A perspective on psychological factors affecting the emotional labor of teachers

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Several psychological factors are discussed in relation to teachers' emotional labor (EL). Ecological systems theory (EST) is used in relation to the role of emotional intelligence (EI) to provide a perspective on ways to conceptualize how to address secondary traumatic stress (STS) risk among teachers. An international selection of the literature is synthesized in relation to the factors that may affect EL in relation to STS risk among teachers who have students with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). The concept of EI is central to this discussion of theoretical relationships between EI and STS risk relevant to teachers' EL. While there is much literature on Bronfenbrenner's EST and Gardner's multiple intelligences (MI) theory separately, there is room in the literature for exploring EST to contextualize the topic of STS risk as it relates to the concept of EI. The purpose of this study is to discuss allostatic load factors that may affect teachers' EL and to discuss potential ways to acknowledge EL.

KEYWORDS

allostatic load, cognitive load, ecological systems theory, emotional intelligence, emotional labor, secondary traumatic stress, teachers, trauma-informed education

1 Introduction: contextualizing terms and identifying emotional labor factors

1.1 Allostatic load

The cumulative increase in chronic psychological stress is known as allostatic load (Wettstein et al., 2023). Increases in teachers' allostatic load may be ameliorated with social support from other teachers and from their school administrators (Wettstein et al., 2023). When a teacher is told of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) by students or their families, this can have a cumulative effect on teachers as it may increase their allostatic load. Expectations on teachers to engage in emotional labor (EL) for students and their families can compound exponentially when there are insufficient numbers of licensed mental health professionals available to students and their families (Eklund et al., 2017). Even in cases where there are licensed counselors available at the school, students may feel more comfortable talking to one of their teachers. Teachers may be placed in challenging situations because they are in nearly daily proximity to students who may ask their teachers for advice on their personal issues, discuss their personal issues with their teachers, or demonstrate behavior in the classroom that may require their teachers to intervene. Discussions of student mental health may frequently occur and regularly involve teachers (Berardi and Morton, 2019; Billingsley and Bettini, 2019; Jackson and Stevens, 2023).

Allostatic load may be a major factor affecting teachers' EL. Secondary traumatic stress (STS) is a potential part of this factor in why there has been substantial teacher attrition in some places. This factor is only recently gaining substantial attention in teacher education and

is being named and explored in detail (Billingsley and Bettini, 2019; Essary et al., 2020; Federičová, 2021; Madigan and Kim, 2021; Edsall, 2022; Perna, 2022; Bosen, 2023). STS is defined as the cumulative negative effect of working with survivors of traumatic life events, or with the perpetrators of traumatic behavior, on a regular or semiregular basis (Osofsky et al., 2008, p. 91). Strategies for managing feelings and related emotions are necessary for teachers to avoid STS (Sprang et al., 2019). Part of the complexity of this issue is in the unwritten, yet socially enforced, "emotional rules" to which teachers are daily expected to adhere. They might be subject to subtle pressure to not advocate for better support because EL is part of the job (Walker, 2019; Dunn et al., 2020).

Teachers' risk for STS may increase when their students–and students' families–discuss adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) with their teachers. ACEs are not necessarily always classified as traumatic events; however, they tend to be considered traumatic events (Jones et al., 2020). According to the *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (American Psychological Association, 2018), trauma is "any disturbing experience that results in significant fear, helplessness, dissociation, confusion, or other disruptive feelings intense enough to have a long-lasting negative effect on a person's attitudes, behavior, and other aspects of functioning." The key phrase in that definition is *long-lasting negative effect*. ACEs may be traumatic events "such as experiencing physical, emotional, or sexual abuse; witnessing violence in the home; having a family member attempt or die by suicide; and growing up in a household with substance use, mental health problems, or instability" (Jones et al., 2020, p. 1). There is an increased risk of negative outcomes for individuals who have experienced more than one type of ACE (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019; Jones et al., 2020). The patterns to identify and for which to design prevention systems continue to be a challenge for multiple reasons (Champine et al., 2019), not least of which are changing sociopolitical contexts that can shift definitions of what constitute adequate interventions (Maslach and Leiter, 1999). According to Portwood (2018), the definition of ACEs has expanded, stating that "more recently, other events, including poverty, bullying, exposure to community violence and discrimination have been conceptualized as ACEs" (Portwood, 2018, para. 1). ACEs may affect people long after the initial adverse experience and may affect an individual's development. According to Shonkoff et al. (2012), "many adult diseases should be viewed as developmental disorders that begin early in life and that persistent health disparities associated with poverty, discrimination, or maltreatment could be reduced by the alleviation of toxic stress in childhood" (p. e232). Their findings suggest potential social ricochet effects in which some students who have experienced one or more ACEs or are currently experiencing one or more ACEs may exhibit behaviors that affect how they plan and interact with others (Ballard et al., 2015; Jimenez et al., 2016). Their findings also suggest a reinforcement of expectations on teachers to perform EL in supporting their students in school.

ACE type may predict specific behavioral outcomes in the short-term throughout adolescence and in the long-term throughout

adulthood (Ballard et al., 2015). Some ACEs are associated with negative effects on academic progress and potential in maintaining gainful employment (Jones et al., 2020). These types of findings seem to be influencing calls for general education classroom teachers to be trained in trauma-informed practices (Berardi and Morton, 2019). Lawson et al. (2019) suggested that ACEs may increase teachers' allostatic load with ripple effects in their professional and personal lives. They observed: "Undesirable effects of STS start with professional disengagement and declining performance, include spill-over effects into educators' personal lives, and, ultimately, may cause them to leave the profession" (Lawson et al., 2019, p. 421). Higher teacher turnover from excessive allostatic load may lead to disruptions of students' academic progress. However, Boulanger (2018) theorized that "vicarious trauma" does not necessarily result in STS. The concept that "trauma is contagious" (Boulanger, 2018, p. 60) is important in the assumption that those teachers with high levels of EI are more likely to effectively resist vicarious trauma and thus not experience STS.

1.2 Questions

Two questions may arise when considering the potential impact of ACEs and teacher knowledge of ACEs: How do school personnel reconcile that some students who have an ACE or ACEs do *not* have any behavioral issues in school that impact others while some other students who have an ACE or ACEs *do* have behavioral issues in school that impact others? Therefore, it follows that teachers might not be aware of any ACEs present in students' lives at all. These questions prompt an understanding of teacher knowledge and student experience that is like a Venn diagram. There are some overlaps but also areas of no awareness. Likewise, Maynard et al. (2019) noted that "trauma-informed" is different from "trauma-specific" interventions for addressing behaviors that may be related to ACEs. That distinction matters because trauma-specific strategies infer clinical support is being provided by a licensed mental health professional, while trauma-informed strategies can be implemented by a teacher who is not a licensed mental health professional. The level of awareness that teachers have of students' exposure to ACEs is an important factor in perception of behavior.

