



*How Canadian Bachelor of  
Education Programs Responded  
to the COVID-19 Pandemic*

Edited by

Patricia Danyluk, Amy Burns,  
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## TITLE

Crisis and Opportunity: How Canadian Bachelor of Education Programs Responded to the Pandemic

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## COVER ART AND DESIGN

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## BOOK DESCRIPTION

This collection examines how Bachelor of Education programs across Canada adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic, covering the period immediately after the pandemic was declared and the year following (March 2020 to March 2021). The collection is divided into four sections focused on programmatic changes, pedagogical developments, practicum adaptations, and equity with an overall consistent concern for preservice teacher learning and well-being.

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*The editors dedicate this volume to all faculty members who reenvisioned their Bachelor of Education programs during the COVID-19 pandemic to create the best possible learning experiences for preservice teachers.*

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## INTRODUCTION

### Why Study How B.Ed. Programs Adapted During the Pandemic?

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Though the pandemic is a global crisis that has impacted education at all levels, it has also been a period of great creativity and learning. In this collection we examine how Bachelor of Education programs across Canada adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic. The adaptations shared in this collection cover the period immediately after the pandemic was declared and the year following (March 2020 to March 2021). The collection is divided into four sections focused on programmatic changes, pedagogical developments, practicum adaptations, and equity concerns that were brought to the forefront during the pandemic. Consistent in each of the chapters is a concern for preservice teacher learning and well-being. We conclude with a brief mapping of the sections of the book, highlighting each chapter.

Why study how Bachelor of Education programs adapted during the pandemic? There are of course many reasons, but one of the most salient is that this period of great crisis has also been a time of creativity and opportunity. The pandemic impacted schooling from K–12 to postsecondary. Consequently, education, or rather continuation of education, became an issue of importance for the masses. As such, the delivery of education became a shared concern not just for Bachelor of Education programs but all levels of education. Although crises in education are not uncommon, this crisis was unique in that it continued to impact education over a long period. The pandemic has forced us as teacher educators to reexamine our programming at the postsecondary level and to consider our priorities in teacher education and what makes a good teacher. In this way, we were all forced into the role of learner, whether it be learning how to teach online, understanding the impact of the pandemic on our students and colleagues, or discovering how to work together to develop solutions.

Sixty Bachelor of Education programs are registered with the Association of Canadian Deans of Education that are publicly funded or members of Universities Canada. Several other institutions partner with universities to offer Bachelor of Education programming in addition to a few programs offered by private universities (Association of Canadian Deans of Education, Katy Ellsworth, personal communication, August 23, 2021). The experience of the pandemic offered us as teacher educators an opportunity to view the educational landscape from a particular perspective, to not only consider online resources and effective online pedagogies, but to contemplate the nature of what is important in education in a context that may be online or face-to-face. Teaching during COVID-19 encouraged an examination of the values and ideals that inform teaching practice and the purposes of education in the present moment. Tarc (2020) suggested that “rather than lamenting upon how our methods are constrained in new teaching environments, we might discover altered and more generative purposes for education in our current worldly conditions which guide us to *transformed* pedagogies” (p. 121) for use in our face-to-face classrooms.

The COVID-19 crisis can be viewed as the ultimate “wicked problem” in that it had no clear definition and no clear solution (Klasche, 2021). Throughout the pandemic we experienced

a state of constant flux, where solutions to address the problem led to other problems. We are only beginning to understand the implications of mandated social isolation, which has led to new problems, including a wave of mental health concerns, drug overdoses and repercussions for provincial and national economies. While we planned for campus-based programs, we also had to consider and respond to partners in public schools, diverse practicum placements, and stakeholders in other jurisdictions.

Yet the pandemic has also forced us to become creative problem-solvers. Courses and field experiences often underwent a redesign, with considerations for delivery, assessment, and technologies. Faculty engaged in professional development to support online learning pedagogies (Hartwell et al., 2021). Mascolo and Burbach (2020) observed that though technological adaptations were an early response during the pandemic, their systemic and community sustainability were challenged. Questioning and reflecting on priorities and values occurred as equity and accessibility were reenvisioned. Educators confronted concerns for student well-being, engagement, and motivation by leveraging technology to facilitate collaboration and innovation (Davis & Phillips, 2020). Flexibility and responsiveness to emerging situations opened discussions about new possibilities for field experience.

### **COVID-19 in Canada**

In Canada, education falls under provincial or territorial jurisdiction, with the exception of on-reserve education, which is a federal responsibility (Van Nuland et al., 2020). This decentralization of education means each province and territory is responsible for their own education laws, curriculum, and response to the pandemic (Metcalf, 2021; Van Nuland et al., 2020). Each province has a governing authority that sets standards for the teaching profession and for licensing in that province. Provincial and territorial education departments work with colleges of teachers, district school boards, federations, faculties of education, and professional associations to establish goals and standards for teaching in relation to the educational goals of the region (Gambhir et al., 2008). There is no one model for teacher education, and each program varies in length and intent depending on the community it serves.

Canada's first recorded COVID-related death occurred on March 9, 2020, and by March 11 the World Health Organization had declared a pandemic (Hill et al., 2020). Universities across Canada closed their doors and, in most cases, international students were advised to return to their home countries. The period after March break saw Bachelor of Education programming move fully online or become a combination of online and in-person instruction, depending on the location. At first many teacher educators believed that remote learning would be in place for only a week or so (Knight, 2020); however, it soon became evident that no one knew how long the pandemic would last.

Despite several weeks remaining in the semester, universities shifted as many courses online as possible. The shift to online learning brought issues of equity to the forefront as we began to realize that learning online was not accessible to all of our learners. Many learners did not have home computers or stable internet connections (Burt & Eubank, 2021; Van Nuland et al., 2020). Preservice teachers and teacher educators alike were forced to upgrade their technology to ensure access to new technology. The move to working and learning from home was often accompanied by additional duties such as homeschooling. For many, cramped spaces where home offices were shared with a partner or one or more children in school were not optimal for teaching and learning (Metcalf, 2021). At the same time, there was a growing awareness of how the pandemic was impacting Black people, Indigenous people, and people of

colour, who suffered disproportionately from coronavirus-related job loss, financial strain, illness, and death (Burt & Eubank, 2021). Attention to issues of racism and colonization in education resulted in calls for systemic change and increased emphasis on antiracism, mental health, and decolonization in teacher education (Hill et al., 2020).

Each university and each faculty of education had a unique approach to adapting their Bachelor of Education program in order to allow students to complete requirements during that first year of COVID-19. These approaches continued to change according to the evolving COVID-19 situation. The original period of adaptation has been referred to as one of crisis adaptation (Hodges et al., 2020). During this time, universities and schools sought to make quick adaptations to their programs to ensure that learning could continue. This differed from online learning that involves careful instructional design and considers different types of student interactions to maximize learning, going beyond placing content online (Hodges, 2020).

For preservice teachers, the move to online courses provided the opportunity to continue in their programs while maintaining a social connection with classmates (Danyluk & Burns, 2021). Maintaining the practicum component of the Bachelor of Education program provided additional challenges (Burns et al., 2020). The reality was that many schools were not prepared to welcome practicum students into the classrooms and at the same time many practicum students felt uncomfortable about returning to their placements. Creative alternatives to traditional practica were sought to provide preservice teachers with the opportunity to progress in or finish their Bachelor of Education program.

Early on in the pandemic, Van Nuland et al. (2020) pointed to the challenges faced by teacher education programs, including equity issues such as access to online learning, the development of faculty to prepare them to teach online, conversion of courses for the online environment, and reorganization of practicum experiences. This period of rapid change, uncertainty, and relearning was stressful for all partners in K–12 and postsecondary education (Van Nuland et al., 2020). With the majority of schools moving to online learning, Bachelor of Education programs faced a new challenge in how to meet certification requirements as practicums were cancelled, postponed, or cut short. What followed was emergency remote adaptation as universities began to offer online sessions for faculty to learn how to transfer their courses online and use new technology. Despite the rapidity of the relearning, many faculty learned how to use applications such as Google Slides and Zoom, create videos, and engage students in online discussions. Hill et al. (2020) noted that preservice teachers helped to implement some aspects of the online learning, as in some cases they were more comfortable with the technology than their instructors were. Generally, online learning places different demands on students (Roddy et al., 2017) including greater reliance on asynchronous modes of communication and reframing of student interactions with the content, their instructor, and their peers in an online environment. As a result, preservice teachers took on increased responsibility for their own learning.

Kraglund-Gauthier (2020) described the process of moving from face-to-face to online teaching as one consisting of three stages: initiation, early implementation, and later implementation. The initiation phase is where instructors prepare to teach online. In the early implementation phases, instructors learn new tools and gain comfort with teaching online. These early stages can be messy as educators struggle with issues related to technological competence and the stability of internet connections. Although online education provided a social connection for preservice teachers and faculty alike, there was a growing realization that many students were struggling and that increased attention to student wellness was required (Burns et al., 2020; Hill

et al., 2020). Social distancing and lockdowns were having negative impacts on productivity, creativity, and general mental well-being (Goedegebuure & Meek, 2021).

Over the summer of 2020, there was still no indication of how long the pandemic would last, and universities began to prepare a variety of scenarios for September start-up. The phase that followed saw a combination of early implementation for those who were new to online teaching and learning and later implementation for those who had more experience and were establishing pedagogical practices (Kraglund-Gauthier, 2020). During this period, we began to reconsider our own teaching practice, trying to create opportunities for students to connect and deepen their learning through the coconstruction of knowledge (Hill et al., 2020) while being careful to limit the amount of time spent online. We began to ask ourselves what is lost and what is gained through online education (Eringfeld, 2021); alongside such questions was an enhanced awareness of pedagogical advances in online learning that have occurred as a result of the pandemic.

### **Structure of the Collection**

When we approached the Canadian Association for Teacher Education with the idea of an edited collection about how Bachelor of Education programs had adapted during the pandemic, we were delighted when our proposal was approved and excited to see who would respond to the call for chapters. This collection includes chapters from the west coast of British Columbia to the east coast of Prince Edward Island. We hope this collection will provide educators with new possibilities for their own teaching and program design. Our concluding chapter brings together the lessons learned, including the adaptations that were made, author recommendations for the future, and silver linings that arose over the course of teaching during the pandemic. Through this final chapter we seek to create a sense of appreciation for the creativity and commitment to student learning of all of the authors as well as gratefulness for their willingness to share lessons learned. We have divided the collection into four sections that represent the character of the chapters: programmatic changes, pedagogical developments, practicum adaptation, and equity concerns.

#### **Section 1: Programmatic Changes**

The collection begins with three chapters that provide insight into the complexity of programmatic changes that occurred in Bachelor of Education programs. The first chapter in this section, “A Case Study of Teacher Preparation in the Atlantic Bubble: Faculty and Student Perceptions of the Impact of COVID-19 Restrictions at the University of Prince Edward Island” by Fitzgerald, Snow, and Coward, draws upon interviews with preservice teachers, instructors, and an administrator to examine perceptions of online learning experiences during the first few months of the pandemic. The University of Prince Edward Island program begins in the spring of each year, so the chapter demonstrates the quick changes that were made.

The second chapter in this section, “From Disruption to Innovation: Reimagining Teacher Education During a Pandemic” from MacMath, Sivia, Robertson, Salingré, Compeau, and Britton, engages in critical questions about how to responsibly deliver a program during a pandemic while still maintaining kindness and care for self and others. The authors engage with a variety of perspectives, including those of faculty, a department head, student support, and an education librarian to examine these questions: What must we let go of? What do we need to transform? What could we completely reimagine?

Rounding out this section is the chapter from Bourgoin and Mitchell, “From Bricks and Mortar to Remote Learning: Building a Community of Learners and Recreating a Sense of Belonging in the Online Environment.” They outline their efforts to attend to preservice teachers’ socio-affective needs through collaboration, cooperative learning, and relationship building.

## **Section 2: Pedagogical Developments**

This section of the book focuses on pedagogical developments and adaptations that arose out of necessity and a commitment to preservice teacher learning and well-being. It begins with “Responsive, Relational Pandemic Pedagogies: A Collaborative, Critical Self-Study” from Schnellert, Miller, Macmillan, and Brant. Data collected from 20 interviews with teacher candidates prior to their practicum revealed that many were experiencing anxiety and distress. As an adaptation, the authors implemented a pedagogy infused with social-emotional learning, but the practice left some teacher candidates feeling uncomfortable. The authors point to important considerations that must be undertaken when attempting a relational, inclusive approach.

In “Pandemic Pedagogies: Transforming Teacher Education Through Spaces of Possibility,” Doyle-Jones, Abawi, and Elia examine shifts from traditional to multimodal, digital learning and consider how they will transform teacher education programs moving forward. The authors provide insights into their own Bachelor of Education program, where pedagogical adaptations included developing digital literacies, transforming traditional practicum experiences, and making space for Black people, Indigenous people, and people of colour.

In the next chapter, “The Student Lens: Education Students’ Response to Our Pandemic Shift in Teaching and Learning,” authors Andjelic, Boschman, Forbes, Gust, McDowall, McLester, and Whidden consider how preservice teachers viewed pedagogical and content adaptations related to assignment loads, assignment formats, and video posting. The authors describe how they took risks in their pedagogical practices and referring to entering into uncharted territory, adopted the inspirational phrase “Here be dragons” with the hope that their students would do the same. A student survey points to instructor efforts to connect with students and build relationships as an important factor in combating feelings of isolation. The chapter concludes with a vision for postpandemic teaching and learning based on students’ perspectives.

In “‘I Look Forward to This Class; It’s the Highlight of My Week’: Strategies for Teaching Successfully in a Crisis,” Miyata and Williams-Yeagers point to relationship building as critical to continued student engagement in online courses. Drawing upon social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Giri, 2009), Miyata and Williams-Yeagers describe four immediacy behaviours—self-disclosure, social presence, interactivity, and teacher support—working in tandem to create a culture of belonging in online courses.

In “You Mean I Have to Learn Mathematics in a Pandemic? The Challenges and Successes Facing Preservice Mathematics Education Courses,” Holm outlines how four mathematics courses were adapted for the online environment during the pandemic. Faced with overwhelmingly negative perceptions of mathematics from preservice teachers, Holm outlines how pedagogical adaptations including creating videos to convey content and having students engage group problem-solving were used to enhance student learning. Still, first-year students struggled with taking risks in the online environment in contrast to second-year students, who had already established relationships and were more willing to take risks that enhanced their understanding.

We conclude this section with a chapter in both French and English from Lemaire, Cavanagh, ElAtia, Lyseng, Jacquet, Manuel, Tran-Minh, and Viens. In “Teacher Training in a Francophone Minority Environment and COVID-19: A Review of the Experience,” the authors describe how important online conversations are to a French-language Bachelor of Education program that relies on opportunities for students to engage with faculty and one another to improve their skills in French. When those conversations moved online, faculty adapted by creating multimodal texts that included video, images, and audio to better engage students. Most preservice teachers were able to complete their practicum by working with their mentor teacher online; the rest were provided with an online course, *Projet d’achèvement de stage*, or Practicum Completion Project, which provided them with the opportunity to work together, practice their language skills, and prepare lesson plans.

### **Section 3: Practicum Adaptations**

School closures resulting in cancelled practica brought an entirely different level of complexity. While some students were able to continue their practica in the classroom, many found themselves teaching online with their mentor teacher or completing an online practicum course.

This section begins with a chapter from Weir and Darko describing the concerns they faced in redesigning practica. Would the preservice teachers have to extend their practicum? Would they need to pay for another practicum? Could they receive teaching certification even though they completed fewer weeks? How would that affect the quality of teachers? And finally, are students confident of their ability as new teachers? In “Pivoting During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Case of a Teacher Education Program at a Private University,” the authors describe a variety of practicum adaptations made to ensure preservice teachers were able to continue in their program.

In “Practicum Continuance and Implementation During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Teacher Educator Leaders’ Insights and Innovations,” Morin and Peters describe how through a combination of collaboration and advocacy with provincial educational partners, they were able to create a shared responsibility for practicum continuance. Additionally, Morrison, Petrarca, and Hughes, in “Making the Transition Online With Alternative Practicum Placements,” confront the reality that during a pandemic, a one-size-fits-all approach to practicum will not work. Faced with additional pressures including full-time childminding during school closures, caregiving for older parents, living with frontline workers, and dealing with their own health and mental health concerns, practicum students need a variety of options that allow them to meet their unique needs. In this program, some preservice teachers were able to complete their placements online with their mentor teachers, but others were not. Innovative solutions for practicum completion included virtual interactive professional learning sessions, a maker lab project to create online resources for K–12 teachers, and alternative spring and summer placements. The authors tackle the issue of assessing preservice teacher practica in a variety of settings.

In the chapter “Perspectives of Faculty and Preservice Teachers During the Transition to Online Learning,” two case studies on the initial shift to online learning are presented. In the first case study, Danyluk describes preservice teachers’ perceptions of an online practicum that provided opportunities for small group and whole classroom teaching experiences. In the second case study, continuing and contract faculty describe their experiences adapting their courses and learning how to teach online.

Ott, Sanjeevan, Chang, Marfil, and Hibbert describe how an alternative practicum provided opportunities for preservice teachers to practice teaching, network with other teaching professionals, dig into educational research, and examine the curriculum in more detail, with a focus on preservice teacher growth through self-directed learning. In “The Alternative Field Experience in Teacher Education: Lessons From Experiential Learning and Mentoring in Pandemic Times,” the authors consider the tensions between providing students with the freedom to direct their learning and outlining parameters for them.

In the next chapter, “‘Teacher Leaders in the Making’: A Response to COVID-19 in Practicum,” Hill, Johnston, Seitz, Twomey, and Vergis describe the creation of a new online learning community that reconceptualized the practicum experience. As an alternative to an in-school practicum, four modules centred on Alberta’s Teaching Quality Standard (TQS) were created. Through the modules, preservice teachers were able to develop a deepened understanding of the TQS and its role in the practicum. Challenges involved creating and maintaining meaningful connections in this rapidly changing context.

Baril, Chevalier, and Yates describe how school closures and cancellation of in-school practicum experiences began as a crisis situation, leading to the reexamination and “flexing” of field experience guidelines and expectations. Their chapter, “The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Effect on the Professional Practice of Field Experience Associates at the University of Alberta,” describes the creation of an online field experience “completion project” and the conversion of the field experience preparatory courses from in-person to blended asynchronous and synchronous online learning for the fall 2020 term. The reflective journey that followed led to reimagined aspects of field experiences that infused flexibility and provided more opportunities for ongoing engagement with school partners.

Concluding the section on the practicum, the chapter “Designing and Facilitating an ‘Adapted’ Practicum Experience Amid a Pandemic,” Pattison-Meek, Eizadirad, Guerrero, Phillips, and Temertzoglou examine lessons learned from developing and facilitating a virtual, nonschool practicum. Faced with a shortage of available practicum placements, preservice teachers were assigned to pods, where they experienced micro and team teaching and embedded wellness practices.

As evidenced by the chapters outlined here, practicum considerations during the COVID-19 pandemic were, and continue to be, particularly problematic given the implications for teacher certification and the level of nervousness that preservice teachers generally experience with regard to practica. However, the problem-solving associated with practica during COVID-19 also provided an opportunity for innovation and challenges to the traditional structure of this critical element of teacher education.

## **Section 4: Equity Concerns**

The pandemic brought attention to issues of racism, and the need for societal change and change within Bachelor of Education programs. In the first chapter in this section, “Changing Educational Landscapes and the Importance of Mental Well-Being in Teacher Education,” Plum and Hunter describe how a 2021 student engagement survey at Lakehead University in Orillia found that 65% of preservice teachers were experiencing physical or mental health crises (or both) from multiple stressors while engaged in their coursework during the pandemic. In response, the authors began integrating mindfulness opportunities into the program.

In the following chapter, “Preservice Teacher Thriving Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: Program Lessons Learned Under Siege,” Soleas and Coe-Nesbitt examine the impact of changes



in delivery of preservice teacher education on the relative thriving of teacher candidates. Preservice teachers report increased loneliness and negative feelings compared to prepandemic samples. The authors provide recommendations for supporting student thriving, adapting courses for remote delivery, building caring relationships, and how the social and programmatic transformations necessary for the pandemic might highlight a more equitable, accessible, and caring benchmark for future teacher education.

Concluding the section is a powerful chapter from Abawi and Eizadirad, who explore the ways in which the pandemic exacerbated obstacles for BIPOC teacher candidates as well as candidates of lower socioeconomic status, by creating access barriers. In “Neutrality Always Benefits the Oppressor: The Need to Rupture the Normalized Structure of Teacher Education Programs to Diversify the Workforce,” the authors argue that the shift to online learning and online practicum experiences disproportionately benefitted affluent white students, who are more likely to have computers and reliable internet connections.

In examining practices and the lessons learned for programmatic, pedagogical, practicum adaptations and equity concerns during the pandemic, these chapters offer new knowledge about the future of Bachelor of Education programs in Canada. The contributing authors are a diverse group of forward-thinking scholars who are committed to becoming agents of change. We hope this collection of work from across Canada demonstrates the ways in which Bachelor of Education programs responded to the pandemic not as only a crisis but as an opportunity to meet the needs of preservice teachers, reexamine the purposes of teacher education, and address the challenges of teaching online during a pandemic.

Right now, we are experiencing a series of unprecedented challenges nationally, including natural disasters like intense heat and fire that have wiped out entire communities, the discovery of unmarked graves of Indigenous children at the sites of former residential schools, police violence and calls to defund the police, and the questioning of what kind of leaders deserve to be upheld as examples of our national values. The pandemic forced us to think differently and consider new ways to deliver programs, as we engaged in problem-solving at each of our institutions. In this collection we share our solutions, adaptations, recommendations, and silver linings.

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# **SECTION 1**

## **Programmatic Changes**

## CHAPTER 1

### **A Case Study of Teacher Preparation in the Atlantic Bubble: Faculty and Student Perceptions of the Impact of COVID-19 Restrictions at the University of Prince Edward Island**

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#### **Abstract**

The University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) Bachelor of Education program begins in May, therefore we were faced with beginning a new cohort of preservice teachers online in 2020 before the rest of the university had fully developed procedures for online learning in the face of the pandemic. In this descriptive case study, we explore the perceptions of 12 teacher educators, seven preservice teachers, and an administrator within the Faculty of Education through semistructured interviews. Our goal was to examine both the opportunities of this new modality thrust upon us, as well as the challenges it brought for faculty and students alike. We discovered a series of tensions among the participants' responses: (a) the convenience and constraints of working from home, (b) course planning and preparation: doing it quickly and doing it right, (c) modelling pedagogy: what we hoped to do and what we did, (d) engaging students in synchronous classes, and (e) building relationships: the personal touch, just not in person. Ultimately, participants perceived more limitations than opportunities; however, a sense of gratitude pervaded interviews with preservice teachers. From our findings, we offer recommendations for future research and practice related to online preservice teacher training; what should be kept as we move forward and what still needs to be improved.

*Keywords:* teacher education, digital competence, online learning, COVID-19

#### **Résumé**

Le programme de baccalauréat en éducation à l'Université de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard commence en mai. Par conséquent, en 2020, nous avons dû commencer une nouvelle cohorte d'enseignants en formation initiale en ligne avant que le reste de l'université n'ait pleinement mis au point des procédures pour l'apprentissage en ligne face à la pandémie. Dans cette étude de cas descriptive, nous explorons les perceptions de douze formateurs d'enseignants, sept enseignants en formation initiale et un administrateur de la Faculté d'éducation au moyen d'entretien semi-directif. Notre objectif était d'examiner à la fois les opportunités de cette nouvelle modalité qui nous était imposée, ainsi que les défis qu'elle présentait pour les professeurs et les étudiants. Nous avons découvert une série de tensions parmi les réponses des participants : (a) les confort et les contraintes du travail à domicile, (b) la planification et la préparation des cours : le faire bien et le faire rapidement, (c) adaptation de la pédagogie : ce que nous espérions réaliser et ce que nous avons pu accomplir, (d) impliquer les étudiants dans des cours synchrones, et (e) établir des relations : une touche personnelle malgré la distance. En fin de compte, les participants ont perçu plus de limites que d'opportunités ; cependant, un sentiment de gratitude imprégnait les entretiens avec les futurs enseignants. À partir de cette étude, nous

proposons des recommandations pour des recherches et des pratiques futures liées à la formation initiale des enseignants en ligne — c’est à dire, les pratiques que nous voulons conservé et celles qui ont encore besoin d’amélioration.

*Mots clés* : formation des enseignants, compétence numérique, apprentissage en ligne, COVID-19

## **Introduction**

Located in Canada’s smallest province, the Faculty of Education at the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) normally offers teacher preparation in the form of an intensive, in-person, postdegree professional program. Preservice teachers begin studies in May and graduate 16 months later in September. With the declaration of a pandemic in March 2020, we like the rest of the world were left wondering how we could continue “business as usual” in the face of stay at home orders, restrictions on gathering size, small physical classrooms on campus and a mandatory 2-week isolation period for anyone travelling to the province. This chapter aims to tell the story of our approach but more importantly the impact these choices had on faculty, students and administrators. Drawing upon current literature related to distance education, online and blended learning, teacher preparation, and transformative change, we sought to understand the perceptions of participants during this unique slice of time: beginning a B.Ed. program amid the restrictions and uncertainty imposed by the first 3 months of the COVID-19 pandemic. The research question which guided our inquiry was as follows: How do preservice teachers and their instructors perceive the opportunities and challenges of their online learning experiences?

We adopted a descriptive case study approach using semistructured interviews with 20 self-selected participants (seven preservice teachers, 12 instructors, and one administrator) who were actively involved in the spring and summer 2020 terms of the B.Ed. program. Through a thematic analysis of participant responses, we have discussed the opportunities and challenges that arose from the program redesign, the solutions we adopted, areas for growth, and perhaps even improvements to the program that will be retained in postpandemic program renewal.

## **Literature Review**

To frame our research, we began with an examination of Moore’s (1993) theory of transactional distance, as the shift to online learning had fundamentally disrupted the pathway between student and teacher that traditionally exists in teacher education. With this as the frame for evaluation, we then examined the current literature in relation to the factors we immediately identified as impacting our ability to transition to online learning. This included the experience and relationship of teacher training and online learning as a measure of “readiness and resistance” for online learning. Furthering the discussion of supports and limitations we then turned to an examination of the “affordances” of technology with regard to changing the nature of teaching and learning online, and finally we examined change literature as it related to “adaptability” to accept the fundamental shift of learning during the pandemic. Our literature review is seated in the premise that there are limitations and opportunities in the change to our relationship with students and through understanding them we might better be able to process our own experiences during this dramatic time.

## Theory of Transactional Distance

Arising from distance education research, Moore (1993) first proposed a theory of transactional distance which has been identified as one of the key theories in understanding distance education systems (Garrison, 2000; Goel et al., 2012; Jung, 2001). Moore theorized that physically distant learning environments complicated relationships between teachers and learners, depending upon: the nature of the *dialogue* between them, the *structure* of the course, and the degree of *autonomy* experienced by the learner. In other words, transactional distance describes the psychologically perceived distance in a relationship between a learner, their peers, instructional content and the instructor (Weidlich & Bastiaens, 2018). In Moore's view, learner/teacher dialogue included all forms of interaction between them, independent of modality (synchronous/asynchronous) and included bidirectional outreach (from the learner to the teacher and from the teacher to the learner). Increasing dialogue in any of its forms was observed to reduce transactional distance, or give learners a sense of connection to other learners and instructor. The structure of the course referred to its flexibility, student assessment, and attention to individual student needs. Moore posits that decreasing structure reduces dialogue and results in greater transactional distance. Finally, Moore conceived of learner autonomy in terms of the learner's sense of independence and control. In an almost counter intuitive phenomenon, Moore outlined that greater autonomy also resulted in greater transactional distance. A careful balance must be found among all three elements and a breakdown in any facet of these pillars could increase transactional distance and lead to lessened student satisfaction and persistence.

## Educational Change

Prepandemic, Bartram (2020) characterized higher education as “a system in perpetual flux” (p. 2). In the midst of the pandemic, Fullan (2020) contends that change is with us to stay, but while COVID-19 has exposed systemic inequities in education, it has also brought opportunities to improve. Similarly, Robinson (2020) argues that the pandemic offers us a chance to press the “reset” button on education. Schein (2010) defines sustainable change in terms of transformed organizational culture. Hubers (2020) discusses sustainable change in higher education in terms of first, second, and third order change. First order change is incremental, builds upon existing skills, and takes place in the classroom, while second order change takes place at the organizational or school level, represents a paradigmatic shift, and requires new skills. Harris and Jones (2019) argue that for change to take root in classrooms and spread to transform practice in schools and systems, teachers must be autonomous co-constructors rather than recipients of policy decisions. Consequently, resistance to change, in the case of switching to online teaching, can stem not only from lack of autonomy, but also from lack of time, low self-efficacy, and feelings of being ill-suited or unprepared (Gratz & Looney, 2020; Prottas et al., 2016). However, as Smith et al. (2021) note, the current external trigger, a pandemic, has thrust change upon us, ready or not.

## Readiness and Resistance for an Online Bachelor of Education

Despite the growing number of fully online K–12 schools in North America, there are few formal teacher preparation programs at the B.Ed. level addressing online learning in a substantive manner (Barbour et al., 2013; Graziano & Bryans-Bongey, 2018). Instead, certified teachers must turn to graduate level degrees such as diplomas and masters which are exploding

exponentially with regard to teacher professional development in Canada. Despite a robust research base that delineates effective online teaching practices (Carillo & Flores, 2020), there appears to be a practice of “do what I say, not what I do” with regard to modelling excellence in online learning at the postsecondary level. Examining the trends in the *2019 National Survey of Online and Digital Learning* (a survey of postsecondary institutions in Canada) reveals the majority of institutions are in the early stages of implementing online learning strategies with faculty reporting the need for training and support, both pedagogical and technological, for online teaching.

In examining B.Ed. programs specifically, Archibald et al. (2020) evidenced the dearth of preparation for preservice teachers for online teaching and learning. In a survey of over 30 universities offering teacher preparation, most offered partial credits or standalone courses and a minority offered “online or field experiences” (p. 4). Archibald et al. attributed this to a lack of institutional resources, limited faculty capacity and a perceived lack of usefulness for teachers’ future careers as provincial regulations across the country appear to discourage online field experiences.

As both national surveys suggest, teacher education programs were probably not ready for this rapid change with the biggest resisters arising from faculty capacity and university infrastructure, a lament familiar to distance education units across the country, and UPEI was no exception. However, as Cutri and her colleagues (2020) have argued, although teacher educators may not be prepared to teach online, affective factors (empathy, humility, and optimism) mitigated their discomfort in taking risks and appearing unprepared, even as they learned by doing.

### **Affordances of Online Learning in Teacher Education**

Community-based and blended teacher education has long filled a gap with regard to access for teacher education, particularly for those in remote areas, and therefore offered clues to the opportunities at improving teacher education through online and blended learning. Beyond issues of access (Rice & Deschaine, 2020), there is a growing body of evidence that outlines that a semionline approach to teacher education can support: flexibility (Simon et al., 2014; Snow et al., 2019); local/culturally relevant approaches to teaching (Snow, 2016); deeper learning (McAuley & Walton, 2011; Snow, 2020); professional administrative skills (Rasmitadila et al., 2020); greater pacing control (Zhou & Chua, 2016), self-efficacy (Karsenti & Collin, 2011; Vaughan & Kimberly, 2013) and the obvious development of personal digital skills (Atmascasoy & Asku, 2018). However, to obtain these new skills requires adapting to a new set of tools and approaches, which is not without its own challenges. Preservice teachers in Snow (2016) reported challenges in finding time and space to study at home as well as the increased time demand for responding in writing to discussions. Additionally, the rise in the use of digital communication platforms saw a concomitant rise in reports of fatigue, especially with prolonged use of tools such as video conferencing (Bailenson, 2021). The degree to which preservice teachers gain access to the affordances of more interactive online learning was highly dependent on bandwidth availability which could create a digital divide within the learning context (Lai & Widmar, 2021). And finally, the success of blended learning teacher education was frequently attributed to pre-orientation and personal preparedness for this mode of learning (Rasmitadila et al., 2020; Snow, 2016). It is important to note that in all of the above-cited studies, preservice teachers also indicated a preference for face-to-face learning.



## **The Context of Our Examination**

UPEI's Faculty of Education offers teacher preparation in the form of an intensive, in-person, postdegree professional program. Preservice teachers begin studies in May and graduate 16 months later in September, meeting all of the requirements of a PEI level 5A teacher certification, which were formerly reserved for full 2-year programs. Preservice teachers complete courses in blocks rather than in the traditional semester design followed elsewhere in the university. This allows for one of the longest in-school placements in the country (26 weeks). The majority of preservice teacher applicants come from the province (71%). Remaining applicants come from the Atlantic region (12%), other provinces (17%), and out of country (< 1%). UPEI preservice teachers are prepared primarily to work in provincial schools, both within the English- and French-language boards, and while some field placements are offered internationally and regionally, most field experiences take place in island schools. Pertinent to this study, UPEI's teacher preparation program prepandemic offered a one credit course in integrating technology in teaching.

On March 15, 2020, the provincial government, responding to increasing public health concerns about COVID-19, shuttered all schools and sent K–12 students home. In-person classes were suspended; however, online teaching and learning for public school students resumed after an extended March break, initially with generalized “Home Learning Resources” parents/guardians could download and use, and then with Google Classroom teacher-supported activities (Government of Prince Edward Island, 2020). As a result, the format of preservice teacher practicums, which were set to begin for the graduating class, remained unclear.

As of March 15, 2020, UPEI moved all remaining classes of the semester, for all programs, online. By March 21, 2020, the province and the chief public health officer imposed a 14-day self-isolation period for any returning travellers (CBC News, March, 2020). Although the majority of current and incoming preservice teachers in the B.Ed. program were domestic students, others resided outside PEI. Therefore, we had to attend immediately to self-isolation accommodations and logistics for arriving students as required by provincial regulations, while also adjusting the delivery of the program from face-to-face to online or hybrid instruction. In the weeks leading up to the start date of the B.Ed. program, teacher educators at UPEI met virtually to collaborate, share expertise, expand their digital repertoires and prepare for the first round of courses to be fully online. Concurrently, the E-Learning Office, housed in UPEI's Teaching and Learning Centre, offered a range of assistance to instructors, including one-to-one consultation, webinars, and archived online help. The traditional week-long orientation for incoming B.Ed. students in May was moved online and concurrently acted as an accommodation period for the Faculty with three recommended technologies: Moodle (learning management system), Zoom (virtual meeting) and Google Docs (document sharing). Instructors were encouraged to keep courses simple, select minimal technology and adopt the chief public health officer's recommendation to be “patient and kind” in all dealings with students.

## **Methods**

This descriptive case study (Yin, 2018) was positioned to examine the experiences of learners, instructors and administrators within the context of pandemic B.Ed. teaching. Using an inductive approach, we hoped to gain insight into the multiple realities that were constructed by the individuals and their positioning within the case (Merriam, 1998). Data was collected through 20 socially distanced semistructured interviews conducted from August to November

2020. Though we would have liked to capture initial impressions from May to July, the university shutdown and the subsequent partial campus reopening resulted in delay of our institutional ethics approval. Each interview lasted between 30 to 70 minutes. We specified that participants reflect upon their experiences at a specific point in time: beginning the B.Ed. program in the midst of a pandemic. We used a semistructured interview protocol (available upon request from the corresponding author) with conversation starters designed to probe interviewees' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of: working from home, course planning and preparation, curriculum and pedagogy, and building relationships in an online environment. The analytic process included a series of researcher reflections throughout the interview process, as well as systematic analysis of recordings and transcripts upon completion of the interviews (Saldaña, 2013). To enhance trustworthiness, we included rich descriptions of our context and provided extensive participant direct quotes within the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study is limited by a relatively small number of preservice teacher participants.

## Findings

Participants shared their perceptions of the opportunities and limitations of the rapid compulsory online learning shift. Their views seldom resulted in binary *eithers*, instead giving rise to a set of nuanced *ands*. Consequently, the findings coalesced thematically around a series of tensions: (a) the convenience and constraints of working remotely, (b) course planning and preparation: doing it quickly and doing it right, (c) modelling pedagogy: aspirations and reality, (d) synchronous learning engagement: cameras on and off, and (e) building relationships: the personal touch, just not in person.

### The Convenience and Constraints of Working Remotely

All participants noted that working remotely (at home or elsewhere) represented both a convenience and a constraint in terms of teaching and learning. Preservice teachers noted increased flexibility in where and when they worked. For example, one said, "I alternate between a desk in my room and the living room couch ... and tend to go to cafes in town when I need to change things up." Finding alternate and socially distanced quiet spots on campus was important to another, whose dorm room was located adjacent to a construction project. Another preservice teacher noted working from highly variable locations, mentioning the flexibility of attending class using a smartphone from anywhere. This preservice teacher also noted advantages of working ahead, to maintain a better work/life balance, noting "The benefits for me when classes are asynchronous, I can do them at my own pace. I can do them when I want. If I want to do them before, I can." Another preservice teacher reported flexibility in being able to "help out with family matters." Conversely, one preservice teacher enjoyed working from home but was "distracted" by seeing the number of household chores that needed to be done.

At the same time, an urban vs. rural and in-country vs. out-of-country digital divide meant that some students experienced spotty access to synchronous classes and the learning management system. Students reported dropped connections and inability to download larger files such as narrated PowerPoint presentations. One instructor reported that due to access issues in rural Quebec, four students gathered together to attend class. Another instructor noted two students could listen but couldn't speak during Zoom meetings.

Only two of the 13 faculty participants described working from a previously established home office, while the rest rapidly improvised home office spaces. These ranged from taking over a children's playroom to appropriating a corner of a bedroom, to claiming part of the kitchen counter or table. One instructor mentioned using outside space when the weather cooperated. All but one participant noted the need to negotiate shared spaces or internet bandwidth within the household. A third of the participants mentioned purchasing additional resources, such as a larger computer screen, a printer or scanner, or better headphones. Despite challenges with negotiating space and internet access, instructors reported advantages, such as time and cost savings. Several, who normally travelled to the island to teach, mentioned the loss of in-person contact, but noted time and cost savings in working remotely. One spoke about "the conveniences of home." Another noted, "My [office] space is set up in a way that I like." One instructor, a parent and practicing professional, noted the ease of "managing multiple roles" and being physically present in the home. The administrator noted the need to maintain focus in spite of distractions, but eventually came to regard working from home as "more productive." Conversely, one instructor noted, "I think you use your time more wisely when you go to the office than when you stay home."

### **Course Planning and Preparation: Doing it Quickly and Doing it Right**

All instructors noted the forced move online complicated course planning and preparation. Factors included respondents' prior experience and expertise (or lack thereof) in online teaching and learning, the need to make rapid decisions upon essential content, and the need to adapt curriculum and content quickly but effectively.

#### ***Prior Experience with Online Teaching and Learning***

Three faculty participants reported prior online teaching experience. Only one instructor had previous formal training (a Master of Education majoring in digital technology). The administrator possessed a background in technology and extensive experience teaching online. Nevertheless, with the forced move online all instructors reported taking advantage of short workshops offered by UPEI's E-Learning Office in instructional design services and other professional development opportunities, such as conferring informally with colleagues in small groups. By contrast, all preservice teachers reported at least some prior experience learning online. Upon discovering the B.Ed. would commence online, one preservice teacher reported, "I was skeptical about its effectiveness for me personally as I am a learner who prefers conversation and hands on projects. Online settings don't seem to offer the necessary ease of communication to ensure excellent learning."

Most instructors opted for a combination of synchronous and asynchronous class activities. Zoom was widely, although not uniformly, used by instructors for synchronous class meetings. Several instructors adopted Google Meet, the application adopted by K-12 provincial schools, thinking it would be advantageous to preservice teachers to be familiar with its features. Similarly, while most instructors opted to use UPEI's learning management system to house course materials, discussion forums, and assignments, several used solely Google Suite applications. Two instructors were comfortable using a wide variety of educational apps, such as Padlet, Kahoot, and Screencastify; however, they were somewhat frustrated that these tools were unsupported by the university financially or technically.

Some preservice teachers took a critical view of their online experiences and reported an uneven experience across classes within the program. For example, one noted “quite a disparity between instructors in terms of their technical understanding of the systems they were using for online instruction.” Another mentioned disappointment at instructors’ general “lack of tech savviness.”

### ***Deciding Upon Content: Paring to Essentials***

In discussing course planning, three instructors specifically mentioned the need to pare curriculum to essentials. For example, one said, “I found I was simplifying and cutting out some of the material that would have normally included in my course.... I looked at my materials and made choices.” Another described his process of prioritization as, “I broke it down and I kept myself to the essentials.... what was the main, the most important thing, because you can’t give as much information.” Another described clarifying her own beliefs about art education, and taking the opportunity to do less, but to lay “a much clearer foundation than usual.” All three framed this paring process as taxing, yet nevertheless an opportunity to revisit course aims.

### ***Doing it Right: A Time-Consuming Process***

Planning for online courses took longer as teacher educators adapted face-to-face activities to work in a digital environment; they described the process as time-consuming. In particular, instructors of methods courses that typically rely upon hands on learning reported grappling with how to design or adapt such experiences for preservice teachers online. One asked “Now, how can I do it? What do I have to change? If I have to. Or how to adapt it to do it the same way? And do it on the computer?” Another said, “It took a lot longer to use the technology and cover the course content.” Another noted, “The disadvantage, of course, is that it’s so much more time consuming and so much more exhausting.” The instructor added, “The disadvantage of online learning is that it requires a lot more time and effort to do it right.” Overall, responses to questions probing course preparation and planning indicated the desire to “do it right” but dismay about the amount of time it took.

### ***Modelling Pedagogy: Aspirations and Reality***

Instructors aim to model pedagogy and practice, and while many perceived a move to an online format in terms of lost opportunities, some saw future benefits to preservice teachers. From the perspective of loss, instructors said: “They’ve missed the best of me teaching them and modelling”; “It’s a methods course, so modelling the dynamics of creating [second language] conversation in a live classroom was lost”; and “When I teach in the classroom, I teach and I tell the students look at whatever I’m doing. That’s what you have to do. You’re modelling.” Another added,

The biggest drawback was having to cut back on some of the some of the content and exhibiting the teaching strategies and methods in-person in groups in particular, because for language learning class, there’s a lot of emphasis on working with partners, listening and in communicating and interacting.

Conversely, some instructors thought having to navigate new online environments constituted a form of modelling and represented an advantage to preservice teachers. One instructor noted that preservice teachers “were facing the same challenges as other teachers in the [public school] system and instructors at UPEI in trying to figure out how to teach in an online environment and keep it interesting and relevant.” Similarly, another thought it beneficial for preservice teachers to experience educational apps, and she helped them to create a bank of such tools for use in future teaching. One instructor thought preservice teachers got to see a range of techniques and tools, and more importantly, got to see what a teacher does when the technology doesn’t work. Another noted, “But teaching as a field is about going with the flow and so if nothing else, they’re jumping in when it is probably the hardest time [during a pandemic] to do that.”

Overall, preservice teachers mourned the loss of in-person modelling of pedagogy, not only in terms of classroom management techniques, but also in terms of subject specific pedagogy, such as facilitating second language conversation, running science experiments, and cultivating arts appreciation. However, at least one preservice teacher praised the pedagogy modelled, noting that the math methods instructor “utilized a variety of effective, quick, and nongimmicky techniques to vary how we participated, and didn’t allow the online platform to take away from her energy and efficiency in delivering content.”

### **Synchronous Learning Engagement**

In general, instructors reported difficulties in gauging student engagement in synchronous classes, both when cameras were on and off. Instructors noted a loss of visual information, especially in large classes, their surprise at how tiring it was to conduct synchronous classes, and the tension between protecting students’ right to privacy (cameras off) and instructors’ need to know whether students were present and involved (cameras on).

### ***Lost Information***

Instructors reported difficulty tracking student interest and involvement in synchronous classes, with many of the difficulties related to the loss of visual information on Zoom calls. One noted that, in large groups, not all of the students “fit” on their Zoom page. Another noted the nonverbal information they relied upon during in-person interactions was missing online. They said, “When you’ve got 20 faces on the screen, you don’t have the nonverbal. I just checked [verbally] if they understood more.” Another said, “When you’re in class, it’s easier to see when they’re off track, but online it’s harder.” One teacher educator discussed it in terms of the data available to him in an online format, saying “I think there’s just less data available than with embodied experience. And so the ability to listen, interpret, respond has a narrower data structure. And so I’d suggest the cues that we get are just narrower.”

Preservice teachers also reported difficulty in engaging in online classes. One linked lack of engagement to interest, reporting “sometimes it depends on how engaged our colleagues are and our instructor is during the synchronous session.... Sometimes it’s hard for me to engage if there’s not a lot of interest or enthusiasm.” Similarly, another noted, “I find that if I’m online, and I’m wanting to focus and pay attention and engage, if I’m not interested in the content, it’s that much more difficult.” Thus, both teacher educators and preservice teachers struggled with gauging levels of engagement and interest in online environments.

## ***Online Fatigue***

Some preservice teachers reported turning cameras off simply to take a break. One preservice teacher noted “Zoom is difficult for a long time,” while another described being tired, especially “if there were two three-hour synchronous classes back-to-back.” The sole administrator noted the preponderance of online meetings which meant long and fatiguing days.

## ***Cameras: On or Off?***

From the perspective of instructors, it was concerning when preservice teachers’ cameras were turned off. One reported, “I was surprised by the number of students who didn’t want their video cameras on, which was a slight deterrent to discussion.” Another speculated that cameras were off because students were disengaged. Without being able to see faces, instructors were unsure if students were present or engaged. One instructor forced the issue by directing students to keep cameras on. By contrast, another instructor, for religious reasons, kept their own camera off and did not require students to turn theirs on.

One preservice teacher reported that cameras off amplified the challenges of Zoom discussions and contributed to feeling disconnected from classmates:

The sense of not being able to discuss content as one usually would in class because of how the technology limits the ability to read body language, notice when a student is about to speak, or handle multiple voices chiming in was difficult. The fact that poor internet connections often forced us to have cameras off added to the sense of disconnect.

As well, some preservice teachers expressed frustration at turning cameras off to conserve bandwidth. Conversely, others reported a number of advantages to turning off the cameras during Zoom meetings. One mentioned the flexibility and ability to stay engaged that came with turning the camera off. She noted that especially with long Zoom meetings (2–3 hours), she would “just turn the camera off, and I do get up and move around. I’m not stationary.” On a similar note, another reported “Sometimes, when lectures are recorded or don’t involve student conversation, I essentially treat them as podcasts and do work around the house while listening, as it helps me focus on the content without getting too restless.” Another preservice teacher expressed reservations about having the camera turned on if the class was being recorded, noting, “I just feel more comfortable having it off ... you don’t really know like, where obviously it’s fine, but like where it’s going.” For this preservice teacher, concerns with privacy and data breaches prompted the decision to turn off the camera. Another discussed feeling uncomfortable with classmates’ decision to turn off cameras, noting, “A lot of people were attending the meetings with the screens off and I know people were folding laundry and doing other stuff and you know, again, not engaged, almost taking advantage.” This preservice teacher indicated understanding the decisions of instructors to direct students to turn on cameras, saying “both specified that unless you let me know in advance that you have connectivity issues and can’t have your camera on, you have to have your camera on.”

## ***Cultivating Relationships: The Personal Touch, Just Not In Person***

In general, instructors perceived that moving to an online format negatively impacted their ability to build and sustain relationships with students. These concerns included missing out

on informal interactions and not forging future professional contacts. Similarly, preservice teachers perceived that moving to an online format represented lost opportunities to develop peer to peer connections and lessened their ability to socially construct learning.

### ***Informal Interactions and Future Professional Relationships***

Most teacher educators perceived moving to an online format as a disadvantage in terms of building relationships with students. Instructors reported a range of relationship building challenges from informal (“as you walk down to your office to get a book to share”), classroom based (“I think preservice teachers are being disadvantaged in ... not having the face-to-face and the one-on-one and the real stuff”) to professional competence (“Teaching is about people. And the worst part, I mean, you don’t have contact and I don’t think it could be replaced, the in-person thing.”). While these instructors were concerned about fostering relationships for immediate purposes, one was concerned about building rapport with students in service of future professional relationship, noting,

This was the biggest drawback for me of the entire experience. I’m very much a people person. And my hope in teaching this course, as a curriculum leader with the [provincial education] department is that I am making bonds with these kids and building relationships so that when they enter the teaching field, they are comfortable to come to me.

Nevertheless, instructors developed strategies to build connections. For example, one reported asking small groups of students to stay behind after Zoom sessions for social chats. Another described intentional modelling of relationship building online (made explicit strategies for learning names, evaluation techniques) while a third reported using consistent daily communication through individual written responses to discussion forums and providing daily synopsis of overall responses.

### ***Peer-to-Peer Connections***

Many preservice teachers felt the loss of in-person connections with their peers. One reported “you lose a lot of the camaraderie” and don’t get to be “in the room with other like-minded people. Furthermore, this preservice teacher connected the lack of contact to lost opportunities to socially co-construct meaning as “the social realm of the absorption of the knowledge.” Another noted, “We were able to find some limited times to connect, but overall the connection and bonding potential for the group was very limited. There was less opportunity to organically develop professional relationships by staying after class to discuss ideas or projects.” Nevertheless, others welcomed the opportunity to work in small groups during synchronous classes and reported navigating time zones to work asynchronously with peers.

### ***More Limitations Than Opportunities, But at Least We Were Able to Do It***

Overall, as illustrated in the previous findings, participants perceived more limitations than opportunities in a forced move online. However, among some respondents there was a sense that although being online was not a superior option, it was an available option. For example, one instructor said,

At least we have the technology like Zoom ... we were all seeing each other. I know the students were eager to meet the members of their cohort [in person], but at least at least we were able to meet [online] so that's an advantage.

Some preservice teachers noted their relief in being able to continue their education, especially those who had been planning B.Ed. entry for several years. For example, one noted, "I wasn't disappointed like, 'Oh, this is ruining my dream.' I just want to get it done. I've been trying to do this for so long.... If this is online, I'm gonna do it." Another preservice teacher reported, "But to be honest, I was really grateful because we didn't lose any time.... It's a 1-year program and ... I've been planning this for a couple years. So I was really grateful to have the opportunity, that it was still being offered."

## Discussion

### Transactional Distance: A "High Touch" Profession in a Digital World

Overall, participants in this study perceived that opportunities to build relationships were compromised by shifting the Bachelor of Education program online. Moore's (1993) theory of transactional distance helped to explain how relationships were cultivated in online spaces and conversely why we faced greater challenges. Moore theorized that instructors could mitigate transactional distance by enhancing instructor–student and student–peer dialogue, structuring courses more flexibly, paying attention to individual student needs, and increasing student autonomy.

In this study, decisions at the program level guided instructors to use a limited range of applications to support consistency and reduce confusion for preservice teachers. Transactional distance appeared to be increased, as evidenced by our interviews by the technological competence of instructors, although several instructors proficiently used a wide range of educational apps, not all of the remaining instructors demonstrated confident use of the foundational applications for communication and course organization, and preservice teachers noted this variation. Both instructors and preservice teachers raised concerns about how reduced or absent visual information (cameras on/cameras off) in virtual meetings lessened their sense of connection (teacher–student and peer-to-peer). Participants also lamented lost opportunities for modelling pedagogy. However, although instructors did not use the language of reducing transactional distance, many intuitively designed learning opportunities (synchronous and asynchronous) for preservice teachers to work in small groups, frequently checked for understanding in synchronous classes, remained online after synchronous class to "chat" with groups of students, communicated on a daily basis with the class, and attended to email questions from individual students promptly. Additionally, preservice teachers noted a variety of ways in which instructors designed innovative and creative ways to teach online, particularly in methods courses. Consequently, despite a lack of formal training and feelings of unpreparedness (Cutri et al., 2020), some instructors modelled transactional distance reducing pedagogy.

### Shift Happens: Readiness and Resistance for an Online Bachelor of Education

Consistent with national trends in higher education and Bachelor of Education programs (Barbour et al., 2013; Graziano & Bryans-Bongey, 2018) and instructor preparation (Gratz & Looney, 2020; Prottas et al., 2016), few instructors in this study reported prior experience



teaching online and few reported feeling confident and prepared for the amount of work needed to design engaging online experiences for learners. Although all preservice teachers had prior experience with online learning, not all were confident this was the best format. Prepared or not, a COVID-19 imposed paradigm shift made emergency online teaching and learning the only available option. Participants faced conflicting feeling of acceptance and resistance as they charted a new path. Schein's (2010) typology of organizational change would describe most participants' transition as one of survival and adaptation to external pressure, with the pervading cultural myth "we can't do B.Ed. online" dominating much of the conversation and outlining what was lost rather than opportunities for gain. However, shift happened, as instructors gained familiarity they began to discuss sustaining, or transformative changes which they hoped to retain. In line with the second order change described by Hubers (2020), instructors' made changes in classrooms, developed new skills in doing, and transformed program delivery. Teacher educators exercised leadership by becoming "the instigators, creators and implementers of educational change" (Harris & Jones, 2020, p. 123).

Despite noting more limitations than opportunities in the move to online learning, participants reported a variety of affordances of online learning in teacher education, including time and cost savings, flexibility (Simon et al., 2014; Snow et al., 2019), ability to work ahead (Zhou & Chua, 2016), opportunities to clarify essential content, alternative ways to group students, and a variety of ways to build relationships in digital environments. Out-of-province and out-of-country preservice teachers were afforded the opportunity to begin the program when travel restrictions prevented them from coming to the island and, all preservice teachers were afforded the opportunity to forge ahead with the Bachelor of Education program as planned.

## Conclusion

The dominant narrative from our participants is one of a rollercoaster of highs and lows in an online B.Ed. learning experience. Lows included increased sense of isolation in learning, and concerns about the integrity of learning, particularly in methodology courses which are primarily based in experiential learning. However, highs included an opportunity for normality, continuation of long held plans for education, and pockets of inspirational instruction. Arguably this parallels every preservice teacher's experience in a B.Ed. online. The opportunity to reevaluate what is a B.Ed., its goals, and how we achieve them was outlined as important by many instructors, therefore another high from the un-anticipated pandemic was an informal program review, course by course, as well as a massive, albeit bumpy online teaching "learning by doing" professional development experience for both preservice teachers and instructors. As we look forward to a postpandemic program, what remains to be seen is what will be retained and what will rebound back to the old. As we reflect on what we learned from participants and our own experiences we want to share some of our hoped-for retentions.

Lack of formal training, as described by teacher educators in this study, underscores the importance of institutions providing ongoing support. Given informal and formal opportunities to learn from and with each other, teacher educators can develop self-efficacy and model effective pedagogy in digital environments for preservice teachers. The paucity of dedicated coursework aimed at increasing preservice teachers professional digital competence suggests an avenue for B.Ed. program improvement. A robust research base outlines that although much is known about effective online teaching practice (Carillo & Flores, 2020), prior to the pandemic, there was a lack of uptake of training on the part of instructors (Gratz & Looney, 2020). Currently, less is known about how sudden change, such as a pandemic, and informal and collaborative training

opportunities accelerate motivation and skill development in teacher educators. As waves of the pandemic continue to affect education, this represents a promising avenue of research.

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## CHAPTER 2

### **From Disruption to Innovation: Reimagining Teacher Education During a Pandemic**

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#### **Abstract**

This chapter focuses on the individual and collective reflections of the COVID-19 pandemic from a variety of teacher education department roles. Reflections from the point of view of department head, education librarian, student support services, and instructional faculty are shared illustrating how this program-wide pivot impacted professional identities, workloads, and pedagogies in diverse and unexpected ways. By sharing these reflections and seeking to understand each other's perspectives and experiences, both losses and innovations were explored leading to a stronger sense of community, an opportunity for catharsis, and an evaluation of what to do as we move forward. We realized that, in being forced to try something new, we had come to think differently about what was possible in teacher education. New pedagogies and practices were adopted, while there were others that could not be replaced when working online. We use the metaphor of a spiral to understand these varying responses, practices, and understandings of teacher education.

*Keywords:* professional identities, teacher educators, perspectives, vulnerabilities, pedagogy

#### **Résumé**

Ce chapitre porte sur les réflexions individuelles et collectives liées à la pandémie de la COVID-19 à partir des responsables du département de la formation des enseignants. Les réflexions sont partagées du point de vue de la directrice du département, de la bibliothécaire pédagogique, des services de soutien aux élèves et du corps professoral, en montrant les divers impacts inattendus de ce tournant à l'échelle du programme sur les identités professionnelles, les charges de travail et les pédagogies. En partageant ces réflexions et en cherchant à se faire comprendre les uns les autres, les pertes et les innovations ont été explorées, nous conduisant à un sentiment de communauté plus solide, à une opportunité de catharsis et à une évaluation de ce qu'il faut faire à mesure que nous avançons. Étant forcés d'essayer de nouvelles choses, nous en étions venus à penser différemment à ce qui était possible dans la formation des enseignants. Ainsi, de nouvelles pédagogies et de nouvelles pratiques ont été adoptées, tandis que d'autres ne pourraient être remplacées par le travail en ligne. Nous avons utilisé l'image d'une spirale comme métaphore pour comprendre les réponses variables de ces pratiques et des interprétations de la formation des enseignants.

*Mots clés* : identités professionnelles, formateurs d'enseignants, points de vue, vulnérabilités, pédagogie

## Introduction

The first presumptive case of a novel coronavirus in British Columbia was confirmed in late January 2020. By March 2020, COVID-19 had been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization and soon became an unprecedented healthcare emergency in British Columbia (CBC News, 2020). The BC government's swift response to the pandemic resulted in significant changes to the delivery of K–12 and postsecondary education programs. On March 17, school districts were required to close schools and develop plans for virtual instruction. Postsecondary institutions remained open, but most courses shifted to virtual/remote instruction in accordance with provincial health guidelines. In June 2020, in-person learning was permitted in K–12 schools with most classrooms only working with four to five students (parents/guardians determined if their child would return; most did not). At the end of July 2020, the province announced that public schools would reopen in September with most teacher candidates attending school full time in learning cohorts. However, the province's 25 postsecondary institutions would continue to offer most courses through online/remote learning.

As teacher educators in British Columbia at the University of the Fraser Valley, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic sparked dramatic changes in our program delivery. The sudden pivot to remote teaching and learning meant a complete transformation of our teacher education program and practices. Courses were to be delivered online, orientations and field experiences would need to be redesigned, many support systems would no longer be available, and access to print and curricular resources would be limited. These challenges were further complicated by our deeply held perspectives about what we believed was essential to effectively prepare teachers—the question of how a B.Ed. program could be delivered fully online and still produce high-quality beginning professionals was a limiting factor in imagining possibilities during the early stages of the pandemic. As we critically reflected on aspects of our teacher education program and on our individual practices, the questions that we grappled with became: What must we let go of? What do we need to transform? What could we completely reimagine?

This chapter focuses on our experiences as teacher educators whose roles include teaching faculty, department head, advising, and education librarian. Our analysis involved introspection, critical reflection, and the creation of narratives that represented our individual and collective responses to the shift to online teacher education. Through these varied lenses, our narratives illuminated important insights related to professional identity, learning spaces, and pedagogical practices. We focused on authentically sharing our own perceptions of the past year and then took time to connect and discuss as a collective to examine what was learned from our sharing of voices. By moving beyond the descriptive to the analytic, our collective experiences represent both an *introspection* into our unique responses to the shift to online practices and an *innovation* (and reinvigoration) of our teacher education program—with broader implications not just for teaching during a pandemic, but for reinventing the future of preservice teacher education.

## Context

Our B.Ed. is a 1-year postdegree program at a small, regional university situated on the traditional lands of the Stó:lō with close ties to the local school districts. The institution is

surrounded by the third most ethnically diverse region in Canada, although this demographic is not fully reflected in the student population. As with other postdegree B.Ed. programs, our teacher education program consists of a combination of foundation courses, methods courses in teachable subjects, and two practica: one in the first semester of the program and a longer certification practicum in the second half of the program. One important feature is the attention instructors pay to embedded pedagogy, a term used to describe how course content is taught by modelling or embedding effective K–12 strategies as part of instruction. The inclusion of program-wide field experiences, such as site visits to a residential school, and a Sikh heritage museum are also unique to our program as they move beyond just the inclusion of activities in individual courses. A third feature is the strong focus on integrating theory and practice by having faculty mentor teacher candidates in practicum. It is within this context and programmatic design that we explored our shift to online teacher education.

## Identity

The question of how our identities as educators were affected by the pandemic is central to this work. As we found ourselves shifting from traditional, face-to-face university teaching to teaching in an online environment, a parallel shift took place in our internalized conceptions of who we are as teacher educators and what we believe is important to developing an electronic or e-pedagogy (Song et al., 2020). In deconstructing our practices, we were also forced to deconstruct our identities, a process that was at times painful but revelatory and cathartic in resituating and finding our place within the shift to online. Richardson and Alsup (2015) describe this as “integrating conflicting subjectivities ... understanding that discourses can create ideological learning spaces” (p. 143). Baxter (2012) suggests that interrogating online educator identities involves “resistance discourses” (p. 9) that push against our accepted beliefs and standardized practices; this interrogation can be challenging and result in the taking up of new ideas. Beijjaard et al. (2004) offer a framework for understanding the myriad ways in which identity can be implicated: identity development is a process, identity implies and is affected by context, professional identity consists of sometimes conflicting subidentities, and agency matters. As a group, our experiences reflected this framework of identity, nuanced by the different roles and perspectives we brought to bear on our discussions. As a group, we went through a process that had us interrogate who we thought we were as teacher educators and we had to reevaluate those identities to, in some cases, move forward. Recognizing that professional identity is both informed by and inextricably linked to factors such as context and agency, our analyses are centred on interrogating identity through discussions about how pedagogy and practice were transformed and reimagined.

## Learning Spaces

Our teacher education program, like many others, had to shift services, communication, and instructional programming for teacher candidates to exclusively online spaces. While faculty were accustomed to using Blackboard Learn as a learning management system, the shift to video conferencing, emails, and prerecorded information for advising, collaborating, and teaching required all of us to move into new and uncomfortable spaces in our practices. The responses of our faculty members to these liminal spaces reflect the discomfort, disconnect, and disembodiment they often felt while working in the online environments and, most importantly, when seeking to develop relationships with teacher candidates. Yet these liminal spaces also

brought about threshold moments of awareness that illuminated or connected us to aspects of our teaching identities and distinct roles within our program.

## **Pedagogy**

A third component of our analysis was to examine our online teaching experiences in relation to pedagogy. Recent studies (e.g., Carpendale et al., 2020; Ellis et al., 2020) are now questioning whether changes to practice thrust upon teacher education programs during the pandemic should be viewed simply as temporary emergency crisis measures or rather as interesting and sustainable pedagogical innovations. A recent analysis of interviews from a global sampling of teacher education leaders revealed the emergence of an “innovative stance” (Ellis et al., 2020, p. 567) among teacher educators during the pandemic, resulting in overall enhancements to the quality of teaching, a new emphasis on online teaching pedagogies for preservice teachers, and innovations in organizational collaboration with partner groups through video conferencing technologies. This theme of innovation in pedagogical practices is closely connected to the sudden necessary shift to instructional technologies (for both teacher educators and teacher candidates) required for online/remote teaching. While many teacher educators lamented the loss of being able to model face-to-face teaching practices, they also discovered new digital tools and instructional strategies to enhance their instruction and, as Carpendale et al. (2020) point out, a valuable opportunity to model “teaching practices at the intersection of technology, content, and pedagogy” (p. 2534) for future teachers who will be increasingly required to teach in blended learning models.

## **Our Stories**

How each author took up these ideas varied. Their vignettes focus on the unique and personal experiences of individuals in different faculty positions. The vignettes that follow are both individual and collective reflections of the lived experiences of our different faculty in their respective positions during the COVID-19 pandemic. These stories reflect both personal and professional emergency responses to the sudden shift to teaching, mentoring, and caring for preservice teachers in an online environment. These narratives grapple with the aspects of our program that we had to let go of, the parts we transformed, and those pieces we innovated during this shift. But at a deeper level, these stories reflect the ways in which the pandemic caused us to reexamine our identities as teacher educators, to reflect on the nature of learning spaces, and to explore the possibilities for new and enhanced pedagogies in our program.

## **Instructional Faculty**

As a number of us teach courses, we collectively looked at experiences that were both common to our work and those that stood out as significant. There were a number of practices that we had engaged in when working face-to-face that were no longer possible when we moved to remote. Significant losses that could not be replaced involved our ability to connect in physical spaces and “see” the faces of teacher candidates when teaching. We recognized that our movement through the room; our observations, listening, and engagement with groups; and our scanning of faces and body language were dramatically hampered in the remote environment. It was harder to “read” the class, monitor their reactions, and connect. We found we needed to be diligent in our electronic communication, we had less access to teacher candidates both formally



and informally, and we had to accommodate this with frequent, purposeful electronic communication. This loss was especially felt by faculty of colour; their space (and the intentional occupation of that space by a faculty member of colour) that, for some teacher candidates, had never been occupied by a person of colour was minimized by our lack of connection (or distance) from teacher candidates.

Just as significant was the loss of experiential and place-based activities that traditionally rooted our program in Indigenous ways of knowing and learning from the land. Trips to residential school sites and whole group activities to experience the history of colonization in Canada (e.g., blanket experience, Indigenous governance) were not replicable in the online environment. While it was easier to bring in guest speakers to connect with teacher candidates (something we will continue to use), we could not make up for the loss of experiential activities. Included in this was the challenge of teaching fine arts-based courses. It is one thing to teach art, music, and drama online; it is another thing to teach *how to teach* these ways of working with the curriculum. While teacher candidates could be instructed to reflect using certain mediums, collect their own resources and complete the projects at home, these activities could not replace the communal experience of creating and taking artistic risks together.

While instructional faculty initially experienced a feeling of “planning paralysis” when faced with teaching *how to teach* solely online, as we began learning about different technologies, we did find ways to alter how we taught: transformations of practice occurred rather than a loss of practice. When teaching remotely, we had to reenvision the screen as our classroom. We could use breakout rooms for group work, and the ease with which we could create random groups saved instructional time and reduced the types of cliques that often form in cohort programs. We used digital tools such as Padlet, Jamboard, Mentimeter, Google Docs, streaming videos, and document cameras to replace paper, pens, sticky notes, chart paper, whiteboards, and physical teaching resources. We still had teacher candidates peer teach and present through screen share options in Zoom. All of these shifts created opportunities to model teaching that caused us to work at the nexus of what we teach, how we teach, and the use of technology.

With the shift to remote teaching, we discovered strategies that actually would better support our face-to-face work as well. Remote instruction required everything to be kept in one place online; this organization made it easier for teacher candidates, especially those who had difficulty keeping track of everything. Creating videos to replace lectures or presentations enabled teacher candidates to pause, rewind, and rewatch as they needed. This change in medium enabled teacher candidates who were slower to process, or who were having a difficult day, the ability to reconnect with material. Across the board, student performance as a group improved (e.g., fewer major revisions were required on assignments, key errors that may have been demonstrated by fewer cohorts were absent). We were also forced to seek out a variety of multimodal resources given our inability to access the paper-based curriculum resources we had used in the past. Digital images and word walls to support language instruction, audiobooks, podcasts, and videos modelling effective instruction permeated all of our courses, maximizing the ways teacher candidates could engage with material. We could use a menu approach enabling teacher candidates to begin their own inquiry, research a variety of different resources, and come back together to share with one another. The secondary special topics course—typically a drama methods course—could not authentically be taught online, so was transformed into a survey course on secondary courses not usually examined in teacher education programs (e.g., grad transitions, applied technology, leadership, careers). Teacher candidates were able to choose

what interested them, research, and share out best practice. As faculty we found our job became more about curating those resources that were powerful, given the amount that is available online.

While we were forced to challenge our assumptions about what could be taught about teaching when working remotely, we have come to recognize that many of the practices we implemented as emergency responses to the pandemic have actually enhanced our instructional practices in working with teacher candidates. On reflection, we realized that these practices included all aspects of the SAMR model: substitution, augmentation, modification, and redefinition (Puentedura, 2013). There were times that we substituted online resources for text resources, we modified assignments to be multimodal, and we created new activities and assignments that had never existed in our traditional face-to-face classrooms. We found it valuable to use the SAMR model to understand our “innovations”; it enabled our discussions to move beyond how we used technology to online best practice. While teacher candidates lost the ability to observe our embedded pedagogy face-to-face, they did observe that embedded pedagogy online; they know now what effective online instruction looks like. We also managed to increase equity with a number of the new practices we undertook. There were more opportunities to engage with a variety of types of materials and resources, there were more opportunities to review and reflect on our modelling, there were greater supports around course organization, and there were a greater number of inquiries that could be personalized. We did a better job of meeting the needs of all of our teacher candidates because of the flexibility online formats provided. While there were things that were lost that we look forward to returning to once again, how we teach has been transformed by this experience and we look ahead to better preparing our teacher candidates to teach effectively both online and face-to-face.

## **Department Head**

As department head, it is the relationality of my position that I appreciate most. I feel like “the glue”—I make connections with, and between, others—and this gives me my greatest job satisfaction. I know how to bring people together.

The teacher candidates were 3 weeks into their practicum when news about COVID-19 really began to make headlines in BC. There was definitely tension and worry as other parts of Canada began to lockdown. We wondered when we would be next. The day came on March 13, 2020—the last day of school before spring break—along with the news that K–12 schools would be closed indefinitely.

My work ramped up immediately. I realized that the B.Ed. program coordinators and I had exactly 2 weeks to figure out how to make it possible for the teacher candidates to complete their certifying practicums with K–12 schools closed. It was triage time, with our first priority being to ease the anxiety of our teacher candidates. I talked, almost daily, with the BC Teacher Certification Branch and members of the Association of BC Deans of Education, making certain that the ideas that we were considering would assure certification.

A week later it was announced that schools would be back in session—remotely. The K–12 teachers were given 5 days to organize and plan. This extra time assisted us as well. My colleagues and I were concerned that the teacher mentors (TMs) would no longer agree to support our teacher candidates. We knew that in order to make things work we needed to focus our energies on supporting our TMs. I contacted the superintendents for the districts where we had teacher candidates placed and asked for a contact person. I called each of these people and talked through the challenges they were facing, asking how we could assist. And then, with their

support, I drafted a letter to all of the school administrators and TMs, talking through the plan; almost all of the teachers rallied and supported.

As online instruction and meetings became the norm, I felt lost. My greatest skills as a department head were basically useless; so I felt useless. I grieved. I did the best I could to rise to the occasion, taking care of those structural pieces of the department head role that, while completely necessary, were not particularly soul-filling. The fact of the matter is that I was lonely. I missed my colleagues, and I missed our teacher candidates.

Thankfully, the teacher candidates successfully completed their practicum and graduated in June. When the K–12 schools went online in March 2020, our teacher candidates had already spent over 10 weeks in face-to-face classrooms. As a result, the BC Teachers' Council decided that the completion of their last 6 weeks teaching online was acceptable. Depending on what their TM was doing, the teacher candidates provided assistance and taught alongside them. Talk turned to the fall, with the new cohort of teacher candidates, and what would happen then. The University of the Fraser Valley was going to be online, but the BC Teachers' Council had not yet come out with a ruling regarding teacher education programs. I prepared all of the paperwork and developed the safety protocols such that this brand-new cohort of teacher candidates could learn on campus, if required. There was relief when the ruling came through that we could be online; but this led to a whole host of other questions as we considered how to turn our very hands-on first semester of the program into a virtual learning experience. The coursework was relatively simple to replicate. But what was missing, unfortunately, were the experiential learning components that simply couldn't be replaced. These were a sad omission from the overall B.Ed. programming for the year.

I worried about the added responsibility placed on TMs and faculty mentors as this new group of teacher candidates moved into their certifying practicum. While these teacher candidates had practiced teaching online, they had not had this experience face-to-face so I felt less competent than I typically would about the teacher candidates we were sending into schools. Though our programming has been more accessible for the parents in the program, and the overall quality of the work submitted to instructors has been exceptionally strong, the *why* for this depresses me. Remote learning has meant that teacher candidates have more time to work on things (e.g., no commuting), but this extra time has come at a cost: Teacher candidates are learning alone and the community that is the cohort-based B.Ed. is not cohesive. There were many, many “outliers” this year—people that would have been “brought into the fold,” as it were, if we were together. The heart of our program has shrunk a little. And so, too, has the Indigenization of it; it was almost impossible to teach in a way that honours the First Peoples' Principles of Learning (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2020) when working online.

## **Student Support and Advising**

Our cohort-based program has always had a heavy emphasis on building supporting relationships among teacher candidates and with department faculty. The department is highly collaborative, sharing the responsibility for the academic, physical, emotional, and social well-being of each teacher candidate.

The new post-COVID orientation shifted to a virtual format offering different opportunities to get to know each other and to facilitate information sharing among teacher candidates and faculty. We implemented seven ConnectED groups of nine teacher candidates (similar to an online home room), each with one faculty facilitator, to provide a space for teacher

candidates to connect outside of classes throughout the whole year. We do hear from teacher candidates that they really miss the personal connections that they anticipated making in this program. Overall, three teacher candidates withdrew from the program during the first semester, changing their mind about continuing, and indicating feelings of “grief and loss” by not being able to develop deeper cohort connections through shared experiences. One cannot help but wonder if in a face-to-face environment we could have helped these teacher candidates earlier on, perhaps sensing their doubts or hesitations. Much support for the teacher candidates occurs during hallway conversations and impromptu visits to my office, which was not possible. As the pandemic also triggered an increase in anxiety among our teacher candidates, it has become evident that a trauma-informed care approach was necessary.

This last year, there has been an increase in enquiries about teacher education, as individuals contemplate switching careers, and find an online program delivery to be more accessible. Information seminars moved to an online platform (Zoom) with a larger maximum enrolment. As the accessibility for remote participation increased, so did the diversity of teacher candidates attending these sessions. Suddenly, registrations originated in countries outside of Canada, and other provinces, with some individuals having no familiarity with the K–12 education landscape in BC. Therefore, the content in the Teacher Education seminars needed to be adjusted, and a condensed recording was added as a resource to the department’s website. While this has proven to be efficient and more accessible for prospective teacher candidates, recorded sessions do not provide prospective teacher candidates with opportunities to have individual questions answered.

Scheduled advising appointments now take place via phone or Zoom, and there has been a heavier reliance on written communication. This has resulted in teacher candidates taking a more transactional approach, hoping to have a specific question answered, rather than having an actual conversation about why they may have decided to pursue teaching, or how they are working towards developing specific dispositions for this career. Teacher candidates cannot always discern through written messages if the advisor is caring, competent, and sincere, and they may need answers to questions that they are not asking. In addition, prospective teacher candidates cannot develop the contextual framework associated with “faces” of faculty and in-person referrals. When reimagining education advising during this context, teacher candidates clearly need to be provided with information beyond their focus by anticipating what may be behind their question, thus opening up other lines of inquiry. This has been more time-consuming, despite the benefits of accessibility through virtual meetings. With every support service of the university working remotely, it has been impossible to “walk a student” down to the Financial Aid Office or to the Indigenous Student Centre to make the much-needed personal referral. A response via phone or internet link does not replicate in-person advising or support the student in thinking more deeply about academic and career planning and developmental progress. I wonder if, as a result, prospective future applicants may be less prepared than they may have been in prior years.

### **Education Librarian**

Not surprisingly, as an education librarian, I have always turned to story and books to help learn and teach with others and myself. In Tan’s (2003) *The Red Tree*, a little girl wakes up and feels sad and alone with the world around her and moves through her days unable to see the small sign of hope—a tiny red leaf—until she finally can. This, for me, was the shift to remote teaching and learning; there was a sadness and grief to what I did—an identity loss with my role

and purpose in working with teacher candidates and faculty. I am an embedded librarian, having the opportunity to work closely as part of the teacher education teaching and learning community. With the new 2020–2021 cohort fully remote, there was not the opportunity to build an in-person community or connection as a whole or with individual teacher candidates and faculty. In the past, I could walk into a physical classroom or other shared space to connect and help teacher candidates. Unfortunately, it had been challenging to connect and build relationships with teacher candidates as I could not do that with the multiple virtual classrooms that teacher candidates were working in together. Relationships shifted with faculty as the quick pivot and intense work to move courses online impacted the time available to teach together; content and experiential activities were altered for the remote teaching environment, and resources adjusted to what was available to access.

Following the path of Carle’s (1987) *Very Hungry Caterpillar* to renewal and transformation, I took “bites” to explore shifted relationships with faculty and teacher candidates, built and provided access to physical and electronic content for the Curriculum Collection, and cotaught with instructional faculty for specific courses with mixed results—there was much more room to keep snacking! This ranged from partnering with faculty to coteach synchronously, cocreating and creating video content for asynchronous teaching, connecting teacher candidates and faculty to provide ideas around the electronic and print resources that were available, doing individual and online resource/research consultations, creating video, tutorial, and library guides, supporting faculty research, and creating teaching-specific content related to information, media, or copyright literacy. Unfortunately, these opportunities were not enough of a sustained connection to build those relationships in remote and hybrid learning environments.

Along the remote teaching path was the push for even more electronic content and to figure out how to use the robust print Curriculum Collection. In one example, we pivoted to support remote teaching by repurposing the large collection of mathematics manipulatives to create individual mini-manipulative bags for elementary teacher candidates to use with their flipped classroom math course. The library itself shifted to purchasing as much electronic content as possible rather than print. I continued to run into content that was unavailable with digital rights in Canada: publishers would only sell some types of electronic content directly to school districts and there was still lots of content that was not available electronically.

Looking at things with a different eye on my path, *A Day with Yayah* (Campbell & Flett, 2018) teaches the second First Peoples’ principle of learning that learning is “holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational” (First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2020), as a young Nl̓eʔkepmx girl accompanies her Yayah and family learning in relationship to teachings of the land. Technology could transform teaching and learning in many ways: from flipped classrooms, to video lessons to scaffold and reinforce learning, to provide alternative spaces for bullied teacher candidates, to multimodal creation of content. However, it could not replace being and learning with people, in community, sharing experience together in relation, on this land. Community development; experiential activities for Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour; and other designs for learning took on a different experience when we could step outside of being alone in our square Zoom window. In *Embers*, there is a quote that stays with me: “Teachings come from anywhere, when you open yourself to them. That’s the trick of it, really. Open yourself to everything and everything opens itself to you” (Wagamese, 2016, p. 58). So I continued to work on opening myself to this new path as an embedded librarian in a remote, hybrid, and face-to-face learning community.

## Discussion

Our interest in exploring our experiences originated from the realization that our different positions within the program afforded us unique perspectives about the shift to online teacher education. As we wrote our reflections independently and came back together to read and learn from each other, several questions emerged: What could we learn from this collection of voices and unique experiences? How can this research inform the field? When revisiting the three aspects of identity, learning spaces, and pedagogy, we realized that these were not equal in importance to this chapter. Changes in pedagogy as a result of the emergency pivot to online learning have already been discussed extensively in the literature since early 2020. Like many other teacher education programs across the globe (e.g., Ellis et al., 2020; Hill et al., 2020; Van Nuland et al., 2020), we were required to move instruction to a virtual environment. This move to an online teaching and learning format resulted in some positive changes to practice in teacher education that we recognize have value even now and in the future. However, beyond shifts in pedagogy, this work presents a unique contribution to the landscape of teacher education in the areas of learning spaces and teacher educator identity.

### Learning Spaces

The variety of spaces available to our program prior to the pandemic was, to some degree, taken for granted. A teacher education program, especially a cohort program such as ours, is much more than a collection of courses. As our instructional faculty described, while there was some adjustment when moving from a physical classroom to a virtual classroom, that space continued to exist: the classroom space, whether face-to-face or virtual, continued to be present. However, in listening to the stories of faculty in both instructional and noninstructional roles, we realized that the other spaces of the program did not translate into the virtual realm. Informal hallway conversations, faculty and teacher candidates having lunch together in the department office, popping in to visit teacher candidates before and after class, and face-to-face advising or check-ins were not replicated. This resulted in a feeling of fracture and disconnectedness for many faculty.

For the advisor, education librarian, and department head, what was lost were those informal spaces. These faculty members attempted to replicate this virtually by visiting classroom shells before class to connect with teacher candidates, sending emails, creating ConnectED groups to meet informally in small groups; however, this change to an online space did not foster the relationships and connections that had existed when the program was face-to-face. Our regular face-to-face informal spaces had allowed us to be nimble and responsive to our teacher candidates' needs. The morning check-in sometimes resulted in a discussion about resources that our librarian could provide, or surfaced challenges faced by students that the academic advisor could resolve, or revealed tensions within the cohort that the department head could address in the moment. These informal spaces had been generative and relational; this was where a sense of program community was fostered and experienced.

Without these informal face-to-face spaces, faculty, particularly those who were primarily noninstructional, were isolated from teacher candidates and other faculty. Advising occurred through email or virtual meetings and focused on answering questions rather than supporting student identity development. The education librarian had significantly fewer student inquiries and collaborations with instructional faculty. The department head, rather than collaboratively making decisions with other faculty and responding to teacher candidate

concerns, felt isolated and was forced to respond to many important decisions regarding the program in a manner that was swift, reactive, and devoid of the tacit knowledge of students and faculty that is developed over time in face-to-face informal settings. We recognized that the benefit of having teacher candidates observe all department members work collaboratively with each other in these spaces, fostering a sense of community that enables students to feel comfortable in connecting with them. In many ways the very generative informal spaces that existed within the program had been removed. This isolation was more than just a lost opportunity for noninstructional faculty; it was in many ways a loss of identity.

## **Identity**

Instructional faculty were still teaching; while the tools and platforms were different, learning still occurred, teacher candidates still collaborated, and assessments still provided evidence. Within the virtual classroom space instructional faculty continued to ask questions, have teacher candidates complete presentations and mini-teaches, and interact and build relationships. However, how were noninstructional faculty going to build those same relationships? How could they come to know the teacher candidates, and through knowing them, meet their needs? How did teacher candidates perceive the education librarian? The advisor? The department head? The opportunities for the education librarian to engage in meaningful ways with teacher candidates were significantly diminished. The advisor answered questions but her role was more like a FAQ portal than a person. The department head felt that teacher candidates were more afraid of her than previous years; more often she dealt with them only when they were having difficulties and not through other interactions. Who they were as people could no longer be expressed within the roles of noninstructional faculty members in the online context. This change had significant ramifications for these faculty and for their sense of purpose and identity.

When we came together as a faculty team to reflect on the shift to an online format, some of us expected to be in a similar place, but we were not. Instructional faculty did not feel as disconnected as noninstructional faculty. While there may have been times of grief, frustration, and extreme tiredness at responding so quickly to such a change, instructional faculty were able to translate the majority of what they did (teaching) to a new space. Their identities remained intact and they still had relationships with teacher candidates, even if less than before. In contrast, even a year after moving remote, noninstructional faculty still felt isolated and lost. Everything that they had loved about their job, they were unable to do; there was no way to replicate the spaces that they had typically operated within. In realizing this, we discussed the idea that there was a continuum of response to the online shift within our faculty team; we were moving through this at different rates and we were in different places. This was important for us to realize and understand as we worked to support each other and tried to identify ways of reimagining those generative spaces.

In discussing our responses as a continuum, we realized that this metaphor was not accurate either. In reacting to the pandemic and moving to remote interactions, we were forced to try something new and different. In the process, we did learn to think differently about what was possible in teacher education. While we may have been doing things that were not new to others in the field, they were new to us and caused us to think more broadly about how new teachers may be supported in their development. We learned new pedagogies and practices that we would not let go of now. However, pedagogies and practices were also lost and could not be replaced in the online program. Depending upon the time of the year in the program, the benefits and the

drawbacks were more pronounced. Thus, we began to see our response to the pandemic as less of a continuum and more of a spiral. We were at different places and our sense of identities were affected disproportionately; sometimes we were reactive and sometimes we were proactive; sometimes we were excited and sometimes we grieved. Our identities shifted and moved differently and independently. Sharing our reflections and recognizing what was similar and what was different, emphasized that as colleagues we had been impacted by this shift; it was not just a shift to remote instruction.

## Conclusion

As we come to the conclusion of our chapter, we pause to look beyond our own program to consider the key take-aways for teacher education across Canada. When schools in BC moved to remote instruction in March 2020, teachers focused on the well-being of their students. More than ever, attention was given to maintaining a sense of community and attending to the social-emotional well-being of students and their families. Principals, in turn, focused on the social-emotional and mental needs of their teachers and their school communities. Given the nature of the pandemic, there was recognition that everyone's physical, mental, and emotional needs were more important to address than focusing on content, curriculum, and assessment.

In contrast, as teacher educators, we were sent emails informing us that we were moving to remote instruction, followed by a proliferation of information about courses and opportunities to learn how to move our instruction online. The focus was clearly on supporting our technological needs and, to a smaller degree, the mental health of our students. There was no extra time given to planning. No one said, do not worry about your assessments or content. The message was: take care of yourselves in this stressful time; but, as much as possible, continue as best you can. Alone.

Under times of stress in the past, we as a faculty would come together. We shared the same three classrooms, we ate lunch together in the main office, we connected in the informal spaces of our program. But moving remotely removed all of those informal spaces; we were under stress *and* we were isolated from each other. This isolation impacted us differently depending upon our roles. Admitting isolation, admitting that you are feeling overwhelmed or lost, admitting that your identity has been eroded puts people into very vulnerable positions. That vulnerability is rarely shared in postsecondary (Jin & Redish, 2020). It may be due to the competitive nature of academia, or it may be the result of a focus on content and courses over community-building, but vulnerability appears to be akin to weakness in postsecondary; and even though the K–12 world adjusted its focus to make a safe space for their teachers to share those vulnerabilities, the same did not happen for teacher educators. Why, we are not sure.

When we started our collective reflection for this chapter, there were a number of us that were scared to share those vulnerabilities; there was a reluctance to be honest in our reflections. However, by taking that risk, sharing our reflections and vulnerabilities, we began to create a space for sharing, empathy, and connectedness. Were we able to fix everything and make us all feel whole? No, but we were able to reduce our feelings of isolation. In many ways this shared reflective process was quite cathartic.

Our university is located on S'olh Temexw, land of the Stó:lō. The cedar tree is pivotal to the lives of the Stó:lō and we saw the splintering of our program similar to the splintering of wood. Moving to remote instruction in teacher education resulted in a splintering—a splintering of the program, of connections, and of identities. Learning new technologies, teaching our courses, and supporting our teacher candidates did not mean that this splintering had been



repaired. It took our purposeful, collective, and vulnerable reflections and sharing to begin to heal those splinters. In times of crises it is critical to move beyond the silos that seem so normal in postsecondary to attend to each other and our experiences: crises magnify our silos and so we need to recognize this and take purposeful action to minimize and repair the splinters that form because of them. Collective trauma does not bring us together, but rather the opening of ourselves to each other and our pain, allowing us to heal, that brings us together. And that healing is critical to giving us hope: a way forward.

So to all teacher education programs and educators, we encourage you to take time to collectively reflect, share, and empathize with each other. This crisis will not simply be over because we return to face-to-face instruction; those vulnerabilities and challenges to our professional identity do not just disappear. We are only able to reconcile these challenges when we purposefully take the time to build that collective humanity. We regularly remind teacher candidates about self-care and how important it is; we need to remember to take our own advice.

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## CHAPTER 3

### **From Brick and Mortar to Remote Learning: Building a Community of Learners and Recreating a Sense of Belonging in the Online Environment**

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#### **Abstract**

This chapter explores our experiences as two university professors in a Bachelor of Education program as we made the shift from face-to-face to online teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. We used a conceptual framework of appreciative inquiry and an intrinsic case study methodology to investigate and reflect on our experiences delivering both core and methods education courses to a cohort of 86 teacher candidates. After a qualitative data analysis of in-depth interviews, recorded lessons, course materials, and student feedback forms, five themes emerged: (a) fostering a positive learning atmosphere in the online environment, (b) establishing safe and welcoming online spaces where everyone matters, (c) building a professional learning community, (d) appreciating synchronous virtual interaction, and (e) appreciating learning from each other. Implications from our study may be useful in shedding light on effective practices for teaching and learning online in professional programs (e.g., education, nursing, social work ) such as using a largely synchronous, dynamic, interactive approach to teaching and learning, and providing a basis for instructors in other contexts (e.g., undergraduate- or graduate-level programming) to adapt our approaches when constructing their own online teaching pedagogies.

*Keywords:* teacher education, online professional learning community, socio-affective needs, appreciative inquiry

#### **Résumé**

Ce chapitre vise à explorer nos expériences en tant que deux professeurs d'université dans un programme de baccalauréat en éducation alors que nous sommes passés de l'enseignement en face à face à l'enseignement et à l'apprentissage en ligne pendant la pandémie de la COVID-19. Dans le cadre théorique d'enquête appréciative et l'étude de cas intrinsèques comme approche méthodologique, nous avons voulu examiner, approfondir et réfléchir sur nos expériences de prestation des cours de bases ainsi que des cours en méthodes pédagogiques en éducation à une cohorte de 86 candidats à l'enseignement. Après une analyse qualitative des données d'entrevues approfondies, de leçons enregistrées, de supports de cours et de formulaires de commentaires des étudiants, cinq thèmes en sont ressortis : (a) favoriser une atmosphère d'apprentissage positive dans l'environnement virtuel, (b) établir des espaces en ligne qui sont sûrs et accueillants à chacun et à chacune (c) fonder une communauté d'apprentissage professionnelle, (d) apprécier l'interaction virtuelle synchrone et (e) apprécier l'apprentissage mutuel. Les implications de notre étude pourraient faire de la lumière sur des pratiques efficaces d'enseignement et d'apprentissage en ligne aux programmes d'études en formation professionnelle (e.g., l'éducation, les soins infirmiers, le travail social) telles que l'utilisation d'une approche

largement synchrone, dynamique et interactive de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage, et à fournir une base aux enseignants dans d'autres contextes (e.g., les programmes de premier cycle ou de cycle supérieur) pour adapter nos approches lors de la construction de leurs propres pédagogies d'enseignement en ligne.

*Mots clés* : formation des enseignants, communauté d'apprentissage professionnelle en ligne, besoins socio-affectifs, enquête appréciative

## Introduction

In the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced most Canadian universities to shift to online teaching and learning in some capacity. Faculty members from across the country had to envision what the upcoming academic year would look like. This was true for professors working in different disciplines, including those teaching in professional programs such as nursing, social work, and education. Important features distinguish these academic programs from others offered at universities such as more rigid calendars of when courses are offered, alignment of programs and courses to requirements of accrediting bodies, more compulsory courses, and completion of field placements or practicums in nonuniversity settings. Within Bachelor of Education programs, it is expected that students will gain in their coursework valuable knowledge of their respective teachable subjects and acquire practical skills deemed important for entering the teaching profession. In the Bachelor of Education program, this includes skills related to curricula delivery, classroom management, assessment practices, communication, collaboration, and the creation of engaging and positive learning environments.

As two education professors experiencing the sudden shift to online teaching, we needed to consider how we would deliver our courses virtually given the nature and shared objectives of our Bachelor of Education program. We work at St. Thomas University, a small liberal arts university in Fredericton, New Brunswick. Our student body is comprised of approximately 1,800 students, 90 of which are enrolled in the Bachelor of Education program. This program is offered as an 11-month postdegree program, wherein students complete 60 credit hours of academic work in addition to two field placements. Broadly speaking, our program aims to create a university experience that emphasizes cooperative learning and teamwork, a high level of interaction with peers, where students quickly develop very close relationships with their own instructors as professors take an active interest in the professional development of students.

## Research Problem

As education professors, we wanted to meet the challenges of online teaching while also ensuring that students received an education paralleling that of other years in the typical face-to-face environment. While online undergraduate courses tend to rely mostly on readings and text-based assignments (Bonk & Zhang, 2006), our program is designed to foster peer collaboration and interactive learning (Damon & Phelps, 2002; Forman & Cazden, 1985; Sessoms, 2008; Tudge, 1992). Thus, we had to envision something different in our approaches to online teaching, but we wondered what would be possible in the online environment.

As teacher educators, we have always strived to exemplify what it means to be a highly competent educator. We aim to be prepared with solid lesson plans, to establish a positive learning environment for students, to value and promote our professional responsibilities as educators, and deliver strong instruction through exemplary teaching practices (Danielson, 2007). As we made the shift to online teaching, we did not want to compromise these key

elements of our profession. As such, we set out to study, through an *appreciative inquiry* lens, how we went about meeting these challenges for the delivery of our courses. Using an intrinsic case study approach, we explored how we shifted to online teaching. In this chapter, we report on creating and fostering online environments conducive for our teacher candidates to learn and grow as future educators.

Given the shift to online teaching of our courses, we were interested in exploring what was possible in the online environment. More specifically, we explored the following three questions:

1. How did we, and our students, experience core instructional values of collaboration, cooperative learning, teamwork, and relationship-building in our online teaching environments?
2. How did we, and our students, participate in the creation of engaging and positive learning environments online? How did our students experience the learning environments we created with and for them?
3. What lessons did we learn from our experiences and what opportunities have emerged as we move forward into the post-COVID-19 era of teaching and learning?

Answers to these central questions may have theoretical and practical implications for enhancing current understandings for teaching and learning in online contexts particularly in the context of professional programs. They may also help in fostering supporting positive educational experiences for students and professors as they navigate the virtual world of teaching and learning.

