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## An exploration of the central factors influencing teachers' stress management in urban classrooms

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An Exploration of the Central Factors Influencing  
Teachers' Stress Management in Urban Classrooms

by  
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## **Abstract of Thesis**

In 1999, it was estimated that 50% of new teachers leave urban districts in less than five years. New urban teachers face a host of demands that can contribute towards stress and burnout. While some of the literature has focused upon teacher stress, to date none has focused upon new teachers who are enrolled in alternative licensure programs with regard to the impact on stress and coping. This doctoral research study used a qualitative methodological approach guided by phenomenology to explore the experiences of new urban teachers with five or less year's experience who were enrolled in an alternative licensure program at a University in Southern New England. The participants were in the process of completing their teaching certification from August 2010 – May 2011. Four middle school math teachers took part and each responded to an in-depth 90-minute semi-structured interview. The research questions were informed by literature on teacher stress and burnout, coping, resiliency, student relationships, teaching efficacy, and a Transactional Model of Stress and Coping. They included (1) What do new urban teachers identify as central factors influencing their capacity to manage stress in the context of their classroom? (2) How do new urban teachers describe conditions they view as stressful? and (3) How do new urban teachers in a licensure program perceive and describe what they do to manage stress? The study results confirmed previous research detailing the implications of stress and burnout. The teachers required supportive supervision and professional development to guide their growth and development. Unmitigated by experience and enough support, the teachers felt uncertain, worried, and overwhelmed. The results of this study suggested that new teachers need support that allows them to draw upon the process of reappraisal to reduce their stress levels and that systemic changes are warranted to improve conditions for new urban teachers. Implications for education are discussed for future research.

*Keywords:* Teachers, education, stress, urban, burnout, resiliency.

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# **An Exploration of the Central Factors Influencing Teachers' Stress Management in Urban Classrooms**

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This phenomenological study was conducted to ascertain which factors were most influential to new urban teachers who were enrolled in an alternative licensure program, and in the process of completing their teaching certification from August 2010 – May 2011, in managing stress. The work is grounded in the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and in the conceptual framework called resiliency. The results of the study pointed to central factors influencing coping that existed in the lives of the four new teachers. External factors included (1) supportive supervision, (2) classroom and time management strategies, (3) meaningful interpersonal relationships, and (4) positive activities. Internal factors included (1) setting boundaries and (2) a process of reappraisal.

### **Problem Statement and Significance**

The word “failure” is used frequently to describe urban public schools in the United States, with problems that are daunting and seemingly insurmountable (Noguera, 2003). Teachers in urban settings work with students who have disproportionately higher risks of poverty, low academic attainment, dropout, teenage pregnancy, substance use, violence, and gang involvement than their suburban counterparts (Billings, 2001). Despite often being labeled a “crisis”, there is a stunning lack of urgency in responding (Noguera, 2003). The complexities of students’ lives often spill over into the classroom, creating a situation that can prove strenuous, and as a result teachers in urban settings face increased risks of heightened stress levels (Noguera, 2003; Weiner, 2006, Billings, 2001). Schools and mental health systems alike

struggle to adequately meet the rising demand for comprehensive, effective approaches to meeting student needs (White, 2007).

Opportunity and mobility are often undermined when there is a lack of understanding of the students and their context (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007). When a classroom climate deteriorates, it can trigger a teacher's "burnout cascade" (Jennings, 2008). This type of climate is marked by troublesome student behaviors, and teachers become emotionally exhausted managing them. Under these conditions, teachers may resort to reactive and excessively punitive responses that do not teach self-regulation and may contribute to a self-sustaining cycle of classroom disruption (Osher et al., 2007). Emotionally exhausted teachers are at risk of becoming overwhelmed and eventually leaving the profession (Farber, 2000). Others may cope by maintaining a rigid classroom climate, utilizing sometimes harsh discipline measures, and working at a suboptimal level of performance until retirement (Farber, 2000). Burned out teachers and the learning environments they create can have harmful effects on students, especially those who are at risk of mental health problems (Jennings, 2008).

Over the past decade, it has been widely recognized that in addition to promoting academic achievement, students need to be supported in interacting in socially skilled and respectful ways (Cornelius-White, 2007). Teachers who recognize what interests and concerns their students are able to help them cultivate the academic skills, information, dispositions and proficiencies necessary to pursue their curiosities (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007). Effective urban teachers draw upon their knowledge of students and the contexts in which they operate to help them interpret and reframe the world around them, and better understand their relationship to it (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007).

Socially and emotionally competent teachers set the tone of the classroom by developing supportive student relationships, designing lessons building on strengths, implementing behavioral guidelines in ways that promote intrinsic motivation, coaching students through conflict situations, encouraging cooperation, and acting as a role model for respectful, appropriate communication and exhibitions of pro-social behavior (Jennings, 2008). When teachers lack resources to effectively manage the social and emotional challenges within the particular context of their school and classroom, children show lower levels of on-task behavior and performance (Marzano, Marzano and Pickering, 2003).

### **Practical and Intellectual Goals**

Understanding the meaning, context, unanticipated phenomena, processes by which events and actions take place, and developing causal explanations are all essential intellectual goals for qualitative research studies (Maxwell, 2005). This study utilized an inductive approach to achieve various practical and intellectual goals. It uncovered how new urban teachers understood stress and its influence on their behavior within the context of an accelerated licensure program.

This study interpreted the teachers' perceptions of their urban context and explored various components of stress. The "urban context" was defined in this study as being two different middle schools located in a city in Southern New England, which had previously boasted one of the largest manufacturing industries in the United States, sustaining the majority of the regions' economy. The effects of the depression, disasters and globalization have dramatically hurt the city's prosperity. At the time of the study, the school systems were working to account for the dramatic economic and demographic shifts they had experienced.

The city where the schools in this study were situated consisted of 20% of families who were “foreign born” and spoke a language other than English at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This city’s population consists of nearly half of its residents being of Portuguese ancestry. It became home to a large number of Cambodian refugees starting in the late 1970’s. It also has attracted immigrants from Latino communities, including Central Americans, Dominicans, and Columbians. There are also immigrants of Chinese, Cape Verdean, and Brazilian descent.

The teachers in this study worked in a context where student drop out, unemployment, and poverty rates were significant problems for students, their families, and the community (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). A total of 28% of the city’s children were in poverty, doubling the state wide average (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Almost 40% of adults were on disability, nearly 50% of households were headed by single women, and nearly 50% of students who dropped out were considered low income (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). A total of 56% of the residents had earned a high school degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

In this context, this study provided further understanding of the many influences of stress and how environmental factors impacted coping. An exploration of how teachers managed, and whether the strategies they relied upon helped mitigate the various dimensions of the stress they experienced is discussed. This study explored the context of being a new urban teacher, revealing how assumptions about urban teachers, students and families influenced the individual teachers in this study with their stress management.

The teachers in this study were all middle school math teachers. With ongoing attention on Science Technology Engineering Mathematics (STEM), and high stakes testing, information on what types of stressors math teachers faced and how they coped was pertinent. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2009), about one-third of the fourth-graders and one-

fifth of eighth-graders cannot perform basic mathematical computations, and U.S. high school seniors recently tested below the international average for 21 countries in mathematics and science. As a result, fewer American students than ever are graduating from college with math and science degrees. When compared with international competitors, America is not performing well. In 1995, U.S. fourth-graders ranked 12<sup>th</sup> against other nations when it came to mathematics competency. By the eighth grade their ranking dropped to 19<sup>th</sup>, below not only Asian students in countries such as Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, but also below students in many Eastern European nations such as Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Slovenia (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).

Middle school math teachers are essential in the development of their students, teaching foundational skills that influence later academic and career outcomes. Urban students demonstrate disproportionately lower math proficiency than their suburban counterparts (Billings, 2001). These skills are often determining factors later in access to post-secondary opportunities (Billings, 2001).

This qualitative approach focused upon teacher perspectives in a particular setting to glean new understanding that supports educational practitioners (Maxwell, 2005). The project has produced knowledge to help improve existing practice of providing support to urban teachers. Central University will use this analysis to inform future professional development and program planning. On a wider scale, it is hopeful that this study will shed light on the problem of urban teacher burnout, and potential strategies for prevention and response, particularly for communities with significant poverty and negative social and economic indicators.

## **Research Questions**

This doctoral research project examined central factors influencing a teacher's capacity to manage stress and cope with demands. The following questions were informed by literature on teacher stress and burnout, coping, resiliency, student relationships, teaching efficacy, and a Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

1. What do new urban teachers in a licensure program identify as central factors influencing their capacity to manage stress in the context of their classroom?
2. How do new urban teachers in a licensure program describe conditions they view as stressful?
3. How do new urban teachers in a licensure program perceive and describe what they do to manage stress?

## **Contents and Organization**

This doctoral project report continues with a theoretical framework in chapter 1 and a literature review in chapter 2, research design in chapter 3, report of research results in chapter 4, and findings and recommendations for practice in chapter 5. A bibliography and appendices conclude the report.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this research study was to understand how new urban teachers enrolled in an alternative licensure program at Central University managed stress and coped with demands. In order to explore the various components of this broad concept of stress, this investigation relied upon a theoretical framework that incorporates stress, appraisal, coping and resiliency. The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) is a framework that describes multiple aspects of stress and explores the complex interplay, known as transactions, between internal and external components. Resiliency research offers an additional lens that

helps explain the dynamic process of positive adaptation in the face of significant stressors or adversity (Rutter, 1990). This section will discuss the central components of the theoretical framework of Transactional Model of Stress and Coping grounding this research study.

### **Origins and Evolution of the Concept of Stress**

There are three basic types of stress: physiological, psychological and social (Monat & Lazarus, 1985). Physiological stress involves disturbances of the bodily systems. Psychological stress involves cognitive factors leading to the evaluation of threat (Lazarus, 1966). Social stress encompasses the disruption of a social unit or system (Monat & Lazarus, 1985). For purposes of this study, both psychological and social stress were explored to understand the ways in which new urban teachers managed stress and coped with demands.

It appears that the word “stress” was first used in a non-technical sense in the 14<sup>th</sup> century to refer to hardship, adversity, or affliction (Lazarus, 1999). Robert Hooke, a prominent physicist-biologist of the late 17<sup>th</sup> century formulated an engineering analysis of stress by questioning how structures such as bridges should be designed to prevent collapse (Lazarus, 1999). Three basic concepts emerged from his investigation, including load, stress and strain (Lazarus, 1999). This analysis influenced 20<sup>th</sup> century models of stress, which drew upon the idea of load as an external force exerted on a social, physiological or psychological system (Lazarus, 1999). Load is analogous to an external stimulus, and strain to the stress response or reaction (Lazarus, 1999).

During the mid-fifties, stress was conceptualized by Seyle as having mainly physiological connotations of hormonal and autonomic nature (Monat & Lazarus, 1985). World War II and the Korean War prompted stress research due to its significance for military combat (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Later, it was acknowledged to be an inevitable aspect of life, contributing

significantly to human functioning and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In the 1960's and 1970's, stress was considered to be a transactional phenomenon dependant upon the meaning of the stimulus to the perceiver (Lazarus, 1966). Various developments in medicine, social work, psychology and related fields have generated increasing interest in the study of stress and differences in coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The agents or demands that evoke a patterned response are referred to as stressors (Monat & Lazarus, 1985). Stressors are demands made by the internal or external environment that upset balance, thus affecting well-being and requiring action to restore balance (Lazarus & Cohen, 1977). Most often, stress has been defined as either stimulus or response (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Stimulus definitions focus on events in the environment such as natural disasters, noxious conditions, illness or loss of employment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Such an approach assumes that specific situations are normatively stressful, but they do not account for variance in individual response, as in the evaluation of events (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping is a framework for evaluating the processes of coping with stressful events (Lazarus & Cohen, 1977). Stressful experiences are construed as person-environment transactions. These transactions depend on the external stressor. This is mediated first by the person's appraisal of the stressor and second by the social and cultural resources at her/his disposal (Lazarus & Cohen, 1977; Antonovsky & Kats, 1967). The impact of teacher stress on education is significant and has not received adequate attention given the potential negative consequences (Farber, 2000).

### **Transactions and Appraisal**

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping asserts that stress involves three components: external, internal and the interaction between the two (Bernard & Krupat, 1994).

The interactions between internal and external factors are referred to as transactions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The theory emphasizes the ongoing relationship between the individual and the environment. The individual's experience or perception of an event, rather than the experience or event itself, determines whether or not it is stressful, making stress the consequence of appraisal and not the antecedent of a particular stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to this theory, the way an individual appraises an event plays a fundamental role in determining not only the magnitude of the stress response, but also the kind of coping strategies that the individual may employ in efforts to deal with the stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

When faced with a stressor, the primary appraisal is the process by which a person evaluates the potential threat. Primary appraisal is a person's judgment about the significance of an event (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Facing a stressor, the secondary appraisal follows, which is an assessment of people's coping resources and options (Cohen, 1984). Secondary appraisals address what one can do about the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

**Table 1***Transactional Model of Stress and Coping*

| <b>Concept</b>                     | <b>Definition</b>  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Primary appraisal</b>           | Evaluation of the significance of a stressor or threatening event  |
| <b>Secondary appraisal</b>         | Evaluation of the controllability of the stressor and a person's environment   |
| <b>Coping efforts</b>              | Actual strategies used to mediate primary and secondary appraisals   |
| <b>Problem management</b>          | Strategies directed at changing a stressful situation  |
| <b>Emotional regulation</b>        | Strategies aimed at changing the way one thinks or feels about a stressful situation   |
| <b>Meaning-based coping</b>        | Coping processes that induce positive emotion, which in turn sustains the coping process by allowing reenactment of problem- or emotion-focused coping |
| <b>Outcomes of coping</b>          | Emotional well-being, functional status, health behaviors  |
| <b>Dispositional coping styles</b> | Generalized ways of behaving that can affect a person's emotional or functional reaction to a stressor; relatively stable across time and situations   |
| <b>Optimism</b>                    | Tendency to have generalized positive experiences for outcomes   |
| <b>Information seeking</b>         | Attentional styles that are vigilant (monitoring) versus those that involve avoidance (blunting)   |

Table 1 provides a conceptual overview of the various facets of coping (Glanz, et al., 2002, p.214). According to the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, the cognitive appraisal of stress leads to determination of an event as irrelevant, beneficial, or stressful. If the

event is appraised as stressful, the individual will see the event as harmful, as a loss or as a challenge (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Ultimately, the way an individual sees the event appears to have a direct influence on how much stress he/she will experience.

Within this framework, the emphasis is upon the *relationship* between the person and the environment, accounting for both the characteristics of a person and the nature of the environmental event (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Psychological stress is seen as a relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her own resources and endangering his or her well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The judgment that a particular person-environment relationship is stressful hinges on cognitive appraisal. Since certain demands and pressures produce stress in substantial numbers of people, individual and group differences in the degree and kind of reaction are always evident (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). People vary widely in terms of their sensitivity and vulnerability to events, as well as in their interpretations and reaction (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

According to Kyriacou (2001), the ways in which individuals attempt to cope fall are either palliative or direct action. Palliative techniques are aimed at reducing the impact of the stressor, versus dealing directly with the source of stress itself. Those coping with stress this way often attribute their success to individual disposition or strength bolstered by “mental health” strategies, such as regular exercise, hobbies and relaxation techniques (Kyriacou, 2001).

Understanding how teachers appraised their circumstances and coped with stressors was at the heart of this research study. The appraisal process provided a lens to explore how teachers make meaning of their circumstances. In order to survive and flourish, people must distinguish between benign and dangerous situations. These distinctions are often subtle, complex, and abstract and contingent upon what has been learned about the world and oneself through

experience (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). A cognitive appraisal can mediate reactions and prove essential for adequate psychological understanding and adaption (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). While appraisal has a substantial influence on emotions, initial responses to stressors do not necessarily signify long-term capacity for appraisal and adaptability (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Cognitive appraisal can be understood as the process of categorizing an encounter and its various facets, with respect to its significance for well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Cognitive appraisal is not information processing, rather it is largely evaluative, focusing on meaning or significance (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

### **Coping**

This theoretical framework ascertains that different types of stress generate different emotional responses. Stressors associated with harm/loss can elicit anger, disgust, sadness, or disappointment. Stressors associated with feeling threatened can produce anxiety. Challenging stressors can produce excitement. This theory integrates both the motivational aspects and the varying emotions that are associated with the experience of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Coping is the effort to manage psychological stress (Lazarus, 1999). Following assessment of the event, the individual now evaluates his/her coping resources and options. In order for an event to be appraised as a stressor, it must be personally relevant and there must be a perceived mismatch between a situation's demands and one's resources to cope with it (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

In addition to Lazarus, Antonovsky (1987) asserts that we face many challenges in conceptualizing wellness because the term has different meanings for different people (p.33). People feel a sense of coherence if their lives are meaningful, manageable, and comprehensible, which suggests that an orderly and consistent life is more desirable than a chaotic, random, and

unpredictable life (Antonovsky, 1987). Therefore, when deciding how to bring about beneficial behavior change, we must consider genetic, constitutional, and psychosocial factors such as people's level of knowledge and intelligence, ego identity, coping strategy, social support system, religion, philosophy, and attitude toward health maintenance (Antonovsky, 1987).

### **Resiliency**

Resilience refers to a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity (Rutter, 1990). Implicit within this definition are two critical conditions: (1) exposure to significant threat or severe adversity; and (2) the achievement of positive adaptation despite major assaults on the developmental process (Garmezy, 1990; Luthar & Zigler, 1991; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Rutter, 1990; Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992).

At the most fundamental level, resiliency research validates prior research and theory in human development, and includes that of Erik Erikson, Urie Bronfenbrenner, Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, Carol Gilligan, Rudolf Steiner, Abraham Maslow, and Joseph Chilton Pierce. While focused on different components of development (i.e., psycho/social, moral, spiritual, and cognitive), at the core of each of these approaches is an assumption of the biological imperative for growth and development that unfolds naturally in the presence of certain environmental attributes (Maston, 1994). When adversity is relieved and basic needs are restored, then resilience can emerge (Maston, 1994). We are all born with innate resiliency, with the capacity to develop the traits commonly found as summarized by Bernard (1991).

**Table 2***Traits Associated With Resiliency*

---

| <b>Trait</b>              | <b>Description</b>  |
|---------------------------|---|
| Social competence         | Responsiveness, cultural flexibility, empathy, communication skills, humor  |
| Problem solving           | Planning, help-seeking, critical and creative thinking  |
| Autonomy                  | Sense of identity, self-efficacy, self-awareness, task mastery, and adaptive distancing from negative messages and conditions |
| Sense of purpose and hope | Goal direction, educational aspirations, optimism, faith  |

---

Table 2 demonstrates the various traits associated with resiliency, with specific attributes that are essential to social competence, problem solving, autonomy and a sense of purpose and hope (Bernard, 1991). Studies of resilience suggest that nature has provided powerful protective mechanisms for human development (Maston, 1994). The research indicates that such protective mechanisms appear to transcend ethnic, social class, geographical, and historical boundaries (Werner and Smith, 1992). They meet our basic human needs for love, connectedness, respect, challenge, structure involvement, belonging, power, and, ultimately, meaning. The development of resilience is a dynamic process of healthy human development in which personality and environmental influences interact in a reciprocal, transactional relationship (Maston, 1994).

## **Relationship to Problem of Practice**

The major implication from resiliency research for practice is that if we hope to create socially competent teachers who have a sense of their own identity and efficacy, who make decisions, set goals, and believe in their future, then meeting their basic human needs for caring, connectedness, respect, and meaning must be the primary focus of any prevention, education, and professional development effort (Maston, 1994). To this end, this study considered the impact of stress among teachers. It looked at how appraisal influenced resiliency and adaption to challenges in new urban teachers.

Lazarus (1999) suggested that “if we want to study emotion narratives as science, we must combine the narratives of many individuals to see in what ways the stories are shared and reflect the collective experience of people in each of the emotions, and in which ways they diverge” (p. 205). This study describes the narratives of four new urban teachers and how they experienced and made meaning of stressors. The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, along with resiliency research provided a foundation to allow for an examination of the interplay between internal and external stress factors experienced uniquely by the urban teachers in this study. This theory provided the framework to assess primary and secondary appraisals the teachers made in the context of their classrooms, and was utilized to guide the study and inform its’ methodology.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Key Areas**

This chapter describes research from educational, psychological, and sociological literature. Throughout this chapter, several key areas will be explored. The definitions of stress and burnout will be provided in terms of their impact in an educational environment. The urban environment will be defined and described with attention to deficit model thinking. The impact of the proliferation of alternative teaching certification programs in the United States will be discussed. Conditions and contextual factors affecting new urban teachers will be detailed.

This chapter will explore the significance of student-teacher relationships, classroom management, self-efficacy, teacher disposition, emotions, social and emotional competency (SEC), and resiliency as it pertains to capacity for stress management in an urban environment.

### **Stress and Burnout**

The concept of burnout emerged in the early 1970's and has been defined in a variety of ways. Gold and Bachelor (2001) defined burn-out as “a function of the many stressors felt by individuals in both their social life and their work experiences” (p. 546). Burnout has also been defined by Maslach and Leiter (1997) as a “syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced accomplishment which is a special risk for individuals who work with other people in some capacity” (p. 347). Others (Friedman 2000; Ozdemir 2007) describe it as having three components: (1) emotional exhaustion, (2) withdrawal and cynicism towards students, and (3) a sense of underaccomplishment.

Teachers compared to other professionals, such as mental and physical health professionals, appear to be at a higher risk for burnout (Ozdemir, 2007). Burnout is a reaction to prolonged high stress that commonly results either in withdrawing and caring less, or in working

harder, often mechanically, to the point of exhaustion (Farber, 1991). Burnout among urban school teachers may be increasing in light of long-term marginalization and many waves of reform, that can fail to account for the day-to-day problems of most teachers (Corcoran, Walker, & White, 1988). There is high turnover among teachers serving diverse children in poverty, resulting in approximately 50% of new teachers leaving urban districts in less than five years and many within the first year (Haberman & Richards, 1990).

Within an educational framework, burnout is considered to be a process in which a teacher becomes emotionally exhausted in response to a demanding work environment (Brouwers, 1999). This exhaustion refers to feelings of being emotionally over-extended and depleted (Maslach, 1993). Consequently, the sufferer develops negative attitudes towards both recipients and his/her work performance (Brouwers, 1999). Teachers with burnout usually experience problems such as decreased mental and physical well-being and deteriorating relationships with students and colleagues (Brouwers, 1999).

By definition, burnout only occurs in professions characterized by caregiving roles such as nursing, social work and teaching (Brouwers, 1999). These are distinguished from others by their demanding and emotionally stressful relationships. Research reveals that the relational component can lead teachers to being worn down and eventually burnt out (Brouwers, 1999).

Although burnout effects many human-service professionals, the term has come to be used with teachers far more than any other occupational group. It is estimated that 35% of American teachers are strongly dissatisfied with their profession, and up to 20% are truly burned out (Farber, 2000). The recent national focus on education reform has obscured attention to the problem of teacher stress and burnout that seemed so salient in the 1970's and 1980's (Farber, 2000). It has been widely assumed that reform efforts would eliminate or greatly reduce stress-

related problems of teachers (Farber 2000). On the contrary, many teachers seek treatment due to stress related problems including pressure to “achieve”, feelings of being left out of the decision making process, greater diversity of students, and fewer resources. Models of treatment for teacher burnout are underrepresented in the literature (Farber 2000).

### **The Urban Environment**

The risks of burnout are increased given that there are tremendous inequalities between the richest and poorest schools in America (Kozol, 1991). Research on urban schools demonstrates that the conditions and culture undercuts many of the teaching attitudes and behaviors that build upon student strengths (Weiner, 2000, Weiner, 2003, Weiner, 2006, Noguera, 2003, Nieto, 2003). Educators may become stressed when they come face to face with such disparities, unquestioned practices and conditions since they are not positioned to eliminate them on their own (Weiner, 2003). Noguera (2003) emphasized that

Unless there is a genuine commitment to address the social context of schooling—to confront the urban condition—it will be impossible to bring about significant and sustainable improvements in urban public schools. (p. 6)

The term “urban schools” has taken on a connotation associated with the “deficit paradigm”, which searches for someone or something to blame for systemic inadequacies, and for ways to “fix” failures (Noguera, 2003, Weiner, 2006, Nieto, 2003). The deficit paradigm upholds the assumptions that the problems seen in schools are the direct results of failures on the part of individuals, and not in larger influential systems (Weiner, 2003).

Schools often have oppressive barriers to communication such as overly busy class schedules and rigidly cast role distinctions regarding power and authority (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998). Youth are frequently viewed from the perspective that they are lacking competence or appropriate behavior rather than having something valuable to offer (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998).

Students who are disempowered may disassociate from lessons and put their guard up to avoid being violated, patronized or disrespected (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998).

The deficit paradigm negatively impacts teachers, students, and their families alike. When students and families are seen through this lens, their inadequacies are seen as poor achievement (Weiner, 2003). Within this paradigm, teacher flaws or negative characteristics are seen to undermine learning (Weiner 2003). Deficit thinking leads to conclusions being drawn that students, families and teachers are to be blamed and need to be “fixed” (Weiner, 2003). Nieto (2003) cautioned that “the call for standards often result in a climate that does little besides vilify teachers and their students” (p. 9).

Urban schools often are characterized by punitive climates that can lead to negative consequences for many students and teachers (Nieto, 2003). These types of school practices and assumptions often hide the abilities of teachers and students (Weiner, 2006). Often they are tacit and unspoken. The effects can prove devastating for all constituents of education.

Several researchers point out that in urban school systems many new teachers approach their work from a white, middle-class framework (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Weinstein, Tomilson-Clarke & Curran, 2004). Teachers draw from what they know, including how they were raised and taught in predominantly white, middle-class communities and colleges (Howard, 1999). Conflict and confusion are inevitable since the embedded assumptions that come from growing and learning in white, middle-class systems do not align with all students’ perspectives or experiences.

Teachers need guidance in discerning the prevailing climate that supports deficit views of minority students that assert devoting resources to teach the “wrong” students is wasteful (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007). Many teachers operating within this ideology do not expect their

students from poor urban neighborhoods and urban students of color to be good students (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007). Teachers need support to work hard to grasp the racial dimensions of teaching in an urban school. Supervision is needed to look at the complexities of an ideological climate that makes it challenging to work with students who are racially and culturally different from oneself (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007). Further, differences in status can provoke anger and resentment from those in the lower status group and undermine a teachers' best effort to be an effective educator (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007).

Many teachers arrive to the urban context with the belief they are rescuing their students of color. Kincheloe & Hays (2007) refer to this as the "white teacher as the savior of urban students of color" mentality (p. 16). In this model, the heroic white teacher perceives themselves as needing to rescue students from their unconcerned families, gangs and their own problems and help them to return to rural white nineteenth century America. There are complex workings in the twenty first century that include power dynamics that are constantly at work, influencing perspectives and activities (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007). Teachers need a firm understanding of these often unconscious forces that shape their students and classroom dynamics. Teachers must be supported to understand student perspective and consciousness to help them understand what is happening and respond effectively (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007).

The lack of hope that emerges from these understandings profoundly impacts everyone involved with urban education. The way people conduct themselves is influenced by their analyses of the socio-cultural and political conditions surrounding them (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007). Urban teachers need to recognize that their students may experience despair when growing up in neighborhoods where there is little chance of gaining access to economic, social and vocational tools needed for mobility. Teachers must understand this is not an inadequacy on

the part of the student but a contextual factor that needs to be countered with creating opportunities for students to display their talents and reach goals (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007). Teachers need to understand and appreciate the strengths of their students and avoid perpetuation of the culture of power that oppresses and destroys (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007).

White teachers need to understand their own cultural vantage point and avoid the tendency to dismiss their own cultural perspectives. Culture shapes everyone's sense making of the world, including how one views others and self (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007). Teachers may be unaware of the dynamics of class and power within their classrooms. Students who are poor are likely to obtain values that allow them to survive that differ from mainstream centered codes relating to power (Delpit, 1988). Teachers may hold beliefs that they are rescuers or experts and fail to account for student and family strengths and cultural distinctions. These beliefs can have negative consequences for students and their families who are cast as disengaged or uninvolved when they actually may be disenfranchised (Delpit, 1988).

With regards to parent involvement, there is no consensus on who is responsible for ensuring it (Blankstein & Noguera, 2010; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Murray, 2009). Low-income parents may be suspicious of schools and not have experience advocating for their children in school (Weissbourd, 2009). Parents who struggled in their own academic careers might experience resentment, anxiety, or a distaste for interacting with school authorities (Blankstein & Noguera, 2010). Parents who do not speak English may be hesitant to contact the schools due to communication barriers they face. In many cultures, educators are treating as having authority and status that make families even less willing to ask questions or voice complaints (Blankstein & Noguera, 2010; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Noguera, 2003).

In 1996, about one-third of public school students were members of racial/ethnic

minority groups; the United States Department of Commerce predicts that the proportion will climb to over 50% by 2035 (Eubanks & Weaver, 1999). As the proportion of minority children in the student population increases, 40% of America's schools still have no minority teachers (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997). The lack of minority teachers is alarming to those who believe that sharing a common race and cultural background facilitates more productive student-teacher relationships (Ladson-Billings 1994).