Teachers must provide and continuously maintain safe environments for students. The previous questions may merge into another question: Do teachers need to do more for students who experienced–or are experiencing–ACEs if those experiences are affecting the students' behavior in school that impacts others? Several studies suggest that, yes, more support may need to be provided to (and by) teachers for those students which could include curriculum modifications, training in trauma-informed practices, and more discussions with school counselors in coordination with administration to address students' behaviors (Jimenez et al., 2016; Berardi and Morton, 2019; Walker, 2019; Brown et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2022). When an ACE is traumatic, as defined by the American Psychological Association (2018) and mental health professionals, then those studies further reinforce that more administrative support may be needed for teachers. ACEs are highly stressful events that may lead to trauma (Jones et al., 2020). Therefore, students who have traumatic ACEs who do not exhibit problematic behavior in school likely already have support and resources that mitigated the impact of those ACEs.

These questions and observations infer the expectation that teachers should have high levels of emotional intelligence (EI)

regardless of the types of ACEs their students may have. Gardner's (1983, 2006) multiple intelligences (MI) theory is foundational to this concept, because EI and interpersonal intelligence are concepts that tend to be synonymous in practice (Bay and Lim, 2006). The combined concept has been widely adopted in the lexicon of many teachers and school administrators (Schulte et al., 2004; Bay and Lim, 2006). EI was coined by Salovey and Mayer (1990) as "a set of skills hypothesized to contribute to the accurate appraisal and expression of emotion in oneself and in others, the effective regulation of emotion in self and others, and the use of feelings to motivate, plan, and achieve in one's life" (p. 185). This definition aligns with the interpersonal intelligence concept from MI theory suggesting that people have a capacity of intuition in identifying–and responding to–other people's motivations and emotional states of mind. Teachers' EI has also been summarized as the foundation for the interpersonal attitudes of teachers that may affect efficacy with EL in maintaining an effective learning environment (Harvey et al., 2012). These definitions are semantically and conceptually similar, especially when applied to teacher education and teacher evaluation of efficacy. The overlapping proximity of the conceptual development of EI and MI theory in the 1990s is important because of the continued influence on educational practice at both the individual classroom level and educator preparation level (Attwood, 2022).

1.3 Systems

Ecological systems theory (EST) defines the microsystem as someone's immediate relationships that they directly interact with on a regular basis (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Someone's mesosystem is the interactions between various microsystems. In combination with the psychological aspects of EI and EL in teachers' lives, EST may provide a way to discuss a reconciliation of differences in response to ACEs and levels of teachers' knowledge of students' behavior. That level of interaction between teachers and students affects teachers' EL. EST acknowledges that some students have a microsystem and mesosystem of supports that are meeting their needs, which may mean that their teachers are not aware of that student having had any ACEs. But some students do not have a microsystem or mesosystem of support outside of school, in which case their needs may not be met outside of school. Instead, some students who have experienced an ACE or are experiencing an ACE are not receiving support outside of school. They may exhibit troubling behaviors in school that teachers must address. Some of those students may tell one of their teachers something that indicates an ACE (Ballard et al., 2015; Chafouleas et al., 2016; Jimenez et al., 2016; Shelemy et al., 2019; Berger et al., 2021).

EST is used as a contextual bridge here in modified holistic form so that this discussion considers the microsystems of students *and* the teachers as substantially overlapping in schools, like Eriksson et al.'s (2018) holistic reinterpretation of the theory within school contexts. As such, EI is assumed to be a widely accepted construct that is *de facto* essential for teachers to be effective. Given this assumption, it follows that teachers engage in EL that should be acknowledged as a factor affecting teachers daily. Teacher risk of burnout has gained scholarly and popular media attention that further highlights the need to better understand and support teachers in their EL (Billingsley and Bettini, 2019; Federičová, 2021; Madigan and Kim, 2021; Edsall, 2022;

Perna, 2022). This would seem an urgent task when considering the increase in calls for teachers to engage in more EL as an essential part of their job that infers counselor-adjacent and social worker-adjacent labor that can have notable overlap (Berardi and Morton, 2019; Lawson et al., 2019; Venet, 2019; Luthar and Mendes, 2020; Madigan and Kim, 2021; Maclean and Law, 2022; Wessen et al., 2022).

Using EST as a lens through which to project MI theory's interpersonal intelligence construct onto the contemporary concept of EI has merit for adding to the discussion on how to improve outcomes for teachers at risk for chronic stress. The student-to-teacher working relationship is part of their microsystem (e.g., students, teachers, families) and is also part of their mesosystem and exosystem (e.g., school administrators, district administrators, and/or school board). Linking EST with MI theory to observe EI and its relationship to EL is especially important when trying to identify risk of STS as it relates to teachers' microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem. As such, Gross's (2001) interpretation of findings on emotional regulation in adulthood suggests that suppression of emotions is not as effective as reappraising or discussing those emotions within context. This observation is important because of the concept of compassion fatigue (Osofsky et al., 2008; Cieslak et al., 2014). Compassion fatigue (*CF*) is "a reduced empathic capacity" because of excessive exposure to the traumatizing experiences of other people (Cieslak et al., 2014, p. 76). The social pressure to perform EL daily and restrict their emotions to emphasize positivity regardless of teachers' personal situation may affect risk for *CF* (Dunn et al., 2020).

There are many potential variables in a student's microsystem and mesosystem that can affect how a previous or current ACE is or is not affecting their behavior. This paper highlights several studies that address those variables; however, this study does not provide new data analysis of those variables. Instead, this analysis addresses the scenario where students who have ACEs do exhibit behaviors that cause issues in the classroom that impact others. Teachers of students with ACEs who do exhibit behavioral issues that affect others in the classroom may not necessarily know why the student in question is exhibiting behavioral issues, but in some cases, information is made available– either by the student and/or by the student's family or other school personnel–to the teacher that gives an idea of potential influences that may be causing behavioral issues (Walker, 2019; Jackson and Stevens, 2023). Teachers' EL may substantially increase when students with ACEs discuss their ACEs with their teachers. Recommendations are presented for additional research on teachers' EL and how school administrators may acknowledge and support teachers' EL.

2 Emotional labor cognitive load phases

Cognitive load is the amount of information that the teacher must process, think about, and store in their memory that may affect them in and outside of the classroom (Borntrager et al., 2012; Walker, 2023). EL is part of cognitive load. Teachers' allostatic load may be viewed as a term encompassing the combination of EL cognitive load phases that may occur if a teacher's EL becomes excessive: (Phase 1) *CF*, (Phase 2) burnout, and (Phase 3) demoralization. If allostatic load crosses into *CF*, then that teacher may be at higher risk for burnout and, ultimately, demoralization. This process may be a factor in teacher attrition (Walker, 2023).

The nature of teachers' labor places them in regular interaction with individuals who may have experienced ACEs and other types of chronic or acute emotional distress (Chafouleas et al., 2016; Sprang et al., 2019; Ormiston et al., 2022). In one of the largest studies of ACEs, the CDC-Kaiser ACE Study of 1995–1997 found that 63.9% of the 17,337 participants in the confidential survey had at least one ACE (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Specifically, 26% of participants had one ACE, 15.9% had two ACEs, 9.5% had three ACEs, and 12.5% had four or more ACEs (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). In a study of 136,549 students in the 6th, 9th, and 12th grades in Minnesota, Duke et al. (2010) found that 28.9% of participants in the confidential survey reported at least one ACE. Additionally, Duke et al. (2010) found that for each additional ACE that survey participants reported–e.g., reporting two ACEs, three ACEs, et cetera–the violence perpetration risk also increased. Jimenez et al. (2016) found that 55% percent of their study's sample of 1,007 children had experienced one ACE. In another study, Morgan et al. (2022) found that children who had one or more ACEs were 63% less likely to demonstrate high resilience in comparison to children who did not have ACEs. When considering the number of students who may have ACEs, the issue of teachers' EL becomes more important to address.

