# Developing Resilience and Promoting Well-Being in Early Career Teaching: Advice from the Canadian Beginning Teachers

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## Abstract

Our multi-phase pan-Canadian research study examined the differential impact of teacher induction and mentorship programs on the retention of early-career teachers (ECTs). One of the research phases—interviews—explored the lived experiences of novice professionals during their first years of teaching as they dealt with requirements, expectations, and challenges.

In this article, we describe the perceptions of the ECTs (N = 36) regarding their needs, hopes, and concerns in relation to developing resilience and promoting well-being for ECTs across Canada. Based on the phenomenological analysis of the data, four themes emerged: cultivating a work-life balance; nurturing a positive mindset; committing to reflective practices; and consulting, connecting, and collaborating with others. These ECTs, who sometimes thrived, and other times struggled, were able to articulate and contextualize their experiences and actions within high-demand environments of early career teaching, and provided useful insights for other ECTs' resilience and well-being. This article concludes with implications for research, practice, and school leadership in the areas of teacher induction and mentoring.

*Keywords:* early career teachers, pan-Canadian, well-being, resilience, teacher retention

# Résumé

Notre étude pancanadienne en plusieurs phases a examiné les répercussions différenciées des programmes d'insertion professionnelle et de mentorat sur la rétention des enseignants en début de carrière. Une des phases de la recherche—les entrevues—a exploré l'expérience vécue de nouveaux enseignants durant leur première année d'enseignement, alors qu'ils devaient composer avec les exigences, les attentes et les difficultés de leur milieu. Cet article décrit les perceptions de 36 nouveaux enseignants en regard de leurs besoins, de leurs aspirations et de leurs préoccupations en ce qui concerne le développement de la résilience et la promotion du bien-être des nouveaux enseignants à travers le Canada. Sur la base d'une analyse phénoménologique des données, quatre thèmes ont été dégagés : établir un équilibre entre la vie professionnelle et la vie privée ; nourrir un état d'esprit positif ; s'engager dans une pratique réflexive ; et consulter, établir des relations et collaborer avec les autres. Ces nouveaux enseignants, qui se sont épanouis à certains moments et ont dû lutter contre des difficultés à d'autres, ont pu verbaliser et contextualiser leurs expériences et leurs actions dans le milieu exigeant que constitue le début de carrière en enseignement, et livrent des conseils pratiques pour le développement de la résilience et du bien-être pour les autres débutants dans le domaine. L'article se conclut par les implications pour la recherche, la pratique et le leadership des écoles en matière d'insertion professionnelle et de mentorat.

*Mots-clés :* enseignants en début de carrière, pancanadien, bien-être, résilience, rétention des enseignants

# Introduction

Imagine an ideal school world where teachers feel supported in growing professionally and living their dreams of positively influencing students' lives; a school environment where teachers enjoy a quality life inside the school and outside the school; and a school organization context and professional work setting where teachers flourish and perform to their full capacity. However, the organizational realities and teaching contexts are not as easily imagined or stress-free for professionals as one might hope (Joseph, 2000). In the real world, most teachers struggle to maintain their well-being and their work-life balance. A recent study by Froese-Germain (2014) on work-life balance in the Canadian teaching profession indicated that most teachers struggle with work-life imbalance and increased workplace stress, both of which negatively affect their ability to teach. These factors are substantially amplified in the work of the early career teachers (ECTs), who experience significant pressures and challenges concomitant with starting in the teaching profession.

Research on teacher socialization has highlighted immense challenges for novices that stem from multi-layered and often complicated expectations for teaching, evaluation, and professional learning from their employers, school administration, colleagues, parents, and students (Guardino & Fullerton, 2010; Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007; Whisnant, Elliott, & Pynchon, 2005). As a result, stresses and inadequate supports, difficult working conditions, and certain education policies prompt a significant number of beginning teachers to leave the profession (Borman & Dowling, 2008). In the United States alone, Ingersoll (2003) estimated that 45% of teachers leave the profession during the first five years of their careers. While there are limited recent statistics about the attrition rates across Canada, during the period from 1995 to 2004 they ranged between 30% and 40% (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2003, 2004). More recently, researchers found that beginning teacher attrition rates varied from high to low across provinces and territories (Clandinin et al., 2012; Clark & Antonelli, 2009), with teachers leaving the profession mainly within the first five years (Karsenti & Collin, 2013). Nonetheless, many ECTs not only choose to remain in the profession but also experience success and enjoyment in their work. What these surviving and thriving beginning teachers exhibit is resilience, or the ability and strength to flourish "in the face of risk factors or adversity as opposed to those who succumb to destructive behaviours" and conditions of stress and uncertainty

(Richardson, 2002, p. 308). Teacher resilience is positively associated with improved teacher retention and effectiveness, as well as student learning and school success (Huisman, Singer, & Catapano, 2010; Patterson, Collins, & Abbott, 2004). Likewise, teacher well-being has been deemed an important factor for increased teacher effectiveness and retention (Day, 2008; Day & Kington, 2008). Because many teachers make tremendous improvement during their first years of teaching, the attrition issue should be addressed by ensuring continual professional development, renewal, and reinvigoration for ECTs (Farrell, 2012; Yonezawa, Jones, & Singer, 2011). Furthermore, Hobson and Maxwell (2017) noted that despite the crucial importance of the early formative years in the profession, there is limited empirical research on the well-being of early career teachers.

Our multi-phase, multi-year pan-Canadian research study examined the differential impact of teacher induction and mentorship programs on the early-career teachers' retention, as perceived across the provinces and territories. In this article, we report findings from one of the research phases—telephone interviews with ECTs (N = 36) from nine provinces and three territories. In this phase, similar to the work of Schaefer, Downey, and Clandinin (2014), we were interested in hearing the stories from our participants in relation to their early career lived experiences. In this article, we respond to the following critical question: *Based on their lived experiences, what advice in relation to developing resilience and promoting well-being do ECTs across Canada have for those entering the teaching profession?* Upon reviewing selected literature with respect to teacher workload, stress and work-life balance, and resilience and well-being, we describe our research methodology, situate the interview data within the broader research study findings, and offer a phenomenological analysis of the stories shared by the participating Canadian ECTs. We conclude with the discussion of research results and implications for individuals and organizations in their support for novice teachers.