Eubanks and Weaver (1999) argue that diversifying the teaching force is about more than matching students' and teachers' race and cultural backgrounds. They assert that the most compelling argument for recruiting more teachers of color is that those teachers "bring diverse life experiences and perspectives that improve the quality of education for all students" (p.451). Although little or no research confirms that a diverse teaching force improves student outcomes (or that it does not), Eubanks and Weaver (1999) pointed out "ample research suggests that understanding the culture and experiences of students helps teachers provide context and meaning to instruction" (p. 453). Therefore, it could be argued that a qualified pool of teachers is *necessarily* a diverse pool of teachers (Eubanks and Weaver, 1999).

Haberman (1999), who has written extensively about how to identify "star" teachers for urban schools (p. 757), asserts that alternative certification may be the most effective means of recruiting a more diverse pool of teachers, based on their characteristics. His research indicates that the most effective teachers for urban schools share some commonalities: often they did not decide to teach until after college graduation, are between thirty and fifty years old, are parents themselves, and live in urban areas. Since alternative certification programs tend to offer abbreviated training, often cater to career changers, and are typically less expensive than traditional training, they are more likely to appeal to potential teachers who meet his criteria than

are traditional programs (Haberman, 1999).

### **Alternative Licensure Training Programs**

The proliferation of alternative routes to teacher certification is impacting many aspects of the profession of teaching in the United States (NCEI, 2010). During the 1980's, such programs emerged to mitigate teacher shortages, which are more acute in poor urban areas than in wealthy suburban areas (NCEI, 2010). More than 250,000 have been licensed through alternative routes, with most growth occurring in the last decade (NCEI, 2010). Approximately 35,000 are entering teaching through alternative certification routes each year (NCEI, 2010).

Alternative teacher certification offers on-the-job training and supervision to candidates with little or no prior teaching experience (Feistritzer 1994, Hawley, 1990). Alternative certification programs differ, but most provide abbreviated preparation, rapid licensure, and expeditious entry into classrooms (Hawley, 1990). They are distinct from traditional teacher education programs in that they give participants access to full-time, paid teaching positions while completing the requirements for certification. These programs offer mentoring and support due to the intensity of completing coursework while managing an actual classroom. In 1983, only eight states offered routes to certification other than the traditional college teacher education program. By 2003, 46 states and the District of Columbia reported that they had some type of alternative means of certifying teachers (NEIM, 2010). In Massachusetts, there is a focus on potential applicants who are willing to work in high-poverty or low-achieving schools (Blair, 2003). This study investigated the perspective of teachers in such schools as they completed coursework and additional practicum requirements towards licensure.

## **Conditions Affecting New Teachers**

Since the 1970's, disparities among racial, cultural, and linguistic groups in school achievement, high school completion rates, poverty levels and educational levels have been identified as matters of urgent national importance (Cochran-Smith, 2004). In response to this, teacher training has become conceptualized as a training and testing problem to ensure all teachers have the basic subject matter knowledge and skills devoted towards bringing their students' test scores up (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Many countries are entrenched in accountability-centered activities towards increasing standards to become effective global participants (Anderson, 2003). Today's teachers face unprecedented demands. Growing numbers of students are coming to school unprepared and many exhibit serious behavior problems (Gilliam, 2005). In addition to needing to maintain order and engage students in learning, teachers require the skills for creating the context where all students have the opportunity to learn ever more complex material and to develop a wider range of skills (Hammond, 2005).

Teaching is complex, and there is a tendency to oversimplify and blame teachers for being "right" or "wrong" without regard to the current accountability context (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006). School staff often feel a lack of community support, appreciation, and recognition coupled with increased pressure to do "more with less" (Henderson, 2003). A considerable number of teachers experience exhaustion during their careers and between 5% – 20% of teachers report burnout (Brouwers, 1999). Teachers in their first five years in the classroom leave the profession in alarming numbers (Murray, 2005).

Since the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, there has been a strong emphasis upon content knowledge and instructional skill for teachers (Murray, 2005). New teachers commonly cite inadequate preparation in classroom management (Farkas, Johnson &

Foleno, 2000). Teacher education programs are criticized for providing limited training in cultural awareness (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Research also suggests that teachers do not achieve proficiency until they have been teaching for three to five years (Darling-Hammond & Schlau, 1996). Moreover, teachers enrolled in accelerated licensure programs are dually balancing demands of intensive graduate coursework and their new teaching practice. Insecurity during the initial stages of teaching can precipitate additional problems for new teachers (Gold & Roth, 1993). It can cause teachers to be overly concerned with appearing competent (Murray, 2005). This pressure may cause teachers to avoid reaching out for help from their administrators and colleagues, in fear of signaling weakness (Gold, 1996). These conditions can lead to a sense of isolation and increase the risks of professional burnout among teachers.

The teacher development literature describes professional life stages that teachers move through starting with daily survival to a primary focus on teaching and learning (Fuller, 1969; Huberman, 1989; Huling-Austin, 1986; Feinman-Nemser & Remillard, 1995; Saphier & Gower, 1997). The literature demonstrates that when new teachers enter the classroom they face a steep learning curve involving a grueling process of trial and error that leaves them feeling insecure and lacking confidence in their instruction, decision making, and management skills (Murray, 2005). They are charged with the task of managing large numbers of students and often have the same teaching load as experienced colleagues (Murray, 2005). New teachers also need to learn a range of administrative tasks and local and state curriculum frameworks (Johnson, Kardos, et al., 2004). New teachers often join schools with autonomous professional cultures and are left to fend for themselves in a “sink or swim” initiation process (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996).

With all of these pressures and the ever-greater emotional demands placed on teachers with little to no support, it is not surprising that the rate of teacher burnout is increasing and that

teachers are leaving the profession at an alarming rate (Hargreaves, 1998; Ingersoll, 2001; Metlife, 2004; Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005). Emotional stress and poor emotion management consistently rank as the primary reasons teachers become dissatisfied and leave the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). Compared with many other professions, teachers report some of the highest levels of occupational stress (Jennings, 2008). There is a growing concern about the adverse effects of teacher emotional stress on educational quality (Travers, 2001).

### **Additional Contextual Factors**

Various contextual factors, inside and outside the school building, influence a teacher's capacity for coping. These factors include co-teacher support, principal and district leadership, school climate and norms, school district values, in-service opportunities, community culture, and demands emerging from local and federal education policy (Jennings, 2008). A teacher's overall well-being and efficacy, as well as factors such as friendships, marital relations, and degrees of life stress in a teacher's personal life, might also affect the performance of social and emotional abilities in the classroom (Jennings, 2008). These abilities influence student-teacher relationships, which have been cited as mitigating the effects of teacher burnout and stress, and affecting other important outcomes (Marzano, 2003).

### **Student-Teacher Relationships**

There is a growing body of evidence confirming that supportive student-teacher relationships play an important role in healthy school/classroom climate, students' connection to school, and desired student outcomes, both academic and social-emotional (Marzano, 2003). In a recent meta-analysis of more than 100 studies, it was found that the quality of teacher-student relationships is the keystone for all other aspects of classroom management (Marzano, 2003). In

fact, the meta-analysis indicates that on average, teachers who had high-quality relationships with their students had 31% fewer discipline problems, rule violations, and related problems over a year's time than did teachers who did not have high-quality relationships with their students (Marzano, 2003).

Effective classroom management can help facilitate the development of positive student-teacher relationships. A teacher who possesses skills and is prepared to implement routines, procedures and demonstrate positive communication towards the class sends the message to students that he/she cares enough about them to help create positive conditions for learning and relationships (Marzano, 2003). A teacher who creates a safe and supportive learning environment demonstrates caring by establishing expectations, setting limits, and helping students respect and take academic risks with each other (Marzano, 2003). Students engaged in learning are generally more connected with the teacher in an active and meaningful way (Marzano, 2003).

Research demonstrates the wide ranging impact of student-teacher relationships (Pianta, 2003; Jennings, 2008). They have been shown to influence student academic success, students' social/emotional health, student behavioral outcomes, student motivation and pursuit of goals, youth risk factors, and school climate (Ang, 2005). The importance of caring relationships in schools is well documented in close to seventy years of educational research, which suggests a strong association between student-adult relationships and student retention, achievement and aspirations, especially in an urban context (Saphier, 2005).

Student-teacher relationships are critical in our present urban educational arenas, given the prevalence of ongoing strains and challenges. Students rely on the leadership and guidance provided by caring adults to help them meet the demands of today's standards. Some students also need specific support to break the intergenerational cycles of poverty, poor educational

outcomes and despair they are entrapped in. Adult role models, who young people perceive as “like them” or whom they “wish to be like,” influence adolescents’ expectations about their future lives, work and family (Leffert & Scales, 2004). A study done in California investigated the question “What is the problem with schooling?” and involved students, teachers, school staff, parents, and administrators in four urban districts. The number one problem identified by participants was the quality of relationships within schools (Cornelius-White, 2007).

Participants reported feeling the crisis is directly related to human relationships, with the relationships between teachers and students mentioned the most often (Cornelius-White, 2007).

According to the Search Institute, developmental assets for adolescents are “the positive relationships, opportunities, competencies, values and self-perceptions that youth need to succeed” (Leffert & Scales, 2004, p. ). These assets, which are the building blocks youth need to be healthy, caring, principled, and productive, includes a total of 8 categories and 40 indicators of healthy development. The “support” category includes involvement with caring, adults apart from parents (Leffert & Scales, 2004). It is important for a student to know that adults care about their learning as well as about them as individuals. Research has shown that young people who feel connected to adults in their school are less likely to engage in many risk behaviors (Center for Disease Control, 2009).

### **Classroom Management**

When new teachers assume control of their classrooms, no task is more demanding for them than fostering a positive classroom climate. Veenman (1984) demonstrated within over 20 years of research on new teachers that classroom discipline, student motivation, and dealing with individual student differences are the most common problems reported by new teachers (p.222). Brock and Grady (1996) found that first year teachers most frequently request help with

classroom management (p.109). A survey of 600 principals nationwide cited classroom management as the most challenging issue faced by new teachers (Peter Harris Research Group, Inc., 2004). An estimated 35% of new teachers cite student discipline as their primary reason for leaving the profession (Ingersoll, 2003).

Uncertainty about student behavior can take its toll on new teachers (Dollase, 1992; Johnson & The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2004). New teachers are often thrown off balance when required to make on the spot adjustments. Uncertainty is an unavoidable way of life for new teachers, and can be stressful and emotionally exhausting (Murray, 2005). It is common for teachers to feel “out of control” and unsure of what to expect on a daily basis. When teachers experience strong negative emotions such as anger and frustration, it disrupts their goals (Sutton, 2009). Factors outside of the classroom, such as uncooperative colleagues or parents, can also be sources of negative emotion (Sutton, 2009).

Teachers face extraordinary stressors as they work to motivate and engage students. Many teachers experience enormous stress related to classroom problems and do not receive the support they need. Half leave the profession in the first four years (Greene, 2008). In a study assessing teacher skills, 82% report that the majority of learning occurred on the job, rather than adequate skill-focused professional development (National Academy of Education, 2005).

Classroom management issues, like student misbehavior, tensions within the school, lack of recognition and support for work, and lack of material resources for accomplishing one’s job are related to teacher burnout (Burke, 1996). Overall classroom climate and student discipline problems are identified as the most powerful factors contributing towards teacher burnout (Ozdemir, 2007). As the quality of the classroom environment deteriorates, teachers can become emotionally exhausted, develop negative attitudes towards their students and their job, and

accomplish few educational goals for their students (Ozdemir, 2007). Leiter (1992) emphasized the need to consider how teachers perceive themselves in the area of classroom management and noted that Bandura's self-efficacy theory is a useful framework for understanding burnout in educational settings (p. 227).

### **Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy is defined as a cognitive process in which a person constructs beliefs regarding one's ability to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given accomplishment (Bandura, 1995). Individuals who perceive themselves as capable tend to attempt and successfully execute tasks or activities. People with higher efficacy beliefs persist with tasks in the face of difficulty and achieve higher results with lower level of stress (Bandura, 1995). The relationship between teacher efficacy beliefs and teacher burnout are indicated by several researchers (Bandura, 1997; Gold, 1996; Rosenholtz, 1985, Ozdemir, 2007).

Teachers who develop a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to report high job satisfaction and stay in the profession (Bandura, 1997; Gold, 1996; Rosenholtz, 1985). Given the very high demands placed on teachers, it is surprising they rarely receive specific training addressing the significance of social/emotional issues in the classroom or how to develop the skills to successfully handle them (Hargreaves, 1998). Although a great deal of attention has spotlighted students' development, there has been little focus on teachers' own development despite evidence that teachers make important contributions to desirable classroom and student outcomes.

Teacher self-efficacy relates to classroom and instructional strategies. An examination of relationships between teacher efficacy and classroom beliefs demonstrated that the more efficacious teachers use positive strategies for classroom management (Ozdemir, 2007).

According to Leffert and Scales (2004), conflict is one factor that negatively impacts a teacher's ability to establish quality relationships with his/her students. Specific skill sets are needed to minimize conflict and maximize connection. When teachers are inadequately equipped to mediate conflict, it is likely their relationships with students will be negatively impacted. This disruption can compound teacher stress and interfere with capacity for a positive disposition.

### **Teacher Disposition**

Over the past decade, educators, parents and the public are beginning to acknowledge the importance of both improving academic performance and enhancing students' social-emotional competence, character, and health (Jennings, 2008). Part of today's educational agenda is now focusing upon helping students interact in socially skilled and respectful ways to promote development of values that will translate into meaningful, engaged citizenship (Jennings, 2008).

When teachers are warm and supportive, they provide students with a sense of connectedness that facilitates exploration of new ideas and taking risks, which are fundamental to learning (Jennings, 2008). Teachers' positive emotions help them in the classroom. A middle school study demonstrated that students who believed that teachers care about them were more likely to be helpful, cooperative and follow classroom rules and norms (Wentzel, 1996). Students also demonstrate improved task mastery when teachers communicated positive emotions and humor (Sutton, 2009).

Teachers routinely function as prominent adult figures in children's lives. A caring or supportive teacher is one who has high expectations for student's success, is considered fair in dealing with a variety of students, is friendly and approachable, and shows care and concern about the student as a person (Leffert & Scales, 2004). These teachers create a climate in which students feel respected and valued, and have a psychological sense of membership or belonging

in the school. Teachers who are controlling and punitive have students who are less satisfied with school and less committed to their class work (Leffert & Scales, 2004).

School is an important place for social and emotional learning. Students often spend more time with teachers and peers than with family members. Consequently, the social skills and self regulation skills that students learn in school could strongly influence how they manage relationships throughout their lives (Jennings, 2008). Interpersonal skills are vital for establishing healthy relationships with friends, with colleagues at work, and with family. The absence of strong role modeling potentially limits students in their capacity to develop such skills (Jennings, 2008).

Positive teacher behaviors help facilitate an optimal social and emotional climate within the classroom. This is characterized by low levels of conflict and disruptive behavior, smooth transitions from activity to activity, appropriate expressions of emotion, respectful communication, problem solving, strong interest, focus on tasks, and supportiveness and responsiveness to individual differences and students' needs (LaParo & Pianta, 2003). Improving new teacher's abilities to manage their emotions and perceive how students may interpret their actions could help them respond to and prevent a certain degree of uncertainty in student behavior (Murray, 2005). A new teacher who can regulate his or her emotions is more likely to remain calm and be able to respond to high-pressure situations, such as a student abruptly challenging authority (Parker, 2000). Emotional regulation has been widely established as a foundation for stress management, burnout prevention and efficacy (Lazarus, 1999).

## **Emotions**

Emotions are an essential part of a productive adult life. Research psychologists assert that emotions are processes that consist of multiple components, including appraisal, subjective

experience, physiological change, expression and action tendencies (Sutton, 2009). This process typically begins with a judgment that involves interpreting some interaction in terms of its relevance for the individual's goals or concerns (Sutton, 2009). Positive emotions such as happiness or satisfaction involve pleasure and occur when one is making progress toward a goal. Negative emotions such as anger and disgust indicate that goals are thwarted or personal concerns are heightened. Since goals and concerns vary across individuals, so do the appraisals of the same triggering event (Sutton, 2009). In educational settings, this may translate into different reactions among teachers to similar student behaviors.

Positive emotions can help mitigate the subjective and psychological components of negative emotions and daily stress common to teachers (Sutton, 2009). Emotions unfold from individuals' appraisals of particular situations, which are a result of unique personal histories and perceptions, thus making them difficult to control (Friedrickson, 2000). Individuals can seek personal meaning from situations they know helped trigger positive emotions at an earlier time (Sutton, 2009). These situations can involve observing students learning and making progress, as well as fostering interpersonal relationships with students. Teachers who are more skilled at finding the personal meaning that elicits more positive emotions in their work are more likely to be effective in their interactions with students, generate a wider variety of ideas and cope better with the ongoing stress of teaching (Sutton, 2009).

Teachers report they use a variety of strategies to help them manage the negative emotions arising in the classroom. Reappraisal, or changing one's view of a situation can help prevent negative emotions from escalating. Teachers use strategies such as self-talk, removing themselves physically away from students, pausing, deep breathing and controlling facial

gestures (Sutton, 2009). Other means of coping can include deep breathing and reminding oneself of the problems created by “losing it” (Sutton, 2009).

Talking or venting to colleagues, friends and family is a common strategy for coping following a stressful event (Sutton, 2009). This can help put it into perspective, and humor can also prove helpful. The quality of a student-teacher relationship can depend upon how well a teacher expresses and processes negative emotions. For many teachers, regulating negative emotions in the classroom can be challenging and is a commonly reported stressor (Sutton, 2009). Although they regularly face situations that provoke anger, contempt, disgust, sadness, and frustration, teachers must find appropriate ways to express (or inhibit) their feelings in a classroom setting (Hargreaves, 2000). Although teachers recognize the importance of regulating their emotions and think they are keeping their feelings hidden from students, often they are not as successful as they perceive themselves to be (Jennings, 2008). Emotional regulation or self-management is an aspect of social and emotional competency needed for containment of negative emotion and positive engagement with students (Jennings, 2008).

### **Social and Emotional Competency (SEC)**

Evidence suggests that social and emotional competency (SEC) is related to emotional stress, burnout and teacher retention. Social and emotional competency is a broad construct defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (2008). This definition encompasses five major emotional, cognitive, and behavioral competencies: self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, self-management, and relationship management (Zins, Weissberg, Wang & Wallberg, 2004).

The dimensions of self-awareness and self-management appear to influence a teacher’s ability to cope with the emotional demands of teaching (Jennings, 2008). When teachers lack the

SEC to handle classroom challenges, they experience stress. High levels of emotional stress can have an adverse effect on job performance and may eventually lead to burnout and leaving the profession (Jennings, 2008). Poor retention of new teachers has significant, harmful consequences for schools and children (Murray, 2005). Persistent teacher turnover undermines the consistent implementation of curriculum and instruction and wastes resources (Guin, 2004).

Socially and emotionally competent teachers demonstrate high self-awareness. They recognize their emotions and tendencies and know how to use them to generate motivation in themselves and others (Jennings, 2008). They have a realistic understanding of their capabilities and recognize their emotional strengths and weaknesses. They know how their emotional expressions influence interactions with others. Such teachers recognize and understand the emotions of others (Jennings, 2008). They are able to build strong and supportive relationships through mutual understanding and cooperation and can effectively negotiate solutions in conflict situations. They are culturally sensitive, understand that others have different perspectives, and take this into account in relationships with students, parents and colleagues (Jennings, 2008).

Socially and emotionally competent teachers practice communication skills, perspective taking, responsible decision making, appreciation of diversity, and caring about oneself and others (Casel, 2005). They know how to manage their emotions, behavior and relationships with others, even when aroused during challenging situations. SEC is connected with well-being. When teachers experience mastery over social and emotional challenges, teaching becomes more enjoyable, and they feel more efficacious (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004). However, although these characteristics would be considered ideal in any educational setting, little attention has been paid to supporting teachers' SEC. This aspect of teacher development can contribute significantly towards resiliency.

## **Resiliency**

Several personal and situational variables have been regarded as influential in burnout and SEC. They include demographic characteristics, psychological traits and motivational factors (Ozdemir, 2007). Research findings indicate that younger teachers report higher burnout (Ozdemir, 2007). Burnout is less likely with teachers who are achievement oriented, avoid extremes of competitiveness, have strong purpose in their personal and professional lives, have a sense of humor, hardiness, self-esteem, self-confidence, professional self-efficacy and positive self concept (Ozdemir, 2007).

Teachers who effectively establish positive classroom climates demonstrate a high degree of situational awareness or “classroom savvy” (Corley, 1998). They are able to both sense the collective mood of students as well as monitor interactions between individual students. A teacher’s level of awareness is also important in signaling to the students that the teacher is “with it” (Kounin, 1970). A teacher’s ability to demonstrate to students that they are aware of the various interactions happening helps to inhibit certain behaviors (Kounin, 1970).

Effective teachers are versed in conflict resolution strategies (Cummings, 2000). They are able to intervene in a timely fashion to deescalate potential conflict. A healthy classroom climate directly contributes to students’ social, emotional, and academic outcomes. Improvements in classroom climate may reinforce a teacher’s enjoyment of teaching, efficacy, and commitment to the profession, thereby creating a positive feedback loop that may prevent teacher burnout (Jennings, 2008).

It is unrealistic to expect students to be resilient if educators are not. If educators themselves are in high-risk situations that lead to burnout, it becomes even more challenging to foster resiliency among students. If students are expected to develop resilient behaviors and

attitudes, then educators also need to demonstrate these qualities (Henderson, 2003). Almost all of the resiliency research to date has focused on children and adolescents, and an understanding of how adults exposed to personal and work-related stress is just emerging (Henderson, 2003). Historically, there has been a heavy emphasis upon the needs of students, with increasing demands and requests on teachers. In order for teachers to promote and model social-emotional skills, they must strengthen their own social-emotional competencies (Murray, 2005). This literature review provided a context for this research study, informing its' design and methods.

## **Chapter 3: Research Design**

### **Overview**

This phenomenological study examined essential factors influencing a new teacher's capacity to manage stress and cope with demands. Teachers enrolled in an accelerated licensure program, while working in urban schools were the focus of this study. A phenomenological study is a qualitative strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009). This study relied upon this type of method due to the inherent complexities associated with understanding stress and coping.

It is essential to understand the particular context within which participants act and the influence that this context has on their actions (Maxwell, 2005). Individuals develop unique meanings about their experiences, affording the opportunity for the researcher to look across a sample for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas (Creswell, 2009). Phenomological research uses the analysis of significant statements, the generation of meaning units and a description of the essence of the participant experience of a particular phenomenon. (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Research Questions**

The research questions were informed by literature on teacher stress and burnout, coping, resiliency, student relationships, classroom management, and a Transactional Theory of Stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The research question guiding this study was *What do new urban teachers in an accelerated licensure program identify as central factors influencing their capacity to manage stress in the context of their classroom?*

The purpose of this question was to examine specific factors contributing to teacher stress management and coping in an urban context. “Central factors” can be understood as critical components of stress management as defined by participants. They are identified as the most essential and influential in mitigating the consequences of stress. “Stress management” is explored through the lenses of resiliency, coping and social and emotional competency detailed in the literature review section.

The two subordinate questions were as follows:

1. How do new urban teachers in an accelerated licensure program describe conditions they view as being stressful?

The purpose of this question was to explore the characteristics of a new urban teacher’s classroom, and to understand the aspects that were considered stressful. This question was instrumental in gathering data that tells the story of the conditions and the meaning teachers attached to them. It was important since it examined teacher perspectives. It is also linked to the main research question aimed at discovering central factors for coping.

2. How do new urban teachers in an accelerated licensure program perceive and describe what they do to manage stress?

The purpose of this question was to explore how teachers in an accelerated licensure program designed to prepare them for working in urban classrooms perceived and described their efforts in managing stress. This question was important in gathering data regarding teacher perceptions of stress and coping and their implications within the classroom. It helped frame the inquiry, as it facilitated exploration of teacher perceptions of their effectiveness in coping.

## **Methodology**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore central factors associated with four new urban teachers’ experiences of stress and stress management. For the duration of

this research project, stress management will be generally defined as the ability to cope with the challenges of teaching by demonstrating positive attitudes and behaviors. The aim of this study was to build close portraits of each participant, versus producing generalizability (Moustakas, 1994). In the following section, I discuss the framework organizing the study, the methods employed, and the site and participants involved.

### **Phenomenology and Phenomenological Research**

Phenomenology is the study of how people understand a particular phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). It comes from the Greek words *phaino*, meaning to bring to light, and *logos*, meaning the word, account, or reason (Lexicon Pathfinder, 2003). Phenomenological research relies upon the individual's subjective perceptions of a phenomenon or experience (Mertens, 2005). It allows for exploration of an individual's lived experience, including the meaning he/she ascribes to it (Mertens, 2005). This understanding of lived experiences marks phenomenology as a philosophy and method (Creswell, 2009). The researcher works to limit assumptions about an objective reality that exists apart from the individual in favor of focusing on how individuals create and understand their own life spaces (Mertens, 2005). The goal is to look for means to draw out emergent themes and produce a structure that allows for finding the most meaningful patterns and connections in the participant accounts (Moustakas, 2004).

During this process, the researcher is required to set aside personal experiences in order to understand those participating in the study (Creswell, 2009). One of the most important aspects of conducting phenomenological research is using what is known as bracketing, the process of attempting to suspend prior knowledge of the phenomenon being investigated to avoid imposing one's lens upon it (Wertz, 2005). Reflective bracketing helps account for and control bias with the researcher viewing data from a fresh perspective by identifying personal beliefs,

background and cultural suppositions to minimize the impact of the phenomena being investigated (Ahern, 1999; Bednall, 2006; Gearing, 2004). Describing a phenomenon as the participants actually see it is the cornerstone of this research methodology (Wertz, 2005).

### **Design Rationale**

Linkages between stress and work are firmly established (Blase, 1986). The existing research into the teacher stress phenomenon has relied primarily on quantitative methods, which employ highly structured survey instruments that may excessively control the research subject's perception of a given phenomenon. Additionally, most of the instruments used to measure stress in teachers are based upon theoretical ideas and assumptions developed from studies of individuals outside of education (Blase, 1986). This phenomenological study elicited understanding directly from teachers and allowed for examination of the context in which urban teachers were working.

By employing a phenomenological method, a thorough exploration of contextual factors has been explored. This practice based research study examined a wide range of central factors influencing new urban teachers' ability to cope with the demands of their profession within the context of an accelerated licensure program in one particular city.

### **Site and Participants**

This study took place at the Central University within an accelerated licensure program in southern New England. "Cohort 4" began in August of 2010, with its' members placed in urban districts to teach math or science at local middle and high schools. They simultaneously engaged in graduate coursework for educators while receiving supervision through the university and in their schools. Teachers enrolled in the Central University program were assigned school-based supervisors at their schools, and received support from the University to equip them in their

work. Many were brand new to teaching and required hands-on experience coupled with extensive support and supervision. Teachers in the program frequently reported being in need of comprehensive resources to mitigate the stressful effects of being new teachers in urban schools while keeping up with the demands of accelerated coursework.

From August 2010 to December 2010, I worked as an adjunct professor at Central University, instructing participants who were obtaining their license through this one-year intensive program. Many were transitioning from previous careers and were entirely new to the profession. They frequently reported feeling challenged and needing resources. My role was to provide instruction on themes that prepared teacher's to work effectively in an urban context. The topics included classroom management, communication strategies, positive expectations, cultural competency, and engaging students and their families. My teaching role formally ended in December 2010 to allow me to focus solely on this research study and to prevent any duality in role that could compromise the study. Although my instructor role ended, my prior experience with the group was helpful to the research. Since August, I had built a strong rapport with the cohort and learned a great deal about their teaching and personal styles. They voiced stressors within the context of our classroom discussions and in their written assignments. This served to build trust and mutual respect and positive communication. It seemed to help participants share openly during our interviews.

This study was performed in cooperation with the University and local school administrations. The preliminary study design was co-developed and approved by the University. Access to the population was ensured by the program director at Central University. This study began in February 2011, well after the fall 2010 semester has concluded and all assignments

were graded. I was not actively teaching courses during the execution of the study to ensure credibility and minimize any potential threats.

The original “Cohort 4” was a group of 21 middle- and high-school math and science teachers. Traditionally, one student, a 29-year-old aspiring teaching apprentice passed away suddenly. Another student dropped out due to not being able to find placement teaching in a school. The 19 remaining were 14 teachers with little to no classroom experience and 5 apprentices.

A purposive sample of middle school math teachers who had five or less years of classroom teaching experience were invited to voluntarily join the study. A purposive sample is a sample selected in a nonrandom fashion to achieve a certain goal (Maxwell, 2005). The purpose of inviting teachers with little to no experience was to understand how new teachers made meaning of their circumstances in their first stages of teaching in an urban environment. Of the 5 available middle school math teachers that fit the criteria of the study, 4 chose to participate.

