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COURAGE AND CONNECTION IN TEACHING

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BY

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*...you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? -Romans 2:21*

## **Abstract**

Social-emotional learning has been shown to have a positive impact on student outcomes, but too little attention has been placed on how the social-emotional competence of teachers is integral to this process. This study addresses teacher social and emotional competency (SEC) and how those skills translate into student-teacher relationship building and classroom practices. This study also addresses the issue of how teachers experience and deal with shame in the workplace. In order to better understand the characteristics of SEC teachers and how they build relationships with students and how they deal with shame, I first conducted a survey of how secondary teachers viewed their SEC and if they had experienced shame related to their positions as teachers. Following the survey, I observed the classroom practices of seven secondary teachers. Finally, I interviewed the seven teachers so that they could explain their views on SEC, their classroom practices, how they develop relationships with students, and how they experience shame in the workplace.

**Keywords:** Teacher Social-emotional Competence, Student-teacher Relationships, Shame, Shame Resilience, Secondary Education

## Chapter One: Introduction

As I reflected on my first year of teaching, I considered the emotional toll this new job had taken on me. I came into the profession later in life and my motivation for changing careers and becoming a teacher was to be a positive influence in the lives of adolescents. Because of the current educational crisis in the state of Oklahoma, almost anyone with a bachelor's degree can enter the profession without formal training, but I chose to pursue a master's in education and teacher certification because I wanted to be prepared and equipped to meet the challenges I would face in the classroom. Once I completed my training and obtained my certification, I felt equipped and ready to begin my first job of teaching tenth grade English. Although I was confident in my ability to deliver quality instruction, I was blindsided by the emotional toll the job would take on me. Having previously worked in a variety of diverse settings, I had never before experienced so many instances of feeling shame than I had in my first year of teaching. I had worked as a non-fashionista at Gucci, as a Gentile in a Jewish synagogue, as a lowly photographer's assistant meeting clients like President Bill Clinton, but never before had I felt so many feelings of shame as I had in my new profession of teaching. The feelings of shame came from a variety of interactions ranging from students and parents to colleagues and administrators. I was there to instruct, encourage, and inspire - so why was I receiving emails like the following from parents:

*I don't like to take my child to the ER with an urine infection to be told that YOU REFUSE to allow the student to go to the restroom. She also tells me that she has tried at lunch. She either eats or pees...can't do both. She goes to the restroom and then the food line is so long. The bell rings without getting to eat. For my family that goes hungry 10 days out of a month with no money for food.*



*She needs to eat there. So the next email will be to the principal and administration. She says you are rude. You're a teacher and a role model. I think you should be treat your students with respect and little adult. Not like CRIMINCALS.*

Or this:

*I am going to advise you that I am going to administration regarding you. Just because you dont like a student does not give you the power or authority to not put their work in or lose it. I have seen and requested my daughter to show me completed work. I have her academic records showing her GOOD grades in all classes from a child until now and can prove your bias. I have attached one of the papers that you claim to not have had. Um, it has a grade and your signature. So please explain your actions since I have your grade and signature but you have never rec'd it...*

Both of these emails from parents caused me to question my motivations and how I was interacting with students in the classroom. It was never my intention to target students in a negative way or to be an insufferable, unreasonable person. I tried to rationally analyze these situations and examine my actions so that I could respond appropriately. In both of these cases, I was trying to help these students and respond fairly in managing my classroom. These emails from parents made me feel attacked and made me question my competence as a teacher, even though the information presented in the emails was false (there was no paper attached with my signature and no one was in danger of medical complications). In both of these cases, the students were lying to their parents regarding the circumstances and I wondered if holding students accountable was worth the emotional upheaval I was experiencing. I also wondered,

regarding these experiences of shame, among others, if I was an anomaly or if other teachers experienced feeling an inordinate amount of shame as teachers. One thing was very apparent though, if I was unable to understand and deal with my emotions in a healthy way, I would not be able to foster an emotionally healthy classroom environment and positive relationships with my students. If I was unable to sort through my emotional baggage, why should I expect my students to be able to?

### **The Problem**

There are too many students who move through the school system gathering only negative experiences (Pomeroy, 1999). Many students carry heavy emotional baggage into school and many students with learning differences fail to thrive within a system that does not always address their learning needs. Unless teachers take intentional steps to initiate caring relationships with students, many students will leave the school environment without having any positive experiences. Care can be defined as the interpersonal experience of human nurturance, connectedness, warmth, and love (Hargreaves & Tucker, 1991). Caring also extends beyond interpersonal sharing. It is also a

moral ideal...whereby the end is protection, enhancement and preservation of human dignity. Human caring involves values, a will and commitment to care, knowledge, caring actions and consequences. (Watson, 1988 as cited by Hargreaves & Tucker, 1991)

In order to initiate and sustain positive connections with students, teachers must be emotionally equipped to see and respond to the needs of students and foster a pro-social classroom environment. The prosocial classroom is one that encourages the “development and maintenance of supportive teacher–student relationships, effective classroom management, and

successful social and emotional learning program implementation” (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, p. 491). However, the emotional complexities inherent within the teaching profession are not always addressed within teacher training programs or professional development (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). In fact, in a study conducted by Schonert-Reichl (2017) which examined 3,916 courses in 304 teacher preparation programs in the United States, researchers discovered very few courses that covered social-emotional competencies.

Specifically, only 13 percent had at least one course on relationship skills. For responsible decision-making, self-management, social awareness, and self-awareness, the numbers were 7 percent, 6 percent, 2 percent and 1 percent, respectively. (Schonert-Reichl, 2017, p. 149)

Consequently, a lack of training in SEC can leave teachers blindsided with emotions within themselves that they do not understand and are not equipped to deal with. When teachers are burdened with complicated emotions within themselves that they do not know how to deal with, it affects their ability to handle relationships with students who are also dealing with complicated emotions.

### **The Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to understand the themes of courage and connection in teaching. Courage, in the context of this study, is a teacher’s ability to face her challenging emotions honestly, acknowledge them rationally, and deal with them in a healthy way. Acknowledging hard emotions requires vulnerability and an understanding that she is still an emotional work-in-progress. I was interested in understanding the details of socially and emotionally competent teacher’s experience such as her habits that contribute to emotional health, barriers that cause her to feel emotionally unstable, and how she identifies and overcomes

feelings of shame. Social-emotional competence refers to a teacher's skills in the following areas: self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self-management, and relationship management (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). I wanted to understand why so many teachers experience shame and try to understand how to support teachers who are burdened with heavy emotional baggage in a profession that already has so many other challenges such as low pay and overcrowded classrooms due to a lack of funding.

Teachers who possess the ability to acknowledge and deal with their emotions in a healthy way are better able to connect with their students (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). The theme of connection, in the context of this study, is a teacher's ability to develop positive relationships with her students. Students that have positive connections with teachers are more likely to be more emotionally regulated and are more apt to reach their potential in school (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Identifying the characteristics of emotionally intelligent secondary teachers who have had a positive impact in the lives of their students was central to this study. Collecting and examining their stories of emotional resilience and how that translated into developing a prosocial classroom was the basis of this inquiry.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the characteristics of socially and emotionally competent teachers?
2. How does a teacher's social-emotional competence translate into classroom practices?
3. How do teachers experience and cope with feelings of shame?

### **Contribution**

Although promoting social-emotional learning in the classroom has been addressed in the literature, many researchers identify shame as "the master emotion of everyday life," (Scheff, 2003, as cited in Brown, 2006) and as such, it should be addressed in the context of the teaching

profession. Questions explored included: are there common experiences that caused teachers to feel shame? How do teachers resolve feelings of shame in a healthy way that promotes a prosocial environment? There was very little information in the literature concerning how teachers experience and deal with feelings of shame. Considering that shame is “the preeminent cause of emotional distress in our time,” (Trout, 2000, as cited in Brown, 2006) this study can fill the void by exploring how teachers experience shame and the methods they employ to identify and cope with challenging emotions. Telling the stories of teachers who are socially and emotionally competent and who embrace the vulnerability of acknowledging their hard emotions can also be an encouragement to other teachers who fear they are struggling with their emotions alone. Some teachers may fear that simply because they experience difficult emotions, they do not belong in the teaching profession or they are not “cut out” for teaching. Perhaps they believe they do not have “thick enough skin” to be a teacher. Understanding common sources of shame and the methods teachers employ to identify and overcome these feelings can be useful for teacher educators and administrators in supporting new teachers and in retaining skilled teachers in the profession.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This literature review addressed the characteristics of emotionally intelligent secondary educators and teacher social-emotional competence (SEC). Also addressed is how teacher emotional health and SEC translate into classroom practices including: understanding positive relationships with students and effective classroom management. These themes are useful for understanding how teachers operate in the field in an emotionally healthy way and optimal classroom practices to initiate, develop, and sustain caring student/teacher relationships and model emotionally healthy practices to students. Finally, the topic of shame and Shame Resilience Theory is explored to analyze what methods could be employed to help teachers identify feelings of shame and various ways to process this emotion in a healthy way.

### **Teacher Social and Emotional Competence**

Emotions are at the heart of every human interaction, and it is therefore important to examine the role of teacher emotions in the context of teaching and learning. Research in the area of social-emotional learning (SEL) has increased greatly in recent years, but the role teachers play in promoting SEL and their social and emotional well-being has received little attention by researchers (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Although teacher emotions and their effect on learning is underrepresented in the literature (Hawkey, 2006 as cited by Arghode, 2013), research suggests that emotions affect teachers' motivations, goals, flexibility, and impact in the classroom (Arghode, 2013). A classroom dynamic in which teachers have healthy student-teacher relationships leads to effective learning and positive social and emotional development in students (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). However, when teachers are unable to manage the social and emotional demands of their profession, student academic achievement and classroom management and climate erode (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Research indicates that teachers are strong advocates for students' SEL and believe that SEL skills are teachable across socio-economic backgrounds and have benefits for students, including attendance, academic performance, college and workforce readiness, and citizenship (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Teachers also indicated that in order to be the engine that drives SEL in the classroom, they need support from school districts and academic leadership (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). However, to successfully establish SEL in the classroom, it is not sufficient to merely train teachers in SEL, teachers' social and emotional competence (SEC) and wellbeing play a major role (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Jennings and Greenburg (2009) suggest that teacher SEC has wide-ranging effects in the classroom including classroom management and ability to form relationships with students which are crucial factors in developing a positive classroom climate.

Teachers who are socially and emotionally competent exhibit "five major emotional, cognitive, and behavioral competencies: self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self-management, and relationship management" (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, p. 494). Teachers who are self-aware recognize their emotional strengths and weaknesses and are able to harness their emotions positively to motivate students to learn (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). They are also socially and culturally aware, recognizing and understanding the emotions of others as well as operating under the notion that other people have varying perspectives that differ from their own (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). SEC teachers care about how their decisions impact others and have prosocial values, respecting colleagues, students, and students' families (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). The greater SEC teachers possess, the better such teachers are able to handle emotional conflict, regulating their own emotions and behaviors in healthy ways to affect positive outcomes in the classroom (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Psychologist Daniel Goleman believes that emotional control is malleable and that the same neural circuitry used for relating to people is the same circuitry used when practicing attention with mindfulness or concentration (Mowe, 2015). Goleman describes the practices of mindfulness or cognitive therapy as mental exercises that strengthen emotional control and help people to manage anger and destructive emotions, which are integral to developing strong SEC (Mowe, 2015). Widening the gap between impulse and action is pivotal in strengthening SEC, and this often comes through maturity, however mindfulness training can also widen that gap, which is important to note in relation to first-year, inexperienced teachers.

Teachers enter the profession with varying degrees of social-emotional competence and it is important to acknowledge that SEC skills are not necessarily intrinsic behaviors that all teachers possess. As such, interventions designed to promote teacher's SEC are an integral part of high-quality instruction and a positive classroom climate (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE for Teachers) is one such program designed to improve teacher SEC through emotion skills instruction, mindful awareness and stress reduction, and caring and listening practices (Jennings, Brown, Frank, Doyle, Oh; et al., 2017). The study by Jennings et al. shows that teachers who received CARE for Teachers training showed a greater ability to adapt and regulate their emotions and had lower levels of psychological distress and time urgency (2017). These teachers also experienced improvement in sleep disturbances and emotional exhaustion (Jennings et al., 2017). CARE teachers also experienced improvements in mindfulness practices such as the ability to observe internal and external experiences without judgement, leading to a greater ability to notice and respond with patience and understanding to students' needs (Jennings et al., 2017). Finally, intervention teachers



provided their students with a higher level of emotional support that was sustained throughout the school year (Jennings et al., 2017).

### **Teaching Implications**

To effectively understand and respond to student behavior, a teacher must be able to identify an individual student's emotions (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). If a teacher recognizes that a student is experiencing depression or anxiety, is having trouble at home, or has recently experienced a loss which results in undesirable behavior, she is more likely to deal with the student compassionately rather than punitively. In addition to being able to recognize and respond to student emotion, a teacher who is more socially and emotionally aware is better able to effectively manage a classroom (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Classroom management as a means of developing impactful relationships with students is discussed in greater detail later in this review. Finally, teachers with greater SEC can be effective role models of desired classroom behavior (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Teachers with greater SEC may recognize their strengths and capabilities and better understand, accept, and like themselves which allows them to better understand, accept, and like their students (Sparks & Rye, 1990).

### **Understanding Positive Relationships with Students**

Student-teacher relationships make a long lasting impact on students' social, emotional, and psychological development by contributing to students' perceptions of connection and belonging (Osterman, 2010). Students' need for belonging and interpersonal connection to be met by teachers is crucial to "students feeling a high level of engagement, motivation, and attachment to classrooms and schools, which in turn can foster high levels of persistence, achievement, and attainment" (Cooper & Miness, 2014, p. 265). Teachers are not only able to heavily influence a student's psychological experience of school through relationship, but they

also affect the motivation, attendance, and academic outcomes of students (Cooper & Miness, 2014). Students who do not experience a sense of belonging due to teachers they perceive as uncaring and a school environment that is unwelcoming are more likely to feel stress, exhibit unwanted behaviors, and ultimately drop out of school (Osterman, 2000; Rumberger, 2011). In order to try to prevent students from feeling pervasive alienation in the school environment, which increases the chance of dropping out, teachers must gain a better understanding of the barriers that contribute to weak student-teacher relationships.

In her study on student-teacher relationships, Pomeroy (1999), gained insight from students who had been permanently removed from schools. In her interviews with students, she identified teacher qualities that contributed to weak student-teacher relationships. Negative interactions that made students feel humiliated and devalued included: “shouting, telling students to ‘shut up’, responding sarcastically, (put downs), and name calling” (Pomeroy, 1999, p. 469). Students also felt a sense of alienation when they were not given attention they felt they needed and when they felt like teachers did not listen to them (Pomeroy, 1999).

In a qualitative study conducted by Poplin and Weeres (1994), students in four multiethnic school districts responded to the question “What is the problem with school?” The participants responded that they

(felt) the crisis inside schools is directly related to human relationships. Most often mentioned were relationships between teachers and students. Where positive things about school were noted, they usually involve reports of individuals who care, listen, understand, respect others and are honest, open, and sensitive. (Poplin & Weeres, 1994, p. 12)

Since strong student-teacher relationships are a precondition to effective student learning (Margonis, 2004), teachers can facilitate relationships with students by connecting and caring for them with warmth, respect, and trust (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Some practical ways teachers can develop caring relationships with students are greeting students as they enter the classroom, initiating conversations of a personal nature, joining in school or community events, writing personal notes on students' test or papers, recognizing and reaching out when students appear troubled, and attending school activities in which students are involved (Pigford, 2001).

### **Classroom Management**

Teachers who have great social and emotional competence are more likely to effectively manage their classrooms (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). SEC enables teachers to have more skill at analyzing the classroom dynamic and the ability to proactively curb negative behaviors. In recognizing student emotions, teachers can take preventative measures to thwart misbehavior and effectively help students self-regulate (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). SEC also allows teachers to recognize the subtlety of student interaction. Often students lacking self-regulation skills become scapegoats. A teacher without SEC will respond punitively to the scapegoat's behavior without understanding the scenario that led to the incident. A teacher with more social and emotional awareness tend to respond to the behavior of both the provocateur and the scapegoat, preventing future recurrences of unwanted behavior (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). The ability to effectively analyze and respond to the complexities of the classroom dynamic by preventing provocative situations from occurring provides a more rewarding and enjoyable experience for the teacher which ultimately limits burnout and cynicism.

Discipline is central to classroom management and student-teacher relations as noted in Pomeroy's (1999) research. Interestingly, in the researcher's interviews with students that had

been permanently removed from schools and were no strangers to school discipline, the interviewees communicated that they felt their teachers should have been more strict with them (Pomeroy, 1999). The students acknowledged that vigilant discipline was an important part of a teacher's role and they identified aspects they felt were important. The students believed that discipline should be administered fairly, carefully taking into account all sides before giving appropriate sanctions (Pomeroy, 1999). Furthermore, it should be delivered via discussion, without shouting, and ideally, parents should be involved when possible (Pomeroy, 1999).

Teachers who construct positive relationships with students recognize that students' socio-emotional well-being is crucial to long-term success. Positive student-teacher relationships are associated with students having greater emotional regulation, social competence, and academic motivation and achievement, while reducing delinquency and drop out rates (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Highly effective teachers recognize the need to develop their own social and emotional competency so that they can initiate and sustain positive relationships with students and effectively manage a prosocial classroom.

Although there is a variety of research on promoting social-emotional learning in the classroom, there is not as much information regarding the relationship between a teacher's emotional intelligence and student learning (Powell & Kusuma-Powell, 2010). This study advances the literature in collecting and retelling teacher stories of how teacher emotional intelligence translates into classroom practices.

### **Shame**

Because of the importance of the impact of teacher social-emotional competence on student learning and the development of prosocial learning environment, understanding the effect of shame on teachers was an important component of this study. Leading shame researcher

Brené Brown identified shame as foremost cause of emotional upheaval (Karen, as cited in Brown, 2006) and researcher Helen Block Lewis “identified shame as the dominant emotion experienced by clients, exceeding anger, fear, grief, and anxiety” (Brown, 2006, p.43).

Shame is still a relatively new field of study and although some research has been conducted on how students experience shame in the educational setting, there is very little research on how teachers experience shame in the workplace. I have drawn heavily on the work of grounded theory researcher Brené Brown to gain an understanding of how women experience shame.

The “social bond,” described by Thomas Scheff, is rooted in human relationships and is constantly “built, repaired, maintained, or damaged” by contact and communication (Bibby, 2002). The idea that human consciousness is social is developed by Scheff “in that we spend much of our lives living in the mind of other without realizing it...We always imagine, and in imagining share, the judgements of the other mind” (Bibby, 2002). Scheff conceptualizes shame as an emotional state of recognizing “a threat to our social being in much the same way that fear signals a threat to our physical selves” (Bibby, 2002). The definition of shame that emerged from Brown’s research is “an intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging” (2006, p.45). Similarly, Giddens suggests that shame reflects feeling a personal and social insufficiency explaining, “shame directly corrodes a sense of security in both self and surrounding social milieu” (Giddens, as cited in Bibby, 2002). Scheff expands on the notion of social belonging as being central to the concept of shame:

The need for the right degree of connectedness is so primitive that we take it for granted. The basic shame contexts - transgressing morally, making a mistake in

public, being ridiculed or rejected - all involve the potential for exclusion or incorporation or the anticipation of exclusion or incorporation. The basic pride contexts - achievement or success, admiration or love - all involve notice and acceptance. (Scheff, as cited in Bibby, 2002)

Although shame is often thought of as a culturally specific issue in the East more so than in the West, the emotional state signaling the threat of the breaking of the social bond is universal to the human experience (Bibby, 2002). However, the notion that shame is a part of some cultures and not others makes it elusive for Western adults to identify shame and leads to the internalization of the emotion (Bibby, 2002). Shame also causes a person to experience a variety of intensely painful emotions such as confusion, anger, embarrassment, and fear and it is difficult to identify shame as the core issue when a person is experiencing co-occurring emotions (Brown, 2006). Even when a person is able to identify the feeling of shame, in a culture in which acknowledging shame is not accepted, the silencing nature of shame makes it difficult for a person to make positive choices to facilitate change (Brown, 2006).

Women and men both experience shame, but it impacts women differently due to expectations placed upon women by culture and society (Miller-Prieve, 2016). It is theorized that women feel more shame than men because women are more relationally oriented and more vulnerable to severed connections, coupled with a cultural patriarchy that promotes the shaming of women and the shutting down of their reality (Jordan as cited in Miller-Prieve, 2016). Although the scenarios and experiences of women that lead to feelings of shame are as varying as the individuals themselves, there are common categories in which women struggle the most with shame. One major category in which women are vulnerable to shame is professional

identity and work (Brown, 2006). Because of the unique impact that shame has on women, this study focuses on how women teachers uniquely experience shame in the workplace.

Shame is often described as feelings of “being trapped, powerless, and isolated” and the notion of these concepts co-occurring is important because the intricate weaving of the concepts...makes shame so powerful, complex, and often difficult to overcome (Brown, 2006). The feeling of “being trapped” associated with shame comes from situations in which one feels she has only “limited and punitive options with layers of competing expectations” (Brown, 2006). The feeling of being trapped can be especially powerful for women because of societal perfectionistic standards prescribed to women which they feel powerless to meet (Lutwak & Ferrari, 1996; Jordan, 1997 as cited in Miller-Prieve, 2016). This complex web of unreasonable expectations causes women to feel trapped within an unrealistic reality, causing shame.

Powerlessness is another concept identified with experiencing shame because the participants in Brown’s study had difficulty producing an effect capable of stopping shame (2006). Western cultural norms of not acknowledging shame and the complex web of emotions experienced with shame make it difficult for women to identify shame which is the first step in taking positive steps to overcome it (Brown, 2006).

Finally, powerlessness and the feeling of being trapped can cause a woman to feel isolated (Brown, 2006). Psychological isolation can be powerfully destructive because a person feels condemned to the loss of human connection and an increasing lack of ability to restore connection (Brown, 2006). “In the extreme, psychological isolation can lead to a sense of hopelessness and desperation. People will do almost anything to escape this combination of condemned isolation and powerlessness” (Miller and Stiver, 1997, p. 72 as cited by Brown, 2006).

## **Shame Resilience Theory**

Shame Resilience Theory (SRT) are steps identified through Brown's (2006) research that women used to develop shame resilience and decrease feelings of being trapped, powerless, and isolated. The action steps in SRT include

(a) the ability to recognize and accept personal vulnerability; (b) critical awareness regarding social/cultural expectations; (c) the ability to form mutually empathetic relationships that facilitate reaching out to others; and (d) the ability to 'speak shame' or possess the language and the emotional competence to discuss and deconstruct shame. (Brown, 2006, p. 47-48)

Vulnerability is an important concept to explore in the context of SRT. Vulnerability is to be open to attack or capable of being wounded and women reported feeling shame in the areas of their lives where they were most vulnerable (Brown, 2006). However, women who were aware of the issues that made them feel most vulnerable were more likely to recognize what was happening and why when they experienced shame and were more likely to know how to help themselves or seek support (Brown, 2006). Conversely, when women experienced shame in an area of perceived invulnerability, they were blindsided by shame, experiencing overwhelming emotions of confusion, fear, judgement culminating in directing feelings of anger, fear, judgement, rage, and blame toward themselves and others (Brown, 2006).

Major categories identified as shame triggers for women are closely identified with social and cultural issues, which is why it is important for women to exercise critical consciousness in order to link personal shame experiences with a larger social/cultural context (Brown, 2006). Linking a shame event involves deconstructing the personal event and contextualizing it within a social/cultural context which enables one to normalize the event and see that she is not alone in



her experience (Brown, 2006). A consciousness-raising dialogue helpful in critical awareness is: “(a) Who am I? (b) Who says? (c) Who benefits from this definition? (d) What must change and how?” (Bricker-Jenkins, 1991 as cited by Brown, 2006, p.48). If women are unable to contextualize a shame experience to social/cultural issues, they are more likely to internalize feelings of shame leading to a mindset that they are inherently bad or flawed (Brown, 2006).

Women are able to become more resilient to shame by developing empathy and connection (Brown, 2006). The development of support networks where women can validate shared experiences, “demystify the isolating properties of shame,” and build critical awareness are paramount in building resilience to shame (Brown, 2006). An important understanding women gain through building empathy and connection is

recognizing how the experiences that make us feel most alone, and even isolated, are often the most universal experiences. In other words, we share in common what makes us feel the most apart. Recognizing the universality of our most private struggles often leads to a second important benefit of reaching out to others. (Brown, 2006, p. 49)

Developing a “fluency in the language of shame” is the final aspect of SRT which enables women to think about and dialogue about their shame experiences (Brown, 2006). Developing a vocabulary that gives meaning to shame enables women to collaborate and develop strategies to become resilient to shame (Brown, 2006). Feelings of being trapped, isolated, and powerless increased when women were not able to identify and name shame (Brown, 2006). Conversely,

women reported that acquiring language that allowed them to accurately express their shame experiences increased their ability to recognize and name shame and

increased their understanding of the importance of externalizing and sharing shame experiences. (Brown, 2006, p.49)

Understanding Shame Resilience Theory in the context of SEC can be useful in helping teachers identify and deal with the destructiveness of shame in a healthy way. Because teacher SEC is a key component in effective instruction and student-teacher relationship building, understanding more about how teachers experience shame and deal with it was part of the goal of my data collection.

Finally, understanding the difference between teacher stress and teacher shame would be helpful in designing strategies to help teachers improve SEC and shame resilience. In reading through the literature addressing teacher stress, it was clear that shame was either not being clearly identified. For example, Woods and Carlyle (2002) featured stories of teachers who had experienced debilitating stress due to their roles as teachers, hit rock bottom, and finally reinvented themselves and their careers. This article featured quotes from teachers going through a period of stress such as Andrew, who stated:

[School management] took away every bit of confidence ... It wasn't just that they made me believe I was useless at teaching. I felt useless at living. If I tried to do something, I'd do it wrong, break it, make it worse, which is why I sat about doing nothing. (Woods and Carlyle, 2002)

Or another teacher stated:

I felt I'd completely failed as a teacher. Emotionally I find that very difficult because I see myself as a secondary teacher. That's what my persona is. I had a lot of emotional investment in it. (Woods and Carlyle, 2002)

Although what these teachers expressed is clearly shame, the authors did not explore the implications of shame in the context of teacher burnout. It would be beneficial to review the literature on teacher stress/burnout and analyze the difference between stress and shame. First, it would be beneficial to form more nuanced descriptions and definitions of both stress and shame and have a clearer understanding of similarities they share and how they differ. Next, a combined description/definition of shame comprised of the research of Brown, Scheff, and Giddens and others could be used to review the literature on teacher stress and emotions to see what and how much material is lacking a shame interpretation or is misidentified.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **Setting and Participants**

The goal of this study was to explore the SEC of secondary teachers and how that translated into classroom practices and how teachers build relationships with students. I chose participants from the high school where I was employed for the sake of convenience. Convenience sampling is a method of data collection which “saves time, money, and effort but at the expense of information and credibility” (Creswell, 2007, p.127). This method of data collection was employed in this study because I was interested in the perspectives of secondary teachers, and as sole researcher, colleagues at my own high school seemed to be the most logical choice. This setting provided me the opportunity to visit the classrooms of seven secondary teachers two times for observation and interview purposes.

### **Research Context**

According to Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, the student body of the large suburban high school where the research took place was made up of 65.6% Caucasian students, 4.3% Black students, 5.9% Asian students, 11.6% Hispanic students, 5.8% Native American students, and 6.8% of students who identified as two or more races. 33.7% of students identified as eligible for free or reduced lunches. Average enrollment throughout the year was reported at 2862 students and number of teachers was 130. Parental support in this school was relatively high with a reported 85% of parents attending parent/teacher conferences. Although the participants are teachers at the high school where the researcher was also employed, the researcher was a first-year teacher and did not have established relationships with the participants that would have prevented unbiased collection of data.

### **Participants**

I initially sent an email (see Appendix A) to my colleagues at the secondary school where I was employed, asking for participants to complete an online survey. Those who were willing gave consent for their information to be used for research purposes and filled out the initial online survey. All survey participants remained anonymous except for those willing to participate in the interview and observation portion of data collection. Those willing to be interviewed and observed added their email address indicating their willingness to participate in the next portion of the research project. Those selected for the interview and observation phase of data collection indicated a strong commitment to developing student relationships and modeling emotional health as per survey questions 5-7 to students as well as varying degrees of attending to their personal emotional health. Participants were also selected based on length of teaching career. I selected two first year teachers, two mid-range career teacher (two-nine years), and two teachers that had 10 or more years of experience. All of the teachers selected were female and identified as having experienced feelings of shame in the context of their teaching career as per question 9. I did not take into account content area, and as such, the participants represent a large cross-section of subjects taught.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection consisted of quantitative and qualitative methods to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of socially and emotionally competent teachers?
2. How does a teacher's social-emotional competence translate into classroom practices?
3. How do teachers experience and cope with feelings of shame?

Data collection began with a survey, followed by interviews and observations of teachers' working with students in their classrooms. The purpose of the survey was two-fold. The first purpose was to gather a wide range of teachers' views on SEC, emotional health, relationship building with students, and whether or not they had experienced shame in the workplace. The other purpose was to identify teachers who were willing to participate in the interview/observation phase of data collection. The second phase of data collection was observations of teachers who were willing to participate, followed by interviews. The purpose of observations and interviews was to gather data on how teacher SEC translated into classroom practices and how teachers tended to their emotional health. I wanted to see through the observations how teachers interacted with their students, how students responded to teachers, and the emotional climate of each classroom. The purpose of the interviews was to allow teachers to tell their stories of relationship building with students and stories of emotional growth through their experience in teaching. I was also interested in what barriers teachers faced in gaining greater SEC and building relationships with students, including dealing with feelings of shame.

### **Obtaining Permission**

To ensure this study was conducted in an ethical manner and that all research participants were protected, I submitted the study to the local IRB for approval. After one revision process, the study was approved (see Appendix E). As a minimal risk study, it was exempted from full IRB review. I then contacted administration at the high school where the research was to take place and received permission to send an email recruitment email as well as permission to conduct observations and interviews.

### **Recruitment of Participants**

After obtaining IRB permission and school administration permission, a survey recruitment script was sent via email to all teachers at the high school where the research took place (see Appendix A). The survey was conducted by Qualtrics, a secure online server associated with the University of Oklahoma, which was available from March 24, 2019 until March 29, 2019. Before participating in the online survey, upon linking to Qualtrics, participants were presented with a consent to participate in research page which outlined the purpose of the study, details on risk, compensation, and the voluntary nature of participation, as well as my contact information. Participants confirmed their consent before beginning the survey consisting of nine questions (see Appendix B). No identifying information was collected from survey participants unless teachers were willing to participate in the next phase of data collection; in that event, an email address was provided by teachers. Because all collected data from the survey remained anonymous (unless teachers indicated a willingness to participate in phase two of data collection), there was no pressure or coercion to participate. A second recruitment email was sent several days after the first, containing the same recruitment script (see Appendix A), as a reminder for those willing to participate in the survey portion of data collection.

### **Phase One Data Collection**

The first phase of data collection took place via the online survey. The survey was designed using categorical and ordinal questions with a few goals in mind. The first goal was to categorize the participants by gender. Although I was interested in comparing the data according to gender, Shame Resilience Theory was developed through the unique experiences of women, and as such this study was designed to examine the experiences of women teachers to see if and how this theory was employed and how it contributed to SEC. Categorizing by gender helped me to easily exclude male participants from subsequent phases of data collection. Other

categorical questions included certification status and length of career. Length of career helped me to identify potential participants that would fall into the three categories of first year teacher, mid-range teacher, or long-term career teacher that would be interviewed and observed in phase two and three of data collections. Finally, identifying participants as having experienced shame in the workplace or not was central to understanding if this was a viable avenue of study.

My goal with using ordinal questions was to allow participants a range of options to gauge their level of commitment to emotional health and relationship building with students. Results to these questions enabled me to identify teachers who, to varying degrees, tended to their personal emotional health, modeled emotional health in the classroom, and took deliberate steps to build relationships with students. Candidates who exhibited the aforementioned traits as identified in the survey responses would be considered for the observation and interview portion of data collection.

The survey was conducted through Qualtrics, associated with The University of Oklahoma. 78 responses were collected from the online survey, which represented approximately 60% of the 130 teachers on staff as reported by the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability.

### **Phase Two Data Collection**

The second phase of data collection involved identifying and approaching research candidates to observe and interview. 28 teachers who participated in the survey agreed to participate in the observation and interview portion of data collection and entered their email addresses to be contacted by the researcher. Of the 28 participants, eight were men and were therefore excluded. Of the 20 women, 12 teachers recorded survey responses that indicated a high commitment to cultivating student relationships, as well as varying levels of attentiveness to



their personal emotional health and awareness of being a role model in the classroom as it pertained to emotional health (Questions 5-7). These 12 also identified as having experienced shame in their workplace (Question 9). Of the 12 potential candidates, two were first year teachers, seven had two to nine years of teaching experience, and three had been teachers for 10 or more years. After narrowing down the group of potential research participants to 12, I sent an email recruitment script approved by IRB (see Appendix C) to all 12 candidates. The teachers who responded first were recruited for the study and times were scheduled for observations. I recruited two first year teachers, 3 teachers that had six years of experience, and two teachers with 10 or more years in the field. Other than two teachers whose classrooms were located in the same hallway as mine, I only learned of these teachers' content areas upon scheduling the observation. The diverse content areas included English, Science, Math, Theatre, Vocal Music, Speech and Dance, and Virtual Academy.

One classroom observation took place for each teacher during a fifty minute class period. During the observation, field notes were collected based on teacher-student interactions, student-student interactions, classroom practices, and environment. I wrote down in my notes, for example, how many personal interactions the teacher had with her students and how many times a student was called by their name. Following the observations, the field notes were reviewed in preparation for face-to-face interviews. In observing it was important to create concise field notes and to be aware of my own personal opinions within the notes. I scripted conversations verbatim during observations and I chose to observe before interviewing so that I would not be aware of specific classroom practices or prior knowledge of student-teacher relationships. This enabled me to record the classroom practices without having prior knowledge of the meaning and intent behind them.

### **Phase Three Data Collection**

Phase three of data collection consisted of interviews with the seven teacher participants. Interviews with teachers took place in their classrooms after school or during lunch/planning period. The interviews lasted an average of half an hour and were voice recorded for transcription purposes. The participants were aware of and agreed to the interview being recorded. The interview was semi-structured and included the following questions (see Appendix D):

1. How do you define emotional health?
2. How do you maintain your emotional health as a teacher?
3. What difficulties do you encounter when trying to maintain emotional health?
4. What practices do you employ in the classroom to cultivate and maintain healthy relationships with students?
5. What barriers do you encounter in building healthy relationships with students?
6. In what ways do you model emotional health in the classroom?
7. In what ways does being a teacher force you to be vulnerable?

