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The COVID-19 pandemic has altered the educational landscape. This article offers the model, Crisis Theory with/in Teacher Education Programs (CT-TEP), which examines how the interplay of preservice teachers' stressors and personal coping strategies filtered through their identity provides teacher educators strategies for helping students persevere through crises. Data collected in one teacher education program during the spring 2020 COVID-19 shutdown across the United States illuminates preservice teachers’ present and possible selves, through a series of poems demonstrating emotions and coping strategies of student-participants. Implications for teacher educators to focus on possible selves with/in teacher education classrooms as a mechanism for understanding emotional health and well-being is discussed.

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lasting well beyond school closures, viral outbreaks, breaking news alerts, and daily briefings from the White House. Understanding the crisis through the perceptions of preservice teachers — their fears, concerns, in/ability to adjust and move forward — will continue to sit at the front of my mind for a long time to come. This article explores previous research on components of crisis theory: crisis, stressors, coping; as well as conceptualizes the connection to possible selves as an aspect of understanding how to address emotionality of preservice teachers, through the conceptualization of a model, Crisis Theory with/in Teacher Education Programs (CT-TEP).

1.1. Inquiry adaptation

Similar to higher education campuses across the United States, our university’s Spring 2020 semester came to an abrupt, physical halt in mid-March. As students left campus, abuzz with possibilities of an extended break and/or state-mandated online completion of the semester, I was fortunate enough to discuss those possibilities with students and faculty alike, when the administration extended the break to two weeks, allowing instructors time to transition to a completely online format. Our virtual semester resumed the week of March 30, 2020. As an educator, the semester was definitely a defining point in remote teaching; as a researcher, the pandemic was clearly inquiry adaptation.

As an assistant professor of educational studies at a public university in the upper Midwest United States, teaching two sections of a first-year Multicultural Education course, as well as a section of second-year Introduction to Curriculum and Pedagogy course, I was in the process of collecting data for two classroom-based, university IRB-approved, open-ended self-study research projects when the pandemic shutdown began. At the beginning of the semester students were informed of the studies, understood their ability to opt out at any time, had signed IRBs, and as a class, we discussed how being a practitioner-researcher means a teacher is continually self-reflexive in their pedagogy — a skill I encouraged them to practice in their future careers. When the semester transitioned online, I adapted those survey instruments to focus on the well-being of these future educators during the pandemic, as that was my focus for the remainder of the semester. Students were informed of the focus change in requested reflections due to the pandemic. In addition, to remind students of these earlier research protocols, each weekly survey response was anonymous and included informed consent. These protocols were put in place to ensure students could respond freely without judgment or criticism from their professor.

This study examines the responses of 74 preservice teachers over a six-week period (March 30 to May 8, 2020). According to initial, online data collected during the semester, participants self-identify as a majority of White, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied Christian females from rural or suburban communities in the upper midwestern United States, who are in their first or second year at the university. Through six anonymous, weekly online surveys, I address these exploratory study questions:

1. How are my preservice teachers coping with crisis? What feelings, emotions, and concerns do they have?
2. How do preservice teachers envision themselves as teachers (their possible selves) addressing the complexities, emotions, and realities with students during this pandemic shutdown?

These research questions dig deep on two perspectives I want to explore: 1) life as a student in online classes during a crisis (their present selves); and 2) how preservice teachers perceive they would respond as teachers dealing with the pandemic (their possible selves). Looking at both positionalities — present and possible — is central to understand their own, lived experiences during this traumatic period in time, but also to evaluate how preservice teachers see their future careers with/in this new reality.

2. Theoretical framework

Crisis, a commonly used term, is a situation often heightened by a sense of increased fear, sadness, anger, or guilt, so unusual or significant, typical responses by those involved are insufficient (Hobbs, 1984; Moos & Schaefer, 1986). Thus, crisis theory, derived from varied sources across diverse fields of study, “focuses on how individuals confront and manage major life crises and disruptions to their established patterns of personal and social identity” (Moos & Holahan, 2007, p. 107). The theory examines the interaction of how an individual perceives stressors and methods they use to cope with said stressors, which are influenced by demographic and personal characteristics and impact the outcome(s) of dealing with a crisis (Denny et al., 2015). Furthermore, researchers argue a person cannot stay in this disruption for too long a period at a time; therefore, a crisis is often considered short lived, with an expectation that a resolution is found (LaMontagna et al., 1995; Moos & Schaefer, 1986).

