little biased because it's like, "Oh, she speaks Spanish. Let's put them in her room."

Other participants shared their covert discrimination experiences with their teacher colleagues. For instance, Participant #18 who had recently moved from Puerto Rico felt that her colleagues treated her differently by not being as welcoming. She shared the following statement:

Whether they have to do with being Hispanic or not, I'm not sure, but that would be it. That would be really like, you know, they kind of look at you and--I don't know, they

[had] some kind of attitude, were kind of dismissive. I don't know because you can't just say, "Oh, well." You don't know for a fact. But it doesn't feel as warm. And sometimes I feel like it has to do with being Hispanic. But then again, it might not have anything to do with that. But I didn't have the same experience with the other school and then that happens here.

Participant #16 had a more confrontational experience with her colleagues during a teachers' meeting. She shared the following experience:

There were all white teachers and they, I'm trying to remember. They were all white teachers and they started to comment about, Oh, now I remember. They were making comments about teachers treating students of their same rights differently than other students; and I said, "I never treat my students any differently because they're Hispanic or because they're part of a minority. And your comment offended me and I just..." You know, I was really offended by their comments so I cried during our meeting and they apologized, but I've always felt that I shouldn't have to do that.

From the interviews, it seemed that participants had their most overt experiences with discrimination coming from the parents: Participant #1 shared:

I think parental. I guess, their perception of who you are, the minute they kind of judge you, coming in as a teacher. "Oh, you're the teacher." And you look this way, so maybe you don't know. Or you're not as strong of a teacher. No, I won't say most--some black families have wanted the black teacher for their black child because they're going to learn from them. That's just that one parent, that one time that kind of almost as if being Spanish made me different or not capable of understanding their situation.

Participant #10 shared:

I've had many parents say to me that I wasn't good enough to be their child's teacher because I appeared white. Or, some parents, like I said, that were disappointed because I was Hispanic and I didn't speak Spanish.

On a similar topic, Participant #3 shared:

As a Hispanic teacher, it was some--no respect because, I was in a mainstream classroom and then I have a bad experience to my first year as a teacher. We had a parent that he was very disrespectful with me because he didn't want his child in my classroom because he doesn't speak no Spanish but my classroom wasn't a bilingual, it was a mainstream classroom.

Participant #7 also shared her perspective:

You know, with the parents also, they should, I'm Hispanic but I can still work with your children. I am prepared for that. I have this accent. So, sometimes they don't see you as, "Well, you're not African-American, you know, what are you doing teaching my children?" So, I do find myself, not on purpose, but by myself telling them I've been working here for so many years. This is my field. This is what I'm doing and your children will be fine. Like you know, just because I have an accent does not mean that I can't teach your child.

The Hispanic teachers that were teaching the Spanish class had a difficult time with the students.

Participant #9 shared her experience:

I had a lot of students refusing to go into my class and yelling [at] me things like "I am not Spanish. I don't need to learn that. Or, I am not Spanish. I don't like that. I hate

Spanish people. I don't like Spanish." So, I had to struggle with a lot of that. I had students from all levels with the same story. Fifth graders who refused to take Spanish, who didn't want to listen. First graders, sometimes they were saying that, "I don't like Spanish." Or things like, "I don't like Spanish people." It was kind of hard. It was very hard. I still end up with a headache. It was hard because, you know, they were so young for having such mentality like that. But to start, it was maybe things that they have learned at home.

Participant #14 also shared her experience while teaching Spanish to the students:

She was all the time doing "Aaahhh" making like noise, covering her ears and behaving really bad. So I started ignoring her and started with the games. And everybody started having fun and playing and I give them rewards, treats. She never got the treats because she misbehaved. So, one day, when I came in the classroom, she called me, "Hey, Ms. Colon, can you come here?" I said, "Yes." "If I speak to you and participate in the class, will you tell my mom?" And I said, "No, why?" "Because my mom told me I can't talk or speak to Spanish people, that's why I do that in the class."

### Language Barriers

Although most of the participants were bilingual, some of them ( $n = 7$ ) shared their experiences in articulating how they felt when speaking in English during stressful situations or in contrast, not being able to speak their native language if they were raised in the United States.

Participant #8 shared:

I think it's interesting because sometimes when I get very frustrated, I forget what I want to say and like sometimes I can't find the right words to express myself in English or my

accent gets thicker, because then you get like really mad. But when there's like stress, like it's different because sometimes there's a different perception, I guess.

Participant #13 also shared a similar experience:

I'm more introverted in that point. I'm like, "Mmh, I'm not going to say anything. I'm going to just sit and listen. Participate within the group." And I think that the language barrier, because sometimes when I hear that, you know, native speakers of English speak, I go, "Wow, they're so fluent." And I don't feel as comfortable with English. But if I could speak about, you know, ESOL or about the strategies and all that, I'm comfortable because that's what I know. But apart from that, it's a little bit intimidating.

Participant #19 shared:

Yeah, because sometimes, I suppose, because during lunchtime, we all sit together, you know, we talk. Like, I do join conversations but not as much as they do. And only because I'm afraid, like I mumble. Like, I mumble my words a lot and I feel like they're not going to understand me. Even though they do understand me, you know? Or when I explain something, I have like trouble finding my words.

Participant #19 also shared her experience feeling isolated by not being able to speak her first language with some of her colleagues that she works with closely:

My other job, most of the teachers talk Spanish. So I did, like, I spoke Spanish to them and that's like one thing that, for me, coming to this school, it's hard. I'm using my Spanish all the time. So, coming here, none of my other Kindergarten teams, they don't speak Spanish. I don't think my colleague speaks Spanish. She says she does. She's from Puerto Rico but she doesn't speak Spanish. So, it's hard. That's hard for me.

But I use it a lot with the kids. So, I say, “Buenos dias, hola como estas?” I talk to them in Spanish. “Gracias,” they respond to me.

The same participant also shared her experience about not being confident with her English when teaching the students:

It hasn’t happened so far this year. But I remember last year, my pre-K kids. Like, one time I said a word and they're like “Oh, this is how you say it.” I was like, “Oh, it might be the accent or I said I pronounced it wrong, you know? So that gets to me. That really does get to me because I'm not very confident with my English.

In contrast, Participant #10 struggled with not being able to speak Spanish and how it had created tensions with some of her parents:

I think it would be more beneficial for me if I had learned Spanish. But like I said, growing up where I grew up and with my father coming to America and being the land of the free for him, he wanted me to learn English and only English, so coming from a Hispanic background and being in a Title I school, you find that you have more Title I students of the Hispanic descent within the classrooms. And for me, being a Hispanic teacher, that doesn’t speak Spanish, a lot of the parents that do come in that speak Spanish have frowned upon the fact that I do not speak Spanish. Parents would get upset and wouldn’t come to conferences and speak to me because they felt that I should have learned my native tongue, Spanish.

### Discrepancy of Cultural Values

Most of the participants ( $n = 16$ ) reported facing discrepancies with their cultural values and having to find congruence and acceptance of other individuals’ cultural values even when

they seemed to clash. For instance, some of the participants came with a background of strong family and educational values which made it hard for the participants to relate or come to terms with a different point of view. Participant #1 shared:

The most important thing you could do was focus on your school. It was the number one job you needed, my parents would always say. And then to work in a Title I school and see parents that don't value or maybe don't hold a strong a value on education as what I was raised with and those beliefs. I think that causes a big stress. And it's kind of hard not to think, "Why wouldn't everybody else feel?" like it's such a value, if that makes sense. That kind of street smart, kind of like, "I just have to survive" and not really looking ahead and say, "What can I do to contribute to my own future?" It's like "What can you do for me?" kind of attitude. And I wasn't brought up that way.

Participant #11 struggled with the same issues:

Our values are completely different. With the parents that I speak to, work and money is more important than anything else. So, "Oh, I can't come in to speak to you because I have to work." Or well that I had a conversation with a parent telling her, "Your son has been involved in this and this incident and his behavior's progressively getting worse and I would love to speak to you. If you can come in for a meeting." She pretty much, flat out, told me that that wasn't her top priority right now, that as long as he was getting good grades that she wasn't worried about him. So, it's like you can either practice this at home which a lot of them won't because again their families aren't involved with school the way that my family was involved at school, where if I didn't understand something my mom or my dad would help.

Participant #17 shared:

So, we were considerate. It was what we had but because of being a Hispanic, I also never saw the types of behaviors or experienced the types of behaviors that I, as a teacher, experience now. Parents have always told me--and I've seen this even with my Hispanic students is that you have the utmost respect for your teachers. In a way, I do. And I feel as if having the Hispanic children here--some of them, a good portion of them, but not all of them. And so, I feel as if it gets watered down, like the more Americanized you become, the more it starts. Education kind of takes like a back burner.

Social interaction was another topic that the participants discussed, where they felt unsure as how friendly or approachable they could be with colleagues, students or parents, and they didn't know what was acceptable. Participant #19 shared:

And I don't know if it's culture--Hispanic culture. We're just so, I guess, loving, caring. You know, that's how we are. We approach each other, "Oh my God. Hi." And then, you know, "How are you?" But with other people you don't know if that's acceptable, if that's okay. But that's okay like for me with my family and my friends, are Hispanic. So here, like all teachers are family, I say, "Good morning. How are you?" but, it's never like "Oh my God" you know, like a hug.

Participant #15 also talked about her experience interacting with her students and parents:

Changing the whole culture and the whole, from teaching in Mexico to teaching in the States, even though kids are kids, there's still a difference. And with the kids in Mexico, you can hug them and kiss them and hug the mom and kiss the mom, you know, because



it's very, that's very cultural. Here, you're not supposed to touch them but that's impossible. I mean, they are little babies that are crying. Of course, I go and I hug them.

Participant #3 shared how she experience the cultural clash with her colleagues:

With the other teachers, I say sometimes yes, some of the teachers are like, nobody pass by and don't say "Hi!" So, I don't know if it is me that I feel that or they are normal because, you know, Hispanics are different than the Anglos. We (Hispanics) are more friendly. We talk even if we don't know each other. We either say "Hi!" or whatever. But sometimes you say "Good morning" and then no respect, they don't answer you back. I don't know. Maybe, it's me.

Other participants shared their experiences feeling misunderstood or not validated on the importance of celebrating some of their Hispanic cultural traditions at the school. Participant #18 talked about her experience:

I mean, I haven't seen--Hispanic month went by. The other thing went by. I haven't seen any--no, nothing at all, in the school--at all so. And usually, those are staple things at school, so I haven't seen so much. I don't know. I think about it so much for that book study being effective. They do a whole unit over Halloween now, but you're not doing Halloween. Every room--bats and whatever. I'm like, "Okay, that's cool." We're doing informational text so I'm like, "Well, can we do something too with the Day of the Dead?" I guess I'd like to bring that, you know, into--like, that's not like it was going to be the end of the world. And I'm like, "Okay, well do you know what it is?" And they're like, "No, no, it's actually something really nice." They shut it down completely. I took it upon myself to do it anyway and it turned out great and my kids loved it, and I've seen

that other people have done things like that. I'm trying to get gauged from my team whether, "Okay, well, should I do this?" And I kind of like took a risk doing that even though they didn't. I'm sure it's just one of the reasons they don't, because, what am I going to do talking about bats for two weeks? Can I just squeeze in one day of the Day of the Dead information?

Other participants also felt a responsibility for being able to relate to other cultures. Participant #7 shared her sense of duty in this regard:

It does because it comes to the challenge that not everybody will see you, can she work with my students? Be myself in a regular classroom. I don't know if this has to do with anything but most of the population in our school are African-Americans. So yes, there is a difference on the way they express themselves and I express myself. So, I have had to kind of learn to get again back to the culture, to go to learn their way of talking. To learn they would say jargon, I guess. So I can relate to them.

From a different angle, Participant #10 felt she was letting down Hispanic parents since they perceived her as not caring enough about her ethnicity for not learning the language. Participant #10 stated:

Parents would get upset and wouldn't come to conferences and speak to me because they felt that I should have learned my native tongue, Spanish. And I've had a finger pointed in my face saying, "You should be better." I've had a parent say that. So that was very disappointing, but I understand where they're coming from, too. It's free and public education and when they see the teacher is Hispanic, they get excited. And then it's a letdown, unfortunately. So, I feel like I let them down.

## Coping Skills

Through the exploration of the experiences of occupational stressors for Hispanic teachers working at Title I elementary schools, I navigated on how the teachers cope with such stressors and what keeps them moving forward. The analysis of the data generated the following subthemes: (a) being critical versus kind, (b) mental and physical awareness, (c) support system, (d) what gives them purpose, and (e) finding community.

