

Compassion Fatigue: Stories/ Artworks of an Art Teacher with a Trauma-Informed Pedagogy

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Motivation

Transitioning from being an art student in high school to an art student in college, art gradually shifted for me, from stressing the elements and principles of art and technique, to emphasizing meaning, exploring feelings, communicating ideas, and imagining possibilities. During my doctoral studies, I learned about using “big ideas” to steer art curriculum, such as “identity, relationships, humans and nature, power, change, [and] conflict” (Walker, 2006). I also started teaching an undergraduate art education course which incorporated these big ideas. After reading the students’ first papers about their identities, I was amazed when they shared intimate issues with me. Stories were shared regarding a student’s struggle with bisexual identity, a student’s mom dying a slow death with brain cancer, a battle with anorexia, the distress of being Muslim in the U.S. after 9/11, and stories of poverty. I had no preparation, support, or training in responding to student trauma, yet I knew from talking to other art teachers that students sharing their trauma with teachers was a regular phenomenon. For example, in the introduction to this article, a very empathetic

teacher, Dr. Christine Ballengee Morris, described her experiences with knowing students' home issues, including not being able to afford food, not having parents around, abuse, and drug addiction. I developed the following research questions for a single case study to start dialogue on the impact of students' trauma on teachers.

Research Questions

When teachers have strong relationships with students and teach meaningful and personally relevant art projects, students may reveal their trauma, which may be overwhelming to teachers. This issue inspired my research leading me to the main question: What are the challenges of being an empathetic teacher? This question is followed by the sub-questions: How do art teachers cope with student trauma and the accompanying compassion fatigue? How can art teachers develop and practice self-care, including creating art, to buffer compassion fatigue and continue being empathetic teachers? How can schools better support empathetic teachers? How can teacher preparation programs better prepare pre-service teachers for student trauma?

Significance of Study

Student trauma can be revealed in the classroom as a pattern of absences, failing grades, disruptive behavior, isolation, disabilities, and/or suicidal ideation, but sometimes student trauma can't be seen (Craig, 2017; Calliano, Macchi, Piazzotta, Veronice, Bocchio-Chiavetto, Riva, & Pariante, 2015; Kay & Wolf, 2017). The reality is many students are affected by poverty, violence, family members that are addicted to alcohol or drugs, family dissolution, unemployment, abuse, and neglect (Andrus, 2006, p. 182). Furthermore, students experience strain because of the "continual patterns of inequality and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, social class, and disability" in the United States (Sleeter & Grant, 2007, p. 2). Students are sharing complicated problems with their teachers as their realities outside and inside the classroom get more complex. Teaching students with trauma is multifaceted because trauma is varied and every situation is unique. Unfortunately, teachers are often not prepared to handle student trauma.

Teachers should not be viewed as counselors but should receive training in trauma-informed practices and collaborate with school counselors and other

trained professionals. Teachers are mandated reporters if they suspect or know of a situation that puts the student at a risk to themselves or others. Teachers need to carefully follow their district's and state's protocols and requirements, such as getting other trained health care professionals involved. In other situations that do not pose immediate threat to students' safety, getting school counselors involved might suffice. Unfortunately, there are many barriers to getting students to see counselors, for example cultural stigma or lack of familiarity/relationships with counselors. Due to shortages of funding, counselors are stretched thin; a counselor may travel between schools, while some schools don't have counselors at all as they aren't mandated in some states. Only three states meet the recommended ratio of one counselor to every 250 students, while in some states, for example California, there is one counselor for every 682 students (Kim, 2019). These ratios are burdensome to counselors, combined with increasing job responsibilities and increasing student needs (Kim, 2019). Teachers become an important part of the equation, since teachers establish relationships with students they see daily and because some students open up to teachers whom they trust and disclose their stories of trauma to teachers. Art teachers can help connect students with resources by eliminating stigma and encouraging students to form relationships with counselors. Teachers should involve authorities when appropriate.

Another way to help students with trauma is by creating an art curriculum centered on transforming trauma, which can lead to student healing, empowerment, and agency. Art can be a coping mechanism, a "calm space where students can pause" to help understand and work through trauma and "articulate complicated feelings" (Collins, 2016, p. 124; Craig, 2002). Student voices can be heard as students become "participatory, creative, aware, and critical," using art to re-frame, re-present, and discuss understandings and critique issues in their lives in a provocative or powerful way (Ballengee Morris, 1998, p. 51). Students become "vocal, active, and reflective," as they use their art to address issues of "power, voice, conflict, class, gender, and race" in a way that is understood by the community (Garcia & Shirley, 2012, p. 83; Ballengee Morris, 1998, p. 44, p. 9). With resources and training combined with the pedagogical approach just described, art teachers can become powerful agents in helping change students' circumstances.

