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Exploring Teacher Resilience And Well-Being Through Expressive Arts

Dominic T. Paguio, De La Salle University, Manila; University of the Philippines

ABSTRACT

Teaching, while a vocation, can be highly stressful, and this stress is often intensified by personal, financial, and other problems. To navigate these challenges, it is essential that teachers cultivate resilience or the ability to achieve positive outcomes despite adverse conditions . (Beltman et al., 2011). This qualitative case study explores teacher resilience through a series of online expressive arts sessions designed to help educators cope with stress and identify resilience factors. It also aims to empower them to continue providing quality education despite the challenges. Faculty members from three Philippine higher education institutions participated in four two-hour, theme-based workshops that focused on wellbeing, gratitude, purpose, and strength. Participant insights and responses were gathered during the sharing of their expressive processes. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, the responses were transcribed and coded, drawing recurring themes from the insights and the creative outputs documented in the field notes. The analysis showed five themes: experiences of stress, optimism, gratitude, power of expression and reflection, and a heightened sense of calling.

Keywords: *Teacher well-being, teacher resilience, expressive arts, pandemic, higher education*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic compelled educators to rapidly shift to virtual teaching, significantly increasing workloads and stress levels. Teachers enhanced digital skills and created online materials, which impacted their well-being. Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al. (2021) and Hartshorn and McMurry (2020) noted similar emotional toll on both teachers and students in their respective studies.

Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated dedication to their students and profession (Lagat, 2021). Amidst the stress brought by the pandemic, teachers were generally optimistic about their situation and the circumstances revolving around their job. Avdeeva et al. (2021) mentioned that the well-being of teachers during the pandemic depended heavily on their motivation, emotional state, and their use of effective coping strategies.

The pandemic underscored the vital role of teachers and the need for greater recognition and support for their well-being and professional development. To enhance coping strategies, various interventions were introduced, including the use of expressive arts. This multimodal approach employs creative expressions, such as visual art, dance, music, and poetry to promote well-being. Engaging in the arts enables teachers to process their experiences, foster emotional resilience, and reflect on the deeper meaning of their roles (Klammer, n.d).

In response to the pandemic's challenges, an online expressive arts program aimed at enhancing teachers' well-being and resilience was designed for higher education teachers. The present study addresses the gap in literature regarding the use of expressive arts for supporting teachers during crises (Crompton et al., 2023). Specifically, this research sought to answer the following questions:

1. What were the teachers' experiences regarding their resilience and well-being during the pandemic?
2. How did the teachers cope with their needs for resilience and well-being during the pandemic?
3. How did the expressive arts contribute to fostering their resilience and well-being?

The Pandemic and its effects on teacher Well-being

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected teachers' well-being. The sudden shift to remote learning brought immense challenges, including adapting to new technologies, managing student engagement from a distance, and coping with limited resources (Soudien et al., 2022). Teachers also faced increased workloads and blurred boundaries between personal and professional lives, as their households doubled as classrooms. The lack of face-to-face interactions and difficulty in assessing understanding greatly affected the teachers' morale (Diliberti et al., 2021; McIntyre et al., 2020).

Additionally, fears of contracting the virus heightened anxiety levels. For instance, Sigursteinsdottir and Rafnsdóttir's study (2022) that involved 920 teachers found that their stress levels increased and mental and physical health deteriorated during the pandemic. Earlier studies, such as Schindler et al. (2006) found that university professors showed high-stress levels, and signs of anxiety, depression, and job dissatisfaction.

Furthermore, Avdeeva et al.'s (2021) study that involved 110 teachers from a technical university identified that the mental well-being of teachers was greatly affected by their professional motivation, their emotional state, and their use of adaptive coping behaviors—a combination of internal and external factors. Supportive environments were associated with reduced stress and greater success (Kraft et al., 2020), while adaptive problem-solving strategies yielded more positive outcomes (McIntyre et al., 2020).

Teacher resilience and well-being

Well-being and resilience are intertwined constructs critical to understanding how individuals navigate challenges and thrive in diverse contexts. Well-being is a multifaceted construct involving physical, emotional, and social dimensions, combining subjective elements like happiness with objective indicators such as health (Ryff & Singer, 1998). Seligman's (2011) PERMA framework emphasizes the roles of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Research highlights the importance of supportive relationships and purpose in well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). On the other hand, resilience, the ability to adapt positively to adversity (Masten, 2001), is now viewed as a dynamic process shaped by individual and contextual factors (Ungar, 2008). Protective factors like self-efficacy and social support are key to fostering resilience, which in turn enhances well-being (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013).

More specifically, teacher resilience refers to the capacity to navigate challenges in the evolving educational landscape while remaining committed to providing quality education (Brunetti, 2006). Resilient teachers can maintain their commitment to teaching even in the face of challenges and adversities.

Key factors influencing teacher resilience include strong support networks, self-efficacy, and coping strategies (Gu & Day, 2013). Also, positive relationships with colleagues reduce burnout (Beltman et al., 2011), while reflective practice and supportive school environments strengthen adaptive capacity, teacher well-being, and retention (Mansfield et al., 2016; Squires, 2023).