## Literature Review

In this section, we provide a brief review of the literature related to teacher workload in Canadian contexts, stress and work-life balance, and teacher resilience and well-being.

## Teacher Workload: The Pan-Canadian Context

As much as work intensification and teacher overload are present internationally, these phenomena are also prevalent across Canadian jurisdictions. Several studies have been conducted by teachers' associations to reveal alarming findings. In their national study of over 25,000 Canadians on work-life balance, Duxbury and Higgins (2013) analyzed the responses from a sample of teachers in Alberta (*n* = 2,462). They reported that teachers were overloaded and worked longer hours than did other professionals. Seventy per-cent of the employees in the Alberta sample reported high levels of perceived stress and almost half (47%) of the teachers reported high levels of depressed mood. In Saskatche-wan, a study found that teachers perceived their duties and responsibilities as increasing in both complexity and volume, with the most common contributors to their job dissatis-faction being excessive workloads, lack of time to complete work, and lack of personal time (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2013). Servage (2013) found that northern Canadian teachers were overloaded, working 50–55 hours a week on average, and that such excessive work hours and challenging working conditions contributed to decreased mental health, stress, and burnout for teachers. Findings from an Ontario study of ele-mentary teachers (Directions Evidence and Policy Research Group, 2014) indicated that teachers did not consider workload an issue unless the demands upon them became over-whelming and prompted them to regard the workload as "too heavy" (p. 108). Similarly, a study of Ontario's secondary teachers (Johnston-Gibbens, 2014) reported members dealing with high levels of stress, disillusionment, and personal and professional burnout, as well as struggling to manage ever-increasing workloads. Research studies on teach-ers' work lives in other Canadian jurisdictions (Dyck-Hacault & Alarie, 2010; Kelloway, Thibault, & Francis, 2015; MacDonald, Wiebe, Goslin, Doiron, & MacDonald, 2010; Naylor & White, 2010; Younghusband, 2005) have also noted similar trends of declining job satisfaction, significant escalation in workload and stress, and higher tendencies for teachers to leave the profession.

## Stress and Work-Life Balance

Teaching is viewed as a demanding job, due to a high emotional labour cost (Brennan, 2006), and as such, teaching has been described as a high-stress profession (Farber, 2000; Vesely, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013). Teacher stress is defined as "the experience by a

teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher" (Kyriacou, 2001, p. 28). During the school year, teachers find themselves putting in extra time to meet the demands of their jobs, but new teachers have to put in more time to adapt to their new roles. In fact, "almost instantly, a beginning teacher has the same responsibility as a teacher with many years of service" (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). Not surprisingly, this makes ECTs more vulnerable to work-life imbalance and stress.

Stress has adverse physical, emotional, and behavioural consequences for teachers, in addition to adverse effects on students, schools, and to the teaching profession in general. Researchers acknowledge the negative effects of stress (Achinstein & Davis, 2014; Beutel & Spooner-Lane, 2009; Dempsey & Christenson-Foggett, 2011; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Helms-Lorenz, Slof, & van de Grift, 2012), isolation and anxiety (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009), and tension in relationships (Forbes, 2004; Grudnoff, 2012; Helms-Lorenz et al., 2012) on the new teachers' well-being and professional socialization. Stress in teaching is often associated with "teacher turnover, low teacher satisfaction, and high teacher burnout, along with negative physical and psychological health outcomes" (Harris, 2011, p. 105). Researchers have highlighted such negative effects of stress as reduced self-efficacy, strained teacher–student relationships, burnout, and higher rates of teacher absenteeism and turnover (Fives, Hamman, & Olivarez, 2007; Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Kyriacou, 2001), as well as reduced morale, thwarted educational goals, and increased probability of quitting (Leroux & Théorêt, 2014; Yong & Yue, 2007). Although burnout is frequently mentioned as an adverse effect in all people-oriented professions (Maslach, 2003), we posit that stress and burnout are particularly damaging in teaching, due to the heightened societal expectations and standard of care in the teaching profession. Complicating the work-life balance and workload problem is the expectation that school personnel play a major role in a transformed child and youth mental health system, and that teachers are skilled in identifying and providing mental health support for their students (Kirby, 2013). Therefore, there is a need to address teacher stress in relation to their overall well-being and resilience.

## Teacher Resilience and Well-Being

Resilience in teaching has been defined as the ability to adjust to situations that require adaptation and to view the situations as opportunities to continue teaching and learning, even under the most adverse of conditions (Huisman et al., 2010; Patterson et al., 2004). Indeed, individual characteristics such as self-efficacy, confidence, and coping strategies are significant factors in overcoming adverse situations, challenges, and recurring set-backs (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010). Other researchers have found that resilience is not solely a personal attribute, but is a complex construct resulting from a dynamic relation-ship between risk and protective factors (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011; Benard, 2004; Day & Gu, 2007). Research on teacher resilience has focused on what sustains teachers and enables them to thrive, rather than just survive in the profession. In this sense, resilience highlights the motivation and commitment of teachers who are able to meet the challenges encountered in their work lives and thrive professionally (Gu & Day, 2007). Teacher resilience has been found to enhance teaching effectiveness, heighten career satisfaction, build working relationships, and better prepare teachers to adjust to constantly changing conditions in education (Gu & Day, 2007; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Le Cornu, 2013). When successful adjustment or adaptation occurs despite stress and other obstacles, then personal well-being is maintained (Howard & Johnson, 2004). Well-being then is "a dynamic state, in which the individual is able to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others, and contribute to their community" (Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Proj-ect, 2008, p. 10).