The impact of not preparing teachers with the skills they need in environments of student trauma is compassion fatigue, or secondary trauma, and burnout. Compassion fatigue is a relatively new concept overall with its

roots from nurses' experiences in the early 1990s (Joinson, 1992). Although scholars have only begun to apply the concept to teachers recently, teachers experiencing compassion fatigue is not new. Compassion fatigue can include experiencing painful emotions, intrusive images, nightmares, sleep difficulties, headaches, and a sense of helplessness while burnout has symptoms of "emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment" (Hill, 2011, as cited in Craig, 2017, p. 100; Hoffman, et al, 2007, p. 16). Discussions of teacher compassion fatigue and better ways of coping with student trauma are absent altogether. Though trauma-informed educational practices are gaining ground, there is still scarce research on compassion fatigue and little support offered for teachers; my research begins to fill this gap.

Compassion fatigue wears teachers out "physically, emotionally, and mentally" especially when teachers feel overwhelmed in an unsupportive, demanding environment (Fowler, 2015, p. 31). Compassion fatigue and burnout can eventually lead to teachers leaving the field. Teaching has a "ripe history of burnout, job dissatisfaction, and teacher attrition" (Scheib, 2006). In 2015, the U.S. was short 60,000 teachers; attrition "was the single biggest contributor to the shortage" (Heim, 2016). Dissatisfaction was the cause of 48% of teachers dropping out (Ingersoll & Purda, 2015). The emotional and physical toll of day-to-day teaching was a reason for dissatisfaction (Olsen & Anderson, 2007). Compassion fatigue may be a part of why teachers are quitting. It is important to address how to keep teachers in the field and support them to reduce attrition (Scheib, 2006).

Statement of Purpose

My research expands compassion fatigue into the realm of teaching by sharing relatable and humanizing stories, poetry, and artworks surrounding these issues. It is important to approach trauma and mental health of teachers proactively to prevent compassion fatigue and burnout through education and teacher preparation. The purpose of this study, aimed at teachers, school administrators, and teacher preparation programs, was to bring the challenges of a humanizing pedagogy to light in order to create a conversation to work through these challenges.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework I used was a Freire's (1993) critical pedagogy combined with post-structuralist theory. Freire's critical pedagogy emphasizes listening to empower others, an anti-authoritarian approach to teaching (in this case research), encouraging critical discourse, and examining power relations of students and larger social/economic/political forces, structures, and practices (Barakett et al., 2002, p. 41; Travis et al., 2017, p. 211). Critical pedagogy influenced my choice of storying and creating with the teacher.

Resisting positivism, which states there is a stable, unchanging truth that transcends opinion/personal bias, post-structuralist theory argues no one 'truth' exists, or no one method can grasp the subtle variations in human experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 24). There are ongoing discourses of power; since many meanings or experiences exist, exposing the researcher's stance and incorporating multiple voices is key. This influenced my choice of multiple types of arts-based research as a methodology, and my value of crystallization, combining my voice with the teacher and students' voices to display multiple perspectives, and experiences of lived and told stories, or narrative inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 965; Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). My stance is exposed because my goals/intentions, thoughts, emotions, and vulnerabilities are disclosed in my artmaking and interwoven through reflections in my writing.

Method & Data

Methodology

Research was conducted through a single case study of one middle school art teacher to explain, explore, describe, and get a deeper understanding of teacher compassion fatigue through multiple types of data sources, including storying and arts-based research (Creswell, 2013).

Storying

Storying and arts-based research were used to collect and interpret data to form insights for art education. I conversed with the teacher surrounding the research questions using storying and recorded and transcribed the conversation. Storying is a more organic version of exchanging stories rooted in Native American oral storytelling traditions (Ballengee Morris & Staikidis, 2017). Storying levels the power hierarchy and decolonizes research in comparison to interviewing (Brayboy, Gough, Leonard, Roehl II, & Solyom, 2012; Grande, San

Pedro, & Windchief, 2015). Instead of one-sided interviews, the storytelling methodology privileges relationships by emphasizing exchanging conversations, and “interactions rooted in difference, conflict, vulnerabilities, and respect are forged” (Green, 2000; Noddings, 1993; Bakhtin, 1981, 1990; Schultz, 2009; Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014, p. 28). I member-checked the transcription to make sure the teacher was comfortable with the information shared.

Arts-Based Research

I then utilized arts-based research, creating poetry, social fiction, and a collaborative visual artwork to display teacher, researcher, and student perspectives. I chose arts-based research to resonate with audience’s emotions and connect with their experiences, inspiring reflection and action immediately (Eisner, 2006, p. 15; Brady, 2005, p. 998); for accessibility to reach a broader audience and engage them on a deeper or complex level; to preserve the complexity of participants (Leavy, 2015, p. 45); to render knowledge and participants’ experiences in a holistic, embodied, authentic, dynamic, and creative way; to breathe humanity back into research; and to expose my stance as a researcher.