The sample size allowed for an intimate analysis, uncovering the essence of each of the participant’s experiences. The four participants who committed provided informed written consent (see appendix A). All elements of participation were explicitly described before obtaining consent to ensure a thorough understanding of the facets of the study. Although grades were finalized during the execution of the study, I made sure that my past role of instructor was not utilized to coerce any potential participants. Everyone was invited to participate and assured that there was no threat of any negative repercussions. Voluntary and informed participation helped ensure high ethical standards within the study.

This study generated a substantial amount of confidential information that was carefully guarded. Each participant was assigned a number for all data collection, except for the written

consent form. The transcribed interviews were stored on the researcher's laptop computer with password protection. All written files were maintained off site at the researcher's home office in a locked drawer. All participants selected a pseudo name and the names of their schools were changed to protect their identities. Any information brought up during the interviews were not discussed with the participant outside of the interviews. To protect confidentiality, only the Principal Investigator viewed the raw interview data. No one else had access to it.

Ninety-minute interviews were conducted with each participant. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions relating to stressors and coping strategies from their own perspectives. This allowed for an in-depth investigation of how the teachers experienced the phenomenon of stress. Since the study was not a developmental theory, it simply measured perspective at that particular point in time. To this end, one interview along with journal entries and follow-up were sufficient for this study.

### **Data Collection**

The data for the study included the actual interviews, some journal entries generated during the fall 2010 term, field notes and researcher memos. For this inquiry, interviews were the primary method of capturing the teachers' perspectives on stress, coping and the conditions in their urban context. Since phenomenological research is an attempt to describe an experience from the participants' perspective, the interviews allowed for gathering their stories in their own words (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003). The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

The interviews looked at the primary and secondary appraisals that teachers were making (Lazarus, 1984). They explored various components of stress as defined by the teachers. Interview responses captured participant perceptions of what they encountered as teachers. The interviews provided understanding of the ways teachers were experiencing and coping with

stressors. The content is explicitly described in Appendix B. The questions were structured as follows:

(1) Historical context questions—these were designed to understand teacher background, including original aspirations and practice. They were built upon what I had begun to learn from the participants.

(2) Research questions—these were designed to elicit information specifically related to the participants' experience of stress within the classroom and what coping mechanisms were enacted.

(3) Reflective questions—these were designed to encourage the teacher to describe his/her perceptions and experiences with specific stressors, subsequent consequences experienced, and strategies employed to mitigate stress.

### **Journal Entries**

During the fall term, participants made several documentations indicating their ongoing development in teaching. During one class, a discussion on stress lead to a writing exercise in which teachers reflected upon their daily stressors and coping mechanisms. Other entries include open-ended questions such as “what are you experiencing now in your classroom?” and “what I learned today includes...” Participants brought their reflective journals and shared information that related to the interview questions described in Appendix B.

### **Memos**

Memos were an important source of data in this qualitative research study (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Memos consist of field notes recording what was heard, seen, experienced and thought in the course of collecting and reflecting on the process (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Each interview and field experience were carefully documented as comprehensively as possible

(Groenewald, 2004). The model developed by Leonard Schatzman and Anslem Strauss supplemented by Robert Burgess of keeping memos and field notes guided this critical aspect of data collection (Gronewald, 2004). They included the following:

**Table 3**

*Notes Supporting Data Collection*

| Type of Notes        | Content   |
|----------------------|---|
| Observational Notes  | Describe what happened, including use of senses in making observations        |
| Theoretical Notes    | Attempt to derive meaning as the researcher thinks or reflects on experiences |
| Methodological Notes | Provide reminders, instructions, or critique to oneself on the process        |
| Analytical Memos     | End of a field day summary and progress reviews                               |

Table 3 demonstrates the various means of note taking that were essential to this research process. Researchers are easily absorbed in the data-collection process and may fail to reflect on what is happening. It is important to maintain a balance between descriptive notes and reflective notes, such as hunches, intuition and feelings. Memos were dated and later correlated with the data (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Memos were used as a record of analysis. Memos were constructed to help maintain awareness and integrity within this study. For this study, memos helped capture essential details and the “golden nuggets” of insight that emerged during the analysis (Saldana, 2009).

Furthermore, memos were used to try out analytic ideas and work out the logic of the emergent findings.

All memos for this study were dated and referenced with regard to what they referred to. They contained a heading and were cross-referenced. They were kept in a separate file and not recorded within the margins of transcripts or field notes. I used a notebook to keep a list of emerging codes handy to avoid duplications. Diagrams were used to help with study conceptualization. They served to uncover gaps and flaws in the relationships of categories and logic (Saldana, 2009). Diagrams were generated from early listings of analysis. The data collected were kept in a file and included the informed consent agreement, field notes from the interviews, memos, the draft transcription and analysis of interviews presented to participants for validation, confirmation and or commentary by participants about the transcript and analysis of interview, and all subsequent communication between the participants and researcher.

### **Data analysis**

The term analysis can imply breaking into parts, which can lead to a loss of a whole phenomenon (Groenwald, 2004). For this study, analysis consisted of seeking essential features and relationships of the data. Data analysis modeled after the modification of Van Kaam's method of analysis of phenomenological data by Clark Moustakas (1994).

### **Coding**

Coding is the transitional process between data collection and data analysis. A code is a word or a short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence capturing and or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data (Saldana, 2009). Descriptive codes summarized the primary topic of the excerpt. Saldana (2009) points out that codes are meant to summarize or condense data not reduce it (p.72). Emerging themes were coded

(Maxwell, 2009). Some categories are evidenced in the literature review and theoretical framework including stress management, classroom management, uncertainty, efficacy and stages of teaching.

Coding involves organizing materials into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information (Creswell, 2009). Another important step in this study was segmenting sentences or paragraphs into categories and labeling them with what Creswell (2009) refers to as an “in vivo term”, based on the actual language of the participant (p. 186). Immediately following each interview, I relied on the process of writing reflective memos to help understand emerging themes and significant statements (Maxwell, 2005).

Initial coding was simple and open-ended. Patterns included varying forms such as similarity, difference, frequency, sequence, correspondence, and causation (Saldana, 2009). I looked at every statement that was relevant to the questions asked in the study. Meaning units were then created. These meaning units were then clustered together for categories. This facilitated the interpretation of the data.

The specific data analysis relied upon the Moustakas (1994) approach to phenomenological research. First, I documented my own personal experience with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). As a teacher and practicing clinical worker specializing in professional burnout, it was essential to bracket my personal experiences and assumptions to every degree possible. Limiting researcher judgments and biases was an integral part of understanding the experiences of the teacher participants.

The process of data analysis involved several steps (Creswell, 2009). Following each interview, I organized and prepared the data for analysis. I wrote and recorded memos before and after each interview. Immediately following, I transcribed each interview carefully, listening to

the recordings repeatedly to ensure accuracy. Once the transcripts were finished and reviewed by each participant, I continued to analyze the data. I listened to the audio and read the transcribed interviews several times to glean a sense of how the teachers were experiencing the phenomenon of stress associated with being new teachers. I identified significant statements that helped eliminated irrelevant statements that did not inform the research topic. From the significant statements, I developed categories for coding using a process of horizontalization. I took the list of significant statements and treated them as statements of equal value that are not repetitive or overlapping (Creswell, 2007). I unitized the statements by identifying them and dividing them into separate text (Miles and Huberman, 1994). I reviewed the codes multiple times to ensure the participants' experiences were represented completely. The member checks confirmed this. I also met with Dr. Jane Lohmann to review the coding process and ensure I was effectively bracketing my own biases.

The codes that were developed included: supportive supervision, professional development, classroom management, meaningful connections, fixing the problems, non-stop demands, influences of stress, and activities. This process ran parallel to recording memos and extensive reviewing of the interview content and process. The codes captured the essence of what and how participants experienced the phenomenon of stress and coping (Creswell, 2009). In phenomenological research it is critical to capture the essence of the participants' experience (Creswell, 2009).

Once the codes were established, I then began devising the narrative to represent the key themes that emerged. My final steps were to interpret the data and articulate the key results, findings and recommendations for practice.

## Validity and Credibility

### Member Checking

Member checking is defined as asking for the participants to check the results of the study in order to see if they find the results to be credible (Padgett, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that credibility parallels internal validity in qualitative research. It can be tested by asking, “Is there a correspondence between the way the respondents actually perceive social constructs and the way the researcher portrays their viewpoints?” (p. 105). To this end, member checks were used to verify the accuracy of the data. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the member check is the “most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). I employed member checking to determine the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2009). The analysis was presented to the members to check for accuracy both in transcript form and once it was been organized into a description.

During member check, participants were asked the following questions after reviewing the transcript of their interview:

1. Is this narrative about your experiences as a new teacher complete?
2. Does this accurately describe the ways in which you experience and deal with stress?
3. Is there anything here that seems inaccurate or misleading?
4. Do you want to share anything else regarding your experiences as a new teacher?

In addition to ensuring credibility, the member check was an opportunity for the teachers to be informed of what would be included in the report and ensure their confidentiality was being upheld. Each participant confirmed the narratives captured their experiences and did not request any revisions.

## **Data Checking**

Engaging in research raises questions of validity that can be addressed in a number of ways. Qualitative validity means that the researcher ensures accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures (Creswell, 2009). A detailed protocol and database was kept that documented each procedural step carefully (Yin, 2003). Some of the precautions I took as described by Creswell (2009) included ensuring transcripts did not contain obvious mistakes, member checking as previously described, and review and consultation with Northeastern University's Principal Investigator, Dr. Jane Lohmann.

Creswell (2003) pointed out that "threats to construct validity occur when an investigator uses inadequate definitions and measures" (p. 171). This study relied on specific concepts to be defined such as coping, resiliency, classroom and stress management. Construct validity relies on questions addressing the research problem (Trochim, 2006). The research questions for this study were intentionally designed to address the conditions that new teachers in an accelerated licensure program potentially faced, based on existing practice experience.

## **Credibility**

Credibility is based upon determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant or the readers of a study (Creswell, 2009). Within qualitative research, terms such as trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility are frequently discussed (Creswell, 2009). Validity was addressed in this study by using various strategies such as clarifying researcher bias, member checking, use of rich, thick description to convey findings, presenting discrepant information running counter to the themes, peer debriefing and use of an external auditor (Creswell, 2009). To minimize bias within the interviews, I used a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions (see Appendix B).

Bracketing involved separating my own biases and lenses in order to make sure the participants' experiences were represented properly (Creswell, 2007). There were three specific areas that I explored in the context of my memos, discussions with my advisor, clarified with members and considered as I analyzed the data. They included setting aside my prior knowledge and work with the teachers, my professional identity as a clinical social worker, and my own experiences as both a teacher and learner. Memoing helped me to work out ways in which these influenced my thinking and helped me to avoid subjectivity in the review and analysis of data.

One of the most salient issues in undertaking this research is my prior role as the participants' instructor at Central University. This served as an advantage as I had already built a positive rapport and familiarity with the participants. It seemed as this allowed them to demonstrate trust and transparency with me. In turn, I had developed warmth and positive regard for them, as they all worked hard to succeed as new urban teachers. At the same time, it was important to listen carefully to the responses and not make preemptive assumptions based on my prior knowledge of them as students and the curriculum we covered in our course, EDU 500 Fundamentals of Teaching and Learning.

As a clinical social worker, I am a specialist in treating stress and related conditions. My focus was working with teachers who face the potential risk for burnout. I continually witness the effects of burnout up close and personal. My clinical expertise is the primary reason I taught at Central University. I provided training to teachers on how to identify and combat stress. Since this is my identity and profession, I had to suspend preconceived notions based on my experiences to be able to really listen and pinpoint what the teachers themselves were feeling and indicating.

During this study, I identified with the plight of being both a teacher and student. While undertaking this study, I also managed multiple demands including teaching at two Universities, maintaining a busy private practice, and completing doctoral course work. Like the teachers, I faced a host of demands and constant work. It was important to capture my own feelings and process in these regards to ensure I was not over identifying with components the teachers described.

Another major element of bracketing including suspending bias over what the teachers' prior knowledge on responding effectively to students was like. Our curriculum included discussion around power and class, racism, poverty and effective responses to students and families. Although these topics were at the heart of the curriculum during the semester, I had to suspend my propensity towards believing they had integrated these lessons into their practice.

The findings of the study were not generalized, since it is specifically looking at the unique and personal experience of the teachers in the particular context of the city school district while completing initial licensure. The descriptions elicited, along with purposive sample selection, data collection tools and strategies for analysis helped support external validity.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

This study did not present any obvious risks to the participants. The data demonstrated types of stressors experienced by teachers and how they were coping. Due to the personal nature of the information and constructs of research, all information was held in strictest confidence. As indicated in Appendix B, participants were reminded of my role as a mandated reporter that required me to report disclosures of imminent harm, due to my credentials as a clinical social worker. To this end, I described the limits of confidentiality and informed the teachers they

would be provided with a listing of several local reputable mental health practitioners if needed. None of the participants requested this.

Participation in the study did not put the well-being of the teachers at risk. It appeared that they raised their awareness of the way they were managing stress, which has the potential to lead them to be more proactive about it. Due to the nature of questions, all participants ran the risk of embarrassment in revealing personal information. To minimize this, all participants were informed of the focus of the interview. The selection process was voluntary, fair and nondiscriminatory. All of the teachers signed the consent form located in Appendix A.

This study provided an understanding of how new urban teachers within the context of an accelerated licensure program perceived and managed stress. The problem of practice included disparities in urban environments that can contribute towards teacher burnout. Much of the literature relies on quantitative research that does not produce enough description to truly explore the phenomenon of stress from a teacher standpoint. This project took into consideration the influence of participating in a comprehensive licensure program while teaching. Lazarus' (1977) Transactional Model of Stress provided a framework that involves the concept of appraisal that influences resiliency and distress tolerance. It is hopeful that the data will help inform ongoing program development at the University and shed light on the lived experiences of new urban teachers in this particular context.

## **Chapter 4: Report of Research Results**

### **Section 1: Teacher Profiles**

#### **Introduction**

The four math teachers in this study were Liz, Rob, Meg, and Jan. They taught at two different middle schools located in an urban district in southern New England. Liz and Meg taught at the Duarte Middle School, where there were approximately 450 students in total. Of these, over 70% were eligible for free or reduced lunch, nearly tripling the state wide average (United States Department of Education, 2011). The Duarte Middle School's 2010 Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) indicates a low performance rating, and it was a restructuring year for mathematics. Jan and Rob taught at the Niklaus Middle School, where there were over 600 students. During their interviews, they mentioned it was "an extended day" school due to low performance ratings. At Niklaus, over 80% of the students were eligible for reduced and free lunch (United States Department of Education, 2011). In the mathematics division, they were restructuring due to not meeting AYP standards over the past years.

The four teachers in this study were selected purposively due to their length of time in the teaching profession. For this study, the criteria was each participant would have less than five years experience and be enrolled at Central University's alternative one-year licensure program while teaching mathematics at an urban middle school.

The results are divided into two Sections: Section 1: Descriptive Profiles of Four Middle School Math Teachers and Section 2: Middle School Math Teachers' Perceptions of Stressors and Coping as New Teachers Enrolled in an Alternative Licensure Program. In Section 1, the middle school math teachers' backgrounds and stories are shared in their own words. Their perceptions of how they experienced and coped with stress are described in narrative form. Their

specific experiences and behaviors in the context of their classrooms and outside of school are presented as they emerged from the data.

In Section 2, the three research questions will be presented with a synthesis of key results that emerged from the data. The data demonstrated similarities and variations in ways the teachers described the conditions for teaching, and what they found most helpful in mitigating the impact of stress.

The teachers' profiles in the study are portrayed from the least experienced to the most experienced. Liz's story as a new seventh grade math teacher will begin the section. Robert's profile as an eighth grade math teacher will be shared next. Meg's narrative as a sixth grade teacher who was new to the district will follow. Finally, Jan's experience as a seventh grade teacher with 4 years experience will end the section.

## **Profile 1**

### **Liz: First-Time Seventh Grade Math Teacher**

I thought I had something that could make the students feel at ease and comfortable in the classroom and bring it out. I was looking forward to giving the students something and create a safe place for them. (Interview 1, p. 2)

Liz and I had our interview at a rural library on the Wednesday of February vacation. The location was known as the historical room, situated within the research section and used for private meetings by the community. The walls were covered with various national and local artifacts, including paintings of tall ships, political figures and fishermen. The room was rather chilly, and we both kept our coats on for comfort. Liz sat facing the closed door, while I had my back towards it. She appeared somewhat nervous and eager to move right into our interview.

Liz was a medium built Caucasian woman in her early 40's. She had bright eyes and a radiant glow and smiled often. She wore a dark jacket and blue jeans. She appeared very intent as she formulated her answers to each question. Liz appeared with cold symptoms, but managed

to demonstrate stamina throughout our discussion. She was at times a bit apprehensive, and seemed to choose her words carefully. At times, she repeated and clarified her answers when she diverged. During the interview, she acknowledged some current anxieties over timing during the school vacation, and feelings of being overwhelmed and having “a lot to do”. She asked to leave her phone on vibrate since her adolescent children were waiting at home, and did not want to worry whether they could reach her if needed.

Liz was born and raised locally in a large family and attended private parochial schools through eighth grade. She described elementary school as particularly strict, where the paddle was used to discipline. She mentioned that the school was an “environment of fear” (Interview 1, p. 1) where anything outside of compliance resulted in “no grace at all” (Interview 1, p. 1). She said that other students in the classroom would “literally get sick right there on the floor”(Interview 1, p. 1) out of nervousness when they were asking out of turn to use the bathroom. She reflected upon the different aspects of this:

It was very, very strict. Looking back, I don’t necessarily think that was bad, because I think I learned a lot of very positive things from it. But it was extremely strict and you were scared to do anything, everything was extremely structured. (Interview 1, p. 1)

Liz believed there were positive aspects of her structured schooling, which eventually became a bit more lenient during her middle school years. Liz enjoyed her middle school experience, dubbing it as “very social” (Interview 1, p. 2) with lots of friends and positive relationships with “really good” lay teachers (Interview 1, p. 2).

Originating from a family of educators meant high standards for Liz. She explained that education was “a big part of our lives” (Interview 1, p. 2). Her Father was a Principal, and her Mother worked as a teacher. Liz said that earning good grades and proper behavior was “expected and necessary” (Interview 1, p. 2).

While working as a Payroll Manager for a company, Liz began to realize her desire for

teaching. Liz noticed that some of her colleagues lacked basic math skills, and “no one knew how to calculate their paycheck” (Interview 1, p. 2). Liz felt she could make a difference with the “upcoming generation” (Interview 1, p. 2) to teach needed skills since “math is not just a subject in school, but part of life, something you need to know” (Interview 1, p. 3).

Liz’s beliefs from her school, home and work experiences moved her into action and she enrolled at Central University to obtain her license. She was hired at the Niklaus Middle School to teach seventh grade math for the 2010 – 2011 school year, and was “excited” (Interview 1, p. 3) to begin her teaching career. Focused upon making an impact on students, she entered with a desire to “make math fun and interesting”, something “they would want to learn” (Interview 1, p. 3).

Throughout the interview, Liz reported on various aspects of stress that she experienced as a first year teacher. She felt some of her students “already had a distaste for school” (Interview 1, p. 4). She spent a considerable amount of time planning lessons that captured the attention of her students when they were “gone” and “hard to reach on certain days” (Interview 1, p. 4).

It appeared that one of the greatest sources of Liz’s stress involved insecurity that was perpetuated by constant monitoring and little to no feedback. She was uncomfortable having a new math coach observe her:

That’s a little bit of a stressor for me because having someone be in the room makes me feel inhibited, so I think my lessons have gotten worse, because I feel like I always have this pressure on me and I just can’t be myself. (Interview 1, p. 9)

Another major source of concern for Liz was classroom management. She was working diligently to establish routines, and worried that her “effectiveness is much less than I thought” (Interview 1, p. 4). She felt that better preparation would help “get more kids on board that way” (Interview 1, p. 4).

Throughout the year, Liz wondered whether her lessons were effective. Liz worried that she was not communicating well and attributed a large portion of her stress towards having to teach multiple methods of math, which she found confusing:

They have 5 different ways that they can learn how to add fractions, when to me, it's like, if just teach them the common denominator, and I think they'll be okay! For me, I have to learn all the methods before I can teach them, I don't quite even understand them all yet; learning but there's so much. (Interview 1, p. 7)

Liz was overwhelmed in managing the many tasks that came with being a new teacher. She emphasized there was a real lack of time for everything, with “so many *other* requirements”. She iterated that it was not necessarily one thing or the other that was stressful, but the “whole thing” that made it so hard:

I feel like I just can't meet all those standards. I can't do everything! I can't do this, I can't plan for my classroom, I can't grade my papers, I can't do this and be doing this stuff with professional development. I just am not capable of doing the teaching job and doing that, you know, it overwhelms me sometimes. (Interview 1, p. 11)

In regards to enlisting support for the areas Liz identified as most stressful, she acknowledged that she “basically just holds it in”. Liz reported being very busy with family responsibilities which at times proved helpful, and at others draining. Liz noticed that when she experienced stress, she dealt with a sense of being overwhelmed, being in a bad mood and feeling distracted and agitated. She also noticed that she would become “tougher on the students” in order to regain control in her classroom (Interview 1, p. 12).

There were a variety of efforts made by Liz to mitigate the consequences of stress she experienced. In particular, she emphasized relying upon various processes involving self-talk and revisiting certain situations. One way she accomplished this was by realizing that each day was a new beginning, a “clean slate” (Interview 1, p. 13). She also discussed strategies such as “counting down” the minutes in a period, hours in a day, days until vacation:

I think the only thing that helps me is time when it comes to stress. When it comes to a weekend coming, there's a vacation coming, so I do always think about it, what's the next thing that's going to give me a little relief from stress, and I just have to make it to that point. I'm always counting down and trying to make it to the next one. (Interview 1, p. 17)

In regards to activities promoting coping, Liz relied on taking some time at home to unwind after school. This was not always possible given her children were often waiting for her arrival, but she would try to transition from the pressures of the day:

I usually come home, I lay on the couch, have some chocolate (laughs), and I will put on some sort of mind-numbing TV show, like Everybody Loves Raymond, that will make me laugh a little bit, and then hopefully I can get a quick nap in and then I'll feel better after the strain of the day is a little bit behind me. (Interview 1, p. 13)

Liz was a brand new teacher entering the classroom for the first time. She was overwhelmed with the workload at school and her graduate course work at Central University. Liz seemed to be in a survival stage of teaching, making an effort to keep track of her daily responsibilities. Liz was constantly on the run, and worried that her performance was not what it should be. In regards to stress, she tried to "hide it" and coped by knowing it would "go away" when "the person leaves, when the class is over, when the day is over, I know it will be better" (Interview 1, p. 17).

## **Profile 2**

### **Rob: A Second-Year Eighth Grade Math Teacher**

The respect thing I kind of took for granted, I've always been able to make connections with people, I have always been able to gain respect from people, so when I was faced with not being able to connect with people and not being able to earn respect, I didn't know what to do. (Interview 3, p. 3)

Rob was interviewed on a Saturday morning one week following February break at a local rural library's historical room where I had interviewed Liz a few days prior. The library was bustling with activity, and we benefitted from the privacy the room afforded. Rob sat facing

the glass door, while my back was turned towards it. Rob had a pleasant, matter-of-fact disposition. He appeared nonchalant but ready to begin our discussion.

Rob was an athletically built Caucasian man in his early 30's. He had light eyes and hair and a wide smile. He wore a bright red short sleeve polo shirt that was slightly rumpled with jeans. He didn't seem to mind the cold temperature of the room, while I kept my coat on. Rob appeared thoughtful as he answered each question in a very straightforward and non-assuming fashion. He answered each question in depth, but stayed on topic and did not furnish more than what was being asked. Rob had recently returned from a trip and had spent the week readjusted.

Rob was born and raised locally and was the eldest in his family. One of his two sisters was still in high school, and he mentioned that she was not having a positive experience. According to Rob, he always did well in school, earning A's and B's and making the honor roll. However, he felt that schoolwork was just not important to him since he "didn't like school, or want to be there" (Interview 3, p. 1). Rob remembered that sports were "really all I cared about in middle school" (Interview 3, p. 1).

In high school, Rob took note of one of his teachers and began contemplating his future. He thought teaching would be "the easiest job in the world" and "allow me to coach football" (Interview 3, p. 1). Once in college, Rob "started to learn more about math, and math became more important to me, rather than just a means to coach football" (Interview 3, p. 1).

Thinking back to his middle school years, Rob reflected that while he was not interested in academics, he respected his teachers. Prior to stepping into his classroom, he anticipated there would be challenges, based on his previous work as a coach and substitute teacher, since "I kind of had a picture of what I was getting into, so I wasn't so shocked" (Interview 3, p. 2). Still, he reported being very surprised that "a student didn't have respect for a teacher" (Interview 3, p.

2). He discussed what this was like for him:

I was thinking that the students would want to listen to me, what I was saying would be important. I thought that everyone would want to know what I had to say and that everybody would respect me and listen to me and follow my directions, and that was my biggest shock cause I never really experienced telling somebody something and having them not respond (Interview 3, p. 2)

It was difficult for Rob to be the “new kid on the block” (Interview 3, p. 2). He was surprised at how his colleagues and superiors made him feel like “a 14-year-old” (Interview 3, p.

2). Around experienced pees he felt “inferior, like I didn’t have the experience, I don’t know what I am doing, I’m not good at this” (Interview 3, p. 2). Rob admitted that it was “just tough to be new at something” (Interview 3, p. 2).

During our interview, Rob reported on his experiences as a second-year teacher that he found the most stressful. As an eighth grade math teacher, he taught various levels and managed large number of students and felt that “everyday can be a stressful day” (Interview 3, p. 4). In particular, Rob’s inclusion class contained 32 students in it, and he stated, “There are a lot of behavior issues in that class” (Interview 3, p. 4).

Rob spoke of his experiences during his first and now second years of teaching. When asked to consider the most stressful moments he had ever experienced, he described them in detail. He reflected upon his experiences during his first year that were especially trying:

We had classes that were 90 minutes and knew in the first 5 minutes that we weren’t going to do anything and that it was going to be just chaos for the 90 minutes and I was just counting down the minutes until it was over, just everything from students to throwing things, to students yelling profanities, to half the students just refusing to do their work, um, giving them a problem and them not having any answers, giving them a problem and not one correct answer, when I thought we’ve been working on this for 3 weeks, and can’t get one correct answer in the class. (Interview 3, p. 4)

When Rob began teaching, he worked endless hours on a daily basis. He intentionally

spent long hours on the job, thinking it would eventually get better. Rob began to notice that in order to avoid burnout, he had to set limits and enjoy some personal time with friends and family. This realization allowed him to take a break from the constant thinking that he did about school, noticing that “next day is the same, whether or not I go home and think about it and stress, or go out and have dinner with my friends, talk to someone, it’s the same outcome, and I feel better doing it” (Interview 3, p. 6).

Rob talked about the importance of recognizing his own learning curve. He felt that his problem solving nature sometimes became a source of distress. He eventually noticed that finding immediate solutions and achieving perfection were not always possible:

Am I gonna be able to teach? It’s a lot to take on at the time, when you start, when you start anything you’re not that good at it, a few people maybe are superstars right off the bat, but most of the time you have to learn things. (Interview 3, p. 4)

Rob found it helpful to take a step back and regroup when situations became too stressful for him. He indicated there were times in the classroom that became out of his control, and he would have to ride out the storm, by “just sitting down, and just letting it happen for a few minutes. (Interview 3, p. 8)

One of Rob’s greatest struggles was accepting that the problems inherent in teaching were extraordinary. He felt it was “tough” when he did not have an immediate solution, and felt most stressed when “I don’t know what to do” (Interview 3, p. 8). Dubbing himself a “problem solver”, he admitted that he was learning to sit with that ambiguity created by the complex situations he encountered. He found it helpful connecting with others who were in the same boat. Rob found that some of his insecurities were curbed when dialoguing with colleagues who were not attempting to keep the problems of their classrooms hidden:

I like to hear from my colleagues that they’re having the same problem, especially the experienced ones, if they tell me they’re having the same problem, and they have some

solutions, but its okay, it's gonna happen, that's what we do, the problem is gonna be there. (Interview 3, p. 10)

Rob relied on a variety of resources to help him manage his demands. He focused extensively on how he would “work harder” (Interview 3, p. 7) figuring that he would eventually “get better” (Interview 3, p. 7). Still, Rob acknowledged that taking breaks from thinking about math, students and his performance were all essential components of managing the levels of stress and insecurity generated by his inexperience and facets of “dealing with the impossible” (Interview 3, p. 10)

### **Profile 3**

#### Meg: A Third-Year Sixth Grade Math Teacher

I take it to heart when they're just not following the expectations, like I said, “You guys know the rules, we've been doing this since September”. Seriously, that's what seriously stresses me out. (Interview 2, p. 11)

Meg and I held our interview at the Central University library on a Tuesday afternoon following the February vacation. The room had a large cherry wood conference table where we sat adjacent to one another. There was a glass window in which I taped a sign that read, “Interview in Progress” to minimize disruptions. The shelves surrounding us were filled with books and University program materials. The walls bore a large dry erase board and posters with inspirational messages. Meg appeared enthusiastic to meet and share her perspectives.