In dealing with stress through growing resilience, Kyriacou (2001) discussed two distinct approaches: (a) direct action techniques that a teacher can enact to eliminate the sources of their stress, and (b) palliative techniques that do not deal with the sources of stress, but rather engage teachers in mental or physical strategies aimed at lessening the feeling of stress that occurs. The latter reflects a mindset change (Dweck, 2006), which has been emphasized in studies that have found a strong link between ECTs' positive self-image, how these teachers build relationships, and what supports ECTs receive (Flores & Day, 2006; Peeler & Jane, 2003). Fredrickson (2004, 2009) argued that posi-tive thinking and emotions fuel psychological resilience. Evaluating the effect of positive emotions on the brain, she suggested that positive emotions widen a person's sense of

opportunity and open his or her mind up to more options, whereas negative emotions and feelings can block the possible paths that people can see and choose. A positive mindset in educators enables them to understand their lifelong effect on their students, to help them be focused and believe in them; to build healthy relationships with students and colleagues; and to apply a strength-based model that targets each and every student in the classroom (Brooks & Goldstein, 2008).

Leroux and Théorêt (2014) discussed the intriguing connections between resilience and reflective practice. Similarly, having studied the role of initial teacher education in developing resilience in pre-service teachers, Le Cornu (2009) emphasized the importance of reflection and reflective attitudes in teacher resilience. Reflection features prominently in teacher induction, mentorship, and development programs (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008). Reflective inquiry may be one of the best tools to develop strong teachers with sound, open, ecological, emergent pedagogies (Dweck, 2014). How do teachers develop their reflective practices? According to Harrison, Lawson, and Wortley (2005), tailored mentoring can assist in developing critical reflective practice, through "exposing one's 'noticing' to other professionals" (p. 270), with targeted goals, such as "clarifying" and "probing" (p. 276). Ultimately, successful reflective practices lead to critical meaning-making—a valuable form of professional development.

In order to best support well-being and flourishing of ECTs, it is important to develop sustainable learning communities characterized by wholeness, connectedness, meaning, commitment, and depth of collaborative relationships (Cherkowski, 2012). Connection and collaboration with like-minded peers are beneficial processes that augment beginning teachers' professional capacity (Anderson & Olsen, 2006). Teachers desire strong connections with one another and with the community in which they teach (Burton & Johnson, 2010). New teachers need connections with teachers whom they can trust and relate to (Desimone et al., 2014), suggesting personality compatibility of mentor and mentee ought to be prioritized. Consultation, connection, and coaching were termed as 3Cs necessary for mentoring (Lipton & Wellman, 2017). Finally, the more types of support teachers experienced, the lower was the likelihood of their leaving or changing schools (Guarino, Santibañez, & Daley, 2006). Smith and Ingersoll (2004) found that most salient induction support factors for reducing turnover included being mentored by someone in the same field, having common planning time with other teachers in the same

subject, collaboration opportunities with other teachers on instruction, and being part of an external network of teachers.

# Research Methodology

This article details the qualitative interview phase of a multi-year pan-Canadian research study that examined the impact of induction and mentorship programs on the retention of ECTs across the provinces and territories. Our study included four phases: a pan-Canadian document analysis, an international systematic review, a survey of over 3,000 ECTs (quantitative and qualitative data), and telephone interviews of 36 ECTs who had expressed their interest in participating in this phase when they answered the surveys. The interviews aimed to go deep into the lived experiences of ECTs, and to get a broad and holistic view of what these ECTs experienced. Similar to Schaefer et al. (2014), we believe that inquiring into the lived experiences of early career teachers affords the opportunity to uncover the stories of teacher attrition, retention, development, and flourishing that are often difficult for ECTs to tell and difficult for practitioners, policy makers, and teacher educators to hear.

For this phase of research, we used the qualitative phenomenological analysis that aims to describe the common meanings different individuals ascribe to their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell, 2012; van Manen, 1997). Phenomenological analysis was deemed a fitting approach for the examination of the lived, concrete, and situated experiences of the participating Canadian ECTs, based on their perceptions, descriptions, and discussions of the phenomenon of early career teaching. Our data collection involved direct interviewing of individuals who had experienced the phenomenon first-hand (van Manen, 1997). We invited Canadian ECTs to participate in the telephone interviews, inquiring about their lived experiences, asking for their stories, and exploring how they view and understand their lives (Charmaz & McMullen, 2011). We asked them to share their stories and insights, and to explain their particular experiences and perceptions.

Our interview questions were framed using a strengths-based, positive development approach of appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2007; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). Appreciative inquiry seeks to encourage participants to

evaluate their stances and to grow by embracing positivity, which means "using mindful wonderment to affirm past and present strengths, assets, successes, and possibilities" (Lewis & Winkelman, 2016, p. 65). The interview protocol included four focused questions, each pertaining to a specific phenomenon evident in the extant literature on early career teaching: (a) development, (b) mentorship, (c) resilience and well-being, and (d) leadership. In addition, we had one question that asked participants to provide comments on any other related ideations not addressed by the focused questions. This approach to interviewing provided us with rich descriptive data that shed light on the lived experiences of ECTs. We analyzed our data thematically, paying attention to voices within each teacher's interview texts and across all teacher interview texts (Charmaz & McMullen, 2011).

In line with the phenomenological focus, this article discusses only the responses to a focused interview question that addressed the phenomenon of developing resilience and well-being: "*As you think of those who are just entering the teaching profession, what advice from your own experience for developing resilience and well-being as beginning teachers might you offer them?*" This triggering question encouraged the ECTs to not only reflect upon their own experiences, but also to offer constructive advice to others regarding approaches to resilience and well-being. This method allowed us to unpack their lived experiences and to generate new knowledge on ECTs' resilience and well-being in meaningful ways. We also conducted an explanation analysis, in which we connected the ECTs' stories to the literature.

## The Early Career Teacher Sample

We selected our interview participants from an online survey participant sample (an earlier research phase, N = 1,343) who had expressed their willingness to participate in the follow-up interviews. We conducted telephone interviews with 36 teachers, who were within the first five years of employment in publicly funded schools, from nine provinces and three territories in Canada (33 in English, three in French; see Table 1 for participant demographic information).