Resilient teachers demonstrate self-efficacy, commitment, adaptability, and effective coping strategies (Mansfield et al., 2016). They embrace flexible teaching methods, remain solution-focused, and address diverse learner needs positively (Beltman et al., 2011). Drew and Sosnowski (2019) emphasized resilience as a dynamic process shaped by internal and external factors. Thus, resilient teachers possess a strong sense of purpose, reframe challenges into growth opportunities, and rely on supportive relationships to navigate adversity effectively.

From an ecological standpoint, Ungar (2008) stated that environments that serve as resources for teachers support the development of teacher resilience. Positive

school environments, collegial support, and empathic leadership further nurture resilience (Mansfield et al., 2016; Walter & Fox, 2021).

Expressive arts and resilience

Expressive arts and teacher resilience are two essential components that significantly impact education. The International Expressive Arts Therapy Association defines it as a multimodal approach to using the creative arts to facilitate personal growth and foster well-being (IEATA, n.d.). The application of the expressive arts ranges from individual, group, and community levels.

The connection between art and education has been described as deeply and firmly rooted (Santos and Lima-Rodriguez, 2016). Additionally, Santos and Lima-Rodriguez (2016) mentioned that learning is better facilitated and gained through the arts because of the natural connection education and the arts possess. Socioemotional learning through the arts brings about a better appreciation of one's self and humanity (Santos and Lima-Rodriguez, 2016).

In addition, the expressive arts provide creative outlets that enhance emotional regulation and strengthen social support (Malchiodi, 2020). These practices have been shown to promote self-awareness and coping skills, which are vital for resilience (Betancourt & Khan, 2008). Their nonverbal nature allows for safe trauma processing (van der Kolk, 2014), reinforcing its role in resilience-building. Zarobe and Bungay (2017) similarly support these findings, noting that art activities help individuals access resources that enhance both well-being and resilience. Thus, the expressive arts foster key factors that promote resilience, such as supportive relationships, self-regulation skills, and opportunities for self-expression (Ungar, 2008).

While much research has focused on younger populations, expressive arts—including visual arts, music, dance, and writing—are also recognized for their therapeutic benefits for adults. Studies show that expressive arts foster emotional expression, reduce stress, and enhance well-being (Malchiodi, 2012). Adults who participate in expressive arts programs experience significant improvements in managing anxiety and trauma, as creative processes support nonverbal communication and self-reflection (Rubin, 2016). Moreover, integrating multiple art forms in therapy promotes personal growth and resilience by engaging individuals holistically—physically, emotionally, and cognitively (Knill et al., 2005). This flexibility makes expressive arts effective for diverse adult mental health challenges.

The expressive arts, an intermodal approach that integrates multiple modalities of creative expression, are increasingly recognized for their contributions to resilience and well-being. By facilitating non-verbal communication, expressive arts provide individuals with meaningful ways to articulate experiences that may be difficult to convey in words, thereby supporting emotional resilience (Rubin, 2016). Expressive

arts promote coping, help reframe adversity, and encourage a sense of agency. Their intermodal nature allows for a holistic therapeutic approach (Knill et al., 2005). Practices like dance therapy improve emotional regulation and body awareness, which are vital for building resilience (Payne, 2017), highlighting their transformative impact on psychological adaptability and strength.

The expressive arts foster resilience and well-being by offering diverse, adaptable pathways for healing across cultural settings (Malchiodi, 2020). Their integrative nature makes them effective in addressing mental health issues, supporting their use in therapeutic and community interventions that promote psychological health and holistic, culturally relevant approaches to care. The expressive arts offer opportunities for teachers to build and sustain their own challenges and develop resilience. Teachers serve as role models through their resilience, inspiring students to overcome obstacles and develop resilience. When expressive arts and teacher resilience intersect, they create a nurturing educational environment that cultivates holistic growth, empowerment, resilience, and well-being (McKay, 2021; Siddins et al., 2016; Tam, 2020).

Methods

Design

This qualitative case study explored an expressive arts therapy-based well-being program for faculty members from three higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study examined the teachers' subjective experiences during the pandemic, the meanings they attached to their coping strategies, and the resources that helped them during challenging times. Sagadin (1991, in Rebolj, 2013) noted that case studies are well-suited for analyzing and describing lived experiences of individuals and groups.

Participants

The study involved 78 volunteer participants who joined a four-session online program focused on enhancing resilience and well-being through self-expression and peer support. Faculty participants came from various academic disciplines across two Metro Manila schools and one in Region 1. They were grouped by institution to encourage collegial reflection on the role of social support in resilience. Only those who completed all sessions were included in the final analysis. Academic backgrounds varied: 34 participants had master's degrees, 24 were pursuing the same, and 20 were doctoral degree holders.

Instrument

The researcher used a person-centered approach in the exploration of the participants' processes. In the breakout rooms where the participants were placed for

more intimate sharing, they were encouraged to share their experience (thoughts and feelings) in the art making. Likewise, they were encouraged to share whatever they felt comfortable sharing. For the participants who will bear witness to the sharing, they were advised not to comment or interpret, rather, if they had a reflection to what the person shared, they should ask permission and phrase it as “With what you shared, I felt...” or “I connected with what you shared because...” By this, respect for the sharer’s experience was fostered.

In the plenary after the breakout rooms ended, open invitations were given, such as “Who would like to be witnessed in the bigger group?” With this question, they were inspired to share their personal insights and understandings they gained from the breakout rooms. Reflections to what they shared were kept to a minimum to help them feel safe in their sharing. Permission to reflect was solicited if the researcher or any of the participants had a reflection they wanted to share.