Meg was a petite Caucasian woman in her early 30's. She had light blue eyes and dark hair, cut stylishly. She spoke very rapidly during our interview. She seemed revved up, moving quickly from one topic to the next and taking few pauses. She appeared to be very open and transparent in her responses. During the interview, she mentioned she had just enjoyed a vacation with her family that proved beneficial. She said she felt rested and fresh in starting back up again. Meg also mentioned that the timing of the interview worked well since she had secured

care for her young children and she didn't have to rush to go pick them up.

Meg was born and raised locally by her parents, and lived next door to her Grandparents who built a mock classroom in their basement for her to “play school” in the “second she got off the bus each day” (Interview 2, p. 4). Her Grandfather built a wrap-around chalkboard and placed desks for Meg and her sisters to enjoy. She loved to play school constantly, and would receive teaching supplies including grade books and red pens from her two Aunts who were teachers to support her favorite pastime.

In describing her own school experiences, Meg stated that “it was very different than now”, and that she had “more options” such as sewing, cooking, and mechanical drafting to participate in (Interview 2, p. 1). She felt that this activated her as a learner and “got me thinking I could be really good at math” (Interview 2, p. 1). Some other differences Meg noted were an emphasis on learning fundamentals she referred to as “drill and kill” (Interview 2, p. 3). She stated that she found this beneficial since she and many of her peers later went on to succeed in college.

Meg fondly recalled her own middle school experiences, and said she was an average student who worked hard to earn leadership roles. She stated she had always done well in mathematics, and struggled with writing oriented work. She remembered that she “loved” school and “got along with my teachers”, and “got involved in activities” (Interview 2, p. 3)

After college, Meg's enjoyment of school, family support and interests prompted her to begin substitute teaching. She began at the elementary level, but quickly realized it was not the right fit for her. When she was placed in fifth grade, she found her niche. She also discovered that teaching math solely was the right path for her, saying it was “where I want to be” (Interview 2, p. 5). Meg secured a job in a middle school, and noted that “once I was there, I was like I will

never ever step foot in an elementary school again” (Interview 2, p. 5).

Meg explained that her experiences as a substitute prepared her in some regards for her full-time teaching responsibilities. She also anticipated enjoying summers and vacations off and wondered, “How hard can it be?” Meg quickly learned “you realize it is not easy; it is by far not an easy job” (Interview 2, p. 6). Meg emphasizes she was “shocked by all of the issues these kids have” and was surprised by the extent of how this impacted her emotionally (Interview 2, p. 1).

While she found that maintaining an environment of order and reducing chaos in the classroom was of utmost importance to her, she worried less about the implications within the classroom and more about her students’ safety and well being outside the classroom. Meg discussed that she found the issues of the students to be a major stressor, something she had a hard time forgetting about after the final bell rang:

I never really expected to worry and have as much attachment with these kids as I do, that drives you crazy when you go home. (Interview 2, p. 7)

Meg focused heavily upon the aspect that she was running around constantly. In addition to her teaching duties, she had two young children. Her day began before her family was awake, and the moment school was over, she immediately picked up her son and daughter and began her home routines. She reported having very little time to regroup because of this.

What she called “ineffective professional development” (Interview 2, p. 10) was a major source of stress for Meg. She felt it was a “complete waste of time with no closure” (Interview 2, p. 10) but was hopeful because “it’s supposed to change next year” (Interview 2, p. 10). Meg explained that outdated data collection methods were being used and what should have taken simply a few minutes ended up being dragged out for inordinate amounts of time.

One of the most substantial sources of stress for Meg was dealing with students who were not following the routines. Meg reported that she strongly emphasized order and control in her

classroom, and struggled when students were noisy and noncompliant. She worked to define a strong sense of structure with her students by keeping “order” and “control” and “the students knowing what’s expected” (Interview 2, p. 16).

Meg dealt with stressors in a variety of fashions. She discussed specific strategies that she found the most helpful to her personally. Meg realized the importance of this, since she knew the effects of stress were unhealthy. Some of the areas she noticed were trouble letting go and constant milling over the day’s events. She talked about needing a great deal of time to sort things out and to be able to “put it aside” (Interview 2, p. 15). Meg also was aware that the stress had the potential to put her “in a bad mood” or ruminate at home (Interview 2, p. 13).

Meg relied upon a variety of actions to dispel the harm associated with stressors she faced. She indicated that allowing enough time for planning, even on a daily arrival basis at school meant less stress. Her planning efforts largely revolved around structure in the classroom, coming in the form of routines, rituals and order. She began the school year deliberately with very specific classroom norms to minimize confusion and disruption. Keeping her class working hard and busy along these lines proved helpful for Meg.

On a nightly basis, Meg made it a priority to carve out some time solely for herself to unwind. She said she liked the “alone time” including reading magazines, going on Face Book and watching television to “just to get out of my life for a little while” (Interview 2, p. 11). Meg reflected that by purposefully taking time away from thinking about school and her students, it helped her to be able to have a “fresh start” and give the students a “clean slate” again (Interview 3, p. 14). She mentioned this was a conscious process she relied upon, and was not achieved instantaneously:

It’s hard for me the next day to let it go, as much as they say, you know that happened yesterday, but I’ve still got a chip on my shoulder. But then, by usually the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> day,

if it was something, if they really stressed me out and got me, you know, frustrated then, if I couldn't teach the lesson because of them, it might take me a couple days to get rid of them. (Interview 2, p. 12)

Meg was a third year teacher new to her school during the past year. She was pressured due to constant running and balancing work and family responsibilities, having recently adopted her infant daughter. She was acclimating herself to a new urban district and adjusting to all that it brought. Meg was grateful for the colleagues and family, who offered guidance and support. She emphasized that her enrollment at Central University provided her valuable opportunities to network with other teachers:

I could talk to them about certain things, and I would be like, "Oh, thank you", and just relieved and just talking to them, and knowing we're all going through the same things, really, really helped. (Interview 2, p. 14)

#### **Profile 4**

##### Jan: A Fourth-Year Seventh Grade Math Teacher

I still everyday love to go to work. I love knowing that I am going to be the memory of those kids. (Interview 4, p. 4)

Jan and I met at the local rural library on the first Tuesday of March after school. Although I had reserved the historical room where the two of the prior interviews had been conducted, a tax meeting was running late and we were provided with a small space in the periodical room. While the space was compact, it allowed for privacy and I set my recording devices atop a stack of newspapers. Jan did not seem disturbed by this, even when a man initially kept walking up to the door and peering in at us. I sat facing the glass door, while Jan was turned towards me. The room had a couple of aisles but the main feature was newspapers stacked from floor to ceiling.

Jan was a petite Caucasian woman in her early 20's. Jan had a tan from the recent vacation she took during February break. She had wide dark eyes and a bright smile. She

appeared relaxed, wearing athletic attire and her dark hair pulled up. She planned to work out at the gym following our interview. Jan was pleasant in demeanor and systematic as she provided answers to all of the questions. She was deliberate in her speech, carefully articulating her words, allowing time for absorption of what she was describing. Jan vacillated between appearing relaxed and slightly nervous. She appeared to be extremely vested in her work, and anxiousness seemed to mount whenever she expressed concerns for the welfare of her students.

Jan described her early Catholic school experiences as “extremely positive”, being a “die-hard student” who wanted to become a teacher from the age of 5 (Interview 4, p. 1). She was known for this, and her classmates all wrote about their predictions she would eventually become a teacher in her eighth grade yearbook (Interview 4, p. 2). She recalled vivid details of her overall experience having 14 students in her class, describing them as “best buds” and a “tight knit group” who “did a lot of awesome things together” such as field trips, and projects in a “small and quaint” situation with only three teachers throughout all of middle school (Interview 4, p. 2). Jan emphasized, “I was very, very into school. Everything was school” (Interview 4, p. 1).

Jan’s love for education was cultivated early on. Jan originated from a background of educators, with her Mother, Father, and Grandmother all working or using the skills of teaching in some capacity. There were high expectations and set routines established in her upbringing, and she spent a great deal of time playing school and longing to become a teacher, “always, ever since I can remember” (Interview 4, p. 3). She admired her teachers and even dressed like them with “wire pretend glasses, “rubber sold high-heeled shoes” and her “school jumper “(Interview 4, p. 3). She played school in her basement for many years and noted that “I did that for years,

which people thought was embarrassing, cause not too many middle schoolers would be playing pretend. But I didn't care" (Interview 4, p. 1).

She emphasized that she was inherently a nurturer who "always wanted to teach people and help them learn" (Interview 4, p. 2). In high school, Jan was impacted by the involvement of one of her guidance counselors and wondered if she might consider that professional path instead of teaching. She ended up graduating early from college and began her formal teaching career at age 20. Jan reflected that perhaps her supervisors and colleagues did not take her seriously because of her youth, but she was determined to "do a good job" (Interview 4, p. 20)

During our interview, Jan offered her perspective on her experiences as a teacher. This was her fourth year in a permanent full-time teaching role. Prior to that, she had worked as a substitute. Jan was able to provide a picture of what her growth and development have entailed through the years, referencing it as she spoke of how she managed stress as a teacher.

Jan relied heavily upon her own experiences to inform her expectations of what she thought her students would be like. She laughed as she recounted how different she actually found it to be:

I thought it was going to be a rewarding job, which it very much is, but I thought it was going to be less stressful, in big words "LESS STRESSFUL!" (Interview 4, p. 3)

Jan said she was expecting the same from her own students, and joked that "I had my head in the clouds!" (Interview 4, p. 4) Jan went on to describe exactly how she pictured her students would be, reflecting further:

I really thought that the students would want to be learning, like me, because I really was that A-student who did everything the teacher told me. I thought I would have those students as well. So that's where my head was at when I first starting teaching. (Interview 4, p. 4)

Jan spoke of her high level of conscientiousness throughout the interview. She felt that

her stress levels have improved as she acquired more experience. Still, Jan realized that teaching took its toll on her, and that she needed to be careful not to let it take over. Jan spoke of ways she was affected, both physically and mentally. Jan had high blood pressure and had to see a Doctor for anxiety problems that developed. She recounted having a day when the anxiety caused her to call in sick when “I couldn’t go to work, get out of bed” (Interview 4, p. 20).

Jan worked tirelessly to set up effective lessons and classroom structure. Jan noticed that when she felt she wasn’t connected with her students, her stress levels increased. Jan spent a great deal of her time engaging in what she referred to as “head time” (Interview 4, p. 8) when she would play over the day’s events and problem solve. Jan made a point to complete all of her paper work by 4:00 pm each day, but admitted that she carried over her work at home by constantly strategizing ways she could better intervene with her students.

Jan depended on order and maintenance of structure. She explained she “leaves no room for breakdowns” (Interview 4, p. 19) and her students tell her that the class “flies by” (Interview 4, p. 21). Jan said this was instrumental in keeping the stress levels down for everyone.

Jan described her growth process as a relatively new teacher who had learned a great deal in her four years. She referred back to her first year as “a painful blur” that caused her to “want to crawl out of my skin” (Interview 4, p. 17). Jan was pleased that she advocated for herself and earned the respect and support of her administration. This caused her to feel very secure about herself and unhesitant to reach out when needed. Jan also relied heavily upon colleagues at school and a large, supportive family whom she visited with each and every Sunday for dinner.

The four teachers provided their own accounts of being new in their urban classrooms. Each of them described their backgrounds and initial expectations. They explained their perceptions of how they experienced and coped with stress. Their responses generated data that

was analyzed and results were found to help determine the research findings of this study.

## **Section 2: Research Questions**

### **Introduction**

Four middle school math teachers were interviewed to gain understanding of their unique perspectives regarding stress and coping. Each described specific aspects of their own personal responses to stress. They identified essential components that influenced their capacity to manage it. In this section, the key results will be revealed, with each teacher's unique experience with the phenomena at the focal point.

**Research Question 1:** *What do new urban teachers identify as central factors influencing their capacity to manage stress in the context of their classroom?*

**Supportive supervision and professional development.** Teachers required supportive supervision and professional development to help them manage stress and guide their learning and growth. This study revealed that there was an absence of an adequate ongoing supervisory or professional development process that ensured teachers were able to debrief their concerns and insecurities and receive coaching, feedback and resources on real time situations they faced. The teachers required structural supports that reinforced their security in what they were doing. They also needed to participate in a culture where learning was supported, and making mistakes were validated as part of the learning process. The teachers framed this in two distinctive ways including “no backing” and “walking on eggshells”.

### **No Backing**

The teachers in this study defined “no backing” as not having enough on-site structural support to help them manage as new teachers. Despite being enrolled in an alternative licensure program at Central University, where the teachers were part of a support network that included

other new teachers and three instructors with 70 years collective education experience and 41 years collective clinical psychology and clinical social work experience, there was a lack of reinforcement for key concepts they were learning on site at their schools. At Central University, the programming was focused on becoming reflective practitioners, providing teaching on understanding the stages of teaching, working with students and families in poverty, meeting the needs of diverse learners, understanding white privilege, and developing self-care and stress management strategies (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2000; Cushman, 2005; Hammond, 2005; Johnson, 2004; Miletta, 2008; Corbett, 2002; Delpit, 2006; Haberman, 2007).

While the teachers were assigned school and university supervisors, often those meetings were focused upon content or curriculum issues. In addition, there was little time for consistent supervision, and when they did meet, the teachers were reluctant to share their difficulties openly. The teachers also reported an absence of school-based supervision designed to help teachers manage their stress and promote meaningful professional growth within an urban context. All four teachers recognized the absence of this kind of support as a central factor influencing their capacity to manage stress.

While there were instances when the teachers described feeling supported, by and large the teachers described a lack of specific guidance on a variety of levels. The teachers found that there were not enough meaningful collegial, supervisory and professional development experiences to truly inform and shape their growth outside of their work at Central University. They felt that being unsupported raised their stress levels and they feared that sharing their struggles might result in negative repercussions. Teachers needed guidance to help understand and determine the different dimensions of student and family needs, warranting strong supervision to ensure they were not misperceiving their roles and complexities of student

behaviors. They needed to engage in a supportive, reciprocal learning process to inform and shape their practice.

Jan experienced little support when she began teaching. She remembered there was “no backing” (Interview 4, p. 12) and felt the administration “was not a fan of me,” or who “hardly knew me”, only approaching her “when there was an issue” (Interview 4, p. 10). Jan “never saw” her administrator, the head of the math department (Interview 4, p. 10). She experienced a “sink or swim” culture during her first two years of teaching that left her with a great deal of apprehension. She recalled wanting “their approval” and wondered what she did wrong when told “the Principal wants you in the office”:

The school had an issue and still does with giving support to new teachers. You feel more scared, than you do wanting to make them happy. They put it off like “oh, this is what you need to do, and just get there”, that’s how it is. They threw me into a classroom when I started, and who can help me out here, guide me a little bit? I had none of that. (Interview 4, p. 11)

Meg was particularly disappointed in the available professional development opportunities. She spoke of needing support to address her “real worries” and felt unsupported by what she received (Interview 2, p. 11). Meg described the professional development sessions she did receive as a “waste of time” and “just horrible” (Interview 2, p. 11). Meg felt there were many other areas of development she would have benefitted from. She described the existing professional development as slow moving and unproductive, reading articles and discussing them together while she was thinking, “let us read at home!” (Interview 2, p. 11) Meg did not describe any type of supervision or professional development that helped her manage stress.

Liz was constantly worried and experiencing high stress levels as a first year teacher. Her only chance of receiving feedback was through a new math coach who replaced one that she had previously found valuable guidance from:

I used to have another teacher that used to come in, a math coach, and she would come in once a week and then she would sit down with me and tell me everything she thinks I need to work on, and sometimes when she was in class I would ask her to model things for me, so she really was a big help. (Interview 1, p.9)

Unfortunately, a change in staffing caused Liz to lose this important support. Having a new math coach who was there daily but “doesn’t participate, she just sits there in the back of the class and takes notes” perpetuated her stress. Liz called this “more stressful for me” (Interview 1, p. 9) despite that it was intended to support her developmental process.

Without backing, the teachers grew increasingly apprehensive about their performance. With this anxiety, came uncertainty and fear. Inadequate site supervision left the teachers feeling insecure. They also felt the environment was not a culture of supportive learning, where there were chances to learn and grow from the mistakes they made.

### **Walking on Eggshells**

In addition to not feeling backed and supported, another phenomenon that related to the teachers need for supervision was they felt they were constantly being scrutinized. The teachers dealt with stress due to being constantly evaluated but not part of a culture that supported them during their initial stages of teaching. The absence of supportive supervision caused them to feel nervous about their performance and longevity. The teachers framed this as “walking on eggshells”.

Jan recalled that her first years were filled with anxiety, and felt she was “walking on eggshells” and felt she had to “prove myself” (Interview 4, p. 10). Liz also described feeling stressed and was “walking on eggshells” because of the lack of support she encountered (Interview 1, p. 15). Liz was constantly worried she was being watched, causing great trepidation. She said she would often “hide her stress” (Interview 1, p. 16) since she did not have on-site supportive supervision or reliable professional development.

Liz explained, “every time the door opens, I have that feeling of stress” (Interview 1, p. 15). She questioned herself, wondering “Am I doing this okay, what do I need to be doing?” (Interview 1, p. 15). Without adequate supervision, Liz kept her worries “to herself” noticing that she doesn’t do anything to change the stress, saying, “I hide it, that’s how I cope” (Interview 1, p. 18). Liz was unable to meet with colleagues and supervisors for needed collaboration:

There’s no time really to do feedback. We have to work something out. We haven’t been able to figure something out yet as far as getting that. (Interview 1, p. 9)

All four teachers needed support during the initial phases of teaching, which were filled with the stress of feeling insecure. Insecurity included a sense of uncertainty, worry and fear that manifested differently for each individual. Rob felt “inferior”, not knowing “what I am doing and if I am good at this”, acknowledging that it is “just tough to be new at something” (Interview 3, p. 2). Rob did not identify any existence of or reliance upon supportive supervision to guide his growth and development as a new teacher.

Rob was unnerved when his student data was compared to other more experienced teachers at his school. They had the potential to be a resource, but instead Rob went without much interaction with them aside from discussing data. Rob lacked collegial support, belonging to a team filled with inexperienced teachers. He described his apprehension in already becoming a “leader” despite only having two years under his belt, “so in my 2<sup>nd</sup> year of teaching, I have teachers looking to me for advice!” (Interview 3, p. 10) He reacted to this situation:

I’m thinking, you must be crazy! But I guess a year experience is more than nothing. So, that’s been a challenge for me this year. (Interview 3, p. 10)

Jan acknowledged it was very difficult making it through the initial phases when she lacked support. Not only did she lack supervision that included positive reinforcement, but she also felt like she was constantly being “nit picked” and “punished” (Interview 4, p. 19). Jan

explained that her current, more positive, relationship with her administration developed over time, and only after she initiated the request for support. In a bold move, to the chagrin of her colleagues, she invited her superiors observe her classroom:

My Principal asked, what would you like me to do to help you then? And I raised my hand, and said, come visit my classroom not for 2 minutes, but come for a period, and everyone was so mad at me, but I was 22 and I was tired, I was sick of that! I said, “don’t come in for 5 minutes, and see one little thing. I think so many people pick on the negative, that they let it completely take over their thoughts, so where is the positive, where is the positive going on? (Interview 4, p. 19)

Once her Principal observed her classroom, the level of support immediately changed. They met periodically and openly discussed the positive aspects of her teaching, and she finally felt affirmed that she was doing a good job. She recounted that day when she and her Principal finally had a heart to heart:

I was like okay, I just needed you to tell me I was doing something right, instead of telling me I was doing this, or this student was doing this wrong, or why did this happen in your classroom with this student, why did he have his sweatshirt on, so all of these different things, where’s the positive stuff? (Interview 4, p. 19)

Jan also said that despite a rocky start with her Principal, she “has become a big support for me now”, and she goes to her to “get something off my chest”, and “ask her for advice” (Interview 4, p. 17). Jan noticed that “things have definitely changed”, bringing a great sense of “calm” to have an increased sense of support. She was being approached in a more positive and productive fashion and believed this helped diminish her stress. (Interview 4, p. 20)

Despite that all four teachers reported that support was critical to their capacity to manage stress, they all indicated that much of what they received came from Central University or from friends and family. The teachers indicated this support was integral to them managing stress. At school, three of the teachers lacked adequate supervision, professional development and collegial support that could promote development of insight and an understanding of best practices in an

urban setting. Jan was the most experienced and had advocated for more support over time, and she felt that having strong colleagues and improved backing from her administration was a central component of her survival. The teachers were all developing in a context where on-site support was scarce given the level of stressors they faced; yet, they felt they had “no backing”.

The lack of supportive supervision left the teachers uncertain and contributed to higher stress levels. Both the experience of feeling “no backing” and as though they were “walking on eggshells” might be reduced by providing adequate supportive supervision to help them manage stress and guide their learning and growth. Provision of supervision that encourages the developmental process of the teachers could help minimize feelings of not being backed and subsequent insecurities. The supervisory agenda could also include practical strategies such as classroom and time management for the teachers.

**Classroom and time management strategies.** Teachers relied upon classroom and time management strategies to help them organize, structure and run their classrooms effectively.

Without adequate on-site supervision, the teachers in this study revealed that classroom and time management strategies were central factors influencing stress management. This helped the teachers cope in light not having enough support and being worried about their performance. One aspect of developing clear classroom and time management strategies was that the teachers felt it supported student engagement, which they correlated with lower stress levels.

Classroom and time management strategies were instrumental in helping the teachers to organize and run their classrooms in a manner that reduced stress caused by the “chaos” (Interview 2, p. 17, Interview 3, p. 8) that ensued without adequate preparation and implementation of routines. Each of the teachers described the significance of classroom management to their teaching practice. Within this construct, facets such as preparation of

lessons, student engagement, maintaining order and containment were discussed. The terms articulated by the teachers, included “being prepared”, “structure”, and “getting kids on board”.

### **Being Prepared**

The theme “being prepared” emerged from the data with all of the teachers identifying it as an essential component of managing their stress and teaching. Preparation involved organizing classroom space, developing routines and procedures, planning activities and organizing paper and materials. They explained that inordinate amounts of time were devoted to preparation. Each teacher felt being enrolled at Central University helped prepare him or her for his or her classroom tasks. During August, the teachers participated in a one-week intensive where they were taught strategies for setting up their classrooms and implementing routines. Liz discussed specific ways her course work “was a lifesaver”:

I didn't know what to expect in the classroom and I didn't know how to handle it, and I learned so many practical, useful things in that time to just prepare me for the classroom. I didn't know anything. I think that that in particular taught me so much about just about going into the classroom and it alleviated a lot of stress that I would have had otherwise. (Interview 1, p. 13)

Rob also benefitted from engaging in summer course work at Central University, stating that the two weeks “made a huge difference” (Interview 3, p. 7). He said what he learned about classroom management was “a big thing” since “classroom management is what new teachers are missing” (Interview 3, p. 7).

In addition to being prepared to start the year, each teacher had a specific way he/she approached his/her daily routine. Meg arrived twenty minutes early to school to:

Get the boards ready, change the date, put up a new objective, put the agenda up, make sure my copies are always done. I get my desks organized, pick up the room, and then that's it, I start the day. And then, here they come! (Interview 2, p. 8)

Effective time management and preparation were essential aspects of Jan's success in managing her responsibilities. Jan unraveled when she faced moments of running behind or not feeling fully prepared, such as coming in late, noticing it "is a big thing", a "big stressor" (Interview 4, p.8). She felt that using her time efficiently was critical. She seemed to account for every last moment: "I completely use my preps up. From the minute I start to the minute it ends, I get all my work done" (Interview 4, p. 7).

Jan relied heavily upon keeping organized by "keeping every single lesson I've ever done in three-ring binders" (Interview 4, p. 8). She emphasized that in doing so, she saved valuable time and energy and prevented high stress levels:

You don't have to spend hours because I already planned an awesome lesson two years ago that worked extremely well, so it's just little add-ons to my lesson plans. I notice my work load gets easier and easier. The planning of my days are easier than they used to be. (Interview 4, p. 8)

Being prepared involved using time effectively and remaining organized. The teachers noticed that a major component of classroom and time management was establishing structure. This helped the teachers feel prepared and implement what they had planned.

## **Structure**

The teachers relied upon structure to leverage their planning efforts. Structure was about establishing and implementing routines for the students to follow. This code emerged from the data since all four teachers emphasized its' importance with regards to their stress management.

With two years experience under her belt, Meg had come to rely upon routines to structure her classroom. She indicated that she began this right at the start of the school year. It became very difficult for Meg when her students deviated from her established structure, emphasizing the impact it had on her:

I take it to heart when they're just not following the expectations, like I said, "you guys know the rules, we've been doing this since September". Seriously, that's what seriously stresses me out. (Interview 2, p. 11)

Jan discussed that she stuck to business during class time, with the goal of learning at the forefront. Even though she highly valued her student relationships, she maintained a very specific structure to keep everything running smoothly. Jan explained, "I leave no room for breakdowns, they always have something to do", and they know "this lady's goal today is math" (Interview 4, p. 18). She reiterated the importance of this for she and her students:

If they're busy, I'm busy. In the classroom it's very let's do this and we have this to do, and I have an agenda every day and I'm sticking to it, and here's what we gotta do, and they also know that I'm not going to ignore their emotions, and that's huge, cause as a student I wouldn't want my feelings ignored, and I do address it, but I do it in a certain way so that it doesn't make the whole class crumble. (Interview 4, p. 18)

Both Liz and Rob were quickly realizing the need for increasing structure in their classrooms. Liz noted that she "has already learned so much this year to use next year, right from the beginning" (Interview 1, p. 2). Rob also wanted to implement more structure to address his students that were "not working" (Interview 3, p. 4).

The teachers conceptualized structure as a means to engage students. Structure provided order and helped avoid negative outbursts. It helped provide consistency for the students and minimized uncertainty of what was expected. Structure helped to create an environment where students were working and on task.

### **Getting Kids On Board**

The teachers relied upon their preparation efforts and implementation of structure to ensure their students were working. The teachers defined getting kids working and on board as engaging students in learning and was of vital importance to the teachers. When students were working and on task, the teachers felt their stress was lowered. This aspect of classroom and time

management revolved around getting students to understand the importance of learning and to buy into the routines that were established. It also involved some elements of mutual respect. The teachers noticed their own containment of emotions contributed towards engaging students.

As a new teacher, Liz felt that classroom management was extremely important. While she noted challenges in finding enough time to prepare, she realized that implementing additional structure and rules would help “get more kids on board” (Interview 1, p 4). Liz realized that being in her first year meant she is learning as she goes.

Rob was filled with apprehension when his students “are not working” noticing that it “stresses me out because I feel that I am failing” (Interview 3, p. 4). He felt that his first year was a “disaster” but since having enrolled at Central University he had acquired classroom management strategies that helped him engage more students (Interview 3, p. 5). He was optimistic that his new skills would be helpful and that he would “eventually get better at this” (Interview 3, p. 10).

Meg spoke of the fact that when her students were not on board, it became very stressful for her, noting “I guess what really stresses me out is when the kids are not really paying attention, giving me their all” (Interview 2, p. 11). When students were not giving their best, she “takes it to heart” (Interview 2, p. 11). She pleaded with the students to consider how much she had invested in getting them to learn:

I explained to them “I’m gonna try and make it as fun and engaging as it can be, but I need it back from you”. So, I think that it really does stress me out, I do certain things so you guys can have fun in my class and want to be in my class, and when I don’t see it back it stresses me out. (Interview 2, p. 10)

Meg acknowledged that getting kids on board hinged upon the rapport she had built with them. She noticed that engaging her students and helping them recognize her expectations took

work on her part. She reflected that students would want to avoid negative repercussions once she had laid out her expectations:

I think that is something that I've earned with them, something that I've worked to. They know, I go over what is expected from the beginning and there are consequences, and sometimes it's just me being disappointed in them. So, I think that I built up to that with them, that they know, ooh, she's upset with us right now, and we don't want that, you know? (Interview 2, p. 17)

Jan found it important that she had learned to read the students and respond in a way that would deescalate a situation. She noted that she had made adjustments over time in her reactions to prevent stress from becoming overwhelming for everyone:

As the years go on, you learn to handle yourself with the kids, you learn they would want you to react. I kind of look at it from their eyes, and think how is she going to handle this stressful situation, and the more control you keep yourself in, and keep it together, the less stressful it is for them, and in turn, the less stressful it is for you. (Interview 4, p. 14)

Jan talked about the importance of learning how to address problems without escalating them. She confronted students in a way that was most effective by pulling them aside rather than putting them on the spot. She noticed that this could backfire and cause more problems. During her earlier teaching moments, she may have approached it differently, yielding less successful results, such as "blowing things out of proportion" (Interview 4, p. 15). Jan had learned "how to handle it in the classroom to make my life and theirs a lot easier" (Interview 4, p. 15).