Interviews were then transcribed and names changed to pseudonyms to protect the privacy of the participants.

### **Data Analysis**

The first step in analyzing the data was to plot all the data from the survey to get an overall feel for the results. I created bar charts for the categorical and ordinal data to summarize the responses of the teachers overall. I then plotted the data to understand the results according to gender.

The next step in analyzing the data was to carefully read through my observation notes and interview transcripts. Detailed notes were made on transcripts and observation notes in each teacher case, noting broad themes that emerged from the data. The broad themes included: “teacher reflections on emotional health”, “ways teachers maintained and found difficulties in maintaining emotional health”, “how teachers cultivated relationships and difficulties in cultivating relationships”, “teacher modeling of emotional health in the classroom”, “good and bad vulnerability”, “how teachers experience shame”, and “teacher shame resilience”.

The larger themes were useful in enabling me to create codes to compare and contrast across cases. The major themes that emerged from these codes that pointed back to the research questions to be discussed later were “emotional balance”, “self-awareness”, “ability to control one’s emotions”, “personal and professional outlets for transparent discussion”, “teacher growth/maturity”, “compartmentalizing”, “grading”, “time”, “positivity”, “greeting”, “teen-speak”, “learning about students’ personal lives”, “one-on-one conversations”, “student reflective writing”, “counsel/encouragement”, “me-centric teaching”, “student poverty and trauma”, “students not wanting to do work”, “teacher is teacher, not friend”, “non-reactivity”, “help students gain perspective”, “comfort in admitting mistakes”, “first year teacher not knowing anything”, “apologizing”, “lawnmower parents”, “social media attacks”, “scripts”, “self-awareness of triggers”, “pressure on admin”, and “student/parent no personal accountability”.

### **Ethical Assurances**

As mentioned above, IRB permission was obtained before any research began. Participants were provided with a consent form outlining the nature of the research and commitment level required of participants. Participation was completely voluntary. Interviews

did not include any compromising questions addressing immigration status or illegal activity and were conducted in the privacy of the teacher's classrooms with all information collected kept secure and private. All names were changed in the study to ensure participant confidentiality. Faculty who did not indicate a willingness to participate via the initial survey were not contacted. Those who indicated a willingness to participate were given more detail about the research and informed of the voluntary nature of participation and the ability to withdraw at any time. Those who chose to participate were given a consent form to review and sign. I transcribed all interviews and pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participants in the transcripts. Some interview segments were redacted to preserve participants' identities. Audio files were destroyed after they were transcribed and digital research records will be stored securely for five years and then destroyed using commercial software designed to remove all data from the storage device.

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations to this study. First, there were very few studies that addressed shame in the context of teaching. The survey question regarding shame could have been multiple questions to gain a more nuanced understanding of how teachers experience shame. As the sole researcher, the sample size had to remain small and there were limitations to the number of interviews and observations I could conduct. The limitation was especially noticed due to only having one opportunity to observe each teacher. Sometimes the class activity did not lend itself to student-teacher interaction, and it was difficult to glean much information regarding student-teacher relationships.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

The purpose of this study was to understand the themes of courage and connection in teaching. In order to examine teacher social-emotional competence and how it influenced classroom practices and the development of relationships with students, I first used a survey to get a broad perspective of how secondary teachers in a large suburban high school respond to these ideas. The survey also gave me an idea of how many teachers had experienced shame in the workplace. From the findings of the survey, participants were selected for me to observe and interview based on their responses that indicated a commitment to developing student relationships and being a model of emotional health in the classroom. These teachers also indicated experiencing shame related to their role as a teacher. This chapter discusses the findings of the survey, observations, and interviews and the themes that emerged from the data collected. These sections point back to my original research questions:

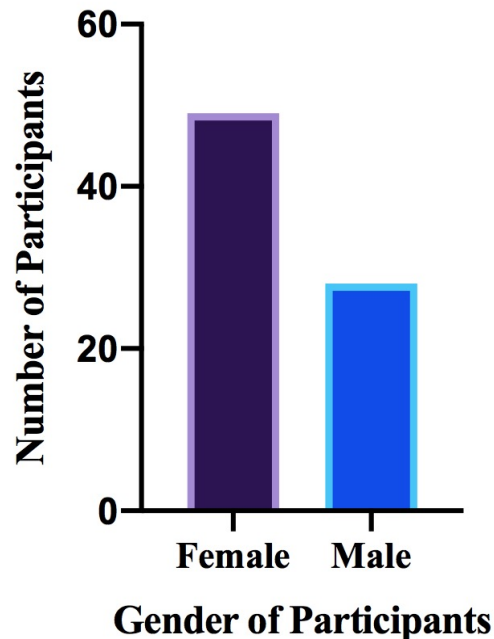
1. What are the characteristics of socially and emotionally competent teachers?
2. How does a teacher's social-emotional competence translate into classroom practices?
3. How do teachers experience and cope with feelings of shame?

### **Survey Findings**

60% of the reported 130 teachers on staff participated in a survey containing categorical and ordinal questions regarding emotional health, developing relationships with students, and experiencing shame. After agreeing to the consent to research question, teachers were asked to identify themselves by gender. Of the 77 respondents, 49 identified themselves as female (64%) and 28 identified themselves as male (36%). Although I was interested in how female/male perspectives differed in their responses, as will be discussed later, this question was primarily used to allow me to eliminate male candidates for subsequent phases of data collection.

Figure 1:

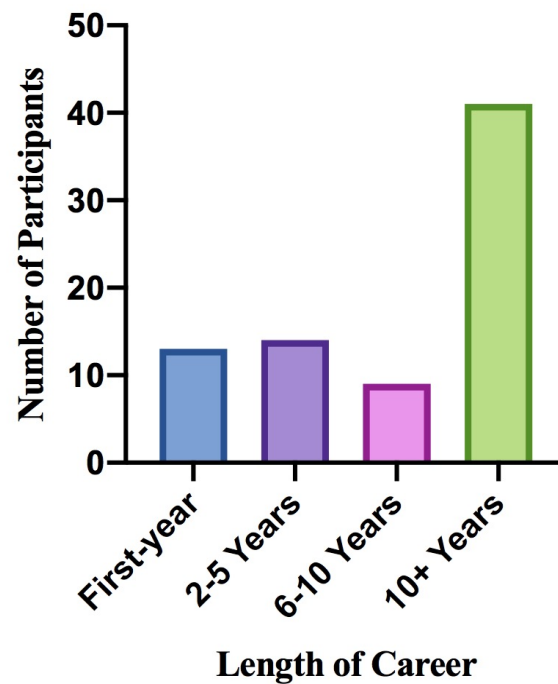
### Q1: Gender of Survey Participants



Next, participants were asked to identify how long they had been teaching in selecting one of four options: (1) This is my first year, (2) 2-5 years, (3) 6-10 years, (4) More than 10 years. 13 participants (17%) identified as first-year teachers; 14 (18%) teachers had been in the profession for 2-5 years; 9 (12%) teachers identified as having been teaching for 6-10 years; and 41 (53%) teachers had been teaching for 10 or more years. Sorting teachers into these categories allowed me to compare how length of career affected responses. It also helped me to identify two first-year, two mid-range, and two long-term career participants for the observation and interview portions of data collection. Interestingly, over half of the respondents had been teaching for over 10 years. Perhaps long-term teachers were more comfortable reflecting on their teaching practices and answering questions of a personal nature.

Figure 2:

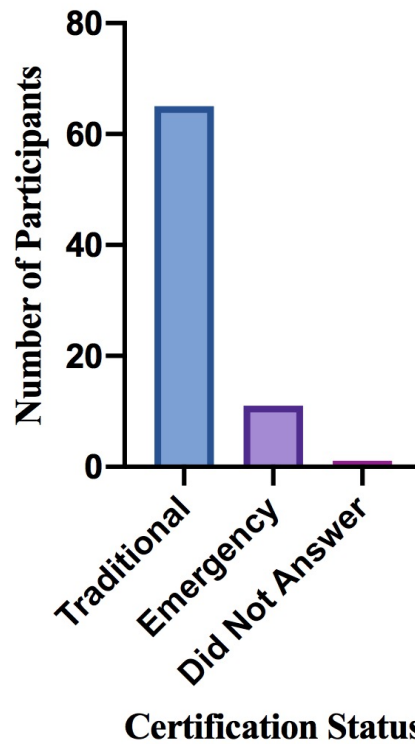
## Q2: Career Length of Participants



Question three asked participants to identify their certification status. This study was conducted in a state with one of the lowest teacher pay rates, and as a result an unprecedented number of teachers in public schools in this state are emergency certified and have little to no training upon entering the classroom. This question was relevant to this research in terms of studying the responses of emergency certified teachers to see how they value student relationship building and teacher SEC in the educational process and seeing how their responses compare with traditionally certified teachers. Since over half of the respondents had been teaching for more than 10 years, predictably, 65 teachers (86%) were traditionally certified. 11 teachers (14%) identified as being emergency certified. Interestingly, 62% of first-year teachers who responded identified as being emergency certified, which seems shockingly high, but is on trend with the current educational crisis in this state.

Figure 3:

### Q3: Certification Status of Participants



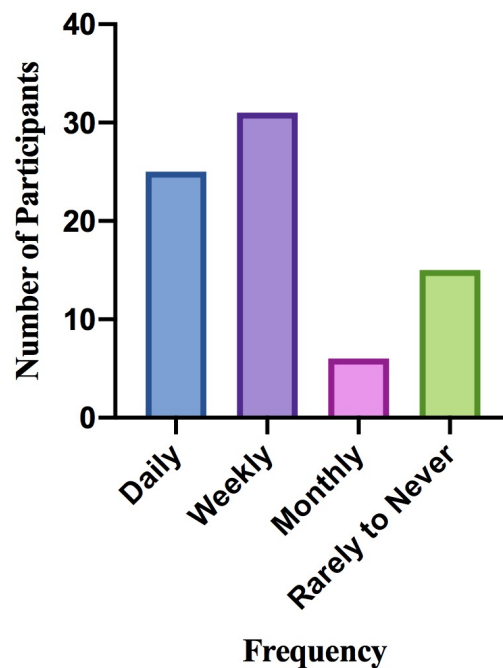
Question four asked participants to identify how often they take steps to maintain or better their emotional health during the school year. 25 teachers (32%) indicated that they attend to their emotional health daily; 31 teachers (40%) indicated that they weekly attend to their emotional health; 6 teachers (8%) attend to the emotional health on a monthly basis; and 15 teachers (19%) responded that they rarely to never tend to their emotional health. Broken down into length of career, the responses were as follows: first-year teachers: 23% daily, 62% weekly, and 15% rarely to never; 2-10 year teachers: 35% daily, 39% weekly, 13% monthly, and 13% rarely to never; 10+ year teachers: 34% daily, 34% weekly, 7% monthly, and 24% rarely to never. Broken down by gender the responses were as follows: female teachers: 27% daily, 43% weekly, 12% monthly, and 18% rarely to never; and male teachers: 43% daily, 36% weekly, and 21% rarely to never. Although most teachers responded that they tended to their emotional



health either daily or weekly, there were a substantial amount of teachers who reported that they rarely or never tend to their emotional health. Although responses were similar according to gender (Rarely to never reported by females 18% and males 21%), teachers with 10+ years of experience had the highest number of teachers reporting that they rarely to never tend to their emotional health at 24%.

Figure 4:

#### Q4: How Often Teachers Take Steps to Maintain Emotional Health

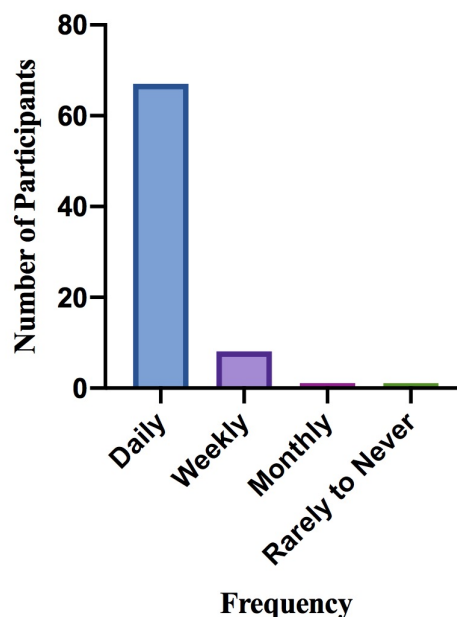


Question five asked teachers how often they took deliberate steps to develop healthy relationships with students. 67 teachers (87%) identified that they daily take steps to develop healthy relationships with students; 8 teachers (10%) take steps weekly; 1 teacher (1%) takes steps monthly; and 1 teacher (1%) rarely to never takes steps to develop relationships with students. It is interesting to note that 77% of first year teachers took daily steps to develop healthy relationships with students, whereas 91% of teachers who have taught for 2-10 years and

89% of teachers who have taught for 10+ years identify as taking deliberate steps daily to develop relationships with students. There was not a significant difference between female and male respondents with 86% of females identifying as taking steps daily and 90% of males taking steps daily to develop relationships with students.

Figure 5:

### Q5: How Often Teachers Take Steps to Develop Relationships with Students

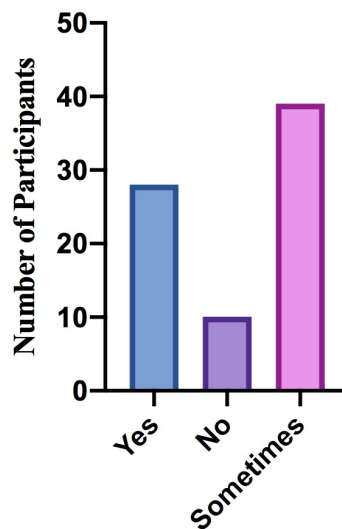


In question six, teachers were asked if they believed their emotional state affected the way they interacted with students in the classroom. 28 teachers (36%) indicated “yes”, 10 teachers (13%) indicated “no”, and 39 teachers (51%) indicated that sometimes their emotional state affected the way they interacted with students. The numbers were fairly consistent within the gender and career length categories with one notable exception. 23% of first-year teachers indicated that their emotional state did not affect the way they interacted with students, as opposed to 4% of 2-10 year teachers and 15% of 10+ years teachers. This increased response of

“no” from first-year teachers may indicate that first-year teachers either lack self-awareness of how their emotions affect their students or it could indicate that this group of teachers lack the confidence to be transparent in their responses.

Figure 6:

**Q6: Does Your Emotional State Affect the Way You Interact with students?**

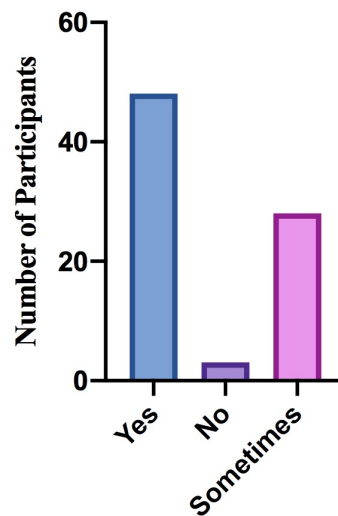


Question seven asked teachers if they considered themselves models of emotional health for students. 46 teachers (60%) responded “yes”, three teachers (4%) responded “no”, and 28 teachers (36%) responded “sometimes”. There were interesting differences in responses when looking at the length of career categories. First-year teachers responded as follows: 46% indicated yes, 15% indicated no, and 39% indicated sometimes; 2-10 years teachers responded as follows: 39% “yes”, 4% “no”, and 57% “sometimes”; and 10+ years teachers responded as follows: 68% “yes”, 2% “no”, and 29% “sometimes”. It is notable that 15% of first-year teachers do not consider themselves models of emotional health, compared with 2% of teachers who have been in the field for 10 or more years. It is possible that with more training,

experience, and maturity comes the recognition of the important role that SEC plays in the learning environment.

Figure 7:

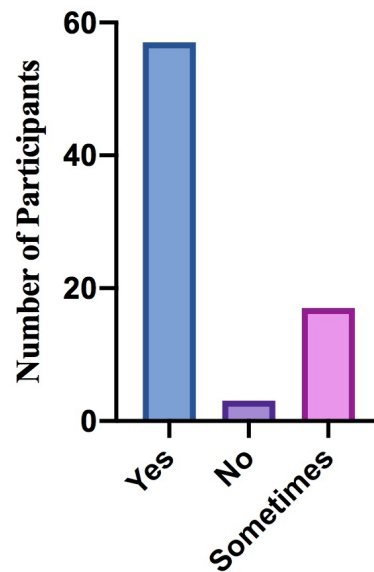
**Q7 - Do You Consider Yourself a Model of Emotional Health for Your Students?**



Question eight asked participants if they embraced vulnerability in their teaching practices. 57 teachers (74%) indicated “yes”, 3 (4%) teachers indicated “no”, and 17 teachers (22%) indicated “sometimes”. Once again, the length of career categories provided interesting detail to consider. First-year teachers responded as follows: 77% indicated yes and 23% indicated sometimes; 2-10 years teachers responded as follows: 83% “yes”, 4% “no”, and 13% “sometimes”; and 10+ years teachers responded as follows: 68% “yes”, 5% “no”, and 27% “sometimes”. Higher percentages of early (77%) and mid-range (83%) career teachers responded that they embraced vulnerability in their teaching practices, more so than long-term career teachers (68%). There is a chance that with the comfort of experience comes the risk of complacency and a lack of risk-taking.

Figure 8:

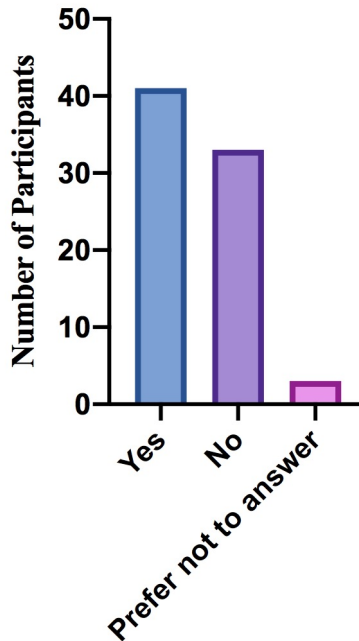
### Q8 - Do You Embrace Vulnerability in Your Teaching Practices?



Question nine of the survey asked participants if they had experienced shame as a result of interactions with students, parents, colleagues, and/or administrators. 41 teachers (53%) responded “yes”, 33 teachers (43%) responded “no”, and 3 teachers (4%) preferred not to answer. The breakdown of responses according to length of career are as follows: first-year teachers: 69% indicated “yes”, 23% indicated “no”, and 8% preferred not to answer; 2-10 years teachers: 61% “yes”, 30% “no”, and 9% preferred not to answer; and 10+ years teachers: 44% “yes” and 56% indicated “no”. The large percentage of early and mid-range career teachers that experience shame as a result of their job indicate that this is a relevant field of study in that shame may be specifically detrimental to early and mid-range teachers.

Figure 9:

**Q9 - Have you experienced feelings of shame as a result of interactions with students, parents, colleagues, and/or administrators?**



Finally, participants were asked if they would be willing to participate in subsequent phases of the research study and were asked to leave an email address if they indicated “yes”. 37 teachers (48%) were willing to participate in observations and interviews and 40 (52%) were not willing. The teachers who left their email addresses were the candidates considered for observations and interviews.

**Teacher Profiles and Observations**

This section addresses the teachers who volunteered and were selected to participate in the next phases of data collection. Although my original plan was to interview and observe six teachers who were willing and fit the criteria of showing a commitment to building positive relationships with students and having an awareness of how emotional health affected classroom practices, there were seven who responded and met the aforementioned criteria. I decided to observe all seven teachers as I was curious to see how teacher SEC translated into a variety of

content areas and settings. This section will address the profiles of the teacher participants, the settings of their classrooms, and the lessons I observed them teaching. I was specifically interested in how these teachers interacted with their students and the emotional climate of the classrooms led by each teacher. I noted the details of the physical space, the number of students and the gender and ethnic makeup of the classes, the number of personal interactions teachers had with their students, and the number of times they called their students by name. I wrote down how many times students were off task or looking at their cell phones. I tried to capture in words the tone of the teachers and classroom environments and wrote down direct quotes to assist in that.

### **Isobel**

Isobel was emergency certified and is a first-year teacher teaching Dance and Intro to Speech. In her survey responses she identified tending to her personal emotional health on a weekly basis and she believed that her emotional state affected the way she interacts with her students. She indicated that she takes daily steps to develop positive relationships with her students and she believed that she is sometimes an example of emotional health to her students. Isobel believed that she embraced vulnerability in her teaching practices and she indicated that had experienced shame as a result of her interactions with students, parents, colleagues and/or administrators.

Isobel was a young teacher in her 20s who dresses casually and trendy. She resembled her students in both age and appearance. I observed her teaching an Intro to Speech class. The class consisted of 13 Caucasian students, seven Hispanic students, and two African-American students, for a total of 22 students. Desks were grouped in threes mostly and there was lots of

“encouraging” and “positive” signage on the walls of the classroom. There were “great job” awards taped to the board in the back of the room addressed to students.

Isobel was introducing a new speech assignment and had speech topics taped to the board for the students to browse and choose one that interested them. The speech topics consisted of controversial topics such as racism, mass shootings, nuclear weapons, gay relationships, drugs/cocaine, and recreational marijuana. Students seemed excited to browse topics and select a topic of interest for the new assignment. Isobel encouraged students to form their own opinions regarding their chosen topic and said to the students, “I’m not going to tell you how I feel about a certain topic until you’ve given your speech”.

Once the assignment was introduced and the speech topics were chosen, Isobel spent the entire rest of the class period engaging the students in one-on-one conversations regarding their topics and their views on the topics. She spoke with them in a warm and enthusiastic manner and they appeared to be comfortable talking with her. I also overheard her telling a student something of a personal nature when she said, “My parents split up when I was 17 and I didn’t want to stay with my mom.” I observed 30 total personal interactions between Isobel and her students. Once the speech topics were chosen and students began the research process, I noticed five instances of students on their phones and five instances of other off-task behavior. I observed Isobel addressed students by name three times during the class period.

### **Anna**

Anna was an emergency certified first-year teacher teaching AP and Pre-AP Biology. She weekly took steps to develop positive relationships with students and believed that she is sometimes an example of emotional health to her students. She believed that her emotional state affected the way she interacted with her students and she took weekly steps to tend to her



personal emotional health. Anna believed that she embraced vulnerability in her teaching practices and she indicated that experienced shame as a result of her interactions with students, parents, colleagues and/or administrators.

Anna was a young, heavily-pregnant teacher whom I observed teaching Freshman Pre-AP Biology. Her classroom was a science lab with tables seating two students each. There were 29 students and the class consisted of 24 Caucasian students, four Asian students, and one African-American student. There were 14 female students and 15 male students. Anna was professionally dressed and smiled a lot at her students. There were no noticeable decorations in the classroom. Anna used a projector to project her bellwork assignment on the board. She used a wireless microphone to introduce the assignment and give instructions. Once the instructions were given she asked members of the class to repeat the instructions.

The lesson consisted of students using paper cut-outs and pipe cleaners to create cell mitosis and meiosis. Students used expo markers to label their cells on the table tops. Students then used their phones to take pictures of their completed cells with labels and uploaded the pictures to Google Classroom. The students seemed engaged with this lesson.

After the instructions and as students worked, Anna spent the rest of the class period engaging with the small groups of students working together. I observed her speaking one-on-one with students 25 times throughout the class period. I observed her address a student by name once. Although she was a bit soft-spoken, she was warm and positive with the students. She also had a sense of humor, telling the students, “(we will be) making babies on Monday with our table partners” in reference to the upcoming Science lesson.

**Cecilia**

Cecilia was a certified teacher in her 6th year of teaching English, Debate, and Mock Trial. She indicated in her survey that she believed her emotional state affected the way she interacted with her students and that she took steps on a monthly basis to tend to her personal emotional health. Cecilia believed that she is sometimes a model of emotional health to her students and she took daily steps to develop positive relationships with her students. She indicated that she sometimes embraced vulnerability in her teaching practices and she had experienced shame as a result of her interactions with students, parents, colleagues and/or administrators.

Cecilia is a relatively young, casually dressed teacher whom I observed teaching Mock Trial. Her classroom was very decorated with one noticeable bulletin board that was full of graduation announcements and other mementos given to her by former students. Desks were arranged in groups of five and the class consisted of 21 students. Of the 21 students, there were nine females and 12 males; there were 17 Caucasian students and three African-American students. The students all had Chromebooks and Cecilia walked about the room monitoring to make sure students were on task. The students had prepared a cross-examination exercise and Cecilia gave them instruction as they went through the exercise. When students were unprepared, she confronted them in a stern manner. Throughout the class period, Cecilia addressed students by name 18 times. She had one-on-one interactions with students four times. Cecilia was stern in her reminders to students to put their phones away and to remain seated before the bell rang for dismissal. Several students seemed very engaged during the lesson, and others did not speak or engage in the lesson at all. It was unclear if this was due to the fact that only certain groups were “performing” their cross-examinations on that day. That being said, there was no obvious off-task behavior noted.

**Kate**

Kate is a certified teacher in her 6th year of teaching Virtual Academy. Virtual Academy is a track designed to allow students who have not succeeded in a traditional classroom due to illness, absences, or discipline issues to work at their own pace to complete coursework that they had previously failed. Kate, along with a second certified teacher, were their primary teachers, guiding students as they worked through their coursework. In her survey, Kate indicated that she believed that she was a model of emotional health to her students and that she took daily steps to tend to her emotional health. She took daily steps to develop positive relationships with students and believed that her emotional state sometimes affects the way she interacts with her students. Kate indicated that she embraced vulnerability in her teaching practices and that she has experienced shame as a result of her position as a teacher.

Kate is a professionally dressed, middle-aged teacher with a Virtual Academy class of 10 students. The class consists of five females and five males, all Caucasian. The physical space is relatively small and contains small tables with two students at each table. I did not glean a lot of information from my observation on Kate's class period. She explained each student works at his or her own pace online to complete missing or failed coursework. She checks in with each student at least twice a day, but unless they need specific help, they work independently. I observed her have a personal interaction with three students and call one student by name during the class period.

**Hannah**

Hannah was a certified teacher in her 6th year of teaching Pre-AP and on level Geometry. She indicated in her survey that she took steps daily to develop healthy relationships with students and that she believed that she is sometimes an example of emotional health to her

students. She believed that her emotional state sometimes affected the way she interacted with her students. She also indicated that she rarely to never takes steps to maintain or better her emotional health. Hannah indicated that she sometimes embraced vulnerability in her teaching practices and that she had experienced shame as a result of her position as a teacher.

I observed Hannah's on-level Geometry class. This class was an inclusion, co-taught class with a Special Ed teacher. Hannah is a fairly soft-spoken, relatively young teacher. Her class consisted of 25 students; 12 females and 14 males. The race breakdown of the class was as follows: 19 Caucasian students, two African-American students, three Hispanic students, and one Asian student. Desks were arranged in small groups of four or five. The lesson consisted of using formulas to measure circumference. The students worked in groups and were guided by a list of tasks on a worksheet. Although Hannah was stern in announcing that anyone with a cell phone out would be assigned two detentions, I noticed three instances of students on their phone when they should have been working. When the students completed all the tasks on their lists, Hannah gave them each a moonpie to eat. Many students seemed pretty excited to get their moonpie, a few did not seem to be motivated at all. Hannah cycled through the room the entire class period and I observed her talking with students 28 times. She was upbeat and positive and she was not flustered even when she and the co-teacher disagreed on how to solve a problem in front of the students. At the end of class Hannah read *Sir Cumference and the First Round Table (A Math Adventure)* by Cindy Neuschwander and Wayne Geehan which some students enjoyed and others were not paying attention.

### **Sara**

Sara was a certified teacher in her 23rd year of teaching Music. In her survey responses she indicated that she believed that she was a model of emotional health to her students and that

her emotional state affected the way she interacted with her students. She also responded that she rarely to never tends to her personal emotional health. She took steps daily to develop positive relationships with students. Sara indicated that she embraced vulnerability in her teaching practices and she had experienced shame as a result of her position as a teacher.

Sara was a casually-dressed, middle-aged teacher. I observed her teaching a Freshman, all girl choir class of 55 students. The ethnic breakdown of the class was as follows: 26 Caucasian students, four African-American students, four Hispanic students, and one Asian student. The space was a large choir room with students seated on risers. Before class began I observed Sara having a personal conversation with students. The students were sharing personal stories with her as she listened. The class began by Sara leading the students in physical and vocal warmups. Students used hand gestures to help them remember varying singing techniques. After warmups, Sara led the students through several songs they had been practicing for an upcoming recital. Sara had the students repeat the same exercise with slight variation, increasing in difficulty. When working through a song Sara would respond with phrases such as, “That wasn’t terrible,” or “Almost, but not quite.” I observed Sara interact personally with students four times and she called students by name 10 times throughout the class period. Throughout the class period, Sara infused life lessons into the content, such as growth mindset. She said such things as, “Whether you think you can or you can’t, you’re right.” She also encouraged students performing solos or singing in small groups to accept constructive criticism from their peers. Those students receiving feedback from members of the class were asked to thank them when they finished giving their feedback. Most of the class was on task the entire class period. I did not see any student on her phone. There was an instance when Sara has to correct students that were talking during the lesson. In that instance, Sara kept the correction light and said with

feigned shock, “Is there talking over there?” That was enough to correct the behavior. She was a very positive, energetic presence throughout the class period.

### **Emma**

Emma was a certified teacher in her 17th year of teaching Drama. In her survey responses she indicated that she tended to her personal emotional health on a daily basis and believed that her emotional state affected the way she interacted with her students. She believed that she is sometimes an example of emotional health to her students and she indicated that she takes steps daily to develop positive relationships with students. Emma indicated that she embraced vulnerability in her teaching practices and that she had experienced shame as a result of her position as a teacher.

Emma was a professionally dressed teacher whom I observed teaching a Sophomore Theatre II class. The class consisted of 23 students, 15 girls and seven boys. The ethnic breakdown of the class was as follows: 22 Caucasian students and one African-American student. The classroom space was a large room with carpeted risers where the students sat. The classroom was somewhat cluttered with theatre props and such. A large sign on the wall read: you audition for me every day. To start class Emma said to the students, “Clap twice if you can hear me.” The students responded by quieting down and paying attention as Emma gave announcements and asked, “Does anyone have anything to share for the good of the group?” The students were rehearsing scenes they had written in preparation for upcoming performances. They worked independently and Emma cycled through the groups watching their progress and making notes on an iPad. The students were very engaged in what they were doing and I only observed one instance of a one-on-one interaction between Emma and a student. I noted only a few instances of off-task behaviors among the students. Because the students were working

independently on an already established project, I did not feel like the observation shed much light on how Emma interacted with her students.

### **Teacher Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the seven teacher participants to gain more insight on their views of SEC and how it translated into their classroom practices. The open-ended questions were designed to point back to the research questions and shed more light on the teacher observations. The quotes included in this section were selected to point out relevant themes and because the subject of SEC is so personal to each of the participants, allowing their words to illustrate seemed most appropriate.

#### **Isobel**

When asked to define emotional health in her own words, Isobel, a first-year, emergency certified Speech and Dance teacher, communicated a common theme among several teachers: finding a balance. She also said that emotional health was, “Being okay with what life throws at you”. In order to maintain her personal emotional health, she made sure she had at least one hour to herself a week. She liked to go get her lashes done every two weeks as a way of treating herself to something that made her feel good. She doesn’t like the gym, so she stayed active by taking a dance class once a month. As a young mother, she found it very difficult to balance life as a new teacher and a parent. With teaching being her first full-time job, she struggled with the time spent away from her young son and felt like she is missing out on a lot. She made time to take her son to the park for an hour occasionally which was good for their relationship. She said this allowed her to decompress, which is another theme that was common throughout the interviews. Finally she identified *Netflix* as a way of maintaining emotional health, which is something else that appeared in multiple interviews. This is an interesting theme to explore, but

is beyond the scope of this project: identifying the difference between emotionally healthy behaviors and numbing behaviors.

Isobel identified grading as a challenge in maintaining her emotional health. She felt a lot of pressure to complete grading by a certain time period and to have the administration mandated two grades a week. She felt like she did not have enough time to plan for two different courses. She did not want to take her work home with her because she had a lot of responsibilities at home to tend to. She also struggled with becoming emotionally involved in the struggles of her students. She explained, “I really struggle with at the end of the day, I know they’re not going to go to the best home and I’ve gotten better at it, but it used to eat me up inside.”

I asked Isobel how she developed relationships with her students and she explained that because she is so young, and is even mistaken for a student as times, the students could relate to her better. She said that she understood the stress they are under as students, and was open with them about that. She was open with them from the beginning of the school year and told them that, “whatever you need, I’m here for you.” She believed that it is the job of a teacher to be somebody for kids that “don’t have somebody” because teachers spend a significant amount of time with their students. She shared several instances of how relationships had impacted her students and her personally:

So I've got a girl right now and she is 19. She dropped out last year as a senior and she doesn't live with, she doesn't talk to her dad. Her mom kicked her out. She's kind of got that whole situation and she's literally putting herself through school while she's working almost full time. She's living with a family friend, I guess until she can graduate. And there were days that she would just come in in



the morning and I could tell she worked at Ihop so she wouldn't get home from work til three o'clock in the morning. And then have to get up in the morning and come here to get her education. And she didn't really have anybody but herself to push her. And so I really tried to help her and I was like, you know, it sucks right now, but it's so worth it. You're almost there, you know? And I really was that only source of that drive for her, I think. I mean she wanted to be done, but you know, when she could just be sleeping because she just got home four hours before she had to come to school or whatever. So that really really touched me.

I've had two cases where I had some girl drop out. She was my server at a restaurant and I knew she was pretty young. She wasn't in school and I was like, are you not in school? She said, no, I dropped out and we made this connection and now she's back in school and she's graduating in two weeks. And I met her in September, I think. So school had already started and she got back in and so she's actually graduating in two weeks. I feel like she didn't really (have anyone). She has her mom and her dad. They're her parents, but I don't think they really pushed her to get done like I did. So she's almost done. She's got two weeks and then she's going to be a high school graduate and going to college. So, you know, I feel like I made an impact on her life, but I feel like she's making an impact on mine too because she's a good kid. She just needed some guidance, I guess.