Stress as a term is multifaceted, with few people agreeing on a singular definition, or even to delineate between good or bad stress (Burton & Hinton, 2004); where some define stress negatively as anxiety or frustration, weakness, or unhappiness (Ho, 1996), others argue stress benefits people (Haan, 1982). Within the context of social psychology, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define stress as the “relationship between the person and the environment” that may exceed their resources (p. 19). Selye (1993) defines the term as “results of any demand upon the body, be the effect mental or somatic” (p. 8), while Deasy et al. (2014) position stress as “situations or events that are perceived as threats” (p. 2–3).

A stressor is an issue, event, or situation that “activates a reaction to stress” (Amponsah et al., 2020, p. 5). While stressors may be considered harmful, they are routine and possibly constructive aspects of life (Schaefer & Moos, 1992). Regardless of career paths, individuals face such personal stressors as divorce, death, end of relationships, chronic illness, unemployment, childhood trauma, and career changes. Moreover, each career path encounters additional stress and/or stressors unique to that profession.

Contextualizing concepts of stress and stressors with/in the education field is valuable to identify as it reduces classroom effectiveness (Murray-Harvey et al., 2000) and leads to attrition, causing instability in the teacher workforce (Fitchett et al., 2018). Examples of educational stressors include workload, time management, discipline, curricular needs/changes, administrative support; whereas, teacher preparation stressors also include teacher educators’ expectations, self-efficacy, being evaluated, and establishing positive relationships with cooperating teachers (Mahmoudi & Ozkan, 2016; Mulholland et al., 2013, pp. 10–13; Väisänen et al., 2018). However, further research on how these stressors impact both in-service and preservice teachers is needed (Gustems-Carnicer & Calderon, 2013; Lindqvist et al., 2017, 2019; bib_Lindqvist_et_al_2017; bib_Lindqvist_et_al_2019).

2.1. Coping

Crisis is a process, not a trait or result, which explains the variance in coping strategies — how individuals correct, endure, lessen, or change problems — vital in resisting stress (Deasy et al., etc...
Copies of dynamic, complex, and contextual; it is defined as “thoughts and behaviors used to manage the internal and external demands of situations that are appraised as stressful” (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004, p. 745).

Moos and Schaefer (1993) articulate four types of coping processes: 1) cognitive approach, which uses logic and prior experiences to reshape and accept realities of stressful situations; 2) behavioral approach, which seeks guidance and support to deal with issues at hand; 3) cognitive avoidance, which uses denial, minimization, and acceptance of circumstance to handle a stressor (it is what it is); and 4) behavioral avoidance, which includes new activities and rewards to supplement loss. Hence, how individuals process and cope with varied stressors is essential in understanding their ability to thrive and change under unpredictable pressures. In truth, “the essence of stress, coping, and adaptation is change. The emotions one experiences in a stressful encounter, for example, are characterized by flux” (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985, p. 150).

Furthermore, coping is strongly associated with regulation of emotion (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004), and as “emotions are at the heart of teaching” (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 835), understanding how preservice teachers cope with stressors is vital to their success. While coping and coping strategies are frequently addressed in other disciplines, it is far less focused upon in teacher education; however, teaching situations require “academic, emotional, and behavioral coping” (Bracha & Hoffenhart, 2015, p. 723), and research on how preservice teachers cope with distressing situations is “needed if we are to have a better understanding of attrition from teacher education and the teaching profession” (Lindqvist et al., 2019, p. 634).

2.2. Teacher identity and possible selves

Danielewicz (2001) defines identity as an understanding of “who we are and who we think other people are” (p. 10). Therefore, if preservice teachers are unable to comprehend their own identities, they cannot effectively achieve their intended future in education, as identity helps with goal setting and shows which course of action comes in two forms—retrospective and prospective—of how emotions guide our actions and thoughts. Therefore, when teacher educators facilitate preservice teachers’ prospective reflection of possible selves, the emotions expressed during that process demonstrate a dimension of self and are significant, as they have a direct bearing on their identity and how it is shaped (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

2.3. Crisis theory with/in teacher education programs

With an eye on trying to evaluate how preservice teachers were handling the COVID-19 pandemic, I began to look at how my students were coping with the complex stressors surrounding them: sudden moves back home (wherever that may be) away from the traditional school environment, isolation for many of them due to lockdown measures, frustrations with the politicization of public health in local communities and state legislatures, and inequities of a hasty shift to a virtual learning environment unfamiliar to many of these students.