**Table 1.** List of Participants

| # | Pseudonym | Province/ Territory | Language | Gender | Age | Teaching Experience |
|---|-----------|---------------------|----------|--------|-----|---------------------|
| 1 | Mike | NS | English | Male | 33 | 5 years |
| 2 | Lise | ON | French | Female | 26 | 2 years |
| 3 | Maira | NL | English | Female | 27 | 5 years |
| 4 | Kamille | ON | French | Female | 26 | 3 years |
| 5 | Mackenzie | ON | English | Female | 24 | 2 years |
| 6 | Evelyn | AB | English | Female | 26 | Less than 1 year |
| 7 | Kandace | AB | English | Female | 31 | 2 years |
| 8 | Alli | QC | English | Female | 26 | 2 years |
| 9 | Stewart | SK | English | Male | 29 | 4 years |
| 10 | Nick | SK | English | Male | 27 | 3 years |
| 11 | Ashish | NT | English | Male | 32 | 1 year |
| 12 | Charlotte | AB | English | Female | 38 | 4 years |
| 13 | Maribelle | SK | English | Female | 39 | 1 year |
| 14 | Christina | ON | English | Female | 24 | 1 year |
| 15 | Andrea | ON | English | Female | 28 | 3 years |
| 16 | Mark | AB | English | Male | 31 | Less than 1 year |
| 17 | Ken | ON | English | Male | 26 | 3 years |
| 18 | Lily | NS | English | Female | 24 | 2 years |
| 19 | Lois | NB | English | Female | 27 | 3 years |
| 20 | Myles | MB | English | Male | 25 | 2 years |
| 21 | Cassie | MB | English | Female | 51 | 3 years |
| 22 | Gladys | ON | English | Female | 49 | 5 years |
| 23 | Tennae | BC | English | Female | 49 | 4 years |
| 24 | Anya | NU | English | Female | 24 | 1 year |
| 25 | Ruth | ON | English | Female | 33 | Less than 1 year |
| 26 | Edward | ON | English | Male | 42 | 3 years |
| 27 | Shana | NU | English | Female | 46 | 5 years |
| 28 | Jane | NU | English | Female | 36 | Less than 1 year |
| 29 | Marilyn | YT | English | Female | 32 | 5 years |
| 30 | Noor | BC | English | Female | 34 | 4 years |
| 31 | Helen | BC | English | Female | 28 | 4 years |
| 32 | Alessandra | BC | English | Female | 41 | 2 years |
| 33 | Barbra | BC | English | Female | 55 | 4 years |
| 34 | Lebert | BC | English | Male | 34 | 5 years |
| 35 | Shelle | BC | English | Female | 29 | 3 years |
| 36 | Françoise | ON | French | Female | 27 | 3 years |

## Data Collection and Analysis

On average, the interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, with all proper names and identifiers removed and changed to pseudonyms. Because phenomenology focuses not only on description, but also on the interpretation of the meaning of the lived experiences, we as researchers mediated between different meanings (van Manen, 1997). Inasmuch as possible and given methodological constraints, we attempted to go beyond superficial descriptions ("begreifen") to look, rather, at ECTs' internal understandings ("verstehen") (Ladd, 1957). We sought to hear their sense of the underlying importance of resilience and well-being in their work. We followed the systematic procedures, moving from the narrow units of analysis (i.e., significant statements) to broader units (i.e., meaning units) (Creswell, 2012) with the purpose of interpreting *what* our participants experienced and *how* they have experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). To this end, participants' responses were compiled by the researchers and analyzed both deductively and inductively following standard coding processes for etic and emic approaches to data analysis (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2006). In addition, the emergent codes were established according to the recurring themes. Both etic and emic codes were then combined into categories, and categories into patterns or concepts (Lichtman, 2010).

## Research Context

In order to situate the interview findings, we offer a brief description of the key findings from the online survey (an earlier research phase, N = 1,343). Although it is difficult to do justice to the research findings in a quick overview of the key survey results here, we have done an extensive analysis of the survey findings elsewhere (Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2017; Walker & Kutsyuruba, 2019).

While the majority of the survey respondents came from three provinces—Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta—all of the provinces/territories were represented in the survey. Most beginning teachers had spent time as occasional teachers, and there was a similar split of beginning teacher representation across grade levels taught and distribution of respondents over the first five years of teaching respondents. Over one-third of respondents reported that they were teaching outside of their subject area, and one quarter reported that they were teaching outside of their grade level. Three quarters of the

respondents reported that they had received support from an informal mentor, and one quarter of the respondents reported that they had received support from a formal mentor. When asked about whether or not the support had met their needs, beginning teachers commented on formal systems, colleagues, and their own personal experiences.

Beginning teachers shared the importance of the strength of the relationship in mentoring, regardless of whether it was an informal or a formal mentoring relationship. Many shared struggles with mentoring processes, including finding time to meet for collaboration, as well as with mentoring structures related to the nature of the relationship, and how mentors were supporting new teachers. Participants considered the influence that administrators had on the induction processes to be of importance; some even cited that this was the most important determinant of how inclusive and supportive the culture of their school was.

Most beginning teachers indicated that they felt well-integrated into their school and that they had been respected by colleagues. Most respondents also indicated that they generally thrived as a beginning teacher, though the first year was cited as an extremely trying one. Beginning teachers highlighted the expectation that they would engage in professional development, indicating that this had come from a variety of sources and that they had engaged in a variety of sources of professional development, including personal ventures. ECTs commented on the internal and external factors that had kept them in the profession; however, the pace of the profession had evidently taken a toll on their socialization and caused some teachers from our sample to leave the profession. Finally, beginning teachers provided personal and work-related advice to new teachers entering the profession and highlighted the important areas in which their needs have or have not been met during the early career teaching.

# Findings

In our interviews, we invited teachers to provide advice to incoming new teachers regarding their development of resilience and well-being. We share our findings based on the four themes that emerged from the data analysis: work-life balance, nurturing a positive mindset, reflective inquiry, and 3 C's (consult, connect, and collaborate).

## Work-Life Balance

The most frequently mentioned piece of advice offered by the interviewees pertained to the importance of maintaining a work-life balance. In part, they emphasized the need to take care of their health and engage in activities unrelated to their school work. They explained that when teachers need to prove themselves, they can easily become overwhelmed and unbalanced. For example, Christina explained the importance of self-care, from health to hobbies, "because if you can't take care of yourself and if there's a problem with you, you can't take care of the students."