Participants

I studied with an art teacher, who teaches grades six through eight at an alternative K-8 school around Columbus, Ohio, which used to be Wyandot Indian Territory. She focused on building parent-teacher, school-community, and student-teacher relationships, and implemented trauma-informed practices. Trauma-informed practices include understanding, recognizing, and responding to the effects of trauma. Trauma-informed and restorative practices were the underlying structure of the teacher’s pedagogy. She did not prompt students to tell her their trauma, but stories came through when they felt safe. She read student body language, hearing their communication or lack of, and stayed non-judgmental, asking diffusing questions. She noted student patterns, such as repeated absences, sleepiness, anger, impulsive/aggressive actions, feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, isolation, and/or withdrawal, that hinted underlying issues of trauma (Craig, 2017, p. 20). Instead of seeing students’ actions as behavioral problems and reacting with punishment, she tried to understand the students holistically and put relationships first. She taught students to manage their stress and emotions, giving them time to deescalate, coached them privately in repairing mistakes, worked on communication, prompted self-reflection and self-monitoring, and constructed a positive self-image. For example, the teacher avoided no-excuse behavioral policies and punitive punishment which further

exacerbates issues and fails to address the “complexities underlying the behavior of adolescents with trauma histories” (Craig, 2017, p. 100). She worked to de-escalate aggressive student behaviors and repair misbehaviors, replacing “harsh judgments of their misdeeds with curiosity about why the misdeeds are occurring” (Craig, 2017, p. 2, p. 9). She modeled and prompted self-regulation of student’s emotions and reactions, giving students space to deescalate and gain composure, then giving opportunities to resolve conflicts and repair damaged relationships.

In order to protect participant identities, the responses were anonymous, and the names of the teacher, students, and school were replaced. This information was kept confidential by converting the names to a code, and the guide was secured in a filing box in my advisor’s office. To further protect student identities, I kept notes on stories of trauma I heard while observing either from students themselves, or from the teacher, but did not write down identifying names. I then color-coded stories and arranged them into broad themes for the social fiction stories, interweaving the true stories with fiction to further conceal their identities. In the visual artwork, I chose to include student artworks of a project that kept trauma anonymous, which is explained in more detail in the section “Visual Art.” After transcribing the interview with the teacher, the audio recording was destroyed.

Data

Participant-voiced & Researcher-voiced Poetry

To illustrate a teacher’s perspective of compassion fatigue, I turned each question/response from the storying methodology, a more organic version of exchanging stories, into a found poem or participant-voiced poem. Found poetry or participant-voiced poetry is a type of poetry created by taking whole passages from other sources and reframing them through reorganizing the text into stanzas, and playing with line, meter, repetition and pauses (Richardson, 1992 as cited in Mandrona, 2015, p. 107). I only used the teacher’s original words and phrases and her full response can still be seen in the background of each poem, thus her story and reflections are layered upon my own reflections creating a space for the viewer to develop their own connections. Attending to and revealing tensions, an important aspect of narrative inquiry, was central to composing the poetry. Though the poems were created using only her words, the choices of certain words and the layout intertwined my story with hers. I read and reread the teacher’s question/response many times, sifting through the data in a creative way, circling words she emphasized, and thinking about

rhythm, stanzas, line, meter, repetition, and pauses as well as meaning/themes/trends or “epiphanies” (Baff, 1997). I then responded to each poem with a researcher-voiced poem, or poetry created purely through words and experiences of the researcher, to insert my own voice and stance into the research. This created dialogue between the teacher’s perspective and my own with a total of twenty-four poems. I wove together interview data, non-recorded conversations, experiences from the teacher and students, my experiences as a teacher, and my own internal dialogue from autobiographical reflective journals into the researcher-voiced poems to showcase my own perspective in a more lyrical/creative way (Prendergast, 2003, p. 20). Compassion fatigue, or feelings of incompetence and emotional exhaustion, were seen throughout the teacher’s responses. For example, when describing student trauma, including homeless students and students stuck in the middle of their parents separating, the teacher took long pauses and made deep exhausted sighs. She frustratingly explained students not having control in their situations and picking up a vibration of how her students felt. I highlighted those moments of compassion fatigue in the participant-voiced poems and elaborated on them in the researcher-voiced poem. A sample of a participant-voiced poem and a researcher-voiced poem follow.

I chose to represent the teacher’s perspective through poetry because poetry is a method of discovery used to clarify, bring awareness to, and explore insights. Poetry aids me and the audience in understanding compassion fatigue in a more intriguing, imaginative, and empathetic way. It uses reduction of words to emphasize feelings and explore charged, intensified emotions, puts a magnifying glass up to a moment of reality, explores “complexities, and subtleties, and details,” and captures soul, passion, essence, and spirit (Glesne, 1997, p. 213; Owen, 2017, p. 4). The audience becomes “immersed in the moment...our senses heightened” evoking an embodied response and employing human connection, resonance, and engagement, inspiring agency (McDermott, 2003, p. 13). To get a more complete understanding of teacher compassion fatigue, I moved from exploring the teacher’s stories to exploring student stories.