Previously, most research on crisis theory addressed coping and stress in relation to health and well-being, specifically in circumstances of chronic illnesses such as cancer (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004); needs for organ transplant (Denny et al., 2015), and living with a disability (Moos & Holahan, 2007). Previous models for crisis theory provided insight into the very components of what I sought to learn from my students, but there was a missing aspect of teacher education. With so much uncertainty and fear in this immediate shutdown of many aspects of life, I wanted to explore how preservice teachers saw these changes impacting their future as teachers—themselves.

Thus, over time (based on previous research from Denny et al., 2015; Schaefer & Moos, 1986, p. 1993), I conceptualized the Crisis Theory with/in Teacher Education Programs (CT-TEP) model, as shown in Fig. 1, which posits how the interaction of stressors and coping viewed through the lens of identity—whether present or possible selves—shapes a preservice teacher’s emotional health and well-being with/in their teacher education program.

The bidirectional paths of the CT-TEP model illuminate this process as transactional and reciprocal in nature (Moos & Schaefer, 1993), and as such this is both a dynamic process, where preservice teachers negotiate these exchanges throughout their education. Thus, understanding the interplay of preservice teachers’ stressors and personal coping strategies provides teacher educators insight into
the emotional and psychological burdens extreme crisis events have on their students. Furthermore, this process filtered through preservice teacher identity provides a framework to assist in persevering through these crises.

As crises are “an inherent part of the human condition and often exact a high toll” (Schafer & Moos, 1992, p. 170), this study considers the impacts the COVID-19 pandemic has on emotional health and well-being of teacher education students, and implications for their teacher preparation programs.

3. Methodology

Poetry is emotional. Previous researchers responding to emotional, traumatic events, such as Iida (2018) reacting to the Great East Japan Earthquake, or Apol (2017) retelling stories of what proved to be expectedly and unexpectedly difficult knowledge (p. 82). Poetry as a methodological tool allows for poignancy (Machado, 2017); plasticity (Paiva, 2020); evocation (Fernández-Giménez et al., 2019); credibility (Machado, 2015); and emotion (Downey, 2016; Faulkner, 2020; Poindexter, 2002). As Pasquin (2010) explains: “Poetry is a form of creative expression that exists to share a truth, an insight, or a feeling that enriches our humanity. It is part of an emotional ecosystem” (p. 258), fitting for a model striving to better understand the emotional health and well-being of preservice teachers.

Prendergast (2009) frames Poetic Inquiry (PI) “as an umbrella term” for an art-based qualitative methodology that has the power to “do as poetry does, that is to synthesize experience in a direct and affective way” (p. xx-xxii). Poetic Inquiry allows researchers to think creatively with their data (Grimmett, 2016), where the researcher is more visible to the reader than other, more traditional qualitative methodologies (Görlich, 2019). While there are three categories of PI, each defined by whose voice is engaged in the poetry, this study focuses on “vox participare,” participant voiced poems (Prendergast, 2009), where a researcher uses found poetry to explore, question, dissect, and illuminate data collected in a study.

Found poetry is arranging and rearranging excerpt words and phrases from collected data and/or existing texts into verse, where the researcher takes liberty with punctuation and arrangement, while ensuring participant emotions, thoughts, and intent are maintained (Butler-Kisber, 2005; Faulkner, 2020; Langer & Furman, 2004; Pillay et al., 2017; Prendergast, 2006; Walmsley et al., 2017a). Poetic Inquiry allows researchers to think creatively with their data (Grimmett, 2016), where the researcher is more visible to the reader than other, more traditional qualitative methodologies (Görlich, 2019). While there are three categories of PI, each defined by whose voice is engaged in the poetry, this study focuses on “vox participare,” participant voiced poems (Prendergast, 2009), where a researcher uses found poetry to explore, question, dissect, and illuminate data collected in a study.

Data in this study consists of 144 pages of open-ended qualitative responses from participants; 118 pages focus on preservice teachers as students and the remaining 28 pages focus on preservice teachers’ perceptions of their possible selves addressing the pandemic. Each survey began with questions regarding the participant’s present self: How are you coping? Feelings? Emotions? Concerns? What adjectives come to mind as we face this worldwide health crisis? What are your biggest challenges moving forward? Then, each survey ended with a question that turned towards the participant’s possible selves: How would you imagine handling this health emergency as a teacher? What would you say/do? How would you address your future students’ fears, apprehension, confusion about the world?

