



Compassion Fatigue, Emotional Labour and Educator Burnout: Research Study

PHASE 2 REPORT: ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEW DATA

Funding provided by the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) and the
Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP)





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Preface

The emotional labour provided by teachers and others in the education sector is a source of compassion satisfaction but can also lead to compassion stress, compassion fatigue and burnout. In response to the limited research concerning the impact of emotional labour on teachers and others employed in Alberta's education sector, in January 2020 the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) partnered with the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP) to establish a two-year research study on compassion fatigue, emotional labour and educator burnout, designed and guided with the expert assistance of a group of researchers from the University of Calgary.

This phase 2 report synthesizes lived experiences as described in interviews conducted with 52 education workers, including teachers, school leaders, learning leaders, educational assistants, school district office staff, school counsellors and support staff.

The researchers derived key themes arising from participants' experiences in the school system, particularly in situations of trauma and crisis. The insights gathered from this phase of the research study also point the way to a potential strategy for planning a response to the impact of emotional labour on educators.

The combined efforts of the research advisory committee have helped to anchor this study, as well as to provide critical guidance in the development of the research instruments. I wish to thank all the members for their participation and input:

- Carlyn Volume-Smith, PhD (Cochair), Strategic Advisor, ASEBP
- Lisa Everitt, EdD (Cochair), Executive Staff Officer, ATA
- Astrid Kendrick, EdD, Principal Researcher, University of Calgary
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- Cindi Vaselenak, EdD, Consultant, Alberta School Boards Association

Additionally, I wish to acknowledge and thank the members of the research team from the University of Calgary for their work in bringing further understanding as to how emotional labour affects education workers. The research team was led by Astrid Kendrick and included research assistants Kate Beamer, Jhonattan Bello, Emilie Maine, Rachel Pagaling and Beejal Parekh.

As well, special thanks are due to Astrid Kendrick, who analyzed and made sense of the data gathered by her team to author this report. The ATA's Document Production team, led by Joan Steinbrenner and including Kristina Lundberg, Joanne Maughn, Kim vanderHelm and Julie Woo, ensured that the report's presentation paid appropriate tribute to the impressive collective efforts that went into its creation.

Finally, I wish to recognize the 52 education workers who took the time to respond to the online survey in June and also offered their time and expertise through interviews with the University of Calgary researchers. Your willingness to share your personal experiences with respect to emotional labour, burnout and compassion fatigue is brave and will help the ATA, ASEBP, other education partners and, ultimately, your professional colleagues across the province to consider how the psychological well-being of education workers can be protected at both the individual and the system levels.

Dennis Theobald
Executive Secretary

Introduction: The Adults Are Not All Right

In January 2020, the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) partnered with the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP) to explore compassion fatigue, emotional labour and burnout in education workers. This partnership led to the establishment of a two-year research study designed and guided by a group of researchers from the University of Calgary.

As the study's phase 1 report (ATA 2020) demonstrated, compassion fatigue and burnout among Alberta's education workers have reached alarming levels: 50 per cent of the survey respondents indicated that they were experiencing compassion fatigue, and 80 per cent indicated that they were suffering from one or more symptoms of burnout.

Intervention is required to effectively address these occupational hazards; however, additional information about the nature of compassion fatigue, emotional labour and burnout is needed in order to fully understand how they present in the field of education. To gain deeper insight into the lived human experiences of Alberta's education workers, phase 2 of the study employed a hermeneutic phenomenological research structure (Crotty 1998; Moules et al 2015).

This phase 2 report focuses on data gathered from qualitative interviews with education workers across Alberta. The interviews centred on the lived experiences of a variety of education workers with regard to crisis and trauma work, compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue, and burnout.

From the data analysis, eight main themes emerged, which helped to refine education workers' and researchers' understanding of the three phenomena studied in this project, and a potential solution for addressing these issues was proposed.

Methodology

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a research framework that focuses on understanding and describing lived human experiences as a phenomenon through written and oral language (Crotty 1998; Moules 2002).

Because education workers experience compassion fatigue and burnout through physical, emotional and spiritual symptoms, hermeneutic phenomenology allows data analysis to take an interpretivist stance (van Manen 2014) on these occupational health hazards. Rather than bracketing their experiences as separate from the research study's participants, the principal researcher, the 10-member advisory group (experts from the ATA and ASEBP), and the research assistants performed the data analysis from a subjective stance, recognizing and detailing how their own experiences and expertise influenced their understandings of the three phenomena being studied (Moules et al 2015). The ongoing discussions between this project's various stakeholders created the horizon of understanding (Heidegger 1996, 348) necessary to form a hermeneutic circle between the researcher, the participants and the phenomena themselves.

Further, regular discussions between the principal researcher; the two main advisors (Lisa Everitt, EdD, of the ATA and Carlyn Volume-Smith, PhD, of ASEBP); the advisory group; and the research assistants helped the principal researcher define the assumptions and foremeanings she herself held, allowing her to deeply and retrospectively investigate her own prejudices that may have influenced her reading of the data (Gadamer 1975).

DATA COLLECTION

Between the beginning of July and the end of September 2020, five research assistants held 52 individual interviews, via Zoom, with educational assistants (EAs), learning leaders, teachers, school administrators, school district office staff and leaders, and school counsellors. These interviews lasted 60 minutes and centred on questions related to crisis and trauma work in educational settings; high and low points in interviewees' careers; and interventions and training in compassion fatigue, compassion stress and burnout. (See Appendix A for the interview questions.)

Interview participants were recruited through the phase 1 survey, which ran June 1–30, 2020. At the survey's conclusion, volunteers provided their name, job role and e-mail address on a separate form. The call for participants resulted in 258 volunteers, whom the principal researcher sorted by job role, providing the resulting lists to the research assistants so that they could contact potential participants. Fortunately, these lists comprised more volunteers than necessary for each job role, so the research assistants chose participants randomly from the lists.

Once the sorted volunteer lists had been distributed to the research assistants, all survey respondents' contact information was permanently deleted from the principal researcher's computer and from the phase 1 survey data. The research assistants followed up with the volunteers and held interviews between July 1 and September 30, 2020. The interview participants were as follows:

- 10 learning leaders and guidance counsellors
- 12 school leaders (principals and assistant principals)
- 9 EAs and other support staff
- 4 system or organizational leaders
- 17 teachers

The research assistants transcribed the interviews using Trint software and then anonymized the interviews and assigned pseudonyms to the participants before submitting the transcripts to the principal researcher for final analysis. The principal researcher met with the research assistants individually to discuss their initial impressions and understandings of the interview data, which provided key insights and potential data codes for further analysis. During these discussions, the research assistants also disclosed participants' consistent physical responses during the interviews, since corporeal responses to a phenomenon are an important aspect of hermeneutic phenomenological data analysis (van Manen 2014).

DATA ANALYSIS

The data were analyzed using constant comparison thematic analysis (Creswell 2015) and NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software to organize codes into nodes and subnodes. The data were coded manually between October 16 and November 26, 2020, without using autocoding or other software tools, since hermeneutic phenomenology requires research teams to carefully interpret all data (Moules et al 2015). NVivo 12 was used solely as a data organization tool, and its autocoding features were not used to create or sort any thematic data.

Because of the varying numbers of participants across various job roles, the analysis focused on general themes that emerged from all participants and did not relate to a specific job role. Future studies and analyses should seek to understand how these themes apply specifically to each job role.

The manual coding process resulted in eight distinct themes and one potential solution for addressing compassion stress, compassion fatigue and burnout in education workers. The themes were as follows:

- Crisis work performed in educational contexts
- Trauma work performed in educational contexts

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- The role of emotional labour (deep acting and surface acting) in educational contexts
- The nature of compassion satisfaction among education workers
- The nature and symptoms of compassion fatigue among education workers
- The nature and symptoms of burnout among education workers
- Specific concerns for those education workers who lead others
- Training and professional development

The potential solution for addressing these matters was HEARTcare planning for education workers.

For each theme, several subthemes emerged. These subthemes helped develop a visual model for the phenomena of compassion satisfaction, compassion fatigue and burnout among education workers (see Figure 1). The model depicts an experience of the compassion continuum in relation to emotional labour and educator burnout. It is based on the findings of this study's phase 1 survey and phase 2 interviews. A draft of the model was presented on November 26, 2020, to the advisory group for validation. This presentation served to determine whether the model would ring true (Moules 2002) with experts' experiences in the field of education. Research assistant Jhonattan Bello used the draft visuals provided to him by the principal researcher to create an artistic rendering of the model.



FIGURE 1. Compassion continuum model for education workers

Crisis and Trauma Work in Educational Settings

As the phase 1 findings (ATA 2020) suggested, a stronger understanding of both crisis work and trauma work in educational settings was necessary to fully understand the phenomena of compassion fatigue and burnout.

CRISIS WORK

The interview data provided numerous examples of crisis work undertaken by education workers. Crisis work occurs when caregivers are directly involved in traumatic events with their clients (Beaton and Murphy 1995).

Of the 52 interview participants, 20 identified at least one example of crisis work from their career. In many cases, this crisis work was undertaken as part of education workers' regular job duties and was related to the children and youth under their care.

Participants' descriptions of crisis work varied, including examples such as assisting students who were bleeding as the result of schoolyard accidents, navigating fires and floods with students, and intervening during students' suicide attempts. In most cases, participants described events that seemed to be frozen in their memories and characterized those experiences as extreme low points in their careers.

Note: The interview excerpts throughout this report use pseudonyms (assigned by researchers or chosen by participants) to protect participants' anonymity and have been very lightly edited to reduce verbal tics.

It was the first day of class, and one of our students had quit breathing, and I do what I'm trained to do. My buddy and I did have to do mouth-to-mouth on her. That's what we did. I was late to class. I didn't even have the sweat wiped off my brow. (North, teacher)

I remember wanting to leave the field when I was a principal at an alternative school, because I was dealing with this parent who was not well. Let's just put it that way. And she was threatening our staff and threatening me and threatening everyone, and it just wasn't pleasant. I was a new principal, so I didn't necessarily have the experience that I have now. It's not that it wouldn't stress me now. It would still stress me, but I would be able to categorize it differently now. You know, it's not a personal attack so much as an attack on a system from someone who has some health and wellness challenges. We can contextualize it that way. It's easier. But I guess I could say at the time

it was scary because this person had brought a gun to a school a few years earlier. (Chris, school leader)

I was teaching Grade 2. I had a teacher's aide in my class, and I had five students, males that were seeing the psychologist, so it was quite a disruptive class. The class was trained that when one of the boys would throw a fit, the class would pack up their work materials and go sit in the hallway. Either myself or the teacher's aide would stay in the room with a disruptive child and try and calm them down. So that was a low. The young man was struggling so much. (Allen, teacher)

It was about a year and a half ago. I had a teacher come to me and say the student just disclosed that he is wanting to die by suicide, and it is my job to then kind of take that on and make sure that kid is OK. So I asked her to bring him to me, and we talked. It is my job to make sure that when the child goes home, that they will be safe.