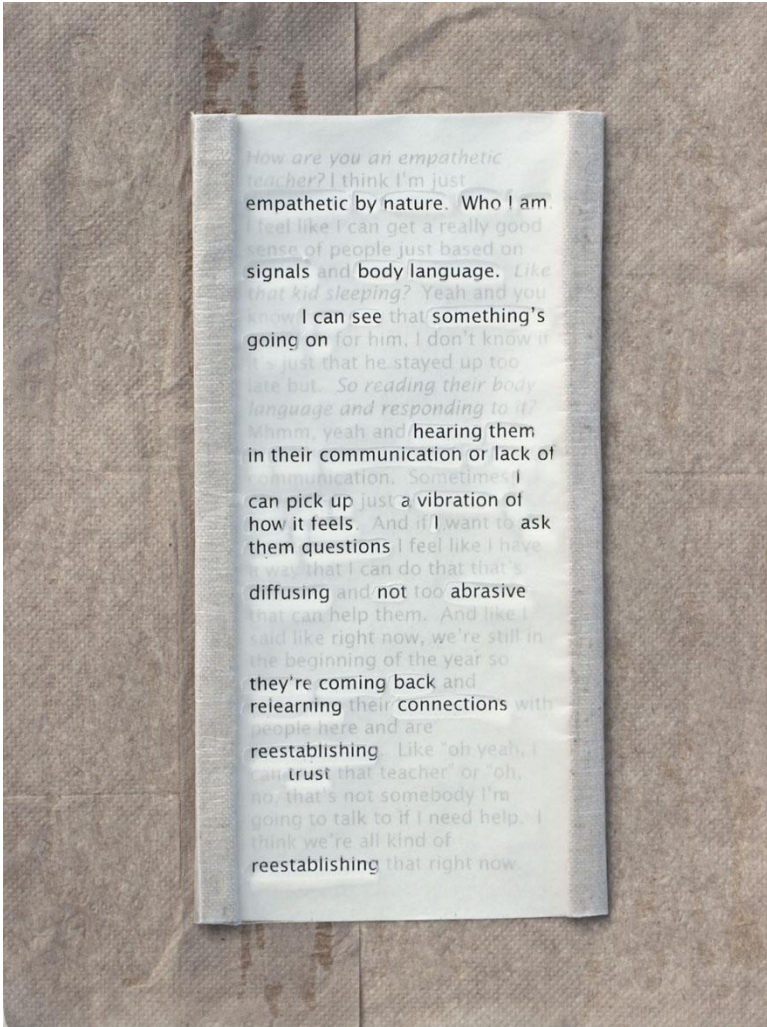


FIGURE 1. PARTICIPANT-VOICED POETRY

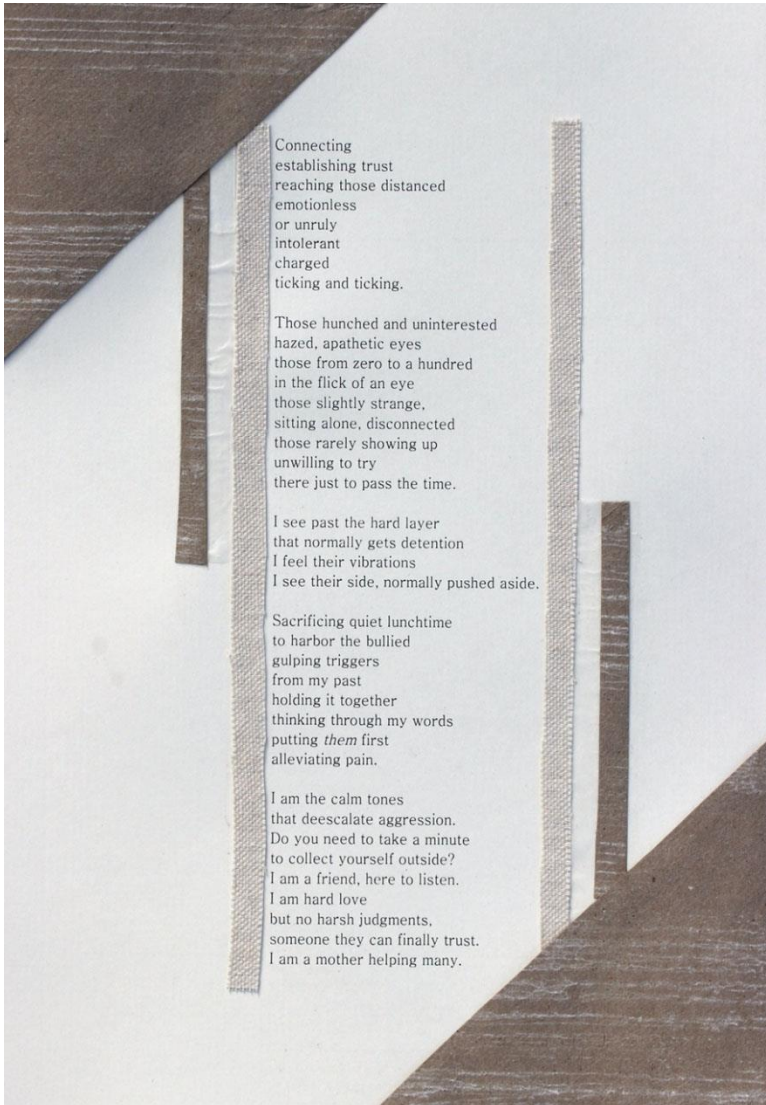


FIGURE 2. RESEARCHER-VOICED POETRY

Social Fiction Short Stories

Next, I created four social fiction short stories, told through a student's voice, which demonstrate the thoughts, narratives, and experiences of students with trauma at school, meant to create a space for teachers to reflect on and