Procedures

The sessions were conducted from June 2021 to February 2022. Participants who missed sessions or did not complete the program were excluded from the analysis. This ensured that they experienced the full effect of the workshops. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants’ identities.

The participating higher education institutions in the Philippines invited the researcher to design and implement an online expressive arts activities program to support faculty well-being and resilience. Though not a licensed therapist, the researcher drew on extensive training in expressive arts and Focusing Oriented Expressive Arts Therapy (FOAT), using a non-clinical, multimodal approach focused on creative self-expression rather than treatment. The program consisted of four sessions, each lasting two to four hours, incorporating visual arts, movement, drama, music, and poetry. Sessions followed predetermined themes based on participants’ shared pandemic experiences and institutional concern, to guide reflection and emotional exploration. Data were gathered through observations, video recordings, and transcriptions of verbal sharing. This structured yet expressive format provided a safe space for faculty to explore personal meaning, build resilience, and connect with others through art-based reflection and communication.

The researcher used the FOAT approach as a guiding framework, emphasizing mindfulness, bodily awareness, and creative expression through imagery and visualization. While not intended for formal therapy, the expressive arts activities aimed to support participants’ well-being and resilience during the pandemic. The program combined art-making with psychoeducation on coping strategies and mental health, informed by interviews with institutional representatives to identify faculty needs. Sessions were held online using platforms like Zoom and Jamboard, with participants using simple, familiar art materials. The study did not

screen participants by demographics or teaching background, which was noted as a limitation.

Analysis

Data were examined using thematic analysis, a qualitative method that identifies and interprets patterns or themes within data. This approach, well-suited for case studies, provides in-depth insights into participants' experiences and the contextual dimensions of a phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis enabled the exploration of both surface-level (manifest) and deeper (latent) meanings, making it effective for analyzing narratives and creative expressions from expressive arts-based activities.

In this study, the manual analysis involved iterative steps: familiarization with data, generation of initial codes, theme development and refinement, and final theme definition. Emerging codes such as "emotional relief" and "resilience-building" were later categorized into broader themes like "emotional well-being" and "coping mechanisms." This process preserved the richness of participant responses while organizing them into a coherent narrative. Through this method, researchers were able to draw connections between individual experiences and larger theoretical frameworks relevant to well-being and resilience.

Data sources included transcriptions of video recordings, field notes, and screenshots of participants' artworks. The researcher's reflective notes played a crucial role in maintaining reflexivity during data analysis. After transcribing, data were read and reread, with initial codes established, collapsed, and combined to derive themes. Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke (2006), enabled the integration of diverse data from a naturalistic setting into meaningful themes. The process also followed Yardley's (2000) criteria for good qualitative research, ensuring rigor, contextual sensitivity, transparency, and significance.

Ethical Considerations

To protect participant confidentiality, pseudonyms were used throughout the study. All participants provided informed consent, signed electronically before the sessions, agreeing to participate, allow video recording, and share images of their artworks for documentation and data analysis. Consent also specified that participants would be contacted for approval if their artworks were to be featured in the study. The researcher, an educational psychologist and mental health psychiatric nurse, committed to providing individual support in case any participant experienced emotional distress, though no such instances were reported.

Ethical procedures were strictly followed, including informing participants about the study's purpose and evaluation processes. While the study did not undergo formal review by an ethics board—because the researcher was not affiliated with the

participating institutions—it fully adhered to standard ethical guidelines for research (Rappaport, 2009). These measures ensured participants' safety, respect, and autonomy while maintaining the integrity of the research process and data collection.

Table 1

Expressive Arts for Teachers' Resilience and Well-Being Program

Session	Objective	Theme	Activities
1	- Introduce the participants to the concept of mental health, well-being, and the impact of the pandemic - Establish one's awareness towards how they feel at the moment	Me, the pandemic and my well-being	EXA: Creative introduction Discussion: Introduction to well-being in the pandemic EXA: How am I on the inside?: A creative check-in.
2	Practice the creation of a safe mental space in the workplace and other places	Creating a safe space	Discussion: Well-being in the workplace EXA: clearing and creating a safe space
3	Identify ways on how self-care can be nurtured.	Caring for the self	Discussion: Self-Care EXA: Self-care
4	- Identify sources of strength and gratitude. - Explain how having an attitude of gratitude could help in coping with the pandemic	Resources	EXA: Sources of Strength EXA: Gratitude Closing Ritual: Take home from the workshops

Note: EXA pertains to activities that involved the expressive arts. All the EXA's begin with a meditation followed by a moment to create (creative process). Subsequently, a witnessing/sharing will follow in the breakout rooms, then in the main room/plenary. Discussions pertain to mental health education discussions given by the facilitator/researcher.

Results

The study yielded five major themes from the sessions' transcriptions and the participants' creative outputs. Table 2 shows the codes that correspond to the themes identified.

Table 2

Analysis of the transcripts and field notes

Initial codes	Themes
Shock	Stressor Experience
Disbelief	
Sadness	
Loneliness	
Frustration	
Fear/Panic/Anxiety	Optimism
Looking forward to returning to normal	
Reframing	
Staying positive	
Engaging in positive activities and thoughts	
Thankful to family, friends, co-workers	Gratitude
Thankful for still having work	
Thankful for health	
Thankful for the well-being program of the institution	
Thankful for the students	
Spirituality: thankful for blessings	Power of Expression and Reflection
Self-care	
Moment to pause	
Reflection as a time to breathe	Intensified Sense of Calling
Teaching as a vocation	
Teachers as counselors	
Teacher as a friend to the student	
Teaching as a resource for resilience	

Note: This table shows the themes and subthemes extracted from the transcripts.