I have two transgender kids who are really struggling, not only just like dealing with high school, but really finding who they are. They're transitioning and I'm all about that, but I can tell that they're struggling with who they are and

who they want to be. And I tell him if this is a permanent thing, then that's great. If it's not, if you're confused, and that's okay too. You're 16 and life is a way more than high school. So I'm trying to help them out.

And I've got a girl who, her boyfriend committed suicide in October and he used to go here. He didn't go here anymore, but I have a lot of his friends too. And that really took a toll on me too because you know, you just don't ever expect it and it's hard on these kids and then it makes you want to do so much for them. But you know, there's only so much you can do. So that's just some of it.

Isobel was interested and involved in her students' individual stories and took an active role in reaching out and getting to know them. She was aware of and sensitive to the emotional turmoil many of her students were experiencing and tried to be a source of encouragement both on a personal and academic level.

She respected her students' individuality in the classroom by giving them choice in the topics they chose for speeches and she was very active in talking with them one on one. She indicated that she really wanted to know the views of her students and to "pick their brains" about why they think what they think. She felt as if she did not have interaction with her students that they would not learn anything.

Isobel acknowledged that she had encountered barriers to developing relationships with students. She had observed that some students are "too cool for school" and these students believed they "don't have to tell my teacher anything cause what does she know?" Students with this attitude toward the teacher were more defiant, especially toward the end of the year and did

not want to do any work. Isobel respected her students individual choices, but made sure they understood the consequences of their actions saying, “You’re grown enough to make that call but you’re still going to get a zero. So you know, you can make that decision because you’re capable of it, but you have to know the consequences.” Even though she struggled with students’ bad attitudes, she acknowledged that she had a bad attitude as a high school student, “So I’m really trying to come at it in a way where, I get it. I was in high school not that long ago. I get it.”

I asked her if her young age and being a brand new teacher caused her to struggle with managing her classroom. She acknowledged that although she felt like her students respected her, sometimes they view her more as a friend than a teacher. She had to draw a line, even if they were having a good conversation, to make sure that the students focused on their work.

I asked Isobel how she modeled emotional health to her students and she recounted several instances when she acknowledged her students’ hard work upon completing a unit. She would give them a free class period saying, “...you guys have been really working hard, we will have a Halloween party. You can do it. You can bring food. You can do nothing in my class but hang out and chill. You did awesome and I’m proud of you and you deserve a break. You deserve it. You’ve been working your butts off.” She believed her students appreciated her acknowledging how much pressure was on them and how overwhelmed they felt and she believed rewarding their hard work contributed to a positive classroom environment.

Isobel also talked one-on-one with her students and gave them feedback on their work. She encouraged them to acknowledge their mistakes and to learn from them and keep improving. She acknowledged that she is just as human as her students are and that she was open about

telling them this. I asked Isobel if, as a first year teacher, she was comfortable acknowledging her mistakes in front of her students. She said, “Oh yes, absolutely. I’m definitely, because I feel like as a first year (teacher) I’m guaranteed to mess up. I just feel like I don’t have any other choice but to accept it because I feel like if you don’t accept your failures then you can’t learn from your mistakes.”

Isobel further embraced vulnerability in other ways like giving an example speech in front of her class in which she showed emotion. She said her speech was a tribute to her grandmother who passed away and it was a big loss in her life. She thought it was helpful for the students to see her be emotional and to see a side of her that wasn’t strictly business. She also thought doing the same assignments as the students in front of the class was a helpful example for students that may feel intimidated in front of their peers.

Isobel said that she has experienced feelings of shame in her new role as a teacher. She recounted one example:

I had one girl who I had to give her detention and I thought it was for a good reason. She just walked out of a class and I was like, ‘what are you doing?’ So I emailed her mom that she had detention and this parent just came out like I was awful for giving her daughter detention for leaving my class. And I told her that, you know, that was just policy. Well, she came up to parent teacher (conference) and just like tried to like ring my neck. And I was like, well, I don't make the rules, I just have to follow them. And so she kind of made me feel shameful about it, even though I knew I was doing the right thing. So, I think it was interesting how I've noticed lots of parents think that their kids or could never do anything

wrong. And and then when I tell them go, 'oh, there's no way,' and then I tell them in front of their kid and their kid is not going to lie to me - and they get caught. I didn't think I was doing anything wrong, but the parent made me kind of feel that way.

I asked her how she copes when she is feeling shame. She responded by saying that she is able to relate to the parent's response because she is a parent and understands the desire to "protect your baby". However, it was helpful for her to compartmentalize her feelings as much as possible, which is a concept that appears multiple times throughout the interviews. When she left school, she had to put aside her worry about her student's parent, so she could be a parent to her own child.

She also acknowledged that talking to other more experienced teachers was helpful in overcoming feelings of shame. One experienced teacher said to her, "you don't take the shit talking, you give it", and emphasized that it was her job to teach the kids and if they do something that requires disciplinary action she has to follow school policy.

After her first incident with an angry and unreasonable parent that caused her to feel shame, she said she knew "what needs to happen" and how better to deal with that situation. She told me she was definitely prepared to handle the situation when it occurs again. I asked her how she would respond and she said, "I just feel like I'm not going to let it affect me." I asked her if that was realistic and she said, "No." Although going through the parent confrontation and experiencing shame will be helpful in not being blindsided in the future, Isobel was still fairly inarticulate in her plan of action when experiencing shame again, saying,

I've just never had someone come at me like that before. And so I'm just going to lay it all out and be like, this is the rules. This is how it is. Your kid messed up. I don't know what else to tell you. This is what's going to happen if your kid doesn't serve the detention they get ISI, et cetera, et cetera. And that's just the way it is. And I feel like I was kind of like trying to turn it around on me in some way. I was like, 'Oh, maybe I did mess up.' And then I was like, 'no, I didn't.' I knew the rules and I did what I had been told by administration. So, and then Denny helped me talking to her, telling me that I shouldn't get any shit talking to me. So I definitely feel like I tried to turn it on myself, but now I know that I wasn't in the wrong.

Because of this parent confrontation that caused Isobel to experience feelings of shame, she developed a "script" to deal with any future confrontations. Scripts as a means of shame resilience was a theme that appeared in multiple interviews. Teachers with more experience had scripts for many potential emotionally volatile situations. Although Isobel's script was inarticulate, having a script or plan is a way a teacher can guard her emotional well-being by becoming shame resilient.

Finally, I asked Isobel about her emergency certification teaching status and if she felt like she was lacking essential skills she needed for her job. She told me that she felt like she had no idea what she is doing all the time. Although she said she was getting encouragement from her administrator, she still felt like she was not doing a good job. She said she was continually asking herself, "why didn't I know that? Or why didn't I think of that?" She said she has to forgive herself a lot because of what she does not know because she did not get traditional

teacher training. But she felt “destined to do this job” because she “loves it so much” and she “cares so much about (the students)” which makes all the difficulties “worth it”. Isobel found it very hard to make mistakes, but she had a growth perspective when she said, “I’m really excited for next year because I’ll have everything laid out and I can learn from my mistakes.” The themes of self-compassion and growth mindset are important parts of maintaining emotional well-being and appear throughout the interviews.

### **Anna**

When I asked emergency certified, first-year Biology teacher, Anna, to describe emotional health, she said, “emotional health is a sense of well-being not just in the absence of distress, but having a peace of mind.” Similar to Isobel, Anna believed that emotional health was not something achieved in the absence of difficulty, but something that provided strength and stability to face difficulties.

Anna indicated that she maintained her emotional health by relaxing during the weekend. She mentioned the common theme of compartmentalizing - not thinking about school on the weekend. I asked her if she brought home papers to grade on the weekend. She admitted she did, but she tried to set aside at least “a few hours each weekend to take care of myself”. I asked her how she maintained her emotional health during the week and she admitted that she was usually thinking about school nonstop and was not good about taking care of herself. She said she tried to “step back and breathe”, which is a theme that appeared in other interviews. Meditative practices have been shown to be helpful in maintaining emotional well-being.

Anna tried not to take student behavior personally, but found that students and parents who “try to blame everything on the teacher” made it difficult for her to maintain a positive attitude. She struggled with the notion that if the student is doing poorly in class, the parents will do everything they can to deflect blame onto the teacher for the student’s poor performance. Her biggest challenge was how quick parents were to blame her for the student’s poor performance rather than figuring out how the student could do better. She encountered a lot of students and parents with “no personal accountability whatsoever”. This was another unfortunate theme woven throughout several interviews. There are so many emotions tied into the parent/child dynamic that sadly lead to teachers becoming convenient punching bags for parents with thwarted expectations. So, the question is not *if* a teacher will take one on the chin, but *when* she does, how will she respond in way to preserve her own emotional well being and preserve the relationship with the student and parent? This is a concept explored throughout several interviews.

In order to develop positive relationships with students, Anna made a habit of greeting her students as they entered the classroom and made a point to ask every student about something related to their life at some point weekly. She was attentive and listened when they talked about things they cared about and noted and remembered the things going on in their lives. I asked her how she found out about quiet students who are less likely to talk openly with the teacher and she mentioned that she used bell work to ask students personal questions like, “how are you feeling?” or “how was your Christmas break?” to learn about the lives of introverted students. She found that a lot of students actually open up through writing, though



she admitted, “some (students) are like a closed book” and was not sure how to solve the problem.

The biggest barrier that Anna identified in developing healthy relationships with students was when students had a preconceived notion that the teacher was the enemy. She had some students who believed she was the enemy because she was there to make them do work which was in direct opposition to their objective of socializing. These students did not open up to her because they had learned that they do not like teachers and teachers are there to make them do stuff they do not want to do. This was surprising considering Anna teaches Pre-AP and AP courses. She believed that some parents push their kids who do not have the motivation or academic skills to enroll in Pre-AP and AP courses, which can be problematic for student morale and classroom climate.

Anna modeled emotional health to students by counseling students when she saw an unhealthy student interaction. Depending on the nature of the offence, she either counseled her students in class or privately out in the hall. She said things like, “Hey, it’s important that we think about how our actions are perceived by others. I know that you probably didn’t mean it to come across like that, but the way you said this could have been perceived this way by someone else.” When a student said something to her that was out of line, she modeled emotional healthy behavior by “keeping her cool” and not getting upset. She shared that sometimes students were just trying to get a rise out of her and she made the choice to stay calm and not get upset.

Anna believed that vulnerability was just part of the nature of being a teacher because of the volume of personal interaction involved. She believed there were so many possible people to have conflict with, especially children who are not cognitively fully developed yet. She also felt

vulnerable due to the fact that she came into the profession as an emergency certified teacher with no formal teacher training. As a former engineer, Anna was obviously highly intelligent, but similar to Isobel, she admitted, “when I started I was like, I have no idea what I’m doing. I still kind of feel that way.” I asked her if she felt supported by her colleagues, and she said she did, but she felt guilty for “constantly asking (her) coworkers for help”. She admitted, “I feel like I am asking too much of them. There were times when it was like every single day I had to go ask them a question.” It was pretty clear that Anna was not fully aware of the burden and difficulty of being an untrained, emergency certified, first-year teacher. Even the most intelligent and capable person would experience difficulty and distress. She lacked self-compassion, which is necessary to face mistakes with grace to maintain emotional stability.

Anna recounted a situation with a difficult student that caused her to experience shame. This student was very hateful to Anna because she saw the teacher as the enemy and did not want to cooperate with her. Anna and this student never had any positive interaction and out of frustration, Anna spoke poorly of this student to another student. She recalled, “I shouldn’t talk about students to another student. It’s unprofessional and it’s just not the right thing to do. And so I felt a lot of shame as a result of making that comment about her.” Anna felt limited in her ability to handle the student’s behavior problems and in her ability to establish a relationship with the reluctant student, and consequently, she took the student’s behavior personally and made a professional error that caused her to feel shame and damage the relationship with the student beyond repair.

Anna also mentioned parents as a source of shame. As mentioned before, Anna was deeply troubled by students and parents that would deflect blame onto the teacher for the student's poor performance. She recalled one such incident:

This parent forced her son to be in all pre-AP classes and he doesn't want to be because, first of all, he's not motivated, and second of all, I don't know that he even really has the aptitude to be in pre-AP classes. He's just not a strong student and she's forced him to be in pre-AP classes and he's getting Cs and Ds. Well she's deflecting all the blame onto the teachers. And so she emails all of his teachers and then copies the principals all the way up to Dr. Walker going on this whole diatribe about how we're not doing enough to help them. We're not doing our part to help him. And basically she wants us to spoon feed him and like basically like type out every assignment, every quiz, like every little thing like type it out and send it her. And so she can help him keep on top of all his work. And it's not really my responsibility to type up and send her like a daily summary. If I did that for every single student that would be a lot of extra work. And I mean I kind of do that cause I do put everything on Google classroom so it kind of is available to her anyway. But it's just the fact that she was deflecting blame on me for her student not performing well. And then basically telling my boss that, oh, you know these teachers aren't doing enough to help my son. And so that kind of stuff does irritate me because it's like, no, the reason why he's not doing well is because he's on his phone all the time. I'm constantly having to tell him to get off of his phone. He's always sleeping during class. I'm always having to prompt him to get your head off your desk.

Parents who shift unnecessary blame for a student's poor performance onto teachers are detrimental to teachers on multiple levels. Such incidents can cause teachers to experience the emotional turmoil of shame and it robs teachers of the limited planning time they have strategizing how to deal with parents who are unreasonable. Teachers need solid scripts or plans in place to deal with such incidents to limit the emotional and cognitive burden so that they can do their job of teaching and building relationships with students effectively.

### **Cecilia**

English, Debate, and Mock Trial teacher in her sixth year, Cecilia, described emotional health as a person having balance. She remarked, "It's like a cup. As teachers we pour from our cup all day long. I think that the cup has to get refilled. The balance has to exist or I'm completely off my game." Cecilia tried to refill her emotional cup at least once a month by checking in with friends and family who ask her how she is doing and ask what they can do to help if she needs it. She also "checks in" internally by journaling.

Cecilia's day to day maintenance of her emotional health involves decompressing during her 30 minute drive home from work. She does not take calls or listen to the radio during the drive home, but uses that time to be alone with her thoughts and reset before she gets to her second job. Cecilia mentioned a point in her career when she lived closer to the school and did not have the opportunity to decompress on her drive home. She noticed during that two year period that she was more emotionally unstable. Like many teachers in the region, Cecilia went directly from school to her second job. Without alone time during her commute, she felt overwhelmed. Solitude is another important theme that emerges from several interviews. With the emotional demands of the sheer volume of people that teachers deal with everyday, the importance of solitude for some teachers should not be underestimated. This could be especially

important for teachers working multiple jobs or teachers with the demands of children and responsibilities at home.

Cecilia identified a lack of time as a barrier to maintaining her emotional health. She felt pressured by grading, email, and phone calls after school hours and found it difficult to balance work, her second job, pursuing a Master's degree, and her personal relationships. She admitted that she lacked the time after all of the aforementioned to always eat healthy, exercise, and take care of herself in general.

Although Cecilia found it hard to maintain balance in her career, she believed the relationships she formed with her students made the struggles worthwhile. She said the key to developing positive relationships with students was communication. She made her position on emotions and communication clear to her students from the start explaining,

teenagers are the moodiest little sacks of hormones. And I tell them that we're all human and everyone is entitled to a bad day or a bad mood. Or maybe you don't know why, but you're just really sad and I tell them that you're completely entitled to that. You are allowed to feel what you feel, but you aren't allowed to take it out on other people. So if you come (into class) in a bad mood, if you want to talk about it, I'm all ears. I may not have any advice for you, but I'll hear you out. But you don't get to put that bad mood on other people. You don't get to take it out on someone sitting next to you who when they asked you to scoot over, it's not because they're mad at you, it's because you're clogging their space and you take that and internalize it because of the moods you came in with. So communication was always open and key in here.

Cecilia also followed her students on social media, which she admitted administrators were not thrilled about. She believed it was useful for developing relationships with students because she was able to keep up with what was going on in their lives via social media. She only followed her students with a classroom Twitter account and did not allow students to follow her on her personal social media accounts. When she saw something going on in a student's life, such as running for class officer, she was able to bring that up and talk about something personally meaningful to that student. She also made a habit of greeting students by name at the door as they entered the classroom to make them feel welcome. She believed knowing a kid's name and his or her story is a prerequisite for learning.

Sometimes, Cecilia admitted, the students would rather talk than work. They knew that she was invested in their lives and would get a little mad at being redirected back to their work. She explained, "I have to remind them: I care about you. I want to know everything, but the classroom is a place for learning, so let's focus on this. Let's get our tasks over with. If we have time at the end of the hour, we can revisit whatever it is that you're wanting to talk about."

Her students also sometimes tried to get too personal. One of her classes kept mentioning that they thought she should have a baby. This was uncomfortable for her because as a 30 year old, unmarried woman, the potential of infertility frightened her, which was something her teenage students neither knew of or cared about. Cecilia set limits with her class and expected to be given the respect due to her explaining to her students, "You treat this place with respect the same as a two way street. I'm not going to talk down to you because you're a teenager. I'm not going to disrespect you because you live a different lifestyle than I (do), but I expect the same in return."

Cecilia struggled with relating to students that were going through extreme poverty and trauma and identified this as a major problem in the region where the research took place saying,

(the region) has a very high poverty rate. 64% of our students live below the poverty line in the state. We have a huge ratio of students that have experienced adverse childhood experiences before the age of 18. We have the highest number of women incarcerated. So if you think about the children that are left behind from that, that are maybe passed around from foster care to foster care...I didn't have that lifestyle. My parents are divorced, but I still had a pretty loving and supportive home. Grew up in a lower middle class family, so I never had food insecurity. We didn't live elaborately, we didn't do vacations. I've never been to Disney world and anything like that, but I always knew that there'd be food on the table and a roof over my head and that the electric bill would be paid. I have students that don't have that. I have students that live out of their car or they rely on the school for food. As much as we want to promote a technology driven classroom, that's not a path that would be realistic for them because they don't have internet at home or they don't know where they're staying the night. Relating to them on that level and gaining their trust is, is usually an obstacle in the first few weeks of school. Just showing them, I'm not going to be another teacher that doesn't take your life into account.

Cecilia took deliberate steps at the beginning of the school year to break down the barriers of not understanding her students' backgrounds. The first assignment she gave her students was for them to write a paper letting her know what they needed to make this a good

class. She told them that she would be the only one reading the paper and she would never approach the students about their papers unless they wanted her to. She elaborated,

Tell me what I need to know about you and your life to reach you where you are. Not to have you come to me, but where I can reach you at your current learning level and your current level of comfort when it comes to education. And I learned more in that first paragraph or two...than I do all year...it just floods out.

Cecilia has learned throughout her career that teachers must be aware of students' needs, particularly students who have experienced trauma or other adverse life events. She understood that not all of her students are like her or had an upbringing like hers, and it was necessary to meet her students where they are. She strongly believed that kids who had experienced poverty and trauma do not learn in the same way as an upper middle-class child from a two parent home, and that the teacher must differentiate accordingly.

Cecilia modeled emotional health to her students by being open with them about her struggles. She elaborated

I told the kids, I'm struggling with this research essay that I'm writing. You're not the only ones that stress out about education when they come in and say, 'Oh, I've got this test and I'm not ready.' I said, "Man, I feel you. I'm writing this essay that I'm not feeling very confident about right now. I totally get it." I tell them when I'm kind of overwhelmed with things and I'm like, 'You guys are just going to have to bear with me this week. If I seem a little off, I'm fine, but I'm a little



stressed out.’ (I) show them that it's okay to have those feelings and to verbalize them.

I asked her if transparency in front of her students was easy for her. She indicated that she had never had a problem expressing how she feels and had always “worn her heart on her sleeve”. This brought up a theme woven throughout the interviews of how you do life is how you teach. For Cecilia, being open and honest with her students was integral to her teaching style.

Although she was comfortable being open with her students, Cecilia admitted that teaching can feel like always being under a microscope. She mentioned there are a lot of people involved in the educational process - the students, parents, bosses - and if anyone doesn't like something, the teacher is going to “hear about it”. Cecilia believed it was important to know how to take constructive criticism, but to also understand that not all criticism is constructive, and to learn to identify the difference. She believed it was important to recognize and filter negative criticism not only because it is hurtful, but it can also give a teacher an inaccurate reflection of what she is doing in the classroom. It can also lead to teachers to developing a negative view of their profession. Cecilia shared about a period of time when she hated her job:

I was called into my, my head administrator's office when I coached cheer, which is the worst decision I've ever made in my life, including getting engaged to my ex-fiance. There was a period of like probably three or four weeks that I was called in to her office two or three times a week and just yelled at because cheer parents weren't happy. They went to back to back state championships with me. I had an all-state, they were all eligible, they were staying out of trouble. But

because they didn't win state, these parents completely lost their minds and wrote to the board threatening my job. So, my boss never took their side in front of me, but when the door was shut, I mean I was forced to tears. I hated it. Hated my job, hated coming here. As soon as I quit cheer, things changed.

Instead of remaining in that unhealthy situation in which she was experiencing shame, Cecilia was forced to quit coaching cheer. She evaluated if she really needed the coaching job in her life and decided the answer was no. Although she was good at her coaching position, the emotional toll was too great for her to continue. This is an unfortunate reality for many who have left the teaching profession.

Cecilia recounted her experience as a first year teacher that was similar to Isobel and Anna's. She recalled that she has no idea what she was doing and was just trying to "stay above the tide". She remembered feeling shamed for being new to the profession by those who had been there longer. She believed that colleagues could get their points across without belittling her and causing her to feel shame because of her inexperience. I asked her how she coped with feeling that shame from her coworkers and she recalled that she "decided that they weren't a good source of advice and started finding other people that I know wanted to help me succeed and were going to do it in a way that didn't make me feel like I wasn't good enough to do it."

### **Kate**

Similar to several other teachers, Virtual Academy teacher, Kate, also identified emotional health as balance. She believed that to achieve emotional health, she needed to keep

things in perspective by recognizing what was going on inside of her and attending to it so that she was able to stay in balance and minister to her students.

She tended to her emotional health by meditating and doing yoga daily. She said she had also benefited from journaling. Another key component to maintaining her emotional health was her conversations with her husband and friends who allowed her to talk about what was going on inside of her and listened and gave her perspective.

Kate came into the profession later in life and drew from a wealth of life experience to develop several techniques she employed in the classroom to maintain control of her emotions. Instead of becoming reactive to whatever was happening, she turned to breathing and gave herself time to think before responding. She explained:

I'm always trying to ignore the tantrum happening inside of me and figure out what was really going on. Perhaps my experience as an emergency room nurse has really helped me because you know, somebody would come in with blood everywhere or maybe in hysteria and you've got to assess what's happening.

You've got to be in control and you've got to not be made panicky by that and look to what has to be done and what's really going on. And I kind of bring that with me.

Kate embraced the fact that she had more life experience than the average sixth year teacher and used it to enhance her teaching and how she builds relationships with students. She believed that by simply being older and having more life experience, her maturity had allowed her to withstand the stress in a profession where teachers are dropping out at an alarming rate. She also

believed that her maturity and life experience had been foundational in her ability to interact with students in a positive way.

Kate cultivated positive relationships with students daily by greeting each student personally as they entered the classroom. She tried to talk to each student and establish a relationship by learning something about their personal lives and taking an interest in whatever way they allowed her to. She also tried to notice and comment on a student's appearance if he or she looked particularly nice. Instead of being punitive, she employed humor, "Hey, Jack, I didn't see you there. Good to see you!" if a student was late, for example. Or she focused on a student's good quality, "I love that shade of green - it looks great with your hair. Just remember to take the hood off," rather than being negative when she noticed a student breaking the dress code. In both of these instances, establishing relationships and acknowledging rule breaking, Kate helped her students to "be seen". They were not just a number walking into a classroom and breaking the rules. They were people with stories and struggles, with good and not so good qualities. Helping students to "feel seen" is an important theme that is woven throughout many of the interviews and is vital to cultivating healthy relationships with students.

I asked Kate if it is more difficult to establish relationships with Virtual Academy students who had not been successful in the traditional classroom due to personal or academic troubles. She explained that before her students are accepted into the Virtual Academy program, she sits down with them (and sometimes their parents) and counsels them regarding how they can make up the credits they are missing. This one on one support continued throughout the program, and yet, many students continue to struggle. She explained that the Virtual Academy required that the students work independently and be self-motivated, but many of her students'

lives “were such a mess”, and the drama and trauma was “so loud that they can’t think or hear anything else.” Kate often found herself frustrated with students who were not working and disrupting others and had to “own” her own prejudices toward students she perceived as wasting a wonderful opportunity to be in her program. In order to overcome her prejudices, she had to first have the self-awareness to recognize it and then “try to be as fair and kind and logical and (give) as much attention (to those students) as I give everybody else.” She acknowledged that although the behavior that manifests as a result of her students’ struggles can be frustrating, the process of sticking with them is how the relationship develops. Multiple conversations reiterating the consequences of not doing the work, phone calls to parents, and finally backing off and allowing the student to make his or her own choice is part of the process in which the student develops trust in his or her teacher and understands that she cares. She explained further

By the time they get to be juniors and seniors or even freshmen in high school, I’m not sure that you can repair (their family situation) anyway. So it’s just very difficult and my approach is to try to develop a relationship with them so that they realize that there’s an adult who believes they can do it and who thinks they should do it. So that if I can get them to that point, then I’ve got a chance to help them get their credit.

In many cases, Kate was the only stable adult in the lives of her students. She tried to model emotional health by being logical. She admitted because of her ethnic background she tended to be very emotional, but when her students had a problem, she tried to break it down with them in a logical way, explaining

We try to look at it from different perspectives and I'm just trying to help them detach from the drama because there are some, especially the ones that come in that have been long-term suspended, that I have so many issues with. The sky is always falling in. The world is always coming down in their lives. And so I'm always hearing all this horrible, fantastic stuff and I'll let them talk and then I say, 'okay, let's talk about this. You understand that that's not reasonable. You understand that that's not healthy.' I try to help kids understand that even though they may have played a big role in it, a lot of what happens is more about the other person than it is about them. And so I'm trying to help give them a perspective so that they can keep things where they belong. And like I also talk to them about compartmentalizing stuff. 'You know, you can't control that. You can control this.'

Even though Kate was comfortable and skilled in developing relationships with her students, she felt pressure to be an expert on all of the content the students were working through. She embraced vulnerability by acknowledging when she did not have an answer for her students. She was not afraid or bothered by having to apologize to her students for mistakes she made. She believed that life is easier when she could acknowledge her mistakes and figure out how to repair the damage. Kate believed that being vulnerable in front of her students showed them that adults are still learning all the time and healthy adults are willing to take the time to apologize and fix things. She did admit that in her younger years, she was more reluctant to embrace vulnerability and lacked the confidence to be honest.

Kate also recounted a painful memory from her first year of teaching that caused her to experience feelings of shame. A student recorded something going on in the classroom and

posted it to social media. She did not get in trouble with administration, but she felt shame about the way she handled the issue with the student because she reacted out of the embarrassment and hurt that she felt. I asked her how she handled feelings of shame and she brought up that she made a plan, explaining:

I've done this all of my professional life - I make a plan. And so I've got plans for all kinds of situations and if I haven't ever had that situation, okay, now here's another situation and I make a plan (and) I go over it in my head so that I don't have to come up with a good plan. And of course, nothing ever repeats itself, but it's something as close to what similar (situation) may come up. So then I've got something to fall back on. Then I was able to think through perhaps when I was not that emotional or it wasn't a serious situation that I can draw on.

Once again, having a “plan” or a “script” is tremendously useful for teachers who encounter emotionally volatile situations and experience feelings of shame. She also spent time examining her inner world to understand why she had been personally hurt so much by that incident.

Kate also reflected on the difficult behavior of students and how she responded to it in her early years of teaching. She believed that her insecurity fueled her responses to students' problematic behaviors. She communicated that she was not prepared for the level of dysfunction and she did not have control or authority to address the behavior. She did not feel adequately prepared to meet the demands of her first year of teaching which led to her not handling situations as well as she would have liked. However, despite all the difficulties, Kate reflects that she has never been more fulfilled saying, “when you feel like you have something to offer and that you're where you belong and that works and everything meshes and it is fulfilling, then sometimes maybe the others things don't matter as much.” A sense of fulfilling a purpose is

important in overcoming the many challenges inherent in a teaching career. This theme is noticeable throughout many of the interviews.

Kate strongly believed that understanding students' personal problems was helpful in establishing relationships. Finding out that a student had medical problems or mental health issues was not being nosy, in Kate's opinion, but it helped her to be supportive of the student. She gave a compelling example when recounting a story of a student with debilitating anxiety:

So this kid, she'd come every day and she'd sit down in this classroom and she wouldn't talk to anybody. And she faced the wall. And I would greet her every day and talk to her as much as I could everyday, but I didn't want to force it or anything. And there's a courtyard out here and freshmen go out fourth hour (when) they're not in the Academy. And one of those times she had Freshman Success and a teacher came to tell me that there was a little girl out in the courtyard crying. I went out there and she was on the bench and she was sobbing and I sat down next to her and I asked her what was going on and she told me a story about how she tried to work with freshmen to do these bulletin boards and that none of the kids would listen and there was pushing and it was just overwhelming. And she was sobbing and I said to her, you're going to be okay. You just do the best you can there. This is just a class to help you think about how to organize things so you can be successful in school. And then I said to her, you know, things are tough for me too, but I want you to know you are the reason I come to school every day. From that moment she turned around. She came every day. Up to that point, she would not make eye contact, but from then on she'd come and she had started looking better, taking more care with her appearance.



And near the middle of the second semester, she came to me to talk to me about what she still needed to do to be able to get all of her classwork done so that she could come back to the Academy next year. And today she's through sophomore year and she's working on junior classes. It's awesome. And she's got an A average and she was failing freshman year and she's vibrant and alive. She talks in class and she wouldn't talk to anybody before. And there was an incident where she saw some kids doing something they weren't supposed to do and she came and talked to me about it. And then when the student tried to intimidate her, she stood up for herself and her friends said to me later I cannot believe that she actually stood up for herself. So I think it's probably a combination of the planets aligning, you know, maturity, maybe things getting better for her in all ways. But I also think the fact that I gave her a safe place to be and that I was able to make that connection with her so that she felt safe and valued. I think that helped.

### **Hannah**

Sixth year Geometry teacher, Hannah, defined emotional health as having the ability to self-evaluate how one is reacting and responding to whatever is going on and the ability to control one's response. She tried to maintain her emotional health by finding time to breathe and be alone. She also tried to compartmentalize her work life from her home life so that she would not obsess about work nonstop. As a mother of small children, she did not have much time for herself, so she sat in her car before leaving work and breathed. She also engaged in prayer and Bible study as a means of taking care of herself. Time was the biggest obstacle she identified to maintaining her emotional health.

Hannah tried to make her classroom a positive place for students. Instead of taking a negative tone, she tried to redirect students who were misbehaving or not on task, and acknowledged and rewarded students for positive behavior. She believed that the more encouraging she was to her students, the more likely they were to behave and work hard.

Hannah was of the impression that Math was a more difficult content area to establish relationships because the content did not lend itself to getting to know the students. Even though side conversations were helpful in getting to know the students, she often had to redirect students back to the academic lesson. She also felt pressure from administration to teach “bell to bell”. Her inclusion classes were designed to have downtime at the end of the class period for her on-level students. This allowed her special needs students more time to work on their assignment and get help if needed. This downtime at the end of the class period was often helpful in talking with her students and getting to know them. However, she admitted if she was ever being observed by an administrator there would be “no way” she would ever include this downtime, even if she had covered all her academic goals for the day with the students.

Hannah tried to make sure that students viewed her as a teacher and not as a friend. Although it was not as much of a struggle in her sixth year, she said this was especially problematic as a young, first year teacher. On a personal level, Hannah said she was not comfortable having deep conversations and counseling students. When it came to emotional stuff, she admitted she was more awkward. I asked her if that was how she was in “real life” and she said yes. This, again, brings up the theme of how you do life is how you teach.

Because Hannah believed that her emotional state affected her students, she tried to model emotional health by being non-reactive and controlling the way she responded to things. She tried not to get drawn into whatever poor behaviors were taking place, but found it difficult

to “always be on.” But, she communicated that with time and experience, she was better at embracing the vulnerability of making mistakes, not getting something right, or a lesson plan failing. In her first year of teaching she would get really “bummed out” if a lesson didn’t go well and she felt that failure reflected poorly on her as a teacher. But as she matured in her career, she realized that failed lessons were just part of the teaching process.

Interestingly, Hannah indicated on her initial survey that she had experienced shame as a result of her job, but when I asked about it in person, she indicated that she had not experienced shame. She mentioned that parents and administrators had been supportive and her parents had instilled a very healthy self-esteem in her during her upbringing. Although there is no way of knowing if she had experienced shame and was just uncomfortable talking about that experience with me or if she was being completely truthful, it is important to note that administrators play an important role in supporting teachers in helping them avoid the pitfalls of shame.

### **Sara**

Sara did not believe being emotionally healthy equaled being happy all the time, rather it meant having an awareness of what was going on within, mentally and emotionally, and having a way to process the feelings internally or through an outside source. She identified her ideal form of emotional support as having someone else who taught in the same content area to talk to and having someone separated from education to talk to. Having two sources to communicate with was how she managed her emotional health. She had a supportive husband who was completely outside the realm of education to provide perspective, and she worked with an assistant teacher who was able to understand her struggles and empathize. She also recounted that at her former place of employment, school counselors made themselves available to teachers as well as

students. She said she had “no idea how much I would miss” meeting with school counselors once a month to debrief and get perspective when something would come up at school.

Sara admitted that she had heard the phrase “self-care” more in the past six months than she had in her entire 23 year teaching career. Although she had seen a professional therapist for situational needs in the past, she had never prioritized self-care because she felt she was too busy with other things. She also admitted that taking care of herself seemed self-indulgent and she felt guilty about tending to her needs. She would come to school 45 minutes early because she felt guilty about anything potentially left undone. Although exercise had historically been a part of Sara’s life, and it made her feel physically and emotionally better, she still felt like she had to be at school early, which prevented her from exercising.

Although Sara was admittedly not great at tending to her emotional health, she believed that her emotions affected the way she interacted with her students and she tried to make the classroom a positive environment. She made a habit of greeting students at the door, knowing their names, and being positive when interacting with them. She said she was by nature a happy person and she enjoyed injecting humor into her interactions with students.

Sara reflected that she had serious emotional issues connected to teaching early in her career. She tied a lot of her self-worth to parent approval. If there was an incident with a student, parents would invalidate her for being young and not having children and assumed that she could not possibly understand. But as is common in other interviews, she said that age and experience helped her to take parent complaints less seriously and she became more compassionate and humble. She believed that most parents were just doing their best with what they had and that most conflict was not about her, but was a parent’s personal issue.