### Being Critical vs. Kind

The majority of the participants ( $n = 17$ ) had experiences and reflections to share on how they can be hard on themselves during stressful situations and also how they can be kind during stressful incidents. Some of the participants shared how they worked on self-forgiveness after making mistakes at work. Participant #1 shared:

So, in learning to forgive that kind of situation, I've had to reflect that on myself and say, "Well, you've got to kind of give yourself a break too." Or sometimes--I don't know, I guess it usually takes like my husband or like a girlfriend to kind of say, "Well, it was your first time doing that. Maybe you didn't know any better?" And I'm like, "Yeah, I guess, it was." But I still kind of hold on to myself. I keep my expectations higher for myself.

Participant #4 shared her approach of forgiving herself involving the students:

It could be losing my patience with a student because sometimes they can be trying. One of the things I've always done in those situations is I'll apologize to the student because before I can forgive myself, I feel I need to apologize to the student. For me, that's the first step in forgiving myself. And usually, in that conversation where I apologize, I will

talk about people losing their temper and why people do it or why I was so upset. And once I've apologized to the student, then I can forgive myself.

Participant #15 had recently taken a course on conscious discipline, which involved practicing a great deal of mindfulness and self-compassion. She was very optimistic about how effective it had been for her to cope with her stressors in the classroom. She shared her experience:

Tell yourself it's okay. I'm safe. It's okay. If I make a mistake, you go 'Oops.' And all of that because you're always drilling on yourself on "Oh my goodness, I made a mistake." And you're on top of yourself and drilling. I did drill myself, you know, you should've been a little more careful. But then, I got my book and I'm okay, Yes, I made a mistake. I should've--okay, go with another teacher. Calm down. I'll calm down and then come back. And we'll work on it, you know? But conscious discipline did help me, definitely. Because I was really strict to myself, you know? If there's something wrong with me, and no, you can't control, you know, things happen. Here, there, everywhere. You know, even on a vacation. Well, you didn't catch the next plane--oops, you know?

Other participants shared their experiences coping with their mistakes by using them as learning opportunities for the students. Participant #10 shared:

Making a mistake in front of the students and maybe making a wrong judgment, making an error in my writing or realizing, "Oh, my goodness, I gave you the wrong information" is easy because I want to teach the students that "everybody makes mistakes and it's okay." I do have one student right now who's a perfectionist and I made a mistake but this is an opportunity to learn and grow rather than be remembered as having that one mistake made.

Similarly, participant #12 shared:

I try to own up to my mistakes as much as possible. I don't try to like push it out on the student like, "Oh, no, he didn't tell me," because that's just lying. You know what I mean? That's wrong. I'm not really hard on myself for that. I mean, sometimes they need a break and I need a break, and we just need a break from each other so.

Along the same lines, participant #17 came up with a creative way to involve the students when having to face mistakes:

In my classroom, we play a teacher versus student game. So, whatever mistake I make, they get a point. Whatever mistake they make, I get a point. But sometimes I just give myself points when they're chitchatting or whatever. And it's more of a classroom management technique but it definitely does work.

A different way of participants expressing how they were being kind to themselves when making mistakes related to the practice of acceptance and recognizing that they are humans and can only do so much. In other words, all humans make mistakes. For instance, Participant #5 shared her perspective on accepting that the differences among humans:

And knowing that everybody has their issues. Or because, you know, for example, I mean, the kids aren't the only things that might cause problems. There's friction between adults and not getting along and teachers nit-picking at each other. I just have the mentality "I don't have time for that. I don't have time for that. I don't have time." Everybody's different. Everybody's, you know, you might think that person's this way but, oh, okay that's the way they are. Accept them the way they are and nobody--you know; you can't be the same. I am probably one of the most laid back person that just gets

along and I don't get along. I don't get mad at people. And I don't know how to explain it. Everybody's different. Everybody reacts different. And I know that a lot of times, maybe some people might say something and it's not really directed towards you. They might be having a bad day. Well, the fact is it was a misunderstanding. And I think that-- it's hard to say that I feel good and on my behalf that we know we all make mistakes. But parents have to understand it's a long day. It's a lot of things going on and when you make the wrong phone call, you know, it's like you just apologize straight out, you know. You don't deny it. You come upfront and you always just apologize and say, "Listen, I apologize. It was the wrong student I was thinking of."

Participant #12 shared:

And so, that was really, really hard that year. My husband had to talk with me a lot about just "You cannot be superman. Just try the best that you can and that's it." And so, it took me a while but after a while, I just said, "You know what, I can only do so much. I'm going to do the best that I can and that's all I can do, so." And it's hard though.

Participant #10 talked about being intentional on not overloading with work:

I don't try to achieve everything in one day. As a teacher, there's going to be things even though I liked to have everything in order for the next day, sometimes there just might be things I might not be able to get to. I might not be able to grade that set of papers before I go home. I can do it tomorrow. I might not be able to go online and do the necessary stuff for my certification, but I know that I can call this parent before I leave to let them know that their child had a good day. It's really prioritizing and knowing that tomorrow's another day. And that Rome didn't get built in one day, so neither should your classroom.

Participant #18 shared:

Okay. It's just all-together, everything, you know, that the classroom stuff. I can only do so much. But the "I can only do so much" is I am doing the best I can type of thing. Not like, Oh well--It's like, I'm human, I'm doing what I can humanly possible and that is it.

Participant #11 was candid enough to share her experience when it was too much stress for her in the classroom:

I love it when the parents come in and let me go to the bathroom because then that's the time that I'm just like--even if I don't have to go to the bathroom, I'm gone for five minutes and that's like a breathing time. So, little breaks during the day will help with frustration and anger. I mean, I can't start yelling and screaming and being all crazy to the kids, so I just have to.

Participants were also candid enough to share when they practiced the opposite of being kind by being hard on themselves and having a hard time letting go when making mistakes. Participant #1 shared:

Absolutely, so I take it very personally. I have a really hard time. And it's hard not to overreact or get stressed in a stressful moment, to overreact because I take you as if you were my kid and I'm going to react in the same way.

Participant #4 shared:

It's probably harder for me to be kind to myself than to be kind to others. I tend to be much harder on myself than I am on others so that would create stress within myself, I guess, that having to live up to the standards I accept for myself.

Some of the participants talked about being perfectionists, which added to their stressors.

Participant #13 shared:

I think I'm a little bit of a perfectionist. Everything has to be, you know, in order.

Everything has to be in its place but in a lean way. In some sense, I lean to being a little flexible. But I like things to be done as is.

Participant #17 shared his perspective on feeling the pressure of being a Hispanic male teacher and his rationale for being a perfectionist:

Because I can be completely stressed out in the sense that I always want to be a perfectionist, but most of the time, just being a Hispanic, it has sent me to being a more of a perfectionist and I've seen that a lot more this year, where I just wanted to excel and excel and excel, because if I don't excel then I'm only going to be—it's almost like putting a shame to the name. And not just the name but I mean, there's not many males, first of all, in teaching or in the elementary setting, so I don't want to become, I guess, a statistic of those who didn't make it.

### Self and Physical Awareness

Nearly all participants ( $n = 18$ ) talked about their approaches on how to cope with stress, being aware of their body and mind by self-regulating and being more intentional on finding ways to decompress. Self and physical awareness practices among the participants varied in different forms. Some of the participants seemed to have a better grasp of how to self-regulate during a stressful time; others relied on activities such as yoga or self-pampering to decompress after work. Three of the participants shared what they do to decompress after work. Participant #1 shared:



I've tried to schedule. Because I'm a planner, I try to schedule more personal time, whether it's a yoga class or a massage or just to get my nails painted which I don't do, but I'll do it on purpose to schedule that time to myself on purpose. I remember really stressful days and I'm going to go to the supermarket and I'd take my time. I'd walk really slow, up and down, every single aisle. We don't own pets but I walk the pet aisle just because it gave me time to just breathe and be there.

Participant #8 also shared how she decreases her tension from work:

I started working out. It was more for like my health but also because of the fact that I needed a way to release the tension that I have. That I'm holding in all day because kids-- they probe you and they try to push you past that point. So, I try to, you know, you reel it in and you reel it in but you're still keeping all of that inside. So, that's one way that I do it. Like lately maybe working out has taught me a little bit that I'm feeling a little less stressed and I've just been trying let it go, trying to compartmentalize, like if I'm doing everything that I can at work. And then when I leave work, then I'm trying to leave that at work.

Similarly, Participant #17 shared:

That is definitely my outlet. I mean, I just put on my headphones and I just go running. It could be a short little sprint or it can be a nice long jog. But do I do it every day? No. But that is my go-to outlet. I mean, I can't even watch TV because I feel as if I'm watching TV, I'm sitting and I could also have my laptop, I could do work.

Some of the participants recognized relying in their own breath to ground themselves during stressful times. Participant #6 stated, "Just took a deep breath and I said I have to keep

going because it doesn't stop here. I've got to keep going and doing the best that I can. You know, I have to try and I can't give up." Along the same lines, Participant #7 shared:

So, I take a lot of deep breaths a lot of the time and say, you know, I need to move on. I need to go home. This is going to still be here tomorrow. So, I pick and choose which paper I'm going to do and which paper might get there a little bit late.

Participant#13 also shared her experience on relying on deep breaths while teaching:

I definitely breathe a lot. I'll take a moment. I'll just turn around and I'll breathe for a couple of seconds. And then I'll turn right back around and have that little, you know, not fake smile but just that smile that's like, Okay, everything's good. Everything's calm. And then everything just kind of goes back to normal. But my kids definitely can sense when I'm getting angry or frustrated because I wear my emotions on my face a lot.

Participant #2 relied on visual reminders to breath and smile more:

In the classroom, I can say, I'm visual. I've learned that I'm a visual person. I have taken a sheet of paper and I've written in the words with a marker, really big BREATHE, SMILE. So, when I would get to that point, I kind of look back and I just smile and breathe and look at my little sign, you know? And, you know, I've done a calendar where I counted how many days of school are left, just to finish that school year because that year was rough and I had a rough group of kids and I was exhausted all the time or I've gotten sick.

Other participants talked about being more intentional with self-regulating during overwhelming times in the classroom. Participant #5 shared how she believed she was getting better at self-regulating with years of experience:

I mean, my first years of teaching, yes. My first years of teaching, in front of the kids, I'd sometimes start crying. But I can't remember the last time that I wasn't able to regulate. So, I guess, I don't allow it to pass a certain level where then I'm not going to be able to regulate my emotions. Or just my age, where I'm thinking, you know, it's more exhausting--stress is exhausting. So, I guess, I try to not exhaust myself. I know that getting upset takes a lot more energy than staying calm so, I don't know. I'm going to try not to let somebody else aggravate my life.

Participant #9 talked about making it a point not to be like other teachers that she has seen losing it in front of the students:

I remember one time, I went to a third-grade class and the classroom teacher was yelling at a student. She was yelling bad, really badly. I mean, she was yelling with all her lungs to that third-grade. You know, that third grader got her out of control so, I don't let myself scream that way. I try to conserve my calm dealing with these students. Like, I cannot yell back at them. I tried to remain calm. I tend to put myself first. One time, I stopped the whole class for a couple of minutes. I asked them all to be quiet and don't say a word for a whole minute and I stretched it until the end of class.

From a more advanced approach of practicing self-awareness, Participant #15 was the only teacher in the sample who had taken formal training on learning how to self-regulate and practice mindfulness when dealing with stressors in the classroom. She shared her experience with self-regulating:

Definitely, because I'm taking a course on conscious discipline, and one of the things that they say is you've got to calm down. Don't take it personally because it's not against you.

It's their particular issue. And so, breathe, calm down, and once you're calm, you can calm them down because calming somebody down is contagious. Just like being angry is contagious, calming down is. So, I breathe and I breathe, and then I calm them down so that, and you see, it doesn't really have to. I don't know if it has to do with Title 1 because they're little babies. This is with practice because I definitely say I'm not perfect and I'm sure some of the reactions. But one of the things you have to do is stop, right there, just stop. Take a breath, and then really look at it. And I'm sure this takes a lot of discipline and a lot of work towards everybody who wants to do it because if you just react, most of the times, whatever outcome is going to be is not going to be very positive. The pause--definitely. The pause. You have to stop, whatever it is. Because the minute you just scream whatever you're thinking out of the top of your head is probably going to be bad news.

Participants also talked about being intentional by leaving their stressors at school and not taking them home. Although, most of them acknowledged that this concept is not always easy, but being more self-aware of this practice seemed to help them cope. Participant #11 shared how she lets go intentionally:

I get that I don't try to like bring it home with me though, you know what I mean? I try to do as much as I can at work. That's why I stay a little later at work, trying to figure things out. Trying to figure out, "maybe if I moved this, this will work better. Or maybe if I try this instead, this will work better. So, maybe, like sometimes I put a little burden on me while I'm at work. Like, maybe I'm not trying hard enough in this area and then I try to improve. And when I'm at school and I've tried what I planned and it failed, I definitely,

you know, feel upset about it. But I try to let it go at school. So, I think about it on my drive home while I call my sister and we'll talk about it. And then when I park my car, that's it. I hang up the phone and that's it. I've got to let it go.