So I go through a flow chart that my division has. . . . We go through every part of the chart and then determine whether I need to call the child's parents immediately or by the end of the day, or do I need to call an ambulance? Or, you know, it just depends on where we go within the flow chart [to determine] which people within my organization I need to call. This is the first time that I was responsible for doing the suicide risk protocol. . . . So it was my job to determine whether I felt that student was safe. After a few hours' worth of conversations, I did feel that he was safe and then sent him home. But I've never been trained in that as a teacher. That is not something that should be on my shoulders, but it certainly is. Since then, I have asked for training from my administrators, and they have not given it to me. They've always just said, "Follow the flow chart. Follow the flow chart," which is not OK when it comes to the life of a student.

That evening, I went out with friends, and we went to a movie. And at the end of the movie, there is a suicide, and it completely triggered me, and I had a panic attack. [*Participant starts crying.*] This is the first one I had ever had. It was horrible, and then I had to wait all weekend to know if he was OK and if he was going to come to school on Monday. (Rosaline, learning leader)

Similar to other front line essential workers, education workers find themselves responding to crises as part of their normal workday. Given that crisis work is linked to increased risk of compassion fatigue (Beaton and Murphy 1995) and burnout (Erbacher, Singer and Poland 2014; Maslach and Leiter 2016), better training and resources are needed to support education workers after they complete crisis work.

TRAUMA WORK

In the interviews, 37 participants described examples of trauma work they had provided during their careers. Trauma work involves supporting and listening to a client who has experienced a traumatic event and is processing that event (Goelitz 2013). In the case of education workers, *clients* can be

defined as the students under their care, the colleagues in their schools and offices, or the staff of leaders.

The participants shared many examples of providing trauma work to students, colleagues and employees as part of their usual workday. In some cases, they felt helpless in terms of having a positive impact on the person who was suffering, as the result of their lack of trauma support training or their inability to change the person's traumatic circumstances.

We did have a teacher in my second year there who was getting close to retirement. I think she'd seen the system change drastically in her time teaching. She had a handful of students with moderate behaviour issues. She had a Grade 1 class, so still [the students were] trying to learn how to share and stay in their own space and do their own work and not get distracted, and still just learning social things, as well as trying to learn academics.

And she was really, really, really struggling for the whole year because she had a handful of kids that just couldn't do it. There were a few times I found her in the hallway. I mean, her door was open. Her kids weren't unsupervised, but she was holding back tears because she just couldn't manage the classroom. She was an experienced, good teacher who I'd watched be very successful the year before. But this particular year, she just couldn't manage these kids. So I ended up, almost on a daily basis, taking one of them into the gym for 15 minutes to play basketball, just to burn off some steam, because he just could not sit still, or not even stay in the room and not disturb everyone. So I would just take him out to give her a break just for 15 minutes, just so she could talk to the rest of the class. And she actually retired that year. She was done. She couldn't do it anymore. I miss her. I'm sorry that her career ended on such a low note, because she was a wonderful teacher and a wonderful person, and I helped her as much as I could. (Bev, EA)

Oh, goodness. I had a colleague who was in a terrible head-on collision with her bus, and that was pretty bad. Two people were killed in the other vehicle, and she was in a bus full of students. Pretty hard to see her go through that, you know. That could happen to anybody. (BlueRoan, support staff)

We lost a Grade 1 student who was killed in a car accident. I was assistant principal, but I was doing some individual or small-group work with kids, and he was one of mine, so that was really hard. We lost one of our secretaries to cancer that same year. . . . And just this June, we lost another staff member. She was one of our support staff who were laid off, and she had a stroke at home and wasn't found until her husband got home. (Becky, school leader)

I can actually speak about a student a couple of years ago that disclosed to me about some major physical abuse that was happening in his home. It was really bad. So I told him . . . when he disclosed to me that I am obligated legally to report what he told me to my administrators, and family services was called in. And there was a big follow-up. That poor child, what he went through. He had me in tears many times, just listening to what he was living with. (Charlotte, EA)

There's so many things that I could talk about. For this last year, . . . one of my students that I coached [in] volleyball actually died in a car accident, suddenly. That was a year ago, in May again. So just that trauma from my other volleyball girls that I coach—I had to support them in some capacity, and especially with [the] new volleyball season coming up and all that stuff. So that was trauma practically for our whole school, just because the student was so connected with everything. But, again, I don't think I took the time that I needed to just because . . . I felt compelled that I had to be there to support my students, especially those volleyball girls, for example. (Anna, teacher)

The type of trauma work most commonly cited by participants was ongoing and daily trauma work with multiple students, often occurring consecutively or even concurrently. For example, 20 participants cited the difficulties they encountered as they dealt with a single student who disclosed a traumatic event while simultaneously dealing with up to 40 other students who also needed their time and attention. Participants provided examples, including teachers providing intervention to suicidal students and then immediately having to instruct a full class of 30 students, EAs being called on to intervene with multiple students who were demonstrating behaviour concerns at different locations around their workplace, and school leaders having to shift from phone calls with exasperated parents to intervening with students in crisis.

I would definitely say that in my typical classroom of 35 students, 10 to 12 were dealing with varying issues, from parents getting divorced and that kind of struggle to being removed from home and working with social workers and that kind of stuff. So I would say that 10 to 12 in every classroom are dealing with something. (Betty, teacher)

There are three students that I taught when I was working in [a different province] who have been murdered. So that in and of itself is a big deal. You shouldn't have to count those sorts of things. "Oh, I actually know three students that were murdered." Those are not things that you want to have to do as an educator. (Laurie, school leader)

I've also had Syrian refugee students, and some of them turned out to be my absolute favourite students and super grateful to be here. But some of them have come from refugee camps, and they've never been to school before, or I had one student who actually had to fire a gun at someone charging at them with another weapon. So how do you do regular teaching with the group like that? (Johnsmith, teacher)

Kids would come to school with the whole bag, right? And sometimes I could see them being triggered by others. I guess one thing that stood out to me happened a week or two into the new school year, and I had just asked the kids to get a pencil. We were going to do a little bit of writing, and that triggered so many behaviours in the students. So I saw kids dropping pencils and falling out of their desks. I saw kids starting to fight among themselves. One child went under his desk

and started crying, and at the time, I thought, *Wow. There's some really deep issues going on for these kids.* (Nana, consultant)

Because of the population that we have at our school, I mean, trauma's just a given. That's just our daily work. Almost every student in our school has some sort of either their own trauma or intergenerational trauma from their families fleeing countries or residential schools. (Ren, counsellor)

The situation kind of reached a breaking point where, during a concert, the way that their child was choosing to participate was not up to the parents' standards. . . . Or maybe, with all of the kids together, it maybe seemed as if their child stuck out a little bit more compared to the others. And that really, I think, shook the parents up—but it was my fault. So I got put in a situation where I was supervising at the end, and they came to pick up their child, and in front of the remaining children in the classroom [and] other parents, one of the parents came right up into my face, looking down on me—someone extremely tall. And I can't even totally remember what was said. I just remember that my heart was beating in my chest. I was extremely anxious and embarrassed. (Araya, teacher)

I would say that the things that have really created the lowest points would be conflict with either other colleagues or with really difficult parents. I find that much tougher than dealing with difficult students. (Michele, school leader)

Another common source of trauma work for many of the interview participants was unrelated to students; instead, it involved dealing with other adults in education, including colleagues, staff, or the families of colleagues and staff. Twelve participants described providing trauma support to other adults in capacities that were unrelated to their job role, and seven participants described providing trauma work to adults as part of their job role.

One of our colleagues committed suicide, and so the entire staff was just—I felt like it was out of nowhere, just very shocking. And this colleague had children. So we are all sort of taken aback by the event. Simultaneously, there's just so much guilt, like we should have reached out. We should have known. I think that was very difficult. (Cam, teacher)

In terms of employees and staff, the most recent [COVID-19 pandemic] experience mirrored the floods here in [town]. And when the schools shut down this spring, it seemed it was eerily similar to shutting down schools during the flood, and the loss and the grief that people experienced, losing their houses or being displaced. I don't believe there was a loss of life. That doesn't mean it wasn't traumatic. So we had to work through that time, and we continue to work through it. We have employees who are afraid to come back to work at this point, whether it's for health reasons or because they're still in that reliving-trauma place. (Chris, school leader)

Well, I think we all have trauma in our lives, right? I can't really say that I've had trauma in my work role. I had a staff member whose husband died a few years ago, but he took his own life, and that was pretty traumatic for everybody in the board office. (Janis, system leader)

When I had just started as a secretary, my cosecretary's husband had a stroke, and she had to leave work very suddenly. I was quite connected with her, . . . and they didn't think that he was going to make it. So I was kind of her confidant with that one and helped her get through it, but it was very hard. (Jenny, support staff)

I mean, yes, but there's a caveat there, because my mom also died. So, I mean, when that happens, that's a part of our lives. But I would say the three months following that, I wasn't myself, so I wasn't able to respond or bounce back as quickly as I would. I was very depressed and, yeah, that's that for me. It was just like memory, kind of more being more agitated, you know, just not feeling supported, and feeling very isolated and alone, and like nobody cared. (Jo, counsellor)

I had someone who had been laid off, with budget cuts, come into my office and was just sharing some ideas. She really didn't say what it was she needed, but I think she just needed a friend for a while. . . . So we hung out for an hour. That's what she needed. She was going back to a situation which wasn't her first choice and wasn't quite ready to talk about it. (Amber, system leader)

When you're a principal, you walk into a building, and you inherit the group that's there, and you work with them and do the best you can. For me, the reason I do what I do and the reason I continue getting out of bed, even though I'm exhausted, is because I love the people in this building. I love them. So, for me, when they're suffering, it affects me profoundly, like I'm suffering. If someone comes to me and says, "This or that happened," and they're upset, I'll try to hold it together. But then the minute they leave, or the minute I get home, I'm the one who's falling in a mess. (Lindsay, school leader)

Understanding the nature of the crisis and trauma work that education workers provide offers a deeper understanding of the risk factors that can lead to stress or mental health problems. The phase 2 interview data clearly indicated that participants had engaged in both crisis work and trauma work, providing evidence that the preconditions for compassion stress and compassion fatigue exist in the field of education.