That being said, Sara still struggled with shame regarding conflicts with parents. One such incident was when she assigned detention to every student whose name was written down by a substitute teacher for misbehavior. Thinking she was following school policy, she unexpectedly experienced backlash from parents and administrators who felt pressure from said parents. The administrator reprimanded her and warned her that the equity in her program would be ruined and parents would no longer trust her, which made her ashamed. She recalls how she felt after the conversation with the administrator:

I (felt) so ashamed. I was so embarrassed that we got called into the principal's office. I'm like, I cannot believe I've done something. First of all, I thought, I can't believe I did something that was so stupid that I didn't even know it was stupid because I felt like it was a good decision. So I must be such a bad person that I didn't even know I was a bad person.

Fortunately, Sara was able to voice her internal struggle to her assistant teacher who could provide empathetic feedback. She elaborated on how she avoided the web of shame through talking with her assistant teacher:

I'm fortunate that I have my assistant because if I had been by myself and told all that, I would have really struggled internalizing that emotionally. I'm a bad teacher. All the kids are going to quit the program. But we were able to just look at each other and go, no, we needed to make a strong statement. They needed to know that what we said we were going to do (we would do). We feel like what we said was fair, accurate, and you know, and that's that.

Sara talked about how the phenomenon of “helicopter parents” from a decade ago had in the past few years transformed into “lawnmower parents.” Where helicopter parents were

following their kids around and trying to engage in every aspect of their lives, lawnmower parents took interfering to another level by trying to make their child's path completely smooth. Lawnmower parents prepare the path for the child instead of preparing the child for the path. Sara believed that some administrators did not like the pressure they experienced from lawnmower parents and consequently acquiesced to parents' unreasonable demands, placing an emotional burden onto teachers.

### **Emma**

Emma described emotional health as having balance and stability and not being reactive about responding to things. She believed that compartmentalizing parts of her life was key in maintaining emotional health and explained:

I've heard it said that men have (multiple) pockets and women have one pocket and so (as a woman) everything goes in that one. So when one aspect of my life is unsettled, it just kind of naturally disrupts (everything). And being married, being a mom, being a teacher, being responsible for all the balls that I juggle, there's a lot that can just go wrong or unsettled. So I think emotional health for me is also trying to separate those pockets a little bit more and not letting one aspect - if it's going to crap or I'm struggling - trying to not let it permeate or bother that the rest of it.

Emma was very active in maintaining her well-being and mentioned several strategies she used to manage her emotional health. She exercised and did yoga regularly. She had conversations with people she trusted. She had people she could joke with and have fun with. She would leave school on her planning period and go get a cup of coffee and if things got really stressful, she would clean her office at school. She used to think taking baths was stupid and

ridiculous, likening it to sitting in your own filth, but she found that taking a bath with a glass of wine and Netflix on the laptop was one of her favorite things to do to relieve stress. She also spent time addressing health concerns that caused her stress at school and received treatment for chronic migraines.

I asked her if she had been this cognizant of self-care in her early career. She related that in her early years of teaching she focused more on working harder and doing more, telling herself to “suck it up,” and pretending like she knew what she was doing. Emma was “scared shitless” about building and establishing her own credibility as a teacher and she believed that being so “me centric” caused her to miss relationship building opportunities with her students. She was controlling about minor things like her “gum chewing policy,” which turned into power struggles between her and her students. She found herself getting very “pissed off” and her emotional outlets were unhealthy, such as “bitching to anyone who would listen.”

Similar to her own experience, she also saw unhealthy expectations and coping in student teachers that she had mentored.

Student teachers...come in expecting it to be like *Mr Holland's Opus* or like this magical experience. They expect that they have to have the program exactly the way that they want it when they want it. And the thing is, even when they get all of those things, there are still ill-equipped. I've seen many of them just be emotionally crippled. They start off that way, and then when they're put under stress, they just cracked even more. I don't know that necessarily it's the job. I know the job contributes to the breakdown, but I think there are already cracks in the system before they arrived.

Although she had struggles in her early years, Emma valued relationships with students and took deliberate steps to cultivate healthy relationships. Seven years ago, she made it a goal to greet all of her students at the door daily and shake their hands and she was surprised at how meaningful that simple act was to students.

So one of my personal goals was: I'm going to shake hands (with students) every day. So I did. And of course the kids that I'd had for two or three years were really weirded out and were like, 'what are you a preacher now?' And then I made it through like the middle of October we were moving into one acts season and I made every single day. But then there was one day I just got behind in the last class and I needed to get some things ready. So I got ready and bell rang and they hadn't come in yet and I'm just mad at myself because I wasn't out there to do it. And so I had broken my promise to myself. And then I was frustrated like, where the heck are they? Well I, you know, got panicked about that. I'm just walking down the hallway like, 'guys, what are you doing out here?' And (they were) like 'you didn't shake our hand yet.' And then I realized, okay, this thing does matter. For some of them, that's the only appropriate contact that they have with an adult during the day that made them feel seen and whatever. So it's also a good time to have a head check and just kind of look and say, 'okay, hey, is something up today?' Or if there's some kind of business thing that needs to (be dealt with), I have been like, 'hey man, you know that assignment you still haven't turned in? Can you get that to me tomorrow?' There are just all these little things that get done and attendance is a breeze because I've shaken their hands. I know exactly



who's here, who's not. So, functionally it served me well, but also relationally it served well.

She went on to say that she believed that using humor and sarcasm was an important component of relating to her students. She did acknowledge that many have said that sarcasm is not appropriate to use in the classroom, but Emma believed if used in the right way and right time, it can be helpful in relating to her students. She also maintained a sense of humor with her students. Knowing how and when to joke, and with whom was also an important component of maintaining good relationships with students.

Emma believed that the most important thing a teacher can do is to get to know the students because when the students know their teacher cares about them, they have more ownership of their behavior and what the teacher says carries more weight. When a teacher knows her students, she can approach them in a non-confrontational way. Emma used this dialogue with a student as an example of confronting unwanted behavior in a non-confrontational way:

‘Have I done something to upset you? Because you seem distant in class and whatever. Is there something going on? Have I done something to offend you? Is there anything?’ (And then the student responds) ‘well no, I just this and this and this’ And so it opens the door to other conversations and becomes less confrontational. Just way easier, way cleaner.

She also believed that students deserve a “redo” and a chance to repair infractions, and she gave a great example of a student using a phone in class to illustrate:

‘Amanda, was I not clear on what I said about the phone? So here's the deal. I'm gonna imagine that you lost your brain for a second and you forgot where you

were and who you're with. And you're also going to imagine that I'm a reasonable human being. So if you really needed to use your phone, you would just come ask me and have a conversation. But now you kind of created a little bit of mistrust. So if I'm watchful of you and paying attention to you a little bit more it's because I'm curious because you've distracted me and I got to figure things out. But here's the deal. We're just going to pretend like this is a one-time deal and this is a learning opportunity. But if you do that again, not only have you lost some more of my trust, but I'm going to actually write you detention. So can we agree that you're going to be a mature adult and you're going to keep your phone away unless you've got an okay, cool? Great. All right. Get back out there.' And it's just a quick conversation because I've got my authority there. I've got this is what's going to happen if...but I'm going to give you a chance to repair.

Emma believed that a fundamental component of building relationships with students was honesty. She would tell her students, "I will always give you what you need, but it may not always be what you want." She believed her job was to see her students and to figure them out. She was always looking for her students' strengths as well as figuring out what they needed to work on. She refused to let off her expectations even though that caused conflicts with her students at times. She believed that a lot of her students 'never get told a lot of truth in their lives', and when she held her students to high standards, she found that students often loved her or hated her. Emma was aware that addressing emotional lives of her students were often key in helping them to excel. She explained:

Every single one of them has like some kind of dragon they're trying to slay in here (gestures to her head) and in here (gestures to her heart). And that's my job to

figure out what it is so I can have a key to unlock it and help them move past it.

But in the process we're going to struggle.

Emma knew that her students were not the only ones who struggle emotionally and she acknowledged that her classes teach her every year who she wants to be and who she needs to be. She continued to make adjustments to how she taught her classes in order to meet the emotional needs of her students. For example, she adjusted how she assessed students at the end of a unit in order to talk to each student individually instead of assigning a grade without feedback.

She acknowledged that there are sometimes innate personality clashes that can sometimes be a barrier to developing student relationships. Even if there was a personality clash, she was persistent in trying to connect with students, bearing in mind that not all personalities work well together and not taking it personally. Sometimes students held a grudge against her for some infraction she was completely unaware of. Other times, students held grudges simply because she continually held them accountable. She even had a student write a threatening note to her, and recounted the story:

I had a student this year in theater one, he actually wrote kind of a threatening little note at the top of his notes saying, if you ever give me a bad grade on my notes again, and dot, dot, dot and I was like, hold up. So we had a quick conversation. Everything (with him is) always defensive. So we had that conversation and eventually I sent him to the principal for his note. He called his mom. Had that conversation. Then he wrote me an apology letter over the weekend and brought it on that Monday and he gave it to me. I read it. I said, 'well thanks man. I really appreciate that. It means a lot to me and I hope that we

can work on being better.’ And since then, everything's lighter now. So sometimes it's just a matter of like natural things in relationships, you kind of have a little bit of blow out before you repair.

Emma believed that vulnerability was an integral part of developing healthy relationships with students that required emotional maturity. After developing more SEC through maturity and experience, Emma was more apt to admit when she was wrong or when she did not have the answer to a question. She used her own missteps or failures as examples in class to help her students understand that it's okay to try something and fail. As far as directing theatre pieces, she modeled exploration, not having all the answers, and problem solving to the students in the midst of the creative process. She invited her students to work with her in figuring out the creative process together. She made a habit of laughing at herself in front of the students and not taking herself too seriously. She also believed that apologizing was crucial in modeling emotional health to the students. Apologizing required the self-awareness of recognizing when she did not handle something well. She acknowledged that sometimes she was mentally or emotionally unprepared for when a student did something that caught her off guard. This led to unintended responses that may have been discouraging to a student. She explained how she repaired her missteps in that kind of scenario with a student:

‘Hey, about yesterday. I don't know how I came across, but I kind of felt like a jerk in that moment. I'm sorry for it.’ That not only clears the air, but I think it helps show them that we're human too, but also that we care about them and then I think it's made them more willing to be open and fail.

A willingness to apologize to her students was also a practice that came with time and maturity. Emma recalled in her early years of teaching that even if she was wrong she had a mindset that

her word was law and she could never do wrong. Even if she knew she was wrong, she thought the students should “suck it up” because that was the way it was going to be. She believed that her coldness and lack of vulnerability led to missed opportunities to build relationships with students.

Like several others, Emma identified unreasonable parents as a source of experiencing shame in her job. Parents whose students were not cast in her plays or musicals would send hateful emails and make phone calls to argue and degrade her. But with maturity and experience, she was able to change her mind set in some ways.

Through personal growth, Emma was able to adjust her thinking when confronted by rude and aggressive parents. So, instead of assuming an aggressive parent was an “asshole”, she was able to understand that the person confronting her probably had personal problems that had nothing to do with her and was acting from the “reptilian brain”. She assumed that the person confronting her was “going through something rough” and she happened to be the punching bag upon which that person took out his or her stress. She stated that experiencing attacks from parents was easier to swallow when she kept in mind that people are scared, hurt, upset, and carrying around a lot of emotional baggage. She viewed these emotionally unhealthy people as the “Titanic” of parents for her: examples of what not to do.

Teachers are often safe and convenient people for parents to unload emotional waste onto. Culturally, this has become acceptable and normal. It takes emotional resilience for teachers to overcome attacks and maintain their emotional well-being. Emma identified having self-awareness as key in shame resilience and explained:

Realizing when I'm triggered in (negative) ways, there's something that I'm not liking within myself. It's typical, we don't like in other people what we see in ourselves. And trying to remember that I'm really enraged right now, but if I stop and I stepped back because the rage is my initial reaction, you know, the hurt is my initial reaction. (But) what's really going on with me? Why is this a problem for me?

Emma believed that a lot of times as a teacher “you’re damned if you do, and you’re damned if you don’t” because whatever decision she made, she was unable to make everyone happy. A lot of people need a villain for their story, and often the teacher is a convenient person to cast in that role. Emma developed strategies to deal with attacks from unreasonable parents and the shame she experienced as a result. She had a core group of trusted people she could talk through an issue with. If a parent sent a hateful email, she would not respond immediately, but take her time in crafting a response, and have colleagues she trusted read her response and give her feedback. Sometimes she felt it would be best to meet parents in person with a counselor or administrator present for more support. When confronted with a “crappy attack” or unfounded complaints from a parent, Emma learned to not react with her natural instinct to attack back. She allowed the parent to unload and then gave them the “confused puppy dog look” (Figure 10). She explained:

(After I do the confused puppy dog look I’m) just like, ‘Huh, I’m confused. I’m not quite sure what you mean. So could you give me an example of that?’ (I do this) instead of my normal tendency of (saying) ‘how dare you speak to me that way!’ And every time I’ve used that it’s disarmed them because they’re also

confused. Then it requires them to give an explanation of things and then we can go through stuff. They have to take ownership (and provide a) rational explanation (for their complaints). If (there is a rational explanation, I would respond by saying) ‘I appreciate you letting me know because it is definitely not my intent to come across that way. I want to have a chance to fix that and repair that relationship.’

The “confused puppy dog look” and accompanying dialogue is a “script” that Emma had developed to defuse emotionally volatile situations. In an effort to preserve her emotional well-being and avoid the trap of shame, she developed a repertoire of scripts. These scripts covered a multitude of situations, such as when she disagrees with a parent:

Well, I hear what you're saying but I'm just going to have to politely disagree and I still respect your opinion, but I completely disagree and this is how I've handled it.

Or when she had to call parents due to ongoing behavior problems with a student:

‘The reason I haven't called you before is because I've been trying to give your student an opportunity to be the mature young adult that he or she is becoming. And here are the conversations that we've had and we've talked about this and this. The reason I'm calling you is because I need your help because obviously what I'm doing isn't working and is there anything that I need to know that could help me understand?’ And then sometimes I'll have parents who then say, ‘I totally understand why that kid's being a jerk’ or ‘I totally understand it because of x, y, z.’ And (then I would say) ‘Well, I would suggest, not for nosiness sake,

but that you contact the counselor then that way they can contact us so we can be more understanding because that's a difficult situation and I'm sorry to hear that.'

Having a repertoire of scripts reduces the emotional toll difficult confrontations can take on a teacher and helps teachers to avoid reactive responses than perpetuate damaging relationships with students and parents.

## **Discussion of Themes**

### **Characteristics of Socially-Emotionally Competent Teachers**

In analyzing the data from the seven observations and interviews, several qualities emerged repeatedly that painted a picture of a socially-emotionally competent teacher. Several teachers communicated that emotional health was not an absence of difficulty, but rather finding a sense of balance in facing life's challenges.

Another characteristic of social-emotional competence that appeared multiple times from the teacher profiles was self-awareness and the ability to analyze how one is reacting internally and the ability to control one's external response. Marzano (2015) describes the management of a teacher's inner world in three phases: awareness, analysis, and choice. During the awareness phase, a teacher recognizes that she has been emotionally triggered, she then analyzes possible outcomes and asks herself if the outcome will be helpful, and finally she chooses a response that is beneficial to herself and the student (Marzano, 2015). The ability to be non-reactive and rational even in problematic scenarios was also identified by several teachers as a key way they model emotional health to their students. Teachers who have the ability to model emotional control are not only a beneficial example to students, but emotional control can also prevent



teacher burnout which is ultimately responsible for poor teaching and teachers eventually leaving the profession (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

### **Maintaining Emotional Health**

A variety of activities geared toward maintaining emotional health were identified by the teachers and several patterns emerged. In addition to compartmentalizing or achieving a work-life balance, another strong pattern identified was having access to trusted people to talk to. Other personal habits teachers adopted to maintain emotional health were exercise, meditation, breathing, and yoga. Journaling and solitude were also important factors identified in maintaining well-being.

There were several factors identified as being roadblocks to maintaining emotional health that emerged from the data, such as a perceived inability to balance work and personal responsibilities and a lack of time to meet all the demands placed upon them in their varied roles. One specific problem identified multiple times was a feeling of being overwhelmed by the amount of material to be graded and a short timeframe in which it had to be completed.

Interestingly, both teachers with over 10 years of experience, Emma and Sara, believed that they were models of emotional health and that their emotional state affected their students; however, Emma indicated that she took steps daily to maintain her emotional health and identified 11 strategies she employed in order to do so, and Sara indicated that she rarely to never took steps to maintain her emotional health. Sara was one of 19% of teachers who indicated on the initial survey that they rarely to never attended to their emotional health, indicating that self-care is problematic for a good amount of secondary teachers where the research took place.

Although Sara had largely been unaware of the term self-care throughout most of her career, she also identified feelings of guilt as being problematic in terms of her maintaining her emotional health.

Some teachers are prone to depressive guilt because often the demands of their jobs draw them away from their purpose to care for individual people (Hargreaves & Tucker, 1991). The intersection of concepts such as: the commitment to care for students, the pressures of accountability, a sense that the work is never done, and perfectionistic tendencies can create powerful guilt in the lives of teachers that can compromise their teaching abilities (Hargreaves & Tucker, 1991). Similar to shame resilience, teachers dealing with unhealthy guilt find support in personal and professional relationships. Teachers can cope with guilt by setting boundaries and managing realistic expectations with the assistance of personal relationships or trusted colleagues (Hargreaves & Tucker, 1991).

Maintaining emotional health can be especially problematic for first-year teachers. Although Emma emerged with having the most strategies to manage her emotional health, she also indicated that this was not the case in her early years of teaching. Like Anna, who communicated that she was “almost constantly thinking about school,” Emma’s first few years were consumed by attempting to prove herself and establish her credibility. First-year, emergency certified teachers, Anna and Isobel, both communicated their feelings that “(they) had no idea what (they) were doing” in reference to teaching. Not having a sense of competence in fundamentals such as lesson planning and classroom management can be emotionally damaging because having a sense of efficacy also builds emotional resilience (Schussler, Greenberg, Deweese, Rasheed, Demauro, Jennings, Brown, 2018).

### **Cultivating Healthy Student-Teacher Relationships**

In analyzing the data, details emerged that pointed toward my research question: how does teacher SEC translate into classroom practices? Daily practices such as greeting students and interacting with them personally were important factors observed in the classrooms and identified multiple times by teachers who cultivated healthy relationships with students. These practices, as well as learning something personal about students in order to engage them in conversation, contributed to students “feeling seen” by teachers. Talking with students during class downtime as well as engaging in one on one conversations with students were also identified as positive ways of establishing relationships. Maintaining an overall positive attitude as well as praising students and empathizing with their struggles were also noted as being helpful strategies.

Letting students contribute to relationships by giving them a voice was another important theme in developing positive relationships. Student reflective writing as a means of getting to know students and allowing them to share personal stories through bell work and other assignments were helpful for teachers in fostering empathy and understanding for the lives of their students. Encouraging appropriate humor and sarcasm was another practice identified by multiple teachers in giving students a voice in classroom culture. The use of humor and sarcasm were ways teachers engaged students, making the atmosphere less formal and dull.

Although allowing students to contribute to the relationship dynamic was a key element, teachers were also clear to establish themselves as a teacher and not a friend. Knowing the importance of establishing relationships with students, teachers were careful to look for time and opportunity to engage their students on a relational level, however they also redirected students’

focus onto learning objectives. Ability to cultivate relationships as well as manage lessons was a balance that SEC teachers continually worked toward.

There were several barriers identified that were associated with hindering student-teacher relationships that emerged from the data. Students with backgrounds of trauma or poverty were in some cases more challenging to establish relationships with. Some teachers found it difficult to relate to a student whose upbringing was vastly different than her own. The trauma some students experienced drowned out their ability to focus on academic tasks and some students entered the classroom with preconceived notions that teachers were “the enemy.” Some students believed that teachers are unable to understand what they were going through which made students closed off to establishing a relationship with a teacher. Often, teachers do not understand the origin of problematic behaviors students exhibit in the classroom and instead form prejudices against them, hindering relationship building. For example, Kate admitted that she viewed students who were not working and disruptive as wasting a wonderful opportunity to be in her class and were not allowing her to help them. In order to reach out to these students, she had to reframe her thinking with an understanding that in order to teach students with a background of trauma, she had to recognize their traumatic background, differentiate instruction, and be persistent in attempting to connect with them.

### **Modeling Emotional Health**

Teachers model emotional health to their students in a variety of ways. As mentioned above, being non-reactive and controlling one’s emotional response were major ways teachers identified modeling emotional health in moments of conflict. Also mentioned above, having self-awareness enabled teachers to recognize prejudices and respond in a fair, kind, and logical

manner toward all students. Talking one on one, with the teacher operating in a mentor capacity, helped students gain a different perspective on a situation and understand their actions through the eyes of someone else. Teachers verbalizing feelings modeled and normalized the recognition and acknowledgement of emotions. Finally, it was beneficial for teachers to acknowledge that students, who are developing human beings, often deal with relationships and emotions in a sloppy way, just like many adults. Teachers who welcomed students correcting their mistakes and repairing relationships, contributed to an atmosphere of social-emotional learning.

### **Vulnerability**

Several themes emerged regarding the issue of vulnerability in teaching. Teachers who were open to their students about their struggles showed students that they were human too. This sharing was within appropriate boundaries, such as sharing about having difficulty with a paper for grad school or feeling upset about the death of a cousin. Some teachers stated they were comfortable with admitting their mistakes and apologizing. The act of a teacher apologizing modeled to students the essential skill of repairing relationships.

Teaching with vulnerability can be difficult because teachers identified feeling like they were always under a microscope, always had to be “on”, and were expected to have all the answers. As emergency certified teachers, Anna and Isobel admitted they felt like they had no idea what they were doing and taking on teaching without experience itself was an act of vulnerability. They were not alone. 77% of first year teachers who took the initial survey identified as embracing vulnerability in their teaching practices. But embracing vulnerability in teaching practices must extend to modeling emotional health. Emma and Kate acknowledged that embracing vulnerability came with time and experience. As a first year teacher, Emma

believed the students needed to “suck it up” and accept her way, even if she had made a mistake. She didn’t apologize and had a rigid “my way is law” outlook on relating to her students. Emma believed that her lack of vulnerability in acknowledging when she was wrong or apologizing when she made a mistake led to missed opportunities in building relationships with students. Continuing to embrace vulnerability, even for teachers who have been in the profession for many years, is an important aspect of continuing to grow as a SEC teacher.

### **Shame**

When I began this research project, I was not even sure if other teachers experienced shame in the workplace as I had. Through the data collected from the survey and interviews, it became clear that many men and women experience shame in relation to their positions as teachers. Over half of the respondents of the survey indicated that they had experienced shame in the workplace and six out of seven of the teachers interviewed indicated that they had experienced shame as a teacher. There were several common factors identified that led to teachers experiencing shame. Unreasonable parent interactions were the most commonly cited reason that teachers experienced shame. Parents who sent hateful emails, made unreasonable demands, and threatened to get teachers fired were a source of shame.

Cecilia and Sara both indicated that they did not feel supported by administrators in the wake of conflict initiated by unreasonable parents. Administrators who are unable to absorb the pressure of unreasonable parent demands and consequently pass the pressure onto teachers, add to the shame teachers feel. The lawnmower parent phenomenon can be problematic for teachers because the lack of student and parent personal accountability led to teachers being the target of

unreasonable demands and blame. This can lead to loss of a sense of efficacy and increased feelings of shame.

Teachers also indicated that students who used social media to attack teachers or post unflattering content of teachers was another reason teachers experienced shame. Although several teachers indicated the use of social media could be helpful in learning more about their students, teachers must use it carefully to avoid it becoming problematic.

### **Shame Resilience for Teachers**

Several strategies emerged from the data regarding how teachers overcome feelings of shame in the workplace. The most frequently cited way of dealing with shame was having trusted people with whom to talk about events that inspire feelings of shame. Teachers indicated that having supportive colleagues that could empathize with their feelings was key in not becoming trapped in a web of shame. It was also helpful for teachers to have trusted relationships outside of the teaching profession to share their feelings with. Colleagues were helpful in providing empathy, whereas relationships outside of school were helpful in providing additional perspective.

First-year teachers, especially emergency certified teachers, should be aware that mistakes pave the way to experience. First-year, emergency-certified, teacher, Anna, indicated that she felt shame due to a mistake she had made out of frustration involving talking about a student to another student. However, she was not taking into account that she not only had no pedagogical training, she also lacked training in SEC. She also felt bad about how often she approached her colleagues for advice and help, making it harder for her to take steps to verbalize

her feelings. Isobel, the other first-year teacher, emergency certified teacher, indicated that she had to forgive herself for the many mistakes she had made in her first year. She also sought help and advice from more experienced teachers who could empathize with her in an effort to overcome shame. Knowledge and practice of self-compassion as well as being able to reach out to supportive colleagues are crucial components of avoiding the shame trap, especially for first-year teachers.

Another major theme that emerged from the data in terms of teachers building shame resilience was teachers having a repertoire of scripts. Scripts defined by Schank and Abelson (1977, as cited by Marzano, 2015), are structures that

describe appropriate sequences of events in a particular context (which) , handle stylized everyday situations. They are not subject to much change, nor do they provide the apparatus for handling total novel situations. Thus, a script is a predetermined, stereotyped sequence of actions that defines a well-known situation.

Marzano (2015) wrote about recognizing negative scripts that compromise teachers' effectiveness in the classroom; but the data that emerged from the teacher interviews shows that scripts can also operate in a positive way that is helpful to teachers. Teachers representing all career length categories, Emma, Kate, and Isobel, all to some extent relied on scripts to become resilient to shame. Experienced teachers, Emma and Kate, both had a repertoire of logical and articulate scripts for common situations that would lead to experiencing shame. Having scripts reduced the emotional burden of dealing with conflict. First-year teacher, Isobel, having



experienced conflict that caused feelings of shame, developed a script for other future encounters, although due to her inexperience, the plan was relatively inarticulate.

Reframing how teachers view parents who initiate conflict is helpful in preventing shame. Teachers who were able to view problematic parents as “hurting and confused” and “doing the best they could” were more empathetic and exhibited greater shame resilience. Teachers who were able to not take confrontations personally were less likely to dwell on feelings of shame and doubt themselves as teachers.

Identifying how teachers experience and overcome shame expands the scope of understanding teacher SEC. Exploring the triggers within the field that cause teachers to feel shame can bring about greater awareness and studying the stories of how teachers overcome shame can help build shame resilience. Because shame is so unspokenly common, as well as so destructive, it is important in the context of teacher SEC. How teachers cultivate SEC on a personal level and how teacher SEC translates into classroom practices provides important information that can be useful in enhancing instruction and student-teacher relationship building.

### **Further Research and Concluding Thoughts**

Teacher social-emotional competence can be crucial to student success. The lack of information on how shame affects teacher SEC is troubling because the effects of shame can be highly problematic. Because shame can have such a powerfully negative impact, it is critical that teachers receive training on how to recognize and deal with shame in a healthy way. More research is needed on the role that shame resilience plays in the development of teacher SEC and SEC training should be more widely available in teacher training programs and professional development. I would like to continue this research, using a larger sample of teachers, to

identify common sources of shame within the teaching context and to identify more ways that teachers develop resilience to shame.

The notion of scripts within the context of teacher training and professional development is also worth more exploration. Just like teachers receive training in various techniques and develop procedures related to classroom management, preservice teachers should also receive training in the development of scripts in preparation for emotional conflict that they will inevitably encounter in the teaching field. Developing and practicing scripts before entering the field could theoretically increase awareness of the various emotionally volatile situations that many teachers deal with and could reduce the emotional and cognitive burden placed upon new teacher when they encounter these conflicts. I would also be interested in conducting a study that included an intervention to train preservice teachers in using scripts as well as other SEC development techniques which followed their progress through their first year of teaching, noting how the training affected their teaching practices.

New teachers should have access to opportunities to establish healthy communication outlets within the school community. More research is needed on the role of administrators, mentors, and professional learning communities in encouraging SEC and shame resilience in new teachers.

Student success depends upon teachers taking deliberate steps to develop positive student-teacher relationships and teachers must be able to navigate their own emotional landscape in order to do so. It requires courage for teachers to acknowledge and deal with their emotions in a healthy way. Teachers who expresses their weaknesses to others, embrace vulnerability, and manage themselves in a way that creates positive connection

with their students are courageous, and every effort should be made to support such teachers.

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## Appendix A

### Email for Survey Recruitment

Re: PLEASE help a colleague out!

Message:

Can you help a sister out? I am limping to the finish line in an effort to complete my Master's in Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum at OU. For my thesis, I am conducting a research study on teacher social-emotional competence and how it translates into classroom practices and I need your feedback.

It would be immensely helpful if you would take two minutes of your precious and valuable time to complete this survey. Your responses will be kept completely confidential and will be used for research purposes only.

Thank you in advance.

Your very grateful colleague,

Amanda Becker

## Appendix B

### Online Survey Questions

#### Survey Questions:

1. How long have you been a professional teacher? -1 year -2-5 years -6-10 years -more than 10 years
2. What is your gender? -female -male
3. Have you received your teacher certification? -yes -no, I am emergency certified
4. How often do you take steps to maintain or better your emotional health during the school year? -daily, -weekly, -monthly, -rarely to never
5. How often do you take deliberate steps to develop healthy relationships with students? -daily, -weekly, monthly, -rarely to never
6. Do you feel like your emotional state affects the way you interact with your students? -yes, -no, -sometimes
7. Do you feel like you are a model for emotional health for your students? -yes, -no, -sometimes
8. Do you embrace vulnerability in your teaching practices? -yes, -no, -sometimes
9. Would you be willing to participate in a study for a colleague's master's thesis? This thesis is studying teacher emotional intelligence and how it translates into classroom practices. Your colleague would observe you teaching on two occasions and would interview you. This would require honesty, but not result in much of a time or effort commitment on your part and would be immensely helpful to a MHS colleague. -yes, -no

## Appendix C

### Email for Recruitment of Research Participants

Dear Colleague,

Thank you so much for your willingness to participate in my master's thesis research study on teacher emotional intelligence influencing classroom practices. The study would consist of me observing you teach during one class period and an interview taking place in your classroom which would last 30 minutes to one hour. Your willingness to be honest and reflective is vital to this study. Because I am a teacher as well, I will be familiar and sympathetic to the struggles, and I firmly believe that we can learn as much, if not more, from our struggles as we can from our strengths. Although this is a low risk research study, risks that you need to be aware of include interview questions that broach potentially uncomfortable topics such as how you embrace or reject vulnerability in teaching as well as how you have experienced shame in working with students, parents, administrators, and colleagues. Understanding these topics can help us to develop more awareness of how our emotions affect our teaching and make us better educators. Participating in the study could be an opportunity to reflect and provide insightful information that could be helpful to many more teachers. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may drop out at any time. All the data I collect will at all times remain secure and confidential. Please let me know if you are still willing to participate. I look forward to talking more with you.

Sincerely, Amanda Becker



## Appendix D

### Interview Questions

1. How do you define emotional health?
2. How do you maintain your emotional health as a teacher?
3. What difficulties do you encounter when trying to maintain emotional health?
4. What practices do you employ in the classroom to cultivate and maintain healthy relationships with students?
5. What barriers do you encounter in building healthy relationships with students?
6. In what ways do you model emotional health in the classroom?
7. In what ways does being a teacher force you to be vulnerable?
8. What experiences/people involved in your job cause you to experience shame?

## Appendix E

## Teacher Interview Transcripts

Anna

AH: Okay. Okay. I'm Anna. I've been teaching less than one year. This is my first year and I teach AP and pre AP biology.

New Speaker: Okay. So how do you define emotional health

AH: Um, how do you define emotional hall? So, uh, having a sense of wellbeing. Um, so not just like the absence of distress or whatever, but like actually wellbeing when it comes to feeling, uh, emotionally well, um, having a peace of mind.

New Speaker: Okay. Um, how do you maintain your emotional health as a teacher? I noticed on your, um, responses to the survey, you said you maintain it weekly. Like what practical ways do you do that

AH: Relax on the weekends. I try to spend at least some time for myself every weekend to sort of recoup and not think about school.

Speaker 2: So you're not bringing home papers to grade and stuff on the weekend?

AH: Oh, I do. So I probably only spend like a few hours each weekends taking care of myself. But at least it's a few hours and not thinking about school,

New Speaker: anything during the week?

AH: Um, I'm usually like thinking in school nonstop. All we long, they don't really stop until the weekend usually. Yeah.

Speaker 2: So how do you maintain your emotional health as a teacher? Like at school, in the school environment?

AH: Um, I don't know that I necessarily do a good job with that. I just try to step back and breathe and try not to get too, um, like personally involved in things like that might make me upset. So like if a student is reacting a certain way to me just realize that, you know, that student probably has something going on and it's probably not just me that's making student act like that and kind of trying to remember, um, that everything's not personal. It's kind of hard sometimes with in the moment. In the moment. Yeah.

Speaker 2: what difficulties do you encounter like speaking of, um, when trying to maintain your emotional health?

AH: Um, some, some students will try to make things personal and try to blame everything on the teacher and that does make it really challenging to maintain a positive attitude because not only will the students sometimes do that, but the parent's will as well. Like, if the student is doing poorly in the class, they'll do everything they can to deflect blame onto the teacher for that student's poor performance.

New Speaker: The parents you mean?

AH: Yeah, students and parents. Right. And that, that's probably my biggest challenge is just how they're so quick to blame me for their poor performance instead of

Speaker 2: strategizing how to do better. Coming up with

AH: a gs on how they can do better and kind of, there's just a lot of people with no personal accountability whatsoever. And I think that's what really bothers me the most and gives me, it makes me hard. It makes it hard to maintain a positive attitude. When people do that.

Speaker 2: So shifting gears a little bit, what practices do you employ in the classroom to cultivate and maintain healthy relationships with students?

AH: Um, so I greet Students at the door, I try to ask every student at some point in the week, like about something related to their life. Um, all at least ask them how things are going. But if I know of like something specific they have going on in her life, like if they're in band or they're in sports or whatever, I'll ask them like, hey, how did that tennis thing go? Or how was your band contest or um, you know, just so they know that I, I pay attention and I listen when they talk about things and I care about what they have going on in their lives and that helps fill personal relationships.

Speaker 2: How do you find out like what's going on in their lives?

AH: Usually talk to their friends about what they have going on. So if you like listen to their conversations that they have with other students in the room, you can pick up on what they're doing.

Speaker 2: What about the quiet ones? Like how do, have you figured out a way to kind of figure them out?