Participant #19 shared how she involves her students in the letting go of worries mentality:

I try not to because, I do believe whatever happens at home, leave it at home. Whatever happens at work, leave it at work. And I tell the kids too, when they walk in, I see their faces, you know. I'm like, No. Whatever that is, leave it outside the door. Don't bring it in here. We want A+ attitude in here because that's one of the rules in the school. A+ attitude. So I was like, leave it outside. I don't want that face. Take it off. Leave it outside. I don't want that negative vibes coming in here. So, I do try to keep everything separated.

The same participant stated how teaching her students how to self-regulate helped with her own calming down:

Okay. Well, at school. I'm a very calm, relaxed person, so I don't really let things get to me. Especially like with the kids. If they're like having a tantrum or something, I get down to their level because that stresses us up too. When I have 29 kids and they're all going crazy. It's stressful. You want to go just leave the classroom, but you can't. I mean, you have to have control of the classroom. And if there's one kid, I have a student, she just throws the worst tantrums. And you see the other kids going like this, covering their ears because it's just too much. So, I told her, "Calm down. Count to 10. Breathe in. Breathe out." And that calms me as well too.

## Support System

The subtheme of support system was comprised of the help that participants relied upon in order to cope with their occupational stressors. All the participants ( $N = 19$ ) made significant statements about the importance of having a support system. Although relying on family was a factor, almost all of the participants ( $n = 18$ ) recognized that one of their major sources of support were other teachers in the school. A common phrase that was noted from the interviews was, “We are all on the same boat.” This phrase represented, for most of the participants, that they were not alone in dealing with difficult times.

Participant #4 shared the benefits that she experienced when talking to other teachers about her frustrations from work:

I think it's a release of stress to have someone to talk to because a lot of times the same things that are stressing me are stressing the other teacher. So, knowing that I'm not alone in those stressors, that there are others that are feeling the same thing, in a way, it helps to reduce that stress because there's someone to share it with, someone to talk about it with; and just being able to do that helps release or reduce the stress for me.

Participant #6 shared:

Well, I do talk with the other teachers. We talk about it, which is really important, and we set aside a time that we can say, “Well, let's work in this way or work it this way.” You know, we try to just put our shoulders together and help each other out. And see how their experiences were. It's good to listen to other teachers that have been there for so long. Remember, every year, it has changed. Within the 17 years I've been there, different experiences have come every year. With the technology comes up and there's so much to

do that you have so much to learn--sitting down with the teammates helps a lot. It helps a lot. I mean, a lot. And it makes you feel better when someone else says, "I've been there, I've done that."

Participant #7 shared how venting with her teammates has helped her change her mind about quitting her job:

So, she tried to do that strategy with us. So everybody, all of us, and we got into it. And it was like, my rose was the good thing of the day and the thorn is what was really the stress of the day. So, everybody said the same and then I realized that we pretty much have the same thorns, you know? And we were all stressed about the same things. And then I said, "Well, you know, I feel like opening that door, and go, and never come back." And there was somebody that said, "You know, you said it. I'm in that same boat." So, I don't know if that answers your question.

Participant #17 shared his perspective regarding being united with other teachers from the idea that working in a Title I school is a bigger stressor than one would have in other schools:

I mean, from my experience of working at a Title 1 school, I feel like--so far, every Title 1 that I've been to has been [that] the majority either are the new hires or recent graduates. So, they're all on the same boat. And they're mostly all female. But gender aside, I've always had a good relationship with like "Oh, we're still first-year teachers, second-year teachers, third-year teachers" so you might be very experienced but this can be your first year at a Title 1 school.

Other participants reiterated the importance of meeting frequently with other teachers in order to help with stress. It seemed that the need to meet with other teachers in order to find support, surpassed cultural differences among each other. Participant #10 shared her perspective:

I really think that meeting with my team more frequently helps alleviate a lot of the stress that would build up if we only met once a week. The one thing that I do enjoy about working here at this school, like I said, I worked at Title I schools all the time, but the team here that I'm on, we try to meet every day and we eat lunch together, some of us. So, at that time, it is lunch, and we can talk about the things that we need to do in the classroom. But we also have that moment where we can talk about our personal lives and get to know one another.

Participant #11 shared how having lunch with her colleagues was her safe place to cope with stress:

At first, it's venting sessions with everybody and everybody's kind of just complaining about what's happening. And then afterwards, it's all fun and games and we're laughing and just, I guess, sharing our frustrations with each other is definitely one way to cope with all of the stress from the day, you know. The moment we do that at lunch, I know I feel a little better after lunch because we get to vent for a little while from all of the stuff that's happened in the morning.

Participant #8 also shared her experience having lunch with her colleagues:

When we go to lunch, that's like our venting time, in a way. And when I don't have it, I miss it. Sometimes, it's just, you laugh at the stuff that kids do. And sometimes you kind of have like the same, like, "Hey, how did your lesson go?" And it'll be like, "Well, this



lesson didn't go that well." And I'm like, "Really?" Or like, "Oh, this doesn't work well for me." We'll talk about like "This worked out. This didn't work out." But definitely, we're on the same boat. Even though we have different students, different classes, we still have to deal with all of the things that come from working in a Title I school. Yeah, I know that they're definitely in that same boat, I guess.

Although, most of the participants stated that the ethnicity of the rest of the teachers did not matter in regard to support, some participants shared how they found a connection with the support of other Hispanic teachers. Participant #8 relied on a Hispanic coworker to vent, "I have like another co-worker, that's Hispanic as well. We can talk about the kind of things that we go through. I mean, I feel like every teacher has stress." Participant #9 also shared a similar experience:

Yeah, one of the reasons why I have stayed at this school is because of the teachers, definitely. It can make a difference because like they can back me up with the students. Like, another teacher from a Latina background can come to the class and say, "Look, it's not that bad to speak Spanish because I also speak Spanish, too."

Family also played an important factor regarding support with the participants. Participant #3 relied on her husband to let all of her frustrations out. She stated, "I communicate to my husband and then he would take it out of my chest and then it got normal--just to take it out." Participant #7 also confided in her husband when she felt ready to give up as a teacher, "My dear husband, I don't think I can. I'm not going to last a year because it's just too much. It's too much. I didn't think that it was going to be that overwhelming, you know, so, yeah we talked."

Participant #8 relied more on her parents and friends to vent:

Another way is I just talk. I just vent and I talk to my parents or I talk to friends and they'll ask how my day went and sometimes I'm like "Don't talk to me about work. I don't want to talk about work." But most of the time, I like sharing and talking. I obviously, don't say names or anything, but I'll be like, "Well, this happened at work and I'm worried. Or, this is what's happening. Or, my kids are not doing so well today.

In contrast, Participant #12 found her support with other parents at the school:

You know, I had some really great parents and I think I stayed in it for as long as I did because I did have some really good parents and a lot of really good experiences. So just, you know, when they come back, help me to be able to handle this situation in a certain way.

### Finding Purpose

From the data analyses, the results identified that part of what kept the teachers motivated despite their constant occupational stressors was a sense of purpose. This sense of purpose was most obvious when feeling inspired by making a difference with the students and recognizing that not all students are disruptive and that the majority of them really want to learn. In this regard, Participant #3 stated:

In the school, the kids. They're so sweet, the Kindergarten especially and the first graders. They're so funny. Like, you forget about the stress that you have--that you have to meet the goal with them . . . when you are with them and you're teaching them and they are responding back to you, that is your goal for that day, that relieves me.

Participant #5 shared:

And every day, I greet them. Every morning, it's "Good morning"--each individual child. So even if the previous day, it ended up horribly because I wasn't happy with you at all about whatever your behavior, but the next morning it's completely fresh. And not even the next morning, it could be an hour later. And it's completely. I don't hold the grudge against the child.

Participant #6 recognized that her students attending a Title I school need more love and attention:

I only have one child and when I do some examples to my child, I let him know that working at Title I schools, with the kind of students that we have at our school, it's not simple. You have to have a lot of tender loving care. A lot of them do need that. And then there, you've got to have a heart. You've got to love being around the kids. And it doesn't matter what nationality. You've got to have the heart and say, "You know what, I'm going to give you all today." And you see that one child. And when I come home, I feel good when I come home and I say, "Look, I did that today. I have a little guy. He's always looking forward to helping me, or working with me, or he did this and he smiled today. He actually focused, you know, and it feels good.

Participant #9 felt a responsibility for the students who were cooperating and willing to learn. She stated, "I look at the good ones and I'm like, this is not fair for me to stop the bus or to argue, because these are the good kids. They don't deserve that.

Participant #10 also shared how her students keep her going:

I was coming in. I had a hard night last night talking to some friends on the phone back in South Carolina. And this morning I just really wasn't in the frame of mind of "Oh, let me

be perky. Let me go ahead and pick this pumpkin up because we've got to carve a pumpkin tomorrow." I wasn't in the frame of mind of the positive teacher that I usually am. And as soon as the kids started coming in, it's like your mind switches. There's really no time to think about your personal self, for me at least. There's no time to really think about my personal life outside of this classroom because once those students enter the door, they are my life. I have to deal with "Who needs a Band-Aid?" to "Who has to use the bathroom?" to "Who didn't get to breakfast?" "Whose mother signed the agenda?" And I have to make a note for how they're going home differently. It really changes quickly.

Participant #14 found purpose in making sure that the students would learn Spanish despite their initial resistance to learn the language:

So, I have to make the difference. Show them the different part of what they think. And I think I did it because this year, I don't have any stress when I come in; they started clapping. Yey, Spanish! Ah, you have this game. You have, "Yes, we have all that." And I see, they can understand all the classes in Spanish and they can speak a lot of words. They don't speak fluently but they can speak phrases and words.

Participants also shared their experiences finding purpose through gaining recognition, respect, and gratitude from the parents. Participant #3 shared how much it meant for her to receive a letter of appreciation from a parent:

He sent a letter. They moved back to Alabama, I believe. So, he sent a letter saying, "Oh, thank you for everything that you taught my child. He knows a lot. Thank you for everything." And so, I was so excited and I went running to my principal showing the

card because after that I was crying. It's not everything because of that. So, wow. And then I talked to him nicely. And we have a couple of like Hispanic students but I was teaching the mainstream.

Participant #16 shared:

So, now that I have another set of students and parents that are also recognizing me. I've been once with this community. I feel like once they see you and like see you wanting to help their student rather than see you attacking their student, they respect you.

Participant #6 also shared how she finds purpose by helping out the low-income families from her school:

And, you know, I've helped the front office, which is a lot of my parents are low income, you know. We provide, and that makes me feel even better that I'm able to help and provide them with some foods during holidays, you know, and things like that.

Finally, Participant #12 stated that being a parent herself gave her a different perspective to remain inspired to treat the students fairly:

And so, I have a certain expectation for my own children's teachers and how I want them to treat them and to behave with them. So, that would also be something that I would keep in my head. I would just try to think about, "Well, how do I want someone to behave with my child or to handle the situation" and I kind of have to do that same thing that I want for my children. I would try to give my students what I wanted someone to give my two kids.

## Advantages of Being Hispanic

Most of the participants ( $n = 18$ ) made notable observations on how being a Hispanic teacher came with advantages. Participants voiced their experiences about developing better connections with the Hispanic students and parents. In this regard, Participant #5 noted, “I don’t see the correlation in being Hispanic with my stressors. I mean, there’s no language barrier. I actually see a little bit of an advantage in being Hispanic.” Participant #4 shared that she can connect better with her Hispanic students and parents:

I do teach ESOL. As far as working with my students and working with the parents, there is not a stressor--quite the opposite. I think it’s an advantage because the majority of the students that I work with are Hispanic and the parents are Hispanic, so it allows me to communicate very easily with the children, who come in not speaking English or speaking minimal English, and the same thing for the parents.

Participant #10 shared:

I think that’s an advantage. And I think the majority of the teachers know that I’m here for the kids, so usually, they will call, “Ms. Teacher, I have this new student who just came in. I don’t know what to do. Can you just speak to him and tell him. . . .” So, they’re able to communicate with me and then I’m able to communicate with the student, and able to have them--the filter is lowered down so they are able to feel at ease in the classroom. Other parents, that see that I am Hispanic but that I don’t speak Spanish but try to reach out to them, find the paperwork to get the information translated for them. And they’re so thankful that we have that ability to put the information that we need to

send home in their native tongue so that they can be aware of what's going on in their children's daily lives at school.