## **Literature Review**

As experienced university instructors, we were generally familiar with the primary literature surrounding the delivery of online teaching and learning. However, in order to be able to unpack our own experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, we needed to examine four key areas of literature: (a) general best practices for online teaching and learning pedagogy, (b) the benefits or challenges of teaching through either synchronous (real-time) or asynchronous (prerecorded) modes of delivery (and how is this best operationalized in our own professional Bachelor of Education program), (c) the unique pedagogical needs of such professional programs, and (d) attending to the socio-affective needs of students.

### **Best Practices for Online Teaching and Learning**

The literature establishes that there is no one size fits all approach to delivering effective online teaching and learning. In light of the nature of provincial autonomy and decentralization of educational delivery across Canada, each university across provincial and local jurisdictions has “responded to the COVID-19 crisis in slightly different ways that address its immediate context and supported the needs of its specific population” (Van Nuland, 2020 p. 444). Several common principles for implementing effective online teaching and learning emerge across the literature. First, effective teaching and learning in the online environment requires effective leadership to guide best practices (Quezada, 2020). Second, instructors need instructional and technical support in transitioning to online course delivery, as a lack of support creates inequity between those instructors who are already experienced in online delivery and those who are not (Van Nuland, 2020). Effective online teaching is influenced by the quality and type of support

available to instructors, regardless of those instructors' individual pedagogical choices. Third, that best practices in online teaching and learning cultivate purposeful collaborative interactions between instructors and students, and students and students. Effective online teaching and learning should include "consistent participation, prompt communication, regular group discussion, timely and relevant contributions and commitment to the task" (Vinagre, 2017, as cited in Carillo & Flores, 2020, p. 471). And fourth, that student agency, which leads to choices in assignments and assessment practices, be built into course delivery by instructors in order to maximize students' opportunities for success. Baker and Watson (as cited in Carillo & Flores, 2020) suggest giving assignment options that address the various needs of students through the lens of equity (e.g., access to reliable internet connection, access to hard copy course materials at home, allowing students to complete work in pairs or as individuals, or giving flexible due dates), and ensuring a dialogic approach to online teaching and learning that accounts for students' humanistic need for connection.

### **Synchronous vs. Asynchronous Course Delivery**

It should be pointed out that pivoting to emergency online teaching and learning as a result of a pandemic is not the same as purposefully constructing an online course with ample time to do so while not under duress. The available literature largely focused on the latter, rather than the former: that the choice to deliver a course through a synchronous or asynchronous mode should be made with pedagogical intentions in mind, rather than as a result of emergency decision-making. Unfortunately, COVID-19 and the urgent pivot to online teaching and learning has left many university instructors going with what works in the moment, rather than having the ability to design a course through longer-term planning and reflection. It seems apparent that "online distance education and emergency remote teaching are not the same things. What is currently being done, emergency remote teaching, should be considered a temporary solution to an immediate problem" (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020, p. ii). As instructors, we agree with this statement. However, we also note that the field of *distance education* (as a well-established body of literature in its own right) did influence our approaches to online teaching and learning even in the emergency state of a pandemic. In our case, supports for the pivot to online teaching and learning were largely provided at the university level and already took into consideration the preexisting body of literature on the topic. The university was therefore somewhat prepared for the state of emergency we found ourselves in. In this vein, Bozkurt and Sharma (2020) ask, "In a time of crisis when people are under trauma, stress and psychological pressure, should we focus on teaching educational content or should we focus on teaching how to share, collaborate and support?" (p. iii).

### **Unique Needs of Professional Programs**

In addressing Bozkurt and Sharma's (2020) question, we discovered strong arguments for and against both synchronous and asynchronous modes of course delivery. For example, Beilstein et al. (2020) examine how new teachers learned in an online mathematics community almost entirely through an *asynchronous* mode, and highlight both the strengths of asynchronous delivery (e.g., using video as a format for teaching, and promoting analytical commentary within discussion forums), as well as the challenges of asynchronous delivery (e.g., the difficulty of providing support to students in unmoderated spaces, and encouraging students to making deeper connections with subject content beyond superficial knowledge retention). Other studies (e.g.,

Duncan & Barnett, 2009; Quezada et al., 2020) emphasize the strengths of *synchronous* delivery (e.g., making personalized connections with individual students and facilitating connections between students, resolving conflicts or addressing difficult topics in real-time, ensuring accuracy of tone in communication, etc.), and the challenges of synchronous delivery (e.g., screen fatigue, real-time technological failures, learners may be engaging in classes from home environments that have inherent distractions).

Teacher education in our province is closely tied to the *21<sup>st</sup> Century Standards of Practice for Beginning Teachers in New Brunswick* (Education and Early Childhood Development 2020), which highlights the “need for beginning teachers to have knowledge of, and be able to teach literacy, numeracy, and scientific thinking as well as 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies in team settings and in cross-curricular ways” (p. 1). In order to accomplish this task (marrying content with professional competencies), we needed to use a synchronous mode for online teaching and learning. Generally speaking, literature on effective teacher education supports the notion that new teachers need to have a combination of both content and professional knowledge and skills to be successful. For example, Best and MacGregor (2015) state that “twenty-first century learners and educators need to develop twenty-first century skills to thrive in an ever-changing technological world” (p. 212). Our objective as teacher educators must be to foster the capacity of teacher candidates as both learners focused on content, and new practitioners focused on skills and professional competencies. Synchronous learning, where students are interacting in real-time with instructors and their peers, is paramount in this regard in the context of teacher education.

### **Students’ Socio-affective Needs**

Real-time, synchronous instruction necessitates that we pay attention to the socio-affective needs of our students. In a live face-to-face classroom teaching environment, it is not possible to avoid attending to socio-affective issues that arise in the moment (e.g., conflict, trust, motivation, mental health, communication), and this is no exception in the online synchronous teaching environment. Literature in this area is clear: that good teaching requires the facilitation and purposeful management of connections between instructor and students, and students and students, regardless of the mode of teaching delivery (face-to-face or online). Noddings (2002) emphasizes the ethic of care for learners across ages, contexts, and disciplines, and this perspective permeates much of the literature in the area of socio-affective student needs. For example, contemporary studies (e.g., Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Quezada, 2020) build upon Noddings’ seminal work and emphasize care and concern as primary factors leading to effective support of students in online environments. Bozkurt and Sharma (2002) state “we should try to amplify emotional presence in order to create a climate of empathy and care, and following that we should focus on different types of presence, such as teaching presence, cognitive presence and social presence” (p. iii). Similarly, Hodges et al. (2020) noted that “careful planning for online learning includes not just identifying the content to cover but also carefully tending to how you’re going to support different types of interactions that are important to the learning process, not merely a matter of information transmission.”

## Conceptual Framework and Methodology

### Appreciative Inquiry

After reviewing the relevant literature, we decided to use key principles of *appreciative inquiry* as a conceptual framework to explore our experiences as teacher educators in shifting our courses from in-person delivery to online and to guide our approach to data analysis.

Appreciative inquiry is grounded in valuing personal, positive, narrative-rich stories, whereby learning can be fostered through engagement, and respect can be deepened among participants as they engage in the investigative process. Appreciative inquiry is naturally inclusive and collaborative, giving equal voice to all stakeholders and “builds on positive experiences to spark positive change by honouring the expertise resident[s] in an organization and its people ... by uncovering what works well in a system and devises ways to expand upon those strengths” (Filleul, 2010, p. 38).

Appreciative inquiry has more traditionally been used in health education (e.g., Lander & Graham-Pole, 2006) and educational development (e.g., Kadi-Hanifi et al., 2013) to conduct research related to program evaluation and systemic change. However, researchers in the field of education (e.g., Allen & Innes, 2013) understand its value in terms of reviewing, learning from, building upon, and subsequently strengthening and/or designing positive opportunities for developing innovative teaching pedagogies that better meet the needs of contemporary students at all levels of education. Examining the data in this study through an appreciative lens allowed us to focus on the depth of the stories arising from our lived teaching experiences that were forward-thinking and particularly compelling for teaching and learning in the online context during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most models for appreciative inquiry take the researcher through four distinct stages: discovering, dreaming, designing, and delivering (Shuayb et al., 2009). For this study, we focused on the first stage of appreciative inquiry (discovering) as our primary focus was one of reflecting on our experiences teaching online and documenting how our students responded to the virtual learning environments we had created with and for them. Future research may use the other three stages of appreciative inquiry (dreaming, designing, and delivering) to build upon findings from this initial study and guide new Bachelor of Education programmatic directions.

### Case Study

This research was designed using a case study methodology, because the phenomenon under investigation (i.e., pivoting to online teaching) is intertwined with the context in such a way that they cannot be separated from one another. Our bounded system for this case was our academic year teaching our Bachelor of Education courses completely online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This phenomenon forced universities across Canada to reenvision the delivery of university programs to meet virtual learning expectations. By using a case study approach to data collection, we were able to examine how we experienced this phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2003). More specifically, because we ourselves, and our teaching were of primary interest, we ascribed to using an intrinsic case study approach to explore our research questions. This allowed us to undertake an in-depth examination of our particular case. Case studies, as a methodological approach, account for the importance of “the problem, the context, the issue, and the lessons learned” (Creswell, 1998 p. 36). This aligned well with our research objectives of describing our experiences in preparing teacher candidates in the online environment, our



instructional practices as we shifted to online teaching and learning, and the lessons we learned from this experience in establishing positive online learning environments for our students.

## **Research Context and Participants**

Considering that our research is underpinned by principles of appreciative inquiry and our aim was to explore our own experiences with teaching professional program courses online, it is understood that we were the primary participants ( $N = 2$ ) of this study. We are professors teaching in the Bachelor of Education program at St. Thomas University. Our program offers 90 teacher candidates options for specializing in elementary, secondary, or French second-language education. It is designed following a cohort model where students are grouped together in the same classes to foster peer collaboration and cooperative learning.

We both have approximately 10 years of university teaching in addition to in-depth experience as K–12 classroom educators. Between the two of us, we typically teach classroom management, social studies methods, language arts/literacy methods, exceptionalities and differentiation, and arts and music education. These courses were all taught in a face-to-face format prepandemic. In terms of our prior experiences with online teaching and learning, we both had taken online graduate-level courses as graduate students. We also had taught or cotaught a few graduate courses online prior to the pandemic, and these were delivered mostly in asynchronous formats.

In the summer of 2020, our university decided that all courses for the 2020–2021 academic year would be delivered online, mostly asynchronously. During planning meetings, we discussed our collective vision for the online Bachelor of Education program with our colleagues to establish shared goals and expectations. These included acknowledging the unique needs of our professional program, upholding our student cohort model, nurturing relationships with and among students, fostering peer collaboration and interactive learning, modelling highly effective pedagogical approaches in a virtual learning environment, and considering how teacher candidates learn and implement newly acquired skills in meaningful ways. As such, we adopted a synchronous mode of delivery for all of our courses. This decision was made in June so we could familiarize ourselves with the virtual platform (Zoom) before the fall semester. All students participated in a 2-day faculty-led orientation to receive instruction on how to use Zoom. Once classes started, teacher candidates logged into their courses via Zoom at specific times following a set weekly schedule and instructions.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

Our data sources were dependent on our theoretical orientation of appreciative inquiry and the purpose of our study (Crotty, 1998; Merriam, 2001). To describe our own experiences with pivoting to online teaching, we collected primary data through a self-administered open-ended questionnaire. This enabled us to describe how we interpreted our experiences teaching our courses online. Questionnaires were completed 3 weeks after the semester ended to allow time for reflection. For triangulation purposes, we analyzed secondary data sources, including our recorded lessons and lectures and other course-related artifacts (e.g., lesson plans, teaching notes, course syllabi, instructional materials, and university-administered student opinion surveys).

Although we largely focused on our own experiences as the primary participants in this study, student opinion surveys (95% return rate from 86 students) also proved to be invaluable

data sources in helping us understand what was possible in the online environment and how students experienced our efforts in creating a positive learning environment. All students in our respective courses were asked two open-ended questions on these surveys (and some students filled out the surveys in more than one course). We asked them first to explain what they liked the most about this course and why, and second to explain what they would change about this course to improve it and why. Data were collected from courses taught in Terms 1 and 2 (September–November and January–March, respectively) and were analyzed using the qualitative coding technique of inductive analysis, typically used in exploratory and descriptive research. For this, we created initial codes during the primary review of the data sets, followed by a more refined analysis to establish codes for emerging themes and patterns.

## **Findings**

Five themes emerged from the data with respect to our experiences in creating online learning spaces for our teacher candidates to learn and grow as future educators: (a) fostering a positive learning atmosphere in the online environment, (b) establishing safe and welcoming spaces where everyone matters, (c) building a professional learning community, (d) appreciating synchronous virtual interactions, and (e) appreciating learning from each other.

### **Fostering a Positive Learning Atmosphere in the Online Environment**

Our students spoke appreciatively about the learning environments we were able to create online. They felt it was respectful, inclusive, welcoming, and supportive. They referred to the environment as being positive and comfortable, one in which the professors “always gave such a welcoming feeling to the class” and that it was “very interactive and inclusive.” Both of us purposefully worked on building positive online learning environments and fostering an online community of learners. We explain this further:

I really made a conscious effort to connect with students and build rapport with them, perhaps overcompensating for the fact that we were not in the same physical space. I didn't know to what extent this would be possible online, but I wanted them to see me as a human being, not as a computer screen or someone removed from the learning experience. I know that positive learning environments are essential to learning, so I tried to recreate this the best I could online. (Renée)

When I learned I would be making a shift from in-person to online teaching, my initial fear was that I wouldn't be able to recreate a sense of belonging for my students in the digital learning environment. As an educator who cares deeply about the emotional well-being of my students, there was an immediate sense of loss as I questioned whether or not I would be able to craft a positive and connected learning space in which they could thrive. (Lisa)

We both wanted our students to feel like being online was not a barrier to receiving what they needed, both in terms of their academic and socio-affective needs: “I just knew that going online was something that we had to do given the pandemic. I took on the challenge. I wanted my students to have the best opportunities to learn regardless of whether it was online or not” (Renée) and going online “prompted me to work even

harder to prioritise designing an online environment that...provided them with a caring, warm, invitational space in which they could flourish as learners and indeed, as human beings.” (Lisa)

To do so, we used various strategies including taking a little bit of time at the beginning of class to greet every student, asking them to share something meaningful from their lives (e.g., new pet, snowshoeing experience), and asking how they were doing. As one student explained, “I liked that you actually gave a damn about every single one of us.” Here we elaborate on the strategies we used to foster this space.

I never started the class cold with me teaching. I always took 10 minutes at the start of class to chat with every student; asking about their weekend, to share a word that described their week, a feel-good moment of the week. Once I touched base, then I felt like I could begin class as I had connected with them—it really humanized the experience; like I was teaching real people, not screens. (Renée)

If I can’t facilitate genuine connections, I know that I will lose students’ attention throughout the class. Simple things like asking students to share their thoughts on their progress, asking them to find a friend to connect with in a virtual breakout room, or giving them the time they needed to express themselves, made a huge difference in how I noticed them engaging within the learning environment. (Lisa)

Our use of relationship-building strategies were very much appreciated by our students, as is reflected in the following comments: “I really loved that you genuinely tried to get to know us a little better regardless of how difficult this is online,” or “our prof created a good atmosphere where we felt we would be listened to and that our mental space mattered to her,” and again, “I liked that our prof took the time to make personal connections with each student at the start of the class, checking in to ensure that everyone was doing okay.”

### **Establishing Safe and Welcoming Online Spaces Where Everyone Matters**

Student opinion data supported the finding that our students felt they could share their ideas, questions and opinions safely. Many students commented, “The environment was always welcoming. It encouraged me to express my opinions,” and “There was never once a time where I felt I couldn’t express an idea or share a story with the class.” Additionally, they said, “I felt comfortable to share my ideas in class and with my peers” and “The prof did an excellent job in creating an environment where we felt comfortable to contribute.” Similarly, our students spoke about appreciating the safe space we had created for them which enabled them to take risks and engage with the material in a meaningful way. Our students expressed that they were not scared to get things wrong: “I knew I would not be chastised for making mistakes” and that the “ability to work with different materials without fear of judgement on its quality was really appreciated.” As we reflected on our students’ comments, we identified ways in which we attempted to create this safe environment.

When I was teaching the visual art course, I stressed the importance of risk-taking and courage. Many of the students hadn’t created artwork since they were children, so I often reminded them that they were “free to create the worst junk imaginable” when trying out

different art mediums that they might not have been familiar with. I demonstrated this philosophy by creating all of the projects myself alongside them in real-time synchronous teaching. (Lisa)

I tried to show students that this was a safe space by actually demonstrating it. I put myself out there in sharing personal experiences of vulnerability for example. This seemed to open up space for students to do the same. I feel that when I share personal stories, experiences, feelings, then students also start doing the same. (Renée)

In addition to feeling safe in taking risks in our online environments, students expressed that they appreciated being regarded as contributing members of the learning community. “I felt seen and heard in this class” said one of our students. Other comments related to feelings of belonging also emerged such as, “I felt that my opinions mattered...which fostered a fabulous learning environment” and “thank you for making us feel appreciated and our thoughts validated.”

The welcome nature of our online virtual spaces was attributed to our ability to “foster respect and inclusion of all individuals,” and our “commitment to making personal connections with every student.” There were additional comments on us “offering help whenever possible” and our “positive, encouraging nature.” When analyzing our own data regarding our online teaching practices, both of us referred to our desire to create a great learning experience for our students.

I did want students to feel like they could ask for help, ask questions, and be themselves. I really tried to make our time online together meaningful. Sometimes small moments and small gestures mean a lot to students. I’ve come to realize that this is the case regardless of whether we’re online or in person. (Renée)

If nothing else, I want my students to know that they matter, that I see their needs and the effort they’re investing in their learning. It matters just as much to me that they are engaged with the course material as it does that they are authentically connecting with me as an instructor and with their peers. I would never want a student to leave my class (virtual or otherwise) feeling that they had been invisible throughout the learning process. (Lisa)

We both recognize that a positive learning environment is most conducive to learning and that building relationships with our students matters. However, we did wonder if we had been successful at achieving both of these goals. Upon reading our students’ comments, our ability to create a positive learning environment emerged as a central theme in the data. Considering the move to online teaching and learning, students felt that the “environment created was one with similar feelings [to that of an in-person class]” and, as one of our students said, “I am sad that our teacher-student relationship is coming to an end.”

### **Building a Professional Learning Community**

Another significant theme that emerged was that of the professional learning community. We explained this in our reflection questionnaires in terms of our desire to foster a space where students could learn with and from each other.

I think it's important that I get to know my students, but I also want students to get to know each other, to work with each other, and see that we can all learn from one another. When people share ideas and perspectives, new ideas grow and more in-depth learning can occur. As a teacher and researcher, I experienced and researched professional learning communities, what works and how they can be beneficial. In teaching, you work with different people all the time. Sharing ideas and collaboration are part of the profession. (Renée)

In terms of my own professional identity, I refer to myself as a teacher-researcher. If I sensed the students were getting overwhelmed with formal curriculum and theoretical content, I redirected the discussion by sharing real-life teaching examples and questions surrounding practices. Breakout chat rooms were especially effective for facilitating a shift in tone as students were able to talk with smaller groups of their peers and share experiences from their practicum placements. (Lisa)

In reference to our efforts in trying to build communities of learners, the data revealed that this is something that was highly appreciated about our classes as our students frequently described the importance of the social and communal learning aspects of our courses.

### **Appreciating Synchronous Virtual Interactions**

Students appreciated that we were able to facilitate time for them to interact with each other. As one student explained, "It was a really engaging and interactive class which can be hard online." Students valued the interactive nature of the course, the ability to talk to each other, and the opportunities to share their ideas, experiences, and feelings. "Questions, comments and overall participation was always encouraged and appreciated," commented one student. Our use of specific instructional strategies in facilitating online discussions were also mentioned. Students appreciated our use of purposeful discussion and questioning techniques. As one student explained, "As students, we had to interact and there was always a listening intention and a clear purpose which helped me be more attentive online." They also valued how we structured our classes in such a way where we moved from small group to large group discussions fluidly and frequently throughout our lessons.

Through the generous use of whole group and small group virtual discussions, we were able to foster ongoing engagement. Students responded well to this, describing liking "the level of interaction they had in the class" and enjoying "that there was so much time for discussion in small groups in breakout rooms." One student commented, "This is important given that the online learning environment has the potential to be unengaging." They overwhelmingly valued this feature of our courses because it allowed them opportunities to "talk to others," "bond tightly," "chat with peers," and "share their own knowledge and experiences." They also found this technique beneficial to their learning. "I enjoyed how we always went back and forth between small group breakout rooms and the main room. I feel this helped optimal learning taking place."

Analysis of our open-ended questionnaire data and course materials indicated that we both valued and promoted interactions and that this was a well-used instructional strategy in our courses. Here we explain why facilitating time for interaction was important for us to use in our online environment.

It was important for me to develop a learning community in my courses. I knew that I did not want passive online classrooms where I delivered content and students just took in the info. I wanted them to engage with the material, ask questions, and apply their learning. I wanted to ensure maximum student engagement. Being online, I quickly learned strategies to ensure participation and engagement (e.g., frequent comprehension checks, chunking my lessons in mini segments, multiple small group discussions)—I wanted my students to understand right from the beginning that they would be active participants in their learning. (Renée)

Face-to-face virtual interactions, during class time, served many purposes including fostering active participation and promoting engagement. They also enabled us to do ongoing formative assessments and do comprehension checks. We also began to understand that small-group discussions helped build relationships in online. For me, small group discussions were more about interacting with the material, but relationship building became a natural by-product of this—with interactions, relationships are at play too. (Renée)

### **Appreciating Learning From Each Other**

Additionally, in relation to building online communities of learners, our students spoke highly of being able to learn from each other. Allowing time for students to interact and to reflect upon the material and content presented in courses resonated positively with students and was a significant finding in our data: “It was nice to learn from others” and “to hear their perspectives,” “get new ideas” and “share my own opinions as well as hear the opinions of my colleagues, despite taking this course online.”

Not only was learning from others appreciated, but students also felt that more in-depth learning took place as a result. As they explained, “I appreciated that we were given time to communicate ideas with others in our class very often because this allowed for further learning to take place,” “The discussions were always very helpful,” and “I learned so much from my peers.” As teacher educators, creating opportunities for students to learn with and from each other was something we deliberately integrated in our teaching practices prepandemic and that we wanted to try to also implement in our online classrooms. As Renée highlighted in her questionnaire, “I really try to include a lot of discussions, peer collaboration opportunities, co-construction of knowledge and hands-on collaborative tasks, and lots of interactions in my daily lesson design.”

In-class, small group discussions and collaborative tasks were used purposefully as a way to provide students with opportunities to learn from one another, to consolidate their learning in a timely fashion, to collaboratively put into practice newly acquired concepts and skills, and to critically reflect upon their classroom applications. By moving frequently from whole class teaching to small group discussions or tasks fostered a sense of accountability. As Renée explained, “I felt that it rendered students more accountable for their learning and to each other as they each had to share with their classmates how they internalized and interpreted the material.” Ensuring that small group discussions and tasks were purposeful also seemed to foster engagement.

I wanted students to feel that they were being treated as members of the larger teaching community right from the start of my courses. Although I acknowledge my role as their

professor and mentor, students are also entering a profession where they will be my colleagues in a very short timeframe as fellow teachers. The synchronous nature of Zoom and its breakout room feature was invaluable for facilitating this kind of professional, collaborative environment, as the learning could be interactive, dynamic, and new approaches could be implemented on the spot as needed. (Lisa)

Having students discuss the content, reflect on it and consolidate their learning, briefly and frequently during the lesson, enhanced the learning and mastery of the content. I found that every time students were placed in small group discussions, engagement would bolster. (Renée)

It was important that the learning that had occurred to small breakout rooms was reinvested in the whole-class context. Upon their arrival back into the main room, students would synthesize and share main discussion points or products they had created as part of their group tasks. As a professor, Renée wrote, “This was an invaluable part of the lesson as it allowed me to do comprehension checks of their learning, to clarify concepts, to elaborate on their ideas, and to push students’ thinking even further.” Additionally, our students really enjoyed having the opportunity to “work with different groups” and “collaborate with others on different projects.” The nature of our assignments and the types of tasks they were expected to complete was another significant and meaningful finding in our data which we plan to analyze and report on in a future article.

## **Discussion**

In light of our findings, we found several areas of interest that may be used as the basis for future research as we continue to explore both our past and emergent experiences in the online teaching and learning environment. We share the following insights as a starting point for professional discussion. First, our findings indicate that the ways in which we built and fostered our online learning environments effectively attended to students’ socio-affective needs, despite our initial concerns that they may not have been possible. Throughout our data, students spoke of their desire to feel connected to others and interact purposefully with one another. They felt that the online environments we were able to co-construct with them were inherently caring, infused with trust, and provided constructive space where they could safely share ideas and take risks.

Although teaching and learning was taking place in a somewhat two-dimensional space, we were able to successfully provide students with a rich, humanizing learning experience that allowed them to flourish despite the challenges we were facing online. Although we never explicitly asked students to comment on the online environment itself, data revealed that only a few chose to comment on it, wondering if perhaps their learning experiences would have been different if courses had been delivered face-to-face. The majority of students appreciated their online experience and the efforts we invested in providing them with a quality education, a supportive online environment, and a sense of normalcy during an otherwise trying pandemic. As an example, one student remarked, “thank you for making these past two semesters so amazing. You took the challenge of teaching/learning virtually and confronted it head on and, at least I believe, did an excellent job with it.”

Second, as previously noted, the current literature surrounding COVID-19 and the shift to online teaching strongly illustrates that pivoting to emergency online teaching and learning is not the same as purposefully constructing an online course with ample time to do so while not under

duress. However, as instructors we did not feel that this perspective necessarily applied to how we experienced this shift for ourselves. Although there was a somewhat steep learning curve for us with respect to the technology for online synchronous teaching, we did not feel ill-prepared to tackle the challenge of delivering our courses online. This can perhaps be attributed to the fact that we both had more time to prepare than other instructors who might have been in the same situation (e.g., the initial shift to online teaching and learning at the beginning of the pandemic took place in the spring, but the courses we personally taught did not begin until the fall); and that despite technological and logistical challenges, our approach to teaching was enacted online in largely the same way it would have been enacted in-person. Thankfully, the values that we both hold dear as teacher educators did not change as a result of the shift to online teaching and learning. In fact, they may have been even more evident in the online environment as we became more attuned to the needs of our students during an otherwise stressful time in their (and our) lives.

Third, by utilizing an appreciative lens to underpin our research, we were able to focus on the depth of positive stories arising from our lived teaching experiences and the experiences of our students that were particularly compelling for understanding teaching and learning in the online context during the pandemic. In this regard, implications from our findings may be useful in shedding light on effective practices for teaching and learning specifically in the context of professional programs (e.g., education, nursing, social work) such as using a largely synchronous, dynamic, interactive approach to teaching and learning online. They may also provide a basis for instructors in other teaching and learning contexts (e.g., undergraduate- or graduate-level programming) to adapt our approaches when constructing their own online teaching pedagogies. Instructors may want to make a similar shift away from an overreliance on asynchronous modes of delivery (as it is largely drawn from theories and literature centred on distance learning), and instead, adopt a real-time, synchronous approach to teaching and learning in the online environment (as we did to attend to the practical, socio-affective humanistic needs of our learners).

## Conclusion

We were interested in documenting our experiences in teaching our education courses virtually, and more specifically, in our abilities to create and foster an online environment conducive for our teacher candidates to learn and grow as future educators. We wanted to learn about what was possible in the online environment. To do so, we reflected on our own teaching values, our roles as teacher educators, and the teaching environments we wished to create for ourselves and our students. Given the shift to online teaching and learning, we questioned whether we would need to adjust our core instruction and whether we would be able to achieve our goals as teacher educators. What we found was that we were both able to foster positive learning environments and establish a professional community of online learners for ourselves and our students.

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## **SECTION 2**

# **Pedagogical Developments**

## CHAPTER 4

### **Responsive, Relational Pandemic Pedagogies: A Collaborative, Critical Self-Study**

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#### **Abstract**

In this self-study, we, an instructional team of four teacher educators, inquired into the experience of teacher candidates as we adapted our work at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The transition to remote learning led us to the inquiry question: How did the approaches we privileged prior to the pandemic influence our teaching and teacher candidate learning at the beginning of the pandemic? Teacher candidates from the 2019–2020 cohort offered several insights into what made a difference for them when the program abruptly shifted online just as they were beginning their practicum. These themes included consistent gatherings of the cohort for collegial support, professional learning and well-being; the benefits of explicit and embedded social and emotional learning (SEL); and opportunities to apply SEL and self-regulated learning approaches during their online practicum. This self-study offered us insight into the practices we value (e.g., relational, equity-oriented pedagogy in the middle years) and how we can take these up online. Interestingly, we found relational, synchronous, SEL-infused pedagogy to be central to teacher candidates' learning, well-being, and success. Barriers encountered had to be addressed with immediacy, particularly in light of the call for antiracist education.

*Keywords:* social and emotional learning, self-regulated learning, relational, equity-oriented pedagogy

#### **Résumé**

Nous sommes une équipe pédagogique de quatre formateurs d'enseignants qui faisons une autoanalyse à l'enquête de l'expérience des candidats à l'enseignement lorsque nous adaptons notre travail au début de la COVID-19. La transition vers l'apprentissage à distance nous a conduits à la question d'enquête : comment les approches que nous privilégions avant la pandémie ont-elles influencé notre enseignement et l'apprentissage des candidats à l'enseignement au début de la pandémie? Les candidats à l'enseignement de la cohorte 2019–2020 ont offert plusieurs idées sur ce qui a fait une différence pour eux lorsque le programme est brusquement passé en ligne au moment où ils commençaient leur stage. Ces thèmes comprennent des rassemblements cohérents de la cohorte ayant comme but le soutien collégial, l'apprentissage professionnel et le bien-être ; les avantages d'un apprentissage socio-émotionnel explicite et intégré ; et des opportunités d'appliquer les approches d'apprentissage socio-émotionnel et d'apprentissage autorégulé au cours de leur stage en ligne. Cette autoanalyse nous a offert une meilleure compréhension des pratiques que nous valorisons (e.g., la pédagogie de la dynamique relationnelle et axée sur l'équité au cours des années intermédiaires) et de la manière

dont nous pouvons les adopter en ligne. Fait intéressant, nous avons trouvé que la pédagogie de la dynamique relationnelle, synchrone et infusée d'apprentissage socio-émotionnel était au cœur de l'apprentissage, du bien-être et du succès des candidats à l'enseignement. Ce fut impératif que les obstacles rencontrés soient affronter immédiatement, notamment à la lumière de l'appel à une éducation antiraciste.

*Mots clés* : apprentissage socio-émotionnel, apprentissage autorégulé, relationnelle, pédagogie axée sur l'équité

## Introduction

We are four teacher educators at the University of British Columbia (UBC) who position our pedagogy as relational, contextual, and community-based. Prior to the pandemic, we were collaborating to research and realize how collaboration and community are at the heart of middle years (MY) pedagogy and self-regulated learning (SRL). In this contribution, we share how we adapted our work at the beginning of the pandemic.

Here we report the experiences of teacher candidates with moving to online teaching and learning during their practicum and for the final semester of their program. We identify if and how the content and practices introduced in the fall semester of 2019 informed teacher candidates' remote teaching and learning at the beginning of the pandemic in the spring and summer of 2020 and into their first year of teaching.

Educators are no strangers to being flexibly responsive to unexpected change. However, 2020 brought continuous change that pushed many to reimagine the ways in which teaching and learning can occur (Burns et al., 2020; Hill et al., 2020). This pandemic has been a test to apply characteristics in our own practice that we purport our MY teacher candidates need to develop to be effective within their own practice as new teachers. As a team, we grappled with ways to deliver course content, provide engaging learning experiences, and model collaborative, caring relationships in an online format. The transition to remote learning led us to the inquiry question: How did the pedagogical approaches we privilege in our program influence our teaching and learning at the beginning of the pandemic?

## Context

In addition to COVID-19, multiple contexts related to racial reckoning (e.g., BLM and anti-BIPOC racism forced us to rethink our practice of teacher education related to mental health and equity. The shifts in education are still relatively new, and little is known about how the sudden changes to pandemic pedagogies affect our learning and practice as educators. During the pandemic, educators struggled to make learning relevant and engaging for students—especially when teaching online (Hill et al., 2020). When face-to-face, we were constantly adjusting for public health protocols, with the well-being of students, ourselves, and our families and communities on our minds. At the same time, COVID-19 highlighted the enduring necessity to attend to the well-being of educators and students.

Many educators experienced feelings of isolation, anxiety, and heightened concern for the well-being of their students (Brackett & Cipriano, 2020; British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 2020). Educators often placed students' needs (physical, emotional and mental health) before their own, which resulted in emotional exhaustion and secondary traumatic stress (Panlilio & Tirrell-Corbin, 2021). Students, too, experienced adverse effects on their mental health; parents of adolescents report their children having experienced new or worsening mental

health challenges in response to the pandemic (C. S. Mott Children's Hospital, 2021; FAIR Health, 2021). These challenges included heightened levels of anxiety and depression.

In addition to mental health concerns, COVID-19 era teaching highlighted equity and access issues at the classroom, school, and systems levels. As such, we are newly aware and in the process of unlearning practices that perpetuate inequities and colonialism. While this past year has been exceedingly difficult, teacher educators and teacher education programs have had the opportunity to decentre normative practices through attending to how teaching and learning are cultural and relational processes that carry and communicate historical practices and unintentionally perpetuate inequities (Yosso, 2005).

Prior to COVID-19 and BLM, our four-person instructional team had been striving to connect inclusion-oriented pedagogy with the fields of MY education, SRL and social-emotional learning (SEL). MY philosophy and pedagogy centres nurturing student identity development, with one or two teachers acting as mentors and advocates for a cohort of students. MY pedagogy also values hands-on, experiential, interdisciplinary, collaborative learning. UBC's MY teacher education cohort is housed within an 11-month, 60-credit elementary teacher education program. To foster a more middle school-oriented program for teacher candidates, in the fall of 2018 Leyton (faculty lead) and Belanina (cohort coordinator) looked for possible synergies across courses and built a relationship with a local school district, where Marna is the curriculum coordinator for middle schools and social emotional learning. Marna became our school district partner and instructor for our one-credit classroom management course, and the next year Miriam, who we had all worked with as part of SEL initiatives, joined us to teach our human development and learning course. Together we built a team that also included eight middle school teachers in School District No. 43 (Coquitlam) and the 36 teacher candidates in the MY cohort.

In the first semester of the program we identified four courses with potential for integration and in situ application: (a) Cultivating Supportive School and Classroom Environments; (b) Inquiry Seminar; (c) Human Development, Learning and Diversity; and (d) Classroom Discourses. With the integrated coursework as a foundation, we worked with our eight middle-school-based teaching colleagues to co-construct in situ experiences. The UBC MY cohort relocated to the city of Coquitlam (School District 43) on Fridays to engage in hands-on learning with culturally and linguistically diverse learners, working with practitioners in their classrooms. As Kozleski and Waitoller (2010) have written, "Lived experiences, mediated thoughtfully and consistently by skilled practitioners, teacher educators, teacher candidates and their PK-12 students provide a better context for a transformative teacher education experience" (p. 656). Together with our field-based partners, we worked to take up MY philosophy and pedagogy, SRL, and SEL to explore teaching and learning as relational pedagogy for all involved. We completed the fall term and our integrated courses and in situ learning prior to the pandemic. With this inquiry we were curious to learn if and how the pedagogies we took up prior to the pandemic transferred to our online teaching, and taken up by teacher candidates in their practicum.

### **MY Cohort Themes**

All MY teacher candidates complete their practicum in Grades 6 to 8 with the majority in middle schools in our four partner school districts. Across the four shared courses described above, we focus on MY pedagogy including active and personal learning; valuing diversity; learning and teaching in multiple ways; challenging, exploratory, integrative and relevant

curriculum; advancing learning through varied and ongoing assessment; nurturing identity development; responsive teaching; and collaborative learning (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010; Schnellert et al., 2015). Teacher candidates also learn about SRL from the first day of the program.

We look to Zimmerman (2008) to anchor our understanding of SRL as the ability to control thoughts and actions to achieve personal goals and respond to environmental demands. Butler et al. (2017) have written that self-regulating individuals take deliberate control over their engagement in activities they face in their daily lives. Cycles of self-regulation include interpreting tasks; setting goals; selecting, adapting, or generating appropriate strategies; self-monitoring outcomes; and revising goals or approaches to better achieve intentions (Butler & Winne, 1995; Winne & Hadwin, 1998; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001). Conceptualizing teachers' professional learning as self-regulation has been particularly useful in characterizing how teachers engage in iterative cycles of knowledge generation (Schnellert & Butler, 2016). Finally, with the MY cohort, we highlight that self-regulation is contextualized. When self-regulating, individuals are working to navigate activities as defined within the environment they live and work.

A final theme that is embedded in our work with the cohort is SEL. We know that all learning is social and emotional in nature and students are required to constantly navigate a myriad of emotions and social interactions during any given school day (Frey et al., 2019). SEL is the process through which individuals develop, maintain, and apply skills and competencies to recognize and regulate emotions, set and achieve goals, experience empathy and care for self and others, build and maintain healthy relationships, solve problems peacefully, handle interpersonal situations, and make personally and socially responsible decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2013; Durlak et al., 2015). An extensive body of research demonstrates the positive influence of SEL, such as protecting against adverse risk-taking behaviours, emotional distress, and behavioural problems, in addition to contributing to mental health and well-being, academic achievement, and success later in life (Domitrovich et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2017).

There are many ways to engage in SRL and SEL in the classroom. Regardless of the entry point, SRL and SEL instruction must be situated in a caring learning environment and through positive relationships. Although SEL programs are perhaps the most commonly used approach to SEL instruction, evidence suggests SEL programs that focus on direct skill instruction and rehearsal have limited effects for adolescents (Yeager, 2017). Instead, adolescents need opportunities to take up and apply the SEL (and SRL) skills they have learned in authentic ways; this takes place through meaningful, experiential learning.

While teacher candidates were introduced to a great deal of research, theory, and practice related to the MY, SRL, and SEL prior to practicum and the COVID-19 pandemic, we want to highlight a few pedagogical approaches and experiences. In the first semester of the program we apply a number of relational practices as a way to build community, establish and develop relationships with teacher candidates, position them as self- and co-regulating learners, and apply an ethic of care. In parallel, as part of integrated in situ coursework, our cohort meets in Coquitlam each week, and, in teams of four or five, spend half of their day in the same MY classroom co-teaching with one of our eight partner teachers. In the fall of 2019 teacher candidates built inclusive, responsive learning experiences by getting to know a class of MY students and asking each of them about their strengths, stretches, interests, passions, dreams, and goals. Before and after these in situ experiences, we modelled and explained how developing a

class profile is a part of responsive pedagogy that values students' funds of knowledge (see also Schnellert & Kozak, 2019). Early on we also identified structural barriers that limit student agency and invited teacher candidates to co-construct curriculum, routines, and processes with us, and in turn to have agency to do the same with MY learners (Moss et al., 2006).

### **Self-Study Methodology**

Together we engaged in self-study to better understand and inform our pedagogical efforts and responses before and during the pandemic. We had already committed to collaborative self-study prior to COVID-19, but this shared, collaborative practice became prescient as we continued to navigate teacher education online. The transition to remote learning led us to develop the inquiry question: How did the pedagogical approaches we privilege in our program influence our teaching and learning at the beginning of the pandemic?

For us, collaborative self-study (Berry & Russell, 2014; Samaras, 2011) helps to unpack our practice as teacher educators and realize how our critical friendship supports us to make spaces for social justice in our teaching, interactions with colleagues, and at the program level. In this chapter, we offer several themes derived from interviews with former teacher candidates who were beginning their qualifying practicum when the pandemic began. Through analysis of this dataset we sought to identify connections between our prepandemic pedagogy and teacher candidates' experiences at the beginning of the pandemic during their practicum.

We conducted interviews with 20 new teachers from the 2019–2020 MY cohort after they had graduated from our program and were several months into their first year of teaching. Their responses helped us to answer our inquiry question. These former teacher candidates offered several insights into what made a difference for them when the program abruptly shifted online just as they were beginning their practicum.

### **Teacher Education at the Beginning of the Pandemic**

In March 2020, the World Health Organization classified COVID-19 as a pandemic and in response, schools and universities closed campuses. We were not sure if teacher candidates could complete their practicum, when schools might reopen, or what the shift to online learning would mean pedagogically for teacher candidates and ourselves. Analysis of interviews identified several pedagogy-related themes.

### **Social and Emotional Learning**

In March 2020, BC schools were closed for spring break and teacher candidates anticipated commencing their in-person practicum after the break. During the 2-week spring break, it became apparent that schools might stay closed and the teacher candidates, like all educators, were faced with an enormous sense of uncertainty. This continued for another 3 weeks as the UBC Teacher Education Office worked with school districts and the BC Teachers' Council to create an online practicum opportunity that would satisfy all parties. Teacher candidates described the broad range of emotions they experienced as they waited to hear how their fate would be determined as an "emotional rollercoaster" and "whirlwind of emotions." In addition to the uncertainty about their practicum and program completion, many teacher candidates faced job and housing insecurity. To assuage some of the anxiety and to attend to the emotional well-being of the cohort, the core instructors met with teacher candidates one-to-one,



held group meetings, and communicated information as quickly and transparently as possible. Teacher candidates reflected their appreciation for the rapid release of information, even though messages kept changing. The core instructors hosted weekly sessions to share updates about practicum, check-in with how teacher candidates were doing, and share resources related to online learning—focusing on technology use, SRL, and SEL. One teacher candidate shared:

That biweekly update was also crucial for me, to know that, one, I'm part of the program still, like it's not somewhere in thin air, it was something tangible. Two, I think it's also that social connection: I'm not doing this all alone, there's other teacher candidates, there's also my beloved instructors and faculty that are there for me. Three, [the] rhythm, "I can expect this, I can look forward to this," was comforting.

Eventually, it was determined that schools would offer sustained distance (online) learning and that teacher candidates could complete their practicum in this online format.

At the start of the online practicum, some teacher candidates and their school associates (SAs) spent time ensuring that their students had what they needed to learn (e.g., technology, food, etc.). In addition to basic needs, a consistent focus was attending to the social and emotional well-being of their students. The students, not unlike the teacher candidates and other adults, were reeling from the emotional impact resulting from the sudden cauterization of human contact. One teacher candidate shared that "COVID had just thrown a curve ball, and everyone was dealing with their emotions and thoughts in so many different ways" and, as a result, the teacher candidate "put a heavier emphasis on SEL first, and then... academics later." SEL was prioritized as a pathway to eventual academic learning. One teacher candidate shared:

[Our team] focused on the SEL piece, so like the learning will happen, it's not going to be as productive online and they embrace that, but we're going to do our best, we're going to try to teach the curriculum, teach our competencies, but also taking in the fact that they're going to focus on the SEL piece as the most important, because our children's mental health ... it's hard being a kid right now.

Similar to the ways in which the core instructors provided emotional support to the teacher candidates, many of the teacher candidates had office hours or drop-in groups to give space for students to connect or come and "just talk." Many teacher candidates invited students to share how they were feeling via emotion check-ins, while others taught lessons related to SEL and strategies for managing emotions. One teacher candidate shared: "I think the kids needed some SEL, like just to help them with their social and emotional feelings at the time.... The students responded even over Zoom."

Since students were required to remain physically distant from their peers, they had limited social interactions. In addition to providing emotional support, many teacher candidates provided time during their online instruction for social connection as a way to promote well-being. Many teacher candidates applied what they learned early on in the program about the importance of relationships. One teacher candidate shared: "You're not going to get to the academics if you don't have the relationships first." Another teacher candidate observed: "You could sense that they were really missing the connection and not seeing their friends," so they gave the first 5 to 10 minutes of class where the students were encouraged to casually chat while the teacher candidate remained muted. Many teacher candidates also shared that they intentionally focused on making social interactions upbeat and enjoyable by creating fun

experiences to foster student engagement. The teacher candidates infused activities like playing games and Kahoot, or planned routines like Fun Fridays to bring “happiness and laughter” into the online teaching.

The practices through which teacher candidates maintained a sense of community and fostered positive peer interactions in their practicum classes were similar to what we enacted at the onset of the program. They adapted many of the SEL-oriented pedagogical practices we introduced them to in our September to March face-to-face courses (e.g., circle pedagogy, morning meetings, emotion check-ins, conferencing) for online learning. Even though we only had 2 to 3 weeks of intermittent contact with the teacher candidates prior to the beginning of their practicums, the approaches that we took up during this time (e.g., online circles, “temperature checks,” liberating structures that made participation routines explicit) offered teacher candidates experiences with, and insight into, how to translate SEL-related practices to online learning. In fact, as evidenced here, these SEL-oriented practices became more central aspects of the curriculum. Across the 20 teacher candidates interviewed, the vast majority felt better prepared for pandemic teaching due to our cohort’s attention to SEL during their program. They reported that we had helped equip them to teach during a time of crisis.

## **Collaboration**

Prior to the pandemic, from September to March, we had focused on teacher teams as a key structure in middle school philosophy and pedagogy through readings (i.e., Schnellert & Butler, 2014; Schnellert et al., 2015; Wilcox & Angelis, 2007), presenters, and in situ collaboration with local classroom teachers. In the research interviews, teacher candidates highlighted how they gleaned a great deal about collaboration and coteaching prior to practicum by explicitly referring to the in situ coursework and how we four instructors modelled collaboration. One teacher candidate explained:

Middle schools are so integrated, and that was really a key thing that you all achieved in our program. You know, we’d be studying something in Miriam’s class and then we’d be having conversations about the same concept in Bel and Leyton’s class, even though it had a different focus. It really helped make nine courses in one term feel like one flowy lesson. That was probably like my favourite thing about how the [MY] cohort was designed.

The importance of collaboration and teamwork was reinforced through witnessing and reflecting on our instructional team interactions. Several teacher candidates highlight the interpersonal aspects of teacher collaboration. For instance, a teacher candidate reflected:

We need to build a community where not only students trust their teacher but also colleagues trust one another, so that they can support one another, and I felt that was a common theme amongst all the four classes [and] between the four leaders of our cohort.

Teacher candidates reported that relational, reciprocal collaboration was powerful and critical for their learning during their practicum. Several highlighted the importance of interdependence in MY teaching and learning and how this was evident during COVID-19. Another teacher candidate offered:

My biggest takeaway from [practicum during COVID-19] was that teaching is highly relational. We need to be learning from our students but also learning from our colleagues and being supportive of our colleagues. I think it helped me grow and expand my understanding of education in the sense that I need to be someone who's learning about my students just as much as they're learning from me, and I need to responsively teach to their needs. That is something that has been a big takeaway, and I've been still applying.

Responsive pedagogy had been a central concept in their September–March coursework, but took on deeper meaning during practicum—and heightened importance during the pandemic.

Although the online practicum was unexpected and different from “traditional” classroom teaching, many of the teacher candidates shared they had a very positive experience. In several cases, the teacher candidates experienced a sense of collaboration and teamwork with their SAs and their school teams because they were experiencing something novel together. One teacher candidate explained:

What I like about middle school is that you have this team of teachers and so you can pull ideas from each other and talk to each other and you can collaborate that way and just have them support you. There's people you talk to and people to help plan.

As this was the very beginning of the pandemic and we had suddenly moved online, most middle schools had organized to have collaborative planning time every day. Teachers were cocreating new online pedagogies and using them the very next day with their students. A teacher candidate shared:

The SA I was working with was figuring it out as we were going along. I loved the fact that we were able to bring up things to our SAs, and say, like, “Okay, here we are in Microsoft Teams. Let's create a notebook and do all these cool things.” It had never been done before.

In a sense, all educators were suddenly “new” teachers because “no one really knew what they were doing.” Teacher candidates worked in partnership with their SAs and school teams to cooperatively problem-solve in real time. They were authentically immersed in collaborative MY teaming during their e-practicums in ways that they might not have experienced otherwise. This offered them a rich experience of one of the touchstones of middle school structures and practice.

In addition to working together with the teams to determine what to teach, many teacher candidates experienced a reciprocal dynamic where their teams valued their expertise in *how* they might teach. According to the teacher candidates, some of the SAs were not familiar or were less confident with the technology required to teach remotely. Many of the teacher candidates were able to support their SAs in navigating new, unfamiliar systems while also modelling how to use technology in innovative ways to connect with and engage students in learning. The SAs still offered support for the teacher candidates in a number of ways, but many teacher candidates were able to offer support to their teams in ways that utilized their knowledge about online teaching. In their interviews, teacher candidates noted the benefits of the strategic targeted workshops about online teaching organized and offered by the MY core team during the 2 to 3 weeks when practicum was in limbo.

## Developing Supportive Learning Communities

In the MY/SRL cohort we devote a great deal of attention, time, and opportunities related to supportive learning communities. All UBC teacher candidates are required to take Cultivating Caring Classroom Communities (EPSE 311), a one-credit course about cultivating caring learning communities but our cohort's SRL theme extends this focus. In particular, we spend time in School District 43 classrooms exploring these ideas. In their interviews teacher candidates recognized the impact of these experiences. One teacher candidate explained: "I really like the in situ learning experiences and going into different classes to see how different teachers handle different situations and have their class set up. That was very beneficial." However, one teacher candidate reflected that even though we took up positive classroom management-related theory while on campus in Human Development Learning and Culture (EPSE 308), and they were able to apply these concepts in schools on Fridays as part of in situ Cultivating Caring Classroom Communities (EPSE 311) coursework:

A lot of us felt really confident from these courses, and then you go in and then just stuff breaks free and breaks loose, it makes you really reflect and be like, "Ok, there's a lot of areas I really need to improve."

Online teaching is considerably different from teaching in-person. Although the online practicum was a learning experience for the teacher candidates, many identified that the online classroom did not prepare them for navigating the demands of a full, in-person classroom. As one teacher candidate remarked:

I got into the classroom in September and it was really hard, because I never got that experience in classroom management, of being in front of thirty kids in a classroom having to transition to "X" amount of lessons throughout the day.

Most of the teacher candidates who participated in interviews reported struggling with classroom management in the fall and not feeling prepared for the pace of planning, teaching, and assessing.

Teacher candidates shared that there was actually very little to "manage" online since groups were smaller and because interpersonal interactions could not take place between peers in the same way. Online, there was no need to address overt conflict. One teacher candidate explained: "I mean, how are you expected to learn classroom management when you're staring at a screen?" Another pointed out: "We didn't get [to] practice because it was online, so we didn't get that classroom experience, and even just like regular classroom things." This feeling of frustration cut across teacher candidate feedback, expressed with significant emotion due in large part to the challenges teacher candidates were experiencing in their first year of teaching, during which the interviews took place. Teacher candidates did not develop "classroom management fluency" in their online practicum and many were overwhelmed trying to match philosophy and practice without the ongoing support they would have received in a traditional face-to-face practicum.

In our interviews with teacher candidates, we found that they were not confident in defining SRL. Many were embarrassed to say that they had not thought much about SRL since completing the program—yet they offered rich examples of how they were explicitly fostering SRL during their practicum. Upon reflection, one teacher candidate noted:

When you approach pedagogy with a strong sense of self-regulation, online learning can be a super rewarding experience for many of your students. I had some projects, they were amazing. [It was] incredible what students could produce, and it's partly because you approach it with the mindset "okay, we're going to do some planning, we're going to do some testing, we're going to evaluate, and then we're going to say 'what can we do better?'" "

Another teacher candidate explained:

I was focusing on those iterative cycles with students, where they were just touching base, they're messaging you and saying, "Well, this is where I'm at. What do you think?" And then you can say, "Well this is where you're at, and we need to think about moving it in this direction. What do you think about that?" That was a really fruitful time for them, of learning.

Many teacher candidates shared that their online practicum allowed them to be innovative and responsive, but did not prepare them for the physical classroom. Few articulated any connection between SEL and SRL pedagogies that they took up in the online practicum as aspects of classroom management. Many reported that in their first year of teaching, they had reverted to and were implementing more traditional, hierarchy-based conceptions of classroom management and did not experience cognitive dissonance about this.

## Equity and Racism

This self-study forced us to confront and name issues that caused discord in what we thought we were already addressing in our overall inclusive approach. Although we saw evidence that our focus on SRL and SEL positively influenced our teacher candidates' online practicum, we recognized a gap in our practice and the negative impact it had on our teacher candidates. Through interviews with the teacher candidates and our shared reflections, we have begun to identify issues and difficult realities in our classrooms, practices, and program. As part of our B.Ed. program orientation for students we had Robin DiAngelo, author of *White Fragility* (2018), speak. The keynote to all students on the very first day of the program was then used as a launch for cohort reflection. We gathered the MY cohort to debrief this talk, and the topic of racism, in our very first meeting together. While both the talk and the debriefing were important and well intentioned, one teacher candidate raised an important issue missed in this effort to address equity:

At the start of the year, they had Dr. DiAngelo come and talk, but that's a white woman, that's catering to the whiteness, to have the white people in the space feel safe. Yes, we want to ensure that everyone feels comfortable accessing this knowledge, but there's so many people of color who take on this work as their life's profession.

We sought to create safe spaces, as aligned with SEL practices, for teacher candidates to push their thinking and recognize privilege, racism, and inequity. A teacher candidate shared the conversations were "definitely very crucial in kind of helping me open my eyes to be more unbiased." There was the perception we had created a "safe space for people to voice their opinions, and people did feel comfortable in voicing their opinions." But through the words of

the teacher candidates, we were able to recognize that the space was not “safe” for all—safety was protective of those who fit into the majority, and left many teacher candidates of colour feeling vulnerable and exposed:

It was really, really hard to be in that environment sometimes because a lot of people that were speaking up never really recognized their own privilege. Our cohort was very diverse, but it was also difficult, because we understood that, we appreciate the advocacy coming from other students, but I felt like our voice was taken away a lot of the time. And then, if we felt emotional about it, that wasn't always heard or respected. It was seen as an emotional response as opposed to an intellectual one. There wasn't an understanding of navigating through the academic world as a person of color, and [as] a woman on top of that.

Another teacher candidate of colour stated that some of the conversations that were meant to openly address racism left them feeling “really angry, really frustrated, and really overwhelmed.” Another teacher candidate shared that the emotional weight of navigating these conversations left some peers feeling unheard and others feeling defensive:

I remember getting into two very heated discussions in class ... and I remember crying so much, so upset, and people didn't understand why, and we talked about—it was so interesting because some of my colleagues had said, “You know, we don't really notice race.” But it's like, yeah, you don't notice it, but *we* notice it. I'm not asking you to cry for me, that's not what I'm asking for you. I'm asking you to recognize that.

Emotions of frustration, but for the opposite reason, were also shared. One biracial teacher candidate felt that although the conversations helped him become “unbiased,” they also polarized members of the cohort:

Some people that were people of colour, they were like, “None of you have felt this way because you are not people of colour.” I understand that, but don't make us the bad guys. We didn't do that. Don't segregate yourself by saying “you haven't felt like this.” It's like, well, no, I may not have felt like that, but at the same time, if you're going to act like that and not come at this in a mutual respect sort of way—don't yell at me.

Some white teacher candidates' unwillingness to recognize systemic racism, and their consistent need to protect their own safety, came at the cost of others' safety. These conversations painfully surfaced implicit bias. One teacher candidate of colour noted:

I felt when people were trying to advocate for something, people weren't really listening, they were just focusing on what to say next and how to overcome things, so it was also a lot of ... defensive positions being taken. I think it divided us a little bit. We tried to move past it, but I think you kind of understood where you felt safe and where you could be yourself and where you weren't really safe to be yourself.

As much as we sought to promote a sense of care and community, some teacher candidates of colour did not feel the freedom to be themselves. One teacher candidate shared that they had “to be someone else” and had to “leave that part of me behind” and engage in “code switching” in their role as a teacher candidate and then a classroom educator. The labour

associated with this kind of role code-switching is taxing, and this continuous effort is what teacher candidates of colour wanted their peers to recognize. One teacher candidate of colour shared how their identity is constantly brought to fore of their teaching:

As a person of colour in the classroom in the majority-white neighborhood, I've also had to reevaluate myself as an educator. I have to educate my students to know that I am a human being who's worthy of respect as the classroom leader, but I would be undermined at home, and how do I out-teach that? That happened a lot at the beginning of the year because of the George Floyd protesters and BLM, and then we had the riot at the Capitol.

Hearing from teacher candidates enabled us to apply a critical lens to the MY pedagogy we privilege, that is learning as relational, empowering, and diversity-positive. Through our self-study we realized how some conversations and interactions in our classrooms perpetuated harm. "Safety" can be used as a tool of white supremacy and, in our case, safety did not actually protect equity-seeking voices that are too often ignored, talked over, and unheard. We must continue to ask ourselves: "Who, in our learning spaces, is afforded safety and who is not?" This requires us to explore how understandings and experiences of "safety" differ between white, racialized, and otherwise marginalized groups in our learning communities and how might we, as teacher educators, attend to those differences in conceptualizing and experiencing safety.

In the fall of 2020, as a team we sought to more deeply interrogate the knowledge and practices we privilege to push our program further toward decolonization and a more liberatory approach to education. We examined our content and course curricula and asked whose voices are centred, to identify where we might be causing harm. Discussing race and equity is layered, complex, and contextual. Sometimes it is difficult to see the influence of white supremacy culture and how education plays a role in perpetuating inequalities. This can be particularly hard to see when you are applying and modelling decolonizing practices.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The pandemic illuminated pre-existing tensions and opportunities within B.Ed. programs such as online learning; collaborative problem-solving; classroom management; and equity, inclusion, and diversity. We now have a chance to leverage what was learned over the past 16 months. This self-study offered us insight into the practices we value and how we can take these up online and in-person.

Studying our initial online pandemic pedagogies revealed that many teacher candidates experienced anxiety and distress. Our inquiry demonstrates how SEL research and practice was taken up as resource by ourselves and the teacher candidates when we moved to online learning. SEL strategies played a significant role in empowering teacher candidates and the students with whom they worked to effectively navigate the myriad of emotions they experienced throughout the pandemic. This study also illustrates how SEL-oriented teaching on its own is not enough. SEL needs to be integrated throughout teacher education programs as we take up ongoing and emergent tensions related to equity, diversity, and inclusion. We found relational, synchronous, SEL-infused pedagogy to be central to teacher candidates' learning, well-being, and success. Whether online or in person, teacher candidates felt engaged and supported when learning was personalized and responsive, built upon the sense of community established at the beginning of the program.

The scope of this chapter is limited to what we learned about online teaching during the beginning of the pandemic which constituted the latter part of the MY 2019–2020 B.Ed. Program. We are currently integrating what we learned about SEL, SRL, building supportive learning communities, and collaboration with our current cohort. For the 2020–2021 MY cohort, coursework has been online, but teacher candidates have weekly school visits and in-person practicums. Developing community online as a cohort has included theme days, check-ins, personalizing support, and focusing on responsive teaching and collaboration with SAs and between teacher candidates.

This inquiry also illustrates how teacher educators can find support, encouragement, and creative energy through collaboration across courses. We ourselves were teaching from home while supporting our children to learn online from home. None of us profess to be experts in online pedagogy and draw energy from in-person and in situ teaching and learning. Yet together we extended our capacity to integrate technology into our courses and developed inclusive, interactive online pedagogies that will continue to grow beyond the pandemic.

Barriers encountered had to be addressed with immediacy, particularly in light of the call for antiracist education. Our self-study also surfaced a significant gap in our practice. As a team we try to live a relational and inclusive approach in the MY cohort, yet through this inquiry we have recognized enormous potential for collective growth as an instructional team in the area of antiracist education. While we have worked to integrate such approaches in to our practice, these acts can, at times, become performative and breed complacency, as if a “tick” is placed in the box beside “decolonizing practices.” When students of colour feel singled out or speak about experiencing microaggressions, we need to further disassemble the structures in our teaching, classrooms, and programs that reinforce dominant discourses and position equity-seeking communities as “other.”

A key contribution of this research is an illustration of how well-meaning SEL, equity- and inclusion-oriented MY teacher education requires critical reflexivity, and ongoing efforts to challenge the notion of “safe space.” As educators, we must not only engage in brave conversations that explicitly address racism and sociopolitical contexts, we must also listen—to truly hear what is being said—so that we might act to make meaningful, sustained changes that honour the lived experiences of our students.

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## CHAPTER 5

### **Pandemic Pedagogies: Transforming Teacher Education Through Spaces of Possibility**

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#### **Abstract**

As faculty in a teacher education program in Ontario we are particularly concerned with providing meaningful opportunities for aspiring educators to practice and reflect upon their learning and teaching, in addition to ensuring our programs are equitable, inclusive, and accessible to students. When the decision was announced to shift to online programming from an entirely face-to-face teacher education program in March 2020, faculty and teacher candidates were equally apprehensive. Faculty across campus needed to quickly integrate digital teaching and learning for online platforms. Teacher candidates were concerned about completing courses and field experiences. The authors of this chapter created an informal professional learning community to discuss and ascertain best practices during these unprecedented times. We asked: (a) How might significant shifts from traditional to multimodal, digital learning transform and reconfigure teacher education programs moving forward, and (b) In what ways might these changes provide new spaces and opportunities to facilitate caring relationships with students and faculty alike? We examine our practices as we discuss the following themes: remaking relationships through digital literacies, supporting and making space for BIPOC teacher candidates, and transforming traditional practicum experiences in pandemic times. As we reflect on our collective responses to this shift to digital online learning, we consider opportunities in multimodal and digital teaching and learning, and the virtual spaces where we continue to build caring relationships in our community of educators.

*Keywords:* new literacies, pandemic pedagogies, relationships, teacher education

#### **Résumé**

En tant que corps professoral d'un programme de formation des enseignants en Ontario, nous nous efforçons de répondre aux besoins des futurs enseignants et à leurs offrir des opportunités significatives pour pratiquer et réfléchir sur leur apprentissage et leur enseignement, en plus de veiller à ce que nos programmes soient équitables, inclusifs et accessibles aux étudiants. Lorsque la décision a été annoncée en mars 2020 de passer à la programmation en ligne depuis un programme de formation des enseignants qui était entièrement en face à face, les professeurs et les candidats à l'enseignement étaient tous aussi inquiets. Les professeurs au campus ont tous dû rapidement intégrer les ressources d'enseignement et d'apprentissage numériques. Les candidats à l'enseignement ont trouvé préoccupant l'achèvement de leurs cours et de leurs formations pratiques. Les auteurs de ce chapitre ont créé une communauté informelle d'apprentissage professionnel afin de discuter et déterminer les meilleures pratiques en ces temps sans précédent. Nous nous sommes demandé : (a) Comment des changements considérables dès l'apprentissage traditionnel à l'apprentissage numérique multimodal pourraient-ils transformer et reconfigurer

les programmes de formation des enseignants dorénavant ?, et (b) Comment ces changements pourraient-ils offrir de nouveaux espaces et de nouvelles opportunités ainsi de faciliter des relations chaleureuses parmi les étudiants et les professeurs ? Nous examinons nos propres pratiques tout en discutant les thèmes suivants : renouveler nos relations parmi une culture numérique, soutenir et faire de la place pour les candidats noirs, autochtones et de couleur et enfin, transformer les expériences de stages traditionnels en temps de pandémie. Nous réfléchissons collectivement à ce passage à l'apprentissage numérique en ligne où nous espérons mettre en oeuvre de nouvelles opportunités à l'enseignement et à l'apprentissage multimodal et numérique en vue des espaces virtuels où nous continuons à établir de chaleureuses relations au sein de notre communauté éducative.

*Mots clés* : nouvelles formes de littéracie, pédagogies pandémiques, relations, formation des enseignants

## Introduction

As faculty in a teacher education program in Ontario, we are responsible for educating future elementary and secondary school teachers. We are particularly concerned with providing meaningful opportunities for aspiring educators to practice and reflect upon their learning and teaching, in addition to ensuring our programs are equitable, inclusive, and accessible to students. When the decision was announced to shift to online programming from an entirely face-to-face teacher education program in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, faculty and teacher candidates were equally apprehensive. Faculty across campus needed to quickly integrate digital teaching and learning for online platforms. Teacher candidates were concerned about completing courses and field experiences. As we reflect upon our collective responses to this shift to digital online learning and teaching, we consider work within the context of multimodal and digital literacies, teacher education reimaged, and how building equitable and caring relationships was remade and supported among our community of educators during this time of crisis.

Pandemic pedagogy emerged from the switch to *emergency remote teaching and learning* during the spring of 2020 (Milman, 2020). This transformation in learning platforms found that “when educational institutions issued the mandate to convert all face-to-face courses to online, often with a week or less to engineer this metamorphosis, the very nature of education transformed” (Schwartzman, 2020, p. 503). Unlike scheduled and planned online pedagogies, the sudden shift to online and remote teaching and learning was a struggle for both educators and learners. There were challenges with digital technology access and issues of inequitable conditions when using people’s homes as their work spaces. Educators had concerns around rigor and accommodations for course work with synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning. While learning new technology tools and platforms (such as Zoom) was at the forefront of everyone’s mind as we attempted to find each other in a virtual mode, empathizing with our students and each other needed to be considered. Key to teaching during a pandemic would be the relationships that are built and maintained (Hamilton, 2020; Milman, 2020; Schwartzman, 2020). Some educators turned to social media for assistance with digital technologies as well as a place to ask questions, seek ideas, and connect, particularly during the pandemic. As Schwartzman created and curated the Facebook group “Pandemic Pedagogy”, Carol also found such a space in the global Facebook group “Higher Ed Learning Collective (HELC)”. Similar to classrooms, these online communication platforms delve into moments of conflict and engagement, while providing opportunities for sharing and learning about teaching. The three

authors of this chapter also created their own informal professional learning community to discuss and ascertain best practices during these unprecedented times. All of these opportunities for learning prompted us to consider how we empowered each other and our students during this period of crisis.

Hill et al. (2020) question what education might look like postpandemic and how this implicates teacher education programs. As colleagues we also wonder about possible changes in our teacher education program, including our pedagogy and practica. In order to consider these changes, we describe, discuss, and analyze our *critical incidents* (Newman, 1987), our active and reflective practices on teaching and learning. We realized that our understandings about teaching and learning during this pandemic “can only be uncovered by engaging in systematic self-critical analysis of our current instructional practices” (Newman, 1987, p. 727). Therefore, the following questions guided our study: (a) How might significant shifts from traditional to multimodal, digital learning transform and reconfigure teacher education programs moving forward? (b) In what ways might these changes provide new spaces and opportunities to facilitate caring relationships with students and faculty alike? We examine our own practices, mindful of the research questions, as we discuss the following themes that emerged through our research: remaking relationships through digital literacies, supporting and making space for BIPOC teacher candidates, and finally, transforming traditional practicum experiences in pandemic times.

We bridge our work and experiences in our roles as teacher education faculty at Niagara University in Ontario. Niagara University is a binational institution, with the main campus being located in Lewiston, New York, and an Ontario site in Vaughan, just north of Toronto. Niagara University in Ontario operates under the written consent of the Ontario Ministry of Education. Our teacher education program is called the Bachelor of Professional Studies (BPS) program and is accredited by the Ontario College of Teachers. Through our experiences working in a binational university, which has a College of Education blending Canadian and American ways, we have garnered insights from both sides of the border in terms of navigating the complexities of the pandemic while doing our best to support our students.

## **Literature Review**

### **New Literacies**

We ground our study within a New Literacies framework in order to reflect on our collaborative response as pandemic pedagogy. Now, more than ever, what we mean by education changes rapidly. As stated by Leu et al. (2013) when discussing literacy as new today and how “it becomes new every day of our lives” (p. 1150), the same can be said for what happens in classrooms.

New literacies “are identified with an epochal change in technologies and associated changes in social and cultural ways of doing things, ways of being, ways of viewing the world” (Coiro et al., 2008, p. 7). A New Literacies’ perspective helps theorize how and why digital technologies are utilized in our classrooms through multimodal means. Characteristics of this perspective include how communication technologies provide new opportunities in literacy tasks, how digital equity is required in our global community, the importance of change, and how literacies, in particular, are multiple, multimodal, and multifaceted (Coiro et al., 2008). This perspective considers the affordances and challenges of integrating digital tools and how they facilitate learning, multimodal forms and tools, and the “opportunities to share knowledge and

respond to each other's work through experiences that maximize social practices in digital spaces" (Kinzer & Leu, 2016, p.11). As new literacies are fluid and collaborative, educators utilizing these applications often find new ways of forming learning communities to facilitate learning and teaching in different roles and ways of being (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011).

New Literacies researchers also consider critical literacies, new social practices, and, perhaps most interesting for this chapter, the changing roles of educators in their classroom (Leu et al., 2013). New social practices, such as moving to synchronous and asynchronous learning from face-to-face in-class teaching, also focus on agency and action (Vasquez et al., 2010). Differing methods, perspectives, and contexts, similar to the changes of new technologies and during major social changes, continue to help shape and evolve New Literacies.

## **Digital Literacies**

Digital literacies are altering what it means to learn, study, work and conduct research. Fundamentally, digital literacies challenge the concept and organization of the traditional university structure and framework. Littlejohn et al. (2012) defines digital literacies as "the capabilities required to thrive in and beyond education, in an age when digital forms of information and communication predominate (p. 547). Sadaf and Tuba (2020) note that the incorporation of digital literacies into curriculum was highly dependent on attitudinal factors, such as the perceived benefits of increased online learning, as well as comfort utilizing digital tools, and administrative pressures to embed digital learning. While being able to work and flourish in digital spaces is more important than ever, there are both benefits and drawbacks to implementing digital literacies into education, particularly for K–12 education. Some of the benefits include increased active-participatory learning, collaboration, engagement, and co-creation of teaching and learning. Some adverse implications are unhealthy amounts of screen time, access to inappropriate websites, distractions from other websites and games, and online bullying (Sadaf & Tuba, 2020).

While the aforementioned studies centre on K–12 education, we are interested in filling some of the gaps pertaining to digital literacies and online learning in higher education, in order to determine the convergences and divergences of the pros and cons of digital literacies and fully remote learning. Beetham (2009) posited that aspects of everyday technological use and digital learning are innately incompatible with traditions of academia. However, due to unprecedented global events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it is worth considering whether we ought to challenge traditional views of academia and academic learning as digital learning platforms and courses become increasingly popular and in demand. As learning across all spheres of education becomes increasingly mediated by technology, we must consider what provisions universities must make to support this transformation of learning and what future learning might look like postpandemic.

## **Teacher Education in Ontario**

Teacher education in Canada is unlike that of its Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development counterparts, in the sense that Canada lacks a national educational policy and a national education department. Therefore, early learning, public K–12, and higher education are all responsibilities designated to the individual provinces and territories. In Ontario, like most provinces and territories, the most common type of teaching degree is the Bachelor of Education.

Within the Ontario context, teacher education has undergone dramatic shifts, largely due to an oversupply of teachers in the province. Teacher education programs in Ontario were historically only 1 year, but in 2012, the Liberal government announced the new 2-year Enhanced Teacher Preparation Program, which came into effect in September 2015. The partial rationale for this was to cut teacher admissions so there would be fewer people competing in an oversaturated job market.

Teacher education has largely been an amalgamation of theory with face-to-face course work and hands-on practical experience through teaching practica that take place over various blocks of time. The COVID-19 pandemic radically altered how teacher education is conceptualized and carried out, as higher education programs transitioned to online learning in the spring of 2020. The pandemic has ultimately changed the face of what teacher education is and what it might look like in the future. For example, in our program, teacher candidates switched from fully face-to-face classes to engaging in online learning opportunities. Associate teachers and practicum supervisors remotely mentored their teacher candidates who were also teaching online. While some students praised the transition to online learning, this enthusiasm has not extended across all communities. The impacts of online learning for teacher education programs have created additional challenges, most notably for low-income and minority students. As asserted by James (2020), White, able-bodied, and affluent students have been able to access more resources in order to successfully navigate online learning and the curricular shifts often designed to benefit them. However, many racialized students and low-income students who already must navigate hostile spaces must now face additional barriers to accessing teacher education programs.

### **Equity in Higher Education Classrooms**

In 2008, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development pointed to two challenges in its advocacy for equity in education: fairness and inclusion. While we understand that everyone should have access to schooling, discriminatory practices often present barriers to people based on personal and social circumstances. Nieto (2010) found that “teachers’ knowledge, experiences, attitudes, and beliefs play a crucial role in promoting anti-racist and anti-bias school reform” (p. 190). Furthermore, understanding that culture, among other factors, is ever-changing, multifaceted, embedded in context, influenced by social, economic, and political factors, and socially constructed, aids in our knowledge about classrooms (Nieto, 2010, 2017). Facilitating a positive cultural and linguistic identity both in-and-out of school further develops students’ confidence and motivation to learn (Cummins et al., 2015). Utilizing culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy is essential where educators know their students and their families, incorporate a sociocultural consciousness, and have a desire to make a difference in our communities with members of our communities (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013; Toulouse, 2013). For example, constructing units of study on critical issues, such as the power of language, further creates learning spaces that are equitable and sustaining (Christensen, 2009, 2017). Transforming our classrooms into equitable learning spaces should make educators consider representation in classroom texts, learning and teaching materials, and in the everyday interactions in our classrooms (Bishop, 1990; Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Lenters, 2019). Transforming educational spaces is key for educators and learners in the design, practices, and resources provided through educational institutions.

## Methods

As we navigated new terrain during the pandemic, we wanted to reflect upon our response to the constant changes in our teacher education program impacted by the pandemic. As of 2020, Niagara University's BPS program included cohorts of 139 teacher candidates admitted each year. Therefore, 278 teacher candidates were impacted by the necessity of closing face-to-face programs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our teacher candidates are Canadian and the majority live in the Greater Toronto Area.

While creating our own professional learning community, we grounded this study in action research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Kemmis, 2010, 2014). We considered with intentionality the relationships and processes that encompass what is conceptualized as practice, including past as well as future possibilities (Ross, 2020). Action, research, and participation as key elements for conducting action research help us to understand and, perhaps change, praxis. Intertwined in this process is inquiry as a stance, providing space for transformative reflection and action (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Creating space for practicing educators to effectively act upon their research has been explored (Black, 2021; Darling-Hammond, 2012; Kitchen & Stevens, 2008). Thinking about these practices, particularly teaching practices, may help us understand the processes and relationships in education and the challenges they present to higher education faculty during times of crisis.

We also consider this research as a pathway to merge wider social, self-reflective collective and individual practice in order to mobilize action to improve processes of teaching and learning (Kemmis et al., 2014). Kemmis (2010) explores not only what we might understand through action research, but what he calls the "happening-ness," or the situatedness of action research in shaping possible futures by altering what is done. Furthermore, researchers can examine their own practices by uncovering "new ideas for practice and praxis (sayings), new ways of doing things (doings), and new kinds of relationships between those involved (relatings)" (Kemmis, 2010, p. 420). Therefore, how do we transform our practice during this time of uncertainty and provide a way into new pedagogical opportunities?

## Findings

Faculty and teacher candidates throughout the pandemic were, and have been, concerned about completing courses and adapting to digital field placements and learning modalities. As we reflected upon our collective responses to this shift in teacher education themes emerged. Each author shared their reflections and active considerations as we, individually and collectively, explored these emergent themes: remaking relationships through digital literacies, supporting and making space for BIPOC teacher candidates, and transforming traditional practicum experiences in COVID times.

### Remaking Relationships Through Digital Literacies

With a significant shift from our face-to-face classes to virtual classrooms, multimodal and digital tools and learning transformed our praxis. For Carol, this shift included reconfiguring her course, Methods of Teaching Language Arts and Social Studies (EDU 433). Key to this change was continuing a sense of community in our virtual classroom. Utilizing an interactive, virtual platform called Padlet, which had already become part of the fabric of the course before emergency remote teaching and learning was enacted, everything we hoped to complete in the



course, along with details and dates, was posted. Alongside the university's Canvas platform, this provided an interactive space where everyone in the class could ask and answer questions and share resources to continue to create and maintain social connections. Likewise, a new digital platform for Carol and the teacher candidates in EDU 433 provided another space to respond to each other interactively, through a multimedia storytelling application called Flipgrid. During our first class back after it was announced that classes would be virtual and synchronous, we were supposed to discuss this digital tool, but instead our interactions with this tool became a sharing point for our discussion, a relational literacy-as-event (Burnett & Merchant, 2020). Posting a welcome and how-to video, Carol invited teacher candidates to post short videos. Everyone participated by showcasing their pets, their children, their worries, what they were watching on a streaming service, favourite music, or taking a moment to just say hello. While there were technology issues with uploading videos, adding audio and responses to peer's videos, and general connectivity (Doyle-Jones, 2019), we remade connections with each other, often through these challenges. Together, we brought our classroom community into a new space.

While course content had already been established for this language arts and social studies methods class, how this content, including the final project, continued to be delivered required alterations with this sudden change to virtual learning. The course's final project on critical reading focused on strategies and practices for literacy learning and teaching. Focusing on teacher modelling and guided reading, several concepts were examined, such as curating multimodal and digital responses (Cloonan et al., 2019) and socioemotional growth (Venegas, 2019). teacher candidates were asked to choose junior grade-appropriate (Grades 4–6) language arts and social studies cross-curricular, diverse books for critical reading within a literature circle format. Some of the books chosen included *French Toast* (2016) by Kari-Lynn Winters, *Fatty Legs* (2010) by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton, *Room for One More* (2019) by Monique Polak, *How to Bee* (2017) by Bren MacDibble, and *Refugee* (2017) by Alan Gratz. For this project, teacher candidates created a project pack for their social justice-based chosen books, including situating their proposed literature circles and related activities. Activities included exemplars for online mapping, multimodal character postcards, thematic collages using digital tools, virtual storyboards, and digital book trailers. While in the midst of their own online learning, in collaborative groups, teacher candidates considered digital and nondigital literacies to create these activities, as well as global initiatives with literature circles (Dwyer, 2016). Implications for changing pedagogies provided opportunities to facilitate learning about digital tools, responding to each other's work in digital spaces, and showcasing the affordances and challenges presented by digital resources (Kinzer & Leu, 2016). Teacher candidate Annie (all teacher candidate names in this chapter are pseudonyms) reflected upon this repositioning of teaching as she completed her project:

The look and feel of teaching is shifting. It was always a requirement for educators to guide their students to understand the world around them. But learning doesn't come from just books anymore like it did in the past but learning has become fluid and dynamic, information can be a form of collaboration from online sources and apps.

Themes of identity, voice, discrimination, and displacement emerged from the activities and final reflections, themes that have often surfaced during similar iterations of this project. Teacher candidate Rashida, reflecting upon her project, shared how “through literature, we can open our students' eyes to diverse cultural backgrounds and injustices that have impacted the lives of

different communities over the years.” As Carol contemplated her own practice, the teacher candidates’ projects and reflections helped unfold the continuing need to explore diverse literature as well as the digital pedagogical resources and tools required as our classrooms become more and more imbued with virtual learning opportunities.

### **Supporting and Making Space for BIPOC Teacher Candidates**

As the only self-identified racialized faculty member in the Ontario faculty at our university, Zuhra is intentional when it comes to carving out spaces for and building relationships with BIPOC teacher candidates. Many obstacles are intact that disadvantage BIPOC teacher candidates in teacher education programs, most notably, institutional and structural practices of colour-blindness that obstruct the path toward racial equity (Brown-McNair et al., 2020). Many white faculty do not understand the lived experiences and positionalities of BIPOC students. In this vein, Zuhra is mindful that racialized professors often must take on extra labour in supporting their racialized students (Zoledziowski, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted BIPOC communities in Ontario, where racialized people comprise 83% of all COVID cases in the City of Toronto alone (Cheung, 2020). Thus, widespread shifts to online learning have effectively created a double barrier for BIPOC teacher candidates, already marginalized by the devastating implications of the pandemic (Abawi, 2021). As previously noted, online teaching and learning policies and practices are designed and implemented to benefit middle- and upper-class white students who have more access to resources to delve into these transitions successfully (James, 2020). With mindfulness and intentional practice, extra time and resources are dedicated to get to know BIPOC students, their lived experiences, especially in light of how they navigate the pandemic, and how they might be supported in being successful in the BPS program. White, middle-class, heterosexual teachers make up the majority of the teacher workforce in Ontario (Abawi, 2021; Childs et al., 2010; Pinto et al., 2012; Turner, 2015). Therefore, carving out spaces and prioritizing the voices of BIPOC teacher candidates already underrepresented in teacher education programs and faculties across the province is vital to being an antiracist educator and scholar.

By holding courageous conversations with students (Singleton, 2005) and embedding antiracism, social justice, and equity throughout programming, regardless of the subject matter, Zuhra is intentional in calling out and challenging white supremacy, by normalizing the discomfort in these critical dialogues. Most importantly, concepts of merit and meritocracy are unpacked, premised upon the notion that whiteness is neutral and objective (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). While it is a common occurrence for many white teacher candidates to attribute their academic and professional success to hard work and grit, many fail to acknowledge, as Brown-McNair and colleagues (2020) posit, that institutions, structures, and systems, particularly settler-colonial educational systems, have been engineered to benefit them. From positive experiences in elementary and secondary school, strong and supportive relationships with teachers and guidance counsellors, access to extracurricular activities and other resources, most white teacher candidates have unmerited access to opportunities that BIPOC communities do not. As a recent report compiled by the United Way (2019) in Toronto indicated, racialized communities are falling further behind their white counterparts in income, employment, and access to resources such as education. In light of the transition to online learning modalities, Zuhra continues to live her commitment to antiracist pedagogies, and building strong and positive relationships with teacher candidates, especially BIPOC teacher candidates. This is done by being more available to students. Rather than holding fixed office hours, making alternative times available might be

more conducive when students have familial or employment commitments. Further, students are not forced to turn on their cameras, even during class discussions or activities, and an option is provided for students to present their assignments and record them on their own time, prior to submission, rather than making them present live in front of the class. It is also important to be mindful that many teacher candidates' work, in addition to being full-time students, and have families, care-taking obligations, and a myriad of other responsibilities to attend to outside of their studies. By utilizing online learning as a tool, Zuhra tries as much as possible to make teaching and learning equitable in times of great hardship and to make space as much as possible to reimagine equitable and antiracist education through digital landscapes.

### **Transforming Traditional Practicum Experiences in COVID Times**

Given the parameters of the pandemic, we as a faculty had to make significant adjustments reimagining the facilitation of teaching field experiences. Christian was responsible for collating innovative digital practicum experiences for teacher candidates who were faced with the barrier of complete school closures in the spring of 2020. The challenge was to find ways for teacher candidates to complete placement and practicum requirements when provincial schools closed face-to-face classes and K–12 online synchronous classes were sporadic. The decision was made to seize this opportunity and use the collective knowledge of the university to assist in the education of teacher candidates in Ontario in a spirit of service and collaboration. For both the first-year teacher candidates, who needed to complete 5 to 10 days of placements, and the final-year teacher candidates, who had considerably more days remaining in their practicum, classroom support and teaching required reimagining field placements. Teacher candidates' collaboration with their associate teachers in the preparation of online lessons, largely asynchronous modules would count as having fulfilled the requirements of the necessary teaching blocks.

Initially, teacher candidates were frustrated, pointing out the many barriers to the digital shift of their placements. Perhaps the greatest of these barriers was the challenge to conceptualize an abrupt and unprecedented virtual shift for which there were no known parameters. Also, many associate teachers expressed reluctance to even continue their relationships with our teacher candidates. Challenges arose with the synchronous check-ins via digital conferencing (e.g., Zoom) and the long wait time in providing online login IDs to the teacher candidates for each school board's virtual platform. Similar to our teacher candidates, many associate teachers could not conceive ways in which the mentorship relationship could continue when faced with the reality of teaching and learning amid the pandemic. It became incumbent on Christian and the university's field experiences coordinator to convince both associate teachers and teacher candidates that the field experience relationship could continue along digital lines. The university shifted from the traditional model of carrying out field placements to one in which our teacher candidates could assist associate teachers by preparing online modules for asynchronous delivery or digitizing existing print materials. This would include the preparation of interactive modules for student learning which might include embedded instructional videos, online quizzes, and interactive games. Teacher candidates were reminded of the knowledge and skills acquired in their Educational Technology course as they were encouraged to showcase their 21st-century skills. In this manner, teacher candidates were able to design meaningful learning experiences for implementation in accordance with skills they had learned online with curricular expectations (Burns et al., 2020).

For our teacher candidates in their final semester, there was the logistical problem of how the university would justify the granting of a six-credit practicum course to a cohort of teacher candidates who had not yet completed their required days of practice teaching in a K–12 classroom. For the solution to this problem, we turned to our colleagues on our main campus in Lewiston. Teacher candidates on the main campus, at both graduate and undergraduate levels, had been accustomed to using simSchool, a web-based virtual classroom platform utilizing artificial intelligence where virtual students act and react in authentic individualized ways as students in an actual classroom setting (Deale & Pastore, 2014; simSchool, 2021). They had used simSchool sparingly during their summer semester, when it was difficult to find live placements for students. It was never conceived as a means of replacing a traditional practicum placement but to enhance the overall experience or to augment the academic requirement of a practicum credit. The new reality of K–12 teachers during a pandemic provided the impetus to use simSchool as a means by which our teacher candidates could fulfill all requirements and graduate on time. Christian and the leadership team at the university decided that students would log 75 hours of simSchool teaching modules to fulfill the remaining requirements of the practicum course. The Ontario Ministry of Education had already excused teacher candidates from face-to-face practicum days due to the pandemic and the shuttering of Ontario schools (Ontario College of Teachers, 2020). Our teacher candidates welcomed the opportunity to complete their degree and Ontario College of Teachers certification requirements, although the barrier of inadequate Wi-Fi coverage remained for some students. Overall, the use of simSchool was a tremendous success because it ultimately provided a means for our teacher candidates to complete their program, at their own pace. Their progress was monitored by Christian who had access to their ongoing online progression through a supervisory dashboard. The teacher candidates progressed through modules that include strategies for accommodations and learning tools, observing student learning differences, different teaching styles and student engagement, exceptionalities and student success, lesson planning, teaching learners with diverse needs, mastering inclusionary practices, teacher talk and impact, and differentiated instruction. The supervisory dashboard, besides tracking the amount of time spent on each module, also tracks equity, academic effectiveness, and the meeting of the virtual students' emotional needs based on the teacher candidates' interactions and interventions. Equity is addressed to a certain degree through the tracking of interactions with virtual students by gender and by skin tone compared to the total population. Fascinatingly, simSchool also tracks the emotional tone used with these students. This provided a means of evidence for the fulfillment of the academic requirement of the student practicum course, and ultimately, graduation and OCT certification. The digital pivots made in the face of a pandemic made us rethink and innovate our conceptions of supporting students by navigating uncharted territory, while simultaneously maintaining our commitment to serving our students.

## **Discussion**

This chapter gave us an opportunity to consider, and reconsider, what practices we engaged with during the pandemic. As Newman (1987) notes when discussing critical incidents, we need to make space to question our practices in order to make our own learning explicit. The sudden shift to reimagine pedagogy through online and remote teaching learning, the challenges to digital access while schooling at home, and maintaining classroom communities, presented a myriad of challenges for faculty and teacher candidates. But virtual learning for coursework and practica have also offered innovative approaches to our teacher education programs. To

showcase the changing roles of those involved in education, we concentrated on two guiding questions: How might significant shifts from traditional to multimodal, digital learning transform and reconfigure teacher education programs moving forward? And, in what ways might these changes provide new spaces and opportunities to facilitate caring relationships with students and faculty alike?

As Schwartman (2020) found, the pandemic has provided faculty with an “opportunity frame” (p. 513) to create instances for pedagogical shifts to rethink, redesign, and reimagine opportunities for all our students. In this new fluid landscape, utilizing such digital tools as Padlet, Flipgrid, and the digital resources the teacher candidates discovered when working with their associate teachers, point to an increased comfort with integrating digital tools and resources by both faculty and teacher candidates. While synchronous learning can sometimes lead to unhealthy amounts of screen time, the benefits described by Sadaf and Tuba (2020) are also evident. While issues of access were evident and supported during each class as we experienced technology and connectivity issues, the opportunities afforded by digital technologies provided interesting social connections for teaching and learning. For Carol, creating a virtual space where we remade our classroom community was an important feat in utilizing social practices in virtual spaces. Our introductory Flipgrid videos, while using a new digital platform, allowed us all to share and maintain our community. While we might have shared our stories and concerns through the chat feature or chatted virtually through the Zoom platform, which we quickly learned to use, Flipgrid provided us with another avenue to connect with each other in real time. Carol often co-creates and collaborates with her teacher candidates when connecting with digital technologies and, as more online opportunities emerged with virtual learning, using digital tools is one more way into active-participatory learning while engaging virtually.

The innovation of simulated practicum experiences through simSchool and its adoption in our program has carved out spaces for teacher candidates impacted by the pandemic to continue with their Teacher Education requirements. In this manner the virtual option has been able to offset periods of forced inactivity due to self-isolation, quarantine and personal and family crises caused by illness and even death at the hands of COVID-19. The simulation option has now been incorporated as a supplement substitute to mitigate nonpandemic setbacks faced by teacher candidates resulting from numerous other factors beyond our control. For example, Christian found that when traditional face-to-face placements for teacher candidates cannot be completed within a semester of study and the required 50 hours cannot be fulfilled within the said placement proper, top-up equivalency hours are now granted for work completed through simSchool. When placements are arranged late by school board officials, or interrupted due to illness, childbirth, withdrawal of the AT, or any other unforeseen and atypical circumstance, teacher candidates now use simSchool to bridge the gap between the OCT mandated 40 hours and the university mandated 50 hours while at home, asynchronously and flexibly online via simSchool.

Opportunities for reimagining meaningful student–faculty relationships also emerged. For Zuhra, carving out spaces to build more caring and inclusive relationships meant being particularly mindful of the specific and unique needs of BIPOC teacher candidates who have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Through intentional practice, Zuhra adapted her pedagogical approaches by offering choices to students that align with their needs and situations. She was also mindful of the extra supports students might require during online learning and purposefully provided more opportunities to connect with students outside of traditional office hours and class time. It is important to note that many challenges

disproportionately impacted racialized communities during this crisis, particularly inequitable access to technology, and the balancing of responsibilities in employment, childcare and other familial obligations. While many students have thrived with the transition to online learning, it is critical as we move forward and digital teaching and learning becomes more commonplace in higher education, that our faculty and institutional policies and practices become more responsive to the needs of all students.

### Conclusion

The affordances and challenges of integrating digital tools and platforms (Kinzer & Leu, 2016) were mostly evident in our experiences during the pandemic. Pedagogically, while we always utilized digital technologies in our courses, emergency remote teaching and learning, with the need to teach and learn virtually, made us reconsider our digital classroom usage. This crisis has presented us with challenges, but has also made us more aware of the challenges faced by our teacher candidates. The continuing need to foster relationships extended outside our classrooms, into our homes and out-of-school spaces.

While there were many challenges in supporting digital practica, teacher candidates became a vital source of support for associate teachers in many instances. They were able to provide valuable work in their field experiences by assisting their associate teachers in lesson planning for online synchronous delivery during periods when face-to-face learning was suspended. The relationship between associate teachers and teacher candidates was enhanced in many contexts, as the pandemic necessitated a greater collaboration especially pertaining to the planning and preparation of digital resources. We have had several occasions where teacher candidates were unable to serve in a traditional face-to-face setting since September 2020 for all of the aforementioned reasons, yet they have been able to continue nonetheless. This has been facilitated by teacher candidates assisting their associate teachers in the digitization of curriculum for multimodal delivery, a practice that was nonexistent in this relationship between associate teachers and teacher candidates prior to the university's pandemic response.

We collectively considered the effectiveness of our responses to these mandated shifts in teacher education, from traditionally practicum-based, hands-on programs to remote, online learning spaces. We reflected upon how we interacted and intervened with our teacher candidates and the material semiotics, the digital aspects of teaching and learning, and now consider the possibilities of what will happen in our postpandemic educational spaces. With direct connections to the teacher candidates and their learning opportunities both in their academic and practicum classrooms, future pedagogical shifts are occurring at the program level with the use of digital technologies, changes in practica implementation, and equity considerations for our teacher candidates, particularly our BIPOC teacher candidates. This transformation in teacher education has created spaces of possibilities for opportunities out of this pandemic crisis.

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## CHAPTER 6

### The Student Lens: Education Students' Response to Our Pandemic Shift in Teaching and Learning

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#### Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic precipitated an unprecedented shift to online course delivery for our small, Western Canadian, community college education program. Our education team of ten instructors quickly adapted face-to-face courses for online delivery and strove to build caring relationships with our 190 students across a 4-year degree program. Using a community of inquiry (CoI) threefold model focusing on pedagogical, teaching, and cognitive presence, this chapter highlights our innovative responses to online learning and how these responses are perceived through the eyes of our students. The student perspective is drawn from a thematic coding of online, anonymous quality improvement surveys. Drawing on the CoI framework, we begin by sharing the student perspective on teaching, cognitive, and social presence. Teaching or pedagogical choices are framed within how we utilize technology to go beyond text-based readings and assignments to instead structure meaningful experiential learning in the education courses. Our students critique the immediate and long-term effects of our innovative choices and how these structural choices support their learning. Cognitive presence or content is grounded in comprehension of course content: Did our students understand the information being taught? We discuss how confident our students feel with course content and the effectiveness of our shifted assessment strategies. Social presence and how discourse and climate of our online courses affect relationships and connection to instructor and colleagues is also discussed. Fairness, flexibility, and effectiveness of communication in online learning is analyzed considering the diversity of our students' needs. This chapter provides unique aspects of online learning from the student perspective. As we grapple with future steps for pandemic and postpandemic teaching, teacher educators may consider student insight to promote accurate and effective educational experiences.