AH: Not really. Um, some of them I can kind of get through bell work, so every once in awhile I'll, I'll put up a bellwork question. Like, how are you feeling? Or like, how was your Christmas break or did you do anything fun over spring break? And a lot of the ones that are kind of hesitant to talk about what's going on in their lives. Sometimes it's still actually write it down in their bell work. Like if I have a question like that, like what'd you do over spring break? They'll feel tell me how their spring break went. And so I've managed to get to some of

the quiet ones like that, but it's all, some of them are just like a closed book. I don't know about solvable.

Speaker 2: I like that idea though is kind of incorporating some personal reflections in bell work. Anytime I've done like a personal reflection, like I'm always surprised like I'll hear like my grandpa has cancer or you know, stuff like that and it's a

AH: They really opened up.

New Speaker: And so what barriers do you encounter in building healthy relationships with students?

AH: So I would say one of the biggest barriers is that there are students that just have this notion that teachers are the entity, that's just what they believe. I'm just another teacher that's making them do something that they don't want to do. And so they've kind of already made up in their mind that I'm the enemy cause I'm there to make them do work and that's, and direct opposition to their objectives of sitting there social around. And so that's definitely a barrier. Like they don't want to open up to me cause they, they have just learned that they don't like teachers. Teachers are there to make them do stuff you don't want to do.

Speaker 2: That's kind of surprising. And AP and pre AP.

AH: Yeah. I was very surprised to find that there were so many students like that. And Pre AP and AP, well mostly my pre AP.

Speaker 2: Do you think that's because their parents are pushing them to do that and they don't, they're not motivated

AH: most of these kids that are like that? I think so. Yeah.

New Speaker: Okay. Um, in what ways do you model emotional health in the classroom?

AH: Um, so like if I see an unhealthy student interaction, all kind of counsel them on, Hey, it's important that we think about how our actions are perceived by others. And I know that you probably didn't mean it to come across like that, but you know, the way that you said this could have been perceived this way by someone else.

New Speaker: Do you do that privately?

AH: it kind of depends on like the, uh, the nature of the offense. If it's like not too big of an offense, then I might say it in class, but if it's like serious, then a pull them out into the hall, like catch them before class. Like I had a student report that she was being bullied by other students in the class, so I had to, you know, pull them outside and talk to them privately.

New Speaker: But, um, did that alleviate the problem or,

- AH: well, I don't know if it was me talking to them that alleviated the problem cause they ended up, um, going to the principal and the principal enacted a no contact contract. So like they're not allowed to talk to each other. So that was probably more of what fixed it, more so than me talking to them. But, but yeah. Um, so like if I see unhealthy interactions, I'll step in and correct it. And then if I, if a student says something to me that's out of line, then I'll kind of counsel them to on, okay, now let's think about how that may have come across and if a student says something really out of line to me how all model emotional health by keeping my cool and not getting upset. Cause sometimes they just want to get a rise out of me. And so if I keep my cool, then it's modeling a healthy way to react to conflict.
- Speaker 2: and then you talk to them privately afterwards about what they said or? okay. Um, what barriers do you encounter in building? Oh, already think I already asked that. Sorry. Yeah. Um, what ways did being a teacher make you vulnerable?
- AH: Vulnerable? Um, I think just the nature of the job and that it's so much personal interaction. You're just there. There's so many possible people to have conflict with and a lot of them kind of have this preconceived notion that they don't like teachers anyway. And so you combine that with the fact that you are working with children and they're not fully developed yet. You know, their brains are still developing.
- New Speaker: So that Darn prefrontal cortex.
- AH: Yeah. And so, um, just the fact that you're dealing with so many people in their kids and kids are going to be kids.
- Speaker 2: Are you alternatively certified?
- AH: I'm actually emergency certified. Even finished my alternative. Yeah.
- New Speaker: So did you, what made you come into the profession?
- AH: Um, so I was an engineer for many years and I just got bored sitting behind a desk all day and I wanted something with more social interaction. And so teaching seemed like the obvious choice to me because there's a lot of interaction in this job, whereas I couldn't really find that in the engineering rules.
- Speaker 2: Do, did you feel vulnerable? Like stepping into the classroom? We're not like, you know, going, getting a teaching certification and all that stuff.
- AH: Oh yeah. Yeah. When I started I was like, I have no idea what I'm doing. Yeah. I still kind of feel that way.
- Speaker 2: Well that's huge. It's vulnerability right there. Yeah. Just stepping in front of a bunch of kids and leading a class and feeling like you need more training or

you're, you don't know what's going on or you know the content. But you know, interacting with kids is another situation.

AH: Yeah. I still haven't mastered that part yet.

New Speaker: I feel like what I saw what you were great.

AH: Oh really? Yeah. Thank you. You weren't here during my fourth hour. Well it's just little things like, hey, can I use the microwave and oh yeah, you can use the microwave and then that establishes a precedent and then next thing you know they're in the microwave room for 20 minutes every day.

Speaker 2: Oh my gosh. The bathroom thing was what threw me for a loop. They're like, can I go the bathroom? Yeah, sure. Why not? Yeah. Like 20 people need to go to the bathroom. So I had to crack down on the bathroom too. And it's so annoying.

AH: Like it should not be a big deal. But see, now that I let him go to the bathroom at the beginning of class every day we lose the first five minutes of class every single day. Where like it's five minutes before every person is actually there. And that's bell work time, which of course they don't think bell work's important but they'll work is extremely important because that's where I'm assessing whether they're getting what we're learning. Um, it reinforces things that we did the previous day. Like bell work is huge.

Speaker 2: So do you feel like next year you're going to be like more comfortable with like your routines and what you're going to do with the kids?

AH: Yeah. Like what I learned, well I'm not going to be here next year cause I'm going to take a year off to be a stay at home mom. But yeah, when I do return, like what I learned is you have to be extremely specific about your expectations. Like if you tell them, oh yeah, you can go to the bathroom at the beginning of class, like just check in with me before the bell rings and then you can go where you learn that, they interpret that as meaning that you can be gone for like seven minutes. And so you had to be extremely specific. Like, oh, will you still have to be back within the first minute of class or whatever? Like you have to define every single little thing. Yeah. Or else they give them an inch. They take a mile.

Speaker 2: So what experiences in or people involved in your job have caused you to experience shame?

Speaker 1: Um, there's one student that I really, right. I think of shame like it, I think of the student cause she, she and I had a lot of conflict. She was one of those that she doesn't really want to do any work and she sees the teacher as the evil person that's making me do work I don't want to do. And so she was always very hateful to me. We had never had any kind of positive interaction and I had made a negative comment about this student to another student. And I, I still feel bad about it. Like I, I shouldn't talk about students to other students. It's

unprofessional and it's just not the right thing to do. And so I felt a lot of shame, like as a result of making that comment about her.

Speaker 2: Was it just out of the frustration that you found from this person? Yeah, it's hard

AH: cause like she would do things like not come to my class, she would be in the bathroom, vaping or whatever. And then she would lie to me and try to convince me she was here, you know, ask her friends what we did in this class but oh but we worked on this. I was here and she tried to get me to doubt myself and think that she was here when she wasn't. And I just got really frustrated and I made an inappropriate comment to another student about it and I felt really bad about that cause it got back to her and by the time it got back to her it had been all distorted. And so she was super, super upset.

Speaker 2: Do you feel like you didn't have an outlet at school to kind of vent that stuff?

AH: Well and I shouldn't have felt like personally involved because you know she hates all teachers. It's not really about me. Like it's not really personal toward me. Like she has an issue with teachers and I just happened to be a teacher and so I shouldn't have taken it personally, but it was just so frustrating.

Speaker 2: It's really hard. Like this one kid, like the first day of school was just like complaining about the summer pre AP assignment reading that they were supposed to do and just publicly convincing about it. And then the counselor came in and was like, Hey, um, we need people to get out of this class, are 35 people in here. And I wouldn't tune was just like, hey the counselors here and you know, if you want to get out, now's the time that he was just like, he took that as me saying, you're stupid. You don't belong here. You need to get out. And he's been mad at me the whole year and at one point like he wrote down like I just proving you wrong that you're on one of his reflections that you think I'm stupid. I'm not stupid. And, and I called him over and I'm like, why do you keep saying this? Because that's not what I said. That's not what I meant. If you want to say that you felt like I said that to you, that's valid, but I did not say that to you, so you need to stop saying that. And so then he went onto like just air all his grievances against me and just, it went on for like 15 or 20 minutes and I just sat there, I'm just like, but come to find out like he had been like abused by his mother and probably has like issues with women and who knows, you know, what triggered that. But it's just like, it's hard to not like really feel Yucky when that stuff happens.

AH: Yeah. It ruins your whole day, your whole week.

Speaker 2: Has there been incidents like with parents that have come up?

AH: Not really that big of an extent, but yeah, there's definitely been incidents with parents that bothered me. this parent, she um, she's forced her son to be in all pre AP classes and he doesn't want to be because first of all he's not motivated. And second of all, I don't know that he even really has the aptitude

to be in pre AP classes. He's just not a strong student and she's forced him to be in pre AP classes and he's getting Cs and Ds. Okay, well she's deflecting all the blame onto the teachers. And so she emails all of his teachers and then copies the principals all the way up to Dr. Winston going on this whole diatribe about how we're not doing enough to help them. We're not doing our part to help him. And basically she wants us to spoon feed him and like basically like type out every assignment, every quiz, like every little thing like type it out and send it her. And so she can help him keep on top of all his work. And it's like, it's not really my responsibility to type up and send her like a daily summary of like these are the assignments we're doing today. You know, like if I did that for every single student, like that would be a lot of extra work. And I mean I kind, I kind of do that cause I do put everything on Google classroom so it kind of is available to her anyway. But it's just the fact that she was deflecting blame on me for her student not performing well. And then basically telling my boss that, oh, you know your tea, these teachers aren't doing enough to help my son. And so that kind of stuff does irritate me because it's like, no, the reason why he's not doing well is because he's on his phone all the time. I'm constantly having to tell him to get off of his phone. He's always sleeping during class. I'm always having to prompt him to get up off of, you know, get your head off your desk. And He,

Speaker 2: so there was no response after ?

AH: I, I did, I spent like an hour responding to her email telling her all the things that I do. I do put all the assignments on Google classroom and she can go check it and um, how all the reference materials we use in class, classroom on Google classroom, so on and so forth. And how I send out reminds if we have quizzes or tests. And so after all that, like she did respond and said, okay, thank you. This is very helpful information. But I think that was her being like, okay, yeah. You, you are good.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

AH: I took an hour spending. I spent an hour typing that email

Speaker 2: do you debrief with anyone about these situations or do you feel like you have

AH: yes. Sometimes like I feel like I, I, I'm constantly asking my coworkers for help and I, I feel like they spend more time than they should have to listening to me. Um, yeah, I've, I have gone to my coworkers for help a lot.

New Speaker: Do you feel supported?

AH: Oh yeah, definitely. I just feel like I'm asking too much of them a lot of the time because there were times when it was like every single day I had to go ask them a question. Like, what do I do?

Speaker 2: I mean that's vulnerability right there.



AH: Yeah, it is.

New Speaker: And one thing that I, I talked to another person that responded who was like 10 plus years of teaching and she said like, she felt like her student teachers and maybe new teachers are less reluctant to like say, I don't know what I'm doing and I need help more. Like, Hey, I'm okay. Yeah, I understand. I know what to do. And she was just saying as she went through, like and became, you know, further on in her career that like being, asking for help and saying, Hey, I don't know what's going on right now is like something that she valued.

AH: Oh yeah. Being able to be new and ask for help and people won't judge you because you're new. Yeah.

New Speaker: Or just not even new, but just like feeling like I can acknowledge that I don't know what I'm going to ask for help. Yeah. Well, thank you for your time.

## Cecilia

Speaker 1: Okay. Here it goes. What do you again, tell me your name, what you teach, how many years you've been teaching?

KC: My name is Cecilia. This is my sixth year teaching. I currently teach on level English competitive mock trial and competitive debate that I have taught intro to speech leadership, um, debate, not competitive and inclusion English classes at the sophomore level.

New Speaker: Okay. Um, how do you define emotional health?

KC: I think emotional health for me is all about balance. About, it's like a cup. As teachers we pour from our cup all day long. I think that the cup has to get refilled, the balance has to exist or I'm completely off my game.

New Speaker: Okay. Um, how do you maintain your emotional health as a teacher? I noticed that you, in your survey you wrote that you maintain it monthly, so what do you do?

KC: I just kind of check in once a month, usually right around the end of the month before we start fresh with a new one. Just kind of journaling, um, checking in with, with my friends and family. I have a group of friends that I go to dinner with once a month from my college days, from Undergrad days and just getting that time where I don't talk about anything school related, work related, any of my students are their problems and they ask me how I'm doing. They check in with me. Uh, I live with my boyfriend and he does that really well on a daily basis, but I'm used to him. So getting that from people that I don't see every day. Just kind of how are you, how are you doing? You seem stressed. What can we do to help? I think that that is a big significant factor.

New Speaker: How do you deal with, um, like how do you deal with your emotions? Like on a daily basis? Like in terms of things that happen at school and situations that come up in school?

KC: Yeah, so I have a 30 minute drive home. And on the way to school it's different. I usually listen to a podcast or a morning radio show just to kind of stimulate my brain, get things going. But on the way home, I usually don't listen to anything. Just kind of have that decompression half hour. I'm just not even really meditate because I'm driving and that'd be super dangerous. But just to have that moment alone with my thoughts, with not getting parent emails or students trying to ask me a question or administrators trying to ask me something. Just that 30 minutes of silence and just to kind of reset before I get home and into a different phase of my life.

New Speaker: Have you always done that, like through your career or do you feel like you maintain techniques as you've grown?

KC: As there was, there was a point where I had a much shorter commute where I lived really close to the school and I didn't have that decompression time. And I did notice that I was very unstable during that two year period that I, I probably lived within five minutes of the school just because I didn't, I worked, I mean, as teachers in Oklahoma, we all work second jobs. So if I was leaving the school and wasn't going to my second job, I didn't have any sort of time of just downtime. When we get home, I feel like we're inundated again. Like we are at work because the email goes off or we get phone calls from, from relatives or we start grading because we all do that when we get home. So it's like the work really never has a minute to kind of escape our lives.

New Speaker: So what difficulties do you encounter when you're maintaining your emotional health, either at school or, you know,

KC: time. Time is a huge factor. Um, especially since I'm in Grad school, maintaining the time to find the balance of grading because it's English, the grading, never, it never abs. The flow is constant. The balance to commit to my master's degree, the balance to work. My second job, the time to pour into relationships outside of work, I think that that is, is the hardest struggle. It's not, am I intelligent enough to handle all of this? Do I have time to handle all of this and then still take care of myself or eat healthy or go outside and go to walk and get those endorphins going. Because as they said in legally blonde, happy people don't kill their husbands.

New Speaker: Well, I mean like when they had the professional development with the nurse and she hated the list of things to like be healthy and it was just like, eat right, spend time with your family, make sure your house is clean, exercise. It's like, well, if I could do all that and

KC: I had an eight day week, sure.

Speaker 1: But it just seemed unrealistic and I just wonder what people do to do all that. Like, I don't know. Yeah, I can't get up at five.

KC: No, I'll, I'll never be an early riser. It's just not in my DNA for me. And I think it's when we have school breaks, I even still find myself getting up and around like seven or eight on an off day. But I still spend the first two hours of that day not really doing anything productive. Just watching the today show, having to have a coffee, maybe do in a couple of laundry cause this smells good, but I don't. And I find that at the end of the day, like I'm still productive, but I'm kind of a little bit happier just because I have, I have that time to sit and think like rushed in front. Yeah. Yeah. I still accomplished a lot, but I have the time at the beginning of my day, just sit down and plan it out. Think about when things are gonna happen and how I'm going to time block and we can, we can say that we're going to do that all day when we're teaching, but it's just, there are only 24 hours.

New Speaker: So what practices do you employ in the classroom to cultivate and maintain healthy relationships with students?

KC: Communication is key in my classroom. Um, teenagers are the moodiest little sacks of hormones. And so they're, they're in. And I tell them that we're all human and everyone is entitled to a bad day or a bad mood. Or maybe you don't know why, but you're just really sad and tell them that you're completely entitled to that. You are allowed to feel what you feel, but you aren't allowed to take it out on other people. So if you come in in a bad mood, if you want to talk about it, I'm all ears. I may not have any advice for you, but I'll hear you out. But you don't get to, you don't get to put that bad mood on other people. You don't get to take it out on someone sitting next to you who when they asked you to scoot over, it's not because they're mad at you, it's because you're clogging their space and you take that and internalize it because of the moods you came in with. So communication was always open. And key in here.

New Speaker: What are some practical ways, like I notice a lot of times you talk to kids when they're coming in, you are kind of talking with them about their personal life. Like what?

KC: Yeah, so I try to stay, I follow them on social media, which a lot of administrators will tell you not to do. I limit it. They're not allowed to follow me on Facebook or snapchat or my personal Twitter. I have a classroom Twitter that I will use to follow them and then they can follow my Instagram account because I can control the content of it. People can't tag me or link me in things or post on my page and link to something else just because of the format of Instagram. So I try to stay up to date with what's going on in their lives. So if I see something that they're running for secretary of the drama department and I say, Hey, how's your campaign going? And I'm excited for you. I hope you get that position. Um, I do stand at my door and try and I don't always, there are some days where our kids stayed after class to talk to me, so I'm not at the door greeting everyone else. Yeah. That's life as a teacher. But I try to make it a point, especially during kind of my problem hours, like second hour to always stand outside, greet them by name as they come in and make them feel welcome. You're not just a number on the role. Like, I know your name, I know your story. Okay. We're going to learn.

New Speaker: Yeah. Um, how do you, I mean I notice you, you have the balance of being really personable with the kids, but also no nonsense. Yeah. The kids is that rubbed people the wrong students the wrong way sometimes or do find a balance.

KC: I have some students that get a little mad just because they know that I am really invested in their lives, but I have to remind them, I care about you. I want to know everything. But the classroom is a place for learning, so let's focus on this. Let's get our tasks over with. If we have time at the end of the hour, we can revisit whatever it is that you're wanting to talk about.

New Speaker: So they try to get too personal.

KC: Sometimes something. My second hour is very much wanting me to have a baby and I'm not married. So that's been kind of annoying. Um, and I don't think that

they, and just like I have friends that have dealt with infertility and that kind of thing and they don't really comprehend that. That's a very scary subject for some women, especially over the age of 30. Um, I set the limits on the first day of school. I always tell them, this can either be your favorite class or the worst class you've ever taken. I can either be your favorite teacher or you will hate me. And it just depends on you. If you want to come in and you want to learn, this is going to be a great place. You treat this place with respect to same as a two way street. I'm not going to talk down to you because you're a teenager. I'm not going to disrespect you because you live a different lifestyle than I am, but I expect the same in return.

Speaker 1: Okay. Um, so what are some barriers that you encounter in building the relationships with students?

KC: Think a lot of kids, and it's what I'm doing my research on right now for my master's degree. A lot of Oklahoma has a very high poverty rate in 64% of our students live below the poverty line in the state of Oklahoma. We have a huge ratio of students that have experienced adverse childhood experiences before the age of 18. Um, we have the highest number of women incarcerated. So if you think about the children that are left behind from that, that are maybe passed around from foster care to foster care, I didn't have that lifestyle. My parents are divorced, but I still had a pretty loving and supportive home. Um, grew up in a lower middle class family. So I never had food insecurity or we didn't live elaborately, we didn't do vacations. I've never been to Disney world and anything like that, but I always knew that there'd be food on the table and a roof over my head and that the electric bill will be paid. Um, I have students that don't have that. I have students that live out of their car or they rely on the school for food. They, as much as we want to promote a technology driven classroom, that's not a path that would be realistic for them because they don't have internet at home or they don't know where they're staying in night. Um, relating to them on that level and gaining their trust is, is usually an obstacle in the first few weeks of school just showing them, I'm not going to be another teacher that doesn't take your life into account.

New Speaker: What are some practical ways that you can break down that barrier?

KC: The first assignment that I do, uh, that I grade all year is just so a writing assignment and I tell them there's no limit on it. I'm not grading your spelling. I'm not grading your grammar. I'm not even going to look at it like an English teacher. You tell me what I need to know about you to make this a good class for you and to help you learn on the only person that will read it. And I will never approach you about it unless you want me to. But tell me what I need to know about you and your life to reach you at where you are, not to have you come to me, but where I can reach you at your current learning level and your current level of comfort when it comes to education. And I learned more in that first paragraph or two that they write about them than I do all year because they, I mean, they're just a seed. They, it just floods out.

New Speaker: What got you, what opened your eyes to like the realities of their life? Was that just something that you learned through like your beginning years of teaching? Like the realities of,

KC: um, I did my student teaching in a school that had an all four grades of high school, nine through 12 98 kids enrolled. It is the center of a nationally recognized cult and it is very impoverished. Um, no medical care because they don't, their religion doesn't recognize modern science or modern medicine. The religion, church of the firstborn and the, and it's a very like conservative sect of it. Huh. So they, if a, if a child in elementary school scraped his knee on the playground and the teacher couldn't even give him neosporran, like they could wash it and put a bandaid on it. But that's kind of it. Wow. When I had strep throat that semester that I was teaching, I was gone for two days, however long the doctor says, you have to wait before you go back for the antibiotics. And they came back and they're like, wait, how you had strep? And I said, I did. I took antibiotics and they just kind of like looked at me like, witch like it was, it was crazy. So that's, I think kind of how I realized like teaching is not going to be, we're never rarely as educators going to teach kids that are like ourselves because the world is changing and the community that we live in, we can't change it. Um, we have to kind of meet them where we are. We can't expect low income kids who experienced a lot of trauma in their lives to learn the same way that we would expect an upper middle class child who lives in a two parent home.

Speaker 1: Right. Yeah. So how do you model emotional health in the classroom?

KC: I tell them when I'm struggling with my things this week is really, my cousin gets married this weekend and they're flying in from Maine and it's a big messy to do because he's Catholic and she's not. And his parents want a very catholic wedding. She was like, well that's not really a possibility right now. And then they're planning it from half the country away. So it's just been very taxing on those of us who do live here cause we've been kind of filling in a lot of the gaps. So I'm in and out of the school all week and I told the kids, I'm struggling with this with my research essay that I'm writing. Like, it's, you're not the only ones that stress out about education when they come in and say, Oh, I've got this test and I'm not ready. I said, man, I feel you. I'm writing this essay that I'm not feeling very confident about right now. I totally get it. Um, I tell them when I'm kind of overwhelmed with things and I'm like, you guys are just going to have to bear with me this week. If I, if I seem a little off, I'm fine, but I'm just, I'm a little stressed out. Show them that it's a, it's okay to have those feelings and to verbalize them is,

New Speaker: have you always been that way or did you develop more honesty in front of your students?

KC: Always been empathy. A very like strong empath. I've always been able to, I kind of read people almost kind of figure out maybe why they tick or whether they don't. Um, I think most educators are impasse or at least the good way. I don't know, when I started like getting to a point where I, I've always worn my

heart on my sleeve and I've always had no problem expressing how I'm feeling. Um, it just kind of seemed natural because there wasn't ever a point where I was like, I don't know how to communicate this effectively if I'm failing something with my friends and family will know it and students and most of my students, well yeah, if it's something really personal. Um, when my cousin died from ODing on drugs, I lost two within three months of each other. They both oded and died and different sides of the family. And I told them, I tell my kids, my students very openly, uh, I've had my cousins, my first cousins have passed away due to a drug overdose and I don't really want to go into details, but that's kind of what I'm struggling with right now. I'll be gone on this day for the funeral. I don't keep them in the dark for my life. I don't want them to put a wall up and shut me out.

Speaker 1: So you feel like in order to be a part of their lives, you have to be open about your own life.

KC: Yeah. Yeah.

New Speaker: So that leads into the next question. In what ways does being a teacher forced you to be vulnerable?

KC: Oh, I think teaching is, is a very interesting career because you are always under a microscope and it's not just from your boss. Most jobs, the only person that you have to really worry about pleasing is the person that's writing your check teaching. You have the kids, your boss, and the kid's parents or grandparents or friends. And if they don't like something you're going to hear about it. I think you have to be able to do construct, like take constructive criticism really well and understand that sometimes it's not constructive, it's just criticism and it's not kind and it's painful, but it's not always accurate. it's not always an accurate reflection of what you're doing in your classroom.

New Speaker: So which leads into what experiences of people involved in your job because you experience shame.

KC: Oh, I was called into my, my head administrators office when I taught, when I coach cheer, which is the worst decision I've ever made in my life, including getting engaged to my ex fiance. Uh, there was, there was a period of like probably three or four weeks that I was called in to their office two or three times a week and just yelled at because cheer parents weren't happy. They went to back to back state championships with me. I had an Allstate or they were eligible. They were staying out of trouble. But because they didn't win state, these parents completely lost their minds and, and wrote to the board, threatening my job.

New Speaker: What was their, justification?

KC: They didn't win state was their justification

New Speaker: and that you just weren't good enough as a coach?

Speaker 1: Yeah. So my boss never took their side in front of me, but when the door was shut, I mean I was forced to tears, hated it. Hated my job, hated coming here. As soon as I quit cheer, things changed. But my boss had been a cheer coach when she was younger.

New Speaker: How do you deal with that? Could you win that you are in that moment? Did you say to yourself, I'm experiencing shame or was it just like these or just like horrible feelings,

KC: I just kind of like evaluated like, do I really need this? And the answer was no. Like I don't need to be a cheer coach is definitely doesn't pay anything. I did it because someone asked me to do it and I knew I was doing a good job and if that's the way that they felt, then they could find someone else to do it.

Speaker 1: So it just forced you to just give it up?

KC: Yeah.

New Speaker: What about like Shame coming like in the classroom or,

KC: oh yeah, for sure. Um, when I was first starting out, I no clue what I was doing. Like your first year it's, you're just trying to stay above the tide. And I had four preps that first year, so I, and I really was just like, didn't even, couldn't follow the standards because they had just changed and we had just gone from being a non PLC school to a PLC school and there was a lot of going against the system with that. People weren't happy about it and I didn't, I was brand new. I didn't really have a preference. I just wanted to know what the crap I was doing. Um, and there would definitely be shame from people who had done this job longer than I have of. And, and, you know, maybe some of it was warranted because I didn't know what I was doing, but I think there's a way to get that across without belittling each other and that was not being effectively done.

New Speaker: So how did you deal with that when you're experiencing it?

KC: Um, I just went to the people. I tried to not communicate with them as much if they weren't going to try to help me in a way that we professionally grow me and not just knocked me down. I just decided that they weren't a good source of advice and started finding other people that I know wanted to help me succeed and we're going to do it in a way that didn't make me feel like I wasn't good enough to do it.

New Speaker: So you found kind of a group of people that you trusted?

KC: Yeah.

New Speaker: Okay. Yeah. And that's who you went to like, okay. And like in the moment, like what other, did you experience shame from parents or, um,



KC: I think I've, I've experienced shame from community. So when we had our teacher walk out and I was very active in that and posted on social media, um, daily during that walk out, there'll be a lot of backlash. Well, how dare you guys should get paid. You knew what you were going into. Get back into classroom. That's where you belong. Yeah. It is where I belong, but I also deserve as a college educated woman is highly qualified in my field to not have to worry about being able to pay my cable bill at the end to the month. And my students deserve to have books aren't held together by tape.

New Speaker: So how did you deal with that kind of shame?

KC: Oh, I, I put it right back at him. I don't, I don't take that kind of thing lying down and just have a little bit of a temper when it comes to that. And someone who, who has no idea what this job is like, tries to tell me how to do it.

New Speaker: Yeah. That's interesting that you had mentioned kind of just the fundamental devaluing of the profession here in Oklahoma especially because, do you think that's, do you think that that's why a lot of people have jumped ship? out of this profession,

KC: I think the walkout opened our eyes. We saw a lot of support from certain community members. Um, and it's, and I think it's ironic when businesses want to give teachers a discount or want to give us free for free meal. Alfredo's did that last night. We shouldn't have to have that were college educated professionals. People shouldn't have to feel sorry for us because we're completely underpaid. But I think that the walkout was very eyeopening to the support in the community, but also too, there's a lot of underlying hate, almost . Yeah. And people that were just said, screw it. I can make double this in Texas. I can make almost double this in Colorado. I think they just said, why and why am I doing this? Yeah. If they didn't have roots here, they were gone. And I can't blame them.

New Speaker: Why do you think people stay in this profession? Even though there's like low pay and

KC: the kids. Yeah. No. When you have a kid that comes to you and says, I've hated school for 11 years, but you made a difference in, I learned like that's, that'll get me through a year of teaching. Yeah.

New Speaker: So it just comes back to the relationship. Yeah. And touching the lives of kids and

KC: you can't put a, you can't put a value on that. You can't put a dollar sign on that.

New Speaker: Okay. Yeah. Anything you want to add?

KC: Be careful who you vote for.

## Hannah

Speaker 1: Okay. Great. My name is Hannah. I've been teaching for six years and I teach high school geometry on level in AP on level and Geometry.

New Speaker: Okay, cool. So what do you define, how do you define emotional health?

JH: Um, I define emotional health is someone who are, I think if someone's mostly healthy, they have the ability to self evaluate, like how they're reacting and responding to certain things that are going on. I think if someone's not emotionally healthy, they maybe not be aware of like how they're responding or they're not controlling how the responding.

New Speaker: Okay. So lacking self awareness and um, the ability to control one's emotions.

JH: Right.

New Speaker: Okay. Uh, how do you maintain your emotional health as a teacher?

JH: That's a hard one. Um, I think it's just trying to find time to debrief and breathe and be alone so that you can kind of let everything go and then you can go home and be at home and separate it from work and not be obsessing about work and just being able to step away from it.

New Speaker: So compartmentalizing like your time at school versus your time at home?

JH: Right.

New Speaker: Okay. How do you debrief? How do you do that? Usually in my car, just before I go home, I just sit in my driveway and this kind of breathe. Um, I also pray and I do, I'm, if I'm involved in Bible study, so that's kind of part of it too, so.

JH: Okay. Is there anything else that you do in terms of maintaining our emotional health? Like just like even small things working out or

New Speaker: out to eat or you know, anything like, or getting your nails done or anything like that.

JH: Um, I should, I have a one year old and a four year old and so usually I can't get away from them to take any time for myself. So, um, I do Bible studies and say that's the only time I get away from, to, to, to take time to like think about myself and like that kind of thing. Um, and occasionally going out to dinner or try to have a date night. Occasionally

New Speaker: I haven't gone to the gym and like I've been giving donations to the gym.

JH: I did that for like a year and my husband said, you've got to stop. I said, okay, I'm not going to go. Let's just accept that I'm not going to make it to the jail. when my kids are bigger. That's what I'm saying. I don't know.

New Speaker: So what difficulties do you encounter when trying to maintain emotional health?

JH: Um, time. That's all I can think of. Cause if I, cause the more time you have, I mean we have more available time free time where you're not structured in something, I think you can really focus on your emotional health. [inaudible] going so much. It's hard. Yeah. True. Yeah.

New Speaker: Uh, what practices do you employ in the classroom to maintain and cultivate healthy relationships with students?

JH: Um, so I try to be as positive as possible versus being negative. Like I tried to redirect and be like, take it, like reward them if they're doing the correct things. And I try to be trying to keep it as positive as possible. I really don't try to be like, I really don't want to like ruin relationships because I, I feel like they'll respond better when I'm being like, like I'm trying to go to work. Um, positive reinforcement and encouraging. If I'm doing that, they're more likely to want to behave, feel like,

Speaker 1: How do you kind of establish that positive relationship?

JH: Um, by, um, like saying good job or like rewards or like whatever I do that's like, um, I don't know. Usually it's more like just words, words of encouragement. Like you're doing a good job. Like thank you for working hard today.

New Speaker: I it harder to kind of get to know the kids in this content area teaching like math as opposed to like, you know, with English we're like, I'm reading their writing and it's personal

JH: right like that. Um, yes. And in Matt, many times I have to tell them to stop. Like, okay, that's an, so we'll, we'll get side conversations. Like this is great. Like I am learning a lot about you, but now we have to change it and get back to what we're talking about. Because you're not actually learning math right now. So it is very, like the content doesn't lead itself to like get to know students. Um, it usually there's downtime and that's, you know, if they're done with their assignment or whatever that they usually talk about all kinds of stuff. Yeah.

New Speaker: Do you think that downtime is necessary? Because sometimes like I was in my first year, I'd been like, oh my gosh, I hope no one comes in cause like I'm just hanging out with the kids, you know, because we've got an extra five minutes.

JH: Right. When you observed me, when you were in my classroom, like we're done. Like usually we would just be chit chatting about whatever. And I'm like, she's just, if this was an observation, no way. Like I like if it was an administrator, like we've got to pull something out because they want them bell to bell. But for me, and I found like towards the end of the school year, I'm not keeping their attention bell to bell. Like it's, I don't know, maybe there's

teachers that still are, but I'm not. Um, and I design things to wear cause I have inclusion classes to where my special needs students can't get through the content by the end of the bell and in that it does them the entire time. So sometimes what we're doing, my advanced kids are going to finish with like 15 minutes left. But that gives my special ed students time to finish and so that we all get done. And so that's just the way I've structured it. So there is breathing time for everyone. For the most part, the only thing

New Speaker: that makes for a more positive atmosphere just to like have that downtime, to just get to know them, especially in this content area.

JH: Yes. I think so. Especially if it, as long as we're covering everything we need to be covering, you know, detriment. If it's like, oh I don't get through my material, we're just chit chatting and yeah, you know, that would be a problem. Right.

New Speaker: Um, so what barriers do you encounter in building healthy relationships with students?

JH: Um, well, the first thing, well, one barrier, I guess I'm going to say when I'm developing relationship with a student, I always want to make sure that they know that I am still the teacher, so I don't want to become their friend necessarily. And when I, and I'm, this is my sixth year teaching, so I'm older now, but in my first few years I was very strong about that. Like if we're definitely not friends, it's like, you know, and so I feel like, I feel like the older you get, the more that they understand that, but I'm still kind of in the middle of like, but we, you know, um, I would say my content areas barrier than just in that I don't read about their lives or anything like that. And we don't, as a math person, I'm not, not emotionally, like, I don't want to say I'm not like an English person in that I, when someone starts trying to tell me like a lot of like emotional stuff, I'm more awkward. So like I don't get deep with students, like I, I'm very surface level and there's a few kids that always looks, Hey, I've gotten, had the conversations with, but for the most part I'm like, I don't know. It's not my area of like, I'm not very good at counseling. I don't know, that's not my awkward and I don't want to hear about parties or anything like that. So that's usually the, just try and keep it like, what are your interests? And you know, how can I get to know you? But like I usually don't go super deep with my students.

JH: Does that how you are in real life too?