Question 1: What were the teachers' experiences regarding their resilience and well-being during the pandemic?

Stressor Experience

Most of the teachers expressed feeling stressed during the pandemic. These feelings ranged from shock, disbelief, sadness, loneliness, frustration, and fear and anxiety.

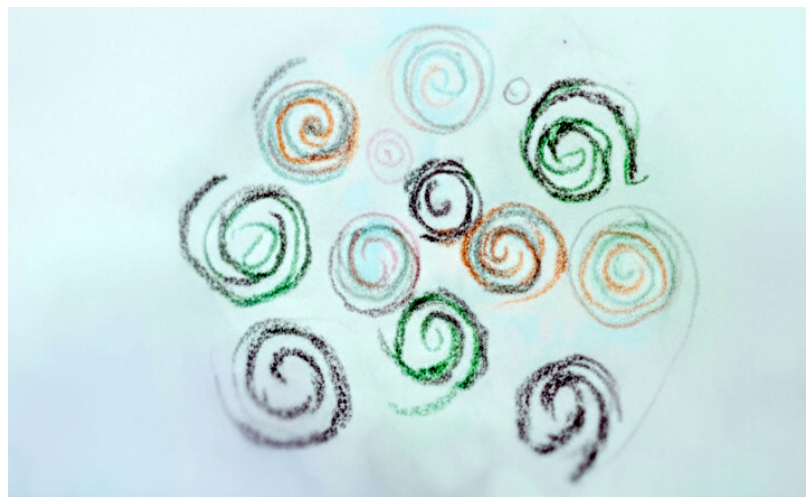
The COVID-19 pandemic placed significant stress on the teachers in this study, presenting them with unprecedented challenges. Emotional responses like fear, sadness, and frustration, along with the shift to remote learning, caused anxiety and exhaustion. Teachers bore the dual burden of ensuring students' academic progress and well-being, while adapting to unfamiliar teaching modes. This stress was further intensified by personal issues, including health, financial, and psychosocial concerns, exacerbating the overall strain they experienced. Four teachers, Angela, Beth, Cel, and Elsa expressed these concerns through their drawings and reflections.

Angela, a faculty member that teaches a medical course, illustrated her pandemic experience through swirls that symbolized her confusion, anxiety, and fears. (See Figure 1). She described her experience of stress by stating that,

"Being in the pandemic felt like being thrown in the middle of the ocean without a lifesaver. At first, I could not believe everything was happening. I thought the lockdown would just last a few days, but when weeks turned into months, the reality of the situation started to sink in. It caused teachers to panic because we were not used to alternative teaching modalities. Also, the boundaries between work and home life were blurred since everything happened in one space. There were times that things felt too much to handle."

Figure 1

Angela's drawing



Moreover, Cel mentioned that keeping up to the technology and the jargon that came with it was challenging and sometimes overwhelming. She reported feeling confused and frustrated. She missed the in-person interactions with her students, which she saw as mentoring moments and a significant part of a teacher's caring role.

In addition, Beth a junior faculty member, stated that,

"There were times that I felt I was going into this dark, sad place in my mind. Maybe it was the lack of clarity when things would go back to how it was because it was hard to juggle being a mother, a wife, and a teacher simultaneously. The pandemic made me value the time away from home. It made things seem more manageable rather than overwhelming."

Fear of contracting the virus, concerns for their families, and the constant need to implement health and safety protocols added to their emotional strain. Cita said that, because of her age, she is conscious that she is at more risk of getting sick. This creates a feeling of "paranoia" and stress, especially when discussions about returning to in-person classes arise. This was also evident in the artwork of Elsa, a new faculty member in her institution. She explained that her health is a major concern because she lives with her aging parents. Every time she goes to the hospital to supervise her students, she worries about getting sick or, worse, passing the virus on to her parents, a risk that terrifies each time she reports for work. Figure 2 shows Elsa with her artwork.

Figure 2

Elsa



Note: Elsa drew her body to emphasize her physiological concerns about contracting and passing the virus to others.

It was evident in the study, through the participants' shared reflections, that the pandemic caused stress in their lives. . Through their verbal and art expressions, they were able to share these experiences with other participants. This helped them realize that their experiences were not isolated but shared by others. Through this, they felt less alone and more courageous in confronting these stress responses. Angel (not his real name) shared: "By talking about the stress we were able to breathe out the tension and breathe in understanding among the participants. After all, that is what we long for, to be understood."

Question 2: How did the teachers cope with their needs regarding their resilience and well-being during the pandemic?

The following themes pertain to the factors that influenced how teachers coped with and addressed their well-being needs during the pandemic. The themes also align with the view that resilience plays a key role in achieving well-being. Resilience positively influences well-being by enabling individuals to adapt and recover from adversity. Ten participants mentioned that optimism and gratitude helped them deal with the emotional impact of the pandemic, while 5 expressed that an intensified sense of calling to teach sustained them. Below are some excerpts that support these themes.