Jan also indicated that getting kids on board hinged upon having a positive disposition and modeling a good attitude. She recognized that when she first started teaching she was not as contained as she was after learning it made such a difference:

Well, I did it for a while, but I realize if I let them see so much emotion in front of everyone else, the other kids are gonna feed off of that. I really like to maintain composure so everybody else still has that structure. They feed off of emotion. (Interview 4, p. 18)

The teachers worked to get kids on board since it contributed to their stress when they were not working and engaged in learning. The teachers worked to build a rapport with their students to help encourage them to pay attention. It was important for the teachers to try and handle themselves in a contained fashion to avoid exacerbation of stress levels.

Classroom and time management strategies were central factors influencing the teacher's stress management. Classroom and time management strategies were essential to the new teachers' development and capacity for coping in their context. Additional support in this area was warranted. They felt the resources being allocated for professional development were wasteful.

The teachers benefitted from their planning efforts, which lowered their stress levels and helped them prepare to run their classrooms effectively. For the teachers, the establishment of structure translated into an orderly environment that was less stressful for everyone. By engaging students, the teachers were able to maintain their composure and accomplish tasks. Further, the teachers were able to not only engage students in learning, but in relationships that were positive and helpful in reducing stress levels.

**Meaningful connections.** Teachers needed meaningful interpersonal connections with others to help mitigate the effects of stress they experienced. The teachers in this study were faced with a lack of adequate on-site supervision and a need for further classroom and time management strategies. The teachers indicated that being able to debrief stressful events and situations was crucial, especially since they did not have an on-site system for ongoing supervision that allowed them to process their stressors. The teachers identified interpersonal connections as a central factor in managing stress and feeling positive about their work and

themselves. This was something the teachers became aware of without prompting at school, as it was not discussed or focused upon in supervision or professional development.

The data revealed that meaningful interpersonal connections provided the teachers with supports that were essential to their capacity to cope. The codes were defined by the teachers as “I’m not alone”, “friends and family” and “student relationships”. They described each of these as being vital to mitigate the consequences of stress they faced.

### **I’m Not Alone**

The teachers lack of on-site supervision and professional development caused the teachers to doubt themselves and feel they were unique in their struggles. Feelings of being alone hindered each teacher and contributed towards insecurities and greater stress levels. The recognition that the conditions of teaching were universally challenging made a difference for the teachers, helping them not to take it personal and “feel like a failure” (Interview 1, p. 3; Interview 3, p. 7). Liz struggled immensely with insecurities and said she felt “like I am the only one” having trouble (Interview 1, p. 3). She acknowledged that she kept to herself at school, but did find it helpful hearing “other people’s stories” at Central University. This made her realize she was “not alone” (Interview 1, p. 5) and that others were encountering similar struggles.

When thinking about benefitting from the power of the group experience at Central University, Meg framed it as follows:

Just talking, knowing that you’re not alone. I always loved getting there 10 minutes early just to sit there and be able to talk about the day and what happened and just to know you’re not alone and it’s happening to everyone. (Interview 2, p. 15)

Rob spoke of his distaste for colleagues who would hide the fact they were having difficulties. He appreciated learning that others were encountering similar situations, and felt less

stigmatized when they were open. He noticed he felt better “when I’m not the only one going through it” (Interview 3, p. 8).

Jan described her colleagues as “awesome” (Interview 4, p. 10) and emphasized how integral they were to her success. She said right from the beginning, they were an essential part of her day:

We talk about anything that needs to be talked about. We’re very, very close, we’re each others helpers, so it’s a big deal that they’re there. We’re all together one little cluster, so that’s awesome cause I get to see them all day. (Interview 4, p. 7)

For Jan, it was significant that she could rely upon such a solid group of colleagues who were continually available to her. This meant she did not feel alone in what she was facing. Jan felt surrounded by supportive colleagues who made her more connected. She reiterated further:

The colleagues that I have are absolutely amazing. They’re just awesome. We have a good group at the school. Our kids are lucky. They never let you feel alone. So that’s what helps me every single day knowing that we have a good set of people that will be around to talk and listen and empathize with you. (Interview 4, p. 14)

For the teachers, feeling alone was a significant source of stress. They relied upon their colleagues at Central University for support. Collegial support helped reduce stigma and provided opportunities to debrief stressful circumstances. Connecting with others involved talking openly together and collective brainstorming. While the teachers had varying degrees of access to collegial support, they valued the role it had in reducing their stress. The teachers also relied on additional interpersonal relationships for support.

### **Friends and Family**

Collegial support was identified as a central factor influencing the teachers’ capacity to manage stress in their context. Outside of school, the teachers relied upon spending time with friends and family as not only a diversion from stress but also something each of the teachers

enjoyed. Despite not having been prompted to do so, the teachers sought support through personal relationships.

Liz talked about her delight in spending time with her children, and noticed that “my mind was not on school” when she involved herself in “what was happening in their days”, versus being overly consumed with thinking about her own (Interview 1, p. 3). Liz expressed wanting to have more “free time” since she was often too busy to spend as much time as she would have liked with loved ones (Interview 1, p. 3).

Meg found her relationships with others as essential to her ability to cope. When faced with an especially trying day, she relied upon contact with her family to encourage her. There were times when she would want to discuss the matters at hand, and others when she wanted to talk about something “completely different” to “get my mind off them” (Interview 2, p. 19).

Spending time with loved ones was a fulfilling means of coping for Jan. She emphasized how family oriented she was, and was in constant contact with them, with her cousins being her “best friends” (Interview 4, p. 12). She noticed that when she was with her oldest Godchild “all the stress melts away” and it helps “get my mind of things” (Interview 4, p. 12). Jan would call her Mother, who is also a teacher, for support. She indicated, “the more positive people I surround myself with is how I de-stress” (Interview 4, p. 12).

Rob quickly realized that he had to substitute some of his work time for some personal time. Initially he worked every possible minute of the day, and then felt that this was contributing towards higher stress levels. He felt that having some friends outside of education gave him a chance to focus on other things. Rob realized that sacrificing some of his work time was time well spent. Rob felt this investment of time helped him “escape” from some of the tension he faced (Interview 3, p. 9):

I had friends, who were like, let's go out to dinner, let's go get a drink. So then, I would go out to dinner and I would think, I feel a lot better! Then I'd go home, and instead of stress out about it, you know what, the next day is the same, whether or not I go home and think about it and stress, or I go out and have dinner with my friends, talk to someone, it's the same outcome, and I feel better doing it. (Interview 3, p. 6)

Spending time with friends and family was an essential aspect of the new teachers' survival. They attributed these relationships as supportive, and helpful in getting their minds off of work. Despite wanting to retreat from thinking about school, the teachers also acknowledged the significance of student relationships in reducing their stress levels and promoting coping.

### **Student Relationships**

Collegial and personal relationships were important supports for the teachers. They relied upon these connections to help them feel less stigmatized, comforted, and have a sense of belonging. Student relationships were also clearly defined by the teachers as important. These relationships were equated with a strong sense of satisfaction and personal meaning. The teachers felt effective as professionals when they were able to forge positive relationships with their students. This contributed to their ability to manage stress.

In various ways, the teachers thought about their capacity to be role models for their students. They also enjoyed opportunities to forge positive relationships with them, characterized by warmth, respect, and humorous banter. According to the teachers, many of their middle school students do not always offer positive feedback or displays of emotion. Some students just seemed hard to reach and were quite guarded. Others seemed disconnected and aloof. When students became engaged in a positive relationship with them, the teachers noticed they felt happier and less stressed. In particular, when a student demonstrated appreciation towards them, it was highly welcomed.

Meg explained that she really preferred the middle school age group. She felt they were “a good fit for her”, and appreciated the vibrancy and tenacity she saw in her students (Interview 2, p. 5). Meg enjoyed the element of being able to be playful with her students:

But it’s like the kids are more my age, I love to mess around with them, you know, they can take it, they give it back, like, it’s just fun. (Interview 2, p. 5)

Rob considered his rationale for entering the profession. His middle school experience had centered more on socializing and sports, and he felt like he developed a strong sense of self. Rob understood the importance of his role in teaching math, yet also wanted to “help the students, and the math was kind of the secondary, and helping the students was first” (Interview 3, p. 11). Rob experienced stress when he could not focus also on “life application”, “motivation” and building relationships with his students (Interview 3, p. 11). He found the relationships he was developing contributed towards a greater sense of satisfaction and lower stress levels.

Liz was working hard to create a “positive and safe space for learning”(Interview 1, p. 1). She felt that this was important for her students. She remembered one particular student that she had trouble with. Liz was worried that she may be “beyond help” (Interview 1, p. 1). It made her day when the student eventually thanked her for her efforts:

There was like one girl in particular in that class, to this day, well she said thank you to me a couple weeks ago and I was like amazed, thank you for something, and she’s very difficult to reach. She said thank you to me the other day, so that gives me a glimpse of hope. (Interview 1, p. 12)

Meg had a similar situation with one of her most challenging students. She spoke of daily battles that she encountered with one of them. Meg felt it continually unraveled her, but she tried to hold her ground. Meg felt very pleased when her investment paid off. She was surprised and delighted to receive verification that she had connected with this student:

But, at the end of the year, she wrote me on this huge piece of paper, the nicest letter ever, you know it just ...like, she was listening to me...for her to understand what I was saying, cause it all came through in the end. (Interview 2, p. 11)

Jan spoke extensively about her affection for her students. Her intentions were clearly stated, she loved her job and the students she worked with. Jan wanted to have a lasting impact on them, saying despite stress, she “still everyday loves to go to work”, knowing she would be the “memory of those kids” (Interview 4, p. 4). Outside of school, students approached Jan and expressed their gratitude towards her. She beamed when she described how rewarding this was to her:

I think the biggest things are the first 2 years of me working there—all those kids, I still very often still, in high school, and see how much they appreciated me teaching them. It makes you like, I am making a difference—even if it is that one kid, I am making a difference. (Interview 4, p. 13)

Student relationships contributed towards lower stress levels and higher satisfaction for the teachers. The teachers were motivated by the belief they could impact their students’ lives. They hoped to create positive and safe learning spaces that met the needs of their middle school students.

The teachers identified three main factors influencing their capacity to manage stress within their classrooms. They required supportive supervision, professional development and meaningful interpersonal connections. The teachers revealed aspects of being a new teacher that were either containing or lacking these factors, and described how it impacted their capacity for coping with conditions they viewed as stressful.

**Research Question 2: *How do new urban teachers describe conditions they view as stressful?***

**Conditions were stressful.** The teachers identified the conditions they found most stressful. Teachers were stressed by their perception they were responsible for “fixing” student, family or school problems. These assumptions contributed significantly towards their level of

stress. Each of them felt compelled to “fix” the problems they were seeing. These beliefs contributed towards higher stress levels for the teachers. This code consisted of the teachers being concerned that students were “gone for the day”. The teachers belief that they were the only role model for students elevated their stress, and lead to negative consequences for them.

The teachers described the students’ problems as burdensome and struggled to find ways to understand and intervene. They were frustrated with various issues, like students who seemed “gone for the day”. The teachers discussed ways they felt they were positioned to “save” (Interview 2, p. 8) or “help” their students, and they believed in some instances they were the “only caring adult” in a student’s life (Interview 3, p. 5; Interview 4, p. 12). The teachers also described feeling overwhelmed with a sense of having to “fix the problems” they were witnessing (Interview 2, p. 7; Interview 3, p. 4; Interview 4, pp. 6, 7, 14, 15). The teachers’ belief they were there to help the “stressed out kids and families” contributed significantly towards their stress.

### **Fixing the Problems**

This study revealed that the teachers’ biases and assumptions contributed to higher stress levels. Each of the teachers brought a certain picture of what they expected life to be like at an urban school. For example, the teachers saw themselves as the sole role models for students. They painted an overly simplistic view of the students’ problems and behaviors, and they tended to blame either the students or families entirely for their issues, without accounting for systemic influences. Further, the teachers believed that there was an absence of additional supports or resources in their students’ lives, reflecting their assumptions about “urban” families. While it is well established that poverty and other destructive forces impact urban students, the teachers focused only on risk factors they saw as being present in the lives of their students without

acknowledging the presence of protective factors. While increased risk was evidenced, the teachers saw this as universally pervasive, without fully accounting for strengths and signs of resiliency.

Liz felt “extremely scared”, especially since “I was looking into the inner city schools”. She anticipated a lot of behavior issues and “didn’t know if I was capable of handling it” (Interview 1, p. 3). She viewed her role as “parental” and nurturing and wanted to “create a safe place” and be a “safe person” for her students (Interview 1, p. 3). She indicated she wanted to “give the students something” (Interview 1, p. 3). Liz revealed she was under pressure in part due to her belief the students lacked nurturing or safety entirely. She did not mention exceptions to her categorizations of students or the role she felt she played in their lives.

Meg felt “emotional” and “so attached to her students”, and she wanted to “take kids home” (Interview 2, p. 7). She saw things from her own vantage point, making generalizations as she compared her background to her students:

It’s just tough because you feel, you know with my life I had a good upbringing, I had a very good life, and I look at these kids and they don’t even have 10% of what I had, and it’s just so sad, you know. It really, really bothers me. (Interview 2, p. 7)

Jan was deeply bothered by her perception that it was her responsibility to ensure her students did not drop out of school or have other types of struggles. She worried “constantly”, calling herself a “big thinker” (Interview 4, p. 6). Jan called this “a lot of head work”, and felt she “carried 70 students futures in her head” (Interview 4, p. 6). Jan even made a deliberate point to finish all of her work at school so she could spend all of her time at home thinking about ways to help her students (Interview 4, p. 6) When Sunday night came around, she was glad the weekend was ending since she was “so worried about whether her students were all right” (Interview 4, p. 6). This constant thinking led to unrest and sleepless nights with “anxiety

attacks” “nightmares” and moments that were “probably the most stressful thing” (Interview 4, p. 6). She would write notes on “doodle pads” and “stickies” in the night that were potential solutions (Interview 4, p. 6). Jan wished she could “do all that thinking at school and bring the paperwork home”, noticing that “it’s the worrying about them while I’m not there to watch them that is actually the worst” (Interview 4, p. 6). Jan did not mention whether she knew if her students had additional caring influences at home, school or in the community.

Another aspect of “fixing the problems” was evidenced when Jan spoke of her take on the long-term implications of students not working. She was worried that her non-invested students would eventually drop out. She discussed various strategies to remedy this situation, and described creative lesson plans and communication tactics she used. Still, she worried that there was a pervasive mindset that affected her students. Jan interpreted this as the students “not all being motivated to learn”, telling her outright “I don’t want to graduate from high school”, which made her “frightened” and “shocked” (Interview 4, p. 4). She felt that her students had “different backgrounds” and were “backed away from education” and “don’t want to be there” (Interview 4, p. 4). Jan worked tirelessly, driven by the belief it was her duty to fix what she saw.

Jan was overwhelmed by the extent of problems. She felt a personal responsibility to “do something” that would contribute towards a solution. She saw that her students were in need of her guidance, and did not take that lightly. Jan felt compelled to actively invest herself in fixing the problems she encountered:

And it’s mostly because I feel they are reaching out to you, but acting like they’re so tough, and they don’t need you, but they really are reaching out to you. You are their consistency. They see you more than they see their parents. So, in my head, it’s what can I do? I have 70 kids—what can I do to help them every single day? If I see that somebody has something that is bothering them or just going to school in general, they have issues of stress with just going to school, I feel like its my responsibility to fix it. I’m a big fixer! (Interview 4, p. 6)

Jan spoke in broad terms over issues she saw in her students, and worried about their stress levels that “even I wouldn’t want to be stressed out about, like my Dad’s going to jail tomorrow kind of stressed out” (Interview 4, p. 15). She also felt strongly that she was ‘*the only constant*’ in their life” (Interview 4, p. 15).

Rob noticed he was bothered in dealing with issues he thought were impossible. In response, he worked extra hard to achieve success. He explained that this was somewhat helpful given the magnitude of what he was seeing. He felt a responsibility to take action in response to what he encountered:

I think if there is a problem, and it’s bothering me, then I have to fix it. So, and the only way to fix it is to work on it, that’s what I have to do—I have to work harder if there is a problem, and the big issue, all the stress comes from is trying to be successful, so if I’m not successful, to look back at what I did and not do something that I should have, well then I just wouldn’t want that to happen. That’s why I think that working it through helps that. (Interview 3, p. 10)

Meg was deeply bothered by the fact that so many of her students struggled with emotional issues. She found that their high stress levels translated into negative behaviors being exhibited, such as “crying” and “acting out” and had not expected it to be so prevalent (Interview 2, p. 8). Meg reflected that she worried for many of her students, and saw herself as a role model for them. She used strong terms and overgeneralizations when describing her view of her students and how they relied upon her:

It’s hard, that’s one of the hardest things I think, especially being in the urban schools, these kids need you, they need someone to talk to, they need someone that has morals, that has like respect for people, that you know, like, I tell them how it is, but in a different way than their home life, than what they’re used to, you know what I mean? I’m very honest with them, but I let them know that someone cares about them. No one cares. I never expected that. I expected to be a teacher, go to school and come home and that’s it. Now, I come home and lay in bed thinking is he really going to eat tonight? (Interview 2, p. 7)

The teachers' responses revealed they were dedicated and committed; however, the striking generalizations about "urban" families were barriers to finding ways to engage students and families and avoid perpetuating assumptions that were rooted in bias and deficit-based thinking. A skilled supervisor could help the teachers develop alternative views that challenge the deficit model in favor of a strengths-based perspective. Supervision could help the teachers reframe their perceptions of the students' needs and their beliefs about needing to "fix" their students.

The sense of having to "fix the problems" evoked fear in the teachers in this study. They saw themselves as parental role models and as "safe", and found they became attached to their students. Their worry influenced their stress levels, and they were particularly focused upon what they were noticing among their students and families. While risks were undeniably present among students, the teachers were unable to identify the presence of protective factors such as high expectations, sense of meaning and purpose, social bonding, personal competence and social competence among their students (Scales & Leffert, 1999).

### **Stressed Out Kids and Families**

When worried about "fixing the problems", Liz, Meg, Rob, and Jan found their students and families were dealing with extraordinary levels of stress. They wanted to intervene and take action that would make a positive impact and reduce their level of anxiety. They described a lack of parental involvement as a source of stress, but did not demonstrate understanding for potential reasons parents may not be engaged. These were cornerstones of the Central University curriculum, and as a researcher who also had the role of teaching topics such as poverty, inclusiveness, cultural competence and social justice, it was important for me to bracket any beliefs that these concepts were being integrated into practice. None of the teachers spoke about

the influences of poverty, about the quality or nature of the parents' experiences with the system, or what access families may have to resources. They also did not discuss what schools were doing to contribute to disengagement. This was another indicator of a need for supportive supervision and professional development to reinforce these concepts. This could help engage the teachers in a learning process and to teach them to examine contextual and institutionalized factors more closely, and apply them to their practice.

Liz found a large number of emotional issues among her students and was amazed at the sheer number of kids who struggled. Liz described her concerns about the emotional needs that her students regularly presented. She was "amazed", finding them "stunning", with "not just one student here or there—there are *so* many students with emotional issues" (Interview 1, p. 5). Liz said she felt like a "social worker" on her first parents' night, and found it "stunning" what she learned was going on with the students (Interview 1, p. 6). The "emotional issues" were distinguished as:

They're not fighting or trying to fight with another student. It's just themselves can't handle whatever is going on for that period of time. Whether it be the class work or some social thing that has happened, or whatever. Just some sort of thing where they are withdrawing, or crying in their seats, you know. But they're not trying to, they just can't handle whatever is going on. (Interview 1, p. 5-6)

Meg talked about one of the most horrendous situations she faced. While she recounted the details of her student telling her she had been repeatedly raped, she appeared viscerally shaken. Meg explained that the "family packed up and were gone by Monday before the police or DCYF intervened" (Interview 2, p. 13). Meg was devastated by the severity of this situation and felt especially upset that the intervention failed. She said it took a lot of support from her family to work through her emotions about it. She still wondered how the student and her sisters

were doing. Meg would have benefitted from a strong supervisory relationship to help her cope with the resulting stress.

Meg spoke of the poverty she saw with one family that really bothered her, recounting a student's mother arriving barefoot and taking her child's sneakers so that she could attend a Doctor's appointment:

How is this even going on? I never expected that part of it, just to see all of this and know that it is happening right under my nose in my classroom to these students, and they're coming in, and I'm like, what do you mean you didn't do your homework last night? I mean, I am getting on them for something like that, and this poor girl's Mother is taking the shoes off her feet. And you know, you gotta kinda wonder. (Interview 2, p. 7)

She was bothered as she told the story of one of her students who had no food at home prior to April vacation. She and another teacher filled the child's backpack with food, since there were 10 children in the family. Meg was bothered by the family's situation:

I just wanted her to know, you've got something, but I never expected to go home and like worry about the kids, you know. (Interview 2, p. 7)

Rob expressed frustration when problems were minimized and parents viewed that he was to blame for their student's failures:

There are parents that are really defensive, the student is really disrespectful, and the parent comes in and says "you didn't let him use the bathroom on Tuesday". But do you see the big picture? They're failing, and you want to talk to me about how I said no when he asked to use the bathroom? I didn't sign his agenda, that's the problem? The student is not failing because I didn't sign the agenda. So this is what we deal with when the focus is on these little things, it's a huge problem. (Interview 3, p. 14)

Jan felt frustrated when parents were not responding to her requests for communication. She wondered if they were concerned about their children's success:

I was thinking I was going to see a lot of parents, a lot of concern, and that was a shock to me as well. I don't like to judge, or say that their parents just don't care, cause like I said I believe every parent does care, it's whether or not they're showing it to me as a teacher. When I call parents, and they ask me what to do with their child. I call parents and never get responses. I call meetings to do a success plan for their child because I need them to pass for the year, and they're well behaved and everything, I just need to figure out a way

to get this child to pass, and no call backs, no response. We make a meeting; they don't show up. It's very, where is the concern? Where is the importance here with your child's education? (Interview 4, p. 5)

Additionally, Jan believed some of her students did not have positive role models at home:

Yeah, I have some kids who say to me "I'm 100% Portuguese", and I'll say "So am I", and they'll tell me your supposed to stay home and get a job and do construction, that's what my Dad does and that's what I want to do. And I think they take their ethnicity and their culture and they place it in a certain folder, "well you're Portuguese, my parents are both on welfare, so that's what I am going to do." It's not only their culture and their ethnicity; it's the way they're being brought up. It kinds of makes it in class, if they're living something, they only see it that one way. And that was quite shocking to me as well. (Interview 4, p. 5)

She elaborated further:

I had a student a couple of weeks ago who told me "both my parents are on disability, because they have hurt backs. So, they stay home and they sleep all day and that's what I'm going to do. So, I'll hurt my back and I'm going to go on disability and I can live on welfare, and I am going to stay home. I don't need to graduate high school, I don't need to graduate 7<sup>th</sup> grade." You don't go into teaching thinking they'll be at least 20 of these, out of about 70 students. I'll have 20 who don't care about graduating. You never think that until you get into the profession. (Interview 4, p. 5)

The teachers were stressed out by their perception they had to "fix" the problems before them. The resulting stress caused constant worry and was perpetuated by their belief they were the "only caring adult" available to the students. They struggled to see the big picture, and were focused on the daily interactions they were having. The extent of problems was overwhelming to the teachers, who had different school experiences as a frame of reference. When the teachers saw their students' basic needs were not met, they wondered if their parents were to blame. As white middle class adults, their own school experiences were quite different and they had certain privileges as a result. Rather than viewing it from a systemic perspective, they wondered if what they were seeing was a lack of concern or values. Despite being taught strategies on engagement at Central University, the teachers struggled to identify ways to help welcome families into

partnership to work towards change. Without an understanding of how to do so, the teachers felt uncertain, which escalated their stress levels.

**Uncertainty was difficult.** The teachers identified their uncertainty about how to manage student issues as stressful. In addition to feeling responsible to “fix” the students’ problems, the teachers were stressed by trying to decide how to handle student issues. Without adequate on-site supportive supervision and professional development, the teachers faced insecurity and uncertainty as they worked to the best of their ability, but at times felt they were not making enough progress.

Students arrived to each of the four teachers’ classrooms lacking fundamental skills. Liz explained her frustration when a student knew of a particular method but could not do basic computations, saying, “she couldn’t actually do the multiplication, she actually didn’t know how it worked” (Interview 1, p. 7). Meg also noted that abstract concepts were ineffective among her students. She was perplexed as to why her students were not able to master the fundamentals:

I teach math, and nothings really concrete with them anymore. People are like well, let them find a way...and I’m like, “no, can’t we just teach them how to multiply!” I’m teaching 6<sup>th</sup> graders who don’t know how to multiply with decimals and they don’t know how to do long division! (Interview 2, p. 2)

Meg was unsure about how to move forward with higher-level concepts. She appeared frustrated as she pondered:

How do you divide? How do I move on with them in math without long division? Are there other strategies? Yeah, but, shouldn’t they know how to divide? (Interview 2, p. 2)

Insecurity over whether students understood the lessons was something that Liz grappled with. She wanted to make certain that her methods of communication were effective, yet she struggled to find the best ways to help them grasp it. She referred to her teaching journal where she had written about this:

I am not sure if I communicate effectively enough for them to understand all the points in class so that they can fully understand what I am trying to work on. But that is a stressful thing for me. Being able to get right into the points, because I know math, but to be able to explain, that is really a difficult process, to kids that don't grasp it, and to be able to communicate it at a level where they can understand it. (Interview 1, p. 19)

Meg was rattled by a student whose emotional volatility made her confrontational. She felt that her interactions with the student were some of her most challenging moments as a teacher:

I had a student 2 years ago, she used to stress me out every day, she had a very bad home life, a smart girl, and I think that's what really aggravated me. We just got into it every day. She would, say "I hate you, I hate you". The way she would just talk to me, and swear at me, and just, openly refuse—and she would just really stress me—and I just think of her every time I think of, you know, bad moments. (Interview 2, p. 11)

She was uncertain as she tried different approaches:

So as much as it was that we thought she shut down, you know, she would tell me off and I would talk to her. Cause in the beginning, I guess, I was like, I would go after her, and then I would just kind of do the ignoring thing, and you would see she would just want more attention. (Interview 2, p. 11)

Rob offered another viewpoint, explaining that the students' behaviors could be attributed in part towards school stress for those students who need more than just the academics. He was unsure about how to carve out needed time to help the students who were not ultra academic and left vulnerable:

Everybody is different. Academics are for some people and some people are going to thrive in it, some are not. We're in middle school and we're making academics the only thing, so you are shutting a whole group of students out, that we're really just stressing the students out for I don't know for why, I don't know why we have to stress the students out so much. (Interview 3, p. 11)

Rob also wondered what to do about students who were exhibiting negative behavior, especially when he felt they were not necessarily discipline issues, but a desire for attention:

One of my biggest challenges are mostly students with issues at home. Not all of them have issues at home, but some of them, they handle it in a way that they need attention. They constantly yell out, they're the class clown, and it's tough for me cause I need to

manage that behavior. I understand where it's coming from, so I feel bad, cause sometimes I feel that they're not in control of their behavior, and I almost feel bad disciplining a student who is not in control of what they are doing. But it has a negative effect on the class, so I have to do something. (Interview 3, p. 13)

Rob expressed that he found it frustrating when problems the students were having were not addressed. He spoke of parents who were also at a loss on how to intervene effectively with their children:

We had this parent in because the student is not doing their work, they're not listening, and the parent says, "yeah, they're not doing any of that stuff at home either". So, what are we supposed to do? Because I am only with them 90 minutes a day, and we all have this little piece, and obviously is a huge issue, part of the impossible, what can we do about this? (Interview 3, p. 14)

Rob felt "inferior" and attributed some of his insecurity towards being new, and was unsure how to effectively engage his students:

The respect thing I kind of took for granted, I've always been able to make connections with people, I have always been able to gain respect from people, so when I was faced with not being able to connect with people and not being able to earn respect, I didn't know what to do. (Interview 3, p. 3)

Rob spoke of the impact of the insecurity generated by being at a loss for knowing what to do:

When I am stressed, I feel like I'm angry or upset or sad that I just can't do it, and usually it results in saying things that I wouldn't normally say, just uh, just being stuck and what am I gonna do? I just don't know what to do. (Interview 3, p. 8)

Rob ultimately realized he was faced with a complex situation. He was working to reconcile there were no easy answers:

I don't know who said it, if it was a professor, but "there's no simple solution to a complex problem", and that's what I'm doing. It's a complex problem, and as a problem solver, some problems don't have solutions, so as a mathematician, I know that. So, when we talk about all these problems and I hear of a simple solution, but I know they're not solutions, and there haven't been solutions, so maybe there is no solution, I don't know. (Interview 3, p. 14)

The teachers were stressed by the uncertainty they felt when trying to address the problems they were experiencing. They desperately sought solutions, yet realized there was not going to be a simple fix. Issues such as lack of academic skills and interest, looking for attention and lack of respect left the teachers unsure of how to respond to their students. Such conditions compounded their worry about fixing the problems and generated insecurity and worry. Without supervision or professional development to provide resources, the teachers found their circumstances highly stressful. Further, they were not afforded enough time to strategize since they faced so many additional competing priorities and demands.

