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A Labour of Love? The Invisible Work of Caring Teachers during Covid-19

Over the last few months, the sociological experiment generated by lockdowns has triggered a plethora of educational debates and research publications. However, the care work enacted by teachers has rarely been at the core of these analyses. As other scholars have previously highlighted, caring in teaching requires not only 'love' but also 'labour'. This means that it entails emotional, social, material and political costs, which are often unacknowledged or devalued. In this study, we delve into the experiences of a small group of caring teachers in Spain to explore the nature and effect of their care work during lockdown. Despite decades of feminist studies showing the value of care work, the stories of the teachers interviewed show the lack of recognition of caring in teaching. The article concludes with a call to problematise the idea of caring in teaching as a labour of love.

Key words: care work, caring teachers, Covid-19 pandemic, lockdown, Spain.

Introduction

Over the last few months, the 'sociological experiment' (Goodson & Schostak, 2021) generated by lockdowns has triggered a plethora of educational debates and research studies. Some of the most popular topics in the media and research have been the digital pedagogy responses (Crawford et al., 2020), the lack of teacher training in IT (Schleicher, 2020), the managing of high-stakes exams (UNESCO, 2020a) and the deepening of socioeconomic inequalities (Save the children, 2020; UNESCO, 2020b). However, in a particularly critical period for students, the care work provided by teachers has rarely been recognised nor raised as a public concern (Bahn et al., 2020; Morgade, 2020). Despite decades of feminist studies showing the value of care work (e.g., Power, 2004; Vogel, 2013) and the role of teachers, generally females, in this regard (Bhana et al., 2006; Noddings, 1992), this work has remained invisible during this pandemic. In an attempt to recognise the care work that teachers provide, this paper examines how

teachers have cared for their students and navigated the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. While the context for this article is Spain, the experiences will probably resonate with teachers worldwide.

In this article, we begin with a brief literature review on the educational impact of Covid-19 in Spain before outlining the theory and the methodology. We draw on qualitative data from the experiences of five caring teachers that worked at different educational levels from early childhood education through to adult education. The findings are focused on the care provided by the teachers to support students during lockdown, the cost of caring and the supports and barriers they experienced. The article concludes with a discussion of the results and a call to acknowledge the value of the care work provided by teachers in critical times.

Context of the study: Teaching during Covid-19 lockdown in Spain

The Covid-19 pandemic and consequent lockdowns have had an enormous impact on educational systems all over the world. In Spain, when the first state of emergency was declared on the 14th of March 2020, face-to-face classes were suspended, and education centres of all sorts closed. The Government established that "educational activities would continue through distance and 'online' modalities, whenever possible" (BOE, 2020). With just a few days' notice, millions of students and teachers were immersed in distance learning models. This situation was prolonged until the end of the academic year, in June, with some justified exceptions. In the guidelines for teachers emitted by the educational authorities a few days before, it became clear that, despite being provided with some technological tools (e.g., Moodle Platform), the responsibility to reach all students would fall exclusively on the management teams and teachers of each education centre. Not surprisingly, recent surveys on teachers' opinions about the management of the pandemic

have highlighted a generalised unrest and feeling of abandonment (Hortigüela-Alcalá et al., 2020; Trujillo et al., 2020; Jacovkis & Tarabini, 2021; Palau et al., 2021).

During lockdown, teachers had to improvise an online teaching for which most of them were not prepared (Trujillo et al., 2020) in a country where 11% of the children below 15 do not have access to a computer (INE, 2019) and 32% lack good internet connection (Díez Gutiérrez & Gajardo Espinoza, 2020). This situation has revealed the existence of various inequality gaps in the Spanish educational system (Fernández Enguita, 2020; Tarabini, 2020; Zubillaga & Gortazar, 2020): the access gap (having or not having access to internet connection and technological devices); the usage gap (usage and quality time spent with technology); the school gap (teacher skills and resource availability); and other gaps derived from focusing on learning or on emotional wellbeing due to schools' socioeconomic conditions. Not surprisingly, middle-class families in Spain were able to maintain higher standards of education quality than low-income families (Bonal & González, 2020; Tarabini, 2020). To overcome these inequality gaps, organisations such as the OECD (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020), UNESCO (2020c) and Save the Children (2020) have outlined recommendations for teachers and schools like guarantying access to technology, using active teaching methods, promoting collaborative and self-regulated work, undertaking formative assessment processes using self-evaluation and co-evaluation procedures, and monitoring students' learning process without overloading families. What is surprisingly missing in these guidelines, or at least largely relegated to the background, is the importance of enacting care work in such critical circumstances for human life. This absence becomes even more shocking when Spanish families and students have recognised the 'need to look after people' as one of the biggest lessons of this pandemic (Díez Gutiérrez & Gajardo Espinoza, 2020) and