Optimism

The theme of optimism was reflected in the verbal and art expressions of the participants. For them, it acted as a buffer against the impact of adversity. They viewed optimism as having a perspective of the situation leaning towards more positive expectations. By doing so, they become more proactive in viewing their circumstance, and ultimately, help them adapt to adversity more effectively. Manuel shared, *"The better option now is to see things more positively. You lose if you succumb to negativity. Being more positive helps me get by day by day and even look forward to the next day. It is a constant battle, an effortful step towards a more positive outlook."*

For the participants, being optimistic entails a more conscious, explicit effort. As Melody shared, *"The easier path is to think negatively. When everything around you seem bleak, you naturally gravitate towards rumination and negativity. It takes a conscious step to look the other way and see things more optimistically."*

In this study, optimism emerged as a powerful force that helped the teachers adapt and thrive in harsh, stressful conditions. By reframing their view towards more positive thoughts, their days became more bearable, giving them more energy to face adversity. Lydia imparted,

"It was hard working from home. Everything gets muddled, and you are put in a situation where you face everything all at once. That kind of environment tested even the strongest among us. I just had to think that, at least, I get to

spend more time with my family, I see my children growing up, that we are healthy and COVID-free. I needed to change how I viewed things. If not, I don't know if I could have survived my days."

As shown in the collage activity in Figure 3, participants included expressions encouraging one another to think more positively, be happy and positive, and focus on positive values and kindness.

Figure 3:

Jamboard on Optimism



Optimism allowed the teachers to see the situation not as what it is, but as what it could be. An optimistic teacher possesses the ability to see beyond current limitations.

In summary, optimism in the study helped teachers have a more positive outlook, allowing them to reframe challenges and adapt more effectively. In addition, the participants' optimism was not about unrealistic expectations or toxic positivity. As Beth (not her real name), a junior faculty member, mentioned, "*We think positively but not fantastically. Being positive about the situation takes into consideration the reality.*"

Gratitude

Gratitude emerged as another theme in the sharing of ten participants. For them, acknowledging what they had amidst immense challenges during the pandemic helped them ease their misery and reminded them of their blessings. Thus, being grateful allowed them to navigate challenges more effectively and even find moments of

fulfillment amidst adversity. It shifted their focus from what was lacking to what they still had, fostering a sense of joy and fulfillment.

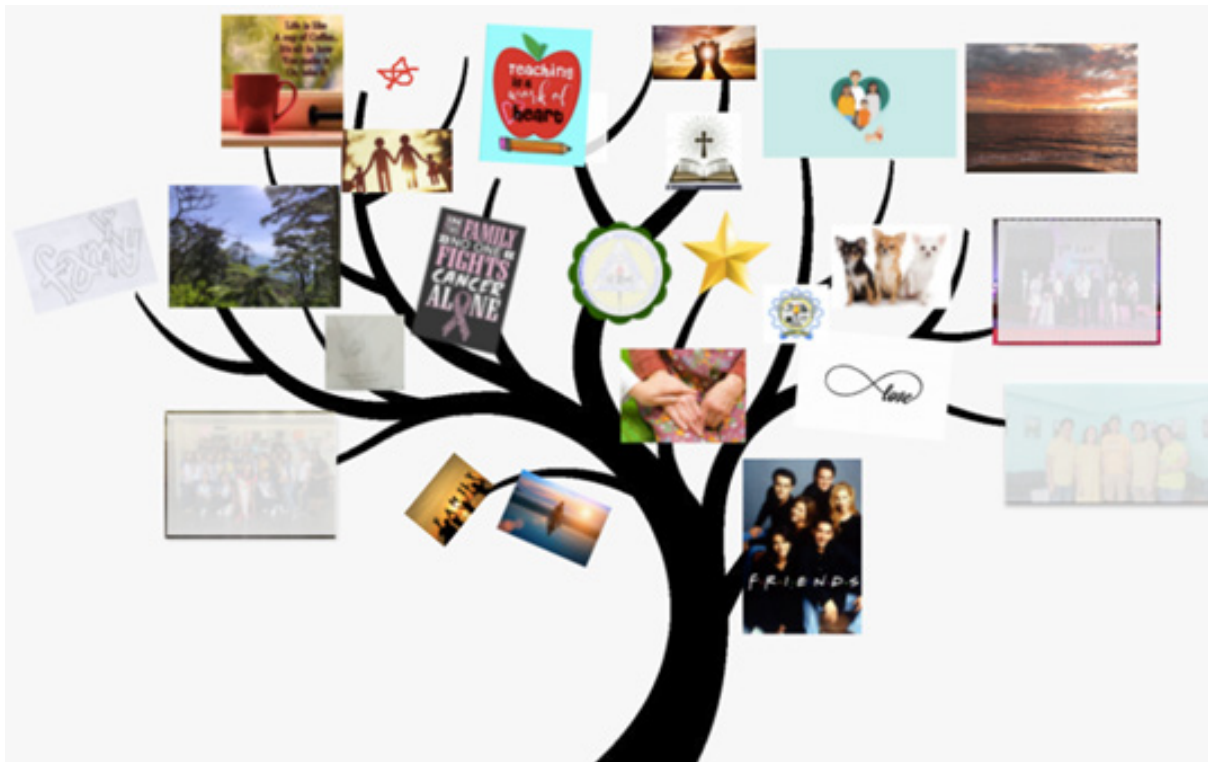
Angela, passionately shared: *“Gratitude was the one thing that helped me get through moments of sadness. It made me realize that I was still blessed. It connected me to God and made me feel that He was in control and that everything would be alright.”* She continued by reflecting on the things she was thankful for, which she wrote in a gratitude journal, helped her reframe her perspective, moving from a sense of lack to a sense of completeness and abundance.