**Being overloaded was hard.** The teachers found it stressful that they were faced with non-stop demands that left them with little time to accomplish their work. In addition to feeling uncertain on how to respond to the challenges they faced, the teachers were facing a busy and rigorous workload. “Non-stop demands” emerged as a code since it constituted a significant portion of what the teachers described as stressful. It was defined by the teachers as being challenged to complete tasks because of high demands, disruptions and constant work. Balancing these aspects of teaching was no easy feat for any of the new teachers involved in this study. Each said they often felt there was “no time” (Interview 1, p. 8; Interview 2, p. 10; Interview 3, p. 7) to get everything accomplished. Non-stop demands included “juggling the workload” “disruptions”, and “doing the impossible”.

### **Juggling the Workload**

Non-stop demands included working to “juggle the workload” for all of the teachers. When thinking about the multitude of demands, all of the teachers acknowledged that balancing the workload of teaching and obtaining their teaching license was a tall order. From planning, to

correcting, to completing their coursework, they all shared the tremendous impact it had on them. Liz found herself in a constant scurry to get things done:

I don't have enough time to plan a lot of times, so I can't make the lesson as interesting or engaging as I would like it to be. (Interview 1, p. 4)

She saw that it was improving slightly, despite having not initially expected the planning process to be so extensive, and feeling "surprised" and "amazed".

Liz revealed what it was like when she discovered this:

I started to think what did I do? I should be at my old job! I think I had more time at my old job. It was like I worked every night, every night, and so, you know, until bedtime, and I had no time with my family, cause all I was doing was planning or at school, so, I was, I find that to be very tough (Interview 1, p. 6).

In balancing the demands of her classroom and her coursework at Central University, Liz realized she was enduring a difficult workload:

It's February vacation, and all I can think about is what I can get done and do this week, and I'm not going to get everything done, so I'm under a lot of stress even though I am on vacation, cause I'm trying to take care of my school work and the PPA's, and all that stuff, so I find that the work load is very tough right now. I know we have a lot of big things coming up, but it's just tough. (Interview 1, p. 14)

Liz and Rob both spoke about the culmination of many things leading to a great deal of stress. Despite being able to separate different aspects of what they felt stressed out about, they also realized that the combination of everything together put a large strain on them. Liz worked tirelessly as a brand new teacher to meet the many demands she faced. She was "overwhelmed" by juggling the "the whole thing":

There's never a time when I am overwhelmed with just one thing, I think it's more being overwhelmed by the *whole thing*. The planning, the grading, the having my classroom be what I want it to be, or what it should be, and you know, pleasing my superiors, and pleasing the students, and the whole thing, the whole thing sometimes overwhelms you. (Interview 1, p. 11)

While Liz considered the implications of all she was juggling, she recognized that eventually it would ease up. She looked forward to completing her Central University coursework so she could devote herself entirely to teaching, believing her work load will be “considerably less” and can “really focus on what I am doing in the classroom without other things going on at once” (Interview 1, p. 18). Liz said she “can’t wait for next year to have more experience” (Interview 1, p. 20).

Meg also realized that teaching demanded constant work, with challenges such as people “running in and out” and the pending extra hours that were going to be added to the school year:

It’s depressing, and I wish I knew that before I took the job! It’s hard, you know, because, you know granted, we get paid, but it’s not fair, I’m a Mom, I can’t get my kids from school now, you know what I mean? (Interview 2, p. 9)

Rob noticed that with all the juggling he was doing, he was having difficulty setting boundaries. He would work long hours and take very little time for regrouping. He believed that the hard work would produce a good result, but also realized his habits of working non-stop could become problematic:

I was staying at school until 5:30 or 6:00, I was going home, correcting papers, doing lesson plans until 9:00 and then just going to sleep, I never stopped, but I guess I was content knowing that I was putting in all this work to do something that I wanted to do. So, even though it wouldn’t make me feel that good, I thought that the end product would be, sort of like working out, I hate working out, but I know the end product is good, so, I just get through it. But, then I realized I had to stop, cause I was going from 7–9, and then waking up and doing it again. (Interview 3, p. 6)

The teachers in this study were inundated with demands, ranging from their course work at Central University to long hours in the classroom. They were stressed by not having enough time to complete everything, and were spending most of their free moments working. They also felt overwhelmed by the constant running around to try and accomplish everything. Without a moment to spare, the teachers could not afford wasted time, and could have been less stressed if

their time was spent productively, such as through supervision and professional development that was constructive and allowed for learning of strategies to help them juggle the workload.

Teachers were stressed when their work time was interfered with, since every moment was accounted for.

## **Disruptions**

Given that the teachers were dealing with pressures from their workload, various disruptions were substantial sources of stress for Liz, Meg, Jan, and Rob. Between absences and lost class time, these instances became costly. Juggling multiple demands left little room for unwelcomed distractions. Each teacher felt disruptions were frequent and this was unsettling. Like all of the teachers, Liz came to really understand the value of using her prep periods wisely. It became very unsettling to her when someone interfered with this precious time frame:

I have one prep period. I only have that short time, so when you come in and talk to me for 20 minutes, the whole time, I am thinking—I need to do these things to make sure I have everything ready, so that stresses me out a lot! (Interview 1, p. 10)

The way that Liz's schedule ran was unique. During one of her classes, lunch was held right smack in the middle. She spoke about how this translated:

So, I have to get them settled again, and get them thinking math again, which is sometimes difficult. They come in, sometimes other students come in that don't belong, and they want to pretend that they're part of the class, and I say "you can't be there, get out, get out!" (Interview 1, p. 8)

Jan was concerned by the constant disruptions she and her students faced. She said that they were called for "absolutely everything, at least 10 times a day" (Interview 4, p. 9). She found this was a great source of stress:

I really like structure in my classroom, when my structure is interrupted, that was giving me anxiety the whole day, because I was saying now tomorrow, I'm going to have 2 classes ahead, and the other 2 are going to be behind. That was stressful. The technology can be a little bit too stressful for me. We have phones now; they call for everything! (Interview 4, p. 9)

Jan explained the reasons behind so many distractions, ranging from students arriving late to being dismissed early. She noted that students take their cell phones “to the bathroom and text their parents to come pick them up for anything and everything and their parents do” (Interview 4, p. 10).

With a fast moving curriculum and high stakes testing in mind, Rob found it especially challenging when students missed class. Absenteeism was a significant disruption to learning, one that he said was constantly happening:

Attendance is a huge challenge, so that contributes to why things are impossible. How can a student be proficient if they miss a day a week? How can I keep up with the pacing chart where everyone knows how to do it if 10 students miss a day a week in one class? How do I catch these students up if they miss 70 days a year? How am I supposed to do it when they miss 5 days in a row, and they come back and say “what did I miss?” (laughs). They missed a lot of class, we do a 90-minute block, so if you miss 2 days, you missed a lot of time, we did a lot of things. A lot of the things we do, I can’t just get it to you and say oh, here do this, it will make up for the few days you missed. (Interview 3, p. 12)

Disruptions led to higher stress levels for the teachers. Classroom time and prep periods were sacred time, and distractions posed a threat to completing tasks. This caused a great deal of stress for the teachers. Between lunch in the middle of a class, telephone calls and absenteeism, the teachers were frustrated that they were not positioned to be effective in all they had to do. Their stress mounted as they worked to figure out what was possible to achieve in light of the non-stop demands being managed.

### **Doing the Impossible**

The teachers described stressful conditions as being expected to accomplish extraordinary feats despite being pulled in so many directions. They felt stressed given the demands they faced and were not sure on how to effectively respond. Rob coined the phrase “doing the impossible” and the other teachers discussed the incredible demands they found most stressful. For them, this

involved having to handle things beyond their control. It meant having to live up to expectations that exceeded the realm of possibility. Rob wondered how he could be expected to achieve 100% proficiency when some things were simply beyond his control:

It's hard when we're looking at data, and I have 60% of the kids who did it correctly, and 80% did it correctly for the other teacher. Why did my class, why is my class lower?  
(Interview 3, p. 11)

Rob went on to express that putting a primary emphasis on what happens on a given testing day might not be an accurate representation of students' proficiencies. He worried that there were many variables impacting testing performance. In particular, he reasoned that achieving conceptual understanding was a process that took time, and differed among the students. He felt that it was unrealistic to think that achieving this level of understanding could happen universally:

I think the impossible part is to think that every student is going to learn every one of these standards and be proficient at it on the test day. I think they can all do it, but they're 14 and some of them may do it later, some of them, cause I am also being asked to teach them conceptual understanding rather than just procedural understanding, and the way they want us to do it is to let students discover things. Well, some people discover things earlier than others. I can teach procedures; you just do it over and over again until you learn it. But conceptually, it kind of has to click, and I can't say it's going to happen with the pacing if we are going to do it conceptually. I'm going to have to do it with a procedure, but that's an impossible thing to do it conceptually. I'm going to follow a pacing chart, do it conceptually, do it in 2 weeks! So that's impossible for everybody, I think. (Interview 3, p. 12)

Liz worried that she might not be able to do all that was being required of her:

I don't know how to explain it but it seems like they have so many *other* requirements, and I feel like I just can't meet all those standards. (Interview 1, p. 10)

During his second year, Rob was inundated with demands that overwhelmed him quite often. He thought about the impact of this on his current situation and worried about the future implications:

When I'm not feeling successful, I feel that there are things I need to improve on, and I understand that sometimes I feel that I am being asked to do things that are impossible, and that becomes a bigger problem. Cause I think, if I am going to be a teacher, my whole career I am going to be asked to do something that's impossible, how am I ever going to do this? (Interview 3, p. 11)

The sense of having to “do the impossible” was a major aspect of conditions each of the teachers described as stressful. From achieving proficiency for data collection, to accounting for differences in learners, to meeting standards, the teachers felt overwhelmed. Additionally, constant disruptions, juggling an intensive workload and facing non-stop demands were defined as stressful for the new teachers. Given the intensity of these experiences, the teachers demonstrated signs of stress that warranted action to help mitigate it.

**Research Question 3: *How do new urban teachers in a licensure program perceive and describe what they do to manage stress?***

**Stress had serious effects.** This study revealed that the teachers who were enrolled at Central University while managing the demands of teaching found their roles and responsibilities stressful on a variety of levels. Teachers described how stress influenced them internally and externally. Stress led to feelings of dysphoria, irritation, and anguish for the teachers. They each shared specific ways that stress took its toll on them, not only in their classrooms but also at home. Maintaining perspective and a sense of well-being proved difficult for the teachers given the challenges they faced. The predominant area of concern included “worried and thinking all the time”, meaning the teachers had a hard time separating from their work and getting their minds into other things.

### **Worried And Thinking All The Time**

One of the major consequences of stress involved carrying it over to home. Being worried all the time included constant thinking about student issues, job performance and ways

to handle situations. Once a day was over, many of the teachers noticed they struggled to leave it behind and spent a large portion of time stewing over what occurred at school. They thought about math and teaching strategies continually. This translated into a loss of sleep, high stress levels and difficulty focusing on other responsibilities. There were times when the teachers wondered if they would make it, and sometimes felt like quitting. Liz acknowledged,

I would just go home and be like, I hate this job, I don't think I wanna do this, this is not the job for me, and um, and then I was disappointed, because you think you can reach kids, and then it was like so difficult. (Interview 1, p. 12)

For Meg, she worked hard to stop worrying about negative interactions with her students. She wanted to have a clean slate, but acknowledged that it took time to be able to stop letting it bother her:

I always try, the next day, to forget it. It's hard for me the next day to let it go, as much as they say, you know that happened yesterday, but I've still got a chip on my shoulder. If they really stressed me out and got me, you know, frustrated then, if I couldn't teach the lesson because of them, it might take me a couple days to get rid of them. (Interview 2, p. 12)

Meg reflected that it was not out of the ordinary for her to need to process after a day's work. She recalled a previous job where a similar phenomenon occurred. Part of her daily unwinding would involve replaying events. She acknowledged that it really seemed to have a hold on her during those moments:

A lot of times I go to bed, I just feel that my brain is going. All I could do was picture myself at the board, trying to get to the kids and I was like whoa, this has really taken over me, whatever it is, but just that stress, that pressure, you know. (Interview 2, p. 18)

Rob indicated that his life revolved largely around mathematics and teaching. He felt that was important to his professional development but also realized that the constant thinking and working to become better could be detrimental. Rob was so immersed that it revved him up:

I feel like I am kind of wound up a lot. I am thinking about math a lot and teaching. Almost all the books I read are about math and teaching books, and actually, just this past

week on vacation, I actually read a book that wasn't a math book, and it felt weird! It felt good though! I want to be as good of a teacher as I can be, so I need to keep work, work, work, to be that teacher. But I also don't want to burn myself out, and I will if I continue to think that I need to think about it all the time. (Interview 3, p. 6)

Liz worried frequently since she was being monitored without feedback. She spoke of the sense of being on audition, a constant job interview, and the constant worry this generated:

I feel like I am on an interview everyday at school. I know that like with teaching it is a little different than all other jobs, cause in teaching you go your whole year and then they say well, we thought you were effective or not effective, and they won't renew your contract. So, I feel that every day if the door opens, my stomach drops, because I feel like I'm on that interview. And so yeah, I think that is a very stressful thing for teachers. I am still waiting. Am I going to be there next year or not? I don't know. (Interview 1, p. 21)

The teachers' worry escalated at times and caused them to want to quit. It also influenced their stress levels significantly. The teachers worked to maintain a positive perspective and well-being by engaging in certain activities that allowed them to separate work and home life, and avoid constantly ruminating about their worries.

**Activities were helpful.** Teachers engaged in specific activities to help mitigate the consequences of stress. Because of ongoing worry, the teachers realized they had to do something to combat the strain they felt. There were a variety of deliberate actions that the teachers took to mitigate the effects of stress. Each of their approaches were unique, yet there were common themes in what they found helpful. The codes that emerged included: "me time", and "setting boundaries".

### **Me Time**

Being able to zone out and take mental breaks from the workload and worrying over student success was essential for the teachers. Engaging in activities that were entertaining and relaxing was important to them. Whether going out or staying in, it was important to give their minds a rest from the usual internal and external commotion they experienced. All four teachers

talked about activities such as watching television, reading non-academic materials, going on Facebook and playing games as important ways to divert stress.

The teachers described carving out alone time to relax and creating opportunities to feel in control of surroundings as important features of stress management. While it was often challenging to fit this in, many of the teachers discovered just how important it was for them. Jan described her love for “homey things,” such as “cooking, watching old movies, and playing scrabble” that she found enjoyable and promoted stress reduction (Interview 4, p. 18).

Liz found relief from “mind numbing activities”, like watching television and napping on the couch after a long day (Interview 1, p. 2). Rob also brought his stress down by reading books “outside of math” and “getting together with people who were not in education, so we have to talk about other things” (Interview 3, p. 9). Meg enjoyed watching “mind-numbing TV” and having “alone time” and just “zoning out” (Interview 2, p. 13).

### **Setting Boundaries**

Setting boundaries helped the teachers to set aside “me time” and stop themselves from being entirely consumed with work. The teachers needed to be able to set clear boundaries for themselves to keep stress at bay. This meant setting limits on the amount of time being devoted towards working and thinking. The teachers were prone to working long hours and then constantly replaying situations in their minds. They recognized that boundary setting was necessary to remain less stressed and cope effectively.

As new teachers, the participants found it easy to fall into the trap of constant work. With innumerable demands, they noticed that there was always something to do. Jan described her first year of teaching as a blur, in which she worked tirelessly to keep up with it all. Rob, Meg and Liz felt that they could work from the minute they awoke to the minute they lay down

at night and still not be settled. Over time, each of the teachers realized that this was contributing to their high stress levels. Despite the reality of having to put a lot of extra time in, it became clear that establishing personal rules around limiting their work time was essential. Being able to stop and refocus energy into other people, activities and thoughts was vital. It took time to be able to realize the importance and develop the ability to do so. For example, setting boundaries for Jan involved making a deliberate point to leave school at 4:00 p.m.

Being able to put complex problems out of their minds was difficult for the teachers. It was especially difficult in light of their concerns for their students. Replaying interactions and daily events was something that the teachers constantly did. It was hard to set boundaries around the time spent thinking about the day, since they had to contain a great deal of it during school and revisit it later. It was natural for the teachers to want to process what they were experiencing. They did so on the ride home, during home time, and when trying to fall asleep at night. This often became stressful and problematic. Meg found setting boundaries was beneficial in helping her to clear her mind and regain perspective:

Just to clear my head, to clear my mind, so that when you go back and look at things a little differently, and it's like, oh it's not that bad, you know what I mean? Like I said before just read a book, just to get my mind out of it and then my mind will be cleared of that and then I can kind of relax. (Interview 2, p. 12)

The teachers drew upon setting time aside for positive activities to help them prevent overload from too much time spent working and thinking. The teachers found this time to be productive as they were able to rethink how they were viewing and approaching the problems they faced.

**Adjusting thinking was helpful.** Teachers utilized the process of reappraisal to reduce their stress levels. After a short time in the classroom, the teachers realized that they needed to adjust their expectations. Once they began to do so, they then moved into a problem solving

stage where they began to recognize their own limitations. Teachers also began to incorporate the norms of teaching, and they realized that they were not alone in their experiences. These teachers also began to rethink their growth status and worked to account for the typical learning curve that came with being new. Finally, it was important to refocus upon the fact that they were in the profession because of their desire to make a difference. Despite many challenges, realizing their efforts were directly beneficial to students who needed their guidance and professionalism was helpful.

Upon entering the field, the teachers were filled with anticipation. They made the decision to teach because they enjoyed their students and wished to impact lives. Not long after their first days, the teachers soon realized they were up against what at times appeared to be insurmountable barriers. Systemic, family and student issues taxed them and made them believe they were not doing a good job. Their initial beliefs included shock, dismay and insecurity over whether they could continue. They were surprised by student demonstrations of moderate to severe emotional problems. It was hard a hard realization that support was not always available or enough to balance the issues at hand. Teachers found it immensely difficult as they searched for solutions to no avail. They worked hard but were consumed with thoughts that their efforts were not enough.

Teachers relied heavily upon certain processes to help them navigate through the challenges they experienced. These processes were vital to maintaining composure during and after stressful moments. The primary processes included: “thinking it through”, and “it’ll get better” and “I’m making a difference”.

## **Thinking It Through**

Teachers learned to adjust their expectations in light of circumstances. They worked to recognize that while problems were pervasive, there were also positive things happening. Once they began to understand the extent of what they faced, they were able to devise a survival plan that accounted for the fact their situation was difficult. Rather than just internalizing the stress, they recognized that they were going to be facing demands over the long term. Instead of viewing teaching as “easy” they realized it was, in fact, extraordinarily difficult (Interview 1, p. 2). The teachers learned to readjust their focus and expectations.

Teachers relied on finding time to think through solutions to the various problems that they encountered. During each day, the teachers held a rigorous schedule and balanced numerous responsibilities. They had to think quickly on their feet, and there was little time or structures such as supportive supervision or professional development to process what had occurred. Designating time to think about solutions to problems was important to the teachers. They worked out possible strategies after reflecting upon the complexities they faced, whether a way to convey a difficult concept, engage a parent or get a student interest in learning.

Understanding the typical stages and cycles of teaching was important for each of these teachers. Some of this was learned at Central University, but they struggled within their school cultures to openly share their difficulties. The teachers began to realize over time that teaching brought a host of challenges, which were not unique only to them. Revisiting their initial responses to what they encountered, the teachers were able to regain perspective. They were able to see that other teachers experienced similar levels of stress. It became clear over time that teaching was inherently challenging and would include ups and downs. Realizing that it was quite natural to be stressed was helpful. It helped to normalize the teachers’ stress and caused

them to think of it as a reality of the profession as opposed to as a personal failure. Rob felt reassured when his colleagues were “having the same problems I was having” (Interview 3, p. 12).

The ability to revisit and rethink a situation was important to the teachers. They each had their own way of realizing that this type of processing was essential to their ability to remain calm and feel at ease. For Liz, she quickly became overwhelmed trying to work with individual students in a classroom with Individualized Education Plans (IEP’s). For a while, she kept putting a lot of pressure on herself and felt that she was a failure. Once she recognized that between the class size and the level of needs it would be quite difficult to achieve perfection, she eased up. She recognized that she was doing the best she could and that would have to be good enough. Changing her mindset helped Liz to relax and alleviated some of the stress she felt:

I got to the point where like, I realize, alright, I am going to do certain things with it, but it’s not going to run like a normal classroom. They are not capable with this grouping of students, and just me. Then I started to relax about it. I have to do whatever I can with them. I’m gonna have to do my best—whatever I can do, I have to realize, that you’re not even supposed to be alone with that many kids on an IEP, so then I said well, their going to have to realize this is the best they can do. And then, it was okay, and then things would happen, and I would call the Principal, you know, and I was able to remain calm, because I just knew that my expectation was different, and so, you know, handle that. (Interview 1, p. 12)

Meg realized the importance of having time to replay events in her mind. She valued time to get her mind off things completely, but also used some of her free time to think things over. She believed this helped her to reconcile some of the levels of stress she experienced:

I guess that’s really it. I really look forward, like I said to that alone time, which is hard to say that, because sometimes I feel like I am being selfish, but I’m really not, you know what I mean? I think the stress of just everything is, and just thinking things through, you know, not only just withdrawing but thinking it through again. (Interview 2, p. 19)

Jan talked about the importance of documenting her thoughts while in her problem-solving mode. She utilized “head time” (Interview 4, p. 9) to consider how she could approach

things most effectively. When it came to classroom stressors, she spent a great deal of her time and energy thinking it through. She utilized note taking as a strategy to keep track of everything she was realizing in those moments:

When I have to deal with any stressful thing that happened in the classroom, and I think things through. I'm like, what should I do now, um, what can I do later that will be helpful. (Interview 4, p. 18)

Additionally, Jan noticed that while she was thinking things through, there was an element of coaching and positive self-talk she drew upon for strength. This helped her persevere and remain resilient in the face of stress. She would constantly remind herself that she was going to be successful despite her initial reactions to the stress at hand:

I kind of just walk myself through: I am going to do this, and then I am going to do this, and it really is breathing and kind of talking myself down, okay everything's fine, the day is going to be over, okay, it's going to be alright, I tell myself that often. (Interview 4, p. 18)

After school each day, Meg realized the need for regrouping. She reported that her ride home was the beginning of this process, where she spent time thinking about the day's events and what she may have done differently:

I kind of replay things on my way home in my head, and try to like, if I'm upset, cause sometimes when I'm upset I feel like maybe if I taught, if I did something different it would have been different, you know what I mean, and if I think through that and I'm like, nah, it wouldn't have made a difference, and you know, kind of like leave it behind. I kind of like process it all, you know. I do it every day driving home, I think about it. (Interview 2, p. 12)

### **It'll Get Better**

Part of the reappraisal process involved the recognition that circumstances would improve. For the teachers, being career changers meant that they had spent considerable time deciding this was the right path for them. Making the transition involved holding a belief that there would be some level of gratification in being a teacher. Each teacher had preconceived

notions of what teaching would entail. Once they acclimated to the actual daily moments, they each realized how many challenges they had to meet. In the face of this, the teachers wrestled with some ambiguity. On one hand, they had made a substantial commitment. On the other, the work was proving far more difficult than they had imagined. Teachers had to remind themselves of their principles and values, and that they were not “quitters” (Interview 3, p. 11; Interview 4, p. 16) in order to keep moving forward. They each realized that eventually the work would get better with time and effort.

The teachers’ instincts to be overwhelmed during high stress moments were curbed by the recognition that experience and time might improve their teaching experience. It was helpful to realize that some moments would be especially stressful, but there would be lulls in the stress as well. The teachers understood that eventually their systems and practices would become more natural, and they would not have to be starting from scratch with everything. This aspect of reappraisal was a great source of comfort. Rob repeatedly described this realization, and he kept reminding himself he would improve and that situations would get better.

Rob realized that each day was an opportunity for a new beginning. Despite obstacles along the way, he would still try and maintain a positive attitude. He worked to remind himself that each new day had the potential to be better. Rob voiced this as follows:

I have a pretty short memory for things like that. I started every day thinking that today was going to be a good day, and then I’d go home sick (laughs) that it wasn’t! So, I removed myself from the situation, and I thought that tomorrow was going to be a different day, and it’s going to be better. (Interview 3, p. 5)

Liz also noticed that she had already learned a great deal over the course of her first year. Meg indicated that she relied upon positive thinking and coaching herself to remember things would not remain so difficult. Jan grew significantly over time and in her fourth year was already demonstrating marked improvement in understanding the norms of teaching. The teachers all

thought about the need to give themselves time, which brought their stress to a more manageable level. They relied upon constant reappraisal of initial stressful thoughts to bring this knowledge to the forefront.

Rob thought of the investment he had made in teaching thus far and did not want to turn back. He was firm in his identity as being strong and not quitting. Rob believed that it would take time to improve and tried to look at ways he could break down what was before him to make it seem more manageable. He reflected upon his realization that there would be an end in sight, and before he knew it, the stressful times would be over and he could start again:

There is an end—from one vacation to the next, and one 3-day weekend to the next, and before you know it, it's over and you get to start over fresh for the next year, it's definitely been, the second year has been better than the first year. (Interview 3, p. 6)

Rob felt that by thinking things would improve, his stress levels would subside. It helped him to cope with the difficulties at hand. He expressed this with a sense of conviction:

There's still a lot of challenges, but I guess it's gonna keep you going if you think it's going to get better and better. Maybe I'll be in a better situation someday. Maybe I'm just paying my dues, I am hoping that goes away. (Interview 3, p. 13)

Liz also drew upon a method of “counting down” (Interview 1, p. 5) to help her move through stressful moments, thinking “okay, this is not going well, if I can just get to the next period the next step will be easier” (Interview 1, p. 17). Waiting for the point in time when progress was realized was a challenge for Liz. She worked hard to be the best teacher possible. As she thought about what she had learned, she recognized that each day afforded a chance for a new start. This “clean slate” (Interview 1, p. 5) was important to her. She began to recognize that her students needed some time to adjust to her expectations and develop respect. Liz realized that even after a student had a bad day, they would often come back as if nothing had happened. This was refreshing for Liz to realize, and helped her put down some of the stress she carried:

I know that tomorrow they'll come back and everything will be okay, cause that's usually what happens. (Interview 1, p. 16)

Liz also reminded herself often that the students themselves were under a great deal of stress. She considered how her students felt about the conditions they faced either in the classroom and or at home. She had empathy for her students when she considered the gravity of their own stress. Given her own experiences with stress, she imagined what it was like for them:

I am sure, they're young, they don't recognize it, how they go through things either, but as an adult I can recognize what I am doing is the same thing they're doing, the same behaviors I saw in them were like the ones I was experiencing. (Interview 1, p. 16)

The teachers drew upon a process of reappraisal that held the notion improvement would happen at the forefront. They realized that even when encountering difficult days, a new day was a new start. The teachers focused upon the importance of the work they were doing and considered the potential impact they were having on the students.

### **I'm Making a Difference**

The teachers realized they were making a difference with their students, which helped them cope with stress in their context. With all the work it took to deal with stress, one might wonder what makes a teacher keep going. When considering the dimensions of becoming a new teacher, each reflected upon their beliefs about the inherent value of the profession. They realized that students had academic, social and emotional needs that needed to be met. Mathematics skills were needed to help ensure life and career success. The teachers knew they had the capacity to make a difference in the lives of their students. With so many challenges in education, each teacher tried to remain focused on what they viewed as the most important thing: the needs of the students. However, time constraints, lack of support and many demands left teachers feeling depleted and insecure. To rectify this, teachers worked to eliminate as much

stress as possible and rely upon coping strategies for the remainder. While this was no easy feat, each teacher worked to the best of their abilities to keep the student needs paramount.

One of the greatest consequences of the various problems the teachers identified was that the students might not make it. For the teachers, the mere thought of this was devastating. From missing out on important life skills to facing the risks and consequences of dropping out, the teachers worried that there was much more at stake than just failing math class. The teachers realized that their role was important, and if they were able to have a part in helping a student succeed, there was no greater reward. The teachers wanted to ensure their students developed a range of academic, social and emotional skills that would leverage a student's capacity to navigate their ongoing academic careers and beyond. It might not necessarily melt all the stress away, but when kids succeeded, it confirmed the very reason they were willing to keep working through it all.