several studies have warned about the dire consequences of lockdowns for youth mental health (see Paricio & Pando, 2020).

Theoretical Framework: Caring in Teaching as a Political Act

The crisis derived from the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the vulnerability of the societies in which we live and the interdependence with other humans and the natural environment, as highlighted by ecofeminist, posthumanist and multispecies theories (Braidotti, 2013; Haraway, 2016; Herrero et al., 2018). We are vulnerable and dependent on the care of other people, especially at critical times such as those we are currently experiencing (Clavijo, 2020). However, our societies, built upon the masculine ideal of self-sufficiency, systematically deny the value of care and coexistence with other non-human species and viruses (Haraway, 2016; Herrero et al., 2018). During this pandemic, care work –particularly that enacted beyond hospitals and rest homes– has not been included within the popular label of 'essential work' (Morgade, 2020). This work, as usually conducted by women in domestic ordinary spaces, has remained invisible during these times. This has occurred despite decades of research conducted by feminist economics revealing the social and economic wealth that the invisible work of caring entails and the effect that it has for the women that provide it (see Power, 2004; Vogel, 2013; Durán de las Heras, 2018). A key tenet of feminist critique has been challenging the contempt of care work and its relegation into private life. Caring itself can be considered as a political act and a public matter linked to the common good (Bartos, 2012), as it is "central to our individual and collective survival" (Lawson, 2007, p. 5).

Caring is also an important aspect of teaching (see Noddings, 1992; Goldstein, 2002). In Hargreaves' words (2003; cited in Tarabini, 2020), schools are not just learning communities, but caring communities. Caring in teaching involves practices such as encouraging dialogue, showing sensitivity towards students' needs and engaging students

in meaningful activities (Rogers & Webb, 1991). It also takes the shape of building relationships with the students (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006), eliciting and listening to their feelings, involving them in caring relationships and self-evaluation (Noddings, 1992), showing commitment to their learning and academic success (Meyers, 2009) and infusing hope (Barrow, 2015).

We agree with Acker (1995) and Isenbarger and Zembylas (2006) that caring in teaching requires not only 'love' but also 'labour'. This means that it is not a natural or effortless form of work, but that it entails emotional, social, material and political costs, which are often unacknowledged or devalued. In emotional terms, caring in teaching, although rewarding in many senses, can also be a source of frustration, stress and anxiety (see Yin et al., 2019) and involve the suppression or neutralisation of one's emotions (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006). Some scholars have also explored the socioeconomic and political costs of caring in teaching. Within the framework of university teaching, for example, some feminist theorists have coined the term 'academic housework' to refer to the care work performed to a large extent by female teachers, such as attending and accompanying the emotional and personal needs of the students (Heijstra et al., 2017). This emotional service or mentoring work is not recognised by the formal university system, not even during Covid-19 (Blackmore, 2020; Nash & Churchill, 2020), distancing female scholars from their male peers in conducting research and accessing to promotions (Heijstra et al., 2017). A focus on care not only recognises the significance of social relations, but also the power relations involved in caring everyday practices (Bartos, 2012).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the caring work performed by teachers has rarely been recognised either (Morgade, 2020). This has occurred despite a growing international literature showing the care work enacted by schools and teachers in post-

disaster recovery (e.g., Mutch, 2013, 2014; O'Connor, 2013) and in the dealing with previous infectious disease outbreaks (Bhana et al., 2006; Howard & Howard, 2012; Wong, Cheng, & Lo, 2010). For example, during the 2009 H1N1 flu pandemic in Canada, Howard and Howard (2012) showed that elementary teachers not only acted as infection control agents, but also exercised a caring responsibility known as *loco parentis* (in the place of the parent). Yet, as these scholars denounced, pandemic planning documents do not usually recognise or address the important responsibilities teachers assume. Also, the study conducted by Bhana et al. (2006) with secondary school teachers during the AIDS epidemic in South Africa found that teachers were required to provide highly demanding forms of support and care to learners, yet this work "carried no weight in processes of promotion and reward" (p. 20).