3.1. Data generation and analysis

Using direct words, phrases, and excerpts from participant responses, guided by my coding and memos for determining the most authentic quotes to use (those best representing the participants’ polyvocal responses), I arranged the phrases in a manner that expressed categories for each poem most honest to their intent. While I concluded there would be seven poems (one for each week of the semester and data collection was complete, I read through participant responses, and wrote memos regarding my initial impressions. I separated data: 1) into weeks to ascertain if there was change over time; and 2) by positionality of preservice teachers in the question — current online student or perception of future educator. Once I had separated my data for analysis, I contacted my department chair, who emailed the dean, who reached out to the university police, who finally granted permission for me to come on campus, and subsequently, opened the building so I could print data. Oh, the realities of researching during a pandemic!

With data in hand, I re-read through each participant response, I started by highlighting keywords and phrases (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2014, p. 158), writing open codes along the side of each response. After reading each week/positionality, I memoed to collect my thoughts about the data (Antin et al., 2015). Next, I began indexing in vivo codes into an Excel spreadsheet, and as I cut and pasted those coded responses into a singular column, categories began to form before me. Categories included: stress, fear, work, boredom, and frustration. Once I had established categories, I then “deconstructed and reconstructed” (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2014, p. 158) phrases and excerpts from categories to create poetry.

Using direct words, phrases, and excerpts from participant responses, guided by my coding and memos for determining the most authentic quotes to use (those best representing the participants’ polyvocal responses), I arranged the phrases in a manner that expressed categories for each poem most honest to their intent. While I concluded there would be seven poems (one for each week and another for their teacher perspective) to make logical sense for me as poet-researcher, networking these ideas gave the poetry its structure. All wording in each poem came directly from participant responses, “except for small grammatical changes for clarity” (Baker, 2017).

Leggo (2005) writes, “Poetry is a way of knowing and being and becoming” (p. 442), and by knowing, or at least attempting to know preservice teachers’ experiences regarding the pandemic through analysis, a series of poems came into being. However, before examining these student-voiced poems, it is necessary to acknowledge arguments by poetic inquiry scholars regarding the subjectivity and/or objectivity of creating poetry from data. Poetry as a means of representation doesn’t “pretend to be objective” (Fitzpatrick, 2012, p. 12), as poetry exists in the research space between what Moxley (2010) calls the “subjective emotional

Fig. 1. Crisis Theory within Teacher Education Programs (CT-TEP), a conceptual model for understanding crisis theory within teacher education.
utterance and the objective reporting of fact” (p. 24).

The data presented in this article derives from words of student-participants, so there is reporting of fact from their responses; however, it would be insincere of me as a researcher to claim I am disconnected from this data — these are my students, addressing the same pandemic as I am — and I acknowledge my subjectivity in the creation of these poems. However, the intent of this research method is to present in an authentic manner what Paiva (2020) calls “intimate, affective, and subjective understandings of the world” (p. 2), which other methods may not fully embrace.

Reading, coding, and constructing poetry does not come from a detached outlook; rather the process of writing these poems is felt “personally and heartfully” (Walmsley, 2017b, p. 14), in an attempt to capture the subjectivity (Görlich, 2020) of my preservice teachers’ lives. The inherent balance faced by a researcher who uses arts-based research, such as poetic inquiry, is to explore lived experiences of participants that are 1) authentic to participants and their experiences, thoughts, and emotions, particularly during traumatic events such as the pandemic; and 2) an abbreviated representation of the polyvocal data that is faithful to the individual as well as the collective. Balancing these two perspectives is where poetry becomes what Prendergast (2005) calls “a performative act, revealing researcher/participants as both masked and unmasked, costumed and bared, liars and truth-tellers, actors and audience, offstage and onstage in the creation of research” (p. xxiii).

4. Results

The following seven poems derive directly from participant data. The first six poems represent a week-by-week understanding of preservice teachers’ lives during the first six weeks of lockdown in their communities. These poems, titled by week and date started, provide a chronological representation of their present selves. Whereas the final poem, “Student/Teacher Voice,” explores preservice teachers’ response to their future students, representing their possible selves during the crisis.