The Compassion Satisfaction–Compassion Fatigue Continuum

An interesting feature of education workers' lived experiences with compassion satisfaction, compassion stress and compassion fatigue is that workers can experience all three mental states in one school day. From class to class, colleague to colleague and student to student, they can experience both the pleasure of compassion satisfaction and the pain of compassion fatigue or burnout while providing their daily emotional labour and care work.

Participants described feeling a sense of compassion satisfaction at times—for example, when a lesson went well, when a high-needs student demonstrated learning progress or when the local community expressed gratitude for their hard work. However, within minutes of experiencing this satisfaction, a triggering event—such as a difficult student, a micromanaging supervisor or a disparaging comment from a government official—could result in symptoms of burnout, compassion stress or compassion fatigue.

Recognizing education workers' daily roller-coaster ride of emotional experiences is a key factor in assisting them with preventing, treating and recovering from compassion fatigue and burnout.

COMPASSION SATISFACTION: THE ENERGIZER

Working with children and youth is a double-edged sword, with both advantages and disadvantages for education workers, resulting in either increased work enjoyment or increased work-related stress.

In the interviews, it became evident that having clear connections to students and their achievements and progress was associated with the pleasure that participants gained from providing education care work. Other common factors that contributed to compassion satisfaction were gaining career experience, feeling a sense of the inherent benefit of their work and maintaining work–life boundaries.

Connections to Students

For 27 participants, their connections to students served as a protective factor against compassion stress and burnout, as well as an important motivator to remain in the education field. They identified guiding students' progress and achievements as their reason for returning to schools and educational centres every day.

I had a student when I was teaching in hospitals. She was there for a really, really long time. She was there for the entire school year, which is pretty rare. And, at the end, she actually passed three high school courses, which is a really big deal for her. And she wrote me . . . the most amazing card. We had such a good connection, and she was with me all day, every day, for the whole year. . . . She hadn't passed a course in years—from, like, junior high. So for her to actually get high school credit, she was really, really proud of herself. So that was pretty cool. (Betty, teacher)

The feedback from the kids is definitely a highlight. I had a couple of kids come to my house and bring me a Christmas card out of school once holidays were on last year, and that was pretty sweet, too. So the highlights are definitely responses from the kids. It's encouraging. It keeps you going. (Bev, EA)

Highlight? I don't know, just any time the little kids get on the bus, and they're so excited to be going to school. . . . And then seeing the older ones graduate. . . . I've had the daughter of a [former] student that I drove at the beginning of my career. Her daughter's riding [the bus] now. It's kind of cool. (BlueRoan, support staff)

The kids are what keeps me going. The connection with kids rejuvenates me and reminds me about why I do this. (Becky, school leader)

Career Experience

The second most common factor contributing to compassion satisfaction that participants identified was experience in the education field. Twenty-one participants described how they had gained the knowledge and confidence necessary to access effective supports and resources for their students as they had become more experienced in their role. They described feeling more competent in providing crisis and trauma work over time in their careers and wished that preservice teacher education had better prepared them for the work. For some participants, having to provide crisis and trauma work had motivated them to learn more so that they could react better to similar situations in the future.

One of the things that I need to do with my students . . . is sit and breathe and feel it, right? Because in a lot of spaces, in society and in our world, you're just not given the space to feel what's there. And I was being present with those students while they were just in pain or anger or whatever was coming up for them. . . . Right, and just hold the space—I had no idea of what that looked like 14 and 15 years ago. (Anne, learning leader)

I've gotten better at knowing what services to access for [kids in crisis] or those kinds of things. I have a better understanding of trauma itself and how that impacts kids, and . . . it's not that they're choosing to be bad, necessarily. . . . And the fact that they could do the [schoolwork] for you on Tuesday, and they can't today, doesn't mean they're choosing not to do it today. It means on Tuesday, all the stars lined up, and they had a breakfast, and Mom didn't yell at the door. So they

were able to hold it together for you on Tuesday. . . . At the beginning, I was trying to swim along on instinct. (Becky, school leader)

I wish I'd known as much in my first few years as I do now about ways to help kids, ways to keep them from losing it. (Carol, school leader)

And I'm kind of getting better. I'm just going to let go if I can't help with [a student's problems]. I think it's a thing that young teachers have to watch out for, not to become everybody's hero. (Coach, teacher)

If you had asked me this question five or ten years ago, I would have a completely different answer. But you learned that you can't do it all, and you can't carry it all. (Lauretta, learning leader)

It is important to note that although experience is a protective factor against compassion stress and compassion fatigue, it can also be a risk factor for depersonalization.

Inherent Good of the Work

The pleasure of doing educational work is an intrinsic reward, and 19 participants cited this pleasure as an element of their professional identity. They were attracted to the education field because of their positive world view and their sense that the work they provided was important either to students' successful completion of their education requirements or, on a wider scale, to the functioning of a civil and ordered society. This deep passion for the job can be described as heartwork (Kendrick 2018).

The work we did through the spring with this whole pandemic response thing—none of us are trained in this. Nobody in our system—no one across Canada—has lived through a pandemic, as far as I know, and the adjustment of in-class education to online education within a week . . . and the decisions, what we had to make thereafter to keep the system working, it was absolutely exhausting. Well, it was, but it's a highlight because I think we did it successfully. You know, from the beginning, our focus was on communication, internal and external, so that our staff knew what was going on, and our community knew what was going on with the information we had, . . . but rewarding in the sense that we made it through, and we got to June. (Chris, school leader)

So, basically, they had no money, and they had a short period of time to get their financial house in order, and we were given five years to do that. We accomplished it within two years, without huge sacrifices. But I feel like that's definitely a big highlight. Just implementing strong business and financial controls—that allows the school division to thrive and allows it to meet its mission, which is all about educating kids, and doing what is right for kids, and doing what is right for our staff, too. (Janis, system leader)

I just had to think about, you know, *I think the best way to support this person is to just help them feel understood*. I had time where I could sit with a student for a half an hour; I could sit with

them for lunch [and figure out], *How do I help this person feel supported, feel connected and feel confident enough to try [their schoolwork]?* As a counsellor, that's the perfect part of [the job]. Every school also has a different amount of control that they want to exert over the counsellor area. (Jo, counsellor)

[The schoolwide fundraising event] was a healing opportunity. It was the school's help to the community; it was helping the school's healing. For everybody involved, it felt like we were doing some good in the world. (Kim1, teacher/counsellor)

Being empathetic is . . . not necessarily part of my job role, but it's just part of being a good human being. (Lindsay, support staff)

Similar to the survey participants in phase 1, the interview participants in phase 2 discussed their roles in society as being essential, and they demonstrated pride in being part of the education system.

[Working in education] has some real pluses. I mean, I loved being the assistant principal and learning coach last year. I love mentoring other teachers. But, you know, I spent a year in kindergarten, and that was amazing. I just love being in the school setting. I'm excited to go to work pretty much every day. (Michele, school leader)

Work–Life Boundaries

Finally, the contributing factor to compassion satisfaction that participants most commonly cited was the development of firm physical and psychological boundaries between school and home. Given that a high proportion of the education workforce is female (Statistics Canada 2021) and that women bear a disproportionate amount of caring responsibilities at home (Brenan 2020; Donner 2020), participants noted that leaving crisis and trauma work at the school building or educational workplace was an incredibly important aspect of maintaining compassion satisfaction. Thirteen participants discussed strategies they used to keep their home and work lives separate.

That was the other thing that's been challenging the last six months. . . . I go to work, and I do work at work. And, then, when I come home, home is home. I don't overlap the two. Even if I have any marking to do, I go to the school to mark. If I have any prep to do, I go to the school to prep. I don't like doing it at home. In the last six months, I've ended up doing quite a bit from home. And I think that separation is really important in order to stay mentally healthy. (Beth, teacher)

When I first started in hospitals, I think I was pretty green. I think I was trying to save the world, and, you know, make sure that every kid was getting the best of me all the time. That's not feasible. I've definitely shifted now to [seeing that] I'm part of the web—I'm one person in the student's life, and I can help them when I'm there, but I am my own person, and I need to be healthy, and I need to be here for my children and my mom. My husband's mom is ill, so we need to be taking care of her. So there's a lot of other things, and my job is no longer my—I don't want to say “main

focus”—but it’s no longer my driving force, because I have the rest of my life. Not to say that I don’t care about my students and that I’m not there when I’m there, but I’m really trying to strike that work–life balance, and I think I’m doing better. (Betty, teacher)

I let my work phone die over the summer, and I didn’t look at it at all. So that was good. It was a good way to set a boundary. (Melanie, school leader)

If you had a bad day at work, and you just go home, it just carries on from there if you don’t go for a drive or something. My kids are all older now, but I noticed that if my kids did something that was similar to a student at school, that was really upsetting to me. . . . It wasn’t fair to my kids, because they’re nothing like that student. But it’s like you had that day, and you’re just like, “OK, I can’t deal with this right now. Dealt with it all day long. I’m not going to do this at home.” So it’s not fair to the people that are at home. (Jenny, support staff)

Clear trends in the interview responses indicated that participants who felt more compassion satisfaction had learned from experience, felt capable when providing crisis and trauma work, considered their daily work worthwhile, and had created clear boundaries between their home and school lives. Creating more opportunities for education workers to reflect on the pleasure they gain from their daily work—their heartwork—appears to be an important aspect of preventing and treating compassion stress and compassion fatigue.

COMPASSION STRESS AND COMPASSION FATIGUE: THE DEFLATORS

Similar to compassion satisfaction, clear themes related to compassion stress and compassion fatigue emerged from the phase 2 interview data. Four main components specifically related to compassion stress and fatigue:

- The separation of personal and professional identity, or “putting the self in a box” (coded in 19 interviews)
- Taking on the trauma of other people (coded in 19 interviews) and difficulties with students who had experienced trauma (coded in 17 interviews)
- A sense of helplessness (coded in 17 interviews)
- A perceived lack of acknowledgement of the work’s inherent good (coded in 15 interviews)

To a lesser extent, maladaptive boundary setting, emotional dysregulation, personal experience with trauma and avoidance trends (each coded in 8 interviews) also related to participants’ experiences of compassion stress and compassion fatigue.