In this study, we delve into the experiences of a small group of caring teachers to explore the nature, value and effect of their care work during lockdown.

Methodology, methods and ethics

The aim of this study is to explore how teachers from different educational levels have cared for their students and navigated the circumstances triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic in Spain. Qualitative methods for data collection and analysis were employed for being the most adequate to understand human perceptions and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As we were interested in examining teachers' interpretations of their own practice and experience as caring educators during Covid-19, an interpretive approach was adopted. For this approach, social reality, as shaped by human experiences and social contexts, is best studied by considering the interpretations of the participants within their sociohistorical context (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012; O'Connor, 2008). The methodology used is case study (Stake, 2000). This methodology allowed us to deeply explore the phenomenon of interest (teachers' care work) during a particular period of

time (the Covid-19 lockdown) across a variety of settings (different educational levels in Spain) through multiple methods (individual interviews, focus groups and artefact analysis).

The study involved five participants. Purposeful sampling was the technique used to select the individuals who had the potential to provide relevant information regarding the research questions (Born & Preston, 2016). The five teachers are practitioners who had a strong commitment towards students and who had at least two years of experience, so they could have a better understanding of the specific challenges posed by the pandemic. We were interested in including teachers working at different educational levels to have a broader view of the challenges prompted by the pandemic. For this reason, we chose one teacher per educational level: (1) Early Childhood Education, (2) Primary Education, (3) Secondary Education, (4) University and (5) Adult Education.

Participants were offered different forms of participation to ensure that they felt comfortable. They could have a one-on-one interview, be part of a focus group and/or share the teaching resources created by themselves to care for their students. All of them participated in a one-on-one interview, which provided us with a deep understanding of their context and experience. Three teachers also decided to take part in a focus group through which they could contrast their experiences. During the interviews, three teachers shared with us some of the teaching resources (i.e. lesson plans) created by themselves to support students during lockdown. These resources were analysed as an accompaniment of the interviews' discourse to reinforce and/or exemplify the ideas explicitly mentioned by the participants.

The interview questions were negotiated with the teachers to make them participants of the process and avoid making them feel uncomfortable. The questions were organised around the following four themes: 1) context of teaching practice; 2)

experience as educators (challenges/pathways/barriers/strategies); 3) responses to care for the students; and 4) external factors influencing the care work.

The interviews and focus groups were conducted via Zoom® and lasted between 60 and 120 minutes each. They were video recorded with the explicit consent of the participants and transcribed in full. Participants were asked for feedback on their transcripts prior to analysis. Pseudonyms were used to ensure participants' anonymity and confidentiality.

Data were analysed using a systematic thematic approach conducted by the research team. An inductive content analysis (Patton, 2002) was applied to identify overarching themes emerging from the data. This process was carried out following Lincoln and Guba's (1985; see also Aydin & Kaya, 2017) analytical steps: 1) the unitisation of data into idea units, 2) the codification of categories, 3) the integration of categories. This process resulted in three overarching themes: 1) the care of students during lockdown, 2) the cost of caring, and 3) supports and barriers.

Findings

The findings are divided into the three themes that emerged as a result of the data analysis: 1) the care provided by the teachers to support their students during lockdown, 2) the cost of caring and 3) the supports and barriers they experienced in providing the caring work.