New Speaker: Yes. Yeah. I'm pretty much. Okay. Um, I come from a family of math professors saw, I'm like right there with you, like very different people you don't like, but it's like we balance each other at the same time.

JH: Um, and some people will tell anyone their whole life story. Um, I'm not like that. And so when people start, you know, telling me like, what you're telling me way too much, I don't get, you know, I don't know. I get.

New Speaker: So do you like kind of cut them off?

JH: Like get, they're like Ed depends. I usually not, I usually let them kind of talk, but I feel like my response is like other peoples where I feel like other people would like dig in and want to like keep going deeper. I'm like, oh, that's nice. I kind don't like, I don't have that. Like I don't know. I don't know. I'm trying to explain, but it makes sense. I do the same thing with like coworkers. If you're like telling me about your marriage and any start going into too much depth than like, oh well, you know, I'll pray for you. But I don't like dig. I'm not like, I don't know, unless you're my best friend, someone I'm really close to, I don't like, I don't really know all that. Maybe some kind of distant.

New Speaker: And so in terms of in the classroom, how do you model emotional health?

JH: Um, I try not to, I try not to risk, like react to things as much as possible. Um, I try to respond hopefully in a way that models good emotional health. Um, and hopefully other students will pick up on that and respond the same way. It doesn't always happen that way. I do that for my child as well, and doesn't mean she always does the same thing that I do, but sometimes, yes.

New Speaker: So, um, so just trying to be nonreactive or, right, like not taking the bait to whatever.

JH: Right. Okay. Right. Yeah. Not getting super, like not drawn it into whatever the beat, the that'd behaviors are.

New Speaker: Okay. Um, in what ways does being a teacher force you to be vulnerable?

JH: Oh, well, um, you're always on, on your, there's always that you could always make a mistake or there's always room for error and everything. So, um, you always have to be willing to be wrong and not get it right and have lesson plans that don't go right. And, and that's just mean, it's not a perfect world, I guess.

New Speaker: Are you comfortable like saying, hey guys, that just didn't work out today or, yeah.

JH: Yeah. That's okay. And that comes with time too.

New Speaker: Yeah. I was gonna ask did that, did you grow to be that way or were you that way in the beginning, like in your first couple of years of teaching? And

JH: I think my first year of teaching I got right, I'm really bummed out if a lesson didn't work. And then now when I try something and I'm like, oh, I don't really like what they got out of that, then I'm like, well that is, you know, this didn't go right or whatever. You know? There's even been times where I'm like, like I've in pre ap like this assignment that I gave you isn't really what we should be doing as well as just change it, you know? And I'm more okay with that now, but I think I was more than my first year teaching.

Speaker 2: Did you feel like it just reflected poorly on you as a right teacher?

JH: Yeah.

New Speaker: Just when something didn't work out.

JH: Yeah.

New Speaker: And now how do you frame it in your mind?

JH: Like if it didn't, okay, I'll just, this is the line. It's just part of it. This is part of it. Yeah. This is just teaching. Yeah.

New Speaker: So what experiences or people involved in your job have caused you to experience shame?

JH: Um, I'm trying to think. I've tried to think of some, I haven't actually been really blessed. Um, and maybe that's just the way it's landed. I, I'm not sure because most of the parents that I've come in contact with have been really supportive. I don't have many parents that are like, that had been complaining or like most of the parents I contact are like I know my son doesn't do anything. I know that's an issue. So it's usually not like they don't put the blame on me. And so I haven't felt that shame yet. I have had a couple observations before that didn't go exactly right. You know, and so I would always get panicky, like, oh my goodness. But usually the administrators like, well, you know, most of the time my, I've had but I've had certain principals who I feel like you're like, well, I kind of understand, you know, it's okay, you know, like I got done and there's five minutes left of class. Like, okay, I kind of understand, try and find something to be doing but not like, I guess I didn't feel super shamed.

New Speaker: So is your tendency more to like be self critical rather than like

JH: I'm definitely more critical of myself then and when other and if someone is critical of me, I don't, maybe I don't feel like I take it a shame. Maybe I'm just like you're right. I don't know. Like I'm trying to think of shame, like just the definition of shame. Like feeling like not adequate, not like you.

New Speaker: It's not like oh I didn't, you know I did something bad or something wrong. More like I am bad or I am oh yeah. Like that's kind of how Shame

JH: see when I was growing up, my dad told me I was the best. He told me that I was the smartest, that I had needed to get straight A's in school because he said there's no reason why you wouldn't have straight A's cause you're the smartest. And so my dad told me constantly how proud he was of me and how I was the best. So I had like an inflated self esteem. And I think that I've kept that in a way. So I think really highly of myself, which maybe that's why I don't ever get to where I feel ashamed of myself and I don't know, maybe that's it. I don't know. So I always, I'm like a lot of times I'm like, I need, a lot of times I'm always trying to be like humble because in the back of my mind, I know I've

been trained to think highly of myself. So I'm always like, but don't go around. I don't go around like [inaudible], you know? So it's like a balance. But I do have a lot of confidence and I also think that anyone who gets a degree, wait, we just getting a degree, you have a lot of confidence. And to get a degree in math, you have to have a lot of confidence. You'll totally, you won't make it through the degree if you're not confident. So a lot of times you meet people who are math and science who are really full of themselves, but I think it can counter turn if they do get a lot of negative feedback from, cause they're used to being like good at things. And then I think teaching sometimes tear him down.

New Speaker: Right, right. Well, if you identify with yourself as being like the smart person, right. And then you encounter something that's challenging and you really don't know how to do it right away, and you counter that challenge than those people often have a fixed mindset rather than a growth mindset.

JH: Yeah. Yeah.

## Isobel

Speaker 1: Okay. Whenever you're ready.

JHi: Okay. Uh, my name is Isobel. Uh, this is my first year teaching and I teach dance and intro to speech.

New Speaker: Okay. So how do you define emotional health?

JHi: Wow. Um, I think emotional health is being, being okay with what life throws at you. Um, I think it's life isn't easy and I think it's really challenging at times, especially being a teenager, but I think finding that balance and being okay with it is having good emotional health.

New Speaker: Okay. So how do you maintain your emotional health as a teacher? I noticed on your survey you wrote that you weekly maintain it.

JHi: Yes. Um, I try to, I try to at least have an hour to myself a week. That sounds kind of minimal when I'm saying that out loud. But, and yeah, I either, like every other week I go, I go get my lashes done. So that's like my me time makes me feel good. Um, and then I try to, I don't like the gym, but I tried to go to like a dance class. Um, there's a company that gives like just classes to whoever. I try to do the how to at least once a month. Um, but then sometimes it's just going to the park with my kid for an hour or 30 minutes or whatever and just decompressing. Um, and yeah, it's, it's not easy, but I try to find the time for sure. I like Netflix too, so watching every Sunday I watch game of Thrones, that's my me time too. So that's at least an hour. But it's, it's hard. Is it hard to balance being a parent and being a teacher? Oh my God, yes. It's so hard. It's harder than I ever imagined. Really. Um, it's hard because I've never been away from my son. So like this is my first year of teaching my first real big girl job. So being away, you know, eight plus hours a day, you know, he's asleep when I leave. And my fiance, you know, takes care of in the morning. I'm really excited when they need to go pick him up. But it's, it's hard because I feel like I miss a lot, but, um, you know, I know I have to do it for him. So now the choice.

New Speaker: So how do you maintain your emotional health as a teacher? What are some like challenges you,

JHi: I've really struggled with trying to get all of my grading done in a certain amount of time because there's a lot of pressure on, we have to have two grades a week. And it's like, well, you know, I've got, I only have one planning period and then I've got two separate courses, you know, so it's hard to whole different sections of homework and um, I grade them in speech and dance. I'm video their tests and their presentations because I know I'm gonna miss something if I can just grade them while they go. Um, and I have so many of them that I don't really have any other choice too, especially in dance. I have to video them. Um, so I really struggle with grading in a good amount of time



because then, you know, I don't want to do it when I go home cause I have a kid and I've got to do laundry and cook dinner and you know, do stuff around the house. So, um, and spend time with my fiance, which is very rare. Um, so I really struggle with that, but I also really struggle with, I care a lot about my kids and I know that they're not all as fortunate as I was and I was in high school and have parents who, you know, actually really cared about them and tried to push them to greater things. And so I really struggle with, you know, at the end of the day, I know they're not going to go to the best home and that, that really, like I've gotten better at it, but it needs to eat me up inside. Like what can I do to help them? But I also know that my job is to teach them and not be their parent. Um, so I do want them to, you know, grow up and be adults, but it's hard sometimes when you realize that kids don't have what I had growing up.

New Speaker: So how, how did you come to have a relationship with these kids that you're learning about their lives? Like that?

JHi: Yeah. Um, so I feel like it is a part of me being younger. Um, you know, I, I get mistaken for a high schooler a lot because I look like a teenager. So I think, I don't know if they can relate to me better because of that, but, um, and you know, I, I get, I get it. I wasn't in high school that long ago. And so I understand the stress and, and I'm pretty open about that with them. And I tell them, you know, guys, I understand you've got six other classes and you're taking the act and you're trying to get into colleges and you're, you know, worried about your, your, the drama, your boyfriend or whatever. Like I get it. So I try to be really open with them at the beginning of the semester or the school year and just tell them that, hey, you know, whatever you need, I'm here for you. And, um, I feel like they, they do, you know, I, I don't want them to take that very, uh, super seriously because I do want them to figure out stuff on their own. But I feel like they don't, some of them don't have a choice and they just kinda, you know, they, they need a somebody cause they don't have somebody. And so I think that's also our job as teachers too is because we spend 50 minutes a day with them, at least, you know, I've got kids and I've twice a day cause I was there and speech and dance. So I see them, you know, more than they see their parents sometimes. And it's, you know, some kids really need that. Um, and I, I like that, but I also struggle with that because I couldn't imagine being in that situation. And it's hard. You know what I'm, so

New Speaker: what kind of situations have, have your students been through that have impacted you?

JHi: So I've got a girl right now. Well, I had her last semester twice last semester and she is 19. She dropped out last year as a senior and she doesn't live with, she doesn't talk to her dad. Really. Her mom kicked her out. She's kind of got that whole situation and she's literally putting herself through school while she's working almost full time. She's living with a family friend, I guess until she can graduate. And, and you know, there were days that she would just come in in the morning and I could tell she worked at ihop so she wouldn't get home till work til three o'clock in the morning. And then have to get up in the morning

and come here to get her education. And um, you know, she didn't really have anybody but herself to push her. And so I really tried to help her and I was like, you know, it sucks right now, but it's so worth it. You're almost there, you know? And I really was that only source of, you know, that drive for her, I think. I mean, you know, she knew she was, she wanted to be done, but you know, when she could just be sleeping because she just got home, you know, four hours before she had to come to school or whatever. So, um, that really really touched me. Um, I had, I actually, I've had two cases where I've had, I had some girl drop out. She was my server at a restaurant and I knew she was pretty young. She wasn't in school and I was like, are you not in school? She said, no, I dropped out and I, we made this connection and now she's back in school and she's graduating in two weeks. And I met her in September, I think. So school had already started and she got back in and so she's actually graduating in two weeks and I was, I feel like she didn't really, you know, she has her mom and her dad. They there, her parents, but I don't think they really pushed her to get done like I did. Um, and so, yeah. So she's a, she's almost done. She's got two weeks and then she's going to be college or high school graduate and I'm just going to go to college. So, you know, I feel like that just, I just feel like I made an impact on her life, but I feel like she's making an impact on mine too because she's a good kid. She just needed some guidance, I guess. Um, but then I've got, I have two transgender kids who they are really struggling, um, not only just like dealing with high school, but I really finding who they are. Um, they're transitioning and I'm all about that, but I can tell that they're struggling with who they are and who they want to be. And, um, I, you know, I tell them that I'm trying to, I try to, I tell him, you know, if you, if this is a permanent thing, then that's great. If it's not, if you're confused, and that's okay too, that, you know, you're 16 and life is, life is a way more than high school. Um, and so I really, I'm trying to help them out. Um, yeah. And I've got, I've got a, a girl who, her boyfriend committed suicide in October and a lot of his, he used to go here. It didn't go here anymore, but I have a lot of his friends too. And that really, really took a toll on me too because you know, you, you just don't ever expect it and it's hard on these kids and then it, it makes you want to do so much for them. But you know, there's only so much you can do. So that's just some of it.

New Speaker: yeah, I mean that's all very intense. Um, so I noticed like when I was watching, observing your class, that you had a personal interaction with every student in your class during that class period. Is that kind of your, what you try to do in terms of like not only helping them academically, but kind of establishing those relationships?

JHi: For sure. Yeah. I think if I, in this big, this big debate part in the, in my curriculum, I feel like I really get to know the kids views. But I do want to know, I want to pick their brain. I want to know why they think this way and is it a intellectual thing? Is that their mom and dad told them to believe this is it their friends? Um, I really want to see how I know how different these kids are. Just the way they interact in my class, but I really want to like pick their brain and just see, cause a lot of them are seniors and I'm like, you're about to be grownups and go to the real world. I want to know what you're thinking and

why you think that and is it educational or is it you just read something on Twitter. So, um, but yeah, I do like talking to all my kids because I think if I didn't, what would be the point? You know, I, I don't, I feel like if I didn't have that interaction with my kids, they wouldn't learn anything. They would just glaze over and it'd be all lecture and I don't think you can actually learn anything from just straight lecturing the whole time. So I really like to interact with my kids and they get to pick their topic, which is awesome. And they're really passionate about it, which is great. And I do play devil's advocate, so I get to whether I agree with them or not, I don't tell them. But I want to, you know, kind of come in from every angle and really see where they are. Um, especially the seniors, you know, as, as a Samaritan and you know, our society, you know, they're about to be grownups. So, yeah.

Speaker 3: So what barriers do you encounter when you're trying to develop relationships with your students?

JHi: I feel like sometimes they think that they're too cool for school. For me. Some of them are like, um, I don't have to, I don't have to tell my teacher anything cause what does she know? And um, and I try not to, that's very few, but I do feel like some of them don't want to, I don't want to do the work because they think that they're better than that or they don't, they don't have to do it or whatever. And I don't make them do anything that, that's not going to benefit them in any way, but they don't necessarily agree with that. Um, but I do think this whole teenage defiance, like a really big thing, especially now towards the end of the year, they just really struggle with, well, I don't want to do it. So whatever. And I'm like, okay, well, you know, you're, you're grown enough to make that call but you're still going to get a zero. So you know, you can make that decision because you're, you're capable of it, but you have to know the consequences. And, and so I really been struggling with the whole attitude thing recently, which is funny because I know I had just as strong as an attitude and I was a teenager, so I'm trying to, oh, none whatsoever. So I'm really trying to like come at it in a way where, you know, I get it. I was, I wasn't in high school that long ago. I get it. You still got to do stuff. If you don't, the consequences are, you're not going to be happy with them.

New Speaker: Do you struggle with managing your class because you are so young and they're kind of think you're more of a friend than

JHi: sometimes, but I would feel like the kids that I'm really close to that consider me more of a friend. I don't actually ever really have issues with. I mean sometimes I'm like, hey, you need to, okay, it was great conversations. Have it at lunch, you need to do your work. But, um, I feel like, you know, they really do respect me. It, which is weird because I am younger, which it should be the opposite. But, um, I was really nervous starting because I was like, these kids know that I'm fresh meat that I've never taught. I'm young, I don't look like it. So they're gonna, they're going to have my neck, you know, they're going to cut my head off. But uh, they actually, we've done, we did really well together. I'm just, I'm very surprised. Um, and I feel very lucky that I actually go to a school where my kids want to learn. I do have a couple of that, you know, are defiant,

but for the most part I really do have good kids and I know not all teachers are fortunate enough to have that situation. So, um, yeah. I mean I've been, I've been pretty lucky my first year, so.

New Speaker: So what ways do you like model emotional health?

JHi: Um, so I let them, so last semester, you know, there's Halloween and Thanksgiving and Christmas and uh, this semester there's not that many holidays. So last semester I told them we had, after they had their big units, I was like, okay, you know what, you guys have been really working hard, will have a Halloween party. You can do it, you can bring food, you can do nothing in my class, but hang out and chill. You deserve it. You've been working your butts off. And um, and I think they really appreciate that because I don't think, I think there's so much pressure on them to get all of this stuff done and be in athletics or be an extracurricular and have a social life. And then they go home and they have homework and they have to do chores and stuff. And so I think it's, it's important to reward them in class because they think when they come to school, it's just work, work, work. It's like a prison for them. You know, I've really feel like I've, I've had kids tell me that there's, they have so much to do and they just don't have any time to do it.

Speaker 3: So you think it means a lot to them to acknowledge that they are overwhelmed?

JHi: Absolutely. Um, and that's what we just had. We just had a party last week cause we, they finished their, their last speech and it was really great. And I said, you know what guys, you, you, you killed it. You did awesome and I'm proud of you and you deserve a break. Even. It's just one class a day, you know, one day in my class, 50 minutes, chill out, eat some chips, relax, talk to your friends, you know, talk to people that in the class that you've never engaged with. Um, and they, I think they really appreciate that. And, you know, and then were we had the party and now we're on this big debate unit and, uh, I feel like they're really driven to do this now because they got their time off and they're really excited about it too. So I think that definitely helped and paid it helped in my favor too.

Speaker 3: So, and in like the way you interact with them, how do you model emotional health?

JHi: Um, I would just, I don't know. I mean, that's hard. I tell them that like when I'm, when I do my one on ones with them, you know, I really tell them that, you know, then they might've messed up in a speech or they might have messed up a dance move, but I tell them, you know, you might have messed this part up, but overall, like I didn't really care because overall it was great and it was good and if you mess up, so what? Keep going, you know, it's not going to, life's not going to stop just because you mess up one little thing. Um, and I think they appreciate that too. And they realized that, you know, I'm just as human as they are. I make mistakes and that it's okay to make mistakes as long as you pick yourself back up after you fall. Um,

Speaker 3: and are you comfortable admitting like when you've messed up?

JHi: Oh yes, absolutely. I'm definitely, cause I mean I feel like as a first year I feel like I'm, I, I'm guaranteed to mess up. You know, I just feel like I don't have any other choice but to accept it because I feel like if you don't accept your failures thtn I feel like you can't learn from your mistakes. And that's what, that's what failures are. I are, they're learning there. You just have to learn from it. And um, yeah. And I, I tell my kids, you know what? You're going to mess up way. You know, just in high school you're gonna mess up about light. You got way more life to live. So they're just going to be mistakes. But if you don't learn from them, then what was the point of a mistake? Cause you're still failure. So,

Speaker 3: so that kind of leads into what ways does being a teacher force you to be vulnerable?

JHi: Yeah. Um, well I think, especially in speech, you know, I give them an example speech before they do theirs. So, um, we did, we did a tribute speech and I, every semester I did mine over my, uh, my grandma had passed away. And, um, it's, it's hard for me to, you know, that was the first real big loss that I felt. And, um, I think it was cool for the kids to see me be emotional because I feel like I have to put on this front of okay and like we're friends, but we got to do this work and we got it. We got to get it done. Um, and I think it was cool for them to see an emotional side of me that wasn't strictly business or, you know, happy go Lucky, fun, Ms XXX. Um, so that was, that's a good part. And then in dance we do, we do one, a contemporary piece. It's pretty emotional. Um, and it's, it's cool for the kids to see me do that instead, rather than just, you know, talk like yelling over the music and telling them to get everything. Um,

New Speaker: so you're actually doing the content that they're doing?

JHi: Absolutely. I do. I walk them through it every step of the way and You know, because especially in dance, a lot of these kids had never taken a dance class in their, actually have no idea what they're doing. So I feel like I have to be there by their side or they're going to get lost. Um, but it's, it's hard. Dancing is not easy, but these kids are really fun. They love it and they know, you know, they're not going to be a professional dancer, but they just want to, they just love the music and having fun. And I think it gives them a purpose too. It's a good, if they don't have any extracurricular, they're not in athletics and are not in choir or whatever. Like my kids come to dance and I love to do it. So yeah.

New Speaker: That's important. Also what experiences or people involved in your teaching your job have caused you to experience feelings of shame?

JHi: I had, I had one girl who I had to give her detention and I thought it was for a good reason. I don't even remember what it was now. Oh, she walked out of my, she just walked out in a class and I was like, what are you doing? So I emailed her mom that she had detention and this parent just came out. Like I

was awful for getting her daughter detention for leaving my class. And I told her that, you know, that was just policy, whatever. Well, she came up to parent teacher and just like tried to like ring my neck. And I was like, well, all, I don't make the rules, I just have to follow them. And so she kind of made me feel shameful about it even though I knew I was doing the right thing. So I think it was interesting how I've noticed lots of parents think that their kids or could never do anything wrong. And, um, and then when I tell them go like, oh, there's no way, and then I tell them in front of their kid and their kid is like, you know, they're not going to lie to me and they get caught. And then I'm like, okay, you know, I didn't do, I knew I didn't do anything wrong, but it just, it's interesting how parents like it kind of had that feeling was like, no, I, I didn't think I was doing anything in the wrong, but the parent made me kind of feel that way.

New Speaker: how do you cope with that when those ugly kind of feelings of like come in? Yeah. Um,

JHi: I had to definitely decompress. I mean, I have a kid, so I get like, you know, protect your baby. I get that. But it's, it's just funny because some parents don't think that they were teenagers and I'm like, you know, you were a teenager. You, you get it. Um, so I definitely think like I just had to set it aside and come dealt with me throughout the day. Um, and then when I went home I just was like, you know what, I don't want to worry about this parent while I'm being a parent. So I just kind of was with my kid and he's two, so he's already being a brat and I'm like, you're not going to be a teenager one day. I get it. It's going to happen. But yeah, I think I just had to cope with trying to put it, put it to the side and you know, I keep hearing that it's not going to be the last parent that I'm going to have to deal with from experienced teachers.

Speaker 5: were you able to talk to other teachers to get kind of feedback,

JHi: yeah, I did. And um, you know, they told me that, you know, you don't take, you don't take being talked to like that at all. You know, it's your job to teach the kid and they do something that needs to disciplinary action, then you have to do it. You have to follow school policy.

New Speaker: Sounds like Danny,

JHi: that's exactly who taught me m

New Speaker: we don't take shit. We'd give it.

JHi: Exactly. That's exactly what he told me. He said, you don't take the shit talking, you give it. And I was like, okay. I mean, that makes sense because at the end of the day, it is my class. It's my class, it's my rules. Um, and this isn't just a free for all. You can do whatever you want. And, um, that after that parent, I was like, okay, like this is what needs to happen. And you know, I've never had to go off on a parent again, so it's all in my first year, so we'll see. But I, for the most part, I'm very lucky because I have kids that want to be in

my class, you know, so it's not like English too where they have to take it. So, um, I, I feel like it'll be minimal, that I'll have to deal with situations like that, but I'm definitely prepared now that it's gonna happen again.

New Speaker: How were you prepared?

JHi: I just feel like I'm not going to let it affect me. I'm just not gonna you know, this is,

New Speaker: is that realistic though?

JHi: No, but, but I just,

New Speaker: maybe you know what to do. Like what would you do if that happened again, now that you've,

JHi: I just feel like I was super timid about it and I'm not a very timid person. I've just never had someone come at me like that before. And so I'm just just going to lay it all out and be like, this is the rules. This is how it is. Your kid messed up. I don't know what else to tell you. This is what's going to happen if your kid doesn't serve the detention they get ISI, et Cetera, et cetera. And that's just, that's just the way it is. And I feel like I was, I was kind of like trying to turn it around on me in some way. I was like, Oh, maybe I did mess up. And then I was like, no, I didn't. I knew the rules and I did what I had been told by administration. So, and then, yeah, Denny helped me talking to her, telling me that I shouldn't get any shit talking to me. So yeah. So I definitely feel like I tried to turn it on on myself, but now I know that I wasn't in the wrong. So

Speaker 3: I wonder why we do that. Why do we turn it onto ourself when we know we're in the right?

JHi: I know. I don't know. I feel like, I dunno. Like sometimes I feel, I feel for my kids for sure because you don't know what they're experiencing at home. Um, but, and then it's a continuous thing with the same kid that got in trouble. I'm like, so it's not me. Like I'm not the one, I'm not the problem if it's a continuous thing. Um, which not saying that I've ever made. I've never made a mistake cause I definitely have, but I wasn't in the wrong at that point. So, yeah. So I don't know. It's a,

Speaker 3: do you ever feel like your emergency certified, right? So do you ever feel like you maybe don't have the skills like to or that you're surprised by some things because you haven't gone the traditional route?

JHi: All the time. I tell Tammy all the time, like, I have no idea what I'm doing. And she's like, you're killing it. And I'm like, I don't, I don't, I feel that way when my kids like really do really good on a speech and they like really nail a test, they finally get something and they have that Aha moment. But I just feel like I didn't take any education classes. I didn't take any, you know, I didn't, I don't know what I'm doing. I just feel like there are things that I miss that I'm like,

well, why didn't I, why didn't I know that? Or why didn't I think of that? And it's just because I have my degree in music and not education. Like, so it's, I definitely are things where I'm like, why didn't I know that? And so I do have to forgive myself a lot because I know I didn't go the traditional route, but I've, I feel like I'm almost like destined to do this job because I love it so much and it's so crazy that I wasn't supposed to, you know, like I wasn't, I thought I was going to do it for a little bit and then you know, do what I wanted to do. But I've just really fallen in love with it and the kids, I just, I care about him so much and it's worth it. But it's very hard when I feel like I'll make a mistake on like tell, like telling the kids one thing when I'm like, oh, we should have done this first and then go there. And then I'm like, oh, we're going, I can't backtrack because it's just, I struggle with that a lot. Um, but why I'm really excited for next year because I'll have everything laid out and I can learn from my mistakes and I know, okay, this is, we're going to start with this, then we'll go into this, but I'm not going to do this because last time it didn't work. Um, so, and I feel like that's every first year teacher though. If you have an education degree or not, like you're gonna make mistakes and you have to just learn from it and fix it for next go around but, I definitely feel like I don't know what I'm doing half the time, but people tell me that I'm doing a good job. So I guess that's,

New Speaker: yeah, it seems like, you know, establishing those relationships and like building that with kids really kind of closes that gap

JHi: for sure. Absolutely. 100%. I love it.

JHi: Cool. Thank you for your time. Thank you. I appreciate it.

New Speaker: Yeah, of course.



Kate

- AB: [00:00](#) Okay. Could you tell me your name, what you teach, and how many years you've been teaching?
- Kate: [00:05](#) Okay. My name is Kate and I am the director of XXXX Virtual Academy. I've been teaching in high school, this is my sixth year before that I taught college.
- AB: [00:26](#) Okay. Um, how do you define emotional health in your own words?
- Kate: [00:31](#) For me, uh, emotional health is about a balance and keeping things in perspective. It's about recognizing what's happening inside of me and attending to it so that I am able to stay in balance and minister to my kids.
- AB: [01:06](#) Cool. How do you maintain your emotional health as a teacher? Cause I noticed in your survey that you answered that you daily attend to your emotional health. So what are some ways that you do that?
- Kate: [01:18](#) Well, personally I meditate every day and I do, um, in conjunction with that I do some restorative yoga and I think that really has helped me to center. Um, I also journal sometimes not as much as I'd like, but I journal and, um, I also have, Extremely good relationships with my husband who was my soulmate. And I have some good friends, so I am able to probably from their perspective, maybe ad nauseum talk about what's going on inside of me, but they're very generous to let me talk and to give me some perspective at times.
- AB: [02:11](#) It's interesting cause I just also interviewed another teacher today to achieve mentioned like having her husband here at the high school with her to be able to just debrief and talk about things. And I assume that it's the same with you, you and your husband.
- Kate: [02:24](#) Well before Ben, this is, Ben just has worked here. This is the second year. Okay. So now he knows the same people. He knows situations than what I'm talking about. And of course that helps. But Ben and I have always been very, very close to, we've always, throughout our marriage, uh, he's been my boss or I've been his boss off and on and we have offered work together. So it helps. It has really helped, Huh.

- AB: [02:53](#) So what difficulties do you encounter when you try to maintain your emotional health?
- Kate: [03:03](#) Life always intervenes, doesn't it? Um, as I was saying to one of the kids today, he asked me what are his faults that would keep him from being a successful adult? And I had to really think, because I said we got to talk about this some more because I'm not sure what the definition of a fault is. And I went on to explain that every single one of us views the world and situations and people through our own eyes. And that's based on a bunch of things. And I enumerated life experiences that I had no control over. Um, my grief, um, my joy is my successes, my failures, um, my personality, my DNA. And I use that. I try to look through that. And just because I might think something's a problem doesn't mean somebody else would think it's a problem. So of course that was more than he wanted to hear. But how do I define, how do I define a fault? So that hadn't been said. When I am looking at what's happening, I'm constantly, well, first thing I do is take deep breaths and realize that it doesn't matter. I don't need to respond immediately soon. But not immediately. And I'm always trying to ignore the tantrum happening inside of me and figure out what was really going on. Perhaps my experience as an emergency room nurse has really helped me because you know, somebody would come in with blood everywhere or maybe in hysteria and you've got to assess what's happening. You've got to be in control and you've got to like that, be made panicky by that and, and look to what has to be done and what's really going on. And I kind of bring that with me. So one of the things, one of the advantages, and I know I'm rambling, but what are the advantages or one of the things that I think I bring to this is that I'm an old person and I have all this life experience and I'm able to use that life experience to the situation now. So I've and I have maturity besides, I think I've, I think I've got a lot of maturities, so that really helps in a lot of wisdom. And I'm a mother. And today as I was looking at your questions and as I was interacting with kids today, I was thinking, you know, my style is like I parented. And of course every parent is different too. But, um, I probably had more freedom to scream at my kids, my own kids than I, than I do at the students. But, um, I did. And to tell them, for example, how upset they may be and how disappointed I was. And I don't do that very often with students, but, um, just my level of concern and my, uh, knowledge or belief, deep belief that I thought our right to say, what are you thinking? Um, what do you want out of life? Why

are you doing that? We got to fix this. You've got to get your act together or you're not going to make this happen. And that's kind of my personality with my approach as well. So, um, that causes me to or, or supports what I do in the classroom and I really seal. Um, that helps me keep my emotional balance too.

- AB: [07:09](#) This is my first year of teaching and I'm almost 40 and I can't imagine like coming into this profession as like in my early twenties, just because I don't have the same tools emotionally as I do now. You know, as a mother, as someone who is more mature. And I wonder if that's part of why there's a lot of teachers kind of falling off the bandwagon, you know, in terms of leaving the profession and kind of their mid rings years
- Kate: [07:34](#) or they get so burned out because they were not really prepared. And I see that too. Yes, I agree with you. I do. I agree with you.
- AB: [07:42](#) So I think that that being more matured and having that life experience just is so foundational for being able to interact in a, in a way that's positive with the kids.
- Kate: [07:54](#) Oh, I think so too. And I'm not sure. Um, again, framing it from me, from my perspective with my personality and my life experiences, um, what somebody might consider a disorganization or, or mild chaos doesn't bother me and somebody else might really have trouble with that. So I'm not sure how much of that as a result of my life experience or is more about who I am. And I suppose that's hard to unpack, you know, but we had a horrendous experience, um, when our kids were teenagers and we had a daughter that was a victim of horrendous bullying and the schools were not able or did not work. They didn't know anything about it. They didn't believe it was happening. They could not help. And when I insisted they do something about it, they actually made it 10 worse. And we had an explosion of bomb and our mailbox. Just all kinds of stuff that happened. And I was not prepared before that experience. I could not have done this. Um, so that's what drove me to count, to become a cop, to go back to get my masters and to become a counseling going through council, a professional counselor. That's how I got my masters in professional counseling. I want to try to understand the dynamics of bullying. And that's what put me on that path. And I thought, I will never teach these nasty kids, you know, who can stand teenagers. And I came out of that going, wait a second, you know, and

things just happened so that I had opportunities and when this was presented to me, I didn't turn it down and I've probably never been more fulfilled. So anyway, you know.

AB: [10:00](#) That's, you know, I feel like having a rich life experience that draws you into the profession is motivational and, and someone else was saying helps you into your, a lot of the harder things about the profession is when you feel like it's a calling, when you feel like you're meant to be here.

Kate: [10:19](#) I think that's true about a lot of professions, you know? Um, I was, like I said, I was a nurse before and, uh, I loved what I did there. It's neither, neither nursing nor teaching necessarily has the kind of a status that, um, maybe we would choose and it's certainly doesn't have the kind of income that may be, we would choose either. And when you feel like you have something to offer that you're where you belong and that works and everything meshes and is fulfilling, then sometimes maybe the other things don't matter as much.

AB: [11:09](#) So what kinds of things do you do daily in the classroom to cultivate positive relationships with kids?

Kate: [11:17](#) Well, I try to greet each student personally. Um, I know that I'm maybe not as, um, concerned about violating their rights to privacy. I, for example, I'll yell across the classroom instead of going up and talking to somebody and, um, if I've hurt somebody, um, I don't know it, but I've never been aware of a negative response. So, um, I, if somebody has snuck into class and I didn't notice, I'll yell across the classroom, Hey Jack, I didn't see you there, good to see you. That kind of thing. And so, um, even if they're tardy or late, I will acknowledge that they're there and if they leave and I noticed that I'm not busy, I'll say I'll say goodbye to them and see you later kind of a thing. Uh, I try to talk to each of them. Of course I developed a relationship with their parents too because part of the process of coming into the academy is an interview process where you have to interview at least one parent along with the student. So I established that, uh, try to establish a relationship. So I learned something about them and then I have something to talk about with them besides their performance. So I take a personal interest in them whenever, whenever I can and whenever they allow me that space. And I talk to parents too and hopefully students still that I'm talking to parents

so that we have that kind of connection. Um, as well. I comment on when I think they look particularly nice. I know they'd taken some, uh, time with their appearance or, um, I've got this one kid who doesn't talk hardly at all and he's got this gorgeous red hair and, uh, he forgets a wears his hood. And so I'm always asking him to take his head off, but I love that shade of green looks great with your hair. We remember we need to take the hood off. Oh, thanks Mrs K. Yeah, I will, you know, that kind of thing. And, um, and it's the truth though. I, I mean it, it's really the truth. So, um, I think that, that, that, that helps,

- AB: [13:45](#) is it harder to get through to kids that are, I would assume that I wanted, these kids are, have experienced trouble or trauma or they, they're not successful in the traditional classroom for some reason.
- Kate: [13:58](#) Most of them, most probably 99% of them have not been.
- AB: [14:02](#) And is it harder to kind of get, establish relationships with them because they have, um, experienced whatever personal or academic troubles or
- Kate: [14:13](#) for some of them? Um, in fact, I had made a note about that, I do, like I said, we have one on ones. We mentor them, we sit down and talk with them individually about their progress and we tried to do time studies when they're not where they need to be and try to help them figure out what they needed to change. Of course, the problem with that is they have to want to get the work done and if they don't really want to be here and they don't care, um, or they've got other stuff going on, um, their own lives is such a mess that those, that stuff yells that's so noisy, that's so loud that they can't think or hear anything else. Uh, so then there are some of those kinds of things too. Um, and then I have my own prejudices. You know, I have a couple of kids that were putting in here after longterm suspension because it's the middle of the semester and there was supposed to be doing online at home and they didn't do what they needed to do at home. So they're so far behind. And to dump them in a regular class are not going to get any credit at all. And maybe here they can get some credit. And you know, these kids that I did not interview and I did not choose are sitting here and uh, not really working and they're not disrupting. Cause of course I would kick them out. But um, and by that I mean that'd be detentions and there'd be all kinds of stuff and I could even insist that I don't

want them against day in my classroom because this is the kind of a place this is. So they're not doing that necessarily. But I've got my own prejudice is, you know, you've been given a wonderful opportunity to be here. Why aren't you taking it in and why would you let me help you? And that's the thing that I have to overcome the most is, you know, I don't want to do this. I can help you. Why aren't you even trying?