empathize with their students' problems outside and inside of school. I gathered data from observations and from information that the students and the teacher shared with me. Trauma included physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical or emotional neglect, exposure to domestic violence, household substance abuse, household mental illness, parental separation or divorce, and incarcerated household member. I also expanded the definition to include the trauma of "continual patterns of inequality and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, social class, and disability" (Sleeter & Grant, 2007, p. 2). I wrote down snippets of quotes and stories concerning students and trauma, color coded and organized the stories into broad themes, and interpreted the data through fictional writing, highlighting moments of tension for both students with trauma and their teachers. Social fiction protected students' identities and avoided re-traumatizing them not probing or prompting them to share.

Through a compilation of true lived experiences from students, I created four fictional student characters to represent each emerging theme. Each theme combines the stories of multiple students, gathered from conversations with students and conversations with the teacher. Themes included poverty and unsafe circumstances (i.e. home invasions, gang-involvement, shooting); homelessness and parents with disabilities; bullying, suicide, and family death; and caring for siblings in a single-parent home. After the stories, I disclosed my process and thoughts. The stories focused on emotions surrounding trauma such as embarrassment, anger, jealousy, hopelessness, numbness, or exhaustion. I incorporated moments of tension when trauma impacted their classroom experience. To engage readers, I added vivid details and vocabulary to paint scenes, used dialogue in contrast with character interiority, and added visual culture allusions to hint at the themes. The following is one of the four social fiction stories. This particular story, which shows the themes homelessness and parents with disabilities, was chosen to exemplify the tension compassionate teachers often feel with staying afterschool to care for students with trauma or going home to care for their own family.

Last period of the day. "Yeah, we're leaving right after school for the airport. You ever been to the Caribbean?" I look down and shake my head. "Nope, never been. Sounds like a blast! Will you get to snorkel?" Jessica is blatantly boasting; her family is traveling out of town to some luxurious place for the holidays. Not me. Will I be at another Motel 6 again, the spiked leaves of unwanted weeds breaking

through the blacktop sea outside the door, heating up ramen noodles in a crusty microwave? Or tiptoeing around another friend of a friend's kitchen for a bowl of soft, stale cereal? Last weekend it was obvious my presence was unwanted at my mom's friend Rosa's house; awkwardly wandering to stay out of the way, I waited for the last of the little kids to go to bed so I could finally retreat to the couch. Who knows where I'll be tonight. I'll definitely be alone dying of boredom, spending hours by myself continuing the elaborate storyline of my comic fantasies in my prized possession, my sketchbook. God I miss my old house. But of course, my mom didn't trust banks. She doesn't trust society. So when everything went up in flames, our savings singed and withered into thin air right along with everything predictable in my life. Jessica, blabbing on, hadn't even noticed I wasn't paying attention. I wish I could put a muzzle on Jessica; no other way would shut her up about her fancy ass life. Finally, the last of my class files out. It's just me sitting in the silent, empty abyss. Ms. Carrie sighs and sort of half-heartedly smiles. Inevitable pity. I think she knows everything that was going on. She has a good heart though. I loved talking to her about nothing and everything—I could talk to her forever. I help her pick up the dull abandoned pencils spilled on the ground and put up all the tiny wooden chairs. The motion of swinging the weight over my shoulder, only to softly set them onto the table, was becoming second nature. She grabs her woven shoulder bag, so heavy she leans to overcompensate. She leisurely escorts me to the sidewalk, and hesitantly asks "Do you know who's coming today?" A slight tinge of rejection quickly flees. I shrug, kicking a tiny pebble into the crack of the sidewalk. "How's your comic coming along?" "Pretty good." I flip open my sketchbook to my bookmark and flip back a few pages to the last page she had seen. "I was thinking she could go on some scuba diving adventure next." Not that I'd ever been to the ocean before, but Rosa's kids were watching *Blue Planet* last weekend, so I could probably make something up. "Wow! Look at this detail! I can tell you put so much time into this." She smiles genuinely; this time without the pity. I don't think she knew this was the best thing I had to pass the time. "Do you want me to take you home?" "No thanks, Ms. Carrie. I'll be fine." I imagine declaring I don't really have a home, but I don't. "Well, Ms. Josie is in the front office if you need anything." "Thanks Ms. Carrie. See you next week!" I knew she had her own kids to get