In a collective collage activity (Figure 4), the participants were thankful for their jobs, their health, their respective universities, and even nature. They were thankful that they still had a source of livelihood to support their families, fully aware of the pandemic's socioeconomic impact and the many Filipinos who had lost their jobs at the time.

Furthermore, their gratitude was usually attributed to the social support they received from their families, friends, colleagues, and students. Their awareness and gratitude for having other people who support, love, and care for them, served as a source for coping with the stress brought about by the pandemic.

Figure 4

Jamboard on Gratitude



Gratitude and resilience are intertwined, as they complement and reinforce one another. When faced with challenges, gratitude helped the participants appreciate what they have amidst. Through the expressive arts, they were able to reflect on their blessings and consider how gratitude supported their ability to thrive during the pandemic. It reminded them of the support systems and resources available to them. In turn, resilience fueled their ability to practice gratitude by fostering a mindset of optimism and perseverance.

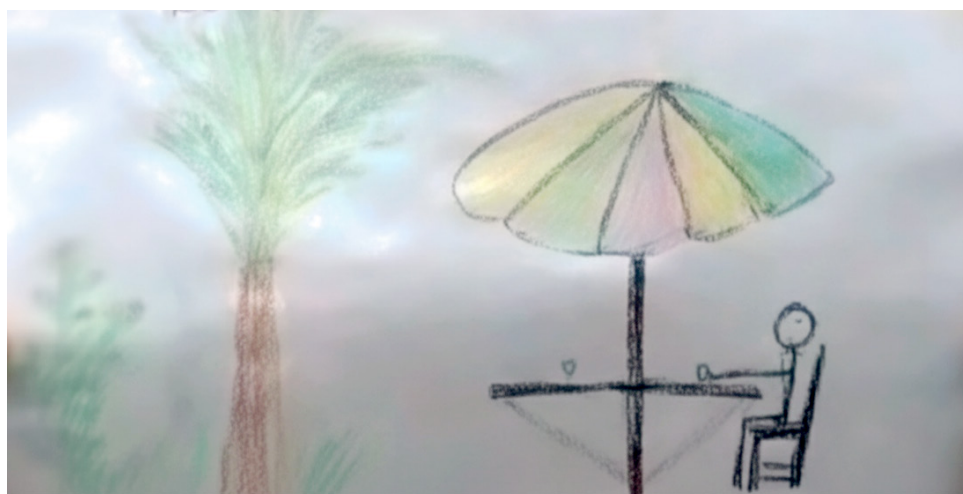
Intensified Sense of Calling

The COVID-19 pandemic presented significant challenges for educators, yet the teachers in this study displayed remarkable dedication to their students' education and well-being. Despite unstable conditions, participants' sense of calling intensified, driving them to continue teaching. For instance, Matteo, a young professor, felt driven to provide quality education, viewing it as essential not only for his students' learning but also for their sense of normalcy during the pandemic. This sense of purpose helped the participants adjust and cope with the adversity, highlighting the importance of their vocation in uncertain times.

Francis shared through the use of his art how he conducts the class. He said, *"I hold class outside, so I have a better signal. I do not have WIFI at home, so I depend on cellular data. I would teach even if it were hot and humid because I know my students needed to continue their learning so they could find good jobs to help their families."* Figure 5 shows Francis and his artwork.

Figure 5

Francis



Through the expressive arts activities, the teachers could reflect on their teaching purpose and unwavering commitment to their calling during the pandemic.

Question 3: How did the expressive arts contribute to fostering their resilience and well-being?

At the end of the workshops, most of the teachers mentioned that the expressive arts provided a safe, non-threatening space for reflection and for expression their thoughts and feelings. It offered them the opportunity to release and process uncomfortable issues and concerns. Below are some excerpts that support this theme of power of expression and reflection.