Participant #16 also shared how she is connecting with her Hispanic students:

This year, it actually plays a big role because I'm able to speak to my students in Spanish if they're not able to come up with the idea that they want to talk about. Or, sometimes they just want to talk to me about something and they feel comfortable talking to me in Spanish so it helps in being Hispanic and bilingual that I speak Spanish. In terms of the way that I am, I feel like being responsible and being family-oriented definitely comes from my Hispanic background.

The same participant also shared her experience interacting with Hispanic parents:

But now, with my Hispanic parents, I feel like they, again, were very welcoming and they were grateful because finally, they have a teacher that can speak to them in Spanish or understand their notes in Spanish, things like that.

Other participants shared their experiences about having a sense of pride for being Hispanic by having the desire to teach their language and culture to the students and how their diversity made them more interesting to others including the administration. Participant #8 shared her culture from Puerto Rico anytime she had the opportunity in class:

I try to bring my background into what I'm teaching so sometimes like if we're talking about--I'm trying to think of like, in science we were talking about like seeds. And I brought the fact that I used to go to this place in Puerto Rico.

Participant #14 shared how rewarding it was that her students were learning to speak Spanish, "After a year of me teaching with them. Now, when they see me, they greet me and they get

happy. And now, they say, ‘Oh, I like Spanish. I love to take Spanish class.’ It has been a process.” Participant #19 shared how she finds opportunities to teach her language to her students:

It’s like, it’s very, you know, it’s just something I do. And my co-teacher, she teaches them sign language because she knows sign language. So, they're getting sign language, English, and Spanish. So, like, when I say--when I give them a pen and paper. They say, “Gracias.” Or I respond, “De nada” because they already know. They already know that meaning. “Hola, buenos dias, de nada.” Like, things like that “adios.”

Participant #10 also shared her experience:

I don’t speak it fluently, Spanish, but I’m able to integrate what I do know into our everyday classroom. So, for me, it’s almost as a stress relief because we can sing songs in Spanish about the content and the students love it. They react to it. They want to learn more. They’re like sponges. Whereas, they would see me before and they wouldn’t know who I was and looking at me like, “Oh, that’s the new teacher.” Where, now, I’m getting hugs in the hallway from students. And they’re getting to know me and it’s a very comforting and happy feeling.

Participant #8 also shared her experience with her principal while helping out a Hispanic parent:

I could see that my administrator was looking at me, like very interested in like the conversation because you could tell, I mean, I know he doesn’t understand Spanish but he could tell from the body language that the mom felt at ease speaking with me and that she was okay that—you know, it was a little bit of an inconvenience that she had to stop and go to the front office and, you know, all of these procedure that we have in place. But I



could still see him, like, you know, how you can tell that somebody's admiring or looking at what you're doing. And I could tell that he knew that she was okay. So that's something that I noticed.

The same participant also shared how she perceived her co-workers when speaking Spanish:

With co-workers, if like I'm talking to a parent or something like that, or if we have a student that's just new that doesn't speak any English and I'm talking in Spanish, they always seem very fascinated and they always want to know more about me.

#### Teachers' Recommendations for Administrators

At the end of each interview, I asked the participants to share recommendations they would give to the administration that could help with the teachers' occupational stressors. From their feedback, three subthemes were identified: (a) administration should be more sensitive and empathetic; (b) administration should give more freedom in lesson planning; and (c) provide more support for students' behavior management.

#### Administration Should be More Sensitive and Empathetic

Participants shared 47 instances in which they suggested that administrators should be more sensitive to the challenges that they faced as teachers. Participants stated feeling that the administration has forgotten what is like to be a teacher facing the daily obstacles and responsibilities of a classroom. Participant #2 stated, "I would just say, for administrators to spend more time probably in classrooms and more time trying to get to know their staff and know them on a little bit more of a personal level to understand." Participant #5 shared her experience in this regard:

I don't know, but I don't understand their logic. I always tell people, "You know, people are making the rules that don't even step inside a classroom and teach", you know. His response was (when talking to her administrator), "Well for years, teachers have known that their job is to take, you know, they take schoolwork home and the work is never ending," or just the lack of compassion. So, I really do think--and if you can do anything about it, set up. I don't know where to go but say, "You know what? These principals need to spend time in the classroom and understand what the teachers are dealing with before. I can guarantee you; they're going to be sending him out because they need some kind of awakening. Most of them were teachers but they've been out of the classroom for so long."

Participant #8 shared:

Like, when's the last time an administrator came and taught a lesson? Like that's something that--you can do that. I mean, I know you have a busy schedule. But there are days that you're just walking around campus or you're in your office. Why don't you come in the classroom and teach a lesson and see how the kids are actually reacting?

Other participants felt that the feedback given from administrators seemed to lack positive statements. Participant #16 shared:

Because it doesn't feel like a unified staff, even that we all feel the unified stress. Like, I think if administration did a better job at like making us more of a team then we would be able to feel like we're a team and be able to perform better for administration for the kids... Well, one of the things that we talked about was, because a lot of us talked about it in group, was the fact that there is not enough positive feedback. So, if they were to

give us some constructive feedback with some positive, that would help us build our confidence.

#### Administration Should Give More Freedom in Lesson Planning

Participants felt strongly about the recommendations for the administration to give them more freedom in lesson planning and in taking a role in the decision making as to what is the best educational approach for their students. Participant #12 shared their thoughts on this topic:

If what they're doing is working so well, why are we trying to come up with something completely different? If they already have something that's working well, can't we look at it? Can't we look at part of what they're doing and see how can we try to bring a part of that over here and see how it affects them? I think a lot of us kind of just did our-own-kind-of-thing [and are] flexible with it. The expectation was that you were still going to be doing or using, what it was. So, if you were kind of doing your own flexible thing, you weren't announcing it to anybody, you know.

Along the same lines, Participant #17 stated, "To support us teachers especially us Hispanics. Even though we might have other ways of handling our classrooms, there is a purpose. I mean, we're nothing but being perfectionists. We're nothing but wanting the best for the students."

Participant #5 shared:

They want to treat us like robots. Everything has to be like a certain specific way. Like, I feel I was a natural teacher. Meaning, it was natural to me and I can teach naturally but I feel like the way that they're making us teach now has taken away that natural teacher in me, so it's become like more robotic. And it's outside of my comfort zone. I get frustrated because, you know, we get evaluated and evaluations are a frustration for me because,

you know what, I feel like, let me do my thing. Let me teach. Let me do it my way. Let me do what I know how to do and then evaluate me on that.

Specifically, participants suggested to the administration to give them more freedom in the classroom on how to teach the students. Participant #12 elaborated on this topic:

So, I think that's one of my biggest frustrations is that we know our children. We know our kids better than anybody out there does. We know their needs and we know their learning styles. And it just seems like they don't take that into consideration. If what I'm doing is really effective, and I'm doing it well, and I've been perfecting my craft, why do I have to keep changing it to please somebody else when I know my students and I'm the one that knows them the best. I know exactly what they need. So that's one thing that, I guess, that's a lot of stressors that comes from teaching, in general, not just in Title I.

Participant #8 shared,

If what I'm doing is really effective, and I'm doing it well, and I've been perfecting my craft, why do I have to keep changing it to please somebody else when I know my students and I'm the one that knows them the best. I know exactly what they need.

Participant #11 also shared her recommendations:

To teach what we know. We're there because we know what we're teaching. You know what I mean? Just give us a little freedom to breathe and to teach. And if they do that, I feel like people would be a lot happier. When you give somebody space and the ability to breathe, we don't feel as caged. You know what I mean? We're kind of like little birds--caged. We can't do anything about it.

Finally, Participant #19 recommended that the administration take into account the individual learning needs of every student:

For example, right now, the big thing is learning targets, learning goals. They want these kids in Kindergarten to learn so many things. So, all of that adds stress for us because we want them--when administration comes in, "Oh, what are you working on?" They [administrators] want them [students] to say, "I am learning on my beginning sounds." But most of the kids are not going to remember what they're learning target is, even though they're working on beginning sounds, you know? They're not going to be able to verbally say it even though they're working on it. So, all of that add stress. I guess, the administration advice would be: It's good to have those expectations for us, but also be understanding that not everybody's the same, not all the kids are going to learn the same way.

#### Provide More Support for Students' Behavior Management

Participants recommended that the administration allow more options for behavioral consequences for the students. They expressed the belief that they were left on their own with minimal tools to handle the poor behavior of some of the most challenging students. Participant #5 shared her thoughts in this regard:

So, that behavior and then the lack of, I guess, empathy from admin and helping deal with the behaviors. It's always--they put it on the teacher. It's always, they put it on us. They don't let us take [away] recess. There's no consequence. At least if we have consequences for them--there are no consequences. We can't give them silent lunch. We can't take away their recess.

Similarly, Participant #11 stated:

Yeah. It's like, "Okay. Well, I can't take away--you're telling me I can't take away their recess. And you're telling me that I can't send them to the office for silent lunch? You're telling me that I can't do this, I can't do this, I can't do this but you need to figure out how you can improve their behavior without taking all of those things away.

Along the same lines, Participant #12 stated that even when the administration provided some consequences, in the end they didn't follow up with them. In this regard, Participant #12 shared her experience:

And so, you know, at the beginning of the year, the students were told, "If you have all these behavior problems or whatever. If this happens, you will not be given that privilege to go on that trip, you know?" And as teachers, we were like, "Thank you." They've chosen this so they miss out on that. But when it actually came down to the field trip, that didn't happen. Yeah. And so, now you feel distracted because now you're like, "I'm at St. Augustine, two hours away from home, and of course their parents don't even come on the field trip. And so, now I have to either me, myself, worry all day long and deal with this behavior while we're two hours away from school or I have to give them to a parent to have to deal with who's chaperoning. And, I myself is what, you know, if I'm going to chaperone on one of my children's field trips, I don't want to spend the day having to reprimand somebody else's child, you know? The thing was that we were told one thing and the kids were told one thing and then it never followed through.

Participants also voiced the need for more assistance and mentoring when dealing with the behavior management of students. Participant #6 stated, "So you need the assistance, a lot of

assistance and help and according to behaviors, maybe things are going to run a little more smooth.” Participant #9 also provided suggestions in regard to teaching Spanish classes:

To bring more support with behavior, and to have like mechanisms to cope with that. Or like to have the Spanish class like by invitation only. More mechanisms for like behavior issues like if there’s somebody misbehaving in the classroom, I would like to, like, call right away so I can send the kid somewhere else. But I don’t even have a phone in my area.

Finally, Participant #13 shared her recommendations for more mentoring in the classroom for the teachers:

I think, there should be a mentor in whom one of those teachers can provide the support and examples. I think that because these teachers don’t have that equipment, that management, their stress level, of course, it’s going to be high. It’s stressful. You’re screaming all the time; those are in the ones that are all over the place. Because like, you know, sometimes we have those bad kids. And that’s when I think administration has to process with the teachers and try to help these kids. But sometimes it’s out of the teacher’s hands.

### Summary

Chapter 4 presented the results of the data analyses performed to explore the experiences and meanings of Hispanic teachers’ occupational stressors while working in Title I elementary schools. In the study, 19 participants were interviewed. Five themes emerged from the analysis of the collected data. The identified themes were explicated through extracted significant statements from the participants’ own language. The emergent themes discussed in this chapter

were: (a) general stressors, (b) emotional stressors, (c) cultural stressors, (d) coping skills, and (e) teacher recommendations for administrators. The next chapter includes a brief summary of the study, comparisons of the findings in this study to those of prior researchers, implications, and recommendations.



## **CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION**

### Summary of the Study

The objective of phenomenology is to determine what are the meanings and experiences of individuals and how such individuals are able to provide a comprehensive description of it (Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand Hispanic teachers' experiences with occupational stressors while working in Title I elementary schools. Qualitative research practices acknowledge that researcher-bias influences an investigation (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994); therefore, I began this study by addressing personal biases, and beliefs, including narrating my own feelings towards Hispanic teachers who work in Title I schools and how my personal history related to these 19 educators. In addition, the researcher reviewed the literature related to (a) teacher burnout, (b) state of minority teachers including Hispanic teachers, (c) coping strategies for emotional self-regulation with teachers, and (d) self-compassion conceptualization and the related research on individuals exposed to high stress.