Putting the Self in a Box

A key adaptive response to crisis and trauma work reflected in the interviews was the psychological separation of the education workers' professional and personal identities. Several participants described compartmentalizing their work personas separately from their personal selves as a way to protect and guard their hearts against harm at work. This notion of putting oneself in a box is consistent with the idea of superficial acting when providing emotional labour; while this emotional labour is expected by educational organizations in order to maintain a safe and predictable environment for students, ongoing superficial acting has been associated with compassion fatigue (Koenig, Rodger and Specht 2018) and burnout (Bodenheimer and Shuster 2020).

At work, I'm really good at compartmentalizing, I would say almost to a fault. It's not necessarily that healthy, because then I take more on at work because I'm like, "Oh, I'm fine at work," when, really, I'm not. (Betty, teacher)

[I've become] a little more protective of me and a little less giving. (Bev, EA)

I don't want to seem to be caring too much. They [school staff] don't want you to care anymore, to just do your job and get it over with. . . . I'm not sure what I'm saying. "Don't put any emotion or any of yourself into it. Just do [your job] like a robot and be done." (BlueRoan, support staff)

We use the term "you need to white coat it," right? So if you go to the emergency room, and you've cut your hand, and you need stitches, and you go in, and the doctor starts running around saying, "Oh, that's the worst cut I've ever seen!," it doesn't give you any confidence. So we talk about how we need to just "white coat it" in those incidences [traumatic events]. We have to remain calm. We have to be the ones who have it together so that the kids feel safe, families feel safe, everybody else feels safe. And then afterwards, you can lose your shit. (Annabelle, school leader)

I've definitely gotten better at compartmentalizing [memories of traumatic events] and saying, you know, that it was a long time ago, and I feel for their families, and . . . if I'm connected through social media, . . . I'll send a message just to say, "Hey, I'm thinking about you in your situation." I don't know if someone can give me the magic bean, so to speak, to not carry the stuff. (Laurie, school leader)

It's like I'm physically distancing from work, you know? I choose to wear cloth aprons at work, partially because my job is quite messy, and it also gives me something that I can psychologically distance with. Like, at the end of the workday, the apron comes off, and it goes in my locker. So I don't know how much that helps, but I try to think about that when I'm taking it off. I just think, *It's done*. But, of course, none of that was really possible [during] COVID. (Cyndey, EA)

Further, this mental separation of the self into the professional educator and the authentic self appears to be a normalized aspect of being an education worker, and administrators reinforce this separation for early-career teachers as a necessary coping strategy. Participants discussed how

difficult their first years of teaching had been and how they had longed for additional supports, resources or mentorship.

I got written up [after a traumatic event]. I was really upset about it. It just wasn't the right call. Like, they wouldn't even hear me out [about] what actually happened. I cried. I was so upset. And then, you know, the next day, I was out on supervision out front of the school, and I had to greet . . . the kid that spat in my face and called me [an offensive name]. (LaurenG, EA)

The first contract that I had in a remote rural school district was very, very hard. It was probably the hardest time of my life, because I was just on my own. I had moved to this small town to take this job, and I didn't have a whole lot of support. I mean, people were kind, and they tried to do the best they could, but when you're a first-year teacher, the anxiety is real. And I remember thinking at the end of it, *I can't. I can't do this for the rest of my life*. So that was really tough because I guess I just felt ill-equipped. And I was trying to teach all these different subjects, you know. And even though the classes were small, the resources were limited, and the Wi-Fi wasn't good, and the photocopier was always shut down, and it just added to this feeling that the odds were stacked against you. And there were all these issues, like the students had some issues, the community had a few issues in terms of students who felt bullied, or they didn't feel like they fit in to that community, and there was really not a whole lot of alternatives for that. You can do the best you can, but there's so much that you can't control. And it's just kind of heartbreaking to watch when kids are being bullied or they really feel like they're not comfortable with who they are, and they don't really have anywhere to go. We really didn't have a dedicated school counsellor at that place. So . . . that was extra hard. There was an administrator also kind of doubling as a counsellor, and . . . everybody was doing the best they could. (Jane, teacher)

Taking on Other People's Trauma

Consistent with the academic literature, a key component of compassion fatigue among interview participants was taking on other people's trauma. As this study's phase 1 report discussed, for a person to experience secondary trauma, they have to have witnessed someone else's pain or suffering (ATA 2020). Further, and problematically, many participants discussed providing crisis or trauma work to children or youth. Given that a client's age is a high risk factor for traumatic secondary stress, it is unsurprising that education workers are deeply affected by their students' suffering.

Additionally, participants noted that students who had experienced trauma often had difficult behaviours, so participants had to work even harder in order to calm and manage the student with trauma while also teaching the rest of the class.

I had one student a few years back who . . . was very, very angry, very disruptive, really had a poor regard for women. And I know that he had some issues. I also taught his older sister, so I knew that there were issues of substance abuse, domestic violence. . . . There was nothing we could do to get him diagnosed because, you know, the family was quite closed off. (Michele, school leader)

The way some of my students had to live, it was heartbreaking, and you could look around, and you knew that there were kids that were being abused in one way or another, and they'd never tell you. [One] girl disclosed only because I pushed. I knew something was wrong. And she's living with an aunt and uncle; she was from a different country. I knew something was up. Something was terribly wrong. . . . So I was setting her up with [the school counsellor], and they were talking, and he came running into the staff room, and he said, "I need you right now. She wants to talk, but it needs to be to you." So I went running in, and that's when she told me. And she's never gone back to that home.

I'd had to go over my statement with the police again, and I had to prepare myself to go into court. . . . Honestly, now when I look at it, in a lot of ways, I was retraumatized. Luckily, it was the principal that I currently have. And I said, "Well, you know, I have a stop for the afternoon, but I guess I should come back [to school] because I am not testifying now." She said, "No, just go home." And I'm actually kind of glad that she did that, because I went and I had a coffee and sat in a nice coffee shop downtown, which I never got to do, and then I went home early. And, yeah, it was probably just as well because [testifying about abuse] took a lot. It takes a lot. (Carol, school leader)

Having ongoing hostile student interactions in a classroom caused me an immense amount of stress. I didn't feel at ease in the classroom, and I didn't feel that we could create a sense of community where there was mutual trust and ability to learn. I felt constantly at odds with students trying to undermine my classroom management, get away with taunting their peers, testing me to see how I would react. I felt that any mistake I made would be taken advantage of to create disruptions, derail the class and create drama. So I spent huge amounts of time making sure every detail and scenario was thought through and accounted for so that the class would run smoothly. (Jane, teacher)

I had one student who was breaking up with his girlfriend, and I was in [the school], and he was trying to get her to go out [with him], and he ripped his skin off his arm to try to get her to go back with him. And then he since passed. . . . I've had a lot of students die of suicide or murder . . . , so those are very stressful. (Joanne, consultant)

There's one little guy who sticks out in particular. He was Grade 1. He had autism and was nonspeaking, like, didn't have very many words and had an extremely traumatic background. He was in the foster care system and had been exposed prenatally to substances. So there was a lot going on with him. He also had a twin brother with a similar diagnosis but [who] was verbal. And he was, the little guy, just extremely aggressive, because he himself had been so traumatized. So he was very physically aggressive towards his staff. And we spent a lot of time trying to help staff understand where his aggression was coming from and also mitigate the trauma that they were experiencing because he was so physical with them. (Ken, system leader)

A Sense of Helplessness

Interview participants also described a sense of helplessness, as the result of feeling untrained or unable to make a positive difference for students, as an additional symptom of compassion fatigue. They felt powerless to change their students' situations and improve their lives, or to connect students with required supports and resources. Several participants expressed concern about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their students, as well as their frustration with their inability to either teach or assist their students with educational progress in 2020.

Further, participants expressed their sense of helplessness with regard to changing larger social issues that affected their students, including the lack of adequate government funding for public education, the lack of access to mental health treatment and prevention programs for struggling and vulnerable students, the lack of parental support, and peer-on-peer bullying (both online and in the classroom).

I think the most challenging piece [during the COVID-19 shutdown] was that providing supports did not feel genuine because of the distancing and because of all the barriers put in place, and we know that those families or those students and those teachers were struggling enormously. At times, it felt like you were just putting band-aids on things. (Amber, system leader)

Working at the education centre and seeing the politics and seeing decision making and the lack of communication, and then how schools are just expected to pick up the pieces and make it work [in the face of budget cuts] was very, very enlightening to me. I've always been that person that makes everything work, which is why I think they asked me to do this job. Yet I don't feel as though, given the challenges that we had last year, there is any support from a district level. (Lindsay, school leader)

The most frustrating part is when you know it's not you, but you have no power to move this situation forward, despite all of these avenues that you have to support you. Then you just have to make the decision that's best for you. (Charlene, school leader)

In previous years, when student behaviours weren't addressed, and we kept wondering, "What can we do to address these behaviours?" we wouldn't come up with any solutions for six, eight, ten weeks, and you just realize—I look at these students and realize there is nothing to be done for this young man or woman right now. (Coach, teacher)

Our savings are dwindling, and . . . I've always been able to find money, and I kind of have a reputation for that. "Janis will find the money." And I'm out of money. I can't find money anymore [tears up]. I'm going to cry. (Janis, system leader)

But the kids of the parents aren't willing to take any support. And you know that this child could have a better chance and get the help he needs. But they don't want them to see the counsellor because they don't believe in that. You take that home because you think that that student is not getting the proper services he deserves to regulate in life in general. (Jenny, support staff)

Basically, our school budget is working on half of its operating budget from the year before, and the government has kind of hid in the news. . . . So, I mean, when we hear this news, and we're the front line people who are dealing with the kids who have the biggest problem, and we know everything is getting cut in half, and we won't have all the resources like we used to have, like money for grocery cards—we would have certain agencies [that] would give us gift cards for food. So we have kids who are homeless or sleeping on someone else's couch. We could give them 50 dollars because we knew they were going to starve. We don't have that anymore. So that's just one example of [how the cuts will make our jobs] stressful for us, because we don't feel like we can help as much. And then, when you can't feel like you can help, it's not satisfying. It's just stressful. (Lisa, counsellor)

I'm very much a "let's fix this, let's do it" kind of person. If there's a problem, I want to solve it. And a lot of times, trauma is not a thing that I can solve. So, often, I have a lot of helplessness around "I see you're in pain. I see you're suffering. I see there's this situation, and it's going horribly for you. I can't fix it." And that often can be quite frustrating and disheartening for me, because I want to be able to fix it. I want to be able to help. (Sara, school leader)

A Perceived Lack of Acknowledgement of the Work's Inherent Good

Many interview participants reflected on world view changes they had experienced while providing educational care work to students. They felt that they had begun their educational careers very hopefully and had expected to have a positive, long-term impact on their students. However, as other caregiving professionals commonly experience, the impact of dealing with students' trauma led to a sense among participants that neither the wider society nor their students valued their work, or that they were not able to influence the common good as they had expected.