Caring students during lockdown

The interviewed teachers, although they taught at different educational levels, recognised developing a close and special bond with the students that they have taught during the lockdown. Going together through such an unprecedented time created an opportunity to build stronger relationships. Maria, a primary school teacher, beautifully expresses the reciprocity and richness of this relationship like this:

> I have never thought that this could have ever happened [the pandemic]. It's been a life experience; a life experience for old teachers [like me] to experience this with children from a completely different generation. It's been a process of discovering something together, of seeing what is happening to us together, from the adult side, from the childhood side. It has been a time when we shared ideas, shared conversations… We shared a lot of things that you don't usually share because they are from one generation and I am from another.

Sometimes the intimacy of the relationships elicited dilemmas in the teachers. This is expressed by Laura, a teacher at the Adult Education Centre, who had two students that lost a close relative during the pandemic. She explained to us that she had frequent conversations with them and even met one of them in person during the summer holiday. During the interview, she highlighted the lack of teacher training to face these challenges:

> No one has trained me to accompany someone in that way […] I never knew if I was doing it right or wrong, you know? If I was invading the privacy of a person or if I was worrying too much about it.

Maintaining a constant communication with the students was viewed by the teachers interviewed as key to build a caring relationship. Yet, all of them had students with limited access to technological devices. They adapted to the circumstances using phone calls, WhatsApp® groups and/or different teaching methodologies, although not always successfully. In this regard, some of the most complex situations occurred among the students of the Adult Education Centre. The teacher, Laura, explained that many of her students viewed the centre as a space to connect and socialise with other people, others had responsibilities beyond their studies (family and work), and some did not have access to the technological resources necessary for an adequate follow-up of the classes. She tried to overcome the technological limitations by using a WhatsApp® group and phone calls. She also adapted her schedule to the needs of the students offering tutorials at different times. To address her students' need of socialisation, she scheduled videocalls

before classes and left some time at the beginning of the classes so that students could have a space to chat and share their experiences. However, despite her efforts, many of them abandoned the training during the lockdown.

As Laura did, the other teachers interviewed reported using a broad range of teaching strategies and resources to care for their students during this process. One teaching strategy reported by all of them was to prioritise the wellbeing of their students over the academic teaching content. As expressed by Alice, the university lecturer:

> I weighed more the socioemotional side than the curricular and we reduced the teaching content. In a normal course, we would have done more activities and things but we reduced the content because we saw that it was not the moment; people were not focused, they were unwell. So, you cannot ask them the same as before, because you know that there will be more failure and you don't want to make things worse.

In addition to reducing the teaching content, they also reported using more collaborative resources and teamwork strategies in their teaching practice to mitigate the students' feelings of loneliness and enhance mutuality. As the secondary teacher, Pedro, explained to us:

> The main aim of my teaching has been to avoid the isolation of the student. That has been the first aim. Because they were already isolated by the pandemic, but the school could already isolate them much more. […] So the first thing I did was to make the curriculum more flexible and to give more importance to these processes in which the intervention of the teacher had to be much less. So I assessed my presence as a teacher in the courses and reduced it as much as possible, with the intention that students were the protagonists and were connected.

For him, the use of this strategy was also key to compensate for the material deficiencies that some of his students faced, either because they lacked technological devices or because they shared them with other family members.

For the teachers in early childhood and primary education, strengthening the relationship with the families was key for the students' wellbeing. As Silvia, the teacher working at early childhood education, reported, families were the link between the students and them as teachers:

> I talked a lot with the families and always, if they told me that the boy or girl was having a bad time, I tried to make a video call with them so that they would tell me how they were, what was wrong, how they felt.

For this reason, she and her teaching partner were very cautious of protecting the bond with the families:

> At all times, we have tried to take care of that emotional stress that families already had […] We didn't want to add another stress of having to do some homework. We didn't want to do that at all to take care of the wellbeing of the family.

In fact, both teachers developed weekly work plans in which they connected curricular goals with activities that could contribute somehow to improve the family environment, alleviating the burden that the pandemic could imply for the families and promoting caring relationships. For these teachers, lockdowns have favoured the introduction of personal and home care skills into learning activities, often forgotten at schools (García-Lastra, 2020). One of them reported working the autonomy and language of the students through housework tasks such as doing the laundry, cooking, sweeping, etc. As the primary teacher, Maria, said:

> For example, to work maths, we realised that if you want to work on geometry, we can do so with the washing machine at home that has a circle, which has a lot of buttons. We worked with the iron, looking for square things, tea towels […] In natural sciences, we were looking at how heat decomposed materials, so we were working with the oven at home and they learned how to turn it on […] then the idea is: go to the washing machine, sit in front of it, see what elements it has, ask the adult

> to tell you how to turn it on and then do the laundry and contribute with your housework to improve the life at home.