Lois echoed Christina, stating that teachers need to "step back and give themselves a life." Evelyn, who played basketball, believed that her involvement in community sports was good to "get away from school for even an hour, just do something completely unrelated to work and just relax." Mike, who coached sports at his school, offered advice regarding volunteer or extra-curricular activities: "[It] needs to have an end date, so at least you get a bit of a breather before you get burnt out." Stewart suggested that teachers' work-life balance would benefit from doing something healthy outside of work. He acknowledged that teachers must be "prepared to take work home," but cautioned that "if you go home and mark and plan until midnight every night, you're going to burn out pretty fast." Similar to Christina, he noted that "you love these kids, and you want to do your best for them, but you can't do the best for them if you're not in a good place mentally."

Lebert, on the other hand, advised teachers not to bring work home. For him, "there's a very clear separation between my home life and my work life." Maribelle urged defining one's own healthy boundaries; even if this meant not always finishing a job. In a profession where the job is never fully done, Maribelle advised her peers "to draw a line and say, if I get it done, I do, and if I don't, I have to just sort of make do" in order to increase resilience for the long run.

Echoing the thoughts of other participants, Andrea, who had already left the profession at the time of interview, shared that it was difficult to keep up with the expected workload:

> I left a permanent teaching job which is difficult to get in Ontario, but I was very unhappy. So, I think the research you're doing is important because figuring out why new teachers leave the career I think can help with retention.

She added that the school lacked structure and discipline, class sizes were constantly getting bigger, and demands were increasing. Her well-being deteriorated, and her sense of happiness decreased: "I was heavily involved with coaching; putting in 60 to 80 hours a week just took a toll on me." The combination of these conditions prompted her to leave teaching altogether.

Another participant, Nick, was still teaching at the time of the interview but had already decided to change careers once his transition plan was in place. He was passionate about helping students but felt that all the cards were stacked against him to achieve his goals. He cited an unreasonable workload, stressful conditions, and compromised systemic educational integrity in order to push students through as contributing to his decision to leave the profession. Nick stated: "You're working those hours, huge hours a week, and you're dealing with stress and you're getting the parent phone calls, and the administration is down on you." According to the data, high levels of stress, anxiety, and conflicting demands of the job, in a context of unsupportive parents and administration, may lead teachers at all stages of their careers to leave the profession.

## Nurturing a Positive Mindset

Many teachers highlighted the importance of a positive mindset by being proactive, patient, and realistic about what can be accomplished at first. Mackenzie advised, "I would say just be open-minded and flexible." A proactive mindset allowed participating ECTs to plan ahead and to be flexible. Ken, who welcomed new learning opportunities, explained, "I think my mindset was just to be very proactive, to be very flexible, and to be willing to do anything, because anything could eventually lead to something."

Among others, Bob and Mackenzie encouraged teachers to be flexible and to seek help when unsure about how to handle situations. Bob noted, "It's always better to go and ask for help when you think it's needed rather than try to handle a situation you aren't sure [of]." Bob further stressed that caring for children influences one's career:

> You have to love children, and if you don't, you're not going to last five minutes. And you need to have an attitude of humility and of an openness to learning is huge. It's impossible to do it without that. You have to be constantly questioning your practice.

According to Lily, initiating requests for help leads to teaching success. She explained that when teachers "were very confined to their own classrooms, to their own ideas of education and ideas of how to teach and didn't ask for much support…those teachers were not as successful in their first year of teaching." For Alli, asking for help was pragmatic for preserving one's wellness. She advised "not to pretend that you're okay if you're not." Alli interacted with retired teachers, who have "been really helpful…I meet them for lunch, just for getting their different points of view…then you realize that other people feel the same way." Although it may seem problematic at the time, Nick highlighted the importance of "letting go" of certain policies and administrative norms that teachers have no control over, focusing instead on what teachers can do for their students.

Novice teachers noted that keeping negative interactions "in check" may help with resilience. Shana advised not to "internalize the negativity that you might feel, you know, with students or with other staff or parents or with administration." Myles thought that balancing negative interactions with positive thoughts was beneficial, suggesting that "for developing resiliency, in any given position, it would just be make sure that you interact with the other individuals, try to be positive in all ways, and always interact positively with others." In order to maintain a positive mindset, Shelle and Christina agreed that "without passion teachers will not thrive." However, Lois warned that excessive passion may lead to loss of personal purpose and clarity: "I think that's the toughest thing about this profession…If you are passionate about it, you lose sight of yourself." Finally, confidence and overcoming of self-doubt was important for a healthy mindset, as Kamille affirmed: "Aye confiance en toi" (Believe in yourself).

## Reflective Inquiry

Teachers who were interviewed said that engaging in and committing to reflective inquiry benefits beginning teachers' resilience and well-being. Edward emphasized that reflection is the best thing for novices' development: "You have to go through difficult times, you have to go through good times as a teacher, and you have to be able to think back and mentally prepare differently for the next time." While some of these teachers valued reflection as an effective approach for developing resilience, others said they had faced the challenge of not having enough time to reflect. Charlotte added that teaching can become daunting when one does not have time to reflect, which leads to more problems.

She noted that "there's only enough time to kind of just survive from day to day, but I don't think there's enough time to improve."

Going beyond just self-reflective practice, Anya sought others in order to reflect, and this practice proved vital for her emotional sustenance. For Anya, talking to a confi-dante helped her to work through struggles. She said it was important to do this, without breaking the confidence of the students and staff, because it was an outlet akin to "having your health care strategy laid out for yourself that you need to have." She added,

> [My] roommate is a teacher as well, so we talked together a lot…we'd talk every night kind of about my day and about, not just what happened but how it made me feel…what a teacher does, and really reflecting on, well, you know, this isn't go-ing well, how am I going to change it, how does that make me feel sort of thing?

Gladys noted that reflective inquiry can happen in a variety of environments: "You find out from learning and reading and taking courses, and sometimes you find out just from talking with other colleagues." Bob observed that openness to learning from reflection was pivotal in this process.