4.1. Week 1 (beginning March 30, 2020)

I’m a little nervous, struggling; I’m struggling — everything is unknown —
I keep bouncing back and forth, From fighting the impulse to shave my head, Bleach my hair, Or shave off my eyebrows.
I am honestly struggling hard.
I’m stuck in time —
Watching a lot of Netflix, Losing all of my motivation, Overwhelmed, overloaded, Trying to focus: a routine, It’s been a weird adjustment.
The distance is really hard.
Moving back home:
I’m an essential worker, Boyfriend of a year broke up with me, Sister is a Nurse, Grandma suffered from a brain bleed, My family kicked me out —
My family is driving me crazy.
Stupid:
We had time to prepare for this.
But we didn’t; We had time to limit non-essential travel, But we didn’t; And we had time to start mass producing resources; But we didn’t.
This doesn’t feel like real school —
And it sucks ass —
I am not understanding the material, WIFI signal is not the best; I am not the best with technology; Disconnected from my professors and friends.

I am … nervous, uncertain, Keeping up, isolated, busy –
Burned out, bored, frustrated, Grateful, but lonely …
Apocalypse - y:
I feel like I’m the main character.
In a dystopian movie.
This whole thing is crazy.

4.2. Week 2 (beginning April 6, 2020)

Better.
Starting to develop a routine.
I have a better grip:
Unproductive, Doing well, Stay busy, A little better.
I love my classes, But haaaaaaaate online schooling:
Tired a lot, emotionally and physically.
Time moves a lot slower —
Online stuff threw us a curve-ball no doubt;
I’m beginning to struggle with sheer amount.
Of excess work being assigned by professors.
There is so much chaos in my home:
So much noise —
Tense with arguments —
My older brother is so paranoid of me.
Contracting the coronavirus.
(And giving it to him).
He slept in his car the other night.
Today is voting day, And half of the people won’t get to;
Not moving the election, really people??
Only five polling stations all in suburbs, They’re not hiding their hatred for poor people.
Let people exercise their right to vote, Frustrated with all the politics about this virus!
Annoyed!
Just stay home, A hot rotisserie chicken.
At 8:30 in the AM.
Is not that important.
Like seriously, Just stay home, please.
I can safely say:
Online learning is not for me.
Some make it clear; Some have things scattered everywhere;
Workload keeps piling up, Too much work, not enough time, I’m drowning.
Motivation is my concern.

4.3. Week 3 (beginning April 13, 2020)

My routine:
Eat, Sleep, Homework, Exercise, Repeat —
Over and over again.
It gets harder to focus every week.
And I’m getting antsy.
Whirlwind of feelings!
An unreal amount of work, Extreme lack of motivation, My morale is low, But I am coping.
… Before.
Crazy.
Overwhelming.
Virus.
Isolated.
Difficult. — 19 came.
My weeks are consumed:
Balance each class, Also balance my mental health,
Social life with my family, Finding time to help my sibling and niece, Overwhelming loads of work.
This is a nightmare.
It iz wat it iz.

4.4. Week 4 (beginning April 20, 2020)

Oh my GOD —
I just wanna go outside ...
I thought I'd be doing better now, But honestly, I've been doing much worse.
I miss human interaction.
— I am doing better.
I hit a low point the other day.
— I feel under control.
I'm coping better than in the past 3 weeks.
The further we get online, The further behind I.
Feel.
I.
Fall.
Reality doesn't feel real right now.
Stop trying to open back up.
Rallies to open up the states again:
So frustrated, incredibly selfish.
You are protesting a pandemic??
We can't live like this forever:
Scary, crazy, frustrated, Stressed, bored, anxious.
I cannot control what other people do.
Which can cause the virus to keep spreading.
It feels like more work;
Workload is insane, ridiculous; I am not learning as much as I would be.
If I were learning face to face.
I am just so stressed.
This new normal is going to stink.
Instant headache, incredibly unhealthy, Extra precautions, anxiety, Unpredictable, accepting isolation, Interactions are slowly being eliminated.
More grateful for the moment, For the hugs, the laughs, the cries,
The jokes, the hard times.
More thankful we have each other.
People are reconsidering the importance of things.

4.5. Week 5 (beginning April 27, 2020)

My mental health has been.
A bit of a rollercoaster.
Through this whole experience.
Mentally taxing, I'm drowning.
Final stretch before the semester ends, I realize what I actually have to accomplish.
We are so close, yet each week.
Starts to feel longer and longer.
Stressed …
Really stressed …
Very stressed …
It is just horrible.
It all seems monotonous.
Almost like a Groundhog Day type feeling —
Trying to remain tranquil during this testing time.
It's hard to be alone.
Learning opportunity: I keep taking time to read and listen to information which will help me as a person and as an educator.
I'm fully adjusted to online.