home to. I take a deep breath. Could be ten minutes, could be an hour. Goosebumps sluggishly creep up my arms. I hate this hoodie—it's too thin and too small so it rides up. I sit on the damp, hard sidewalk, grab a nearby twig, and graffiti my name in the dirt, imagining what the world could be if I could just draw it with my twig. Maybe I could draw myself a nicer coat, a puffy one that makes you look like the Pillsbury Dough Boy. My toes were going numb. Finally, the tan minivan clatters around the corner, stuffed full of everything we owned, making us look like hoarders. Frustrated, I shove everything onto the floor to clear my seat; the cover of *The Giving Tree* slightly rips in the process. Great—my favorite book from childhood. My disheveled mom, reeking of cigarettes, huffs “Well, another shitty day at the factory! That Ms. Carrie tried to call me today. She really gets under my skin! Can't trust her.” She rambles on, “you didn't tell her anything did you?” “No, mom. I didn't say anything.” “That whole school's out to get us—trying to take you away. Well I'm giving you a roof every night. I'm doing everything for you.” “Mom, can we stop somewhere? I'm hungry.” “No, there's some saltine crackers in the back. You know, you have it so easy. Everything's so much harder in my life because of you. I could go anywhere, do anything.” Squinting and wiping away tears before they turn to steam, she adds “but no, I'm taking care of you.” I wish I could just make her happy. If I could only be better, she wouldn't be so miserable. I recover the *The Giving Tree* from under my feet and carefully slip it into my backpack, like I'm handling a cherished print in an art archive with pearly white gloves. Maybe I can keep it safe in my locker at school.

I used social fiction because it takes “factually accurate prose about real people and events—in a compelling, vivid, dramatic manner” to entice readers (Leavy, 2015, p. 44). Social fiction gives complexity to an often simplistic, incomplete, underdeveloped narratives, such as trauma (Kraehe, 2017). Another strength of social fiction is the ability to reveal the inner lives of characters, and to create worlds that the reader can engage and empathize with (Leavy, 2015, p. 55, p. 63). As a white, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied woman, it was difficult and uncomfortable to be the voice of the students, especially when the students' experiences were completely different from my own. However, this process exemplifies how teachers should explore their students' lives, stepping into their shoes to be more understanding and to realize the necessity of a humanizing and empathetic pedagogy.

Visual Artwork

Lastly, I collaborated with the teacher to create an artwork, which also utilized student art, to visually represent compassion fatigue issues and possible solutions. The artwork, based on Alexander Calder, an American sculptor best known for abstract kinetic wire sculptures, is a hanging wire sculpture with attached organic shapes. One side has shapes of photographed student art that demonstrates the trauma students share with teachers.

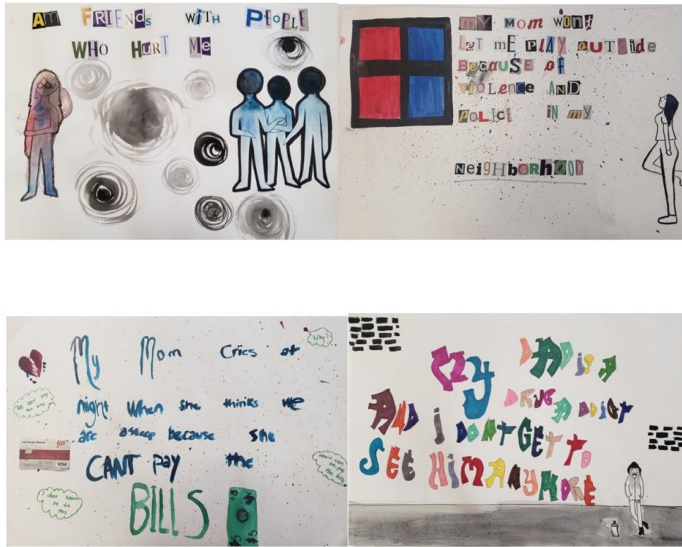


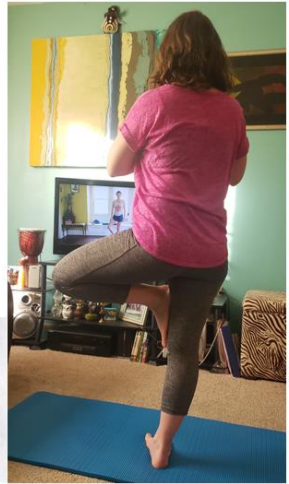
FIGURE 3. STUDENT ARTWORKS

The particular lesson displayed had a goal of building empathy. Students anonymously shared a “secret” based on a challenge in their life. Secrets were typed up, then students chose a random secret from a basket and interpreted them visually. Some secrets were more ‘normal’ issues, for example insecurity and fitting in, while others shared trauma, such as “my dad is a drug addict and I don’t see him anymore.” The other side of the sculpture consists of photographs of the teacher and I participating in a self-care challenge, showing how teachers cope with trauma, for example doing yoga or talking to colleagues.