Prior to participant recruitment and collecting data, I followed the protocols to secure faculty, program administration, school district, and IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval to conduct the study. A total of 19 participants were part of the study ( $n = 18$  females;  $n = 1$  male). Participants worked at three Title I elementary schools within the same district. All of the interviews were structured following an interview protocol that consisted of seven primary topic questions. The interview protocol allowed for participants to interact and bring out their own variations on the script of the interview (Moustakas, 1994). All interviews were recorded and transcribed into text. Transcriptions were reviewed for accuracy. Participants were sent their

identified significant statements and meanings to confirm accuracy; a qualitative research validation tool referred to as member checking (Moustakas, 1994).

To analyze the data, the researcher followed Colaizzi's (1978) structured methods. Colaizzi offers a structured framework that is useful for novice researchers (Saunders, 2014). The researcher was also influenced by the guidance of Saunders (2014), who described, through a contemporary lens, how to create a clear auditable trail following Colaizzi's (1978) method of analysis. My goal in analyzing the data was to identify common themes and perceptions among the participants related to the phenomenon (stressors) in question. Steps taken in data analysis included: (a) familiarization of transcripts, (b) extraction of significant statements, (c) developing of meanings, (d) transitioning formulated meanings into cluster of themes, (e) comprehensive description of the investigated phenomena, and (f) description of the structure of the fundamental phenomena. Following this data analysis process, five interwoven themes emerged: (a) general stressors, (b) emotional stressors, (c) cultural stressors, (d) coping skills, and (e) teacher recommendations for administrators. Emotional stressors included four subthemes and was conceptualized as how teachers reported experiencing emotional stressors that were related directly to their occupational responsibilities and their emotional connection with students. The second theme, general stressors was comprised of six subthemes and captured participants' stressors that related to the school environment and community, including roles associated with students' behaviors, social exchanges with parents, administration, and other teachers. The third theme, cultural stressors included three subthemes and was used to capture all of the participants' experiences related to how their ethnicity and cultural background played a role, adding to their occupational stressors. The fourth theme was coping skills, which was comprised of five

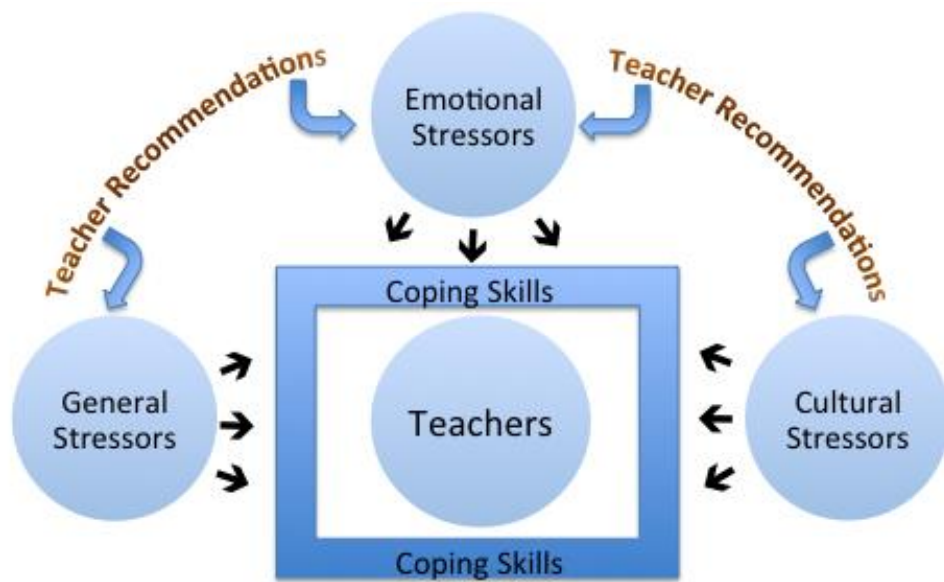
subthemes and referred to participants' experiences with occupational stressors while working at Title I elementary schools and how they navigated such stressors to keep moving forward. Finally, the fifth theme was teacher recommendations for administrators, which contained three subthemes adding to the voice of participants through their own recommendations to the administration as to what could be done differently to alleviate their occupational stressors.

In order to promote a rigorous qualitative investigation, multiple methods designed to provide trustworthiness and integrity of the study were available (Creswell, 2007, 2013). The methods that were used to ensure trustworthiness in this study included: (a) clear articulation of methods in order to protect the integrity of the data, (b) reflection on the researcher's positionality and pre-conceived notions about the participants' experiences by using bracketing, (c) analyst triangulation of the collected data with peer debriefers, (d) member checking, and (e) a thorough description of previous literature (Creswell, 2007, 2013; Marshall & Crossman, 2006; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015).

### Interrelations of Main Themes

Figure 1 presents a diagram representing how the five main themes are interrelated. The circle in the center of Figure 1 represents the participants and the three circles on the outside are the three major themes of stressors that are experienced individually and/or linked to another stressor. For example, teachers' emotional stressors included feelings of guilty for the students, while at the same time teachers' emotional stressors included feelings of frustration with the administration and/or parents' lack of support (General Stressors). The square in Figure 1 represents the coping skill tools that Hispanic teachers use to stay afloat while experiencing occupational stressors that were consistently experienced. Finally, the last main theme, teacher

recommendations was placed in between the stressors representing what may be possible solutions from the administration to alleviate some of their occupational stressors and also an opportunity for the Hispanic teachers to have a voice about what is effective for their profession to mitigate educator attrition.



*Figure 1. Visual Interrelation of Major Themes*

#### Comparison with Prior Research

This research study was the first qualitative investigation to explore the experiences of Hispanic teachers' occupational stressors while working in Title I elementary schools. This investigation was also the first to use a self-compassion theoretical framework to understand how Hispanic teachers who work in Title I elementary schools relate and cope with their stressors.

Several of the findings from this investigation are consistent with the literature and research investigations reviewed in Chapter 2. The findings of this study include 21 subthemes clustered into 5 main themes. The five main themes were congruent to previous research relating to teachers' experiences with occupational stressors. Thus, the following discussion is organized around the five main themes identified in this study, comparing this study's findings with those from prior published research.

### General Stressors

The second theme that emerged from the data was general stressors, which was comprised of six subthemes including: (a) stressors with parents, (b) stressors with student culture in Title I schools, (c) stressors with administration's expectations, (d) stressors with classroom management and challenging students, (e) stressors for ESOL and Spanish teachers, and (f) stressors of teaching. The subtheme with the highest frequency of significant statements (140) within the main theme of general stressors was stressors with the administration's expectations. Specific expectations of the administration that seemed to cause significant stress among the participants revolved primarily around lack of autonomy on lesson planning, classroom management, lack of proper communication, keeping up with the never ending changes and paperwork, and the low wages considering all the responsibilities. For instance, Participant #2 stated:

I think, just as a teacher in general, some of the biggest stressors are that we're given such schedule of time that we're supposed to cover an unrealistic amount of material. And I think that's just a general stressor for teachers. I just felt my latest year teaching, overwhelmed and constantly questioning the school system. I just felt like there was

always this kind of argument going on in my head about them [administration] letting down the students and them [administration] letting down the teachers that it was kind of like I couldn't deal with it. I always felt like almost angry about it. Like I felt like there's no justice. It's unfair. And that kind of, is what made my stress level so high.

Participant #5 stated:

I think that's one of my biggest frustrations is that we know our children. We know our kids better than anybody out there does. We know their needs and we know their learning styles. And it just seems like they don't take that into consideration. I get frustrated because, you know, we get evaluated and evaluations are a frustration for me because, you know what, I feel like, let me do my thing. Let me teach. Let me do it my way. Let me do what I know how to do and then evaluate me on that.

Therefore, the findings of this study supported that teachers' main stressors include the unrealistic expectations of the administration, consisting of administrators' lack of sensitivity towards their teachers' professional struggles. In addition, findings from the current investigation and past literature confirms researchers have investigated the incidence of teacher attrition in high-poverty schools such as in Title I, noting that problems with job satisfaction including (a) low salaries, (b) high demand of work from students that struggle to succeed academically, (c) little leadership support, (d) lack of time to prepare for classes, and (e) difficult student behavior that impedes learning in the classroom, leave the teachers emotionally exhausted (Cochram-Smith, 2009; Fox & Certo, 2002; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Teachers' burnout and attrition are also linked working environment, lack of programs for teacher preparation, and constant job stressors (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Jacob, 2007).

Such teacher stressors are compounded by the increasing administrative duties and scrutiny that teachers receive as a result of the educational system's focus on standardized tests (Moriarty et al., 2001). The findings from this study also aligned with studies performed by researchers on the incidence of teacher attrition in high-poverty schools, noting that problems with job satisfaction including (a) low salaries; (b) little leadership support; and (d) lack of time to prepare for classes, leaving teachers frustrated with the administration (Cochram-Smith, 2009; Fox & Certo, 2002; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004).

The presented findings on the subtheme of specific stressors related to classroom management and challenging students in Title I elementary schools also relate to those of prior researchers (Aloe et al., 2014; Pearman & Lefever-Davis, 2012). Overall, participants felt overwhelmed and found themselves with few options when it came to handling challenging students with mental health diagnoses that often were being untreated. Participant #12 stated:

You know, I could barely smile with them, which I learned really quickly, when they first started, I was myself and smiling and everything and they took that as a weakness. I mean, like to the point that I had a student pretty much try to throw his homework in my face because I didn't take it at that moment when he wanted. And that was the moment when I noticed I cannot be that myself with them. I cannot smile at them. I had to put him in his place very, very quickly and show them a different side of me. And so, that was really hard because I felt like I can't even go in and smile with you. I felt like it had to be a prison ward.

Participant #11 shared:

The group of students that I have are very challenging. I have a lot of physically aggressive kids. I have a few students with mental disorders. I have a handful of ADHD kids. So, it's just, you know, I have a very diverse group of kids and they definitely challenge me and everyone else that is trying to help or that they go to.

Therefore, the findings supported teacher participants' expressed concerns that working with challenging students and trying to manage their classroom was one of their biggest occupational stressors.

Prior research related to Title I elementary schools and the related stressors supported the identification of experiences similar to those of participants in the present study. Pearman and Lefever-Davis (2012) analyzed the reflections of novice teachers ( $N = 12$ ) at 11 elementary schools as to their experiences working in Title I schools. The purpose of this study was to understand if their reflections related to reasons for leaving the profession. Investigators found that classroom management was one of the most challenging tasks. Teachers doubted their self-efficacy to properly manage student discipline. Furthermore, findings from Aloe and colleagues' (2014) multivariate meta-analysis of 16 studies with teachers and classroom management also supported my findings. The authors found that there was a relationship between CMSE and the three dimensions of burnout. They noted that the largest effect was between CMSE and personal achievement ( $r = 0.43$ ; 18.49% of the variance explained). In other words, when teachers sense that they can manage their classrooms, they also feel more accomplished. In addition, the investigators found that CMSE negatively correlated to emotional exhaustion ( $-0.27$ ; 7.29% of the variance explained) and depersonalization ( $-0.32$ ; 10.24% of the variance explained). Thus,



the findings of these studies supported that the stressors resulting from classroom management may be a significant contribute to feelings of burnout and attrition in teachers.

### Emotional Stressors

One of the five themes that emerged from the data was emotional stressors, which included four subthemes: (a) guilt for the students, (b) physical and psychological exhaustion, (c) struggling with home/work balance, and (d) sense of self-efficacy. The subtheme of physical and psychological exhaustion contained the highest number of significant statements (110) coming from the participants. Participants shared their experiences feeling physically and psychologically exhausted from the constant stress of the job. For example, Participant #12 responded:

I mean, teachers, we do what we do because we love it, because we want to help these kids. But sometimes you just feel very overwhelmed, like you just feel kind of alone. You kind of feel like people don't understand. They just think it's this easy thing and they have no idea all the paperwork that you have to do . . . you know, they think you can handle it and you do handle it but it doesn't mean that you're not tired and stressed and overwhelmed.

Participant #17 noted:

Stress often plays a role in that simply because—I mean, you're always anxious, well, at least, not always. But I'm always anxious. And I mean, I go through my troubles. I'm pretty sure that I've been pretty depressed at one point. And it's just my feeling. It's just how I go. I go through these motions of elation at the beginning of the school year. But

then by the time December comes, it's ready to walk out--and it could be a factor of things.