*Keywords:* pedagogical shifts, pedagogical approaches, content considerations, connection and relationships

#### Résumé

La pandémie de la COVID-19 a précipité un changement sans précédent vers la prestation de cours en ligne pour notre petit programme d'éducation collégial de l'Ouest canadien. Notre équipe pédagogique comprise de dix instructeurs a dû vite adapter les cours en face à face pour une prestation en ligne et elle s'est efforcée de nouer des relations bienveillantes avec nos 190

étudiants pour la durée du programme de quatre ans. À l'aide d'un modèle à trois parts de communauté d'enquête axé sur la présence pédagogique, la présence d'enseignement et la présence cognitive, ce chapitre met en évidence nos réponses novatrices à l'apprentissage en ligne et demande comment ces réponses ont été reçues par nos étudiants. Un sondage anonyme en ligne d'amélioration qualitative a identifié leur point de vue en utilisant un codage thématique. Tout d'abord, tirant du cadre de communauté d'enquête, nous commençons par partager le point de vue des étudiants sur la présence de l'enseignement, la présence cognitive et la présence sociale. Les choix d'enseignement ou de pédagogies sont encadrés par la façon dont on utilise la technologie pour ainsi aller au-delà des lectures et des devoirs fondés sur le texte afin de structurer à sa place un apprentissage expérientiel et significatif aux cours d'éducation. Nos étudiants critiquent les effets à court et long terme de nos choix innovateurs et comment ces choix structurels soutiennent leur apprentissage. La présence ou le contenu cognitif est fondé sur la compréhension du contenu du cours ; nos élèves ont-ils compris la matière enseignée ? Nous discutons à quel point nos étudiants ont confiance au contenu des cours et de l'efficacité de nos stratégies d'évaluation modifiées. Également abordés sont la présence sociale et la façon dont le discours et le climat de nos cours en ligne influencent les relations et la connexion avec l'instructeur et avec les collègues. L'équité, la flexibilité et l'efficacité de communication dans l'apprentissage en ligne sont analysées en fonction de la diversité des besoins des élèves. Ce chapitre présente, du point de vue de l'étudiant, des aspects uniques à l'apprentissage en ligne. Alors qu'on fait face aux futures étapes d'enseignement en cas de pandémie et de post-pandémie, les formateurs d'enseignants pourront prendre en considération les connaissances témoignées par les élèves pour favoriser des expériences éducatives qui seront précises et efficaces.

*Mots clés* : changements pédagogiques, approches pédagogiques, considérations de contenu, connexion et relations

## Introduction

In our Western Canadian, community college education program, we are accustomed to small, in-person classes where connection with our students as individuals and learners is paramount. We believe this connection affords us the opportunity to personalize the educational journey for the 190 students across our 4-year degree program. This scenario was taken for granted until March 15, 2020, a date that will be etched in our collective memory as the day postsecondary instructors and students shifted their practice of teaching and learning due to a health pandemic.

After March 15, 2020, our education team, like many others, dealt with a multitude of foundational questions: What pedagogical shifts need to occur? What adaptations will need to be made to course content? How will we build relationships with students in this fully online format? As we began to work through these questions, we remained cognizant of our responsibility to uphold overall program goals. Mindful that instructor and student expectations may be impacted, we still wanted to ensure program quality. Could the same program goals be achieved in this new landscape?

As we began to adapt courses to online, limited face-to-face delivery and strove to build caring relationships with our students, we sought research-based theories and practices for our adaptations (Flynn, 2020; Lock & Redmond, 2021; Mohammed et al., 2020; Openo, 2020; Wolfe & McCarthy, 2020). Reinvention of collaborative learning communities necessitated innovation and retooling of our practice; it did not simply involve moving materials online (Kiernan, 2020) but required strategic restructuring (Hege, 2011). Drawing on inspirations such as growth

mindset, we stretched ourselves to create learning tasks that, in turn, created stretch and the room for risk for students (Dweck, 2010). One of the big challenges was how to model moving out of our comfort zones into *here be dragons*, so that students would risk doing so as well. The phrase *here be dragons* was used by ancient cartographers to refer to entering into uncharted territory (Elahi, 2011).

In fall 2020, our courses were offered in a manner that our educational team had deemed as having the most educational impact. As fall turned to winter, we sought feedback to determine whether these adaptations indeed were having the intended educational impact. Student voice has always been viewed as a valid contribution to our educational decisions and it felt even more imperative at this time to view our shifts through the student lens (Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006; Fielding, 2010; Kehler et al., 2017; Lodge, 2005; Matthews et al., 2018; Mihans et al., 2008). Trying new ideas and learning from mistakes *with* students (Kim, 2020) intentionally fosters trust if transparency is in place; we felt that if the student voice was not heard, this would lead to an incomplete picture of the impact of our adaptations and would invalidate their voice as cocreators of knowledge. Cook-Sather (2002) states there is “something fundamentally amiss about building and rebuilding an entire system without consulting at any point those it is ostensibly designed to serve” (p. 3).

To view our adaptations through the student lens, we framed our study in the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model. CoI focuses inquiry simultaneously on social, teaching, and cognitive presence in online and blended teaching and learning environments (CoI, n.d.; Garrison, 2017, 2019; Garrison & Akyol, 2015; Xin, 2012). Through the usage of this framework, we uncovered and unpacked the impact and efficacy of our adaptations on student learning. Students’ perspectives were shared through an online survey containing both Likert scale and open-response questions. Students across our four-year program were anonymously surveyed in the winter 2021 semester with results being thematically coded.

Through the student lens, we were able to evaluate the impact of our shifts to teaching and learning in the areas of content, pedagogy, and relationships. This lens is pivotal in ascertaining the efficacy of our adaptations and how we will go forward in the near and distant future.

## **Pedagogy**

### **Our Pedagogical Philosophy: Constructivism**

Our education program could be described as most closely aligned with constructivist and social-constructivist pedagogies in terms of creating learning experiences with and for our students. Taking these pedagogical inclinations and applying them thoughtfully to our work is an ongoing challenge, especially in this past pandemic year. Working within an expanded strategic repertoire of synchronous, asynchronous, fully online, and blended (in-person and virtual) delivery, the constructivist pedagogical lens has not been lost simply because we went to an adjusted format for learning (Nilson & Goodson, 2018).

### **What We Did: Pedagogical Adjustments Prompted by COVID-19**

COVID-19 prompted instructors to make numerous and diverse pedagogical course adjustments. Essential to our teacher education program is its hands-on, active nature so our first priority was lobbying to conduct classes with as much face-to-face time as possible. We

succeeded in coordinating a blended format (partially online, partially in-person) for our third- and fourth-year classes while first- and second-year classes were solely online. To ensure our face-to-face time worked within mandated restrictions, pointed adjustments were made; for instance, our third- and fourth-year instructors shared the allotted weekly 3- or 4-hour time-slot, either rotating through approximately 1-hour segments or determining use of the time based on the topic of study that week.

Attention to effectively conducting synchronous classes was also a priority (Nilson & Goodson, 2018; Vaughan et al., 2014). With a growth mindset at the fore (Dweck, 2010), we took on the challenge of using new technologies that would enhance our synchronous time (Lambie & Law, 2020). We used built-in tools (e.g., chat box, polls, breakout rooms, screen sharing, collaborative whiteboards and slide-decks, video recording) available in our learning management systems (LMSs; e.g., Blackboard Collaborate, Google Meet, Zoom) to ensure synchronous time was engaging, collaborative, and interactive (Nilson & Goodson, 2018; Vaughan et al., 2014). For example, student groups used breakout rooms in which they made online whiteboards to capture their thinking that they then presented and fielded questions. In the same vein, external tools were also utilized, such as PearDeck, FlipGrid, and Quizizz, to name a few. In some situations, a hybrid of tools was used; for example, during synchronous class time, diagrams and explanations were outlined on a physical whiteboard while students asked questions orally or through the online chat box. At times flipped learning was adopted as a way to use synchronous class time more strategically (Awidi & Paynter, 2017; Jeong et al., 2018). To support students with assignments, we adjusted assignment loads, altered assignment formats (e.g., an online oral midterm), posted explanatory videos and exemplars, as well as coordinated assignment due dates to attend to cognitive load (Kirschner, 2002), ensure task manageability, and avoid overlaps.

## **Findings**

### ***Pedagogical Approaches***

In analyzing the pedagogy sections of our survey results, it became apparent that, overall, students appreciated the lengths to which instructors had gone in order to activate meaningful learning despite the pandemic obstacle course. A significant overarching theme mentioned by students across all program years addressed course structure. To elaborate, first- and second-year classes were conducted online, with both synchronous and asynchronous components, while a blended format was used for third- and fourth-year classes. Student comments seem to indicate that the closer the structure was to a prepandemic classroom, the more effective their engagement, attentiveness, and overall learning. Despite a few outliers, first- and second-year students strongly indicated their preference for synchronous classes over asynchronous, citing greater connection and a more in-class feel. Similarly, third- and fourth-year students, despite a few diverging opinions, provided strong support for in-person classes over online.

All groups of students pointed out the various difficulties associated with online learning. An asynchronous structure made students feel more responsible for self-learning and the lack of opportunity to ask instructors questions in real time was noted as an issue. While synchronous learning was strongly preferred, students still struggled with various on-screen distractions and with screen-time weariness and strain. When synchronous classes were interspersed with varied activities, as well as frequent breaks—especially for the longer 3- to 4-hour sessions in third- and fourth-year classes—students felt more engaged and as though it was more “like a normal year”

(Fourth-year student). A final question on the survey asked students to envision their ideal online or blended class and a good many suggested a structure whereby content is delivered asynchronously, then processing, discussion, and practice are synchronous or in-person, focusing on engaging and hands-on learning opportunities.

### ***Learning Management System***

Although the responses indicated a significant preference for one LMS over another, students were especially clear in suggesting we, collectively, choose one and adopt it for use across our whole program. This year, some instructors used BlackBoard, while others used Google Classroom, and students indicated that toggling between the two platforms was confusing for accessing materials, submitting assignments, and even attending online classes. Students were adamant in suggesting we choose one platform and commit to it across our courses. In terms of built-in digital tools such as breakout rooms, chats, and whiteboards, 78% of students agreed or strongly agreed these helped their learning. However, only 60% of students indicated that the use of external digital apps (e.g., PearDeck, shared slide decks) helped their learning. Taken together, these findings seem to indicate that students tended to prefer the ease and clarity associated with tools directly accessible through the LMS rather than exiting the LMS to use an additional application.

### ***Pedagogical Support***

Students frequently stated that instructors were supportive of student learning needs and purposefully worked to create worthwhile and navigable educational experiences. While a contingent of 30% said that their own individual technological issues affected their learning, students noted that instructors responded with understanding and support. The instructors found that, when the tables were reversed, students were similarly forgiving and patient. Safety was a learning-support factor as well; due to close adherence to COVID-19 protocols (e.g., masks, sanitizer, safe handling of manipulatives, physical distancing, staggered classroom use) third- and fourth-year students predominantly felt safe during in-person classes. It is apparent that, despite some isolated issues, students were accepting of pedagogical imperfections and unknowns as long as they felt their learning was deemed a priority in the classroom. “Considering flying the airplane while building it, the instructors did an amazing job,” commented a fourth-year student.

### ***Love–Hates***

Although the Likert scale results showed strong support for the following pedagogical approaches, when given the opportunity to comment freely, three distinct topics emerged in a dichotomous fashion: some students either loved them or hated them and chose to use their comment space to expand on their views.

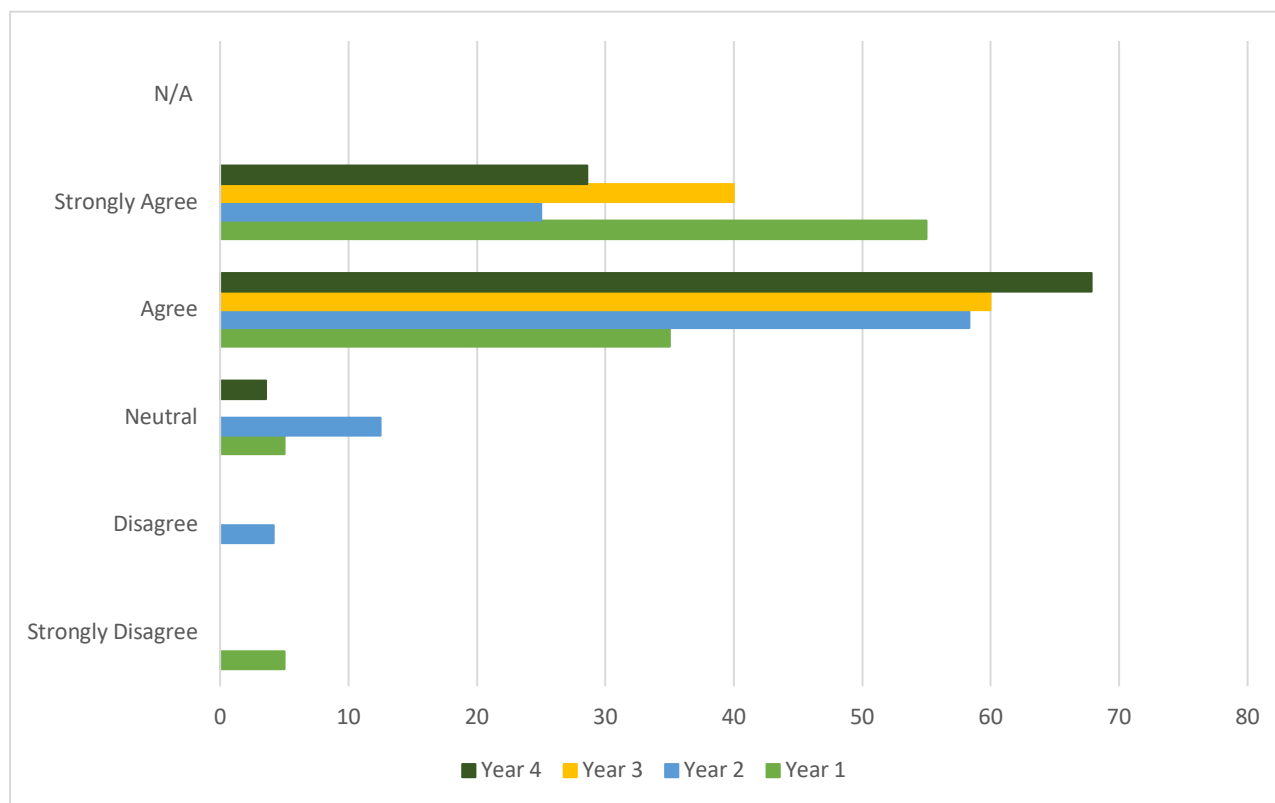
**Prerecordings.** Although many students appreciated both prerecorded lectures and assignment explanations (because these allow the flexibility to return to them at one’s leisure), others thought they took up too much time and preferred synchronous lectures with engaging activities built into them. Seventy-eight percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that assignment explanations were useful to them. However, there were some who found the need to watch these prerecordings an unnecessary addition to an already dense workload. Lesson

recording utility was supported by 68%, though this is notably lower than the assignment explanations. Comments from third- and fourth-year students stood out, with a startling 14% strongly disagreeing with the usefulness of prerecordings for lessons. This could indicate that the instructional needs of first- and second-year students are quite different from upper-year students, who might be more self-efficacious.

**Breakout Rooms.** The survey results noted resounding support for breakout rooms (see Figure 1); 93% agreed or strongly agreed that breakout rooms allowed for collaboration, engagement, and sharing thoughts and ideas with peers. Many students commented that they loved breakout rooms, appreciated being able to work more closely with other students, and found them useful as a forum for refining thoughts and ideas, especially from readings, with peers. This is counteracted by voluntary comments in the survey in which some students did not hold back their opinions on breakout rooms. Some wanted to break out of them immediately because they found they “wasted time” (Third-year student); others took issue when instructor directions were perceived as unclear. They stated they could tolerate breakouts only with strong, built-in accountability for every student in the breakout room. There were also comments regarding the inaccessibility of the instructor during breakout room time.

**Figure 1**

*Student Responses to “There Were Opportunities for Me to Collaborate With My Peers Through Breakout Groups”*



**Cameras on? Cameras off?** Many students indicated that they felt having cameras on kept them present in the class; 68% agreed or strongly agreed that seeing fellow students on screen during synchronous class time was important to their learning. Others disagreed and commented that having a camera on was intrusive or an infringement on privacy. Several noted that it was distracting to see fellow students doing other things. One third-year student commented:

Additionally, being at home is distracting and there was always an inner fight to not try and multitask, which was difficult to fight against. I would often see people doing their hair, makeup, exercising, laughing, being on their phones, etc. We would not do this in a classroom setting so I think we did not learn as much as we would have if we were in person instead of online.

Conversely, many students saw having cameras on as a student responsibility as it provided evidence that one was actually attending and attentive. Also, having cameras on helped with peer connection, engagement with learning and feeling like part of the community. Interestingly, these students also argued that not being on camera, saying it was too easy to become preoccupied with other things. “I believe that the usage of cameras is a necessity to hold a better class” (Fourth-year student).

### **Our Conclusions: Pedagogy**

There is power in this pandemic disruption; in the push to be exceptionally selective with our pedagogy, we have built a new and improved skill-set that we can access at any time. Many of these new strategies and insights have been gleaned through our attention to the student lens; they will inform, expand, and refine our pedagogical toolbox. In light of what we have learned via this study of the student lens, we believe that the most significant takeaways for postsecondary instructors, like us, are as follows:

- Wherever possible, if classes are online, synchronous is strongly preferred over asynchronous; synchronous classes feel familiar, more like the prepandemic classroom, and are effective as long as breaks and varied strategies are embedded.
- For synchronous classes, students strongly urged instructors to settle on one LMS and use it consistently, with a lean toward using LMS-based apps rather than external ones.
- Prerecorded videos, which can be asynchronously viewed by students, might be better used in giving descriptions of assignments, not as a replacement for lessons.
- If breakout rooms are used, students have suggested that directions, including task and time, must be clearly outlined; strategies must be put in place so that everyone in the breakout room is held accountable for its efficacy.
- At the very least, having cameras on should be a requirement for everyone at certain times; there is contestation about how long and when, but some individual discretion seems to be key.

As we move forward into further unknowns, we need a flexible, expanded, and well-equipped pedagogical toolbox.



## **Content**

### **What We Did: Course Content Considerations**

Adapting typical course content into an online format was another strategy we used to modify learning experiences in the emergent online environment. We recognized that we were unable to cover content in an identical way as in a face-to-face class (Hege, 2011; Ruth, 2006). By analyzing and focusing on the essential learnings for each course, we determined how topics would be covered and the depth to which we could delve into them (Coman et al., 2020; Marinoni et al., 2020). These content decisions were subject to external factors such as time constraints, the challenges inherent in online discussion, and technology issues. Some strategic adaptations to the overall curriculum content load were made by adjusting reading lists and independent work as well as triaging content between blended, synchronous, and asynchronous learning times. We also recognized that our opportunities for hands-on experiences with the content were limited at best, so we sought ways to provide alternate active learning elements (Marinoni et al., 2020; McGowan, 2021). Though students never see the inner workings of instructor decision-making, this year instructors found themselves more frequently adapting content with the aim of benefitting the overall course objectives and experience.

### **Course Content Concerns**

Our situation was not unique; other postsecondary institutions also found that reproducing content in a way parallel to prepandemic times was a struggle (Coman et al., 2020). It has been recognized that teaching during the pandemic often focused more on the theory as the practical components were difficult to integrate (Marinoni et al., 2020). Hege (2011) mentions there is a great “temptation simply to replicate as nearly as possible the traditional classroom model” in the online classroom (p. 2). Taking what was fully taught in-person and transitioning it to the pandemic online learning environment was a significant challenge for instructors who wanted to maintain content integrity and rigor as well as consider the preparation for students’ careers. Instructors also reflected on the amount and depth of course content in this emergent online environment and some adaptations were needed (Hege, 2011). According to Marinoni et al. (2020), only “two percent of HEIs [higher educational institutions] reported that teaching and learning is not affected” by COVID-19 (p. 23). Given that content is one of the basic constructs and building blocks of postsecondary learning, in these pandemic times, instructors were forced to contemplate the extent to which they make adaptations to their course content.

### **Findings**

In terms of amount, depth, and understanding of course content, first-year students indicated the highest satisfaction overall whereas third year students indicated more dissatisfaction overall. This may be related to the amount of workload, professional expectations, and heavier course content in education-specific training courses as students move from their first 2 years into their professional terms beginning in third year. The most positively answered question overall by students in all 4 years was “I have a good understanding of the course content.” Fourth-year students responded with 89% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they had a good understanding of the content. It is statistically significant that over 30% of our students chose neutral or N/A for some content area questions. This could be attributed to the fact that

some students did not feel knowledgeable about actually rating questions related to content or were unsure where to place their varied experiences.

Two distinct themes emerged from our student survey responses: amount of overall content in the course as well as comments on assigned readings. We must note that students do not inherently know the course content or amount needed for each course as they are indeed the students. The student lens on this topic is thus a perception of what one feels is necessary and appropriate for his/her education and growth at that level. The students will not experience the same course fully in-person with which to compare and contrast this aspect of content.

### ***Amount of Course Content: The Students Speak***

In the Likert scale survey responses, approximately two-thirds of students indicated that the course content presented was appropriate (see Figure 2).

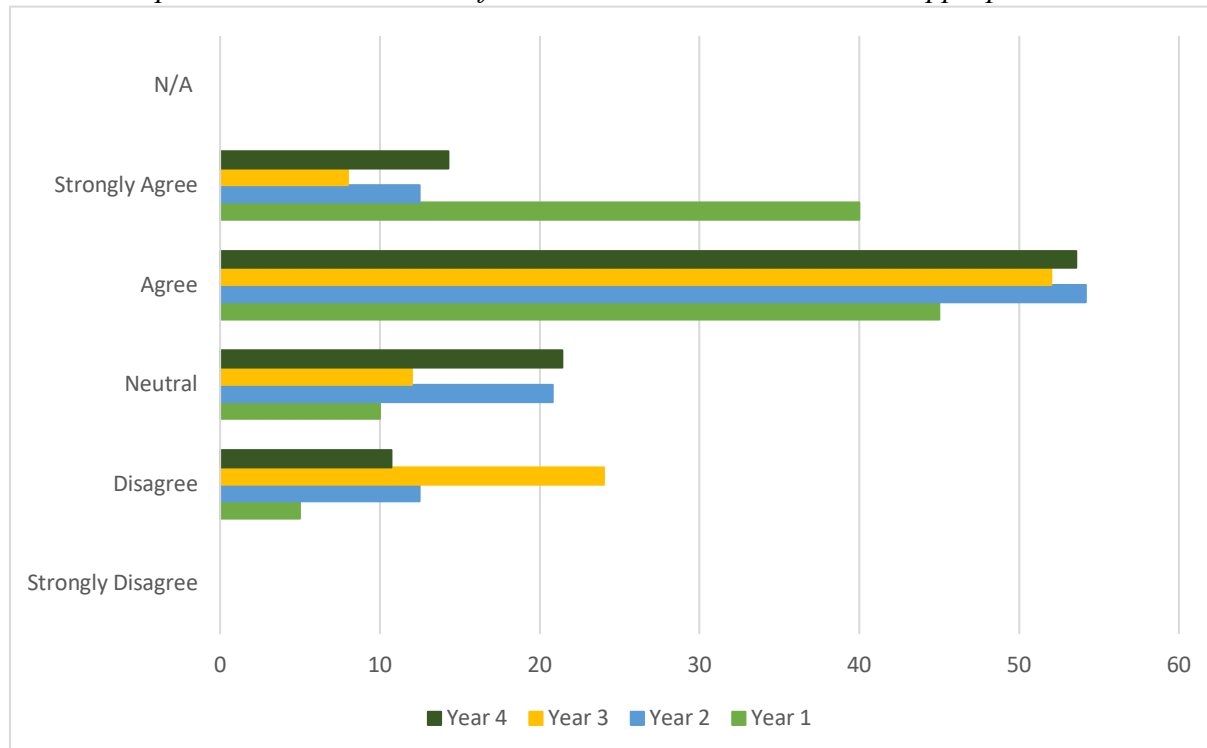
I felt that the professors knew what would be attainable for us to do while trying to re-arrange our lives to fit online. They did not set goals for us that were impossible yet they still challenge us to learn as much as possible. (Fourth-year student)

However, in the open-response section many students indicated they felt overwhelmed with the amount of content. First-year students were the anomaly, with 85% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the amount of content. One possible explanation is this is all they have known in their postsecondary studies. One-quarter of third-year students (in their first of two rigorous professional years) felt that the amount of content was not appropriate, whereas 5 to 12% of first-, second- and fourth-year students responded in the same way. We must also consider a small minority of open responses, but nonetheless important to note, regarding students that mentioned there was not enough content. These were few but notable and emerged in the third- and fourth-year student open responses. These students worried about missing content due to the online format and feeling compromised in the preparation for their career.

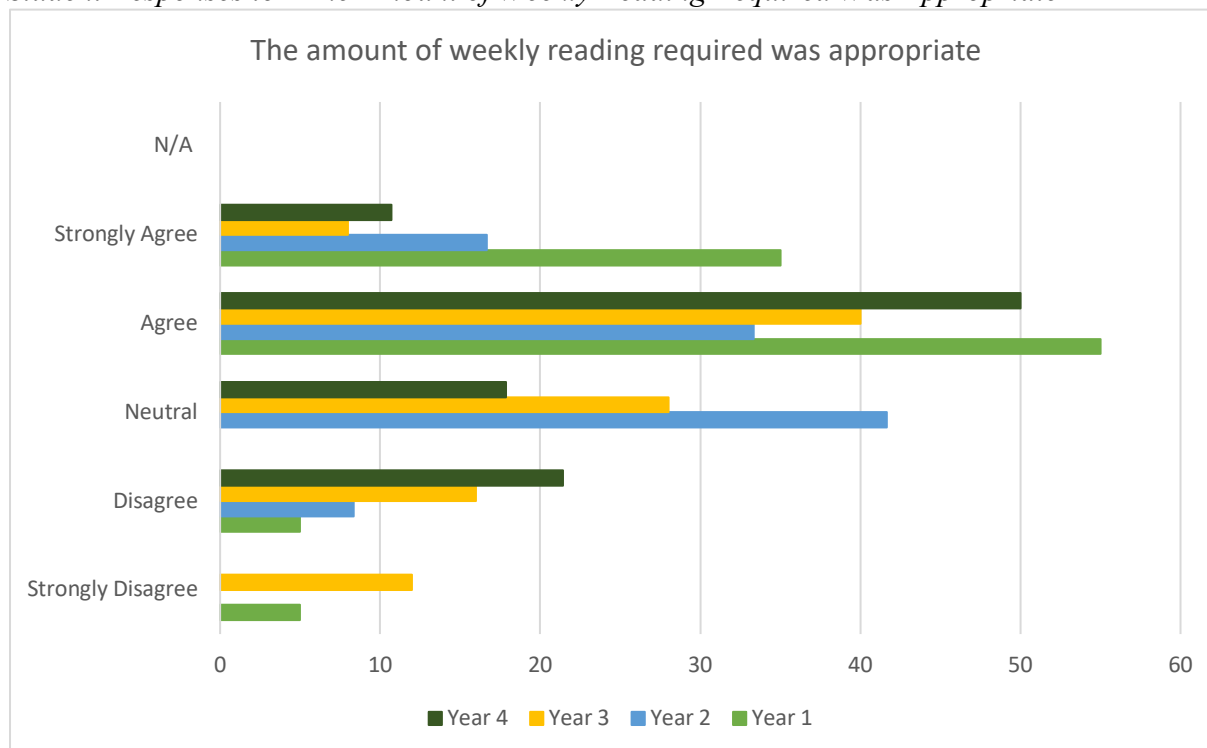
### ***The Delicate Balance of Course Readings***

Of particular note with students in the area of content was the appropriateness of course readings. Approximately one-quarter to one-third of students in their third or fourth year responded negatively, with disagree or strongly disagree (see Figure 3). In three out of the four years, it was the highest disagree/strongly disagree response as well as the lowest agree/strongly agree of all the survey questions in the content section. While instructors made strategic adjustments to the reading lists, it is clear from the student perspective that the abbreviated amount of readings still felt onerous, with comments like “the reading material was an area I struggled to find time for,” “I felt like I was always doing readings,” “I felt like teachers were piling on extra readings,” and “I am not sure what a regular third year would look like, but it felt like I was always doing readings; with all the readings, I found it difficult to retain much of the information I read” (Third-year students).

**Figure 2**  
*Student Responses to “The Amount of Course Content Presented Was Appropriate”*



**Figure 3**  
*Student Responses to “The Amount of Weekly Reading Required Was Appropriate”*



### ***Pandemic Effects on Course Content***

Open responses indicated insight into students' abilities to concentrate on and participate with content due to the pandemic situation. Some felt that their ability to consume the content was affected by a staggering amount of computer time demanding mental focus for long periods. Others felt their overall mental health was affected by the COVID-19 situation and this limited their overall capacity to manage course content. One second year student stated, "I know that most instructors included less content than usual, but it still felt like a lot and was very overwhelming."

### **Our Conclusions: Course Content**

Course content, being the crux of our student learning and experience, is a major factor for instructors' reflection in, and possible adaptation to, the emergent pandemic online environment. We recognized the value of student responses as these perceptions can help instructors envision the amount and depth of content for optimal student learning. In light of what we have learned via this study of the student lens, we believe that the most significant takeaways for postsecondary instructors, like us, are as follows:

- Although there were varied student responses, the ideal amount of content for an online or blended course is not significantly different than it was in pre-COVID-19 classes.
- Students felt that a 3-hour class length is too long to effectively absorb content in an online setting; breaking learning time apart into two smaller classes would allow for greater student concentration and reflection on the content.
- Careful selection of readings is essential in terms of length, manageability, and follow-up, ensuring readings are not viewed as a waste of time.
- Instructors should avoid perceived content-based busy work and, rather, identify and focus on the deep and essential learnings for the course.
- Opportunities to discuss the content significantly impacted students' understanding and application of the material; instructors should plan for ongoing discourse on readings to deepen understanding and prompt reflection.
- Instructors should seek out innovative ways to help students connect with the content and increase engagement.

Aspects of course content will directly impact students and must be considered by instructors in all learning scenarios, especially times of change.

## **Connection**

### **What We Did: Connection Considerations**

Building relationships and creating a classroom community is vital to being an effective teacher (Garza, 2020) and has been a focus and goal of our education program. As instructors, we were concerned how the transition from face-to-face learning to online learning might impact relationship building with, and among, our students (Dolan et al., 2017). Building relationships positively impacts student achievement and engagement (Dolan et al., 2017) causing us to examine our practices in order to ensure this occurred in online learning environments, as well. One of the main areas of student dissatisfaction with online learning was the lack of teacher

presence (Garza, 2020; Martin, 2019); thus, it felt necessary to modify our practices in order to nurture encouraging and supportive online social communities (Dolan et al., 2017). In an effort to build relationships with, and among, the students in our education classes, we utilized techniques that increased connectivity in an unconnected time. Instructors made thoughtful choices in selecting LMSs that created opportunities for synchronous instruction and small group collaboration, with the goal of increased student engagement (Martin, 2019).

## Findings

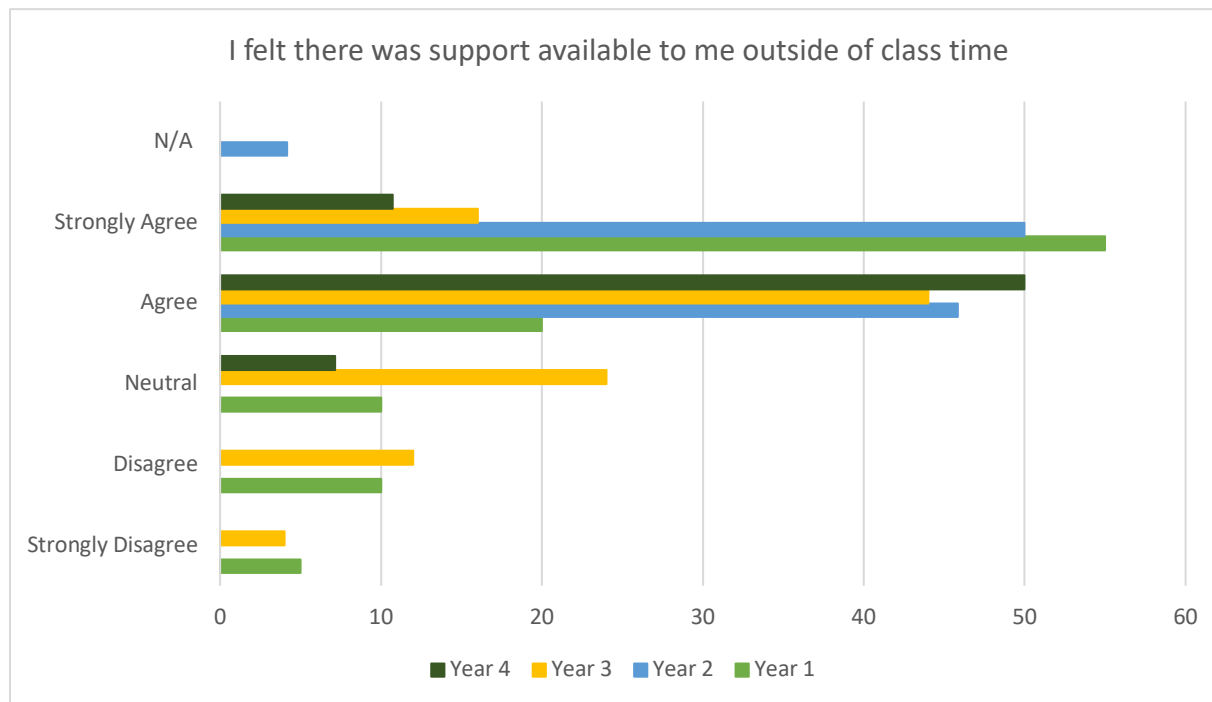
### *We ARE the Village: Instructor Responsibility*

This past year has reinforced the old adage that *it takes a village to raise a child*. Survey results indicated that never was this concept more significant than during a pandemic. Student comments clearly demonstrated the importance of connection and relationship building throughout their online learning experience. More specifically, students often commented on the role of the instructor in creating connections through course delivery and availability outside of class time. The survey results highlighted the requirement that, for students to even begin combatting feelings of isolation, connections needed to be created. The onus was often placed on the instructor to construct a learning environment that created connections between student to teacher and student to student. One second-year student said, “I have nothing but praise for our instructors and their ability to accommodate our needs. They were also readily available to connect outside of class, [where] they made every effort to efficiently answer our questions in a timely manner,” This comment is supported by Figure 4, which shows that over 70% of fourth-year students, 60% of third-year students, 95% of second-year students, and 75% of first-year students felt positively supported out of class time.

This research highlighted the assertion that during the shift to online learning, WE, the instructors, became the proverbial village for creating and maintaining connection. A common theme throughout the survey was the students’ pervasive feeling of disconnection ultimately leading to frustration with online learning. Our results indicate that these feelings of displeasure with online learning differed from year to year. For example, results from first-year (34%) and second-year (29%) students, whose learning was solely online, expressed dissatisfaction with online learning. Despite having a blended delivery format of synchronous and asynchronous classes, 44% of third-year students and 14% of fourth-year students felt a disconnect from their peers and faculty. Student comments reinforced the challenge of being an online learner regarding relationship building and they stressed the importance of connection-making as an instructor responsibility.

**Figure 4**

*Student Responses to “I Felt There Was Support Available to Me Outside of Class Time”*



### ***Seeing is Believing: The Interactive Aspect of Connection***

Teaching is about building connections with peers, instructors, and the community in order to create engaging and thoughtful learning opportunities. Through synchronous and a blended delivery of on-campus courses, students appreciated that instructors were able to have face-to-face conversations with students. Our results showed that the use of synchronous class time, versus asynchronous, positively impacted the students' connection with peers and instructors, which translated in their learning. In fact, 72% of all students indicated that synchronous class time provided them the opportunity to build connections with other students. Due to the variety of teaching methods and strategies used in both synchronous and in-person courses on campus, students from first to fourth year agreed and strongly agreed that they were able to collaborate with their peers. The pedagogical approaches used in all courses had a direct correlation with students' sense of connection and community. For example, when breakout rooms were used with set groups, clear expectations and time frames, the quality of relationship-building was effectively facilitated. Results indicated that postsecondary students at all levels of their program need to feel support both in class and outside of class time. The data articulated that in all cohorts, over 70% of students agreed or strongly agreed that support was available to them outside of class time. Unique to our third- and fourth-year students, community-building also occurred since students were able to see each other weekly, in-person. Survey results indicated that 83% of third- and fourth-year students believed that the use of in-person class time impacted their feelings of connection and community. "The use of in-person class was great for relationship building and classroom community because it was such a nice feeling to see everyone in person and connect face to face" (Fourth-year student).

## **Our Conclusions: Connection**

Avenues for connection have been the most dramatically adapted in the emergent pandemic online environment. In response to what we viewed in this study of the student lens, we believe that the most significant takeaways for postsecondary instructors, like us, are as follows:

- Building community and connection within our classes is viewed by students as a must instead of an option.
- Instructors are seen as responsible for creating an optimal online learning environment for building connection.
- The ability to build relationships with colleagues and instructors through synchronous class time and varied learning opportunities increases the feeling of support and commitment to the course content and pedagogy.

It was clear that student engagement and motivation were positively correlated to the building of community and connection. As one fourth-year student stated, “Community is everything in teaching and that connection needs to be established” (Fourth-year student).

Looking forward, instructors would benefit from a consistent plan for varied, frequent and timely strategies to build and allow for increased connection and community within postsecondary classes.

## **Conclusion**

### **Results**

Student response to our pandemic shift in pedagogy, content, and connection was understandably mixed. While an appreciative sentiment was expressed for the effort put forth by instructors to contemplate and shift numerous teaching and learning aspects, other sentiments reverberated with frustration at some of the decisions made by instructors in this new and unanchored learning environment. For example, students were appreciative of the effort made by instructors to create engaging activities in synchronous and asynchronous situations, opportunities for student-to-student connection, and adaptations to course content. Nevertheless, some were frustrated by the usage of different LMSs, overwhelming demands on their time, and amount of content, readings, and assignments resulting in too much on-screen time.

The dichotomy in their thinking is not surprising when their previous conceptualization of school has limited bearing on this year’s teaching and learning experience. Seeking the normalcy of prepandemic, face-to-face class structure became the ultimate grail for all levels of students. In the study results, there was a real yearning from students for the return to connection on several levels: connection with content through experience, and most importantly, connection with their colleagues and instructors.

### **What Our Students Would Do**

When our students were asked to describe their ideal online or blended learning experience, they had a plethora of ideas. Most students, however, started with a caveat to their description. The caveat stated if they could choose between a fully face-to-face or blended learning experience, the majority would choose fully face-to-face. The rationale for this choice

focused on the perception that a superior educational experience would occur in a face-to-face scenario. Nevertheless, if a blended learning environment was necessary, they envisioned more synchronous or face-to-face time being utilized for collaboration, discussion, and interactive hands-on learning potentially supported with asynchronous being utilized to introduce theoretical and content concepts in combination. This combination could then alleviate the need for long class times, allowing instructors and students the opportunity to delve deep into the content and its application. Our students also envisioned how to create relationships in a blended format. They put forward that relationships could be enriched by dedicating informal and formal time to building connections with colleagues and instructors. For example, informal instructor–student check-ins and allocated community building time, either in breakout rooms or with a full class, could be combined with more formal, purposeful time focusing on building connection through course-related activities such as engaged student participation and supportive group work. Finally, even though ideas about online or blended learning were put forward, students consistently situated this style of learning as suboptimal. This sentiment is expressed in the following quote, “Honestly, this is hard. Not being in person is terrible. There is no ideal online version of education” (Third-year student).

### **Postpandemic Teaching and Learning Future**

Going forward, one thing that has become clear from this study is that, even when the pandemic ends, its impact will continue to be felt. When we look at student responses to this pandemic experience, it appears that some past concepts of postsecondary teaching and learning that we deemed foundational have been shifted while others have remained steadfast. With this glimpse behind the curtain into the student experience, we ascertain that future students, in any learning environment, may benefit from

- blended learning scenarios where students are responsible for any assigned prework for class, leaving in-class time available for active and experiential learning;
- varied but easily accessible pedagogical approaches interspersed throughout each class and course;
- consistent choice of LMS across their postsecondary program;
- instructors continually assessing the amount of content to ensure knowledge, depth and preparation for students’ careers; and
- thoughtful consideration of the purpose of course readings and how those are woven throughout each course.

Within that same glimpse, we have also become aware that future students need

- face-to-face learning opportunities—the student voice strongly advocated for such schooling from all (pedagogical, content, and connection) perspectives;
- connection with instructors—students are seeking recognition and support of their learning needs from the instructor since learning is impacted without this connection;
- purposeful and intentional community and relationship building through informal and formal processes;
- hands-on experiences to engage with content in a deep and critical manner; and
- clear, communicated, and achievable expectations of course requirements.

The disruption to schooling since March 15, 2020, has been unprecedented. As we enter a post-COVID-19 era, we have become cognizant that, from disruption, new traditions can be



woven into a reimagining of education. Our students' collective voice will impact our action and our future teaching practices. We look forward to the time when we can mobilize this knowledge for our students and make impactful pedagogical, content, and connection changes.

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## CHAPTER 7

### “I Look Forward to This Class; It’s the Highlight of My Week”: Strategies for Teaching Successfully in a Crisis

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#### Abstract

During the unfoldment of the first COVID-19 remote courses, the initial focus was on engagement. How do we suddenly stimulate and sustain engagement for student teachers in a remote environment? This focus also included providing modelled experiences for student teachers that they could use in their practicums, be they remote experiences or mask to mask. But this focus quickly gave way to understanding engagement in a crisis remote environment which presented a very different set of needs and demanded different strategies. One significant factor emerged as paramount to student–teacher engagement and ultimately their success in the course: relationship building (Eikenberry, 2012; Feldman et al., 1999). Building instructor to teacher candidate and teacher candidate to teacher candidate relationships required cautious but deliberate entrance into the stages of social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Giri, 2009). This was accomplished by implementing a range of immediacy behaviours which successfully dispelled feelings of disconnection and isolation, which also enabled bonding and allowed teacher candidates to thrive. Four immediacy behaviours emerged as key engagement tools: self-disclosure (Song, 2019), social presence (Campbell, 2014), interactivity (Dixson, 2016), and teacher support (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). All of the four immediacy behaviours appeared to work in tandem to foster the relationship building and create a culture of intimacy; however, teacher candidates made it clear that self-disclosure was by far the most meaningful and powerful of the four.

*Keywords:* student engagement, relationship building, social penetration theory

#### Résumé

Lors du déploiement des premiers cours à distance de la COVID-19, l’accent initial a été mis sur l’engagement. Comment faire pour que les futurs enseignants s’engagent dans un environnement éloigné et comment encourager un intérêt constant ? Nous voulions également munir les futurs enseignants avec des expériences de modélisations qu’ils pourraient utiliser dans leurs stages, qu’il s’agisse d’expériences à distance ou de « masque à masque ». On a dû plutôt rapidement se fixer à comprendre ce qu’il sagissait véritablement de faire honneur aux engagements durant une crise pandémique dans un environnement d’apprentissage à distance qui enfin présentait un ensemble de besoins très différent et exigeait de différentes stratégies. Un facteur important est apparu comme primordial pour l’engagement des stagiaires et, en fin de compte, leur réussite dans le cours : l’établissement de relations (Eikenberry, 2012 ; Feldman et al., 1999).

L’établissement de relations entre instructeur et candidat à l’enseignement et parmi les candidats à l’enseignement nécessitait une entrée prudente mais délibérée dans les étapes de *la théorie de la pénétration sociale* (Altman et Taylor, 1973 ; Giri, 2009). Cela a été accompli en mettant en œuvre une gamme de comportements d’immédiateté qui ont réussi à dissiper les sentiments de détachement et d’isolement, et cela a permis de créer des nouveaux liens et aux candidats à

l'enseignement de s'épanouir. Quatre comportements d'immédiateté ont émergé comme outils d'engagement clés : la divulgation de soi (Song, 2019) ; présence sociale (Campbell, 2014) ; l'interactivité (Dixson, 2016) et soutien des enseignants (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Les quatre comportements d'immédiateté semblaient fonctionner en concurrence afin de favoriser l'établissement de relations et créer une culture d'intimité ; cependant, les candidats à l'enseignement ont clairement indiqué que l'auto-divulgation était considérablement la plus significative et la plus puissante des quatre.

*Mots clé:* participation des étudiants, établissement de relations, théorie de la pénétration sociale

## Prologue

These are our stories: Amanda's and Cathy's. We share these with you in the hopes you will find some of yourself in them and perhaps learn from our successes and mistakes. Stay safe.

## Part 1

### Cathy

March 2020. The first lockdown.

At the beginning of the pandemic, like many, I did not have a working knowledge of synchronous, asynchronous, or highflex teaching modes. Nor had I ever used Zoom. I was in the midst of teaching a Master of Education course as full-time faculty when the pandemic hit. I had to pivot overnight to continue my course and sent out the following email to my students:

Greetings, as we discussed in class on Wednesday, the possibility of COVID 19 affecting our class has become a reality. This is most unfortunate but we will persevere. Our time together face-to-face has been so very rewarding and enriching, I know it will buoy us through the last three classes. We will yet be able to view all of the final multimodal creations and learn from each others' creativity and intellectual prowess.

We muddled through and actually felt proud for successfully transposing the final assignment into a digital form and finishing the course during an emergency situation. But then what? I had another course to teach during summer session in four weeks time.

My faculty talked at length about online student engagement. Many differing opinions ensued. Research led me to Martin and Bolliger (2018), who describe student engagement as a student's psychological investment in learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge, skills, or crafts that academic work should promote. But this begged the question: What is psychological investment and how do I foster it? Further investigation led to Chickering and Gamson (1989) who suggest a seven-principle framework to support online student engagement:

1. Provide instruction that increases contact between the student and the teacher;
2. Students work collaboratively;
3. Students use strategies that promote active learning;
4. Teacher provides feedback promptly;
5. Student spends quality time completing tasks;
6. Teacher sets high standards for student achievement; and
7. Needs of each student is supported by the teacher.

This framework touched on central components of teaching that resonated with me, particularly the collaboration, prompt feedback, and the need for support. Martin and Torres (2016) added yet another component that I felt was even more significant—meaningful involvement—which included developing a relationship with the school community, staff, peers, instruction, and the curriculum. Martin and Torres predict these relationships can be achieved by including behavioural engagement, emotional/social engagement, and cognitive engagement. I found these possible factors intriguing, but the how still eluded me.

Hoping for more concrete examples of online engagement and further instruction in Zoom competency, I registered for several seminars offered by the university. However, I was somewhat surprised and quickly became frustrated when the message delivered by technicians was all about control. Turn off everything in settings so that only you have the ability to screen share. Set up a waiting room and only admit students one at a time to all classes. Don't use breakout rooms because you won't know what they are doing in there! I explained to the technicians that these instructions might be appropriate for first-year university students with lecture size classes of 200 but not for teacher education classes. My classes were modelled on the theories of Lev Vygotsky and John Dewey. I needed my students to develop control themselves, experience creativity, and initiate meaningful discourse.

I was finally granted a private session with the lead technician. I learned how to create different kinds of breakout rooms and within those spaces, allow the students to screen share and use some elements of creativity on whiteboards (e.g., graffiti, time lines, brainstorm pages, and graphic organizers). I also found out how to share videos from YouTube, use Jamboard, and create amusing polls and surveys. I was encouraged. This would be engaging, right? Then I started hearing reports about 3-hour classes being too long for students to remain focused. I had to rethink my content to reduce screen time. Prioritize. What really mattered in my courses? I had always used a personal check-in with my students, but maybe now there wasn't time. Some instructors were suggesting lecturing for 1.5 hours and then letting the students work through the rest of the content on their own with the option of checking in. My upcoming course was the very first course in our Master of Education program. It was a significant course in the program and would also prepare me for my Bachelor of Education courses to follow. The primary focus of this upcoming master's course was relationship building achieved through narrative inquiry. The results of the course had always been strong bonding between students, deeply personal meaningful reflection, and a positive launch into a new phase of learning. Could the engagement experiences I was learning about help me achieve these same powerful results in a remote environment? Would these also be applicable in the Bachelor of Education program?

Throughout this interval of time, even as I struggled to grasp the intricacies of remote teaching and learning I was secretly relieved to be at home. Sitting alone at my computer in a quiet house, not being allowed to go anywhere was my blessing. Earlier in the year, in January, my husband had fallen off the roof and suffered two brain hemorrhages. Three weeks before COVID-19 hit Ontario, he had brain surgery. Now he was recuperating at home with a walker, taking too many medications to count, and needed constant supervision. He mostly slept. It gave me time to work with the university technicians, read up on online strategies, but mostly time to just be still. He had survived and I needed time to process what we were going through. I didn't know if he would fully recover. Learning about remote teaching was a welcome distraction. This was something productive and constructive I could do for my students and myself.

## Amanda

I, on the other hand, was quite familiar with Zoom when the pandemic hit, having used it to bring guest speakers into the elementary school where I work full-time as a teacher librarian and student-success teacher. I had a comfort with technology as it had been an integral part of my life through my teenage years into adulthood. My school board had transitioned to the cloud-based Google platform years before, and I had taken and taught several online courses. In the evenings, I taught several teacher-education courses as a part-time instructor, but even with my confidence and experience in digital formats, instructing teacher candidates in a remote environment was daunting. How could I facilitate and engage students in arts instruction—specifically drama or dance—without teaching in a face-to-face setting?

While preparing for my teacher education classes neither did I share Cathy's peace of mind or stillness. Every member of my six-person household was either teaching or learning online at the same time. The logistics of internet bandwidth, organizing devices with working cameras, and finding a quiet place to think and teach from was challenging. The stress in my new teaching environment (home) was palpable and the students in my classes also were experiencing challenges in their learning environments (home). The solution I found was setting aside time to devote to careful planning and creating slides with content that could speak for itself if technology failed. During class time, my family made every effort to support me by respecting that I needed quiet and focus. It was definitely challenging and often looked like a three-ring circus.

## Part 2

### Cathy

May, 2020. Teaching the first remote courses during COVID-19.

As the weather warmed, my first spring courses began. Grief, fear, loneliness, and finally exhaustion were the primary emotional states I witnessed in my students. Their lived experiences were far beyond a need for mere engagement in online learning. The students were in crisis mode. Tears were a common occurrence. Robbed of their socialization opportunities, I discovered my students needed time to talk, and not just about course materials. I opened my class 30 minutes early so students could come online and just sit together and get to know one another. However, issues with internet service, poor rural connections, low bandwidth, computer crashes, Zoom log-in denials, and sheer confusion caused some students' anxiety levels to soar, so often the Zoom meetings were opened one or two hours before class to ensure connectivity. Acknowledging how the students were feeling and allowing time for personal check-ins was a necessity overriding any need to explore a few more minutes of course content. The seriousness of our circumstances also demanded some levity in class. I started collecting hilarious gifs from movies to put into my PowerPoints. All of these experiences helped, but it became evident that due to the lockdowns and social distancing, the students still felt isolated and disconnected—from everything. We needed to build relationships (Eikenberry, 2012; Feldman et al., 1999).

### Social Penetration Theory

While desperately searching for engaging online strategies, I happened upon social penetration theory (SPT; Altman & Taylor, 1973; Giri, 2009) and the corresponding immediacy

behaviours that enable students to move through the SPT stages. Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor first presented SPT in their book *Social Penetration: The Development of Interpersonal Relationships* (1973). The theory suggests four stages of social penetration that vary in levels from casual to intimate through dimensions of breadth and depth. SPT is also known as the “onion theory” as it compares relationship building to peeling back the layers of an onion (Mangus et al., 2020, p. 376). Taylor and Altman (1987) state that SPT focuses on interpersonal behaviours “occurring in social interaction and the internal cognitive processes that precede, accompany, and follow relationship formation” (pp. 258-259). Relationship formation was exactly what we needed. The first stage in SPT is “orientation,” where individuals share a small part of themselves. The next layer to be penetrated is the “exploratory affective exchange” layer through which communication becomes richer. This is accomplished by sharing more personal experiences and vulnerability. In the third layer called “affective change” and the fourth layer, known as “stable exchange,” communication is more intimate, friendships are formed, and trust is established (Taylor & Altman, 1987, p. 259).

Immediacy behaviours refer to verbal and nonverbal communication behaviours that reduce social and psychological distance between people (Andersen, 1979). In face-to-face classes, teachers employ behaviours such as using humor, eye contact, smiling, reducing physical distance, and addressing students by name. With the growth of popularity of online courses, even prior to COVID-19, research was attending more closely to various communication styles, particularly teacher immediacy behaviours in online learning environments. (e.g., Ghamdi, Samarji, & Watt, 2016; Gunter, 2007; Song et al., 2016; Tu & McIsaac, 2002). Immediacy behaviours for online asynchronous instruction includes changing font style, colours, and capitalizing words to depict emotion, using emojis, downloading imagery and pictures, using friendlier tones in written language, and finally, self-disclosure (Dixson, 2017). As COVID-19 instruction was remote, I could utilize immediacy tactics used in online instruction and some tactics used in face-to-face instruction. Interestingly, Taylor (1968), who originally wrote about SPT, identified self-disclosure as the major immediacy behaviour needed to penetrate the stages of SPT and establish relationships within the class.

I discovered, whether building instructor-to-teacher candidate or teacher candidate-to-teacher candidate relationships, cautiously but deliberately entering the stages of social penetration made an enormous difference. Four immediacy behaviours emerged as engagement tools: self-disclosure (Song, 2019), social presence (Campbell, 2014), interactivity (Dixson, 2016), and teacher support (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). All of the four immediacy behaviours appeared to work in tandem to foster the relationship building, create a culture of intimacy, and successfully dispel feelings of disconnection and isolation.

## Self-Disclosure

Song et al.’s (2019) study on online postsecondary learning stated that one out of five students searched online for information about their teacher, which implied that “students have a desire to want to know about their teacher” (p. 453). Students knowing more about their teacher would be the first step in building a healthy relationship whereas a general lack of information about their teacher could “negatively affect teacher–student relationship and potentially learning outcomes as well” (p. 453). Teacher self-disclosure entails a sharing of personal information that makes the teacher relatable and human. Another way to view self-disclosure is to consider it storytelling, which according to Bowman (2018) is a primal need in all cultures and has been since humankind started communicating. In its basic form, I share a story about me and you



share a story about you. The degree of the personal sharing that is revealed, (e.g., information, relationships, fears, hopes, desires, mistakes, regrets) determines the level of intimacy established. According to Taylor (1968) the amount of time, or breadth of the sharing, will also contribute to the stage of the relationship obtained.

Knowledge of SPT and the immediacy tools drove my course forward. I felt I was helping my students. In my personal world, my husband continued to improve. He slept less and less during the day and slowly his medications were reduced. CAT scans were scheduled less often. He abandoned his walker. I started gardening to get out of the house and out of my head.

### **Part 3**

#### **Amanda**

Fall 2020. Approaching the second lock down for COVID-19.

I was working out of my office at school when I received the call. My 6-year-old daughter, who was running outside at recess, had coughed. Since this was a symptom of COVID-19, both my daughter and her older brother were sent home immediately. This also meant their older siblings were pulled from school, as was my spouse, who was also a teacher. We all piled into the car in search of the local COVID-19 testing site that would give us the fastest results so the children could return to school and we could return to work. Fortunately for us, we received our results in 48 hours, but this would not be the only time this would happen. COVID-19 testing became a regular, frustrating, and rather unsettling occurrence.

The environment at my school was sombre. The teaching staff, cleaning staff, and administration were highly stressed. I began to wonder how I could possibly motivate teacher candidates who had their in-person learning experiences cut short. I wondered how I could build community for young learners who had the option to turn off their cameras. Would teacher candidates do the same?

Working with the children I did discover that humour, flexibility, and empathy were significant positive factors. I suspected these would be just as important in teacher education. I also learned that engagement comes from active experiences. Students needed to move and speak, but how could I accomplish this with adult learners?

#### **Cathy**

I was now teaching Bachelor of Education courses. I thought the M.Ed. courses I had already taught would prepare me. Unfortunately, it didn't help as much as I had hoped. The B.Ed. students were more fearful, more intimidated. Mine was their first course in a new degree program cloaked in uncertainty. Everything was new: learning to teach, remote learning, Zoom and breakout rooms, being a student again, and being in a pandemic. All of the remote issues I experienced with my M.Ed. students reoccurred, but at least I was ready. We discussed possible technological glitches and what to do if one occurred: If you can't get into the meeting, if you get knocked offline, if I get knocked offline, if you can't turn on your video screen, and how to navigate a Zoom screen to find a breakout room.

As a faculty we struggled with practicum placements. Due to strong partnerships and many, many hours of negotiations by our remarkable field placement officer, our professional development schools still wanted and accepted teacher candidates. But when, we wondered, should we allow them to go into the schools? Although we prided ourselves on providing a first

day of school practicum experience, was this feasible? Was it fair to the associate teachers or the principals who were struggling to understand how to wear personal protective equipment and teach while social distancing? The teacher candidates also needed COVID-19 training prior to entering classrooms. We decided to postpone their entrance into the schools for a few weeks.

In my remote classroom I realized I had to build relationships with these students as quickly as possible. Miraculously, my husband was recovering well. So well in fact, he asked my daughter if he could be our 4-year-old granddaughter's kindergarten teacher in lieu of enrolling her in school during a pandemic. After all, though long retired, he was a primary specialist, who had taught kindergarten for 20 years. We worried about his energy levels but decided he had to decide for himself. We also knew there was a safety net, as I was teaching from home should anything go awry. My daughter and son-in-law agreed to remain in a closed bubble, which would allow our granddaughter to come to us on weekdays. So on the first day of school, our darling granddaughter, a rather precocious and imaginative child, arrived at our house in her new clothes with a snack packed and called my husband "Mr. Atta." She was our joy.

Class one began with self-disclosure. I talked about what was going on in my life including my husband's accident. I shared a picture of my granddaughter arriving for her first day of junior kindergarten. They all said, "Awwww." I also told one amusing story about something I messed up on the weekend. Messaging was all important—I am only human and so are you. Then I invited their stories. As I expected, their contributions were slow to evolve, but we had 10 weeks to get to know one another and build our intimacy. I was acutely aware of the fact I was their professor which put us immediately into a power relationship, so we needed time to build some trust. At first, they were mostly comfortable with saying something cryptic in chat or filling out Likert scales, value lines, polls, and amusing self-disclosure surveys. The engagement tools I first learned from the university technicians at the beginning of the pandemic were useful but kept intimacy on the surface. We needed to peel back the onion if I wanted them to feel like this course mattered, they mattered, and what they were going through mattered. So I persisted in telling them stories about me. Eventually, we talked about their trepidation regarding entering the schools as frontline workers. Approximately one-third of the students in our program were teaching remotely but they also experienced anxiety over their decision. Were they risking eventually not being hired for lack of face-to-face experience? Once the teacher candidates started their field day experiences (attending their professional development schools once a week, prior to practicum), I sent them into breakout rooms to discuss the differences they were experiencing between remote and face-to-face teaching. Here, they couldn't share their teaching stories enough.

As the course progressed, so did the depth of our stories. Vignettes about my granddaughter continually found their way into my classroom. Sometimes I shared a picture or video of her, as she was learning to read and that happened to be what I was teaching. Sometimes they shared stories with the class as well. Videos of my granddaughter learning to blend "a" and "t" or her reading her first onset and rime words were moments we could share as both teachers and colleagues. Sometimes the students shared pictures of their children as well. Occasionally, while I was teaching, my granddaughter would make her way into my office to tell me, "It's time for a break, gramma!" which my students found hilarious. Once she even sneaked up behind me as I was screen sharing and screamed "BOO." I jumped right out of my chair. My students laughed so hard they cried. One student wrote about this incident in her evaluation of my course as the best thing that happened during COVID-19 classes. This all mattered because it was real during a time that was surreal. Plus, we all needed to laugh, even at my expense. Consequently,

when my students' spouse, child, parent, or pet suddenly showed up in a class, we welcomed them. We asked them what was going on and welcomed those stories as well. Virtual environments became a more humane and comfortable space.

I also shared stories about mistakes I have made, regrets, and successes I have had in teaching. Students often thanked me for these stories as they felt they learned as much from my sharing my teaching stories as they did from their assigned readings. Some of these stories I used to tell before we were forced into remote teaching and learning, but it was clear the significance of them meant even more now. So I told more in this environment. The students shared that our classroom time felt personal and entering the class was comforting. One student wrote me, "I look forward to this class; it's the highlight of my week." My students emailed me frequently, far more than they did when I taught face to face. They shared their hopes and fears. This also assisted me to develop a social presence.

### **Social Presence**

As Web 2.0 online learning has progressed, so has the terminology, definitions, and expectations of an instructor's role. Picciano (2002) identifies the online instructor as having a telepresence, cognitive presence, or a teaching presence, whereas Campbell (2014) refers to teacher immediacy as a social presence. However it is identified, research has generally accepted that developing the social presence of an instructor can be established by initiating a variety of social behaviours (Lee & Nass, 2005). According to Kehrwald (2008), these behaviours or tactics create the feeling that a teacher is a real person. In his online study on social presence, Campbell (2004) sent out assignment reminders, brief feedback on homework submissions, prompts to stay involved on the discussion forums, explanations of grading, and general email messages intended to motivate the students to stay on task. Campbell claimed that increasing the social presence of an instructor resulted in "enhanced online discussion activity and higher test scores" (2004, p. 164). Tu and McIsaac (2002) suggest the instructor be expressive, convey feeling and emotions, and provide meaningful content.

Chronemics or aspects of time regarding messages also helps develop a social presence. For example, the response time for an email and the amount of time an instructor spends crafting messages indicated by length of response. Short responses can be perceived as hurried and not thought through (Tyler & Tang, 2003). Prompt and meaningful feedback on assignments and discussion posts is also considered a significant part of an instructor's social presence (Bonnell et al., 2008).

### **Cathy**

Technically, I started building my social presence with my students before my courses started. I sent a few emails prior to the opening of the course with explanations about what to expect. I sent short surveys of introduction, pictures of me and what I was currently working on, and some funny memes. I also opened my course sites earlier than usual and gave them access so they had more time to review the course content. All asynchronous classes were posted online and students were free to complete those classes whenever they had had time, even before the course started.

I recognized that my students' time was extremely limited due complicating factors such as their own children often being home with them, or they were caring for a parent who was suddenly living with them, or they were getting COVID-19 tests for the family. Under these

circumstances, their opportunities to work on assignments might only be on a Saturday morning. Hence, if they emailed me on the weekend, I answered them. If I was not near my computer I still responded to the email telling them where I was and that I would get back to them when I could. I had so many emails of thanks telling me that one small gesture meant so much. They understood I was not on call all the time, but they knew I was there and would help them soon.

### **Amanda**

I missed the personal connection with my students; the energy and connection that comes from social learning. The online format meant that one person could share at a time, and time did not allow for extensive interactive discourse. I started to pay closer attention to facial expressions, posture, and background visits by pets and family members, as well as which cameras were never on and those that ceased to be on. I started to reach out to students via email. The email content was simply a check in about how a student was feeling at this really difficult time. I usually shared a little piece of my own lived experience in those emails so that students understood that I was not checking in just as their teacher, but as a fellow human living through an unprecedented time in history.

If a student asked for an extension or reached out for help with something perhaps unrelated to our course, my response was always, “Of course, take the time you need” or “How can I support you?” During class one evening, I noticed that a student who normally was an active participant did not seem like themselves. During a break, I invited them to join me in a breakout room and simply asked if they were okay. I wanted them to know that I noticed. It turned out that they were struggling both personally and as a teacher candidate. We talked and shared stories and we both felt better for connecting.

### **Interactivity**

Interactivity moves beyond student engagement, which sometimes passes as busywork, into more demanding forms of thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and emotional involvement (Dixson, 2016). In her article addressing the crucial role the arts play in engaging learners, Sanders Evans (2020) highlights:

The arts have always engaged students in ways that traditional academic approaches do not. They instill the thrill of discovery, encourage risk taking, emphasize imaginative creation, help kids feel seen, and connect us—whether we’re in the same room or not. In this time of remote learning, that unique approach can unlock the levels of engagement needed for students to continue making progress. (p. 1)

The same can be said for teacher candidates attempting to shift their typically in-person learning experiences to an online approach.

### **Amanda**

I was teaching the Arts in and Around the Curriculum course for teacher candidates when I had to pivot into remote teaching. The course content focuses on primary, junior, and intermediate drama for six weeks and then dance for another six. This course typically begins with hesitant and nervous teacher candidates who are uncertain about what to expect. These feelings of uncertainty were only amplified by the shift to learning arts fundamentals in a virtual

environment. I scrutinized my drama strategies for ones that could work well online: tableaux (frozen pictures), thought tracking (thinking aloud in character), voice alley (whispering advice to a character), teacher in role (instructor going into role), choral speaking (creating and speaking text as a chorus, in solo, or in canon), writing in role (writing as someone else), and movement-based approaches (moving creatively).

It is through connected and active learning experiences that teacher candidates develop skills for effectively facilitating learning not only in the arts, but *through the arts*. Regardless of their comfort level with the subject matter, I felt the students needed to feel creative, particularly now. After the course, one student confessed, “I am not a very artistic or dramatic individual, but you made this class accessible and relatable for me and I thoroughly enjoyed myself every week during our time.”

In one example, preservice educators were asked to explore the perspective of Wangari Mathaai, environmental activist and the first woman in Kenya to win a Nobel Peace Prize. The lesson began with a read aloud of the story, *Wangari's Trees of Peace* by Jeanette Winter. The students learned of Wangari's return home to Africa and her discovery of a land void of trees due to deforestation. Wangari vows to do something about it and elicits the help of the women in her village. This empowers them to make their own earnings. But, Wangari faces trouble from the local investors and is imprisoned for fighting for what she believes in. I paused at this point and took the teacher candidates through a series of drama strategies to achieve deeper understanding of the text.

First, I used the “role on the wall” strategy to determine elements of Wangari's character, as well as how others viewed her (internal and external characteristics). In breakout rooms they created silhouettes of Wangari on whiteboards and filled the silhouettes with words, phrases, and pictures representing her thoughts and feelings. Next, the students were asked to imagine they were Wangari, who was just imprisoned, write *in role* as Wangari about their experiences, and determine whether they believed it is worth it to continue the work. In this exploration of activism and consequence the students wrote furiously- some by hand on scraps of paper and some digitally, but everyone was engaged. At the end of the timed writing session, the students were asked to select one word or phrase that stood out to them in their writing. One student volunteered to act as Wangari and listen carefully to the words of their classmates. One by one, educators turned on their microphones and read their selected word or phrase aloud such as, “I will not give up,” “I am brave,” or “I just can't keep going anymore.” At the end of experience, the “student in role” was asked to decide, based on what they have heard, whether they would continue planting trees upon their release from prison. They used evidence and examples from the phrases they heard to justify their decision. The students were highly engaged in the process. The results were stunningly powerful.

The power of this experience was that it positioned the students as active participants in the learning process. Not only were students asked to consume the story, they are asked to construct their understanding by taking on a perspective that may not be their own. The same could be said for strategies such as tableaux or thought tracking which supported the development of perspective but also the connection within the context of the virtual classroom.

In another example, teacher candidates were invited to consider the role of the parts of the human digestive system using tableaux and thought tracking. In virtual breakout groups, the students developed a tableau (frozen picture) representing key parts of the digestive system and represent them accordingly. After a virtual screen shot was taken, the candidates explored voice recordings that were placed with the associated tableau in the picture. Again, this strategy

required an understanding of perspective as students made statements such as “I am the mixer that mashes up the food!” (the stomach) or “I absorb all of the water and salts before getting rid of waste material” (large intestine). In-person use of tableau and thought tracking requires a tap on the shoulder, while this experience required participants to utilize technological skills. The collaborative exploration led to lots of laughter, active participation, and a solid understanding of the fundamental science concepts of the parts of the digestive system and their functions. The necessity of the creative process and the use of the arts as a vehicle to teach different subject areas continued to be significant even in a COVID-19 era.

## **Cathy**

I also implemented arts-based strategies as a source of interactivity in several Bachelor of Education courses. I went into role (with costume and props) to enliven our lesson on children’s literature and poetry. I led the students through a writing-in-role exercise regarding the Walkerton tragedy to gain an emotional grasp of the importance of clean water in a social science lesson, and had my students dance their spelling lesson on syllables. I had the students create digital graffiti walls to summarize group discussions and used digital representations of paintings from different cultures to initiate discussions. I used music to create meaningful land acknowledgements at the beginning of classes. Without a doubt, the strategies employed in the arts are pivotal for engaging learners of all ages, regardless of curriculum focus. But more importantly, during COVID-19, students needed to move outside of their own experience and try something new. They were grateful for the chance to be creative, have fun, laugh, move, express, and forget about the world for a while. The arts are interactivity and interactivity was, and is, necessary.

## **Teacher Support**

Teacher support is often associated with an instructor’s social presence, but in the circumstances of COVID-19 the demonstration of one primary emotion became paramount as a teacher support behaviour—the ability to care. The teacher candidates needed know that we cared about them, about what was happening to them both academically and personally, and about their future. “Your warmth and kindness,” emailed one student, “were felt even through the virtual classrooms you held with us, and I truly hope to meet you in person once we’re able to return to campus again.” Yet another student wrote in a classroom chat, “We always knew you cared about us and that made such a difference.” Interestingly, our research revealed very little supporting documentation regarding synchronous or asynchronous classes to support this observation. We found a few studies addressing teacher care as a teacher immediacy tool but these only involved elementary, middle, and high school students. For example, Klem and Connell (2004) and Connell and Wellborn (1991) both expounded on the need for teachers to demonstrate care and fulfill students’ basic psychological needs. As a result, we had to consider what actions we were practicing that demonstrated our caring attitude.

We realized active listening, especially if the students broke down and cried, mattered to them. Verbally empathizing and giving reassurances was highly significant. Additionally, actions we took regarding assignments such as lessening students’ workload (while still maintaining a high standard of expectations) and giving extensions on deadlines for assignments and posts without penalty was greatly appreciated by the students. We discovered group work outside of class time was very stressful for teacher candidates, so all group-work assignments were

executed in breakout rooms within the scheduled class time. This also ensured we were available as instructors to assist. One student wrote, “the before or after [synchronous time with the instructor] work periods worked well because they were similar to in-person class structures where a teacher would move between groups to provide individualized support.” We also learned to not just offer, but insist on, frequent short breaks with cameras off so students could relieve eye strain, get up and move, make tea, or as one student confessed, “go kiss her kids.” These were not significant changes to our courses but they were often mentioned by our teacher candidates. Their responses led us to believe we were on the right track even if control of the virus was not.

## Part 4

April 2021. Entering the third wave of COVID variants.

It has now been 16 months of COVID-19 life. In our faculties, we must prepare for what may happen in the fall. We live, as everyone, in a state of uncertainty. Yet we can reflect back and know that by utilizing self-disclosure, social presence, interactivity, and teacher support to penetrate a few layers of socialization, we can create a community of teacher candidates that thrive in a remote environment. We are confident enough with remote teaching and learning to face, if needed, many possible repeats of this experience and know it will succeed. We hope it does not come to that, but we are ready. We hope you are too.

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## CHAPTER 8

### **You Mean I Have to Learn Mathematics in a Pandemic? The Challenges and Successes Facing Preservice Mathematics Education Courses**

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#### **Abstract**

This chapter looks at how, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, one preservice teacher education program chose to change four mathematics education courses to a combination of asynchronous and synchronous work to address the stresses, negative conceptions, and lack of understanding of mathematics that learners brought to the mathematics courses. The difficulties posed by moving into a completely remote environment were increased by considering how to bring the supportive environment and hands-on experiences to this digital experience. Added to this challenge were the other pressures and stresses that coping with the pandemic would bring to individuals who were already stressed and unhappy about having to take a mathematics course. The changes to a remote learning experience made it imperative to carefully consider how to reach already upset learners and to support their understanding of mathematics while changing their views on the subject. The combination of videos for lectures and group problem-solving provided a supportive environment, in most cases, while also addressing the lack of flexible mathematics understandings that many of the preservice teachers had. Although the online context allowed for some benefits, there were still some notable deficits to the remote platform for learning about teaching mathematics.

*Keywords:* mathematics education, preservice education, remote teaching

#### **Résumé**

Ce chapitre examine comment, au début de la pandémie de la COVID-19, un programme de formation initiale à l'enseignement a choisi de changer quatre cours de mathématiques en formant des composantes asynchrone et synchrone afin de relever le défi (le stress, l'appréhension, le manque de compréhension) que les apprenants apportent au cours de mathématiques. Les difficultés posées par le déplacement à l'apprentissage à distance ont été aggravées par la question de comment faire pour apporter un environnement de soutien ainsi que des expériences pratiques au domaine numérique. À ce défi s'ajoutent les tensions associées à la gestion que la pandémie apporterait aux personnes déjà stressées et mécontentes de devoir suivre un cours de mathématiques en ligne. Les changements apportés par le déplacement à l'apprentissage à distance ont rendu impératif que nous considérons comment bien atteindre les apprenants déjà contrariés et d'offrir du soutien à leur compréhension des mathématiques tout en changeant leur point de vue sur le sujet. L'accouplement de discours et de résolution de problèmes en groupe fourni par vidéos a fait pour un environnement favorable dans la plupart des cas, tout en comblant le manque de souplesse en compréhension du sujet que de nombreux enseignants en formation initiale avaient. Bien que le contexte en ligne ait permis certains avantages, la plate-forme à distance pour l'apprentissage de l'enseignement des mathématiques présente encore des lacunes notables.

*Mots clé:* enseignement des mathématiques, formation initiale des enseignants, enseignement à distance

## Introduction

Teacher candidates tend to bring overwhelmingly negative perceptions about mathematics to preservice teacher education programs (Holm, 2018). Understandings, even of mathematics majors, tend to be very procedural in the beginning (Holm & Kajander, 2020; Kajander & Holm, 2013). Given that research has linked more specialized understandings of mathematics to student achievement (Baumert et al., 2010), considerations of how to increase mathematics for teaching knowledge in a teacher education program are vital to the planning of mathematics education courses. Research has shown that mathematics education courses can provide benefits for increasing these understandings when there is a focus on concrete representations and the mathematics knowledge for teaching (Kajander, 2010). Silverman and Thompson (2008) and others (e.g., Ball et al., 2008) have noted that mathematics for teaching is a subset of mathematics knowledge that includes ideas such as knowledge of curriculum and student misconceptions. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM; 2000), among others, has recommended teaching mathematics in a way that moves away from a traditional transmission model, so mathematics for teaching knowledge is imperative to be effective in these types of classrooms. A teacher would need to believe that the methods suggested by the NCTM are effective pedagogies in order to make use of them, as Wilkins (2008) has noted that the beliefs that a teacher holds about mathematics has an impact on the classroom practices used. Previous research has also shown that a focus on increasing knowledge of mathematics through models and manipulatives can have a positive effect on beliefs about teaching mathematics (Holm & Kajander, 2012), so carefully structuring mathematics education courses can have multiple benefits.

Due to these demands, teaching in mathematics education courses has proven to be a balancing act of shifting beliefs about mathematics, decreasing stress around the content, increasing positive feelings about mathematics, deepening knowledge of content, and educating on unfamiliar pedagogies in mathematics. To do this, the focus in my courses has traditionally been on building positive relationships with teacher candidates, bringing in activities and concrete materials to build understanding, and teaching through modelling effective teaching practices. The pandemic and switch to remote learning has afforded some opportunities to consider other pedagogies but also has presented some concerns about how to keep what educators already know helps in these types of classes.

In this chapter, I first look at the educational literature that underpins my course development and then discuss the context of the courses that I taught during the pandemic. Next, I describe each of the courses, the impact on the teacher candidates, and the changes made. Finally, I discuss my conclusions after having taught the four different courses over the past year in the pandemic. The pandemic itself added additional stressors to teacher candidates that would not normally affect their learning, but I focus this chapter on lessons related strictly to the teaching of mathematics education in a fully remote context.

## Literature

Mathematics teaching in elementary schools has been undergoing a shift from a traditional transmission model, where a teacher shows students what to do and then students

complete problems to practice the skills, in favour of a more constructivist-based pedagogy. Best practices in teaching (NCTM, 2000) have stressed that students learn mathematics better through a more social and exploratory method. In fact, the 2020 Ontario curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d.) has used these evidence-based practices as the basis of updates, ensuring that students learn the content through problem-solving and hands-on activities, while they develop an appreciation for the subject. The curriculum focuses on not only learning the skills, but also understanding why and how these ideas work through methods such as the use of manipulatives, models, and alternative procedures. Given that many teacher candidates have completed schooling in a more traditional paradigm in their mathematics classrooms (e.g., Holm, 2019; McNeal & Simon, 2000), this shift requires careful attention in a teacher education program.

Philipp (2007) noted that “beliefs might be thought of as lenses that affect one’s view of some aspect of the world or as dispositions toward action” (p. 259). In teaching, beliefs affect teaching choices (Wilkins, 2008), and research has shown that not accounting for beliefs can impede the effectiveness of the professional development in shaping mathematics practices (Handal & Herrington, 2003). Research into future mathematics teachers has shown that most enter a teacher education program with a belief that mathematics is simply about rules and procedures to be memorized (Grootenboer, 2008; Holm & Kajander, 2012; McNeal & Simon, 2000), so if they are to teach in a different way, they need to confront these beliefs and then revise them.

Within the shift in teaching pedagogy, more attention has also been paid to the type of mathematics knowledge that would be needed for teachers to enact these types of lessons in their classrooms. Ball and her colleagues (e.g., Ball et al., 2008) have viewed mathematics for teaching as specialized and have attempted to identify different areas within this broader umbrella. Their research has looked at ideas including understanding of students, curriculum, and content knowledge as separate facets within mathematics for teaching. Others, such as Silverman and Thompson (2008), have claimed that mathematics becomes knowledge for teaching only when it is linked to pedagogical choices and knowledge. Regardless of the definition, mathematics for teaching is something that is more than any learner studying mathematics would need to know (Ma, 1999).

The move to remote learning and the need to avoid three straight hours of online learning led to exploring the “flipped” classroom. Bishop and Verleger (2013) defined the flipped classroom as “interactive group learning activities inside the classroom, and direct computer-based individual instruction outside the classroom” (p. 5). They cautioned that this approach is not just reading outside of the classroom with class discussions but something more complex. In this environment, the students would learn the content on their own through a series of activities or videos and then in the classroom time, they apply the learning (Flipped Learning Network, 2014). In a mathematics classroom, this latter component could be accomplished through interactive activities and problem-solving. The Flipped Learning Network (2014) discussed four pillars to keep in mind to truly flip the classroom: flexible environment, learning culture, intentional content, and professional educator. Based on the research on mathematics for teaching, the most important idea from these pillars was to “help students develop conceptual understanding, as well as procedural fluency [by intentionally choosing the important content to] ... maximize classroom time in order to adopt methods of student-centred, active learning strategies” (Flipped Learning Network, 2014, para. 6). In their review of the literature, Bishop and Verleger (2013) concluded that the overall results of the research into the flipped classroom had positive benefits for students. Other research in mathematics specifically (Lumsden, 2020)

has suggested that the flipped classroom has benefits for many students, but should not be used consistently. Given the pressures of the pandemic and the need not to have extended online sessions, the flipped classroom presented the most promising model to use in the mathematics education courses that could potentially account for the mathematics education research in teacher knowledge and beliefs, as well as shifting pedagogies in mathematics teaching.

### Context

The courses discussed in this chapter were part of a teacher education program at Wilfrid Laurier University. In Ontario, the teacher education program occurs after an undergraduate degree in any other discipline. At Laurier, there are two cohorts of teacher candidates based on the grades that they wish to teach in the future: the primary/junior (Grades 3–6) cohort and the junior/intermediate (Grades 4–10) cohort, as well as both first-year and second-year teacher candidates within each cohort. Two mathematics education courses must be completed as part of the program. The primary/junior teacher candidates would take a primary (kindergarten–Grade 3) mathematics course in first year and a junior (Grades 4–6) mathematics course in second year. The junior/intermediate cohorts would take a junior (Grades 4–6) mathematics course in first year and an intermediate (Grades 7–10) mathematics course in second year. All teacher candidates can also take an optional elective in mathematics for teaching content. This chapter explores four courses within the program and the lessons learned through teacher candidate feedback and reflecting on the work of the teacher candidates.

The main goal of the courses was to maintain the community feeling and the conceptual-based work in the classes while making the move to a remote teaching environment. Three of the courses were mandatory, 10 weeks long, with each scheduled class being 3 hours. One was an elective course that was only 5 weeks long, with the scheduled classes being 3 hours. Table 1 gives the breakdown of the four courses. The next section looks at these courses, how they were set up, and the lessons learned for teaching mathematics. Courses B and C are combined in this discussion; they were both first-year courses and had similar content and reflections.

### Course Descriptions

Some basic tenets were consistent across all four courses. All courses emphasized feedback in the evaluated student work. The feedback could be applied, and then assignments could be resubmitted for additional feedback. The focus was on showing a growth in understanding related to both mathematics content and teaching mathematics. All courses required the submission of a math tasks assignment for each completed module that was evaluated to keep abreast of the teacher candidates' understanding of the mathematics content.

**Table 1**  
*Overview of the Four Courses Taught During the Pandemic*

| Course name | Type of course | Teacher candidates  | Year of program | Length of scheduled class time |
|-------------|----------------|---------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| Course A    | Mandatory      | Junior/intermediate | Second year     | 10 weeks/3 hr (30 hr total)    |
| Course B    | Mandatory      | Primary/junior      | First year      | 10 weeks/3 hr (30 hr total)    |
| Course C    | Mandatory      | Junior/intermediate | First year      | 10 weeks/3 hr (30 hr total)    |
| Course D    | Elective       | Open to all         | Either year     | 5 weeks/3 hr (15 hr total)     |

Each course also had a focus on creating community and building relationships with the teacher candidates. I made an effort to remember the names of the teacher candidates and use their names when speaking with them. Teacher candidates were encouraged to reach out whenever they encountered difficulties, and emails were responded to in a timely manner. Virtual office hours were scheduled every week, during which teacher candidates could drop in to discuss the course, share their teaching experiences, or ask for support and advice. The virtual office included a waiting room so teacher candidates could “line up” while giving them privacy to discuss issues without knowing who else was waiting or attending the office hours.

All the videos were constructed using common materials. An iPad and Apple Pencil were used to create most of the videos using the screen record feature to show how to use different manipulatives and explain content areas. When giving a lecture-type lesson, voiceover on PowerPoint was used to create videos. All videos were then housed in a private YouTube channel to allow teacher candidates access.

For ease of the discussion in this chapter, the two types of course content are called *asynchronous*, for time that teacher candidates completed work independently from online modules, and *synchronous*, for time when they would log into an online platform, Zoom, at a scheduled time and work as a class.

## Course A

Course A is the second 10-week mathematics method course required for all teacher candidates in the junior/intermediate program. It started the first week of September 2020 and ran for 10 weeks, ending at the end of November. There is a 2-week break from classes in the middle of the fall semester during which teacher candidates spend the entire time in elementary classrooms. The teacher candidates in this course were in their second year of the program, and the focus of the course was intermediate mathematics (Grades 7–10). Given that teaching in Grades 9 and 10 in Ontario requires a specialization in mathematics (as well as an extra course), the focus in the course was mathematics content in Grade 7 to the beginning ideas in Grade 9.

The course started with the goal of having a flipped classroom: teacher candidates would complete asynchronous online modules for the first hour and a half of class time, and then participate in a synchronous session for the second half of the scheduled course time. Each week was divided to have a pedagogy topic and a mathematics content topic explored. For the first nine weeks, a mathematics task was given and evaluated to ensure teacher candidates were learning the mathematics content of the course. The makeup of the class stayed consistent for the first 5 weeks until an anonymous survey was given to teacher candidates.

### *Asynchronous Classes*

A week before the scheduled class, the online asynchronous module would open. Teacher candidates would have a week to complete the online content, or they could complete it during the scheduled class time that was available for the asynchronous work. A classroom board was provided for each week to allow the teacher candidates to see the content, the suggested order of the requirements, and the links to websites, virtual office hours, and the synchronous class (see Figure 5 for an example). Each online module consisted of reading online, visiting a website, watching a video, or listening to a voice-over PowerPoint of the pedagogy portion of the course.

**Figure 5**  
*Virtual Classroom Board From Week 2 of Course A*



*Note.* Arrows indicate areas with a live link for teacher candidates to examine.

Next, teacher candidates would complete a mathematics content portion of the course consisting of a practice task to introduce the content, a video that explained the task and the mathematics topic, and then some additional practice problems. All the mathematics content focused on teaching using models and manipulatives and then explaining how the ideas could be built in a hands-on manner. See Dr. Elle's Math Academy (2020) for one of the early content introduction videos. The online work was completed with a quiz about the module, to allow teacher candidates to see where they needed to continue to focus. The goal was for them to understand where they made mistakes to further their learning and address misconceptions.

### ***Synchronous Classes***

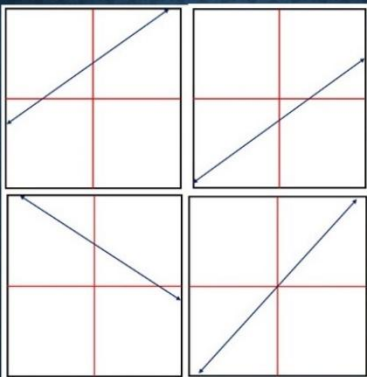
For the second half of the class time, teacher candidates would log into Zoom to participate in the remote classroom. The hour and a half was divided into three parts: a minds on task, a discussion period, and a group problem-solving activity. See Figure 6 for an example of a class. The minds on were quick tasks to get the teacher candidates involved such as Number Talks or Math Talks in order to have them start discussing mathematics, as well as activities that could be brought directly into the elementary classroom. The minds on activity gave the teacher candidates some time to converse with one another because it was fairly simple and only meant to start discussion. The discussion period was always related to the pedagogy portion of the course, to get teacher candidates talking and then sharing with the whole group what they learned. The group problem-solving activity focused on the mathematics content of the week and had teacher candidates working together to solve questions.



**Figure 6**  
*Example of the Three Parts of the Synchronous Class*

[Minds on]

## WHICH ONE DOESN'T BELONG?



Idea from:  
<https://wodb.ca/graphs.html>

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How would you use the information from the Liljedahl (2015) and Lunney Borden (2011)?
- What did you learn about mathematics teaching that was interesting or useful?
- Thinking about your experiences, where might you have added some of the ideas from the articles?

[Group problem-solving]

## JOULIES

- <http://mrmeyer.com/threeacts/joules/>
- Do Joules work? Refer to the graph to support your case.
- Where in the curriculum does this fit?

*Note.* Labels were added for this discussion. The graphs in the minds on were adapted from “Which One Doesn’t Belong,” by M. Bourassa, 2013, Graph 5 (<http://wodb.ca/graphs.html>).



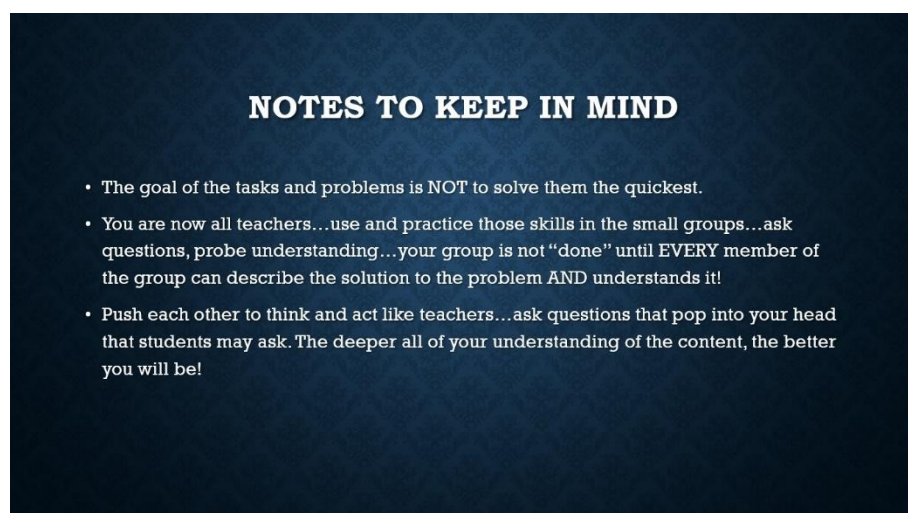
The breakout room feature of Zoom was used and groups were randomly assigned for the three portions of the class, with a new group for each section. For the two mathematics content sections, a teacher was picked from the group, and the virtual whiteboard was used to record the group's thoughts. The teacher was chosen to lead the discussion, ask supportive questions, record ideas, and practice teaching mathematics skills. This individual would also be responsible for saving and submitting the virtual whiteboard on behalf of the group. The norms for the mathematics content portions for the class were set up in advance (see Figure 7) and pushed teacher candidates to consider more than just how to solve the problems, but rather to use their knowledge of mathematics for teaching.

### ***Lessons Learned***

The feedback from this group at the midpoint was mainly positive, and the negative portions were all related to the asynchronous portions. Comments ranged from there being too much content, the readings taking too long, and the mathematics content taking too much time to learn and complete. To make things more manageable, I suggested the weekly readings from the textbook were a chance to deepen content and to be read when the online videos did not make sense. I also created a new classroom board to reflect this change (see Figure 8). The asynchronous portion was also changed: The pedagogy portion remained the same, but the mathematics section took a slight overhaul. Now the teacher candidates were asked to complete a task and watch the video that explained the mathematics thought behind the task and the content area. Next, teacher candidates were given the opportunity to practice using the math tasks assignment. Additional practice problems with solution methods were also included, but these problems were no longer required.

**Figure 7**

*Norms for the Mathematics Tasks Portions of the Classes*



**Figure 8**  
*Example of New Classroom Board*



*Note.* The classroom board contained active links, as indicated in Figure 5.

Teacher candidates shared their appreciation for the changes. Those who were struggling liked being able to go back through the videos if they did not understand the mathematics, and those who understood the content could speed up the videos to watch them in less time.

The teacher candidates in Course A really enjoyed the time to talk in the synchronous sessions. The group appreciated having time to work together and discuss ideas related to the content they had learned. They also shared they had appreciated just having some time to talk given that they were struggling with the amount of work in the program due to the switch to remote learning, as well as the challenges presented by the pandemic itself.

## **Courses B and C**

Courses B and C both started after the 2-week break and ran 5 weeks in the fall and 5 weeks in the winter. Both were first-year courses, and because teacher candidates did not have the foundation, the readings were vital. The changes that had been applied in Course A were implemented in these courses from the beginning, with the exception of the readings. Readings in Courses B and C were required for the quizzes because of their importance.

## ***Asynchronous Classes***

Each week, the asynchronous content focused on a pedagogy topic and a content topic. Classroom boards were again used to keep the teacher candidates organized and to allow them to keep a list of what they needed to complete. The pedagogy content consisted of a lesson using a PowerPoint, written content, or another website to explore the ideas. The content section focused

on the mathematics for teaching ideas at either the primary (K–3) or junior (4–6) grade levels depending on which course teacher candidates were enrolled in for their specific program. Each module started with a practice activity to have the teacher candidates thinking about the content, followed by a video that described the content and showed the mathematics using manipulatives. Afterwards, there was a math task that would be submitted for grades, as well as practice problems with possible solutions. As with Course A, the practice problems were optional and to be completed only if needed to help understand the content. The online work was completed with a quiz about the module, which also included questions related to the main points of the readings that were completed each week. Again, the goal with the quizzes was for teacher candidates to see where they had made mistakes and to learn the content by addressing misconceptions each week.

### ***Synchronous Classes***

Given that the feedback was so positive from the first class, the synchronous classes followed the same format as Course A, with the groups being randomly divided and switched between the three tasks of minds on, discussion, and group problem-solving. Again, for the two mathematics tasks, the groups would elect a teacher to lead the discussion and then submit the virtual whiteboard on behalf of the group.

### ***Lessons Learned***

The teacher candidates in these courses did not have the advantage of having built connections with one another or the content (as they were in their first year), so their feedback focused on both the asynchronous and synchronous content. Again, the teacher candidates complained about the readings, so the readings were no longer tested in the quizzes to decrease time. However, they were still stressed as being important for understanding the content. The asynchronous content within the course was one and a half hours and would be in the classroom in a normal situation, and teacher candidates had three grade levels of content to learn in the 10 weeks. As such, the text was vital for their understanding of the content and to build a solid foundation. Challenges were raised by the teacher candidates that this was a new lens for them, and they were having a hard time with the difficulty of the mathematics content (especially Course C with the junior level mathematics content). The use of models and manipulatives was taking the teacher candidates longer to understand and to work with, and they felt unsure of their understandings.