H I K I N G



Y o g a



C O O K I N G



FIGURE 5. TEACHER ARTWORKS

Overall the sculpture shows the balancing act of student trauma and teacher self-care, or work life with a personal life, where lack of balance leads to teacher burnout and dropout. The weight of the shapes represents students' trauma emotionally weighing on teachers. Bending wire, which is laborious yet fragile work, ties into the theme of compassion fatigue as demanding and delicate work. The wire never becoming quite straight, and the sculpture never quite balanced shows the impossibility of perfection. There is no perfect way to handle a students' trauma and each unique case will be drastically different. The removable/interchangeable shapes represent the possibility of encountering new trauma with new students each year, yet some trauma may stay constant. Some of the sculpture's meaning came from dialogue with the teacher after the artmaking.



FIGURE 5. COMPASSION FATIGUE MOBILE BY THE TEACHER AND AUDREY REEVES, MARCH 2019, WIRE HANGERS, PAPER, AND FISHING LINE, 48 X 60 IN.

Visual imagery shows what is hard to grasp through language, and can relay complex perspectives in an economical and memorable fashion; invokes reflexivity in the creator and interpreter, as the artwork shows artist experiences and ways of seeing to herself and to the audience; exposes insights and emotions and inspires audience embodiment; communicates multiple meanings to the artist and the audience; and shows participant complexity and voice. Visual art was used to seek meaning, to generate new insights, and to clarify and expand on data (Manders & Chilton, 2013).

Evaluation of Arts-Based Research

I evaluated all three types of arts-based research, the poetry, social fiction, and visual artwork, by the following criteria: substantive contribution, usefulness, and significance; credibility; literature and theory groundedness; reflexivity; aesthetic merit; invitation of interpretive responses; and audience impact and accessibility (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005; Leavy, 2015). The only places the research fell short in the evaluation criteria was reflexivity and aesthetic merit. Reflexivity was a weakness in the social fiction stories and the students' visual artworks as the students' identities were kept anonymous in order to protect them. Aesthetic merit was not useful for student artworks, and was limited for participant-voiced poetry too, as staying true to the teacher's words was more important than creating an aesthetic poem.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited as it was a single case study, and results may not be generalized to other populations. To further explore teacher compassion fatigue, there are many possibilities for future research, for example continuing storying and arts-based research methods. A cross analysis of multiple case studies, using multiple teachers and schools could be conducted. This study has a wide range of other possible research projects as well.

Initially, I considered the question how might compassion fatigue impact curriculum? Although I explored the question, the data was not tied as strongly to this question compared to the other research questions. During storying with the teacher, she exclaimed her curriculum gave students choice and control, which was often missing in their lives. Her curriculum centered personal narratives and identity expression, to reflect on and critique their lives and

empower students. Some students utilized the curriculum to explore their trauma, while others used art as an escape mechanism, but both were transformative and healing, or healthier ways to cope than alternatives. Future research could specifically look at curriculum created for students with trauma and analyze the data. This research question could be an entire study itself.

Although interest in issues of compassion fatigue stemmed from teaching in an undergraduate setting, this research was limited to exploring K-12 contexts as well as what needs to be included in teacher preparation programs. A future research study can attempt to answer similar questions about higher education such as: What are the challenges of being an empathetic professor and responding to undergraduate students with trauma? Do teachers with trauma, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, have support systems within the university? Structurally, how can faculty and students work together to ensure student and teacher mental health? How can universities reflect values of relationships and mental health, for example in tenure requirements? Since higher education feeds into the K-12 education systems, and the K-12 education systems feed into higher education, having common ground with trauma and mental health would be beneficial to both systems.

Analysis & Suggestions

Research Questions

At the beginning of the research, I asked the main question: What are the challenges of being an empathetic teacher? The sub-questions included: How do art teachers cope with student trauma and the accompanying compassion fatigue? How can art teachers develop and practice self-care, including creating art, to buffer compassion fatigue and continue being empathetic teachers? How can schools better support empathetic teachers? How can teacher preparation programs better prepare pre-service teachers for student trauma? Next, I cross-analyzed my data within the framework of each of the research questions.

Empathetic Teacher Challenges

A challenge of empathetic teachers is knowing so many students have experienced or are experiencing trauma, such as students who are homeless, students that are hungry, and students who have parents going through a divorce, as mentioned in the poetry. The teacher explained it is heavy on her heart, and an added weight and responsibility to teaching demanding great energy, similar to the heaviness of the student trauma shapes in the wire

sculpture (Gannerud, 2001, p. 62). She was lost with how to react to each student's unique case, which was similar to the social fiction story where a student shares their trauma of neighborhood violence during a class discussion on community; the teacher is set back but keeps the discussion moving. Also, in the sculpture, the trauma shapes are removable and interchangeable, representing the constant flow of new student trauma that teachers respond to.

The teacher thought it was also challenging sending students to counselors as those who need it often won't go, or even if they do go, she explains "there's no guarantee...he's going to say anything." This is also difficult because of the shortage of counselors who are constricted on the time needed to form relationships with students, or as the poetry explains, to connect with them and then open up. She was challenged by confidentiality laws getting in the way of a collaborative effort: teachers need to report if a student plans to hurt themselves or others, or exhibits destructive behavior, yet some trauma (i.e. homelessness) does not fall under the criteria, so the trauma cannot be discussed. Though, she argues, it is the teacher's responsibility to keep students safe so knowing is key.