These findings align with Maslach and colleagues' (2001) burnout model where emotional exhaustion is the primary precursor to burnout; therefore, emotional stressors is one of the main topics that individuals see relating to their feelings of stress at work. Also aligning with the emotional stressors theme were Bulluough and colleagues' (2006) findings from interviews completed with teachers working in elementary schools ( $N = 21$ ) about their teaching-related dreams in order to explore the relationship of dreams with anxiety. Specifically, the results identified similar experiences from the participants such as experienced anxiety, lack of control, and running behind due to feeling so emotionally overwhelmed. Similarly, Chang (2009) noted that emotional exhaustion contributes to teachers being less responsive to the needs of their students, stating that the most common feeling for teachers was frustration. The emotional stressors theme also aligned with Carson's (2006) findings, which investigated the relationship between teachers' burnout and emotional regulation by tracking teachers' ( $N = 45$ ) daily emotional experiences for a two-week period of time with the use of virtual assistants. The researchers found that repeated unpleasant experiences on a daily basis, such as frustration, anger, anxiety, and lack of hope, contributed to teacher burnout. Lambert and colleagues (2009) investigated teacher stress among a sample of elementary teachers ( $N = 521$ ) working in 16 elementary schools in the same county. The researchers also found that teachers tended to depersonalize from their students when reporting higher levels of emotional exhaustion. In addition, researchers found that the participants lacked positive social behavior with the students

and reported a lack of support from colleagues, parents, and the community in general as major stressors.

Based on the findings in the current study, teachers feeling guilty about their students is highlighted. Most of the participants ( $N = 14$ ) reported complex feelings of guilt that were the result of various circumstances. Some of the teachers felt guilty for having to sacrifice so much precious time from teaching the lesson as a result of the difficult behavior of some of the students, or by feeling burned out with the additional responsibilities of teaching thereby affecting the rest of the class. Participant #2 stated:

For me, I would just feel guilty, I think, about how I was teaching. Especially last year, I felt overwhelmed with stress. I would look into other classes and see teachers doing extravagant projects or something and I'd feel like I'm not doing enough for my students. Thus, the findings supported the notion that teachers struggle in emotionally feeling guilty about how their teaching performance in general was affecting their students due to stress. Lazarus (2001) found teachers can experience guilt when they perceive that they are to blame for something that is out of their control or in a situation that is not going well. For example, teachers might feel guilty because they feel responsible for the pace of what their students should be learning. In addition, Hargreaves and Tuckers (1991) noted that teachers' guilt emerged from conflicts in different situations: (a) teachers' commitment to keep students engaged, (b) unreasonable expectations of making an effect on the students as a teacher, (c) never ending demands from the school administration, and (d) personal high expectations. Liljestrom and colleagues (2007) indicated that teachers perceived their main role or moral duty to be helping family and students to alleviate their challenges in regards to students' learning. Therefore, the

findings from this and prior studies support that teachers have complicated emotional connections related to occupational stressors that may affect students and increase teachers feelings of burnout.

### Cultural Stressors

Cultural stressors were the third theme and consisted of three subthemes including: (a) overt or covert discrimination, (b) language barriers, (c) discrepancy of one's cultural values with others. Thus, the themes of cultural stressors emphasized on the specific experience of participants' with being Hispanic and how their ethnicity and cultural background played a role adding to their occupational stressors. Specifically, the findings from the current investigation identified participants' experiences with overt or covert discrimination, noting 75 significant statements. Participant #4 shared:

Well, with the administration, I think it is--again, the overall feeling sometimes that we may not be perceived as being equal to the other teachers, that somehow we're a little bit less. Here, it's not overt. Like I say, it's that underlying feeling and I cannot pinpoint it. I try to look back and try and see other than the example I gave you where I was asked to be part of a committee because they needed a diverse ethnic representation and I happened to be the only Hispanic to be and there. It's just a feeling that, as a Hispanic, I am not looked at as being of equal value or equal worth as the non-Hispanic teachers. And this is something that I've only experienced up here in Central Florida.

Participant #17 shared:

I mean, like I was saying early with administration. Like, I don't want to cause a ruckus, so I'm not—and I felt as if, if there was a Hispanic person on the hierarchy, I would be

more willing to speak to them--male or female. But because there isn't, I kind of don't want to overstep my boundaries.

Therefore, the findings supported participants' expressed concerns on not feeling equal to the rest of their co-workers and not being able to trust their administration to voice their issues to non-Hispanic person.

Although the prior research focused on Hispanic teachers was limited, the findings of this study corroborated the cultural stressors from previous research. Mayes and colleagues (2004) examined issues from a first-year Latino teacher's ( $N = 1$ ) point of view from both an institutional and ethical perspective. Their holistic analysis addressed several major issues in the everyday life of a Latino teacher, including that administrators and other members of school have to be more sensitive to minority teachers and be able to accept their cultural identity as strengths.

Similarly, findings from the current study identified that at times, the participants felt offended by comments from their co-workers related to their cultural background that came across as insensitive. For example, Participant #16 stated:

There were all white teachers and they, I'm trying to remember. They were all white teachers and they started to comment about, Oh, now I remember. They were making comments about teachers treating students of their same rights differently than other students and I said, "I never treat my students any differently because they're Hispanic or because they're part of a minority. And your comment offended me and I just. . . ." You know, I was really offended by their comments so I cried during our meeting and they apologized, but I've always felt that I shouldn't have to do that.

Gomez's (2009) research was also compared to the findings of the current study. Gomez used Latina prospective teachers from a Midwestern university in his sample ( $N = 3$ ) with the aim to explore life histories of prospective teachers through their experiences at home, school, and university, particularly their experiences with white, middle class populations. The participants reported, among other experiences, situations with peers and teachers that were unpleasant such as offensive comments, unfounded generalizations about their cultural and historical background, and teachers' expectations with classroom management. Thus, the findings of this study and previous research support that Hispanic teachers have been exposed to additional cultural stressors that may contribute to increased feeling of occupational stress and burnout.

### Coping Skills

The fourth theme to emerge from the data was coping skills which included five subthemes: (a) being critical vs. kind, (b) self and physical awareness, (c) support system, (d) what gives them purpose, and (e) advantages of being Hispanic. The theme of coping skills related to how teachers found ways to navigate their stressors and stay on track without losing purpose. Specifically, relating to participants coping with being kind to themselves vs. critical, the current study's findings indicated that the participants relied on the practice of self-forgiveness when they found themselves making mistakes due to stress and also being able to take responsibility for their mistakes. For instance, Participant #1 stated:

So, in learning to forgive that kind of situation, I've had to reflect that on myself and say, "Well, you've got to kind of give yourself a break too." Or sometimes, I don't know, I guess it usually takes like my husband or like a girlfriend to kind of say, "Well, it was your first time doing that. Maybe you didn't know any better?" And I'm like, "Yeah, I

guess, it was.” But I still kind of hold on to myself. I keep my expectations higher for myself.

Participant #4 stated:

It could be losing my patience with a student because sometimes they can be trying. One of the things I've always done in those situations is I'll apologize to the student because before I can forgive myself, I feel I need to apologize to the student. For me, that's the first step in forgiving myself. And usually, in that conversation where I apologize, I will talk about people losing their temper and why people do it or why I was so upset. And once I've apologized to the student, then I can forgive myself.

Therefore, the findings supported that some of the coping skills of teachers include the practice of self-forgiveness and taking responsibility for their own mistakes.

Neff's (2003) findings support practices of self-forgiveness as a part of being kind to oneself during difficult times. Neff (2003) indicated the practice of being kind to oneself during stressful times as one of the key components of self-compassion. Self-kindness is the practice to be kind to the self, during challenging times. Personal imperfections and mistakes are seen and treated without resistance and through an understanding approach, reframing any negative criticism (Neff, 2003). Neff and Faso's (2014) results are also consistent with the current study's findings on the practice of being kind, which allows for individuals in high stressful circumstances to find a safe place for acceptance and therefore self-forgiveness. Neff and Faso (2014) examined the association of between well-being and self-compassion with parents ( $N = 51$ ) with children diagnosed with autism. The results identified a higher level of self-compassion correlated with greater well-being in general. Positive correlations were found with self-

compassion and life satisfaction, hope, taking responsibility for mistakes, and goal reengagement (all  $ps > 0.05$ ). Conclusively, according to Neff and Faso (2014), there is a significant role that self-compassion has with emotional resilience and greater life satisfaction in general despite the incredible challenges that one could have such as parenting a child with Autism.

Rickers (2012) conducted a phenomenological study with 10 social workers to explore their experiences with self-compassion in the midst of stress. His findings also supported the findings of the current study. Participants had initially completed an eight-week Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), where they learned basic skills on self-compassion practices. Within the analysis of the data, Rickers found from one of their themes was the recognition within the participants to view self-compassion practices as useful in their line of work during stressful times. Participants described self-compassion, the practice of being kind to oneself (e.g., practicing self-forgiveness) as a vehicle to help others address their stress and burnout in the midst of making mistakes.

Based on the findings of the current study, the subtheme of finding purpose is highlighted, which is conceptualized as a way for teachers to remain motivated despite their constant occupational stressors. Teachers' sense of purpose was most obvious when feeling inspired by making a difference with the students and recognizing that not all students are disrupting and that the majority of them really want to learn. For instance, Participant #3 stated:

In the school, the kids, they're so sweet, the Kindergarten especially and the first graders. They're so funny. Like, you forget about the stress that you have--that you have to meet the goal with them . . . when you are with them and you're teaching them and they are responding back to you, that is your goal for that day, that relieves me.



Therefore, the findings supported the need for teachers to connect with their students in order to find purpose to remain motivated with their jobs and as a way to cope with their feelings of occupational stress.

Gusting and Wagner's (2013) research supports the importance of finding a connection with others in order to cope with stress. Gustin and Wagner (2013) examined four clinical nursing teachers in order to understand their experiences with self-compassion as a vehicle for compassionate care. Researchers conducted an action research design by implementing a teaching-learning program in order to understand the clinical phenomena of being a caregiver and how it relates to self-compassion. From the analysis, researchers identified themes such as including consideration for human vulnerability, acceptance of compassion towards others as a gift. Overall, the study identified the risks of compassionate caregiving in burnout; especially when the suffering of others touched the caregiver. Thus, cultivating self-compassion as a sense of purpose and equanimity towards oneself while experiencing compassion can create an intentional process for the caregivers of giving and receiving. Furthermore, the researchers concluded that compassionate care was linked to being touched by the other's situation through the experience of common humanity; therefore, caregivers are able to connect to the suffering in meaningful ways. Compassionate care requires self-compassion as a skill in order to take care of oneself (Gustin & Wagner, 2013). Thus, prior research results align with the findings of the current investigation, supporting human connection as a quality of self-compassion and as a way for individuals to find purpose in order to cope with their feelings of occupational stress.

The subtheme of support system also aligns with the main tenets of self-compassion, which is the practice of common humanity in order to avoid isolation. The findings from this

study identified an approach toward the practice of identifying support by relying on their coworkers and for the teachers to accept that they were not alone in facing their stressors. A common phrase used among the participants was, “We are all on the same boat” inferring that they knew their peers were going through the same occupational stressors. For instance, Participant #4 shared,

I think it’s a release of stress to have someone to talk to because a lot of times the same things that are stressing me are stressing the other teacher. So, knowing that I’m not alone in those stressors, that there are others that are feeling the same thing, in a way, it helps to reduce that stress because there’s someone to share it with, someone to talk about it with and just being able to do that helps release or reduce the stress for me.

Accordingly, Neff (2003a) defined common humanity as the idea that everyone makes mistakes and has challenging times in life. The experience of common humanity reveals to individuals that they are not alone in the world, and this thought ignites hope in challenging situations. The goal is to feel connected to others during a stressful time. In contrast, feelings of seclusion that result from an emphasis on personal inadequacies interrupt the possibility of connecting with others. Neff (2011) explained isolation as irrational and observed that the “why-me?” effect can complicate things for the individual.

The findings of the current study indicated that despite the high levels of stress that the participants were facing, they relied heavily on the concept of common humanity instead of isolation. These findings focused on a feature that was not identified in past research. For instance, Maslach and Jackson (1981) developed constructs composed of three dimensions to identify burnout: (a) emotional exhaustion, (b) depersonalization, and (c) reduced personal

accomplishment. In particular, the dimension of depersonalization presents when teachers start isolating or disconnecting from their professional peers (Lambie, 2007). Teachers are at greater risk for depersonalization due to the dynamics of the teaching profession in which teachers tend to have minimal interaction with their peers (Bennet & LeCompte, 1990). Thus, the findings in the present study seem to differ, as participants continued to rely and connect with their coworkers despite the high stress circumstances. One possible rationale for the teacher participants relying heavily in the practice of common humanity despite the high levels of stressors may be that within the culture of Hispanics, the concept of interdependence and close proximity in relationships including friends and work colleagues is a strong value (Sabogal et al., 1987). Therefore, close proximity being such a strong cultural value within the Hispanic culture may emerge as a way of coping when Hispanic teachers experience a high level of occupational stress and/or emotional burnout.