4.6. Week 6 (beginning May 4, 2020)

It feels strange, knowing.
That I've been doing this online learning.
For 6 whole weeks now, And that it has finally come to an end.
I am proud that I have been able to accomplish.
This strange way of learning.
If quarantine has done anything for me, it has made me:
Love food more than before;
tired of watching SNL reruns on Hulu;
Appreciative and hopeful; Numb while the world falls apart;
Stressed, anxious, frustrated, and really bored.
I just wonder how this happened?
Why this happened?
When will it be over?
How uncertain the severity of this virus is?
Where I go from here?
I just want the whole coronavirus thing to be over.
This year with COVID-19:
I'm not sure I'll have a job, Or go on a little road trip, Visit my grandma in South Carolina in August, Go to Europe — Norway, Germany — Puerto Rico, Yellowstone, Montana, California.
Unfortunately, a lot of my plans were cancelled.
Because of the pandemic, But I am still keeping my head up, Staying active, Keeping my mental health up, and.
Get outside and explore nature.
I've felt like I was letting down my professors and peers.
When I was struggling to log in and participate.
But I feel more confident and hopeful now.
Emotionally, of course, this is draining.
Still struggling but starting to finally settle in, I can see the end of the tunnel.
Quarantine was become way more routine.
I get up, make coffee, and start my classes.
After a few hours, I eat and then help my sister with her homework.
I do more work, make dinner, and then finish any chores.
It is all the same.
But it has become normal.
I genuinely didn't know today was Tuesday.

4.7. Student/Teacher Voice

As a teacher —
This is new for all of us.
It's okay to be struggling; Know that I am struggling, too.
Hang in there.
As a teacher —
I … don't know, to be honest, The world is forever changed, We can't ignore that fact.
I'm not sure.
Even if we don't have the answers, The most we can do is:
Make them feel safe, And less alone:
Facetime friends, Slow down, Read books, Enjoy family time, Watch TV, Find a hobby, self-care, self-reflect.
We are alone together.
As a teacher —
Give the students hope; keep up a relationship; Make sense of
something that doesn’t make a lot of sense;
    Emphasize staying kind and calm.

Feelings are valid — I’m there for you; Take a deep breath — I am
    proud of all of you; Look at the positives — I am there for you; Ask
me questions — it’s okay.

These are uncertain times for all of us, School might not look like
it usually does —
    Take 1 day at a time, One accomplishment at a time.
As a teacher —
    Discuss the importance of others, Ourselves, and
Our health.
Encourage students:
    Stay active.
    Stay positive, Be honest … even though the world is in a weird
place.
This is really difficult.
    Keep your head up, Keep working hard —
No matter what —
    We will all get back on track!
As a teacher
    Read a book, learn a new sport, Make a new game, your own
memories, Push through and finish strong.
    Stay safe, Stay active and creative, Stay in a routine —
    Stay busy.
As a teacher — I would encourage them.
    Walking in nature isn’t cancelled,
    Calling your friends isn’t cancelled,
    Practicing gratitude isn’t cancelled
And staying optimistic isn’t cancelled
    I am here for you.

5. Discussion

This study provides insight into how 74 preservice teachers
coped with an abrupt shift to online courses, their workload during
the transition, as well as stay-at-home orders, living adjustments,
and their resulting emotions during a turbulent six-week conclu-
sion to their semester during the initial COVID-19 shutdown. As
social distancing, work from home, and safety protocols are likely
to change the field of teaching more than many other careers, it is
imperative to understand the emotional well-being of preservice
teachers while in their education courses learning and adapting to
change. Using the new CT-TEP model, analyzing interactions of
stressors and coping strategies — through the lens of present and/or
possible selves — allows for a deeper perspective of preservice
teachers’ emotional health and well-being, vital to the sustain-
ability of teacher education programs.

5.1. Coping with stressors

Throughout participant responses, preservice teachers articu-
lated their stressors: “moving back home,” “online schooling,” fear
of “contracting the coronavirus,” “voting day,” “mental health,” “the
new normal,” as well as if they will “have a job,” cancelled “plans,”
and “letting down” their professors. Additionally, participants
provided glimpses into their inabilities to cope with those stressful
situations. Moos and Holahan (2007) offer eight categories of
coping skills, as shown in Fig. 2, in which these preservice teachers
expressed their successes and/or shortcomings throughout the
poems.