I remember as a new teacher, when [then premier] Ralph Klein came in, when I first started as a special ed teacher in my little country school, I had seven ed assistants in the building, and there were two special ed teachers. It was amazing. The work we were doing to support every kid in the school was incredible. And then it was "We're rolling back your wages, and we're taking away all the money." And I was so dejected that I actually quit public education at that time and went and worked in private schools. . . . And, again, it just feels like education as a whole is not—public education is not seen as valuable, is not seen as worth investing in. (Anabelle, school leader)

We had such a difficult year in education as teachers, because we felt like we were constantly under fire from the government. So if it wasn't "We're going after your pension," it was "Oh, you better be careful, 'cause we're going to rip up that curriculum." Right? People were feeling battered down right from the start of the school year. So, yeah, I would say that COVID just put the icing on a really yucky cake. (Becky, school leader)

There doesn't seem to be an appreciation for teachers and principals, in my opinion. I feel it's getting worse in this province. I feel like, with this particular government, teachers are

being vilified, and they're not valued. And, you know, the cuts to education. But yet there is an expectation that we'll still do all of these things in the classroom. (Lindsay, school leader)

I shouldn't read the comments, but, you know, you read. The public just thinks that teachers, and those of us that work in the public sector, are just lazy and just want the public's money. And, you know, it's all this "taxpayer money" and "You should [feel] lucky you have a job," without really understanding the impact of what a teacher does or what somebody in my role does. (Janis, system leader)

I also have anxiety about the government cutbacks, and the lack of resources, and the fact that the students who needed the most are going to suffer the most because they're not going to have what they need. . . . Kids need to further their mental health. [Proper funding] is how they're getting food. It's how their struggles are being identified by the teachers and the EAs, and parents are struggling to support. Well, my God, if the parents can't do it, how the hell am I supposed to be able to do it? . . . I work with 50 [kids] every day because my partner teacher and I have a combined classroom. So 50 people are impacted by what I do every day. (Joy, teacher)

I don't think very many PD [opportunities] focus on enjoyment. . . . I think they're more worried that anything like that in our industry—especially because I think we all feel, as educators lately, with this government line of anti-educator sentiment, [that] the [negative] optics of anything that remotely looked like a wellness day, a spa day, would hit the news. They [leadership] would be so concerned that that would be an issue. (Lisa, counsellor)

I've given my heart, my soul, my blood, sweat and tears, and I'm only a number. Please, take what I give you [in this interview] so that nobody else goes through this shit. Get on them early. Teach them how to take care of themselves early. Because I guarantee you, . . . if you pass away, your job is going to be in the newspaper before your obituary will be. And if we don't learn to take care of ourselves first, there is no way—no way—we can take care of kids. (North, teacher)

I've lost faith in the system to be responsive, though. And that's the greatest challenge that I experience on a daily basis because, for me, my pedagogy revolves around creativity, and humour, and delving into the wonders that kids naturally have, and exploring those things. And every day, the government makes it harder and harder to do that with a good conscience or in good conscience. So I end up in this position not even necessarily of compassion fatigue but, like, a side interest of mine, and it's moral distress. (Oswald, teacher)

Participants suggested that, over time, they had become resigned to the belief that they could not help all the students in their care, so rather than trying to help everyone, they would help only students whom they thought they could influence. This change in perspective may be a form of depersonalization, which is a problematic outcome of both compassion stress and compassion fatigue, as well as burnout.

I definitely feel, at the end of it, I was so tempted to just kind of phone it in because . . . everything felt useless. Everything felt absolutely like it wasn't worth a damn. (Johnsmith, teacher)

But sometimes, if you've been hit with a lot of big things that are really taxing and complex, and then you don't get a break, and you get some smaller things coming in, I get desensitized. I can tell that I'm less patient, or I'm kind of wanting to defer [the student] until I can recentre myself. So I've noticed myself do that. But I wouldn't say that it's, in my case, gotten worse and worse over the 10 years. I would say there's been moments over the last 10 years where it's been too much all at once, and I've needed to try and—what's the word—control the pace? And you can't, right? You can't control the pace of what comes in a counselling door. (Lisa, counsellor)

The Collision of Compassion Fatigue and Burnout

Burnout is a long-term consequence of providing care work, and evidence of burnout was apparent in the interview data. The overwhelming reason for participants' burnout was work intensification (Apple 2004), which aligns with other studies on education workers and burnout (Iancu et al 2018; McCarthy et al 2016).

Work intensification results from a reduction in the number of supports and resources available for a job, requiring more labour from an employee. Eighteen participants referenced an increasing workload as a concern and as a reason for their physical, emotional and mental exhaustion. Several burnout symptoms were coded in the data, including physical exhaustion, feeling unappreciated, constant and high stress levels, and a lack of focus. Very few participants expressed that they had depersonalized the children and youth under their educational care; rather, participants were more likely to have worked themselves to exhaustion than to have depersonalized students.

WORK INTENSIFICATION

Research on the problem of increased workload for education workers has found substantial evidence of the negative consequences for both students (Class Size Matters 2016) and the adults who work with them (McCarthy et al 2016). Burnout has been strongly linked to work intensification (DuBois and Mistretta 2019).

In educational contexts, work intensification is characterized by increased numbers of students in a single classroom (Class Size Matters 2016), increased complexity of student needs as the result of underfunding inclusion (Hoglund, Klinge and Hosan 2015), and reduced numbers of support staff and other workers, leaving teachers and school leaders to take on additional administrative duties (Kendrick 2020). Participants referenced all of these situations.

I was working and learning support. I had 150 students on my caseload. There were three of us that were learning support teachers in the high school that I worked in. So, out of a population of 900 students at that school, I had about a third of the cases. (Anne, teacher)

You know, I'd be in the library for 45 minutes, and then I'd be required somewhere else, and then I'd get back. So it's hard to maintain focus when you're being pulled all over all day—you know, covering a coffee break, back in the library, covering the lunch break, back in the library, covering something, helping with lunchroom supervision, back in the library, covering another coffee

break, back in the library. So I have a lot of jumping between 20-minute chunks. They [school administrators] always have somewhere else I need to be at once. I ended up adding the nutrition position to that. It got exponentially worse, because no matter what room in the building I was in, somebody needed me to be somewhere else. So that's been tough. (Bev, EA)

I feel sometimes that we have been asked to do so many things—you know, to be a jack of all trades—that it becomes watered down. . . . The [local PD group] has evening sessions. So I'm required to stay at work late so that parents from all different schools and stuff can come and listen to some nurses from Alberta Health talk about your child and drugs and your relationship. And they're holding these things in our schools. And I get that. I work with children. But now I'm being asked to stay late when my own family doesn't get to see me. (Gabby, school leader)

Well, I forgot to mention, too, that our admin assistants were pulled. I have two admin assistants in the office. Because of the budget being clawed back in the spring, I lost that. I lost my support. So I didn't have anyone to do my paperwork. (Amber, school leader)

One of the things that I think that a lot of admin and district offices don't really recognize as being a valuable part of self-care for teachers is, on our PD days, to have at least half a day to work on what we need to work on. . . . I've definitely noticed, since I started teaching 20 years ago, that the workload is going up exponentially. What's expected of us is going up all the time. And a lot of times, it feels like the supports that are provided to us are decreasing at the same time. So we're always having to do more with less, which is stressful in itself. (Kathryn, teacher)

OTHER BURNOUT SYMPTOMS

In addition to work intensification, various other symptoms of burnout were evident in the interview data to varying extents. Notably, fourteen participants discussed feeling physical exhaustion as a result of their work in educational settings, and seven participants discussed feeling unappreciated and unacknowledged—two key symptoms of burnout (Maslach and Leiter 2016).

I don't know. It just feels like the tank is always so low right now that there's just not a lot to give to something else. I just don't have [energy] for the next other thing. (Aaron, school leader)

If I had to describe it as something physical, over time, it just felt like someone was just piling weights on my shoulder. And then, eventually, I just couldn't hold them up. Eventually, I was done, and I just could not take on anyone else's stuff. (Laurie, school leader)

I noticed that I was having really big headaches, and my jaws hurt because I started clenching my teeth during the day. At night, I was having a hard time falling asleep, or I would wake up in the middle of the night and be unable to fall back asleep. I stress ate, so I gained 30 pounds. Memory, for sure—I had to write everything down and check it off when it was done because, sometimes,

I couldn't even remember if I finished a task. The constant interruptions from my little people would make getting my work done very difficult and very stressful. (Rosaline, school leader)

When I'm in burnout, I'm exhausted. It becomes very difficult to get up in the morning. If it's a workday, it's about an hour process of convincing myself, "No, we're going to work today." . . . It becomes a struggle to manage my personal life when I'm in burnout, because I just really feel like I lack the energy to do the things that would take care of myself, to eat healthy and to get to the gym, which hasn't been an option. (Anne, teacher)

I always say that schools have to give you the Christmas break and the summer break and everything off, or else they'd have nobody that worked in a school, because it is so stressful—and the burnout is insane—that if you don't have that time to recharge, I don't think you'd have anybody doing this job, for sure. But, I mean, going into it this year—I'm not going back until next Monday, and I'm already tired. I don't even know how to explain that. But I'm already tired, anticipating what's to come. (Jenny, support staff)

Seven participants felt a lack of appreciation from either their school or the wider community. As the phase 1 report found, education workers view themselves as employees of society, not just of the local school board (ATA 2020). Thus, they can feel unacknowledged or unappreciated not only at the local level but also at the provincial and global levels.