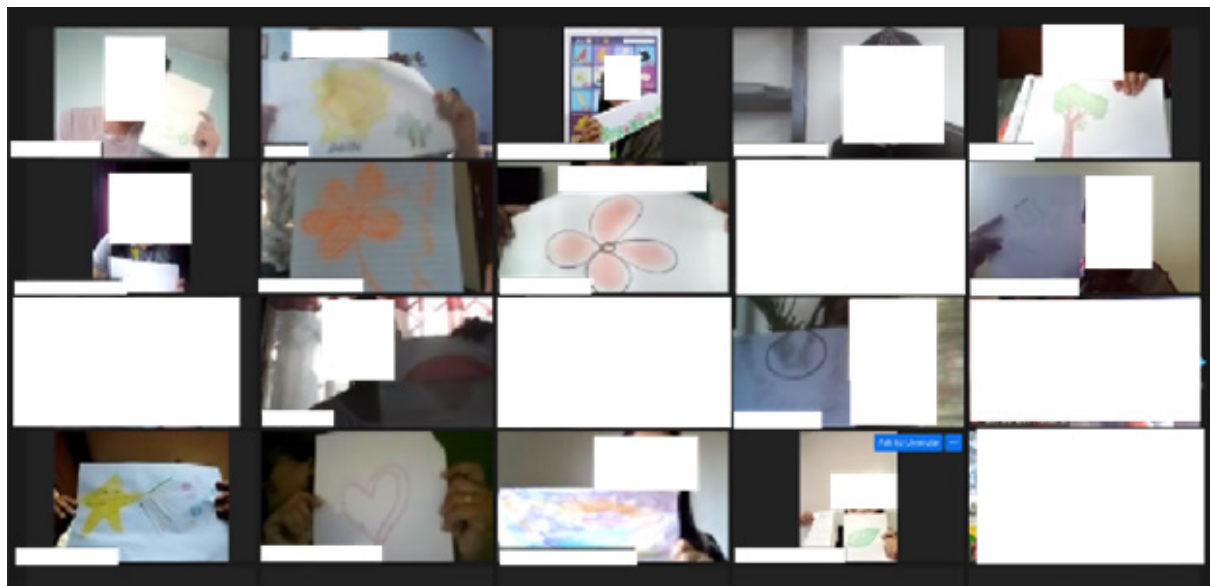
Power of Expression and Reflection

During the session, the expressive arts activities allowed the participants to share how they faced the pandemic, reflect on their experiences, and make meaning in them. Lydia shared,

“Though I am not artistic, the expressive arts activities allowed me to share thoughts and feelings I find difficult to share with others, especially my family. I am afraid to show vulnerability to them since they rely on me to be strong. These activities gave me a feeling of safety to open up and share my experiences.”

Tess said that expressive arts activities gave her time to reflect, which she had been unable to do because of her busy schedule. She said, *“The activities were a pause to my busy life. It allowed me to reflect, especially during the meditations. It afforded me the time to do some much-needed self-care.”*

Figure 6 shows the participants sharing their takeaways from the workshop. Most of them drew flowers. Pip, a senior faculty member teaching a science course, said that the flower represented the time they had to “stop and smell the roses.” The activities allowed them to pause from the busyness of a teacher’s life. The activities allowed them to sit with their thoughts, reflect on their experiences more objectively through their art, and witness each other’s journeys and the meanings they attached to them. This fostered catharsis, self-reflection, and self-discovery. Through art, participants were able to explore and make sense of their emotions, find solace in creativity, and develop a sense of agency over their narratives.

Figure 6*Screenshot on the power of expression and reflection*

Ultimately, the expressive arts became a medium through which the teachers in the study explored their resilience, transforming their experiences and empowering themselves to face adversity with courage and creativity. Individuals cultivate resilience by engaging in the expressive arts as they embark on a transformative journey of self-expression and growth.

Discussion

This study aimed to examine how expressive arts activities could aid teachers in exploring their resilience and well-being during the pandemic. The findings indicate that the teachers experienced the pandemic in varied ways. Their emotional responses ranged from shock and disbelief to sadness, loneliness, frustration, and fear and anxiety. These responses illustrate the initial responses of teachers to the adverse situation. It was also found that protective factors, such as optimism, gratitude, and an intensified sense of calling to serve and teach helped mitigate the pandemic's impact. Likewise, through the expressive arts, the teachers were able to explore their resilience.

These findings provide new insights into how teachers coped during the pandemic and explored the potential of the expressive arts as a tool for fostering resilience among teachers. These results have significant implications for education, suggesting that expressive arts can be an effective strategy for supporting teachers' well-being.

Stressor experience

The findings suggest that teachers experienced adversity during the pandemic in varied ways. These emotional responses were manifested through shock, disbelief, sadness, loneliness, frustration, and fear and anxiety. Gurree (2021) and Ozamis-

Extebarria et al., (2021) noted the same in their respective studies, where they noted that teachers experienced immense stress from the sudden shift in teaching modality, which left many feeling helpless and overwhelmed.

Moreover, the pandemic has disrupted the delicate work-life balance that teachers strive to maintain. Ozamis-Extebarria et al., (2021) attributed the teacher's anxiety and stress among teachers to the blurring of boundaries between their professional and personal spaces. Increased workloads and administrative demands further intensified these stress levels.

Also, teachers reported fear for their own health. She et al. (2025) said that fear of contracting the virus among teachers was linked to the development of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms and nomophobia.

The study's findings align with existing literature, which highlights the unprecedented stress and emotional exhaustion teachers faced during the pandemic brought about by the increased workload and the rapid transition to remote learning. Teachers struggled with balancing professional and personal responsibilities, leading to heightened burnout (Pressley, 2021). Challenges included mastering new technologies, addressing diverse student needs remotely, and facing job insecurity (Kim & Asbury, 2020). Additionally, the lack of social interaction and limited administrative support worsened mental health issues (Herman et al., 2021). These factors underscored the need for systemic support and mental health resources to improve teacher well-being.

Teachers' coping and resilience

The findings of the study revealed several factors that helped teachers cope with the stress brought about by the pandemic. These factors contributed to mitigating stress, promoting emotional regulation, and enhancing life satisfaction (El-Sayed, 2022). Higher resilience was linked to better mental health outcomes, fostering optimism, self-efficacy, and coping strategies (Masten, 2001).

Optimism

This finding is supported by Arampatzi et al. (2019), who argued that optimism enables individuals facing adversity to experience decline in subjective well-being and to adapt faster to their ordeals. Other studies also stated that optimism plays a significant role in developing resilience (Ramirez-Fernandez et al., 2018; Paguio, 2021; Soury and Hasanirad, 2011).