## The 3 Cs: Consult, Connect, and Collaborate

Many participants recommended an eclectic approach that we decided to call the "3 Cs": consulting a mentor, connecting with colleagues, and collaborating with others. There is no particular formulaic order for the 3 Cs; yet each is independently as well as cumula-tively beneficial to a new teacher's overall flourishing.

*Consult.* Consultation for our participants occurred formally (e.g., a mentorship relationship) or informally (by their simply asking for help). Noor strongly believed that mandatory internships, where teachers receive rich mentorship, was necessary. Ruth advised new teachers "to find a mentor, whether you continue the same contact with your practicum teacher, or there's somebody you already know in a school board that you want to work for." Maribelle referenced potential mentorship learning: "I was really lucky and I had a great internship teacher and she was doing lots of inquiry-based learning…I brought those things with me into my teaching."

When choosing professionals with whom to consult, new teachers highlighted the importance of trust and accessibility. Kamille emphasized the importance of trusting

relationships when it comes to choosing who to consult with. She advised teachers to make friends with teachers in other schools, and people who work with youth, and to ask as many questions of others as possible: "Fais-toi confiance. Demande des questions même si tu penses qu'elles sont stupides…trouve-toi quelqu'un à qui tu peux discuter ouvertement." For Kamille, anyone who works with or cares for children is potentially a great resource for new teachers, so she advised that new teachers engage in ample consultation, including parents. Tennae saw potential benefits of having a principal as a mentor, though she recognized that this rarely happens in schools.

Marilyn emphasized the need for new teachers to do lots of consulting in the form of *asking*:

> Teachers kind of get it that we have to help each other out…if you have a problem, I think, approach other teachers, administrators…[and ask] just being very open and not just closing the door and try to deal with everything on your own.

Similarly, Lily noted that some new teachers were willing to ask for help, ask questions, and ask for support; while others were "very confined to their own classrooms, confined to their own ideas of education and ideas of how to teach and didn't ask for much support, and those teachers were not as successful in their first year of teaching."

Beginning teachers who are charting new territory may be reticent about asking for help, since they wish to be observed in the most positive light possible. Nevertheless, Mackenzie advised new teachers to not be afraid and ask for help: "If you are unsure in a situation or, you know, even just have something happening in the class…you are maybe a little afraid to call the administration office. No, go ahead and call the office. It's always better to go and ask for help when you think it's needed rather than try to handle a situation you aren't sure about on your own."

***Connect.*** Many teachers, such as Shelle, called broadly for new teachers to "speak to teachers." Alli recommended that new teachers find

> at least one person at the school, I think, that you can hopefully talk to. And if you could have someone your own age, like, someone at the same place as you, and it's also good to have someone who is older and has been there.

Such connections, according to Alli, diffuse the sense of alienation and isolation, which can lead to negative and faulty conclusions. She explained that connections help new teachers to "realize that other people feel the same way. I guess because they're having, like, usually similar experiences." Françoise echoed Alli's thoughts, advising ECTs to find someone with whom one can speak without inhibition: "Trouver quelqu'un dans l'école avec qui on peut parler sans gêne." Having a teaching ally who will not hold a new teacher in judgement, but instead shares similar values, can be very affirming, according to Françoise. She further explained that this affirmation can help "à ne pas sentir tout seul, puis être compris, puis, un envie de ne pas laisser tomber," which is to say the connection can prevent alienation, which may lead to losing one's way in teaching. Feeling safe was important to Françoise, who discovered her mentor listening in on one of her conversations. She felt spied upon and wondered if anything about her teaching was being reported back to her principal, and this made her nervous about reprisal.

Although most of the connections advocated by teachers related to teaching, ECTs' responses also clearly noted that connection had to do with sustaining strong mental health. Anya found connection to be one of the best "health care strategies." Cassie, whose mother passed away from a terminal illness in her first year of teaching, explained that she felt unsupported by school administration, both during her mother's illness and afterward. She said, "There was not even so much as an email to say sorry for your loss or anything…well I didn't do a very good job at balancing myself."

*Collaborate.* Our data analysis indicated that positive, affirming collaboration with experienced educators who are accessible was seen as a key to successful development of resilience and well-being of new teachers. Alessandra advised teachers to "find other like-minded colleagues that [one] can share resources with, because [one] can't reinvent the wheel over and over and over again." This echoes Marilyn's motto of "beg, borrow and steal everything you can." Lois appreciated collaborative reflection for idea sharing and problem solving. She recognized that

> to have that network makes all the difference. If you are teaching and you don't have that network, and you're teaching it and your students are still not getting it, you can get very frustrated very fast, and think that you're not doing your job as a teacher.

She added that teachers should be mindful about efficient collaboration: "Teachers were really bad for going and having informal meetings and completely losing track of time. [The job is] never done, and so, I think you really need to really schedule your time." Fortunately, Lois's family included several teachers; she was able to tap into her mother's wisdom on how she had scheduled and how she had figured out how to teach full-time and still make time for herself. Finally, Ashish noted that developing a collegial relationship with principals and vice-principals was an asset in his early teaching years. He portrayed his principal as being patient, sympathetic, and someone who explained things well. Others also noted that relationships with supportive principals were beneficial for their well-being.

# Discussion

Overall, the pan-Canadian teacher perspectives gleaned from this study are consistent with findings related to the increased teacher workload and the need for work-life balance in the teaching profession, as is evident from research in various Canadian jurisdictions (e.g., Duxbury & Higgins, 2013; Naylor & White, 2010). Moreover, stories about increasing stress, struggles to balance multiple demands, and challenging working conditions contribute to the growing body of international research in the areas of teacher turnover, burnout, and negative effects of stress (Harris, 2011). We noted that most teachers experienced significant stress, some to a near breaking point, which leads us to appreciate the value of resilience strategies, while acknowledging that if ECTs bear the brunt of the coping burdens, the profession is drifting further away from the ideal image that we discussed at the beginning of this article. We highlight and discuss the key themes that emerged from our participants' lived experiences.