These two courses of teacher candidates presented some other interesting challenges in their feedback about the synchronous sessions that ran entirely counter to the feedback from Course A. Teacher candidates complained that there was too much group shifting, and they felt as though they did not know enough to lead a discussion or learn from one another. Groups during the synchronous sessions were then kept the same for the entire session of each of the last five class times. These teacher candidates had never met in person, so they had not developed the same relationships as the teacher candidates in Course A. Given the stress of the mathematics content for some, they also did not feel comfortable sharing ideas with peers that they did not know well. When it came time to choose a teacher, the same confident teacher candidates were leading the groups. The lack of overall knowledge and confidence was impeding the synchronous time from being effective for their continued understandings of mathematics teaching.

The time for the synchronous portions was revised to have me introduce the content and review the errors from the quizzes, have a discussion with small groups, and then complete either a minds on or group math task. For Course B, the Zoom link became active at the start of scheduled class time to act as an extra office hour. If teacher candidates encountered difficulty during the asynchronous portion, they could log in and ask questions immediately. For Course C, because the content was more difficult, many teacher candidates wanted the synchronous time first, so they could get an overview before they had to work on their own. The synchronous class time was subsequently moved to the first hour and a half, and the second half became office hours. The added office hours in both classes became an opportunity to ask immediate questions, and they became popular with the struggling teacher candidates.

At the end of the courses, one teacher candidate mentioned an unforeseen issue with the quizzes. Due to the program used for the online courses, the teacher candidates, it turns out, could not review the quizzes, so they had no idea which questions they had gotten wrong. Teacher candidates instead got a score at the end. Even though I put feedback in for the questions, it was returned to teacher candidates in the same box, and the questions in the quiz or content to which the feedback applied was not supplied to the teacher candidates. This technical shortcoming was unfortunate because the entire point of the quizzes was for individuals to see where they had misconceptions. Even though it looked on my end that users would see the feedback associated with the questions, this is not what the teacher candidates saw.

## **Course D**

Given that Course D was an elective, and teacher candidates volunteered to take it, the goal was to make the course completely flexible. The course focus was on developing an understanding of the mathematics content and not about developing teaching skills, so the content was more specialized. I created a series of 23 modules of different areas of the Ontario curriculum, such as working with the Pythagorean theorem, making computations with square roots, and finding the area and perimeter of different shapes. Each module consisted of some instruction either by video or in written form about the topic, followed by a series of practice problems to complete (see Dr. Elle's Math Academy, 2021, for an example of the content portion of one of the modules related to multiplying decimals). Teacher candidates submitted the practice problems to be evaluated, and I gave feedback to support their development of content. Each week, four to five modules were unlocked to provide the teacher candidates opportunities to focus on the areas of mathematics where they felt they needed the most practice.

The only course requirements were to complete a minimum of five modules and to attend the first class synchronously, so that teacher candidates could hear the expectations and ask questions. The rest of the class times were open as office hours, or teacher candidates could enter a breakout room with their peers to work on the mathematics together. The help function in the Zoom breakout room would alert me when a group needed support, and I could join to answer questions. Several teacher candidates attended all five scheduled classes for the entire time; some would work alone in a breakout room so they could ask immediate questions, whereas others worked in small groups to support each other. Many other teacher candidates would come in and out to ask questions as they arose while they worked on the content.

I evaluated the practice problems that were submitted each week and gave extensive feedback to help support mathematics content development. Teacher candidates were allowed to address the feedback and resubmit the problems for additional feedback and a new grade. Some teacher candidates submitted extra modules and asked that they only receive feedback, so they

could get some support, but they did not feel confident in being graded. Many of the teacher candidates completed all the modules to get the most out of the course and ensure an understanding of all content areas.

No formal feedback was requested of teacher candidates in the course, but informal conversations with those who had enrolled showed that the increased flexibility with the course made it appealing. Many teacher candidates who did not take the course commented that they wish they would have, so that they could have gotten the extra support before graduation. Ontario has recently implemented a Mathematics Proficiency Test that must be passed before a new teacher can be licensed in the province (Ontario College of Teachers, n.d.), so ensuring a strong understanding of mathematics has become even more pressing for teacher candidates.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

In conclusion, there were differences between the teacher candidates in the first-year courses and the second-year course that were not considered when initially designing the courses. Having no experience with the type of mathematics environment used in teaching the courses, the teacher candidates in their first year did not have the grounding to fully understand what they were learning on their own. As well, not having met their peers in person or having had enough time to develop relationships, they were understandably worried about sharing their mathematics in front of one another. The negative attitudes and fears about mathematics became detrimental as teacher candidates did not want to appear unknowledgeable in front of their peers. It was interesting to notice that as their confidence increased, their willingness to take risks also increased. Neither of these considerations were difficulties with the second-year teacher candidates, who already had a strong grounding in the types of activities that would be done in the class, and their close-knit community allowed them to take risks, make mistakes, and ask questions from the very beginning. The second-year students found the synchronous time together to be vital to their mental health and mathematics learning during the year.

Adding in the office hours during the scheduled class time proved to be crucial for many of the teacher candidates. Although not everyone took advantage, for those who did, the extra support made a difference in their confidence. They knew they could ask questions or just talk about the mathematics during their scheduled class. Many took advantage of the regularly scheduled office hour as well, but because it was open to all three of the courses that were running at the same time, there was often a queue waiting to get in.

The small groups made it difficult to keep on top of the individual needs of the learners. Unlike in a classroom, where I could subtly walk past a group and eavesdrop without being noticed, popping into small groups on Zoom was often disruptive. Some groups would stop talking upon my entry and would wait uncomfortably for me to leave, or would ask questions to see if they were right, so I was unable to ascertain what was really happening. Although the virtual whiteboards helped, as I could see what they were working on, it was still difficult to judge individual needs. What was interesting was keeping track of when teacher candidates shared ideas (either in chat or orally) and seeing who was participating and who was not during the 10-week courses. When linking this participation data to other information I knew about the teacher candidates through diagnostics, meetings, and evaluations, I noticed a pattern: many of those who did not share also lacked confidence in their mathematics ability.

The online videos were the most important aspect of the courses. Multiple teacher candidates, even those with a strong mathematics background, commented on how helpful the videos were in increasing their understanding of mathematics. The most frequent comment was

that they found it helpful to review the videos multiple times until they felt confident. In reviewing the statistics from YouTube, the number of views on all the videos in Courses A, B, and C showed that they were viewed more times than the number of teacher candidates in the course. In the elective course, Course D, the increased flexibility allowed students to target the specific skills and mathematics content knowledge that they individually needed more time to develop. Knowing that this flexibility for time spent on individual needs was so important, I will continue this structure when face-to-face classes resume. I have already requested to have the elective continue in a similar fashion, but instead of being solely online for the class time, teacher candidates can meet in the classroom and be provided with one-on-one support as needed. Putting the videos online for access is also a practice that I will retain for all in-person courses, so that the teacher candidates can continue to review concepts until they have a stronger understanding of the course content.

One other area that ended up being invaluable and memorable based on reading the teacher candidate reflections of the courses was to have experts give talks instead of only me lecturing. Many teacher candidates mentioned how powerful it was seeing individuals such as Dan Meyer (2010, 2014), Dr. Lisa Lunney Borden (2014), or Dr. Rochelle Gutiérrez (ALCh, 2016) speak about their own work. I would like to continue to incorporate these moments in the course by providing opportunities to view these videos in the future.

There were some downsides to working in the remote context. One of the major ones was that because the manipulatives were not placed directly in front of the teacher candidates, as they would be in the classroom, some individuals refused to use them at all, even when presented with online options. This complete lack of experience with the materials could be problematic in their future classroom work, where manipulatives are an expectation in the elementary grade levels. When reviewing assignments and comments from teacher candidates, some misunderstandings about some of the pedagogical ideas that were presented were apparent. Although misunderstandings are common, some of them were unusual in the context and likely could have been prevented in person. Upon reflecting, it is often more impactful for teacher candidates to see the pedagogical practices in action than to read or hear about them in the course content. In past courses, I would have modelled the ideas for the teacher candidates, and then we could have talked about the teacher moves and reasons for the decisions in the classroom. It was difficult to accurately model these behaviours in the online context, and it was clear that although some teacher candidates had logged into the classroom, they were nowhere near their computers. These students had their cameras off during class, and when switching to small groups, it would take them 10 or more minutes to accept the move on a consistent basis. Finally, there are many videos of teachers working in elementary classrooms that I usually show, but copyright prevented me from being able to post them on the site. Using the synchronous time to show the videos led to computer issues and decreased the amount of teacher–candidate interaction.

Despite all the difficulties and lessons learned, teacher candidates responded positively to the courses and the changes. Although not perfect, the adaptations to online study seem to have set a good foundation for learning about mathematics education.

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## CHAPTER 9 (English version)

### Teacher Training in a Francophone Minority Environment and COVID-19: A Review of the Experience

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#### Abstract

This chapter provides an overview of how education professors at Faculté Saint-Jean (FSJ), the University of Alberta's Francophone faculty, have adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020 in order to maintain education programs that ensure that students—future teachers—meet provincial training requirements related to the particular of the evolving Francophone minority environment despite their challenges. Topics include the transition to online learning, student and teacher support, subsequent pedagogical innovations, as well as our questions on the maintenance of French-language competencies, which are essential to teacher training for the Francophone educational community and French-language immersion programs. Also provided is a situational analysis of strategies to support practicums, the cornerstone of teacher training. The chapter concludes with a discussion of issues of fairness and inclusion in the specific context of the pandemic.

*Keywords:* minority environment, initial training, teaching, pandemic

#### Introduction

Although it is a small faculty<sup>1</sup> in an English-language university with a population of almost 40,000 students, Faculté Saint-Jean (FSJ) and its campus are rooted in a very active French-speaking community that has been advocating to ensure the vitality of Francophone minority language rights and the right to quality education in French since the success of the Mahé case<sup>2</sup> in the Supreme Court. FSJ has played a key role in this regard. As part of the University of Alberta, it enables the graduates of Francophone schools and French immersion programs to continue their studies in French at the university level. In particular, it trains

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<sup>1</sup> FSJ had about 750 registered students over the past 3 years. For many reasons and because of the uncertainty linked to the pandemic, the administration anticipates a 20% decline in enrolment for 2021–2022.

<sup>2</sup> The Mahé case, which was launched by Francophone parents in Alberta in 1983 and ended with a ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada in 1990, was the origin of the constitutional right of the Francophone minority in Canada to education in French with distinct governance by the English-speaking majority.

teachers who will subsequently work in these specific schools and programs. The faculty's education programs<sup>3</sup> not only follow the requirements for provincial teacher certification, but also take into account the training required to respond to the particular issues of teaching in minority and immersion environments. The sudden emergence of the pandemic clearly exacerbated and increased the visibility of some of these issues and added more. As an educational community, we tried to tackle these issues, seeing this as an additional opportunity for student learning.

This chapter provides an overview of the way that we, as education professors in the Faculty, have adapted to the pandemic situation. Our contribution to this work is not a summary of our research but rather a collective testimony of the team's adjustment to an unusual health and social context.

Special coverage is given to the topics of transition to online learning, student and teacher support, pedagogical innovations, as well as the maintenance of French-language competencies essential to teacher training for Francophone schools and French-language immersion programs. Also provided is a situational analysis of strategies to support practicums, the cornerstones of teacher training. The chapter concludes with a discussion of issues of fairness and inclusion in the specific context of the pandemic.

### **Online Teaching and Pedagogical Support**

In March 2020, the pandemic forced an “emergency” transition to online learning in educational institutions in Alberta in order to limit the spread of COVID-19, leaving little time for teachers to adapt. If the resources to develop the competencies required to adapt to this virtual environment were not readily available, a real feeling of crisis and misunderstanding prevailed, as well as all kinds of logistical issues, including the difficulty of contacting students confronted with an unprecedented reality and learning from home without necessarily having sufficient access to computers or internet connections.

In fall 2020, when it became evident that the pandemic would not go away anytime soon and would impact the 2020–2021 school year, it was clear that students doing their practicums would have to prepare for the novel challenge of online teaching. To support them, we opted to develop a “digital badge” as described below.

### **Supporting Student Teachers With Digital Badges**

The digital badge is an online visual representation used to motivate learners, recognize learning, and certify competencies in formal or informal learning situations (Garon-Épaulé, 2015). In the case of this particular initiative, the badge corresponds to tangible and visible recognition of competencies acquired by students outside of their “normal” training path. This recognition can be transferred to the student's electronic portfolio<sup>4</sup> and added to their professional CV.

Our digital badge corresponds to five online elementary and secondary education workshops. These workshops were facilitated by field specialists and covered the basics of

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<sup>3</sup> This refers to the three FSJ undergraduate programs—namely, the Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Education After-Degree, and Education/Science Combined Degrees.

<sup>4</sup> The eportfolio is a student's personalized file containing work, reflections, and other artifacts, such as videos, to attest to the evolution of their learning on a digital platform such as Mahara or Moodle.

online teaching, use of the Google Classroom platform for course and content management, various digital tools for content and online video creation, and, finally, use of games such as Minecraft. The workshops were offered in synchronous mode via Zoom, and recorded and posted on the university's EClass platform<sup>5</sup> to create sustainable teaching material.

Only those students who had attended the five workshops were eligible for the digital badge. The students indicated that they appreciated the initiative as they gained a grasp of new teaching practices and became familiar with new online teaching and learning tools.

The urgency to adapt student teacher support for the sudden transition to online teaching indicated that there was a need to continue reinforcing initial training for the development of digital competency. The sudden transition to total online teaching also indicated the need to support teacher trainers, as mentioned hereinafter.

### **Creating a Collaborative Space for Teacher Educators**

In order to support teacher educators, we developed a new modality of support inspired by professional learning communities (Leclerc & Labelle, 2013). A shared space for the team of professors and lecturers was created to meet the following three objectives: (a) to explore various pedagogical practices with online potential, (b) to provide a virtual space to practise the facilitation of short activities, and (c) to identify concrete elements that could pose obstacles and to limit unexpected technical challenges in online and offline courses.

Four 2-hour sessions were offered in the fall 2020 semester during which the colleagues experimented with a particular online activity in the presence of their classmates who played the role of students. Each one was asked to suggest topics or pedagogical tools that they could explore together and discover specific functions. The other participants were encouraged to comment respectfully and share their knowledge.

The impact of these sessions was positive and some colleagues mentioned that they had regained confidence in their pedagogical competencies following the disruption of in-person classes and the abrupt transition to online teaching. They also discovered various modalities to support the transition to online learning without compromising their teaching style.

These sessions provided a space for professional development which met the participants' immediate, concrete needs and strengthened collaborative relationships when they suddenly found themselves isolated at home and overwhelmed by the pandemic situation. One of the new practices that emerged over the past few months was the transition from photocopied to scanned materials.

### **Examples of Course Adaptations for an Online Format: Use of Multimodal Devices**

In one course, a photocopied booklet including a variety of documents on the theoretical and pedagogical aspects of literacy instruction was distributed to all in attendance. Alternatives to the paper medium were explored due to public health restrictions. The option of scanning the material for distribution in PDF format was deemed obsolete in the context of virtual courses and was quickly eliminated. We pivoted to the multimodal option as a means to enrich the learning and teaching experience. Contrary to the monomodal document, multimodal (Boutin, 2012) uses several iconic, auditory, and textual modes. We became writers and designers and used the Canva platform to convert our booklet to a multitext format (see Figure 9).

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<sup>5</sup> Eclass is an online learning management system powered by Moodle.

**Figure 9**  
*Examples of Multimodal Documents*

#### #5 : La diversité

Bien que la lunette pour le cours EDU M 344 porte sur la diversité raciale, ethnique, religieuse et linguistique, la catégorisation de la diversité comporte bien plus de variables. Lors du choix d'un texte, l'inclusion doit prendre des proportions plus larges:



Traduction libre de la "Diversity Wheel" par la Johns Hopkins University (n.d., image du domaine public).



En examinant la roue, on remarque tout ce qui permet de diversifier les sources textuelles.

L'enseignement explicite est une stratégie structurée à haut rendement comportant trois étapes : la pratique modelée (modelage), la pratique guidée (soutenue) et la pratique autonome.



Cette vidéo présente des professionnels qui utilisent l'enseignement explicite afin de soutenir la réussite de tous leurs élèves, dont ceux ayant des troubles d'apprentissage (TA). Les trois étapes de l'enseignement explicite sont décrites et illustrées.

Du point de vue de l'enseignant, quels sont les avantages de l'enseignement explicite et du modelage?



Du point de vue de l'élève, quelle serait une stratégie importante apprise en littérature qui sert à travers les disciplines?



*Pour aller plus loin*

L'article [Le modelage, une technique pédagogique qui rend l'implicite explicite](#), de Geneviève Messier

Le [eWorkshop](#) du référentiel l'Atelier.on.edu

*Note.* Image on left translated and adapted from John Hopkins University Diversity Wheel.

The concept of multiliteracy design requires active, critical content transformation and the selection of modes of representation that support the reader's experience as well as the message (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, 2015; Kern, 2015). Since the very nature of the booklet had been altered, we had to take a critical look at it based on the course objectives and subsequently reorganize the content. We then thought about orchestrating the modes of representation (Hull & Nelson, 2005) so that the multimodal text could take shape. To orchestrate our modes (e.g., text, icons, video, image, audio), we thought about their value and juxtaposition. We had to find a creative tool that would maximize not only the multimodal nature of a document but also its print format so that students with limited computer access could also benefit from the material. We found the solution in the Canva platform, an algorithmic design tool that provides models, images, filters, icons and fonts and allows for the insertion of audio, video, and interactive material as well as hyperlinks.

The final document included several design choices to facilitate reading and organize the integrated sections, videos, intertextual and URL hyperlinks, GIFS, sound signals, and highlighting. The PDF can be read, annotated, and underlined on screen or on paper, and the digital version allows students to interact further with the document.

This experience enabled us to revisit and transform a tool, and led to the creation of a rich learning environment that provided quick, direct access to a wide variety of in-context

information using several different modes. Although we were novice writer–designers, the Canva platform enabled us to create a quality document that can now serve as a multimodal product model for our students in their future professional activities.

It is important to us that our students benefit from our trials and experience as well as the creativity and reflexivity that emerged from our team’s management of the pandemic. The following section contains an explanation of how the public health situation also highlighted the relevance of implementing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in teacher training as a new component in our education programs.

### **Educating Future Teachers to Indigenous Traditional Knowledge and Perspectives: Particular Resonances in a Climate of Social Crisis**

The relatively new integration of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into teaching in Alberta (Alberta Education, 2018) recently led the faculty to rethink its programs to include Indigenous education and reconciliation.

#### **A New Component Still Requiring Occasional Justification**

Although a compulsory course will be offered as of fall 2021 and an optional course has been available since 2018, this component has been gradually integrated into various interdisciplinary courses. However, much remains to be done in this field, which is still “under construction” and where the relevance of this component in teacher training and practices is still misunderstood and even rejected (Scott & Gani, 2018; Tupper & Cappello, 2008). The pandemic has shed an unprecedented light on this dimension.

In fact, the pandemic situation is more than the sum of the pedagogical, logistical, and professional adjustments that we have had to make. It is actually a global (health, environmental, economic, social, even existential) crisis that requires us to face the world as it turns, determine how to manage the situation individually and collectively, and rethink the world of tomorrow. Traditional Indigenous systems of knowledge actually open alternative horizons (Battiste, 2016) at a time when our Western points of reference and practices are being seriously challenged.

#### **Rethinking Education and Society Through the Prism of Traditional Indigenous Knowledge**

Traditional Indigenous systems of knowledge invite us to step back and (re)think some choices about education (Tanaka, 2017) as they relate to the choices we make collectively as a society. Notably, this emphasizes the importance of the following, particularly during the pandemic:

- a holistic approach to personal development (Archibald, 2008) where individuals can develop and live in harmony only if their emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being and development are considered along with cognitive and mental dimensions;
- our relationships with ourselves (self-care) and others (Sanford et al., 2012), knowing that anxiety, fatigue, various dependencies, isolation and confinement to a digital bubble (the well-known “Zoom fatigue”) have become sources of major concern (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020);

- our connection to nature, when outdoor spaces that have become safer from an epidemiological point of view also support well-being and learning (Cajete, 1994; Wildcat et al., 2014);
- listening to support others in leadership (Minthorn & Chavez, 2014), rather than seeking personal recognition at the expense of their ideas and feelings;
- Elders and their value in our societies and learning paths (Herman, 2011), when they are the most vulnerable to disease and their protection entails significant collective restrictions;
- community and our collective commitments (Sanford et al., 2012), when our individual choices clearly impact society, particularly the most vulnerable and discriminated-against persons and groups;
- rethinking assessment and not leaving anyone out of the assessment of a situation (Claypool & Preston, 2011) in situations of learning, public health or society; and
- a connection with the teachings of the medicine wheel (Calliou, 1995; Pewewardy, 1999), especially given that the pandemic seems to have disrupted our lives and interrupted engagement trajectories.

Therefore, integrating traditional Indigenous systems of knowledge and worldviews into teaching practices is especially relevant to teacher training in the context of the pandemic.

In a teacher training video, Elder Francis Alexis (n.d.) asks about the purpose of education, which leads us to review Freire's (1974) dichotomy between the banking and emancipatory approaches to education. What is the purpose of teaching? And which ideals of personal and collective development should it promote? Indigenous systems of knowledge, worldviews, and pedagogical principles take us back to critical key questions that have surfaced during the pandemic.

There have been many limitations as well as possibilities for adaptation over the past year, including the invitation of Elders on Zoom, adaptation of ceremonial protocols<sup>6</sup>, respectful online dissemination of traditional knowledge (Wemigwans, 2018), extra support provided for sensitive teachings (such as teachings related to residential schools and colonial violence). Limitations and adaptations were also obvious when trying to implement experiential learning (Lemaire, 2020, 2021) or land-/place-based or spiritual learning experiences (Campeau, 2019; Mitchell, 2018) during the pandemic.

This pandemic has given us an opportunity to rethink our pedagogical practices and has given them a new scope. It has also involved students in our emerging reflexivity and modelled the importance of continuous training and cross-disciplinary competencies that are part of our framework of competencies to be acquired during training (see

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<sup>6</sup> In our practice, for example, the Elders present on Zoom during the online course suggested that we offer tobacco virtually, so that we began the learning sessions respectfully and educated students in this regard. It was then up to the professor to offer it back to the Earth with words of gratitude.

Figure 10). These competencies include reflective thought, inclusion, communication, and creativity.

Another key competency in our Francophone minority and immersion environment is French-language competency. Our students' ambition is to teach in this language, which is not the language of the English-speaking majority. The question is to what extent the transition to online learning has influenced the development of our students' language competencies.

### **Language Competencies and Online Teaching in the Francophone Minority and French Immersion Environment**

#### **French at FSJ**

Campus Saint-Jean is located off the main campus in the French Quarter. Courses and administration are offered in French. Students who attended our classes in "normal" times were exposed to French as an academic as well as for everyday language even though the surrounding area is mostly English speaking. The faculty gathers students from Francophone minority schools in Western Canada, French immersion programs, the French-speaking majority in Quebec, and abroad. Their varied personal and school experiences lead to a wide diversity in student competencies and relationships to the French language (Cavanagh et al., 2016; ElAtia, 2018; Lemaire, 2018).

FSJ opted for a set of approaches aimed at strengthening the language competencies of all students, regardless of their level of French. The development of language competencies is integrated, to varying degrees, into education courses, modelling the approach that integrates language and content (Cammarata, 2016). Also offered are so-called basic French-language courses, which students can take to address potential gaps and prepare to write and pass the DELF B2 FORT exam<sup>7</sup> (Council of Europe, 2001), which is a condition for participating in the practicum.

#### **COVID-19 Adaptations and Consequences**

To a certain extent, the change in teaching format did not seem to pose a major obstacle to students taking basic French courses and the final course, essentially focused on writing. Interactions and classroom activities took place using the features of Zoom videoconference (hand raising, discussion room, screen sharing, chat, etc.) and the Eclass digital platform (online document sharing, discussion forum, etc.). However, several students in the education courses offered in French pointed out that they were hesitant to speak up when screen was blank and the camera was turned off, making them fade into anonymity. These students also reported a lack of practice, related to isolation at home and the absence of French speakers nearby. Several lamented the physical closing of the Linguistic Support Centre (Lemaire & Wilson, 2018) which had provided them with an additional learning space even though the centre was also adapted for online meetings.

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<sup>7</sup> To pass Level B2, the DELF exam candidate must obtain a mark of at least 50/100 with at least 5/25 in the four parts of the examination. FSJ education student expectations are higher, requiring a mark of at least 70/100 on all four components, at least 18/25 on written comprehension and oral and written production tests, and at least 12.5/25 on the oral comprehension test. During the pandemic, the minimum requirements have been limited to the oral and written production components.

One might also wonder what impact the transition to online learning in practicums had on student language competency in our minority environment. Several students actually viewed their practicums as a challenge and an opportunity for language development since they were not only required to speak French throughout the day but also to become language models whose competency in French was held up to close scrutiny. Student teachers had less face-to-face time with the class when online (although some teacher advisors took the opportunity to assign their student teachers to small group of students or teach one-on-one) and fewer opportunities to manage verbal interactions in large groups and refine interaction strategies to draw attention, maintain interest or to hold and restart conversations. Finally, some student teachers found themselves developing online teaching resources and helping teacher advisors adapt to emergencies in a new format; this may have contributed to the development of organized writing skills to the detriment of spontaneous oral skills.

Other than their eventual practicums, students have had few opportunities to meet with outside practitioners in a real, nonacademic context since the start of the pandemic. “Laboratory” experiences in the educational community (Cavanagh et al., 2013) and community service learning projects (Taylor et al., 2015), used by certain teachers to connect theory and practice, were very limited as of fall 2020 and were essentially remote activities, but could support students’ language development via a so-called language experience “beyond the classroom walls” (Chapus, 2012; Parpette, 2007, 2008). Such an experience is important because students work on pragmatic, sociolinguistic competencies, which compensates for the lack of exposure to the formal professional (or everyday) French in our language environment.

Finally, from an extralinguistic point of view, practicums and other experiences “beyond the classroom walls” enable students to develop confidence in speaking French in public while exposing them to risk-taking and engagement in French-language interactions that are different from those created by the classroom. This often allays the linguistic insecurity of many of our students (Blain et al., 2018; Mandin, 2008).

It would be interesting to look further into the pandemic’s impact on the language development of future teachers in a minority language environment such as ours. Confidence, engagement, and risk-taking are key elements that education students have the opportunity to put to the test during practicums, but for now they can only develop their pedagogical and didactic skills. Support for practicums during the pandemic is crucial.

### **Practicum Implementation and Support**

School closures had a particularly notable impact on students who had just started their practicum and completed only 2 of the 7 weeks required. The challenge for us was to enable student teachers, scattered across 19 school boards in Alberta and four provinces, to complete the remaining 5 weeks so that they could do their second practicum the following semester and receive their degree as anticipated.

### **Managing the Urgency for Practicums With School Closings**

Following negotiations with the school boards and schools,<sup>8</sup> we managed to convince most of them that our student teachers could continue their practicums online. Almost 70% of our student teachers were able to do so in March and April 2020. However, we did not know

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<sup>8</sup> These negotiations could be completed very rapidly, in a few days, or take up to 3 weeks.



what to do with the other student teachers who had not received such permission. We started a dialogue with our colleagues facing the same challenge at other universities in Alberta. We soon came to the conclusion that the best way to take on the challenge was to create an online course on Eclass called *Projet d'achèvement de stage* (practicum completion project). The purpose of this course was to foster reflection and collaboration among student teachers through the development of a series of lessons that could be presented on an online learning management platform. To avoid decontextualized learning for student teachers, we asked them to create lessons based on the context of their initial placement (target grade and subject area, theme or concepts covered, and so on).

### **New Learning Opportunities for Our Student Teachers**

Paradoxically, the critical situation in which we found ourselves ultimately allowed our student teachers to develop more of the cross-disciplinary competencies in our programs (see Figure 10).

Despite the development of this adaptive capacity and various competencies during the pandemic, we did not overlook the gamut of issues, criticism, and fairness in training access and assessment as discussed in the following sections.

### **Issues of Fairness and Inclusion**

The pandemic has had a lasting impact on student learning paths, and especially on transcripts.

### **Reviewing the Grading System**

Like all public universities in Canada, the University of Alberta and, by extension FSJ, had to make a quick decision on grading (Westerfield, 2020). Unlike other universities, the University of Alberta decided on a pass/fail (P/F) grade (credit or no credit system), which raised questions of fairness and led to heated debates. This significant decision will have major short- and long-term repercussions on students because they did not have the option of taking a letter grade (A, A-, B+, etc.). A grade of P/F will not be included in GPA calculations. Yet students will still have to undergo assessments of their performance, take final examinations, and submit final assignments.

While some students were happy with this decision, others were ultimately concerned about a possible negative impact, along with a feeling of deprivation accentuated by the lockdown. With this new assessment framework, students would have to continue on with their semester of work, be involved and keep on doing their best with no positive expectation in terms of performance. The P/F grade became a question of fairness in assessment.

However, the model proposed by other universities, which leaves the choice of P/F (credit) or letter grade up to the student, causes other problems: (a) students choosing the credit option will be seen as the weakest (Friesen 2020) and (b) those who opted for a letter grade will be perceived as the strongest. This system creates two tiers of students without taking into consideration the individual situations behind these choices, which clears the university but does not solve the students' problems (S. ElAtia & S. Walden, personal communication, 2020).

The university took this delicate situation into account and gave students the opportunity to request an official letter from the Office of the Registrar providing details on the grades

received on assignments. This option seems most fair in that it gives students the chance to present a breakdown of course marks, which could be particularly important on scholarship and bursary applications, for example.

**Figure 10**  
*Cross-Disciplinary Competencies in the Faculté Saint-Jean Education Program*



| Competencies               | Student teacher discoveries and initiatives  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Ethics and professionalism | Student teachers had to adapt to a constantly changing situation and learn to respect Department of Education directives, school board regulations and various stakeholder (school principal, teacher, advisor) expectations. Despite these constraints, those who were tech-savvy agreed to assume a leadership role and show senior school teachers how to adapt to the new digital realities. |
| Creativity and innovation  | Student teachers had to modify their lesson plans using new technologies and experimenting with new digital platforms. They had to convert their “traditional” in-class lessons to online instruction.   |
| Reflective thinking        | Student teachers had to find quick solutions to online teaching challenges. We encouraged them to reflect on how they could plan their lessons to engage students in an unprecedented learning environment.  |
| Communication              | Our student teachers developed new communication strategies to maintain positive relationships with the students and their parents. Some of them presented their experience formally to their peers.   |
| Collaboration              | In March and April 2020, we noted that the student teachers had developed a learning community when they shared strategies and resources on a Google Classroom created by the Field Experiences Office.  |
| Inclusion and diversity    | Student teachers faced the challenge of finding ways to include all students in the remote learning environment. They relied on the universal design for learning approach (Hall et al., 2012) to develop various forms of support and give all students equal opportunity to succeed.   |

## Rethinking Assessment

The transition to virtual teaching caused problems beyond the critical issues at the start of the pandemic and challenged the postsecondary assessment model itself. Banta and Palomba (2014) were already challenging university normative assessment practices. Students were expressing growing dissatisfaction with postsecondary assessment objectives (Arum & Roska, 2010; Hattie, 2009). The pandemic accentuated this discontent, which we also observed at FSJ.

The transition to online teaching actually necessitates an adapted assessment (ElAtia, 2020). There was a tendency to want to maintain exactly the same type of assessment but in a virtual form. This leads to important questions: (a) How can we ensure that students do not cheat during exams (particularly in the case of multiple-choice questions)? (b) How can we make online corrections in a formative way that will be in the best interests of student learning? In the face of these challenges there is an emergence of higher-level thinking among students (Haladyna, 2004). At the postsecondary level, a transformative assessment (Popham, 2008) that allows for the assessment of learning outcomes beyond rote memorization should be valued. The pandemic gives us the opportunity to review assessment pedagogically and make it more relevant and more difficult to cheat, instead of relying on technology to recreate assessment situations prior to 2020 using spyware applications that students considered intrusive and stressful. There again, it would be valuable to collect and analyze student input; the winning assessment would be the product of a teacher–student negotiation to foster student learning (Popham, 2008).

Input from students would also provide us with a better understanding of how they experienced issues of fairness in the various measures taken for a total transition to online learning, since the pandemic has uncovered clear disparities and raised questions about our commitment to student inclusiveness.

## Fairness and Inclusion in the Classroom

Emerging work attests to the magnified effect that COVID-19 has had on underprivileged, marginalized students who continue to fall behind in school and are at risk of dropping out. (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2020; Potvin, 2020). This unforeseen scenario underscores the fragility of a school system aspiring to fairness and inclusion for all. But what about university students in education programs of study? How have they been affected?

Half of our education students are enrolled in the after-degree program and most of these are immigrants.<sup>9</sup> Most of them, who are primarily from Francophone sub-Saharan Africa, are older with dependent family members. They may have been drawn to teaching because that was their career in their country of origin, or they wanted to retrain and hoped to take advantage of professional training and employment opportunities in view of the teacher shortage in western Canada (Bourbonnais, 2018; Canadian Parents for French, 2018), and escape “chronic deskilling” (Kanouté et al., 2012). Although some of these students may have acquired excellent

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<sup>9</sup> It is difficult for us to know the exact proportion of immigrant students, whether they immigrated recently, where they completed their high school education, their marital status or their exact origins, as administrative statistics do not necessarily include this data. Therefore, we had to extrapolate from existing data. However, we do know that, according to the data compiled by the administration, 15% of our undergraduate education students are not Canadian citizens but have permanent resident status.

technical skills from previous training (their first degree), we observed that their skills were more limited than those of their peers who were Alberta high school graduates, especially since after-degree students had only 2 years to become familiar with the special technology used in teaching. These observations are supported by the work of Prensky (2001) who contrasts “digital natives” immersed in the technosphere from a young age with “digital immigrants” who have not had as much access to this technological capital and must undergo a more extensive process of adaptation.

During the first few weeks of courses, we often heard “Sir/Madam, I can’t log in,” attesting to the technological stress experienced by some students. We cannot count the number of times we had to repeat, “You have to turn on your microphone” or “You need to turn off your microphone when you are not speaking.” From time to time, curious children would butt in and distract their parents<sup>10</sup>. Such situations revealed the technological inequalities and family constraints of these older students who were resuming their studies, often after going through the immigrant experience.

In sum, the transition to online teaching has emphasized the “digital fracture” existing between digital natives and digital immigrants (Prensky, 2001), those who are familiar with digital technologies and those who had to jump on the bandwagon. A situation already stressful in itself is exacerbated by the family responsibilities and socioeconomic fragility of many immigrant students engaged in professional requalification. Our ultimate hypothesis was that this clear transition to online teaching certainly added to the regular challenges already facing immigrant and visible minority students in education (Deschesne, 2018; Jacquet, 2020; Mujawamariya, 2002). Future empirical research will tell.

## Conclusion

The reflection proposed in this chapter is not based on general evidence of teacher training during the pandemic. It is rather an initial synthesis of our experience as a team of teacher trainers in the context of Francophone minority language education and French immersion programs in Alberta, done with the help of our expertise and various viewpoints. The resulting overview indicates that there are significant issues<sup>11</sup>. Several of these issues existed even before and were exacerbated by the pandemic. The entire situation and resulting questions provide subjects for reflection, training, solutions and research that will require further, postpandemic analysis.

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<sup>10</sup> Note that open cameras allowed us to gain a better awareness of challenges of students, especially female students who are also parents of young children, regardless of whether they are immigrants or in single-parent situations.

<sup>11</sup> We did not develop the question of student and teacher mental health or the support that could be offered them. This would be an extremely relevant area of research to investigate.

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## CHAPITRE 9 (version française)

### Formation des enseignants en milieu francophone minoritaire et COVID-19 : retour sur expérience

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#### Résumé

Dans ce chapitre collectif, nous proposons un tour d’horizon de la manière dont les professeurs en éducation de la Faculté Saint-Jean, faculté francophone de l’Université de l’Alberta, se sont adaptés à la pandémie de la COVID-19 depuis mars 2020 dans le but de maintenir des programmes en éducation qui puissent assurer que les étudiants, futurs enseignants, satisfassent aux exigences provinciales de formation, en dépit des défis rencontrés, mais en lien également avec les spécificités du contexte francophone minoritaire dans lequel nous évoluons. Nous abordons la question de la transition en ligne, de l’accompagnement des étudiants et des enseignants, des innovations pédagogiques qui ont découlées de nos nécessaires adaptations, ainsi que nos questionnements quant au maintien des compétences en français, essentielles dans le cadre de la formation des enseignants pour le milieu éducatif francophone et l’immersion française. Nous dressons également un état des lieux des stratégies d’accompagnement développées autour des stages, pierres angulaires de la formation. Nous posons enfin la question des enjeux en termes d’équité et d’inclusion dans le contexte spécifique de la pandémie.

*Mots clés* : contexte minoritaire, formation initiale, enseignement, pandémie

#### Introduction

Bien qu’une « petite » faculté<sup>12</sup> au sein d’une université anglophone de presque 40 000 étudiants, la Faculté Saint-Jean (FSJ) et son campus s’ancrent dans une communauté francophone très active qui, depuis le succès à la cour suprême de la « Cause Mahé »<sup>13</sup>, milite pour assurer la vitalité des droits linguistiques des Francophones minoritaires et pour assurer un droit à une éducation de qualité en français. La FSJ joue à cet égard un rôle clé. Elle permet en

<sup>12</sup> La FSJ a compté environ 750 étudiants ces trois dernières années. Pour de multiples raisons et de manière encore incertaine, l’administration anticipe une baisse de 20% des inscriptions pour 2021–2022, en lien avec la pandémie de la COVID-19.

<sup>13</sup> La cause Mahé, portée entre 1983 et 1990 par des parents francophones de l’Alberta jusqu’à la Cour Suprême du Canada, est à l’origine du droit constitutionnel des francophones canadiens minoritaires à une éducation en français avec une gouvernance distincte de la majorité anglophone.

effet aux finissants des écoles francophones et programmes d'immersion de poursuivre leurs études en français au niveau universitaire. Elle forme en particulier les enseignants qui œuvreront plus tard dans ces écoles et programmes spécifiques. Les programmes en éducation de la faculté<sup>14</sup> suivent ainsi non seulement les exigences du ministère de l'Éducation pour ce qui est de la certification provinciale des enseignants, mais ils prennent également en compte les besoins de formation particuliers pour répondre aux enjeux propres à l'enseignement en milieu minoritaire et immersif. L'émergence soudaine de la pandémie a clairement exacerbé (et rendu plus visible) un certain nombre de ces enjeux, auxquels se sont greffés des nouveaux ; des enjeux auxquels, comme communauté éducative, nous avons voulu faire face, y voyant une occasion supplémentaire d'y éduquer nos étudiants.

Dans ce chapitre, nous proposons un tour d'horizon de la manière dont nous, professeurs en éducation de la faculté, nous nous sommes adaptés à la situation pandémique. Notre contribution à cet ouvrage n'est donc pas une synthèse de nos recherches, mais bien un témoignage collectif survolant la manière dont l'équipe s'est ajustée à un contexte sanitaire et social hors norme.

Nous abordons plus particulièrement dans ce texte la question de la transition en ligne, de l'accompagnement des étudiants et des enseignants, des innovations pédagogiques qui ont découlé de nos nécessaires adaptations, ainsi que nos questionnements quant au maintien des compétences en français, essentielles dans le cadre de la formation des enseignants pour le milieu éducatif francophone minoritaire et l'immersion française. Nous dressons enfin un état des lieux des stratégies développées autour des stages, pierres angulaires de la formation. Nous abordons pour finir la question de l'équité en évaluation et de l'inclusion en temps de pandémie.

### **Enseignement en ligne et accompagnement pédagogique**

En mars 2020, la pandémie a forcé les établissements d'enseignement de la province à passer « en urgence » à l'apprentissage en ligne afin de limiter la propagation de la COVID-19, laissant peu de temps aux enseignants pour s'adapter. Si les ressources pour développer les compétences nécessaires à l'adaptation à cet environnement virtuel n'étaient pas nécessairement à disposition, primaient de toute façon un réel sentiment de crise et d'incompréhension, ainsi que des difficultés logistiques de toute part, y compris la difficulté à rejoindre des élèves et étudiants confrontés à une réalité inédite, étudiant chez eux, et sans nécessairement un accès suffisant à des ordinateurs ou connexions internet.

À l'automne 2020, alors qu'il était devenu évident que la pandémie s'était installée durablement et qu'elle impacterait l'année scolaire 2020-2021, il est apparu clairement que les étudiants en éducation qui seraient en stage devaient plus que jamais se préparer à relever le défi de l'enseignement en ligne. Afin de les accompagner, nous avons opté notamment pour le développement d'un « badge numérique », que nous présentons ci-dessous.

#### **L'accompagnement des stagiaires par le « badge numérique »**

Le « badge numérique » est une représentation visuelle en ligne, utilisée pour motiver les apprenants, reconnaître les apprentissages et certifier des compétences en situation d'apprentissage formel ou informel (Garon-Épaulé, 2015). Le concept de badge, dans le cadre

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<sup>14</sup> Nous discutons dans ce chapitre des trois programmes de premier cycle offerts à la FSJ, soit le bac en éducation, le bac après-diplôme, et le bac combiné éducation et sciences.

particulier de cette initiative, correspond à une reconnaissance visible et tangible des compétences acquises par les étudiants en dehors de leur parcours « normal » de formation. Cette reconnaissance peut être transférée au portfolio électronique<sup>15</sup> de l'étudiant et ajoutée à leur CV professionnel.

Le « badge numérique », tel que nous l'avons offert, correspond à cinq ateliers portant sur l'enseignement en ligne pour les niveaux élémentaire et secondaire. Ces ateliers étaient animés par des spécialistes du terrain, et portaient sur les fondements de ce type d'enseignement, sur l'utilisation de la plateforme « Google Classroom » pour la gestion des cours et des contenus, sur différents outils numériques pour la création de contenus et de vidéos en ligne et, finalement, sur l'utilisation des jeux tel que Minecraft.

Ces ateliers, offerts en mode synchrone *via* Zoom, ont été enregistrés et affichés sur la plateforme EClass<sup>16</sup> de l'université afin de contribuer à créer du matériel d'enseignement pérenne. Seuls les étudiants qui avaient participé aux cinq ateliers étaient éligibles pour obtenir le badge numérique. Cette initiative a été très appréciée de la part des étudiants qui ont indiqué avoir apprivoisé de nouvelles pratiques pédagogiques et s'être familiarisés avec de nouveaux outils numériques au service de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage en ligne.

Ce que nous retenons principalement, suite à l'urgence que nous avons vécue de devoir adapter l'accompagnement des stagiaires pour un transfert soudain à l'enseignement en ligne est le besoin de continuer à renforcer la formation initiale concernant le développement de la compétence numérique. Ce que nous retenons également, de la transition soudaine à un enseignement totalement en ligne, est aussi la nécessité d'accompagner les formateurs d'enseignants, comme mentionné ci-après.

### **Création d'un espace de collaboration pour les formateurs d'enseignants**

Afin de soutenir les formateurs d'enseignants, nous avons développé une nouvelle modalité d'accompagnement inspirée des communautés d'apprentissage professionnelle (Leclerc et Labelle, 2013). Un espace de partage rassemblant l'équipe des professeurs et chargés de cours a été créé afin de répondre aux trois objectifs suivants : (1) explorer différentes pratiques pédagogiques pouvant être effectuées en ligne ; (2) offrir un espace virtuel pour pratiquer l'animation de courtes activités, et (3) identifier des éléments concrets pouvant occasionner des obstacles et limiter les imprévus techniques lors des cours donnés en ligne de manière synchrone et asynchrone.

Quatre séances de deux heures chacune ont été offertes au semestre d'automne 2020 durant lesquelles les professeurs ont pu expérimenter une activité en ligne particulière, en présence de leurs collègues qui jouaient le rôle des étudiants. Chacun a pu proposer des sujets ou outils à explorer ensemble et découvrir les fonctions spécifiques aux différents outils d'enseignement discutés, dans un climat d'échange et de respect où les autres participants étaient invités à commenter et à partager leur savoir.

L'impact de ces sessions fut positif et certains professeurs ont mentionné qu'elles leur ont redonné confiance en leurs compétences pédagogiques alors que plusieurs d'entre eux se

<sup>15</sup> Le eportfolio est un dossier personnalisé de l'étudiant de façon à rassembler des travaux, réflexions et autres artéfacts (vidéos, etc.) pour témoigner de l'évolution de son apprentissage sur une plateforme numérique comme Mahara ou Moodle.

<sup>16</sup> Eclass est un système de gestion d'apprentissage en ligne (management learning system) alimentée par Moodle.

sentaient déstabilisés par le passage abrupt d'un enseignement présentiel à l'enseignement en ligne. Ils ont pu également découvrir diverses modalités qui sont à même de soutenir le passage en ligne sans compromettre leur style d'enseignement.

Ces sessions ont enfin permis d'offrir un espace de formation continue, malgré la crise et le sentiment de chacun d'être submergé ; un espace qui puisse à la fois répondre aux besoins concrets et immédiats des participants tout en renforçant les liens de collaboration quand chacun se trouvait soudainement isolé chez soi. Parmi les nouvelles pratiques qui ont émergé ces derniers mois se trouve par exemple l'adaptation du matériel reprographié au format numérique.

### **Exemple d'adaptations de cours au format en ligne : l'utilisation de matériel multimodal**

Dans le cadre d'un cours de didactique de la littératie, est généralement distribué un livret reprographié regroupant une variété de documents portant à la fois sur des aspects théoriques et pédagogiques. Les restrictions sanitaires nous ont incités à remettre en question le médium (papier) de ce livret et à explorer d'autres possibilités. La solution de numériser le matériel pour le distribuer en format PDF a été vite écartée. Nous avons jugé que celle-ci était trop désuète dans un contexte de cours virtuels. Nous nous sommes tournés vers la multimodalité qui pouvait enrichir de manière considérable l'expérience d'apprentissage et d'enseignement. À l'inverse du document monomodal, le multitexte (Boutin, 2012) met en jeu plusieurs modes iconiques, auditifs et textuels. Notre livret est donc devenu un multitexte par l'utilisation de la plateforme Canva et, par extension, nous sommes devenus les auteurs et les designers du matériel (voir schéma 11).

Le concept de design en multilittératies exige une transformation critique et active des contenus et une sélection des modes de représentation de l'information qui soutiennent l'expérience du lecteur et qui appuient le message (Cope et Kalantzis, 2009, 2015 ; Kern, 2015). Ainsi, la nature même du livret étant altérée, nous avons eu à poser un regard critique sur le livret en fonction des objectifs du cours, ce qui nous a amenés à réorganiser son contenu. Ensuite, nous avons réfléchi à la question de l'orchestration (Hull et Nelson, 2005) des modes de représentation qui permettent au texte multimodal de prendre forme. Pour orchestrer nos modes (ex. texte, icônes, vidéo, image, audio, etc.), nous avons réfléchi à leur valeur et à leur juxtaposition. Nous devions trouver un outil de création permettant à la fois la maximisation multimodale d'un document mais aussi son impression en format papier, pour permettre aux étudiants ayant un accès limité à un ordinateur de pouvoir tout de même bénéficier du matériel. C'est par l'entremise de la plateforme Canva que nous avons trouvé la solution. Canva est un outil de design algorithmique qui propose des modèles, des images, des filtres, des icônes et des polices de caractères tout en permettant l'insertion de matériel audio, vidéo, interactif et d'hyperliens.

Le document final comporte plusieurs choix de design pour faciliter la lecture et organiser les sections, des vidéos, des hyperliens (intertextuel et URL), des GIFS, des trames sonores et des mises en relief intégrées. Le PDF peut être lu, annoté, surligné sur écran ou sur papier, et la version numérique permet à l'étudiant d'aller plus loin dans son interaction avec le document.

Cette expérience nous a ainsi permis de revisiter et de transformer un outil, menant à la création d'un environnement d'apprentissage riche qui offre un accès rapide et direct à une grande variété d'informations en contexte, orchestrées entre elles par plusieurs modes. Malgré notre posture de novice en tant qu'auteur-designer, la plateforme Canva nous a permis de créer

un document de qualité qui peut maintenant servir de modèle de produit multimodal pour nos étudiants, durant leurs futures activités professionnelles.

## Schéma 11

### Des exemples de documents multimodaux

#### #5 : La diversité

Bien que la lunette pour le cours EDU M 344 porte sur la diversité raciale, ethnique, religieuse et linguistique, la catégorisation de la diversité comporte bien plus de variables. Lors du choix d'un texte, l'inclusion doit prendre des proportions plus larges:



Traduction libre de la "Diversity Wheel" par la [Johns Hopkins University](#) (n.d., image du domaine public).



En examinant la roue, on remarque tout ce qui permet de diversifier les sources textuelles.

L'enseignement explicite est une stratégie structurée à haut rendement comportant trois étapes : la pratique modelée (modelage), la pratique guidée (soutenue) et la pratique autonome.



Cette vidéo présente des professionnels qui utilisent l'enseignement explicite afin de soutenir la réussite de tous leurs élèves, dont ceux ayant des troubles d'apprentissage (TA). Les trois étapes de l'enseignement explicite sont décrites et illustrées.

Du point de vue de l'enseignant, quels sont les avantages de l'enseignement explicite et du modelage?



Du point de vue de l'élève, quelle serait une stratégie importante apprise en littératie qui sert à travers les disciplines?



#### Pour aller plus loin

L'article [Le modelage, une technique pédagogique qui rend l'implicite explicite](#), de Geneviève Messier

Le [eWorkshop](#) du référentiel l'Atelier.on.edu

*Note.* L'image de gauche a été traduite et adaptée de John Hopkins University Diversity Wheel.

Il nous semble en effet important que nos étudiants bénéficient de nos propres apprentissages, de nos tâtonnements, mais aussi de la créativité et réflexivité qui ont pu émerger de la gestion de la crise pandémique par notre équipe. Dans la partie ci-dessous, nous expliquons comment la situation sanitaire et sociale a également permis de mettre en exergue notamment la pertinence d'implémenter les savoirs et perspectives autochtones dans la formation des enseignants, une composante nouvelle dans nos programmes en éducation.

### Former les futurs enseignants aux perspectives autochtones : résonances particulières dans un climat de crise sociétale

L'intégration des savoirs et perspectives autochtones dans l'enseignement, relativement nouvelle en Alberta (Alberta Education, 2018), a amené la faculté, à repenser récemment ses programmes pour inclure éducation autochtone et éducation à la réconciliation.

## Une composante nouvelle qu'il s'agit encore parfois de justifier

Alors qu'un cours obligatoire sera offert à partir de 2021–2022 et qu'un cours optionnel est proposé depuis 2018, une intégration progressive de cette composante s'est faite dans différents cours, de manière intégrée et transversale. Mais beaucoup reste à faire dans ce domaine « en construction », avec une certaine incompréhension voire un rejet quant à la pertinence de cette composante dans la formation et dans les pratiques des enseignants (Scott et Gani, 2018, Tupper et Cappello, 2008). La pandémie jette néanmoins un éclairage inédit sur cette nouvelle dimension à intégrer.

En effet, la situation pandémique est plus que la somme des ajustements pédagogiques, logistiques, professionnels que nous avons dû faire. Il s'agit plus largement d'une crise globale (sanitaire, environnementale, économique, sociale, voire existentielle) ; une crise qui nous oblige à regarder en face comment va le monde, comment gérer la situation individuellement et collectivement, et comment (re)penser le monde de demain. Or, les systèmes de savoirs traditionnels autochtones ouvrent justement des horizons alternatifs (Battiste, 2016), à un moment où nos repères occidentaux et pratiques sont profondément remis en question.

## Repenser l'éducation et la société au prisme des savoirs traditionnels autochtones

Les systèmes de savoirs traditionnels autochtones nous invitent en effet à prendre du recul et à (re)penser certains de nos choix éducatifs (Tanaka, 2017), en lien avec les choix de société que nous faisons, collectivement, et notamment :

- l'importance d'une approche holistique du développement des individus (Archibald, 2008), ceux-ci ne pouvant s'épanouir et vivre en harmonie que si leur bien-être et leur développement émotionnel, spirituel et physique sont considérés au même titre que les dimensions cognitives et mentales,
- l'importance de nos relations envers nous-mêmes (*self-care*) et envers les autres (Sanford et al., 2012), sachant que l'anxiété, la fatigue, les dépendances diverses, l'isolement, l'enfermement dans une bulle numérique (la fameuse « fatigue zoom ») sont devenus des sources d'inquiétudes majeures (Pfefferbaum et North, 2020),
- l'importance de notre connexion à la nature, quand les espaces extérieurs sont devenus des espaces à la fois plus sécuritaires, d'un point de vue épidémiologique, tout en étant des espaces de bien-être et d'apprentissage (Cajete, 1994 ; Wildcat *et al.*, 2014)
- l'importance de l'écoute dans le leadership (Minthorn et Chavez, 2014), plutôt que de l'affirmation de soi au détriment des idées et du ressenti de l'autre,
- l'importance des aînés, leur valeur dans nos sociétés et dans nos parcours d'apprentissage (Herman, 2011), quand ceux-ci sont les plus vulnérables face à la maladie et que leur protection implique d'importantes contraintes collectives,
- l'importance de la communauté et nos engagements dans le collectif (Sanford *et al.*, 2012), quand nos choix individuels impactent clairement la/les société(s), et en particulier les personnes et groupes les plus vulnérables et discriminés,
- l'importance de repenser l'évaluation et de ne laisser personne en marge dans l'évaluation d'une situation (Claypool et Preston, 2011), qu'elle soit d'apprentissage ou qu'il s'agisse de choix sanitaires et sociétaux,
- l'importance enfin, en lien notamment avec les enseignements de la roue médicinale (Calliou, 1995 ; Pewewardy, 1999), des cycles : cycles naturels, cycles de développement

et d'apprentissage, cycle de guérison ; et ce alors que la pandémie semble avoir suspendu nos vies et interrompu les trajectoires engagées.

Dans le cadre de la formation des étudiants, les systèmes de savoirs traditionnels et visions du monde, ainsi que la manière dont ceux-ci peuvent être transcrits dans la pratique enseignante prennent, on le voit, une résonance particulière dans le contexte de la pandémie.

Dans une vidéo destinée à la formation des enseignants, l'Aîné Francis Alexis (n.d.) pose la question de savoir à quoi sert l'éducation, ce qui nous amène à reprendre la dichotomie de Freire (1974) entre approche bancaire et approche émancipatrice de l'éducation. Dans quel but enseigne-t-on ? Et pour quel idéal de développement personnel et collectif ? Les systèmes de savoirs traditionnels, les visions du monde et principes pédagogiques autochtones nous ramènent ainsi à des questionnements clés, que la pandémie a ramenés à la surface de manière critique.

Beaucoup de limitations et possibilités d'adaptations sont aussi apparues cette dernière année autour de l'invitation d'Aînés sur « Zoom », autour des protocoles cérémoniels à adapter<sup>17</sup>, autour de la diffusion respectueuse de savoirs traditionnels en ligne (Wemigwans, 2018), autour des enseignements sensibles à accompagner (lorsqu'on aborde par exemple les pensionnats et autres violences coloniales) ou encore autour d'expériences d'apprentissage que l'on voudrait expérientielles (Lemaire, 2020, 2021), spirituelles ou encore basées sur la pédagogie du lieu ou de la terre (Campeau, 2019 ; Michell, 2018).

La pandémie nous a ainsi donné l'opportunité de repenser nos pratiques pédagogiques, de leur donner une portée nouvelle, mais aussi d'impliquer les étudiants dans notre réflexivité émergente, modelant l'importance de la formation continue et des compétences transversales qui font partie de notre référentiel de compétences à acquérir en cours de formation (voir schéma 12) ; des compétences telles que la pensée réflexive, l'inclusion, la communication, ou encore la créativité.

Une autre compétence clé, dans notre contexte francophone minoritaire et immersif, est la compétence linguistique en français ; nos étudiants ambitionnant en effet d'enseigner dans cette langue, qui n'est pas celle de la majorité anglophone. On se demandera dès lors dans quelle mesure le passage en ligne aura influencé le développement des compétences langagières de nos étudiants.

### **Compétences langagières et enseignement en ligne en contexte francophone minoritaire et immersif**

#### **Le français au FSJ**

En temps « normal », le campus Saint Jean, comme lieu physique séparé du campus principal et situé dans le quartier francophone, avec une administration et des cours offerts en français, permet aux étudiants qui occupent nos classes d'être exposés au français, à la fois comme langue académique et langue de vie, alors que le milieu environnant est par ailleurs majoritairement anglophone. La faculté rassemble des étudiants issus des écoles francophones minoritaires ouest-canadiennes, des programmes d'immersion française, du contexte francophone majoritaire québécois, et de l'international. Leurs expériences scolaires et

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<sup>17</sup> Dans notre pratique par exemple, les aînés présents en cours synchrone sur Zoom nous ont enjoint à faire l'offre du tabac de manière virtuelle, ce qui a permis de démarrer les apprentissages de manière respectueuse et d'éduquer les étudiants à ce sujet. Il revenait ensuite au professeur d'aller remettre le tabac à la Terre, en offrande, avec des mots de gratitude.



personnelles amènent de fait à une grande diversité quant aux compétences et rapports à la langue française des étudiants (Cavanagh *et al.*, 2016 ; ElAtia, 2018 ; Lemaire, 2018).

La FSJ a opté pour un ensemble d'approches visant à renforcer les compétences langagières de tous les étudiants, quel que soit leur niveau de français. Le développement des compétences langagières est intégré, à différents degrés, dans les cours en éducation, modelant ainsi l'approche de l'intégration de la langue et du contenu (Cammarata, 2016). À cela s'ajoutent des cours de français-langue dits « de base » que les étudiants peuvent prendre pour remédier à des lacunes éventuelles et pour se préparer notamment à valider un niveau B2 fort<sup>18</sup> (Conseil de l'Europe, 2001), conditionnant l'entrée en stage.

### **Adaptations et conséquences liées à la COVID-19**

Dans une certaine mesure, le changement de format d'enseignement ne semble pas avoir posé d'obstacle majeur aux étudiants prenant des cours de français de base et le cours final, essentiellement axé sur l'écrit. Les interactions et le déroulement des activités de classe ont pris place grâce aux affordances offertes par l'outil de visioconférence Zoom (lever la main, salle de discussion, partage d'écran, clavardage, etc.) et par la plateforme numérique Eclass (partage de documents en ligne, forum de discussion, etc.). Dans le cadre des cours d'éducation dispensés en français, plusieurs étudiants ont cependant témoigné de leur difficulté à oser prendre la parole quand l'écran interposé et les caméras éteintes peuvent permettre de se fondre dans l'anonymat. Ces étudiants rapportaient également comme obstacle leur manque de pratique, lié à l'isolement à la maison et à l'absence de proches francophones à qui parler. Plusieurs déplorent la fermeture physique du centre d'appui linguistique (Lemaire et Wilson, 2018), qui leur apportent habituellement un espace d'apprentissage additionnel, bien que celui-ci se soit également adapté pour offrir des rendez-vous en ligne.

Par ailleurs, on peut se demander quel a été l'impact du passage en ligne des stages sur la compétence langagière des étudiants, dans notre contexte minoritaire. En effet, de nombreux étudiants considèrent leurs stages comme un défi et un espace de développement langagier puisqu'ils sont non seulement amenés à parler en français toute la journée mais deviennent également des modèles langagiers dont la compétence en français est scrutée. En ligne, les stagiaires ont moins de temps en face à face avec la classe (bien que certains enseignants conseillers aient profité de cette opportunité pour attribuer le stagiaire à un petit groupe d'élèves ou pour faire des interventions un à un), avec moins d'opportunités donc de gérer des interactions verbales en grands groupes et d'affiner notamment les stratégies d'interaction pour attirer l'attention, maintenir l'intérêt, entretenir et relancer la conversation. Enfin, certains stagiaires se sont retrouvés à développer des ressources pour l'enseignement en ligne, aidant les enseignants conseillers à s'adapter en catastrophe au nouveau format ; ce qui a pu contribuer à développer les compétences d'écriture planifiée, au détriment possiblement de l'oral spontané.

En dehors de leurs éventuels stages, les étudiants n'ont eu par ailleurs que peu d'occasions de se confronter à des intervenants extérieurs, en contexte réel et non-académique, et

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<sup>18</sup> Pour obtenir le niveau B2, le candidat à l'examen du DELF doit obtenir une note minimum de 50/100 avec un minimum de 5/25 aux 4 épreuves qui composent l'examen. Les attentes du FSJ pour les étudiants d'éducation sont plus élevées puisqu'on attend une note minimum de 70/100 sur l'ensemble des quatre composantes avec un minimum de 18/25 aux épreuves de compréhension écrite et de production orale et écrite et un minimum de 12,5/25 à l'épreuve de compréhension orale. Durant la pandémie, seuls les seuils des composantes de production orale et écrite ont été exigés.

ce depuis le début de la pandémie. Les expériences en « laboratoire », dans le milieu éducatif (Cavanagh *et al.*, 2013) et les projets d'« apprentissage par le service à la communauté » (Taylor *et al.*, 2015), que certains professeurs utilisent pour lier théorie et pratique sur le terrain, n'ont pu avoir lieu que de manière très limitée, à partir de l'automne 2020 et essentiellement à distance, alors que ces opportunités d'apprentissage expérientiel peuvent pourtant soutenir le développement langagier des étudiants *via* une expérience de la langue dite « hors-les-murs » (Chapus, 2012 ; Parpette, 2007, 2008). Or cette expérience « hors-les-murs » est importante car elle permet de travailler les compétences pragmatiques et sociolinguistiques du langage et de pallier au manque d'exposition au français formel professionnel (ou, au contraire, familier), qui caractérise notre milieu linguistique.

D'un point de vue extra-langagier enfin, stages et autres expériences « hors les murs » permettent d'un côté aux étudiants de développer une confiance à prendre la parole en français et en public et de l'autre, les exposent à une prise de risque et un engagement dans leurs interactions en français différents de ceux créés par la salle de classe. Ces bénéfices répondent souvent aux questions d'insécurité linguistique d'un bon nombre de nos étudiants (Blain *et al.*, 2018 ; Mandin, 2008).

Il serait ainsi intéressant de se pencher plus avant sur l'impact de la pandémie quant au développement langagier des futurs enseignants, dans le milieu minoritaire qui est le nôtre. La confiance, l'engagement et la prise de risque sont par ailleurs des éléments clés que les étudiants en éducation ont l'occasion de mettre à l'épreuve de la réalité au moment des stages, mais pour ce qui est cette fois de développer leurs compétences pédagogiques et didactiques. L'accompagnement des stages en période pandémique s'avère dès lors crucial.

### **Mise en place et accompagnement des stages**

La fermeture des écoles a eu un impact particulièrement marquant sur les étudiants qui venaient d'engager leur stage et avaient complété seulement deux des sept semaines obligatoires. Pour nous, le défi était de permettre aux stagiaires, éparpillés à travers 19 conseils scolaires en Alberta et quatre provinces, de faire les cinq semaines de stage qui leur manquaient afin de pouvoir faire leur deuxième stage au semestre suivant et de recevoir leur diplôme comme prévu.

### **Gérer l'urgence créée au niveau des stages par la fermeture des écoles**

Après négociation avec les conseils scolaires et les écoles pour savoir s'ils accepteraient que nos stagiaires continuent leur stage<sup>19</sup>, nous avons réussi à convaincre la majorité d'entre eux que les stages allaient pouvoir continuer en ligne. Ainsi, presque 70 % de nos stagiaires ont pu continuer à faire leur stage en ligne pendant les mois de mars et d'avril 2020. Cependant, que faire avec les autres stagiaires qui n'avaient pas reçu la permission de continuer leur stage en ligne ? Nous avons alors entamé un dialogue avec nos collègues des autres universités en Alberta qui faisaient face au même défi. Nous sommes rapidement arrivés à la conclusion que la meilleure façon de relever le défi était de créer un cours en ligne sur Eclass appelé *Projet d'achèvement de stage*. Le but de ce cours était de favoriser chez les stagiaires la réflexion et la collaboration à travers le développement d'une séquence de leçons pouvant être présentée sur une plateforme de gestion des apprentissages en ligne. Pour éviter la décontextualisation des

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<sup>19</sup> Cette négociation avec les différents conseils scolaires a pu être très rapide, de l'ordre de quelques jours, ou prendre au contraire jusqu'à trois semaines.

apprentissages des stagiaires, nous avons demandé à ces derniers de créer des leçons en tenant compte des éléments du contexte de leur placement initial (niveau et matière scolaires visés, thème ou concepts abordés, etc.).

### **De nouvelles possibilités d'apprentissage pour nos stagiaires**

Paradoxalement, la situation critique dans laquelle nous nous sommes retrouvés a fini par permettre à nos stagiaires de développer davantage les compétences transversales visées par nos programmes (voir

Schéma 12).

Cette capacité d'adaptation et les compétences que nous avons développés dans notre prise en compte de la pandémie ne doivent cependant pas nous faire occulter les enjeux, critiques, d'équité dans l'accès et l'évaluation de la formation, tout un pan de réflexion que nous abordons ci-dessous.

### **Enjeux en termes d'équité et d'inclusion**

Les conséquences de la pandémie seront à jamais présentes dans la trajectoire de formation des étudiants, en particulier pour ce qui est des relevés de notes.

#### **La remise en cause du système de notation**

L'Université de l'Alberta (UofA), et par extension la FSJ, comme toutes les universités publiques du Canada, devait prendre une décision rapide sur les notes à accorder pour les cours (Westerfied, 2020). Contrairement à d'autres universités, la UofA a décidé en faveur de la note P/F<sup>20</sup> (Crédit), ce qui a soulevé des questions d'équité et des débats houleux. Cette décision importante aura des répercussions majeures sur les étudiants à court et à long termes parce que les étudiants ne recevront pas de note numérisée pour leurs cours (A, A-, B+, etc.). Or, la note P/F ne rentre pas dans les calculs des moyennes générales. Pour autant, les étudiants doivent continuer à se soumettre à l'évaluation de leur rendement, passer notamment les examens de fin de sessions et rendre les travaux finaux.

Alors que certains étudiants se sont réjouis de cette décision, d'autres s'inquiétaient d'un possible impact négatif à terme, mêlé à un sentiment de dépossession déjà accentué par le confinement. Avec ce nouveau cadre d'évaluation, les étudiants devraient continuer leur semestre de travail, s'investir et continuer à donner le meilleur d'eux-mêmes, mais sans attente positive en matière de rendement. La note P/F est ainsi devenue une question d'équité (fairness) dans l'évaluation.

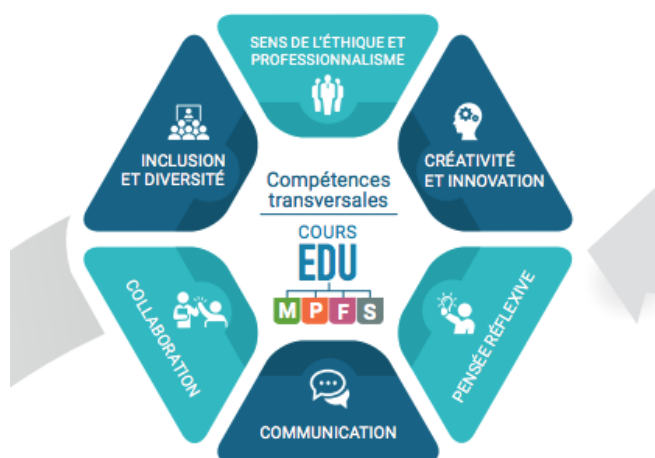
Cependant, le modèle proposé par d'autres universités, qui laisse le choix à l'étudiant entre la note P/F (crédit) ou la note ABC, cause d'autres problèmes : (a) les étudiants optant pour l'option crédit seront vus comme « les plus faibles, ceux qui avaient peur de leur note finale » (Friesen 2020), et (b) ceux qui optent pour la note ABC, seront perçus comme étant les plus forts. Ce système crée donc deux catégories d'étudiants sans prendre en considération les situations individuelles derrière ces choix, ce qui revient à « exonère[r] l'université de cette responsabilité mais (...) ne règle pas le problème des étudiants » (S. ElAtia & S. Walden, communication personnelle, 2020).

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<sup>20</sup> pass/fail

## Schéma 12

### Compétences transversales du programme en éducation au Campus Saint-John



| Compétences                            | Découvertes et initiatives du côté de nos stagiaires  |
|--|---|
| Sens de l'éthique et professionnalisme | Les stagiaires ont dû évoluer dans un contexte changeant dans lequel il leur a fallu apprendre à respecter les directives des ministères de l'Éducation, les règlements des conseils scolaires et les attentes des divers intervenants sur le terrain (directions d'école, enseignants, professeurs conseillers). En dépit de ces contraintes, certains d'entre eux qui étaient habiles en technologies ont accepté d'assumer un rôle de leadership dans les écoles en montrant à des enseignants chevronnés comment s'adapter aux nouvelles réalités numériques. |
| Créativité et innovation               | Les stagiaires ont dû modifier leurs plans de leçon en utilisant de nouvelles technologies et en expérimentant avec de nouvelles plateformes numériques. Il leur a fallu transformer leurs leçons « traditionnelles » livrées en présentiel en des leçons en ligne.   |
| Pensée réflexive                       | Les stagiaires ont dû trouver rapidement des solutions pour relever les défis créés par l'enseignement en ligne. Nous les avons amenés à réfléchir à des manières de planifier leurs leçons de sorte à susciter l'engagement des élèves dans un contexte inédit.  |
| Communication                          | Nos stagiaires ont développé de nouvelles stratégies de communication afin d'entretenir des relations positives avec les élèves et leurs parents. Certains ont par ailleurs de présenter formellement leur expérience auprès de leurs pairs.  |
| Collaboration                          | Au cours des mois de mars et d'avril 2020, nous avons remarqué qu'une communauté d'apprentissage s'était développée entre les stagiaires quand ils ont partagé plusieurs stratégies et ressources sur un Google Classroom créé par le Bureau de la pratique.  |
| Inclusion et diversité                 | Les stagiaires ont fait face au défi de trouver des façons d'inclure tous les élèves dans le contexte de l'enseignement à distance. Ils se sont appuyés sur le cadre de la conception universelle de l'apprentissage (Hall <i>et al.</i> , 2012) pour concevoir des formes variées de soutien qui permettraient à tous les élèves de réussir.   |

Pour prendre en compte cette situation délicate, l'université a mis à la disposition des étudiants la possibilité d'obtenir, sur demande, une lettre officielle du bureau du registraire détaillant les notes reçues dans les travaux notés. L'option de la UofA nous paraît être la plus équitable dans le sens où on donne à l'étudiant la chance de pouvoir présenter un « breakdown » de toutes les notes obtenues dans chaque cours, ce qui peut être particulièrement important pour l'octroi des bourses par exemple.

## Repenser l'évaluation

Au-delà de la situation critique du début de la pandémie, le passage à un enseignement complètement virtuel cause des problèmes qui remettent en question le modèle même de l'évaluation aux niveaux postsecondaires. Banta et Palomba (2014) remettaient déjà en question les pratiques universitaires en évaluation, jugées normatives. Les étudiants tendent d'ailleurs à affirmer une insatisfaction croissante envers les objectifs de l'évaluation au post-secondaire (Arum et Roska, 2010 ; Hattie, 2009). La situation de la pandémie a accentué cette situation de mécontentement, que nous avons également observée à la FSJ.

Le passage à l'enseignement en ligne nécessite en effet une évaluation adaptée (ElAtia, 2020). Or la tendance que nous avons observée est de vouloir maintenir exactement le même type d'évaluation, coulé simplement dans un moule virtuel. D'importants questionnements se posent néanmoins : (1) comment s'assurer que les étudiants ne trichent pas lors de l'administration des examens (notamment pour les questions à choix multiples), et (2) comment s'assurer d'apporter des corrections en ligne de manière formative qui vont servir au mieux l'apprentissage des étudiants. Face à ces défis, se dégage une piste émergente, soit l'évaluation, chez les étudiants, du « *higher level thinking* » (Haladyna, 2004). Au post-secondaire, une évaluation transformative (Popham, 2008) qui permet une appréciation des résultats d'apprentissage allant au-delà de la seule mémorisation devrait être valorisée. La pandémie nous donne justement l'opportunité de revoir pédagogiquement l'évaluation pour une évaluation plus pertinente et pour laquelle il semble plus difficile de tricher, au lieu de compter sur la technologie pour recréer les situations d'évaluation antérieures à 2020, à grand renfort d'« applications espionnes », qui sont par ailleurs vécues comme intrusives et stressantes par les étudiants. Là encore, l'input des étudiants serait précieux à collecter et analyser, l'évaluation gagnant à être conçue comme une négociation du savoir entre professeur et étudiant de sorte à favoriser l'apprentissage de ce dernier (Popham, 2008).

L'input des étudiants permettrait également de mieux comprendre comment ces derniers ont vécu les enjeux d'équité autour des différentes mesures prises pour s'adapter au passage intégral en ligne, sachant que la pandémie a globalement mis en évidence des disparités claires, questionnant notre engagement d'inclusivité envers les étudiants.

## Enjeux d'équité et d'inclusion dans la salle de classe

Au niveau scolaire, les travaux commencent à émerger et témoignent de l'effet décuplé des conséquences de la COVID-19 sur les élèves défavorisés et marginalisés, lesquels accumulent du retard scolaire au risque de décrocher (Commission canadienne pour l'Unesco, 2020 ; Potvin, 2020). Ce scénario que d'aucun n'avait prévu, met en évidence la fragilité d'un système scolaire aspirant à l'équité et l'inclusion de tous. Mais qu'en est-il au niveau des étudiants universitaires en formation en enseignement ? Comment ont-ils été affectés ?

Précisons ici que la moitié de nos étudiants en éducation sont inscrits au bac après le diplôme et qu'une grande partie de ces étudiants sont issus de l'immigration<sup>21</sup>. La plupart de ces étudiants, principalement originaires de l'Afrique francophone subsaharienne, sont plus âgés et ont des familles à charge. Ils optent pour une carrière d'enseignant possiblement par goût, parce que certains étaient déjà dans cette carrière dans leur pays d'origine, ou par désir de se reconverter, bien souvent aussi dans l'espoir d'une insertion professionnelle rapide dans un contexte de pénurie d'enseignants élevée dans l'Ouest canadien (Bourbonnais, 2018 ; Canadian Parents for French, 2018), et afin d'échapper à une « chronicisation de la déqualification » (Kanouté *et al.*, 2012). Bien que certains de ces étudiants puissent avoir d'excellentes connaissances en technologie, notamment leur formation première (leur premier bac), ces étudiants semblent généralement avoir un capital technologique plus limité que leurs pairs, sortant des écoles secondaires albertaines, d'autant plus que les étudiants du bac après-diplôme n'ont que deux ans pour se familiariser avec ces technologies particulières que sont les technologies au service de l'enseignement. Ceci nous renvoie aux travaux de Prensky (2001) qui oppose les « Digital Native », immergés dès leur jeune âge dans la technosphère et les « Digital Immigrants » qui n'ont pas eu autant accès à ce capital technologique et doivent donc engager un plus grand processus d'adaptation.

Dans les premières semaines de cours, nous avons souvent entendu la phrase suivante : « Monsieur/Madame, je n'arrive pas à me brancher », témoignant de la détresse de certains étudiants face à la technologie. Combien de fois avons-nous répété « il faut que tu allumes ton micro », « il faut fermer ton micro quand tu ne parles pas » ? De temps à autre, les enfants curieux s'immisçaient dans le cours et détournaient l'attention des parents<sup>22</sup>. Autant de petites phrases et situations anodines révélant les inégalités face à l'usage de la technologie et les contraintes familiales dans lesquelles s'est déroulé l'apprentissage de ces étudiants plus âgés qui reprennent des études, souvent après une expérience d'immigration.

En somme, la transition vers l'enseignement en ligne a mis en relief « la fracture numérique » existante entre les *Digital Native* et les *Digital Immigrants* (Prensky, 2001), entre ceux familiers avec les technologies numériques et ceux qui ont dû prendre le train en marche. Une situation d'adaptation déjà stressante en soi et décuplée par le poids des responsabilités familiales et des fragilités socio-économiques vécues par beaucoup d'étudiants issus de l'immigration engagés dans une requalification professionnelle. À terme, nous faisons l'hypothèse que cette transition éclair vers l'enseignement en ligne a certainement contribué à alimenter les défis déjà rencontrés en temps ordinaire par les étudiants issus de l'immigration et des minorités visibles en formation en enseignement (Deschesne, 2018 ; Jacquet, 2020; Mujawamariya, 2002). Cela, les recherches empiriques futures nous le diront.

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<sup>21</sup> Il nous est difficile de connaître précisément la proportion d'étudiants issus de l'immigration, le caractère récent ou pas de leur immigration, l'endroit où les étudiants ont fait leur scolarité secondaire, leur situation familiale ainsi que leurs origines précises, dans la mesure où les statistiques administratives ne collectent pas nécessairement ces données et que les statistiques, partielles, ne se recoupent que partiellement, nous obligeant à faire des extrapolations à partir des données existantes. On sait toutefois, selon les données compilées par l'administration, que 15% de nos étudiants en éducation (au premier cycle) ne sont pas citoyens canadiens, et ont un statut de résidents permanents.

<sup>22</sup> À noter que les caméras ouvertes nous ont permis de mieux prendre conscience des défis rencontrés par les étudiants (et en particulier les étudiantes) qui sont aussi parents de jeunes enfants, qu'ils soient issus de l'immigration ou non, en situation monoparentale ou pas.

## Conclusion

La réflexion que nous proposons ici ne repose pas sur des données probantes sur la formation des enseignants en général en temps de pandémie. Il s'agit plutôt d'une première synthèse, effectuée à l'aide de nos expertises et regards différents, de l'expérience que nous avons vécue en tant qu'équipe de formateurs d'enseignants en contexte francophone minoritaire et immersif en Alberta. Le tour d'horizon qui en résulte indique une certaine vue d'ensemble et des enjeux importants<sup>23</sup>. Plusieurs de ces enjeux existaient même avant la pandémie, qui aurait ensuite eu sur eux l'effet d'une loupe grossissante. La situation au complet ainsi que les questions particulières soulevées permettent d'avancer des pistes de réflexion, de formation, de solutions et de recherches qu'il sera important de continuer à analyser dans l'après-pandémie.

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<sup>23</sup> Nous n'avons pas développé dans ce chapitre la question de la santé mentale des étudiants et des éducateurs, ni de l'accompagnement à offrir ; un pan de recherche qui serait aussi extrêmement pertinent à investiguer.



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## **SECTION 3**

# **Practicum Adaptations**

## CHAPTER 10

### **Pivoting During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Case of a Teacher Education Program at a Private University**

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#### **Abstract**

Currently, a major pivot is taking place in education all over the world. Since March 2020, COVID-19 has caused changes in how education is perceived and delivered. Higher education, just like other levels of education, has drastically changed with the emergence of COVID-19 in Canada. The world over, institutions are struggling to navigate safety issues and the vigorous requirements of the academy. Many questions have been raised about the type of graduate who will be produced by COVID-19 educational policies. Questions about the validity of experience, teacher-student relationships, and student-student relationships continue to trouble many educators and policymakers. Teacher education is one of the programs that has been hardest hit by the pandemic: faculty and instructors in teacher education departments have worked diligently to find ways to deliver quality education to students during a pandemic. Teacher education programs have specific requirements, including practicum. Because of COVID-19, this major component of teacher education has seen a dramatic shift in its process and administration. The goal of this study is to examine and highlight the challenging experiences of students, faculty, and mentor teachers involved in a Bachelor of Education program as they engaged in practicum during COVID-19. In addition, this study highlights how faculty and instructors moved with alacrity to adapt courses to online learning while maintaining the rigor and integrity of the teacher education program. It shows how pivoting during challenging times can influence change in teacher practice.

*Keywords:* practicum, health protocols, online learning, COVID-19, social distance, teacher education

#### **Résumé**

Un changement d'importance capitale dans le domaine de l'éducation se déroule présentement partout dans le monde. Depuis le mois de mars 2020, la COVID-19 a provoqué des changements dans la façon dont l'éducation est perçue et dispensée. Comme en tout autre niveau d'enseignement, l'éducation postsecondaire a changé radicalement depuis l'émergence de la COVID-19 au Canada. Partout dans le monde, les institutions ont du mal à gérer les problèmes de sécurité et les exigences rigoureuses de l'académie. De nombreuses questions ont été soulevées sur le type de diplômé qui sera produit par les politiques éducatives de la COVID-19. Les questions sur la validité en fonction de l'expérience, le rapport entre enseignant et élève et les relations entre étudiant.e.s continuent de préoccuper de nombreux éducateurs et de décideurs politiques. La formation des enseignants est l'un des programmes les plus durement touchés par la pandémie ; les membres du corps enseignant responsables pour la formation des enseignants ont travaillé avec assiduité afin de trouver et de livrer une éducation de qualité aux étudiants pendant la pandémie. Les programmes de formation des enseignants ont des exigences

spécifiques, y compris le stage pédagogique. En raison de la COVID-19, cette composante clé à la formation des enseignants a connu un changement remarquable envers son développement et son administration. L'objectif de cette étude est d'examiner et de mettre en évidence les expériences des étudiants, des professeurs et des enseignants à titre de mentors impliqués dans un programme de baccalauréat en éducation alors qu'ils effectuaient un stage face au défi de la COVID-19. En outre, cette étude met en évidence la façon dont les professeurs et les instructeurs se sont empressés à adapter les cours à l'apprentissage en ligne tout en conservant la rigueur et l'intégrité du programme de formation des enseignants. C'est ainsi qu'accorder un pivotement pendant de telles périodes difficiles peut influencer le changement dans notre pratique d'enseignement.

*Mots clés* : stage pédagogique, practicum, protocoles de santé, apprentissage en ligne, COVID-19, distanciation sociale, formation des enseignants

### **The Context**

The latter part of the year 2019 and the year 2020 will be remembered for the sweeping and unprecedented changes that occurred across the globe because of the coronavirus. By the end of the first quarter of 2021, worldwide there were 132,730,691 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 2,880,726 deaths (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). The North American continent topped the list with 57,262,736 cases reported. Within the same period, Canada recorded 1,036,023 cases with about 23,211 deaths (Statistics Canada, 2021). Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, and Alberta were the provinces with the highest numbers of reported cases. As the numbers increased around the world, restrictions and protocols were set in place. Many businesses were forced to close, and some employees were forced to work from home. This resulted in significant job losses in the country and created dire economic circumstances for many (Murray & Olivares, 2020).

COVID-19 and its resulting restrictions and safety rules meant a change in the normal routines for almost all institutions and individuals in the province of Alberta. As the pandemic swept over Canada, concerns were raised about its impact on schooling from kindergarten to higher education. In many places there was much panic as teachers, parents, and students were concerned about learning experiences. Educational institutions faced closures, new protocols, and changes in the day-to-day operations. COVID-19 catapulted educators into making swift changes to facilitate teaching and mentoring to preservice teachers (Hill et al., 2020; Yao et al., 2020). This qualitative study followed two practicum supervisors, five mentor teachers, and ten students in a B.Ed. program at a private university. The participants shared how COVID-19 impacted them. The goal of this study is to understand how faculty, mentor teachers, and B.Ed. candidates navigated the COVID space as they participated in the practicum experience. Of significant importance was the students' experiences of practicum during this period.

### **Literature Review**

COVID-19 changed the landscape of education from kindergarten to higher education. Concepts that were foreign to the vernacular in education became commonplace as schooling changed. Teacher preparation and learning were affected in various ways by the pandemic as schooling transitioned, for many, into remote learning (Fox et al., 2020; Mohammed et al., 2020; Yao et al., 2020). While teachers had little warning before online learning was initiated,

uppermost in their minds were the need for flexibility and concern for students (Barry & Kanematsu, 2020). This flexibility allowed teachers to recognize that it was necessary to reimagine the ways in which teaching and learning were done (Burns et al., 2020).

A major component of teacher education programs is the practicum experience which provides preservice teachers with opportunities to learn from mentors and to practice the skills related to teaching (Schultz, 2005). This practical element of teacher education programs is immensely valuable to preservice teachers because it provides an opportunity for them to demonstrate teaching competence and skills. Through the practicum experience, teachers get to practice the art of teaching in a real school context with student teachers assigned to specific classes with individual experienced teachers with specific mentorship directions (Grosbois, 2014). This has been the traditional method for students' experience. Thus, the moving of practicum to an online space introduced preservice teachers to new ways of teaching and new technologies; this, in turn, resulted in teacher educators reimagining teaching and the structure of programs. Many preservice teachers participated in both online and face-to-face practicum experiences during the pandemic. Following WHO's recommendation to institutions and individuals, as well the governments of Canada and Alberta, mentor teachers and University faculty had to adjust their outcomes, expectations, and requirements for practicum. WHO's (2019) recommendation revolved around the following areas; community-level measures, policy, practice and infrastructure, behavioural aspects, safety and security, hygiene and daily practices at the school and classroom level, screening and care of sick students, teachers and other school staff, protection of individuals at high-risk, communication with parents and students, Additional school-related measures such as physical distancing outside classrooms, and physical distancing inside classrooms. Additional school-related measures included physical distancing outside classrooms, and physical distancing inside classrooms. Specific recommendations in these areas forced schools to adopt comprehensive measures to prevent the spread of the virus (Panovska-Griffiths et al., 2020) which included a shift to online delivery for the 2020 academic year. Several studies (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020; Huffman, 2020; O'Sullivan et al., 2020; Poletti & Raballo, 2020) have examined the impact on students, families and teachers but little is known about the impact on teacher training experience, especially practicum. Thus, this study fills this gap in the discourse and highlighted how the pandemic affected practicum experience in teacher education.

### **The Case of a Private University**

The goal of teacher education programs is to provide society with teachers who are equipped with pedagogical practices that support effective teaching and learning in schools. Bachelor of education programs are designed to promote best practices and to challenge students to participate in good citizenship. The private university where this study was conducted is located in Alberta. It offers a variety of bachelor's degrees and is founded on Christian values and principles. As was true for many institutions in the province, COVID-19 presented administrators, students, faculty, and staff with many challenges. The escalating pandemic in 2020 and the subsequent closure of some schools coincided with spring break. This created much confusion for students at the university, many of whom lived outside of the province. Because it was uncertain how long the institution would be closed, students packed up and stored their belongings prior to leaving. Before the break was over, the university administration, following the advice of the health ministry, made the decision to switch to online instruction.

Uncertain of what schooling would look like, the faculty were challenged to quickly pivot to an online learning platform. The administration took immediate measures to provide training to sharpen the technological skills of the teaching faculty. This included a fast-track training of faculty in software applications to facilitate online teaching and learning. These training sessions were augmented with intensive seminars and professional development over the summer of 2020 when faculty were introduced to new technologies for online delivery that would aid them during the 2020–2021 academic year.

This was a difficult time in the School of Education because students were in their practicum and field experience rotations. Students, mentor teachers and university professors asked many questions about practicum. Students wondered if the policies governing practicum would change. Would practicum experiences be extended? Would they be given enough practicum experiences to qualify for teacher certification? Would they need to pay for another practicum? University professors and students alike voiced concerns. Could students receive teaching certification even though they completed fewer weeks? How would a shortened practicum affect the quality of teachers? Would new graduates be confident of their ability to teach? Would the suspension of practicum prevent final year students from graduating? Mentor teachers were concerned with the quality of preservice teachers that they would need to support. Many of these difficult questions resulted in stress and anxiety.

### **Methodology**

This study, situated within the interpretive research paradigm, posits reality as constructed through the meanings and understandings of research participants, who develop socially and experientially through an intersubjective process (Miranda et al., 2003). The goal is to understand “the world of human experience” (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 36), as “socially constructed” (Mertens, 2005, p. 12) by the research participants. In this qualitative study, an inductive method was used to develop meaningful patterns (Creswell et al., 2003) from participants’ responses. This qualitative approach provided the opportunity to understand people’s beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviour, and interactions and can give voice to the realities experienced by participants in a study (Gibson et al., 2014). Qualitative research can give voice to the realities experienced by participants in a study (Gibson et al., 2014). The participants in this study were given the opportunity to share their experiences of practicum in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and described how it impacted them. While the researchers worked on the social parameters, our participants also had an empowering experience as their lived realities were shared and respected. Qualitative research also allows researchers to study and engage participants in their natural settings (Creswell et al., 2007). As Merriam (1998) posited, case studies like this one, seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, changes, actions, and perspectives of research participants. We found this to be true as we studied participants at a private university in Alberta.

A purposive sampling method was used in this study. Purposive sampling allowed us to select respondents who were in the best position to meet the research goals and objectives (Guarte & Barrios, 2006). Our objectives and goals for the study included understanding challenges participants faced during the COVID-19 pandemic: discovering some of the coping mechanisms of practicum students, mentor teachers, and university supervisors; and communicating self-care practices among research participants. The exploratory nature of the study made purposive sampling the most viable option for gathering data. We selected 10 mentor teachers who have been working with our university students over the years because of their



experience and commitment to support the university in the training of future teachers. Two faculty members who supervise practicum were also involved in this research, along with fifteen education students.

Invitations to participate in this study were sent out to 25 practicum students of the 2019–2020 academic year. Students willing to participate in the study were thus engaged. These students were in practicum when sudden changes occurred due to COVID-19 restrictions and school closures. All respondents worked in the province, within or adjacent to the central Alberta area. Semistructured questionnaires and one-on-one interviews were used to solicit ideas and comments which were analyzed by the researchers. By using these methods, we had the opportunity to ask, listen, rephrase, and ask follow-up questions, as recommended by Valenzuela and Shrivastava (2002). Questions were aimed at exploring participants' experience with practicum and candidates' supervision during the COVID-19 pandemic. Questions asked included the following: What has been your greatest challenge having practicum students during COVID-19 times? What are some strategies that you used to mentor teacher candidates in your care? How rigorous was your assessment of students' teaching performance in this period? Data were analyzed based on themes identified through inductive data analysis. Pseudonyms were used to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents. Close attention was given to recurring ideas, consistencies, and biases as well as contradictory ideas. Adhering to the principles of research ethics, respondents participated voluntarily and had the right to withdraw at any time.

### **Data Analysis**

In this section, we analyze recurring themes that were identified in data among participants. They are discussed based on themes that recurred most frequently or were identified by most of the participants. Analysis entails quotes from students, mentor teachers, education faculty and comments from the researchers.

### **COVID-19 Experiences and Feelings**

Many educational programs faced enormous challenges, some of which may continue in a postpandemic era (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). Practica for B.Ed. students were one of the many areas affected. Students were concerned and anxious as they faced not only sudden changes in teaching format, assignments, assessments, and absence of in-person classes, but they were also worried about the true nature of the virus and its spread. Furthermore, the students were concerned about their ability to complete the semester and about the plans the institution would put in place to ensure proper training. Respondents succinctly reflect this view in the comments below:

I had mixed feelings. I was anxious because it was a scary time. We did not know what was going on as well, but we had to get through. Did not know if I would have to come back and take the course again or if I will receive a half grade or I will fail. It was a very difficult time mentally and physically draining. (Susan, third-year student)

It was a difficult time as I contemplated pulling out my kids from school for homeschooling and pulling out of practicum myself. What if any of my kids get the virus while I am in the practicum? It meant I would have to quarantine with my family and

even worse the classroom I am doing my practicum. This whole COVID thing has been stressful. (Ama, third-year student)

I was fearful and confused because I did not have a practicum experience before it was somehow troubling. When we got a case in my school, I was scared I would not finish my practicum and delay my graduation. Something I cannot afford. (John, first-time practicum student)

I was afraid and scared. Not just for myself but for my elderly grandparents that I lived with. What if during practicum I got the virus and brought it to them? (Linda, first-time practicum student)

Fear, uncertainty, and shock could easily be heard as the pandemic unfolded, especially among preservice teachers engaged in their practicum experience for the first time and those finishing their last practicum. However, their own well-being and that of their family and relatives was the paramount concern during the COVID-19 transition period. The mentor teachers were equally affected by stress as a result of the pandemic. One teacher described the situation with COVID-19 as “stressful and involving additional work, though the extra help from student candidate was much appreciated” (Lily, lower elementary teacher). This response shows the dilemma of having practicum students during this period. As much as the practicum students helped in reducing the stress on teachers, their presence created its own challenges. Monica, a teacher in a lower elementary grade, reflected this struggle when she noted,

I need to be watching my students to make sure they follow all protocols while learning, and at the same time I need to watch, evaluate and make sure this new teacher is doing her job well. This is difficult I must say ... really just the stress of trying to keep them safe and my students safe. Not having either exposed unnecessarily while making sure they learn.

Classroom schedules and procedures drastically changed to accommodate COVID-19 protocols, such as cleaning and social distancing. Mentor teachers had to enforce these protocols and additional requirements, especially among younger students who seem to be lost in this whole arrangement. Lucy and Martha, teachers at the upper elementary level, noted the following about their experiences:

The greatest challenge this year with COVID-19 in the classroom is making sure visitors entering our school and classroom are aware of and follow all protocols and cleaning procedures outlined by Alberta Health Services. Cleaning procedures are intense. Every student must sanitize when entering and leaving the room and desks must be cleaned several times during the day. With new cleaning solutions, students no longer can clean their desks, thus a lot of time during our day is dedicated to cleaning every child's workspace. Our schedule is not consistent due to all extra time spent on protocol procedures.