But, every once in a while, you know what? You get disheartened. My sister is in the government, and she talks about her cost-of-living increase. And I think, *Whoa, wouldn't that be nice?* (Gabby, school leader)

When that work is not validated, or seen as important, or kids are not put first in decisions . . . especially around budget or whatever, that stuff just infuriates me. (Anabelle, school leader)

It's really hard for me to find the words, because I don't expect a pat on the back. But I do like being a teacher. I think we're really underappreciated, and I know the general public says, "You've got it so easy. What are you complaining about?" I can't see myself doing anything else. I love my job. I love teaching. I love being with kids, but I feel like I've taken on so much. What is my legacy going to be? I don't know. (Joy, teacher)

I don't do what I do for the pat on the back or [anything like] that. But, somewhere along the line, when you do mouth-to-mouth [resuscitation] to a kid, you'd think somewhere along the line, they'd send a positive note somewhere that says, "Hey, thank you." You know, "Thank you for doing this." (North, teacher)

I don't know the right word for it, because I just felt like I didn't matter and my work didn't matter. (LaurenG, EA)

Participants' interview responses demonstrate that education workers' lived experiences of burnout and compassion fatigue collide and that direct action is necessary to prevent the foreseeable consequences. Complicating factors within the profession—such as varying levels of professional training, the workplace culture and occupational heartbreak (Kendrick 2018)—can either intensify or ease education workers' mental health distress. Untreated mental health distress can lead to many problems, such as longer absences from work, in turn leading to higher system costs (De Lorenzo 2013); difficulties attracting new professionals to the field and keeping them in the field (Buchanan et al 2013); and a negative impact on the crucial student–teacher relationship (Spilt, Koomen and Thijs 2011).

Complicating Factors in the Field of Education

In addition to the symptoms of compassion stress, compassion fatigue and burnout, several factors unique to the education field must be addressed to understand how these phenomena affect education workers' occupational health. Complicating factors in the field include varying levels of training (preprofessional and professional), workplace culture norms and occupational heartbreak.

VARYING LEVELS OF TRAINING

Interview participants reported varying levels of training (preprofessional and professional) on compassion fatigue and burnout. Some had completed master's degrees in teacher well-being and mental health, and others had no training at all. Given that training in trauma and crisis work is a key aspect of preventing compassion fatigue (Figley 2002), education worker certification programs should provide consistent, targeted professional training on crisis and trauma work.

Alarming, several participants also noted that they had learned about these mental health conditions through self-study or single-day workshops, rather than through evidence-based instruction. To ensure that the best-understood information and practices are taught, reinforced and learned, health literacy requires training programs that are based on research evidence and that are taught repeatedly in both preservice and inservice professional development (PD) programs (Paakkari and Paakkari 2012).

I'd never even heard of compassion fatigue until very, very recently, like, probably April of 2020. I didn't even know what it was. So I guess I was put into my position without really having that emotional training or awareness or something. (Bev, EA)

[I've been] looking into things like yoga and meditation [on my own]. I don't know if that counts, but, yeah, stuff like that. . . . It would be nice if [the system] would have stuff like that available. (BlueRoan, support staff)

I will admit that [sessions on compassion fatigue or wellness] are offered. It's just, the way the professional development is set up, you get to choose the sessions, sort of like teachers' convention. . . . I typically don't choose those sessions. I will usually lean towards the math ones or the ones that are very specific to content and pedagogy. (Cam, teacher)

You know, we did a lot of work this year with the staff. Book studies, . . . one of them was Brené Brown. [Reading Brown's work] on vulnerability was a way to help people reduce some of the stress. (Amber, school leader)

Lots of PDs, lots of reading. The inclusive learning piece of my job really helps because we talk a lot about [wellness], and we have access to resources and things. The work of Dr Jody Carrington, . . . we had her at our school. (Becky, school leader)

I worked in and around disability support for seven years before working for the school system, and I did take quite a bit of training in [self-care and wellness]. They talked about compassion fatigue extensively. (Chance, EA)

We have been given mental health phone numbers. We have coverage for counsellors. They will e-mail that out if something happens within the division, like if you lose a student or a staff member has been lost or not. But for PD days, it's mostly on how we need to care for the trauma of the students, and it's all about, usually, caring for the students. I know that has been requested, to have compassion fatigue or mental health seminars on for us. And [current PD] doesn't touch base on that. (Jenny, support staff)

TOXIC WORKPLACE CULTURE

Workplace culture can be defined as the policies and procedures, both formal and informal, that define a human organization (Schermerhorn et al 2005). In educational settings, the school culture's influence is mainly defined with reference to creating safe and welcoming spaces for students (Alberta Health Services 2017), with less emphasis on the school culture's impact on teacher well-being.

During the phase 2 interviews, participants expressed how the school culture (whether positive or toxic) influenced teacher well-being as a confounding factor on individual teachers' ability to cope with and seek treatment for burnout or compassion fatigue. They identified a positive school culture as one that involved compassionate or responsive leadership, access to resources and supports to ensure students' learning progress, and collegial relationships between education workers and other adults.

I've had two very different experiences. I've had a very supportive world, and then I've had a very punitive [experience]—you feel like a child sometimes. That part for compassion fatigue, for burnout—if you don't feel like you're supported, it really, really leads more quickly to burnout than almost anything, because of that feeling of always having to explain yourself or not being believed or feeling like you're a criminal in some way if you don't do something right. Whereas, you know, if you have a leadership team that really understands that we all come to work and we all come to school with our baggage, including teachers and students, and that we're so much more than our productivity, and that you get the most out of people by forming those relationships, you know? By taking the time to really know people and care about them, you know? (Jo, counsellor)

I've made some personal choices in terms of what I've wanted to teach in the classroom, and how I wanted to engage with kids, and how much time I wanted to spend. And I've always had a really good relationship with my admin, who respected what I was asking for. We always have those annual fireside chats, and I'm fortunate enough that I was able to have my job, kind of like what my assignment was at schools, shift into things that really fitted where it was. (Beth, teacher)

That first acting principalship, it was only six months. But I was having a hard time because I wasn't sure that I wanted to go back to work [after my maternity leave], and my dad had passed away in the summer prior. So there was a lot of emotional stuff, but that school was a gift. You know, like some places you go and you just fit in? And, like, it's a puzzle piece, and you fit right in. . . . It was a wonderful place, people were great, and I felt like I belong. If it had not been, I don't know that I would have survived emotionally through the return-to-work process. (Melanie, school leader)

I teach leadership. So, to be honest, that's absolutely a part of my career that fires me up. I'll put on big school events where students really get a chance to shine. . . . So those are usually my highlights, when students that I don't directly teach but have been able to be invited into the leadership class get an opportunity to shine. (Anna, teacher)

Conversely, a toxic or negative work culture can compound or intensify mental health distress. The participants described unsupportive leadership, tense relationships with students or coworkers, a normalization of high workloads, and an overall sense of helplessness as characteristics of a toxic workplace. While a positive work culture acted as a protective factor against compassion fatigue and burnout for some participants, a toxic work culture made compassion fatigue and burnout feel more severe for other participants.

I think when you are—I don't want to use the word *stuck*—but you're stuck with one student, and he had a disability and wouldn't stay in the classroom. So we were in the sensory room for basically six weeks solid. And I was by myself and didn't seem like I had a lot of support, because the teacher had a responsibility for the other 20 students. I felt that I was babysitting [and] basically didn't feel like I had a lot of support through the admin. The odd time, the teacher would come up in her break, so she could give me a break. She never really got a break. So that was tough. Yeah, that was really tough until they put a program in place for this person. (Sue, EA)

I even talked to my principal. I said, "Listen. Can I have our youth liaison worker come hang out with us once a week and just talk through some of the stuff and get through it [student trauma]?" He's like, "He can see them outside of time, definitely put him—put those kids on his list. But you need to be teaching these kids. We can't take time away from the learning to make this [support for the traumatized student] happen," which I found really hard to swallow. (Aaron, school leader)

I would say that [during] my first four years with one particular principal—it's hard to be compassionate when there is no compassion. There you go. There was no compassion for staff.

There was no compassion for certain students, right? . . . Being new to the role, and being new to the school and even the division, it was really hard when I was putting in 12- and 13-hour days, and I'm driving home in the middle of the night, and I'm crying because I'm exhausted. (Gabby, school leader)

I feel very taken advantage of. I feel that there is a lot of guilt. We need to do this for the kids, so for us to put in a full day at work—I mean, when I was in that high school, if I had a full teaching block, I had 160 students, on average. And if I was teaching all science courses, timely returning feedback on assessment, coming home at 6:00, and then marking and planning till 11:00 PM was very normal. That was typical. . . . Our inability to balance is just perpetuated by the administration. (Sara, school leader)

It was three years in that kind of environment, where anything that I did was always under scrutiny. You know, I wasn't supported. I did some really big projects that were recognized at the board level by my higher-up bosses [and] my superintendents, and none of my administration team under that principal showed up. So after three years of working in that scenario, I quit teaching. I put it up for personal leave for half of the school year and ended up leaving, and I just didn't go back. My plan was that I was never going to teach again, because I really came to a place after that kind of harassment and that kind of neglect by my admin—it was one or the other on that continuum—that I thought I was a terrible teacher. . . . And that was when I found the board that I currently work for that restored my faith. (Anne, teacher)

I did have one administrator who did not understand [the importance of relationship building]. Her entire focus was "How do we get our numbers out? How do we get our results up? That's what I'm here to do." . . . So that precipitated a move for me, and it also traumatized me. It took a long time to get out of. She bullied me horribly. That's not the norm, but it does happen. So those are some tough times. (Carol, school leader)

I have noticed also that there has been a shift from support staff being general support in the school to being more relegated to dealing with disabled students almost exclusively. There have been fewer and fewer opportunities to assist in [work with the] general student body. . . . There's a lot of . . . compassion fatigue, or just the general stress of the job, I think, also stems with support staff being treated as kind of second-class workers in the school system, a lot of arrogance and condescension from teaching staff towards the support staff, even though some of us are highly specialized and trained. (Chance, support staff)

I am in a large school. So we have close to 400 students, K-6, and close to 50 staff. But, I guess, at the end of this last school year, there was a lot of discontent among our staff [amid the pandemic]. They felt like we weren't communicating as well to them as we should be. . . . The principal and I didn't know definite answers. There was a lot of conjecture because we didn't even know what scenario we were going to come back in. . . . So we felt like we were protecting our people by only

giving them things that we knew were for sure and things that we could give them that weren't just a guess that might change. . . . There was a lot of discontent and unrest. And that was very difficult. I ended the school year feeling very down and judged. (Becky, school leader)

OCCUPATIONAL HEARTBREAK

Finally, the concept of occupational heartbreak—which occurs when a strongly passionate person experiences a loss as the result of a change at work (Kendrick 2018)—also emerged as a confounding experience in the interview data.