Throughout the poetry, expanding over a six-week period, these
preservice teachers used both approach and avoidance coping
skills. The tone of present-oriented weekly poems is notably full of
negative emotions: despair, frustration, anger, and confusion;
whereas, the poem from the perspective of possible selves —
despite deriving from survey questions asked at the same time as
the present-oriented questions — showcases more positive, less
avoidance coping responses. Thus, when thinking as their possible
selves, these students instinctively focused on approach coping
skills, but deferred more to avoidance skills with present-self
positionality.

As shown in the poem, “Student/Teacher Voice,” there is a sharp
difference in emotional tone between participants positioning
themselves as current students and their possible selves. In the
opening stanza, a participant acknowledges their own struggle but
reasures their possible student(s), “it’s okay to be struggling” — a
sentiment lacking in previous, present selves poems. As a partici-
pant admits personally, “this is really difficult,” the overarching
sentiment shared for future students is to “keep your head up, keep
working hard — no matter what — we will all get back on track!”
Furthermore, when addressing the challenges they faced as present
selves, they did not thoroughly discuss what supports were needed
from their own teachers. When asked to focus on possible selves,
preservice teachers provided supports such as encouragement, a
plan of action, and healthy alternatives to keep students busy,
contrary to the negative emotional state articulated in present
selves responses.

5.2. Connections with/in the classroom

These results provide insight for teacher educators. The first six
poems, which chronicle the perspectives of preservice teachers
studying in a pandemic, are useful for teacher educators who: 1) strive
to understand realities preservice teachers face outside the
classroom/virtual class space; as well as, 2) offer opportunities for
making connections as a means of coping with stressors of the
pandemic. By understanding how preservice teachers cope with
stressors, teacher educators can support their students by utilizing
those same coping skills to improve the education class experience.
For example, if teacher educators know their students are coping
through alternative rewards, such as TikTok or Netflix, can educa-
tors use those forms of media with their students to bridge personal
and professional positionalities together? Changing reading as-
signments to streaming online videos or converting writing re-
sponses to short-form video creations allows the teacher educator
to directly connect with their students’ present selves — which
could lead to better focus and much-needed relief to their sense of
being overwhelmed, as participants articulated. Tapping into their
perceptions of their present selves may offer teacher educators
insight into what supports preservice teachers need to move for-
ward as well as provide a springboard into their students’ possible
selves.

Using prospective reflection offers preservice teachers the op-
portunity to focus on results and/or outcomes, rather than present
selves mired in the current emotional state of crisis. In other words,
for teacher educators to glean a better sense of their students, they
should utilize prospective reflection (through alternative assign-
ments as suggested above) to gauge preservice teachers’ emotional
well-being. Instead of reflecting on the present crisis, such as the
COVID-19 pandemic, redirecting reflection in a prospective frame
allows teacher educators to comprehend students’ individual
“goals, dreams, and anxieties for the future” (Gaines et al., 2018, p.
209), a better indicator of the long-term well-being of the preser-
vice teacher and, thus, the teacher education program.

If the trauma of the current crisis becomes too much for a pre-
service teacher to see themselves as a teacher moving forward, this
may be a sign that a preservice teacher is considering a career
change or unable to reconcile current stressors with appropriate
coping strategies. Prospective reflection acts as an early warning
signal for dangerous emotionality of preservice teachers. This
struggle, if observed early on by the teacher educator, may be mediated with counseling or trauma-informed pedagogical practices. If not, preservice teachers may leave the field due to external crises.

5.3. Trauma-informed practices

Much has been written about the need for trauma-informed practices integrating into education programs (Cummings et al., 2017; Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016), teaching trauma as curriculum (Carello & Butler, 2014), as well as needs of those pedagogical practices in the wake of disasters in Indonesia (Seyle et al., 2013), Taiwan (Chen et al., 2012), Italy (Vaccarelli, 2018), Armenia and Japan (Shiwaku, 2014) and Louisiana, United States (Graham et al., 2017). However, previous research has typically framed itself as instructing in-service and preservice teachers how to connect with students after a traumatic event has occurred, not always how to handle a real-time, ongoing, widespread crisis. As seen from the emotions of preservice teachers in this study, teacher preparation programs must consider the need to employ and teach trauma-informed practices contemporaneously with actual events to help students cope with stressors of the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises they may face.