#### Teachers' Recommendations for Administrators

The fifth theme to emerge from the data analysis was teachers' recommendations for the administration, which included the following subthemes: (a) administration should be more sensitive/empathetic, (b) administration should give more freedom for lesson planning, and (c) provide more support for students' behavior management. The teachers' recommendations theme provided an opportunity for participants to voice their thoughts regarding what administrators could do to alleviate some of the teachers' frustrations and occupational stressors. For instance, on the topic of lack of freedom for lesson planning for the teachers, Participant #5 shared:

They want to treat us like robots. Everything has to be like a certain specific way. Like, I feel I was a natural teacher. Meaning, it was natural to me and I can teach naturally but I

feel like the way that they're making us teach now has taken away that natural teacher in me, so it's become like more robotic. And it's outside of my comfort zone. I get frustrated because, you know, we get evaluated and evaluations are a frustration for me because, you know what, I feel like, let me do my thing. Let me teach. Let me do it my way. Let me do what I know how to do and then evaluate me on that.

Participant #11 stated:

To teach what we know. We're there because we know what we're teaching. You know what I mean? Just give us a little freedom to breathe and to teach. And if they do that, I feel like people would be a lot happier. When you give somebody space and the ability to breath, we don't feel as caged. You know what I mean? We're kind of like little birds--caged. We can't do anything about it.

Thus, the findings in the current study supported the need for teachers to be trusted more and have more say in the lesson planning for their students. As the participants stated, having more of a voice in deciding the best way to teach the students could be empowering to teachers.

Prior research examining teachers' recommendations to the administration supported the need for administrators to allow teachers to play a more active role in lesson planning. In particular, Ingersoll and May (2011) found the top items for teachers' job dissatisfaction included (a) frustrations with school administration; (b) student discipline problems; (c) little democracy in decision making, especially on how to manage the classroom; (d) limited resources making difficult work conditions; (e) large class sizes; (f) constant classroom disruptions; (g) poor salary; and (h) disenchantment with teaching responsibilities. The authors noted that the job dissatisfaction condition that had the strongest correlate with teacher attrition was the lack of

autonomy for teachers to make decisions on how to manage or teach their classes, and this was most evident in minority teacher participants (over 40%). In other words, these teachers reported feeling frustrated about not having a voice at their schools. Thus, the current study's results align the findings of earlier investigations, supporting the exploration by school administrators to examine how to best assist their teachers in taking a more supporting active role.

#### Summary: Comparison to Literature Reviewed

Overall, the findings from the current study (five main identified themes) were congruent with the prior research presented in Chapter 2. Specifically, the experiences of the participants and the findings in the reviewed literature support the following: (a) teachers experience complicated emotions that connect them with their students, such as feeling guilty and responsible for them, as well as feeling emotionally and physically exhausted from the daily basis occupational stressors that their jobs present; (b) classroom management, specifically, when dealing with students with additional challenges (e.g., mental health conditions) may be a significant contributor to teachers' feelings of burnout; (c) Hispanic teachers are exposed to additional cultural stressors, including covert and overt discrimination from peers and school administrators (i.e., experiencing offensive comments or feeling disregarded within their own cultural values); (d) self-compassion tenets align with participants' experiences on how to cope with stress, particularly the practice of self-kindness and common humanity; and (e) the need for the administration to recognize that teachers feel strongly about playing an active role regarding how their students are taught. Teachers providing their input into the functionality of the school and curriculum may assist them in feeling they have a voice in their teaching; and as a result, increase their feelings of occupational satisfaction and mitigate their feelings of burnout.

### How This Study Adds to the Body of Research

This research study contributes to readers' understanding of Hispanic teachers' experiences with occupational stressors while working in Title I schools. According to Von Bertalaffy (1968), any part of a system influences other parts because of interdependency, interconnectedness, and embeddedness. Therefore, any new findings from this study add to the collection of experiences, (i.e., stressors), of Hispanic teachers that could potentially lead them to burnout. Within the new findings of this investigation, specific experiences of the participants with cultural stressors such as language barriers were presented. Participants ( $n = 7$ ) shared their experiences in articulating how they felt when speaking in English during stressful situations. For example, participants feeling frustrated about an important issue and wanting to say something in a teachers meeting. Although these participants were fully bilingual, they shared feelings of self-consciousness, realizing that their accents would get thicker or they would have a difficult time expressing their frustration when talking in English in stressful situations.

Participant #8 shared:

I think it's interesting because sometimes when I get very frustrated, I forget what I want to say, and like sometimes I can't find the right words to express myself in English or my accent gets thicker, because then you get like really mad. But when there's like stress, like it's different because sometimes there's a different perception, I guess.

Participant #13 also shared a similar experience:

I'm more introverted in that point. I'm like, "Mmh, I'm not going to say anything. I'm going to just sit and listen. Participate within the group." And I think that the language barrier, because sometimes when I hear that, you know, native speakers of English speak,

I go, “Wow, they're so fluent.” And I don’t feel as comfortable with English. But if I could speak about, you know, ESOL or about the strategies and all that, I'm comfortable because that’s what I know. But apart from that, it’s a little bit intimidating.

Participant #19 shared:

Yeah, because sometimes, I suppose, because during lunchtime, we all sit together, you know, we talk. Like, I do join conversations but not as much as they do. And only because I'm afraid, like I mumble. Like, I mumble my words a lot and I feel like they're not going to understand me. Even though they do understand me, you know? Or when I explain something, I have like trouble finding my words.

These findings provide a new understanding of how Hispanic teachers face additional stressors related to communicating their frustrations in critical situations such as in teacher meetings.

Finally, the recorded experiences from the only male teacher participant provided a completely different perspective when compared to the female participants and are worth noting. Within the theme of covert and overt discrimination, Participant #17 felt the pressure to represent himself well as a Hispanic male teacher without letting the administration down. At the same time, he felt it was unfair that he kept getting the most challenging students in his classroom. He shared the following experience:

Being Hispanic gives that whole machismo mentality as far as float back into my mind of why are you stressed when you shouldn’t be because you should have control, like in your classroom or control on your life. That is what I just tend to hear. And I've tried to forget about it, but it’s hard. I feel as if, so far, they definitely--I wouldn’t say they have pigeon-holed me into a sense of “Oh, you're Hispanic so we're going to give you like the

tough kids.” But there have been certain situations where I guess being a Hispanic they seem--it’s like that toughness they would say where, I guess, anybody or just society would think of you as having that tough mentality where there is no give in you and they’re in the straight and narrow. So that means that if you can change all the students, so they’ll place you with a difficult class because they, is just from my experience and that I would feel as if they think to themselves, “Okay, he would be the most beneficial because of their background or because of their ethnicity.”

It is important to acknowledge that this finding was reached based on the perspective of one participant; therefore, caution should be taken to not generalize the results to all Hispanic male teachers’ experiences. However, noting the additional pressures that Participant #17 felt as a male teacher may provide new insights that could be explored in later research.

### **Self-Compassion Relation with Participants**

The main goal of this study was to understand the Hispanic teachers’ experiences with stressors and how they coped emotionally. Using a self-compassion lens to explore their experiences contributes to a better understanding of how Hispanic teachers use self-compassion as a tool to navigate their stressors. Within the lens of the three main tenets of self-compassion identified by Neff (2003a), assumptions can be presented on how the participants directly or indirectly attained each tenet: self-kindness vs. harsh criticism, common humanity vs. isolation, and mindfulness vs. overidentification.

First, on the tenet of self-kindness vs. harsh criticism, participants tended to be more critical of themselves, recognizing that they could be perfectionists when it related to work, and therefore, hard on themselves when making mistakes. Some participants ( $n = 4$ ) went further to



articulate that they had to be hard on themselves in order to accomplish their goals or learn from their mistakes, which according to Neff (2003a) was a common misconception from the general public about why it is better to be hard on oneself rather than being kind during moments of failure. The research suggests that the practice of being hard on oneself increases cortisol levels, thereby adding additional stress to their suffering (e.g. Johnson & O'Brien, 2013). Based on the findings of this investigation, teachers could potentially benefit from turning their harsh criticism into the practice of self-kindness with internal dialogue in order to reduce some of their stressors.

On the tenet of common humanity vs. isolation, all participants ( $N = 19$ ) seemed to actively pursue the common humanity practice. They recognized that they were not alone in facing the challenges and stressors at their schools and that other teachers were having similar experiences. Participants actively reached out to their peers to collectively talk about their stressors. Furthermore, they expressed their recognition of their humanity and their vulnerability to such stressors, just like anybody else. Based on these findings it could be assumed that participants relied heavily on the skill of common humanity in order to cope with their stressors.

Finally, on the tenet of mindfulness vs. over identification, most of the participants ( $N = 12$ ) made an effort to recognize when the experienced stressors were taking over their emotions and relied on grounding themselves through breathing. They stated that the act of simply pausing and taking a few deep breaths made a difference. With the exception of one, participants did not have any formal training in mindfulness. Still, they seemed to recognize the benefits and were somewhat intentional with the practice. Thus,, these presented findings suggest that participants may positively welcome additional mindfulness tools for them to use during stressful situations.

## Implications of Findings

### Implications for Policy Makers

As stated in the review of the literature, there is an alarming gap of Hispanic teachers to meet the rapid growth of Hispanic students in the school system (Albert Shanker Institute Report, 2015). Furthermore, it seems that increasing the efforts to recruit minority teachers is insufficient if the teachers working at challenging schools such as Title I schools do not last in their jobs due to the frustrations and lack of control. The amount of money being spent for recruitment and attrition is unprecedented. The findings from this investigation confirmed those of prior researchers as to how teachers struggle emotionally with their students, including feeling guilty for not being effective as teachers, and this can result in burnout. Therefore, a closer look at the mental health wellbeing of the teachers is potentially a critical factor to stop the revolving door of minority teachers within the school system. Addressing the emotional resilience of minority teachers in general is a concern that needs to be addressed systematically. Policy makers are recommended to treat the issues of attrition with minority teachers with a holistic approach whereas, the implementation of mandatory professional development for teachers to learn classroom management might also include learning practical and portable skills for emotional regulation so the teachers are prepared to deal with the occupational stressors that they face in a daily basis. There are practical strategies such as the practice of self-compassion and mindfulness, which are not time consuming or costly for the teachers to learn and which produce realistic results to reduce their stressors. The formula is simple. Emotionally resilient teachers will result in effective classroom management. Effective classroom management could reduce teacher burnout and, therefore, teacher attrition.

### Implications for School Administrators

The findings from this study identified the need for school administrators to consider taking a more empathetic role with their teachers in regard to their occupational stressors. Rather than just setting clear expectations for the teachers, school administrators may find approaches on how to promote a culture of compassion, so even when there are no clear solutions to offer, teachers can feel validated and respected when facing difficult situations such as managing a disruptive classroom. Furthermore, as identified in prior research findings as well as the results of the current investigation, school administrators should consider introducing systems that permit teachers to play a more active role in the decision-making regarding the best learning approaches for their students. The goal to increasing teachers' voices in decision-making would be to empower teachers, thereby motivating them with their occupational roles.

Finally, the results of current study identified the need for a greater discussion on how school administration is going to take a closer examining of the specific needs of Hispanic teachers in regard to their cultural values. Also, school administrators may develop alternatives methods to help Hispanic teachers feel safer when communicating at teacher meetings and to encourage them to express their concerns related to race and discrimination if it is experienced at work.

### Implications for Counselors and School Counselors

The results of the current study identified the need for teachers to address their occupational stressors and find ways on how to better cope with the constant challenges at work. Based on the participants' responses, the emotional stressors that they face are interconnected with feelings of guilt regarding their students and being emotionally and physically exhausted.

Furthermore, as indicated by the findings, the tenet of common humanity was a strong coping tool for participants. Thus, counselors may provide tools related with common humanity practices to help Hispanic teachers built up on their emotional resilience.

Although school counselors' main responsibility is to advocate for students' needs, teachers also share the same goal. The findings from current study and prior research identified that one of the main stressors for teachers was related to classroom management and the handling of difficult students. In addition, participants indicated that administrators had provided little guidance as to the best ways to manage disruptive students; typically, a prevalent issue in Title I schools. School counselors may promote collaboration with teachers so they do not feel isolated when educating difficult students.

#### Implications for Counselor and Teacher Educators

The results of the current study identified that counselor and teacher educators may assist by facilitating a discussion as to what better role future school counselors and teachers could play in advocating for teachers and help them to support each other professionally. Counselor and teacher educators could develop partnerships to collaborate to better prepare teachers-in-training and administrators to cope with the systemic stress in the Title I elementary schools.

Finally, counselor and teacher educators may educate future school counselors and teachers on the specific cultural stressors that Hispanic teachers face including the discrepancy of cultural values that teachers experience with students and parents. By having a better understanding of the additional cultural stressors that Hispanic teachers can face compared to non-Hispanic teachers, school counselors could be more successful in collaborating to improve the overall academic achievement of the students. For example, educators can collaborate on

developing a curriculum for teachers and administrators with the main goal of learning to appreciate cultural differences.