Given these findings, it follows that teachers may be expected to provide social–emotional learning support in their classrooms (Lawson et al., 2019). According to several studies, "The emotional needs, labor, and work required for a teacher are significant" (Chang, 2009, p. 194). Teacher attrition has long been an issue. For example, 25% of teachers exited the profession before their third year in 2003 (Chang, 2009). Two decades later, that percentage had increased, according to the National Education Association (Walker, 2021). In another study, Haydon et al. (2018) found that one of the most important factors in teachers' self-reporting of stressors was a "lack of administrative support" (p. 106) in addressing what they perceived as an increase in their EL. Teachers' allostatic load may be mitigated with support from their school administrators (Wettstein et al., 2023).

STS is when teachers internalize their students' emotional distress to a substantial extent that then may cause the teacher to become exhausted (Walker, 2023). That level of exhaustion may be CF, burnout, or demoralization. There may be a distinction between burnout and demoralization in discussing the concepts for teachers as overlapping yet slightly different processes. According to Walker (2021), burnout in the teaching profession might be a "temporary condition" while demoralization is when an educator is "unable to perform the work in ways that uphold the high standards of the profession" (para. 9). When identifying potential STS, it can tend to emerge in phases: CF is the precursor to burnout which is the precursor to demoralization (Walker, 2023). Exhibiting any of these phases could be a sign of risk for STS (Caringi et al., 2015; Essary et al., 2020).

3 Discussion of social–emotional concepts

3.1 Emotional labor resiliency

Teachers tend to be expected to have high levels of EI so that the EL they are expected to perform is more likely to be effective. A high level of EI assumes a high level of emotional resiliency and adaptivity (Herman et al., 2020; Horner et al., 2020; Perna, 2022). The assumption that EL is an essential part of a teacher's job has been so engrained that many teachers have not–until recently–known that STS "had a name" (Walker, 2019). Naming STS helped some teachers discuss their experiences of allostatic load–the chronic emotional stress and acute emotional distress in their long-term daily EL (Walker, 2019). Some educators have described experiencing CF as feeling different from burnout, which could be a symptom of STS. It is a multifaceted type of emotional exhaustion. As such, the emotional rules under which teachers may often operate may be discussed through the EST lens in how the EL of teachers is theorized, perceived, and practiced. EST may provide a frame for discussion of how to address the process for design of burnout prevention strategies in conjunction with teachers' perspectives. There is a continued need to expand understanding of teachers' risk of STS, especially in how to formulate proactive interventions to prevent burnout (Borntrager et al., 2012; Champine et al., 2019; Miller and Flint-Stipp, 2019; Sprang et al., 2019; Hureau et al., 2022).

EI has been emphasized as de facto essential for teachers by various school stakeholders. Interpersonal intelligence has formed the basis for part of popular understanding of EI among educators (Ferrero et al., 2021). Concurrent with EI is the concept of EL. EL is the work that teachers undertake to serve their students and other relevant stakeholders (Zhang and Zhu, 2008; Caringi et al., 2015; Ormiston et al., 2022). Those in other "helping professions" such as healthcare providers also undertake EL as part of their responsibilities (Horner et al., 2020; Halamová et al., 2022). These concepts suggest that teachers' dispositions influence their pedagogical practices. This assumption, however, needs additional research. As a theory, the MI concept has been evaluated in several neuroscience studies that have resulted in some support for the theory's contested claims (Visser et al., 2006; Shearer and Karanian, 2017; Shearer, 2018, 2020). Even some of the critiques of MI theory have acknowledged the importance of personality as an important factor (Schulte et al., 2004; Visser et al., 2006). In a study of 447 elementary school teachers in Cyprus that addressed the question of how personality may relate to EI and how it may impact teachers' EL, Kokkinos (2007) found that personality and stressors at work were associated with burnout. Managing student misbehavior was an especially important factor in predicting burnout. In another study, Basim et al. (2013) found partial support for personality affecting EL. They also found that EL "significantly predicted emotional exhaustion" because "emotional exhaustion was significantly predicted by surface acting" (p. 1493). However, correlation between personality and EI has been inconclusive in other studies (Corcoran and Tormey, 2013).

In a study of preservice teachers in the context of studying EL resiliency factors related to personality constructs, Corcoran and Tormey (2013) found that a quantification approach to level of EI did not have a significant relationship to their classroom teaching performance. However, the same study also found a significant relationship between awareness of emotions in oneself and others with perceptions of success in teaching. While these findings may at first seem contradictory, there may be an explanation in how EI is conceptualized in relationship to EL. That explanation may be summarized as this: EL should not necessarily be tied to EI. The linkage between the two is important to consider, but multiple perspectives are necessary to determine useful information between

the two related, but different, concepts (Salovey and Sluyter, 1997; Corcoran and Tormey, 2013). In other words, the EL of teachers can and should be acknowledged by school administrators and other school community stakeholders without emphasizing a codified measure of their EI in relation to their teaching performance. Interpretation of EI tends to depend heavily on individual perspective that is not necessarily quantifiable.

An important part of students' educational success comes from their teachers' ability to form cohesive teacher-student working relationships so that students trust their teachers (Schroeders et al., 2016). This is an EI skill. Fostering trust may be a continual process in which teachers must carefully consider what they say to students who are telling them about their personal issues or asking for advice. The assumption is that if students trust their teachers, they are far more likely to learn from their teachers and demonstrate their learning. Since students have the most interaction with their classroom teachers than any other personnel in the school, students are more likely to discuss their personal situations with their classroom teachers, which places teachers in the position to do work that substantially overlaps with the responsibilities of the school counselor in addition to teaching their content area (Eklund et al., 2017; Berardi and Morton, 2019; Kim et al., 2022).