The pivotal message shared across the data was that *achieving work-life balance is challenging* due to early career teaching being a high-demand profession. ECTs noted key teacher stresses echoed the main ones cited broadly in the literature by Leroux and Théorêt (2014), which include "heavy workload, lack of time, resources and support, and challenging behaviour or special needs of some students" (p. 290). Understanding the interplay of individual and contextual protective factors (Beltman et al., 2011) is an area of inquiry needing further study. One of the main reasons for this is that attrition is

influenced by both personal and professional factors that are prone to change across the life span and career (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Teachers in our sample indicated that some supports were helpful and others were merely optical, highlighting the need for

> responsive and differentiated support to meet teachers' professional and personal learning needs at different times in their work and lives…means understanding and taking into account the different positive and negative scenarios which affect teachers' identitites, and which, therefore, affect their sense of commitment and effectiveness. (Day & Gu, 2007, pp. 439–440)

However, individual protective factors may at times impede effective contextual factors. ECTs spoke of trying to manage challenges independently. Indeed, this is valiant, and is also reinforced by the prevalent finding of principals not having enough time to support ECTs. For new teachers to be fully transparent about their needs, job security needs to be ensured, however one ECT had discovered that her mentor was observing her secretly, leading her to wonder if she was being secretly adjudicated rather than mentored.

While it is desirable to enjoy personal time, the sheer workload may require a blurring of the boundaries between work and home. Novices struggled with the dilemma of whether to work longer hours in school or bring school work home. On one hand, some teachers can be more effective and satisfied when they can integrate work-life together. According to Burke and Mcateer (2007), "employees can work more effectively if they can integrate their work, families, and personal lives in more satisfying ways" (p. 266). On the other hand, to break out of the long working-hours culture, Cartwright (2000) recommended against employees taking work home on a regular basis, which reflects advice that we heard from ECTs. Mixed messages from different participants in our sample can be attributed to the findings by Porter (2001), who noted that while excessive time at work is typically linked to stress and burnout, "the dangers associated with excessive time at work do not apply equally to all people" (p. 147). Some teachers found ways to successfully manage wellness in the face of high workload by getting enough sleep, having a hobby, being involved in activities unrelated to school work, not feeling guilty about taking time for themselves, and pursuing counselling. Others, unable to find the balance, experienced burnout and considered quitting. The one teacher in our study who had already left teaching deemed achieving her work-life balance impossible given the workload, organizational structure, and lack of support. Another teacher was planning his

exit strategy for similar reasons. Attrition stories, such as the ones depicted by these two teachers, serve as an unhappy reminder that both workload and work-life balance development and adjustments for ECTs need to be prioritized by school leaders and policy makers. Those who decided to leave were impassioned teachers who worked hard, and yet the development of coping skills does not appear to sufficiently mitigate the demands placed upon ECTs, as some scholars have suggested (Castro et al., 2010; Harris, 2011). While resiliency training may help, system and school leaders need to be recognized as the key policy actors (Ball, Maguire, Braun, & Hoskins, 2011) who can ensure access to appropriate ongoing support, resources, and learning opportunities for all ECTs, and can strategically support and promote their well-being and resilience through the artful and coherent enactment of relevant policies (Sullivan & Morrison, 2014).

*Nurturing a positive mindset* emerged in our findings as essential for success in early career teaching. Many participants found that their first years of teaching were incredibly demanding, challenging, and full of adverse situations; and yet, all but two decided to stay in teaching—perhaps demonstrating some threshold of overall resilience (Huisman et al., 2010; Le Cornu, 2009). The majority of the teachers we spoke with were determined to persevere and overcome the many stressful obstacles that they faced. This positive mindset supports the argument that nurturing a positive mindset leads to resilience (Dweck, 2014; Fredrickson, 2009). Reviewing the sundry techniques for nurturing a positive mindset, we observe that the new teachers included both direct action and palliative techniques (Kyriacou, 2001) in order to preserve their optimism and develop resilience. Proactivity, help-seeking, and initiative were among the active measures that teachers took to curb stress and ensure their wellness, whereas positivity, flexibility, passion, and confidence constituted some of the palliative strategies aimed at lessening the feeling of stress related to teaching. The advice for being authentic and respecting one's feelings, such as not pretending to be "okay" when one is not, and not internalizing the negativity that stems from working situations, highlights the importance for novices to honestly deal with both positive and negative emotions. Teachers need to face their emotions without drawing negative conclusions, which can occur when dealing with difficult situations in school (Kyriacou, 2001). David (2016) recommended that people appreciate negative emotion such as anger, frustration, and sadness as part of human lives, and argued that learning to be resilient is about valuing, understanding, and processing a full range of emotions and thoughts, both positive and negative. Neglecting personal well-being may

take a toll, as many of the interviewed new teachers had learned the hard way. Therefore, self-care is critical for new teachers due to its focus on maintaining a positive mindset and committing to reflective practices (Wood & Stanulis, 2009).

Engaging in and committing to *reflective inquiry* was found to be of considerable benefit for beginning teachers' resilience and well-being. Critical self-reflection is healthy for developing resilience (Cook-Sather & Curl, 2014). Opportunities for reflection among participants extended beyond the classroom and in connection with others, reading, and taking courses. As a deliberate way of thinking to seek explanations for and solutions to self-identified issues, reflection allows beginning teachers to effectively consider and respond to difficult situations and complicated issues in their early careers (Shoffner, 2011). Practitioners usually engage in reflection as a means of problem solving, understanding the nature of teaching, and uncovering personal values and beliefs (Lee, 2005); when teachers reflect, they learn from their experiences, build new knowledge, and develop professionally (Sellars, 2012). Our participants viewed reflective inquiry (in both self-oriented and collective forms) as a powerful tool for growth, and yet its rewards were not without obstacles. It comes as no surprise that most teachers thought they did not have enough time at the end of the day to reflect upon what worked, what did not, and what needed improvement. Despite this, many new teachers called for reflective inquiry practices, both for professional growth and personal balance, supporting the body of research linking reflection with resilience (Le Cornu, 2009; Leroux & Théorêt, 2014). When considering the dual benefits of reflective inquiry, one can see the need to prioritize this process, and build it into one's work day. The appropriate professional setting must also exist in schools so that teachers are able to engage in reflection and inquiry about their practices (Ostorga, 2006).