AB: [16:15](#)

So what, how do you overcome that prejudice?

Kate: [16:19](#)

I ignore the negative impact of it as much as I can and try to be as fair and kind and logical and as much attention as I give everybody else. I try to and I, but I try also not to browbeat them or overwhelm them with attention either. Basically, I've got a couple of kids, probably five maybe that I have a frank discussion with and so does coach and it is this, you've got this much to do. You need to always figure out what percentage they need to do every day. You understand what's going to happen. If you don't get this done, you're not going to get the credit and next year they're probably not going to put you in a class and have you take this class in the classroom from the beginning. They're just going to stick you in a credit recovery class and you're going to have to finish what you're working on now. Oh yes, Mrs. X. I know. I'll write emails to parents if I can't get them on the phone and explain the whole thing. They sure they know and then I have to back off and shut my mouth. Dealing with teenagers, it's difficult. You can't, can't ride them all the time. You just got to make sure that you know, that they know the truth. And then I've got to keep myself from coming back to it. All I do, I come back to it often and show them the truth and I am constantly amazed the third time, probably in as many weeks or maybe even four or five weeks, but the third time we laid it out and explain it, they go, you never told me that. So, but, but, but through that process of trying to do that, we develop a relationship as well. So most of them actually come and talk to me about other things. So I know that they see me as a caring person and they trust me.

AB: [18:28](#)

How do you model like emotional health to them?

Kate: [18:32](#)

I try really hard to, um, to be logical. Um, I can't necessarily keep emotion out of by cause I'm an emotional person. Um, my personality and my ethnic background makes me very demonstrative. I'm Italian, so I, you know, in fact, I had one teacher at prom on

Saturday come across the room laughing at me and say, your face is expressive. I can see exactly what you're thinking in your face. And I didn't even, it wasn't even aware of it. But, um, anyway, um, I try really hard to be as logical as possible. Yes, I am sarcastic. I try hard not to be unkind in my sarcasm, but I, but that's just part of, I mean, oh really? You know, logic, but I'm logical so that I don't take it personally. We are logical types, so when they have a problem, even a personal problem, we talk or we break it down. You know, we try to look at it from different perspectives and I'm just trying to help them detached from the drama because there are some, especially the ones that come in that have been longterm suspended, that I have so much issues with. The Sky's always falling in. The world's always coming down and in their lives. And so I'm always hearing all this horrible, fantastic stuff and I'll let them talk and then I say, okay, let's talk about this. You understand that that's not reasonable. You understand that that's not healthy. I mean, what do you do about that? And we just, we, that's the best I can offer for you. Yeah. But that's, but that's, I try to be, I try to be that way and I try to help kids understand that something they've done or their attitude or, uh, per situation. Um, even though they may have played a big role in it, a lot of what happens is more about the other person than it is about them. And so I'm trying to help give them a perspective so that they can keep things where they belong. And like I also talk to them about compartmentalizing stuff. You know, you can't control that. You can control this. And we try. So I don't know if that answers your question, but, but basically I'm kind of the, that perspective I guess. Like I said, I like a mom. Um, I don't know if every mom is that way, but that was how I, parented and coach is different because coach is a coach, but, and he's quite a bit younger than me. He's like younger than my youngest child, so, uh, he can relate to them in some ways, but I'm always amazed at how they come to find me in my other classrooms. Sometimes

AB: [21:59](#) I can see that. So how do you embrace vulnerability in your teaching practices?

Kate: [22:09](#) The, my sister used to have a say it was called the sage on the stage or the something in the room, I think anyway, as a teacher, especially in this classroom, I'm expected to be the expert on everything. Everything from the way Edgenuity works to the way credits are counted in what you haul, all that works and graduation and

school policies and procedures and life in general. And that puts me in a position to have, to have answers for them. And when I don't have an answer or what, well, when I don't have an answer, I tell them I'll find out. Um, I don't know. That's a good question. I'll get that for you. Or I thought that I, that was the way it worked, but maybe it doesn't. I'll check it out. And if I have made a mistake, really make it mistake. I apologize. and yet none of that bothers me, I am not afraid to do that. And that does not bother me at all. In fact, it makes life so much easier to be able to say, did I have that wrong? I am so sorry. Let's see what he can do to fix this kind of a thing.

AB: [23:55](#) I think that's another way that you model some emotional health and how to learn. Like, I don't know, let's go look it up. You know, let's, let's figure it out together. And then they're like, oh, if I don't know something, I look it up. [inaudible] I don't know.

Kate: [24:08](#) We do that all the time and I hope it shows them that adults can be learning all the time and that, uh, healthy adults are willing to take the time to learn something new but also to apologize and to work things through and to fix things. And so that's, that's like, yeah, that's my, my approach now. There may have been a time in my life when I was in my early twenties when I wouldn't Because I was so, I didn't have a lot of self confidence. I mean, I've obviously been a very confident person, but as a professional, um, I recognize that people look to me to answer, be able to know and I may have bluffed a lot and, uh, I don't do that so much anymore. So that's, that's what we do. I, but I think being vulnerable, one of the things that did happen, you talked about shame. About five years ago. The first year that I had taught in the high school. And quite frankly, I believe they did a really terrible job of helping me with that. Some kids recorded something that were going on in the classroom and it got on snapchat or one of the social media things. One of the principals notified me and um, I didn't get in trouble for it. But I was not happy with the way I'd handled that situation. And I was also embarrassed and hurt that they had recorded it, violated the privacy of our classroom. So I came when I found out about it, I yelled at him the next day. How dare you, this is a sacred space. We trust each other. You cannot do that if you expect to maintain a relationship. And that was kind of what I did and I still wasn't sure what I could do, what my boundaries were here.



- AB: [26:18](#) So how did you deal with like your inner Yuck, you know, when that happened?
- Kate: [26:23](#) So most of the time what I do is, um, when stuff like that happens is, and I bet, and I've done this all of my professional life is I make a plan. And so I've got plans for all kinds of situations and if I haven't ever had that situation, okay, now here's another situation and I make a plan I go over it in my head so that I don't have to come up with a good plan. And of course, nothing ever repeats itself, but it's something as close to what similar may come up. So then I've got something to fall back on. Then I was able to think through perhaps when I was at the emotional or it wasn't a serious situation that I can draw on. And then I think about, um, do I need to do something to fix it or am I better off? We'd be better off just letting it go. Because sometimes if you, um, make a big deal to the student, then all of a sudden they think they've got a grievance when it might not really have been that way. I, I just don't want to make it into a bigger deal than it needs to be. But I'm only thinking of a couple of times when like one time, um, I was out in the hall and watching uh, exchange class exchange and I came back in the room and there was a handful of kids that had set fire to some sage that some kid brought in. So I had the sage that was brought in. I had the kid that's set fire to it. I had the kid that had the lighter, that shared the lighter and should not have had a lighter and the smoke in the room. And I had all of those things together and it wasn't pretty, my response wasn't pretty. And then I had to decide. What do you mean how do I deal with that? So I had a lot of, uh, examination to do about, um, why did that hurt me so much? Why was I, you know, and um, I've come through that a lot. That was like five years ago. And, um, boy, I'm not personally hurt that much anymore. And I think because I was so vulnerable and risking so much to do this in the first place, because I had been, what did I know what teenage kid kids except my own teenagers. And so, so I was a real vulnerable to begin with it.
- AB: [28:57](#) So do you feel like when the students misbehave that it reflects on our insecurities? Like as our flex on how we feel in terms of our competency as a teacher in those early days,
- Kate: [29:13](#) I didn't feel that it reflected on my insecurity, but my insecurity triggered my response to it. That was the first year I had a bunch of kids that probably, um, had major

issues and I don't know that I shouldn't have had, but I was not prepared for that level of dysfunction and in an environment where I didn't know them and I had no control or, or authority, I felt authority over what was happening because my whole purpose was to get them to get these credits done. And so, um, of course, that whole thing, it has changed a lot for me in terms of having authority here. I, um, and I've, I've kind of got the whole thing figured out now about, um, how I, um, observe what they're doing, how I motivated them or, and I don't mean that I know that you can't motivate them, but you've got to provide tools and support. Um, but I'm much more confident in, uh, how I get them from not having credit to getting credit and that process and what is reasonable, what's not reasonable in what I can tolerate and what I shouldn't tolerate and what I need to do about it. Um, Shannon even said, um, the disciplinary process has got a lot of problems and I know that it's trying to do the best it can, but you know, you can't, you have a kid who doesn't come to school or you've got a kid who misbehaves. How often do you give them detentions and when they don't serve the detentions, then what do you do? And you can call parents. What if it doesn't make a difference? And at what point did they preliminary Isi and then of course, Isi. They're not classrooms, so they're missing out, but you need them out of the classroom because it's so disruptive. They're ruining things for everybody else. And that whole conundrum about what do you do with that?

AB: [31:39](#) Yeah, it just seems like it's a partnership with the parents, isn't there? Everything kind of breaks down. But there, the problem is, is that there is no parental support and that's what's fueling good behavior in a lot of cases.

Kate: [31:51](#) By the time they get to be juniors and seniors or even freshmen in high school, I'm not sure that you can repair any of that anyway. So it's just very difficult than my, my approach is to try to develop a relationship with them so that they realize that there's an adult who believes they can do it and who thinks they should do it. So that if I can get them to that point, then I've got a chance to get them to help them get their credit. But in the end, I, you know, I'm not sure, um, I've got students in here who will not earn the credits they need to be in here, uh, to begin with. And then I ask, have I helped them at all? But letting them be in here and have some flexibility. And yet we know that if they were in the regular classroom, they might not have gotten any credit. And at least night here

they'll get something. But that doesn't mean I want them back next year. So it's, you know,

AB: [32:46](#) is there any story in particular that like, was a successful turnaround for a student that stands out to you?

Kate: [32:56](#) last year late in the semester. And I'm not sure how far. I can't remember. Anyway, I have to look it up. But it wasn't before school started. And this was a freshman would break down in tears every day and go to the freshman office. They had to call her, her guardian to come and get her. And she has this horrible anxiety and she just couldn't teach us. She just could stay in class. And the union though, the academy, the Virtual Academy was not intended for freshmen. It was intended for kids who had had a highschool experience who proved that they couldn't be as successful in the classroom as we'd like to give them that option after we could see all that. But this kid, I don't know anything about junior high, but this kid was a freshman and was just having, struggling, struggling, struggling. And so the counselor had asked me what I thought I would when I would do, and I said, well, let's try get [inaudible] fill out the application. And her, her mom came to meet me and the student and we talked. And of course, even then you don't hear much. I mean, they don't always give you the whole story. You don't really know all the time what's going on. Um, and I don't feel it as being nosy if I understand that this kid's got a variety of issues from, uh, lots of medical problems that are frequent hospitalizations or surgeries and, and maybe a chemical imbalance and struggling with depression. And I, if I can understand some of those things, and maybe that's because I'm a nurse, but it helps me to be, supportive in a way, I think other than, Oh, you're not trying, what's wrong with you? Uh, approach. So this kid, uh, I said, okay, let's come. We had, I had three classrooms then and I had one that was called the quiet room and she'd come every day and she'd sit down in his classroom and she wouldn't talk to anybody. And she faced the wall. And I would greet her every day and, and talk to her as much as I could everyday, but I didn't want to force it or anything. And there's a courtyard out here and freshmen go out, fourth hour, third and fourth hour, they go out, they're not in the academy. And one of those times she had a freshman success and a teacher came to tell me that there was a little girl out in the courtyard, crying. And I know if it was mine, but I went out there and she was on the bench and she was sobbing and I sat down next to her and I asked her what was going

on and she told me a story about tried to work with freshmen to do these bulletin boards and that none of the kids would listen and there was pushing and it was just overwhelming. And she, she was sobbing and I said to her, you're going to be okay. You just do the best you can there. This is just a class to help you think about how to organize things so you can be successful in school. And all that. And then I said to her, you know, things are tough for me too, but I want you to know you are the reason I come to school every day. From that moment she turned around, um, she came every day. She'd come up to that point, she would not make eye contact. From then on she come and she has started looking better, taking more care with her appearance. And by the near the middle of the second semester, she came to me and talk to me about what she still needed to do to be able to get all of our classwork done so that she could come back to the academy next year. And today she's through sophomore year and she's working, on junior classes. It's awesome. And she's got an a average and she was failing freshman year and she's vibrant and still alive. But you know, she's, she's vibrant. She's, she's talks in class and she wouldn't talk to anybody before. And there was an incident where, um, she saw some kids doing something they weren't supposed to do and she came and talked to me about it. And then when the one, the student tried to, uh, uh, intimidate her, she stood up for herself and her friends said to me later, I cannot believe that she actually stood up for herself. So I think it's probably a combination of the planets aligning, you know, maturity, maybe things getting better for her in all ways. Um, but I also think the fact that we, that I gave her a safe place to be, and that I was able to make that connection with her so that she felt safe and valued in and whatever. I think that helped. Absolutely. So that's my, one of my stories, you know,

AB:

[38:29](#)

I appreciate the time that you've taken so generous of you.

## Emma

- AB: Okay. This is Emma theater teacher at XXXX high school. just starting out. How do you define emotional health for yourself?
- Emma: For Myself, I think it's, I don't know, probably the best way to describe it is kind of a balanced and, um, not reactive about responding to things. And then, I don't know about you, but like as a woman, I've heard, I've heard this, it said that men have pockets and women have like one pocket and so everything goes in that one. So when one aspect of my life is unsettled. It just kind of naturally disrupts. And being married, being a mom, being a teacher, being responsible for all the balls that I juggle, there's a lot that can just go wrong or unsettled. So I think emotional health for me is also trying to separate those pockets a little bit more and not letting one aspect if it's, if it's going to crap or I'm struggling trying to not let it permeate or bother that the rest of it. Um, which I think, you know, can sometimes be disconnect because you feel like, oh, I'm being a success at home but I'm not at school or I am, I'm sucking at that school but are your vice versa? You know. But um, so I think for me emotional health is where that's kind of balanced and not that things have to be calm, but that I'm, I'm content and I have joy and I'm not like a panic, frazzled and this. Does that make sense? Even as in, in spite of the seasons and busy cause those are all just like just a shift. It's, it's like a slight stress change and I'm not talking about that, but just that stability. Yes. It's separating the pockets.
- AB: I've heard that men are like waffles. Women are like Spaghetti.
- Emma: Yeah. Or like a tool belt versus like an apron. I've heard that too, but that's how you would define it for me.
- AB: So how do you, I noticed in your, um, in your survey that you said that you take steps daily to maintain your emotional health. So what, Oh, wise one, what does that, oh, why do you maintain your emotional health?
- Emma: I think a couple of different ways. And I, it again depends on the day, but on a regular basis. Like I, um, I do exercise, I'm like, I for the past year I've been waking up at like five, five 30 in the morning and I'll do like a longer yoga thing, like an in home yoga type thing. Um, and then I've tried meditation and things like that. I just can't get my brain to calm down so that if I shifted, um, within the last month to like T-25, which is this kick your ass type rigorous thing, like for 25 minutes, I'm just going hard. So I, I'm too like in my body to think. So just getting out of my body that way. I think having conversations with people that I trust, I, um, my husband is a teacher, so we have lots of conversations. Um, but also my audi tech guy that when he runs auditorium, use my right hand man here. Um, I talk a lot with, um, uh, XXXXX the band, and then we, whenever it comes to like the social maneuvering, political chess, um, like we have a lot of conversations. Um, and then I just, you know, have people that I can joke with and have fun with. Um, I also listened to a lot of podcasts and things like that about, um, just different things and I'm going

through or just to get me out of myself. Um, sometimes I just do sometimes, like I'll just leave during my plan and like go get a cup of coffee or something, just to get out of there. Um, and then other times like, uh, when I get really stressed and it only happens a few times a year, I just clean, I cleaned my office, so my office looks great, like a couple times a year. Um, I do that. Um, sometimes like I, uh, I like to watch Netflix a lot. Um, I do, um, soaks. Um, like I used to think taking baths with stupid as ridiculous to you set in your own filth for a long time. But now that's one of my favorite thing was actually to like just be by myself and turn ons and Netflix on my laptop and have a glass of wine and just chill. So there, those are things that I've been doing and since I've been doing those things, I've found like just physically, like I hold a lot of stress in here (gestures to shoulders) and I don't, I don't have that so much anymore because of the exercise because like I do things to kind of help my spinal health and I don't have as many headaches. Um, and that's another thing too. Like, um, I went to doctor because for the past, I don't know, five or six years, um, and I can't tell you with certainty the why behind it. Like we looked and did allergy testing to see if that was a trigger. But like, probably like once a month, at least once a month, I'll just have this intense migraine. Um, and like I just throw up the entire day. So it was like I'll be in class and whatever and I'll hold it down and then, or I'll ask my ade, like, I'm just going to step away so I'll go throw up and then I'll come back and just keep going through. And so I went and I got diagnosed with migraines officially and I got medicine. So like now I don't stress about that at all. And like as soon as I take the medicine, like within 30 minutes, everything is regulated and gone. And then they gave me nausea medicine. So I think that's something that's been helped to, cause that does kind of stress me out sometimes. Like, am I going to have one? Cause I feel it, I feel it can be gone. So those will be things, I guess, precautions and steps regular. I think most of those are pretty regular.

AB: Has it taken you a while to kind of understand that these are the things that you need to regulate yourself? Uh, as opposed to like your early career and

Emma: yes, my early career it was just work harder, do more. Um, put your head down, suck it up buttercup. We're like an unhealthy version of that is just a bitch to anybody who will listen or whatever. But even I think, you know, some of my fine arts people, they understand like XXXXX probably the one that closest understands what I do. Um, and also just, I think just maturing. Like I'm almost 40 now, I'm just realizing that nobody's ever going to know or like feel exactly what I've gone through. So just mentally trying to understand that because sometimes in the telling of it, I want them to feel what I feel, but they just don't understand. Um, so just getting a healthier perspective that, you know, one is not the end of the world. I've learned to chill out, I think a little bit more, which has been good.

AB: Do you think that's why so many early year teachers are not coming back to the profession in terms of they're just not able to emotionally now?

AB: Yeah. Like there, they hit that point where they don't have the capability to cope with the stress that they're experiencing.

Speaker 1: And I think so, but I also think, I think for people on my circuit, like in the speech theater stuff, what I've seen, especially having student teachers and just knowing a lot of the younger ones, they come in expecting to be like Mr Holland's opus or like this magical experience. Um, and uh, they expect that they have to have the program exactly the way that they want it when they want it. And the thing is, even when they get all of those things, there are still ill-equipped. But I dunno, I've seen many of them just be emotionally crippled. They start off with anyway, and then when they're put under stress, they just cracked even more. So, I don't know. I don't know that necessarily it's the job. I know the job contributes to the breakdown, but I think there are already cracks in the system before they arrived.

Speaker 1: Well, I mean, there's a lot of research about how creative people in particular, a more emotional, that's just the deal. Yeah. Like, if you're a creative person and you're in the arts, you're probably more, well you have to, I just having volatile emotional.

Emma: Yeah. And yes, I will definitely, definitely say that and based upon the people that I know, but you can still be emotional and not be reactive. Um, and then the other thing too is I think, and again I can't speak for all teachers, but I know a lot for myself and for my husband, but just for those of us that do run programs and things, there's so many, they're bazillion choices that you make during the day and so many of them, like you've, you've been so personal, you've, you've analyzed all these things, you've made all these conscious choices and in many ways it's like you're damned if you do, damned if you don't. Because like when we go to auditions, like there are stories and yes, there are probably things that I do and I've reflected a lot on that. Are there things that I can do contribute, contributing to a negative idea of me to peers or by my students and the, are there things that I can be, when it's helpful having my husband here because you kind of is an echo chain or you know, he kind of absorbed what's happening and then we talk about different things. But even when I do everything right, I still feel like I lose a lot. Um, because I can never make people happy. It's like if I, um, if I have a cast of 30 and close to a hundred people audition, I've upset, pissed off, hurt 70 people. And it has nothing to do with like, do I like you? Do I not like you? Um, it's who's right for this part. And then also what they've shown me in the day to day. If they don't do their work and they're kind of jerks when it comes to things or they're not able to be socially mature. It's like on my wall, you auditioned for me every day, every day you show you who you are and if you're not showing me who you are and it's not great right now, we'll work on making that happen. But I'm not going to spend my time away from my family and everything else and for very little pay that I get to do that, I'm not going to spend my time away being around people that make them who the experience miserable for me or for you. I want him to get the get to is not the half dues to get to. So I don't know. There's, there's that or just being in the position and I think a little bit being a woman and then being a taller woman too, like I, I'm automatically in people's brains a bitch or he I, it's weird. It's interesting. It really is. And I, I feel that every year from different kids. And then of course, you know for some it's like

in parents too, they need a villain for their story. They need to justify and I'm a convenient source so they're happy. There's that.

AB: Yeah, I've experienced that one. One boy in particular, I'm very direct and be like I'm not in one and fuzzy type of personality there. I'm just kind of alert to the point. And one kid was just like complaining and the very first day of school about like the summer assignment that they had to do for AP and it was a class of like 35 kids and a counselor came and was like, listen anybody that can get out of here, we need you to get out of here. It's too big. And I to him and I was just like listen you know she's here to get you out if you want to get out cause you're complaining about this, this already. And so he, the whole year he has been angry at me and just, he came in and just aired his grievances. I don't like you or there's just something about you I don't like you. And just like, like you think I'm stupid and like at no time did I, you were stupid. Yeah. You were complaining about the work. So if you don't want to work then get out. Right. So it's just, I feel like the target being a targeted, especially if you're just a direct well type of woman I think.

Emma: But just in general, I don't think they get told a lot of that truth in their lives and which is why, I don't know, it's kind of a blessing and curse. They like light hate it. Um, I think that they respect, I dunno. I think that they respect that honesty and truth. Cause I do like from the time that they come in here until the time that they leave, like I've, I've told them like I will always give you what you need, but it may not always be what you want. That's the way that it is. And my job is to see you and my job is to figure out you and my job is to know what you're good at, what you need to work on and help you get there. And every single one of them has like some kind of dragon they're trying to slay just in here (gestures head), in here (gestures heart). And that's my job to figure out what it is so I can have a key to unlock it and help them move past it. Um, but in the process we're going to struggle because they expect will, especially in theater, they expect it to be blow off class, which this is probably one of the hardest classes through through school. Um, but uh, yeah, and I don't let off on my expectations, which is also too that the, because I don't let up and because I keep expecting them to do things like turn things in on time or do you know whatever or treat people, well, I call him out on it when, I mean not like in a public shaming way, but I call him out on it and expecting me to do it, which means that we have that cycle of conflict because they keep being targets when like if you change yourself behavior than we are, we're all good. But yeah. So that's an interesting, interesting dynamic.

AB: Yeah. A big believer in growth mindset. And if you're not struggling, you are not. Yeah, why would you be here if you weren't struggling?

Emma: Yeah. But I think on that same hand, um, my classes remind me, teach me every year about who I want to be in, who I need to be in. Like is what I'm saying and doing matching with what I'm living or the culture that I've created here. Is it, what is it and is it what I really want it to be or are there things that I'm doing? Like I'm always thinking about that stuff, which I can just be lazy and not.



AB: But I that really challenge yourself.

Emma: Well, every year. Like I have like a professional goal that set for myself and then I have like a personal goal every single year. And then I tried to get better at that through, through the course of the year. And like, even the other night, my husband and I were talking about things and I was like, I think I'm going to rework my schedule a little bit for the, um, for next year and like find places to let things breathe a little bit more because we move so fast. So is there something short that I can cut or is there something that I need to link in an extend? Um, just to give a little bit more weight because I think some of the stress that they have in my class are like, some of the frustration is the fact that we do keep moving. So maybe if I'm going to try it next year, and again, it's just subtle, subtle changes, but I think it'll make a bigger difference or like even the way that I work for makeup, like the stage makeup unit, like in the way that I grade. Cause one of the things that, that uh, he's, he's my husband is heard, you know, students say, and I've, I've tried to explain, but it is kind of an intense situation. Um, they, I basically, like I sit at my little podium thing, they come in, they stand before me. I look at them and like I'm looking, writing, doing all this stuff and then they just are standing there. I'm like, turn that way too. And that way. Cool. Whatever. And they just like, Oh God, she's appearing into my soul and judging me forever. And it's like, no, no, it's not a next, all right, well I've got 30 plus in that class. I have like less, less than an hour to get this stuff done in. I have to grade all these people. This is their final. Um, and what's going through my brain is, um, oh God, I gotta hurry up and do this. Okay, what's the check? The checklist of things. So that's where that, I guess that RB RBF the retching resting bitch face or you know, all that stuff comes in is because like I'm panicked trying to do stuff. So it's like even trying to rework like how do I ease that, that culture in in the class, how do I make it more inviting and I have to like build time. So next year I'm going to try to do it where like okay we've gone through the unit and we've practiced, but then we have sign up day. So you're going to be graded on day one. You're going to be graded on two instead of all at once together. That way they can practice on some different things, but we can just take things with more ease. I can talk to them a little bit more and have time to go are nice highlights and shadows. We need to soften your jaw line but really good and nice application. Blahdy blahdy Blah instead of,

AB: so I mean you're just not rigidly doing your own thing, but being aware of how, what, how your interactions are effecting them

Emma: absolutely. Cause the other part too is, I mean most of my classroom, yes, we go through a crap ton of curriculum and yes, they leave probably better trained than at some colleges, but that rigor should not sacrifice or, or overcome the relationship. And that's kind of what I've learned over over the years. Cause I, when I first started it was just trying to build and establish credibility and you know, all these things that were really like me centric and like trying to do, do Mrs XXXXX. I'm well, um, but I think in that there's, there were some coldness or unintended, you know, unintended issues that were created. And again, not in anything super bad or whatever, but just there were missed opportunities.

There were probably kids that got out because I was a little bit colder. Um, just different things like that or like stresses that I had to deal with conflicts that I had to deal with that. Um, I, if I would have approached it differently, um, like stupid example from back in the day when I first started, I, I've always had a no gum policy, but like, I was like, this is the hill to die on. And it became this game with some of them, like just students, especially me being in and, you know, replacing a previous teacher. I was already the bad guy. Um, but I had asked them to spit it out and then they would pretend to or they would hide it or they would get out another piece of gum and it just became like this, this war. And I just remember getting so pissed off and whatever because I couldn't control them and less what I was like, wait a second. Um, ease up on that. So I did. And it was pretty much the rule is like, um, you can't have gum when we're rehearsing or performing well, that's like 90 plus percent of the time. So it's just that like, hey, go ahead, spit out your gum or just whatever. Yeah, I mean that's, it's it. And I haven't had a problem with that since, since I've changed my mindset on it. So I think in addition to trying to help them be better humans, they helped me a lot more than I've realized or that they realize. Cause again, it's just little things.

AB: Yeah. You've got to relinquish control.

Emma: Yeah. Well and even with like being a mom, like once I became a mom that changed teaching cause I saw it a little bit more from a parent perspective and like how would I, how would I perceive what I do from a parent perspective or different things like that. So I think it just made me better than customer service, if that makes sense. Yeah.

AB: So what other practices do you employ in the classroom to cultivate and maintain healthy relationships with students? Cause I totally get the, the struggle between like, like I don't ever want the administrators come in and see me just like chit chatting with the kids, you know, and

Emma: see I don't have a problem with that because the, the other thing is like they're, they're looking at like a small portion of it and if they want to have a discussion about that small portion that we totally can, but then I've also got this backing evidence of other things that we are doing. So just because you caught me at this time, which again, that's not a bad, I don't think that's a bad thing. If that's a regular practice then sure. But no, that's how you get to know them. So as far as like basic things, um, I do handshakes everyday at the, and I changed that probably five, seven years ago, something like that. And my husband did it at his school. He taught at the middle school and I just like, I don't have time for that, whatever. And then I went to go watch one of my mentor teachers in Tulsa and he did it too, except he broke into hugs and one, I'm not a hugger in two, let's just, I don't know, if they asked for a hug then fine, we can do that, but you're kind of whatever. Um, so I was like, okay. So one of my personal goals was during that year of change, like I set out, I'm going to shake hands every day. So I did. And of course like the kids that I'd had for two or three years really weirded out and like, what are you a preacher now? Like okay, cool. And then it started developing into like some wanted to

do handshakes and then it was like I made it through like the middle of October we were moving into one acts season and I made every single day. But then there was one day, like I just, I got behind in the last class and I needed to get some things ready. So I got ready and bell rang and they hadn't come in yet and I'm just mad at myself because I wasn't out there to do it. And so I broken my promise to myself. And then I was frustrated like, where the heck are they? Well I, you know, got panicked about that. I'm trying to get this stuff and like I'm just walking down the hallway like, guys, what are you doing out here? And like you didn't shake our hand yet, you hit okay. And then I realized like, okay, this thing does matter. In talking with kids, it was like that's the sum. For some of them that's the only contact that the physical contact, that appropriate contact that they have with an adult during the day or like that made them feel seen and whatever. So it's also a good time to like have a head check and just kind of look and say, okay, hey, it's something something up today. Or if there's some kind of business thing that needs to be ha, you know, have been like, hey man, are you, uh, you know, that assignment, you still haven't turned it in. Can you get that to me tomorrow? They're just all these little things that get done and like attendance because I've shaken their hand. Like attendance is a breeze. I know exactly who, who's here, who's not. So functionally it served, served me well, but just relationally served well. So there's that. I do joke a lot. Um, and I'm sarcastic. I disagree with people that say sarcasm shouldn't belong in the classroom. I think that's when we, um, cause I think that's teen speak. That's how a lot of them speak, I think in the right place, right time, right kid for sure. But you've got to have that relationship beforehand. Um, you know, I do, I do silly things. I do a remind. Um, and yeah, all those different things. But mainly, I mean it's been just a crap ton of time with a lot of room. So I mean like we eat together, we eat, you know, go to Tulsa overnight together. We have lots of bus rides and just again, conversations. But I think that's probably one of the biggest, yeah. Biggest things you can do as a teacher and strategies you can use as get to know them because if they know that you care about them, then there's a little bit more ownership or there's a little bit more weight than not saying guilt trips, but there's a little bit more weight to your word. Like come on, like, and that's actually stuff that, um, conversations that I've had with students before, like if I had done something to upset you because you seem like maybe they seem distant in the class and whatever. Is there something going on that now I done something to offend you? Is there anything? Well No, I just this and this and this and so it opens the door to other conversations, um, and becomes less confrontational. Yeah. Can you get up? Blah, blah blah. Just way easier, way cleaner. Yeah. Or like even the cell phone thing, cause it's in my class, they're not allowed to have their cell phones unless they've gotten permission from me, period. That's it. And, uh, so when I have a student, it's just a simple case of, um, Amanda, was I not clear on what I, what I said about the phone, you know, just to call you in here. So here's the deal. I'm gonna imagine that you lost your brain for a second and you forgot where you were and who you're with. And you're also going to imagine that I'm a reasonable human being. So if you really needed to use your phone, you would just come ask me and have a conversation. But now you kind of created a little bit of mistrust. So if I'm watchful of you and paying attention to you a little bit more is because I'm, I'm

curious cause you've distracted me and I got to figure things out. But here's, here's the deal. I'm going to go ahead and let you have this and we're just going to pretend like this is a one time deal and this is a learning opportunity. But if you do that again, not only have you lost some more of my trust, but I'm going to actually write you detention. So can we agree that you're going to be a mature adult and you're going to keep your phone away unless she got okay, cool. Great. All right. Get back out there and it's just a quick conversation because I've gotten my authority there. I've gotten like this is what's going to happen if, but I'm going to give you a chance to repair. Um, so just little stuff like that.

AB: Are there barriers that you think countered that like keep you from developing these relationships with kids?

Emma: I mean sometimes there's just an innate personality clash. I mean that is a reality of the classroom. Sometimes there are just people that if, if you are both at the same level in the same chapter of life, you would not get along and you had whatever. But the other thing too, that attendant within program is like you don't have to like each other, but you have to work with each other. It's the same way as some faculty. There's some faculty, I don't really care for it. Like I would not hang out with them in personal life. I would not be friends with them, but I can still be friendly with you and I can still get my work done with you that I need to. There you go. So I just keep trying. And then sometimes it's just a warmup thing. Sometimes it's the, they're holding a grudge because of something that, some infraction that I didn't even know that I did or a, because I keep holding them accountable to things. But then it's just a quick conversation. But like I had a student this year in theater one, he actually wrote kind of a threatening little note at the top of his notes saying like, if you ever give me a bad grade on my notes again, and dot, dot, dot was like, hold up. So we had a quick conversation. Everything's always defensive. And like when he didn't, when he doesn't get a grade that he wants, it's like you gave me a... Hold up. So we had that conversation and um, eventually send them to the principal for his note. He called his mom. Had that conversation. Um, and then he wrote me an apology letter over the weekend and brought it on that Monday and he gave it to me. I read it. I said, well thanks man. I really appreciate, I really appreciate that. It means a lot to me and I hope that we can work on being better, bloody blah. And since then, everything's lighter now. So sometimes it's just a matter of like natural things in relationships she got, I kind of have a little bit of blow out before you repair. But yeah, things are, things are fine. But then I also tried to realize too that some of these things, I think part of it is as the adult, I've got to not take things personally. It's the same like with my son, like he's not acting out because he hates me or doesn't, I mean he may not like me or prefer me at that time spending with me. I may not like him or prefer him at that time, but he's just a young adult trying to deal with stuff in a very sloppy way. And I've got to be the adult in that situation. So my, my husband is, uh, taught me the puppy dog look, which is not just somebody makes an accusation against you and whatever. And then you're just like, Huh, I'm not quite sure what you mean. So can you, can you give me an example of that instead of my normal tendency of like, um, how

dare you speak to me that way. This, this, this defensive Blah Blah Blah [inaudible] monster. I'll show you my answer instead of that. I Huh. I, and every time I've used that it's like disarmed them cause they're also confused, but then it requires of them explanation of things and then we can kind of go through stuff. Cause a lot of times they're just reacting to, and I think it's those reactions I just keep feeding off of each other and then are just little bombs that happen in the classroom.