Education workers, like other caregiving professionals, tend to enter their professions with honest intentions and a desire to make a difference in students' lives at the school or educational workplace. When presented with crisis work or trauma work, or when their efforts did not bring about the acknowledgement or success they had hoped for, interview participants felt a deep loss. Conversely, when their heartwork was rewarded with student success, participants were able to persevere through crisis or trauma work.

I love my job. It's hard that I don't go to sleep sometimes, but I can't see myself doing anything else. (Johnsmith, teacher)

I have always wanted to be a teacher. My grandma was a teacher. . . . So it was something that I've always wanted to do. (Beth, teacher)

I think it's a lot about connecting who you become, because professional identity is wrapped around those experiences and how you dealt with them. So, in the end, I tended to view myself as fairly courageous. . . . But I think there's some level of success that comes with realizing that [even with] the tough cases and the situations you get placed in, you are able to cope with [them] and be helpful or supportive. (Amber, school leader)

This isn't a job. It's a calling. I really feel like I cannot imagine myself doing anything else. When I was a kid, I used to have a little desk, and I would set up my stuffed animals, and I would erase my homework book and make my brother do it. . . . And I went down a different path at first, but ultimately, I was brought back to teaching, and I can't imagine doing anything else. But it's the hardest job I've ever done. (Joy, teacher)

Well, it wasn't until the last year did I ever realize how much money I made. I never looked at a paycheque. It wasn't until I realized, *Oh, I'm turning 55 years. It's time I looked at my retirement.* I went, *I'm done. I'm done.* I've never done it for a paycheque. . . . You know, the boss asks you to work a little bit more. I've never once said, "Well, that's not within my contract"—shit, no—if it's in the best interest of students to just get it done. Right? (North, teacher)

I'm finally on a continuous contract, you know. Blood, sweat and tears poured into this thing. My greatest goal is to make the broadest and deepest positive impact in the most kids' lives that I can while I'm here, and as long as I do that, I feel like I've been successful. I'm not in it for the pension. I mean, I think that the pension ought to be there, but that's not why I do what I do. (Oswald, teacher)

Passion and heart play an important role in protecting education workers from compassion stress, compassion fatigue and burnout. Recognizing this, prevention and treatment should involve HEARTcare.

HEARTcare Planning: Occupational Heartbreak Prevention and Treatment

Given that the role of compassion stress and compassion fatigue in the education sector has emerged as a relatively new area of study, many resources developed in the literature have focused on other caregiving professions. Therefore, a key finding of this study is the necessity of developing a preventative care planning tool specifically designed for education caregivers.

As the phase 1 report discussed, several interventions are known to assist in preventing and treating compassion stress, compassion fatigue and burnout at the systemic, organizational, professional and individual levels (ATA 2020). Most interventions identified in both the initial survey and the interview data occurred at the individual level, with participants viewing their mental health as primarily a personal responsibility. However, in caregiving professions, collective well-being (Roy et al 2018) is equally important. The term *collective well-being* suggests that individuals are part of a group or organization that influences individuals' wellness, and vice versa. As Roy et al suggest, collective well-being is "dependent on individual well-being, but this association is bidirectional and the properties of the group also influence the individual" (p 1801).

Rather than discussing self-care alone, or individual interventions to promote wellness, the principal researcher of this study has proposed introducing educational caregivers to HEARTcare, a multidimensional framework for well-being that accounts for the unique needs of education workers (see Figure 2 and Appendix B).

HEARTcare is a framework for preventing and treating burnout, compassion stress and compassion fatigue among education workers. It involves the following levels:

- School
- System
- Individual
- Professional
- Education worker

The acronym HEART derives from the underlined letters.



FIGURE 2. HEARTcare planning visual

SCHOOL

Working in and around schools is a double-edged sword for education workers. On the one hand, a positive school culture acts as a protective factor against compassion fatigue and burnout, providing education workers with the necessary resources and supports to flourish and to develop the resilience required to be effective with students in schools. Schools have strong links to the local community, the province and Canada, and they are an essential part of the education system. They are the workplace centre for educators and students alike, and they play a crucial role in child and youth development.

The two most important components of a positive school culture that interview participants described were a supportive staff team (described by seventeen participants) and effective mentorship and supervision from administrators (described by eight participants).

A supportive school team involved friendly, collegial relationships between staff members. Participants described trusting relationships with colleagues in which they could discuss difficult daily troubles, vent their concerns and support each other with self-care strategies.

I had very strong coworkers, and we learned to support each other and lean on each other professionally and personally. So when our personal lives went to shit, we were there for each other. At the end of a crappy day in school, we'd come together and support each other, and talk it out, and whatever. (Carol, school leader)

I usually just vent to somebody that I trust. That helps quite a bit. Also, you know, having collegial colleagues that you can talk to—it makes a big difference because they really get it. And, yeah, that helps to put things into perspective. I would say it helps almost all the time. So I guess I'm starting to realize now that, in those situations, I didn't have as tight of a group of people that I felt like I could just really talk to. Like, within the school, that's where you can really feel . . . so isolated. (Jane, teacher)

My two admin, my principal and vice-principal, are very strong advocates for mental health. So, over the last two years, we've brought in people from the ATA to talk about mental health and teaching, and we've done our own wellness days for the staff and [for] staff and students. So there is a whole atmosphere in the building that I'm in now for the last two years to make sure that you are taking care of yourself, right? Whereas, in other schools that I've worked at, a lot of times, it was lip service. . . . You'd have your admin or your district office talk about it, but you knew that support was maybe questionable. (Kathryn, teacher)

Participants also emphasized mentorship and supervision as strong indications of a positive school culture. They discussed the important role that mentors, usually school administrators, played in providing the time, space and other resources necessary to ensure that participants felt supported after providing crisis or trauma work.

I really like when my mentor—who I so admire, that I worked for as an assistant principal—when she said to me, “You have to stop solving people's problems. They just sometimes need someone to listen.” I took that to heart, and I started looking at opportunities for me to develop skills in better coaching people to come to their own realizations of what the next steps and answers are for them personally. (Lindsay, school leader)

My time at [the school board district office] was, I would say, pretty special. I had an excellent principal. I think we made a good team. He had his strengths that were my weaknesses, and vice versa. So I think we made it. We made a good team. . . . It was his first principalship, and it was my first [assistant principalship]. . . . We got along really well, and the staff there were great. (Melanie, school leader)

I felt that I was very lucky because I had a very strong mentor [in my first year of teaching]. And she was able to give me perspective on some of these things that make you want to quit and that you don't want to come back to in September. [My mentor would say,] “But I will tell you that even if it's a different school, even if it's different grades, it's just not going to be as hard as this year. I promise you your second year is not going to be as hard as your first.” So I felt like that made a big difference, and that's what I usually tell first-year teachers: “You need to find somebody who's going to be there, who is on your side and is going to remind you that there are some things that you cannot change, and you need to let that go.” (Jane, teacher)

Managers at schools must understand the importance of a positive school culture and develop plans to ensure that their staff can find the support, resources and mentorship required to recover from mental health distress.

SYSTEM

Because education workers see themselves as working for the good of the wider society, they must feel appreciated and essential to their students and the community. Moreover, they benefit from understanding that public education is an important aspect of social justice and that they play a recognized role in reducing poverty and creating good future citizens.

Several interview participants discussed concerns about the lack of appreciation from their local and provincial governments, which added to their distress. These participants also worried that the stories of crisis and trauma they shared with the interviewers would not be taken seriously and that this research would be ignored.

I'm actually really excited that you guys are doing this research. I think it's about time that it's been done. I love that. . . . You're really sharing it with the ATA, and I forget who else, but I read all of that, and I just think it's so important. There's lots wrong with our education system, right? Well, there's lots of good things, and there's so many ways that we could make it even better. So I just think that this research is so poignant and imperative. I love that it's being done and you guys are in the process of doing it. (Anne, teacher)

Whether [this research] will actually make an impact and change—and I hope it does—because you hear that stat—and I guess I'm over the hump of it now—but, you know, [that stat about] within the first five years how many [teachers] are going to, sadly, leave for different reasons. And if there's a way through these different studies, or just even having conversations about it to make meaningful change, and to figure out ways to make it more manageable for everybody, then I'm definitely open to figuring out how I can help in that way. So I don't know if it's necessarily a suggestion but more just an appreciation for you doing this type of study and work and, you know, caring, really. (Araya, teacher)

I think COVID is such an interesting time, and we really had to stop and slow down. I know the particular school division that I work with, a part of our day was dedicated to self-care and just slowing down. So I kind of hope that some of that gets carried over and that we, in education in general, can slow down a little bit and just be there for each other during those tricky times. I'll never forget the beginning of my bachelor of education program. I went to [university], and they sat [us] down in the auditorium and said, "Within five years, only 50 per cent of you will be here," . . . and just how stressful the job of teaching is. And I'd like to hope that many of these incredible teachers that I work with, and that I've seen over the years—I hope they can feel like they did a

great job and that people have a lot of respect and [are] grateful [for] the work that teachers do, especially in COVID, when it was kind of tricky. (Lauretta, school leader)

Students, teachers, EAs, school administrators and system leaders must all work to ensure that education workers are appreciated and respected at the system level. System-level interventions are a shared commitment, between the members of the education workforce and the community, to a brighter and better future.

INDIVIDUAL

Of all the interventions necessary to prevent and treat compassion stress, compassion fatigue and burnout, interview participants most commonly (35 participants) referenced individual self-care.

These education workers understood the importance of self-care and had tried to implement a variety of strategies, including daily exercise, mindfulness training, nutrition, sleep, and socializing with friends and family. The largest barrier to effectively implementing these strategies was a lack of time during the school day for education workers to take care of their own well-being. Participants described rushed lunches, packed schedules, and having too many students to take time to breathe and ensure that they could focus on their tasks, colleagues and students.