Sensory-processing sensitivity (SPS) is a personal disposition that has been defined as an individual's level of reaction to interpersonal stimuli or other interactions with the environment that can potentially influence emotional distress (Malinakova et al., 2021). SPS level may be a factor in determining risk for STS and, as such, this should be considered in a process for fostering EL resiliency. Research on SPS in schools may provide additional context for the working definition of EI and its influence on perception of EL. As such, SPS may be part of the factor potentially affecting teachers' risk for burnout or STS. In a sequential mixed methods study of K-12 teachers in the United States, Stefan Lindsay (2017) examined teachers' SPS using the Highly Sensitive Person Scale (Aron and Aron, 1997) to determine whether teachers' SPS affected their risk for burnout. SPS and burnout were related in several ways. In the quantitative analysis, for example, there was a "statistically significant positive correlation between SPS and the emotional exhaustion construct of burnout… [and] a positive correlation between SPS and stress but did not reveal a correlation between SPS and self-efficacy" (Stefan Lindsay, 2017, p. iii). In the qualitative analysis, Stefan Lindsay (2017) found that burnout risk was higher among teachers who completed an alternative route to licensure and that the "interview sample did not reference their training when talking about their professional stressors or how they coped with them" (p. 105). In a study on SPS among teachers in Germany with a comparison of educator preparation program (EPP) standards in Germany with American EPP standards, Tillmann (2019) found that the American EPP standards for integration of counseling support for students was less prominent in comparison to the German EPP standards. Tillmann (2019) concluded that SPS can help explain part of the reason why some teachers might be more at risk for negative affect in schools with substantial student behavior issues. This also applies to schools that may not have substantial behavior issues overall, but a teacher may have one or more classes that do have student behavior issues. These observations are important because they may suggest that EPPs in the United States should consider including coursework in trauma-informed practices to facilitate educator resiliency in addressing chronic and acute stressors

that may be present in the schools. School administrator preparation programs should also include trauma-informed practices to support both students and teachers. As explored in a mixed methods study of preservice teachers' perceptions of ACEs as they relate to managing student behavior and supporting students' education, Attwood et al. (2022) found that trauma-informed practices should probably be taught in EPPs to prepare preservice teachers before their student teaching internship.

Ormiston et al. (2022) observed that teachers experiencing chronic stress–from their interactions with students and students' families when they are not supportive of the teacher's work–may often exhibit signs of *CF*. According to Ormiston et al. (2022), teachers who have students with ACEs who are exhibiting behavioral issues in school are at risk for *CF*. A study found that teachers' symptoms of STS were associated with their ratings of their students' social–emotional difficulties (Simon et al., 2022). As teachers' STS symptoms increased, so did the level of students' difficulties with behavior and/or making academic progress (Simon et al., 2022). The quality of the working relationship between teachers and students was negatively associated with students' social–emotional challenges, suggesting the importance of fostering a positive working relationship that integrates social–emotional sensitivity skills in practice (Simon et al., 2022). These findings are especially important because they highlight the potential link between students' development and teachers' morale. If teachers have high morale, they are more likely to maintain an effective learning environment. These findings also suggest the importance of teachers' EL as a variable for how researchers can develop a more systematic approach to identifying and accounting for cognitive load in teachers' EL. When teachers must address problematic student behavior, that increases the EL cognitive load on that teacher (Chang, 2009; Walker, 2023).

Given those studies' findings, there is a need for addressing teachers' EL within a framework that can account for the relationship between teachers' workload and EL as a factor in addressing risk for STS. Doing so may provide additional insight for fostering EL resiliency. Though problematic to quantify, there are some studies that have been conducted to test interventions for mitigating risk of STS and to increase probability of avoiding *CF*. Halamová et al. (2022) tested an emotion-focused training for helping professionals (EFT-HP) online module. 22.6% of their participants were educators. Among their findings is the observation that those in the experimental group with the intervention had lower STS risk. Taylor et al. (2021) had a similar observation in their study using a brief mindfulness-based intervention (bMBI) workshop for teachers. The EFT-HP and bMBI examples demonstrate the potential for data-based support models in schools to address emotional stress. These studies have thematic overlaps with Mayer et al's (2024) Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) and its application to measurement of EI (Salovey et al., 2003).

3.2 Perceptions of emotional labor expectations

3.2.1 Emotion models

School administrators are essential in the establishment of school culture and how teachers' EL is acknowledged and supported. McMahon et al. (2017) found that school administrators were major

figures in teachers' microsystem. Frequent turnover of school leadership is a potential problem for systematic approaches to trauma-informed practices. Specifically, teacher turnover and administrator turnover might further add to the challenges of stabilizing EL. This may be because of a feedback loop in having to start again in earning trust with a new stakeholder when there is high turnover (Brackett et al., 2010; Shen et al., 2015; DeMatthews et al., 2022). This factor could be referred to as school leadership culture. Clearly defined professional roles are essential in helping to mitigate acute stress events because, in part, teachers know who to refer students to for assistance when the school leadership culture has clearly defined the referral process and supports teachers in enforcing it (Beames et al., 2022).

A teacher's microsystem is part of the students' microsystem. Teacher modeling of emotional regulation is of foundational importance because social modeling may have a substantial effect on student social–emotional development (Tierno, 1996; Bear et al., 2003). This connection is important to note because teachers play a pivotal role in many students' lives. When students discuss personal stressors or ask for personal advice, which may often happen, especially if the school has a schedule that includes advisory and/or homeroom that places teachers in an advisor role (Appleby, 2012). How the teacher responds, what advice is given, and what additional guidance during those discussions is provided may be crucial in a student's choices.

Some school cultures may include pressure on teachers to suppress personal emotion. This would be in contradiction to Gross's (2001) findings that reappraisal would be a better approach in which emotional distress is confronted in an appropriate context with the goal of lessening its impact on the individual. Likewise, Richards (2004) found that chronic, artificial suppression of emotion can lead to interference with cognitive functioning while, in contrast, reappraisal addresses the distressing emotion so that it can be alleviated which helps protect cognitive functioning. While not generalizable, Richards (2004) study highlights this issue to reinforce what other studies established in emphasizing reappraisal over suppression (Gross, 2001). This does *not* mean that teachers should emote their feelings when at school. Care should be taken to always maintain professionalism. However, when teachers are experiencing chronic emotional distress because of behavior from their students or related stakeholders, their EL should be acknowledged by school administrators. The teachers should be provided with time to emotionally recharge, and licensed mental health professionals should be available to assist with students or related stakeholders who are the cause of the emotional distress. If teachers do not feel supported by school administrators, teacher peers, or students and their families, then teachers are more likely to show signs of *CF* and then burnout (Schlichte et al., 2005).

These issues are compounded when considering students' perceptions of teachers and how they perceive or do not perceive teachers' EL and emotional stress. In a study of 676 students in grades 4–7 across 35 classrooms, Oberle et al. (2020) found that students' ratings of their teachers' social–emotional competence (SEC) revealed significant variability at the classroom-level and that students' ratings of a teacher's SEC was significantly predicted by teachers labeled as experiencing burnout. Teachers who self-reported signs of burnout received lower SEC ratings from students. This is important for both its implications for the need to provide more support to teachers in

their EL as well as what its implications for students' academic progress in classrooms being affected by teachers who are not being adequately supported in their EL.

Related to SEC, is the concept of collective emotional intelligence (CEI) that Fotopoulou et al. (2021) called a group characteristic in which EI is mediated through a modeling effect. This is where individuals in the group tend to mimic the EI of the leader or leaders of the group. Although CEI can be used to encourage displays of certain forms of emotion, it can also be used to suppress displays of certain forms of emotion through social comparative peer pressure. However, there are barriers to measuring EI that "do not permit the homogenous representation and evaluation of the EI construct" (Fotopoulou et al., 2021, p. 1). To address this challenge, Fotopoulou et al. (2021) proposed what they call the "EmoSocio" model that emphasizes comparison and synthesis of identified constructs or factors aligned to research questions. There remains the challenge of identifying and addressing the effects of CEI on SEC in the school context, especially as it relates to teachers' EL (Oberle et al., 2020).