Jan was emphatic about her desire to make sure her students were equipped to finish both middle and high school. She committed herself daily to doing her best to teach effectively and forge strong connections with her students. Jan told her students not to hesitate to contact her even when they were out of her classroom if they ever needed help. Much to her delight, she maintained contact with students who, from time to time, reached out to her. Jan summed it up when she thought about a student who initially was hard to engage and then made it:

I worked so hard, one of them, I still am close with, he's a senior in high school and he's graduating high school, I am so proud of him, it's like a big deal to me. (Interview 4, p. 11)

The teachers drew upon the process of reappraisal to reduce their stress levels. Despite many of the stressors the teachers faced, they were able to take comfort in knowing they were having a positive impact on their students. The teachers reassessed frequently to help them

remember why they were committed to the profession. They wanted to have a positive and lasting impact on the lives of their students. Making a difference meant being involved in a way that was mutually rewarding for the teachers themselves and their students. It was part of what made all the efforts worth while.

### **Summary of Research Results**

This study examined the perspective of four new teachers who taught math in urban middle schools while enrolled at Central University's alternative licensure program. The results indicated that stress was an impediment to their feelings of self-efficacy and overall development. Each teacher shared his or her own perception regarding the phenomena reported. The first research question was *what do new urban teachers identify as central factors influencing their capacity to manage stress in the context of their classroom?*

**Table 4**

*Research Question 1 Results*

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| <b>Results</b>  | <b>Liz</b>   | <b>Meg</b>  | <b>Rob</b>  | <b>Jan</b>  |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| <p>1. Supportive supervision and professional development were needed to guide the teachers' growth and development. The teachers felt they had "no backing" and were "walking on eggshells".</p>             | <p>I feel like I can't be myself; my effectiveness is must less than I thought. I've got to just cover it up and try to still do the right things</p> <p>There's no time to really do feedback</p> <p>Who can help me out here, guide me a little bit?</p> <p>I'm not exactly sure where she's coming from because I don't get too much time with her.</p> | <p>Professional development is a complete waste of time.</p>  | <p>Having administrators come in the room and walk around and not doing anything, that is a pretty stressful day.</p> <p>I have teachers looking to me for advice. I'm thinking, you must be crazy!</p> | <p>So many people pick on the negative that they let it completely take over their thoughts, so where is the positive going on? I just needed you to tell me I was doing something right.</p>   |
| <p>2. The teachers required classroom and time management strategies to organize, structure, and run their classrooms effectively. The teachers relied upon "being prepared" and "getting kids on board".</p> | <p>I think I would tend to be more structured next year; I think if I do that I'll get more kids on board that way.</p>  | <p>I'm a very routine teacher. They know what I expect. It has to be within my control. If it does snowball, it's just chaos and I don't know what to do.</p> | <p>Classroom management is the biggest thing; that is what teachers need.</p>   | <p>The more control you keep yourself in, and keep it together, the less stressful it is for them, and in turn, the less stressful it is for you. I have an agenda every day and I'm sticking to it. I know if I am not prepared, I stress out.</p> |

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| <b>Results (cont.)</b>   | <b>Liz</b>  | <b>Meg</b>  | <b>Rob</b>   | <b>Jan</b>  |
|--|---|---|--|---|
| <p>3. The teachers needed meaningful interpersonal connections. The teachers needed to know “I’m not alone”, and relied upon “friends and family” and “student relationships” for support.</p> | <p>I basically hold the stress in.</p> <p>I’m close with my sister, sometimes I’ll talk to her about it, but I really don’t talk to anyone about it.</p> <p>I work with Meg, so sometimes we’ll vent, we’ll vent a little bit. But as far as personally, I don’t talk to anybody.</p> | <p>Just knowing we are going through the same things really, really helped. Just to know you’re not alone and it’s happening to everyone.</p> <p>I would be relieved in just talking to them.</p> | <p>I like to hear from my colleagues they’re having the same problem.</p> <p>There have been a few teachers who have really helped me.</p> | <p>The more positive people I surround myself with is how I de-stress.</p> <p>My colleagues never let me feel alone, so that’s what helps me every single day knowing we have a good set of people that will be around to talk and listen and empathize with you.</p> |

Table 4 demonstrates that the teachers were in need of supportive supervision and professional development to guide their growth and development. They felt as though they had “no backing” and were “walking on eggshells”. The teachers depended upon classroom and time management strategies to run their classrooms effectively. It was important for them to “be prepared” and “get kids on board” through such strategies. Meaningful interpersonal connections helped mitigate stress for the new teachers. This helped them to know “I’m not alone”, and they relied upon “friends and family” and “student relationships” for support that would help them cope with the stressors they faced.

The teachers revealed what made it difficult for them to cope with stress. They described in detail the conditions they faced that they found the most challenging to manage. Each teacher spoke from their own vantage point and provided details of what they thought and how they felt. The second research question was *how new urban teachers describe the conditions they viewed as stressful?*

**Table 5**

*Research Question 2 Results*

| <b>Results</b>  | <b>Liz</b>   | <b>Meg</b>   | <b>Rob</b>   | <b>Jan</b>   |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| 1. The teachers were stressed by their perception they had to “fix the problems” of their students and families.                    | When we had our first parent night, I felt like a social worker, and it was really stunning to me.   | In the urban schools, these kids need you, they need someone to talk to, they need someone who has morals, who has respect for people.   | So, what are we supposed to do? I am only with them 90 minutes a day and obviously this is a huge issue, a huge problem, and it’s bothering me, then I have to fix it. | I feel like it’s my responsibility to fix it. I’m a big fixer!<br><br>It’s the worrying about them while I’m not there to watch them that is actually the worst. |
| 2. The teachers faced uncertainty on how to manage issues.  | I’m already thinking, am I doing this okay, what do I need to be doing? Should I be doing this? I didn’t think I was going to make it through.                     | I was upset, I would call my Mom crying, cause what do you do?   | How am I ever going to do this? I don’t have a solution, I don’t know what to do.  | It’s shocking to me for a kid to not want to do anything, ever. I have had many nights with anxiety attacks thinking, “what am I going to do?”                   |
| 3. The teachers faced non-stop demands. They were challenged by “juggling the workload”, “disruptions”, and “doing the impossible”. | It seems like they have so many <i>other</i> requirements and I feel like I just can’t meet those standards.<br><br>I am overwhelmed with the <i>whole thing</i> . | We had a lot more pressure on us, not only was I in a new school teaching something new, but also make sure you read this tonight, or this paper is due. I’m running from the moment the bell rings. | I think if I am going to be a teacher, my whole career I am going to be asked to do something that’s impossible, how am I ever going to do this?                       | My classroom works because of structure. When it was interrupted, it gave me anxiety the whole day.  |

Table 5 demonstrates that the teachers found their circumstances to be highly stressful. For the teachers, one of the most stressful aspects of their work was their belief they had to “fix” the problems of their students and families. The teachers faced a substantial level of uncertainty as they contemplated how to manage the issues they encountered. Another major contributing factor towards their stress involved being faced with non-stop demands. The teachers were stressed as they worked to “juggle the workload”, while facing various “disruptions”. They characterized this as “doing the impossible”, and were overwhelmed by all that was being asked of them as new teachers enrolled in Central University’s alternative licensure program.

The teachers provided insight on how they perceived their coping efforts, and what they did specifically to manage the stressors they faced. They discussed the internal aspects of how they managed stress, including their thinking patterns and associated feelings. The teachers described how they perceived the external impact of their stress, describing specific activities and behaviors that resulted. The third research question was *how do new urban teachers in an alternative licensure program perceive and describe what they do to manage stress?*

**Table 6**

*Research Question 3 Results*

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| <b>Results</b>  | <b>Liz</b>   | <b>Meg</b>  | <b>Rob</b>  | <b>Jan</b>   |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| 1. The teachers described internal and external manifestations of their stress, including “worrying and thinking all the time”. | If I get stressed, I am distracted and can’t quite focus that well. Thoughts are racing and the stomach is not feeling good. I don’t like that feeling.      | I never really expected to worry and have as much attachment with these kids as I do, that drives you crazy when you go home.<br><br>I was like whoa, this has really taken over me, that stress, that pressure.  | I feel like I am wound up a lot. I don’t want to burn myself out, and I will if I continue to think that I need to think about it all the time.                 | I could not cope, literally going to the doctors for anxiety that I never had before. It was just a blur, I got sick a lot and it was just painful. I carry the future of 70 kids in my head constantly. |
| 2. The teachers engaged in specific activities to manage stress, including “me time” and “setting boundaries”.                  | I watch some sort of mind-numbing TV show and hopefully I can get a quick nap in, then I’ll feel better and the strain of the day is a little bit behind me. | I like the alone time, I really do. Just something that I am not doing every day, just to get me away from that for a little while.<br><br>I just have to clear my mind, not that I want to relive what happened, but just time to get it out of my head. | I would go out to dinner and feel a lot better. I’d go home and instead of thinking about it and stress, I’d go out with my friends and I feel better doing it. | I go home, I cook, I put on the radio, I watch old movies, I play scrabble, I do very homey things.  |

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| Results  | Liz   | Meg  | Rob   | Jan  |
|--|---|--|---|--|
| <p>3. The teachers used the process of reappraisal to reduce stress levels. They relied upon “thinking it through”, the realization “it’ll get better”, and “I’m making a difference”.</p> | <p>Typically I’ll think, okay, this is not going well. If I can just get to the next period the next step will be easier. I know that tomorrow they’ll come back and everything will be okay, cause that’s usually what happens.</p> <p>There was one girl in my class and she said thank you, she’s very hard to reach, and I feel she’s lost already, so that gives me a glimpse of hope.</p> | <p>Just to clear my head, so that when you go back and look at things a little differently, and it’s like, oh, it’s not that bad.</p> <p>At the end of the year she wrote me the nicest letter ever, it all came through in the end.</p> | <p>When you start anything new you’re not good at it, a few people maybe are superstars right off the bat, but most of the time you have to learn new things.</p> <p>I have a pretty short memory for things like that. I thought that tomorrow was going to be a different day, and it’s going to be better. There’s still a lot of challenges but I guess it’s gonna keep you going if you think it’s going to get better and better.</p> | <p>When I have to deal with any stressful thing that happened in my classroom, I think things through.</p> <p>I am making a difference. I think that that is really special. I worked so hard, one of them is graduating high school, it’s a big deal to me.</p> |

Table six demonstrates that stress took a toll on all four teachers. Internally, they were “worried and thinking all the time”. To help mitigate the consequences of stress, the teachers engaged in specific activities including what they called “me time” and “setting boundaries”. To prevent stress overload and feeling burned out, the teachers utilized a process of reappraisal, which involved being able to reassess and make new meaning of their initial reactions to stress. The teachers worked to “think it through”, which helped them to realize “it’ll get better” and “I’m making a difference”.

The perspective of four new urban teachers was illuminated in this study. It yielded results that were multi-layered and rich. The teachers shared openly regarding their perceptions and experiences with stress. They demonstrated what they relied upon and what they were lacking to support their growth and development. The teachers provided understanding towards what factors were most influential in helping them to manage the stress they experienced.

This study was guided by phenomenological inquiry. The purpose was to explore the central factors that influenced teachers’ stress management in their urban classrooms. The participants were teachers with five or less years of experience who were teaching simultaneously while earning their teaching license through Central University’s alternative program. Data analysis reflected the work of Moustakas (1994) research and analysis approach. During the research process, I bracketed my own thoughts and feelings and relied upon peer debriefing and internal audits to ensure credibility and dependability. In chapter 5, research findings will be presented, along with recommendations for practice.

## **Chapter 5: Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Practice**

### **Overview**

The goal of this phenomenological study was to identify central factors influencing the stress management of teachers with five or fewer years of experience who were enrolled in an alternative licensure program at Central University. The purpose was to explore the four participating teachers experiences with stress and means for coping. Through interviews and analysis, it was uncovered the teachers relied upon specific processes to help reduce their stress levels. The study revealed that these teachers experienced aspects of being a new teacher in an urban district that presented complex challenges that warranted additional types of support beyond what they were receiving.

This study explored the problem of practice that teachers in urban settings work with students who have disproportionately higher risks of poverty, low academic attainment, dropout, teenage pregnancy, substance use, violence and gang involvement than their suburban counterparts (Billings, 2001). This can trigger “burnout cascade” (Jennings, 2008), marked by teachers becoming exhausted by overwhelming stressors. Teachers lack resources to effectively manage the social and emotional challenges and systemic issues that contribute to student disengagement (White, 2007; Tomlinson-Clarke & Curran, 2004; Haberman, 1999), and this can lead to suboptimal performance and negative repercussions for students (Cornelius-White, 2007).

While the study results were consistent with previous research on teacher stress and burnout, new information also emerged. This section highlights new knowledge gained through this phenomenological study. The findings will be discussed through the lens of the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which was the guiding framework for this study. This

chapter also discusses the limitations of the study, followed by implications for educators and recommendations for practice. Finally, areas for future research are reviewed.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping was used as a theoretical framework for this study. Stress has significance in many environments, and contributes substantially to human functioning and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) highlighted the complexities of stressors and emphasized the value of cognitive reappraisal. This involves categorizing facets of encounters with respect to their significance for well-being. Rather than being about information processing, it facilitates meaning making (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The teachers in this study reported they were without opportunities to examine their appraisals within a safe, supportive supervisory context that allows for such examination and reformulation without fear of signaling weakness (Gold, 1997).

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping describes multiple aspects of stress and explores the complex interplay between internal and external components (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Cognitive factors that lead to the evaluation of a threat impact psychological stress (Lazarus, 1966). When social units or systems are disrupted, it influences social stress (Monat & Lazarus, 1985). The teachers in this study indicated feeling stressed from the various threats they encountered, such as uncertainty, feeling overwhelmed, and performance anxiety. Socially the teachers were stressed as they worked to acclimate to their school cultures that lacked an emphasis on transparency regarding making mistakes. Their efforts for reappraisal were undermined in the face of limited supportive supervision and school cultures that did not offer reassurance.

The demands evoking a patterned response are known as stressors (Monat & Lazarus, 1985). Stressors are demands made by the internal or external environment that upset balance, impacting well-being and requiring action for restoration (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This model approaches these constructs in a way that allows for the variances in individual responses according to their own unique evaluation of events (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Individual responses to stress are mediated by the social and cultural resources at one's disposal (Lazarus & Cohen, 1977; Antonovsky & Kats, 1967). In this study, it was clear that the teachers' capacity to manage stress was hampered by limited available resources and systemic circumstances.

The capacity for reappraisal contributes significantly towards resiliency (Maston, 1994). The teachers in this study were in need of a reciprocal, transactional relationship to help support their development of resiliency (Maston, 1994). With respect to the problem of practice and key findings in this study, the teachers needed a strong sense of identity and efficacy to help them confidently make decisions, set goals and remain optimistic for their futures (Maston, 1994). The research demonstrates that teachers who perceive themselves as capable are better positioned to carry out their responsibilities with confidence and higher results (Bandura, 1997). Teacher efficacy beliefs and burnout are strongly correlated (Bandura, 1997; Gold, 1996; Rosenholtz, 1985). The teachers in this study needed to be supported in gaining perspective given the complexities of the transactions between themselves and their new teaching environment. They sought out strategies to make new meaning of what they encountered, and wanted opportunities to debrief their feelings to promote increased self-awareness and self-management. The teachers' capacity to manage stress was hampered by having to rely primarily upon themselves for reappraisal. These aspects of stress management are crucial for containment of negative emotions and positive engagement with students (Jennings, 2008).

This theoretical framework allowed for an exploration of how the teachers coped within their own context. It provided a lens to explore the relationship between the teachers and their environment. This framework allowed for an investigation of the teacher's resources and how they contributed towards or endangered their well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It allowed for investigation of the distinctive variations in levels of sensitivity, vulnerability, and resiliency. This framework helped provide understanding of how appraisal influenced stress. It illuminated which aspects were helpful for adaptability and which were less effective. The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping was useful in deciphering to what extent teachers required certain resources and supports to mitigate the harmful effects of stress.

### **Limitations**

This study has limitations. One is that it had four participants, which is a small sample size. While this is justified in a phenomenological study, the results cannot be generalized (Moustakas, 1994). More research in the field is needed before the findings can be generalized.

The urban context in this study was defined according to the characteristics within one city in southern New England. With high unemployment, dropout and poverty rates, there were many disparities that impact the community. This particular city was predominantly white with a large immigrant and refugee population. One of the defining features was the change in prosperity over time that influenced the region. Prior to the 1950's, the city had reaped the benefits of a booming manufacturing industry. At the time of this study, the schools continued to work to respond to the number of students who were English as second language learners and from a diverse range of backgrounds. These distinctions also limit generalizability.

One of the factors that acted both as a limitation and strength was my prior role instructing the teachers through the Central University alternative licensure program. This may

have influenced the participants' decisions in how they would frame their responses, knowing I had taught lessons centered upon stress management and social justice themes. The teachers may have been inclined to provide answers they thought were expected. One of the safeguards against this was the use of open-ended questions.

A strength of the study seemed to be that the teachers were comfortable sharing their personal experiences. The rapport we had previously built seemed to enable the participants' to demonstrate candor as they discussed in depth their perceptions and beliefs. The teachers were informed on the intentions of the study, and agreed to participate for the purposes of discussing their unique experiences as new teachers as it pertained to stress.

Another limitation is the influence of potential biases brought on by my professional and personal life experiences on this study. As a clinical social worker specializing in stress and burnout, and an educator who was brought onto the staff at Central University to teach on themes of social justice, diversity, and stress management, I had to maintain awareness of how this perspective could potentially interfere with the study. To account for this, I bracketed my biases, thoughts and feelings continually throughout the study. It was also important to rely upon peer debriefing and an external auditor to strengthen the integrity of the study.

While conducting this study, I had to bear in mind my own growth trajectory when it came to understanding issues of social justice and oppression. Since I am passionate about these areas, it was important for me to separate any reactions I had when the teachers' statements seemed reflective of the deficit paradigm. I recalled my own learning process as a professional social worker, realizing that my understanding of social justice was influenced over time throughout my initial graduate work at Boston University and in the field. By working with diverse families in the same city where the study took place, I had the unique opportunity to

witness firsthand the impact of poverty and lack of resources. Over time, I have come to learn to rely upon a strengths based model of practice that seeks to build upon the resources and assets among individuals, families and communities. It became important to recognize that the teachers' were new in their exposure to poverty and oppression, and needed to time to make sense of what they were experiencing.

### **Findings and Recommendations for Practice**

Conducting this research has enriched my teaching and clinical abilities and sparked a greater desire to contribute towards helping others. I am continually reminded of the consequences of stress and burnout in my work. Without support and resources, people can suffer tremendously. It is important that awareness be raised on the problem of stress in education. It is my hope that this discussion will influence clinicians and educators to think critically about the impact of stress on teachers and their students. The following section addresses recommendations for future practice on issues affecting new urban teachers.

The research design facilitated investigation of the unique perspective of four new teachers in a particular context. Although the findings cannot be generalized, the data revealed important considerations for the teachers enrolled in alternative licensure programs while teaching in an urban environment, and the findings have the potential to be helpful for new teachers in similar settings. It is important to recognize the teachers in this study were provided with extensive supports through the University program, yet were still dealing with high stress levels and uncertainty in working with their students. Given the substantial stressors the new teachers faced, changes in practice must be adopted to ensure adequate support to prevent burnout and other negative consequences for teachers and their students.

Since the teachers revealed central components that influenced their stress and capacity for coping, the key results and findings generated from this study have informed specific recommendations for practice that take both fully into account. The findings were (1) teachers lacked enough specialized support to mitigate the consequences of stress; (2) teachers were in need of professional development opportunities to help them manage stress, engage their students, and run their classrooms; and (3) the teachers faced high stress levels, which had a serious impact on them.

The three recommendations are discussed in this section, and include (1) provide the right support, (2) provide professional development that is tailored to the teachers' needs and complements the proposed model of supervision, and (3) raise awareness on burnout.

### **Provide the Right Support**

The first finding in this study was that the teachers lacked enough specialized support to mitigate the consequences of stress. When developing supports for new teachers, it is recommended that educators consider adopting a model of supervision based on professional social work that engages teachers in a supportive reciprocal learning process that helps prevent teacher burnout and promotes ethical responses to students and families by embodying principles of social justice. This study revealed that the teachers were in need of specialized support to help mitigate the consequences of stress and increase their capacity to be effective within their classrooms. While site supervision existed, it was held infrequently and not formulated in a manner that allowed a critical reflective learning process through direct strategic support to address the stressors faced. The teachers rarely met with their administrators, and when they did it was often to be corrected for something they did wrong. Supervisors were technically available on site, but there was limited time to meet for feedback and support.

## **Supervision According to the National Association of Social Work (NASW)**

The profession of social work is rooted in enhancing human well-being. The National Association of Social Work (NASW, 2010) distinguishes that professional social work embodies a commitment to helping meet the basic needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of those who are vulnerable, oppressed and living in poverty (NASW, 2010). A historic and defining feature is the focus on individual well-being in a social context, giving attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to and address problems in living (NASW, 2010). Like teachers, social workers are faced with complex situations requiring approaches that are ethical and grounded in best practices. In order to obtain professional licensure, professional social workers are required to engage in structured, supportive supervision to help ensure competency and prevent burnout.

Within the discipline of social work, clinical supervision addresses certain aspects of professional development and growth. Given the parallel occupational demands, adopting a similar model could prove helpful for teachers. Also known as educational supervision, clinical supervision is conducted by an experienced and trained clinical social worker to assist a less advanced practitioner form a professional identity and develop the knowledge and skills to be able to practice effectively (American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work, 2004). Supervision enhances the worker's capacity to achieve competency in providing quality care, aids in professional development and improves clinical outcomes. (NASW, 1994). In schools, similar outcomes would be supported through an experienced and trained educator who has the capacity to work with the supervisee.

In social work, administrative supervision is a different branch of supervision that is oriented towards an organization's policy and public accountability (Barker, 1990). This

oversight ensures that work tasks are performed, but is a separate and distinctive function from clinical supervision. While teachers reported receiving some oversight, their administrators were mostly concerned when they were not performing to standards. While administrative supervision is necessary and valued, adding educational supervision could be largely beneficial for teachers during their first years.

Social work clinical supervision is grounded in the NASW Code of Ethics, promoting service, social justice, the dignity and worth of a person, the importance of human relationships, integrity and competence for all professional social workers (NASW, 2010). Professional social workers are guided to demonstrate a commitment to their clients, responsibilities towards colleagues, responsibilities in practice settings and ethical responses in settings and with regards to the profession (NASW, 2010). In education, these principles are vital for all constituents. Supervision could assist new teachers in demonstrating a greater commitment to their students, mutual responsibility with colleagues, and ethical responses in their classrooms and with regards to the teaching profession.

Social work supervision dates back to the early 1900's when it was recognized that administrative, educational and supportive components were essential to achieving professional practice competency (Kaduskin, 1992). The clinical supervisor's role helps ensure public protection against sub-standard practice and undesirable outcomes, and by law requires that new clinical social workers be supervised for a designated time frame before eligibility for their professional license (American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work, 2004). In an educational context, there is an ongoing emphasis on accountability, school performance and improvement, often through high stakes testing (Elmore, 2004). Supervision prior to licensure eligibility could help reform efforts since new teachers would be accounted for through the

process. A supervisor would take the legal and practical role of ensuring that new teachers would be held accountable for high ethical standards and be supported in working towards desirable educational outcomes.

Clinical supervision is designed towards establishing a learning alliance between the supervisor and supervisee in which the supervisee learns skills while developing self-awareness at the same time (Barker, 1990). It is concerned primarily with teaching the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are important to clinical tasks by analyzing the social worker's interaction with the patient(s). New social workers are taught what they need to know to provide specific services for a range of needs. The goal of supportive supervision is to increase job performance by decreasing job related stress that interferes with work performance (Barker, 1999). For teachers, supervision could serve to teach the knowledge, skills and attitudes by examining their interactions with students. Supervision could equip teachers to respond effectively to a diverse range of student needs. It could also help reduce stress that impedes job performance.

Clinical supervision supports the supervisee to understand their patients and develop planning strategies for intervention. It supports development of knowledge and skills through a teaching-learning process. A learning plan is developed that describes the goals and objectives of supervision. Various models are drawn upon to guide practice, while incorporating "strengths perspective" as a core principle (American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work, 2004). Supervision supports establishing a treatment plan that understands the importance of assessing the client's resources, social supports, network and other factors (American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work, 2004). Social work embodies a "person in environment" perspective that seeks to leverage a person's resources and account for barriers in access, or capacity to navigate their environment (Barker, 1999). Supervision for teachers could help teachers devise a

plan including classroom and student strategies that are also based on a strengths perspective and minimize deficit thinking that fails to account for student's talents, resources, supports, networks and more.

Supervision helps the supervisee integrate theory in treatment planning based on the needs of the client. It also helps address issues such as the client's language, interests, culture, and other elements of diversity in order to help facilitate an alliance. Supervision also helps supervisees examine their own biases and how this impacts client outcomes. Teachers could benefit from this process to maximize their ability to form strong student relationships. It would help teachers avoid subscribing to biases and assumptions that are systemically present and push them to search for deeper meaning of their interactions with students.

Supervision involves a parallel process in which the interaction with the supervisee can be acknowledged as a teaching tool. The supervisor understands the connection between content and process. The supervisor demonstrates mastery of skills in communications, relationships, learning styles and problem solving and is a role model for professional practice (American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work, 2004). Through this modeling and connection, the supervisor guides and evaluates the supervisee toward greater effectiveness in working with a broad range of emotions and situations (American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work, 2004). Likewise, in education teachers can be taught these skills within the context of a supportive supervisory relationship.

### **Social Work Supervision as it Relates to Burnout**

The supervisor helps the supervisee with stress management. They guide the supervisee to understand the meaning behind certain behavior and provide resources to help them effectively communicate and respond (American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work,

2004). For teachers, who are at-risk for high stress and burnout, these resources could prove helpful in mitigating stress and preventing serious problems indicative of burnout.

Burnout is a problem of practice that warrants attention and intervention. Regular opportunities to debrief and process with a skill supervisor could prove invaluable for new teachers. By providing individual supervision to teachers, they would be afforded the opportunity to discuss their concerns in a supportive, confidential context.

Teachers who experience burnout are depleted and suffer with decreased mental and physical well-being (Brouwers, 1999). One in five teachers meet the criteria for burnout, which involves emotional exhaustion, withdrawal and cynicism towards students and a sense of under accomplishment (Friedman, 2000; Ozdemir, 2007).

“Burnout cascade” (Jennings, 2008) occurs when teachers become emotionally exhausted in dealing with negative student behaviors. In such circumstances, teachers can resort to punitive responses that potentially escalate (Osher et al., 2007). Given these factors, a model of supervision that incorporated skill building and tools for navigating the complexities of an urban environment could become a substantial stress reducer for new teachers, and promote increased capacity for responding to students.

In addition to preventing burnout, clinical supervision addresses the risk of what is known as vicarious trauma. Judith Herman (1992) characterized trauma as “contagious” (p. 140) and a risk to professionals working with those who have or are experiencing trauma. Vicarious trauma involves disruptions such as heightened feelings of vulnerability, helplessness, bitterness and alienation (Cunningham, 2003). It can lead to obsession with the traumatic material, emotional numbing, anxiety and listlessness (McFarlane & de Giroloma, 1996). In the field of social work, these risks, which include potential of developing post-traumatic stress disorder, are

well known and accounted for through education and a supportive supervision process. Although educators may be exposed to similar disclosures of trauma, there are no existing structures in place to minimize the risk for teachers.

### **Supervision as Professional Development Through the Initial Stages of Teaching**

Another reason supervision is warranted is that it could help support teachers in understanding and coping with the initial stages of teaching. Teachers move through professional stages that begin with day-to-day survival and then towards teaching and learning (Fuller, 1969; Haberman, 1989; Huling-Austin, 1986; Feinman-Nemser & Remillard, 1995; Saphier & Gower, 1997). Research suggests teachers do not achieve proficiency for three to five years (Darling, Hammond & Schlau, 1996). Uncertainty during the first phases of teaching can precipitate additional problems for teachers that can lead to isolation and eventual burnout (Darling, Hammond & Schlau, 1996). Since teachers face a substantial learning curve, supervision can help minimize insecurities and contribute towards attainment of needed skills during the moments they need it the most (Murray, 2005).

### **Supervision in Working Across Culture, Class, Race, and Economic Status**

Minority teachers are underrepresented in schools nationwide, despite estimations the number of students who are members of racial/ethnic minority groups projected to grow from one-third to half by the year 2035 (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). There is a 50% turnover rate among urban teachers working with diverse children in poverty (Haberman & Richards, 1990). Schools are often laden with oppressive barriers to communication, such as overly busy class schedules and rigidly cast role distinctions regarding power and authority (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998). Often, youth are viewed from the perspective that they are lacking competence or appropriate behavior rather than having something valuable to offer (Nakkula &

Ravitch, 1998). Students who are disempowered may disassociate from lessons and put their guard up to avoid being violated, patronized or disrespected (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998).

Teachers need support in understanding how to recognize these communicative barriers to promote recognition of student strengths and to account for the complex variables impacting their relationships.

A trained supervisor could provide training in working within poor, minority communities and how to understand how their students live, view the world, what motivates them and how to effectively respond (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2005). Supervision could help teachers renegotiate their tendency to view themselves as needing to “save” or “fix” their students and instead be better equipped to account for student, family and cultural strengths (Delpit, 1988).