She was challenged with her own trauma being triggered by students experiencing the same trauma. For example, she had a friend who had committed suicide while three of her students were on suicide watch (two attempted). Teachers of color have the same problem with dealing with their own discrimination (past and present) on top of seeing their students discriminated against in the same way (also applies to gender, sexual orientation, social class, and/or disability discrimination).

Another challenge was creating relationships when the school's main focus is academics, with a full schedule and large class sizes (Grument, 1988, p. 86). In the poetry, she asked "how long do I really take?...I have 27 other kids too...the reality...so many other kids...left without assistance" Supporting students with trauma often took place during a teacher's lunch, a planning period, or afterschool, forcing empathetic teachers to take work home with them which spills over into their personal lives. This was incorporated multiple social fiction stories; in one story after the death of a family member, a student fled chemistry to their sanctuary (the art room); in another the teacher stayed afterschool to wait for the students' mother to show up and pick up the student; and in the last story the teacher made the student lasagna and dropped it off to their house, all taking up extra time. The teacher's biggest challenge was not taking students' trauma home with her too, every night and every weekend, as explained in the poetry. She wrestled with thoughts of "what can I do?" but created the mantra

“I’ve done all I can do for today” in order to create a boundary and shift focus to herself/family. The sculpture focuses on the balancing act of student trauma and teacher self-care, a major challenge for empathetic teachers.

Teachers Coping with Trauma/Compassion Fatigue

To cope with trauma, the teacher recommends talking to other teachers, colleagues, and principals, collaboratively collecting pieces of ‘the puzzle,’ and taking steps together to help a student with trauma. In the poetry, she talks about team meetings to communicate and inform teachers’ approaches to students struggling with trauma. Other coping strategies that were included on the sculpture were carving out time and prioritizing physical and mental health through weekend getaways, hanging out with family, hiking, meditation/deep breathing, cooking, yoga, gardening, and creating artwork (though self-care values are unique to each individual). In times of extreme stress, it is difficult to comprehend the need to practice self-care, so peer-based mental health communities are necessary, with teachers checking on each other to preventatively address compassion fatigue. Self-care is key to teacher survival. This choice of self-care can be seen in the second social fiction story; the teacher chooses to go home to her kids instead of waiting afterschool with the student. The balancing of work life with personal life also shows in the sculpture, where not balancing can lead to the sculpture tipping, representing burnout. Long-term emotionally demanding situations combined with a lack of training and resources can lead to compassion fatigue and burnout. Maintaining self-care, or as the teacher explains it in the poetry “giving myself a boundary,” allows teachers to continue impacting students with trauma.

Schools Nurturing Empathetic Teachers

Commitment from administrators is key for schools to nurture empathetic teachers. Teachers need scheduled time for team meetings to communicate and build a collaborative school-wide approach to students with trauma, and for teachers to emotionally support each other. In the poetry, she explains a system is needed, or a model that is doable. School structures should allow time for socio-emotional support of students and teachers in the curriculum and within the day, instead of finding out students’ trauma weeks later, as the teacher explained in the poetry. Resources, such as more counselors and teacher wellness programs, for example de-stressing collaboratively in afterschool yoga or Pilates, are needed. An underlying structure that values relationships and mental health, support, resources, and time to take care of students and teachers is necessary. Trauma-informed practices should become second nature,

engrained into school systems. With support, teachers can facilitate meaningful art lessons and practice compassionate pedagogies that connect to students lives, creating a transformative and healing space for students. In a social fiction story, the student uses art to pause during their first day back to school following a family member's death, and in another social fiction story the student uses an art journal as a "rock" in her otherwise transient environment. Nonetheless there needs to be more professional development, support, resources (including counselors), time, and structure to support and sustain empathetic teachers.

Preparing Pre-service Teachers

It is important to prepare pre-service teachers for compassion fatigue, burnout, and dropout with a course on trauma-informed practices, teaching them to recognize and respond to students with trauma, but also the self-care needed to sustain themselves. In the poetry, the teacher exclaims punishment doesn't teach, it just shames kids and creates a snowball effect. Instead, teachers should not damage but restore relationships. Preparing teachers with solid, simple strategies and habits for trauma-informed and empathetic pedagogies before they enter schools is key, as implementing it into schools through professional development is much harder. In the poetry, the teacher explains if we just go all the way back to the university programs, it becomes a natural part of your pedagogy, your practice, your philosophy. Teacher preparation programs can develop empathetic teachers instilling values of stressing student health/wellbeing, encouraging student resilience, creating a safe environment for students, building strong and caring relationships with students, avoiding punitive punishment and instead understanding trauma responses, teaching social and emotional skills, and utilizing therapeutic art in their curriculum. In addition to teaching these values, professors should also model these ideals. Teacher preparation programs should stress the importance of maintaining teacher mental health through emphasizing the need for teachers to carve out time for self-care to sustain their careers.

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