The construct of EI can also be applied to adolescents. This matters in relation to teachers' EI, because the teacher and student microsystems overlap with effects on each other. To discuss one, is also to discuss the other as linked within the school environment. In a study of students' EI, Espino-Díaz et al. (2021) found that EI had significant correlation with prosocial behavior. Low levels of empathy are especially problematic in that this can have a compounding effect with the increase in likelihood of disrespectful behavior from a larger number of students which, in turn, may have a cumulative adverse effect on teachers. Students' perceptions are important. How they view their teachers may influence their academic progress (Shen et al., 2015; Oberle et al., 2020). Qualitative research methods, such as content analysis of programs designed for intervention to support students who have experienced ACEs, have suggested a way for gathering perspectives on intervention effectiveness which can then be modified based on the data collected from their school (Sparling et al., 2022). Likewise, teachers' perceptions are important. How they view their administrators influences their feelings of being or not being supported in their EL (Chafouleas et al., 2016; Ormiston et al., 2022).

EST can help to explain how teachers and other school community members interact with their environments as sociocultural process (Darling, 2007; Eriksson et al., 2018). Socioecological perspectives, drawing on EST, have been used to discuss trauma-informed practices in educational contexts (Albrecht and Hill, 2022; Arvizo-Zavala et al., 2022; Egan and Pope, 2022; Mahon, 2022). EST has also been used to consider how group affiliation can affect students (Crawford et al., 2020; El Zaatari and Maalouf, 2022). Perhaps most related to the topic of EI and EL, is how EST may inform understanding of trauma that is the result of bullying (Lee, 2011). Instructional contexts and student attendance as related concepts have also been explored using EST (Melvin et al., 2019; Nobre et al., 2020; Peterson, 2020). The cultural context of schools is also very important as the teacher's place in society relates to response to chronic stress (Zhang and Zhu, 2008; Berger et al., 2021; Yang, 2021; Brown et al., 2022; Maclean and Law, 2022).

3.2.2 Psychological transference

The teacher is a regular figure of authority in a student's microsystem, and how such authority figures are viewed matters for

behavior management (Ibrahim and El Zaatari, 2020; O'Toole et al., 2020; Yang, 2021). Related to this is the concept of psychological transference, which is when some students who are experiencing a situation that causes chronic or toxic stress–and may feel powerless to affect change of that situation–may "vent" or transfer that frustration toward teachers who are regularly in their microsystems (Boulanger, 2018). The teacher, in such cases, has nothing to do with the root issue causing the student frustration or stress, but the teacher is in convenient proximity that may increase teachers' risk of being a target of psychological transference.

Psychological transference of emotional distress directed toward teachers by students, their families, and/or school administrators may increase the risk of causing emotional fatigue among teachers and, ultimately, may increase teachers' risk of STS (Borntrager et al., 2012; Caringi et al., 2015; Hydon et al., 2015; Walker, 2019). Psychological transference could take the form of a student telling their teacher about ACEs, asking for advice on personal issues, or discussing individual issues that place the teacher in the position of having to make decisions about how to support students' social–emotional well-being. It could also take the form of a student who may be frustrated about a situation in their personal life that technically has nothing to do with their teacher but—because of convenience of proximity and a permissive school culture–may project or vent their frustration about that unrelated issue onto their teacher. Thus, the teacher's EL probably increases. Its effect on teachers' sense of self-efficacy can be substantial and part of that efficacy component of teachers' work relies on a sense of belonging (Van Ryzin et al., 2009; Walker, 2019). Successfully mitigating risk of STS can lower burnout (Schlichte et al., 2005; Hydon et al., 2015; Miller and Flint-Stipp, 2019).

The teachers' microsystem may be the first place to start in evaluating support processes, because it is the microsystem that affects the teachers most directly (Hureau et al., 2022). Eriksson et al. (2018) noted that studies using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) EST can help determine recommendations for mental health interventions. For the EI construct to be studied more effectively, it seems that it should be applied as a factor to all stakeholders associated with a school, including students who have experienced ACEs that are affecting their behavior or sense of belonging in school (Attwood et al., 2022). Psychological transference of stress onto teachers should be measured in some way (Boulanger, 2018). Items that could be coded for psychological transference could include verbal disrespect or physical aggression against their teacher that substantially increase the risk of those teachers having STS (Jackson and Stevens, 2023). In parallel with these findings, Tebes et al. (2019) argued for "infusing trauma-informed practice into everyday activities so it is a routine part of interpersonal transactions" (p. 494). Similarly, Berardi and Morton (2019) noted the importance of social context: "We caution educators not to minimize the importance of developing trauma-informed competencies, and to name them as such" (p. xi). That sensitivity is part of EI, but implementation language should be consistent across school personnel to establish a culture of supporting teachers in their EL.

3.2.3 Emotion acting

EL is tied to concepts such as satisfaction and burnout (Zhang and Zhu, 2008). This suggests an intracultural semantic linkage

between EL and EI. There is also a semantic connection across the EL cognitive load phases in intracultural contexts that rely on stakeholders approaching these concepts from the same working definitions (Attwood, 2023). If understandings of these terms are misaligned across stakeholder groups, then there may be increased negative effects on perception of teachers' EL. Teachers are often the authority figures in schools who are most affected by student behavior in schools because of proximity in the classroom. This understanding is important in the context of teachers' EL because they establish a culture in their classroom that matters and should be supported by school administrators. Teachers are placed in situations where they evaluate student behavior and must make decisions on how to support prosocial behaviors in the classroom. This process may differ from classroom to classroom. Teachers must try to find support for students who exhibit antisocial behaviors. Making decisions on whether to refer to the school administrator or school mental health professional is a frequent aspect of EL. As such, teachers may have to attune their classroom culture to ensure that students feel safe. This may increase the effectiveness of the learning environment while also potentially increasing the amount of personal information that students may feel more comfortable talking about with their teacher. Students who divulge sensitive information about ACEs to their teachers may further increase teachers' risk of STS, especially when it is multiple students throughout the year, and year after year (Caringi et al., 2015; Walker, 2019).

In a study of teachers in the United States, Horner et al. (2020) posited an EL construct for K-12 teachers adapted from the nursing profession. They analyzed types of EL that teachers must engage, including rules about feelings that established expectations of how teachers should feel and rules about display of emotions. The expectation on some teachers seemed to emphasize not showing emotions or rigidly regulate any emotive behavior that could in any way be construed as negative (Horner et al., 2020). In other words, teachers must engage in a sort of acting in which authenticity may be strongly discouraged. This observation is a type of "code switching" that may be socially enforced (Morton, 2014). Horner et al. (2020) suggested that despite teachers' concerns about maintaining complex expectations of emotional acting, the teachers in their study seemed to feel there was no other choice but to strictly conform. They found that teachers were implementing the expected social modeling at a substantial level to teach social skills to students (Horner et al., 2020). Teachers' responsibility for teaching and supporting their students' social–emotional development is a continuous process that is frequently evaluated or judged by various stakeholders. It is in constant flux depending on each student's situation. Those individual fluctuations may increase teachers' stress to manage myriad fluctuations of all their students' behavior and well-being on their own in the school.