Supervision could serve to promote better ethics and social justice in education by offering an active self-reflection process. Self-reflection is designed to lead the interpreter beyond concealed prejudices that impact understanding of and work with others (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998). Nakkula & Ravich argue that self reflection is important for those working with youth who may be labeled “at-risk” to avoid drawing conclusions that the locus of difficulties seen are identified as “resistance”, “pathology” or “antisocial behavior” of the “disturbed youth” or in the “irresponsibility,” “bad parenting skills,” or other “dysfunction” of a student’s family (p. 86). Skilled supervisors could help new teachers see beyond these harmful stereotypes and strive towards understanding ways to frame what they are encountering with less bias and greater skill.

Teachers need supportive supervision to help them account for the dynamics of class and power among their students. Students who are poor may be misunderstood by their teachers who

may hold faulty beliefs they are rescuers, and in doing so, dismiss family strengths (Delpit, 1988). Supervision could help teachers who are drawing upon embedded assumptions from their own backgrounds in predominantly white, middle class communities (Howard, 1999). It could also help teachers understand the interactions of students and contexts including the ways that poverty and racism shape the lives of students (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007).

Teachers need support in understanding the impact of such macro-forces on the relationship between the student and school and trace affective dimensions on the experience of growing up and living in marginalized circumstances. Such affective factors include how everyday anxieties may impede a student's ability to concentrate on abstract concepts (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007). Supervision could assist teachers to work with students in a way that helps them lessen anxiety by creating safe and emotionally supportive classrooms while working to increase student hope and optimism (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007).

Supervision could be drawn upon to work for socio-political and economic justice for those who are marginalized in urban contexts (Noguera, 2003; Weiner, 2000, 2003, 2006, Delpit, 1999). Teachers need to understand the way power operates to undermine achievement and success of individuals in low status situations (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007). Supervision could help ensure that urban students marginalized by race, class, language and immigration status develop a sense of belonging in the classroom, school, community and larger social commitments such as justice and fairness for all (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007). It could help dispel popular notions perpetuated by the deficit model that teachers, students and their families need to be "fixed" (Noguera, 2003). Supervision could support teachers to examine unquestioned practices and conditions more critically and refocus upon student strengths (Weiner, 2000, 2003).

Teachers who demonstrate capacity to account for contextual forces are better positioned to understand their students as learners in all the diverse ways learning can take place (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007). Such teachers are able to explore the worlds of their students, including their social and cultural contexts and mind spaces emerging from their environment. This supports recognition of individual identities being recognized, an understanding of the problems being faced, and hopes and dreams are taken into account when providing positive academic and social experiences (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007). Further, students can be challenged by teachers to cultivate their intellects and engage in civic acts for social improvement (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007). Asking students who are underserved and marginalized to do so demonstrates respect for their abilities and potential (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Teachers could benefit substantially from supportive supervision that teaches and guides this process.

### **Conclusion**

Adopting a model of supervision based on the professional social work is recommended to assist new teachers in developing a professional identity that is grounded in principles of human dignity and contributes to engagement of all students. By providing supportive supervision, teachers will be equipped to help their students and themselves to manage stress and develop needed skills to navigate the challenges within the system. Supervision could meet teacher's basic needs for connectedness, respect and meaning (Maston, 1994). Such efforts will build resiliency and should also be embedded within professional development opportunities.

### **Tailor Professional Development for Teacher's Needs**

The second finding in this study was that the teachers were in need of professional development opportunities to help them manage stress, engage their students and run their classrooms. With regards to professional development, it is essential to ensure that teachers are

provided with professional development opportunities offering strategies for effective stress management, student engagement, and classroom management. This study revealed that the four teachers were in desperate need of such additional opportunities to do so. The teachers were disappointed that outside of their work at Central University, they were not engaging in professional development that was relevant or useful in proportion to the magnitude of the issues they were facing. Professional development consisted solely of content and pedagogy and did not offer any practical tools for teaching and working with students in an urban context. The teachers were not offered assurance through their initial stages of teaching and the topic of stress was simply not discussed.

In addition to being provided with specialized supervision modeled after professional clinical social work, teachers could benefit from professional development that embodies ethical principles and encourages self-care promoting self-efficacy. Not only would these concepts be taught and supported through individualized supervision, but reinforced during professional development. Like the proposed supervision, the content needs to be grounded in ethical principles that promote well-being and justice for all.

Professional development efforts need to be productive and useful for teachers. This study revealed that these teachers felt it was largely a waste of time. Teachers already faced severe time constraints and needed effective professional development that transcended mere content topics and reached into areas of stress management, student engagement and classroom management.

Instead of adequate skill-focused professional development, 82% of teachers reported the majority of their learning occurred on the job (National Academy of Education, 2005). Given the tremendous professional demands teachers face, it is inconceivable that they do not receive

specific training on how to manage emotions arising from struggling to successfully engage students and address social emotional issues in their classrooms (Hargreaves, 1998).

Emotional regulation, being able to remain calm and respond to high-stakes situations, serves as a foundation for stress management, burnout prevention and efficacy (Parker, 2000; Lazarus, 1999).

Since emerging forty years ago, the concept of burnout has been understood in various ways. It is caused by stressors experienced personally and at work and is known especially to impact professionals who work with others in some capacity (Maslach, 1997). Burnout impacts teachers more than any other occupational group and is known to be a contributing factor in the alarming rate of teachers leaving the profession (Ozdemir, 2007; Farber, 1991; Corcoran, Walker & White, 1988; Brouwers, 1999, Haberman & Richards, 1990).

Stress and burnout threaten teachers and students and can lead to various negative outcomes. Given the seriousness, there is not enough discussion around ways to promote stress reduction and prevent burnout. Research reveals that the relational component of teaching warrants a great deal of support since it can lead teachers to being worn down and eventually burnt out (Brouwers, 1999). Positive emotions can help mitigate stress common to teachers (Sutton, 2009). Teachers need professional development that demonstrates how to employ strategies that combat stress and help teachers prevent negative emotions from escalating (Sutton, 2009) and develop strong relationships with students (Pianta, 2003).

Kyriacou (2001) emphasized that palliative techniques, such as exercise, hobbies and relaxation techniques can help reduce the impact of stressors. Professional development that is geared towards helping teachers reduce stress should include discussion on specific strategies such as self-talk, removing themselves from students, pausing, and deep breathing (Sutton,

2009). Teachers need to be taught to develop strong supportive networks consisting of colleagues, family and friends they can turn to for perspective (Sutton, 2009).

This study revealed the teachers were working to cope with stress and relied upon their relationships with others, classroom management and activities to help them maintain health. Additional professional development providing specific strategies could help the teachers increase their resiliency and capacity for stress management.

Targeted professional development efforts that help teachers engage their students could prove helpful for teachers. New teachers receive inadequate preparation for urban classrooms during pre-service training and have limited prior exposure to poor, minority communities (Ladson-Billings & Darling-Hammond, 1999). Many new teachers arrive at urban schools unfamiliar with how their students live, view the world, what motivates them, and how to manage their behavior (Murray, 2005). Teachers need professional development to help them understand how to increase their capacity to understand and connect with their students.

A teacher's success requires more than strong interpersonal skills and a consistent, fair approach to classroom management (Murray, 2005). It also requires that teachers acknowledge the particular cultural experiences and perspectives of their students (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Kincheloe & Hayes (2007) asserted that "it requires thinking about and getting to know students not only to teach them better but to resist the ways dominant corporate power operates to standardize the curriculum in an assembly line fashion to then have limited opportunities in the free-market driven workplace of the globalized economy" (p. 37). Such policies and practices alienate economically and racially marginalized students from schools that have no respect for them as human beings or value what they bring to the classroom (Kincheloe & Hayes, 2007).

A student's formal learning context is largely shaped by their teacher (Jennings, 2008). Socially and emotionally competent teachers set the tone by the types of relationships they forge with students. They design lessons that build upon their students' strengths and proficiencies to promote intrinsic motivation. Today's teachers are also charged with the responsibility of modeling prosocial behavior through positive, effective communication that encourages conflict resolution and cooperation (Jennings, 2008). On a daily basis, teachers confront complex decisions that rely on many different kinds of knowledge and judgment that can involve high-stakes outcomes for student futures. This can create a great deal of pressure and stress on teachers that warrants training and professional development.

Positive teacher responses can help facilitate lower levels of conflict, smooth transitions and respectful communication that supports individual differences and student needs (LaParo & Pianta, 2003). Teachers need support on how to maintain the disposition to connect with students and facilitate a positive learning experience for students.

Teachers need to be supported to develop skills to run their classrooms effectively. There is compelling evidence that teachers who relate to students manage classrooms well and foster positive, safe learning environments that enhance learning outcomes (Zin, Weisserber, Walng & Walberg, 2004). Effective classroom management and positive student-teacher interactions are more highly correlated with student academic success than other variables such as parent involvement, curriculum, school culture, or school demographics (Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1994, 1997).

First year teachers ask for help in classroom management more than any other area (Brock & Grady, 1996). Classroom management issues are related to burnout (Burke, 1996) and have been called the most powerful contributing factors towards it (Ozdemir, 2007). Professional

development that provides practical strategies for new teachers is needed to ensure their sense of efficacy, which has a substantial effect on stress levels and performance (Bandura, 1997).

Those providing training to teachers need to provide adequate support on how teachers can effectively do their jobs. Teachers require a working knowledge of the realities they will face. They benefit from practical and relevant strategies to help them run and manage their classrooms. Training should include ways that teachers can manage their time and develop and implement strategies that work (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996). Teachers require tools to help them avoid professional burnout and not be left alone to sink or swim (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996).

### **Raise Awareness on Implications of Burnout**

The third finding in this study was that the teachers faced high stress levels, which had a serious impact. When considering changes in education, it is critical to raise widespread awareness on burnout to advocate for increased responses that promotes teacher development and resiliency. This study revealed that teachers needed support that would promote their growth and development and enhance their capacity for resiliency. As individuals, the teachers dealt with a lack of supervision and professional development that addressed the stress levels associated with the uncertainty and challenges they faced. They felt as though they “walked on eggshells” and worried over their performance. They hid stress levels in fear of negative repercussions. Stress was a topic that was not discussed freely outside their program at Central University. The teachers struggled to manage time and their classroom duties. They worked to forge meaningful connections with students to help combat stress and feel less alone. They relied upon relationships to help them through trying times.

The teachers in this study were particularly stressed by their belief they were responsible to fix student, family or school problems. This created inordinate amounts of stress that lead to fear and uncertainty. Teachers found the non-stop demands nearly “impossible” and worked to juggle multiple responsibilities while maintaining the disposition needed for effective teaching. The teachers tried to carve out time to regroup and stop thinking about work. They also worked to adjust their expectations and realize it would eventually improve. The teachers belief they were making a difference appeared to help them manage their stress levels. The teachers relied upon their appraisals of their circumstances and drew conclusions that either contributed towards their stress or management of it.

This study uncovered that teachers experienced high levels of stress and relied upon coping strategies to manage. This investigation examined a body of literature to illuminate the various components of stress and burnout for new urban teachers. In order to promote raised awareness and intervention, the various facets of burnout must be understood, along with components of resiliency that can help reduce and prevent teacher burnout.

Recommendations one and two include providing supervision and professional development opportunities to reduce stress and promote teacher development. The purpose of the recommendations is to educate and guide teachers’ development to help them manage stress and become more effective in their classrooms. In accordance with the first two recommendations, raising awareness to promote burnout prevention amongst the wider education community is warranted. Based on the key findings in this study, the two main areas of focus include raising awareness on ways to (1) prevent burnout and (2) promote resiliency.

Teachers, along with the public, need to be informed of the occupational risk of burnout. Burnout does not receive adequate attention due to competing priorities in education (Friedman,

2000). Burnout takes its toll on all constituents in education and impacts society as a whole. (Farber, 2005). Many teachers experience exhaustion during their careers and 5% – 20% report burnout (Browers, 1999). An alarming number of teachers leave the profession during the first five years (Murray, 2005). The consequences of poor teacher retention are felt by both schools and students. Persistent turnover undermines curriculum implementation and depletes resources (Guin, 2004).

Teachers face extraordinary stressors that can lead them to feel out of control and unsure of what to expect daily (Murray, 2005). Teachers should be informed regarding the risks of burnout and stress overload. They need practical strategies and resources to help combat the harmful consequences of stress. Awareness on the risk factors associated with the profession must be raised so that teachers can take direct action on managing their work and stress load. This should include promoting understanding that the greatest occupational risk is burnout. With teachers leaving the profession in droves, concern must be raised on why this is happening. Teachers leave at alarming rates or stay with potentially harmful consequences for themselves and their students.

With so many competing priorities, the topic of stress and burnout prevention is not at the forefront of reform efforts. While many would acknowledge that teaching is stressful and understand that teachers may be stressed, there are limited resources to help teachers deal with it. Teachers need to be trained on ways to manage stress and recognize when it becomes problematic. Teachers need information on how to identify signs of emotional exhaustion within themselves to prevent exacerbation to the point of mental health problems such as depression or anxiety. It is important that teachers are provided access to treatment, wellness programs and

therapeutic programs when needed to promote resiliency, retention and the greater good for all constituents.

Supervisors and administrators also need training to recognize signs of burnout among teachers. They need to be knowledgeable in noticing what to watch for so that they can monitor teachers and prompt them to seek additional support when needed.

Resiliency encompasses social competence, problem solving, autonomy and a sense of purpose and hope (Benard, 1991). These protective mechanisms help individuals adapt in the face of adversity (Matson, 1994). In regards to resiliency, the capacity for coping is at the forefront. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) offer the following process view of coping:

We define coping as constantly changing cognitive and behavioral effort to manage specific external and or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person (p.141).

Emotions emerge from appraisals of certain situations. When teachers view a situation as exceeding their ability to cope, stress intensifies. Teachers who are able to find personal meaning that brings forth positive emotions in their work are more likely to be effective with their students and better equipped to cope with the stressors inherent in teaching (Sutton, 2009).

Self-efficacy is a cognitive process involving a person's beliefs about their capacity for accomplishment (Bandura, 1995). Individuals with higher efficacy beliefs persist in the face of difficulty and achieve higher outcomes with lower levels of stress (Bandura, 1995). The relationship between teacher efficacy beliefs and teacher burnout are indicated by several researchers (Bandura, 1997; Gold, 1996; Rosenholtz, 1985, Ozdemir, 2007).

Teachers who develop a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to report high job satisfaction and stay in the profession (Bandura, 1997; Gold, 1996; Rosenholtz, 1985). Although a great deal of attention has spotlighted students' development, there has been little focus on

teachers' own development despite evidence that teachers make important contributions to desirable classroom and student outcomes. Further investigation of how to encourage and build teachers' self-efficacy is needed.

Other factors influence a teacher's resiliency, including school norms, leadership and educational policies (Jennings, 2008). Teacher well-being is often contingent upon additional variables such as personal relationships and degrees of personal stress (Jennings, 2008). While resiliency research originated through an adolescent lens, it is important in the lives of teachers (Benard, 1991). To this end, raising awareness around bolstering self-efficacy through the process of reappraisal is essential. This study demonstrated that in addition to classroom and stress management strategies, reappraisal helped the teachers to cope with the demands they faced and work towards improvement in their teaching practices.

This analysis demonstrated that the teachers required supportive supervision and professional development to help manage their stress and to guide their learning and growth. The teachers reported needing greater backing and were filled with fears about their performance and job security. Despite having assigned supervisors from the University, they found inadequate supervision and professional development in place at their schools to help them manage their stress as new teachers.

It was found that the teachers relied upon classroom and time management strategies to help them organize and structure their classrooms effectively. These teachers felt that adequate preparation was an essential to lowering their stress. Structure was another area that the teachers attributed towards helping them cope. By implementing routines and procedures, the classroom ran smoothly and less stressfully. Classroom management also involved engaging students in the learning process.

Having meaningful interpersonal connections was another central component influencing the teachers. They found relationships were essential to mitigating the effects of stress they felt. Interpersonal connections helped assure the teachers they were not alone, especially within the University program and with certain colleagues at school. The teachers relied upon friends and family to relieve stress and help them focus on their personal lives and not just school. Student relationships were also vital to the teachers. They enjoyed the bonds established and found it satisfying when they were able to have positive connections with their students.

The teachers in this study were especially burdened due to their perceptions they were supposed to “fix the problems” of their students. They brought certain expectations and assumptions into their classrooms and struggled with oversimplifying the problems they encountered. Poverty was a significant stressor for students and their families. Concern for the students’ circumstances generated a great deal of stress and anxiety among the new teachers. They were particularly worried when they faced uncertainty about how to effectively respond. They also ruminated about students who appeared to be dealing with various levels of trauma at home.

The teachers also identified the non-stops demands of teaching as a major stressor. They scrambled to accomplish all the necessary tasks and found there were just not enough hours in the day. The teachers worked hard to balance the workload while encountering various types of interruptions. It was hard to engage in their graduate coursework while simultaneously managing a classroom full-time. The teachers were also challenged by the pressure associated with helping their students achieve proficiency while dealing with competing demands. The stress mounted for teachers when they worried about whether they were able to keep up with it all.

The teachers in this study acknowledged that stress impacted them internally and externally. It affected them at school and home. One of the major evidences of stress included being worried frequently and replaying events in their minds. They had trouble switching gears and letting go of stressful moments and days.

Teachers described specific activities they relied upon to help reduce their stress. They described spending time engaged with other people and activities outside of the school realm as particularly helpful. Participating in relaxing and fun activities was beneficial, and the teachers realized they had to deliberately carve out time to do so.

Reappraisal involved readjusting expectations and reframing how they initially perceived struggles they faced, and was another key aspect of stress management. The teachers worked to remain composed and focused on their purpose for teaching. They spent time thinking this through to help them regain perspective and momentum. Another key aspect of reappraisal was the recognition they would continue to make progress over time. Being able to see some of the progress they had made helped the teachers cope. Finally, they remembered why they had entered the profession and were propelled by the idea they were making a difference. The teachers' stress load was lessened when they held the success of their students at the forefront.

### **Future Research**

This study revealed that stressors in an urban environment were complex experiences influencing new teachers. This study was conducted due to relative paucity of research examining teacher stress and burnout in urban settings. This study specifically explored the central factors influencing new urban teachers' capacity for coping. It would be helpful to replicate this study with a larger number of participants in additional locations. This area of focus

will enrich the current literature by providing a more thorough understanding of how new urban teachers make meaning of and cope with their stress.

Liz, Meg, Rob, and Jan provided a detailed account of their perceptions and experiences with stress and coping. Some of the questions during the interviews elicited rich responses that generated additional data falling outside of the scope of this study's inquiry. Each of the participants spoke about the impact of stress and what they did to cope. Many of the responses provided would inform development of further research studies on the impact of parent engagement, student teacher relationships, and poverty on teacher stress. Due to the nature of this study, there was a wide range of inquiry. Several additional themes could be studied independently, such as the specific factors that cause stress and what can be done to cope with it.

The teachers shared stories about their lack of supervision and experiences in professional development. Further research could investigate types of effective professional development and supervision design. It could also help examine the impact of stress on teacher development and teacher retention. It would be interesting and beneficial to further study the role of social and emotional competency on teacher and student development. Further research could also yield a greater understanding on the specific causes of burnout and interventions that promote stress reduction and resiliency. The literature on teacher burnout is scarce. Examining the effects of teacher burnout would be an important contribution. Studies conducted in these areas will enrich our understanding of how current educational practices impact new teachers and their students and what can be done to advocate for improvements.

### **Conclusions**

This study investigated how new urban teachers enrolled at Central University perceived and responded to stressors. This study uncovered a gap in the literature on teacher burnout. It is

hopeful this study will help new urban teachers receive more support. In addition to the relevance of teacher burnout in urban settings, there are other aspects of teaching that are worth investigating further.

Conducting interviews with the four teachers was an invigorating and intensive process. The teachers shared deeply personal beliefs and feelings with me. They disclosed what they felt since they wanted their experiences in urban schools to be known and accurately represented. Following the interviews, the teachers each conveyed they had enhanced their capacity for self-reflection and were motivated to keep working hard at teaching and managing their stress levels. They articulated they wanted to keep the notion of taking care of themselves at the forefront of what they were doing, since they realized they were faced with complex challenges. This feedback was motivating to me, confirming the value of teachers' voices being heard, and strategies need to be implemented to prevent burnout and stress overload.

Educators and policy makers need to reassess current practices that perpetuate stress for teachers and their students. It is wrong to expect teachers simply to get better at managing it. By doing so, the deficit model is substantiated by blaming teachers for not managing all they are asked to do (Weiner, 2006). Between high-stakes testing, extended time, and all of the requirements of the job, teachers are inundated with tasks and left depleted. The system is in need of reform that promotes more just and humane practices.

We need to change the amount of stress we are placing on teachers. High-stakes testing and the ways that learning is measured must be reconsidered. Teachers and their students are caught in the political discord and lives are being negatively impacted. With the unprecedented demands teachers face, teachers need recognition, appreciation and support and access to resources that will help them manage stress. Ultimately, the amount of stress being placed on

teachers must change in order for them to be able to engage in additional activities and processes that promote effectiveness, security, and well-being.

These recommendations are intended to encourage educators to take action to create a connection and shared knowledge that will enhance the quality of the teaching experience for new urban teachers. How urban teachers are coping with stressors is important. When we strive to respond to the needs of teachers, we are in turn helping promote better outcomes for students.

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## Appendix A: Request for Consent

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, Department of Education

**Name of Investigators:** Kristen Lee Costa, Graduate Student and Dr. Jane Lohmann, Principal Investigator

### *Request for Consent to Participate in a Research Study*

14 January 2011

Dear Students:

As our fall semester is now over, I am preparing to begin my doctoral research project. The purpose of my project is to understand how new urban teachers perceive and manage stress levels. I invite you to participate in this research process and seek your consent to use documentation from our course work and to collect additional data, as described below.

As part of the informed consent process, it is important that you understand the following key points:

- There is no compensation offered for participation
- I do not foresee participation in the project posing any risks for you
- I will not identify anyone by name in any publication of the project results
- All audiotapes of interviews will be destroyed following analysis and transcription
- There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. However, your answers may help us learn more about specific stressors that urban teachers face, and ways we can provide ample support
- Your participation in the research project is entirely voluntary. You can refuse to answer any question and may withdraw at any time. Your decision to participate or not will have no impact on your status as a “CU” cohort member
- I will offer you the chance to review the transcript of the study interview and to request retraction of any contributions

Specifically, I am seeking your consent for the following:

- **Documentation:** I would like your permission to utilize journal recordings from the semester pertaining to your ongoing development as a teacher. I would also like to request using your wellness plan developed on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2010. You can choose which entries you are willing to share.
- **Interviews:** I plan to conduct a comprehensive, structured interview with each participant for up to 90 minutes. This interview will be recorded and transcribed. We will hold the interview in the privacy of the CU library, with the door closed. There are windows that

allow for others to see in, but they will not be allowed to enter or be able to hear our conversation. My goal for the interview is to explore in detail your experience as a new urban teacher. I will be asking targeted questions around any stressors you may be experiencing and how you are coping with them. I am expecting the interviews to take place in January 2011.

- **Review of Interpretations:** Your review of my interpretations of project data, particularly as it represents your own personal perspective is critical to the validity of my research. I will provide the opportunity for clarification of the information you provide through email check-ins. I will provide the transcript to ensure I have accurately understood and documented your responses. I will do my very best to limit the time required of you, but your corroboration of my findings are invaluable.

My focus for this study is to understand how you uniquely are experiencing teaching during your first years. I will not be actively seeking input from your students or other CU staff or colleagues, but rather will depend solely on your reflections on stress and coping.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns about participating in this research. You may contact me at [Kristencosta@aol.com](mailto:Kristencosta@aol.com) or 508-789-7207. You can also contact Dr. Jane Lohmann, the Principal Investigator at [J.Lohmann@neu.edu](mailto:J.Lohmann@neu.edu) or 413-695-6051.

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Telephone: 617-373-4588. Email: [irb@neu.edu](mailto:irb@neu.edu). Please note: you may call anonymously if desired.

**Please indicate your consent by signing below.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of person agreeing to take part**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Printed name of person above**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of person who explained the study  
to participant above and obtained consent**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Printed name of person above**

## **Appendix B: Interview Guide**

**Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, Department of Education**

**Name of Investigators:** Kristen Lee Costa, Graduate Student and Dr. Jane Lohmann, Principal Investigator

January 2011

### **Introductory Statement**

First, I would like to thank you for your time today. As you know, we will spend an hour and a half together for this interview. We have already reviewed the informed consent, but I still want to be sure that you fully understand the parameters of this study. First, everything you share will be held in the highest confidence. This means that aside from the Principal Investigator, Dr. Jane Lohmann, who is my academic advisor at Northeastern University, I am the only one who will have access to the data. To make sure this happens, all of the files are password protected and any written files will be locked in a drawer in my home office. You will be assigned a number as I gather and organize all of the interview information, and during my write-up, the final report, I will use a pseudo name to protect your identity. Do you have a preference on what you would like your pseudo name to be? I suggest something that does not have an obvious association with you so as to protect your confidentiality.

I want to address another important point. As a clinical social worker, I am a mandated reporter. Therefore, in the context of this interview, if you disclose that you are a harm to yourself or to others or that someone is being abused or neglected, it is my duty to report this. I also want to mention that this is a structured interview with a purpose of gathering information for research purposes. My role will be to ask a series of questions, but I will not be offering you feedback on your responses or suggestions on how to manage any potential stressful situations that you may share. You're your former instructor and as a therapist, this is a bit counterintuitive for me. If following the interview, there is anything identified that raises a flag either for you or for me, and you were to request guidance, I would refer you to speak to the appropriate person-whether it be a supervisor or a licensed practitioner that could answer any questions. Do you have any questions regarding this?

It is important for you to remember that this is a purely voluntary study, which has no bearing on your status as a Cohort 4 member. At any time you have the right to exit the study. Aside from our time today, I will be contacting you to follow-up and make sure that I have documented what you share with me correctly. I will be mindful of your time during this follow-up and will do my best to keep it at a minimum. I will be using this computer and a back-up recorder to tape our interview. I will be transcribing our interview and then take that transcript and organize the

information you provide me, along with the other participants to see what types of commonalities and differences emerge. My goal is to understand to what extent you are experiencing stress as a teacher and what you are doing to cope. I am hoping you can paint of a picture of what it is like for you to be a new teacher at \_\_\_\_\_School in a City in southern New England.

We will be spending about 25 minutes talking about 3 different types of questions. First, we will talk about your path to becoming a teacher. Second, we will talk about

your day-to-day experiences as a teacher. Third, we will talk about what you may be doing to manage your responsibilities as a teacher. If at any point you do not understand a question, please ask me to clarify. You also have the right to decline to answer any question that you do not wish to answer.

Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

For the next 25 minutes or so, I would like to begin by hearing about your background. There are 3 questions, so I would like you to think carefully as we have ample time for you to elaborate.

### **Historical Background Questions**

1. Please tell me about your own experiences as a student.
2. Please tell me about what led you to want to become a teacher.
3. What did you imagine life would be like as a teacher?
4. How do your expectations or initial assumptions about what teaching would be like for you compare to what it is actually like?

For the next 25 minutes, I would like to focus on what I call “research-centered” questions. As you know, this study is focused on understanding potential stress that can arise for new teachers. There are 5 questions, so please take your time as you answer and be as descriptive as you can.

### **Research-centered Questions**

1. Walk me through a day in your life at school.
2. Please describe to me one particularly memorable stressful day in your classroom is like.
3. Tell me about the most stressful moment you have experienced in the classroom thus far.
4. Please explain how you coped with that situation.
5. Could you take a few moments and share some of your journal entries and notes from the past semester that fit in with our topics today?
6. What would you tell a prospective student who is enrolling at CU?

Do you need to take a short break before the last few questions?

Our final questions are reflective in nature. They will give you a chance to tell me about the ways you handle any stress you may encounter. There are 3 questions, and as with the other sets, please take your time to describe to me your own experiences.

### **Reflective Questions**

1. Please describe what happens to you when you experience stress in the classroom.
2. When you hear the word “burnout” what do you think of? Have you personally ever felt burnt out? Do you see it in colleagues, what do you notice about the ways others seem to be managing their stress levels??
3. Please tell me about how you cope and manage with stress. What do you rely on primarily?
4. Is there anything else that helps you in the face of stress? What types of thoughts and reactions do you have both while experiencing stress and attempting to cope with it?

As our time comes to a close, I want you to remember that if you have any questions or concerns about participating in this research, you may contact me at [Kristencosta@aol.com](mailto:Kristencosta@aol.com) or 508-789-7207. You can also contact Dr. Jane Lohmann, the Principal Investigator at [J.Lohmann@neu.edu](mailto:J.Lohmann@neu.edu) or 413-695-6051.

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Telephone: 617-373-4588. Email: [irb@neu.edu](mailto:irb@neu.edu). Please note: you may call anonymously if desired.

I want to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me today. I have enjoyed our interview, and will be in touch in the next 2-4 weeks for follow-up.