Adding to the stress was the challenge of uncertain school days and inconsistent student attendance: COVID-19 rules and restrictions changed the classroom dynamics. Sam, a high school preservice teacher, reflected this situation when he noted the following:

I think that with the strict rules, it makes it challenging adding another person to the class. On top of that, often students were away due to symptoms so at times as a practicum student you will have to reteach a topic to missing students.

For the faculty in the School of Education, most of the stress emanated from the quick transition from face-to-face instructions to purely online delivery.

The greatest challenge was trying to figure out how to ensure the safety of my practicum students. I was fearful that they may get sick and would be unable to complete their practicum. I spent time encouraging them to do their best and to abide by all the health protocols. My assessment did not change much as I followed the rubric used to assess them. (Faculty 1)

I taught online so I was not able to interact with my students the way I would normally. One of the things that I did before every class was a wellness check. I would ask students how they were doing and we would encourage each other.” I found that students were very appreciative of the wellness checks done before and sometimes after each class. (Faculty 2)

Online teaching was hard for the first two days but then I got better as I had no choice but to learn how to navigate the learning platforms. (Faculty 1)

Pivoting to online impacted the university in various ways. The main impact was the absence of students from the campus. I missed hearing the hustle and bustle of students day by day. Also, I missed the interaction with students in my classes, in the hallways and cafeteria. Pivoting meant that all faculty were teaching online, some from their offices at home and others from their offices on campus. It was a quick move to move some content online, especially for asynchronous classes. Assessment was just as rigorous as students were required to meet the expectations for success (Faculty 2)

During the first wave of the pandemic, the students were withdrawn from practicum after they had completed only four weeks; prior to COVID, practica were 8 weeks long for each session. Students were required to augment their shortened practica by writing an intensive reflection paper about the experience of teaching during a pandemic. The students who were withdrawn from practicum were able to complete their full eight weeks in the succeeding practicum rotation, which allowed all of them to meet the government requirements. Fear and uncertainty characterized the experiences of students, faculty and mentor teachers during the pandemic. However, they indicated coping strategies that were helpful during this time.

### **Mentoring Strategies for Teachers**

Mentor teachers, despite having to deal with the impact of COVID-19, encouraged creativity and flexibility in the assessment and expectation of candidates. The results from the study indicated that mentor teachers adopted several strategies to support practicum students. These strategies included the added awareness of COVID-19 protocols, changes in classroom structure, support for practicum students, and adaptations to learning strategies.

### ***Awareness of COVID-19 Protocols***

Just making students aware of our protocols, trying to encourage them to think/plan outside of the box in their time with the students. (Magi, lower elementary grade)

It is important to wear masks when working one on one and roaming the classroom. Incorporate time into schedules for sanitizing/washing. Limiting the “extras” [food/manipulatives/shared items] that I used to be able to do with my class. (Braddy, lower elementary grade)

### ***Changes in Classroom Structure***

Classroom arrangement. I had to take out our library area and some flexible seating arrangements for my students. (Alice, secondary school)

The school developed a cohort system that works perfectly. It allows us to have few students at a time and this was very effective for teaching. The practicum students helped make the work a bit easy as enforcement of protocol was easy because of his presence. (Alice, lower elementary grade)

### ***Support for Practicum Students***

I gave access to my resources so that the teacher candidate did not have to make everything from scratch. For safety, we developed a cohort system where particular teachers were the only contact for particular students. This was helpful for contact tracing. (Mike, secondary school)

Allowing them [candidates] to stay after school, work on lesson plans, and the other things needed. (Sue, secondary school)

### ***Adaptations to Learning Strategies***

Kids don't leave the classroom. It's just a switch from one subject to the other—our gym requires constant spraying and is thoroughly cleaned. (Braddy, lower elementary grade)

Group work cannot be done so easily due to cohort policies. Online options must always be available in case a student is missing from class. (Alice, lower elementary grade)

I have had to make sure that online options are always available but outside of that, I have not been too hampered by the provincial protocols. (Jay, upper elementary)

From the above responses, it is clear that mentoring involved many activities and revolved around the need to maintain and uphold health and safety protocols for everyone involved. This meant that all teaching strategies, classroom management practices, assignments, and activities were designed in direct adherence to health and safety protocols. Cohort systems allowed few students to be in the classroom at a time which helped with health protocols as teachers had less students to manage. At one level, this reduced the pressure on teachers but meant constant repetition and reteaching of lessons. In one school, the cohort system surprisingly

revealed some weakness in the classroom. Students were randomly grouped into two cohorts, alternating week by week. Three weeks into the cohort system, the teacher realized students in one cohort were on a higher academic level than the second group. Changes were then made to ensure that the students were taught at their level. The mentor teachers went above and beyond by sharing their lesson plans and other resources with preservice teachers. The willingness of mentor teachers to share material with preservice teachers ensured that the prescribed curriculum was taught, and that students were learning the skills and strategies needed for success in that subject.

The key goal of students' practicum experience is for them to gain hands-on knowledge in the classroom with limited support and observation. By engaging with students and mentor teachers, preservice teachers learn the skills associated with this practice. Since teaching is a profession that places great emphasis on interaction and engagement, COVID-19 requirements and protocols made this goal challenging to achieve. Notwithstanding, many mentor teachers were gracious and willing to adapt and give candidates the best experience as close as possible to the "normal" classroom.

### **Rigorous Assessment of Students**

It was a concern that COVID-19 would affect the practicum experience for both mentor teachers and students. However, the study showed that mentor teachers, as well as university faculty supervisors, were as rigorous as at any other time. Mentor teachers did not relax their expectations, but rather provided flexible ways that candidates could achieve the expected outcomes. Mentor teachers, when asked about the rigor of assessments, noted the following:

I would say my assessment was comparable to other years. However, my expectations of her providing different learning opportunities were lowered due to the restrictions upon us. I am encouraging more online activities where students can show their understanding and creativity— instead of the group projects per se. (Mike, secondary school)

High expectations are kept, but considering that the curriculum is technical, a little bit of grace is given to give the preservice teacher time to get up to speed. (Mike, secondary school)

We took the opportunity to learn something new. Now at least we know some things could be done remotely. So my assessment was rigorous on some level as I expected the candidate to be able to adapt to new changes in the classroom and the school. (Alice, lower elementary grade)

When students were asked if they felt their experience was negatively impacted by COVID-19, their responses were varied. Most of them appreciated the opportunity to experiment with different methods, especially technology and online learning. This view was succinctly reflected in the answer given by one preservice teacher.

I always look at the positives of every situation. COVID-19 was a blessing in disguise. There are things I never thought could be taught or engaged in online but the situation forced us to do it and it worked perfectly. Maybe it's time for us to rethink how we teach and interact with students in and outside the classroom. (Mike, secondary school)

While COVID-19 was cause for much stress and anxiety for many, there were positives that resulted from the experience. COVID-19 allowed educators to recognize that schooling can be done differently. The traditional ways of teaching in the face-to-face context have great value, but the online teaching experiences created another space for understanding how learning can occur. In addition, the move to online learning provided opportunities for innovation and new learning, especially as it related to emerging technologies.

### **COVID-19 Protocols With Great Impact**

Mentor teachers were asked about the COVID-19 protocols that had the greatest impact on their activities. Protocols—including periodic sanitizing, constant cleaning and wiping of tables and chairs, social distancing, wearing of masks, screening, and keeping personal hygiene up—changed the dynamics of school. Classroom management, recessions, teaching styles, group activities, and teacher-student interaction and relationship were all affected. Respondents noted the following as some of the protocols that had an especially strong impact on teaching and learning:

Not being able to physically touch my students. Sometimes they need that positive high five/touch on the shoulder, or hug when they are hurt. I feel I have had to rethink everything. (Alice, lower elementary grade)

Limiting interactions with other classrooms. Our school used to thrive on these multigrade /classroom interactions. It is hard for me to not have the kids interact with the others in our school. They love bonding with both the older and younger students. (Mike, secondary school)

Cleaning and disruption from cleaners who work constantly to ensure the place is clean and safe. (Amy, lower elementary grade)

Adhering to COVID-19 protocols proved challenging, especially because teachers and students were not able to have physical contact with each other. Physical interaction plays a role in the bonding that occurs in classrooms. The inability of students to interact with each other also meant that students were unable to provide the support and camaraderie that occurs in multigrade activities. Changes because of health protocols limited the extent to which interactions occurred within classrooms.

### **Effective Self-Care Practices**

Effective self-care practices are key to teachers' health and well-being, especially during this period when proper health planning is integral to every individual and organization. Self-care practices are intentional activities people undertake in order to take care of physical, mental, and emotional health. It is important to create effective self-care and a community of care. Respondents engaged in several activities to enhance their well-being during the pandemic.

I did a lot of physical labour and my sister and I relied heavily on each other for company and entertainment. We played more board games, had movie nights, made new meals we had never made before (like butter chicken). I also work at the pool at home during the

summer so when that opened up I was able to swim a lot and see my coworkers. So, there were lots of ways.

I was able to spend more time with my family—go for walks.

In terms of mindfulness, I engaged in outdoor exercise—staying with a family, with a partner.

Engaging in hobbies outside of the classroom as a way to destress.

More personal time for me. Walking away from the job, and focusing more on my family and myself.

For my self-care practices, I took pictures of nature and shared them with my friends. I have scores of pictures of sunrises and sunsets. Even my students were taking pictures and sending them to me. There was this bond that we were all in this together. The wellness checks were meaningful to me as a faculty. I did not go to the stores frequently. As a matter of fact, I did not go further than four kilometers from my home in four months! A trip to the mailbox was considered a field trip!

Participants in this study indicated that self-care was important to them. Their responses indicated that teachers give a high level of priority to their mental health and wellness. If they are to be effective in the classroom, teachers' well-being played a role and the pandemic made this more profound to them and their families. Teachers shared how they managed the stresses brought on by COVID-19 and how they strove to maintain wellness in their lives. While the pandemic was a stressful time, teachers also found ways to use this opportunity to focus on their health and wellness. The practicum students expressed that they felt supported during this time by their mentor teachers. They explained how the mentor teachers kept the communication line open, provided professional support by sharing teaching resources, and interacted with them in meaningful ways.

### **Learnings From the Pandemic**

COVID-19 impacted faculty, students, and mentor teachers in various ways. The narrative of how the university pivoted in this time continues to unfold as all the stakeholders adjust to a new reality which is determining how we teach, how we interact, and how we share our experiences with others. We were taught to teach in a society that does not exist anymore, and we must adjust our thinking and our planning as we prepare students to function in a post-COVID-19 society. The challenges faced by students, mentor teachers, and faculty during the pandemic should serve as a guide in teacher education programs. Students adjusted quickly to their new realities by teaching online and working with school protocols in face-to-face interactions while attending to their own wellness. Adaptability and flexibility are hallmarks of good teaching, and teacher education programs need to prepare students to function in a society where change is inevitable. COVID-19 and its impacts on education has taught us that teacher educators need to rethink how practicum is done and school administrators need to develop a road map for dealing with mental health issues. In addition, teachers who were trained and completed their practicum experiences during the pandemic should be given priority for continuous mentorship. In the days to come, many questions will be asked about the future of

learning in teacher education programs, and whether postpandemic learning will meet the needs of the changing times. The upside to the pandemic is that it will encourage educators to study how to pivot and to be prepared for sudden changes. Teaching and learning in this emergency have implications for teacher education programs: perhaps the most pressing need is to reimagine practicum and to make use of ever-emerging technologies.

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## CHAPTER 11

### **Practicum Continuance and Implementation During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Teacher Educator Leaders' Insights and Innovations**

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#### **Abstract**

This chapter is a story told by two teacher educator leaders. Our purpose is to share the practical knowledge that resulted from assuming an action learning (Pedler, 2011; Revans, 1982) stance to resolve complex challenges associated with leading the practicum component of an initial teacher education program during the COVID-19 pandemic after school and university closures in March 2020. We begin with an account of our initial response, the development of a rigorous field-based practicum continuance and implementation plan intended to guide teacher professional learning and the assessment of practicum course expectations in remote learning environments, as well as the steps taken to support and prepare all school partners, practicum advisors, and teacher candidates for such an extraordinary and unexpected shift. We track the twists and turns that evolved as we worked together over several months to maintain the integrity and authenticity of practicum courses and implement them. Intentional collaborations, negotiations, and advocacy efforts with educational partners were found to be central to our practice as we took action to address issues that surfaced within the Manitoba context including: teacher and substitute teacher shortages, the need for flexible practicum schedules, shifting and variable school situations, the need for consistent and ongoing communications, professional certification requirements, the threat of a campus strike, and practicum advisor staffing. Finally, we elaborate the opportunities embraced that allowed us to design innovative practicum protocols, policies, and procedures that hold relevance, immediacy, and meaning for Canadian teacher educator leaders today and in the future.

*Keywords:* teacher education, action learning, virtual practicum, education partnerships, academic leadership

#### **Résumé**

Ce chapitre est une histoire racontée par deux formateurs d'enseignants dans un rôle de leadership. Nous avons comme objectif de partager les connaissances pratiques qui ont résulté de l'adoption d'une méthode d'apprentissage actif (Pedler, 2011; Revans, 1982) après la fermeture des écoles et des universités au mois de mars 2020 viser à résoudre les défis complexes associés à la direction de la composante pratique d'un programme de formation initiale à l'enseignement pendant la pandémie de la COVID-19. Nous commençons par un compte rendu de notre réponse initiale, la mise en œuvre et le maintien de stages destiné à guider l'apprentissage professionnel des enseignants et l'évaluation des attentes aux cours de stage dans des environnements d'apprentissage virtuel, ainsi que les mesures prises pour soutenir et préparer toutes les écoles partenaires, les conseillers de stage et les candidats à l'enseignement pour un tel déplacement extraordinaire et inattendu. Nous avons suivi les rebondissements qui ont évolué au fur et à mesure que nous avons travaillé ensemble pendant plusieurs mois, et nous avons mis en œuvre

les retouches nécessaires afin de maintenir l'intégrité et l'authenticité des cours pratiques. Les collaborations intentionnelles, les négociations et le travail de soutien avec nos partenariats en éducation se sont avérés être au cœur de notre pratique alors que nous avons pris des mesures pour résoudre les problèmes qui ont émergé dans le contexte manitobain, notamment : les pénuries d'enseignant.e.s et d'enseignant.e.s suppléants, le besoin d'horaires flexibles au stage, les variables continues à la situation scolaire, le besoin de communications cohérentes et continues, les exigences de certification professionnelle, la menace de grève sur le campus et un manque en personnel de conseillers de stage. Enfin, nous partageons les occasions saisies qui nous ont permis de concevoir des solutions novatrices des politiques, procédures et protocoles au stage qui tiennent à la révélation, à l'immédiateté et à la signification pour les leaders canadiens de la formation à l'enseignement pour aujourd'hui et demain.

*Mots clés* : formation des enseignants, apprentissage actif, stage virtuel, partenariats en éducation, leadership académique

## **Introduction**

We are two teacher educator leaders at the Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba (UM). As associate dean undergraduate and director of practicum and partnerships for the after-degree Bachelor of Education program, we offer our unique perspectives and insights in response to the closure of Manitoba schools and universities in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The school closure occurred just two weeks after launching winter term practicum courses for more than 300 teacher candidates. This unexpected event created a crisis for our students, putting them at risk of not completing their practicum courses and for some, not graduating. We story our response to this crisis, outline challenges, share our learning, and describe the innovations resulting from our collaborative actions. Dr. Beryl Peters, Director of Practicum and Partnerships, begins the storying in "From Urgency to Agency: Reimagining Practicum for the Virtual Environment" and Dr. Francine Morin, Associate Dean Undergraduate, continues storying our response in "B.Ed. Program Planning for an Unpredictable Environment." The final section, "Implications for Teacher Education Practice in the Future," concludes with our joint learnings and implications for the future.

### **From Urgency to Agency: Reimagining Practicum for the Virtual Environment**

At the beginning of March 2020, the Practicum and Partnerships Office staff and B.Ed. students were looking forward to the upcoming field-based practicum courses scheduled from March 16 to April 24. Across Manitoba 112 schools were in place to host UM teacher candidates, and a contingent of 51 highly experienced practicum advisors was in place for weekly visits to practicum host schools.

News of a coronavirus affecting other countries was concerning, but with only 12 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in all of Canada by February 26, 2020 (Canadian Press, 2020) the threat to the UM seemed distant and unimaginable. As practicum director, I (Beryl Peters) along with my office staff continued preparations for the practicum block, confident in assurances that the overall risk of acquiring the coronavirus was low (Government of Manitoba, 2020).

Then cases in Manitoba began to suddenly climb and on March 11 the director-general of the World Health Organization declared that for the first time in history, a pandemic had been caused by a coronavirus (Ghebreyesus, 2020). On March 13, the Manitoba education minister

announced that students would be sent home on March 23, one week before the planned spring break and would remain home for another week following the spring break to lessen the potential impact of the coronavirus on Manitobans (Froese & Gowriluk, 2020). Teachers were directed to continue working at their schools for the weeks before and after spring break, to prepare materials so that students could continue learning while at home.

### **Practicum Continuance Plans**

On March 17, 2020, Manitoba Education asked all teacher education institutions to provide the ministry with a plan for how institutions would address practicum courses if schools remained closed after the spring break. At UM, the B.Ed. degree includes four different practicum courses over the two-year after-degree program. Students must meet practicum expectations associated with each course and must also accumulate 120 days of in-school practicum required by the province for professional teacher certification. On March 16, 2020, UM students had just begun the final practicum course of the 2019–2020 academic year.

Our plan in response to Manitoba Education’s directive was to continue practicum courses even if schools closed. We ruled out the option of terminating and rescheduling practicum courses for the following year as some Canadian institutions were forced to do (Van Nuland et al., 2020). We considered instead how we might design online practicum course experiences as certain institutions were planning to do (Burns et al., 2020). We wondered if it was possible to design the online practicum course experiences in collaboration with host practicum schools, cooperating teachers, and practicum advisors, so that practicum courses remained field-based and teacher candidates could continue to plan for and teach in their K–12 classrooms in the event classrooms moved online.

Our thinking was guided by understandings of the importance of practicum and an awareness of the value that teacher candidates place on the practicum experience. Practicum experiences are described in the literature as important and highly valued components of teacher education (Burns et al., 2020; Darling-Hammond, 2014; Hartshorne et al., 2020; Van Nuland et al., 2020). Teacher candidates are reported to believe that practicum is the most important and meaningful element of their teacher education program (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; Flores, 2016; Kitchen & Petrarca, 2016; White & Forgasz, 2016).

Our goal was to create a practicum continuity plan for the online environment that allowed our teacher candidates to participate in the real-world authentic work of teachers who were problem-solving to meet the teaching and learning challenges presented by the pandemic. We were supported in this decision-making by our students and practicum advisors. Despite fears of the coronavirus and the many unknowns, teacher candidates and practicum advisors largely advocated for continuing practicum online using various digital platforms to teach their classes, rather than rescheduling practicum or designing other non-field-based alternatives.

Teacher candidates pleaded in email communication to be offered the chance to learn new technologies and adapt as their cooperating teachers were doing. They believed that a virtual practicum would not only meet all practicum expectations but would also provide new and unique learning opportunities and ways to connect with students and families. As one teacher candidate described, “Being able to adapt my practices was one of the biggest things that I’ve taken away from this, as well as technology and new ways of engaging students that I can bring to a brick-and-mortar classroom” (TeachingLIFE, 2021, Kelsey Collins-Kramble section, para. 5).

With few resources, I began to design an online practicum continuance plan. A scan of the literature provided little support for adapting in-person practicum experiences to the online environment. Burns et al. (2020) found that very few programs in either Canada or the United States provide any online practicum experiences. They state, “Developing an online practicum experience for preservice teachers was not even on the radar of most teacher education programs before March 2020.... There appears to be no literature that examines the issue of delivery of a practicum course in an online environment” (Burns et al., 2020, p. 6).

With no supporting literature to guide the creation of an online practicum continuance plan, we assumed an action learning stance. Action learning is a rich philosophy of learning and practice used in fields like education (Brockbank & McGill, 2003; Revans, 1982, 2008). The goal of action learning is pragmatic—to resolve real-life problems, especially for critical ones defined by Grint (2008) as crisis situations that demand swift action, like the ones we were confronting. As a job-embedded form of professional development, action learning is “outcome-oriented and problem focused ... it enables people to learn by doing” (Coughlan & Coghlan, 2011, p. 6). It is undertaken by peers, typically leaders, who share problems and have the power to do something about them (Pedler, 2011). Action learning is provoked by a dilemma that requires leaders to work together and act.

Formal theory, research, or external expertise is not relied upon in action learning because existing knowledge may not be sufficient or applicable to a particular context. It is for this reason that action learning offered us a fruitful pathway. As action learners, we addressed our critical problems and learning through the processes of inquiry, innovation, experimentation, and reflection.

Resolving immediate problems, increasing practical knowledge and competencies, and supporting necessary change within our faculty were the expected outcomes of our action learning. To begin, we drew from whatever data we could collect. The associate dean undergraduate and I gathered all available data from emails and calls from students and practicum advisors. I analyzed our existing practicum guide and related documents to determine what elements could be transferred to the online environment and we consulted with other education faculties in Manitoba and with the education ministry.

Armed with encouragement from students, practicum partners, and our administrative team, I crafted a *UM Practicum Continuance Plan* (Peters, 2020a) for our practicum courses. The plan began with a rationale for continuing practicum in virtual, remote settings, as follows:

The UM Faculty of Education believes that in order for our teacher candidates “to construct compelling, challenging, motivating, socially responsible, and just classrooms” (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2018, p. 4) we need to ensure that the 2020 Winter term practicum courses continue in ways that position our teacher candidates as actors and not merely spectators in helping to resolve problems and address challenges associated with the global health crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic. (Peters, 2020a, p. 3)

On March 22, 2020, Manitoba Education approved the *UM Practicum Continuance Plan*. The pressing urgency to create a ministry-approved practicum continuance plan now shifted to efforts to implement it by reimagining field-based practicum courses for the online environment.

## **Practicum Continuance and Implementation Plan**

On March 31, 2020, the education minister directed all Manitoba schools to suspend in-school classroom learning indefinitely for the remainder of the school year and to shift to remote teaching and learning. A remote practicum implementation plan for teacher candidates and practicum advisors was needed immediately and before our students began online practicum on April 6, 2020.

In concert with office staff and the associate dean, I consulted with all education and practicum partners and developed various mechanisms for providing feedback. Practicum advisors were asked to schedule a special half-day virtual meeting with their teacher candidates to debrief and share practicum experiences beginning March 16 and to discuss challenges, issues, learnings, questions, and successes. We asked teacher candidates to critically assess their practicum experiences in specific areas and provided guiding questions for the meeting. We asked for critical feedback around key areas: school and divisional responses, classroom continuance, technology and virtual resources; and classroom and school contributions. We asked teacher candidates to identify strategies that were and were not successful in addressing issues resulting from the COVID-19 crisis, ways that schools ensured the continuance of teaching and at-home learning, the technology and resources needed for classroom continuance in virtual spaces, and ways that teacher candidates were contributing to educators' efforts to respond to learners' needs and classroom continuance.

We asked similar questions of practicum advisors and created a form for responses that I analyzed along with data from emails, cohort meetings, and feedback from all education and practicum partners. That data was then synthesized to inform the development of the 2020 winter term *Practicum Continuance and Implementation Plan* (Peters, 2020b). The plan was reviewed by education partners and received approval from the Manitoba Teachers' Society and the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents.

## **Reimagined Practicum Curricula**

The reimagined curricula outlined ways that all practicum course expectations could be met and enacted in the virtual environment alongside practicum host schools, cooperating teachers, and students. The plan stressed that rigorous criteria for completing practicum courses would not change. The same expectations listed for all four in-school practicum courses would still be expected in the virtual practicum environment; however, the ways to successfully meet those expectations could change. The *Practicum Continuance and Implementation Plan* illustrated ways that each expectation might be met in the virtual environment. For example, the practicum expectation "Make meaningful contributions within the classroom, school and community that reflect the policies, priorities, and school context" was newly interpreted through the lens of pandemic planning.

One practicum advisor shared ways that teacher candidates made meaningful and valuable contributions within the classroom, school, and community related to policies and procedures in the new virtual learning environments:

Teacher candidates have assisted with setting up and running virtual platforms such as Google Forms and classrooms and have shared their knowledge of technology and various programs and platforms with CTs [cooperating teachers] and schools. TCs [teacher candidates] have participated in drive-by community outreach initiatives; TCs

have set up YouTube tutorials and learning experiences and have created banks of virtual resources for students and teachers in their host schools. TCs have used Flipgrid to lead students in literature circles and to interact and respond to them. They have communicated with students through email, videoconference, and Google Classroom to ensure student participation and engagement. They have helped create information bulletins and assessment tools. The ways that TCs make meaningful contributions within the classroom, school, and community will be unique to each context; however, with TC creativity and ingenuity there will be many ways to meet this practicum expectation that will be important to the life of the classroom, school, and community. (Peters, 2020b, p. 31)

The *UM Practicum Continuation and Implementation Plan* also included assessment evidence for the virtual practicum, well-being supports, online resources, ways to address difficulties encountered during the virtual practicum, and words of inspiration. Throughout the online practicum we continued to gather data which was used to create a further *Practicum Supplement* to provide direction for 2020–2021 practicum courses.

The implementation plan would have been useless without the support and commitment of all our education partners. Out of the hundreds of teachers working with UM teacher candidates before school closures, not one teacher said they would no longer support our students following the shift to online practicum. All host schools remained committed to supporting UM students' virtual practicum courses. Likewise, all 51 practicum advisors agreed to mentor teacher candidates despite unknown variables and the significant extra time and efforts their commitment would entail.

We received strong support from Manitoba Education, the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, Manitoba School Boards Association, and Manitoba Teachers' Society and they collaborated regularly with us for communication and problem-solving. We sustained these important relationships following the 2020 winter term and they were vital to the successful continuation of practicum courses during the ongoing COVID-19 affected 2020–2021 academic year.

### **Technology**

Technology was crucial to the continuing operation of education systems around the world following the emergence of coronavirus. Students at all levels were able to transition to online learning if necessary and appropriate technology and internet resources were in place and available (Quezada et al., 2020). However, UM students observed that a lack of technology contributed to inequities in K–12 learning during the pandemic. Fortunately, no teacher candidates or practicum advisors reported a lack of necessary technology although technology support was occasionally required.

We were privileged to have staff willing to take on the challenges of learning new technology. Office staff provided technology supports to practicum advisors ranging from learning how to cut and paste to operating Zoom and other platforms. Practicum advisors were able to continue advising remotely because of rapidly deployed videoconferencing platforms. Each advisor was assigned a unique videoconference link to use for meeting and observing teacher candidates throughout the online practicum block. A weekly virtual drop-in session initiated for advisors to discuss emerging issues including technology challenges was so well-received and productive, that it continued the following year.

Technology also played a crucial role in ensuring all teacher candidates remained safe, healthy, and actively engaged in their practicum courses during the shift to remote practicum and throughout the virtual practicum block. We had the necessary staff and existing database infrastructure to quickly implement an online attendance tracking system. Students entered their attendance daily into the system, using different categories to let us know if they were absent, working remotely from schools, from home, with their practicum advisor, or cooperating teacher. Staff monitoring the online system were able to quickly identify emerging issues with schools or individuals.

The new attendance system proved highly successful at tracking students in their various and changing practicum settings and COVID-19 contexts and provided the capacity and flexibility to be immediately responsive to unexpected situations and crises. It also served to improve communication between practicum partners, as the attendance system was designed to send alerts to cooperating teachers and practicum advisors informing them of student absences or changed circumstances.

### **Agency and Action Learning**

The shift from urgency to agency in reimagining our practicum courses for the virtual environment was only possible due to the intentional and productive collaborations with all partners at all levels of our education system, from staff working overtime problem-solving emerging issues, to ministry officials working through weekends to be responsive to our urgent needs to support UM students. The office motto initiated by one staff member was “We got this!” and it was taken up in spirit by all partners. We were grateful to be one of the few Canadian universities to complete B.Ed. practicum courses in a field-based online environment, planning and teaching in collaboration with host practicum schools, teachers, and classrooms. All UM teacher candidates who successfully completed their final practicum course graduated as scheduled.

The action learning opportunities in reimagining practicum for the virtual environment were rich, often unexpected, and informed subsequent practicum course planning. Reimagining was certainly not without its difficulties and critiques. But despite the many challenges including learning and using new and sometimes frustrating technology, communicating effectively and in timely ways through online media, problem-solving unexpected issues unique to each school context, working to extremely tight deadlines, uneven human and tech resources to support teacher candidates and their learners in schools, and absenteeism in schools’ remote classrooms, the decision to reimagine practicum was justified. The development of a rigorous practicum continuance and implementation plan in collaboration with education and practicum partners was successful in supporting our teacher candidates to meet practicum course expectations in the virtual environment. We are confident that teacher candidates who completed the remote, online practicum, will enter the field with important competencies for teaching. They have learned about flexibility, adaptability, professional collaboration, innovative approaches to teaching and learning, and the need to address inequities in our education system.

### **B.Ed. Program Planning for an Unpredictable Environment**

After the successful implementation of virtual practicum courses in winter 2020 our next effort focused on planning the B.Ed. schedule for the upcoming 2020–2021 academic year. For two terms, the schedule needed to accommodate 9 weeks of faculty-based coursework and 30



days for school-based practicum courses. At this point, it was Manitoba Education's position that practicum days completed virtually in winter 2020 would fulfill university practicum course requirements, but these virtual days would *not* count towards the required 120 in-school practicum days for teacher certification. This decision meant that we had to add 15 in-school "COVID-19 make-up days" to our 2020–2021 schedule for students who completed practicum courses in winter 2020. To complicate matters, our University announced that the fall 2020 term would extend into January 2021 for essential in-person classes on campus. This mandate meant that some students would not complete fall 2020 courses until mid-January 2021, and there would be later than usual start and end dates for winter 2021 term courses.

We felt a high sense of responsibility to students, the university, Manitoba Education, and school systems. Our goals were to keep teacher candidates on track to complete the program, graduate on time, and meet teacher certification requirements. Scheduling most components of the B.Ed. program was relatively routine because we had the information needed to move forward, but just when and how to schedule practicum courses was more unsettling. We needed assurances from the ministry that practicum courses could continue virtually if schools closed while practicum courses were underway and that virtual practicum days would count towards certification requirements.

To reduce some of the ambiguity and problem solve, we initiated conversations with Manitoba Education authorities to gather information that would help us optimize practicum scheduling and advocate for the continuance of practicum courses under open, closed, or varying school contexts. Academic leaders met in June 2020 with ministry officials to raise questions about issues such as: approval for virtual practicum courses in 2020–2021 if necessary, revisiting requirements for teacher candidates to make up outstanding in-person practicum days, requirements for divisions to follow similar schedules and patterns for reopening schools, ministerial and partner support for practicum continuance virtually, in-person, or some combination of both, and practicum options for teacher candidates with health-related concerns.

Unfortunately, teacher education leaders did not get the firm answers or assurances hoped for at that meeting. The situation was acute, and we could no longer wait for direction from government to respond to the University with our program schedule. We proceeded with some available information, some unknowns, and thoughts about what would be in the best interests of our partners, students, academic and support staff, and practicum advisors. We assumed that our school partners would surely be overwhelmed with reopening health protocols, reorganizing physical teaching spaces, educating staff, developing routines, communicating with families, and welcoming students back to school. We were certain they would need time to settle in and adjust before adding teacher candidates and practicum advisors to the flurry of adjustments.

To respect the challenging circumstances the field was facing, we judged it best to stay out of schools, waiting until November to launch practicum courses. Teacher candidates would first focus on coursework to prepare for practicum, which would be particularly important for first year students just starting the journey to becoming teachers. During this period important learning about virtual platforms, practicum expectations, and resources for health and wellness could be offered. The same could occur for practicum advisors who would need updates and professional development on new procedures and platforms for mentoring teacher candidates during a pandemic. A later start would also give us the time necessary to respond to the high probability of: principals changing the nature of their requests for hosting teacher candidates, teacher candidates deciding to defer practicums, practicum advisor resignations or reluctance to work in schools, and the need to interview and hire new advisors and staff to handle the ever-

growing workload.

The unavoidable challenges of the pandemic led us to rethink our typical program schedule and create a new approach. We first configured weekly calendars for teacher candidates proceeding through the B.Ed. program full-time, one plan for teacher candidates who completed a pandemic-impacted practicum course, and another for those who had not. Next, we set up additional calendars to accommodate students following our part-time program option. All scheduling was completed by the end of June 2020, and registration opened in July 2020 for 2020–2021. We took comfort in this moment, but we were aware that the sources of unpredictability could confront us again.

### **Collaborating with Educational Partners in Complex Contexts**

Postsecondary institutions lead the design and implementation of teacher preparation programs in Manitoba. Teachers have legislated responsibilities to host teacher candidates in their classrooms as stated in *The Public Schools Act* (Government of Manitoba, 2021) and their role in this important process is outlined by the Manitoba Teachers' Society. Teacher and school participation, however, is not compulsory and therefore, program leaders depend on the good will of school partners who are invited by us each year and decide to host teacher candidates for practicum, or not.

Recognizing the necessity of strong partnerships between universities, colleges, and schools, Manitoba Education (2011) published *Strengthening Partnerships: Improving the Quality of Teacher Candidate Practicum Experiences in Manitoba*, a document that guides our collaborative practice and took on even more significance this year. Since undertaking leadership roles, we work to honor the tenets outlined and nurture meaningful partnerships with Manitoba Education, Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, Manitoba Teachers' Society, Manitoba Association of School Boards, Council of School Leaders, and colleagues from other postsecondary institutions also responsible for implementing practicum courses.

The need to safeguard relationships with external partners was elevated as we moved into 2020–2021 still impacted by COVID-19. Our relationships shifted as issues surfaced that we had never encountered in the past but had to be addressed together. The first issue came in August 2020 when the Association of Canadian Deans of Education published clarion calls for provincial governments and universities to proceed with designing and delivering online practicum and developing alternative supervision and evaluation protocols so that practicum courses could proceed, students could graduate, and teacher certification requirements could be met. This decanal group encouraged partners across the country to be “flexible and adaptable to the current and changing context” and “accelerate innovation” (Association of Canadian Deans of Education, 2020, p. 9). We felt secure in knowing that we had already developed an innovative plan and secured ministerial approvals. The actions we took to reconceptualize practicum courses were prototypes that could also be used to inform other teacher education institutions across Canada.

Manitoba Education (2020) further answered this call with a new policy—*Framework and Requirements for Teacher Candidate Practicums Meeting Qualification for Manitoba Certification*. The modified framework took into consideration “factors related to the fluid nature of the COVID-19 pandemic environment and its impact on in-class learning within the K-12 education system.” Although too late for our scheduling purposes, the essential direction from government that we anxiously awaited was now in print. Education faculties were offered some flexibility, but Manitoba Education held firm on most requirements for teacher certification

including the existing requirement to complete all 120 days of practicum. If schools were open, supervised practicum would take place in schools. Unexpectedly, the ministry recommended that practicum be scheduled early in the school year, which was at odds with our scheduling decisions and pedagogical thinking. On one hand, it was a relief to learn that only 60 of 120 required practicum days would have to be completed in schools for teacher certification. On the other, it was distressing to learn that any teacher candidate who could not meet the mandated 60-day in-school threshold would *not* graduate. Alternative practicum plans would be subject to several conditions and require government approval.

We did wonder if our program would continue without disruption. Much was on the line, including the ability of schools to remain open long enough for our students to reach 60 days of in-school practicum and the ability of partners to sustain their commitments to hosting practicum as stress levels and workloads intensified. With hundreds of teacher candidates scheduled to go into schools, it took sustained efforts in our office to react to multiple changes in early fall. We were keenly aware of the wide-ranging external network on which we were highly dependent (schools, principals, teachers, practicum advisors, students, government) and how fragile the initial teacher education ecosystem had suddenly become. Partnership agreements were signed, we had a vision, approved continuance plans, and trust, but all worked under a cloud of fear that the entire operation we had worked around the clock to create for the pandemic context could easily fall apart.

To further illustrate the differing relationship evolving with our partners, we received an urgent appeal from superintendents and school boards to help enact strategies to expand the pool of substitute teachers for the pandemic-impacted school year, particularly in rural and remote communities. This role was new, expanding our collaborations beyond what was typical. Our field-based colleagues proposed that we invite noncertified substitute teachers, including teacher candidates, to apply for substitute positions across the province. As academic leaders, we were committed morally and ethically to support this appeal, given the extreme situation facing our educational partners, students, and families.

It was clear that there were benefits to engaging teacher candidates in gainful part-time employment as paid noncertified substitutes. Our support came with concerns shared by our partners about maintaining program integrity and teacher candidate well-being. We supported the appeal by circulating an advertisement and related application instructions to *all* UM teacher candidates. This action would help recruit those interested and available to substitute during times when they were *not* scheduled for faculty-based classes or school days for practicum courses. We also circulated a letter prepared by our partners to teacher candidates stating, “It remains important to us that your academic program, including your practicum, not be affected in any way by the pandemic. We need your focus to remain on fulfilling the expectations set by your faculty this year.” Partners also conveyed that all home faculty policies and protocols were to be observed. As faculty, we cautioned teacher candidates to balance substitute teaching opportunities with their professional studies to maintain optimal health and well-being, and that they would not be excused from classes to substitute teach.

We took other actions to address the substitute teacher shortage in Manitoba. We shared students’ weekly schedules with school partners to inform them of when students had no program-related obligations and might be available for substitute teaching. We recommended preference for employment be given to second-year teacher candidates to recognize their completion of one year of professional studies. It was suggested that professional development sessions be offered to better prepare teacher candidates for the realities of substitute teaching in

schools, particularly the health and safety protocols. Moreover, we promoted substitute teaching opportunities to 13,000 UM Education alumni members and students in the Post-baccalaureate Diploma in Education program. We reacted promptly to a request from Manitoba's Professional Certification Unit to simplify the process for universities and division employers who would be contacted by students for the recommendation letters needed to apply for a Limited Teaching Permit. We worked with teacher candidates to provide Manitoba Education with an alphabetized list of all UM teacher candidates currently registered in the B.Ed. program who had successfully completed practicum courses and wanted to substitute teach. Any name appearing on this list would *not* be required to obtain individual letters of recommendation for the LTP.

Akin to other professional programs, our connections to and relationships with external partners are central to our practice. During the pandemic, however, partners became increasingly interdependent and engaged with more openness and honesty than we had experienced in the past. In sharing our challenges, perspectives, and insecurities in multiple email interactions and meetings with one another, we grew in our understandings of each other and our portfolios. Interestingly, these multifarious joint efforts helped us establish a powerful bond as caring colleagues. Without question, we needed each other, and we had each other's best interests in mind.

Practicum courses were launched in November 2020 with schools open and we held our breath hoping they would stay open. By this time, K–12 teachers in Manitoba were already becoming overworked and overwhelmed with the increased teaching and nonteaching responsibilities that were now required of them in the pandemic context, as reported regularly in the media. We became concerned that teachers and school leaders might reconsider their decisions to host teacher candidates or that their participation in practicum could be susceptible to moments of panic or changes of heart.

Despite our strong support for one another, we did not and could not take our partnerships for granted. During practicum implementation, we encountered challenges along the way that required ongoing forums, dialogue, and communications to resolve. There were different interpretations of the new certification framework in action among institutions that were causing confusion for practicum advisors and teacher candidates. In some programs, practicum advisors were reportedly supervising virtually while those working for other institutions were directed to work in schools. Meetings were initiated with government and partner institutions to request clarification and ensure that we were all interpreting the guidelines in the same way. Some principals viewed practicum advisors as “visitors” rather than university employees who were contracted to supervise teacher candidates in schools and refused them entry into their schools. Again, we entered negotiations with Manitoba Education to ensure that teacher candidates and practicum advisors would be permitted to work in schools, included as K–12 education providers, and officially defined as Tier 1 Critical Service Workers. In another case, a superintendent with no recorded school cases of COVID-19 was afraid that statistic could change if teacher candidates were permitted to enter their schools after a holiday weekend, and so contemplated requiring them to self-isolate for two weeks, which would have extended their practicum too far into spring to graduate. We were grateful to the leaders representing superintendents and school boards who were instrumental in helping us work through such issues. They crafted clear messaging around practicum protocols to all division and school leaders to ensure practicums ran smoothly.

Our worry that schools might retract commitments to practicum was short-lived. Soon after teacher candidates started in Manitoba schools, their value as critical assets to the K–12

school system was recognized (Mason-Williams et al., 2020). COVID-19 had created a staffing crisis and swelling workloads for teachers all over Canada (Reid & Cranston, 2021). Teachers were directed to stay home if unwell or to self-isolate. Absenteeism among school staff was way up. Teachers travelled between smaller cohorts of physically distanced students in different instructional spaces. Others dealt with staggered school schedules and planning for in-person and remote learning at the same time. Nonteaching duties such as cleaning protocols added to teachers' heavy burdens. In a November 2020 letter to the education minister, hundreds of Manitoba educators stated that education was "on the verge of collapse" (Lefebvre, 2020).

The arrival of teacher candidates relieved some of the pressure evident in schools. In winter 2020, cooperating teachers had voiced their appreciation of many important contributions made by teacher candidates through numerous emails and calls to the Practicum Office describing valuable ways that teacher candidates had supported teaching and learning during the remote practicum period. In 2020–2021 they continued to undertake multiple responsibilities for teaching, learning, and assessment that augmented the work of cooperating teachers. Mentors and mentees teamed up to implement learning plans with small cohorts of students in the same classroom but located in different instructional spaces. Together they created instructional designs for essential learning in various curriculum areas. Some B.Ed. students shared in the responsibility of researching instructional materials and resources to support learners. Others delivered learning plans approved by their cooperating teachers with student groups online, while their host teachers did in-person teaching with others at school, or vice versa. Teacher candidates shared their growing knowledge of and competencies with digital pedagogies and various technologies. Home learning packages were prepared and cocurricular programs, nutrition breaks, and hand-sanitizing stations were supervised by them. Importantly, teacher candidates were able to take the lead in classrooms when cooperating teachers were away, and substitutes were not available. The contributions that teacher candidates made to alleviate the substitute teacher shortage and provide teachers with much needed respite were acknowledged and valued. In essence, teacher candidates were viewed as part of the solution to an education system in crisis, not a part of the problem.

Our story is unique in that we were the only Canadian teacher education program launching practicum courses in fall 2020 during a pandemic and university union–employee labor dispute. In fact, the same day teacher candidates entered the field on November 2, the University of Manitoba Faculty Association (UMFA, 2021) announced that 80% of its members had approved potential strike action. Just a few days later, UMFA set a bargaining deadline which meant that a campus-wide strike could potentially begin on November 16, only 2 weeks into our 7-week practicum block. Now there were so many more unknowns and the situation at UM became increasingly complex.

As academic leaders our work is highly interrelated, and the labour dispute put us in a most unenviable position—one a union member and one a senior academic administrator. This news of a looming strike was concerning because it could have profound impacts on our program and the school system this year, especially with little room for adaptation left in the academic schedule. UMFA members were lobbying us and the Manitoba Teachers' Society to suspend practicum courses as a bargaining tool, as all other faculty-based courses were finished and would not be impacted by a strike. Intuitively, we knew we had to wait patiently for the process to unfold and hope for a settlement. Individually, we agonized about what we would do if there was a strike, playing and replaying various scenarios through our minds, what actions we could take, what decisions we might make, and what the implications would be for relationships with

our university community and external partners.

We spent much time keeping teacher candidates and support staff calm, who were already highly anxious and losing momentum. On November 11, we learned that the Manitoba Teachers' Society would support UMFA's application for binding arbitration, donate \$10,000 to their strike fund, and publicly support a strike. However, the society did not support requests to cancel practicums (Manitoba Teachers Society, 2020). The same day UMFA entered mediation with the university, and we were elated to hear soon after that this process had resulted in a tentative agreement between the parties. Another tense week passed until it was declared that the university's final offer was ratified by UMFA members. There would be no strike, and no heart-wrenching decisions to make.

### **Implications for Teacher Education Practice in the Future**

The conclusion to the winter 2020 *Practicum Continuation and Implementation Plan* outlined the professional learning opportunities we anticipated would be afforded by the remote, virtual practicum:

Professional learning through practicum experiences will result in: demonstrated competencies in teaching, planning, and assessment; a deepened understanding of teacher identity; understandings about the importance of relationships, critical reflective practice, educational equity, and social justice; and an appreciation for the many complexities of the teaching profession. (Peters, 2020b, p. 71)

These words written in hope and trust were proven out by the dedicated and inspired efforts of Manitoba teachers, UM teacher candidates and practicum advisors, UM education faculty and staff, and practicum and education partners. Remote practicum experiences illustrated rich ways that all UM practicum course expectations could be met in the virtual environment. Ongoing professional learning through remote practicum experiences fostered competencies in teaching, planning, and assessment and deepened understandings of teacher identity and the importance of professional relationships. They illuminated issues around educational equity and social justice regarding access to education and technology. Teacher candidates and their advisors repeatedly voiced that learnings about collaboration, flexibility, adaptability, critical and creative thinking, and problem-solving would inform the rest of their teaching careers. The remote practicum experiences created an awareness of the many complexities of the teaching profession that otherwise may have taken years to acquire for some teacher candidates.

The action learning stance worked well in the pandemic situation. Immediate critical problems were resolved through collaborating, developing, and implementing innovations, practical knowledge was generated, and necessary change to our teacher education program was facilitated. As a result of the pandemic, we now have a foundation to build upon for similar unpredictable situations that might arise in the future. Offering our B.Ed. program wholly online or using hybrid approaches can now be envisioned when it had never been easily pictured in the past. Interestingly, some teacher candidates struggling in the face-to-face environment flourished online, and while others experienced difficulties working online which holds some promise for differentiating learning for professional learning moving forward.

As teacher educator leaders we learned that assuming an action learning stance was critical to imagining a new way forward through a crisis when no formal theory, research, external expertise, or virtual field-based practicum models were available to draw upon.

Likewise, all UM stakeholders learned to exercise agency, experiencing a sense of empowerment they never knew they had. Newly crafted field-based virtual practicum course curricula, procedures, policies, and protocols generated during the pandemic will remain, as well as new communication approaches (e.g., video debriefing, streaming teaching, online conferences, cohort meetings, virtual orientation), adding much to existing practices for Canadian teacher education programs. And finally, the pandemic exposed the high level of interdependence that exists among educational partners, and the importance of nurturing and extending these critical collaborative relationships, especially for implementing school practicum during high challenge circumstances.

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## CHAPTER 12

### Making the Transition Online With Alternative Practicum Placements

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#### Abstract

Our chapter focuses on the innovative ways our Faculty of Education pivoted when the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to move online, requiring us to provide our teacher candidates with alternative practicum opportunities beginning in March 2020. This submission addresses multiple, interrelated streams from the call for chapters, including (a) innovations to field experience; (b) mentorship of teacher candidates in a socially distanced environment; and (c) assessment of the field experience. We discuss the ways our practicum program responded to the reality that the spring practicum experience would not happen in its traditional form. In particular, we focus on how our Maker Lab (housed within the Faculty of Education) provided an alternate placement for a group of teacher candidates. Our Lab took on the mentorship of eight teacher candidates and over 4 months the students collaborated with us to create virtual interactive professional learning sessions and online resources for K–12 teachers. During this mentorship, the Lab team helped the teacher candidates learn about various maker tools and pedagogies and the teacher candidates helped develop content (i.e., session content and resources housed on our Lab’s website). We also discuss assessment, detailing how our practicum office collected the digital reports provided by mentors, and evaluated the teacher candidates’ alternate placements. The chapter provides readers with a complete, narrative presentation of the successes and challenges of shifting online in the context of COVID-19 and the important implications gleaned for teacher education in a postpandemic world.

*Keywords:* practicum, online learning, COVID-19, makerspace, teacher education, teacher candidates

#### Résumé

Nous réfléchissons dans ce chapitre sur l’approche novatrice prise par la Faculté d’éducation lorsque la pandémie de la COVID-19 a forcé les écoles à se déplacer en ligne, nous obligeant à offrir à nos candidats à l’enseignement des stages alternatifs dès le mois de mars 2020. En réponse à l’appel de soumissions, nous avons soumis un chapitre qui aborde de multiples lignes de développement interreliés, notamment (a) les innovations à l’expérience pratique (c.-à.-d. sur le terrain) ; (b) le mentorat des candidats à l’enseignement dans un environnement isolé et distancié ; et (c) l’évaluation de l’expérience < stagiaire >. Nous avons discuté de la façon dont notre programme de stage a dû répondre à la nouvelle réalité de l’expérience stagiaire sous forme non-traditionnelle au printemps. En particulier, on met l’accent sur la façon dont notre atelier collaboratif logé au sein de la Faculté d’éducation a pu fournir un placement alternatif pour un groupe de candidats à l’enseignement. Notre atelier a pris en charge le mentorat de huit candidats à l’enseignement, et pour une période de quatre mois les étudiants ont collaboré avec nous pour établir des sessions virtuelles interactives d’apprentissage professionnel ainsi que de générer des

ressources éducatives en ligne pour les enseignants de la maternelle à la 12<sup>e</sup> année. Au cours de ce mentorat, l'équipe de l'atelier a aidé aux candidats à l'enseignement à se renseigner des divers outils de création et pédagogies ; ainsi, les candidats ont pu aidé à mettre au point le contenu des sessions et des ressources hébergées sur le site web de notre atelier collaboratif [Maker Lab]. Nous discutons l'évaluation des candidats à l'enseignement à l'égard de leurs placements alternatifs, détaillant comment notre bureau de la politique de stage a recueilli les rapports numériques communiqués par les mentors. Le chapitre offre aux lecteurs un récit complet des succès et des défis du passage en ligne dans le cadre de la COVID-19, et de l'impact ici glané pour la formation des enseignants dans un monde après la fin de la pandémie.

*Mots clés* : stage, apprentissage en ligne, COVID-19, *makerspace* (atelier collaborative), formation des enseignants, candidats à l'enseignement

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the “largest disruption of education systems in history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries and all continents” (United Nations, 2020, p. 2). In Ontario, the provincial government closed all publicly funded schools, initially for an additional two weeks following the March break, and subsequently, school districts transitioned to emergency remote learning. School districts were required to develop plans to shift student learning to online platforms, which differed from board to board. Amid much confusion in a very fluid situation, educators in all contexts had to be nimble, creative and adaptable. This was definitely the case for our initial teacher education program at our university. In this chapter, we discuss one example of how we addressed changes to our practicum in order for our teacher candidates to meet the accreditation requirements for practicum hours through our Maker Lab (located in the Faculty of Education). The lab created alternative placements for eight teacher candidates, providing them with opportunities to engage in educational outreach and research. Finally, we discuss how these alternative placements were assessed.

Although it is important to reflect on our experiences and practices in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic to gauge its impact on our students, it is perhaps even more important to consider how virtual field placements might become more prevalent postpandemic. The field experience component has long been an essential part of initial teacher education programs (Feiman-Nemser, 2001) and research documents the traditional approaches as they relate to teacher candidates' experiences (Freese, 1999; Kennedy & Archambault, 2011; Mule, 2006). There has been very little research that explores virtual field placements (Compton & Davis, 2010; Kennedy & Archambault, 2011), but given that more school districts are offering courses online, especially in secondary school, it makes sense that future teachers should learn how to teach in online contexts. Our Faculty of Education already offers two programs fully online (M.Ed./M.A. and B.A. in Digital Education), and one semester of our four-semester B.Ed. program is also fully online. One of the courses offered during that semester is called Learning in Digital Contexts. In this course, teacher candidates learn about and experience best practices related to online teaching and learning including the flipped learning model, the community of inquiry framework, collaborative and student-centred learning within small professional learning networks, and asynchronous and synchronous learning. They also learn about and develop various online learning tools, activities, and experiences. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for us to reconsider what can be taught and learned successfully in an online context and encouraged us to think creatively about ways we might innovate in our program moving forward.

### **Situating Our B.Ed. Program and Practicum**

Our B.Ed. program is a postbaccalaureate, consecutive four-semester program, completed within a 16-month framework, whereby our teacher candidates begin their first semester in September and enter their fourth the following September, allowing successful teacher candidates to earn their B.Ed. degree by the end of December. Upon successful completion of the program, candidates apply to the Ontario College of Teachers for certification. Our three practicum placements are part of three respective Foundations of Teaching courses offered in Semesters 1, 2, and 4. Given the 16-month format of our B.Ed. program, our Foundations courses and respective practicum placements can only occur in these semesters, as Semester 3 is completed in a fully online asynchronous and synchronous learning environment in May and June. The teacher candidates have no program commitments in July and August.

As part of the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) accreditation requirements, our program must have a minimum of 80 practicum days. As per Regulation 347/02 and Regulation 176/10, the college requires that while in practicum, the teacher candidate is “supervised and assessed by an experienced teacher who is a member of the College in good standing” (OCT, 2017, p. 41) and a faculty member is appointed to each teacher candidate as an advisor.

### **Confronting the Unknown**

The ministerial order from the Ontario government to close the province’s publicly funded schools for 2 weeks following the upcoming March break in 2020 coincided directly with the beginning of our second practicum block. At that point, we knew very little about COVID-19’s potential impact on our partnered schools and B.Ed. program, so we needed to remain open, flexible, and transparent. Our instructors were able to swiftly adapt their instructional plans for either asynchronous or synchronous activities for the final week of classes however, of greater concern was the scheduled and upcoming 5-week practicum block that was suddenly disrupted. The most pressing concerns focused on what would happen if the practicum was cancelled. How would teacher candidates meet the accreditation requirements related to practicum hours? Would they need to spend time after regular program completion to make up the required time? Would virtual placements be “counted” towards those hours?

Frequent and ongoing communication within the B.Ed. program administrative team and with our stakeholders was essential to navigating the unforeseeable circumstances and issues that seemed to emerge on a daily basis as we learned more about COVID-19. We communicated with teacher candidates via email and several town hall meetings on Google Meet so that we could hear their questions and concerns and provide reassurance and information. The sessions were taped for those who could not attend. This townhall approach proved beneficial as we learned there were high levels of anxiety among teacher candidates regarding the uncertainty of their future in the program, especially as it related to practicum requirements. These conversations ultimately helped guide our planning and decision-making.

We also immediately reached out to associate teachers scheduled to host our teacher candidates for the upcoming practicum to confirm whether they were interested in still working with their teacher candidate if they eventually pivoted to online learning. As a Faculty of Education with a focus on digital technologies, we felt we were well positioned to support our partnered school boards regarding online learning. We also sought feedback from the associate teachers regarding the types of supports we might be able to provide.

While some associate teachers were still willing to continue to work with our teacher candidates once the pivot to online learning was announced, the majority indicated they would not feel comfortable or be able to support a teacher candidate during this uncertain time. Many were scrambling to transition to the new teaching and learning format with varying levels of experience with online learning and technology. The mixed response from associate teachers created additional complexities regarding the types of online learning activities our teacher candidates would participate in, the imbalance of opportunities for our teacher candidates (i.e., some associate teachers wanted to continue while others did not), and the required tasks and expectations of the teacher candidate as per our formal evaluation process. Due to these uncertainties, we decided to make some temporary structural changes to the program in the hopes of all teacher candidates being able to complete their practicums in the face-to-face setting. To do this, we moved the start of Semester 3 forward by about one month, April 13, 2020, instead of the usual start at the beginning of May. We hoped that if schools returned to the face-to-face setting by June, teacher candidates would be finished Semester 3 by then and they could all complete their final practicums at that point. Unfortunately, as COVID-19 continued to prevent our regular program from continuing, this did not materialize and other alternatives had to be explored.

### **Contingency Practicum Planning**

In addition to B.Ed. program responsibilities, some of our teacher candidates were also facing other challenges related to parenting (and assisting their children with online learning), caregiving for older parents, living with frontline workers, dealing with their own health issues and mental health, finding alternative housing due to campus closures, and many more. What became increasingly clear was that a one-size-fits-all practicum approach would not benefit our teacher candidates and we needed to be flexible and creative in our approach to practicum so we created three options: (a) online placements with associate teachers; (b) alternate spring/summer placements; and (c) postponement of placements until the fall with the understanding that make-up time (to meet the required mandatory minimum number of days for practicum) may be required upon completion of course work. We provide a brief overview of the first two options and expand upon the Maker Lab field experience in a subsequent section.

### **Online Placements with Associate Teachers**

Teacher candidates who were able to work with willing associate teachers could continue to do so. Teacher candidates whose associate teachers were unable to continue to work with them were encouraged to reach out to their former associate teachers from their first practicum experience to see if they could work with them during this online learning time. It is important to note that teacher candidates are typically not permitted to contact classroom teachers to establish their own placements but given the circumstances, we made allowances. In several instances, those former associate teachers welcomed their teacher candidates back in the new online learning environment.

In the early stages of the pandemic, given the early uncertainty of OCT accreditation requirements for our teacher candidates, we encouraged them to gain as much experience as possible in an online practicum setting during their regularly scheduled practicum block time in March and April (if possible) in order to complete the program by their anticipated completion date. For teacher candidates who were unable to complete any practicum experiences for various

reasons related to COVID-19, we provided reassurance that they would be able to gain the practicum experience upon formal completion of course work the following January and we would be flexible in the timing to accommodate their needs.

### **Alternate Spring/Summer Placements**

Some of our part-time B.Ed. instructors, recently retired as school administrators, created additional opportunities for our teacher candidates to complete practicum experiences during the spring and summer months. These opportunities included supervision by classroom teachers in good standing with OCT in a variety of contexts such as virtual summer school, virtual school board tutoring programs, and other programs where teacher candidates would be working with the Ontario curriculum in subject areas specific to their B.Ed. program division (i.e., primary, junior, intermediate, or senior) within online contexts. The majority of our teacher candidates did complete such alternate practicum experiences in a variety of contexts and settings such as formal summer virtual school courses, online school tutoring programs, curriculum development with OCT teachers, and the Maker Lab situated in our Faculty of Education. We now focus specifically on how the Maker Lab created meaningful online experiences for a small group of teacher candidates as an alternative practicum setting.

### **Meet the Maker Lab**

The COVID-19 pandemic also had implications for our Maker Lab, which was grappling with how to continue our work despite the pandemic and related restrictions. The pandemic impacted our research projects—many of which had to be put on hold as we navigated the logistics of how to continue them virtually. For example, two of our SSHRC-funded research projects were classroom based, so we had to take a step back from data collection. The school board and its educators first needed to figure out what online learning would look like for them before they could focus on how to accommodate virtual classroom-based research. We were eventually permitted to continue our research with the teachers and their classes online, but this required us to reassess the data collection methods we had used in the physical classroom (e.g., student-worn spyglasses, strategically placed video cameras). As the pandemic impacted educator needs, it also impacted our Lab's outreach initiatives. We realized that educators needed immediate support in making the shift to emergency remote teaching and learning. As a result, the lab team began developing and offering virtual professional learning for teachers in the areas of online pedagogies and virtual tools. We also hosted teachers and their students for virtual making sessions that included topics and tools such as coding and math with Scratch and math and 3D design with TinkerCad. From March to June, we offered 25 sessions. Other implications for our Lab included migrating the B.Ed. Open House day for prospective students online and hosting the annual B.Ed. Maker Day for current students online.

### **How the Maker Lab Responded**

The Lab team responded to the practicum office's call for assistance in the form of virtual placement opportunities. We offered to mentor up to 10 B.Ed. students. The Lab's research project manager, who also teaches in the B.Ed. program (with OCT certification), reached out to a handful of B.Ed. students she knew from the previous online semester. She selected students who had demonstrated an interest in the Lab and the type of innovative work we were doing. The

selection also strategically included students from both the primary/junior and intermediate/senior divisions, a variety of subject-area experts (i.e., math, science, the arts) and a variety of backgrounds (gender, age, online learning experiences).

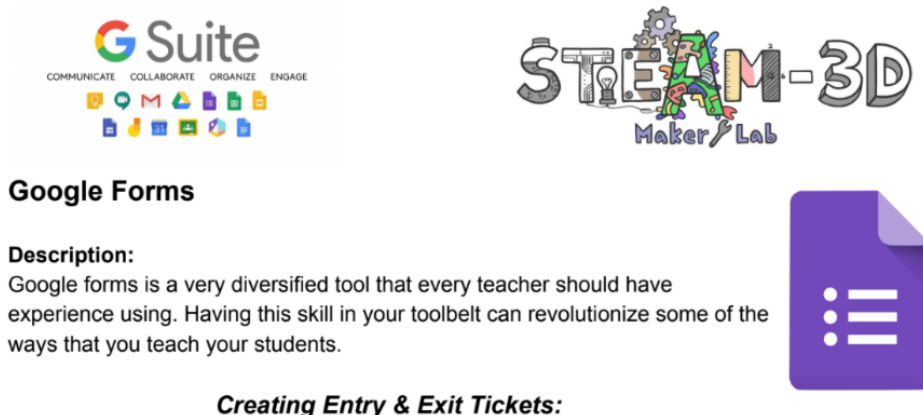
As this was the Lab's first time operating in an entirely virtual context, we knew we had to think differently about what this practicum placement would look and feel like for the students. The Lab's director and project manager both have expertise in the field of online teaching and learning, so we knew we wanted to promote connection and social presence among the group (Garrison et al., 2000). We also knew we wanted to provide the students with personally relevant and engaging learning opportunities and projects (Knowles, 1980; Vygotsky, 1978). As a result, to foster connection and social presence, we incorporated weekly, synchronous check-in meetings with the teacher candidates so they could share important insights, reflections and questions related to what they were working on. This also provided them with an opportunity to hear feedback and questions from their peers and from the Lab team. We found this collaborative and iterative approach was an important way to build community and knowledge and to keep the students engaged and accountable. Such cyclical and structured opportunities for ongoing feedback and reflective practice can foster deeper learning in teacher candidates (Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2019). In their examination of exemplary programs, Darling-Hammond and Oakes (2019) describe practicum experiences that support deeper learning:

In contrast, these seven programs all work to structure extended clinical placements so that candidates become apprentices to accomplished teachers in classrooms that instantiate the practices described in their tightly connected coursework. In these apprenticeships, they can watch excellent modelling of instruction and learn how to emulate it step-by-step, with explanations about decision-making that support their own developing abilities to make complex judgements about practice. (p. 140)

We wanted to create the opportunities for teacher candidates to experience these practices for their respective journeys as educators. Coherence and integration of their course work and their practices as educators also promoted authentic learning as this type of collaboration mirrored the type of professional learning community work common in schools. We know from the research that authentic and collaborative learning opportunities are important in professional learning settings for deeper learning and transfer (Campbell et al., 2016; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

In terms of the projects, the students were mainly tasked with helping the Lab team develop virtual resources to assist in-service teachers in the transition online during the COVID-19 pandemic. These resources varied and included guides like how to get started with and leverage the tools in the Google Suite for online learning. The students researched their chosen tech tool and curated resources that would provide educators with easy entry into the tool and suggestions for immediate application in the online classroom (see Figure 13).

**Figure 13**  
*Sample From the G-Suite Resource Package*



Entry or exit tickets are a great way for gathering quick pieces of information from the class as a check in for understanding. This Assessment for Learning is very important as it can help drive your instruction throughout the semester/year. By posing a quick question to the class as an exit ticket, you can collect a class worth of student responses that can inform you, the teacher, as to their level of comprehension from this lesson. If the understanding is not at the level you anticipated, then you can restructure the following lessons to help bridge the gaps.

The following is an in-depth look at how to create an exit or entry ticket for your students.



*Video: Google Forms - Creating Exit Tickets for your Students - Student Reflections using Google Forms*

The resources also included curriculum-grounded lessons and activities related to specific online programs like the game-building program, Bloxels, or the coding program, MakeCode. The resources were always developed from the division and/or subject specialization of each teacher candidate. This was done for two reasons: first, to be in alignment with the practicum requirements and second, to foster teacher candidate engagement with the materials and learning (see Figure 14). In creating these resources, the students themselves became more familiar with the tech tools and the curriculum (especially the new math curriculum with coding and financial literacy) and they gained insight into how they might use these tools in their own future classrooms for teaching and learning.

**Figure 14**  
*Sample from a Subject-Integrated Activity*



## **Activity 2: Rolled Expressions**

**Subject:** Math

**Strand:** A. Social-Emotional Learning Skills and the Mathematical Process, B. Number, C. Algebra

**Specific Expectations:**

| Grade | Specific Expectations  |
|-------|--|
| 7     | <p>A1: apply, to the best of their ability, a variety of social-emotional learning skills to support their use of the mathematical processes and their learning in connection with the expectations in the other five strands of the mathematics curriculum</p> <p>B2.1 use the properties and order of operations, and the relationships between operations, to solve problems involving whole numbers, decimal numbers, fractions, ratios, rates, and percent, including those requiring multiple steps or multiple operations</p> <p>C3.1 solve problems and create computational representations of mathematical situations by writing and executing efficient code, including code that involves events influenced by a defined count and/or sub-program and other control structures</p> |

**Activity Type:** Plugged & Unplugged

**Materials Needed:**

Chromebooks with access to MakeCode editor, micro:bit board (optional), game board and game sheet per student, coloured markers, pencils

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Finally, many of the practicum students helped plan and facilitate professional learning sessions for their peers and in-service teachers during our faculty's virtual learning conference in the summer of 2020. They were encouraged to select a session in their area of expertise (i.e., coding for the elementary classroom), again for practicum requirements and engagement. Students then worked closely with the graduate students in the Lab to create interactive learning



experiences for session participants like how to create a character and a game environment in Bloxels. The students were also given the option to facilitate as much or as little of the conference sessions as they felt comfortable. All the practicum students chose to take central leadership roles in the sessions, introducing participants to the topics and leading them in hands-on activities and reflective discussions.

In this way, the students were engaged in authentic work creating products and experiences for real audiences (i.e., pedagogically informed tech tool resource packages and online learning experiences for conference attendees). We know from the literature that connecting learning to the real world is an important element of the learning process for teacher candidates (Luo et al., 2017). The more teacher candidates feel the activities within their program of study have a practical connection, the greater the chances will be for engagement and learning. As their former Learning in Digital Contexts instructor, the associate teacher was able to make intentional connections between the teacher candidates' practicum activities in the Lab with the coursework from the previous semester. Here the intention was to further allow the teacher candidates "to understand the practical relevance of theory and how to theorize practice so that their actions are grounded and principled" (Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2019, p. 107).

To track the students' progress over the weeks, the research project manager created a virtual, collaborative progress chart (see Figure 15). Here, the students' weekly progress was tracked using Google Sheets. The students' intentions or goals were set at the beginning of each week and these were then updated at the end of the week with their progress. As the work was primarily student led and there was a high degree of independent learning and work responsibility, we wanted a way to stay connected and to help with agency- and accountability-building. This tracking chart was an extra layer of connection in the absence of being together physically. The asynchronous format of the chart also allowed those who were not able to make every synchronous session to update us on their work. Toward the end of the alternative practicum placement, the practicum office reached out to the lab manager to complete a revised practicum report, which is outlined in more detail in the following section.

**Figure 15**  
*Collaborative Work Tracking Chart Sample*

| Week 1: June 15-21<br>Proposed Focus  | Week 1: Descriptive update / Link to work in progress or completed   | Week 2: June 22-28<br>Proposed Focus   | Week 2: Descriptive update / Link to work in progress or completed   | Week 3: June 29-July 5<br>Proposed Focus  | Week 3: Descriptive update / Link to work in progress or completed   |
|---|--|--|--|---|--|
| Begin work on Google Suite task, as well as annotated bibliography for Gendered Learning. | <a href="#">Descriptive Doc</a> is in progress, with multiple sections being addressed. Annotated Bib is in progress. Multiple articles identified, in progress of writing descriptions. | Continuing with the G Suite Doc, wrap up articles identified thus far for Annotated Bib. | <a href="#">Descriptive Doc</a> is in progress, with multiple sections being addressed. <a href="#">Annotated Bib</a> is in progress. Multiple articles identified, in progress of writing descriptions. | Finish up the list created of sources for annotated bib. Then work on the Descriptive Doc for GSuite. | 12 resources done for <a href="#">annotated bib</a> . For the <a href="#">Doc on GSuite</a> , Forms and Drive are pretty much complete. Slides are a work in progress, and the others are beginning to be worked on. Final Draft formatting is being worked on for each section. |

## **Assessment Strategies**

To keep track of the diverse range of practicum activities, teacher candidates were required to document their work, lesson plans, and other practicum tasks via their digital field experience binders. This was done so their faculty supervisors (we refer to them as university liaisons), who also serve as their Foundations of Teaching and Learning instructors, could supervise at a distance. They were able to do this by accessing teacher candidate materials via shared documents, teaching materials, and lesson plans, and providing feedback and mentorship.

Due to the diverse range of alternate practicum experiences, our formal Field Experience Practicum Report was not appropriate to the various contexts specific to in-person learning environments in a classroom setting. For the alternate practicum experiences, we decided to create a more flexible type of formal assessment tool that would be completed by the supervising OCT teacher at the alternative practicum site and approved by the practicum specialist. We created a Google Form to gather information regarding the teacher candidate's time, tasks, progress, and general feedback regarding their time (which varied tremendously) in the alternate settings. To complete the reports, the associate teacher in the Lab completed an individual report for each teacher candidate based on the associate teacher's knowledge of the individuals from their work together in the alternative practicum placement, the notes recorded on the progress tracking chart, and the students' final work products, completed during the alternative practicum placement. The output from the Google Form was then exported to its cvs format and merged to create a document that would eventually create a PDF-secured professional report. The report allowed the Practicum Office to keep track of the alternative practicum activities for record-keeping and accountability. As we were creating this new system as we went along, it proved extremely labour intensive. However, the professional report meant teacher candidates had a formal report to use in future employment applications, which typically require practicum reports. This was done as a precautionary measure in case the teacher candidates were unable to complete their official third practicum placement. In the end, however, the teacher candidates were able to complete their third placement, but this again looked different from previous years. They were given the option to complete the placement from September to December 2020 or defer to January 2021. Some teacher candidates completed virtual placements while others completed their placements in a physical classroom.

## **Conclusion**

At the beginning of the pandemic we were all (educators, students, and the general population) dealing with tremendous uncertainty, fear, and anxiety. Out of this emerged a collective understanding that there would be a greater need for empathy and understanding towards one another in this trying time. At the Faculty of Education, we knew we were not just dealing with students; we were dealing with humans with complex lives and varying personal and professional needs. These realizations are what prompted our contingency planning. Our goal was to model and provide responsive and adaptive programming in order to best serve our students. We found that in undertaking this temporary program redesign to accommodate the third and final practicum placement, communication, flexibility and an all-hands-on-deck approach among faculty, staff, and students were key elements. We also found that the continued communication between OCT's leadership and OADE were important in understanding the complexities related to meeting the mandatory 80 days. Their solutions helped ease the burdens placed on faculties of education and their students. Feedback from teacher candidates and

associate teachers in the alternative practicum settings was overwhelmingly positive given the unstable backdrop of the pandemic. The alternative settings, including the Maker Lab, provided many opportunities for our teacher candidates to foster deeper learning within unique learning environments.

From the Maker Lab perspective, three key insights emerged regarding the importance of coherence and integration in the practicum and school and university partnerships. By working closely with the supervising OCT member (i.e., associate teacher) in the field who was also an instructor in the B.Ed. program, opportunities for teacher candidates to discuss and link pedagogies with theory as described by Darling-Hammond (2006) were abundant and flowed naturally in an authentic manner.

In addition, the alternative practicum placement in the Lab provided the teacher candidates with mentorship from a variety of educational researchers (i.e., a Canada Research Chair, a postdoctoral fellow, a doctoral student, and four master's students). As a result, two of the teacher candidates have started graduate studies in our virtual graduate program and they are continuing their studies as part of the Lab's research team. These types of alternative practicum placements therefore hold the potential for teacher candidates to become exposed to different pathways after receiving their B.Ed. certification—rich and interesting pathways they may not have previously considered.

Finally, conversations linking theory to practice coupled with the modelling of instruction by the associate teacher and peers (i.e., other teacher candidates) within a collaborative community nurtured pedagogical conversations regarding the rationale for instructional decisions and the complexity of practice in a natural and ongoing manner—critical for fostering teacher candidate deeper learning (Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2019). Such practices that fostered coherence between course work and practice inherently emerged due to the supervising OCT member's participation in the B.Ed. program as an instructor—highlighting the importance of the well-documented need for building close partnerships with schools who work with our teacher candidates during practicum experiences (Beck & Kosnik, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2019; Kosnik et al., 2016).

From a program-wide perspective, these alternative practicum placements provided our Faculty with important insight into the value of including these as practicum options moving forward. COVID-19 has proven there is an immediate need for pre- and in-service teachers to be equipped with the tools and skills to teach in an online environment and there is no better way to prepare teacher candidates than with authentic experiences within the B.Ed. program. While many B.Ed. programs in Ontario offer alternative practicum opportunities, typically those type of practica do not count towards the province's 80-day requirement.

Our post-COVID-19 discussions will debrief the virtual practicum experiences and consider how pivoting online provided our teacher candidates with unique learning opportunities such as the alternative practica hosted in the Maker Lab. Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) described the ideal practicum placement as one where teacher candidates “are supported by purposeful coaching from an expert cooperating teacher in the same teaching field who offers modelling, coplanning, frequent feedback, repeated opportunities to practice, and reflection upon practice while the student teacher gradually takes on more responsibility” (p. 409). We believe that our Maker Lab experience provided our teacher candidates with these opportunities and a deeper examination of how this and other virtual practica might better serve both our future teachers and their future students is warranted. For initial teacher education programs such as

ours where we do not have the space due to our 16-month structure, we will continue to have conversations and to explore the possibilities of alternative, virtual practicum opportunities.

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## CHAPTER 13

### Perspectives of Faculty and Preservice Teachers During the Transition to Online Learning

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#### Abstract

When the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the closure of universities in Canada, the Bachelor of Education program at the University of Calgary's Werklund School of Education shifted courses and upcoming field experiences to the online environment (Burns et al., 2020). Though online teaching and learning had been part of the community-based pathway at Werklund since 2014, preservice teachers and contract faculty in the regular program were not as accustomed to the online environment. The closure of Alberta schools on March 13, 2020, meant that the second practicum scheduled to begin on March 16, 2020, needed to be redesigned for an online environment to allow preservice teachers to progress in their program. At the same time, preservice teachers, who look forward to their practicum experiences with great anticipation, were extremely disappointed to learn they would be completing an online practicum. This chapter examines the perspectives of faculty and preservice teachers during this time of transition and reflects on lessons learned, including the benefits of a community of practice for faculty transitioning to online teaching and the importance of continuous contact with students to encourage a sense of community and belongingness within their courses.

*Keywords:* online practicum, pandemic practicum, perspectives, preservice teachers, faculty

#### Résumé

Lorsque la pandémie de la COVID-19 a entraîné la fermeture des universités au Canada, le programme de baccalauréat en éducation à l'École Werklund School of Education de l'Université de Calgary a déplacé leurs cours et les expériences censées être sur le terrain vers l'environnement en ligne (Burns et al., 2020). Bien que l'enseignement et l'apprentissage en ligne fassent partie du parcours communautaire à Werklund depuis 2014, les enseignants en formation initiale ainsi que les enseignants contractuels du programme régulier n'étaient pas aussi habitués à l'environnement en ligne. La fermeture des écoles en Alberta le 13 mars 2020 signifiait que le deuxième stage qui était censé commencer le 16 mars 2020 devait être réaménager de façon convenable pour l'environnement en ligne pour ainsi permettre aux enseignants en formation de s'avancer dans leur programme. Les enseignants en formation, qui attendaient avec impatience leurs expériences de stage, ont ainsi été extrêmement déçus d'apprendre qu'ils effectueraient leur stage en ligne. Ce chapitre examine le point de vue des professeurs et des enseignants en formation pendant cette période de transition et prend l'occasion d'en tirer des leçons, y compris les avantages d'une communauté de pratique aux professeurs en période de transition vers l'enseignement en ligne et l'importance d'un contact continu avec les étudiants afin d'encourager un sentiment de communauté et d'appartenance au sein de leurs cours.

*Mots clés* : stage en ligne, stage pandémique, points de vue, enseignants en formation initiale, professeurs

## **Background**

The University of Calgary's Werklund School of Education began offering a community-based Bachelor of Education pathway in 2014. Through the community-based pathway, preservice teachers complete in-person classes on campus during an intensive two-week period each year of the program and through blended delivery. Practica are arranged in preservice teachers' home communities, and approved noneducation courses can be completed through other education providers. As a result of the community-based pathway, several of the faculty at Werklund, including myself, had learned to teach online. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a group of faculty that enjoyed teaching online; however, most preferred face-to-face teaching. When the pandemic necessitated the shift to online courses, those faculty with experience teaching online worked to mentor others who had not previously done so. At the beginning of the pandemic, I found myself transitioning out of my role with the community-based pathway and working alongside two newly appointed directors of field experience to adapt a preservice teacher practicum for an online environment.

## **Context**

The Bachelor of Education program at Werklund includes four practicum experiences, totalling 22 weeks of in-school field experience. The first practicum is an orientation to schools at the elementary and secondary levels. The second practicum is where preservice teachers begin to plan lessons and teach alongside their mentor teacher. In the following two practica, preservice teachers increase the amount of lesson planning and teaching they do, and by the final practicum, preservice teachers are teaching up to 100% of the day. Through this gradual progression in teaching responsibilities, preservice teachers refine the skills they will need to teach in their own classrooms.

In Alberta, schools were directed to close by public health officials on Friday, March 13, 2020. Werklund's preservice teachers were scheduled to begin their second practicum in schools three days later. They had already been partnered with mentor teachers in schools, and faculty had been assigned to conduct observations. Werklund's associate dean of the undergraduate program encouraged the three directors of field experience to envision an online version of the second practicum. As school boards were faced with the reality of moving K–12 learning online, it was clear that it would be months before preservice teachers would be able to join their mentor teachers and K–12 students online or in the classroom. The second practicum fell near the end of the university calendar year in March and April, and thus postponing it would result in a setback for the 435 students who needed to complete it, impacting their degree progression and likely delaying their entry into the teaching profession. The decision was made to create an online practicum experience.

Over the next week, our team of directors worked together to redesign the second practicum for an online environment. Prior to the pandemic, the second practicum had focused on an introduction to lesson planning and teaching responsibilities. During the four-week practicum, preservice teachers worked alongside mentor teachers and by the conclusion of the practicum were teaching up to 30% of their mentor teacher's day. The newly designed course was launched on March 23, 2020, and incorporated lesson planning and delivery, differentiation,

and an introduction to Indigenous resources—areas consistent with the province’s *Teaching Quality Standard* (Alberta Education, 2018) and where preservice teachers had indicated they would like more focus on in past exit surveys. The *Teaching Quality Standard* outlines six competencies for Alberta teachers: fostering effective relationships; engaging in career-long learning; demonstrating a professional body of knowledge; establishing inclusive learning environments; applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples; and adhering to legal frameworks and policies (Alberta Education, 2018). Mindful of the impact of the lockdown on mental health, the first week of the course focused on preservice teacher well-being by providing resources that could be used by the students in their teaching careers. In the absence of access to mentor teachers and K–12 students, preservice teachers delivered lessons to their instructor and peers and received feedback from both sources. The newly designed practicum became known as the “pandemic practicum” (Burns et al., 2020).

Twenty-two faculty members had been assigned to supervise and evaluate preservice teachers during their second practicum. Although some of the faculty were in continuing positions, the majority were contract faculty, consisting of retired principals and teachers who had taken on a sessional role. Many of them took on the role because they enjoyed being in schools and mentoring preservice teachers, and many of them had not taught online prior to this course. A smaller component of the faculty assigned to the role were continuing faculty, many of whom had experience teaching online. When the shift to online learning occurred, many of the contract faculty were unprepared to teach the course in an online environment. Recognizing the variety of experience and skills within the group, the three directors set up a community of practice that met weekly to discuss the course and to share expertise. Wenger and Wenger-Traynor (2015) defined communities of practice as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (p. 1). The community of practice included several workshops led by a teaching and learning facilitator within the department. Those workshops on technology included how to manage synchronous sessions, set up breakout rooms, and conduct polls. Each week the three directors led the faculty through a discussion on the weekly course content and suggestions for facilitation. Although the three directors expected preservice teachers would be disappointed by the cancellation of their in-school practicum, we wondered if they would also find value in the online practicum. Similarly, we wondered how faculty perceived this sudden shift to online teaching.

### Literature Review

When the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the closure of universities and schools across the globe, the shift to online education occurred at an unprecedented pace. As a result of the rapid shift, many face-to-face courses were quickly transferred to the online environment. For most educators, getting the course up and running was the immediate priority, with limited time left to consider the elements of good online course design (Hargis, 2020). Faculty who possessed limited experience with online learning view online teaching more negatively than those with more experience, according to Panda and Misha (2007). The same authors pointed to the need for continuing faculty development in the area of online teaching, a statement echoed by Van Nuland et al. (2020) in their examination of the impact of online learning on teacher education in Ontario. Hargis (2020) described the rush to move courses online at the start of the pandemic as necessitating “quick decisions based on fast and easy solutions, often made by leaders with little experience in online teaching” (p. 1). The quick transition has been referred to as an “unprecedented educational experiment as faculty attempt to transition their courses en



masse to online learning” (Cadloff, 2020, p. 1). Cadloff (2020) described the abrupt transition as impacting faculty who had “a week, or maybe just a day or two, to scramble and rejig their courses for a new delivery system” (p. 1).

For students and faculty members learning and teaching from home, a new set of concerns arose during this time. Both students and faculty found themselves working from home in close proximity to other family members, who were also working from home or engaged in online learning (Goedegebuure & Meek, 2021). New equity concerns arose as students and faculty were forced to purchase a computer or upgrade their computer hardware to ensure they had access to online cameras and technology (Metcalf, 2021). The impact of this new way of working and learning had effects on both mental and physical health and for many resulted in declining productivity and creativity (Metcalf, 2021). One of the consequences of being fully online is a reduction in informal conversations with students and other faculty members. These discussions often help to build a sense of community and result in the generation of new ideas (Goedegebuure & Meek, 2021). During this time, faculty workloads are estimated to have increased by at least half at the same time that caregiving responsibilities increased due to school closures (Metcalf, 2021).

Online learning has been unfairly maligned and stigmatized as being lower quality than face-to-face learning (Hodges et al., 2020). In fact, the research on online learning indicates that it provides many advantages not offered in face-to-face learning and results in a similar level of learning (Means et al., 2009). In a meta-analysis of 51 studies, Means et al. (2009) found that “students who took all or part of their class online performed better, on average, than those taking the same course through traditional face-to-face instruction” (p. 68). Garrison (2006) found that online learning offers many advantages not found in traditional face-to-face courses. It allows for permanency, so students can look back on discussions for future work. In addition, it provides the opportunity for reflection on readings and others’ postings, which can result in more reflective and rigorous thought. One of the disadvantages of online learning, according to Garrison, is that students are often unaware of the increased responsibility they must take for their own learning. They must plan for the extra time commitment required to engage in online learning (Smith & Winking-Diaz, 2004). Further, Hewitt (2001) suggested learners may view convergent activities that require additional time, such as summarizing and synthesizing, as the facilitator’s responsibility. As a result, students may opt to post their responses without taking the time to digest previous responses, leading to more fragmented discussions.

In a recent survey of over 100,000 postsecondary students in Canada, Doreleyers and Knighton (2020) found that students were concerned with the shift of their courses online for several reasons. They worried about grades, the ability to complete their program, and that “their credential would not be equivalent to those not affected by the COVID-19 pandemic” (Doreleyers & Knighton, 2020, p. 4). Similarly, Compton et al. (2010) previously found that preservice teachers are reluctant to engage in online learning as they fear it will diminish the quality of their degree. Undergraduate and graduate students from York University reported missing their in-person classes during the pandemic for a variety of reasons, including the opportunity to build new friendships and the sense of solidarity that comes from being able to see others working on their studies. They also expressed challenges with staying focused in the home environment resulting from the lack of privacy and sense of routine, and not being on campus seeing others working on their studies (Ong et al., 2020). Eringfeld (2021) found that students valued face-to-face learning for opportunities to socialize, become part of a community, and learn more about themselves. Although students struggled to stay focused on their studies during

this period, faculty also laboured to transfer and adapt their courses to the online environment while providing a robust learning experience.

Cutri et al. (2020) described the shift to online learning during the pandemic as “forced.” Faculty who were not previously teaching online had to make a quick transition under “traumatic conditions,” including COVID-19 and a cloud of uncertainty regarding whether the shift would be temporary or permanent. Though most faculty were optimistic about the transition, they often found themselves in situations where their students were better equipped with technology than they were. Cutri et al. also pointed out that faculty reported being challenged by issues of equity that arose regarding students’ access to technology.

One of the important predictors of student satisfaction in an online course is the learners’ interaction with the instructor (Andersen et al., 2013). Reflective activities that require collaboration among students enhance students’ sense of interconnectedness and belonging in the course (Park, 2015). By modelling good online behaviour, engaging in online discussions, and providing support, encouragement, timely feedback, and clear expectations, faculty build a sense of community in an online course (Martin & Bolliger, 2018; Shackelford & Maxwell, 2012). Bolliger and Martin (2018) found that instructor-to-student interaction through announcements, email reminders, informal question and answer sessions, and reflective activities contributed to positive student perceptions of the course. Hew (2015) pointed out that students prefer an instructor who will monitor their discussions and keep them on track, but also allow some freedom to voice their views.

## **Methodology**

In seeking to better understand the experiences of preservice teachers and faculty members as they transitioned to online learning and teaching, this study draws upon a scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) framework. The purpose of SoTL is to inquire into student learning to inform practice (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999). SoTL encompasses “scholarly inquiry to any of the intellectual tasks that comprise the work of teaching – designing a course, facilitating classroom activities, trying out new pedagogical ideas, advising, writing student learning outcomes and evaluating programs” (Hutchings et al., 2011, p. 7).

This research includes two separate case studies conducted between April 2020 and December 2020 (Stake, 2006). Consistent with case study methodology, the cases are bounded or separated for research terms (Cresswell, 2012, p. 465). The first case study focused on the perspectives of the 435 preservice teachers at Werklund immediately following their online practicum. This case study was bounded by two factors: all preservice teachers were scheduled to begin an in-school practicum on March 15, 2020, and all preservice teachers had their in-school practicum cancelled and replaced with an online practicum.

The second case study focused on the perspectives of faculty transitioning their courses to the online environment. This case study was bounded by four factors: each of the courses was previously delivered face-to-face and had to be redesigned for an online environment, was taught by both contract and continuing faculty, and was offered between September and December 2020.

In both of the cases, data collection included surveys, document analysis of course outlines from the previous year, and reflections on discussions with members of the community of practice. Institutional ethics was applied for and received for both of the studies. Qualtrics software was used for the surveys to allow for participant anonymity and to ensure that responses could not be linked to a specific participant. For the first case study, the invitation to participate

was sent out to all 435 preservice teachers in the online practicum course by a third party, to reduce any power dynamics. Similarly, the survey for faculty was sent out by a third party to all 48 faculty members teaching one of four courses during the fall term. Several of the faculty teaching the fall term courses would have also taught the online practicum course. Each of the courses had several sections but all had three assignments, consistent rubrics, and four synchronous sessions. Faculty had the option to add additional synchronous sessions and resources to their course as they determined appropriate.

The survey of preservice teachers had a 52% response rate while the survey of faculty had a response rate of 41%. For the faculty survey, 80% of the survey responses were from contract faculty and 20% were from continuing faculty. As a result of the unequal distribution of responses between continuing faculty and contract faculty, it is difficult to compare and contrast responses, except in a generalized manner.

### **Case Study 1 Findings: Preservice Teacher Experiences With the Shift to the Online Practicum**

#### **Course Outlines**

The course outline prior to the pandemic had three face-to-face classes at the university, combined with practicum experiences in schools. When the course was redesigned for the online practicum, the number of synchronous sessions increased to eight to compensate for the absence of in-school experiences. Faculty had the option of adding additional synchronous sessions if they thought such sessions were warranted. The original course outline had four assignments, including a field experience dossier, participation in synchronous sessions and D2L postings, lesson plans, and a final oral presentation. The online practicum adapted the school lesson delivery to K–12 students to online lesson delivery to peers in small groups and delivery of one lesson to the whole class. The online practicum replaced the final oral presentation with a written reflection on their individual lesson delivered in small groups.

Whereas preservice teachers would have designed a lesson per day during their second and third weeks of the course prior to the pandemic, the online version of the course saw preservice teachers designing one lesson and redesigning it two times, first for the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives and then for differentiation. In this way, the requirement for lesson planning was less than what was expected in the in-school practicum.

#### **Community of Practice Discussions**

The three directors met with the 28 faculty members delivering the course on a weekly basis to share ideas, resources, and digital instructional tools such as Zoom and D2L and to support one another. The directors created a D2L shell for the course and populated it with resources, PowerPoint presentations, and readings to support faculty in their planning and delivery of the course. During the community of practice meetings, faculty were encouraged to share successful and innovative ideas, suggestions for improvement, feedback on course materials, and lessons with one another to ensure the course was meeting its learning objectives. These discussions exposed a wide variety of online teaching competence within the group, ranging from faculty who had taught online for years to those who had never taught online before this course. Faculty feedback on the redesigned course outline was very positive at the

beginning, although over time several faculty identified the need to create additional synchronous sessions in order to allow more observation of preservice teachers' lessons.

## **Survey Data**

Analysis of the 228 preservice teacher responses provided quantitative and qualitative data. The survey tool provided a preliminary analysis of the quantitative data, and researchers read through the narrative responses several times before determining themes. The data pointed to five themes as follows: shifts in perceptions of online learning, need for preparation for future teaching, areas where the most significant learning occurred, skills developed, and suggestions for how to improve the course.

### ***Shift in Perception of Online Learning***

Eighty percent of the respondents indicated being extremely unhappy when they learned that they would not be able to complete their practicum in a school and would instead complete an online practicum. By the conclusion of the online course, 44% of the respondents reported the course had shifted their perspective of online learning in a positive direction and another 31% indicated it had probably shifted their perspectives in a positive direction. One of the respondents commented as follows: "My perception about the effectiveness of online learning improved greatly. The course went smoothly, and I still felt as though I was able to get to know my instructor and cohort."

### ***Preparation for Future Teaching***

Preservice teachers were asked how the course prepared them for future teaching. When the survey data was collected in April 2020, the shift to online teaching and learning was fairly recent. Depending on how preservice teachers envisioned their future teaching, they may have believed that online teaching would be a part of their future or, conversely, they may have believed the pandemic was temporary and in-class teaching and learning would continue within weeks. Thirteen percent of respondents indicated the course had been extremely useful, 37% found the course moderately useful, and another 26% indicated it was slightly useful. Feedback from preservice teachers pointed to positive aspects while at the same time recognizing that the experience was not what it could have been if they were in schools: "I think that although I missed out on the experience of being with students in a classroom setting, I learned a lot through this format" and "I think it somewhat prepared me for teaching. Actually, being in front of students would have been more beneficial; however, I understand the reasons why this was not possible. I was happy that I was able to complete this course and was not delayed in working towards completing the program." Although the course was useful, preservice teachers indicated it was not as useful as an actual in-school practicum would have been.

In terms of practicality of the course, the percentage of respondents who found the course moderately practical was similar to those who indicated it was slightly practical, with 31% finding it moderately practical and 33% finding it slightly practical. Nine percent of respondents found the course extremely practical and another 20% indicated that it was very practical. Respondents who found the course very practical made comments such as the following:

The opportunity to practice teaching in front of informed colleagues and receive their feedback—as well as the opportunity to observe, critique and most of all help and encourage one another as colleague student-teachers—was highly valuable and might not have been as readily achieved (as a collaborative cohort) using the original field course structure.

There were also respondents who found the course very impractical, as indicated here: “Although we considered some important questions through the course, I don’t think this prepared us for the realities of teaching and engaging with students in our chosen specialization.”

### ***Most Significant Learning***

The survey data indicated the greatest learning that preservice teachers experienced was about teaching online. Although it was never intended for the course to teach preservice teachers how to teach online, preservice teachers gained valuable online teaching skills by teaching to their peers. Respondents commented on how the course provided them with the opportunity to learn new technology and, as one respondent put it, “how to effectively and engagingly teach in an online setting.”

For many preservice teachers, the course offered an opportunity to learn more about effective lesson planning. One respondent indicated, “My instructor provided excellent feedback on the lesson plan,” and another similarly stated, “My instructor took the time to go in-depth with creating lesson plans and gave very helpful feedback (one-on-one Zoom session) so I learned how to actually write a lesson, unlike in our other courses on campus. I had already created three in other courses but no professor took the time to show us how to ACTUALLY create one.” A small number of respondents indicated they were comfortable with lesson planning prior to the course and were frustrated that the course appeared to be a reiteration of what they had already learned.

In their responses, preservice teachers were able to find a silver lining in the shift to an online practicum. Many indicated the experience had taught them more about, as one respondent described it, “how education is all about flexibility and accommodation.” Similarly, another respondent commented,

This Field 2 experience has been a very good lesson in being flexible and adaptable to change. One of the best qualities a teacher can have would be their ability to roll with the punches or obstacles. This is a wonderful quality to have professionally and personally. Patience is also a quality that seems to go hand in hand with flexibility. Through this challenging situation, I have learned valuable information pertaining to teaching and online teaching.