Finally, another strategy that was carried out at all educational levels was openly addressing the pandemic in the classroom to help students better understand the situation and infuse some informed hope in the future. As Maria, at primary education, said:

> We took the opportunity to see the pandemics of the black plague, the Spanish flu and the Covid-19, which was the one that was touching them. We saw that there had also been other pandemics before and how, thanks to research, remedies have always been found, remedies to cure all these diseases. That helped them emotionally, seeing that scientists are working hard and that is a source of hope.

Similarly, Silvia, at early childhood education, used the picture book 'The monster of colours' that specifically talks about the Covid-19 pandemic to help them better understand the situation and open up conversations about the emotions that the pandemic has arisen for them.

The cost of caring

During the Covid-19 lockdown, physical and emotional costs of caring work among teachers intensified at personal, family and professional level. All the teachers interviewed described the first weeks of lockdown as stressful, overwhelming and exhausting. The times of dedication to the students and their families were unsustainable. Silvia, the early childhood educator, explains it as follows:

> At first, my experience as a teacher was very stressful, because we didn't really know what to do […] it was quite overwhelming. Then we would send a lot of emails to the families to find out how they were, how the children were going through this and, in the end, you would receive emails at 9 pm, you would answer emails until 2 am, the next day... It was very difficult to manage that work schedule too, it was difficult.

This situation was recurrent in all cases. As Pedro and Maria explained, the dedication was 24 hours a day because they never knew with certainty the situation that the students had at home, so they tried to adapt to their schedules. Often, not only the schedules were intrusive to their lives, but also the means of communication, since they were using their personal phones. In this regard, Laura at adult education level explained that:

> the problem is the issue of disconnection […] people used the [WhatsApp®] group outside of class, out of hours […] in the end, the bad uses of WhatsApp® that we have at a social level, we also have them at an educational level.

The challenge of finding a balance between personal, professional and family life was also evident during lockdown. Alicia also mentioned the difficulties that she faced when combining the flexibility explained above with her family life. As she said:

> It is sometimes difficult for you to maintain this schedule due to your family […], because you sometimes have to balance it with your husband, with your child.

Another factor that increased the time devoted to teaching was coordination with colleagues, which at times was particularly complicated due to the lack of training or experience of some of them. In this regard, the 'academic housework' (Heijstra et al., 2017) often carried out by female teachers did not only imply a service towards students, but also towards other teachers. As Alicia, at university level, explained to us:

> There are colleagues who do not face certain situations in the best way and it becomes a double overload; emotional overload because obviously you suffer when you see how they are, because they do not know how to react in another way, and work overload because you obviously empathise with them and assume that work.

Pedro and Maria, at secondary and primary education respectively, also emphasised the personal cost in terms of physical and emotional fatigue that teaching during lockdown has implied for them:

> We [teachers] are people, and that means that we have also been in lockdown, that we also have a family with whom we were in lockdown, and that we have also suffered ourselves […] with a workload that has overwhelmed us. (Pedro)

> We need to stop somehow because we have been very loaded, very loaded since March. And there is a part that is the "emotional salary", which is not paid with money, which is only paid with time. (Maria)

Supports and barriers

The view of teachers as humans beyond their teaching work is one of the issues underlying this section, and this was expressed by the interviewees when referring to the need and effect of social interactions during this crisis. As Alicia said:

> [I have lived this situation] realising the power of social relationships, that is, I believe that loneliness weakens us, absolutely. And that is how I have seen and noticed it, when a person next to me has faltered, I believe it has faltered because of that feeling of loneliness […] and because they do not have that emotional support to move forward.