I deal with a lot of my stress physically. So I play volleyball. I go running and stuff like that. So that's actually really helpful in terms of just decompressing. But I do feel that when I don't get a chance to decompress, it kind of builds up, and I come off [as] sarcastic to students or family members. (Anna, teacher)

After work, if I had a long or emotionally costly day, even if I was having a great day and I felt good, . . . I usually head straight to the gym or do some kind of workout, something that gets my heart rate up so I can get some endorphins. . . . So something like that is usually one of my big go-tos, like moving my body with some level of intensity and then making sure I eat really nourishing food. Often, I plan my meals, especially during the school year. I've done all my cooking on Sunday, and so I'm just grabbing stuff. I may just grab one of those healthy meals, or I will choose something that is still healthy and nourishing but has a lot of taste so that I can enjoy those sensations. And that's where those mindfulness pieces come in, of just finding joy. I'm a big believer in baths [*laughs*]. (Annel, school leader)

In terms of coping strategies, I'm very much an introvert. So sitting by myself and reading a book or going for a run, those are the things that helped me to kind of de-stress. And I reflect and think about what was going on to process after the fact. (Betty, teacher)

You know, it made me feel good when I'd have a little bit of a break. I dropped somebody off at a practice, and I would have an hour to go to the mall and just walk around by myself. (Carol, school leader)

Education workers appear to understand the need for and crave opportunities for self-care; however, they lack the time and space necessary for the activities they need in order to recharge. Identifying ways to encourage self-care throughout the school year is a necessary outcome of this study.

PROFESSIONAL

Professional interventions in HEARTcare include education workers meeting with a therapist, a family doctor or another trained professional caregiver to work through stress or distress.

Interview participants suggested that they experienced stigma around admitting that they needed help, and they also expressed a concern that their work benefits and other supports did not cover all the assistance they needed in order to feel healthy. Access to professional support, and a willingness to use this support, should be destigmatized so that education workers feel confident in seeking help. Accessing professional assistance is a private matter, and it should be treated with confidentiality, but seeking such help should be an option for education workers—especially if they have been diagnosed with compassion fatigue or severe burnout.

Eleven participants admitted to having sought professional support, and they also reflected on how such help was crucial to their ability to return to providing effective educational caregiving.

You know, I think I found the right doctor to talk to. And she was wonderful, because I was kind of at the end of my rope there. (Janis, system leader)

I have, in my recent past, because of everything at work, gone to therapy to help deal with what's happening. And I try and be more understanding of my students, and I try to listen more than speak, and I try to validate their experiences. And, even though I haven't had that experience or I don't see it that way, doesn't mean that they can't see it that way. So I'm just trying to make sure that I'm understanding, and I'm listening, and that they feel like they are heard. (RosalineD, school leader)

Interview participants' acts of seeking help for themselves often resulted in a sense of being a better and more empathetic education worker. Participants appeared to realize that by taking better care of themselves, they could take better care of the children and youth in their classrooms.

EDUCATION WORKER

The emotional labour provided by educators in schools differs distinctly from that provided in other caregiving professions. Education workers focus on building strong professional relationships with children and youth, thereby increasing their own risk of experiencing compassion stress or compassion fatigue when providing crisis or trauma work. These workers interact with many

children and youth throughout the day, increasing their own likelihood of providing crisis or trauma interventions, which results in a higher chance of secondary emotional trauma.

Education workers enter the education profession with a deep passion for positively influencing students, and many of these workers are eager to share their intellectual curiosity about a subject they have spent many years exploring. Providing the professional training that they require to ensure that they can recognize, prevent and treat compassion fatigue and burnout is a necessary aspect of ensuring that they can remain in the education workforce and avoid experiencing occupational heartbreak.

Kendrick (2018) defines *occupational heartbreak* as the experience of caring so deeply about one's profession that unexpected changes result in deep despair—essentially, the experience of one's job breaking one's heart. Developing a strong HEARTcare plan can provide education workers with the knowledge, supports and resources necessary before they provide crisis or trauma work in educational settings to ensure that they know what they must do to cultivate a sense of positive well-being.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This research study has demonstrated that education workers in Alberta experience compassion stress, compassion fatigue and burnout as a result of their work at or for schools. Because of the unique nature of education work, the final phase of this study will focus on developing a HEARTcare planning tool that can be easily accessed and implemented.

Appendix A: Interview Script

Adapted from Creswell (2015, 225).

Project: Compassion Fatigue, Emotional Labour and Educator Burnout Interviews

Subject: The experience of compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction and emotional labour of people working in the field of education

Date of interview	_____	Time of interview	_____
Interviewer	_____	Interviewee	_____
Position of interviewee	_____	Pseudonym	_____

Pre-interview Script

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the lived experience of people working in the education sector with compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction and emotional labour to understand the mental state of educational workers in Alberta, Canada. The final report will be a collective description of a plausible experience with these phenomena, not a detailed account of your own experiences.

You will be assigned (or may choose) a pseudonym to be associated with the data that you provide to me to protect your privacy. This interview should take about sixty (60) minutes. I have e-mailed a consent form to you, which you have signed. This form will be sent to Dr Astrid Kendrick, who will keep a copy of all the consent forms in an encrypted file on a password-protected thumb drive. This thumb drive will be kept for five years and then fully erased. To maintain your privacy, she will not look at the consent forms and your chosen pseudonym. The name assigned to you on the transcripts from this interview will be your pseudonym. The only identifying aspect will be your job role.

If you wish to drop out of the interview at any time, you are welcome to do so, and if you no longer wish to participate, you are free to drop out of the study at any time. When answering the questions, please keep the responses general—do not name specific people, places or organizations.

Should we get started?

Interview Questions (Teachers)

1. In the survey, did you have a higher level of compassion fatigue or compassion satisfaction related to your work role?
2. Tell me about your career as a teacher.
3. Can you describe a work experience that stands out as a highlight of your teaching career?
4. Can you describe a work experience that stands out to you as a low or difficult time when teaching?
5. *Trauma* is described as a person's ongoing and unmanaged stress response to a challenging or difficult life event. Describe a teaching experience you had with a student or colleague experiencing trauma.
6. Over your teaching career, do you feel that you have been teaching more or fewer students or colleagues impacted by trauma?
7. Do you feel, or have you ever felt, that the trauma of your students or colleagues has impacted your own mental state? Describe that experience.
8. Have you noticed any change in the way that you deal with students or colleagues who have experienced trauma over your teaching career?
9. When responding to the questions about burnout in the survey, did any of the symptoms stand out to you as becoming more intense for you over the past six months?
10. When you have an upsetting or difficult day at work, how do you manage your emotional response?
11. Self-care has been identified as a key element of the prevention of compassion fatigue, compassion stress and burnout. Have you had any professional development about any of these phenomena?
12. If PD were to be offered, how and when would you like to receive it?
13. Since completing the survey, have you had any insights that you would like to share with the research team?

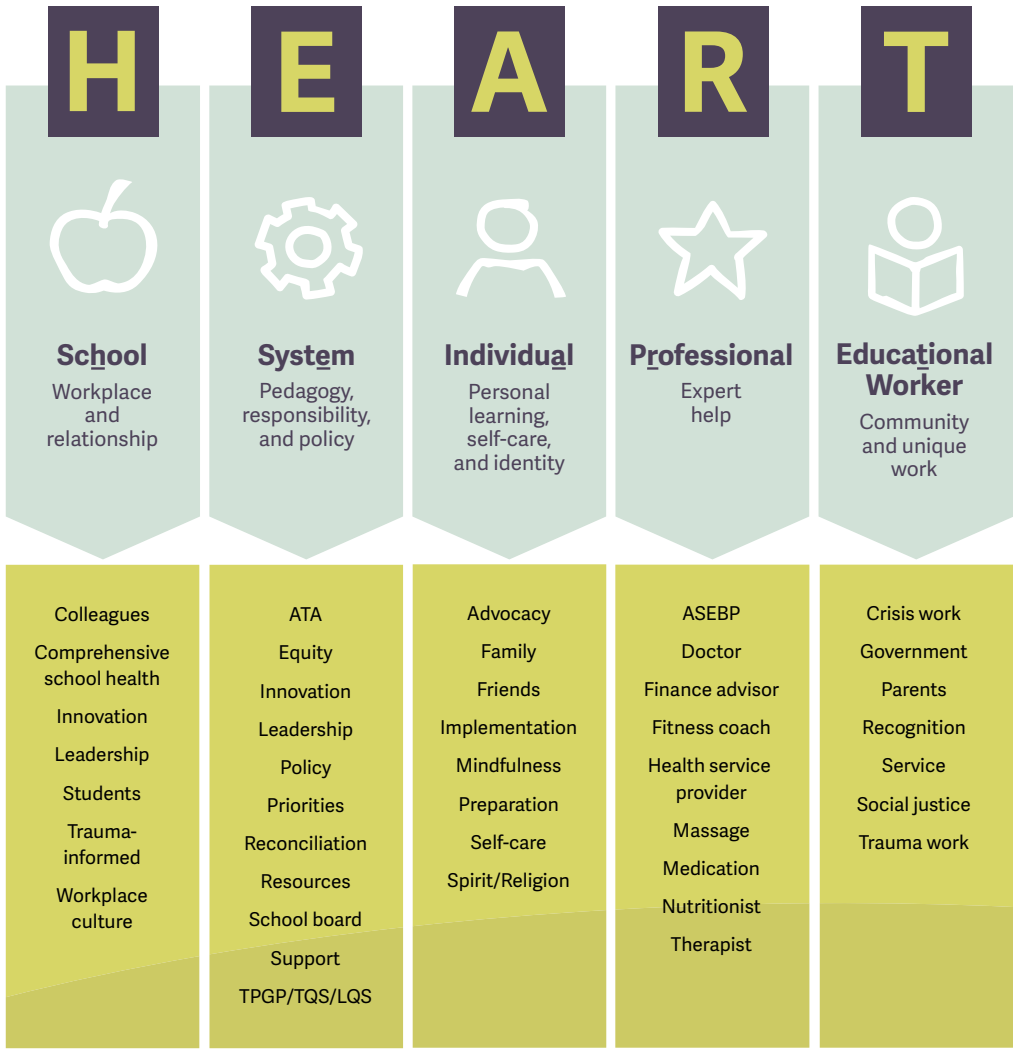
Post-interview Script

Thank you so much for speaking to me today. I appreciated your openness to speak with me about your experiences in/at school. I would like to assure you that your responses will remain confidential and that I will provide an opportunity for follow-up discussion. Also, if you wish to read the transcript of this interview to provide additional information and ensure accuracy of your experiences, I can provide a copy to you before I send the transcript to the PI, Dr Astrid Kendrick. As noted earlier, the final report of this study will mirror and reflect your experiences, but it will not be a description of only your responses. The final write-up that will be shared with the ATA and ASEBP will reflect a collaborative view of the lived experiences of all the study participants and analysis of the survey data.

If you are experiencing a change to your mental state, or if upon reflection of this interview today, you are concerned about your own mental or emotional well-being, here is a list of resources and supports that you can access through either the ATA or ASEBP.

The research team appreciates your time very much.

Appendix B: HEARTcare Model



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