Gratitude

Feng and Yin (2021) supported this finding and added that gratitude was a protective factor that fostered social support and hope and shielded people from stress and depression. Similarly, Büssing et al. (2021), in their quantitative study among individuals

during the pandemic, mentioned that gratitude was the best predictor of perceived positive changes, making it a good resource for positive adaptation.

Participants' reflections on their gratitude for the presence of social support in their lives during the pandemic also stressed the importance of a supportive social network. Several studies reinforce this finding about the mitigating effect of social support against adversities (Aruta, 2021; Labrague, 2021; Paguio, 2021; Trudel-Fitzgerald et al., 2021).

Intensified Sense of Calling

Trudel-Fitzgerald et al. (2021) also identified the caring role of teachers during the pandemic, reporting that they demonstrated deep concern for their students' well-being and continued learning. Teachers became virtual cheerleaders, providing emotional support and motivation and fostering a sense of community amidst physical isolation. Their calling during the pandemic extended beyond academics. They actively promoted mental health and well-being, guiding students through challenging times. They inspired resilience and hope, reminding students that learning could continue even in the face of adversity.

Singh et al. (2021) highlighted how teachers went above and beyond to adapt to the rapidly changing educational environment during the pandemic. Despite the abrupt shift to remote learning, teachers quickly embraced virtual platforms, mastered unfamiliar technologies, and designed engaging lessons to ensure educational continuity. They balanced professional and personal responsibilities, transformed their homes into classrooms, worked extended hours, and offered additional support through virtual office hours. By offering a safe space for students to express their anxieties, teachers demonstrated an intensified sense of calling to teach, showing exceptional dedication during a time of crisis. Moreover, Baloran (2020) supported this in their finding, reporting a strong correlation between crisis efficacy and the teacher's work commitment was evident during the pandemic. Their sense of calling enabled the teachers to cope with the pandemic and continue teaching despite harsh conditions.

The expressive arts and resilience

The findings in the study reveal that the expressive arts became a way for the teachers to explore their resilience during the pandemic.

Power of Expression and Reflection. Mohamad et al. (2013) support this finding, noting that Expressive Arts Therapy (EXAT) offers a promising modality for creative exploration of their participants' experiences, especially those they found difficult to share. Furthermore, the expressive arts empower individuals to explore emotions, foster self-awareness, and promote healing through creative expression (Malchiodi, 2020). Reflection within artistic processes enhances emotional resilience and personal

insight, facilitating growth and well-being (Levine, 2019). Integrating reflection with creativity provides a holistic approach to mental health support.

In this research, participants had the opportunity to focus on their journeys during the pandemic through meditation by expressing their experiences creatively and reflecting on them through sharing and witnessing. McKay (2021) further supports the findings of the study, highlighting that art-based reflection improves well-being and develops resilience. They added that these reflections allowed the teachers the awareness of interconnections in their experiences and, eventually, meanings they have built on these experiences.

Groups that promote empathy and understanding through respectful and accepting expressions, such as expressive arts activities, make the participants feel heard and understood, making their experiences shared and collectively faced (Lun et al., 2008). Expressive arts and resilience are intertwined, as they offer powerful means to navigate and overcome life's challenges. The fusion of creativity and resilience provides individuals with essential tools to cope with adversity, transform their experiences, and emerge stronger. Sapouna and Pamer (2016) stated that arts-based approaches have a transformative potential that facilitates connection-making, meaning-making, hope, and eventually, empowerment and resilience. Creating art can be a form of resilience, requiring perseverance, experimentation, and a willingness to learn from failures.

This study's results underscore the need for educational institutions to explore other modalities to help ensure that their teachers are meeting their well-being needs, and that they feel supported, especially in times of crisis. The findings highlight the potential of expressive arts in helping individuals explore their coping and resilience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the case study demonstrated that expressive arts activities helped participants explore and recognize factors that supported their teaching during the pandemic. Key protective factors, such as maintaining an optimistic perspective, practicing gratitude, and reflecting on their calling as teachers mitigated the stress caused by the pandemic. These activities encouraged self-reflection, allowing teachers to find meaning in their experiences. The study highlights the transformative potential of expressive arts in fostering positive coping, resilience, and well-being.

However, a limitation of this study is that it only focused on teachers at the tertiary level. It is recommended that teachers in basic education (K-12) be included in future studies. It recommends further research to support the integration of expressive arts in institutional programs, emphasizing collaboration with program providers to tailor interventions to teachers' specific needs. The study also advocates for the inclusion of mindfulness-based approaches like Focusing-Oriented Expressive Arts

Therapy (FOAT), which offers teachers meaningful respite from stress. Establishing evidence-based practices through ongoing research can strengthen the effectiveness of expressive arts as a vital component of mental health support for teachers.

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Authors' Bionotes

Dominic T. Paguio, is a faculty of De La Salle University and the University of the Philippines. He is a registered nurse, a special education teacher, educational psychologist, and a focusing-oriented expressive arts practitioner.

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During the development of this manuscript, the author/s used ChatGPT. This was/ These were used to check and improve grammar and language refinement. After using the AI and AI-assisted technologies, the author/s reviewed and edited the content. The intellectual content of this manuscript remains entirely the responsibility of the authors.

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