Several preservice teachers mentioned the value of observing their peers’ online lessons and receiving feedback on their own. One responded said, “Feedback from my peers provided me with insight into my teaching and how to improve.” Still another respondent pointed to the power of feedback, stating, “I found it very powerful to receive so much great feedback from my instructor and my peers.”

### ***How to Improve the Course***

When asked how the course could be improved, preservice teachers indicated they would have preferred more opportunities to teach to their peers. One respondent phrased that sentiment

as follows: “Provide more opportunities for teaching. Perhaps have students develop a unit plan and teach one micro-lesson to their PLC [professional learning community] group per week (this would be closer to the 30% teaching load we were expected to have during Field II). D2L discussion posts were not overly beneficial.” Another preservice teacher commented, “The only thing I would have liked is to have had more opportunities to deliver lessons or longer lessons to our peers.”

Several respondents lamented the absence of mentor teachers and K–12 students to teach. One respondent said, “Perhaps invite some students who are willing to join so we can get a feel of teaching to students. Or have a current elementary/secondary teacher to observe and give feedback.” Another respondent echoed that thought: “I would suggest connecting us with real online classrooms so that we can teach real students, get feedback from real teachers, and get experience guiding real online classrooms. Additionally, I would suggest putting more of a focus on helping us to create engaging activities, in how other teachers view online learning, how students (K–12) view online learning.” It was clear that preservice teachers gained valuable skills in learning how to teach online and plan lessons, while recognizing the importance of flexibility in teaching; however, many were frustrated by not being able to teach K–12 students and learn from their mentor teachers.

## **Case Study 2 Findings: Faculty Experiences With the Shift to Online Teaching**

### **Course Outlines**

When courses moved from face-to-face delivery to online, much of the discussion that would have occurred as part of the class took place in writing. Preservice teachers submitted more assignments in writing, including blogs and discussion posts, than they would have if they were in the face-to-face version of the course. Faculty found themselves reading more written submissions and providing feedback in writing. Each of the courses retained the expectation of participating in a learning community, either face-to-face or online. Although the assignments remained unchanged in the course outlines, during the pandemic each course added three to four synchronous sessions in order to replace in-class facilitation. Faculty had the option of adding additional synchronous sessions.

### **Survey Data**

Twenty-one faculty members responded to the second survey. Eighty percent of the responses were contract faculty, also known as sessional faculty. As with the first case study, both quantitative and qualitative data were available through Qualtrics, and themes were determined by reading and rereading the qualitative data. From the survey data, course outlines, and literature, the researchers identified four consistent themes: the challenges of teaching online, a perceived inability to develop relationships with students, course adaptations made by instructors, and the advantages of teaching online.

### ***Challenges of Teaching Online***

Although half of the faculty respondents indicated they had taught online before, the same number described the shift to online teaching as moderately challenging. The data indicate the shift was more challenging for contract faculty than for continuing faculty. Fifty percent of

continuing faculty described the shift as being more work, versus 57% of contract faculty. The increased workload was attributed partially to transferring the assignments to an online environment, with one faculty member stating, “It was slightly challenging because the workload increased due to required revision of assignments to make them digital, more planning and prep time for courses I have already taught.” Another faculty member indicated that redesigning a course for online delivery resulted in an additional 50 to 60 hours of work. Still other faculty members attributed the increased time spent on having to put everything in writing, as indicated in this quotation from the survey: “More time-consuming. Rather than having a variety of in-class activities and discussions, the bulk of the delivery, assignments, and discussions are written products. Therefore, there is substantially more time spent reading and responding.” The combination of redesigning courses for the online environment and communicating in writing what would have been stated verbally in a face-to-face class resulted not only in different work but more work.

### ***Challenges of Developing Relationships With Students***

The challenge most frequently mentioned by faculty in shifting to online teaching was not being able to develop relationships with students or build a sense of community within the classroom. One faculty member described missing getting to know students, “being able to connect with my students.” Another indicated that the reason they taught was to connect with students: “I REALLY miss that. I don’t HAVE to teach so I’m doing this because I want to.” Faculty described lost opportunities to connect with students before and after class, which was when they felt they had the opportunity to get to know students as individuals. Without those casual opportunities to connect, faculty found it challenging to build trust in the online course. Several described the challenge of reading facial expressions and body language as an impediment in the online environment. As one respondent said, “You can read body language and facial expression when you’re talking face-to-face. You can stop when you read the class and recognize they are ‘stuck.’” Similarly, another noted the challenge of “not getting to ‘read’ the students’ body language when they are frustrated or not understanding. Not getting to know them as people.” The sense of trust and connection that was previously built through informal discussions in class occurred less frequently in the online environment.

### ***Adaptations to Courses by Faculty***

Sixty-seven percent of contract faculty respondents added additional synchronous sessions to their courses to enhance student learning, whereas none of the continuing faculty respondents indicated they had done so. Additional synchronous sessions provided more opportunities for discussion. One respondent indicated, “With the complexity of this course, I felt that the students would need to get together more often, so I have added weekly breakout sessions. The students have voiced that they are very thankful for this and also I have been able to connect with all students and provide ongoing feedback to their learning.” Similarly, another contract faculty member noted,

The class meetings were essentially one-way, stand-and-deliver presentations of core course content. There was insufficient time for any useful full class dialogue/discussion of concepts and examples with 35 students at once in a limited time frame. However, this

did take place in separate Zoom meetings that students arranged, which were unconstrained by scheduled course section time.

Others described adding voluntary or optional synchronous sessions to “respond to student needs” and at “students’ request.” Two contract faculty described having additional one-on-one synchronous sessions in order to support students who were struggling, with one faculty member suggesting these sessions enhanced equity for students struggling without exposure in a face-to-face class.

Contract faculty were also more likely to add additional resources to the course than continuing faculty, with 83% of contract faculty indicating they had done so and only 50% of continuing faculty indicating they had. Additional resources consisted of videos, articles, and websites, with several describing adding items related to “current trends” in education and content from their experiences in schools. One continuing faculty member described removing items from the course out of concern that students were already coping with enough stress resulting from the pandemic, noting, “However, I have also removed some of the reading and revised discussion times to be less in this pandemic environment because students are over-Zoomed and experiencing screen fatigue.” This concern for student well-being was prevalent in one faculty member’s response pointing to the impact of the pandemic on student and faculty well-being:

Student fatigue, declining mental health and well-being of students and instructors, and the fact that course expectations remain the same and not being really responsive to students’ needs and many personal challenges (e.g., social isolation, smaller support networks, disconnection from family and friends, home schooling, loss of income, living conditions that don’t accommodate online work, etc.).

Though some faculty thought it was important to add synchronous discussions and resources to their course to better engage students, others removed readings from their course and limited the amount of time students spent in synchronous sessions.

### ***Advantages of Teaching Online***

Faculty members described appreciating teaching online for the time that was saved by not having to commute to the office with comments such as “No driving and parking in the cold!” Still others depicted an enhanced sense of freedom that allowed them to “explore new methods of teaching and learning” and an appreciation for flexible scheduling. The flexibility allowed faculty members to accommodate student needs. One respondent explained, “A significant number of my students are at home with young children and/or working shifts or part-time. We have been able to schedule productive Zoom meetings at times workable to all.” For faculty, the challenges of teaching online were alleviated by the flexibility and time gained by not needing to travel to the university.

## **Discussion**

The first case study examining preservice teacher perceptions of online learning began with a group of students who were very disappointed when their in-school practicum experiences had to be cancelled. Though that disappointment lingered throughout the course, by its



conclusion 75% of respondents indicated a positive shift in their perceptions of online learning. The incorporation of reflective activities and peer feedback likely contributed to moving perceptions of the online course from disappointment to eventual acceptance (Park, 2015). The data make clear that the experience of learning to teach K–12 students cannot be replicated in an online environment devoid of K–12 students; however, significant learning did occur during the course.

Preservice teachers pointed to the value of observing their peers teaching online and receiving feedback from not just the course instructor but from one another. Still others found the course allowed them to deepen their understanding of lesson planning. An unexpected finding was that several respondents were able to find a silver lining in the course being moved online. Several preservice teachers commented on how the experience taught them about flexibility and being able to adapt, two qualities that are important in teaching.

The three directors thought it wise to decrease the amount of lesson planning required of preservice teachers in the course out of concern for student and faculty well-being during a time of uncertainty (Goedegebuure & Meek, 2021), but the results of the first case study demonstrate preservice teachers wanted more opportunities to plan lessons and teach online. Preservice teachers expressed frustrations at having to design only one full lesson and then redesign it two more times. They contrasted that with the reality of the classroom, where they would have been designing lessons on a daily basis.

The results of the second case study indicate that faculty, especially contract faculty who may have been new to teaching online, found online teaching to be more work than teaching face-to-face. The additional work was attributed to increased written communication and time spent adapting courses for the online environment. This continuous communication is an important factor in student satisfaction with online courses (Andersen et al., 2013). Though contract faculty were not responsible for course redesign, they were more likely to report online teaching as being more work. This might be the result of having to learn new technology. Cadloff (2020) suggested that rather than focusing on learning new technology during this time, faculty should ensure consistent communication with students. For continuing faculty, course redesign may have contributed to the additional work experienced during the shift, with one faculty member describing an additional 50 to 60 hours of work to adapt their course for the online environment. While Panda and Mishra (2007) recommended more time be allocated to training faculty how to teach online, the abrupt shift (Hodges et al., 2020) to the online environment left little time to provide such training. Similarly, Van Nuland et al. 's (2020) study of the online shift in teacher education called for further research on which pedagogical skills teacher educators require to sustain online learning. By meeting each week with the Werklund community of practice, the three directors were able to provide faculty with direction on the content that was being covered over the week and also provide just-in-time training on technology.

The results of the second case study showed that faculty, both contract and continuing, were concerned with student well-being during this time (Metcalf, 2020). What is perhaps most interesting are the actions they took to support student well-being. Although contract faculty were more likely to add synchronous sessions to their course to provide opportunities for discussion and support student learning, continuing faculty did not do so. In fact, none of the continuing faculty that responded to the survey indicated they had added synchronous sessions. Because continuing faculty were most likely responsible for the course design, they may have believed the course already had the appropriate number of synchronous sessions. In regards to

adding resources to the courses, contract faculty were more likely than continuing faculty to do so. This may be attributed to the fact that continuing faculty were responsible for teaching more than one course to the same group of students and would have had a better understanding of assignments and synchronous sessions in other courses. One continuing faculty member even mentioned removing resources from their course in order to decrease student workload during an already stressful time.

### Conclusion

Through an analysis of the experiences of preservice teachers and faculty during the shift to online learning, it is clear that online learning cannot replicate the experience of teaching K–12 students in the classroom. At the same time, preservice teachers were able to learn through reflection on their own teaching and by observing their peers' teaching. An unexpected outcome of the shift to online learning was preservice teachers' recognition that they were in fact in the midst of a massive change and that the adaptability and flexibility so often mentioned in teacher training were required of them.

Though faculty experienced the shift to online learning in different ways, their course adaptations all held a consistent through line, which was an attempt to enhance student well-being during a time of uncertainty. These two case studies demonstrate the importance of faculty maintaining continuous contact with students during their online learning. This contact contributes to an enhanced sense of community and belongingness for students and may be more important than using the latest technology. Another lesson from these two case studies is the importance of having faculty draw upon a community of practice to share ideas and to elevate the quality of teaching in online courses. The community of practice that arose in the online practicum course provided an opportunity for faculty to draw upon one another's strengths and elevate their own teaching.

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## CHAPTER 14

### **The Alternative Field Experience in Teacher Education: Lessons From Experiential Learning and Mentoring in Pandemic Times**

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#### **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic dismantled traditional approaches to classroom practicum learning in the spring of 2020 due to the cancellation of in-person learning for postsecondary students. Western University's Bachelor of Education program was able to pivot to alternative field experiences (AFE) at this time because we had an existing structure for self-directed experiential learning that could be quickly adapted and expanded. The necessity of innovating within the program afforded study of the opportunities and challenges of learning and mentoring through the AFE. We conducted semistructured interviews with six teacher candidates and 15 supervisors about learning intentions for the AFE and preferences for mentoring between March and December 2020 using constructivist grounded theory. Findings were conceptualized visually with the assistance of an artist to illustrate different pathways, discovery tools, and needs for mentoring that expand agency for teacher candidates to develop professional capabilities. This study informs how we provide flexible guidelines for AFEs in the pandemic and beyond, and contributes lessons for teacher education programs concerning equity, assessment, and mentoring.

*Keywords:* experiential learning, self-directed learning, mentoring, agency, capability

#### **Résumé**

Au printemps 2020 la pandémie de la COVID-19 a démantelé les approches traditionnelles du stage pratique en raison de l'annulation de l'apprentissage en personne pour les étudiants de niveau postsecondaire. Le programme de baccalauréat en éducation de l'Université Western a pu glissé vers une alternative à l'expérience pratique à ce moment-là car nous avions déjà un système en place pour l'apprentissage expérientiel autodirigé qu'on a pu rapidement adapté et agrandir. La nécessité d'innover au sein du programme nous a toutefois permettre d'étudier les opportunités et les défis de l'apprentissage et du mentorat qui existait dans cette alternative à l'expérience pratique. Nous avons mené des entrevues semi-dirigées entre mars et décembre 2020 avec six candidats à l'enseignement et quinze superviseurs au sujet des intentions d'apprentissage de notre alternative à l'expérience pratique et des préférences pour le mentorat en utilisant une approche ancrée dans la théorie constructiviste. Les résultats ont été conceptualisés visuellement à l'aide d'un artiste pour nous illustrer différents parcours, outils de découverte et besoins de mentorat qui permettraient aux candidats à l'enseignement de développer leurs compétences professionnelles. Cette étude explique l'approche flexible aux directives utilisée à l'expérience pratique alternative pendant la pandémie, et contribue à des

leçons qui touche sur l'équité, l'évaluation et le mentorat dans le programme de formation des enseignants.

*Mots clés* : apprentissage expérientiel, apprentissage autodirigé, mentorat, capacité

## Introduction

When initial teacher education preparation became located in university programs, a gap between theory and practice was opened (Darling-Hammond, 2006). This opening presented a challenge but also many opportunities for innovation to bring educational theory into practice. Given the ubiquity of literature on mentoring in teacher education (Devos, 2010; McGee, 2019; Strieker et al., 2016), it seems Bachelor of Education programs have long since been bridging—and studying—the theory–practice divide through mentored approaches to experiential learning. The literature in teacher education is replete with studies of such approaches. Three Canadian examples press this point: Black (2016) explored the role of the supervising teacher in developing teacher candidate self-efficacy in practicum, Robinson and Walters (2016) conducted an action research project to develop mentoring relationships prepracticum between teachers and candidates, and Martin (2017) conducted a self-study of her role as a teacher educator supporting theory to practice work through inquiry groups with teacher candidates while on practicum.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced teacher education programs to innovate yet again as vital opportunities for learning through the practicum were put on hold. We were fortunate in our Bachelor of Education program at Western University to have other opportunities for self-directed experiential learning available through a program known as the Alternative Field Experience (AFE). We were faced with a problem, however. While the literature on mentoring in teacher education is expansive, the intersections of theory, practice, and mentoring when experiential learning is self-directed are less clear (Davis & Fontazzi, 2016; Evans et al., 2017; Henning-Smith, 2018). Since the structure for the AFE was in place, this allowed us to study the opportunities and challenges of self-directed learning and mentoring in this theory to practice experience. This chapter reports our learning through this research study, beginning with some context on our program and the AFE.

## The Alternative Field Experience at Western

Western's Bachelor of Education program has sought to provide opportunities for experiential learning beyond the minimum requirements set by accreditation standards (Al-Haque et al., 2017). Along with an increase in formal classroom practica, the shift to an expanded four-term program, mandated by the Ontario government in 2015, afforded an innovative approach to self-directed field work through two placements (a total of 7 weeks) in AFEs at the end of the third and fourth terms.

Through the AFE, teacher candidates seek out learning opportunities in a variety of education settings (e.g., gaining more experience in a particular grade or teaching subject, doing field work in an international education setting, developing curriculum for a community organization). The teacher candidates are responsible for proposing the AFE, subject to approval by the teacher education program, finding a mentor to supervise their work in this setting, then writing a reflection about their learning which the supervisor must sign in confirmation. From its inception, the AFE has been seen as a space for exploration that has a “wilderness” quality: “Right from the beginning it's been ... somewhat of a wide-open choice,” noted an AFE supervisor in our study (AS10). However, there were requirements for AFEs to be related to

areas of specialization teacher candidates pursue in their course work, and to be completed during defined time blocks in the third and fourth terms of the program.

The AFE is designed to expand options for teacher candidates to pursue professional learning goals and translate education theory to practice, but as a recent addition to our program, little was known about its effect. In March 2020, teacher candidates in their first year were about to begin their next practicum when Ontario went into emergency lockdown due to the pandemic. All elementary and secondary schools were closed for 2 weeks, then transitioned to online learning for the remainder of the school year. As this cohort was caught in a circumstance when practicum could not be organized, our program responded by redesigning the AFE as an experience that could be conducted either online or onsite, in any term or throughout the 2-year period of the program by accumulation of hours, and in any area of education-related interest. This flexibility was introduced to free up time in the fall and spring of 2020–2021 for completion of the mandatory practicum blocks, and to make space for teacher candidates to continue their experiential learning, as they were able, through the mass disruption to life at this time.

### **Methodology**

Following principles of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), we adopted an approach to interviewing and data analysis that explored the learning and mentoring experiences of teacher candidates and supervisors in the AFE. Constructivist grounded theory is a qualitative methodology that aims to generate theory about a social phenomenon from the perspectives of participants. Data collection and analysis are concurrent and iterative so that analysis guides further data collection, in a process known as theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006). In grounded theory approaches, researchers interpret data with data through constant comparison, an inductive, theory-building approach to analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Mills et al., 2006; Nelson, 2017). For this reason, while literature is used to situate the purpose of a grounded theory study, the data itself often suggests further literature to draw on in the analysis (Mills et al., 2006). Finally, given that the aim of our study is theoretical sufficiency rather than generalizability, the number of participants is of less relevance than the quality of the data and analysis to explain the phenomenon (Dey, 1999; Charmaz, 2006; Nelson, 2017).

Questions in the interviews sought an understanding of how teacher candidates negotiated support and feedback from their self-selected mentors, what kinds of learning opportunities they were able to pursue during the pandemic, and the problems and possibilities of working in virtual or physically distanced spaces. These questions were refined over time as constant comparison of the data allowed us to see patterns and explore emerging questions about the diversity of learning intentions and supervision styles we encountered. Interviews averaged 45 minutes in length.

Members of the research team responsible for data collection and analysis included research associates, a graduate student, and an elementary teacher who is a recent graduate of our teacher education program. The staff member in the program responsible for organizing the AFE contributed to confirmation of findings, and the associate dean of the program participated in manuscript writing once data were analyzed and anonymized.

### **Participants**

With institutional ethics approval, we conducted online interviews with six teacher candidates and 15 field experience supervisors about their experiences in the AFE between the

period of March to December 2020. During this time, teacher candidates were transitioning to their second year in the program, and some of the participants were reflecting on an AFE they recently completed, while others commented on an AFE that was ongoing. This interval afforded a range of in-the-moment to reflective insights. In the findings, quotes by teacher candidates are identified as TC1, TC2, and so on.

The AFE supervisors represented a variety of professional roles in the network of our teacher education program, including associate teachers who usually supervise a formal classroom practicum, course instructors, and master teacher mentors connected to another learning opportunity in our program. While quotes from the teacher candidates may refer to these different roles, for the purpose of this chapter, quotes from AFE supervisors are identified as AS1, AS2, and the like.

### Analysis

While interviews were ongoing, four members of the research team met weekly to discuss tentative themes about problems and possibilities in the AFE and to make decisions about theoretical sampling for upcoming interviews with teacher candidates and supervisors (Charmaz, 2006). Transcripts were divided for coding among the researchers to highlight representative examples of themes and a subset of transcripts was cross-coded to ensure we included discrepant cases. For example, two of us would code AFE supervisor transcripts for themes we had identified, while the other two would code teacher candidates. After meeting to discuss the coding, we would test the thematic categories by switching transcripts and recoding. This approach allowed us to discern whether the interpretation of the data from the first and second set of coders was consistent and supported our analysis.

Initial coding revealed insights about the type and timing of the AFE, learning intentions, and mentoring styles. This open coding stage led to a more focused coding stage where we explored contrasting themes of possibilities and problems. Exploring these contrasts revealed insight on ways to maximize the learning potential of the AFE. For example, the need for more consistent guidelines about mentoring and feedback was a strong problem theme in the data from both teacher candidates and supervisors. However, this problem conflicted with a possibility theme that was also consistently represented in the data: the open-endedness of the AFE afforded a fluid space for meeting learning needs. In another example, participants discussed their needs for experiential learning during the pandemic from both a gap and opportunity lens, often in the same transcript. Through this process of open and focused coding, we began to reconceptualize our idea of the AFE. We shifted from viewing it as a general opportunity to meet needs for experiential learning in teacher education, to a more focused theory about purposes for self-directed learning in our program. As suggested by our data, we refined our analysis through insights from prior research in our program conceptualizing professional agency and capability (Hibbert et al., in press; Ott & Hibbert, 2021), as well as relevant literature on self-regulated learning in mentoring relationships (Schunk & Mullen, 2013) and mentoring styles and preferences in teacher education (Evans, 2004; Davis & Fantozzi, 2016; Henning-Smith, 2018; Streiker et al., 2016).

Our findings enabled us to develop a set of flexible guidelines for the AFE that reflects the different kinds of learning intentions, learning opportunities, and approaches to mentoring that teacher candidates are likely to engage and encounter along the continuum of our two-year program. Finally, we worked with an artist (J. E. Kassen Illustration) to visualize the findings through the metaphor of exploration for ongoing use in our program.



## Findings

In what follows, we first describe the categories of learning intentions teacher candidates engaged through the AFE with quotes from participants and the visual concept illustrating each category. Next, we explore the map of possibilities for self-directed learning and mentoring in this program, using literature to expand on these ideas.

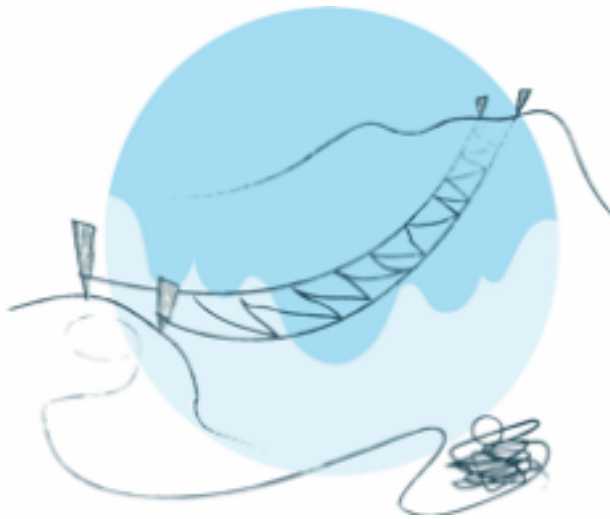
We identified three categories of learning intentions teacher candidates were meeting through their AFE: (a) unexpected needs: goals for learning that required unanticipated workarounds, (b) discovered needs: goals sparked by mentors in the field or theories encountered in course work, and (c) purpose-driven needs: goals identified through prior learning experiences that realized a strong sense of purpose. The visual concepts for each learning intention represent the teacher candidates' agency, needs for mentoring, and tools for discovery as they navigated these opportunities for self-directed learning.

### Unexpected Needs

As they discussed learning intentions for the AFE, some teacher candidates and their supervisors described encountering difficulties, disruptions, barriers, or unmet expectations as a result of the pandemic. The image of a broken bridge presents an impasse, and the rope illustrates both the need for a creative workaround, as well as the support of others to cross this divide (see Figure 16).

**Figure 16**

*Visual Representing Unexpected Needs*



One supervisor, who is also an instructor in our Bachelor of Education program, expressed concern with the potential for a relational gap when teacher candidates participated in learning and teaching online:

The experiential component is really missing ... the collaboration when they're ... reading about something or watching a video and then we talk about it and we break it down.... If they're in a placement where they're not in a classroom, but they're doing an online placement, it would be interesting to see how they feel about the relationships they have with their students. (AS13)

Another supervisor organizing a community placement also referenced the relational disruption.

If they were at the museum they would work normal times. If they were doing programs they would work with a variety of staff including their volunteer tour guides, some of our curators, myself, so they would have much contact with museum staff. In this context, not so much. (AS2)

However, looking at these data through the lens of possibilities, we found that the AFEs that arose from unexpected changes in experiential opportunities and relations sometimes led to innovative projects. In the case of the museum placement, for example, the supervisor went on to describe how working from home, the teacher candidate was able to go into more depth than usual in a curriculum development project that produced creative learning materials for the museum.

Other teacher candidates and supervisors shared unexpected needs that raised the themes of opportunity and appreciation. One teacher candidate realized that the online AFE gave them additional time to learn more about their AFE topic.

Actually, the pandemic gave me an opportunity, especially the [Ontario College of Teachers competency] about like knowing the subject matter and the curriculum. I actually think I got to do more of that because of my virtual AFE, and what I chose to focus on for that. (TC5)

Similarly, an associate teacher found that the online AFE they supervised was not only as effective as an in-person AFE, it created opportunities for teacher candidates who otherwise could not take part in this particular experience.

Overall, I think for alternative field experiences that aren't necessarily face to face, I think this has shown that they don't have to be. That they can be done virtually. And in some ways that takes care of some time and space constraints that wouldn't otherwise be available. So for example, the literacy coaching one, it couldn't have happened face to face very easily. A lot of the teacher candidates don't live anywhere near [the university]. (AS1)

Some teacher candidates appreciated that the relaxed requirements of the AFE enabled them to broaden their expertise beyond their specialty subject matter:

One thing I actually did appreciate about the AFE this year was that they took away the requirement for it have to be in your specialty. Because I know they said before one of your AFEs had to be in your specialty, and my specialty's French. But I will be completely upfront: I don't particularly love French. French is my teachable and my specialty because I know it will get me a job. What I love is, I really like history. (TC1)

As another teacher candidate confirmed, the flexible nature of the AFE during the pandemic provided “the opportunity to do placements not related to my specialty, which for me was a very positive thing. I really, really wanted to do an AFE [related to English as a second language] and if it had to be related to math, I wouldn't have done that” (TC5).

There were also examples of the importance of professional connections when encountering unexpected needs. One teacher candidate described the challenges faced in finding a supervisor who was a practicing teacher to support them in designing appropriate grade-level learning resources, because teachers weren't in their existing network of friends and family. In working around this issue, they went on to say:

I would have loved if there were opportunities or something that was kind of linked by the university to help us set up an AFE that could have been somehow related to that because, as someone who doesn't have any connections to that field, it's near impossible. Like I can't reach out to the Ministry of Education and say, “Hey, let me do some work for you” or one of the school boards because I don't know anyone in the board office, but I would have loved to have the chance to kind of explore that a little bit more. (TC1)

In our visual concept representing unexpected learning needs, we chose the discovery tool of rope for its capacity to bind broken, disparate, or new components into a new tool or practice. But the rope also represents the necessity of strength and trust in relationships with professional networks to help teacher candidates in this process. As the quotes in this section indicate, an openness to doing things differently was also required of our program and of our AFE supervisors—an openness to innovation that we will strive to maintain postpandemic.

## **Discovered Needs**

Another set of learning intentions that surfaced through our interviews with teacher candidates were discovered needs, depicted as a compass and a dark night in the forest (see Figure 17).

Teacher candidates described opportunities that led to the discovery of the need for “expansion” (TC1) in professional knowledge, or new areas of professional practice to explore. In some cases, it was a mentor who provided such insight. For example, one teacher candidate with a secondary specialization in physical education discovered their dance background could appeal in a job interview. This candidate felt dance wasn't a strength until they received advice from a mentor to incorporate this expertise into their teaching (TC2).

**Figure 17**  
*Visual Representing Discovered Needs*



Prior to the second wave of the pandemic in Ontario, our teacher candidates in the second year of the program did get the opportunity to complete their first practicum. These practicum experiences also provoked adaptation and reorientation of learning goals for the AFE:

There was a huge focus, I realized, on your relationships with students during COVID, more so than the material I was teaching. So I had to really adapt my goals to that, and it was great. It meant that some of my [annual learning plan] goals that were related to relationships with students, I got to explore them really, really well, and like I said, I kind of solved some, and I feel so good about it. (TC4)

In this reflection, we see the discovery of a self-directed learning intention to focus on developing relational skills emerging through the experience on practicum. The following example also shows a discovery moment—in this case, an experience of struggle on practicum that oriented another teacher candidate’s decision about next steps for learning through their AFE:

On my very first placement in November and December, I was in a Grade 4/5 classroom and my class had many English-language learner (ELL) students. And I really struggled ... so it was really important to me to get some more experience in that. So I applied to an AFE in learning support and ELL teaching.... I thought that would be the next best step for me. (TC5)

While the examples we have presented thus far frame a positive perspective of teacher candidates using the AFE to meet discovered needs, we do not discount the struggles and tensions that often proceed new directions. For example, we did hear teacher candidates in this study express frustration with the amount of theory they received in course work compared to their opportunities for practical application. No Bachelor of Education program is immune to this complaint, particularly during the pandemic. Through the perspective of possibilities, however, we noted instances where theory acted like stars in the night sky—providing a dimly lit yet growing awareness of principles for orienting professional growth. The importance of knowing students well to enact principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion was one such orientation:

I would really like to continue and get experience working with students who might not have the same experience with school or with life as I do ... because we talk about it in theory a lot. Like we do, but until you actually do it, it's a little bit different. (TC1)

The focus on equity in our program course work also heightened awareness for teacher candidates of the need to update provincial curriculum documents and related learning materials, a project some of them took on independently through their AFEs:

Something that's just become very apparent to me is that equity and social justice is not meant for just, like, one course.... I know curricula don't really get updated all the time, so even as I'm going through—even when I was going through the curriculum last year for the course, I noticed that ... it was a bit outdated already. (TC3)

As we have demonstrated, some of the discoveries in this category of learning intentions were prompted by a growing awareness of a gap in knowledge or experience. At times the theory to practice gap can threaten a teacher candidate's self-efficacy, causing them to falter in taking the next step. In our visual concept for the category of discovered needs, we used the compass and stars as orientation devices to illustrate the positive effect of mentors and theories in both inspiring and leading the way to professional growth.

### **Purpose-Guided Needs**

Purpose-guided needs for an AFE included clearly stated intentions to explore new ground or engage in leadership opportunities, and a sense of being well-equipped with prior experience, mentoring, or professional networking to take on the challenge. The mountain path and backpack in the visual concept for this category represent this sense of purpose and capacity (see Figure 18).

**Figure 18**

*Visual Representing Purpose-Guided Needs*



One teacher candidate discussed their intention to “experiment” with different approaches to teaching and catered their AFE to achieve this goal:

I have a couple of goals. The first goal kind of relates to, I want to experiment with as many multimodal or interdisciplinary ways of teaching as possible. So I had the chance to apply that in my second practicum, when I tried to incorporate songs and raps into my teaching. And that’s something that I’m going to try to apply to my AFE coming up.  
(TC4)

Another teacher candidate set a goal to incorporate two areas of personal interest and develop resources to share with peers:

I like working with curriculum development. I like working with Indigenous education. These are the areas I’m actually passionate about. Now I’m building a resource kit to use to help teachers incorporate Indigenous pedagogy, Indigenous learning, and Indigenous worldviews and lessons into their classrooms.... My master’s is in it. (TC1)

In this category of learning intentions, we once again noted that the flexibility in timing and duration of the AFE introduced by the pandemic had a positive effect on making space for teacher candidates to pursue their professional learning goals. For example, one teacher candidate described an online curriculum development project they took on in more depth:

It gave me that experience that you can’t really get in a short assignment in class because it was a much more extended exposure to it. It forced me to look into the capabilities, to work through it largely myself. My supervisor didn’t have much experience with that either, but was more than willing to work with me on it if I was having any troubles.  
(TC6)

As the quotes in this category of purpose-guided needs illustrate, the self-directed and flexible nature of the AFE afforded space, time, and agency for some teacher candidates to explore their passions, connect with mentors as needed, and extend their professional growth into innovation and leadership opportunities.

### **Mapping Possible Pathways for Self-Directed Experiential Learning**

In addition to identifying categories of learning intentions for the AFE, we also identified four categories of experiences that met these needs. During the many pivots and disruptions of the pandemic, these categories of experience accommodated both virtual and in-person learning opportunities. The categories of experiences with representative examples are outlined in Table 2. As the findings on learning intentions and categories of experience show, we uncovered multiple possibilities and pathways for self-directed learning through AFEs in this study. In fact, exploration in a field of uncertainty became an organizing metaphor as we sought to use our data to develop a set of flexible guidelines for the AFE.

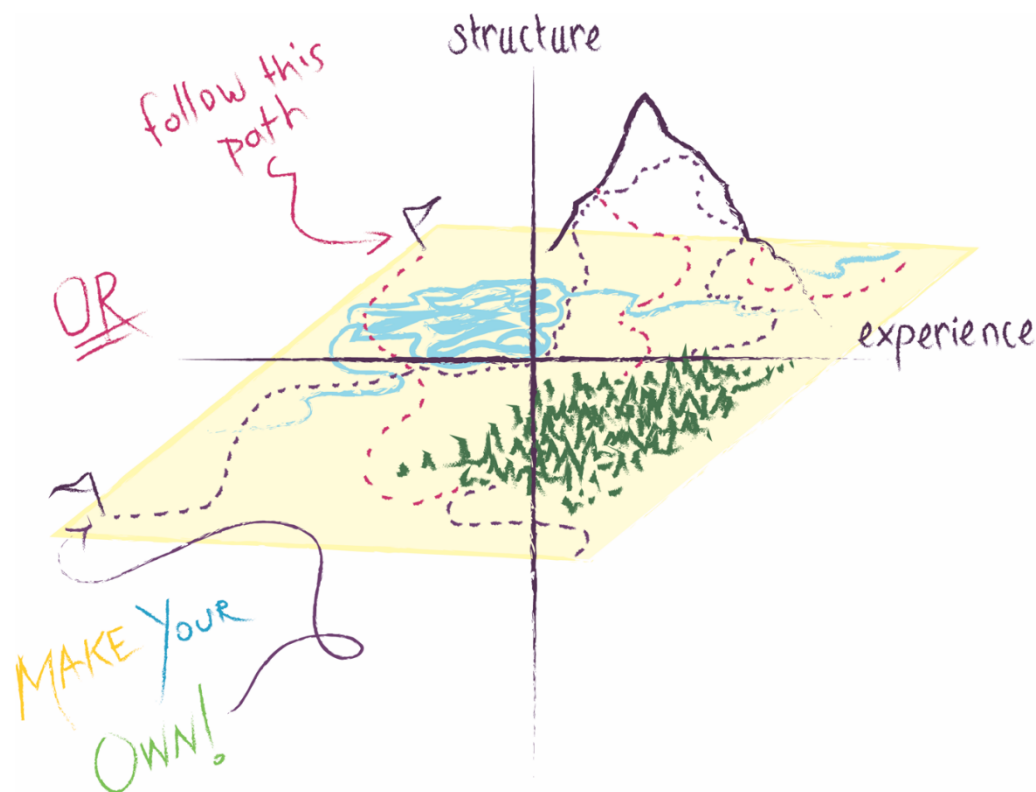
**Table 2**  
*Categories of Experiential Learning*

| Category                | Description   | Participant quote   |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Practice teaching       | Class instruction by a teacher candidate under the supervision of an experienced teacher  | And I think the other thing is just learning to be more relaxed about the process. I feel like I know a lot of type A teachers that have to plan things to a T, especially at the primary and junior level. But this associate teacher just said, you know, you do what works for you, and different teachers are going to plan things in different ways, so you don't have to copy anyone. You just have to find something that works for you. (TC4) |
| Professional networking | Building relationships with other professionals or assisting with employment opportunities in teaching and other related fields | I get a lot of people that ask me to help with all kinds of stuff like writing reference letters for them and supporting their applications. (AS6)  |
| Educational research    | Systematically investigating different approaches and strategies to implement in teaching                                       | So what we are researching about is building a toolbox of children's literature for candidates to use that has been reviewed by other teacher candidates. It has the details and the richness that as a teacher candidate you can share and say, oh, if you're doing math in grade one or two, this is a great book to use to springboard to this lesson plan or that lesson plan. (AS5)  |
| Curriculum development  | Creating lesson and/or unit plans and compiling resources for class instruction   | [I'm] working on developing curriculum or a resource list for a course in the grade 9-12 social science curriculum. It's a course on equity and social justice.... It's kind of evolving. ... The other thing that I wanted to do with it was to be able to make cross-curricular connections. (TC3)  |

Through our analysis of how teacher candidates and supervisors navigated the uncertainties of negotiating support and feedback for self-directed learning, we identified relationships between the ways that different intentions for learning and preferences for mentoring were related to different needs for structure. Drawing on literature on self-regulated learning and on teacher agency, we created a map to help teacher candidates situate themselves in conversations with potential mentors about experiential learning.

The illustration for this section shows a new trail map for the AFE in our program, with multiple pathways for exploration (see Figure 19). It provides a guide for teacher candidates to be intentional about their professional learning needs and orients them to strength-based possibilities for growth such as aspirational goals and leadership and service opportunities.

**Figure 19**  
*New Trail Map for the Alternative Field Experience*



But self-directed learning, while rich with potential for discovery, can also leave one feeling alone, overwhelmed and uncertain. This is especially tricky at the outset of a new experience. How does one seek out potential mentors, when you don't know what you don't know? How do mentors support an open-ended journey? Both supervisors and teacher candidates discussed these complexities.

Several supervisors commented on the uncertainty they felt in terms of keeping the end in mind. One commented that knowledge of the expectations would have allowed them to support their teacher candidate better:

I knew that it was self-directed, and they would write some kind of report and I would sign off on it, but I didn't know what kinds of questions they needed to engage with in their self-reflection. So in hindsight I wish I had known that because that would have given me a focus obviously for the kinds of questions I asked, and feedback that I gave them. (AS1)

Another set of supervisors stressed the importance of understanding the structure to better support their teacher candidates. One asked: "If there would be even more guidance for mentors, and I don't know what it would look like in terms of a checklist or something or another?" (AS14). Similarly, a supervisor of an AFE in online teaching suggested: "I think for the student candidate having some parameters around their expectations on maybe if there was some



structure on ‘Okay, you know the first week we would like you to just observe the teacher’ ” (AS7).

The call for some guidance on the expectations for support and feedback was clear, but not without tensions. In prepandemic times, the defined learning period of the AFE and requirement for teacher candidates to submit a proposal for approval by the teacher education program provided more direction. However, due to the sudden pivot to first-year teacher candidates organizing an AFE because of the pandemic, these standards had to become more flexible. With this flexibility came the need for supervisors to reconsider their approach to supporting teacher candidates—a period one AFE supervisor described in his own professional journey as “unlearning” (AS7).

There was also a wariness expressed by teacher candidates and supervisors alike about asking too much in terms of asking for support or providing direction. One teacher candidate stated, “It was certainly more like if I had questions or things like that, I would reach out.... I really appreciated being able to do that because she was also teaching online school, had her kids at home, and so she had a lot going on” (TC5). A supervisor described how they relaxed some of their own expectations of the field experience in order to provide emotional support to their mentees: “I want you to feel that I am here to support you and that I believe you’re doing your best under the circumstances, whether that feels like your best in the most normal time doesn’t matter. We’re not in the most normal time” (AS6).

Reading our data for this challenge of negotiating mentorship and direction, we noticed a pattern in preferences for kinds of support and feedback teacher candidates were requesting and supervisors were providing. Drawing on concepts in the literature on motivations to learn (Pink, 2009; Schunk & Mellon, 2013) and mentoring styles and preferences in teacher education (Davis & Fontazzi, 2016; Evans, 2004; Henning-Smith, 2018; Streiker et al., 2016) we described this pattern as a continuum related to structure. The structure continuum on our map illustrates the need, or preference, for a higher or lower amount of direction and predictability in a learning situation. Teacher candidates and supervisors on the lower end of this continuum expressed more comfort with open-ended discovery:

Sometimes you’re going outside of your comfort zone and you do have to adapt, you don’t have the resources to step back. And you still learn, regardless. But I do feel most comfortable when I can jump into it, try my best at it, and if needed, get feedback and take a step back if I need to learn more. I think that’s a perfect system for me. (TC4)

From my perspective, I felt like she did some really good independent learning. Independent study. And we probably—I feel like we had enough interaction... I think how even that’s valuable for them to take ownership of that, right? (AS11)

On the higher end of the structure continuum, we heard observations about more directive learning and supervision styles that one supervisor described as goal-oriented: “There were a couple of them that were very goal-oriented in saying, ‘Okay, so this week I want to do dah-dah-dah-dah.’ And then I would get another sort of update from them ... very organized in that way” (AS14). Another supervisor described his role as “to bump it up and try to spin it up in a different direction and really relate it back to what’s happening currently in public education today” (AS15). A teacher candidate expressed gratitude for the amount of structured feedback and mentoring she got from an employer who volunteered as an AFE supervisor: “She asked

very specific questions.... It was nice to be able to be checking in on just my work in general” (TC3).

Finally, there were examples of individuals who were comfortable with a release of responsibility: “At the beginning, it was setting the expectations very clearly by email and by videoconference. Once we knew that, I think we were both very content” (TC6).

As we reflected on these differences and how our program could maintain the openness of the AFE to exploration while still providing some structure, we conceptualized the trail map as a way for teacher candidates to begin situating their learning needs and preferences. We could see that unmet expectations were in some cases the result of not recognizing these learning intentions and different types of support and mentorship needed. Our goal for the teacher candidates in our Bachelor of Education program is to develop insight about their professional learning goals in order to pose focused questions for feedback, such as in this example:

How can I be exercising my own independent teaching style? Because I feel as teacher candidates, we can have a tendency to copy our associate teachers. So I wanted feedback from my teacher on what I was doing that was different from him, and what he felt my teaching style was, just to kind of get an outside perspective on that. (TC4)

### Discussion

There is a longstanding question in teacher education of how to help teacher candidates integrate theory with practice to grow as professionals (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Various approaches to mentoring have been called on to support this evolution of student to teacher (Kiggins & Cambourne, 2007; Martin, 2017; McGee, 2019). Indeed, a core purpose of the initial teacher education program is to foster opportunities for the agency required of teachers as professional learners (Hibbert et al., in press). Careful consideration is needed to find the balance between providing direction on the one hand, and creating barriers to the development of professionalism on the other.

A recent modification to our program’s progression requirements to a pass/fail assessment framework was made in large part to ensure our assessment of teacher educators aligned with professional agency. The move supported our desire to shift from preparing teachers to simply acquire competencies—described as “observable behavioral outcome[s] ... performed to meet a preset standard” (Cairns & Stephenson, 2009, p. 15)—to preparing *capable* professionals. Capable professionals have confidence in their ability to take “appropriate and effective action; communicate effectively, collaborate with others and learn from experiences” in both “familiar and unfamiliar situations” (Cairns & Stephenson, 2009, p. 9).

Daniel Pink’s (2009) thinking about motivation is instructive here. He argued that people are innately motivated toward “self-determination” (Deci & Ryan, 2008) based on autonomy, mastery, and purpose. The teacher candidates in this study based their self-directed experiential learning on what they wanted to learn, what they wanted to improve, and what they thought might better prepare them for their future profession. Much of this capacity was realized because we relaxed our prior policies that insisted on ties to a specialization, or assumed a face-to-face placement, or required meeting a consistent set of criteria. The disruptive nature of the pandemic pushed us into allowing teacher candidates to be even more self-directed; in essence, codesigning their professional learning experience. While it created some uncertainty for teacher candidates and their mentors, everyone was extended a level of trust in their professional decision-making that brought into focus one of the key tensions in the teaching profession.

Teaching is a highly scrutinized, highly regulated profession. In our context, despite the existence of a professional governing body—the Ontario College of Teachers—significant control is mandated (indeed legislated) by the provincial government and imposed on school boards, the college, and teacher education programs. Many of the government mandates come as a result of narrow metrics that compare our performance relative to other countries, viewed through a competitive market lens of globalization. One of the countries often touted as leading in educational performance recently is Finland. When we look at Finland’s teacher preparation program, we see some significant differences. Finland prepares its teachers as scholars and requires them to “combine the roles of researcher and practitioner” where they are ultimately trusted as “professional partners” (Schleicher, 2011, p. 17). We hope to more explicitly extend that level of trust and self-determination to our teacher candidates (and their instructors and mentors) while they are in our program. Using the map of possibilities, we are encouraging teacher candidates to have conversations with potential AFE supervisors and even associate teachers in practicum that situate the learning goals and supervisory preferences of both parties in the mentoring relationship.

At the university, we view curriculum making as a social practice that occurs across various sites of activity. Evidence from European case studies (Priestley et al., 2021) argue that this view is supportive of capacity building as it promotes the development of a shared understanding across people and systems. An ecological view of agency, refined by Priestley et al. (2015) over the past decade, argues that agency is “an emergent phenomenon of the ecological conditions through which it is enacted” (p. 3). Agency is not passively acquired in this view, but achieved and highly dependent upon the personal and professional experiences of individuals as well as the experiences they have access to. A close analysis of the data has underscored the need for cultural changes in our Bachelor of Education program to ensure that our own institutional practices are not thwarting our stated ideals of creating capable professionals. Lessons from our innovative approach to the AFE during the pandemic and beyond contribute to the conversation about mentoring for professional agency in teacher education.

### **Lessons for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion**

Opportunities to codesign AFEs open up many possibilities for teacher candidates eager to learn new ways of knowing and doing that provide “public value for the whole of society but especially for those who have been poorly served historically” (Ellis et al., 2019). As a means of creating additional opportunities for our teacher candidates to receive financial support due to the pandemic, some paid student internships were created. Objectives were collaboratively developed with a supervisor, and the ensuing relationship was akin to the professional partnership we aim to develop. Examples of AFE and internships that provided valuable experience for the teacher candidates and the populations served included virtual tutoring of more than 400 families; mathematics lessons to prepare for Ontario’s new mathematics proficiency test; the curation of resources for families; the development of Online-teacher.ca, and the development of an “integrity module” that specifically focused on antiracist education. Creating opportunities for the AFE in ways that serve the experiential gaps of our teacher candidates has immense potential to serve our communities better. Internships and codesign opportunities also support the development of our teacher candidates’ capabilities, not only in the ability to adapt to the unexpected described by Cairns and Stephenson (2009), but crucially, in the provision of equitable opportunities to foster capabilities (Nussbaum, 2003; Sen, 2005).

## Lessons for Assessment *as* Learning

The flexibility of our AFE guidelines reflects the philosophy of ungraded, formative assessment in our Bachelor of Education program to create fertile conditions for complex, agentic, professional growth (Ott & Hibbert, 2021). Research has been clear that mentor relationships work best when there is no evaluative component expected. If the goal of mentor–mentee interactions is “oriented towards improving practice within schools, teachers are typically willing to reveal their weaknesses” (Schleicher, 2011, p. 40).

Current trends in leadership also emphasize the value of vulnerability for establishing trust and fertile conditions for growth. For example, Brené Brown (2015) argues in *Daring Greatly* that growth depends upon our ability to be vulnerable: that place of uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure that we almost universally fear. Supervisors of the AFE can support our goal of helping our teacher candidates go “from glow to grow” (AS6) by modelling their own vulnerability and situating their own journeys of professional learning and preferences for mentoring and feedback.

## Lessons for Mentoring in Experiential Education

A literature search we conducted on mentoring in teacher education returned over 1,500 results. As we scanned and sorted the literature to find resonant sources for our work, we were struck by the depth of import for the topic in teacher education and the breadth of creative approaches. It was humbling. We discerned an area for continued work, however. Researchers in teacher education have studied mentoring roles in various programs of professional development, and much focus has been placed on ideal structures for experiential learning placements. Less attention, however, has been given to the agency of teacher candidates in these learning relationships. In their paper connecting theories of mentoring to theories of motivation in self-regulated learning, Schunk and Mellon (2013) discuss an obvious but often overlooked implication: mentees influence their mentors too. Learning interactions emerge dynamically in response to different priorities and changing needs.

Teacher educators have contributed to the mentoring literature by raising awareness of how needs for learning can change with experience, requiring shifts in mentoring approach (Glickman et al., 2004; Streiker et al., 2016). However, more recent work is beginning to go beyond staged models of teacher development, which tend to take a deficit (Henning-Smith, 2018) approach to what mentors can do to bridge learning gaps. These scholars explore the intentions of new teachers in their experiential learning opportunities and preferences for support (Davis & Fontazzi, 2016; Evans et al., 2017; Henning-Smith, 2018). The flexible guidelines for the AFE in our program are a contribution in this area, recognizing that our teacher candidates will have different needs for professional growth across the learning opportunities in our program and over the span of their careers. These needs are goal-directed intentions to expand and enrich their practice. Having capabilities to identify goals and situate their needs and preferences for support in conversations with potential mentors — formal or informal, on practicum or in alternative field placements, supports the agency of teacher candidates to self-direct their professional learning.

## Conclusion

At the time we wrote this chapter, we were in the midst of the third wave of COVID-19 in Canada, an ongoing disruption to our sense of normal progression in teacher education. A new cohort of teacher candidates found themselves at an unexpected and unwanted detour in their professional journey, pivoting from directed practicum placements to self-directed AFEs. Although we empathized with feelings of loss and the anxieties of finding their path through an open space of possibilities, we walked alongside these emerging professionals with increased optimism for the profession. We have a much stronger understanding of the possibilities for growth in the ‘wild’ space of the AFE, and a strength-based, theory-informed recognition of new teachers’ capabilities to chart their way forward. Taking responsibility early on for articulating areas to expand and enrich their professional growth positions teacher candidates as capable, theory-engaged, and ready to exercise leadership opportunities in ways that challenge staged norms of teacher development. Through the analogy of discovery tools: the rope for innovation and connection, the backpack of experiential resources, and the compass and stars of orienting goals, we also have a clearer vision of how teacher mentors can support the agency of teacher candidates as professional learners.

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## CHAPTER 15

### “Teacher Leaders in the Making”: A Response to COVID-19 in Practicum

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#### Abstract

March 2020 was the beginning of a radical shift in how we defined and animated community within our education program. In particular, we struggled to conceptualize a community of practice within students' practicum experience that could provide the support and mentoring that is critical in the development of teacher educators. We found ourselves within the new landscape of online learning and teaching, a learning environment that offered a unique opportunity to rethink a type of preservice teacher knowledge that extended beyond the conventional context of classroom teaching and learning. This chapter explores a community of practice within our teacher education program, with particular emphasis on how the COVID-19 circumstances provided a unique opportunity for our students to develop as “teacher leaders in the making.” A reflexive inquiry lens and narrative thinking are utilized to gain insight into the response undertaken by a Bachelor of Education program with emphasis on the practicum. The focus is on the development of learning experiences designed for preservice teachers that replaced the traditional practicum experience that was truncated due to the school closures during the onset of the pandemic. Following the analysis of our initial response, we offer a subsequent design iteration and implications for further knowledge development.

*Keywords:* preservice teachers, online practicum, COVID-19, pandemic response, communities of practice, teacher leaders

#### Résumé

Le mois de mars 2020 a marqué le début d'un profond tournant dans la façon dont on définit et conceptualise une communauté au sein de notre programme d'éducation. Nous avons eu du mal à mettre au point une communauté de pratique qui pourrait fournir le soutien et le mentorat essentiel au développement des formateurs d'enseignants au sein de leur stage pratique. Nous nous sommes retrouvés sur un nouveau terrain de l'enseignement en ligne, un environnement d'apprentissage qui nous offrait l'opportunité unique de repenser les connaissances initiales des enseignants qui s'étendait au-delà du contexte conventionnel de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage en classe. Ce chapitre examine la communauté de pratique au sein de notre programme de formation des enseignants, et souligne comment les circonstances de la COVID-19 ont fourni une occasion unique à nos étudiants de se développer en tant qu'« enseignants en cours de réalisation ». Notre enquête utilise une pratique et une narrative réflexive afin de mieux comprendre la réponse entreprise dans le cadre d'un programme de baccalauréat en éducation en



mettant l'accent sur le stage. L'objectif de cette réponse était de développer des expériences d'apprentissage pour les enseignants en formation initiale afin de remplacer l'expérience du stage traditionnel qui avait été tronquée en raison des fermetures d'écoles au début de la pandémie. Après l'analyse de notre réponse initiale, nous proposons une itération de plan ultérieure ainsi que des suggestions pour développer des connaissances supplémentaires.

*Mots clés* : enseignants en formation initiale, stage en ligne, COVID-19, intervention contre les pandémies, communautés de pratique, enseignants leaders

## **Introduction**

In postsecondary institutions, online courses and the virtual technologies that are used to facilitate these courses are familiar components of many programs, but in B.Ed. programs, e-learning is utilized as a learning platform less often. This is especially true in the practicum experience requirement of a teacher education program where placements for the preservice teacher in a classroom setting have been the norm. These practicum experiences have been considered an essential part of education programs for developing teaching capacities and shaping teacher practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Danyluk et al., 2020; Ten Dam & Blom, 2006) by giving the preservice teacher an authentic and lived understanding of teaching in a classroom setting. But this aspect of preservice teacher experience all shifted in the winter semester of 2020 as schools across Canada locked down and moved to online learning environments as a way to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Preservice teachers were no longer able to continue their practicum experience at a school site but had to adapt to working with their mentor teachers in an online learning environment.

The shift to online learning in schools required teacher educators to reconceptualize the elements of a practicum experience and to respond in a new way to support and mentor their preservice teachers under challenging circumstances. At our institution, we acted quickly to develop an online learning program that would provide both the preservice teacher and their university practicum advisor a new format for connecting. In this new reality, practicum advisors and preservice teachers developed new ways of interacting and communicating with one another. This format offered a unique opportunity for our preservice teachers to develop skills that identified them as “teacher leaders in the making.”

In this chapter we describe the process we undertook for reconceptualizing the practicum experience for our preservice teachers while creating opportunities for meaningful virtual learning that encouraged students to continue to develop as “teacher leaders in the making.” We take up these issues reflexively in an effort to reconstruct our response to new learning contexts and a pedagogical shift.

## **Context: St. Mary's University Bachelor of Education Program**

St. Mary's University is located in Calgary (Moh'kinsstis), Alberta, and we honour and acknowledge these traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, and Piikani), the Tsuut'ina, the Îyâxe Nakoda Nations, the Métis Nation (Region 3), and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta. Our institution is an innovative teaching and research university founded on the Catholic intellectual tradition. The 2-year Bachelor of Education after-degree program prepares preservice teachers to teach at the elementary and secondary levels. The program utilizes a cohort model with four first-year cohorts and three second-year cohorts presently serving 280 students. Preservice teachers in our

program participate in four practicum experiences during their 2 years of study for a total of 26 weeks in a classroom setting. The authors of this paper include three faculty members, a dean, and a consultant, all affiliated with St. Mary's University B.Ed. program.

### **Theoretical Framework**

John Dewey's (1919) understanding of schooling's role in developing democratic citizenry established the importance of sociocultural elements of learning. "For Dewey, person and world are deeply interconnected" (Hansen, 2002, p. 268). Every individual lives and works in a community and is partially shaped by this experience with others. "Development, according to Dewey (1983 [1932]), is richer when it is 'faithful to relations with others' and remains constricted if it 'is cultivated in isolation from or in opposition to the purposes and needs of others'" (van der Ploeg, 2016, p. 146). Dewey saw the teaching environment, the activities that students participate in, and the manner in which teachers shape learning to provoke curiosity and engagement as a significant environment for meaningful learning (Hansen, 2002). Teacher educators wishing to provide preservice teachers with a varied and rich learning environment for developing the understanding, skills, and imagination of a teacher focus on relevant courses and face-to-face practicum experiences. In order to flourish, preservice teachers require instructors who share relevant concepts of teaching and learning, meaningful understandings, and varied practicum experiences that deepen their outlook and perspectives.

Teacher education programs are organised to support preservice teachers' understanding of the profession of teaching through the completion of program coursework with university instructors and practicum experiences under the mentorship of classroom teachers. This intentional framework gives preservice teachers the opportunity to develop a professional body of knowledge about the roles and responsibilities of educators (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Vick, 2006). The links made between these two contexts are viewed as essential for the development of preservice teacher practice. Ellis (2010) notes that often teacher education programs are focused on giving preservice teachers an acquisitional view of learning and a view of knowledge that is transferrable. This approach denies the importance of preservice teacher experience and the reciprocal nature of teaching and learning between seasoned professional and preservice teachers in field contexts (Ellis, 2010). In-classroom experiences are an essential foundation of pre-service teacher learning; the absence of these experiences creates a vacuum for preservice teacher development.

Lave and Wenger (1991) developed the term "community of practice" to signal an important shift in learning theory that privileged learning as "an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice" (p. 31). Communities of practice, also called professional learning communities, have become synonymous with teacher education and professional development. Learning communities are described as the coming together of individuals who share common goals and work towards them in a way that allows them to reach a new collective understanding that they would not have reached on their own (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014). Community members are encouraged to examine issues and ideas through a critical lens in a way that facilitates the realization of goals and the development of the community. Forced to shift to an online learning environment to replace the practicum experience created challenges for our program. Our faculty were suddenly drawn together in order to address the new context for preservice teacher practicum experiences. Our response to the pandemic and supporting our preservice teachers created a narrative of change and collaboration.

## **Methodology: Inquiry Design**

In our chapter, we draw on reflexive inquiry as a critical lens through which we examine the initiatives we took, and the decisions we made, in meeting the challenges of creating an online practicum learning environment. According to Lyle (2017) “reflexive inquiry requires that we address critical questions about the essence of reality, the construction of knowledge, and the ways we engage with each other and society” (p. ix). Additionally, reflexive inquiry is defined as “a process of engaging in relational contexts, of inter-subjectivity with a critical perspective, examining how we are always implicated in shaping events and experiences” (Sinner, 2018, p. 163). As a process, reflexive inquiry is at the core of how we came to understand the shift to an online learning environment and the resulting change in our pedagogy.

Recalling and examining our experiences from the winter semester of 2020 suggested to us that our work was also narrative in nature. Clandinin (2013) notes that “narrative inquirers study experience” (p. 13). The experiences we had emerged as accounts and stories; stories about ourselves and our students in an institutional context at that particular point in the pandemic time. Our stories are also characterized by the curriculum-making that happened when our program shifted to a virtual learning environment. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) note that “the focus of narrative inquiry is not only on individuals’ experience but also on the social, cultural and institutional narratives within which individuals’ experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted” (p. 42). Collaborating as a community of practice in responding to the sudden shift in program practice created a shared experience among us that offered the opportunity to ask questions, consider solutions, ponder program changes, and reflect on program philosophical foundations.

This chapter explores a community of practice within our teacher education program, with a particular emphasis on how the COVID-19 pandemic circumstances provided a unique opportunity for us as faculty to reflect on how our students began to develop as “teacher leaders in the making.” We scrutinize and weave together our experiences through the lens of reflexive inquiry and a narrative inquiry framework in order to respond to the following questions:

1. What can we learn from this time to continue to support the development of preservice teachers’ agency in the new pandemic environment?
2. What new understanding as teacher educators can we take away that informs our program planning and our individual practices?

The following sections describe the phases of planning, implementation, and reflections that were part of redesigning the learning experiences for our preservice teachers.

## **Reflexive Analysis**

### **Planning**

On Thursday, March 12, 2020, the first health restrictions were issued in Alberta, cancelling all gatherings with more than 250 people. By Sunday afternoon (March 15), Alberta’s education minister announced that all schools and every student in Alberta would move to online classes. This marked Monday, March 16, 2020 as a day that displaced 1,007,715 students in Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2020a, 2020b). As teacher educators from the postsecondary sector, our response was not unlike many educators. We began with conversations on how we could maintain the learning communities that were so critical to our students’ success and

mitigate the perceived threat to their final work toward teacher certification. At our small institution, problem-solving is required for many of the initiatives that we wish to implement, so a culture of accommodation was already in place when these conversations began. Historically, we have had success in previous change and implementation endeavour, in part a result of a fairly flat hierarchy at a smaller university.

Our Faculty of Education leadership identified the need for curricular support for the preservice teachers and the practicum experience portion of our program. The faculty, Dean, and staff collaborated to identify next steps. Our first-year preservice teachers were about to begin a second practicum experience of five weeks in length. The second-year preservice teachers were in the midst of their 10-week practicum experience. An online learning environment would be required to replace the face-to-face practicum experience for both groups of preservice teachers. The challenges facing the faculty were compounded by a new learning management system that had been recently implemented and was largely unfamiliar to faculty and students. At the time, there were no existing on-campus curriculum designers or course construction supports. We undertook the planning process ourselves and identified the online tools that could support the delivery of the courses. We decided to use both synchronous and asynchronous approaches to deliver a 4-week practicum course. This format allowed preservice teachers to meet with their university practicum advisors and explore, through guided inquiry, the course content and case studies, and to individually complete course assignments and post reflections.

## Implementing

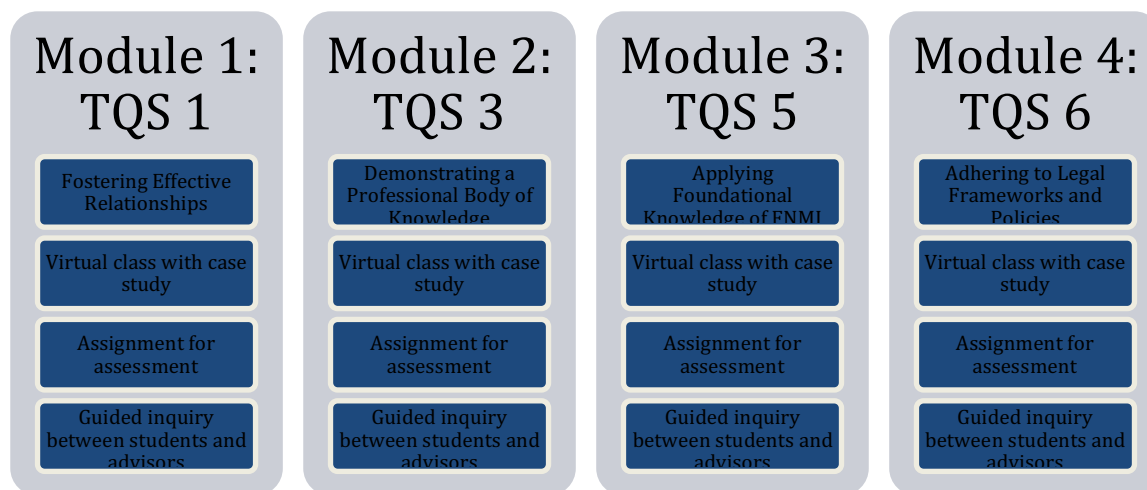
As a faculty, we determined that it would be essential to connect preservice teachers' learning to the professional knowledge and skills laid out in the provincial *Teaching Quality Standard (TQS)* document (Alberta Education, 2018). Four modules were developed around four *TQS* competencies: fostering effective relationships, demonstrating a professional body of knowledge, applying foundational knowledge of First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI), and adhering to legal frameworks and policies. The inclusion of the competencies linked knowledge and skills criteria to practicum course expectations (See Figure 20 for design elements in each module). We identified the following three goals for the development and implementation of the four modules:

- Use case studies to replace the experience that would have been developed in the classroom face-to-face time.
- Utilize a digital platform as a means of delivering content.
- Fulfill required *TQS* competencies.

Once the modules had been developed, and a class schedule determined, preservice teachers and practicum advisors began to meet and engage with the course content. In the weekly modules, preservice teachers explored their professional responsibility in applying the *TQS* competencies in a progressive way that recognized the respective knowledge outcomes for their year. Case studies of school-based scenarios were used to deepen preservice teachers' understanding of learners and curricula. Practicum advisors lead the weekly sessions addressing the particular competency identified in the module and supported preservice teachers in analyzing the themes introduced in the content. Each week, preservice teachers were expected to submit an assignment for assessment and self-reflection as part of their practicum evaluation.

**Figure 20**

*Four-Module Online Course Designed to Fulfill TQS Competencies in Practicum*



*Note. TQS = Teacher Quality Standard.*

## Reflecting

Practical knowledge is important in learning how to teach, and the practicum experience offers preservice teachers the environment they need to apply their knowledge of the curriculum and to acquire the skills and strategies that have to do with student engagement, instruction, and assessment. But as this was not an option for Bachelor of Education students at the time, a deliberate focus on the *TQS* competencies through the case studies and an emphasis on what it means to be a teacher through discussion and individual reflection were key elements of the online course. Without direct contact with children in school settings, preservice teachers were asked to reimagine their teaching selves and the ways in which they could develop new understandings that would support their teaching when they returned to a more traditional practicum experience.

Preservice teachers reflected on the case study theme at the conclusion of each module. In practicum experiences preservice teachers are given “opportunities to regularly and critically reflect on their teaching, either when it happens or after the fact” (Camburn & Han, 2015, p. 512). The online course was developed to give preservice teachers the chance to cultivate a reflective stance that would later support their work in classroom settings where finding solutions for coping with challenges in their work is important.

During the 4 weeks that the modules were taught, practicum advisors shared feedback from their perspective and the preservice teacher perspective with the faculty and dean. The opportunity to share responses to the module framework and content was an intentional design of the modules. In turn, our faculty reflexively assessed the successful and the challenging aspects of teaching a practicum course online.

## Discussion

### Communication

The COVID-19 pandemic was an unprecedented event, and our faculty had to think outside the box and take direct action to address issues in a rapidly changing program context. As a small faculty our culture is such that we communicate openly and transparently about the needs of our program. This working environment allowed us to discuss and identify the direction that we needed to take in order to respond to school closures across the province. The opportunity to consider alternate ways to meet the *TQS* competencies came about as a result of this challenge.

The abrupt shift to online learning was made easier for preservice teachers and faculty by the leadership shown by our dean. She led our small team through the creation of a 4-week online course that would replace the practicum experience for preservice teachers. The new online course consisting of the four modules described in Figure 20, demonstrate the flexibility in thinking required to meet the challenge of providing a meaningful learning experience for preservice teachers that connected to the practicum experience. A new pandemic pedagogy evolved in which the “online learning environment” required “a rethink and reengineering of teaching and learning strategies” (Naidu, 2021, p. 2).

Although the shift to online instruction necessitated changes to how preservice teachers completed the requirements for a practicum, one aspect that remained similar was the role of our practicum advisors. The practicum advisors continued to support the instructional skill development of their cohort of preservice teachers by facilitating discussions, guiding inquiry into *TQS* competencies, and providing mentorship. Purposeful self-reflection was required of preservice teachers as this expectation was built into the online course. Our faculty engaged in ongoing reflexive thinking as the swift shift to online learning and the relatively new platform and tools we utilized required constant attention.

Flexibility and openness to engaging in online learning were attributes we wanted to emulate for our preservice teachers. Preservice teachers were concerned that they were missing out on important learning by not being in a traditional face-to-face classroom setting. As a result, the conversations between faculty and students were viewed as being instrumental in fostering a positive outlook to the new format. Regular conversations were led by the dean through her weekly online town hall meetings to discuss with preservice teachers their teaching and learning and the requirements of their practica. These conversations eased anxiety and helped to mitigate frustration that preservice teachers and practicum advisors held about the semester.

### Collaboration and Community of Practice

Collaboration between faculty members was essential in navigating the complexities of a new learning management system, an online learning environment, and an abrupt shift in how a classroom practicum experience could be reimaged in an online space. An ethics of care (Noddings, 2012) is one of our program values. “We have to show in our own behaviour what it means to care” (Noddings, 2012, p. 237) and so creating and implementing an online learning course for our preservice teachers as quickly and as capably as we could was a readily agreed upon course of action. Joining together with the common goal to address the reality of delivering an online practicum course created a shared experience among us. Lesser and Storck (2001) argue that learning communities are effective ways to handle unstructured problems and to share

knowledge outside of usual institutional boundaries. This particular characteristic of communities of practice is an apt way to describe the circumstances we faced building a new online course to replace the practicum experience.

Our B.Ed. program is organized around a cohort model. Students remain in their cohort groups for the duration of the program, thus offering the opportunity for preservice teachers to be part of a learning community. In community engaged participatory learning, such as the cohort model, students contribute to and benefit from the understandings of their cohort members (Jacob et al., 2015). The cohort model as a community of learners promotes “mutual trust and loyalty, sharing ideas, and support for one another” (Lenning et al., 2013, p. 9). As future teacher leaders the model provides preservice teachers opportunities to develop collegial friendships that have the potential to continue well beyond graduation, moving teaching from an isolated endeavor to one of collaboration.

## **Resources**

One of the most pressing problems our faculty grappled with was a scarcity of resources to respond to the shift of online learning. While we are not alone in this set of circumstances, in a small institution, the lack of initial supports and personnel was a challenge. A new online learning platform had just been introduced at our institution; this was a fortunate circumstance for us, but no one had had an opportunity yet to fully engage with and understand the technology. With the suddenness of the shift to online learning, the chance to approach skill development in a measured way was impossible. Practicum advisors and preservice teachers were required to engage with the online learning course almost immediately. We were fortunate to have a small IT office of committed individuals who did their best to support us in making the shift to online instruction.

As well, our program had no access to online design personnel who could help us shape the course modules for a preservice teacher audience. Among us, there was only a small measure of understanding about how to utilize best practices for online learning environments. In online learning, there is an absence of face-to-face interaction. Hannafin et al. (2003) add that “the distant nature of Web-based approaches renders difficult many observational and participatory assessments” (p. 256). Thus, we were made aware of the added clarity and precision needed in helping students understand the learning objectives, and how we as instructors need to provide different strategies to engage students in their understanding and development of these learning objectives.

## **Implications and Significance**

The signature pedagogy of the St. Mary’s University education program is a focus on holistic practices. How could we as faculty and our students in practicum, respond to the “whole” person when the apparent barriers of online teaching and learning seemed antithetical to this principle of connectivity and community? No longer was teaching about a fixed context, but rather it became an experience of discursive understandings at the intersection of embodied and virtual learning.

Richmond et al. (2020) describe the impact of the pandemic this way: “The sudden shifts to ‘crisis schooling,’ stay-at-home orders in many parts of the country and around the world, and related shocks in spring 2020 are the turbulence of chaos” (p. 376). This state of chaos was experienced by all educators in both postsecondary and K–12 settings in spring 2020. Managing

a measured response to possible future disruptions is going to be an essential element of any education institution's planning.

Writing about the prevalence in the academy of “damage-centered research,” Eve Tuck (2009) asks us all to “pause for a bit and think through this idea of a theory of change” (p. 413). Her call for a pause to re-examine the focus of research on what is broken rather than what is desired in Indigenous communities speaks directly to scholars who conduct valuable research in this area. However, the impulse for us to pause at this particular point a year after the emergence of COVID-19 and consider implications for our practice as a result of the pandemic is a helpful application of her work, we believe. While there is an understandable urge to address issues related to planning for unpredictable events in the future, and to create and confirm new ways of doing course delivery so that everything is in place for the next time, an opportunity is present to make these changes thoughtfully and in a measured way.

We took pause following the completion of winter 2020 to reflect, identify needs (faculty and students alike), and collaborate to develop intentional practice. We recognize that more resources will be required for online learning, that specialists are needed to support our online pedagogical approaches to learning, that we need to develop our own online teaching skills, and that our program can be more inherently flexible to respond to a range of circumstances and learner needs. We will engage in further research to support program iterations while continuing to develop our “teacher leaders in the making.”

### Conclusions

The circumstances of COVID-19 provided a new opportunity to iterate and create elements within what was already a solid foundation and key principle (holistic practices) of our Education program. Central to our mission is the commitment to the Common Good. From a Catholic intellectual tradition, this means recognizing the need to see the work of Education within the larger context of how we can provide learning and teaching that serves the needs of all children. Our program strives to support the realization of this goal among our preservice teachers.

The response of our program to the closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic was carried out under pressure, but was successful overall in meeting the needs of our preservice teachers who required an alternative space to develop new knowledge about teaching. Along with other teacher education programs across the province, we recognized that the online learning environment was a viable way to support preservice teacher learning in the absence of a practicum experience within a school setting.

In reflecting on our work, we believe that our institution and faculty values were reflected in the ways in which we shifted and implemented online learning. We learned that an education program cannot flourish as a factory model of production of teachers. We were recently asked to consider an “economy of scale” approach in our program planning, and we all shook our heads wondering how we might quantify the business of fostering human development and respect for human plurality that defines our unique gifts as individuals living in community. We find resonance in a “pedagogy of pause” (Tuck, 2016) as it has given us the opportunity to stop and reflect on what continues to drive our pandemic pedagogy within a teacher education program.

Hill et al. (2020) remind us that “moving forward, teachers, and teacher educators will require backgrounds in hybrid pedagogies and transdisciplinary self-directed learning” (p. 573). We believe that this reaches beyond modality and connects the ability for strategic re-visioning of practice. As faculty, we take heart in seeing the reengineering of teacher education as a gift of



pause in which we have found comfort in the interrelatedness of our lives and our common commitment to fostering new teachers who embody a leadership in the making that will prepare them well for the future, no matter what it brings.

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## CHAPTER 16

### The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Effect on the Professional Practice of Field Experience Associates at the University of Alberta

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#### Abstract

At the University of Alberta, the Faculty of Education's Bachelor of Education degree program includes the integration of coursework and field experience. Eight field experience associates (FEAs), including the authors, are primarily responsible for the latter portion of the degree program. Collectively, efficiently, and effectively, the team responded to the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic so that the ultimate goal, successful completion of field experiences, was attained. This retrospective narrative inquiry recounts the FEAs' lived experiences from March 2020 to June 2021 through five core elements of our practice that required urgent response due to the COVID-19 crisis: (a) creation of an online Introductory Field Experience completion project in the wake of school closures in March of 2020, (b) conversion of the field experience preparatory courses from in-person to blended asynchronous and synchronous online learning for the fall 2020 term, (c) reexamination and flexing of field experience guidelines and expectations, (d) revision of field experience assessment processes and documents, and (e) enhancement of connectivity, collaboration, and responsiveness to ensure strong relationships with all stakeholders involved in field experiences. In addition to a narrative of the team's journey since March 2020, this chapter includes members' reflections on their work, a discussion of lessons that emerged, connections to relevant literature, and implications for future practice.

*Keywords:* COVID-19, pandemic, field experience, practicum, collaboration, teamwork, narrative inquiry, preservice teacher education

#### Résumé

À l'Université de l'Alberta, le programme de baccalauréat en éducation à la Faculté d'éducation comprend l'intégration des cours et de l'expérience sur le terrain. Huit conseillés associés (field experience associates), y compris les auteurs, sont principalement responsables de la dernière partie du programme d'études. L'équipe a répondu aux défis causés par la pandémie de la COVID-19 avec une efficacité collective afin que l'objectif ultime, c.-à.-d. la réussite des expériences sur le terrain, soit atteint. Cette enquête narrative rétrospective raconte les expériences vécues par les conseillés associés durant la période de mars 2020 à juin 2021 par l'entremise de cinq éléments clés de notre pratique qui ont nécessité des mesures d'urgence en raison de la crise COVID-19 : (a) la création du « project d'achèvement » du cours de stage d'exploration en ligne dans le sillage des fermetures d'écoles en mars 2020, (b) la conversion des cours préparatoires à l'expérience sur le terrain d'un apprentissage en ligne asynchrone et synchrone mixte pour le trimestre d'automne 2020, (c) une revue des directives et des attentes de l'expérience sur le terrain, (d) la révision des procédés et des documents d'évaluation de l'expérience sur le terrain, et (e) une amélioration des rapports, de la collaboration et de la

sensibilité pour s'assurer de relation solide entre toutes les parties prenantes impliquées dans les expériences sur le terrain. En plus d'un récit du parcours de l'équipe depuis le mois de mars 2020, ce chapitre a permis les réflexions des membres sur leur travail, une discussion des leçons à en tirer, les liens avec des documentations pertinentes, et à la future application de la pratique pédagogique.

*Mots clés* : COVID-19, pandémie, expérience sur le terrain, stage, collaboration, travail d'équipe, enquête narrative, formation initiale à l'enseignement

## **Introduction**

The University of Alberta's Faculty of Education is one of the largest in Canada, serving approximately 3,000 students in the undergraduate degree program. The main education field experiences are Introductory Field Experience (IFX) and Advanced Field Experience (AFX), which are 25 and 45 days in length, respectively. In addition, the faculty offers two elective field experiences, EDFX 200, an orientation to teaching, and EDFX 490, a specialized field experience. The undergraduate program is currently undergoing an extensive renewal process.

We are members of an eight-person field experience associates (FEAs) team, responsible for the preservice teachers within the Greater Edmonton Area. The area is divided into seven relatively equal geographic zones, with one FEA and two university facilitators assigned to each zone. The eighth FEA serves as the team lead and the lead for the regional zone. Each FEA oversees their zone, directly supports the IFX preservice teachers, and supervises the two university facilitators. The latter work directly with the AFX students. Preservice teachers in the Greater Edmonton Area are placed, on average, in at least 15 different school districts in approximately 360 schools. The faculty also has numerous regional placements throughout Alberta, and occasionally other provinces. In total, in a typical academic year, FEAs work with approximately 2,000 preservice teachers placed in over 400 schools, encompassing 71 school districts.

In addition to supporting preservice teachers in their field placements, FEAs help placement coordinators find schools for them and teach the IFX preparatory course during the 8 weeks prior to placement. The course is bridging in nature, intended to help education students transition from student to teacher, focusing on proactive classroom management, professionalism, and meeting the expectations of a field placement. Each FEA team member has additional specialized portfolios, including supporting students with accommodations for field experience or when repeating a field experience; delivering the two elective field experiences; updating website content and issuing communications; revising field experience processes, policies, assessments, and documents; liaising with school districts and other faculty; supporting our university facilitator group; and completing external and internal committee work. It is a complex, demanding job, and we love it.

## **Methodology and Chapter Overview**

This study addressed the question: How were the core elements of the FEAs' work affected during the COVID-19 pandemic? We approached this study from the perspective of retrospective narrative inquiry. According to Clandinin (2013), "narrative inquiry is an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding" (p. 17).

Since March 2020, the FEA team has continually reflected on the impact of the pandemic on our work and on field experiences during team meetings and in individual conversations. In preparing for this chapter, we and our teammates documented our reflections on each of the identified five core elements of our pandemic work. We gratefully acknowledge our teammates' contributions. We have randomly assigned them participant numbers to differentiate their words in this chapter. Additional data came in the form of student surveys and emails from students, school partners, and other field experience stakeholders.

The five subsections of the findings explain how the FEA team responded to the challenges created by the pandemic in each of the core elements. We then used these written reflections as data to identify three significant themes that form the backbone of the discussion section. We also discuss lessons learned, make connections with the literature, and present implications for future practice.

## Findings

### Element 1: Create an Online IFX Completion Project

In mid-March 2020, in the wake of school closures, our world<sup>24</sup> as FEAs changed drastically. FEA-2 explained our situation:

On Sunday, March 15, during the dinner hour, the government of Alberta announced that due to COVID-19 there would be province-wide school closures that were effective immediately. To say that the public was caught off guard would be an understatement! That was also the night we had hundreds of IFX student teachers anxiously preparing for their first field experience that was supposed to start the next day. We also had hundreds of AFX student teachers already more than halfway through their placements. It would be fair to say that almost immediately my email was on fire.

When K–12 schools were closed to in-person classes, the team had more questions than answers. What would we tell our IFX and AFX preservice teachers? What would we say to the hundreds of mentor teachers wondering how they were going to begin teaching online? To compound the mounting anxiety, conflicting information began circulating about the continuation of field experiences. Some boards said yes to continuing, others said no, and the remainder did not say anything. Some mentor teachers contacted us, saying what a great opportunity for their student teachers to learn about online delivery. Others thought that having a student teacher was impossible and ridiculous given the circumstances.

Accustomed to working in shared offices within our department, the mandate to work from home cut us off from our normal mode of teamwork, readily available collegial interactions, and strategy sessions. We suddenly found ourselves forced into solitary confinement. Our priority had always been the preservice teachers, upon whom we focused our expertise and attention to ensure their successful completion of field experiences. As we awaited decisions from ministers, deans, and superintendents, we knew that clear and cohesive communication would be essential to quell the anxiousness of preservice teachers and their mentors. We assumed the role of crisis communication directors and sent mass emails to our

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<sup>24</sup> From this point forward, all references in the chapter to *we*, *us*, and *our* refer to the FEA team, not to the authors.

students, mentors, and principals, saying, essentially, “Stay tuned. We are awaiting direction from ... somebody.”

Within 2 days, senior administration decided that all field experiences were suspended. It was further determined that approximately 1,000 preservice teachers could not have their degree program halted. Because AFX preservice teachers had enough weeks of field experience to be eligible for Alberta interim teacher certification, those whose mentors recommended them for credit would be considered complete. EDFX 490 preservice teachers who had completed 80% of their placement would also be granted credit with the recommendation of their mentor.

By far, the most vulnerable preservice teachers were our IFX students. Our associate dean directed us to create an online course for them so that they could complete the IFX requirements. We harboured no pretence that any set of assignments we created would ever come close to replacing an authentic field experience, yet that was our mandate. As FEA-3 explained, uppermost in our minds was a desire to develop a course that would give students the greatest preparation possible to progress to their AFX:

What could we do to make this experience be as close as possible to the expectations that they would have had to meet in the classroom? We obviously could not import a group of students for them to teach, ... so we examined the *TQS* [*Teaching Quality Standard*, Alberta Education, 2018] and selected the competencies and indicators that we felt were essential for preservice teachers. [We] shared thoughts and ideas ... [and] near the end of that week, four of us ... met at the university. We masked, we sanitized, and we socially distanced. We set up the computer and projector in one of the classrooms, and we talked and talked and wrote and talked and edited and talked and then wrote some more.... We had created a completion project.

The four FEAs involved in the initial creation of the IFX completion project sought input from the rest of the team; others worked on developing the course in eClass, our online student portal. FEA-4 described the process this way:

Once we overcame the collective shock that we were going to be responsible for creating an alternate means of completing an IFX experience, our team of FEAs got to work.... We assumed roles that emphasized our previous knowledge and strengths and began creating a project for our students. My role in the process was to work as a collaborator, which included participating in discussions that evaluated and modified early versions of the project. Thankfully, the initial versions of the project were well constructed, which allowed us to spend most of our time talking about the most effective ways of presenting and evaluating the assignments as well as communicating with our students.

Even though online instruction was new to our team and the majority of our students, we proceeded with a confident naivety. With the strength, knowledge, and diverse thinking of our team, we were able to not only create relevant and meaningful content, but we also established a means of providing seamless student access to the material, an efficient means to monitor student progress, and the ability to communicate effectively with them.

The strength of our team was highlighted as we came together with a tight timeline to develop and launch an online completion project for our IFX students. Significant to us was that our experience as classroom teachers shone through in the way we designed assignments to be as

authentic and connected to classroom teaching as possible, communicated the expectations, and shepherded students who dropped off during the project. We received many comments from students grateful for the opportunity to stay current in their program and have a completion project that in some way addressed their need to be prepared for AFX. Our completion rate was close to 100%, but along with relief, we also had several misgivings. As teachers, we knew that no online project could adequately replace teaching experience in a classroom. We also knew that the group of winter 2020 IFX students progressing to AFX without an in-school field experience would require additional support.

## **Element 2: Convert Face-to-Face Courses to Blended Asynchronous and Synchronous Online Learning**

The winter term ended; we cancelled EDFX 490 for the spring term. By mid-May 2020, the university announced that online teaching would continue for the fall term, and we worried about the effect that decision would have on our IFX preparatory course. How could we, in an online platform, maintain the essential features of our course delivery: creating community, modelling instructional strategies and enthusiasm for teaching, reinforcing professionalism and the expectations of field placement, and requiring our students to participate as they would in a faculty meeting? Moreover, despite collectively having extensive teaching experience, new vocabulary being bandied about made us feel a bit trepidatious: *asynchronous*, *synchronous*, *blended*, *Zoom*. What were these things?

Our lead FEA put together a collaborative plan for retooling our course. Our first decision was that we would prioritize conducting robust synchronous sessions with our students. As teachers, we unanimously agreed that we had to preserve as much face-to-face connection and active participation with students as possible. We committed to learn how to use Zoom effectively for teaching.

Next, we decided that a common set of asynchronous materials used in a flipped classroom instructional model would be effective in preparing our students for a productive synchronous time together. As teachers of students in the introductory professional term of their degree program, we have always been aware that our course is one of several compressed courses they complete in just a few weeks prior to starting their IFX. For that reason, we have generally avoided additional readings and assignments, choosing instead to use class time to deliver the majority of content through collaborative learning activities. Wanting to preserve this element of our course, the goal of our asynchronous content was to ensure that our students had a user-friendly resource, engaging content, and activities that would prepare them to fully participate in the synchronous session to follow. Tasks were distributed to working groups (pairs and triads), and the process was coordinated by one FEA who became our project lead. Although we did not know it at the time, we were in the early stages of developing what turned out to be an excellent refinement process: essentially, a series of “funnels” whereby instructional materials were distilled in a consistent way.

Using the essential elements of the course scope and sequence as a guide, the first working group selected slides from the extensive cache of shared teaching slides our team had created over several years. The second working group formatted them into eight draft asynchronous slide sets. The last working group further refined and organized the content of each set. This step included adding explicit instructions for students and moving nonessential content into an optional resources section. We felt a responsibility to prepare our preservice teachers for the very real possibility that they would need to teach online at some point during

their placement. To this end, we compiled a set of online teaching resources and made it available to the IFX students in our classes, as well as to the AFX preservice teachers.

Creating course content was one thing; engaging students online was quite another. Using Zoom to conduct our synchronous sessions was a steep learning curve for us. We spent our summer months learning some basics of the platform and practising with one another. We experimented with various Zoom features to enhance engagement, such as breakout room notetaker slides, and learned to use several third-party enhancements, such as Pear Deck and Mentimeter. One member's comment epitomizes our thoughts prior to the start of fall term:

Fast forward to a sleepless Monday night on August 31 [2020] because of all the normal jitters many teachers experience before the first day of school. For me, the worries were amplified because Tuesday morning I was teaching my first synchronous online... seminar class... Most of the angst was related to concerns about the technology. Would Zoom work? What if there were tech issues in the middle of class I had to problem solve while teaching remotely? What if the Wi-Fi went down? What if I lost the whole class and couldn't get them back? Would I be able to use the tools effectively? How could I make the course interesting and engaging? How could I incorporate the important time for student sharing and collaboration? As I said, I didn't get a lot of sleep that night! (FEA-2)

Significant in the development of our online course was the goal of connecting with students and the extent to which we would be able to achieve that goal. Many students commented that our course was the only one, at least in the fall term, with a synchronous component, and they appreciated the opportunity to see others and have discussions. They also liked the emphasis on collaborative learning and interaction, building on the asynchronous content rather than repeating it. Online, we held to the same requirements as for in-person classes: It was mandatory for students to attend, be on time, and be prepared to engage in discussion and activities with their peers. Online, we found that two additional requirements were needed to reinforce the preparatory aspect of the course: Students had to have their camera on and be professionally dressed and aware of their background.

We encountered a few bumps in the road during the online course. For example, we noticed that some students accessed the asynchronous content immediately before the synchronous class started, leaving insufficient time to read and complete the required activities. This observation prompted focused discussions with our classes during synchronous time about the expectations of beginning professionals, such as preparedness and time management. Additionally, we each had to reach out by phone or email to get a few students back on track after unexplained absences in synchronous sessions. We offered students individual or small group repeat sessions, plus the option of joining a colleague's session on another day. This practice reinforced for students the importance of attendance and preparedness. Overall, we received thanks from our students for reaching out and connecting at a time when they were feeling isolated.

When the team compared notes, we were surprised to learn that attendance was better than it had ever been on campus. The following quote from a Universal Student Rating of Instruction illustrates the feedback we received from students:

The class setup itself was worth-while, we didn't just go over the ... slides given to us, we changed them up so that they were engaging and that we got to talk in groups. Being



online definitely wasn't a disadvantage. The topics week to week were mandatory for us to understand before going into our practicums and the added videos, links etc. were super great to refer to. I felt motivated to learn by myself and did all of the work that was assigned to us even though the class was a completion mark and not for a grade. This is the best part about this course because it was engaging and we did the work because we wanted to, not because we had to.

### **Element 3: Reexamine and Flex Field Experience Guidelines and Expectations**

As we journeyed through the creative and collaborative process of developing an online course that would honour our commitment to engage with our students, we were cognizant that the existing guidelines and expectations for field experience may not be applicable in the new reality in schools—and if not, what would need to be changed? How could we adapt them to meet our primary goal of having preservice teachers work alongside a mentor in a teaching situation? In addition to adjusting for the COVID-19 context in schools, we had to consider what supports to put in place for the cohort of AFX preservice teachers who had not been able to have an in-school IFX due to school closures.

Early in this process, beginning in August 2020, we decided to incorporate the maximum flexibility possible into our fall 2020 guidelines and expectations, while maintaining the integral components of field experience. This approach would allow our school partners the freedom to adapt as they saw fit to accommodate for their changing circumstances and was respectful of the stressful nature of K–12 educators' new reality. We also believed that added flexibility would support the cohort of students who had no prior in-school experience.

The modified guidelines and expectations we created became critical documents that outlined the roles and responsibilities of the mentor teacher and the student teacher, as well as the specific week-by-week expectations of the IFX and AFX practicum. These guidelines were updated for the winter 2021 term (University of Alberta Faculty of Education, 2021a, 2021b) and will be updated for upcoming terms as needed. The documents amalgamated the essential information from the field experiences website in a succinct and easy-to-understand format, and clearly outlined areas where flexibility was introduced or reinforced. The following list summarizes the main modifications the FEA team considered essential in response to the pandemic context:

- The usual schedule of 3 orientation days was cancelled, and mentors and students had the option to plan orientation time to fit their circumstance.
- The expectation for preservice teachers to become involved in extracurricular activities was removed because such activities were now nonexistent or severely curtailed.
- If isolation or quarantine occurred during their placement, preservice teachers could continue their field experience by teaching online if possible. Requirements for isolation and quarantine often resulted in swift rotation from in-person to online learning. We judged that preservice teachers could gain valuable experience while teaching online and could still be expected to plan and deliver lessons.
- Absences were dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and increased time for completion was available as required. For instance, the fall 2020 term could be extended up to the school's winter break, and the winter 2021 term to the end of April, or even beyond, if the student had no spring term courses. FEAs developed an absence tracker to monitor absences and track extensions.

- We introduced flexibility to the amount of teaching time a student teacher was expected to reach. Instead of a mandatory amount of teaching time, we introduced an acceptable range of teaching time in IFX and AFX. This strategy served the dual purpose of adapting to the quarter system in many Edmonton schools and supporting the AFX students who did not have an in-school IFX. It also assisted mentor teachers in using their professional judgement to make an assessment based on a demonstration of the necessary competencies and indicators of the *TQS* (Alberta Education, 2018).
- Preservice teachers whose mentors were on a quarter system were expected to follow their mentor teacher's teaching assignment as much as possible, even if it changed during the placement. This modification meant that secondary school preservice teachers (Grades 7–12) might teach more in their minor subject area than their major for part of the placement. (University of Alberta Faculty of Education, 2021a, 2021b)

We implemented other supports for the fall 2020 AFX cohort who had not had an in-school IFX due to school closures in the spring of 2020. We worked with our university facilitators to ensure that these students were identified to their mentor teacher as a preservice teacher who may require more time and scaffolding, and we directed our facilitators to monitor them closely. We suggested a longer orientation period at the start of the placement. As well, we encouraged a combination of independent teaching, coteaching, and team teaching with mentor teachers.

At many points, we were concerned that there may not be enough placements for our students. We reached out to the field, invited fall term mentors to consider taking their IFX student teacher for their subsequent AFX placement in the winter term, asked IFX mentors to consider taking two preservice teachers, and encouraged teachers to team up with a colleague to mentor one preservice teacher together. An additional challenge was finding placements for preservice teachers who, due to health concerns, required an online teaching situation. After exhaustive efforts, all but one of approximately 2,000 preservice teachers were placed, and we used the IFX completion project once again for that one student.

The number of regional placements significantly increased due to students remaining in their family homes after their online courses were completed. The number of regional districts increased by 13% from winter 2020 to winter 2021, and the number of regional students increased by 50%. This resulted in the regional placement coordinator having to reach out to school districts that had not previously been part of our catchment and asking students to make placement connections within their own communities, where possible.

Especially evident in our efforts was our determination to have preservice teachers receive the best possible field experience, one that allowed them to get some teaching experience instead of no teaching experience. We were successful due to the collective wisdom and dedication of our team, the adaptability and resilience of the preservice teachers, and the overwhelming willingness of school coordinators and mentor teachers to welcome and infuse increased flexibility as part of the field experience. As FEA-3 stated,

It worked! ALL of our students were placed, some online, most in the classroom. Some had to face periods of isolation but worked from home, others taught in the classroom while streaming lessons to online students, and all learned that our mentors are creative, adaptable, and thoroughly professional in the most challenging of circumstances.