This interdependence was accentuated in the workplace during lockdown. For this reason, the majority saw their students and peers as their main support during this period, particularly those with whom they had a greater affinity. This support was materialised in countless hours of meetings to coordinate and share ideas, experiences and even training. As Pedro said:

> We have done peer learning, too. We have tutored each other. We have tutored ourselves in e-learning. Who was more skilled helped you, and vice versa. This has been essential because in many cases there has not been any training for online teaching. So we have been training each other.

Laura, the teacher at the Adult Education Centre, recognised finding that peer support through social media (Twitter®) that connected her with teachers in similar circumstances that have openly shared their work and concerns. She used this resource to compensate

for the lack of support from her peers and the management team of her own centre. In contrast, the other teachers interviewed reported feeling accompanied and supported by their peers and school management teams, who constantly sent them messages of trust and provided them with guidelines to know how to proceed. Silvia, the teacher at early childhood education, expressed it like this:

> My main support has always been my peer because we complemented each other very well. Then, also the support of the rest of my colleagues. We were constantly: "What are you doing?". We had many meetings, many, we met almost every day and it was like: "What are you doing?" "And what can we do from the management team to help?" The management team also gave us quite a few guidelines, so that has also helped us a lot. In the end, not being alone and being able to count on a team that was very helpful. That has been a very big support, to be honest.

Beyond the external support that they found in other people, one of the teachers, Alicia, mentioned the importance of having a reflective attitude to fill the training flaws:

> Identify the needs that arise [...] in order to face them and find the necessary supports and resources [...]. What has helped me the most is assessing the situation, my needs, that is, what I saw that could help me, identify those supports and get some training.

This self-assessment of the situation is something that several interviewees valued as positive and that, at the same time, they denounce that it has not been done at a policy level. They criticised the Ministry and regional authorities for not requesting any report on the strengths and limitations that they had faced, missing a valuable opportunity to jointly rethink the current educational system. As Laura said:

> I think that this reflection has not been done and I feel sorry, because I think that all this is something we should have learned from; we are not individual beings […] we are not sharing what has worked for us and what has not. Even though this can happen to us again, we have not done any assessment.

The lack of organisation and assessment from the administration authorities has been a recurring topic when talking about the barriers that they have encountered. Initially, they recognised being sympathetic with the regional authorities and Ministry of Education, considering the unprecedented nature of the situation. However, as months went by, the mismanagement became more unacceptable and frustrating for the teachers interviewed. The perceived difficulties related to the governments' management of the educational situation refer to: (1) the demands and restrictions imposed on the teachers and (2) the abandonment and lack of recognition. The demands were full of incongruences, as can be seen in the following quote of Maria:

> On the one hand, we are being asked to take care of the students […] but, on the other hand, they keep asking us for the same reports with the same deadlines. They are not considering what is being done at all, the time that is being invested in taking care of the health and wellbeing of the students. They have not modified the curriculum at all.

This lack of flexibility was also imposed on the teachers in other areas such as students' assessment, teaching methodology and resources, which raised criticism from the teachers interviewed:

> They have told us how we have to mark the students […] I understand that an educational administration in a situation like this gives you general instructions on how to evaluate the students. But not the mark. That's what we have been told: If they have this mark in the first and second semester, then this will be the mark for the third one. (Pedro)

> The Ministry asked us for a report on what techniques and channels we were going to use to be in contact with our students […] Yet, that initial freedom was not such later on. In fact, they have asked us to use only official tools […], but they have very limited tools and we find that they are not realistic. (Laura)

Laura explains how the restriction on the channels of communication was an insurmountable obstacle for those students that did not have access to a computer because, among other things, they needed an email account that could not be accessed from a mobile device.

In addition, the teachers interviewed perceived a carelessness and abandonment of the administration authorities that reflected a broader lack of social recognition:

> In my opinion, they have done very badly, very late and at the wrong time. In Spain, people have given more importance to soccer than to school. During lockdown, the news was all about how the disease has developed and the death poll, and then it was soccer: What was going to happen with soccer? What was going to happen with the league? And nobody talked about education in Spain. Nobody was talking about school. No one was talking about what was going to happen in September [when the academic year starts]. (Pedro)

The feeling of abandonment and invisibility perceived by the teachers was increased by the lack of fluid communication with the regional authorities. The teachers who were working at early childhood, primary and secondary levels mentioned that once they found out through the press that they did not have to work the day after when talking about a holiday week in November that was going to be cancelled.