AB: So how do you do this with parents? I've had conflict with parents when there's an adult that is acting like a child either via internet, via email or, or,

Emma: well sometimes like with the email, it just depends on the email. Like for that, I typically have, of course you have the initial reading and then you have the third and the fifth and the 17th reading, you know, all that other stuff. Um, I think before I would typically respond. Now I again, we'll have a, you know, a few of the key people I trust depending on what the issue is, I'll have them read it and see if I'm missing something because of course my first he read it in a tone or what the perceived tone is, which is kind innately defensive, which is fine. That's fine as your initial thing, but then you've got to think about it. And one, am I putting anything stupid in writing? So again, when I craft a response, um, I'll have somebody check it that I trust and make sure that it's good and then edit accordingly. Um, the other thing is I'll just typically if it's a response, uh, that requires more, or I feel like mine can be misinterpreted, which is typically the case. If they're having a reactive thing, I just request like, I'm, Hey, I thank you for your information or thank you for your concern. Um, I'd love to talk with you about this, blah, blah, blah. And then depending on the parent or depending on what the situation is, either asked him to come meet up here. And so we meet in person so we can see each other and deal or the phone conversation. Um, I've also had some people like I know when it's tricky, um, I don't meet here, I'll meet up in the front office in the conference room and then I'll have, uh, a counselor or a XXXXX really good to be with. And I or whoever, the kids' principal once I've informed them of the thing. Um, and then, so that typically works, having that third party in there. Um, but most of the time it's just saying, oh, wow. Yeah, I just depends on the situation. Like with the kid, um, that wrote the hateful note, his mom, I talked to her on the phone and I was probably a little bit, I should have, I should have waited before I called because I'm still a little worked up cause it was pretty right after the class and I don't think I said anything stupid, but I probably came across as a little bit more defensive and whatever. And then she threw out the whole, well he says he doesn't like your class because of Xyz and teaching style, a lot of blah blah blah. And like it was just, it was crappy attack. And uh, I said, well, I'm sorry you feel that way, which I never should have said that. I should have said, Huh, I'm confused. Can you provide an example of that? Because then again it puts them, um, they have to take an ownership of whatever rational expansion. And with this kid he wouldn't have any rational explanation or if he did like again going from that, Huh, well if that's is that, if that's the case, like I, I appreciate you letting me know cause obvious like that would definitely not my intent if I'm coming across that way, I want to, I want to have a chance to fix that and repair that relationship. So kind of trying to come at it

from that perspective. But there's some people that you're, you're just not ever going to make them happy. They are, it's never going to be resolved again. As long as it's not anything illegal, you know, unethical or whatever, that's fine. And sometimes you just got to flush it. But I've, I've said to parents, well, I hear what you're saying but I'm just going to have to politely disagree and, and I still respect your opinion, but I completely disagree and this is how I've handled it. But most of the time by then, like even if I've had, this is my, my fun time and the guy had a conversation with parents, I'll typically say, yeah, the reason I haven't called you before, this is because I've been trying to give them you and your student and opportunity to be the mature young adult that he or she is becoming. And, um, I've, here are the conversations that we've had and we've talked about this and this and, um, the reason I'm calling you is because, um, I need your help because obviously what I'm doing isn't working and blahdy Blah, sir, is there anything that I need to know of that you could help me with to help me understand? And then sometimes I'll have parents then like theirs, theirs, I totally understand why that kid's being a jerk or I totally understand it because of x, y, z. And it's like, well, I would suggest not for nosiness sake, but that you contact the counselor, I'll go talk to the counselor and let them know, but I'd contact the counselor and then that way they can contact us so we can be more understanding because that's a difficult situation and I'm sorry to hear that or blahdy Blah Blah. I mean it there by now I have all my little scripts. I mean, and that's pretty much what it is. Just developing what your script is for the situation and the faces and the places may change. Um, the exact details of the story may change at the root of it. The storylines the same for a lot of or another thing too, especially when it comes to grades. Yeah, I know that they're failing in this particular assignment or here's, here's the issue, whatever. But, um, this is just one grade in a slew of many. So, um, here's what they can do, um, to repair this grade or they can't do it, but here's what they need to do and then we can finish out strong. So short term, not the greatest long term, they'll be fine, blah, blah blah. I mean there again so many different scripts.

AB: Yeah. I just wonder if the reason why so many teachers are kind of falling off the bandwagon in their early years is because they don't have, they don't have these scripts, they don't have the community support people they can talk to. They're just in there under equipped in terms of their emotional, capacity to handle these things.

Emma: So to there I, and I know like it's true for me sometimes I definitely see it with my son, but I see a lot in the classroom with students. And then again with the student teachers that I've had, there's this big thing of like pretending where we pretend like we know what's happening or we say yes, yes, I get it. And then we are absolutely clueless. So I think that that is another, uh, issue of a lot of these younger teachers or teachers that just enter in general is for some reason they feel like they have to go it alone or that they can't ask for help. And the thing is like, like I tell my students, I don't mind questions ever. I think they're exciting. What I get frustrated with on questions is I've explained it to you and you're doing something different and you're not paying attention to me. So now you're using me and I have to waste my time going back and

explaining something. If you didn't get it, I totally understand. But like you're actually wasting my time now. Like that's when I have problems. Um, but they,

AB: it goes into like the issue of vulnerability is like how does teaching force you to be vulnerable and especially in the early years in terms of not knowing things.

Emma: And well I think on that, like just looking back at my previous year or early years, I had to pretend I had to fake it to make Tony made it, cause I graduated college, I was 22 the oldest kid and I had him in class was 19 I was scared shitless like running a program. I taught six preps. I mean like what the, what? It was just crazy. So I had to pretend because I, I didn't, I don't know, I just kind of have to make it day by day. But I also asked a lot of teachers questions or like, Hey, can we, can you help me with this or how do I handle this or where do I go to for this or how does that work? So,

AB: and you're a little bit on an island here. Yeah. Like, yeah, go theater teachers to collaborate. Yeah.

Emma: Which even if I did have multiple theater teachers, that doesn't necessarily mean like curriculum wise we can collaborate, but that doesn't mean that that's who you know, who I want to collaborate with because uh, even Omar like chief Jones, you know, ROTC guy and Doug catch math guy and several others like melody bio and McGarry and a few others. Like I like talking to teachers outside of my sphere. Not only because, you know, sometimes we have shared students, but teacher practices or teacher practices or teacher practices. And you may have different gimmicks or may different things, but a solid teacher, as a solid teacher, no matter what you teach, you know what I mean? A crappy teachers, a crappy teacher, no matter what you teach. So I think for me, reaching out, especially just being a stepchild of education and not being seen as credible for a lot of their career. I mean seriously like, Eh, you don't even have state standards or whatever, who cares? Um, there, there's a little bit of like, I don't know. All right. I had to reach out because if I did stay alone then, I mean, I would be totally alone. I mean, totally. So yeah, I had to, I had to reach out and I'm glad that I did.

AB: How has vulnerability changed for you, like from the beginning of your career to now, like how do you continue to put yourself out there?

Emma: Well, I think now, like I just, I admit things more in the classroom, not like, I don't know, it's just like, well, I'm going to have to check that out. Or Hey, why don't you figure that out? Or here's what I've learned. Here's the, like my thing or yeah, there was this one time where I did this and I'll use myself as an example of whatever. Um, I think the other thing too is just being in the creative process. Like especially when we're exploring through a show. Yeah. I have to be like, uh, for this year I directed the hardest show I've ever directed in my life. It was like calculus on steroids. I mean, it was crazy. Um, but I admitted from them or admitted to them at the beginning, I was like, guys, this is going to be the hardest show I've directed to date. Um, there's still a lot that I don't know about right now and we're going to have to figure it out as we

go. Here's kind of the context for this particular scene and let's try to figure it out together. And so there was a lot of that exploring, um, problem solving process done in front of them. And it wasn't like a freaked out or whatever, but it was honestly probably one of the best shows I feel like I've directed. And then process wise it was, it was fantastic because I never would have thought that I would have been able to block a full show without having like, uh, a plan before because before I'd map it all out and whatever, and then this was like completely organic, if that makes sense. But it was still efficient. It was still great. Are Still,

AB: I feel like the kids really enjoy when I'm like, well it's look it up, you know, like they like finding the answers and stuff and telling me like what the answer is when I'm like, I don't know how to pronounce this. You tell me like, and I think they like being a part of that process as

Emma: well and laughing at laughing at myself like, oh my God, that was silly. Sorry about that. Or just making fun of myself or even what I started to do. Um, a lot more is a apologize and that doesn't necessarily mean like in a big class setting, although sometimes maybe it is, but like maybe I handle something. It was a little discouraged with the student. And again, it had nothing to do with them. It was maybe mentally where I was at before they asked me at an inappropriate time or whatever it may have been. Uh, you know, those moments where you just feel like, oh gosh, that was, you just feel like I could have handled that better. And it's just like, Hey, about yesterday. Um, I, I don't know how I came across, but I kind of felt like a jerk in that moment. I'm sorry for it. Just simple things like that. Um, that not only clear the air, but I think help show them that we're human too, but also that we care about them and then I think it's made, made them more willing to be open and fail or whatever. Yeah.

AB: And it's a modeling healthy emotional processes, like repairing when you've, you know, done something to someone else, which maybe they don't even experience in their home life.

Emma: Yeah. Well, and you know, depending on student conflicts and things that are happening, then having conversations about how the work that out. And then also I'm gonna expect you to apologize to them yet did apologize to them for this and this and this. And there we go. Yeah. But I think just the willingness to apologize because I think earlier when I first started it was like, no, my, my word is the law and I can never do wrong. Or even if I do, you better suck it up cause this is the way it's going to be. I don't want to defend myself and all these other things. Yeah.

AB: So lastly, what experiences and people involved in your job has caused you to experience shame? Like how have you experienced shame and the job?

Emma: I think different parents who like tried purposely tried to make me feel bad or not make me feel bad. Um, I had one, uh, there was this lady that didn't even have her kid, but her kid was dating one of my kids and my kid had to kiss



another girl on stage. Mom was upset about it and I spent a good hour on the phone trying to talk this woman down. Apparently this woman and I went to church together. Never met her before. Don't even know, but how I was corrupting the youth with this kiss and I was breaking apart their relationship and blah, blah, blah, blah. And um, she tried to get me fired and like always other things that's happened a couple times. Um, just little things like that. Um, I've had parents that have been very frustrated that their kid did not get Xyz role. Um, and so I've gotten some pretty hateful emails or a phone calls with that. Um, of course you have kids that, uh, with the social media stuff, I send things that are not appropriate or, uh, not flattering. Um, like rude things, like a rude things. And again, not anything that's accurate, but like just they're mad at me. So then they go on this tear in the kicker of that as they pretend like everything's okay and then they go off and do that stuff. That's why I hate these group chat things and everything else because it's just an echo chamber of the looney most of the time. Um, and negativity. Um, I haven't had anybody like do an outright, I'm pretty good at zinging things. I'm pretty good at shutting things down, so nobody really engages in a word with me in class. But if they did, I would laugh it off. Like somebody said, fuck you. I think that happened like early on my career. Of course, you know, I be mad at really not my type and kind of married, so I'm not, now I'm busy, you know, like just deflating it and twisting it. Meanwhile, you know, I want to punch you in the face. Today's a great day to get fired. Um, uh, just like little things like that. Um,

AB: has that been consistent through your whole career in terms of just the disrespect from parents and stuff like that? Okay. Yeah. How do you, how do you process that in a way that's healthy and hasn't changed from the beginning to the, to where you are now?

Emma: Well, I think again, just, just maybe maturing a little bit and just understanding and just trying to work on the personal growth of just me night school aside, I don't know. I'm able to see through some of that more because some of it's, it's just that reptilian brain like that or flight and all that stuff. And so, yeah, instead of man a person's an asshole, it's like, wow, they must be going through something rough. And then, I wonder what's up with them?, that's cool that I'm like a person that they can take it out on. Like that's kind of, I mean like seriously, like that's how I, how I started to flip. I started to flip scripts in my brain more like, okay, well I'm glad that you feel comfortable unloading on me. Uh, I'm kind of a safe person. I'm kind of a tough person. I can take it. Um, but who else are you doing this with? So what's really going on here? Like what's, and when you realize like people are just scared, they're hurt, they're upset, they're carrying a lot of stuff. Like, I dunno, it makes it easier to swallow or they're just in that weird funky life chapter of, I see where you are. I was like that too. When I was your age. You know, you'll, you'll mature out of it if you keep making the same choices or different things like that. I wanted to flip the script or with parent phone calls sometimes. It's a matter of like, okay, well how do I, how do I not be that for somebody else? How do I not do that to someone else? Thank you for being the titanic for me.

Like what not to do. Thank you for reminding me of who I could be, who I have been, who I don't want to be. Thank you.

AB: I felt like I've learned a lot about parenting. Like what not to do.

Emma: Well, I mean, and that's, that's it. I, that's, that's a lot of it. Like I don't know and I think maybe again it is just where I'm at in my life or just understanding character studies and then having to teach character studies. Like I kind of look at it more like that instead of like what makes you work that way? Like how does that, how do you work that way? How do you live that way? Oh, that's really sad. Okay. Well, yeah, I see where you're at. So I've wanted to know. Yes, chippy. Cause that's the other thing too. Realizing just within myself, like when I'm, when I'm triggered in those ways, there's something that I'm not liking and it's typical, we don't like in other people what we see in ourselves, you know, and trying to remember that, that like I, I'm really like enraged right now, but if I stop and I stepped back because the enraged is my initial reaction, you know, the hurt is my initial reaction. Like, what's, what's really going on with me? Like why is this a problem for me? Oh. Cause I, it reminds me of this time when this happened or, uh, because I still, I still do this same thing and I don't, so I remember what that feeling is, remember how I cannot do that to somebody else, that type of thing. So again, I just, I don't know. It's a, maybe it is cause I'm close to 40 and this year it's just been a big personal growth, like tough year, just like just working through all my junk. Um,

AB: so like in the beginning of your career where you just like shoot off emails like straight off or were you able to like step back and step back?

Emma: Some, but I mean again, I was more reactive and just again I was on a mission to like prove myself and to build the program and to uh, make a name for the program and be credible and learn the ropes and survive and all those things. And then I learned the system and then it became more, how can I be better just in my own classroom. And then it completely shifted. I don't know. I think that first year that we went to state, we may, we got third of state and the one act and I was hanging with like the top two. Like I made it, this is amazing. I was so excited. And so I called my husband, I called my boss at the time. Um, we were celebrating, there was lots of tears of joy and all this stuff. And about five minutes after we got on the bus, I felt like this sick hollow feeling. And I looked over at the trophy, I thought two things. I am gonna have to dust this. And then I thought I did all of this, I'm going to stressed about all this for that. Then I realized I don't get paid more. I just get more expectations, mainly from myself, from other people. I don't really care about this. And then it was weird because after I stopped caring and that's when everything started to flourish. Like I don't care. I want the students to do well. Obviously I don't want to be embarrassed, but I honestly don't care. well that's when the job easier. I mean, I care about my reputation here. I mean I care about the reputation of us in the community and then I care about like the reputation just on the circuit in terms of like, I want to be able to call up colleges, universities and say, Hey, I have a kid. And they're like, oh, they're from us saying, of course just send them our way or oh yeah, XXXXX and me. Okay. She directed that say you're

fine. And that's been happening. So it's like, okay, cool. Just do my thing and don't worry about it. And that's really, I think when the stride came was when I just stopped caring. I was just like, okay, how can I do better in my world? I don't care about everybody else. I don't care. I mean, I wish everybody, well, I mean, I've got it, but just do my world well, then that's how I, how I cope being, it's hard to stay because this is year 17 well, yeah. I mean, I'm playing in unless I have some other desire, unless the school has some other desire, I plan on being here until I retire. That was kind of the thing I wanted to do, so we'll say. Cool. Yeah,

AB: I appreciate it.

Sara

SS: Okay. My name is Sara. I've been teaching since 1990 this is my 23rd year in the classroom and I teach high school choir and a ninth through 12th grade men and women.

New Speaker: Cool. Um, so tell me what emotional health means to you or what does that look like?

SS: To me, when I think of emotional health, I think of where I am. Um, mentally when I'm in the classroom, how it affects me outside of the classroom if they wear me down. And to me emotionally healthy doesn't mean that I think that you should be happy all the time, but it means that you have an understanding of where you are and when things happen, have a way to process that, whether it's internally or through an outside source and having someone to bounce things off of a sounding board maybe. So ideally a sounding board would be someone who's teaching your same thing so that you can, you know, ask if you think you're crazy and you can get that. And also though, having someone completely outside these, a lot of times I feel like in the classroom you can get so caught up in thinking and things that you think maybe are really, really big deal. But then when you talk to someone who is completely outside of the realm of education, they look at it and bring some reality of life into it, if that makes sense.

New Speaker: So you're saying in order for you to maintain balance that you need like, um, an outlet within your school community and also without,

SS: yes, I that ideal is what I think is ideal.

New Speaker: Cool. Um, how do you maintain your emotional health?

SS: Well, I'm fortunate that I teach with someone who we are able to bounce a lot of stuff off of and I'm able to share things or say, what did you think of this? And you know, we can talk those things through. Also, I'm fortunate that my husband is completely outside the realm of education and so he has that. Now. I will say that until this year, I always made frequent release of the counselors in my school. Not ever a formal thing, but they were particularly at XXXXX, they were great friends who always were able to help you reframe things. You know, I would go in and say, I don't know what to do this parent. And, and they'll say, okay, so let's reframe that. And they were just great. Not even, not even always school things, sometimes even just the personal things. Um, and I, I knew I was going to miss that when I came to the high school. I had no idea how much I would miss it. But I miss that a lot because I, I really appreciate that mental health perspective on things that a lot of times they're not big deals and I don't have any serious emotional issues connected to school. I think I did a lot when I was younger in my twenties and thirties a lot. I tied a lot of myself worth to the relationship of me with students or parents approval. And then when I hit 50 something just change. I'm 52 now and I was like, Oh, I'm

older than most all of you. So don't even go there. But it's helped me be compassionate. Also, I was in a class where a principal said, you know, the thing about parents, and the reason they don't bother me is because of just really doing the best they can with what they have. And so that helped a lot just to, I think that emotional, emotional involvement, um, typically happens when a parent complains or student gets mad and then the parent complains and just, it's been, as I've gotten older, I've learned to take that less seriously. Not that I don't care, but it's not actually about me, it's about their issue. But when you're in your twenties, my very first year of teaching a kid was super, super snotty and rude and disrespectful and I, he, I called the parent and she was like, how dare you, you're not, you don't even have any children. You're what, 23? You don't know anything. Yeah. It was hard. That's like, oh no. And that he was being bad. So, but you know, and so as I grown older, just able to, um, it's easier for me to approach parents with humility the older I've gotten because I realized that they, they're, they really just think they're doing the best they can. And Ron Clark said, he came and spoke last year at our school and he said, you know what? Every single one of you in here, if you're a parent, there's probably something that you wish you could change about your kids' school right now. And I thought that's exactly true because my stepdaughter was a senior in high school when there were several things I did not appreciate or enjoy or like, but you just go, that's just the nature of things. So I was like, so when a parent calls, just know that you, it's don't take it personally, let it roll off and, and that really, all those things, it's, it's learning things like that, that help. But I don't think you can go into teaching knowing all that, even knowing as much as, you know.

Speaker 2: That makes sense. Right. Um, I feel like I was very taken aback when I experienced kind of the hostility from parents. And I was just thinking, I've never, no one's ever sent me such a rude email before.

SS: Right.

Speaker 2: What is going on here. Why do they feel, uh, empowered to do that to someone who, and, and like you said, you know, I'm a person of deep faith as well and you know, my motivations are to serve and to encourage and to help and to be like, for that to be unleashed on me was just really startling

SS: and ugly, isn't it?

New Speaker: It is. And I understand that there's like so much emotion wrapped up in like the parent child relationship and so many issues wrapped up there, but it still doesn't make it any easier to be like the punching bag. But that was,

SS: yeah. I have a friend who is a principal and he said, what I find now more than anything, and you know, back in 2000 when I was working with him, um, it was all about the helicopter parents and even NPR. Did you think about how helicopter parents were following their children? To University and trying to engage there. But I was just talking to him a couple of months ago and he said, now what I find is, um, parents just want to smooth the path, prepare the path

for their child and not prepare the child for the path. And if that whole lawn mower parent now let's just make that smooth. And actually my assistant and I just had an incident last Friday. We had a seminar, men's choirs, they're wonderful young men, but it's a lot of testosterone, a lot of energy and all year long we've been getting complaints about them all year long. And most times go, oh well they're boys. But then boys in the choir are really upset about how certain boys act, but no names are left. And our policies benefits, if a sub leaves your name, you're going to get detention. It's automatic. That is actually a district policy. Um, I don't know if you read Tuesday tweets where we were told we shouldn't do that, but that's not actually, it is a district policy. So it's okay to do that. But, so on Friday we had 38 names left of our men's choir and some of them we were really surprised, but we're like, look, if they're here, they're here. So we gave them all two detentions and said, look, maybe you are caught in the crossfire were just asking me to man up, just take it. We don't. And I said, I don't need to hear from your parents. That didn't mean I didn't want them to tell their parents. We had told them to tell their parents. We had them get off their phones and tell their parents it meant handle it and know that that's how life is. Well we've got one phone call from a parent who was furious. I want to speak to that teacher. And I said, well it's a sub and we don't give out some phone numbers. Well my son did not do anything and I said, I agree. Your son's a wonderful, a wonderful young man. I cannot imagine him doing anything. Well Uni. And um, we were really taken aback. We didn't, but we said, we're just going to sit on it. And there were about five or six that we thought, well, we'll, um, we'll see what happens because these boys probably really, we're doing the right thing. And literally, and we didn't know, we really felt comfortable with them doing some detention or not because they're really, really usually the ones trying to maintain order. And so then I heard from two other parents, one of them agreed. So the mom and then that one, I agree that their kids didn't need to serve the detention. The other one absolutely needed to. The kid is always in the thick of everything, completely self an unselfaware. And I've known, I've known his parents for a long time and so I talked to his dad, just through it. Your son's a great, great young man, precious heart, completely not self-aware, completely unaware of himself, has no idea how many times he turns around and looks at the kid behind him completely. No idea. But he's a great kid, but that doesn't, this is still, you know, and um, and so, uh, we actually got called into the principal's office and she said, you cannot, you can't do this. We're getting all these calls from parents and emails and can't back you on this kind of a policy. you can't, you can't say that kid's name gets written down as automatic detention. You can't do that without investigating. And I'm like, I mean honestly I was were really taken aback and uh, so we are going to keep that policy if the name is written down, um, because it made believers out of our kids. And so we brought in five or six kids and said, tell me your version of events. And cause they were the ones that we really thought probably were very, very good. And so we actually released them from a detention. I said, I'm sorry, you know, but we have to, and they, every single one of those kids got it. Like yeah, no I totally get it. Some of them had already served and like, oh it's fine. Whatever. You know what? It doesn't, we I trust your decisions. You're good. Yeah. Kid, they get it. They and they can all look. Cause some of them we said, hey, you know what? Maybe you

didn't do anything this time, but see, you know, self assess, see if you've done something some other time and maybe your name should have been written down and all except for the one mom who was very demanding. All the kids were super gracious, super understanding. So it was really, really interesting. But I'm fortunate that I have my assistant because we were, if I had been by myself and told all that, I would have really struggled internalizing that emotionally. I'm a bad teacher. All the kids are going to quit the program. Uh, you know, but we were able to just look at each other and go, no, we needed to make a strong statement. They needed to know that we, what we said we're going to do. We feel like what we said was fair, accurate, and you know, and that's that. And so,

Speaker 2: so like that internalizing, is that like what you would identify a shame?

SS: Yes, exactly. Like I'm so ashamed. I was so embarrassed that we got called into the principal's office. I'm like, I cannot believe I've done something. First of all, I thought, I can't believe I did something that was so stupid that I didn't even know it was stupid because I felt like it was a good decision. So I must be such a bad person that I didn't even know I was a bad person. Because that's worse when you know you did something wrong. It's one thing when you don't even know that you did something wrong. To me is worse because that's where that shame comes in. And so we walked up, but then I was able to look at my assistant and go, just look at each other. And we're both like, we needed to make a statement. We weren't wrong. We can call in some of those kids that we really, really questioned. But the rest of them, they were totally fine. They, I mean, we were told maybe our equity and our program was going to be ruined. Parents wouldn't trust us anymore. We, who knows what we've opened up and, and I,

Speaker 2: that's so all that was communicated to you, by the administrator

SS: Yeah. And I said, I would hope that after six years with some of these kids and parents and they would know who I am. And she said, yeah, well did you hear what you said? And this is all confidential. Right. And I said, I mean I signed that thing but um, I said, what you hope you don't know. Okay. But I really feel I, I mean that all really am so thankful that I had someone here to bounce that off of.

Speaker 2: So basically the way to avoid like stewing in that shame is to just like communicate with somebody that can understand.

SS: Yes, I think so. Because if I hadn't, I mean I went home, I even struggled that night, but spend a lot of times just praying and thinking and really, because I am, I did a lot of praying and I felt like the Lord was saying, look, you are not going to let fear come in. Cause that's what it is. Fear level, fear and anxiety. That's not who you are. That's not how you operate. Let that go, you know,

New Speaker: so your faith is part of yes. Overcoming that as well.

SS: So I'm yes, for me, my faith and having someone to talk. And when I went home also telling my husband, he was like, that's me digitally, you know. So, but that was, I needed that perspective. And it's always had outlets like that. Your career, I know I only got married seven years ago, so I've not ever had the outside. I've typically sought someone out who was also an educator. Maybe not in my exact field, but I've always had good friend. But having an assistant, like someone who's in there, like you having a team mentors, not the more, you know what I mean? Having someone who's right in that with you is I is amazing. And I've never had an assistant before who now I had an assistant teaching fifth grade music and so she would help when the assistant was good. But when you're ahead an assistant who was, she caused the problems for me. Oh okay. So you know, just having one. But I am very, very fortunate to have what I have here. Cause we're, I mean, yes, she's my assistant, but we're really team, you know, like we, we just teach together. We don't have choirs divided at like, that's your choirs, that's your, we do it all. We have different strengths but yet, but it's amazing.

New Speaker: Do you think the administration calls out teachers like that because they're feeling the pressure on themselves and they need to like alleviate the pressure that they're feeling?

SS: I think sometimes I will say that I was really surprised and we didn't make the decision. I talked to a different principal before we made the decision and that principal said, do it, we're on board with you. Send us a list that we know who they are and we can track them down. So that's why I was so surprised. And then when we were told a lot of emails and phone calls, um, I said, are they going to be forwarded to us?

Speaker 1: And she's like, oh, absolutely. Well we got one email forwarded and one phone call. I'm like, out of 38 that's it. You know. And I said, well, it's because you don't want to tell your kids not to talk to their parents. We want them talking to their parents. I'm like, I know, I wonder if in this particular situation, I wonder if the administrator is thinking more about legacy in light of leaving and wanting to make sure that people look at her in a good light. Yeah. And I love her or do, I just was shocked. I was shocked that I, and she's very nice about it, but I walked out with a lot of like shame and embarrassment and, and if I had not had my, my assistant, what, you know, t I m I would've, it would've been really hard for me cause that, so I, yeah, it was not a pretty, yeah.

Speaker 1: I feel like this year, like having XXXXX has been like my saving grace because XXXXXX, she's still good. Right. She, um, has supported me through a lot of like, ugly parent interrelations and stuff. And I feel like if that would have, if she would've come down on me too, I would have really been like low. Yeah. In that. Yeah. No. And

SS: she, I, she's not the one that I went to first, but I then went in and talked to her. She was like, whatever. No. So what, it's two 30 minute detention. Like she's really good. We really have some good principles here. I love her. And XXXXXXX. I mean I, and I love XXXXXX. I just was shocked.



New Speaker: But yeah, that's pretty intense. So I noticed on your survey that you said that you rarely tend to your emotional needs, like your emotional health.

SS: You know what's funny is I've never even thought like I've heard that word self care more in the last six months than in my whole life. I'm like self care, self care because I'm just always really busy. You really doing a lot. So I've never really thought about it. There have been specific times because of a specific situation where I've gone to see professional, um, therapy. Um, but they were both situational and other than that, you know, I mean, and I would go talk to the counselors at Canyon ranch, but when I w I mean talking to them was like once a month just, you know. Um, but yeah, I never really thought about it. I always kind of felt like guilty I guess.

New Speaker: Right. I mean sometimes it does feel self indulgent, but even like small things like do you exercise or do you get a massage or anything like that?

SS: Right. And that I've, I've taken to try and get a pedicure and maybe once every two months because it does, it does feel fancy and special to me. And I used to be really consistent about exercising until this year. This is the first year that I can't remember the last time I exercised, which is shocking because it was, it's always been part of my lifestyle since college and this year.

New Speaker: And so just like you're developing this program and I established,

SS: established myself here, but my assistant, she works out. I think that, I think I'd like at XXXXXXX, I had to be there really early. So I usually got there about seven seven 15 and I went, I was driving to school the other day going, you don't even have to be at school until eight so why are you feeling like you should be there by seven 15 or seven 30 that is 30 minutes that you could use to go for a walk, jog in the morning. Do that, you know. So I'm trying to retrain my brain.

New Speaker: Why do you think you're getting here so early?

New Speaker: I think it's just that guilt. Like I feel like I need to be here and I want to, I don't know what, no one's telling me to be here. That you know. So, and I feel like we've done a lot of program moving and setting. So that next year for sure I think will be easier for both of us. Cause we all know we want these things taken care of and the, and we have this, we've made this a Google sheets with our to do list and we have immediate future summer. So that I think really helps us too because we look at that and go, okay, what do we need to do so that we'll have, so we already have things set like this year we, we do a lot of purchase orders and all that for our program and this year we do them as, they come but our plan next year is to write all of them like before school starts and then enter them so we don't have to worry. They're all sat there printed off and then we just take them as we need to or as we have money or whatever. I think that will help a lot. I think I've been afraid that I'm maybe missing something or you, I don't want to, you know? And so I'm seeing to give myself a little more grace, probably not really good at that. Firstborn performance

oriented, adopted, you know, all those. Even though I've dealt with all that stuff, there's some stuff that's just ingrained in you, you know what I mean? So thing, that's part of it. But exercise always makes me feel better.

Speaker 2: Me Too. Yeah. Yeah. I feel like I'm just like donating to the gym this year. So what difficulties, so do you encounter maintaining your emotional health?

Speaker 1: You know, it's interesting. I think this year more than any other year I've noticed that. Um, I haven't, I haven't been really, really happy this year really content really full of joy. Um, and I think it's because I've, well I've says I'm in my masters. One of the teachers said, you could have your dream job, what would it be? This was back in October and everyone was saying the things and I said, I'm in mind. I, this is what my whole career I feel like has come to or has been for is, is building this program. I mean it wasn't, it was a good program already, but as we build the six day school, I mean we're just growing and growing and growing. So having the mind for how do we, how do we put things in place to be able to handle 400 kids at the high school level? Cause I think we're going to be their suit. And so just doing all of that and bouncing things off of XXXXX, which I don't have no, I be telling her my sister, cause I don't know if I can say names, but that XXXXXX, right. But you know, just as we bounced and as we grow and, and so it's just been a really good year. I just, for me, um, this was about getting the job was a real step of faith because, um, because said, but when I first met her, said like, I don't typically even higher within district, I hire whose best. I'm like, Oh nice to meet you. And then I had my interview. But so all of that was me having to trust what I believed. God said to me a long time ago. I'm like, maybe I was crazy. I don't know. But I felt like he said it was going to be at the high school, you know? And so all of that and just saying, and I have to believe that what you have put in my heart, you will bring to pass, whether it looks like it's going to happen or not, you know? And, and so then it all happening was good for me in my faith to know that I do hear from God and then good because this is what I love.

Speaker 2: So you feel like you're called here in that gives you a peace even though you're dealing with some of these uncomfortable situation.

SS: Bottom line is, I know I'm supposed to be here, those things will happen, but that the grounding in who I am and where I'm supposed to be really helps with a lot of that so that when things do come on, like look, I know that I'm called to be here. And so you expect some push back anyhow and yeah.

New Speaker: Good. Um, so what practices do you employ in the classroom to cultivate and maintain healthy relationships with students?

SS: Um, I by nature, am a happy person. And so I love injecting a little bit of humor. Um, we work hard but positive or positive when we talk to our students were positive and our comments, we are, you know, not, not like blowing smoke up people's butts kind of thing, but very clear, very, you know, but always try, always try to maintain humor, knowing everybody's names. Typically standing at the door greeting, you know I also like to, I kept were all,

they're all singing who was supposed to be focused on like pointed really we're in here, I'm like, you know, like you don't even need the. Just joking. Just injecting that humor among kicking on in a fun way. They totally get it. I think that helps a lot. And then children 10 or practicum hammer on youtube, that gap.

New Speaker: So I noticed you have a house system. Yes. Yes. Does that motivate your kids? I do too.

SS: We just started it this year and it's been, we haven't used it pipeline too, but we are trying to Redo. You can earn points in these funds for other things as, and the house goes across the choir's so every choir is that probably how you do it. All of your, all of my classes are a house, so that's like compete against each other. Oh, that's good. We have it show. Every section is divided into housing for me, and so sometimes we'll do competitions within the class. Like I'm a sucker for sight reading in the tech job, and then that makes sense. You're going to run into the home and we can go in there or do you mean I don't want to.

Appendix F  
IRB Approval Letter



**Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects**  
**Approval of Initial Submission – Exempt from IRB Review – AP01**

**Date:** March 21, 2019

**IRB#:** 10491

**Principal Investigator:** Amanda Elise Becker

**Approval Date:** 03/21/2019

**Exempt Category:** 1 & 2

**Study Title:** Courage and Connection in Teaching

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed the above-referenced research study and determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications as changes could affect the exempt status determination.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Notify the IRB at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or [irb@ou.edu](mailto:irb@ou.edu).

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Aimee Franklin'.

Aimee Franklin, Ph.D.  
Chair, Institutional Review Board