Burnout and STS are not necessarily linked, as burnout can occur without STS. However, like a Venn diagram, there can be overlap. Horner et al. (2020) observed that when teachers do not meet the expectations of EL established by the school administrators and students' families in general, "they may experience a sense of failure to authentically uphold the ethic of care" (Horner et al., 2020, p. 25). The concept of authentic care tends to be embedded in the assumptions surrounding a teacher's job that EL is rarely mentioned but is instead assumed. When this is assumed, the school culture may

further sublimate teachers' access to emotional support such as collegial validation. As Horner et al. (2020) noted: "The emotional climate of schools inherently hinges on the ability of teachers to serve not only as content educators but also as facilitators of social and emotional development" (p. 25). If teachers' role is assumed to include being a social–emotional learning specialist, then teachers find themselves placed in a position where they are expected to perform more EL.

3.3 Emotional labor role expansion

According to a 2022 national research report in the United States, 53% of teachers reported that their schools used a social and emotional learning (SEL) model in their school, while 76% of school principals reported using a SEL model in their school (Schwartz et al., 2022). That 23% gap between teachers and principals in their reporting of whether a SEL model was being used further highlights the call for establishing consistent alignment of expectations of EL between school administrators and teachers. SEL, as a concept, is not new. However, SEL as an expansive comprehensive list of requirements has expanded in some places. For example, in Tennessee—as of June 2022—public school in-service teachers are required to complete training in at least 16 different topics. For example, some of the required topic courses are an expansion on what had already been mandatory reporter training for identifying and reporting suspected child abuse. Other topics are an expansion on what had already been mandatory emergency medical aid training, such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and automated external defibrillator (AED) use. In addition to training in the use of an epinephrin pen, there was a new and expansive "Behavioral and Emotional Disorders Prevention and Intervention strategies" training, suicide prevention training, and ACEs awareness and intervention training (Tennessee Department of Education, 2022, p. 4). The list continues. The required training is beneficial for teachers so that they are more likely to be prepared for emergency situations as well as being better prepared in identifying students who are in distress. At the same time, the growing list of required SEL-related trainings is one of the indicators of an expansion of requirements for teachers' EL. A teacher must be ready to intervene in any event that may require activation of those training protocols. Decisions may have to be made in a second with no time to deliberate. Being expected by most, if not all school stakeholders, to always be monitoring all their students' mental and physical well-being all the time in school each day of the school year with substantial documentation requirements adds to teachers' risk of emotional fragmentation (McMahon et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2022; Ormiston et al., 2022). Emotional fragmentation could become the first EL cognitive load phase of *CF* which increases the risk for burnout (Walker, 2023).

It has been estimated that teachers make an average of 1,500 decisions per day while at school (Goldberg and Houser, 2017; Klein, 2021). Negative interactions tend to increase cognitive load while positive interactions tend to stabilize or reduce cognitive load (Blackley et al., 2021). When an individual's cognitive load tipping point is reached (O'Brien, 2020), "decision fatigue" can occur, which tends to disrupt an individual's efficacy (Goldberg and Houser, 2017). Teachers' EL role expansion becomes more apparent when they are monitoring student mental health while trying to also remain cognizant of their own well-being (Eklund et al., 2017; Kim et al.,

2022). Such role expansion may increase cognitive load on teachers as the number of decisions is compounded by the intensity and importance of more of those decisions being about students' mental health.

In addition to teaching the content area subject and skills, teachers are often required to monitor all student behavior, detect patterns, screen for behavior issues, as well as intervene with students to help them make academic progress and develop social–emotional competencies (Walker, 2023). With the daily proximity during the school year of students to teachers, such context may situate teachers in *de facto* mental health screening roles as students are more likely to mention personal issues to teachers who must make multiple decisions about documenting and following up with school counselors, administrators, and the student's family (Kim et al., 2022). In a study of elementary and secondary school teachers, McMahon et al. (2020) observed an expansive EL expectation on teachers that required continual mental energy that increased risk for *CF*. Teachers' EL, and thus their risk for STS, may potentially be higher when their students have more ACEs (Jackson and Stevens, 2023; Walker, 2023). The context that teachers are in matters for their resiliency, so interventions to support teachers should be adaptable for individual needs (Ainsworth and Oldfield, 2019). Systematic administrative support may be designed to better support teachers in schools (Luthar and Mendes, 2020).

At what point does the increasing EL become too much and overload teachers' abilities to provide consistent compassion in addition to all their other responsibilities daily? It varies by individual, but tipping points into *CF* and then burnout are an issue for reflection. Reaching such a tipping point can cause emotional fatigue that may negatively affect teacher morale (Osofsky et al., 2008; Cieslak et al., 2014). Teachers tend to have much higher morale–and are much less likely to experience STS–when they feel respected by school administrators and students (Kincade et al., 2020; Luthar and Mendes, 2020; Simon et al., 2022). Supporting teacher morale is important in helping them manage the trend in the increase of cognitive load expectations in their work (Walker, 2023).

The expectation of EL in teachers' role may have expanded in which more teachers may be expected to take on some of the responsibilities of mental well-being screening and support by being asked by school administrators to engage in social–emotional learning activities for and with their students (Gaines et al., 2019; Lawson et al., 2019; Tuchinda, 2020; Schwartz et al., 2022; Jackson and Stevens, 2023). By being in daily classroom proximity to students in the classroom, teachers may most likely be the first school personnel point of contact for addressing student social–emotional issues. Teachers may be required to serve as homeroom advisors, complete behavioral inventories, write notes on students' daily behavior, and complete additional screening forms that will be given to a school psychologist, counselor, or other mental health professional at the direction of school administrators. This is perhaps a shift in many schools for the emphasis on teachers' involvement in students' social–emotional development that can often become stressful for teachers as their risk for additional exposure to students' ACEs may increase through these additional tasks (Jackson and Stevens, 2023). These expectations affect teachers' workload, especially their EL. Some states' laws and policies are reflecting this shift. For example, Tennessee's Literacy Success Act of 2021 requires early childhood education teachers to have competency in trauma-informed practices (Wessen et al., 2022). This

may further increase expectations on teachers to perform *de facto* adjacent counseling roles that necessitate EPPs to include trauma-informed education as a component of teacher education curriculum (Attwood et al., 2022; Brown et al., 2022; Simon et al., 2022). This increase in expectations on teachers likely means that school administrators may need training in trauma-informed practices to support teachers in their work with students (Attwood et al., 2024).

Teachers may be under expectations in some schools to endure substantial oppositional defiance from some students (Martin, 1988; McMahon et al., 2017, 2020). Students who are aggressive against their teachers can be an especially important factor in teachers' risk of STS (Alvarez, 2007; Jackson and Stevens, 2023). When students create a hostile work environment for the teacher through various aggressive behaviors, the teacher's EL cognitive load can increase exponentially (Jackson and Stevens, 2023). When a teacher's allostatic load increases, they may be more at risk for what Walker (2023) explained as the phases of EL cognitive load in which demoralization can occur after burnout which is preceded by *CF*. While teachers may still function with *CF* or burnout, they are more likely to not function efficiently if the EL cognitive load advances to the phase of demoralization (Walker, 2023). The more that teachers must engage with a student's personal issues—or with a student's antisocial or otherwise disruptive behaviors in the classroom—the more EL they must do (Borntrager et al., 2012; Walker, 2023).