#### Element 4: Revise Field Experience Assessment Processes and Documents

At the University of Alberta, the assessment process for field experiences has evolved over the past few years, resulting in a focus on a foundational growth mindset. The assessment philosophy established by the FEAs is that

student teachers are on a complex journey of growth towards becoming a professional teacher. It is common for student teachers to be at different points on the continuum for different areas of their growth. This reality can be reflected in their growth plans, assessments, and evaluations, as these are meant to be a snapshot of student teachers' abilities at this given point and not at a finite endpoint. (University of Alberta Faculty of Education, 2017, p. 1)

Our field experience assessment process for both IFX and AFX students includes a growth plan component and subsequently a final assessment. The growth plan's main author is the preservice teacher, with input from the mentor teacher. It serves to articulate the strengths and areas for growth of the preservice teacher in accordance with the *TQS* (Alberta Education, 2018), and provides the student and mentor an opportunity for focused discussion and reflection on the student's ability to self-assess. In September 2020, after reviewing the IFX and AFX growth plan process and document, we decided that we should leave them intact as they had been recently revised.

The final assessment for the IFX is one that we had purposefully designed to be an extension of the growth plan and encapsulate the development of our preservice teachers. For the 2020–2021 school year, we added a section to identify whether the teaching experience was in-person, online, or a combination of both. Being cognizant of the additional demands on a teacher's time and energy during this pandemic, we wanted to have a final assessment document that was comprehensive but more succinct, requiring less time to complete. In the winter term, we decided to remove the portion that required the preservice teacher to describe their strategies for continued growth, as this portion of the document requires significant time spent in collaboration between the mentor and student.

When the winter 2020 AFX field experience was ended due to the school closures in March 2020, we reviewed the AFX final assessment to see where we could streamline the process as much as possible for both mentors and students. We removed the requirement for preservice teachers to explain strategies for growth for each of the six *TQS* (Alberta Education, 2018) competencies and replaced it with their choice of only two areas. This modification again meant that students and mentors did not have to spend as much time collaborating on the document, while retaining a desired element of preservice teacher voice in the final assessment. We also reformatted the document to make it more user-friendly. On the winter 2020 AFX final assessment, we deemed it important to add a proviso that would be descriptive of the circumstances and positive in tone. We settled on stating,

This assessment is based on the first 25 days of the Advanced Field Experience. The Winter 2020 field experience was truncated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. PLEASE NOTE: Our AFX student teachers have completed the requirements for interim certification in the province of Alberta.

At the outset of the COVID-19 school closures in March 2020, our team regularly met and discussed changes that needed to be made to ensure that our school partners and students had an effective and valid assessment process. Our revisions were overall well received by mentor teachers, and our relationships were maintained and strengthened.

### **Element 5: Enhance Connectivity, Collaboration, and Responsiveness to Ensure Strong Relationships**

Our main mission, as FEAs, is to help education students cross the bridge that leads to the beginning of their career. Our practice, therefore, is predicated upon forming strong working relationships, certainly with our students and faculty colleagues, but also, and perhaps more important, with the people external to the university who have a stake in the success of our preservice teachers; specifically, mentor teachers, school coordinators, principals, and school district personnel. Because we value our relationships so highly, staying connected through regular communication and being aware of what our many stakeholders were experiencing was paramount. This awareness would guide our decisions about how best to be responsive to students and to the field.

With regard to our students, we frequently compared notes with one another, and with our university facilitators, about how our students were doing in class and in their placements. Many of our students reported heightened and exacerbated feelings of anxiety, both before and during their field experiences. These feelings were brought on by various factors, including being physically and socially distanced, struggling with online learning, caring for vulnerable family members, facing AFX without having had an in-school IFX, exposure to COVID-19, and, in the fall 2020 and winter 2021 terms, dealing with the challenges of an in-person field placement after a long period of being limited to virtual social interactions. Our main method of seeing our students for classes, scheduled meetings, and observations while they were in their schools was virtual meetings, with some socially distanced in-person meetings when necessary. Our university facilitators used a similar mixture of virtual and in-person meetings and observations to maintain connection with AFX mentors and students.

Over the fall and winter terms, we grew in our comfort level and ability with conducting productive and interactive virtual meetings and came to appreciate their expediency and ease compared to arranging time and space in schools. Virtual meetings made it easier to have frequent check-ins with every student. We even started some new projects, such as after-school virtual sharing sessions, in which mentors and school coordinators shared best practices, as well as a virtual community of practice for preservice teachers placed in online teaching for their field experience. The convenience of virtual meetings may have paradoxically enabled greater connection in some ways.

At the same time, we recognized the limitations of this format in terms of developing the truly personal connections that are so essential to ongoing relationships. Virtual meetings may be less than ideal when discussions are sensitive or personal; for example, when we meet with students preparing to repeat a field experience, or with students experiencing difficulties in their placement. As FEA-4 explained,

While I felt overall okay with most of my small and large group meetings, I experienced some definite shortcomings in one-on-one meetings with students that were of a more personal and sometimes emotionally charged nature. What I found to be lacking was the

ability to see off-camera clues, such as fidgeting, as an example, that would have provided me with a different pathway of questioning had we been meeting in person.

Effective communication is central to good working relationships, which has always been our focus with our stakeholders. Concise and timely communication became a paramount concern early in the pandemic. We constantly grappled with the what, why, who, when, and where of communication, striving for a balance in our messaging, ever mindful that K–12 educators and university students were dealing with an onslaught of email. FEA-2 described our approach as

the “Goldilocks” method: not too much, not too little, but “just right” helped us navigate in terms of content and timing. Our team initially focused on emergent issues which required urgent communication, and then focused on a series of more proactive messages to help students and our school partners stay on top of developments as much as possible. We made it a top priority to express our gratitude at every opportunity and acknowledge the many additional challenges they were facing amidst all the uncertainty. We worked on common messaging to continually keep school districts up to date with field experiences’ current realities.

The results of our communication efforts during the first year of the pandemic were a mixture of successes and missteps. In the success column, we received many expressions of understanding and thanks from students, mentors, and school coordinators. For example, one student email in March 2020 expressed the following:

University FEAs, I know the last few days have added unimaginable amounts of stress and work to your already hefty workloads. I want to thank you for constantly keeping us up to date with the latest information and I am appreciative of the hard work you do and have done during this time. I am extremely happy with the decision the Education Faculty has come to and await further instructions for AFX students and their mentor teachers. Thank you all once again!

Also on the success side, closer ties were forged with other universities, as FEA-1 noted:

Prior to the COVID experience, relationships between the various postsecondary institutions offering a Bachelor of Education degree were surrounded by a bit of a competitive spirit. While always collegial, we operated independently ... and only spoke during formalized advisory meetings. In the early hours of wading through the implications of school shutdowns last spring [March 2020], however, field experience units reached out to each other. This move towards cooperation and collaboration has continued through the months of the pandemic.

One unavoidable communication misstep was caused by the timing of the pandemic. When schools were closed for in-person classes in March 2020, senior faculty administration, and our team, were already dealing with a communications conundrum regarding the decision to discontinue offering honoraria to mentor teachers as of the fall 2020 term. This decision was a result of the devastating cutbacks to postsecondary funding in the February 2020 provincial budget (Labine, 2020; Turpin, 2020), and was communicated to school districts in early April

2020. We were acutely aware that this message was likely one of many dozens hitting superintendents' and principals' inboxes during the early stages of the pandemic, and we feared that our message would not reach our school coordinators and mentors. We hoped that our valued school partners would empathize with our situation and that the unfortunate timing of the decision would not negatively impact our connection with the field. Regrettably, there were some repercussions, and it was a strong reminder that in relationships, careful attention to communication is essential.

## **Discussion**

Three major themes emerge from the data with respect to how the core elements of our work were affected during the COVID-19 pandemic: (a) relationships and effective communication continue to be of foundational importance, (b) roles and responsibilities must be clearly identified and articulated in order to define essential competencies for all stakeholders, and (c) the online platform is a beneficial resource for the delivery of field experience. These themes are discussed with noted implications for future practice.

### **Theme 1: Relationships and Communication Are of Foundational Importance**

As we responded to the emergent needs of our partners in teacher education, we learned that relationships could not only carry us through this difficult time but would lead us toward a better space. During the pandemic, our need for connection, engagement, and support provided us an opportunity to question and confirm what we valued most as educators.

What have we learned? Perhaps above all, we have discovered that adversity highlighted our success as a team; the ties that bind us grew stronger, which is an ironic outcome considering the isolating nature of the pandemic. We remembered that we are teachers first and that our collective 300+ years of experience as K–12 teachers could help us make decisions that benefited both preservice teachers and their mentors. Through this lens, we were able to give our mentor teachers and school coordinators agency to make decisions based on their own contexts; this flexibility allowed us to be more responsive to their needs and earned us their trust. Students, as noted in their feedback, also appreciated the efforts we made to connect with them online, strengthening relationships and guiding them toward a successful completion of their field experience. We proudly showed our team to be a group of highly motivated people with a shared vision and a collective sense of efficacy. We learned that we are, individually and as a team, strong and capable of the creative problem-solving that is needed to face the future in education. “Team members’ confidence in each other’s abilities and their belief in the impact of the team’s work are key elements that set successful school teams apart” (Donohoo et al., 2018, Resetting the Narrative section, para. 1).

We were reminded that communication is key in opening the pathways toward success. Especially within a virtual context, success meant continuing to form relationships built on trust with all stakeholders. It was important to create online interactions that were safe and inclusive, honouring and respecting all voices. To this end, we purposefully learned about and employed best practices for online pedagogy as well as virtual meetings. Throughout the pandemic, as stresses increased, we needed to make sure our messages were received as intended. We learned to appreciate the complexities of effective communication and the expertise required to carry it out successfully.

## **Theme 2: Roles and Responsibilities Must Be Clearly Articulated**

For the University of Alberta, the pandemic crisis was preceded by unprecedented budget cuts; throughout the 2020–2021 school year, the threat of reduced resources plus the stress of a complete structural reorganization has been ever-present. In field experience, FEAs were asked to revisit our roles and responsibilities and check them for efficiencies. We examined our workloads and renewed our focus on a commitment to the field. We took from this introspection the realization that we did not have the capacity to be all things to all people and that it was best to concentrate our energies on our prime objective: providing the best possible support to our preservice teachers and our school partners.

The pandemic experience has caused us to ask seminal questions of ourselves: What kind of teacher does the world need moving forward? What kind of training do we provide our preservice teachers to meet that need? This inquiry cannot be done in isolation. It must be done in ongoing consultation with the field. Our mentor teachers have let us know that they would value, in the words of Beck and Kosnik (2000), “the development of a clearer sense of the goals of teacher education, and, specifically, the practicum” (p. 221). This feedback has led to an in-depth inquiry into the essential competencies, the nonnegotiable milestones, that aspiring teachers must reach in order to meet the challenges of a future in the classroom. And with this knowledge comes a responsibility to adapt and make changes to our teacher education program.

In looking to modify our current practices, we have questioned past practices and tested them for relevance. We have become more aware of existing gaps in our teacher preparation and have set about to thoughtfully fill them through a process of program renewal. Some examples include the following:

- An awareness of the increasing strain on the mental health of our students. As FEAs we see firsthand the devastating effects of mental health issues exacerbated in a field placement. Continued advocacy for increased and readily accessible student support services is paramount.
- An affirmation of the necessity of a series of field placements starting as early as possible in an education student’s degree program. An observational field experience is being considered as an addition to the second year of our degree program as a result.
- A realization that we need to build a stronger bridge, one that emphasizes the move from theory into practice, between the IFX and our certifying AFX. This bridge may include the creation of an additional seminar that would build on our recent work with the IFX course.

## **Theme 3: The Online Platform Is a Beneficial Resource**

Throughout this pandemic, our field experience team has been aware of “a paradigm shift in the way educators deliver quality education—through various online platforms” (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021, p. 133). Although this move was born out of necessity and admittedly came with great challenges, the practice of virtual connection with our preservice teachers and their mentors was ultimately successful.

Virtual meetings allowed for more flexibility in terms of scheduling and proved to be less of a disruption to the school day. One team member, FEA-2, accurately expressed our shared view:

After a year of working through a pandemic, what we've learned as FEAs is that two Ts have been critical to our success: teamwork and technology.... Working remotely, the tools of technology have allowed us to continue teaching and collaborating with each other and all our stakeholders in a way I never would have imagined. If you had told me a year ago that I would be doing virtual observations of student teachers using Google Meet and Zooming with everyone, ... I would have said, "What's Zoom?" Overall, it is thanks to the technology that our team has had the ability to work more closely than ever, and I believe our students and schools have been well served throughout the process.

We have also made modifications to existing practices that will stick as we move out of the pandemic. One example is the hybrid delivery of the IFX preparatory course. Over the past few months, we have learned that although there is no substitute for direct, face-to-face interaction, the inclusion of an online component can add value to the field experience. FEA-5 noted that this model "mirrors the new reality for classrooms where a hybrid setting may be a part of the future."

Our work with the IFX completion project, created in response to the initial school shutdown in March 2020, applied scenario-based learning as a way of familiarizing preservice teachers with the classroom environment. Scenario-based learning uses online, realistic classroom scenarios to promote reflection and critical thinking (Errington, 2011). With the planned addition of an observational field experience early in our teacher education program, we will need to consider mentor teacher capacity to host preservice teachers in their classrooms. The inclusion of scenario-based learning could be of value; case studies could be presented for preservice teachers to consider with feedback provided virtually by interested mentor teachers. The experience could be "delivered in an online environment, which does not depend on the real-time presence of classrooms or coaches, overcomes time and space constraints, and can be accessed by large numbers of student teachers" (Bardach et al., 2021, p. 2).

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this lived experience, what began as a lesson in crisis management transitioned into a journey of reflection, one that produced lessons learned that will inform future practice. As we have moved through the pandemic, the importance of collaboration and cohesion has become increasingly evident. We have developed new communities of practice that strengthened the bond between the university and the field, and we anticipate that they will continue to thrive and grow next year. We are excited to build upon the knowledge and experience of our veteran mentors by inviting new teachers to join them; we envision mentors mentoring mentors.

The Association of Canadian Deans of Education (2020) has named resilience and transformation as one of the five markers supporting the assertion "that education and teachers are key to a post-pandemic Canada that flourishes" (p. 10). As a team of FEAs, we have built resilience through our experience over the past year, and we believe that what we have learned, through that experience, will transform and strengthen our future practice.

In March 2021, on the 1-year anniversary of our COVID-19 shutdown, our team lead sent us this message:

I am guessing that we are all thinking the same thing today—can it really be a year ago that we walked into the chaos of the Winter 2020 term? I have been re-reading our emails



from that week, a year ago; they range from Friday's "we're good to go" through Sunday's "or maybe not?" to Wednesday's "cease and desist." What a whirlwind! The thing that strikes me most, though, is the incredible work the team has done throughout all of this. You created a whole new completion course. You came up with a seminar that you can be so proud of, with some changes that I believe you will probably keep. You weathered the honorarium storm and, while I know there is work left to do, you preserved relationships to such a degree that all students received placements this term! The list goes on and on, but the bottom line is that you provided a bridge for our students that carried them safely from our old reality into this new one. And throughout it all, you were so kind, compassionate, and kept your sense of humour! You are still the best examples of what it truly means to be "the teacher." So thank you. With you at the helm, I say "bring it on!"

Not only does this message aptly summarize our experience, but we could not agree more. Bring it on, indeed.

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## CHAPTER 17

### Designing and Facilitating an “Adapted” Practicum Experience Amid a Pandemic

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#### Abstract

The in-school practicum experience is a significant component of teacher education programs in preparing candidates for classroom teaching. In the fall of 2020, due to the global effects of COVID-19 and the resulting shortage of available practicum placements in schools (both face-to-face and virtual), it was necessary for the Master of Teaching (MT) program at the University of Toronto to transition to a modified practicum program for approximately 400 first-year teacher candidates. In response to these challenges, and in consultation with provincial practicum guidelines, the MT program pivoted to a 4-week adapted practicum comprising pods of 15 to 30 teacher candidates, each led by one or two instructors (all Ontario-certified teachers) serving as practicum advisors. Unified by common elements and goals, each practicum advisor had autonomy to design and deliver a unique adapted practicum program, without access to school classrooms and students. In this chapter, five teacher educators utilize self-study (Kitchen et al., 2020) to reflect and share their individual narratives as practicum advisors working with intermediate/senior (Grades 7–12) teacher candidates. Within these individual narratives are key moments and takeaways related to creating nonschool-based, virtual practicum experiences for teacher candidates during the pandemic. Self-study of teacher education practices within practicum contexts is an underrepresented area of research (Petarcarca & Van Nuland, 2020; Thomas, 2017). This study will be of interest to Bachelor of Education programs (and other professional programs that include a practical component such as social work) for exploring an alternative approach to experience practicum and the “learning-to-teach” process (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008).

*Keywords:* practicum, self-study, initial teacher education, pandemic

#### Résumé

Faire son stage sur le terrain est une composante importante des programmes de formation à l'enseignement, et être stagiaire dans une classe d'école est une expérience de valeur aux candidats à l'enseignement. En automne 2020, en raison des effets mondiaux de la COVID-19 et de la pénurie de stages disponibles dans les écoles (en présentiel et en virtuel), il était nécessaire pour le programme de maîtrise en enseignement de l'OISE / L'Université de Toronto à effectuer la transition vers un programme de stage modifié pour environ 400 candidats à l'enseignement de première année. En réponse à ces défis, et en accord avec les lignes directrices relatives aux stages pratiques de la province, le programme de maîtrise en enseignement est passé à un stage adapté aux nouvelles exigences. Composé de groupes de 15 à 30 candidats à l'enseignement et

pour une durée de quatre semaines, le stage fut dirigé par un ou deux instructeurs OISE (tous enseignant(e)s certifié(e)s de l'Ontario) qui agissaient à titre de conseillers de stage. Unis par un objectif commun, et sans accès ni aux salles de classe ni aux étudiants, chaque conseiller de stage a pu concevoir avec autonomie son unique programme de stage modifié. Dans ce chapitre, cinq formateurs d'enseignants utilisent l'auto-apprentissage (Kitchen et al., 2020) afin de réfléchir et de partager leurs récits individuels en tant que conseillers de stage travaillant avec les candidats à l'enseignement en voie intermédiaire et secondaire (7<sup>e</sup> à la 12<sup>e</sup> année). Au sein de chaque récit, on y retrouve des moments clés et des points à retenir liés à la création d'expériences de stage virtuelles à l'intention des candidats à l'enseignement pendant la pandémie. L'auto-apprentissage des pratiques de formation des enseignants dans le cadre des stages est un domaine de recherche sous-représenté (Petrarca et Van Nuland, 2020; Thomas, 2017). Cette étude intéressera les programmes de baccalauréat en éducation (et d'autres programmes professionnels qui incluent une pratique, e.g., brevet travail social) qui veulent explorer une approche alternative à l'expérience du stage et au processus « apprendre à enseigner » (Crocker et Dibbon, 2008).

*Mots clés* : stage, auto-apprentissage, formation initiale à l'enseignement, pandémie

## Introduction

We are five teacher educators working with intermediate/senior (Grades 7–12) teacher candidates in the Master of Teaching (MT) program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto. The MT program leads to a graduate-level degree and recommendation for teacher certification in the province of Ontario. As with many faculties of education across the country, our program transitioned its classes to full virtual teaching and learning via Zoom in the spring of 2020 because of health restrictions imposed by COVID-19.

In addition to coursework, our teacher candidates complete four practice teaching placements in 4-week blocks, during each of their fall and winter semesters across the two-year program. We pair teacher candidates with an associate teacher from a partner school who acts as a mentor of good teaching practice and professionalism, as well as a coach. Teacher candidates are further mentored by an MT faculty advisor, who conducts at least one in-class observation and provides feedback on curriculum design and instruction. The MT program describes these practice teaching requirements, or practicum, as “an opportunity to integrate academic preparation and educational studies in workplace learning” (OISE, 2020, p. 5). The Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) requires teacher education programs to allocate 20% of teacher training to practicum: a minimum of 80 days (400 hours) of practice teaching.

Late in the summer of 2020, due to the ongoing global effects of COVID-19, the OCT invited faculty of education deans to apply their judgement on any adjustments to practicum. The minimum 80-day requirement remained in effect but there was recognition that the in-school practicum format might need to change. Key practicum elements to prioritize were connections to the field, such as to schools, and supervision by an OCT certified teacher. The Office of the Provost of the University of Toronto granted a program-level academic disruption permitting such changes to provide students with reasonable opportunities to complete programmatic requirements considering the extraordinary pandemic circumstances.

By the fall of 2020, OISE's 10 partner school boards continued to shift their delivery models for teaching and learning in response to public health concerns and ongoing policy changes. Many boards were in tumult with staffing shortages and there was considerable movement between in-person and virtual student enrolments. Due to the resulting shortage of

available practicum placements in schools (both face-to-face and virtual), the MT program quickly pivoted to design and implement a 4-week modified practicum program for 400+ first-year teacher candidates. In this virtual adapted practicum experience, the program created pods (cohorts) each led by one or two practicum advisors and assigned 14 to 30 teacher candidates. Practicum advisors were OISE teacher educators who possessed provincial certification as teachers (OCT certification), research skills, mentorship capacities, and connections with schools and school boards.

In this chapter, five teacher educators utilize self-study to collectively reflect on their experiences modifying practicum in response to challenges imposed by COVID-19 restrictions. We found ourselves in an extraordinary moment in our careers with an opportunity to redefine the professional experience. The main question that guided our self-study asked: What have we learned, from our individual and collective experiences during pandemic times, about the possibilities of developing and facilitating a virtual, nonschool practicum? The goal of this chapter is to explore our capacities to support our teacher candidates and shape alternative approaches to practicum experiences, while exploring this question.

We begin with a brief review exploring the role of practicum in initial teacher education (ITE) programs in the research literature. We then provide an overview of self-study as our methodology. Next, we delve into the details of the adapted practicum including an outline of common elements across our AP pod groupings followed by our individual narratives as Practicum Advisors.

### **What Constitutes Practicum (“Practice”) in Teacher Education?**

The practicum is a significant component of ITE programs in preparing candidates for classroom teaching. Field experiences presumably offer sound pedagogical learning, so much so that Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2005) refer to them as “the most pervasive pedagogy in teacher education” (p. 42). Many teacher candidates seem to agree with this sentiment citing practicum as one of the most valuable learning experiences in their teacher education (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2005; Russell 2017; Martin, 2017). Practicum goals and experiences will vary depending on the orientation, requirements and organizational structure of an ITE program (Kitchen & Petrarca, 2016).

The ITE practicum tends to be associated with an “in-school experience” (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008, p. 32), whereby candidates are afforded opportunities, in theory, to operationalize the theoretical and practical knowledge and skills acquired in their ITE courses, develop practical wisdom (Kitchen & Petrarca, 2016), or both. Mattsson et al. (2011) suggest that a teaching practicum emphasizes “performance and ‘doing’”. Practice knowledge is situated, context-related and embodied. It relates to what particular people actually do, in a particular place and time” (p. 4). Through practicum, candidates may work towards expanding their understanding of learners and learning, lesson planning, instructional strategies, assessment and evaluation, equity and inclusive education, reflective practice and developing a professional identity (e.g., see Petrarca & Van Nuland, 2020).

### **Methodology: Self-Study and Initial Teacher Education Practices in Practicum**

In this chapter, we draw on self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP) as our methodology (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Self-study is increasingly recognized as a principal

means for identifying and examining effective practices in teaching (Kitchen et al., 2020) and developing a pedagogy of teacher education (Loughran, 2006). Ikpeze (2019) argues S-STEP is “a necessary pedagogical exercise that can improve teaching and learning in teacher education learning contexts. Self-study enables teacher educators to conduct intentional and systematic inquiry into their own practice that yields knowledge about practice” (p. 107). Common among all approaches to self-study is an emphasis on positioning the knowledge and practice of the teacher educator at the centre of their academic work (Loughran & Russell, 2002).

S-STEP and teacher educator learning within the practicum context are less explored areas of research (Petrarca & Van Nuland, 2020; Thomas, 2017; Vanassche & Kelchertmans, 2015). This is puzzling given the embeddedness of practicum across ITE programs in Canada. Petrarca and Van Nuland (2020) argue, “Since the practicum plays such a critical role in teacher candidate learning within ITE programs, we are obligated to our teacher candidates—and to their future students—to learn more about how to optimize their practicum *learning* experience” (p. 12, emphasis in original). They further argue that self-study offers a logical means to achieve this.

In this self-study, we share and collectively reflect on our individual narratives as practicum advisors, creating and delivering a modified practicum in response to challenges imposed by COVID-19 restrictions. Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) state that “the aim of self-study research is to provoke, challenge, and illuminate rather than confirm and settle” (p. 20). These words resonated with us as we attempted to envision online possibilities for what practicum learning in ITE could involve. A self-study approach provided us, as teacher educators committed to the success of our teacher candidates, an opportunity to examine our own learning to focus on how we might depart from more traditional practicum models (e.g., Mattsson et al., 2011).

Self-study draws on multiple methods of data collection, depending on the focus of the study. Drawing on narrative inquiry allowed us to describe our personal stories and explore the meanings derived from these experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). We collected qualitative data through personal online journals, retrospective reflections, recorded zoom meetings, and email exchanges to organize, analyze, and present our findings. We weave our narratives together, shared below, drawn from these various sources. Using a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2017), analysis of our narrative accounts was ongoing, both during and after the adapted practicum period. Throughout this process, we acted as critical friends to validate our findings (Schuck & Russell, 2005). Within our individual narratives are key moments and takeaways related to creating meaningful virtual “field” experiences for our teacher candidates.

### **Practicum Advisors—Introductions**

We agree with Mahani (2019) who contends that we need to situate ourselves in the inquiry and draw on our experiences as teacher educators, while also collaborating with colleagues coming from different backgrounds and who bring different lenses to self-study. What follows is a brief introduction to the five practicum advisors in our self-study.

#### **Joanne**

I arrived to my teacher educator role in the MT program after having worked in the field for more than 11 years. I was a high school geography and politics teacher in southern Ontario

with the Halton District School Board. I left the classroom to act as a curriculum lead at the school board level and later a program leader in the research department. I had tremendous opportunities in these roles to provide system leadership and support teachers and programming. I worked across 17 high schools in my work, building strong connections with many teachers and administrators. As a teacher educator, I work to nurture communities of care in my practice so teacher candidates feel recognized, appreciated, and respected, as I hope their future students will feel as well.

### **Ardavan**

I come from a teaching background with the Toronto District School Board having taught a range of grades from kindergarten to Grade 12. I also have postsecondary teaching experience in the field of child and youth care, early childhood education, and teacher education. Community is at the heart of my praxis and pedagogy, which involves using education as a tool to inspire, motivate, empower, and more importantly bring social consciousness to individuals and social groups to resist and challenge injustice and inequity in its various forms. I believe theory and practice are interconnected and make a difference in the lives of others in a manner that is socioculturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining to the needs of learners and communities.

### **Cristina G.**

I come to the adapted practicum with different experiences as an educator. I bring with me 15 years of experience working for the Toronto District School Board. During this time, I was a secondary classroom teacher, an instructional leader for the Equity and Inclusive Schools department, and a learning coach working with middle and secondary schools, mostly in the areas of antioppression and literacy. Working and coplanning with different teachers and administrators across various school contexts provided me with knowledge and experience on topics related to curricular content, school improvement, equity and antioppression, and student well-being.

### **Christina P.**

I arrived at OISE as an instructor 4 years ago after completing my doctorate in science education. I decided to take a leave of absence from my high school science teaching with the York Region District School Board to work in teacher education in both the MT program and the larger Curriculum, Teaching and Learning department. I also worked in a leadership capacity as a practicum coordinator at OISE, placing our teacher candidates in various schools across the Toronto District School Board. I was able to bring these collective experiences to our preservice teachers in the adapted practicum through the conversations, activities, and coplanning interactions with my cofacilitator (not a self-study participant).

### **Carolyn**

I am a teacher at heart with more than 25 years of educational experience as a teacher, department head, curriculum writer, and now teacher educator. I arrived at OISE 15 years ago as a seconded faculty to share best practices as a provincial lead teacher in curriculum planning and implementation with health and physical education (HPE) elementary and secondary teacher

candidates. I am passionate about educating and inspiring teacher candidates in their process of becoming a HPE teacher. Mentoring and guiding teacher candidates to create a vision for teaching HPE through critical reflection of their lived experiences is fundamental in my role as a teacher educator.

Carolyn's pod was a subject-specific group, as it was home to her HPE teacher candidates. All other pods comprised teacher candidates from mixed subject-specialist areas.

### **Adapted Practicum: Common Elements Across Pods**

As practicum advisors, we each assumed a lead role in designing and facilitating our own program for our individual pods (15–30 students each) in terms of structure, content, and pedagogy. Though we had agency in our planning, we were required to apply common elements. We summarize these requirements below:

#### **Practicum Preparation List: A Common First Week**

During the first of 4 weeks in the adapted practicum, teacher candidates completed a number of tasks similar to those that would typically precede a traditional in-school practicum. In addition to an initial pod meeting to discuss the weeks ahead, teacher candidates were required to individually review key MT program documents, such as the Equity Policy and Sexual Violence and Harassment Policy, and complete the Ministry of Labour Health & Safety Training. Depending on the practicum advisor and pod, candidates might also be required to become familiar with a particular school board and its policies and procedures. Teacher candidates also reflected on their learning priorities for the adapted practicum.

#### **Wellness and Self-Care Activities**

As Zee and Koomen (2016) document, there is a robust body of research demonstrating the importance of teachers establishing a self-care routine; teacher mental health, resilience, and well-being has a ripple effect on their students. One of our responsibilities as practicum advisors was to support teacher candidates to cultivate health and wellness as a core professional practice. This might entail inviting teacher candidates to design and lead health and wellness activities for their pods, and/or developing a self-care plan for the year ahead.

#### **Micro-Teaching and Feedback**

As a teacher training technique, microteaching in the adapted practicum was a means for teacher candidates to practice their teaching skills in a low-risk, simulated, virtual classroom environment. Peers, practicum advisors, or both provided feedback in various forms (e.g., written, oral). As practicum advisors, we used our discretion to determine the conditions (e.g., team teaching or individual), frequency, and scheduling of microteaching over the course of the adapted practicum.



## Formative Assessment

The Formative Assessment was a checklist providing a common set of assessment criteria for teacher candidates to identify goals for improvement over practicum and to demonstrate and monitor their growth. It included five categories:

- Professionalism (e.g., engages in inquiry and reflective practice);
- Diversity & Equity (e.g., investigates one's own social locations, biases, (dis)advantages, and predispositions in relationship to one's learning about teaching);
- School & Community (e.g., demonstrates an interest and understanding of school and community connections);
- Understanding Curriculum & the Learner (e.g., uses a variety of effective questioning to facilitate student inquiry and learning); and
- Assessment, Planning & Instruction (e.g., plans lessons/units from an outcomes-based perspective using the Ontario provincial expectations).

## Digital Portfolio

Each teacher candidate created a digital portfolio, a personalized tool to capture examples of professional growth and learning throughout the adapted practicum, aligned with the five sections of the Formative Assessment. For example, some practicum advisors invited teacher candidates to include curated artefacts representing evidence of knowledge and/or skills accrued from practicum activities. Such artefacts might include a video of a teacher candidate reflecting on peer feedback received after facilitating a micro-teaching session.

## Summative Evaluation Self-Report

During the fourth and final week of the adapted practicum, teacher candidates completed a Summative Evaluation Self-Report describing their professional growth. Practicum advisors compared each teacher candidate's evaluation against their final digital portfolio, used as evidence to support self-reported learning and development across the five evaluation categories. Practicum advisors then assigned a pass/fail grade for the adapted practicum course credit.

Part of our collective challenge was the short timeline available to us (approximately two weeks) to plan how our 4-week adapted practicum programs would unfold. Our practicum advisor group met on three occasions in advance of the practicum to support one another with our planning. We also met each Friday during the adapted practicum to check in and provide emotional and professional encouragement as we enacted our roles.

Joanne, Christina P., and Cristina G. designed schedules to mirror a high school teacher's typical day, including five 75-minute periods. We dedicated one period to teacher prep and another to lunch (both asynchronous). The remaining three periods were allocated to professional development sessions (e.g., facilitated by guests from partner school boards), micro and team teaching blocks, or work periods (e.g., focused on common element requirements). Carolyn and Ardavan each used dedicated themes to frame their weekly schedules.

## Shape Shifters: Defining Our Practicum Advisor Roles

### Christina P.

I thought of my role as a combination of *associate teacher* and *learning/teaching coach*—designing a schedule for each week, providing feedback on lessons, and coordinating professional development activities for the group. A role that I did not anticipate filling was that of *adapted practicum vice-principal*. I especially felt this when we were called upon to support teacher candidates who were navigating challenging discussions with their colleagues, or who sought out guidance regarding whether a teaching resource was appropriate to use, as well as when managing teacher candidates' absences. I really was not expecting this sort of supervisory role—shape-shifting is complex yet fulfilling work!

### Cristina G.

My role entailed many different things, which ranged from *referee* (to mitigate conflict between some students) to *professional development provider* (on topics that interested students) to *faculty advisor* (I provided detailed notes on the three lessons teacher candidates taught during the adapted practicum) to *career counsellor* (in their process of learning to create a web portfolio, helping to oversee the steps that needed help or validation), to pretend *potential employer* (to provide detailed and honest feedback on the mock job interviews I facilitated for my pod). As Christina P. indicates above, this was also a coordinator role. Like a vice-principal, I timetabled teacher candidates into “teaching assignments” and created class lists that included specific learning profiles that needed to be addressed during microteaching. Ultimately, my role was to serve as a critical set of eyes, to offer friendly, field-informed, and constructive suggestions to help teacher candidates reflect and improve upon their practices. The month was definitely full and challenging, but I think that it was a beautiful struggle for all of us.

### Ardavan

I saw my role as a *facilitator* at large, taking on hybrid roles of *faculty advisor* and to some extent responsibilities of the *associate teacher*. I made clear to teacher candidates that I was not to replace or do the role of an associate teacher. It was important to me to make sure these expectations were clear, to avoid burning out. I was clear to my students that there will be a lack of feedback from myself in terms of lesson planning and work submitted, and we would instead rely on collective peer and oral feedback in group conferencing.

### Joanne

I feel caught between Christina P. and Ardavan regarding our role. Like Ardavan, I was concerned about instructor burnout. I had a full teaching schedule leading up to the adapted practicum and I typically look forward to practicum blocks to recoup and settle into my own research and writing. I made an initial promise to myself not to take on the role of *instructor*—providing individualized feedback for various tasks. Similar to Ardavan, I relied on teacher candidates to provide peer feedback on their lesson plans and teaching, and to support building a professional community, thus freeing me from the marking cave. However, I empathize with Christina P. in that I found myself acting as *department head* when called on to mediate disputes (e.g., “my teaching partner isn’t putting in the same effort as me”). In this role, I felt transported

back to when I was a classroom teacher. I just couldn't say no to my students when they needed support or even a good chat. I wanted to model care in the profession; however, again similar to classroom teaching, mentoring took an emotional toll on my well-being.

### **Carolyn**

To define my role, I had to shift from being seen as the teacher candidates' HPE course instructor to more of a facilitator. Similar to Cristina, my approach was that of a *critical friend*—to encourage and support teacher candidates to see their strengths while also offering constructive feedback to move forward. I was now their mentor, much like an associate teacher. I shared insights and experiences, gained through years of teaching. I listened and guided teacher candidates but did not provide all the answers, enabling them to collaborate with their peers as they would in a department to figure out the most effective course of action in their planning and delivery of a lesson. Thank you critical friends Christina, Cristina, Ardavan, and JPM, as it appears this culture of collaboration among us was echoed in our pods!

### **Empathic Advisement: Supporting Teacher Candidates' Pandemic Needs**

We initially asked ourselves to reflect on the needs (e.g., skill development) of first-year teacher candidates when they typically arrive at their first practicum experience, and the ways we anticipated meeting those needs in the adapted practicum. In reviewing our narratives, it became apparent that our pandemic circumstances and shift to virtual settings—in both our teacher education courses and adapted practicum—overshadowed discussions about supporting professionalism and pedagogical competencies. This has been a year like no other in teacher education, and empathy for our teacher candidates' varied circumstances guided our adapted practicum planning and facilitation.

### **Ardavan**

Within my pod, it was important to talk about emotions and teacher candidates' disappointments and frustrations with not having a traditional in-school practicum. My pedagogy was to channel our positive and negative energy into what we can control and how we react, similar to Cristina, who saw her role as a mentor and not an evaluator. It's a life skill and coping mechanism I have learned through refereeing basketball at all levels under pressure. I situated this important skill at the start of all our synchronous classes by dedicating time to talk about how we feel and what we can do to respond constructively. For example, we would break into smaller groups to discuss coping mechanisms to challenges created by COVID-19 circumstances at home and in our communities. We also discussed how teaching remotely will be an essential skill that many administrators will be looking for when hiring teacher candidates.

### **Carolyn**

As the instructor of the HPE course, I had a sense of how teacher candidates were feeling leading into the adapted practicum. I was amazed in the 6 weeks prior to the practicum how close-knit our community had become—yet the anxiety levels surrounding the uncertainties of this adapted practicum were high, both for the teacher candidates and myself. I was experiencing lots of mental chatter—*Do I have the mental energy to take this on after 6 months of learning how to teach online? Would I be able to provide a meaningful and purposeful teaching and*

*learning experience knowing my teacher candidates were disappointed that they were not going to be placed in schools, brick or virtual?*

A framework of guiding principles and questions, I thought, might help guide teacher candidates and I through our 4-week adapted practicum and ease some concerns. This is what I came up with, not grounded in any research, though formulated by considering what this teaching and learning experience could look, sound, and feel like:

- Our purpose is greater than our discomfort around the uncertainty of this learning context. Recognize this discomfort. Anxiety is normal as we navigate these uncharted waters together.
- Be the star in your own journey. What will be your priorities for the adapted practicum experience?
- Self-selecting into this profession of teaching you were not aware there would be circumstances in which we (re)learn to become teachers. This adapted practicum presents an opportunity to deepen our understanding of knowing our purpose. What is your superpower in HPE?

### **Joanne**

Carolyn—Thank you for creating and sharing these principles and questions near the start of the AP. I borrowed and adapted a version for my pod, inspired by your first point about recognizing discomfort in these uncertain times. I needed to understand and assuage my own discomfort with the adapted practicum before I could even begin to see a way forward in planning. I was fearful of how teacher candidates would respond to me as a practicum advisor given their deep disappointment about the change to practicum. The tension felt thick across my first-year classes after the announcement about the shift to a pod-based, virtual model. I wasn't able to answer teacher candidates' questions about what the adapted practicum experience might entail because we just didn't know. So not only did I feel overwhelmed with uncertainty about my role and a way forward, I also felt immense pressure to create and sustain a virtual practicum experience that did not further discourage the teacher candidates. I felt their frustrations and desperately didn't want to let them down. This concern consumed me throughout the adapted practicum.

### **Christina P.**

Joanne and Carolyn both expressed concern about how their teacher candidates might perceive them and/or the adapted practicum experience. This resonates with me as well. I think it is important for us all to remember that we are not just teaching virtually, but teaching in response to significant and continuing societal trauma from the ongoing pandemic. It is always necessary to cultivate a learning space to support the socioemotional needs of students, even more so now. I think we have all converged on this collective anxiety in our reflections based on not fulfilling what our teacher candidates might expect from the experience. I have tremendous empathy for my students as they are immersed in their studies while navigating a troubling time—and I also hope that our students had empathy for us as we too tried to navigate an entirely new experience as educators—a sort of educational full circle or karmic dance as we moved forward together.

My co-practicum advisor and I were mindful to try to create a rigorous environment for our teacher candidates to practice their teaching craft and to support their socioemotional needs.

The pandemic has unleashed a torrent of mental health challenges and we sought to build an inclusive and supportive environment for our teacher candidates. We met every morning for half an hour for community building activities led by two different teacher candidates in our group each day. The students all participated and seemed to enjoy this space to destress and connect through activities such as guided meditations and physical activity.

### **Joanne**

The embedded wellness activities, one of our AP common elements across pods, were an absolute joy. Similar to your schedule, Christina P., we started each day with a wellness and mindfulness activity, facilitated by a pair of teacher candidates. These ranged from creating a pod-community music playlist, to finding creative ways to connect with the natural environment from the confines of our “COVID caves.” As the days progressed, I could sense connectedness growing in our virtual community, and I wonder to what extent these activities contributed to this feeling (or did I imagine it?).

### **Cristina G.**

From the very beginning it was important for me to let the teacher candidates know that I was on their side as a mentor and not an evaluator. It was important for me to reframe and model the adapted practicum as a unique colearning opportunity for growth as a teacher candidate and teacher researcher that extended beyond the traditional walls of the classroom. Like Ardavan, we also had a conversation about working with what we could control and to turn that positive energy into a productive energy through which many possibilities could arise, like the ability to create websites and effectively teach with different webtools.

Christina P., you are so right that the pandemic has presented so many mental health challenges. The teacher candidates’ mental well-being was paramount during our time together, especially given their initial apprehension about the adapted practicum and uncertainty about their job prospects.

Woven throughout the landscapes of the adapted practicum, both personal and collective, are the ideals of connection and community, prioritizing social-emotional needs of one another, and a focus on the process fostering a growth mindset—an “I can do” kind of attitude. We unveiled our vulnerabilities and showed willingness to be open to new ways of thinking to support our teacher candidates in this unique practicum experience—which, in turn, was essential for our teacher candidates to embark on this journey with empathy, trust, and meaning-making in this process of becoming a teacher.

## **Reflecting on the Possibilities of a Virtual Practicum Experience**

### **Joanne**

From my reading to frame this article, I’ve learned the importance of nomenclature around *practice teaching*. For example, Canadian and American teacher educators tend to refer to field experiences in preservice teacher programs as the *practicum*, whereas our Australian colleagues will likely speak of the *professional experience* (Forgasz, 2017). I reflect on my version of an adapted practicum as a *virtual professional experience*. Despite the significant drawbacks I outline above, we each provided rich and varied virtual professional learning to

support the development of our teacher candidates. For example, I reached back into my school board life and invited various colleagues to facilitate professional development sessions (how to be an antiracist educator; programming for empowering multilingual students). It was important for me to share with teacher candidates the interconnectedness of professional relationships. I framed each guest as a mentor—illustrating that in education-world, we build a web of mentors who support and sustain us. I would go so far as to say that teacher candidates would not even have some of these professional opportunities available to them in a traditional practicum.

### **Ardavan**

In retrospect, at the core of navigating a pandemic and providing an alternative practicum experience is the importance of becoming comfortable with the unknown and accepting that we, as teacher educators and teachers in general, cannot control everything. This is part of embracing and enacting a socioculturally relevant and responsive pedagogy that centres the emotional and spiritual side of teaching and learning as a community of learners. The adapted practicum provided a unique experience where teacher candidates could practice skills (e.g., team teaching) in a low stakes environment where mistakes could be made and constructive feedback from multiple perspectives received. This month-long collaborative experience provided an opportunity for my teacher candidates to get to know their own strengths and skills while navigating challenging circumstances at home and in their communities. Was everyone happy with the experience? Probably not, but I think I pushed teacher candidates to grow in different ways by inviting new skills to their teaching toolbox. Above all else, I learned that good can emerge from the conditions created and perpetuated by the pandemic: making us, as teacher educators, and as a larger institution, reflect on who is disadvantaged in society and how we can support them at micro and macro levels to balance the playing field with respect to access to opportunities.

### **Christina P.**

I'm going to base my reflections on some of the points that Joanne and Ardavan have both articulated well. Joanne's recharacterization of the adapted practicum as a virtual professional experience is a game-changer in my mind. The discourse associated with the words and implicit meanings of "adapted practicum" conjures a practicum that is perhaps less than ideal. "Virtual professional experience" is more pointed—as a learning experience. Our teacher candidates' expectations of what a practicum experience entails are highly contextualized in their own enculturation and what they internalized as their personal grammar of schooling.

I think we have provided an exceptional "adapted" experience where teacher candidates were able to liaise with administrators and learn from education professionals, far beyond what they could access in a typical face-to-face, in-school practicum with a lone associate teacher. Reflecting on my own career trajectory, some teacher candidates may not yet realize in this early stage of their professional development how unique and privileged this experience was. I think that their understanding of the grammar of practicum is tied with interactions with actual students. I don't think we could replicate these interactions—but I feel our teacher candidates need to learn to think of the four practica more holistically and as threaded across the 2-year MT program rather than as a compartmentalized series of experiences.

## Carolyn

Over the years, while acting as a faculty advisor for my first-year teacher candidates during field placements, I have observed many factors that may support or hinder the process of becoming a teacher in the first practicum experience, 6 weeks into the MT program. Some of these may include the relationship with an associate teacher, the culture of HPE in a school community, the varied delivery models of the HPE program, and the range of courses, department dynamics, and student expectations. I have seen how these experiences can positively and/or negatively influence teacher candidates' confidence and enthusiasm for teaching in their process of becoming a teacher early on. Thus, this adapted practicum was positioned well, at the beginning of the sequence of practicum experiences across the MT program.

I can honestly say that this adapted practicum provided opportunities for my teacher candidates to engage fully with the HPE curriculum, deepen their content knowledge, think critically about current issues related to teaching HPE in diverse contexts, engage in courageous conversations to understand and appreciate different perspectives and the varied lived experiences of their students, begin to develop pedagogical content knowledge rooted in evidence-based research and resources, and foster a sense of hope and optimism for teaching HPE during a pandemic. I agree with you Christina P. that teacher candidates need to think more holistically about practicum and I believe this experience pushed us as teacher educators to consider new ways of thinking about scaffolding the experience for our teacher candidates.

## Cristina G.

Reflecting upon this practicum experience has yielded various themes related to my own growth as a teacher educator, not only in terms of the virtual format, but also about the powerful possibilities for colearning and collective growth. I agree with Joanne's points about the implications and depth of naming the practicum. This experience has reinforced my understanding of the richness that can come with learning-to-teach models. While the MT program officially referred to our experience as an *adapted* practicum (and sometimes a contingency plan), it was actually much more than that. As Christina P. mentions above, the notion of *adapted* seems to denote "below standard." However, as Joanne and others mention, this professional virtual experience provided us with room to delve into our own personal and professional networks to expand (and deepen) teacher candidates' professional development—beyond the scope of the MT program. By bringing in administrators, Indigenous knowledge guides, and school board trustees, we collectively created a village that added new dimensions to ITE. As teacher educators, we work among and between various communities, and build bridges between them. I still see this adapted practicum experience as a beautiful struggle because it took place within such tight timelines. It was also an act of love—one that created new ways of thinking about and doing the practicum experience.

## Concluding Reflections

Our experiences raise the viability of a nontraditional, virtual practicum, and invite us to consider how some of the strategies we applied might find their way into a nonpandemic field experience. Anonymized exit surveys collected from teacher candidates following the adapted practicum indicate that the focus on wellness practices as a common element was important to the majority of respondents. This finding aligns with our self-study reflections and collective

observations of teacher candidates and their expressed needs for self-care and emotional support (a) during the pandemic and (b) as a core of professional practice. Teacher candidates also viewed as important embedded opportunities for lesson planning and micro-teaching within their pod groupings. Such possibility spaces for teacher candidates to develop and practice pedagogy in virtual (a)synchronous settings may not be as available in traditional field experiences as they were in our adapted practicum. Prior to the pandemic, Ontario saw a 16% increase in students opting for some form of remote learning between 2011 and 2019 (CBC News, 2021). Given that virtual learning will persist postpandemic, practicum presents an opening to build teacher candidates' capacities to teach in virtual and hybrid settings—embedded opportunities that may not exist currently in some ITE programs.

We would like to end by acknowledging that vulnerability is a powerful and deliberate feature of self-study. In this chapter, we open our candid reflections on practice to the academic community and invite readers into our self-study process as collaborators and critical friends. Self-study demands an openness and interpretation that never entirely ends. As Berry and Russell (2016) write, “Personally and professionally, this is risky business” (p. 115). Yet we share this study to support a larger objective: to innovate normalized educational practices to better reflect the needs of our educational system, both during and postpandemic, and to ensure we support new teachers to advocate and enact equitable practices in their classrooms. Thus, this study will also be of interest to Bachelor of Education programs and other professional programs that include a practical component (e.g., social work, counselling) for exploring an alternative approach to experience practicum and the “learning-to-teach” process (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008).

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## **SECTION 4**

# **Equity Concerns**

## CHAPTER 18

### Changing Educational Landscapes and the Importance of Mental Well-Being in Teacher Education

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#### Abstract

The changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic both outside and inside spheres of education have been widely apparent during the past year. The pandemic, and resultant movement to online learning, heightened student stress, anxiety and worry, posing challenges on students' personal and professional development and well-being. At Lakehead University, Orillia, the pandemic—and the institution's response from in-person to online instruction—inspired new supports for our students' well-being, including initiatives that promote empathy, boost resiliency, and mitigate burnout. In this chapter, these initiatives and our intent to improve students' focus, sustain attention, reduce their stress and increase their compassion for self and others (Ireland et al., 2017; Kabat-Zinn, 2003b) will be discussed in greater detail. To gain insight into the student experience and better understand the effectiveness of these interventions, we utilized an annual student feedback survey, enacted to improve the preservice teacher experience. Feedback on the mindfulness programs was solicited within this questionnaire, allowing us to better understand student well-being and the potential of such initiatives to build students' stress resilience. In this questionnaire we inquired about students' general well-being, the impact of the pandemic on their personal and professional lives, the role of the university and its faculty as networks of support, the shift to online pedagogies, and our students' perspectives on potentials future and lasting trends in teacher education. Through these questions we garner a deeper understanding of the impact of the pandemic on our students, and the potential of mindfulness to support self-compassion and focus attention in online learning. This case study from the Faculty of Education at Lakehead Orillia illustrates some of the ways that we have designed for care during the pandemic; a snapshot of our students' situations and perspectives on our adaptations; and how mindfulness and social and emotional learning have played roles in moving our supports from the margins of the student experience to better support these transitions. Driven by a vision to improve our program through student involvement, understanding these nuances will help better address the diversity of student needs and provide valuable knowledge for other faculties of education with similar questions and situations.

*Keywords:* teacher education, student voice, mental well-being, mindfulness

#### Résumé

Les changements provoqués par la pandémie de la COVID-19 ont été largement évidents au cours de cette dernière année, tant à l'extérieur qu'à l'intérieur des domaines de l'éducation. La pandémie et la tendance qui en a résulté vers l'apprentissage en ligne ont aggravé chez l'étudiant et l'étudiante le stress, l'anxiété et l'inquiétude, ainsi posant des défis au développement personnel et professionnel et au bien-être des étudiants. À l'Université Lakehead à Orillia, la pandémie – et la réponse de l'établissement de l'enseignement en personne à l'enseignement en

ligne – a inspiré de nouveaux soutiens pour le bien-être de nos étudiants et étudiantes, y compris des initiatives qui favorisent l’empathie, renforcent la résilience et atténuent l’épuisement professionnel. Ces initiatives à l’intention d’améliorer la concentration des élèves, de maintenir leur attention, de réduire leur stress et d’accroître leur compassion envers eux-mêmes et les autres (Irlande et al., 2017 ; Kabat-Zinn, 2003b) seront examinées en détail. Nous avons utilisé un sondage annuel pour mieux comprendre l’expérience des étudiants et mieux comprendre l’efficacité de ces interventions avec l’intention d’améliorer l’expérience des étudiants en formation initiale d’enseignement. Les commentaires sollicités au sujet des programmes de pleine conscience dans ce questionnaire nous permet de mieux comprendre le bien-être des étudiants et le potentiel transformateur de telles initiatives à l’intention de renforcer le ressort au stress des élèves. Le questionnaire a fait enquête sur le bien-être général des étudiants, l’impact de la pandémie sur leur vie personnelle et professionnelle, le rôle de l’université et de ses professeurs en tant que réseaux de soutien, le passage aux pédagogies en ligne et le point de vue de nos étudiants quant à la possibilité de l’avenir de tendances durables de telles initiatives dans la formation des enseignants. Grâce à ces questions, nous obtenons une compréhension plus approfondie de l’impact de la pandémie sur nos étudiants et du potentiel de la pleine conscience à soutenir la compassion de soi-même et à concentrer leur attention à l’apprentissage en ligne. Cette étude de cas de la Faculté d’éducation de Lakehead Orillia illustre comment nous nous préoccupons aux soins conçues durant et pour la pandémie; un aperçu des situations de nos élèves et des perspectives sur nos adaptations ; et quel rôle ont joué la pleine conscience et l’apprentissage social et émotionnel dans le déplacement de nos soutiens des marges de l’expérience étudiante pour mieux soutenir ces transitions. Poussé par une vision visant à améliorer notre programme et grâce à la participation des étudiants, la compréhension de ces nuances aidera à mieux répondre à la diversité des besoins des étudiants et à fournir des connaissances précieuses pour d’autres facultés d’éducation ayant des questions et des situations semblables.

*Mots clés* : formation des enseignants, voix des élèves, bien-être mental, pleine conscience

## Introduction

It is both an understatement and a cliché to characterize the 2021 academic year as one like no other. Sudden health directives caused by the COVID-19 pandemic for physical distancing had implications for teaching and education, especially preservice teacher education, which in Canada is largely facilitated face-to-face in relatively small classrooms. At Lakehead University’s campus in Orillia, Ontario, it was a massive endeavour to shuffle over 400 teacher education students in the Professional Bachelor of Education Program (which we refer to as the Professional Program in this chapter) to a remote learning structure. As has been noted throughout this volume and elsewhere, the consequences and complexities associated with this sudden migration to remote learning have been intense and far-reaching (Burns et al. 2021; Hill et al., 2020; Van Nuland, 2020).

At Lakehead University, the spring 2020 migration to online learning happened very quickly. Within days, campuses were closed and students transitioned to distance modalities, uncertain of their progression through the preservice teaching program and the implications of elementary school closures for placement requirements. All the while our students (as well as staff and faculty) were processing the waves of emotion that accompany crisis. The further shift from emergency remote learning to intentional synchronous and asynchronous design will

require thoughtful foresight and planning, much of which at Lakehead has been informed by the student experience.

Several years ago, a group of faculty and students in the Professional Program launched a student experience initiative to better consider the emic perspective of teacher candidates, deepen the relationships with and among students, and implement strategies and supports to proactively meet students' anticipated needs. This inquiry project has been a 3-year endeavour involving many mechanisms for student input, engagement, and participation, but centred largely around an extensive annual questionnaire. In this chapter, we concentrate on the 2021 questionnaire, which was tailored to address the specificities of the online and pandemic circumstances. In particular, this chapter focuses on (a) our students' feedback on the online migration, and (b) the status of their mental health, as well as one particular strategy (mindfulness) we have begun to incorporate to respond to students' well-being needs.

We first provide some context of the Lakehead education program, the student experience project, and the methodology of the questionnaire, one that might invigorate a whole program effort to better respond to the real needs of preservice education students during the postpandemic recovery period and beyond. We hope to inspire readers to consider the student experience as a springboard through which meaning can be made and curricular, instructional and program changes can be enacted, and to conceive of the classroom, whether virtual or face-to-face, as a place that attends to the affective and noncognitive needs of students.

### **Conceptual Backdrop: Why Consider the Student Experience?**

Several conceptual influences underpin our interest in this project. We begin with a premise that care for students must be at the centre of teacher–student relationships, and that this care should be particular to the students' context. Following Noddings (1984), an individual's very identity is predicated on the set of relationships they have with other humans. Collectively, individuals can reach a level of “moral maturity” when both the self and the other are cared for. The thriving quotient, conceptualized by Schreiner (2010), provides insight into why tuning into the student experience and embedding noncognitive supports and scaffolds in the classroom impacts more than just learning and the development of empathy and care. Schreiner combines the perspectives of well-being with more traditional notions of postsecondary student success to tap into the academic, intrapersonal and interpersonal qualities that have proven to be malleable and correlated to students' grit and persistence. In this context, Schreiner suggests that “thriving” is a construct composed of engaged learning, academic determination, positive perspective, diverse citizenship, and social connectedness.

We also draw upon a Freirean framework of democracy and education in which power and voice might be transferred from teachers to learners in their educational situations. This approach comes from a long-standing tradition of progressive educational and philosophical thought that advocates for learners to be active in, responsive to, and critical of their curriculum (Dewey, 1923; Freire, 1972). Beyond tokenizing student participation in ways that might simply affirm the predetermined direction of an educational program, authentically seeking student voices aims to deeply understand the student experience across and through all aspects of the program. This notion has been explored in tertiary and teacher education programs where student participation can yield favourable outcomes, such as increased motivation for learning, improved mental health, and enhanced overall satisfaction with educational experiences (Bergan, 2003; Zeki & Güneyli, 2014).

A third influence is student development theory. The student development and persistence literature suggests that supporting students' social and intellectual growth will naturally lead to improved student retention. Student success leader Tinto (2012) has found that campus efforts that transcend the classroom and academic student experience have the unique potential to augment success, meeting students where they are most commonly—in the classroom. This need is heightened in a professional program that is composed largely of mature and commuter students. Zepke (2015) suggests that traditional views of student engagement are insufficient and narrow, encouraging us to consider the intersectionality of our students' lived experiences, including the social and cultural contexts that influence their experiences in higher education. Zepke's "critical sociocultural ecological perspective" (2015, p. 1312) is grounded in four assumptions: (a) student engagement occurs in a specific ideological climate; (b) engagement research that produces generic indicators of success must be questioned; (c) student engagement is situated within an ecology of social relations; and (d) critical holistic engagement research occupies a different pragmatic space—one that is emancipatory. Zepke suggests that whole campus efforts that seek to engage students in the process of informing curricular and pedagogical change must consider the ecology of the student experience. Common siloed approaches to postsecondary education rarely consider the totality of experience throughout the student lifecycle.

Similarly, the pedagogies used with our students must be developmentally appropriate for mature students. Unlike young learners, adult learners bring an existing foundation of knowledge and are typically more self-directed. Adults tend to choose their educational paths based on their interests and past experiences,, and look to be actively involved in their learning (see Knowles, 1978). From a socioemotional perspective, adult learners should seek tasks grounded in purpose and integrity, connecting their learning to their own behaviour, values, and hopes (Chickering, 1972). These important facets contribute to adult students' satisfaction and enjoyment in preservice education.

This recursive cycle of gauging students' needs and plotting instructional, pedagogical and curricular changes not only works to democratize preservice teaching and create a culture of student success, but also enables us, as educators, to model an ethos of care—an ethical standard that is foundational to good teaching (Ontario College of Teachers, 2021). By tuning into the student experience, awakening conscious empathy, and responding thoughtfully in a way that nurtures each student's well-being, we believe that our students will learn to care. This conceptual framework sets the stage for the research methodology and initiatives that ground this work in the student experience.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Teacher Education Program and Student Experience Project at Lakehead Orillia**

Lakehead University expanded its teacher education program in Thunder Bay with a second campus in downtown Orillia in 2006. The site of our program is on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Three Fires Confederacy peoples, land that was originally appropriated through the Williams Treaty. One distinction of our Professional Program has been its rapid and growth in enrollment. As the program first evolved from an extension of the courses provided in Thunder Bay, soon local full-time staff and faculty were hired and within 10 years student numbers surged to over 400. It was evident that the student body was not only becoming larger, but their program expectations, pedagogical experiences, and life circumstances were

becoming more diverse. No longer a small, tight-knit community where the pulse might be gauged informally, the larger numbers necessitated a more systematic approach to understanding overall student perceptions of the program.

In 2018 Gary pitched the creation of a student experience program with an overarching aim of understanding and improving the teacher education experience through student voice, feedback, and involvement. Since then the project has drawn upon numerous mechanisms to gain a broad representation of student perspectives, including informal conversations, straw polls, and brainstorming sessions about students' well-being, perceptions and experiences in our program. Applying a ground-up, grassroots philosophy, these activities involved professional program students, graduate students, sessional and contract instructors, full-time faculty, and program chairs. The project has been an ongoing and iterative effort to seek authentic participation, to involve students in curriculum and pedagogy decisions, and to enable the education program to respond to diverse learners. Over time the group has initiated numerous activities to support student experiences such as fitness clubs, healthy meal provision, and cohort community building. One such initiative began in the fall of 2019, embedding mindfulness activities across the program, and will be expanded on later in this chapter.

### **The Student Experience Questionnaire**

In 2019, the first iteration of a comprehensive annual questionnaire was administered and completed by students generating an overall response rate of 54%. As the student population grew, the questionnaire provided a more formal space for each student's voice to be heard, ultimately creating a knowledge base through which changes can be made and action taken. The 2021 questionnaire saw the highest participation numbers (191 students) of all 3 years. With a net enrolment of 483, this amounted to a completion rate of 40%. Of this sample, 74% of the respondents were first-year students and 26% were second-year. Students were recruited to complete the questionnaire (uploaded as a Google Form) in various ways, and a draw prizes were offered as incentives.

The 2021 questionnaire consisted of 100 mixed-method questions, divided into three main parts. Part I asked detailed questions about the courses, program, professional development, and our online migration. Part II solicited more general responses regarding students' perceptions of and experiences in the program. Part III invited students to share demographic responses, including such things as their personal and family circumstances, aspects of their identity, and their stage and involvement in the program. Closed-ended questions, many of which were Likert-style to enable the quantification of these data, were balanced with open-ended qualitative questions to provide opportunities for students to elaborate on previous questions. The questionnaire design allowed for connecting one response to another. For example, we could follow a student's response from a Likert-style question to other comments they provided later in the questionnaire. We could also match student perspectives with certain demographic questions and the ways they identify. To preserve the integrity of our student voices, their words are presented verbatim in this chapter.

The questions were designed carefully with specific attention to the nuances of our program and the overall objectives of teacher education in general. Anticipating the ways in which the pandemic might affect student well-being, we embedded questions inquiring about stress, ability to relax and the general impact of the pandemic on wellness. Among our questions was a small selection that we drew, verbatim, from another source for comparison. The Canadian Association for Mental Health (CAMH) has conducted a series of surveys to gauge Canadians'

mental health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. Fear of an “echo pandemic” on mental health and wellbeing has spurred many allied health professionals and educators to more deeply consider how they can better support well-being and promote health within the classroom. Their results have been astounding, showing that the pandemic has had a significant effect on the well-being of Canadians. In this chapter we present these results, and for comparison, alongside the findings from our research.

For the Likert-style and other closed-ended questions, we drew on quantitative methods of analysis. We began by generating descriptive statistics for the full sample of students surveyed. In subsequent phases, we disaggregated the data based on demographics, such as the students’ year in the program, the various ways in which students identified, students’ financial circumstances, and other aspects that might provide context to students’ experiences, perceptions and well-being. For this portion, we analyzed these subsets using SPSS v.26 statistical software, using t-tests and one-way analyses of variance to compare multiple groups on similar questions and determine the significance of responses between groups. For the open-ended responses, comments and elaborations on student perspectives, we drew on several qualitative methods. In our first scan of the data, we coded our data, observing the types of themes that emerged with and across questions related to student experiences. We sorted these data using both a priori and inductive codes, noting co-occurring codes and documenting factsheet codes that emerged during these processes. We looked for patterns, themes, reemerging ideas, commonalities and differences in student perceptions. In subsequent rounds of analysis, we conducted a more thorough, systematic analysis according to the selected themes and questions.

The demographics section of the questionnaire provided an overall snapshot of the makeup of our student body. In terms of gender, 80% identified as women, 12% as men, and 1% as another gender, and 7% either chose not to (an option for this question) or did not answer. In addition, 94% of our sample indicated they were born in Canada, and 93% named English as their first spoken language. As a condition of admission, all students in our program are pursuing their second degree. Almost one-quarter of students identified as living with a disability or health condition; 22% of students reported an invisible disability and 1% a visible disability ( $n = 177$ ). Only a small proportion of students identified as First Nations, Metis, or Inuit (2%) or a visible minority (8%). Clearly, these demographics suggest a large degree of cultural, gender, and racial homogeneity, with these and other forms of hegemonic positionality. Similarly, we identify as white, settler, cisgender educators.

## **Mental Well-Being Concerns**

A high percentage of students (65%) reported having suffered physical or mental health crises, which is of great concern to us as a faculty. Research elsewhere has demonstrated that mental health issues disproportionately affect underrepresented groups in Canada and abroad. This dimension of well-being is of interest to us as well; however, due to the disproportionately low numbers of students in the program that identify as BIPOC, our research did not permit the development of such findings with any degree of certainty. While measuring students’ well-being during the pandemic, we concurrently worked to embed strategies to potentially mitigate burnout, build resilience, and cultivate empathy. Our institution’s shift from in-person to online instruction inspired new ways of providing this support and, in many ways, reduced the barriers to providing well-being education. While participating in the student experience project, Sarah has also been leading a study funded by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada exploring the role of mindfulness in building resilience and empathy and mitigating



healthcare worker burnout during the pandemic. Constantly curious about the dose-relationship of mindfulness, Sarah wondered if embedding even small amounts of mindfulness in the preservice education program could move the needle on well-being.

### **What Is Mindfulness?**

Jon Kabat-Zinn (2003a, 2003b), the founder of mindfulness-based stress reduction, describes mindfulness as paying attention to the present moment in a particular way, purposefully and without judgement. This secular understanding of mindfulness as an attention and acceptance-based practice guides and informs our practice as practitioners and educators. Our focus was on introducing the basics of mindfulness as a self-care strategy and providing opportunities for supported continued practice. Deborah Schoeberlein (2009) suggests that teaching mindfulness builds students' capacity to "exercise simple, practical, and universal attention skills" (p. 1). By teaching students' mindfulness, our aim was not only to cultivate their ability to pay attention, but also to scaffold the development of social and emotional intelligence, including self-awareness, self-management and social awareness (Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning, 2020). This approach of threading mindfulness into the preservice teacher program served to model how we care for ourselves and for our students, encouraging our students to become caring educators by being cared for (Noddings, 2005).

In response to mounting stress levels even prior to COVID-19, we considered the different ways we could provide holistic opportunities for well-being amid the new pressures presented by the pandemic. First, we provided an Introduction to Mindfulness workshop during a mandatory professional development session, which introduced students to the concept of secular mindfulness, the importance of and connection to self-care and provided practice strategies for students to enact. This workshop was hosted by Sarah and the founder of Mindfulness Without Borders, Theo Koffler, in an effort to professionalize the opportunity and introduce students to the ways in which mindfulness is being used in educational settings across the world. Further, this session unpacked the misconception that mindfulness is synonymous with meditation and that it leads to feelings of bliss; rather, mindfulness can be integrated in daily life by paying attention with attention and it is not about feeling a certain way, it's about developing an understanding of how you feel, without judgement. Following the workshop, select classes embedded mindfulness practices, and a virtual gathering called Mindful Midweek was offered to all Lakehead Orillia Professional Program students. Furthermore, the link between mindfulness and social and emotional learning was made in a mandatory first-year course to help teacher candidates better understand the potential of mindfulness to support student learning by improving focus, sustaining attention, awakening resilience, and increasing their compassion for self and others (Kabat-Zinn, 2003a; Schoeberlein, 2009).

### **Findings**

The student experience study generated vast findings, the depth and breadth of which cannot be done justice in this chapter. Here, we focus on the mental health and well-being of our respondents and then reveal specific subthemes that illustrate the range of experiences in the preservice education program: (a) lack of social connections, (b) frustrations with learning online and how online learning diminishes the value of the experience, (c) associated financial stressors, and (d) the direct effects of COVID-19.

## Mental Health and Well-being

Examining our teacher candidates' responses to the identical questions from the CAMH study, our research found that our preservice teaching students were significantly more likely,  $t(260.19) = -10.78, p \leq .001$ , than the CAMH sample to feel nervous, anxious, or on edge. Furthermore, teacher candidates were significantly more likely,  $t(258.71) = -9.62, p \leq .001$ , than the CAMH group to feel that they had trouble relaxing. Notably, there were significant differences between first-year and second-year student teachers—namely, the first-years were significantly more likely to feel nervous or on edge,  $t(177.76) = -10.67, p \geq .001$ , and more likely to feel that they had trouble relaxing,  $t(132) = -11.45, p \geq .001$ . Overall, 90% of the students surveyed said the pandemic had had a significant impact on their personal life (60% strongly agreed and 31% agreed), and 72% felt that COVID-19 had negatively impacted their personal well-being.

To better understand why students were feeling this degree of anxiety, we turned to the qualitative data in our questionnaire and found that students offered a noteworthy range of reasons for their feelings. In Table 3, we share illustrative selections of the feedback we received from students about their experiences. As we coded and sorted these qualitative responses, we found that they clustered into five categories. Of the 68 students who commented, 31 spoke about the perils of social isolation, 17 about stresses related to the quality of education, 14 about financial strain, and six about health concerns. These student narratives shed light on the depth and breadth of concerns that have caused mounting stress, tension and anxiety, many of which we feel can be better supported through instructional, pedagogical, curricular and institutional changes.

## Intersecting Dimensions of Our Students' Experiences

Certain connections emerged when we began examining broader trends. Almost two-thirds of respondents (65%) reported feeling disconnected from their peers since Lakehead migrated to fully online courses (i.e., that proportion of students either agreed or strongly agreed with that statement). This alone may not be a cause of anxiety, as many students prefer learning independently, even in person. However, much educational research points to the importance of learning with and through others, for example, the impact of developing relationships with peers in the learning process and the social enactment of learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

Learning is also affected by the lack of the more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978); for example, when mature learners share their perspectives and experiences, this knowledge base augments the learning of others. Our Professional Program students concurred, with the large majority (87%) either strongly agreeing or agreeing that “connections with peers are an important part of my learning experience.” A very small proportion (1%) disagreed. Students gave examples of aspects that would be routine in person, such as having opportunities to socialize after class; choosing partners in group projects when they do not know each other that well; and simply seeing people in person on a regular basis.

The financial costs are a burden for our students, with two out of every three students (66%) reporting they received Ontario Student Assistance Program loans for the program. A similar proportion of students (69%) disclosed that they had at least one part-time job outside this program, with most (60%) working at least 5 hours per week. The many stressors associated with financial burdens were exacerbated by the economic downturn as a result of the pandemic and our students are no exception to these circumstances.

**Table 3**  
*A Range of Student Experiences*

| Experience                         | Participant quotes   |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Social isolation                   | <p>Social connection is something I am missing. Although we are able to communicate through online platforms, face-to-face contact, getting up and driving to school, socializing before and after class are things I am missing and that have impacted my wellbeing as a student.</p> <p>I feel as though my personal relationships have dealt with more strain as a result of seeing only a few people constantly. I also just feel isolated as the majority of the connection I have is through technology, which, while better than nothing, is certainly not an adequate replacement for in-person connections.</p> |
| Frustrations about learning online | <p>Had I known I would be sitting for hours on end on a computer, it feels like a lot.... Being on the computer all day and then having to be on the computer more for assignments and homework gives me constant migraines and my physical health has suffered from it.</p> <p>Zoom and online learning are all very new to me, so jumping into a fully online environment was very difficult.</p>  |
| Concern about value of experience  | <p>I've struggled with not having placement due to COVID last term. I feel as though I've fallen behind my peers that were lucky to get placements. I feel like I'm not able to properly practice things I learn in class and am feeling disheartened.</p> <p>Learning online is difficult because I am more of a hands on learner. I have also found group projects difficult as we have never met people and it sometimes makes picking a group difficult.</p> <p>Since I live far away and haven't been able to work for about a year due to COVID, financially, online school would be more convenient.</p>          |
| Financial strain                   | <p>It has put a financial strain due to job insecurity, and then increases stress to be able to afford necessities for school: rent, food, textbooks, supplies, etc.</p>   |
| Health concerns                    | <p>My grandmother died from Covid in April. It's also been really hard not being able to see my family or friends.</p> <p>Mentally and physically. Covid put me in the hospital for three days.</p>  |

For many students, these pressures have been compounded by others. Some students have had family members contract COVID-19. Some students recognized that being inside in front of a computer for protracted periods of time was taking its toll. With preservice courses offered during the day, certain unintended and gendered consequences have emerged, as the only time to get outside is after classes when it is dark and unsafe. The following comment illustrates the degree to which all of these intersecting factors have affected one student's life:

I live in an area of Orillia where I do not feel comfortable walking alone. I only get fresh air and exercise when I decide to drive to somewhere that I feel comfortable walking. I

have an extremely small space that I now spend 7 days a week in. I had to quit my job because of the demand of this program, and I now have financial stress. The only times I speak with others is during class time. I have found all of these have negatively impacted my mental health and my productivity. Some professors have been extremely accommodating at understanding that zoom fatigue and being online for an extended period of time is exhausting and difficult, but some have not been accommodating whatsoever.

Although many consequences of COVID-19 are beyond our reach, students in this study reported a number of aspects related to our program delivery. In online learning, students expressed general frustration in (the amount of time spent) using technology, and specifically navigating our online platforms, retrieving the appropriate links for Zoom meetings, and exceeding storage capacities on their own computers. Given the practical aspect of education programs, students also reflected on their placement experiences. Many students were not able to be placed and so they did not feel like they were getting the experience they had hoped for. For those who were placed, despite the Lakehead courses being online, their school placements were in-person in new social bubbles, putting them at direct risk of contracting COVID-19. The potential physical consequences of the disease have added to the psychological burden of worrying about getting it. Overall, students shared their anxiety around the general uncertainty over what is going to happen next.

### Discussion

The finding that our students are significantly more likely to experience consequences associated with COVID-19 speaks volumes about the specific circumstances of preservice teacher education. But, *why* do our students feel anxious, nervous, edgy or unrelaxed in such high numbers? What has contributed to teacher education students experiencing these feelings and to this degree? Is there something that makes this group unique compared to the general population? Our experiences teaching in the preservice program suggest that many students who choose to pursue teaching tend to have a high degree of social and emotional intelligence, and be empathetic, intuitive, and sensitive toward others. It follows that this group might also lack *self*-empathy and *self*-compassion, factors proven to mitigate burnout and boost resiliency (Neff, 2011) and thus be sensitive to the consequences of COVID-19, such as social isolation, detriments to mental health, and the illness's effects on the most vulnerable members of society.

A consecutive education program is a relatively high-stakes investment. Rather than just a year of one's life, as it was up until 2014 in Ontario, a 2-year undergraduate program is a significant commitment in terms of the time, effort, financial, and opportunity costs involved. Many students return to school, give up careers, or sacrifice families or other aspects of their lives to pursue this degree. Indeed, as our questionnaire showed, about one-third of the respondents embodied the characteristics of mature students: 35% were 25 years or older; 29% had had a career before the Professional Program; and 17% had at least one child, parent, or another person at home they were caring for. Returning to school after some time can be unsettling or anxiety-provoking. Often at a new institution, students are unfamiliar with the setting and may feel distanced from the culture and routines of tertiary education. Some students may feel unsure of their decision to return to school, while others may struggle with balancing their studies with their home and/or family commitments. Furthermore, institutional student services are most often geared toward first-year students who are at the greatest risk of attrition.

However, our findings revealed that students in professional programs, such as teacher education, have had mounting needs during the COVID-19 pandemic that are likely not so different from students who are transitioning into higher education. These issues, coupled with a lack of formal support, might add to the intensity of the experience and the anxiety it provokes. The student development literature, student affairs practitioners and postsecondary institutions tend to place great emphasis on supporting students' transition into higher education. While the most emphasis is placed on students' transition from high school or the workforce into higher education, our experience and survey findings suggest that their transition into the preservice teaching program is just as worthy of consideration, both in terms of faculty intentionality and student support services.

Furthermore, our findings suggest that students in the preservice teaching program at Lakehead "feel the weight" of the pandemic more than the general population. It is likely that our first-year students have had more trouble relaxing, anxiety, nervousness, and feeling on edge compared to second-year students because they did not have an in-person experience to support their orientation and transition into the program. The preservice teacher program's demands and expectations are vastly different from those of many undergraduate programs and pose a steep learning curve for many students. The added pressures resulting from the pandemic have drastically altered many students' housing and employment plans, factors that have likely affected their student experience and impacted their ability to learn and engage fully.

Students in preservice teaching also go into schools for placement. For many, this has meant an in-person, frontline experience during a pandemic, posing health and well-being concerns, despite the potential for a rich teaching experience. Those on placement have also felt the burden of responsibility, worrying for the health and well-being of the young public school students in their care. For those without a placement, however, the lack of in-class experience has presented its own worry and concern.

Our students have learned alongside us, their faculty, as "many teachers had hoped to teach about the crisis remotely but wound up doing more crisis teaching, remotely" (Shuttleworth, 2020). It is of the utmost importance that teacher education programs work to create the conditions for learning by attending to their students' physiological, emotional and affective needs. Almost two-thirds of students in the professional education program found that, generally speaking, the Faculty of Education did a good job of migrating to online learning during the pandemic (65% agreed or strongly agreed with a related statement, and less than 5% strongly disagreed with that statement).

### **The Future of Teacher Education Delivery**

One contribution of our student experience project has been to inform programmatic decisions on the future of course delivery, pedagogical choices, and the approaches we take with our students. One question we ask is whether, despite the challenges and concerns, it makes sense for our program to remain online, or perhaps to continue as a blended model? Interestingly, when asked about their pedagogical preferences for after pandemic restrictions are eased, students' leading response was to "remain all online" (43% of students on a question that allowed for multiple responses). To test these waters, we also asked about courses being held outdoors; however, this garnered the fewest number of positive responses (10%). As one student noted, "I would have originally wanted classes outdoors or in-person again. However, financially and logistically it makes more sense for me to stay where I am currently and finish the final year out online than moving to Orillia for a few months of the year." When asked about what type of

online learning, the largest group of students (33%) responded with “mostly synchronous with some asynchronous.” A similar number (29%) suggested an “even blend of synchronous and asynchronous.”

There are other factors that should be addressed to attend to the affective needs of our students more keenly. Although student services provide numerous supports, our preservice teaching program is housed off-campus, traditionally disconnected from the larger “main” campus. Students in preservice teaching tend to not be high student service users. Perhaps they feel disconnected from the main campus, or the program’s time demands and professional expectations impede their ability or likelihood to reach out for support. Students in the Professional Program may not view these services as meeting their unique needs as apprentices of teaching and their use of student services should be further explored.

Our findings also highlight the critical importance of embedding care as a pedagogical priority. The ethos of care that accompanies the profession naturally transcends the classroom, as by caring for our students, we seek to produce competent people who have the capacity to care for and love others (Noddings, 2005, p. 174). We also know that this care goes a very long way in creating the conditions for learning. As bell hooks (1994) says, “to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (p. 13). In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have felt a greater pull to design a learning environment that anticipates our students’ social and emotional needs, and, in doing so, wondered whether we might better teach the ethos of care required to change the educational landscape postpandemic.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

In a nonpandemic world, education for K–12 teaching is a complex prospect. Packaging a comprehensive program to orient preservice teachers on child development, classroom management, planning, assessment and social justice (to name a few), to provide professional development on educational policies and practices, and to provide specific instruction in the broad range of elementary school subjects is a tall order. There are also the pressures of applying the theory learned in teacher education to practice in teaching placements. These pressures mount on top of any personal circumstances that students bring to this education. Students feel these demands in various ways, and, as illustrated in this chapter, the pandemic situation has only exacerbated these factors.

In this chapter, we have sought to illustrate the particular weight of the pandemic on students in the Lakehead Professional Program in Orillia. Clearly, students at Lakehead are dealing with anxiety and pressures from numerous stressors, parsed out to various groups. These stressors include lack of social connections, financial strain, educational frustrations, technical anxieties and direct impacts of COVID-19. Our findings suggest that we need to continue to deepen the ways we care for our students. However, following Noddings (1984), this care should be bidirectional, whereby students and instructors care both for themselves and for each other. Weaving together theories of democratic education, student development, and ethics of care, we propose embedding mindfulness, or other social and emotional learning in preservice teacher education programs. In our program, Sarah initiated a training workshop for all students and a weekly mindfulness drop-in program to support continued practice. Equally influential, as many of our faculty do, is to implement mindfulness in an allocated teaching time. This approach gives all students access to the benefits of mindfulness, without needing to spend a lot of extra time and coordination, regardless of their prior experience, skill, or initiative.

On one level, as a response to the high rates of anxiety among our students, these initiatives taken by faculty to implement mindfulness in their own classes and spheres are wonderful strategies to cultivate students' ability to orientate to their external environment and cultivate internal awareness by anchoring to breath. One concurrent study is showing the ability of small doses of mindfulness to mitigate burnout, improve self-empathy and boost resiliency (Hunter et al., 2021) and as such even brief practices should be considered a valuable skill for apprentices of teaching. Many instructors in our faculty and in other faculties of education across the country are excellent at incorporating these approaches. However, the student experience transcends these individual courses, encompassing their experiences in a larger, constructed system of eight or nine courses, professional development, and in-school placements. The added dimensions and weight of the combination of these responsibilities suggest that we can do much more within the structure of the education program to mitigate sources of student anxiety, beyond providing mindfulness responses in an individual, piece-meal fashion. While there are many things out of the faculty's control, there are many programmatic aspects that an attuned faculty team can modify to ease pandemic stress, such as ensuring a coordinated program, applying accessible online pedagogies, and setting reasonable expectations for the amount of time students commit to online learning.

All of these inputs should reflect the context of students at their appropriate, adult stage of learning, through relativist, choice-based content that connects to the prior knowledge and experiences of the learners with purpose and integrity. Structurally, this includes conducting a comprehensive examination of what our students are experiencing as they move through our education program. This should include holistic strategies to both thoughtfully consider how the program's expectations affect mental well-being and incorporate accessible opportunities for students to practice self-care and care for others. Along the way, we need to continue to invite students to offer their voices to their education in meaningful ways.

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## CHAPTER 19

### Preservice Teacher Thriving Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: Program Lessons Learned Under Siege

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#### Abstract

In spring 2020, Canadian teacher education programs shifted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As B.Ed. programs moved online and remote learning took hold, teacher candidates faced unprecedented programmatic changes and unexpected challenges. In this chapter, we present data from a cross-sectional mixed-methods survey capturing prepandemic (2019,  $n = 215$ ) and midpandemic (2020,  $n = 204$ ) samples to examine the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the relative thriving of teacher candidates in one Ontario B.Ed. program. Thriving is understood as students' holistic (social, emotional, physical, cognitive, and spiritual) experience of optimal functioning within the context of their higher education program of study. Analysis of pre- and midpandemic samples revealed a significant decrease in teacher candidates' comprehensive thriving and indicated that students' ability to thrive within teacher education is mediated by personal, relational, programmatic, and institutional elements. Findings from this study call for a timely and targeted effort on the part of leaders and other educational stakeholders to support teacher candidate thriving within their programs of study. These findings also invite those in leadership positions to consider the following questions: How can faculties of education support students on individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels? What have we learned throughout the pandemic about student needs and their ability to thrive that can be applied to postpandemic teacher education programs? With vaccine rollout underway across Canada, the return to on-site teaching and learning is a realistic possibility for the near future. This shift should not be viewed as a mere reversal in programming but rather as an opportunity to (re)envision, (re)assess, and (re)establish goals that set a new equitable, accessible, and caring benchmark for future teacher education—one that recognizes the importance of facilitating student thriving by enhancing access to supports and reducing barriers that inhibit teacher candidates' ability to thrive.

*Keywords:* student thriving, positive functioning, student success, student wellness, teacher education, COVID-19 pandemic

#### Résumé

Au printemps 2020, et en réponse à la pandémie de la COVID-19, les programmes de formation des enseignants canadiens ont changé. Alors que les programmes de baccalauréat en éducation se déplacent en ligne et que l'apprentissage à distance prenait racine, les candidats à l'enseignement ont été confrontés à des changements sans précédent en programmation et à des défis inattendus. Dans ce chapitre, nous présentons les données d'une étude transversale à méthodes mixtes qui ont été obtenues par des échantillons pré-pandémiques (2019,  $n = 215$ ) et mi-pandémiques (2020,  $n = 204$ ) afin d'examiner les effets de la pandémie de la COVID-19 sur l'épanouissement relatif des candidats à l'enseignement dans un programme de baccalauréat

en enseignement. Dans le contexte de ce chapitre, on comprend < épanouissement > en voulant dire l'expérience holistique (sociale, émotionnelle, physique, cognitive et spirituelle) optimale des étudiants dans le contexte de leur programme d'études d'enseignement supérieur. L'analyse d'échantillons avant et mi-pandémie a révélé une diminution significative de l'épanouissement complet des candidats à l'enseignement et indiquerait que la capacité des étudiants à s'épanouir au sein de la formation des enseignants est médiée par les éléments personnels, relationnels, programmatique et institutionnels. Les résultats de cette étude appellent à un effort opportun et ciblé de la part des dirigeants et des autres intervenants en éducation à pouvoir aider les candidats à l'enseignement à s'épanouir dans leurs programmes d'études. Ces résultats invitent également ceux qui occupent des postes de direction à se poser les questions suivantes : Comment les facultés d'éducation peuvent-elles soutenir les étudiants aux niveaux individuel, interpersonnel et institutionnel ? Qu'avons-nous appris au cours de la pandémie sur les besoins des élèves et de leur capacité à s'épanouir qui pourrait être appliqué aux programmes de formation des enseignants au delà de la pandémie ? Avec le déploiement du vaccin en marche à travers le Canada, le retour à l'enseignement et à l'apprentissage sur place est une possibilité réaliste dans un avenir proche. Le revirement ne devrait pas être considéré un simple renversement de la programmation, mais plutôt un moment propice pour (ré)envisager, (ré)évaluer et (ré)établir les objectifs qui favorisent un standard équitable, accessible et bienveillante pour l'avenir de la formation des enseignants—un programme qui reconnaît l'importance de faciliter l'épanouissement des élèves en améliorant l'accès aux soutiens et en réduisant les obstacles qui empêchent aux étudiants à s'épanouir sans inhibition.

*Mots clés* : épanouissement des élèves, fonctionnement positif, réussite des étudiants, mieux-être des élèves, formation des enseignants, pandémie de la COVID-19

## Introduction

In 2020, Canadian universities were forced to respond to the emerging impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring B.Ed. programs to make sudden but necessary changes to the way that preservice teacher education was delivered and supported. Throughout the pandemic, teacher candidates have faced unanticipated challenges and uncertainty in terms of program delivery and practicum-based learning experiences (Association of Canadian Deans of Education, 2020). These challenges affected teacher candidates' learning lives as they progressed through a hastily adapted preservice teacher education program in a remote and isolated fashion. In Ontario, Canada, teacher candidates most often enter B.Ed. programs having completed or as ongoing part of an undergraduate degree or, much less frequently, from a workplace or college program. With the recent expansion of teacher education from a 1- to 2-year program and the pandemic having spanned most of 2 consecutive years, a cohort of teachers entering the profession have primarily learned to teach in the pandemic context and have experienced little of what might be considered a traditional teacher education program. Even at the best of times, preservice programs present unique challenges for those enrolled. Although enjoyable and fulfilling for most teacher candidates, the experience of teacher education can be isolating, frustrating, a culture shock, and often the first glimpse of what future teaching practice will be like (Soleas, 2015; Soleas & Hong, 2020). The pandemic made it such that the emotional highs and lows of preservice teacher education took place in a vacuum, filled with “pivoting” surprises and rapid changes in policy and structure. In this chapter, we explore the effects of these unexpected changes and challenges on the relative thriving of teacher candidates in one B.Ed. program in Ontario.

In recent years, the notion of thriving has received increased attention among scholars interested in understanding and supporting optimal functioning across individuals' lifespan (e.g., Benson & Scales, 2009; Nesbitt, 2019; Schreiner, 2013; Spreitzer et al., 2005). Perceived as more than merely surviving (Meuleman et al., 2015; Schreiner, 2010b), thriving is a dynamic process that involves a bidirectional relationship between individuals and the developmental context, including people and places (Benson & Scales, 2009). Within the context of higher education, a focus on thriving draws attention to the experiences of students, including those enrolled in B.Ed. programs, within the context of their programs of study and institutions, more generally. Spreitzer et al. (2005) describe thriving as an individual's experience of a joint sense of vitality and learning within a social context. Arguing that there is more to a successful higher education experience than grades and graduation, Schreiner (2010a) defines a thriving student as someone who is "fully engaged intellectually, socially, and emotionally" (p. 4). Within the context of graduate and professional programs, student thriving can be understood as a holistic and multidimensional construct and has been shown to involve the experience of achieving, engaging, connecting, balancing, enjoying, and being (Coe-Nesbitt et al., 2021; Soleas et al., in press). Drawing on these various understandings, we define thriving as a student's holistic (social, emotional, physical, cognitive, spiritual) experience of optimal functioning within the context of their higher education program of study (Coe-Nesbitt et al., 2021). In this chapter, we focus on students' thriving within the context of preservice teacher education to examine the ways that the pandemic has impacted their experience.

### **Methodology**

In this chapter, we examine the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the relative thriving of teacher candidates in one Ontario B.Ed. program, drawing on teacher candidate data collected in 2019 and 2020. This research is part of a larger, ongoing study of graduate and professional student thriving and well-being. After we obtained university research ethics clearance, the sample institution's graduate and professional student society agreed to aid in survey dissemination. The mixed-methods survey integrated 61 Likert questions and five open-response items to provide a comprehensive set of snapshots tracking the effects of the pandemic at different times during the study session, as well as a cohort of students thriving through the pandemic. Surveys were distributed via email and social media to graduate and professional students, including the subset of teacher candidates in the Faculty of Education. Respondents completed online questionnaires consisting of demographic questions, quantitative items, and open-ended questions. In this chapter, we present data from a cross-sectional survey capturing prepandemic (2019,  $n = 215$ ) and midpandemic (2020,  $n = 204$ ) samples of teacher candidates.

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

Quantitative responses from the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS to determine if there were differences between the pre- and midpandemic samples using multivariate analysis of variance to compare means and isolate differences. Cohen's  $d$  effect sizes were calculated to illustrate the magnitude of differences. Results display the  $F$  statistic, degrees of freedom, the  $p$  value, and the effect size (Cohen's  $d$ ) preceding the calculated means and standard deviations for each subconstruct. The 61 Likert items were adapted and modified from the following: (a) perceived autonomy support learning-climate questionnaire (Black & Deci, 2000), adapted for the graduate education setting (15 items); (b) perceived competence scale (Williams & Deci,

1996), adapted to the graduate education setting (four items); and (c) comprehensive inventory of thriving (Su et al., 2014), with the autonomy and competence questions judiciously replaced with questions from the above instruments (42 items). Internal consistencies were run on all instruments using Cronbach's alphas as a means of demonstrating trustworthiness (see Table 4).

**Table 4**

*Internal Consistencies of the Instruments*

| Time        | Autonomy | Competence | Thriving |
|-------------|----------|------------|----------|
| Prepandemic | 0.91     | 0.93       | 0.89     |
| Midpandemic | 0.94     | 0.94       | 0.88     |

### Qualitative Data Analysis

All survey participants were invited to respond to two open-ended questions asking them to identify specific supports and barriers impacting their ability to thrive within their program of study: What are some of the specific supports that help you thrive in your program of study? What are some of the specific barriers that negatively impact your ability to thrive in your program of study? Fall 2020 survey participants were asked to respond to a supplemental pandemic-specific question: In what ways (if any) has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your ability to thrive as a graduate or professional student? Open-ended responses from the identified survey questions were thematically analyzed (Braun & Clarke, 2019) using a multistage, systematic approach that combined both inductive and deductive analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2015). To ensure consistency of approach, research team members met at each stage of analysis to collaboratively code and to discuss and consolidate preliminary findings and to construct a shared understanding of the qualitative data based on 100% consensus.

### Results

The results are presented in a nested mixed-methods design in which quantitative trends are illustrated and then explored using the qualitative themes. The exploration of the qualitative themes offers insight into the significant changes in thriving, as reported within the quantitative data, observed among teacher candidates during the pandemic.

### Overall Quantitative Results and Qualitative Findings

Overall, the quantitative analysis, using analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistical tests showed differences between teacher candidates' pre- and midpandemic thriving. Using an aggregated measure (a calculated average of all other subscales), an ANOVA test showed that comprehensive thriving decreased ( $F = 57.97$ ,  $df = 1,637$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = 0.61$ ) between the prepandemic ( $m = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 0.34$ ) and midpandemic ( $m = 3.39$ ,  $SD = 0.32$ ) samples. Table 5 provides an overview of the reported contributors to this trend. In alignment with the nested design of the study, these results will be examined further alongside the qualitative data.

Qualitative analysis revealed three overarching themes emerging from the data: individual supports and barriers; interpersonal supports and barriers; and institutional supports and barriers. Within each theme, two dominant categories ( $N = 6$ ) became apparent, each capturing various elements perceived by participants as supporting and/or hindering their ability to thrive within their B.Ed. (see Table 6). The emerging themes and related supports and barriers

are further explored alongside related quantitative data to provide a nested examination of the data.