Other difficulty mentioned by the teacher who worked at a university level was the reluctant of the students to turn on the cameras during Zoom® meetings and how this considerably hindered the learning process and increased the feeling of discomfort of the teacher:

> They don't turn on the camera or talk much, I mean, it was a space that they could have used more, and today we continue with the same trend, they don't connect the camera when it is much richer if I see your face, despite being on the screen, we feel much closer and communication is easier than if it is only with the audio and seeing a black screen. I felt very uncomfortable and didn't know if I was talking to myself. (Alicia)

This experience reflects one of the multiple technological scenarios that were an obstacle for developing the teachers' caring work. All of them agreed that in person teaching provides them with much richer opportunities to take care of their students, particularly those who are in more vulnerable circumstances.

Discussion

Care, as a political concept, brings attention to the everydaytr practices and interdependences that are crucial to our individual and collective survival (Bartos, 2012). Using the framework of care to explore teachers' practices during lockdown has helped us better understand the significance of social relations and the political agency of teachers. The stories of care work of the teachers interviewed show the importance of connections and social relationships in dealing with the 'sociological experiment' (Goodson & Schostak, 2021) created by lockdowns, challenging the idea of the autonomous self-made individual/teacher/student.

For the teachers interviewed, teaching during lockdown has involved various kind of caring: *emotional* caring –caring about students' (and, often, their families') wellbeing (Jacovkis & Tarabini, 2021); *pedagogical* caring –caring about students' learning and academic achievement (Meyers, 2009); and *social* caring –caring about enhancing mutuality and a "culture of care" (Nias, 1999) among students and teachers themselves. This care work has taken many forms. The teachers interviewed have used a broad range of teaching strategies and resources such as promoting collaborative and cooperative work, resorting to self-evaluation and co-evaluation and fostering individual and self-regulated work. These strategies do not differ much from those recommended by the OECD (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020) and UNESCO (2020c)'s guides to help schools navigate lockdowns. What these guides hardly mention, however, is the difficulties that caring teachers face to put them into practice.

The teachers interviewed mentioned important material, training, temporal and institutional limitations. Material deficiencies such as lack of internet or IT devices have considerably hindered the connection between teachers and students. In this regard, the experiences narrated by the participants reflected situations that have aggravated the digital and social divide previously highlighted by other scholars in Spain (Bonal & González, 2020; Save the children, 2020; Jacovkis & Tarabini, 2021). Also, online education has limited teachers' opportunities to provide emotional support to their students. The affection that permeates face-to-face educational actions in almost imperceptible ways has been obstructed in an online environment (Tarabini, 2020). The gestures and words of support that spontaneously take place in face-to-face relationships become artificial in the virtual world, forcing caring teachers to create ad hoc spaces for this purpose.

In relation to the training limitations, the teachers interviewed recognised having lacked not only the IT skills necessary to deal with distance learning models, as other studies have highlighted (Hortigüela-Alcalá et al., 2020; Palau et al., 2021), but also the training to emotionally support students who are coping with traumatic events.

During lockdown, teachers also faced two complex barriers: time and lack of recognition and support from the educational authorities and society. Teachers were left with the burden of care work, with few guidelines and little support from the educational authorities (Hortigüela-Alcalá et al., 2020). At a society level, their care work was left out of what has been considered as essential work, neglecting the emotional state of the students and of the caregivers themselves. Care –particularly in its emotional dimension– has been relegated to the private sphere during this pandemic (Morgade, 2020). The cost of caring for the caregiver has been observed in the emotions listed by the participants: stress, loneliness, anxiety, uncertainty, tiredness, restlessness, etc. These emotions also

reflect the precarious situation of care-related jobs, in which there is not only a lack of resources, but also an invisibility and lack of recognition of the personnel involved (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; Durán de las Heras, 2018). Is caring in teaching a labour of love?

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