When students engage in aggressive, disrespectful behavior toward their teacher, such students' antisocial or maladaptive behaviors may undermine teachers' sense of self-efficacy which can cause a deterioration of morale (McMahon et al., 2017). If teachers cannot discuss their concerns in a confidential, safe space with other teachers and with school administrators, then teachers may not feel supported. While a counselor usually does not have to interact with a student of concern every school day, the teacher does have to interact with that student in their classroom every school day. The teacher must also teach the student their given content area and skills, even when a student is aggressive or otherwise disrespectful. This continuous proximity may increase EL cognitive load on the teacher. This continuous proximity to a student in emotional distress can increase the risk of STS which may substantially affect teacher self-efficacy (Cheung et al., 2011; Caringi et al., 2015; Hydon et al., 2015; Zee and Koomen, 2016; Ormiston et al., 2022). Taking this concept another step further would suggest its importance for balancing cognitive load on teachers. With cognitive load theory's update (Valcke, 2002), it might be relevant to study STS risk as a factor in teacher's daily cognitive load.

There may be a need for reviewing role clarity in what EL expectations are required of teachers (Venet, 2019). If students' academic progress is affected either indirectly or directly by perception of teacher burnout, this may have related effects in special education services. As discussed by Tuchinda (2020), trauma-informed practices in schools may be an "imperative" that has increasingly been linked to legal interpretations. Tuchinda (2020) concluded: "Schools must be proactive in making their systems for serving children with disabilities trauma-responsive. The imperative to do so is moral as well as legal" (p. 835). This seems to be presented as a cultural imperative that has been adopted by some school administrators. As concepts of what constitutes trauma have expanded, calls for awareness of and proactive support processes for trauma-informed administrative operations in schools for teachers have been suggested (Portwood,

2018). For example, the concept of "political trauma" has been posited by Sondel et al. (2018) in which teachers may be placed directly in the position of navigating and supporting students' emotional well-being–not just their own–during political election cycles, especially when election political rhetoric affects students.

EL can have a cumulative effect on teachers that may be difficult to discuss because it may be assumed to be part of K-12 teachers' jobs. Confusion over interpretation of their role in addressing mental health of students tends to substantially add to teachers' stress levels as they try to determine how best to navigate the written and unwritten expectations placed on them not just in teaching in their content area but also in supporting students' social–emotional equilibrium and development (Venet, 2019; Tuchinda, 2020; Madigan and Kim, 2021; Maclean and Law, 2022). The level of expansion of expectations placed on teachers for monitoring and supporting students' social–emotional development and emotional well-being needs to be addressed by school administrators because it is substantially affecting teacher workload (Venet, 2019; Maclean and Law, 2022). School administrators should develop processes to support teachers in setting boundaries for their EL workload (Venet, 2019). Studies have suggested that teachers have expressed the desire for training but do not and should not be seen as students' therapists (Shelemy et al., 2019; Venet, 2019).

Taken together, these views emphasize the interplay between microsystems and mesosystems. Fostering a sense of belonging is essential for both students and teachers. Both must feel respected. This starts in educator preparation programs, but it must continue in the teacher's first year at a school and continue to be fostered by their school administrators in responsive ways each year. EST provides a way to re-think EI and its operation in teachers' EL. Teachers are part of both the microsystem and mesosystem of students as they interact with each other nearly every week during the school year (Allen et al., 2016).

3.4 Emotional rules

Teachers are frequently evaluated and observed under accountability measures. Part of this accountability is in teachers' EL and how they follow the "feeling rules" of when to express, how to express, and when not to express their feelings while simultaneously being consistent in their reliability to support students' emotional well-being. In large part, this is because teachers have historically been seen as having a responsibility to acculturate students into the norms of that school's community; therefore, it follows that teachers would model regulation of emotions as a culturally mediated process (Hochschild, 1979). In their study of teachers in the United States, Dunn et al. (2020) found "that teachers have been socialized into the emotional rules of the profession in ways that inhibit their expressions of so-called outlaw emotions, or negative emotions that certain groups have been taught not to exhibit" (p. 1). Those emotions included vulnerability and burnout (Dunn et al., 2020). That study suggested that there was a disciplining of the teacher's mind to inculcate self-surveillance.

The concept of surveillance is reminiscent of the psychological panopticon concept of systemic surveillance (Foucault, 1995). The other school stakeholders seem to increase the probability of teachers conforming to the unwritten rules of EL in which the teacher should

remain nearly always positive (Karnovsky et al., 2022). External evaluation may frequently be in mind for teachers in schools with this type of surveillance culture. Indirect and sometimes direct pressure from various school community stakeholders can also influence school administrators' perceptions of the teachers' conformity. As such, this forms a type of panopticon at the mesosystem level. For example, social enforcement could include observing and stipulating teachers' online social media activity. It could also include stipulating what can be discussed by teachers with colleagues when they are in a public space, such as at a restaurant. There may be many other forms of social enforcement of what school community leaders see as the emotional rules by which teachers are expected to abide (Skerritt, 2023).

Generally, being positive emotionally is a desirable trait and to be encouraged. However, sometimes, when attempting to deal with acute emotional stress or chronic emotional distress from their students and/or their students' families, teachers may need to be given a break rather than always encouraged to be emotively positive all the time while at school (Kitching, 2009). To continually reinforce an emotional disciplining model on teachers to always be emotively positive may increase risk–perhaps ironically–for burnout. Overcorrection is a risk, too, but teachers should have a way to express concerns without fear of being ostracized for identifying and discussing their concerns about mental health from the EL they are expected and required to do (Herman et al., 2020; Horner et al., 2020). This is not a one-dimensional process but is, instead a process that may necessitate taking various points of view together to acknowledge each teacher's ethical practices to do their jobs while also protecting their own emotional equilibrium.

Teachers' microsystem is important in the discussion of emotional rules. The teacher's background, culture, and personal experiences matter. For example, "emotive dissonance" was posited in a study seeking to identify teachers' efforts to express emotions that they are not experiencing internally (Richardson et al., 2008). This could also be stated in reverse: emotive dissonance could be emotions teachers are experiencing internally but not allowed to express externally. Sometimes, emotive dissonance can increase the risk of increased teacher turnover (Richardson et al., 2008). Similarly, expression of identity may place a teacher at increased emotive dissonance when that identity is not supported at their school (Kahn and Gorski, 2016). For example, identity dissonance may occur in which a teacher may have a historically underrepresented identity in a school in which they may be the only–or nearly only–member of that identity group. If the school administration does not support their identity, then there could be substantial dissonance that could increase the teacher's stress (Kahn and Gorski, 2016). This may, in some cases, increase that teacher's EL to provide emotional support to students who may see this teacher as their only exemplar in the whole school community.