### Limitations of the Study

The data for the current study were analyzed following rigorous research protocols, interpreted appropriately, and the findings were reported in a concise matter. However, precautions are to be considered when interpreting the study's findings. Glens (2006) indicated that all research methods come with their flaws, and that it is up to the reader of a qualitative research study to conclude if the investigation carries enough validity as a whole. The goal of this study was to understand the experiences and meanings of Hispanic teachers with occupational stressors that work in Title I elementary schools. Thus, consistent with phenomenology and qualitative approaches, the findings and implications in the present study were also guided by the limitations inherent in a qualitative study. There was no attempt to uncover a generalized idea of the experiences in questions; rather, the researcher sought to explore the unique perceptions and experiences of the participants. Therefore, the goal of the current study was not to uncover findings that could be generalized, but instead explore and understand the experiences of participants within their unique circumstances and settings. Nevertheless, the findings from these participants' experiences were consistent with previous research findings.

Grinch (2007) observed that phenomenological research and its methodologies come with the weakness of not being clear if the researcher biases have not been properly disclosed. For instance, the approach of bracketing, which is intended to put aside any presented biases from the researcher, can be difficult; and evaluating the right time to complete the study can be a

complex process (Grinch, 2007). Although, the researcher followed appropriate protocols to address her personal biases in order to increase the validity and integrity of her study, it is possible that the findings are a part of her own reflections and beliefs that shaped her ideas; getting in the way of an accurate representation of the participants' experiences.

The researcher's goal for this investigation was to elicit participants' true experiences; however, relying only on the self-report of the participants' stories might not be a reliable source for matching their true experiences. One reason some participants may have chosen to refrain from freely expressing their experiences with stressors and frustrations with the administration was the fear of their narrative somehow getting them in trouble later on. Even though all participants were briefed on the confidentiality terms, it is possible that some participants reported conservatively regarding their experiences in order to feel safe. On the other hand, it is also possible that some participants described their stressors in working at the school more negatively than the actual facts in order to vent their frustrations or in the hope that by exaggerating some facts change could happen. Along the same lines, the discrepancies from some of the initial responses from the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix A), where some participants ( $N = 5$ ) stated not feeling as stressed on the job or receiving enough support from the administrations, however once they eased up during the interview their answers differed. In other words, participants recognized being more stressed and frustrated with their jobs compared to their earlier responses from the questionnaire.

The sample of participants for the current study was limited to their experiences coming from only three schools within the same district. This sample of teachers provided for a perspective influenced by these particular locations and therefore, such findings do not represent

a general overview of Hispanic teachers' experiences with occupational stressors working at elementary schools at a more general level. In addition, the participants had different years of working experience (ranging from 45 years to 3 years of experience) could also influence the different perspectives of the participants' experiences when dealing with occupational stressors. In addition, having only one male participant was a limitation since his experiences as a Hispanic male teacher with stressors provided a different perspective. Finally, the location of the schools could have been a limitation as the experiences of the participants were limited only to that geographical location.

#### Future Research

This study was designed using an exploratory qualitative method, which is used when little is known about a phenomenon of interest (Marshall & Crossman, 2006). Based on the findings from the current study, an exact replication is not achievable; however, researchers may want to replicate this study in other areas such as different school districts, and grade levels. In addition, given the fact that only one of the participants in this study was a male, it is suggested for researchers to replicate this study with more males to compare results. In addition, from a different standpoint, future research could aim at examining schools' administrator perspectives on occupational stressors of teachers

Using a self-compassion lens to determine how teachers could be assisted in navigating their occupational stressors and potentially prevent burnout, future researchers could develop self-compassion workshops geared specifically to the needs of minority teachers and their cultural values. Such interventions could be measured through quantitative assessments to determine if they can reduce stress levels and prevent occupational burnout.

### Personal Reflections

As I close this study, I pause and look back on the journey to reach this point. Although at the beginning of the path there seemed to be more questions than answers, I realize that what matters the most was the opportunity to give these participants a safe platform to have a voice and talk about their struggles. In my role as a researcher, I felt at times to be an advocate for their voices. Thus, I felt I carried an enormous responsibility to present the essence of their stories in a manner that could be disseminated so readers could understand what it is like to be in their shoes. I do not think that the product of my work is flawless; however, I feel that this investigation has added one more stepping stone that could document and validate the experiences of individuals that hold the responsibility for the academic future of the next generation.

### Summary and Conclusion

This phenomenological study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are elementary school Hispanic teachers' lived experiences with stressors while working in Title I schools?
2. What are the elementary school Hispanic teachers' experiences coping with stress while working at Title I elementary schools?

Interviews were conducted with 19 Hispanic teachers that work in Title I elementary schools. Five themes emerged from the analysis of the findings: (a) Emotional Stressors, (b) General Stressors, (c) Cultural Stressors, (d) Coping Skills, and (e) Teachers Recommendations. The findings from the current investigation provided an in depth-examination of Hispanic teachers experiences with occupational stressors when working in Title I elementary schools within a self-compassion lens. Although, this investigation is largely an exploratory study on



Hispanic teacher experiences with occupational stress, it provides a foundation of understanding and a platform to develop interventions with self-compassion approaches to prevent burnout in the job. It is my hope that these findings serve as the voice for Hispanic teachers that work in Title I schools to be heard by school administrators, and counselor and teacher educators to find solutions to the alarming rates of attrition that school districts are experiencing from minority teachers. The participants' statements provide a powerful testament to the emotional depletion that Hispanic teachers are experiencing when working in Title I schools. Therefore, the results of this study call for continuation of research and development of interventions that could attend to the emotional regulation and burnout prevention of minority teachers.

**APPENDIX A**  
**DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE**

## DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Hispanic Teachers' Experiences with Stressors While Working in Title I Elementary Schools: A Phenomenological Investigation Using a Self-Compassion Framework

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. Your input is highly valued, and will help in considerable ways. Please keep in mind your identifying information will not be asked for (e.g., name, etc.).

**Instructions: Please check all answers that apply for the questions below. Please provide the answer that reflects your identity most accurately.**

1. How many years have you worked as a teacher?

\_\_\_\_\_ years

2. Please indicate the grade level you currently teach at:

\_\_\_\_\_ grade

3. Please indicate your biological sex:

☐ Male  
☐ Female  
☐ Other

4. Please indicate your current age:

\_\_\_\_\_ years

5. Please choose your marital status:

☐ Single  
☐ Married  
☐ Divorced  
☐ Widow

6. Please indicate your Hispanic ethnicity background (e.g. Colombian, Cuban):

\_\_\_\_\_ (please be as specific as possible)

7. Please rate your current level of occupational stress:

Low Stress	Below Average Stress	Average / Normal Stress	Above Average Stress	High Stress
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8. Please rate the level of support at your current school:

Low Support	Below Average Support	Average / Normal Support	Above Average Support	High Support
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9. Please rate your current level of wellness:

Low Wellness	Below Average Wellness	Average / Normal Wellness	Above Average Wellness	High Wellness
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10. Please rate your current level of satisfaction in being an elementary school teacher:

Low Satisfaction	Below Average Satisfaction	Average / Normal Satisfaction	Above Average Satisfaction	High Satisfaction
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**Thank you for your time!**

**APPENDIX B**  
**SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

## **Hispanic Teachers Experiences with Stressors While Working in Title I Elementary Schools: A Phenomenological Investigation Using a Self-Compassion Framework**

### Central Qualitative Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews

#### **Main Open Question**

- ☐ Please talk about your experiences working in a Title I elementary school as a Hispanic teacher.

#### **Ethnic Background Questions**

- ☐ Please tell me more about your ethnic background.
- ☐ Please share any insight on how being Hispanic plays a role with your stressors working at your elementary school.

#### **Focus on Stress**

- ☐ Please talk about your experiences with specific stressors while working in a Title I elementary school as a Hispanic teacher.
- ☐ Please talk about your experiences on how you navigate your stressors while working in a Title I elementary school as a Hispanic teacher.
- ☐ From the scale of 1 to 4 how would you rate your level of stress where 1 is low-level stress and 4 is high-level stress?

#### **Focus on Self-Kindness**

- ☐ Please share how you react when you make a mistake at work.
- ☐ Please share any examples where you were able to forgive or be kind towards yourself after making a mistake at work.
- ☐ Please share your thoughts on how stress influences your ability to be kind towards yourself. Provide examples.

#### **Focus on Mindfulness**

- ☐ Please talk about your experiences with separating yourself from your emotions to remain as neutral as possible in stressful situations at work.
- ☐ Please share your experiences (e.g., emotions) when you were not able to separate your thoughts and feelings from a stressful situation.

#### **Focus on Common Humanity**

- ☐ Please share any experiences when you felt as if you shared similar stressors as others at work. What was that like?

#### **Closure**

- ☐ Are there any other ideas or experiences related to what we have discussed today that you would like to add to our discussion?
- ☐ Do you have any other thoughts in general or additional comments that you would like to share?

**APPENDIX C**  
**INFORMED CONSENT OF PARTICIPANTS**



### **EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH**

Title of Project: Hispanic Teachers' Experiences with Stressors While Working in Title I Elementary Schools: A Phenomenological Investigation Using a Self-Compassion Framework

Principal Investigator: Coralie Solomon, MSCP, LMHC

Faculty Supervisor: Glenn Lambie, Ph.D.

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you.

- *The purpose of this research is* to explore the experiences of Hispanic teachers with stressors while working in Title I elementary school using a lens of self-compassion.
- Once you consent to participate in the investigation, you will be asked to complete a general demographic form at the time of the interview. Completion of the demographic form will be about 5 minutes. This is followed by the research investigator conducting the interview, which will be audio recorded. The interview is expected to last for 45 minutes to 1 hour. You will be asked individually about your experiences with stress while working in a Title I elementary school as a Hispanic teacher. Furthermore, you do not have to answer every question or complete every task, and you will not lose any benefits if you skip questions or tasks.
- You will be audio taped during this study. If you do not want to be audio taped, you will *not* be able to participate in the study. Please discuss any concerns with the researcher or a research team member. If you are audio taped, the tape will be kept in a locked, safe place, and the tape will be erased or destroyed at the end of the investigation.
- Compensation for your participation will be a \$50 gift certificate. If you complete any part of the experiment, you will receive compensation for the time you have spent in the research project.

You must be Hispanic, teach in a Title I school, and be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

**Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem:** If you have questions, concerns, or complaints: Coralie Solomon, Doctoral Candidate, Counselor Education, College of Education and Human Performance, (407) 968-6534 or Dr. Lambie, Faculty Supervisor, (407) 823-4779 or by email at Glenn.Lambie@ucf.edu.

**IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint:** Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901.

**APPENDIX D**  
**APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**





WALT GRIFFIN  
Superintendent

**Educational Support Center**  
400 E. Lake Mary Boulevard  
Sanford, Florida 32773-7127  
Phone: (407) 320-0000  
Fax: (407) 320-0281

**SCHOOL BOARD**

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October 12, 2016

Coralis Solomon  
400 Central Florida Blvd.  
Orlando, FL 32816

Dear Ms. Solomon,

I am in receipt of the proposal and supplemental information that you submitted for permission to conduct research in the Seminole County Public Schools. Thank you for very clearly delineating the required components of the research request. After a review of these documents, it has been determined that you are granted permission to conduct the study described herein.

Your project, *Hispanic Teachers' Experiences with Stressors While Working in Title I Elementary Schools: A Phenomenological Investigation Using a Self-Compassion Framework*, is of interest to the district. I appreciate your willingness to comply with the expectations detailed in the email exchanges related to your study

We look forward to receiving a copy of your results. Best of luck!

Respectfully,

Anna-Marie Cote, Ed.D.

Deputy Superintendent, Instructional Excellence and Equity

cc. Dr. Marian Cummings, Executive Director, Elementary Schools  
Dr. Robin Dehlinger, Executive Director, Elementary Schools  
Ms. Minnie Cardona, Director, ESOL, World Languages and Student Access

**APPENDIX E**  
**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD OUTCOME LETTER**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

### Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1  
FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Coralis Solomon**

Date: **October 05, 2016**

Dear Researcher:

On 10/05/2016, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination  
Project Title: Hispanic Teachers' Experiences with Stressors While Working in  
Title I Elementary Schools: A Phenomenological Investigation  
Using a Self-Compassion Framework  
Investigator: Coralis Solomon  
IRB Number: SBE-16-12596  
Funding Agency:  
Grant Title:  
Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patria Davis".

Signature applied by Patria Davis on 10/05/2016 02:34:51 PM EDT

IRB Coordinator

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