Furthermore, current research on trauma-informed teaching practices provides opportunities for prospective reflection. Cummings et al. (2017) elaborate on approaches for responding to trauma: be attuned, convey positive regard, collaborate with others, and engage in proper reactions. Considering who we are as teachers in those moments: mentor, support, guide, listener, and touchstone makes possible selves inherent in teaching trauma-informed practices. Therefore, learning about these approaches and how to create supportive environments for students and family alike puts preservice teachers directly into the realm of prospective reflection, dealing with a role they may one day find themselves performing. This is the benefit of possible selves — pushing preservice teachers to reflect on their future actions and identities as...
an educator. Framing preservice teachers’ views towards their possible selves, teacher educators provide future-oriented talk, turning the focus to “planning and prediction” (Urzúa & Vá, p. 1944), which aligns with trauma-informed practices.

5.4. Our new reality

Researching an ongoing pandemic is difficult. By the time research makes it to publication, realities of the world could drastically change; therefore, it is crucial to remember, as Austin (2020) points out, “quality research of any kind takes time” (p. 9). Issues currently unbanknownst to us as practitioners and researchers in teacher education will likely skew conversations regarding upcoming challenges in equity (Glenn et al., 2020; Kier & Clark, 2020), accountability (Buber & Helm, 2020), safety (Darling-Hammond & Melnick, 2020); transitioning to online formats and/or use of technology (Daniel, 2020; Moorhouse, 2020; Trust & Whalen, 2020), and what these changes mean for education in general. These are difficult conversations, with constantly changing targets.

While Delemarter and Ewalt (2020) offer: “perhaps one of the greatest services we can provide our student teachers is a framework to help them process their fears, such as modeling how to reflect on one’s emotional state” (p. 5); this study adds the use of the newly conceptualized CT-TEP model to a more extensive discussion on methods to understand, evaluate, and mitigate the crises our preservice students face as well as the vitality of teacher education programs’ futures. Furthering that claim, I argue more research is needed, not just on student teachers, or preservice teachers already in field components of their program, but on introductory, foundational, pre-field students. These students in their first or second year of schooling are the most volatile to changing career paths, as they are not too far into the program to change course. Teacher education programs, based on the feedback of participants in this study, need to incorporate prospective reflection practices throughout their course sequence, as understanding how preservice teachers see their possible selves offers much needed information regarding their emotional well-being.

5.5. Limitations and future research

This study is limited to a single public state university in the upper Midwest, United States, and only examines first- and second-year preservice teachers. Future research should investigate how CT-TEP applies to preservice teachers at multiple universities—facing their own unique curricular and environmental issues—as well as varied levels of preservice teachers’ experience, including student teachers. How will the continuation of this pandemic impact attrition rates in classrooms as well as enrollment rates in teacher preparation programs, particularly pre-field students? What do we as teacher educators do to ensure our own university programs offer, within the curriculum itself, crisis resources that mitigate stress/stressors and provide coping strategies to preservice teachers? Moreover, how do we teach them to be a conduit for minimizing their prospective students’ own crises while also garnering insight into our own students’ emotional health? What can teacher educators do to assist students already in field placements during a crisis? These questions are left unanswered; hence, it is essential for teacher educators to focus on the emotional health and well-being of preservice teachers to ensure they realize their possible selves.

6. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic is not the only crisis preservice teachers will face; thus, teacher educators need pedagogical tools to address emergencies as they arise. Writing in the context of school shootings, Wiest-Stevenson and Lee (2016) offer: “In an increasingly unpredictable and vulnerable time, it becomes imperative for schools to be proactive in providing the resources, environment, and planning to assist in the effective management of traumatic situations” (p. 498), and in the middle of a COVID-19 reality, these words could not resonate more. The CT-TEP model provides a mechanism to gauge preservice teachers’ emotions while also gleaning insight into their possible selves. Gustems-Carnicer and Calderón (2013) assert little time is spent on recognizing stressors and coping strategies in teacher preparation courses, so future research is needed to fully understand the inabilities of preservice teachers to cope with the stressors of an ongoing pandemic or any future crisis.

During the Spring 2020 semester, inequities, emotions, structures, and norms were shaken in unforeseen ways, hence teacher educators were left to rethink, reclarify, and reorganize strategies to assist preservice teachers facing substantial stressors. As mental health and well-being of preservice teachers is vital to teaching and teacher education, this study examines how the interplay of preservice teachers’ stressors and personal coping strategies filtered through their identity provides teacher educators strategies for helping L-students persevere through crises. As shown in the CT-TEP model, this process acts as a conduit for helping teacher educators evaluate their preservice teachers’ mental health and well-being amid the stressors associated with/in crisis.

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