Our participants offered proactive strategies to help novices successfully navigate the overwhelming task of flourishing in early career teaching. We call these the three Cs: consult, connect, and collaborate. *Consultation* manifested itself in formal and informal ways, such as mentoring, networking with colleagues, or just asking colleagues for help. The beneficial role of mentors supports the value of formal mentorships as part of new teacher induction processes (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Asking for help, with the intention of receiving it, illustrated that teachers believe in and initiate consultative relationships informally, and with multiple people. O'Brien and Christie (2005) referred to colleagues in such roles as *supporters* whom teachers consult, especially ones who

are "honest, sympathetic, approachable and patient…being empathetic, understanding, reliable, encouraging, and supportive" (p. 194). Furthermore, teachers who asked for help were more successful than those who didn't ask, indicating that consulting with colleagues (including the school administration) whom they could trust and confide in was important. Therefore, it is important that beginning teachers do not experience the *judgementoring* (Hobson & Malderez, 2013), as Françoise had experienced, that can have a negative influence on their well-being.

Building relationships—*connecting*—with colleagues who are both like-minded and experienced, can strengthen a teacher's capacity. Novices' personal confidence and efficacy depend on supportive relationships that help beginning teachers with social-ization into the teaching profession (Fenwick, 2011; Long et al., 2012; Tillman, 2005). To this end, good relationships with students were deemed essential to the profession, as their benefits—and harms—go both ways. Teachers need to develop successful rela-tionships with students in order to know that their efforts are achieving desired results, and they need these relationships for a personal sense of satisfaction, for safety, and for professional efficacy (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Relationships with colleagues provided a sense of connection and belonging that, in turn, sustained teachers through numerous challenges and supported their well-ness and mental health. Hobson and Maxwell (2017) found that the presence, absence, nature, and intensity of teachers' relatedness (i.e., social connections to others in and around schools) constituted the single most prominent factor for enhancing or impeding ECTs' well-being.

Finally, formal and informal collaboration provided such practical benefits to ECTs as network building, time efficiency, and sharing teaching ideas while increasing their confidence and self-efficacy. Nieto (2003) argued that collaboration is vital for new teachers to solve the problems of their practice because collaborative discourse allows teachers to build critical and long-standing relationships with colleagues, which, in turn, produce a sense of community. It is clear that in schools, where formal opportunities for collaboration are provided, teacher development and efficacy are promoted through common planning time and scheduled times for joint activities (Guarino et al., 2006), participating in sustainable learning communities (Cherkowski, 2012), and utilizing collaborative inquiry models (Brooks & Adams, 2015). Through collaboration, teachers mobilize knowledge without having to "reinvent the wheel" and develop a higher sense

of connectedness (Swars, Meyers, Mays, & Lack, 2009), which translates to pedagogical well-being (Soini, Pyhältö, & Pietarinen, 2010).

# Conclusion

The ECTs we spoke with are striving to meet the high expectations placed upon them. Work-life imbalance may be more challenging for new teachers than those who provide these expectations are aware. The circumstances of ECTs warrant their adaptation to their new jobs. Heavy workloads result in teachers working after school hours, or taking their work home, even if this comes at the expense of their personal lives. Their options are limited because when overwhelmed by demands, they say they easily forget or even ignore their own health needs. Excessive workloads were presented by interviewees as a major threat to teachers' health and well-being. The effects of excessive workload often manifested as stress or burnout. Many of the participants in this pan-Canadian study demonstrated having a positive mindset, and yet the awareness of the risks of stress and burnout were universal. This led some teachers to leave, or consider leaving, the profession.

The ECTs had developed many coping skills that helped them persevere. At the same time, they expressed needs that were only sometimes being met. By revealing their needs, hopes and concerns to us, we discovered four important themes, such as cultivating a work-life balance, nurturing a positive mindset, committing to reflective practices, and finally consulting, connecting, and collaborating with others. Exploring these themes adds valuable learnings to the extant literature, which has the opportunity to shape educational systems that approximate the ideal, supportive world that we spoke of earlier, in which teachers may grow professionally and become inspirational teachers. Furthermore, the stories that we heard provide programmatic guidelines at all levels of the school system in terms of better understanding and supporting new teachers. First, how might policies become responsive to the needs of teacher well-being? How might school leaders become aware of, sensitized, and responsive to the needs of ECTs? Second, how might existing structural supports be improved in order to support ECT adaptation? Mentorship is one method utilized, however, how might mentorship programs be improved? The literature shows that formal mentorship programs are helpful, and yet one cannot mandate

a fitting connection between mentor and mentee. Given that the ECTs' stories included many instances of benefiting from informal mentorship, what of these, and how might creating responsive mentorship programs benefit ECTs? Finally, might graded responsibilities, such as found in other professions, be beneficial for teachers?

While our interviews did not specifically focus on the root causes of teacher work overload, ECTs did describe and report the complexities and struggles—but almost all hope to ameliorate or contain the stress and distractions that might keep them from developing their own teaching craft and making a difference in the lives of the children. Inadvertently, our interviews revealed factors that may be viewed as the root causes of teacher distress, such as class sizes, heavy workloads, unsupportive parents, and frustrating administrations. They were all main ingredients in developing distress within teachers, and our research showed how ECTs established different strategies to face these challenges and maintain their resilience and well-being. Some expressed faint hope that the realities of the complex and demanding environments in which they work will improve. Exploring, in further detail, the root causes of ECT work overload and other distresses is called for. In the meantime, many of these beginning teachers had learned some secrets for their own resilience. They had discovered what was working for them. The future teaching landscape could use further study in this area. A more longitudinal and larger study of teachers, from pre-service through the first five years, could yield deeper understanding of the themes that we have uncovered and brought to description in this study. Furthermore, connecting the dots between the teachers' needs, hopes, and concerns, and those of their administrators, many of whom are also dealing with excessive workloads and demands, would be illuminating. This broader scope could potentially reveal solutions for leaders and at a programmatic level (e.g., improving mentorship programs).

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