**Table 5**

*Overview of Quantitative Measures and Results*

| Construct              | Prepandemic |           | Midpandemic |           | Change    |
|------------------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-----------|
|                        | <i>M</i>    | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>    | <i>SD</i> |           |
| Comprehensive thriving | 3.59        | .34       | 3.39        | .32       | Decreased |
| Skills                 | 3.57        | .78       | 3.55        | .73       | Decreased |
| Competence             | 6.32        | 1.26      | 6.19        | 1.32      | No change |
| Self-efficacy          | 3.89        | .63       | 4.09        | .60       | Increased |
| Engagement             | 3.23        | .75       | 3.52        | .66       | Increased |
| Accomplishment         | 3.97        | .69       | 3.63        | .66       | Decreased |
| Meaning                | 3.79        | .76       | 3.12        | .63       | Decreased |
| Optimism               | 4.00        | .72       | 3.72        | .55       | Decreased |
| Life satisfaction      | 3.67        | .84       | 3.29        | .56       | Decreased |
| Positive feelings      | 3.73        | .92       | 3.19        | .69       | Decreased |
| Self-worth             | 4.10        | .55       | 3.83        | .50       | Decreased |
| Lack of control        | 2.13        | .73       | 2.36        | .66       | Increased |
| Negative feelings      | 1.97        | .64       | 2.34        | .69       | Increased |
| Relationship           | 4.08        | .59       | 4.41        | .50       | Increased |
| Community              | 3.84        | .62       | 3.37        | .63       | Decreased |
| Loneliness             | 2.55        | .86       | 3.20        | .97       | Increased |
| Trust                  | 3.78        | .75       | 3.52        | .65       | Decreased |
| Respect                | 4.01        | .52       | 3.76        | .41       | Decreased |
| Autonomy support       | 4.53        | 1.36      | 3.90        | 1.42      | Decreased |

**Table 6**

*Overview of the Overarching Themes and Categories Emerging From Qualitative Analysis*

| Overarching theme               | Category  |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Individual supports/barriers    | Holistic well-being<br>Financial stability              |
| Interpersonal supports/barriers | Informal relationships<br>Formal relationships          |
| Institutional supports/barriers | Academic and wellness resources<br>Academic programming |

## Individual Supports and Barriers to Teacher Candidate Thriving

This section presents quantitative results related to individual supports and barriers, followed by an exploration of this theme based on the qualitative findings. Participants identified several supports and barriers unique to their individual experiences and circumstances within the B.Ed. program. Categories within this theme included students' holistic well-being and financial stability.

### *Quantitative Trends Related to Individual Supports and Barriers*

The quantitative trends showed that individual measures of teacher candidates' thriving tended to decrease, with some notable exceptions (engagement, skills, self-efficacy), when compared between the pre- and midpandemic samples (see Table 7).

Perceived skill level did not statistically change ( $F = 0.11$ ,  $df = 1,637$ ,  $p = .73$ ) between the prepandemic ( $m = 3.57$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ) and midpandemic samples ( $m = 3.55$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ). Similarly, perceived competence did not change statistically ( $F = 1.61$ ,  $df = 1,637$ ,  $p = .20$ ) between the prepandemic ( $m = 6.32$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ) and midpandemic samples ( $m = 6.19$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ). However, reported self-efficacy increased ( $F = 16.71$ ,  $df = 1,637$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = 0.33$ ) between the prepandemic ( $m = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ) and midpandemic ( $m = 4.09$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ) samples. Perceived level of engagement with the program increased ( $F = 26.48$ ,  $df = 1,637$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ) between the prepandemic ( $m = 3.23$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ) and midpandemic ( $m = 3.52$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ) samples.

**Table 7**

*Overview of the Prevailing Trends Emerging From Quantitative Analysis*

| Direction of change | Constructs  |
|---------------------|---|
| Increased           | Relationships<br>Loneliness<br><br>Self-efficacy<br>Perceived lack of control<br>Optimism<br>Life satisfaction<br>Negative feelings               |
| Did not change      | Engagement<br>Perceived skills<br>Perceived competence  |
| Decreased           | Community<br><br>Trust<br>Respect<br>Accomplishment<br>Self-worth<br>Meaning<br>Positive feelings<br>Comprehensive thriving<br>Perceived autonomy |

Individual sense of thriving measures decreased in the aggregate. Teacher candidates' reported feelings of accomplishment decreased ( $F = 40.11$ ,  $df = 1,637$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = 0.50$ ) between the prepandemic ( $m = 3.97$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ) and midpandemic ( $m = 3.63$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ) samples. Teacher candidates' perceived meaning in life decreased ( $F = 144.10$ ,  $df = 1,637$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = 0.96$ ) between the prepandemic ( $m = 3.79$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ) and midpandemic ( $m = 3.12$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ) samples. Reported optimism decreased ( $F = 29.62$ ,  $df = 1,637$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = 0.44$ ) between the prepandemic ( $m = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 0.72$ ) and midpandemic ( $m = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ) samples. Life satisfaction decreased ( $F = 43.63$ ,  $df = 1,637$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = 0.53$ ) between the prepandemic ( $m = 3.67$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ) and midpandemic ( $m = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ) samples. Positive feelings decreased ( $F = 68.46$ ,  $df = 1,637$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = 0.66$ ) between the prepandemic ( $m = 3.73$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ) and midpandemic ( $m = 3.19$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ) samples. Self-worth decreased ( $F = 41.57$ ,  $df = 1,637$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ,  $d = 0.51$ ) between the prepandemic ( $m = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ) and midpandemic ( $m = 3.83$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ) samples.

Threats to individual wellness tended to increase. For example, lack of control was reported more frequently in the aggregate ( $F = 17.20$ ,  $df = 1,637$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = 0.33$ ) between the prepandemic ( $m = 2.13$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ) and midpandemic ( $m = 2.36$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ) samples. Similarly, negative feelings became reported more prevalently ( $F = 49.37$ ,  $df = 1,637$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = 0.55$ ) between the prepandemic ( $m = 1.97$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ ) and midpandemic samples ( $m = 2.34$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ).

### ***Holistic Well-Being***

Teacher candidates identified elements related to their individual holistic well-being as both a support and a barrier to their ability to thrive within their program of study. Supports included aspects such as engaging in self-care and maintaining some form of work–life balance. Furthermore, numerous participants articulated the supportive nature of attending to their holistic health and wellness through strategies such as regular exercise, sleep, meditation, mindfulness, time management, dancing, workshops, clubs, and personalized coping techniques. Moving into the pandemic, descriptions of these supports reflected more sedentary and solitary engagements, such as “taking time at home for myself” or individual spiritual practices.

Although teacher candidates identified several supportive elements related to their holistic well-being, they also noted numerous barriers. Identified individual barriers were often related to time and individual demands outside of the program. For example, a perceived lack of time to establish and maintain healthy routines, such as eating or sleeping, was seen as a barrier. Similarly, even before the pandemic, the need to attend to parental duties was frequently perceived as a barrier to thriving as a professional student. Illustrating how closely interconnected supports and barriers to student thriving can be, one participant commented: Some courses have a very high course load demand, and this can become very stressful and this can make you have to put aside your leisure time (which is also essential to well-being) like watching a movie, crocheting or reading a book.

Corresponding with the shift from on-site to remote program delivery, the demands of online learning appeared to negatively impact individuals' holistic well-being and, by extension, their ability to thrive. For example, one participant commented:

I've written an MA thesis while working full time as a teacher, but I find this workload to be more draining. We are being asked to spend too many hours online in class, preparing for class, or working on class assignments.

Explicitly connecting the online learning and their individual holistic well-being, another participant asserted: “I’ve felt more isolated and have had more trouble managing my mental health than I ever have before as a student.” A third participant emphasized that “it is extremely difficult to stay motivated when my mental health has been so poor due to the pandemic.”

### ***Financial Stability and Frustrations***

Numerous teacher candidates identified a lack of financial stability, including debt and financial burdens, as notably hindering their ability to thrive. Identified barriers included carrying student loans, high cost of tuition, heavy debt loads, financial need, and the challenge of finding employment due to the unique demands of the program (e.g., scheduling). One participant articulated frustration with the practicum model, stating that “we should not have to pay to do another person’s job” and that a “practicum stipend would alleviate much of the financial strain.” Looking beyond graduation from the B.Ed. program, several participants also noted that a lack of job prospects was a barrier to their ability to thrive.

Moving into the pandemic, a lack of financial stability remained a barrier among many teacher candidates: “Financial barriers have been big this year.” For some survey respondents, individual financial stability was a clear barrier and a point of extreme tension and frustration: “The financial burden of being unable to work and also pay for our studies on top of the University telling us that we will not be reimbursed for any aspect of our tuition has weighed on me heavily.” One participant expressed frustration with “faculty forcing us to pay for the lack of practicum, and all the experiences and professional development opportunities we have been deprived of.”

### **Interpersonal Supports and Barriers to Teacher Candidate Thriving**

Among the identified supports and barriers to thriving, survey participants highlighted the importance of interpersonal connections and relationships, both formal and informal. The quantitative trends showed that interpersonally mediated measures of teacher candidate thriving tended to decrease, with one notable exception (relationship), when compared between the pre- and midpandemic samples. Relationship strength, which includes relationships outside the program, increased ( $F = 57.05$ ,  $df = 1,637$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = 0.60$ ) between the prepandemic ( $m = 4.08$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ) and midpandemic ( $m = 4.41$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ) points, whereas perceived sense of community, which focused on the program itself, decreased ( $F = 89.87$ ,  $df = 1,637$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = 0.75$ ) between the prepandemic ( $m = 3.85$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ ) and midpandemic ( $m = 3.61$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ) points. Overall, self-reported loneliness increased ( $F = 80.59$ ,  $df = 1,637$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = .71$ ) between the prepandemic ( $m = 2.55$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ) and midpandemic ( $m = 3.20$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ) samples.

### ***Informal Relationships***

Informal connections and relationships—including family, friends, partners, classmates, and peers—were identified by teacher candidates as a prominent form of support prior to and moving into the pandemic. Family members and close relationships, such as a partner, were frequently highlighted as support mechanisms. For example, one participant remarked that speaking to family and friends supported their ability to thrive: “My program is not overly difficult, but it’s time consuming and exhausting. Talking to them helps me relax.” Among the



various informal relationships shared by participants, friends, classmates, and peers were frequently identified as a critical support. While some participants identified specific individuals (e.g., “friends,” “my girlfriend,” “like-minded colleagues and friends”) as supports, others articulated particular characteristics or types of supportive interpersonal engagements and experiences perceived as impacting their ability to thrive.

A lack of interpersonal connections and feelings of isolation were among the barriers to thriving identified by teacher candidates. Prior to and moving into the pandemic, a small group of participants reported feeling isolated, misunderstood, left out, not involved, socially anxious, or like they were not able to establish a “solid group of friends.” As programming moved online, one participant highlighted that there was “limited time to connect with peers,” which served as a barrier to their ability to thrive. Another commented that the pandemic had impacted their ability to thrive in “every way.” They went on to state: “I feel so isolated, and it is hard to understand how career building is working/will work.”

Moving into the pandemic, informal interpersonal relationships remained important among participants; however, reflecting societal social distancing measures, the identified connections and relationships tended to involve individuals closer to “home” (e.g., family members, friends). In fact, among the mid-pandemic survey responses, “classmates” were explicitly identified by only one participant who highlighted how “small group discussions about classes during Zoom breakout rooms” helped them thrive. More frequently, participants communicated that an inability to connect and build relationships with others was a barrier to their thriving during the pandemic: “I feel like I am missing out on a lot of things since my program is fully online. Virtual classes can become tiresome and lonely. I am not meeting as many classmates as I think I normally would.”

### ***Formal Relationships***

Prior to and moving into the pandemic, teacher candidates highlighted formal interpersonal relationships as both a support and hindrance to thriving. Among the formal relationships, participants most frequently identified instructors and professors as a key thriving support. However, survey responses indicated that not all faculty members received such accolades. Rather, teacher candidates reserved praise for “a select few” instructional faculty perceived as “helpful,” “experienced,” “caring,” “understanding,” “open-minded,” “easy to talk to,” “outstanding,” and “show[ing] humility and compassion.” Trust, approachability, accessibility, and flexibility were also identified by participants as among the qualities of supportive formal interpersonal relationships. In contrast, some formal relationships and connections were perceived as being a barrier to thriving. For example, one student commented: “Instructors preach that we must offer our students infinite options and flexibility and we receive none.” Participants articulated the importance of clear and effective communication, suggesting that “unclear guidelines,” “do as I say, not as I do” approaches to teaching and learning, and “unclear expectations, due dates, and timelines from instructors and course syllabus” can have a hindering effect on thriving.

As remote learning took hold and face-to-face, on-site connections were no longer possible, participants less frequently reported formal relationships as being supportive to their thriving. Aligning with the remote nature of these formal relationships, one participant commented: “I appreciate my instructors’ office hours and how they are available to help through emails and appointments.” Similarly, another participant articulated that “communication with professors” was key to their ability to thrive within the B.Ed. program

during the pandemic. In contrast, participants identified barriers resulting from courses “being remote, and the breakdown in communication that comes with that.” Comparably, the transition to “online classes due to the pandemic with no expectations changed” was also perceived as a barrier to student thriving.

### **Institutional Supports and Barriers to Teacher Candidate Thriving**

This section presents quantitative results related to institutional supports and barriers, followed by an exploration of this theme based on the qualitative findings. In their responses, survey participants highlighted several supports and barriers at the programming and institutional level. Categories within this theme included supports and barriers emerging from academic and wellness resources (or a lack thereof) and the overall academic programming structure within the university and B.Ed. program, more specifically.

#### ***Quantitative Trends Related to Institutional Supports and Barriers***

The quantitative trends showed that institutionally mediated measures of teacher candidate thriving tended to decrease when compared between the pre- and midpandemic samples. Departmental trust decreased ( $F = 21.54$ ,  $df = 1,637$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = 0.37$ ) between the prepandemic ( $m = 3.78$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ) and midpandemic ( $m = 3.52$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ) samples. Similarly, perceived respect decreased ( $F = 44.42$ ,  $df = 1,637$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = 0.53$ ) between the prepandemic ( $m = 4.01$ ,  $SD = 0.52$ ) and midpandemic ( $m = 3.76$ ,  $SD = 0.41$ ) samples. Overall, perceived autonomy afforded to students by instructors decreased ( $F = 32.71$ ,  $df = 1,637$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $d = 0.45$ ) between the prepandemic ( $m = 4.53$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ) and midpandemic ( $m = 3.90$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ) samples.

#### ***Academic and Wellness Resources***

Among the reported supports and barriers, teacher candidates highlighted numerous institutional academic and wellness resources contributing to their ability to thrive within their program of study. At the university level, supports included access to and support provided by formal organizations and facilities, such as academic support, accessibility services, counselling, and health services, and informal organizations and facilities, such as clubs and exercise amenities. In addition, the presence of an Elder on campus and spaces for spiritual practice were also highlighted as a support. At the departmental level, teacher candidates articulated their appreciation for institutional supports such as administrative staff, career services, embedded counselling, practicum advisors, academic counselling, and specialized programming and supports (e.g., Aboriginal Teacher Education Program), and suggested that the presence of “understanding staff” served as a support for student thriving. Several students appreciated having “a counsellor I can talk to” and “health care providers who care for my well-being,” even though wait times to see counsellors presented a challenge for some.

While one participant suggested that these various institutional academic and wellness resources contributed to “an overall culture of mutual respect and standards of excellence,” others communicated contrasting views. For example, one teacher candidate commented: “The faculty seems to have very little respect for student’s mental health and our needs.” Others suggested that “students are not spoken to with respect” and that the Faculty “doesn’t seem to care very much about their students.... It is honestly demoralizing.” Several students reported

feeling unsupported, even disrespected or undervalued, on an institutional level. Illustrating the interconnected nature of the various individual, interpersonal, and institutional supports and barriers emerging from the qualitative findings, one participant highlighted how feelings of isolation or a lack of relatedness (and representation) within their program of study might span from a larger institutional issue: “My people are non-existent within the structures and systems that I find myself in.” Taken together, these findings communicate the idea that a perceived negative departmental and institutional culture can hinder students’ ability to thrive: “Sometimes the bureaucracy of it all is a lot.”

Moving into the pandemic, all references to the institutional academic and wellness resources vanished. What appeared to be a prominent institutional support for student thriving pre-pandemic was no longer identified or even hinted at as a support mid-pandemic. Moreover, comments highlighting administrative barriers, issues regarding availability of wellness support, and “convoluted communication and deadline expectations” emerged. One participant suggested that an institutional barrier impacting their ability to thrive was: “Decisions made for the students by the faculty that do not take into account student well-being or providing the best education.”

### *Academic Programming*

The structure and organization of academic programming on an institutional level emerged as both a support and barrier prior to and moving into the pandemic. In terms of supports, many teacher candidates articulated an appreciation for the structure and organization of the program as a whole. Participants appreciated an institutional effort to provide effective guidance (e.g., “great course guidance and practicum placement guidance”), as well as “clear instructions and expectations for course work, papers, and projects.” Furthermore, leading up to and heading into the pandemic, participants articulated how reasonable academic expectations, understanding staff, access to online resources, and the practicum experience supported their ability to thrive. For example, one participant commented: “The content is not difficult, so it is quite easy to thrive academically. It is good that the syllabus is online for referral.” Another participant articulated an appreciation for “flexibility and forgiveness” from the Faculty in response to a family circumstance.

While many participants highlighted academic programming as a support, the number of respondents illuminating it as a barrier was more than three as many. Identified barriers within this category included a heavy course load, repetitive assignments and redundant content, a lack of perceived communication among course instructors and program organizers, deadline schedules, course scheduling, and long class hours. Connecting institutional academic programming to individual holistic well-being, a teacher candidate explained that “the schedule of our program changes so frequently that it’s difficult to build healthy routines.” One participant saw the “competition” and “pace of the program” as a barrier to their thriving, while another suggested an inefficient use of time in that “a lot of the work we do is a waste of time, that can easily be completed in 30 minutes but stretched over 2-hour lecture periods.”

Moving into the pandemic, respondents no longer referred to the structure and organization of the program as a support or barrier. Rather, attention shifted to the barriers emerging through the structure of remote learning, a lack of effective institutional communication, and challenges associated with online learning. For example, one participant commented: “Currently we are having all online classes. I wish there were more hands-on experiences and placement opportunities.” When asked to identify barriers to their thriving, one

teacher candidate responded: “Studying online in a virtual setting, Zoom fatigue.” Another replied: “Remote learning (too much screen time).”

### Discussion

In spring 2020, Canadian teacher education programs shifted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As B.Ed. programs moved online and remote learning took hold, teacher candidates faced unprecedented programmatic changes and unexpected challenges. A cross-sectional survey capturing pre- and midpandemic samples provided unique insights into how the pandemic has impacted preservice teacher thriving. Analysis of pre- and midpandemic samples revealed a significant decrease in teacher candidates’ comprehensive thriving. Furthermore, this decrease aligned with diminished individual measures of thriving and interpersonally and institutionally mediated measures of thriving. Findings indicate that students’ ability to thrive within their B.Ed. program is mediated by personal, relational, programmatic, and institutional elements, and that the pandemic has notably negatively impacted teacher candidates’ ability to thrive.

On a global level, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to present a threat to the physical health of individuals and communities around the world (World Health Organization, 2021). Focusing on the holistic health and wellness of teacher candidates, it would seem that the pandemic also attacked the very things that supported thriving. As teacher candidates moved into the pandemic, their individual sense of thriving within their B.Ed. program tended to decrease. Likely as a result of public health guidelines (Public Health Ontario, 2021), individuals reported more sedentary and solitary behaviours. These quantitative findings were further supported by qualitative data that echoed the idea that self-care practices were becoming more solitary and less social.

Establishing and maintaining a work–life balance can be challenging even in the best of times (Sprung & Rogers, 2020). However, being able to strike such a balance is essential to students’ ability to thrive within postsecondary professional and graduate programs (Coe-Nesbitt et al., 2021). As programming shifted online, the division between work and life became blurred. Spaces within one’s home or living quarters that would typically serve as a retreat from school quickly transitioned to workspaces and sites for virtual classroom gatherings. The pandemic introduced students to new and unforeseen stressors, such as “Zoom fatigue” (Levy, 2021) that likely had not been considered or even recognized as a possibility prior to remote learning. Similarly, the ability to stay organized and engage in effective time-management became a support and a challenge for many. On an individual level, a lack of financial stability (e.g., existing debt, student loans, cost of the program) was perceived as a barrier to one’s ability to thrive within a B.Ed. program both prior to and leading into the pandemic. The pandemic state made already tenuous financial conditions worse for many teacher candidates by reducing or eliminating their potential for earned income (e.g., inability to access paid work) and introduced feelings of dismay for those who thought that the cost of tuition did not align with the opportunities and remote programming being provided.

Instincts to be collaborative (or not) in the practice of teaching are known to form in teacher education (Soleas & Hong, 2020). Findings related to the diminished sense of community and increased loneliness point to a particularly troubling trend in that preservice teachers within the pandemic context may feel a reluctance or weakened incentive to form or act as part of a team. The lack of a collaborative identity formation is problematic and incongruent with the development of a collaborative approach to teaching and learning (Avalos, 2011; Smith

& Ingersoll, 2004). Swift and decisive intervention is needed to address this pandemic-entrenched trend as teacher candidates transition from preservice to early-career teachers and become more embedded within the teaching profession. This trend comes after a school year when students' practicum experiences have also been impacted. Nevertheless, these experiences are a key part of B.Ed. programs (Chiptin, 2011; Norsworthy, 2014; Soleas & Hong, 2020) and essential to provincial certification. In alignment with a shift in programming, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the realities of practicum experiences for B.Ed. students, with many having to complete virtual placements. The long-term impact of such learning experiences in terms of early career teacher preparation (Kutsyruba et al., 2016) is yet to be seen.

Positive and supportive relationships are key to thriving (Benson & Scales, 2009; Nesbitt, 2019; Coe-Nesbitt et al., 2021; Schreiner, 2013), including both informal and formal relationships. In this study, informal relationships (such as family, friends, peers, and partners) were reported by teacher candidates as a key support prior to and leading into the pandemic. However, moving into the pandemic, findings indicated that participants were impacted by feelings of isolation, lack of personal connection, and an inability to connect with peers. Quantitative data showed that the pre- to midpandemic shift to online programming—ironically, often within large class sizes—resulted in participants feeling isolated. Being one of a crowd, or one of many digital faces within a synchronous learning platform, appeared to align with teacher candidates feeling alone, along with a decrease in reported connections to community. This idea was echoed in the qualitative data that indicated classmates all but vanished as a support mid-pandemic.

Participants identified many institutional barriers prior to the pandemic, including factors such as an apparent lack of organization, a departmental culture of competition, and scheduling concerns. Moving into the pandemic, teacher candidates no longer identified these institutional barriers as a hinderance. Rather, there appeared to be a shift in focus from the structure of the program to challenges presented by the remote learning context, including concerns about excessive screen time and Zoom fatigue, administrative barriers, and ineffective communication. During the pandemic, numerous teacher candidates identified that their mental health, including reports of anxiety and depression, was a barrier to their ability to thrive. These findings coincide with fewer reports of institutional academic and wellness resources, such as counselling services, as a support for student thriving. While the data provide no clear evidence as to why teacher candidates failed to identify institutional supports mid-pandemic (e.g., Were services still available? Were students unable or unwilling to access these services? Did students know that such services existed?), taken together, these findings point to a concerning disconnect among individuals seemingly in need of support and various institutional services designed to support (Schreiner, 2010a, 2014).

### **Looking Forward to Postpandemic Teacher Education**

Thriving within a preservice teacher education program is not about students merely surviving or getting by. Rather, the focus should be on supporting learners in reaching their full potential and a state of holistic optimal functioning. Early attention to the needs of students can help establish a positive trajectory for student thriving throughout the preservice teacher program and into the future where, as early career teachers, they will be expected to subsequently support student thriving as part of their classroom practice (Benson & Scales, 2009; Nesbitt, 2019). Findings from this study call for a timely and targeted effort on the part of leaders and other

educational stakeholders to support teacher candidate thriving within their programs of study. These findings also invite those in leadership positions to consider the following:

- How can faculties of education support students on individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels?
- What have we learned throughout the pandemic about student needs and their ability to thrive that can be applied to postpandemic B.Ed. programming?

With vaccine rollout well underway across Canada, the return to on-site teaching and learning is a realistic possibility for the near future. This shift should not be viewed as a mere reversal in programming but rather as an opportunity to (re)envision, (re)assess, and (re)establish goals for B.Ed. programs. It is also an opportunity to establish a new equitable, accessible, and caring benchmark for future teacher education—one that recognizes the importance of facilitating student thriving by enhancing access to supports and reducing barriers that inhibit teacher candidates' ability to thrive. Even so, the pandemic revealed a distinct divide between individuals and existing interpersonal and institutional supports, begging the question: What happened? Data from this study suggest that, moving forward, programs and instructors need to focus more on building community and providing opportunities for teacher candidates to connect with one another. Understanding that the physical sharing of space seems to build community much more effectively than sharing a digital space is illuminating; however, the chance to connect and build relationships among peers, classmates, instructors, and those working within positions of support should not be reserved for on-site programming only. Consequently, ways to facilitate these types of connections using e-learning tools, such as breakout rooms, should be explored (Levy, 2021).

On a programmatic level, findings from this study speak to the need for: effective communication, clear program and class goals and expectations, engaging pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning, and programming that supports student learning in a way that allows the maintenance of a work–life balance. This call may be an opportunity to address redundancy among courses or to clearly articulate how each course contributes to the B.Ed. program and, subsequently, student learning as a whole. Comparably, considering the recent shift to and dominance of remote learning, continuing efforts to revise curricula can be made so that online learning can be transformative rather than a replication of in-person practices (Hughes et al., 2006).

Time will tell how the pandemic cohort of teacher candidates will transition into the profession as early career teachers and who they will become as educators. However, the findings of this study suggest that these individuals are starting from a deficit position in community connections with their peers, overall thriving, perceived respect from institutions, and in terms of loneliness—all of which are strong predictors of relative thriving and mental health (Coe-Nesbitt et al., 2021). We distributed our survey in spring 2021 to explore the impact of the pandemic on the thriving of teacher candidates. Moving forward, we recommend a cohort-study following these teacher candidates as they transition into early-career professionals (not only when they have obtained full-time employment but also within occasional and long-term occasional teaching positions) as a means of ensuring that they are receiving appropriate early-career support (Kutsyruba & Walker, 2017) and that professional development opportunities are tailored to their needs. Following these individuals from pre- to in-service will allow researchers and those working with B.Ed. programs to also identify the unique needs and supports, as well as the struggles and successes experienced by this pandemic cohort, as a way to prepare and identify their struggles in their early years of teaching as a contingency plan for when disruptions

like a pandemic happen in the future. The pandemic represents a profoundly shocking, quasi-dehumanizing, and world-changing event that is possible to recur—a situation that forced teacher education programs to rapidly respond to evolving programming and student needs. As the common saying goes, “Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.” As a field of teacher education, we cannot responsibly be surprised again.

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## CHAPTER 20

### **Neutrality Always Benefits the Oppressor: The Need to Rupture the Normalized Structure of Teacher Education Programs to Diversify the Workforce**

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#### **Abstract**

As faculties of education have undergone drastic changes to keep teacher education programs afloat while accommodating teacher candidates during a pandemic, much of these alterations are designed, much like the education system itself, to meet the needs of white, privileged students. Although many of the changes from classroom content, pedagogy, and assessment to alternative practicums are commendable in the face of a pandemic, BIPOC and teacher candidates from lower socioeconomic status, who are already underrepresented in the Ontario teacher workforce, are further disadvantaged due to existing inequities and opportunity gaps (Battiste, 2013; Colour of Poverty, 2019; Henry & Tator, 2012) exasperated by pandemic conditions. In this chapter we ground our experiences through a duo-ethnography as two racialized faculty members within teacher education programs at Canadian postsecondary institutions. It is argued that the implications of the pandemic in convergence with the axiology of whiteness and white privilege that define teacher education and the teaching profession in Ontario operate as a double barrier to entry into and diversification of the teacher workforce. Suggestions are made for how to disrupt and rupture the normalized structure of teacher education programs and its policies and practices to advance equitable outcomes.

*Keywords:* duo-ethnography, BIPOC, critical pedagogy, whiteness, teacher candidates, pandemic

#### **Résumé**

Alors que les facultés d'éducation ont subi des changements radicaux pour maintenir les programmes de formation des enseignants à flot tout en accueillant les candidats enseignants pendant une pandémie, plusieurs de ces modifications ont été conçues pour répondre aux besoins des étudiants blancs privilégiés. Bien que bon nombre des changements apportés au contenu, à la pédagogie et à l'évaluation en classe vers des stages alternatifs soient admirable face à une pandémie mondiale, les candidats noirs, autochtones, de couleur et de statut socioéconomique inférieur, qui sont déjà sous-représentés au personnel enseignant ontarien, sont encore plus défavorisés en raison des inégalités existantes et des lacunes en matière d'opportunités (Battiste, 2013 ; Color of Poverty, 2019 ; Eizadirad, 2020 ; Henry & Tator, 2012) exaspérés par les conditions pandémiques. Dans ce chapitre, on se tient bon à nos expériences dans une duo-ethnographie, deux membres racialisés du corps professoral au sein de programmes de formation à l'enseignement dans des établissements postsecondaires canadiens. On soutient que la convergence des conditions pandémiques avec le privilège blanc comme forme de monnaie qui définissent la formation des enseignants et la profession enseignante en Ontario, fonctionnent comme une double barrière contre la création d'un accès à la diversification du personnel

enseignant. Nous présentons des propositions qui répondent à comment perturber et rompre la structure normalisée des programmes de formation des enseignants et de ses politiques et pratiques afin d'avancer des résultats équitables, des propositions sont présentées.

*Mots clés* : duo-ethnographie; candidats noirs, autochtones, de couleur; pédagogie critique; blanchité; candidats à l'enseignement; pandémie

We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.

– Eli Wiesel, Holocaust survivor

## Introduction

Following the brutal murder of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin on May 25, 2020, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, antiracism protests were staged around the globe to draw attention to widespread racism, particularly anti-Black racism, not only at the hands of police forces, but also within institutions including education. Institutions across different sectors had to critically self-examine their policies and practices with a heightened level of critical consciousness to reflect on their role, historically and currently, in perpetuating racism and privileging whiteness as a system (Ahmed, 2007; Annamma & Handy, 2021; Henry & Tator, 2012; Karumanchery, 2005). There is momentum and pressure on institutions to speak up and commit themselves to doing the work of equity beyond simple acknowledgements of past wrong doings or solidarity statements. This is evident in the rise of consultations and equity, diversity, inclusion, and indigenization efforts and initiatives being enacted across multiple sectors, particularly within K–12 and higher education institutions. This is a pivotal moment in the history of institutions and how they will be remembered: whether they respond with intentional actions to reduce the harm they have inflicted and enacted via historically normalized policies and practices that disadvantage BIPOC and those of lower socioeconomic status (Abawi & Eizadirad, 2020; Colour of Poverty, 2019; Eizadirad, 2017; Henry & Tator, 2012; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019) or continue to be a bystander through silence or superficial statements.

Karumanchery (2005) reminds us that “space and place, the social, political and historical fabric of existence has constituted a relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. This is a relationship constructed through discourse, and through the institutional structures that work to subjugate the margins” (p. 6). We expand on this by emphasizing that when it comes to the work of institutions, it does not occur in a binary framework of the oppressor/oppressed but rather within a malleable discourse that simultaneously and paradoxically oppresses while claiming liberation, freedom, and support for marginalized groups. Most institutions are hiring more faculty from underrepresented groups to diversify representation as a response to being more equitable and inclusive. Although this is a good start, if this is the only response to making teacher education programs more inclusive, it drastically falls short of being effective.

While calls to diversify the teaching profession have long been touted, educational systems, including school boards and institutions of higher education such as teacher education programs in Canada, continue to be predominantly white spaces that BIPOC educators must navigate carefully to succeed (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Henry & Tator, 2012; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019). At a systemic level, the hostilities and microaggressions of educational spaces toward BIPOC communities and identities via its policies, practices, and colourblind neutral approaches came to the forefront following the Ministry of Education’s 2020 Review of the Peel District School Board, which expressed widespread and embedded racism, most notably anti-

Black, anti-Indigenous, anti-South Asian, and Islamophobic racism at all levels of the board (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2020). Peel is not an anomaly in such incidents of institutional, systemic, and structural racism as similar findings have also been uncovered in ministry reviews of other Ontario school boards, including the York Region District School Board and Toronto District School Board (CBC News, 2021). For example, the Toronto District School Board Human Rights Office examined reports of hate activity among its 245,000 students and 40,000 staff from 2018 to 2020 and found that

Race-related complaints made up 69 per cent of all reported hate incidents in the 2019-2020 school year, with anti-Black racism making up the biggest share. Incidents related to a person's sexual orientation accounted for 17 per cent, while creed or religion made up 14 per cent. (para. 6)

Furthermore, a recent study by Abawi and Eizadirad (2020) found that BIPOC teachers have markedly different experiences, facing more systemic challenges in accessing and securing permanent teaching employment than their white colleagues. Racial inequities in teacher education and access to the teaching profession have only been exacerbated by the pandemic, as James (2020) notes, the massive shifts to online learning and in some cases online practicum experiences, are designed to benefit affluent and white students to the detriment of BIPOC students. This systemic barrier is driven by institutional policies and practices that are normalized and claimed as neutral and colourblind, yet they privilege certain ways of being and doing, in the process safeguarding who can gain entry into teacher education programs and consequently who has positive experiences rooted in belonging and who has negative experiences rooted in lack of representation and exclusion. This is the invisibility of whiteness as a culminating system of privileges (Abawi et al., 2021; Ahmed, 2007; McIntosh, 1988) rather than a descriptor of skin colour, where it leads to access to opportunities for some at the expense of exclusion to others, including the assessment process for who is an ideal teacher candidate and how they would demonstrate their value and worthiness as part of gaining entry and completing the 2-year teacher certification program within Canadian teacher preparation programs.

### **Critical Pedagogy as Theoretical Framework**

By employing a critical pedagogical framework (Battise, 2013; Freire, 1970; McLaren, 2015), we attempt to move beyond Eurocentric ontologies and epistemologies that privilege whiteness and neglect the multiplicity of lived experiences of BIPOC identities including teacher candidates and faculty. We agree with Brown and Strega (2005), who distinguish differences between doing research on the marginalized versus doing research with the marginalized:

Research from the margins is not research on the marginalized but research by, for, and with them/us. It is research that takes seriously and seeks to trouble the connections between how knowledge is created, what knowledge is produced, and who is entitled to engage in these processes. It seeks to reclaim and incorporate the personal and political context of knowledge construction. (p. 7)

At the core of this paper is troubling of the metanarrative that teacher education programs operate in neutrality and as apolitical spaces. Their current normalized policies and practices, to varying degrees, is exclusionary and leads to perpetuating inequality of access to opportunities

for minoritized teacher candidates and faculty, which on a larger scale has led to lack of diversity in the workforce across different geographical locations.

The personal is political, just as much as institutional policies and practices wrapped up in market logic are political and driven by profit (Giroux, 2003; hooks, 1991). There are ongoing disparities in accessing teacher education programs both via entry requirements and lack of funding, supports, and mentorship within programs for minoritized teacher candidates and faculty following entry into the programs. This contributes to many BIPOC students and faculty alike feeling isolated, burned out, and unsupported (Henry & Tator, 2012; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019). We contribute to filling in the research gap by discussing how mandated institutional equity and inclusive policies, including the changes and adaptations introduced and enacted as part of teaching and learning during a pandemic, have fundamentally failed to respond to the needs of BIPOC identities and communities, often being performative and superficial. As implications, we discuss the myriad ways that the pandemic exposes and accentuates cracks in the system. Critical questions such as “Who can be a teacher?” and “Who is education for?” highlight the salience of race in teacher education programs as well as the permeation of whiteness as a normalizing force which needs to be ruptured systemically with alternative approaches.

### **Methodology**

This chapter takes on a duo-ethnography methodological approach (hooks, 1991; Latz & Murray, 2012; Lund et al., 2017; MacDonald & Markides, 2016; Sawyer & Norris, 2013). A duo-ethnography is a qualitative, emancipatory methodology that makes space for two scholars to engage in critical dialogue concerning a specific topic or phenomena. Through this dialogical exchange (Freire, 1970), the two scholars engage in a conversation, juxtaposing their ways of knowing, identities and lived experiences to offer a myriad of understandings about a specific topic. Latz and Murray (2012) articulate duo-ethnographic work as a process whereby “each researcher/dialoguer uses his or her life’s curriculum, which is, inevitably steeped in some culture(s), as a starting point for dialogical contributions” (p. 2). This transformational exchange allows for an open-ended discussion between the voices of two social locations, in which the relationship between the two dialoguers come to “regard each other as both their teacher and student, assisting the other in reconceptualizing their own meanings” (Sawyer & Norris, 2013, p. 22). For the purpose of this paper, our experiences as two racialized faculty members in Ontario teacher education programs are centred, discussing how we navigated the pandemic to support our students emotionally, professionally, and spiritually especially our BIPOC students.

Our positionalities and lived experiences not only frame our exchange and our overall work, but also inform the rationale for selecting this particular methodology. We chose a duo-ethnographic study with intentionality as a counterstory to resist Eurocentric methodological norms (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The overarching purpose of our critical dialogic exchange is to explore how identities and discourses of education in settler colonial societies such as Canada inform notions such as who is education for, who can be an educator, and the power relations that make some valued at the expense of exclusion to others.

### **Zuhra: Carving Out Spaces**

As a settler on Turtle Island to parents of different backgrounds, I identify as a cisgender white-passing female of mixed race. My father is an ethnic Pashtun from Afghanistan and my

mother is Scottish. Before my father came to Canada, he lived in India, where he received his undergraduate education. I had always grown up feeling proud of my heritage, and looked forward to evenings when my parents, especially my father would tell animated stories of his childhood in Afghanistan and his days as a student in India. When I was in Grade 11, the September 11, 2001, attacks occurred, and suddenly I was not so proud of my identity. In fact, I just wanted to hide it. Most of the students in my high school were white, as were the teachers. People started calling my dad a terrorist within public spaces saying that we would pay for what happened.

None of the teachers addressed any of this discrimination, nor offered any support. Not a single teacher sat down with the class and discussed the dangers and implications of the hurtful stereotypical words expressed by other students towards me and my family. I felt completely isolated and did whatever I could to downplay my heritage. I was not interested in my father's stories anymore and I even asked my parents if I could change my name. It was not until I went to university that I began to learn about colonialism and antiracism and Western military imperialism. This knowledge gave me the power and the critical analysis to challenge and resist white supremacy and find strength in my background and ancestral history.

Growing up, I never had any teachers that represented my father's heritage. I never had a Muslim teacher or any South Asian teachers. The same is true throughout my postsecondary studies. Teacher education is embedded in whiteness from white socialization to white normativity, as well as programming, assessments, and curricular decisions (Childs et al., 2010; Pinto et al., 2012; Solomon et al., 2005). Moreover, white privilege also informs student demographics where overwhelming majority of full-time teacher candidates in the BPS program at Niagara University are white and predominantly female. Niagara University does offer a pathway program unique to other faculties of education across Ontario, known as the paraprofessional program, meant for Early Childhood Educators and Educational Assistants already working in school boards wishing to obtain their teacher certification. The program allows for candidates to continue working full-time to support their families while pursuing their teacher degrees. The paraprofessional cohort has significantly more racialized teacher candidates than the full-time program.

A large portion of students speak English as a second language, are foreign born, and have families to support. I have taught the paraprofessional cohort for 4 years now, and although I make it a habit of learning about my students and getting to know about their lives and interests outside of the program, I am much more intentional with ensuring I get to know my paraprofessional students. I am mindful of the fact that racialized women, who make up a significant demographic of the cohort, are disproportionately more likely to be subject to precarious labour and low wages, with the average racialized woman in Ontario earning just 55.8 cents for every dollar earned by a white male (Block & Gallabuzi, 2011). In general, racialized Ontarians continue to fall further behind their white counterparts in terms of income, access to resources, and opportunities (United Way Report, 2019). Through a shared dialogue, we learn from each other's experiences, struggles, hopes, and dreams and form a reciprocal relationship of trust that disrupts the traditional binary student–professor relationships in the ivory tower. The COVID-19 pandemic has made these efforts more difficult, so I log into the Zoom link beforehand and always make sure that I allocate time to check in with my students. I also make my office hours more flexible and beyond the scheduled office hours provided in the syllabus. With intentionality, I ensure I make space for BIPOC students who continue to be marginalized by white privilege and heteronormativity encapsulating teacher education (Abawi, 2021). For

example, I do not require students to turn on their cameras, being mindful that many are parents and have young children they care for at home, or other family members working at home. I do not require students to present their work live, as it may not be possible for them to stop all of their other obligations to present, rather, I allow them to submit a video recording on their own time that meets their needs.

As the only racialized faculty member in my department, I have witnessed first-hand some of the equity detours (Gorski, 2019) taken by other faculty members in order to avoid discussing race. An example of a detour I have come up against, numerous times, is what Brown-McNair and colleagues (2020) call “substituting race talk with poverty talk” (p. 3). This demonstrates how conversations about poverty and socioeconomic status, though important, effectively detour from discussions about race and fail to acknowledge intersectionality of race and poverty. Time and again, I have listened to white colleagues during faculty meetings insist that we ought to focus more on poverty rather than race, as that is where our attention is *really* needed. While racism is often attributed to individual acts of racism, what makes racism so potent is the power relations of whiteness which uphold it. In higher education, racism translates into hiring, promotion, and tenure decisions, faculty reviews, and curricular and syllabi content (Brown-McNair et al., 2020; Essed, 1991). One of the greatest barriers to racial equity I have noticed is the problematic use of colour-blindness and neutrality as a normalized framework to discuss equity issues. While faculties, including Niagara, have held discussions on racial equity and antiracism, the majority of faculty, who are white, do not have the tools needed to support BIPOC students. In order to address racism in higher education, whiteness must be both named and acknowledged as a racial identity, meaning that white people must be tasked with feeling uncomfortable (MacIntosh, 2019).

### **Ardavan: Rupturing the Norm**

I did not have many Middle Eastern Muslim teachers or professors growing up. Having said that, I did have teachers who cared a lot about my success and others who could care less. I attended four high schools in 3 years in Ontario, and my experiences across different schools opened my eyes to what a big difference inclusion can make. Diversity is the tip of the iceberg. Inclusion is an embodied experience felt through our senses; whether you feel valued and experience belonging for who you are and your contributions. Am I seen or ignored? When I enter the room, how is my body and mannerism received and interpreted? Does the power dynamics in the teaching and learning space invite me to voice my concerns and viewpoints as part of the discussions or simply does ignore and indirectly signals to me that my very presence allows the institution to feel good about themselves by allowing them to proclaim diversity through a checklist approach?

In one high school I felt accepted for who I was, from how I talked to how I did my hair and dressed, whereas in another school I felt like an outcast, always judged and criticized. Therefore, inclusion is more than simply being given access to an opportunity or having a seat at the table as part of the discussions for change. It is about how one is supported and interacted with after entry into the space. Inclusion begins at the intersection of access and diversity. I agree with Annamma and Handy (2021) when they emphasize, “Centering oppressed groups is very different from giving them a seat at the table.... Injustice then, is an outcome of not centering the marginalized, effectively isolating and erasing them even when they are invited to deliberate” (p. 45). Hence, creating better access is only one component of making teacher education programs more diverse and inclusive. The challenge to being inclusive and equitable is whether

minoritized identities are made to feel valued and included by centring their lived experiences throughout their time in teacher education programs over a 2-year period rather than being left out on the margins.

With intentionality, I notice when there are racialized and minoritized students in my classes, particularly when there is only a few among a predominantly white cohort. They have to be seen and valued for who they are and the added value they bring to the program through their lived experiences. I make sure I check on them emotionally and spiritually at key points throughout my classes, even when such classes are offered remotely. This is part of ensuring they do not leave the program due to microaggressions or feeling excluded. I take time to learn how to pronounce my students' names correctly. This is important. The trauma of having your ethnic name made fun of and constantly mispronounced is a daily reality for many minoritized students. I suffered from the trauma of name mispronunciation with respect to my first and last name for the majority of my life. It was much more hurtful in the early years of arriving to Canada as immigrants from Iran.

I tell my students to call me by my first name, because education is about relationships and building rapport to understand the needs of our students, instead of fixation on titles and accomplishments. Hierarchy can be beneficial in setting boundaries, but misuse of unequal power dynamics can also serve as a barrier. This does not mean that the professional boundaries of teacher–student should be blurred but that as educators we do not always have to be mechanical in how power is enacted and dispersed within our teaching and learning spaces. This is part of the process of working towards creating brave spaces (Eizadirad & Campbell, 2021) where we can have discussions from opposing viewpoints rooted in varied life experiences to understand the complexities and nuances of inequities and injustice in its various forms.

This process is supplemented with me modelling being vulnerable by embracing my emotions and spirituality as part of teaching and learning to facilitate development of socioemotional IQ in teacher candidates. This is significant given the added stress and uncertainties created by pandemic circumstances such as limited space at home that needs to be shared among family members. Hence, I allocate 10 to 15 minutes at the beginning of each class to discuss nonacademic content and to share positive and negative events from our personal lives to the extent people feel comfortable sharing to cultivate a community of learners. No, you do not need to have your camera on at all times for the duration of my classes as it can be an equity issue. Learning occurs in different ways and having back-to-back 3-hour classes on Zoom does not align with best practices. I typically host 90-minute classes and make myself available after class for one-on-one check-ins if requested by a student. If you need an extension, simply let me know. You do not need to fill out three pages of paperwork or get a doctor's note to get a consideration for an extension. The normalized practice of extensive paperwork required to get accommodation approval is a systemic barrier that needs to change.

I speak up about political, community, and world issues. Black Lives Matter. #Justice4George Floyd. Anti-Indigenous and anti-Asian racism is #real and happening in many communities across Canada. I choose not to ignore it. Putting out a statement about various forms of injustice both within our classes and as faculty is not political. It is important to create spaces within our classes to discuss these events so it goes beyond solidarity statements. It is part of hoping and healing as a community of learners. It is an activist stance (Eizadirad & Campbell, 2021) that is needed to advance equity and social justice. Some colleagues worry that centring these events and lived experiences might impact their trajectory to getting tenure status as the normalized expectations is that politics and education should not mix. Who is this claimed by as



a normalizing expectation and for whom? Perhaps instead of trying to fit into the normalized inequitable system and its colourblind neutral approach to its policies and practices in postsecondary institutions including teacher education programs, we need to change the system to adjust its values and ideologies to prioritize human needs over profit. Minoritized identities experience feeling of uncomfortableness and microaggressions on a regular basis. Whose feelings and experiences are we choosing to centre and for what purposes?

Access to opportunities can be the difference between a paycheck or starvation. It can be the difference between being glorified for making good decisions or being vilified for poor choices. Who keeps the system accountable? Isn't the system made up of individuals? Is it a zero-sum game or are we as good as our weakest link? Unlearning is needed. Microsoft Word no longer tells me it's a misspelling #unlearn. Unlearning has entered the realm of decolonizing conversations. But is one course or perhaps two, 3 hours a week for one term, enough to equip people to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion for a lifetime? Is this a checklist approach again? "You always talk about equity," some of my students tell me through conversations and comments on course evaluations. Yes I do! I centre equity with intentionality at every opportunity, because within the normalized structure of the university and within teacher education programs, even though equity is present, it is often on the margins. As Giroux (2003) put it,

Color-blindness is a convenient ideology of enabling Whites to ignore the degree to which race is tangled up with asymmetrical relations of power, functioning as a potent force for patterns of exclusion and discrimination including, but not limited to, housing, mortgage loans, health-care, schools, and the criminal justice system. (p. 67)

Whiteness as a form of currency continues to be the default marker of teacher education programs. What will we do in our different roles and positionalities to rupture whiteness as the default marker and a normalizing force? This involves larger reflections on who is privileged within teacher education programs and in what ways? This is a life-long journey and commitment which requires grappling with and marination with opposing ideas and working in solidarity and in allyship with multiple identities across different communities. It needs emotional and spiritual labour. I choose to continue disrupting with intentionality, centring minoritized and racialized cultural capital and lived experiences within my classes, while being conscious of unwritten rules and codes affiliated with risk-taking and going against the norm.

### **The Problematic Nature of the Current Normalized Teacher Education Programs**

The intersection of the COVID-19 pandemic with racism and classism has visibilized inequality of access to opportunities rooted in historical and systemic inequities perpetuated by institutions across different sectors. Even though the focus of our chapter has been on the educational sector, specifically teacher education programs, keep in mind that what occurs in different sectors and their institutions has an impact on others—for example, the school-to-prison pipeline, academic streaming, and educational qualifications required to access well-paying jobs. A historical example that has a ripple effect even today is the role of residential schools as spectacles of terror and sites of physical, psychological, spiritual, and intergenerational trauma: social workers as practitioners were part of taking children away from their parents and teachers were part of the violence enacted as part of the curriculum aimed at destroying Indigenous oral culture, languages, perspectives, and ways of being (Battiste, 2013). As a result of this systemic

violence and its inflicting terror and trauma, we see an underrepresentation of Indigenous identities within most postsecondary programs across Canada including teacher education programs (Mohamed & Beagan, 2019). As Dei (2016) reminds us, “We must make entry accessible to all groups not some at the expense of or on the backs of others. The university must solve this accessibility issue and refrain from making it a budgetary or financial issue” (p. 43).

The rapid shift from in-person learning, predominantly affiliated with experiential learning and hands-on practicums within teacher education programs, to online remote learning and practicum experiences has served to widen already prevalent opportunity gaps (Eizadirad, 2020; Eizadirad & Sider, 2020). Online learning in higher education, by its default conditions, has effectively provides a one-size fits all approach that privileges affluent white able-bodied students, creating conditions for learning that minimize access to education via consideration for who has consistent access to personal devices such as a computer, reliable internet connection, as well as timely access to academic and social supports (James, 2020). Further, students working from home, students who have childcare responsibilities, international students who have had to return to their own countries, and students with precarious immigration statuses have been pushed to the margins by such approaches, thus demonstrating how little institutions of higher education understand the lived realities of BIPOC and low-income students (Naffi et al., 2020).

Yes, there are existing and evolving accommodations, offered by postsecondary institutions, but they are predominantly aligned with what already exists as normalized policies and practices. The current normalized accommodations seek to facilitate othered identities to fit in and conform versus being an alternative approach intended to mitigate unmet needs. We agree with Dei (2016) when he states, “Inclusion is not bringing people into what already exists; it is making a new space, a better space for everyone. Such space is about structures and instructional processes and places” (p. 36). This is why the current structures within teacher education programs are problematic, because in the name of equity and inclusion, it still reinforces a hegemonic colourblind neutral framework with hierarchical unequal power relations that pressurize minoritized identities to fit, play by the rules/policies/practices, or risk getting poor marks, being placed on academic probation, or not progress forward in their program.

Ontario is often prided as being one of the world’s most diverse regions; however, the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted BIPOC people and poverty-stricken communities in Ontario (CUPE, 2020; United Way, 2019). The overarching social, political, and economic implications of the pandemic have effectively transcended into teacher education programs throughout the province, further hindering access for BIPOC candidates and negatively impacting their trajectory within the program and as part of securing permanent employment postgraduation (Abawi & Eizadirad, 2020). As such, the implications of the pandemic in convergence with the axiology of whiteness and white privilege (Ahmed, 2007; McIntosh, 1988) that define teacher education and the teaching profession in Ontario operate as a double barrier to access to as well as diversification of the teacher workforce.

Change starts with examining the criteria used to grant access and entry into teacher education programs, but more importantly how teacher candidates, particularly those from historically underrepresented groups, are being marginalized and the extent to which they are supported from entry to completion in their Bachelor of Education program. Are they being pressured to fit in or are they being supported and centred for what they bring into the education sector in terms of their lived experiences, knowledges, cultural capital, and ways of being? Are they being mentored? Are they provided avenues to express their social, emotional, academic, and spiritual concerns while in the program? If the power dynamics exuded by administrators,

faculty, and other students is not inclusive, and if there is a lack of representation within courses and curriculum content, is it any surprise that many racialized and minoritized identities choose to not apply for teacher education programs or leave the program at some point? This has a ripple effect and implications for who can enter the workforce and to what extent the demographics in teaching can be diversified.

### **Discussion and Conclusion: Strategies to Support Minoritized Students Throughout the Pandemic and Beyond**

The racial inequities informing income and access to resources and opportunities in Ontario also inform the province's teacher workforce. The teaching profession, as well as teacher education in Ontario, has and continues to be overwhelmingly overrepresented by whiteness, in particular white females, impacting discourses about which identities are most suitable as teachers and which identities do not belong and have been excluded in the profession (Abawi, 2018; Childs et al., 2010; Turner, 2015). This could be a teachable moment in teacher education programs during the pandemic, where we pause to strategize and mobilize for postpandemic teaching and learning conditions guided by values of equity and social justice driven by woke culture. This requires extensive reflection on how we can alter and rupture the normalized criteria typically used to give access and entry to teacher education programs. Who are we excluding and based on what criteria? How can we be intentional in recruitment so there is more representation from historically marginalized and underrepresented social groups? Should there be an optional component for self-identification as part of the application process for teacher education programs? How is the intent behind such initiatives articulated to the applicants? How much weight should self-identified demographical information be given in comparison to other criteria used to judge suitability of teacher candidates such as relevant experience and marks? What are we missing in Bachelor of Education programs holistically in terms of content, curriculum, and pedagogies?

Other suggestions that can contribute to strengthening the diversity and level of inclusion in teacher education programs and in the long term the diversification of the teacher workforce in Ontario across different geographical locations include the following:

- Listen and do not make assumptions.
- Do not force cameras on during classes and allow presentations to be recorded and submitted separately rather than making candidates turn cameras on and present in front of their classmates. Providing options is an equitable approach that allows for various forms of accommodation based on different needs and circumstances.
- Allow flexibility in assignment deadlines and work together with students to ensure they have an opportunity to express their socioemotional, spiritual and academic needs.
- Create brave spaces to validate and amplify BIPOC cultural capital and their lived experiences and perspectives and do not dismiss them as exceptions to the norm.
- Initiate cohesive partnerships between school boards, the Ontario College of Teachers, the Ministry of Education, and faculties in consultation with minoritized identities and communities.
- Invest in intentional recruitment: provide an option to self-identify as part of the admissions process.
- Have a student representative be part of the admissions process.

- Explore alternative approaches for entry into teacher education programs such as the use of portfolios to demonstrate growth over time. This can balance the weight allocated for marks, professional and lived experience, and other relevant skills needed for entry into teacher education programs.
- Make Ontario College of Teachers emergency certificate adjustments to guarantee permanent placement of teacher candidates on occasional teaching lists rather than providing them with temporary certificates expiring in August or December if their Math Proficiency Test is not successfully completed. This would minimize conditions for perpetuating precarious employment.

Overall, these critical trends discussed and their normalizing force rooted in privileging of whiteness as a form of currency highlight the salience of race in teacher education programs and highlights the need for alternative approaches to advance equitable outcomes. We need to question the rigidity of postsecondary policies and practices within teacher education programs always asking who does it privilege, why, and in what ways. This is a starting point to initiate and create long-term change. We must continue to disrupt and rupture from within, while working in solidarity and allyship with others from the community and other sectors to keep up the pressure and urgency to alter the normalized conditions for teaching and learning socially, culturally, and politically. As Elie Wiesel remind us, reflecting his horrific experiences during the Holocaust, “We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”

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## CONCLUSION

### **What Have We Learned: Adaptations, Recommendations, and Silver Linings**

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At the time of this writing, we are experiencing the fourth wave of the pandemic. As Bachelor of Education programs across Canada prepare to welcome preservice teachers back to campus, precautions vary from province to province and even between institutions, with some requiring masking and some indicating they will require vaccinations. Over the last year and a half, teacher educators have learned much about online teaching and learning. For most of us, this period of intense learning required risk-taking. In response to the pandemic we have shifted our courses online, designed solutions for practica, developed new pedagogies, and become much more aware of issues of equity and the role we can play in student wellness.

What became apparent as the pandemic continued was that it was not enough to move our courses online—we needed to consider the structure of our Bachelor of Education programs and critically examine what we were teaching and how we were teaching it. As Fitzgerald, Snow, and Coward pointed out in their chapter, “A Case Study of Teacher Preparation in the Atlantic Bubble: Faculty and Student Perceptions of the Impact of COVID-19 Restrictions at the University of Prince Edward Island,” the pandemic provided an opportunity to reevaluate and reconsider the goals of a Bachelor of Education program and how those goals can be achieved. Similarly, in “Responsive, Relational Pandemic Pedagogies: A Collaborative, Critical Self-Study,” authors Schnellert, Miller, Macmillan, and Brant suggested that the learning context shaped by the pandemic provided an opportunity to reassess practices. The redesigning of program delivery for field experience also led to stronger relationships between schools and the university.

Faculty began to witness how the isolation and additional stressors related to the pandemic, including the challenge of finding a quiet space to study, job loss, financial difficulties, and the need to care for children no longer in school, began to impact not only preservice teachers' mental health but our own sense of well-being. In the chapter “From Disruption to Innovation: Reimagining Teacher Education During a Pandemic,” authors MacMath, Sivia, Robertson, Salingré, Compeau, and Britton shared their growing recognition that the mental health needs of both preservice teachers and teacher educators were more important than any course content, curriculum, or assessment. Bougoin and Mitchell reinforced this point in their chapter, “From Bricks and Mortar to Remote Learning: Building a Community of Learners and Recreating a Sense of Belonging in the Online Environment,” where they stressed the importance of attending to the socio-affective needs of students by creating rich, humanizing learning experiences. Consistent with MacMath, Sivia, Robertson, Salingré, Compeau, and Britton, they pointed out that in the online environment the socio-affective needs of preservice teachers should be given as much, if not more, attention as curricular or pedagogical content.

As teacher educators, we experienced a steep learning curve not only to adapt our courses for online delivery but to learn new technology and pedagogies to engage preservice teachers

during synchronous sessions. In “The Student Lens: Education Students’ Response to Our Pandemic Shift in Teaching and Learning,” authors Andjelic, Boschman, Forbes, Gust, McDowall, McLester, and Whidden inquired into preservice teachers’ experiences with online learning. Among their findings was that preservice teachers preferred courses that utilized tools that were already built into the learning system, including breakout rooms and whiteboards, over those that were accessed through an additional application. Though preservice teachers appreciated video content such as assignment instructions, they also found courses content heavy, requiring them to spend extended time online. Interestingly, overall, preservice teachers in the study indicated a preference for online learning over face-to-face classes.

Bachelor of Education students who began their program during the pandemic appeared to struggle with the online environment more than students in the second year of their program, according to Holm’s chapter, “You Mean I Have to Learn Mathematics in a Pandemic?” Students in Holm’s second-year mathematics classes were more confident with taking risks in the online environment. Holm theorized that second-year students, who already had the opportunity to build relationships in face-to-face classes, may have been more comfortable with making mistakes during online classes because of those previously established relationships.

Preservice teachers in the French-language Bachelor of Education program met an additional challenge of not being able to rely on informal class discussions to practice their language skills. In “Teacher Training in a Francophone Minority Environment and COVID-19: A Review of the Experience,” Lemaire, Cavanagh, ElAtia, Lyseng, Jacquet, Manuel, Tran-Minh, Pellerin, and Viens detailed how adaptations such as multimodal text, and projects with partners and in groups, provided additional opportunities for preservice teachers to practice their French skills outside of class. A series of online workshops was created to allow students to develop online teaching skills and build an online community. That sense of belongingness is essential to creating a supportive classroom environment, according to Miyata and Williams-Yeagers. In “‘I Look Forward to This Class; It’s the Highlight of My Week’: Strategies for Teaching Successfully in a Crisis,” they shared how the online environment provided an opportunity to combat the isolation that so many preservice teachers experienced during lockdowns. As the title suggests, preservice teachers viewed the time spent online with others as a welcome respite from the isolation they were experiencing.

While the shift to online teaching required many adaptations, reenvisioning the practicum for an online environment pushed many teacher educators outside of their comfort zone. Moving the practicum online appeared to contradict the highly experiential nature of preservice teaching experiences. In the chapter “Pivoting During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Case of a Teacher Education Program at a Private University,” Weir and Darko described how preservice teachers in the midst of their in-school practicum experienced an abrupt end to it when schools closed. Faced with the reality of cancelled in-school practicum experiences, many teacher educators asked ourselves the same questions posed by Weir and Darko: Would practicum experiences be extended? Would preservice teachers have enough practicum experiences to qualify for teacher certification? Would they need to pay for another practicum? Could preservice teachers receive teaching certification even though they completed fewer weeks? How would a shortened practicum affect the quality of teachers? Would new graduates be confident of their ability to teach? Would the suspension of practicum prevent final-year students from graduating?

Recognizing that no one solution would meet the needs of each preservice teacher, solutions ranged from having preservice teachers complete a reflective paper on the nature of teaching during a pandemic to having them work in a maker lab to create online materials to



support in-service teachers, as described by Morrison, Petrarca and Hughes in “Making the Transition Online With Alternative Practicum Placements.” In the chapter “Perspectives of Faculty and Preservice Teachers During the Transition to Online Learning,” Danyluk outlined the creation of an online practicum that provided opportunities for preservice teachers to teach in small groups and to the whole class, thus maintaining aspects of the experiential nature of the practicum. While preservice teachers originally expressed extreme disappointment when they learned that their in-school practica were cancelled, by the conclusion of the online practicum 75% indicated their perceptions of online teaching and learning grew more positive during the course. Similarly, in “ ‘Teacher Leaders in the Making’: A Response to COVID-19 in Practicum,” Hill, Johnston, Seitz, Twomey, and Vergis described a 4-week online course that provided preservice teachers with the opportunity to engage in case studies designed to replicate realistic classroom scenarios. The case studies were enhanced by synchronous classes, guided inquiry, and assignments to address learning outcomes that prior to the pandemic would have been part of an in-school practicum.

In their chapter, “The Alternative Field Experience in Teacher Education: Lessons From Experiential Learning and Mentoring in Pandemic Times,” Ott, Sanjeevan, Chang, Marfil, and Hibbert described how supervised, self-directed projects such as developing curriculum for a community organization, gaining more experience in a particular grade, and doing field work in an international education setting provided preservice teachers with alternatives to a traditional practicum. In creating self-directed experiential learning projects, preservice teachers enhanced their own agency and honed skills in self-assessment.

Baril, Chevalier, and Yates described how the creation of an online introductory course combined with a practicum completion project resulted in enhanced connections between the program and the school’s mentor teachers and principals. Their chapter, “The COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Effect on the Professional Practice of Field Experience Associates at the University of Alberta,” outlined the ways in which frequent communication and joint problem-solving resulted in stronger relationships between the program and local schools. Similarly, in “Practicum Continuance and Implementation During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Teacher Educator Leaders’ Insights and Innovations,” Morin and Peters described how constructive collaborations and advocacy efforts with provincial educational partners created a sense of teamwork. In “Designing and Facilitating an ‘Adapted’ Practicum Experience Amid a Pandemic,” Pattison-Meek, Eizadirad, Guerrero, Phillips, and Temertzoglou described how providing practicum advisors with increased autonomy allowed them to tailor content to the needs of their practicum pods and provide greater individualized support to preservice teachers experiencing the strain of isolation.

Recognizing the multitude of stressors that preservice teachers were experiencing during the pandemic, Pluim and Hunter described how they sought to attend to their students’ physiological, emotional, and affective needs through the integration of mindfulness programming. In “Changing Educational Landscapes and the Importance of Mental Well-being in Teacher Education,” they suggested that preservice teachers tend to be more empathetic to others than they are to themselves. Through the integration of mindfulness workshops and virtual mindful midweek gatherings, and by threading mindfulness into course work, Pluim and Hunter encouraged preservice teachers to pay attention to how they were feeling without judgement. They suggested that the integration of self-care practices such as mindfulness show promise in mitigating burnout, improving self-empathy, and boosting resilience. Interestingly, Pluim and

Hunter also found that 43% of the preservice teachers who participated in their study showed a preference for online learning.

In “Preservice Teacher Thriving Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: Program Lessons Learned Under Siege,” Soleas and Coe-Nesbitt shared the results of their study on teacher thriving pre- and midpandemic. Preservice teacher thriving decreased during the pandemic, impacting their ability to stay organized and resulting in increased feelings of loneliness. The authors pointed to the power of Bachelor of Education programs and faculty to enhance preservice teachers’ feelings of belonging through supportive online relationships. Similarly, in their chapter, Morin and Peters identified that often unexpected but rewarding learning opportunities were presented in the shift to an online practicum environment. These opportunities contributed to preservice teacher agency and the fostering of flexibility, adaptability, and innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

Teacher educators have become increasingly aware that moving courses online increased inequities for many preservice teachers, especially those in BIPOC communities. Abawi and Eizadirad suggested the pandemic presented a teachable moment for higher education, allowing for consideration of how teacher education programs can be made more equitable by considering the lived experiences of applicants as part of the process. In “Neutrality Always Benefits the Oppressor: The Need to Rupture the Normalized Structure of Teacher Education Programs to Diversify the Workforce,” they called upon faculties of education to create spaces to amplify BIPOC cultural capital and their lived experiences.

In assembling this collection, we asked each of the authors to consider the **lessons they have learned** through their adaptations to online learning and to identify **at least one recommendation** they would make for adapting programming or for teaching online. We also asked each author to consider a **silver lining** that resulted from the adaptations they made or lessons they learned. Figure 21 details these adaptations, recommendations, and silver linings. We have grouped them into the four sections of the book, including programmatic changes, pedagogical developments, practicum adaptations, and equity concerns. The adaptations section demonstrates the ways that courses and practica were modified for the online environment and include suggestions for improving the delivery of course content while making synchronous sessions more efficient. The recommendations section focuses on the future of Bachelor of Education programming, whether it be face-to-face, online, or blended delivery, and includes suggestions for course design, self-care, and preservice teacher wellness. Finally, the silver linings section shows how the past year and a half was not only a crisis but an opportunity that saw teacher educators thinking collaboratively, reflecting on programs and courses, and embracing new discoveries of digital tools, skills, practicum alternatives, and ways of being in the online environment.

**Figure 21**  
*Adaptions, Recommendations, and Silver Linings*

| Responses           | Adaptations  | Recommendations   | Silver Linings  |
|---------------------|--|---|---|
| <b>Programmatic</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focused on essential knowledge</li> <li>• Encouraged informal discussions before and after online sessions.</li> <li>• Incorporated frequent purposeful communication</li> <li>• Moved courses online</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide faculty professional development to enhance teaching online skills</li> <li>• Prepare for the reality of blended teaching and learning</li> <li>• Avoid isolation</li> <li>• Be kind to yourself</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided an opportunity to examine goals</li> <li>• Integrated digital competence into program</li> <li>• Created enhanced opportunities to differentiate</li> <li>• Created an opportunity to (re)envision, (re)assess and (re)establish goals for the B.Ed</li> <li>• Adopted holistic practices in program design</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Pedagogical</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporated social and emotional learning and self regulated learning</li> <li>• Adjusted assignments and due dates</li> <li>• Moved group work to class time</li> <li>• Created videos to convey content</li> <li>• Used in class time to explore content and build relationships</li> <li>• Moved text to multimodal text</li> <li>• Incorporated self care into the program</li> <li>• Shortened Zoom sessions</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider how instructors might collaborate across courses</li> <li>• <b>Make equity a top consideration</b></li> <li>• Incorporate student voice into decisions</li> <li>• Have fun! Lighten up!</li> <li>• Limit discussion boards</li> <li>• Make teaching online part of the B.Ed.</li> <li>• Prioritize community building and empathy towards one another</li> </ul>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognized the importance of relationships with colleagues</li> <li>• Benefited from team work and joint problem solving</li> <li>• Became critically reflective about our practice</li> <li>• Discovered new digital tools</li> <li>• Learned new technology</li> <li>• Thinking collaboratively</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Practicum</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Created online placements</li> <li>• Formed a Community of Practice (CoP) for instructors</li> <li>• Provided self-directed learning options</li> <li>• Provided case studies around Teaching Quality Standard (TQS)</li> <li>• Implemented a Field Experience Completion Project</li> <li>• Created online materials for K-12 teachers in the Maker Lab</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draw upon a variety of pedagogical strategies</li> <li>• Provide additional opportunities for preservice teachers to teach online</li> <li>• Draw upon technologies that support hybrid pedagogies               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• face to face, online, blended, flipped</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Conduct research into effective online pedagogies</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraged innovative practicum</li> <li>• Demonstrated ability to adapt to the unexpected</li> <li>• Increased practicum flexibility to accommodate school partners</li> <li>• Used the practicum to benefit K-12 teachers and under resourced communities by creating online materials</li> <li>• Expanded opportunities for preservice teachers to develop professional agency</li> </ul> |
| <b>Equity</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporated mindfulness into course design and created optional mindfulness drop in sessions</li> <li>• Inquired into student thriving</li> <li>• Created opportunities for informal discussions with students prior to class beginning</li> <li>• Made cameras optional</li> <li>• Created spaces for Black, Indigenous People of Colour (BIPOC) to be heard</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embed mindfulness and wellness into teaching</li> <li>• Consider flexible assignment deadlines</li> <li>• Consider intentional recruitment</li> <li>• Create spaces to validate and amplify BIPOC experiences</li> <li>• Focus on community in the online classroom</li> <li>• Build in opportunities for preservice teachers to connect</li> </ul>                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discovered the potential of mindfulness practices to mitigate burnout, improve self empathy and boost resilience</li> <li>• Discovered new ways to build new relationships with students online</li> </ul>   |

### Lessons Learned

In reading through the chapters that make up this collection, we were able to identify three impactful lessons that have resulted from the shift to online learning and teaching during the pandemic. We offer the following three suggestions for teaching and learning during and after the pandemic:

- Pay attention to preservice teacher mental health and wellness.
- Continue to reexamine programs and how well they meet the needs of preservice teachers.
- Attend to the inequities that resulted from the shift to online teaching and learning, especially as they impact BIPOC communities.

### Pay Attention to Preservice Teacher Mental Health and Wellness

Many of the authors in this collection were concerned with the isolation and the lack of connection that preservice teachers were experiencing during the pandemic. Several authors described the importance of teacher educator relationships with preservice teachers and school partners. Andjelic et al., Bourgoin and Mitchell, Miyata and Williams-Yeagers, and Schnellert et al. discussed concerted efforts to build relationships and increase preservice teachers' feelings of belongingness through informal discussion before and after synchronous sessions, and to

enhance transparency about decisions and support belongingness through frequent, purposeful communication with preservice teachers.

Faced with multiple stressors, including learning from home, needing a quiet space to study, losing employment, and caring for children no longer in school, preservice teachers' sense of thriving decreased. Efforts to embed self-care, social-emotional and self-regulated learning, and mindfulness into courses and programs were described by MacMath et al. and by Pluim and Hunter.

The wellness of teacher educators was impacted by the shift to online teaching and learning as we endeavored to find practical solutions that would meet provincial guidelines. We had to remind ourselves to be kind and patient with our own transition from face-to-face teaching to online teaching. In their chapters, Danyluk, Holm, and Hill et al. described joint problem-solving through communities of practice, which were formed to find solutions, design courses, support members, and learn new technologies and pedagogies to enhance our teaching online. These communities of practice also combatted our own feelings of isolation and in many instances drew us closer together. Baril et al. described the enhanced feelings of trust in our colleagues that resulted from this teamwork. Working together during this time of crisis pushed us to make changes that might have taken years to implement pre-pandemic.

### **Continue to Reexamine Programs and How Well They Meet the Needs of Preservice Teachers**

Several authors (Doyle-Jones et al.; Fitzgerald et al.; Ott et al.; Pattison-Meek et al.) described the significance of the pandemic in forcing a reexamination of Bachelor of Education programs and whether they met the needs of preservice teachers and would do so in a postpandemic world. Danyluk as well as Pluim and Hunter pointed to preservice teachers' increasing appetite for online learning. At this point it is safe to say that the Bachelor of Education programs of the future will no longer be offered through face-to-face learning alone. Increasingly, preservice teachers are demanding flexibility in how they take their courses, including through blended and online delivery.

In the future, Bachelor of Education programs will need to integrate teaching online into their programming. As Lemaire et al. highlighted, preservice teachers will need to be equipped with the skills to teach face-to-face as well as online. In light of increasing climate volatility, programs need to be prepared to continue even when campuses are closed down due to an unexpected public health or safety concern.

When school partners were no longer able to provide practicum opportunities for preservice teachers, each institution created a unique solution, as pointed out by Morrison et al. and Weir and Darko. Solutions included online practicum courses that provided preservice teachers with opportunities to teach online, learning through case studies, and practicum completion projects in maker labs and with community groups. Though these solutions cannot take the place of an in-school practicum, they resulted in significant learning about online teaching.

### **Attend to the Inequities That Resulted From the Shift to Online Teaching and Learning, Especially as They Impact BIPOC Communities**

During the pandemic, teacher educator awareness of issues of systemic racism was heightened, as described by Doyle-Jones et al. and Soleas and Coe-Nesbitt. The move to online

teaching and learning further marginalized some BIPOC learners and magnified the multitude of stressors they faced as preservice teachers. Going forward, teacher educators need to pay attention to how changes in program delivery impact already marginalized communities. This will involve consulting with and listening to BIPOC communities to determine ways in which programming can become more equitable.

Bachelor of Education programs need to reflect the diversity of our population, which means we will need to engage in the active recruitment and retention of preservice teachers from minority groups. It is also imperative that we acknowledge the systemic challenges that exist for BIPOC faculty and commit to decreasing colour blind policies and assessments as recommended by Abawi and Eizadirad. By increasing BIPOC faculty representation, changes in policies and content can be supported without placing the responsibility of advocacy on marginalized preservice teachers.

### **Moving Forward**

How did Bachelor of Education programs in Canada adapt during the pandemic? Teacher educators took risks, we pushed ourselves outside of our comfort zones, and, as the authors of one chapter put it, we adopted a “here be dragons” approach to the reality that programs had to be moved online and in-school practica were not possible. Not everything we tried was successful, and in some cases the experience opened our eyes to gaps within our own pedagogy. What is important now is that we take every opportunity to learn from our experiences. As we continue to experience wicked problems, the problem-solving and creativity engaged in by the researchers who have contributed to this collection demonstrate how we can work together to address the complex issues of a rapidly changing world.

## About the Editors

### **Amy Burns**

Amy Burns is an associate professor and the associate dean of undergraduate programs in education with the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. Her research centres on systemic thinking in education, particularly on the narrative experiences of those who hold formal leadership positions within those systems. Additionally, she researches the development of systemic thinking and leadership competencies among preservice and early career teachers.

### **Kathryn Crawford**

Kathryn Crawford is an assistant professor in the School of Education at Ambrose University in Calgary, Alberta. Her former role as director of field experience in the early years of the Bachelor of Education program at Ambrose led to an interest in the role of field experience in socialization of partner and preservice teachers and the role of administrators in fostering professional development through these partnerships. Other areas of study include reframing classroom management for contemporary classrooms and preservice teacher reflections on Indigenous-led experiential learning. Kathryn's research interests include living stories, organizational storytelling methodologies, critical narratives, and the communication acts that constitute and shape preservice teachers, teacher identification, and field experiences.

### **Patricia Danyluk**

Patricia Danyluk is the chair of adult learning and the second-year curriculum coordinator at the Werklund School of Education in Calgary. She is the former director of field experience for the community-based pathway. She completed her B.Ed. at Nipissing, her master's at St. Francis Xavier, and her Ph.D. at Laurentian University. In 2021, she was the corecipient of the Alan Blizzard for her work *Modelling Reconciliation: Educators Building Bridges and Connections*. Patricia's research areas include the practicum, critical service learning, and reconciliation. She is a co-coordinator of the adult education certificate *Community Engagement: An Ethical Practice*.

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## About the Authors

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### Colleen Andjelic

Colleen Andjelic is the newest addition to the team of education instructors at Medicine Hat College. A former K–12 teacher and consultant for the Critical Thinking Consortium, Colleen has presented at numerous conferences such as Alberta Education’s Social Studies Institute, Montgomery County Public Schools Professional Development Conference, and Medicine Hat College’s Geekapalooza on the topics of critical thinking, social studies curriculum and pedagogy, and educational technology.

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Roberta Baril is a retired teacher who spent almost 40 years as a junior and senior high school music teacher in Edmonton Public Schools. She has an M.Ed. in secondary education for which her thesis topic was the mentoring of preservice teachers. She works at the University of Alberta as the field experience team lead and as a lecturer in music education.

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Belanina Brant is a middle years educator who has taught in the Coquitlam School District for 15 years. She has been a resource and classroom teacher which has given her the opportunity to relate to, encourage, support, and teach students in diverse ways. Belanina holds an M.Ed. and works as a cohort coordinator and faculty advisor for the middle years cohort at the University of British Columbia, supporting and nurturing the development of the next generation of middle years educators. She is committed to creating and holding space for her students, whether middle years or adult, to realize their potential.

### Lorelei Boschman

Lorelei Boschman has been an educator for 32 years as an elementary teacher, high school mathematics teacher, and education instructor, coordinator, and chair at Medicine Hat College. Lorelei’s scholarly work and presentations have focused on mathematics education, leadership, experiential learning, and impactful student learning. She has presented at numerous conferences, including Canadian Society for the Study of Education, Mathematics Council of the Alberta Teachers’ Association, Postsecondary Learning and Teaching (University of Calgary), and Kappa Delta Pi International Research Conference. She also is the editor of *delta-K*, journal of the Alberta Teachers’ Association Mathematics Council.

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Heather Coe-Nesbitt is an educator, researcher, and mother. She is an adjunct assistant professor in the Faculty of Education at Queen's University, where she has worked with graduate students and preservice teachers. Heather is interested in the ways that educators and learning environments nurture student thriving, health, and well-being across the lifespan. Her doctoral research exploring thriving in kindergarten was awarded the 2020 Canadian Association for Research in Early Childhood Award. She is part of a research team examining well-being and



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### **Isaac Nortey Darko**

Isaac Nortey Darko is an assistant professor of education at Burman University, Alberta, Canada. An emerging scholar and researcher, Isaac is making inroads in innovative classroom teaching with his integrative approach to teaching and learning. He is especially interested in examining the intersectionalities of the teaching profession as it relates to engaging multiple epistemologies, technology, social justice, morality, and adult education. He focuses on understanding the significant role of Indigenous knowledge in the holistic development of the learner within the frameworks of inclusivity, anticolonialism, antiracism, equity, respect, and recognition, and the historical context through which knowledge is engaged primarily in the academy.

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### **Deborah Forbes**

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Kathy Hibbert is professor and associate dean of teacher education at Western University's Faculty of Education. Her research focuses on innovations in curriculum that can better serve those who have been historically marginalized, teacher education assessment, multiliteracies, and violence and trauma-informed education in schools and the professions. An interdisciplinary scholar, Kathy is cross-appointed to the Department of Medical Imaging, Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry, and serves as a research associate in the Centre for Education Research and Innovation.

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### **Janette Hughes**

Janette Hughes is a Canada Research Chair in Technology and Pedagogy and professor at Ontario Tech University. She is the recipient of multiple research and teaching awards and research grants. She is widely published and is the author of *The Digital Principal*, a guide for school administrators who are interested in promoting technology-rich learning environments for students and teachers. Janette is a prolific author and presenter, sharing her work nationally and internationally through prestigious scholarly and professional journals, keynote talks, and conferences. She has presented more than 100 peer-reviewed research papers at conferences across Canada, the United States, Europe, Asia, and South America. Attesting to the recognition of her leadership in technology and pedagogy, Janette is routinely contacted by school districts, education ministry personnel, and industry partners to consult on a variety of topics, including online teaching and learning, equity issues in ed tech, creation of innovative learning environments, establishment of makerspaces in schools, shifting pedagogies in a digital era, and how to foster the development of global (21<sup>st</sup>-century) skills and competencies in K–12 and higher education.

### **Sarah Hunter**

Sarah Hunter is an educator, mindfulness practitioner and facilitator, student affairs professional and researcher interested in student development, mindfulness, and social-emotional learning. Having held numerous roles in community college student success, she remains curious to understand the complexities of the student experience in relation to the pressures and demands of higher education. Sarah's work with students has affirmed what has been discussed in the student

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### **Marianne Jacquet**

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### **Marna Macmillan**

Marna Macmillan is a middle educator at heart. She taught middle years students for 20 years in the classroom before spending the last 10 years as a teacher coordinator, with a focus on the areas of social emotional learning and the middle years. She holds an M.Ed. and is a curriculum coordinator working alongside School District 43 teachers and administrators in Coquitlam to support and embed competency-based curriculum, literacy, and assessment practices, as well as social and emotional learning, into teaching and learning. She deeply believes in the power of story, relationships, and building collaborative school and classroom cultures that foster connection, belonging, and agency.

### **Dominic Manuel**

Dominic Manuel is an assistant professor of mathematics, science, and technology education at the University of Alberta's Faculté Saint-Jean. His research focuses on the creation of effective learning conditions in mathematics and science through enrichment in teaching and learning as well as the use of winning teaching practices to support the learning of advanced mathematical and scientific concepts and processes for all students.

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### **Miriam Miller**

Miriam Miller is a learner, teacher educator, researcher, and storyteller, committed to working alongside educators to embed social and emotional learning and emotional well-being into their practice. She is a former senior coach and trainer with the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence at Yale University. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate, researcher with the Social, Emotional, and Educational Development lab, and sessional instructor at the University of British Columbia. Miriam's background as an educator and her role as a researcher allow her to dynamically present research-to-practice in especially relevant ways for educators.

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Lisa A. Mitchell is an assistant professor in the School of Education at St. Thomas University in Fredericton, NB. Lisa holds a Ph.D. in Education (Queen's University), M.Ed. (University of Victoria), B.Ed. (University of British Columbia), and B.Mus. (Capilano University). Lisa has over 18 years of teaching experience in both K–12 and university contexts. Her current teaching and research interests include preservice teacher education; curriculum studies; integrated, interdisciplinary, and intercontextual pedagogy; international education; ethical responsibility in diverse classrooms; narrative; creative nonfiction writing; and music- and arts-based research. Lisa is also a semiprofessional musician, photographer, and trained music conductor in both classical and jazz traditions.

### **Cathy Miyata**

Cathy Miyata is an assistant professor at Wilfrid Laurier University, teaching courses in the Teacher Education, Master of Education, and International Studies programs. She is also an award-winning author and professional storyteller. In these various roles she has performed, lectured, and taught courses across Canada, in many Indigenous communities in the Yukon, and in Sweden, Greece, Mexico, the United States, Japan, Malaysia, Portugal, Serbia, Egypt, and Germany. Cathy loves a good story and hopes you have one to share with her.

### **Francine Morin**

Francine Morin is a professor and former associate dean undergraduate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba, who leads arts education and teacher development initiatives. She conducts action research aimed at improving educational experiences for children and educators and is collaborating with field-based partners to refine a 2-year induction and mentoring program for new teachers and an after-school orchestral program for children who live in challenging circumstances. Francine leading a study examining the impacts of the pandemic on singing in Canadian school music programs, while also serving as the Canadian Music Educators' Association's director of research and publications.

### **Laura Morrison**

Laura Morrison is a sessional instructor in the Faculty of Education at Ontario Tech University (formerly the University of Ontario Institute of Technology). She teaches the online course Learning in Digital Contexts to teacher candidates. Laura is also the project manager of research in Canada Research Chair Dr. Janette Hughes' STEAM3D Maker Lab, located within the Faculty of Education. Laura completed her M.A. at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology with a focus on the impact of digital literacies skills development in the language learning process. She completed her Ph.D. in education at the University of Calgary with a focus on promising practices associated with online preservice teacher education.

### **Mary Ott**

Mary Ott is a research associate in Western University's Faculty of Education. Her work coordinating a research and assessment course led by mentor teachers informs her research interests in teacher inquiry, mentoring, and experiential learning. Mary is also an assistant professor in the Faculty of Education at St. Francis Xavier University, teaching courses in research, curriculum theory, and literacy.

### **Joanne Pattison-Meek**

Joanne Pattison-Meek is a faculty member in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto. She teaches courses on educational research literacy and the fundamentals of teaching and learning. Prior to joining the Master of Teaching program in 2018, Joanne was a high school social studies teacher, school board curriculum leader, and program leader for a school board research department. She received her Ph.D. in curriculum studies and teacher development from OISE in 2016. Her research interests include rural education, educational advocacy, and pluralist citizenship teaching and learning.

### **Gary Plum**

Gary W. J. Plum is a researcher, activist, and educator in global, democratic, and social foundations of education. Informed by his work as a classroom teacher, outdoor educator, and international program director, Gary's research examines the nexus between global citizenship education and local/place-based education, decolonial and learners' perspectives in education, and various dimensions of cultural studies. The findings of his research have been published in *Intercultural Education*, *Research in Comparative and International Education*, the *Citizenship Education Research Journal*, *Policy Futures in Education*, and the *Journal of Global Citizenship & Equity Education*. Gary is currently an assistant professor in education at Lakehead University, Orillia. In 2018, he founded the student experience program at Lakehead Orillia (Operation "Happy to Be Here"), which has expanded to include dimensions of research, policy recommendations, intramural activities, and graduate student projects.

### **Christina Phillips**

Christina Phillips is an assistant professor at Cape Breton University in the Faculty of Education and Health and an assistant professor (status only) in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. Previously, she was a high school chemistry and biology teacher in Ontario. Christina teaches an array of courses for preservice teachers and graduate students in science education, assessment, and research methodologies. Her current research focuses on inclusive practices in science education and pedagogical responses to the pandemic.

### **Martine Pellerin**

Martine Pellerin is a full professor in education and associate dean of research and innovation at University of Alberta's Faculté Saint-Jean. Her interests in teaching and research focus on digital integration in the language learning community, digital literacy, digital citizenship education, inclusion and multisensory approaches to learning, and professional training in online and hybrid instruction through collaborative research.

### **Beryl Peters**

Beryl Peters is director of practicum and partnerships at the Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba, responsible for leading the practicum components of the B.Ed. program. She has extensive experience teaching in K–12 and postsecondary schools from Texas to the Yukon. An arts education consultant with Manitoba Education, she coordinated the development and implementation of curricula and resources for K–12 arts education. Her research focuses on

teacher education, arts education, and multiliteracies. Beryl holds multiple awards, including the national 2012 Arts Researchers and Teachers Society Doctoral Graduate Research Award.

### **Diana Petrarca**

Diana Petrarca is a founding member and associate professor of the Faculty of Education at Ontario Tech University (formerly the University of Ontario Institute of Technology). During her time at Ontario Tech University, she has held numerous administrative roles including practicum coordinator, Bachelor of Education program director, assistant dean, and acting dean in the Faculty of Education. Her research has evolved from exploring how to support classroom teachers who work with teacher candidates in the field via web-based learning tools to exploring more deeply how initial teacher education programs enhance teacher candidate critical thinking, creativity, and learning. She is currently on a mission to (un)make teachers by exploring the conceptions and misconceptions of teacher candidates as they progress through initial teacher education programs. Along with Julian Kitchen, she edited the first volume of *Initial Teacher Education in Ontario* in 2017 for the Canadian Association for Teacher Education, and is wrapping up the second volume to be released in 2021.

### **Joanne Robertson**

Joanne Robertson is a professor with the University of the Fraser Valley's Teacher Education Department. Her research interests include educational leadership and language and literacy instruction in K–12 contexts. Joanne teaches courses in leadership theory and practice in the M.Ed. program and language arts, second-language methodology, and online learning in the B.Ed. program. Before coming to the University of the Fraser Valley, Joanne was a director of instruction in the North Vancouver School District.

### **Barbara Salingré**

Barbara Salingré is an associate professor in the Teacher Education Department at the University of the Fraser Valley. Her research includes student success, admission to education programs, teacher identity, and social-emotional learning. She teaches courses in best practices of teaching and learning, mental health, and conflict resolution, and also advises prospective teachers about the profession.

### **Teenu Sanjeevan**

Teenu Sanjeevan is a research associate at Western University's Faculty of Education. Her expertise lies in quantitative and qualitative research methodology, which informs her research interests in teacher education. Teenu is also a research associate at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, conducting research on language and motor learning in children with neurodevelopmental disorders.

### **Leyton Schnellert**

Leyton Schnellert is an associate professor in the University of British Columbia's Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy. His scholarship attends to how teachers and teaching and learners and learning can mindfully embrace student diversity and inclusive education. His community-based collaborative work contributes a counterargument to top-down approaches that operate from deficit models, instead drawing from communities' funds of knowledge to build participatory, place-conscious, and culturally sustaining practices. Leyton has been a middle and



secondary school classroom teacher and a K–12 learning resource teacher. His books, films, and research articles are widely referenced in local, national, and international contexts.

### **Paolina Seitz**

Paolina Seitz is an associate professor and area chair in the Faculty of Education at St. Mary's University. Her research focus is on curriculum alignment, educational assessment, and student well-being. Dr. Seitz has completed many projects that utilize various frameworks and surveys that measure student well-being (e.g., the role of trust in an emotionally safe classroom environment). She collaborates with schools in enhancing teachers' formative assessment strategies and in the development and implementation of district-wide student assessment guidelines. She is a published author both nationally and internationally.

### **Awneet Sivia**

Awneet Sivia is an associate professor in the Teacher Education Department at the University of the Fraser Valley. She teaches courses in social justice and antiracism education, K–12 science methods, leadership studies, and classroom research. Awneet's research interests include teacher education, diversity and social justice pedagogy and leadership, school innovation, and self-study research and practice.

### **Kathy Snow**

Kathy Snow is an associate professor and the academic lead for the Certificate in Educational Leadership in Nunavut program at the University of Prince Edward Island. In 2019 she was awarded a Fulbright Canada Research Chair in Arctic Studies hosted at the University of Washington, where COVID-19 restrictions allowed her to model a new type of Fulbright Lecture online with a panel of speakers from across Inuit Nunangat. Kathy has been teaching and learning online for over 15 years, both as a department head for technology at the K–12 level and as technology-engaged instructor and researcher at the postsecondary level. Follow her on Twitter: @kathymesnow.

### **Eleftherios Soleas**

Eleftherios (Terry) Soleas is an adjunct assistant professor in the Faculty of Education and the director of continuing professional development for the Faculty of Health Sciences at Queen's University. His research and teaching focus on enhancing higher-order thinking and well-being through applied motivation and have yielded national and international funding and awards. Before arriving at Queen's, Terry was a high school biology teacher. He is a primarily mixed methods researcher who embraces data syntheses as foundations for planning and has a passion for grouchy advocacy for a fairer, more egalitarian Canada. Terry enjoys, in no particular order, trying to be funny, teaching, baked goods, and learning.

### **Carolyn Temertzoglou**

Carolyn Temertzoglou, a health and physical education (HPE) lecturer, teaches in the Master of Teaching and Continuing Professional Learning programs at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. Through Carolyn's many years of educational experience as a teacher, department head, curriculum writer, and teacher educator, she has advocated for and supported the delivery of effective implementation of HPE programs worldwide. With a master's degree and research interests in teacher identity and teacher development in HPE, Carolyn is

passionate about educating and inspiring teachers throughout their professional journey to ensure a future where every student has a sense of belonging in HPE.

### **Thao Tran-Minh**

Thao Tran-Minh is an associate professor (teaching stream) at the University of Alberta's Faculté Saint-Jean. Her research interests focus on language teaching in a minority environment as well as the assessment of language competencies.

### **Sarah Twomey**

Sarah Twomey is the dean of education and professor of language and literacy at St. Mary's University in Calgary, Alberta. Her research interests are cultural literacy, postcolonial studies, educational leadership, and antiracist/transformational pedagogies.

### **Elizabeth Vergis**

Elizabeth Vergis is an assistant professor at St. Mary's University in Calgary. Elizabeth came to Canada with an M.Sc. in Biochemistry from the University of London. In Canada, she completed her Ph.D. in science education at the University of Alberta in the Department of Educational Policy Studies, Faculty of Education. She is concerned about equity issues including gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status as they affect education. Dr. Vergis is a member of the Science Education Research Group and has presented regularly at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education and Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education annual conferences.

### **Chantal Viens**

Chantal Viens is an assistant professor (teaching stream) at the University of Alberta's Faculté Saint-Jean. Her research interests focus on professional development support for teachers and the integration of knowledge gained from research into differentiated instruction in a Francophone minority environment.

### **Chloe Weir**

Chloe Wier is devoted to teaching and learning, and enjoys having conversations with preservice teachers. Her research interests intersect teacher identity, preservice teacher growth, adult learning, professional development, and understanding Indigenous ways of knowing and doing. She presently serves as chair of the School of Education at Burman University in Alberta, Canada.

### **Colleen Whidden**

Dr. Colleen Whidden is a coordinator and instructor in education at Medicine Hat College. She has received the Alberta Colleges and Institutes Faculties Association's Provincial Instructor Award, the University of Calgary's Make a Difference service award, and the Alberta Choral Federation's Arts Advocacy Award. Colleen presents her academic research at local, national, and international conferences, including Canadian Society for the Study of Education, American Educational Research Association, and International Society for Music Education.

### **Amanda Williams-Yeagers**

Amanda Williams-Yeagers is an elementary educator, instructor of virtual learning and the arts for two faculties of education, a writer, and a performer. She leads professional learning for

educators across Canada and internationally on arts integration, multimodal communication, and innovative practice. She is about to complete her Master of Education in Interdisciplinary Studies, and her current professional focus is on culturally sustaining practice and on providing authentic learning experiences for elementary and postsecondary learners. Recent research projects she has worked on include the use of narrative therapies (spoken word, visual art, letter writing, and sandplay) and the impact of using spoken word in virtual classes to build community and connection.

**Maureen Yates**

Maureen Yates is a retired principal from Edmonton Public Schools, where she spent over 30 years as a teacher, counsellor, department head, assistant principal, and principal. She has an M.Ed. in school counselling and a Ph.D. in educational administration and leadership. Her Ph.D. thesis explored the self-efficacy of high school principals and how it relates to their professional practice. Maureen is currently a field experience associate at the University of Alberta and a lecturer in the Professional Learning Unit.