4 Recommendations and conclusions

Some students may rely on teachers for frequent social–emotional support. Empathy may be an essential component in teachers' EI as a factor in how successful teachers may be in supporting their students' social–emotional needs. When those needs focus on ACEs or related traumas from multiple students each year, there should probably be a process at the school or distract to address strategies for mitigating teachers' STS risk. Social–emotional support roles may be complicated, especially when a teacher is providing social–emotional support to multiple students (Aron and Aron, 1997; Ormiston et al., 2022). Some strategies for preparing teachers' for social–emotional support work may include trauma-informed education in EPPs, in-service professional development, and more administrative support for teachers to lessen or better distribute the EL cognitive load. That type of training or professional development must be assessed, however, to determine if such programs are beneficial to teachers who are either experiencing emotional distress or at risk for emotional distress from their jobs (Gaines et al., 2019).

Teachers and administrators proactively planning together will help to systematically address mitigation of risk for STS so that reliance on case-by-case reactivity can be stabilized (McMahon et al., 2017). If students have more ACEs, the emotional labor required of teachers may increase. If students tell their teachers about their ACEs or other personal issues, teachers' risk for STS may increase. Teachers' knowledge of students' ACEs or other negative personal issues is part of EL cognitive load. As teachers are told more by their students and expected to give advice, teachers' EL may increase. Compassion is linked to EI, but the teacher emotional model continues to need additional research for practical solutions to address burnout and compassion fatigue (Walker, 2023). Trauma-informed EPPs and administrator preparation programs are important so that teachers and administrators can proactively discuss current best practices with teachers and within their school context (Attwood et al., 2022; Brown et al., 2022). By providing such education, EI can be better defined for the school context and expectations for EL can be better defined, acknowledged, and factored into teachers' workload credits (Caringi et al., 2015; Hydon et al., 2015).

If teachers are not being adequately supported by their school administrators and/or students are not being given enough social–emotional supports in their microsystems and mesosystems—to include access to school counselors and other mental health professionals—then risk of emotional distress transference to teachers tends to be high. There needs to be enough licensed mental health professionals available in schools so that teachers are not being expected or tacitly required to take on the additional EL of an interim counselor (Eklund et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2022). The question of *EL* persists as it is the daily experience of teachers. Additional research should be conducted like those of Halamová et al. (2022) and Taylor et al. (2021) that design and test ways to specifically assist K-12 teachers, school counselors, and administrators in identifying and understanding EL, their roles in addressing students with ACEs, and how to share EL with sustainable processes and procedures.

Given the interconnected nature of influences on student and teacher perceptions of what Oberle et al. (2020) called social–emotional competence, there is a need for additional contextual framing to situate support processes in schools. Teachers' EL could be factored into their workload with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods measurement and analysis. Such a measure could be called emotional labor-workload credits (EL-WLCs). On the quantitative side of a potential process for establishing a framework for EL-WLC, teachers could take the Highly Sensitive Person Scale inventory (Aron and Aron, 1997) or a modified version as part of a combination of assessments to determine potential baselines in SPS. On the qualitative side of this process should be an acknowledgement that anecdotes or individual case studies matter in this discussion of EI and EL since perceptions of these concepts tend to be personal and culturally mediated which can result in inconclusive findings (Corcoran and Tormey, 2013). This can be especially relevant if the definitions–or the semantic usage–of the

terms, or the cultural understandings of the terms used, differ among stakeholder groups (Attwood, 2023). It is important that a framework for EL-WLC has a common definition of terms and inventories or rubrics for determining EL-WLC levels. This observation in relation to the recommendation of establishing a framework for identifying and measuring EL-WLCs, prompts the question: What are the characteristics of high EI among teachers? If EI is quantifiable, there may be confounding variables that make it challenging to generate generalizations across cultures or even within one culture. EI can be studied through multiple research methods from quantitative to qualitative and through mixed methods techniques. Using multiple research methods will be important for identifying and explaining complex factors such as STS risk level and the relationship between EI and effectiveness in EL, as well as resilience to emotional distress.

When viewed through the lens of EST, EI may be especially important at the microsystem level for teachers. Coordination between the system levels from microsystem to mesosystem and beyond is important for school administrators in supporting teachers to mitigate risk of *CF*. When the risk of STS is not effectively addressed by school administrators, it can lead to *CF* which can potentially affect student academic and social development. Part of this process is for school administrators to acknowledge teachers' EL as part of teachers' workload. As such, students who are exhibiting traumatic stress or maladaptive behaviors are in close psychological proximity to teachers in ways that increase the risk of transfer of emotional distress to their teachers. STS is a factor affecting teachers as their microsystem overlaps with students every week of the school year.

There should be clearly defined roles for school personnel in which processes and procedures are in place for referring students of concern quickly so that teachers are not in the position of interim intake screener longer than necessary. Such procedures should include clear duty rosters and referral procedures among the school administrators, counselors, school psychologists, and related licensed professionals such as licensed clinical social workers (Beames et al., 2022). This is especially relevant when schools require teachers to also serve in the role of academic advisor or homeroom teacher/advisor where there is especially high likelihood of students eventually—if not immediately—viewing their teacher as having some form of interim counseling role (Appleby, 2012).

Programs in trauma-informed education for general education teachers, such as one studied in Australia, tended to increase teachers' self-reporting of less indecision in how to respond to students who have experienced trauma (Berger et al., 2021). EPPs may help teacher candidates learn the emotional rules of their local school contexts so that they are more likely to be prepared for their student teaching internship. More training in trauma-informed practices may be needed in American K-12 school administrator preparation programs and EPPs (Attwood et al., 2022). Using an EST lens may potentially help administrator candidates view EL as a layered phenomenon in which students' microsystems overlap teachers' microsystems which themselves are affected by each other's mesosystems. Intentional support from administrators who acknowledge these overlapping influences that can manifest as social pressures should be explained. In doing so, school personnel may feel more confident in identifying and engaging in an "ethic of care" (Berardi and Morton, 2019; Horner et al., 2020).

Teachers may improve their social–emotional teaching skills through educator preparation coursework or in-service professional development, but there is need for additional research to establish empirical evidence to support such training (Chen, 2021). Some teachers find themselves to be in a social–emotional support role for their students (Eklund et al., 2017; Lawson et al., 2019; Madigan and Kim, 2021; Ormiston et al., 2022; Simon et al., 2022). These studies suggest the challenges in how to research these factors in the study of teachers' EL, because the process for trying to construct potential intervention solutions face substantial difficulties in design, generalization, and securing agreement among all stakeholders.

Some teachers fulfill social–emotional support roles for some students because of a variety of factors related to proximity on a nearly daily basis in the classroom. This working relationship of trust is important for a student's well-being. Additional research is needed on designing and testing proactive support programs for teachers and students to effectively talk about emotional distress when students rely on their teachers rather than school counselors or administrators for discussing their personal issues. This is especially important when teachers are either expected or tacitly required to perform some of the EL that overlaps with school counselors' responsibilities in a homeroom advisory, for example. School administrators should consider proactively checking in with the teachers at their school to ask if they–the administrators–can do anything to help with facilitating support or interventions for students. Interdisciplinary research on this topic that uses EST as part of its framework may advance the identification of EL workload. Additional research should also consider possibilities in potentially providing a better foundation for designing proactive processes to address and support students in schools and distribute EL more systematically across multiple relevant school personnel.

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